

4 days, 4 scenes

Thursday, 21 January

Nepal and Israel signed an agreement for the recruitment of 500 caregivers in Israel that excludes recruiters.

In 2009, Israel stopped recruiting Nepalis after migrant workers were found to be paying hefty fees to recruiters for jobs in Israel. It was reopened in 2015 under a pilot Nepal-Israel agreement that sent about 80 workers.

The new agreement will place Nepalis as auxiliary workers in old-age shelters and not private homes, and they can earn as much as Rs200,000 a month. Nepal's Ambassador to Israel Anjana Shakya lobbied for the agreement which has a higher preference for women workers because there are more female elderly in Israel, and they prefer caregivers from the same gender.

Israeli Ambassador to Nepal Hanan Goder hopes the agreement will help transform the lives of

Nepali women and their families. The ambassador will meet workers pre-departure, and assure them that they will enjoy all labour rights just like Israeli citizens.

Ambassador Shakya is hopeful that the current quota of 500 can be expanded as there is demand for caregivers and other jobs in Israel. She says workers should not be made to pay illegal fees, and Nepalis should not overstay their visas in Israel. However, she says there are already cases of middlemen demanding fees from workers for jobs. She says: "This should be stopped with strict regulation."

Saturday, 23 January

At Kathmandu airport a coffin with the word 'Fragile' is placed alongside a drag-on luggage in the back of a pickup. Painted on the truck's bumper are the words: हाँसी खुसी जिन्दगी चल्छ, मेहनत गरे नेपालमै सुन फल्छ (Life is full of laughter and happiness, you can grow gold in Nepal itself if you work hard.)

The pathos and irony of the photograph made it viral on Nepali social media. The body was among 18 coffins repatriated from Malaysia on Saturday. Dinbandhu Subedi at the Foreign Employment Board explained there was a backlog of bodies because smaller Nepal Airlines jets could not carry enough coffins home. Finally, a bigger Airbus 330 was used to fly the coffins out. There are still 16 bodies left to be brought back from Malaysia.

There are over 380,000 documented Nepali workers in Malaysia, the largest overseas

destination for Nepalis. Out of the 656 deaths of Nepali workers overseas in 2019/20, the highest number (176) was in Malaysia. The main causes were officially listed as cardiac arrest, 'natural causes', and suicide. These deaths have become mere statistics. For the airlines, the coffins are just cargo.

Sunday, 24 January

Nepal's recruitment companies staged a protest in front of the Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE) on Sunday, submitting a 21-point demand that included compensation for migrant workers who have returned

prematurely during the pandemic.

The Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA) wants compensation to be decided on a case-by-case basis. DOFE set up a 7-member joint taskforce to address the demands, and Director General

Kumar Prasad Dahal said that while some of them may be reasonable, malpractice will not be tolerated.

The same day, reports surfaced that Nepalis had joined the Qatari Police bypassing DOFE approval by travelling via India. A row

broke out in November when Qatari officials were found conducting interviews for security jobs without permission from DOFE as required by the law.

Monday, 25 January

DOFE's Monitoring Team conducted a sting operation on Kalyan Security Private limited in Sina Mangal. Loopholes, a powerful trans-national nexus, vested interests and the desperation of migrants for jobs overseas drives recruiters to find new ways to squeeze workers who will do anything for a better future.

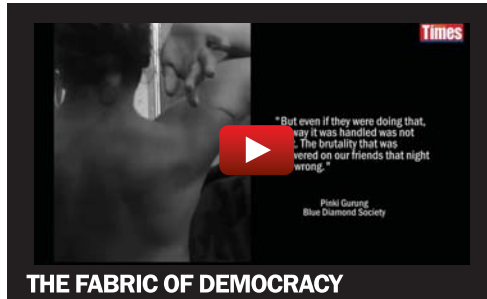
Kushal Baral of the Monitoring Team seized applications forms for Qatar Police. But even while DOFE ramps up its raids, the newly appointed Labour Minister Gauri Shankar Choudhary has allowed another company, SOS Manpower which had been suspended for conducting interviews for Qatar without official approval, to resume operations. Politically connected recruiters will continue to cheat Nepali workers with impunity.

We asked Baral how long before he gets transferred from DOFE. It will not be the first time an honest bureaucrat or politician is removed for being honest. Baral replies matter-of-factly: "It is not under my control. Until then, I will continue to do what I can."



New labour agreement, flying coffins home, recruiters protest, and a sting operation.

ONLINE PACKAGES



THE FABRIC OF DEMOCRACY

Fifteen members of the LGBTQIA+ community were brutally assaulted by the police last week, sparking widespread condemnation of the attack. Watch the video with clips of the police action, and listen to the victims talk about their ordeal on our YouTube channel.



RETURN FROM EXILE

Video clips from the Himalmedia video magazine *Saglo Samaj* of the return of Nepal's stolen statues from museums and collectors in the West. After the plunder of the 1980s, many museums are now being named and shamed if they exhibit stolen artifacts. Story: [page 8-9](#)



GUIDED MEDITATION

Watch the video accompanying a new installment of Anjana Rajbhandari's column Life Time in which she takes viewers through a mindfulness exercise to cope with these stressful times. Column: [page 12](#)

NEPALIS ON K2

The saying 'No one is a prophet in their land,' can be applied to the ten Nepalis who ascended K2 in winter. Recognised by the entire international mountain community, emphasising the great teamwork they carried out to achieve it, was not enough for Nepal's politicians to congratulate them.

Isabel Diaz Novo

- They are all amazing your Nepali government should recognise this, it's been in all UK newspapers and on TV news

Sue Everall

- Young people that used to work as guides are more interested in going overseas than hard seasonal jobs back home. The career of being a guide should be by choice not necessity. A good government would be offering subsidies to guides to offset the cost of their salaries which has added benefits to the economy. Such insight in Nepal's current political situation simply does not exist.

David Winter

- Sad to think that the governing classes have exclusive views of what Nepali achievement. This is possibly the greatest single nation feat of mountaineering ever. But Kathmandu elites? Meh.

Daniel Lak

- So humbling that they decide not to take individual credit for the climb, but claim the achievement on behalf of Nepal.

Kent Steen Handlos

COVISHIELD

Curious if cities need to be prioritised before rural areas where Covid-19 transmission is quite low and challenges of distribution are massive.

Rastra Raj Bhandari

AIR POLLUTION

Sustainable rain catchment, greenhouses, micro hydro wind solar. Then just cable or drone supply runs. Smart hill communities will be in demand. But need public will and investment. Kathmandu needs urban lungs, waste management, incinerator. Mass transit on Ring Road, battery buses inside.

Nathan Hagen

- For years I have wondered, no, been amazed why Nepalis I know have moved from the hills to Kathmandu. For the amenities/services, they said. Now Kathmandu has become unlivable.

Roger Ray

GREENING OF EVEREST

I wonder if forests are growing in other high altitude areas as well where people are shifting from livestock to tourism, or if this is only happening in Khumbu?

Aslak Ljone

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Nepalis on K2 make the impossible possible

Nepali high altitude guides used to assist mountaineers from other countries to make record-breaking climbs of the world's highest peaks, but on 16 January an all-Nepali team set its own record with the first ever winter ascent of K2.

Read the blow-by-blow coverage on [Nepali Times](#) online.



Most reached and shared on Facebook



Most commented

Jabs and Jab-nots

by *Buddha Basnyat*

The first lot of 1 million Covishield vaccines donated by the Indian government is now being used to inoculate frontline workers all over Nepal. Now, the challenge that lies ahead is to get them to high-risk groups in an equitable way. Full story on our website.



Most popular on Twitter



The greening of the Khumbu

by *Alton C Byers*

What are the reasons for such a dramatic re-growth in trees in Nepal's Everest region? Find out in this Weekend Longread through dramatic repeat photography that shows the return of Khumbu's forests. [www.nepalitimes.com](#)



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Fifteen members of the #LGBTQIA+ community were reportedly manhandled by the police last week. This incident has been condemned by many.



Atithi Pradhan @atiithi
When authoritative forces like the police engage in such disgusting activities, how and when will our society learn? What happened to "Prahari Mero Saathi"?



Niranjan Kunwar @MetroNir
This is not just #GenderBasedViolence - we need to use an intersectional lens and consider caste and class. Multiple layers of discrimination marginalizes and oppresses many individuals. This might be one such example.



Mohit Rauniyar @mohitrauniyar
This needs to come under investigation! @NepalPoliceHQ



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
"Many will remember Manoj Basnyat for being a catalyst for conservation in Nepal, and for development and peace-building around the world." A tribute by @HumGurung1



Binayak Basnyat @nepal_bb
Thank you @HumGurung1 ji for penning down your remembrance of late Manoj Basnyat so gracefully. His humble effort is an extraordinary example of Nepal's sincere contribution to global sustainable development.



Dipak Gyawali @dipak_gyawali
Shocked and saddened! Remember this fellow Xavierian and Rooskie Kharoshovitch working with him as he supported our efforts to restructure Marchawar lift irrigation from agency-(mis)managed one to a farmer-managed system in the 1990s. It was a real pleasure to work with him.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Ten Nepalis ascend #K2 in what is being hailed in the international mountaineering community as a major milestone but Nepal's political leaders couldn't be bothered.



Niren Shrestha @niren09
Nepali leaders are fighting amongst themselves to reach the #Top



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#editorial
If driver exhalation is checked for alcohol, why not vehicle exhaust for pollutants?
Governance failure. Corruption.



Prashanta Khanal @theprashanta
Given the rate of motorisation, simply checking the emission won't alone help. Along with recommendations in the editorial, we need to have immediate roadmap to ban import of new fossil-fuel private vehicles, reduce carbikes numbers, & phase-out polluted vehicles.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

This winter, a three month drought and global warming have turned Mt Machapuchhre (6991m) that looms north of Pokhara, into a stark black pyramid. At its base, there have been wildfires that burnt out of control for weeks this month.

But twenty years ago this week, the debate was about whether the iconic peak should be open to climbing. Noted geographer Harka Gurung, who served in the National Planning Commission, Tourism Minister and a committee to rename Nepal's peaks, pitched in with a column in *Nepali Times* #27 of 26 January – 1 February 2000.

Excerpts:

This beautiful mountain, that rises about 24 km due north of Pokhara and often depicted reflecting on the Phewa lake, has become a symbol of the stupendous scenery that Nepal has to offer. Poets, painters, and photographers find inspiration in this soaring pyramid. What is most impressive is that the terrain rises from a sub-tropical Pokhara, at 900 metres above sea level, to nearly 7,000m all within a horizontal distance that would take 30 minutes to drive if there were a highway.

Some Pokhara residents say that climbing on Machapuchhre should not be allowed because it is beautiful and also because it has religious significance. Others believed the opinion of people in nearby villages should be taken before deciding.



The prettiness or otherwise of the mountain cannot determine whether it should be climbed or not. If that were the case, Ama Dablam would also qualify for a ban, and so would Purni and other beautiful peaks. In Nepal itself there are many other mountains that are actually considered holy but which are open for climbing and some of them even have the names of gods and goddesses.

The truth is that of all the 151 peaks opened in Nepal till now, the opinion of the villagers living at their base has never before been a consideration. Since Machapuchhre was open for climbing till 1965 and then closed, it becomes important to examine why the peak became off-limits to climbers after that. The reason given so far and one that has been internalised by a generation of Nepalis, is that this peak has great religious significance for the Gurung who live below it, which is nothing more than a myth.

The peak is not the monopoly of individuals of Pokhara Bazar with their sentimental ego. Machapuchhre must be utilised for the benefit of people living around it.

From the archives of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: [www.nepalitimes.com](#)

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BHARAT BANDHU THAPA

Panoramic encyclopaedia of the Himalaya

Himalaya: A Human History, is an exhaustive and sweeping account of the roof of the world

● Lisa Choegyal

Both a soaring celebration and a sacramental offering to the highest mountain range in the world, everything you ever wanted to know about the Himalaya is found between the covers of this magnificent, ambitious and panoramic book.

An 'abode of snows' love story featuring kaleidoscopic cultures, spiritual elevation, migrating peoples, epic adventures and colliding colonial conflicts, this first major history of the Himalaya tackles a vast subject, takes the reader on a rollicking journey that starts with the geological crash of tectonic plates 50 million years ago, and brings us to present day disputes about national borders and contentious commercial expeditions.

Although it spans millennia, Ed Douglas has an enviable ability to escort us through the intimidating landscape, grand peaks and steep valleys of the region's daunting geography and shifting civilisations, introducing the individuals who shaped its past and the pressures that drove its waves of conquerors.

He effortlessly weaves together the ebb and flow of centuries, unravelling the religious and political alliances, dispelling the myths, and sharing with us gripping tales of resilience, discovery, plunder, oppression and enlightenment on the roof of the world.

Far from being a wild and barren 'blank on the map', the Himalaya has



throughout the ages been home to an astonishing diversity of indigenous cultures, a medley of religions and a crossroads for commerce. The idea of mysterious monarchies and forbidden cities is revealed as a largely European construct, born of explorer egos, occult fantasists or political expediency.

Until the mid-1800s the Himalaya was at the centre of busy trade routes from all points of the compass, a crucible of cultures characterised by intellectual curiosity and crossovers with the outside world.

'Here Jesuit missionaries exchanged technologies with Tibetan Lamas, Mongol Khans employed Nepali craftsmen, Armenian merchants exchanged musk and gold with Mughals and the East India Company grappled for dominance with China's emperors.'

We meet princesses married to Buddhist sages, scheming queens tormenting unhinged kings, Capuchin friars vying with the Vatican, Jang Bahadur Rana's Parisian mistress, and the first Westerner to marry a Tibetan, the rambunctious George Bogle.

We learn of the landscape-changing drama of cultivating tea plants from China, the circuitous arrival of the potato, the Western craze for rhododendrons, and the gardening sensation caused by the exasperatingly ungrowable blue poppy, 'the colour of a summer day'.

A journalist and climber, Ed Douglas is a frequent visitor to Nepal. He has pulled together a swathe of recent research and the all-embracing bibliography is an accomplishment in its own right. I most admire his fresh slants on well-worn stories

– the pivotal sophistication of Kathmandu's Newars, the fusion of traditions that honour Mount Kailas, the genius Arniko's royal Mongolian wife, Prithivi Narayan Shah's patience, the origins of Bovril, George Everest insisting his name be pronounced 'Eve-rest', and a young Liz Hawley climbing an Egyptian pyramid in moonlight.

Containing magicians and nomads, scholars and tyrants, pundits and pilgrims, raiders and revolutionaries, Ed Douglas's Himalaya is a heroic and learned investigation of the region. He deftly untangles the geology and genetics, botany and wildlife, art and exploration, lost kingdoms, forgotten skirmishes, and a comprehensive climbing chronology.

Ed told me: "I was aiming to bridge the gap between the experts and the public who have been so long led astray by misinformation."

The pages throng with eccentric narcissists, romantic introverts, resourceful women, dogged plant hunters, courageous spies, overlooked adventurers, and of course mountaineers. The book is both concise and lengthy, readable but dense, factual and fanciful, with all the various strands distilled into an immensely entertaining read.

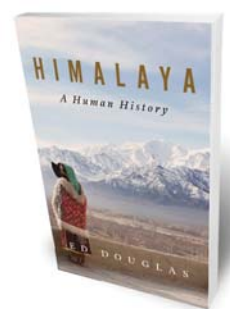
I embarked on the massive 600-page tome in Pokhara as the last light of 2020 faded on the Annapurna ranges, her normally white ramparts now startlingly black with lack of snow, the triangular walls of Machapuchhre naked and bereft, the valleys drained by depleted rivers running low through

their rocky roadside beds.

Along the ridgeline before us, smoke billowed from distant forest fires, contributing to the rosy sunset but laying waste to Himalayan hillsides vulnerable to drought and climate change.

Billions of people depend on the third pole of the Himalaya for their water and weather but, as in both the Arctic and Antarctic, the impact of our carbon consuming lifestyles are now tangible and irrefutable. Melting permafrost cracks the foundations of stone homes in the high mountains, and glacial outbursts threaten the populated high valleys.

Whilst nuclear superpowers fret about boundary markers and world leaders come together at the UN climate summit COP26 in Glasgow later this year, the next critical chapter of the human history of the Himalaya is waiting to be written. 🇳🇵



HIMALAYA
A Human History
by Ed Douglas

W.W. Norton & Company, 2021
Illustrated 581 pages \$40

prabhu BANK

Turkish PCR test partnership

Turkish Airlines has signed an agreement with Health at Home/Med Pro International to provide free PCR tests to Business Class passengers flying out from Kathmandu on the carrier. The tests will be carried out at home of the passengers. Economy Class passengers will also benefit from discounted rates for swab collection from home as well.

The agreement with the motto 'Partnering Towards Excellence on Client Experience' was signed by General Manager of Turkish Airlines Abdullah Tunçer Kececi and Bishal Dakhla of Health at Home. This collaboration will allow Turkish Airlines



passengers to receive their test report via mobile or email before their flights.

Turkish Airlines operates regular flights between Kathmandu and Istanbul and

beyond, and is the only European carrier that connects Nepal directly to Europe. Despite the pandemic, Turkish Airlines operates to around 219 destinations with strict safety protocols. Health At Home was established in 2007, and is the pioneer in creating a culture of customised home healthcare service in Nepal. KTMSALES@THY.COM

Global IME cashless banking

Global IME Bank organised a promotion event for its QR payment program in Nakkhu on 22 January in a bid to promote cashless transactions. Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank Maha Prasad Adhikari inaugurated the

payments at retail shops in the area. The bank has also launched online training on electronic payments for QR merchants.

Global IME Bank and Bhandara Dairy Cooperative also signed an agreement to increase farmers' access to agricultural subsidy loans.

Ncell greening the Ring Road

Ncell, in collaboration with the Department of Forest and Soil Conservation will be responsible for landscaping more than 10 km of the Kalanki-Koteswor Ring Road. The pilot phase of the green-belt project began in November following the completion of the

Balkhu-Ekantakuna stretch of the Ncell and will plant 6000 trees in the area in the next five years.

250MW Solar Plant

Nepal's biggest solar electricity farm is going up in Kohalpur of Banke district. The \$181 million 250MW array will supply power to the grid and will also have a 40MW battery storage capacity. An agreement on a detailed project report was signed on Tuesday between the Nepal government, Investment Board Nepal and Risen energy JV of Singapore. The DPR will be ready in a year, and installation begin after that.

Santosh Shah’s favourite dishes

The recipes that Nepal’s MasterChef finalist took to the world

● Sanjib Chaudhary

After finishing in second place in the 2020 edition of BBC’s ‘MasterChef: The Professionals’, London-based Nepali chef Santosh Shah became a household name both in UK and Nepal. During the run-up to the finals, the 35-year-old chef presented before the judges a variety of dishes that are little-known outside Nepal.

Born and raised in Karjanha, Siraha District of Nepal’s southern plains, Santosh toiled up a hill to reach where he is today. After failing his school-leaving exams, he moved to India to work as a dishwasher at a five-star hotel. There, he rose through ranks to become a cook.

In an interview with Nepali Times, Santosh says he took a risk when he moved to London in 2010, but it paid off as he began working with renowned chefs. At the time he entered the MasterChef competition, he had been experimenting with Nepali food for two years in restaurants in the British capital. The judges appreciated the food items he prepared and presented, such as kodo (millet) pudding, amot (mango leather), crispy stuffed okra, yomari, chicken chilli, and crab curry.



Nepali Expat Arun Chaudhary tweeted:

(By presenting Nepali cuisine to the world, from the tubular papadum (fofi) from the Terai to yomari, Chef Santosh Shah from Karjanha Village in Siraha has reached the finals. Best wishes, brother. Shine the name of Nepal like this only.)

Chef Santosh Shah chatted with Global Voices on WhatsApp to know about Nepali food he loves and would like to promote. “I love biriya (a delicacy from the Terai region),” he said. “Biriya cooked with newly harvested potatoes are my best.” Biryia is made of grass peas, mustard greens or broadleaf mustard leaves wrapped in black gram paste and dried on the sun. They are then stored to be cooked in the rainy season when green vegetables are scarce.

Another dish Santosh would like to promote is Airkanchan, which is also popular in Bihar, Jharkhand and other Indian states. Taro leaves, pasted together with rice flour or gram flour paste and cut into small cutlets, are fried in mustard oil and then dipped in a gravy of curd and spices – it’s hot, salty and sour! 🍲



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sankuchy
Make hay when there is sunshine. This is how the Tharus and others in southern plains of Nepal preserve the greens for future use. Called 'biriya' they wrap the wilted greens, especially grass peas, mustard leaves and broad leaf mustard, with black gram paste and dry it in the sun. It's cooked with potatoes during the rainy season when the greens are scarce.

BIRIYA

Make hay when there is sunshine. This is how the Tharus and others in the southern plains of Nepal preserve the greens for future use. Called ‘biriya’, they wrap the wilted greens, especially grass peas, mustard leaves and broad leaf mustard, with black gram paste and dry it in the sun. It is cooked with potatoes during the rainy season when the greens are scarce.



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MAGIC OF THE DAY
Taste of Madhesh/Terai (a Traditional dish)

AIRKANCHAN

Collect soft taro leaves, wash them and put them in the sun for an hour. Spread the first layer of leaves and add rice flour paste, turmeric, a pinch of salt and some spires, and then the next layer. Roll the leaves into a cylinder and cut small pieces out of it and fry them in mustard oil. Add onion, garlic, chillies, ginger, and garnish with coriander leaves.



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chefsantoshshah
Yomari Punhi is a Newari festival marking the end of the rice harvest. It takes place in November/December during the full moon day of Thina (Pitri), the second month in the lunam Nepal Era calendar.
Bhakka- The traditional snack popular among Tharu, Rajbanshi, and Tajpura communities from eastern Nepal has made its way to the capital and is gradually picking its popularity. Primarily prepared from rice flour, this snack can be found at street stalls in Putalisadak, Anamnagar, Shantinagar among other places in Kathmandu.
#festivalsofnepal
#nepalstreetfood
#nepalstreetfood #nepalstreetfood #modernnepalstreetfood #modernnepalstreetfood #modernnepalstreetfood #modernnepalstreetfood #modernnepalstreetfood
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YOMARI AND BHAKKA

Yomari is prepared and eaten on Yomari Punhi full moon day by the Newa community in Kathmandu. Bhakka is a traditional snack popular with Tharu and Rajbanshi people from eastern Tarai.



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Thank you everyone for my birthday wishes.
Poleko makai, dhaniya ko chutney.
#Chargrilled #corn
#nepalstreetfood #nepalstreetfood #nepalstreetfood #nepalstreetfood #modernnepalstreetfood
#modernnepalstreetfood #modernnepalstreetfood #modernnepalstreetfood #modernnepalstreetfood
#newcuisine #chefsantoshshah #modernchef
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POLEKO MAKAI

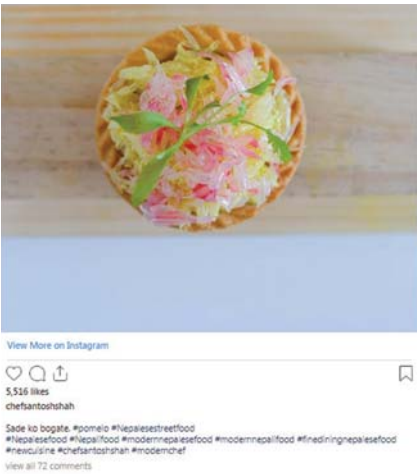
Roasted corn with coriander chutney.



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#modernchef
10w
niraulasam 100
9w Reply
Isami cooking uncut

JHOL MOMO

The origin of this dish goes back to the alleyways of old Kathmandu. One of the nameless eateries, constantly serving momos cooked on blazing kerosene stoves, was the first to come up with the watery soyabean achar on the side. They’re now served at most high-end restaurants in Kathmandu.



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Sade ko bogate. #pomelo #nepalstreetfood
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view all 72 comments

SANDEKO BHOGATE

What is the start of Kathmandu winter without some bhogate? The end of Tihar marks the start of sandheko bhogate season, as families gather to peel pomelos in the sun, punctuated by a repeat of childhood anecdotes. Pour in a bowl of curd as you gather memories. Fry some fenugreek and turmeric in oil. Spill a few tablespoons of sugar, and add a pinch of salt. Mix them all together. Pass sandheko bhogate around in little bowls, as you bond again.

This story by Sanjib Chaudhary originally appeared on Global Voices on March 19, 2020.

Nepal-Japan jobs deal still stuck

Nearly two years later, a win-win bilateral employment agreement has not taken off

● Upasana Khadka

In 21 December 2020, Prakash Parajuli was waiting at the Tribhuvan International Airport to board his flight to Japan. He had secured necessary paperwork for his job there as a caregiver, and was in high spirits at the prospect of starting anew despite the pandemic.

Parajuli is employed under the Japan Government's Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) residence status. "This is a result of a lot of hard work and patience. For many months, I focused entirely on studying for the Japanese language test," Parajuli told *Nepali Times* before he boarded his plane.

After working in Qatar for two years as a cashier he is set to earn around Rs145,000, excluding overtime and bonuses. "I plan to work very hard and hope to stay long-term in Japan," he says.

In March 2019, the governments of Nepal and Japan signed a memorandum of cooperation for the SSW residence program. The SSW1 category of the program allows workers to remain in Japan for a maximum of five years, with workers ensured equality of treatment as well as the ability to change employers within the same sector.

There is also a longer-term SSW2 category that allows unlimited visa renewals and dependents. In the next five years, a total of 345,000 workers were to be hired from all SSW partner countries.

In addition to the win-win situation that such labour programs afford, by helping 14 sectors address



Binu Gurung is one of the few workers from Nepal who arrived in Japan in November 2020. She is now working in Japan as a caregiver (above).

Prakash Parajuli (left) at Kathmandu Airport before boarding his flight to Japan in December. He is one of very few who have benefited from the Japan-Nepal agreement for the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) residence status in Japan for 14 types of jobs.

severe worker shortages in super-aging Japan (see figure), it also allows Nepali youth to be gainfully employed at higher earnings in a secure labor market. Nepal had one more reason to be jubilant— it was the second country to sign the agreement with Japan after the



Philippines.

But little did we know that almost two years down the road, Parajuli would be just one of the handful of Nepalis who would benefit from this agreement despite the head start.

The agreement was a hybrid of the existing agreements Nepal has with other countries: it was neither a purely government-to-government model like that with South Korea or Israel, nor did it allow recruiters to play a role like the agreements with Malaysia and select Gulf countries. It was signed under a government-to-business model in which the Nepal Government proposed setting up a Japan Unit at the Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE) to oversee all aspects of the SSW implementation.

On the Japan side, the government played a more hands-off role and allowed the private sector to participate including employers, recruiters and support organisations. "This mixed modality is creating widespread confusion as there is a misconception that this is a government-to-government modality, while it isn't," says Yuzo Yoshioka, Charge d'Affaires, Embassy of Japan in Nepal.

This government-to-business model envisioned a proactive government that would take on added responsibilities in lieu of the recruiters via the Japan Unit. It was an attempt to ensure that the flawed technical implementation experiences related to the past programs would not be further exacerbated in this model, forcing workers to pay hefty amounts to land in the destination job market.

The success of this hybrid model, however, rested on a proactive Japan Unit that imitated the private sector's strengths in marketing, matching, information sharing and employer engagement. The SSW program itself has had a rough start. The number of countries that Japan has signed agreements with has increased over the last two years with the addition of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and most recently, India. But deployment has been poor across the board.

While the SSW program covers 14 sectors facing worker shortages, so far, tests have been arranged only for the caregiving sector in Nepal. Tests in other sectors like the food industry and agriculture are scheduled for February and March. Japan-based Nepalis have also been taking advantage of the tests administered in Japan to enable them to switch to SSW1 status.

In the last two fiscal years, 234 Nepalis have passed the technical examination for care

workers whereas 207 have passed the language exam. "So, over 200 aspirants are eligible to work as caregivers in Japan and they will have to make the effort to find suitable employment opportunities," says Yoshiko from the Japan Embassy.

And therein lies the confusion, as the Japan Unit at Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE) is still not functional, whereas private sector intermediaries are barred from participating. Both employers and migrants are unfamiliar with the recruitment and employment system in the other country.

In 2019, the Nepal Embassy issued 7 visas for SSW although it is not clear how many among them passed the exams in Nepal versus Japan. More visas have been issued in 2020, but the data has not been made public yet.

While individual labour approvals are being issued by DOFE, which means a migrant can independently arrange his contract with the employer and would be provided the labor approval by DOFE, it is easier said than done. The employment system is complex to navigate: from job search to obtaining the visa related paperwork, confusion related to language differences, distance and unfamiliarity of contexts and practices prevail.

Nepalis are already investing time, effort and money to prepare for the exams, with many, as seen in the case of over 200 successful test-takers, who are looking for guidance on being matched with employers in the caregiving sector.

Amid the confusion and delays, a few language institutes like Universal and Reiwa have stepped in to intermediate and garnered recognition among aspirants for helping them connect to employers. They explain that they have facilitated the interviews with care centers in Japan free of cost to the migrants because but are being compensated by their Japan-based partners.

Data obtained by Universal Training Center from the Japan Foundation shows that, of the couple hundred that have passed both exams, around 96 have gone further with the process and passed interviews, completed paperwork, and received their Certificate of Eligibility (COE), the last step required before they can apply for visas. But there are delays and uncertainty in obtaining visas due to the pandemic.

While confusion abounds and there is a pressing need for a functional Japan Unit or another alternate to the woeful inaction, the lucky few Nepalis who manage to overcome the odds are thankful for the opportunity.

Binu Gurung, was one of the first and few SSW workers from Nepal who arrived in Japan in November 2020. "I am now in my training period but am getting paid my regular wages. Most of the Japanese I take care of are in their 80s and 90s," she said over the phone. Her husband, too, has taken Japanese language classes and is waiting to take the exam so he can join her.

However, despite successfully completing his language and skills exams, Phanindra Sedai, has failed the interviews "I have taken the interview three times already," says Sedai. He worked in Malaysia for eight years as a security guard and now runs a small shop in Nepal, brushing up on Japanese vocabulary, when he can. "I won't stop reapplying because I have already invested an enormous amount of time and effort and passed the tests," he says. 🇳🇵

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Nepal hopes for tourism rebound in 2021

A lot depends on vaccines, arrival quarantine rules, and ease of getting visas

The availability of Covid-19 vaccines, a recent decrease in fatality rates in India and Nepal, and inquiries from travelers seeking to get out into the Himalayan wilderness, have raised hopes of a rebound in Nepal's tourism industry in 2021.

However, travel trade insiders say the numbers will only pick up if Nepal's tourism authorities are proactive about promoting Nepal as a safe destination, and if the byzantine rules for visas and quarantines are clarified and eased.

However, some of that optimism has been tempered by a new resurgence of the coronavirus in Europe and Southeast Asia, as well as sustained high levels of infection in the United States.

"We had a German group booked for an Annapurna Base Camp trek in February, but when they found out that they had to spend a week in quarantine in a hotel in Kathmandu, they cancelled," said one trekking agency owner who has not had a single group for one year now.

Although few question the need for quarantines, there is a feeling that with double PCR tests on arrival and after quarantine, the period can be reduced to four days.

Then there are the confusing rules about visas. Nepal has cancelled on-arrival visas, although in some cases tourists have been allowed in if their tour agent supplies proper documentation beforehand. The rules are neither clear, not consistently applied.

Present rules stipulate that foreigners coming to Nepal have to get visas before they come, have a PCR test 72 hours before the flight, \$5,000 insurance, a 7 day reservation at a designated hotel in Kathmandu, and a return ticket. Citizens of countries where there are no Nepal embassies have to send their passports to



KUNDA DIXIT

the nearest capital with one.

However, where trekking agents with enough connections could organise the papers, some trekking and climbing groups have got visas on arrival.

"The rules have to be very clear, they should not be confusing, and they should be consistently applied," said an international airline manager in Kathmandu. "Otherwise, it adds to the uncertainty of travelling in the time of corona, and people end up cancelling their trips."

The travel trade is putting pressure on the Ministry of Tourism to allow visa on arrival to all foreigners as long as they have insurance and PCR negative reports, and to streamline the entry process before the spring trekking and climbing season to revive the industry. More than 1 million people used to be directly employed in the tourism industry, and double that number depended partly on income from the sector.

"I am not very optimistic about 2021, but I believe 2022 is going to explode," says Birendra Basnet, Managing Director of Nepal's largest domestic airline Buddha Air, who expects arrivals by road and air to increase once India-Nepal travel is opened.

However, for attracting tourists from Europe and North America, he says

Nepal has to publicise the fact that Nepal is a safe destination, and rebrand itself and proactively promote its unspoilt nature, and wilderness adventure for the post-pandemic era.

Buddha Air had started training its staff with safety drills and health protocols training for check-in and on board in July. After domestic flights resumed mid-September, Nepal's airlines have been carrying even more passengers than pre-Covid on trunk routes because of reduced fares and the risks in long-distance bus travel.

Much of this surge is also due to the expansion in domestic tourism. Although arrivals figures are still lower than pre-Covid levels, destinations like Chitwan, Pokhara, Khumbu have picked up because of Nepali travelers.

Indeed, Dhananjay Regmi of Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) says domestic tourism has been able to partially compensate for the loss in business in the hospitality industry that used to be dominated by international visitors.

"Domestic tourism sustained us during the time of crisis, now with the vaccines, we hope foreign tourists will start coming back from the spring season," Regmi says.

However, airline and hotel executives say that unless the visa process is made easier, and the restrictions relaxed, it is unlikely that the numbers will pick up till September at the earliest.

After regular international flights restarted in October, and trekking resumed, there has been some foreigners trickling in, but most have been deterred by safety concerns, as well as entry restrictions. Total tourists dropped from over 1.1 million in 2019 to fewer than 230,000 last year.

Tribhuvan International Airport saw a drop in number of passengers from 4.13 million in 2019 to only 1.03 million last year.

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Nepal's gods re

Western museums are under pressure to send back Kathmandu Valley's stolen deities

● Alisha Sijapati

One day in 1984, the residents of a Patan neighbourhood woke up in the morning to notice that the Laxmi-Narayan they had been worshipping, was missing from the shrine.

The rare, androgynous composite deity of the two deities had been in the temple in Patko Tole for 800 years, where it had been venerated by generations. Having lost all hope of finding it, the community established a poor replica of Laxmi-Narayan and placed it in the shrine in 1993.

Six years after its theft, in 1990, the 12th-century statue, which is also known as Vasudeva-Kamala surfaced briefly at Sotheby's auction house based in New York. But it vanished again after that.

Two years ago, American artist Joy Lynn Davis, who had documented Kathmandu's stolen deities through her unique paintings, was doing a Google search of lost idols from Nepal, when she came across a grainy image of the familiar Laxmi-Narayan that she had painted (see interview).

Working from the image, the deity was traced to the Dallas Museum of Art to which it had been loaned for 30 years by private collector David T Owsley.

American art crime professor Erin L Thompson went on to write an elaborate piece on the stolen god last January in the portal, *Hyperallergic*, titled 'Stolen Deities surface in a Dallas museum'. This put not just the Laxmi-Narayan but other stolen Nepali deities in the international limelight.

Bhai Raja Shrestha, a resident of Patko Tole is excited that their god has been located and will soon be returned because of the evidence of provenance of the statue.

"Every single authority involved in Nepal and the US has done a great job, all the paperwork is done. We are just waiting for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to work out some final formalities," says Damodar Gautam, Director-General of Department of Archaeology.

While the Laxmi-Narayan statue is on its way back home, another deity, a 10th century Uma Maheswar, sits at the Denver Art Museum. The Museum has also put out the 'known' provenance of the statue that has been in the collection of the museum since the 1980s given by Jane F. Ullman to his son, Edwin.

Patan to Denver

Uma-Maheswar statues usually follow the same iconographic tradition, but the one that was stolen from Gahiti in the 1960s is distinct because of its unique structure.

Babulal Maharjan, 82, looks frail and does not have many memories of his youth, but remembers the deity because of his community's reverence for this beautiful deity. Fifty years after it was stolen, Gahiti residents still preserve its base below a graffiti-scrawled wall, hoping for its eventual return.

When Nepali Times showed Babulal and his 78-year-old neighbour Babukaji Maharjan a photograph of their Uma-Maheswar which is now in the Denver Art Museum, both immediately recognised the familiar figure.

"With Patan's Laxmi-Narayan now making its way back home, and with rising awareness and the pressure, someday the Uma-Maheswar will also find its way back like other gods," says Suresh Lakhey of Patan Museum.

More than 30 stolen gods have been returned to Nepal from various museums and private collections in the past years, and although it is only a small percentage of the stolen images, it does represent a trend. Museums and collectors are now ashamed to exhibit stolen artifacts.

Another activist has been trying to draw attention to Nepal's stolen gods, but in a slightly different way. In Bhaktapur, architect Rabindra Puri is setting up a museum with replicas of trafficked cultural heritage, including Patan's Laxmi-Narayan.

Puri's Museum of Stolen Gods at the Toni Hagen House in Bhaktapur is set to open in 2022, and already has duplicates made of 36 stolen stone statues. He says: "Our gods are merely an art object



The long wait

The 10th century idol of Uma-Maheswar in Gahiti, Patan (above) pictured in Lain Singh Bangdel's book *Stolen Images of Nepal*, which was stolen in the mid 1960's.

More than 50 years after the Uma-Maheswar was stolen, the community has preserved the base below a graffiti-scrawled wall in Gahiti (right), hoping for its eventual return.

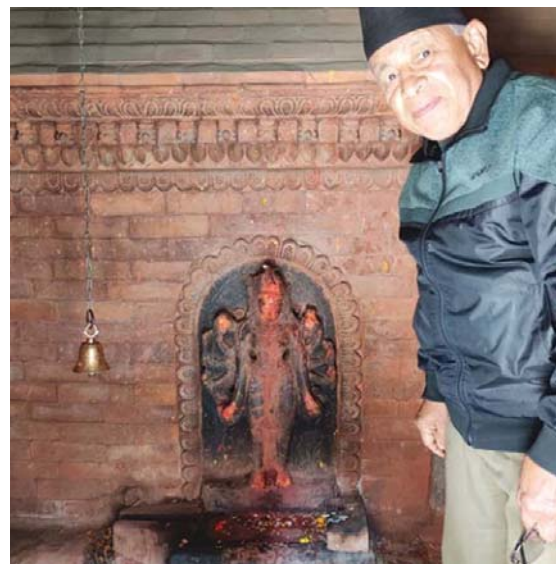
The Gahiti Uma-Maheswar is at present an exhibit in the Denver Art Museum (far right).



LAIN SINGH BANGDEL



ERIN L THOMPSON



Holy homecomings

Kanak Mani Dixit: You painted Patan's stolen Laxmi-Narayan idol. Why that particular idol and how did you ultimately locate it at the Dallas Art Museum?

Joy Lynn Davis: I painted the Laxmi Narayan *murti* based on its replica in 2013 when I was living in Patan as an artist resident at Kathmandu Contemporary Art Centre. At that time, we knew that the idol had been stolen in 1984 and sold by Sotheby's in New York in 1989. After that, no one knew its whereabouts.

I did a Google image search, and found the blurry image of a Laxmi-Narayan and my heart just jumped. I knew immediately it was the same *murti* from Patan. The image was on a blog by a Nepali who didn't know that the idol in the Dallas Museum was stolen. It was particularly extraordinary to have found the image online.

Where are we on the return of the Laxmi-Narayan statue to Nepal?

It's been a great privilege to be able to collaborate with the FBI and share the information I had collected. The Dallas Museum was not immediately open to returning the *murti* and the FBI was able to make a very strong case against them. It has now been seized and will soon be returned to Nepal. The day it arrives in Nepal, I will be the happiest person—so many people and organisations have worked on this.

But if we put out information about the theft, wouldn't museums and collectors hide the statues, making their return even more difficult?

I absolutely agree. There are many sculptures around the world from Nepal. They are now housed in museum storage facilities. It is unfortunate. We need to get the word out there that Nepal is ready to accept them back. It would be ideal if the museums worked on it voluntarily, and we could help facilitate that. We can make replicas for them, document



American artist Joy Lynn Davis talks about her famous 2015 exhibition, 'Remembering the Lost Sculptures of Kathmandu' and her unique method of commemorating Nepal's stolen idols through paintings. She spoke to Kanak Mani Dixit on the *Saglo Samaj* tv magazine program. Excerpts:

Return from exile



ALISHA SIJAPATI



Lost and found

The original 12th century Laxmi-Narayan before it was stolen in 1984 from Patko Tole in Patan (*photo strip, below*).

After vanishing for six years, the idol reappeared in a Sotheby's auction catalogue in 1990.

Bhai Raja Shrestha of Patoko Tole at the shrine in which a replica of the stolen stone statue consecrated in 1993.

The rare androgynous Laxmi-Narayan was memorialised in gold by Joy Lynn Davis in her painting exhibition in 2015.

In 2018, Davis came across an image of the statue on Google, and located it at the Dallas Art Museum, which is now working with Nepal's authorities to bring the god home from exile.

in the international market to be auctioned for thousands of dollars. But for us, all of these artefacts hold cultural and religious significance that represents our values."

During the peak of the plunder of Kathmandu Valley's cultural heritage in the 1980s, many had given up hope of the bronze deities, wooden friezes, and stone carvings ever finding their way home. But moral pressure is growing on Western collectors and museums because of the naming and shaming.

Much of the awareness about the thefts were due to the painstaking work of two art historians Jürgen Schick and Lain Singh Bangdel who in the 1980s and 90s recorded images and information of over 200 missing deities in their books *The Gods are Leaving the Country: Art Theft from Nepal* and *Stolen Images of Nepal*, respectively.

Pharping's Saraswati

One of those is the juxtaposed images of Veendharini Saraswati from Pharping. In 1984, thieves decapitated the Goddess of Learning because the rest of the stone figure was too heavy to transport. It has been replaced by a poor replica that appears as a prosthetic to the beheaded body.

But the Saraswati was located and returned to Nepal in 1999 by an anonymous person from USA, Los Angeles, and is now an exhibit at the National Museum in Chhauni Museum.

The most popular deity for smugglers appears to be figures of Uma Maheswar, which depict Shiva and Parvati in embrace. Since the 1950s, over 26 statues of the conjugal deities have been stolen from Kathmandu Valley, some of them dating back to 11th century. Most are in museums or warehouses abroad, and only a handful have been returned to their original shrines.

Once deities are returned, they are sent to the National Museum which then works with local communities where the gods were stolen from, to determine if it is safe to send them back and there is no danger of them being stolen again.

For example, the exquisite bronze water spout depicting Laxmi Narayan and Garuda was stolen from Sundari Chok in Patan Darbar Square 50 years ago, but was retrieved by police before it could be smuggled abroad. It has been replaced with the duplicate, while

the original is in Chhauni.

"Our Ancient Monument Act requires us to help communities install the gods back to their rightful places," says Jayaram Shrestha, Director of the National Museum.

Roshan Mishra, curator at Taragoan Museum, also has the Global Nepali Museum database says that because of public awareness in Nepal, stolen stone statues are easy to locate because they were lifted from public places and some continue to have vermilion marks on them even after continuous polishing.

"International museums and auction houses have started becoming aware about the trafficking of cultural heritage items which makes it more difficult for thieves to steal and sell them," Mishra explains. However, the market for stolen antiquities has shifted from the West to museums and private collectors in West Asia, China and Hong Kong.

Mishra gives full credit to Jürgen Schick and Lain Singh Bangdel for their early effort in documenting stolen gods: "If it wasn't for them, I don't think we would have had the community awareness we have now."

Another 12th-century statue of Uma Maheswar which was stolen from Dhulikhel's Wo Tole in 1982 was retrieved from the Museum für Indische Kunst in Berlin in 2000, and is now placed in its temporary home at Patan Museum. Twenty years later, the youth of Wo Tole and the Dhulikhel mayor are preparing to restore the statue to its original location, and a shrine has been reconstructed to house it.

Sun Prasad Shrestha, 70, who lives on the street from where the figure was stolen, says "It'll be an exciting moment to have the familiar gods back again. But what will happen if the thieves steal it again? How will we protect it?"



(This article and interview with Joy Lynn Davis are based on the fifth episode of Saglo Samaj, a tv magazine program produced by Himalmedia which is broadcast every Monday, at 8:30 pm on Dish Home Channel 130. Go online to watch a trailer of the program.)



JOY LYNN DAVIS



ERIN L THOMPSON



The 16th century Saraswati statue in Pharping before and after it was decapitated in 1984 (*left*), and the head smuggled out to be sold to an art collector in the West. The head was returned to Nepal in 1999 and is now in the National Museum in Chhauni (*above*) while the original has a replica prosthetic head.

stories of the sculptures returned and their cultural significance. Museum visitors would find that much more interesting.

Why paint the stolen idols the way you did?

The goal of the project was to increase public awareness of the problem of illicit trafficking of Nepal's cultural heritage. The other goal was to re-contextualise the stolen sculptures. As a Westerner visiting a museum, if I had not worked on the project, I would glare at the art knowing little about it. Visitors believe these sculptures were dug out of the ground and have no idea about their religious, cultural and spiritual significance. Through my paintings, I wanted to put back the stolen gods in their rightful places.

Why did you choose to use gold in your work?

First, gold becomes an easy visual language for viewers when they look at the painting and they understand that they are from these sacred sites. One painting of gold that I worked on was of Saraswati. The thieves had chopped off the head, and just the head was painted in gold—the collector returned it in 1990. Gold represents the commodification of the sacred. We are used to seeing gold in art and temples. Gold

also symbolises wealth. Gold has the value of spirituality, and when sold, it turns to cold hard cash.

The original Laxmi-Narayan statue is covered in tika, but under the museum spotlight, it is a shiny black rock.

To see the sculptures in places where they were touched and conversed with, has more significance. For Nepalis, these aren't just statues, they embody religious and cultural sentiments. In the West, these values are transformed. This murti will always have more value in its original place.

The reason statues are stolen is their market value. What should we do to ensure they cannot be stolen?

Nepalis should not feel bad that they were not able to protect their gods. These problems come from bidesi foreigners. The gods were saved for hundreds of years in their shrines, and then outsiders wanted to own them. I think the only way to protect them is to increase the awareness about their significance. We have a lot of work to do, Laxmi-Narayan is just the beginning.

EVENTS



Hitaishi 2021
Hitaishi's rural-urban intercultural exchange project will develop skills, knowledge, and empower girls to promote talents and abilities through travelling to diverse communities. Register for the fundraiser hike on Facebook.
30 January, 7am - 6pm, Shivapuri National Park



First-aid course
Join Outdoor Adventure Center's one-day refresher course and polish those rusty wilderness first-aid skills. Go to OAC's Facebook page for more information.
2 February, 9 am, Outdoor Adventure Center Nepal

The Latin Lovers
Beer and great music this Friday at the London Pub, where Chris Masand will perform live. Get details on London Pub's Facebook page.
29 January, 7 pm, London PUB Kathmandu



Le Sherpa market
Support local businesses. Shop for fresh fruit and vegetables, cheese, bread, meat products, honey, and much more. Physical distancing measures apply.
Saturdays, 8am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa, Maharajgunj

ONLINE ARCHIVES



Herne Katha
The web series shows untold stories of ordinary people in the form of short documentaries. Go to Herne Katha's YouTube channel to start.

Martin Chautari
Watch Martin Chautari discussion sessions on topics ranging from feminism to parenting to Nepali infrastructure. Sessions are available on the Martin Chautari Facebook page.



One world theatre
Some of One World Theatre's plays are now on YouTube. Watch "The Flight" and a Nepali adaptation of the Russian play, "Three Sisters".



Divya
Celebrate Nepali art and artists. Check out the work of 17 traditional artists online through Tulikaa Kala's website. The artwork is also available to purchase.

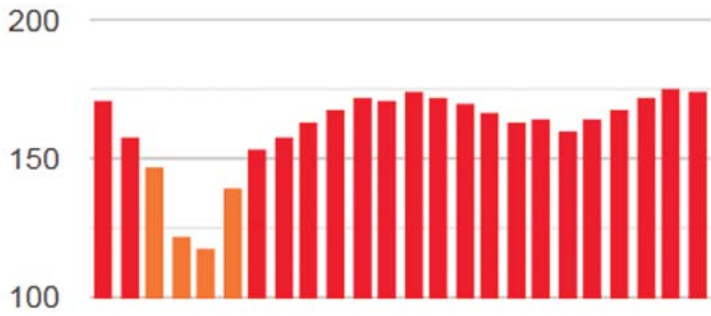


NHDP Virtual Tour
Nepal Heritage Documentation Project visits Patan's monuments right from home, and learn about the historic heritage site in the process. Visit NHDP's website for details.



No respite from this long drought over Central Nepal. the forest floors are tinder dry, so be careful, those of you planning hikes in the hills. There will be some cloud cover on Friday and the weekend, but for the most part it will have a very wintry feel with the minimum dropping to 2-3 Celsius with frost. The Tarai fog will be thick, and not likely to burn off during the day. Both maximum and minimum temperatures will rise slightly early next week, but no rain in sight.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

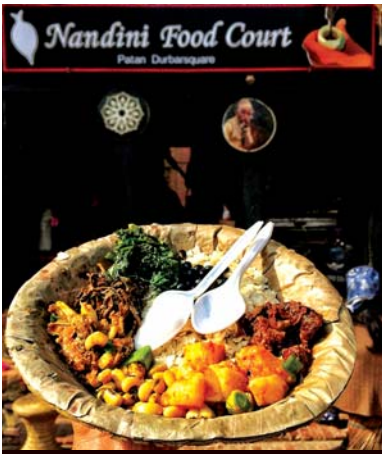


Kathmandu's Air Quality Index this past week has occasionally peaked at above 300 in the 'Hazardous' zone during traffic rush hours. The afternoon breeze blows away some of it, but by evening winter inversion in the Valley has kept pollutants trapped in a thin surface layer, worsening the AQI. The eastern parts of the Valley are generally more polluted because of prevailing winds, but everywhere is pretty unhealthy. Those with respiratory issues and allergies should not venture out in the mornings and evenings.



Dish Home is now airing the popular Turkish series 20 Minutes starring Tuba Büyüküstün and Ilker Aksum. The show follows the story of Ali Halaskar, a history teacher with a happy family who ventures into a world of action and intrigue when his wife Melek is arrested for an attempted murder and sentenced to prison for 20 years.

DINING



Nandini Food Court
Head to Nandini Food Court to try out the Newari Platter. Or order Yomari, one of the best dishes on the menu.
Patan, 9849259212



Jatra Cafe & Bar
Jatra offers a wide variety of Continental cuisine. Try the signature Veg Momo and Sukuti Pizza and enjoy the wonderful, cosy ambiance with other delicious Nepali and Indian dishes on the menu.
Thamel (01) 4256622



Hermann Helmers
With a tint of European charm, Hermann Helmers serves a wide array of cookies, bread, pastries and their most famous cakes. Relish in the baked delights alongside a mug of hot chocolate.
Jhamsikhel (01) 5524900



Places Restaurant & Bar
A testament to how vegetables can be used in a variety of creative and tasty ways, Places has an entire plant-based tasting menu—from vegan pizzas to vegan comfort food— all in one place.
Thamel (01) 4700413

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Memories of home

Himalayan Light Foundation awardees Jagdish Moktan and Priyanka Singh Maharjan showcase their work at Siddhartha Art Gallery

● Alisha Sijapati

After nearly a year of closure, Siddhartha Art Gallery is putting up two new shows. Jagdish Moktan's *The Way Home is Away from Home* and Priyanka Singh Maharjan's *In the Realm of Recollections* showcase art they worked on during the pandemic.

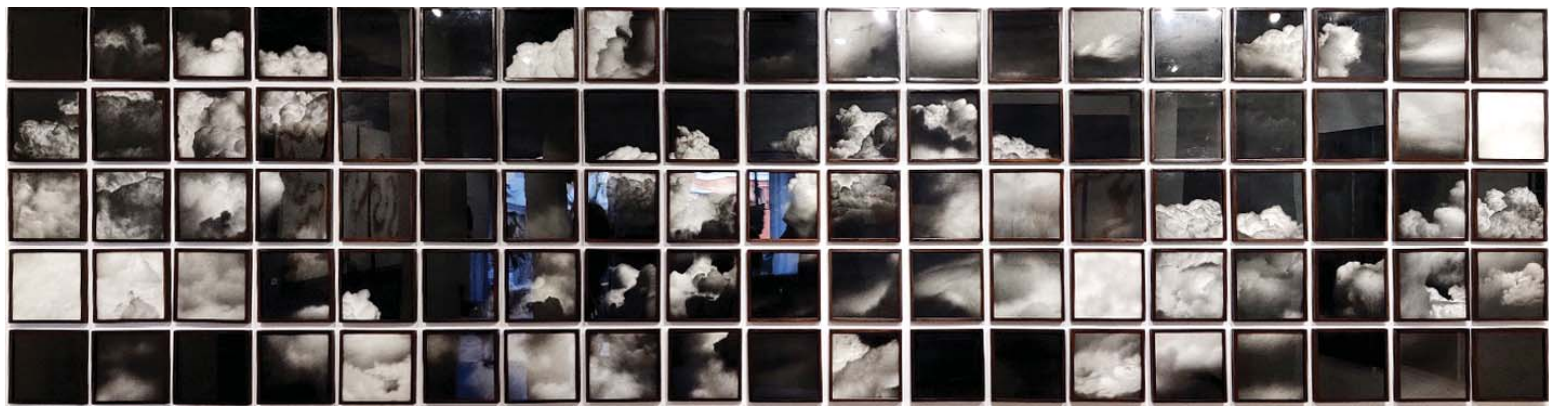
The artists received the Himalayan Light Art Scholarship Awards, a joint grant created by Chinese artist Zhao Jianqui and Siddhartha Art Gallery's Director, Sangeeta Thapa.

Although both Moktan and Maharjan have taken part in group shows at their university's BFA exhibitions, Angkor Photo Festival and Kochi Biennale, they were very anxious about the reception they would receive in Nepal.

"When you work on your own, you have to be your own judge. But when the work gets on display for viewers, the anticipation is somewhat different," Moktan said after the inauguration at Baber Mahal Revisited.

There is an array of Moktan's 108 frames of charcoal on paper along the walls at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. The series is called 'Fragmented Clouds', and depict skies hemmed in by densely-packed buildings where the clouds are reflected on window panes.

"Crammed in my room in Bhaktapur during the lockdown, looking from one window to another, I often wondered how it might be to see beautiful clouds from my ancestral hometown in Ramechhap," he



says. "Although I was born and brought up in Kathmandu, my sense of belonging has always been associated with Ramechhap."

Moktan calls his work an attempt to explore his feelings of alienation, and finding the road home. The art is unrestricted in form of medium, and consists of realistic portraits in oils and coloured soil—faces he paints from memory, exploring his relation to his ancestral home.

Jagdish Moktan painted the reflection of clouds as seen on a neighbour's window, during the lockdown.

Priyanka Maharjan embroiders colourful designs to old photographs to amplify her childhood memories.

While Moktan's works on the ground floor showcase his hyper-realistic vision, the first floor of the gallery also carries the theme of 'home', but to a polar opposite level. Maharjan's exhibit, *In the Realm of Recollections*, is grounded in nostalgia out of which she weaves patterns.

Maharjan creates art out of memory, scanning old family images, and transferring them on to fabric. She picks a set of black and white images, and embroiders on them, the variations of different stitches amplifying her own experiences of those memories.

"I learned hand embroidery from my grandmother. My father, who was working in Hong Kong then, often sent pictures via posts. Those photos and my grandmother's embroidery skills have always been close to my heart," says Maharjan.

Her work transforms the ceiling into an amalgamation of images and colourful stitches that instantly embrace the visitor in the warmth, associated with the idea of home. She was studying chartered accountancy and increasingly unsure about her career path, when a friend suggested applying to Kathmandu University.

While the two exhibitions are juxtapositions in terms of projection, thematically, they converge in their sense of belonging. While Maharjan accumulates an abundance of family memories, Moktan pursues the idea of a distant home.

Himalayan Light Art Award tries to give space to emerging artists in Nepal with the potential to go big with an original personal style. Prithvi Shrestha, Lavakant Chaudhary, Man Gurung and Subhas Tamang are artists who have been recipients of the scholarship in the past.

The Foundation's Justin Zhao says, "Through this scholarship, we want the artists to hone their skills and help them organise exhibitions."

Sangeeta Thapa of Siddhartha Art Gallery wishes there were platforms like the Himalayan Lights Scholarships when she was an aspiring artist herself.

"As an art curator, my job is to see the potential in the artists and display their work. It is about promoting these budding artists and making them known to the viewers," Thapa told Nepali Times.

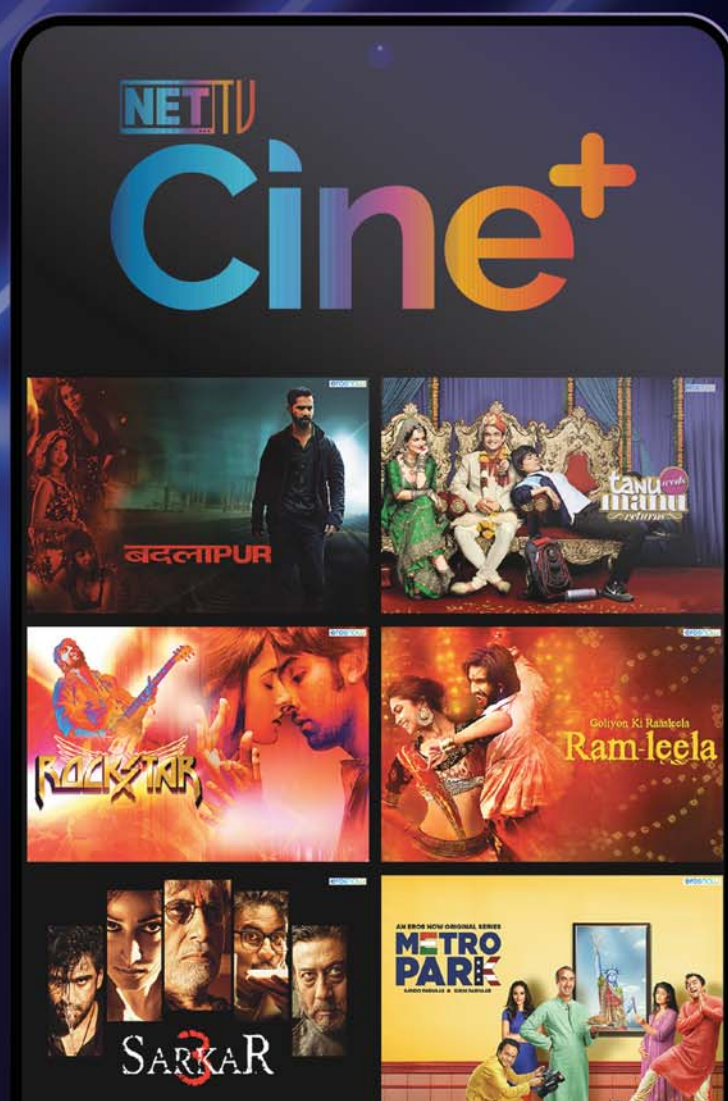
She adds that Maharjan and Moktan's works are representations of how the two artists worked through the lockdown, amidst the uncertainty of the pandemic.

Being sequestered at home for such a long period may have inspired them to create new versions of 'home'. 🇳🇵

The Way Home is Away from Home and In the Realm of Recollections

Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited
Till 15 February 2021

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MOFA NEPAL

COORDINATING ROLE: UN Resident Coordinator to Nepal, Sara Beysolow Nyanti presenting Letter of Credence to Foreign Minister, Pradeep Kumar Gyawali on Tuesday.



EMBASSY OF INDIA

VIVE LA REPUBLIQUE: Indian Ambassador, Vinay Mohan Kwatra with Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali at the Indian Independence Day celebration on 26 January, in Lazimpat.



RAJAN KAFLE/PMO

TOP TEN: Ten Nepali members who made the first ever winter ascent of the world's second highest mountain, K2, in Pakistan on 16 January, being felicitated by Prime Minister Oli at Baluwatar on Tuesday.



TURKISH AIRLINES

FREE PCR: Abdullah Tuncer Kececi, General Manager of Turkish Airlines for Nepal after signing an agreement with Bishak Dhakal of Health at Home/Med Pro International for PCR tests for passengers on the carrier.



ROTARY CLUB KATHMANDU MIDTOWN

HELPING HAND: The Rotary Club of Kathmandu Midtown awarded its first Pratap Malla Social Service Award to Bashudev Adhikari, a visually challenged radio journalist (second from right) at a ceremony on 23 January.



As we crossed the threshold from 2020 to 2021, many had thought this year would be a better one—but we have to give it time. We continue to experience anxiety because the Covid-19 pandemic is still a chief cause of concern for millions.



LIFE TIME

Anjana Rajbhandary

We are living in overwhelming times and it can cause emotions such as frustration and irritability more easily than before. It is completely normal to feel anxiety at such times as we are learning to cope with stress, worry and fear of the unknown. We cannot help but wonder what could go wrong next?

Health measures such as social distancing, closing of establishments and wearing masks have made people feel isolated, lonely, and angry—all these emotions add to more stress and anxiety.

As we continue to address the corona virus pandemic, it is time to pay attention to the one that grows at a parallel—the mental health pandemic. It is vital to learn healthy coping methods to take care of oneself, and as a sense of responsibility to the community we live in. Right now, the concerns are bigger than before. It is no longer, just about us but about everyone around us.

It is completely natural to experience feelings of worry and stress about one's own health. It is valid to have fears regarding your financial situation or potential loss of employment due to businesses closing.

When you feel anxiety, it is normal to notice changes in your eating and sleeping patterns, having difficulty concentrating, and feeling of temptation to use more caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol. When you experience such changes and urges, it is important to realise that your mental health needs attention.

Like most things in life, anxiety is not a one size fits all. Different people experience different signs and symptoms of anxiety. People react differently to stressful

situations, and the same coping mechanisms and treatments will not work for everyone.

There are many factors that affect the level of stress and anxiety you feel during a pandemic, such as your emotional and physical health, emotional support from family and friends, and your financial situation, among others.

Just because meditation worked for your cousin, it does not mean it will work for you the same way. You may have to try different methods, so you are able to find what works best for you. Till then, it is important for you to stay patient.

Be kind to yourself and remind yourself that it is completely normal to experience anxiety during a pandemic and that there are healthy ways available to tackle that anxiety.

Here are some ways you can take care of yourself and others during the pandemic.

- Take care of your family but also remember to take care of yourself.
- Establish and focus on meaningful connections with people.
- Continue to maintain social connections with family and friends despite social distancing via phone calls or video chats, as loneliness and isolation can deeply affect one's mental wellbeing.
- It is important to do your research and get your information from reliable sources. Do not believe everything you see and hear on social media, and only trust Covid related information from certified medical professionals.

Make sure to have the following information easily available:

- Know what to do if you think you might be sick or infected. Given your health and access to medical facilities, go see a medical provider to get a PCR test or self-quarantine as needed.
- Know when and where you can get tested close to home, the average cost of tests and the amount of time taken to get the PCR results.

If you believe something won't help you, it never will; but if you believe that something can help you, it just might.

- Take care of your emotional well-being by having someone to talk to and have someone who can bring you groceries and medicine if you were to self-quarantine.
- Find out details about mental health professionals accessible to you, so that you have someone to talk to if needed.
- Staying in alone can be daunting, so engage in activities such as reading or watching television. Try methods to keep your mind busy.
- Maintain a healthy diet, stay active, try to get adequate sleep, and do not use caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, and illegal drugs as they might make your anxiety worse.

It is possible to experience anxiety and panic attacks at any time, so remember to keep aside a set of helpful ideas that will help you in those moments. Here are some tips to help you in case of extreme anxiety or panic attacks:

- Focus on your breath and practice the breathing exercise 4-7-8 (see video). This breathing exercise has shown to help decrease anxiety.
- Practice yoga and meditation.
- Practice mindfulness by learning to be aware of the present moment. (Mindfulness is paying attention to experiences occurring in your present moment)
- Use lavender oil as it tends to have a calming effect.
- Speak with a supportive loved one whom you can trust.
- Have faith in yourself and if praying helps, pray.
- If you feel you are a danger to self and worried for your life, speak with a psychologist, therapist or counsellor.

It is extremely important to take care of your mental health for your overall wellbeing because it has a strong influence on how we handle life's stressors, react in emergencies, and relate to other people. It is okay if you need therapy or medication. Everyone has different needs.

Remind yourself that some days you will feel more anxious than others and it is completely normal. It is important to realise that the feelings of anxiety are only a phase. When you feel extreme anxiety, you probably feel like your anxiety will never go away. But let me tell you this: it does, and it will. The truest (and the worst) thing anyone told me about anxiety is that it will go away, and it will take time and it will take work from your side.

So, be patient and compassionate with yourself. Your anxiety is not who you are but how you are feeling, and it is okay to feel that way as long as you try to help yourself. Treat yourself the way you would a loved one who is going through a hard time. Give yourself a chance, and never give up on yourself. Just remember that you are not alone in this. 🇳🇵



LIFE TIME

Watch the video accompanying a new installment of Anjana Rajbhandari's column Life Time in which she takes viewers through a mindfulness exercise to cope with these stressful times.

How transboundary haze affects Nepal

Indo-Gangetic pollution flows up Himalayan river valleys, to the mountains

● Prabhakar Shrestha

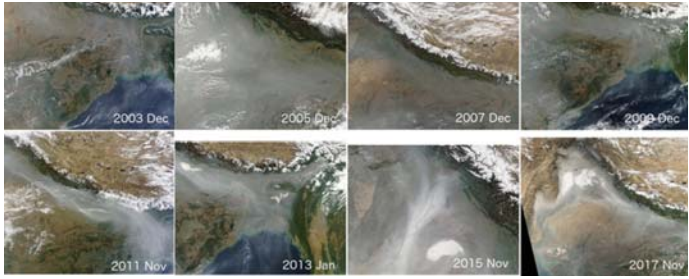
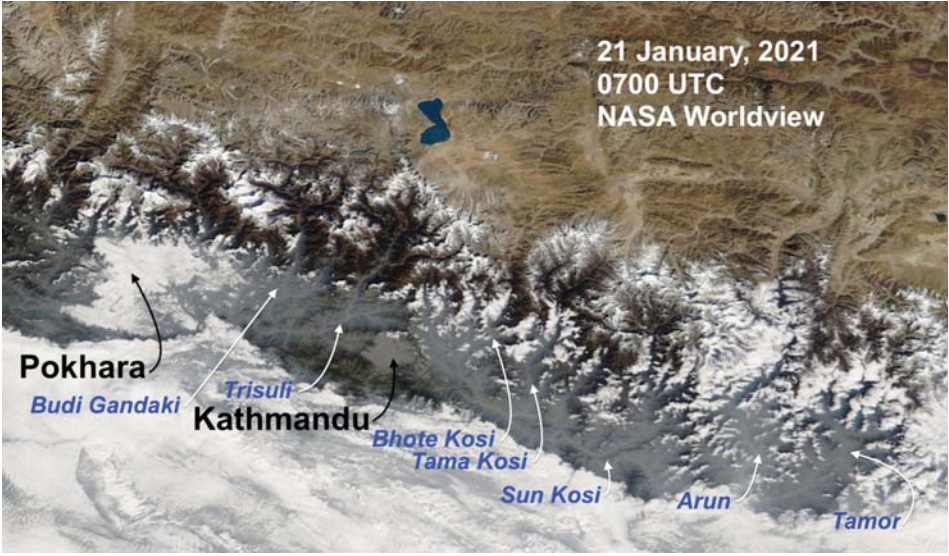
The Himalayan mountains act as a barrier separating the clean air of the Tibetan Plateau from the polluted Indo-Gangetic plains. But Nepal's rivers cut through the mountains, and their valleys allow smog from the plains to penetrate deep into the mountains.

This haze intrusion goes up to elevations of 4,000m, and the pollution layer is more shallow and flat in winter, and inclined and parallel to the ridgeline in the pre-monsoon. The depth of this pollution layer up the valleys also decreases with elevation.

These visible air pollution images are captured regularly by the MODIS (Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer) instrument aboard the two NASA satellites Terra and Aqua orbiting the Earth. The dull bluish haze is mostly made up of fine aerosol particles and extends right across the Indo-Gangetic plains from Pakistan to Bangladesh, as well as the Tarai in Nepal.

While human-generated emissions from agricultural burning, urban, rural and industrial emissions are mainly responsible for this region-wide pollution, weather conditions and the blocking effect of the Siwalik Range also affect its spread. More interestingly, if we zoom in on the images, we can see that the haze does not just stay in the plains, but flows up into the inner Himalaya along river valleys.

These satellite images provide



NASA satellite image showing Central Nepal's river valleys and how they act as funnels for pollution from the Indian plains to travel up to the mountains (left).

Blue Indo-Gangetic pollution seen in satellite images taken in November-December from 2003 to 2017 (above).

valuable insight for researchers looking into the geographical spread and long-range transport of aerosol particles. Scientists at Duke University in the United States have developed a novel technique to use the high-resolution satellite images from MODIS and elevation data from SRTM (Shuttle Radar Topography Mission) to extract the daytime haze run-up that measure intrusion length and height over the Arun Valley in eastern Nepal.

The Arun River starts in Tibet, snakes around Mt Everest to find a gap between Makalu and Kangchenjunga to tumble down Himalayan gorges to meet up with the Sun Kosi and Tamor—flowing out into the Tarai at Chhatra and then through the Kosi Barrage to meet the Ganges in India. This also opens up the entry gate for haze to

flow from the Indo-Gangetic Plains into the inner Himalaya.

In winter, the surface temperature in the plains plummets, and the air is dry. The southern edge of the Tibetan Plateau at upper levels is also battered by the sub-tropical jetstream, with weak westerly wind below it. The low surface temperature in the plains confines the pollution to a shallow boundary layer that is lower than the Siwalik Range. Up-valley winds along the river valleys then transport the haze into the Inner Himalaya.

In general, the aerosol size distribution peaks around 100nm, which is usually the oldest, most processed background aerosol and about the size of the Covid-19 virus. Another smaller peak around 20 nm, is indicative of fresh but not

necessarily local aerosols. The chemical composition of PM2.5 (particulate matter below 2.5 microns) is dominated by organic matter from burning of wood fuels, crop-residue, coal including vehicular emission, and others. The light absorbing properties of elemental carbon play a crucial role in atmospheric warming and surface cooling due to their interaction with the daytime solar heating.

Aside from transboundary haze, this winter has also seen an increase in wildfires that have exacerbated the pollution in Nepal's Inner Himalayan valleys. The Pathivara and Annapurna Conservation Area fires in December, followed by uncontrolled wildfires in Manang, Lamjung and Rasuwa in January were clearly visible in NASA satellite images.

The very high pollution levels in Kathmandu Valley on 6-7 January was also aggravated by overcast skies which subdued the ventilation mechanism of the valley, but smoke from these wildfires also acted as contributors.

While local air pollution can be brought under control in the interest of protecting public health by the local governments with appropriate policy and regulation, it is trans-boundary pollution that cannot be easily addressed. More immediately, there is an urgent need to set up permanent air quality monitoring stations along Nepal's major river valley outlets to monitor trans-boundary air pollution. 📍

Prabhakar Shrestha is a research scientist working at Bonn University, Germany.

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Lost in translation

Nepal struggles to preserve its indigenous languages as those speaking them dwindle

● Alisha Sijapati

At last count Nepal had 129 spoken languages, but even as new ones are identified, others are becoming extinct.

At least 24 of the languages and dialects spoken in Nepal are 'endangered', and the next ones on the verge of disappearing are Dura, Kusunda, and Tillung, each of which have only one speaker left. If a language is spoken by less than 1,000 people, it is categorised as 'endangered'.

"It will not surprise me if these three languages will be the next to go. With no one left to speak, we will not be able to save them," says Lok Bahadur Lopchan of the Language Commission of Nepal, which is entrusted with preserving Nepal's linguistic diversity.

Lopchan predicts that over 37 more languages spoken in Nepal are likely to disappear in the next ten years.

According to the Language Commission of Nepal's 2019 annual report the languages most commonly spoken in the country are Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpur, Tharu, Tamang, Nepal Bhasa, Bajjika, Magar, Doteli



MONIKADEUPALA

and Urdu, in that order.

But just as there are languages disappearing, new ones that had never been recognised are being found in far flung parts of the country, like Rana Tharu which is spoken in the western Tarai, Narphu in a remote valley in Manang, Tsum in the Tsum Valley of Upper Gorkha, Nubri Larke in the Manaslu region, Poike and Syarke.

"It is fortunate that these languages have been identified, but it is unfortunate they are spoken

by very few people, and could very soon die out," says Lopchan, who adds that every two weeks, an indigenous language goes extinct somewhere in the world.

Even those that are among the top ten most spoken in Nepal are losing their first language status. Parents insist on proficiency in Nepali or English in school to ensure good job prospects for their children. And even since King Mahendra's reign, the state has pushed Nepali as the lingua franca to the detriment of

other national languages.

Supral Raj Joshi, 29, is a voice actor and grew up speaking Newa at home. But from primary school onwards, it was Nepali and English only in class, and he soon forgot his mother tongue. Speaking Nepali with his family, it suddenly struck him how much of his culture he had lost with the language.

"The loss of Nepal's languages is the result of deliberate state policy, our linguistic heritage was swept away to promote a national

character," says Joshi.

King Mahendra instituted measures to create a unified Nepali identity through dress, language, and even dismantled democracy and instituted the partyless Panchayat system that he said "suited the Nepali soil".

Experts say that the decision enforcing the idea of nationalism through one language restricted indigenous communities to speak their ancestral tongue.

"The dominant class made its language the national language, and in doing so other languages suffered collateral damage," says Rajendra Dahal, Editor of Shikshak magazine. "The end of a language is not just a loss for a community, but for the country and the world."

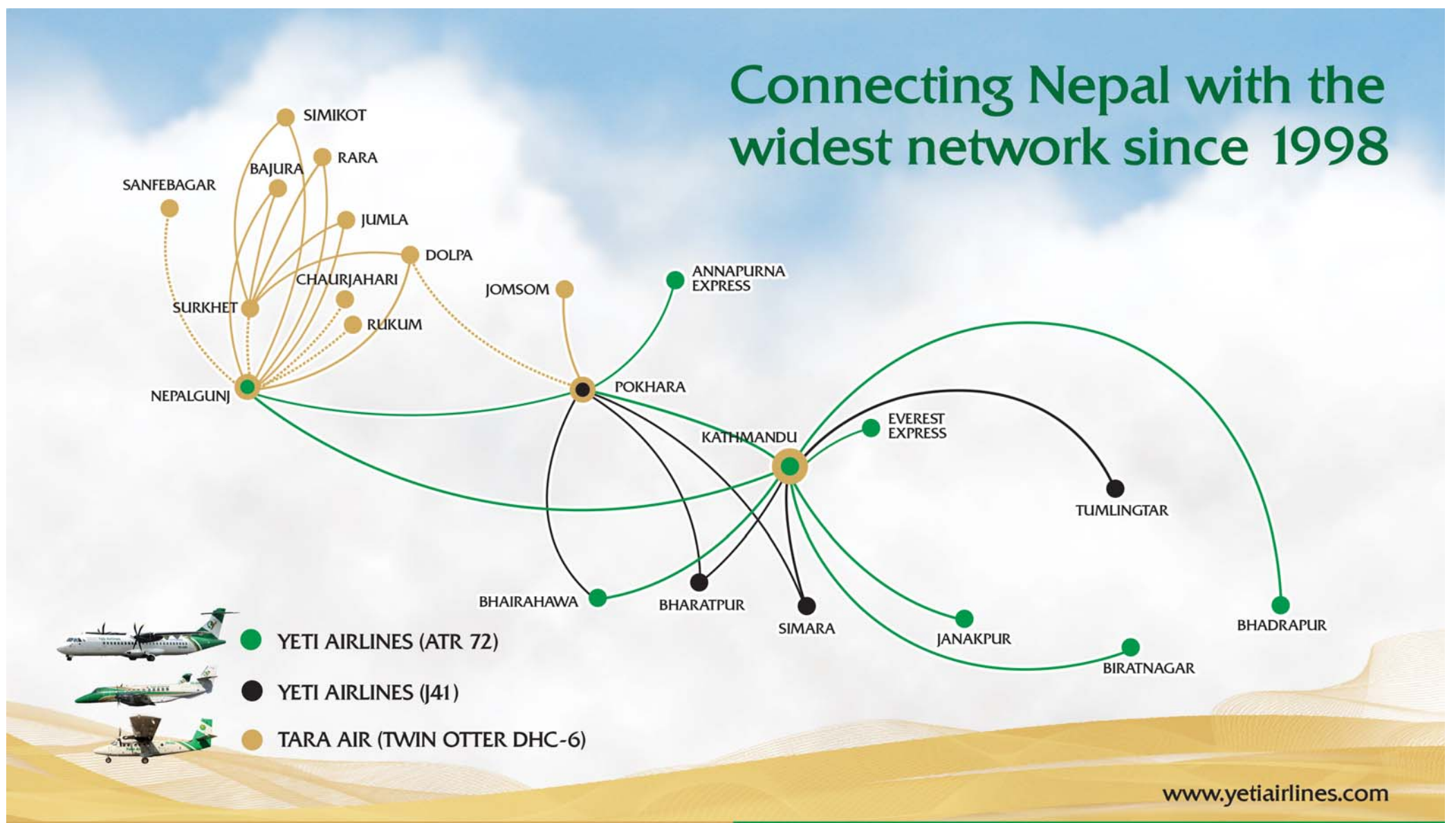
At the Language Commission of Nepal, there is a sense of urgency to save the three languages that each have only one speaker left. It has partnered with 45-year-old Kamala Kusunda, the only living person in the world who speaks Kusunda. She now runs a small private school in Dang to teach the language to over 20 students.

"If I die, then my mother language dies with me too. I had to revive this language for its value to our people, and the hope of keeping our ancestral language alive," Kamal Kusunda told Nepali Times over the phone.

Muktinath Ghimire in Lamjung has a similar task. As the only remaining speaker of Dura, he is preparing to start a school to teach the language to others in the community. "We can't let this language die," he says.

Other languages like Tsum, more recently identified as distinct dialects, were already endangered by the time they were identified as being uniquely different.

"Older people in Tsum Valley exclusively speak Tsum, but the younger generation is losing the language," says Wangchuk Raptan Lama, a fluent Tsum speaker himself who is working to expand its use by



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introducing the language to children through cultural activities.

Canada-based linguistic anthropologist Mark Turin worked with the Thangmi in Dolakha and Sindhupalchok to document their endangered language.

“To speak of linguistics saving languages is just as ludicrous as suggesting that Apps and digital technologies save language,” he says. “Neither is true, and field linguistics is still dominated by quite colonial and extractivist models of knowledge production.”

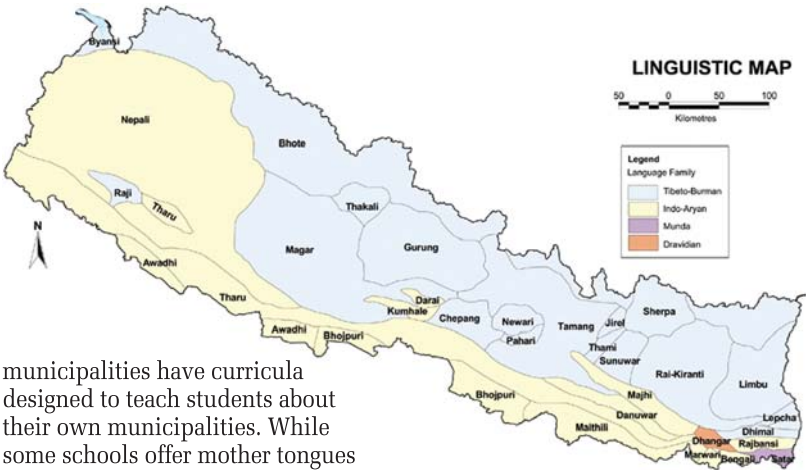
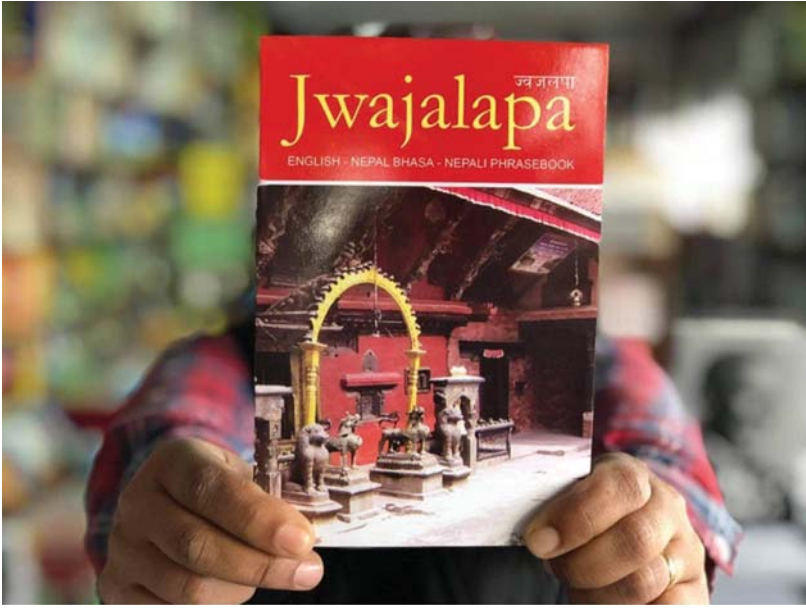
He says speakers of indigenous languages like Thangmi deserve the recognition as they work tirelessly to reclaim, rejuvenate and revive their ancestral languages, often in the face of considerable opposition.

“Indigenous youth in these communities are now creating

domains of use for ancestral languages to thrive once again, in print, online and on air. This is the true work of language revitalisation and reclamation, and it deserves wider recognition,” Turin adds.

After Nepal went into the federal mode, it was expected that schools across the country would teach regional languages. Article 31 of the Constitution says: ‘Every Nepali community living in Nepal shall have the right to acquire education in their mother tongue up to the secondary level, and the right to open and run schools and educational institutions as provided for by law.’

The Curriculum Development Centre along with rural municipalities introduced a ‘local curriculum’ bearing 100 points. For instance, Bhaktapur and Gokarna



municipalities have curricula designed to teach students about their own municipalities. While some schools offer mother tongues as an option, a majority choose the ‘local curriculum’.

In October 2020, Kathmandu Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya made it mandatory for schools to teach Nepal Bhasa from Grade 1-8. But there was mixed reaction from parents, with many feeling it would burden the students and their Nepali and English would suffer.

“We have tried offering students formal classes on Nepal Bhasa for many years, but there was not much interest from guardians even though we know children thrive when they

learn new languages,” says Jyoti Man Sherchan, former Principal of Malpi International School, who introduced a Thakali language club in the school.

“Parents are more interested in their children being proficient in English or Mandarin. Change is possible only if the government intervenes and provides resources and training to teach our own mother tongues,” says Sherchan.

However, there are limitations in residential schools where

students come from all over Nepal. It is impossible to make everyone speak different languages.

Province 2 is different because the Tarai districts are the most multilingual in the country. In Birganj, for example, most people speak Maithili and Bhojpuri, and they also speak Hindi, Nepali or English.

“Although schools here do not teach ancestral languages, the majority of children continue to speak Maithili and Bhojpuri at home,” explains writer Chandra Kishore. “In my school English and Nepali were taught, but the medium language for explaining those languages was Maithili.

Languages stop evolving once people stop conversing in them. Ancestral languages are also needed to root a people in their heritage and give a distinct identity. This is becoming more and more difficult all over the world with globalisation and the Internet.

“My little children only speak English,” says Saraswati Lama who is married to a Rai, and works for a non-profit in Kathmandu. “My daughter learned it from YouTube and she taught it to her younger brother.” Neither Lama, nor her husband speak their own mother tongues, and use Nepali to speak with one another.

But these days, it is in the Nepali diaspora that the country’s linguistic heritage seems to be valued more. Sujana Shrestha was born in Kathmandu but moved to the US while he was in high school. Now a professor at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, he says his wife and children only speak English and Nepali, and no Nepali.

“Nepali gives the kids an identity, and connects them to the extended family, especially their grandparents. It is about teaching our kids cultural sensitivity and open-mindedness towards other cultures and people.”

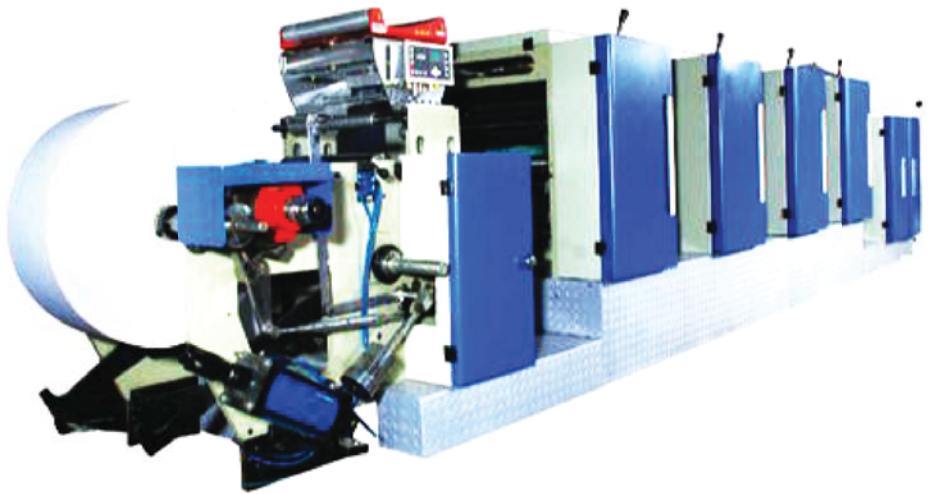
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Holy guacamole

All this knee-jerk criticism of Prime Minister K P Oli for offering prayers at Pashupati misses the whole point about his interpretation of dialectic materialism. This is the doctrine in which Marx (Karl, not Groucho) postulates a steady revolutionary progression from the primary stage of socialism, through the dictatorship of the proletariat, on to full-blown Communism, and finally breaks the cycle of birth and rebirth through the attainment of Nirvana.

Latin American lefties must be red with jealousy that comrades in Nepal have given 'Liberation Theology' an entirely new meaning by cleverly combining Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, Hoxhaism and Hinduism.

In fact, unbeknownst to most of us, the entire Central Committee of the Nepal Communist Party was red on the outside and saffron inside all along.

But The Almighty is in the horns of a dilemma. Which faction of the NCP should He side with: Oli, or Prachanda-Nepal? Which one will make Him party chair?

Having abolished the monarchy and banished the Shah god-kings for good, it is logical for Prime Minister K P Holy, as protector of the realm, to also regard himself now as an omnipotent incarnation of Comrade Vishnu.

On the other hand, PKD has a head start with a large collection of bronze Buddhas in Khumaltar. Comrade Awesome likes to draw attention to the similarities that he bears with Siddhartha Gautam. He is also known, on occasion, to worship water buffaloes on the holy banks of the Kosi in Chhatara.

If this carries on, it may just be

a question of time before Chairman Awe-inspiring starts to also sacrifice said buffaloes, as well as black goats to appease the gods. For someone who conducted human sacrifice in the past, that shouldn't be too much of a leap.

Chairman MKN, for his part, hosted a large Moonie gathering in 2018 at Soaltee during which he partook of sacramental wine from none other than Hak Ja Han with Unified Church comrades in attendance. This means Nepal (country, not comrade)

has inducted new members to its celestial Politburo, in addition to the 33 million we already have.

Not to be outdone, x-Speaker Christian Bahadur Mahara had himself blessed by members of the

Evangelical Gospel Assembly Church so he could purge himself of his sins and perform a Second Coming.

Communists are atheists and are thus not supposed to believe in god, but there is nothing stopping an atheist from being God himself. But if the comrades really want to perform miracles and are serious about turning Nepal into Singapore in the next two years, they may need to fall back on the opiate of the asses.

Luckily for us, NCP commissars are already named after gods:

Ishwar Pokhrel
 Vishnu Poudel
 Vishnu Rimal
 Bidya Devi Bhandari
 Bum Dev Gautam
 Narayan Kazi Shrestha
 Shankar Poudel
 Krishna B Mahara
 Ram B Thapa
 Dev Gurung
 Gauri Shankar Chaudary



कोरोनाबाट सुरक्षित रहने तीन उपायहरू



कोरोनाबाट आफू पनि बचाउँ र अरुलाई पनि बचाऔं

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