POKHARA SPECIAL

- Inciting Pokhara businesses
- Cleared to Land
- Land of milk and money
- Snake charmer
- Cleared to land
- Shooting on location in Pokhara
- The education hub
- What's happening
- North Annapurna Trek

POKHARA

Probably Cleanest & hygienic store of Nepal

Standard Chartered
7.29% p.a.

For more details...
More Himalayan tsunamis

The devastating collapse of the Nanda Devi glacier in India’s Uttarakhand state on 7 February that killed hundreds should be a warning for Nepal to be prepared for disasters in the future.

A fallen glacier is usually caused by a large earthquake, which can happen anywhere on Earth. In this case, the earthquake was so strong that it triggered an avalanche that destroyed everything in its path.

The Nanda Devi glacier is one of the most dangerous in the world because it is located on top of a volcano. The volcano is known for its frequent eruptions, which can trigger tsunamis.

The glacier is also located on top of a fault line, which means that it is at risk of collapsing. This is why it is important for Nepal to be prepared for disasters in the future.

The collapse of the Nanda Devi glacier is a warning for all countries that are located on top of volcanoes or fault lines. It is important to be prepared for disasters in the future so that we can save lives and prevent damage.

In conclusion, the collapse of the Nanda Devi glacier is a warning for all countries that are located on top of volcanoes or fault lines. It is important to be prepared for disasters in the future so that we can save lives and prevent damage.
LOVE IS EVERYWHERE

Happy Valentine’s Day.

TURKISH AIRLINES

ARTVIN - TURKEY
A t a time when most airlines around the world are folding, and Nepal’s own carriers struggle to stay airborne, Buddha Air has not just survived the crisis but is expanding. It is adding two more ATR-72 aircraft when others are selling or mothballing their planes.

This is driven by a sport in domestic traffic: when flights resumed last September. A combination of low fuel costs and a fear of travelling by bus, convinced many to fly. Forced to tighten their belts, airlines have also reduced overheads so cheaper fares are possible, as passengers have started to fly more. Low-fare routes, including between Kathmandu and Pokhara are packed with domestic tourists. Nepal is flying where they had not flown before, like on Mt Everest sightseeing flights which used to be mainly for international tourists. Innovative strategies like buy-one-get-one-free to use side seats have meant that the weekend mountain viewing flights are full.

Nepal Times spoke to Buddha Air founder Birendra Bahadur Basnet about the lessons of the pandemic and his future plans.

Nepali Times: How did Buddha Air tide over the Covid-19 crisis?
Birendra Bahadur Basnet: From our very inception 23 years ago, we were very focussed on prudent fiscal discipline, that helped us ride-out the pandemic and to survive the worst crisis in the 100 years of global aviation history.

During the pandemic, our overdraft hit the sky, we had maintenance and insurance costs despite the lack of revenue. We tried to manage cash flow the best we could, and put salaries in staff accounts. We encouraged team spirit, and collective ownership of the airline by all our 1,100 staff. This gave us the strength to survive and grow. Every crisis creates an opportunity, and we created our own opportunity. The last two months were the most difficult. We brought everyone down to a basic salary. We decided that everybody has to contribute for the survival of the company.

But after the flights started on 21 September, we immediately went into recovery mode, and could start paying full salaries again, so we are now back in a normal situation.

At a time when other airlines are shrinking or going belly-up, you have not just survived, but are expanding.

Yes, right now we are in a recovery mode, but by now we just added one ATR-72 aircraft and one more end of July. This is because the Covid crisis has actually opened up a new business avenue for us — domestic passengers. What helped was the reduction in aviation fuel price and lower overheads, which allowed us to reduce fares. This in turn made it possible for a big jump in domestic passengers. In December 2020, we carried 20% more passengers than the previous December. We know that Nepali passengers would be our bread and butter. And we started planning for a Covid-19 prevention protocol months before we started operations. We trained all our employees, implemented the procedures, we did a lot of drills, so we were able to convince passengers that it will be 100% safe to fly Buddha Air. That was the strategy that allowed us to keep flying.

How badly were you hit by the loss of tourist traffic in 2020?
We used to carry about 900 tourists a day pre-Covid. We are now sustained by the Nepali flying public, Nepalies who used to travel by bus have shifted to aviation because fares are comparable. So when the tourists return, it will be a bonus.

What is your reasoning behind flying to remote areas within Nepal?
From September 22 we are starting operations to Lukla and Tadapani in eastern Nepal from a new hub in Manali. For this we are acquiring two STOL (short takeoff and landing) aircraft, and we are currently competing for the Viking Twin Otter and Tecnam Sky Courier.

Why Manali?
Manali because congestion and visibility at Kathmandu airport forces planes to go into long holds to land and take off. Flights are longer, are delayed and are unavailability. From Manali, it will be a very short hand to Lukla, only 17 minutes. One aircraft can perform 10 shuttles between Manali-Lukla in one morning. Our plan is to provide transport to and from Manali, get passengers to drives two and half hours to Manali one day before, stay overnight in our lodge, and the package will be cheaper than the current fares for Lukla.

How about other sectors?
We will serve STOL airfields in western Nepal like Jumbi, Rasu, Simikot, in the coming years, from our Pokhara hub starting September 2023. That will also be a game changer for rural aviation in Nepal. Many of these airports have been abandoned, some like Simikot need runway extensions, and we are talking to the Civil Aviation Authority to upgrade runways. And once flights are reliable, passenger confidence will grow as we will open up a neglected part of the country to tourism and travel.

We think there is potential for Pokhara-Nepalgunj post-pandemic as Indian tourists arrive. We are planning to evolve the Lucknow-Nepalgunj-Pokhara package for Indian tourists through Buddha Holidays, our 100% subsidiary.

Why did you shuffle your international expansion plans?
Once you are making a profit and consolidated, you have to expand, that is the golden rule of business. You don’t expand when you are making a loss, which a lot of businesses startups have learnt the hard way. So, before the pandemic we were thinking of international operations and did a lot of work, we did a technical evaluation of Boeing 737, Airbus 320, Embraer 190. But international flights do not just depend on good internal management, there are external factors. We would actually make a loss if we went international at this juncture. We are already flying to international from Pokhara’s new airport, we have the capacity, we have the license, but the government has to help remove all the constraints.

The prospects of the revival of international tourism?
I am not very optimistic about 2021, but 2022 will be a good year. If the Nepal Indian border opens, we will see an inundation of Indian tourists by road and air. Not sure about Chinese tourists because that is determined by their government. Once the vaccine is available, there will also be a return of international tourists. That will be momentous in 2022, and we have to prepare ourselves for that.

What should the Nepali Tourism Board be doing?
We can have another interview on that. They need a lot of things that they have not done because of political instability and leaders focused on other issues rather than development. They need to start marketing in an unconventional way. Nepal should be able to convince global tourists that flying is safe within Nepal, Nepal has been flying without being infected because the protocols have been established. We can create that confidence in the international tourism mindset. People have been locked down for so long, they want to go out — especially to be in a pristine environment, open spaces. That should be Nepal’s selling point to revive tourism.

Easing entry into Nepal
Nepal’s tourism industry is reeling at the government for not streamlining entry process for foreign visitors. The head of the Nepal Tourism Board is in repeat with the confusing immigration and health rules. It feels that visitors who are tourism, security and security agencies have not been able to coordinate policy that tourists can get in so as, reduce quarantine times, and arrive outside.

Tourist arrivals reached 50,000 this December, by dropping the entry fee. But still only a fraction. Blame the sluggish arrival figures on the lack of daily and at remote entry points. These tourists can fly to Nepal, but need a visa from an embassy abroad, although our groups with connections can get visa on arrival if their company makes a request. This leaves a lot of room for all the stakeholders, and confusion at check-in on international arrivals flying to Nepal are not on par with the said capacity.

Passengers also need to show reservations at a designated hotel for 14 days quarantine, but this duration is 10 days. Visitors are arriving from countries with new strategies for the same.

“For sure, the government has gone some ways in easing restrictions. For example, a person with a vaccine certificate will not have to be put in a 14-day quarantine before boarding a flight to Nepal. But the rule is not clear as what happens after arrival in Kathmandu.

Turkish partners with Advanced College
General Manager of Turkish Airlines in Nepal Mustafa Tuner Tuner, and Executive Director of the Advanced College of Engineering and Management Kajal Regmi, signed a MoU to play a key role in technical upgradation, innovation, and competitiveness of aviation.

Qatar and MoNa
Qatar Airways, KGL Group, MoNa & Nepal Air Pvt Ltd have decided to join hands to create awareness among the local community through art and writing. Through the collaboration, they are offering a chance to win anywhere in the world’s most top lottery tickets and discounts to anyone entering MoNa’s M3, in March.

White Lotus eV
Nepalese telecom giant’s electric vehicle drive. Pure EV has launched its international debut with the launch of its eRanger in Nepal partnering with White Lotus Motors for distribution of all electric vehicles in the country. White Lotus Motors’ signed Antarctica, Visa Nepal World 2021, and Board Antares.

BMW test drive in Pokhara
BMW’s driven program of BMW has been successfully completed in Pokhara, Lumbini, and Mustang. It will be the last tour of Nepal’s official importer for BMW’s last tour drive with its 15 and 33 models at the Sharpa La Village Resort.

What
-

A proposal by Nepal’s Immigration Department acquiring consent from a guardian and local government for women under the age of 40 to travel abroad has sparked public fury, and it has raised concerns about a misogynist, bungling bureaucracy.

The Department made the recommendation to the Home Ministry on Wednesday, saying it needed to curb trafficking of Nepali women, especially to the Gulf.

Tekamay Poudel at the Immigration Department told Nepal Times that a 2006 directive had to be amended because of “ramptant misuse.” The following changes are proposed:

1. Women travellers on visit visas need Rs 5 million insurance.
2. They need vouchers of currency exchange.
3. Women under 40 travelling alone for the first time to the Gulf need permission from family members and the local ward.

It is the third proposal that set off outrage. In the past, labour permits have been gone to misuse when unnecessarily restrictive, especially for women.

By not granting labour permits or approvals for household work abroad, women cross the open border to India, as visa visas since that is their only way out. Curbing visit visas, will increase travel via India and trafficking.

Poudel says public reaction to the proposal overlooks the criteria that it only applies to first time travellers to the Gulf. “It is the first-time to the GCC who are most vulnerable to visit visa misuse that this proposed amendment is addressing,” he said.

Nepali workers have been bypassing cumbersome labour permit by travelling visit visa. The Immigration Department had been severely criticized for an earlier requirement that those with visit visas have to speak English.

Poudel dismissed this, saying, “It was one of the many options that were tabled, but it was never given much consideration.”

To be sure, the misuse of visit visas is a pressing problem because has put many migrants, especially women, at risk. In addition to bypassing jobs and countries for which labour approvals are banned for safety reasons, visit visas are also misused by recruiters who want to circumvent legal safeguards.

Countries or sectors restricted for foreign employment are the most tips for misuse of visit visas,” says Kumar Dahi of the Department of Foreign Employment. “We get calls from women in places like Syria that are banned for foreign employment. Stranded domestic workers from Kuwait call us in the worst imaginable situations. They all left on visit visas.”

Many workers go to the UAE on visit visas and they are on transit to third countries. On Wednesday the Nepal Embassy in Abu Dhabi asked Nepali workers not to come to the UAE on visit visas because of cases of stranded migrant.

The latest proposal on visit visas has its roots in Nepal’s labour migration system that requires workers to obtain approval to work abroad. The government labour permit is the exit pass that signifies legal, pre-departure procedures are followed.

The permits have their merits since they keep intermediaries and employers accountable.

However, the new proposal is reminiscent of past restrictions on women:

1985 The Foreign Employment Act prohibited recruiting from providing jobs to women without the consent of guardians.

1988 An amendment expanded this to include permission from a mother or father of an unmarried woman or husband of a married woman, or elder or younger brother aged 21 years or more of an unmarried woman living in the same family, or father-in-law or mother-in-law of a married woman.

2007 The Foreign Employment Act stated: No gender discrimination shall be made while sending workers for foreign employment pursuant to this Act.

2021 The proposed amendment requiring approval from guardians and local governments for first-time to travel on visit visas puts Nepali women back on square one.

Shambhu Niraula, a legal advisor to the National Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA) says the ban on domestic workers that are predominantly female contraindicates legal clauses, and the new proposed rule is regressive.

The latest ban on domestic workers was put in place in 2017 after a Parliament committee decided it was unsafe for domestic workers, regardless of gender.

After a similar trip by a team led byional Press Secretary, Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Labour instructed the government to make country specific policies for domestic workers.

However, Covid-19 detailed action. The pandemic itself impacted women workers abroad disproportionately especially those who had traveled through India or on visit visas since they did not exist in government records and were ineligible for any support from Foreign Employment Welfare Fund.

The restrictions on travel that disproportionately target women are key because the alternative requires stakeholders to be proactive, engage in bilateral discussions with destination country governments, have strong interagency coordination, hold compliant immigrant officials accountable, ramp up action against traffickers, train and inform workers on safe practices, to look for safer, legal pathways, create jobs at home, and clamp down on domestic violence.

Nepali workers on social media to the proposal have questioned on what grounds a ‘guardian’ is eligible to grant permission for a woman to travel. Why should one under 40 be spared from this provision?” asks one. How will the consent from the guardian and local authority address trafficking, said another. What if the same guardian is the very source of domestic violence from which the women is escaping for overseas work?

Because of the public reaction, it is likely that the Home Ministry will not move forward with the proposal. Sanda Rai, a migrant who has worked in households in Dubai, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. She is now back in her home in Morang, and says: “I left via India but used to return home through Kathmandu airport. The Immigration officials gave me a hard time every time. I had to fight back and tell them either to lift the ban, to not issue us passes at all, or to give us visas in Nepal. All that is still true.”
Incubating Pokhara’s business ecosystem

Pokhara is not just tourism, it can be a hub for Nepali innovators and entrepreneurs

Thanks to the year-round pleasant weather and its geography as a valley with lakes nestled below mountains, Pokhara has been synonymous with tourism.

CROSSCURRENT
Ashutosh Tiwari

But in the last few years, it has diversified its appeal. Pokhara is now home to upcoming universities and colleges that attract both domestic and foreign students. It has a growing manufacturing and service economy, a thriving construction industry and a slice of venues for adventure sports.

It has an international cricket stadium, to which the Annapurna provide a postcard-perfect backdrop. Soon, a spanking new airport will connect Pokhara directly to cities outside Nepal. In these days of global connectivity, can it also be a hub for young Nepali innovators and entrepreneurs?

That was the question when I worked as a Pokhara University faculty two years ago. The university wanted to start a business incubation centre for its students, and was looking for ways to make it a successful undertaking by first making sure that the faculty was ready.

Ecosystem before the species: Donor-funded micro and small business development programs have been training Nepali chicken farmers, beauty parlour owners and the like at least since the late 1970s. Few of these showed success beyond the end of the funding cycle.

One reason was that the past generations of small business development work did not focus on building up and strengthening the ecosystem for entrepreneurs to first survive and then thrive. They used public funds to train individuals—often in batches and for days on end. But they did not see their role in improving the business environment under which the entrepreneurs struggled and laboured for little gain.

These days, universities, municipalities and other public-serving institutions need to add the task of building entrepreneurial ecosystem to their to-do list. They can provide space with low or no rent for initial years, basic infrastructure such as the internet, electricity and water, and subsidies for advising and mentoring services, seed funds to help the entrepreneurs start accessing other services that they need, and a network of local investors.

Public institutions now know that paying for training services alone is not enough. They need to attract, work with and retain entrepreneurs akin to the federal government’s effort to attract and work with foreign investors. And much like in nature, where the right combination of water, oxygen and temperature helps species to grow and evolve to complexity, entrepreneurs flock to areas where the public institutions have first put in the basic elements of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in place.

With its invigorating weather and amenities, and its tourism-based customer-service orientation, Pokhara should stand ready to strengthen its own ecosystem for domestic and foreign entrepreneurs.

Can-do mindset over business jargon: Universities and public institutions are averse to taking risks. They aim to minimise failures. But entrepreneurship is all about learning from mistakes and failures so that success can eventually be maximised.

If public institutions see entrepreneurship training as an exercise in creating ‘safe to experiment’ and ‘safe to fail’ many times and get back up’ spaces for students and innovators around their campus and the city, that resilient mindset alone would pay for several years’ worth of pricey MBA fees.

Because of high upfront costs of starting a business, most Nepali entrepreneurs dare not fail. As such, they start small, take no risk, and remain small for years—hardly growing beyond the cottage-industry category.

If a progressive city like Pokhara defrays the upfront cost of starting and running a business, say, for the first two years, a number of firms could potentially grow to scale, providing hundreds of jobs and other spill-over benefits that would more than make up for the initial loss of the rental and income tax revenue.

Without the ever-present worry to pay the government from the first month of starting their business, entrepreneurs would learn to calibrate risks and initial energy to maximise success, and not just play safe and remain small by design.

Investments ever-greener: Both grants and investments are important for the growth of an entrepreneurial culture. But Nepali public institutions tend to give grants to individuals (especially in agriculture), but tell them to seek high-interest loans for basic infrastructure upgrades, when it should be the other way around.

Pokhara’s public institutions can pay for the basic infrastructure (cold storage facilities, work stations, etc.) while encouraging entrepreneurs to seek equity investments by convincing those with money.

More than public institutions, private investors have a better sense when it comes to deciding who to fund and who to let go. If public institutions pay for basic infrastructure while enabling private investors to bet on entrepreneurial teams, then this blend of public and private money minimises entrepreneurs’ start-up risks while their potential for success gets recognised. This is where Kathmandu has failed, and the opportunity is for Pokhara to take.

In 2013, Korea’s Ministry of Science and Technology paid for the Nepal Innovation Technology & Entrepreneurship Centre that got its start at Pokhara University, which will soon be headed over to the PU Faculty. My conversation with the faculty two years ago was about how to run the Centre for its students.

The level of ambition could be much higher how to start and run a few such Centres across Pokhara to help innovators—students and others—launch and scale up their own businesses that take advantage of Pokhara’s hitherto untapped potential as a destination for entrepreneurs.

Ashutosh Tiwari, head of a visa startup, wrote in his weekly column for the Kathmandu Times, commenting on entrepreneurship, development, public policies and management in Nepal's context.
Rowing for Nepali children

They took 37 days to row across the Atlantic to raise money for schools in landlocked Nepal.

Four members of a boat that took part in the world’s most challenging competition to raise money for schools in Nepal have come third in a grueling trans-Atlantic rowing race. Julian Barley, Ashley Jones, Nick Kempster and Jack Carter took part in the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge to row 5,000 km from the Canary Islands to the West Indies in 37 days (pictured, right in Antigua).

“Being a Gurkha officer in the British Army, I had knowledge and love for Nepal, and we have so far raised enough money to build two schools in Nepal and hopefully we will raise more,” says Ashley Jones. The two schools are in Taplejung, in eastern Nepal.

The crew has a target of raising $800,000 for The Humanitarian Foundation (HPF) to help build schools to educate 2,000 children every year. HPF, set up in 2014 has built 59 schools in Nepal and Kenya, helping educate 27,000 children. It also supports a Coffee Impact Program in Nepal.

The team rowed for two hours at a time and had two hours off, doing this for 24 hours a day for the 37 days it took to make the crossing. They ate freeze dried high calorie foods, and consumed 2 litres of water each per day from a water maker device on board. They navigated using an electronic chart plotter and had information on weather so they could avoid bad weather and take advantage of winds.

“We never slept for more than 1.5 hours at any one stretch, and once a day could link to the internet for 5 minutes,” Jones said. The team left the UK at the height of Covid-19 and reached La Gomera in the Canaries. But for the last part of the pandemic, the team was out at sea. The team took a more northerly route because of the weather, but it lost its lead. Then northerly winds slowed the boat with waves over the beam.

“During the last third of the trip, it was really quite hot and no escape. The cabins were hot to touch and the inside was like an oven,” Jones recalls.

The crew did some fishing more for distraction than for food, catching mackerel and tuna. They saw manta rays, dolphins, turtles, and swordfish. Of the 30 boats that left the Canary Islands, four were attacked by marlin, and their hulls spared.

Members of the crew have served in war zones, rowed the North Pacific, climbed mountains and run marathons. Some members of the group were want to row across the Indian Ocean, but the others will go back to their day jobs in the UK. “We will have to wait and see how the recovery goes, but I imagine it will take some time to forget the hardship, but who knows,” Jones says.

More people have climbed Mt Everest than rowed the ocean, and the team members spent two years planning for the race with over 100 hours of training. They battled 10m waves, and used buckets for toilets, losing 13kg of body weight during the crossing.
Nepalis still dying of cold

Annual cold waves have far-reaching consequences on health, agriculture, and economy of the plains

As it has every winter, the cold wave in Nepal’s Terai has had a devastating impact on the livelihood of its people, but local governments have provided little to support the needy. As a result, even in this day and age, Nepalis still die from the cold. There are indications that the ground fog that covers the Indo-Gangetic plains that include the Terai, is getting thicker and lasts longer because of a combination of moisture in the air due to the spread of irrigation and pollution. Water droplets stick to sees particles, and even the sun cannot burn the smog off during the day. “Only those who can afford to wear warm clothes face. Our children ran around in head and downs, and sometimes without warm clothes, even in winter,” says Lalmani Devi of Birgunj. “We have had no income because of the lockdown, so we couldn’t buy clothes.”

In Nepalgunj, 50km away to the west, passengers at the airport wait for days on end for flights, which are cancelled or delayed due to poor visibility. It is the same story in Jhangadi, Simra, Binetnagar and Bhandrapur. “We have visibility of only 10-20 metres right now, it is too low to operate flights. This has been the case here for the past few days,” says Prem Nali Thakur, head of the Nepalgunj Airport. Even a decade ago, the winter fog used to clear by afternoon. But in recent years it stays for days on end, sometimes for a week or more. People are trying to cope, but cannot seem to stay warm. “When humidity is over 95% and visibility is below 1km, water droplets are suspended in the atmosphere or near the earth’s surface. Like a thick cloud that touches the ground,” explains Arghana Sharma of the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology. “It is only at ground level, but it is persistent and doesn’t allow the sun to warm the ground, leading to a cold wave.”

The cold kills people. Either because of hypothermia, or indirectly through smoke inhalation inside the homes as people try to keep warm. The problem lies in the lack of awareness about indoor air pollution, ventilation, insulation and an as well as inadequate architecture. Winter fog is getting thicker and lasts longer every past year because of open agricultural burning, industrial emissions, transboundary pollution, wildlife and smog. The cold wave on 31 January reduced the maximum temperature in Nepalgunj to 14°C whereas it was 19°C in Jumla, which is at an altitude of 2,000m in the mountains. The first recorded cold wave in the Terai occurred in 1968. At that time, the difference between the minimum and maximum temperature was a mere 1.3°C, meaning the temperature was constant throughout the day. The longest cold wave recorded was in 2002/03, when it continued from 26 December to 27 January without any sunshine. Prior to this, a cold wave in the plains lasted from 15 December 1995 to 15 January 1996. This year, the cold wave has hit the Terai in short spells but they were no less menacing, particularly in central Nepal where they were longer and denser. In Mahottari, the fog was so thick people could hardly see a metre away. Families huddled inside their homes, and do not venture out unless there is an emergency. But like all other disasters, the poor are disproportionately affected by the cold wave.

People with means have homes, warm clothes and heating, they can even employ others if they are unable to work because of the cold,” says Tulsi Narayan Thakuri of Nepal Mahila Foundation. “But even among the poor, women and Dalit in the Terai are hit the hardest.”

The Muslim community in this Province 2 district have homes built with public housing programs but with no roofs. Families do not have warm clothing or electricity. “It has been two years since we paid for the roof but we are still waiting, government does not listen to us,” says a local resident, Birju Pathi. Otherwise, people burn straw in order to warm themselves from the cold. There are families every year from fires. Nine people died in house fires this winter alone. But those aren’t listed as deaths caused by the cold wave. Open burning to keep warm also degrades air quality further.

Bheri hospital in Nepalgunj is often crowded with hypothermia patients and those having difficulty breathing in the winter season. “Generally, blood pressure increases during winter, even of those who have it under control. Other chronic illnesses are also more pronounced and people need a higher dose of their medications,” explains cardiologist Krishna Prasad Adhikari. “There is also an increased risk of heart attacks as morning chill leads to spasm and narrowing of blood vessels. Covid has added to the risk.”

The cold waves also affects agriculture. Crops will wither before the sun, and insects infest the vegetable patches.

Moreover, due to increased deforestation in the Churia, wild animals have moved down the plains, destroying crops as they search for food. But farmers are unable to stand guard during a cold wave and are forced to send their produce to the market before they have fully ripened. Even by moderate estimates, cold spells affect at least 125,000 households in the Terai every year and these numbers are increasing. The Cold Wave Contingency Action Plan has estimated that 50,000 people from 5,000 households in Sapatri (where 19 people died of cold three years ago) would be affected this year. Another 30,000 and 6,000 households in Dang and Bardia.

Cold waves are listed as a disaster in Nepal now, and the District Disaster Management Committee has a plan to reduce its impact. Says Krishna Babu Katwal, former Chief District Officer of Mahottari: “No citizen should suffer from the cold wave or die from it. We are ready to respond and we have made arrangements through municipalities to distribute warm clothes, blankets and bedding.”

But in most places, such support is yet to reach the neediest of the bunch. “The CDO came for inspection a month ago, the help hasn’t reached us yet,” says Ramprat Sari of Khair in Mahottari. Addis Lamani Devi of Birgunj: “We haven’t received anything from the municipality. This is a Dalit neighbourhood. Our children just burn the cows dung to keep warm.”
How weather elevates air pollution in Kathmandu

Analysing the impact of weather can help forecast high pollution episodes so citizens can take action

Jagdishwor Karmacharya and Shanti Kandel

Kathmandu Valley witnessed hazardous levels of air pollution on 6 January 2021, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) highest among major cities in the world. The pollution level had been stable or slightly below the daily average in the preceding days. Air pollution over the area is determined by emissions and their transport. Sources of pollution can be both local and regional, whereas it can be carried into and out of the area depending on its geographical setting and atmospheric conditions.

Understanding the role of geography and seasonal climatic variations in altering air pollution levels in Nepal is generally well understood. The role of weather events in air pollution fluctuation is of key importance in predicting pollution levels across the country. Predicting weather therefore is closely related to predicting air pollution.

Advancing pollution forecasting has practical as well as policy implications. If pollution levels can be predicted, people can plan their activities accordingly. Also, it allows the government to timely take necessary measures to reduce the severity of pollution during adverse weather conditions.

The alarming levels of pollution in Kathmandu Valley in winter has been receiving much publicity, and has been a matter of serious concern. The high pollution episode on 6-9 January got widespread media attention, raising public awareness about the issue.

Residents of Kathmandu already taking precautions against the Covid-19 pandemic were made conscious of the additional hazards of poor air quality on their health.

As the PM2.5 AQI (the concentration of fine particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter) exceeded 600 in peak in some areas of the Valley, the Department of Environment (DoE) issued an advisory on 5 January urging people to remain indoors as far as possible and refrain from making open fires. The high level of pollution would prevail for some time, depending on how weather impacted its diffusion.

Research has shown that the lifespan of some Nepalis has been reduced by up to five years because of the air we breathe. Advances in knowledge of the situation would be more effective in protecting the public.

Every time the DoE discusses in Kathmandu’s pollution situation, experts flag their opinions citing the topography of the valley and winter inversion as the major factors that trap polluted air.

In the case of the early January pollution, however, the air pollution decreased to pre-epidemic levels, and the government, which promoted an analysis of the impact that cloud cover from a western front had on AQI.

The daily and hourly time series of air pollution level and concentration of gases were recorded by air quality monitoring stations for the analysis. A newly established Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) monitoring station at Nagarkot as well as others in the valley were used for measurements. The vertical atmospheric profile measured by DHM’s radiosonde station at Kirtipur, satellite imagery and surface weather charts related to the first week of January were reference points.

A comparison of the time series of high-frequency PM2.5’s values shows that hazardous air quality levels were recorded within the Kathmandu Valley in Bhaisepati, Bhaktapur and Ratna Park areas.

Air quality deteriorated to dangerous levels from the afternoon of 6 January till the morning of 9 January, with some areas being much worse compared to those recorded before and after the hazardous air level episode in Bhaktapur, Bhaisepati and Ratna Park areas.

Data from the radiosonde stations at the premises of Tribhuvan University Kirtipur is being released regularly at 045AM since March 2019. Attached to a hydrogen balloon, the radiosonde measures temperature, relative humidity, wind speed and direction at different elevations.

There are hundreds of such stations that make measurements once or twice a day, providing valuable insights into the global weather pattern at different altitudes.

Comparing the Kirtipur data on 5-9 January there is a clear indication that ground-level inversion was present on both days. This happens when a layer of warm surface air is trapped by cooler air above it trapping pollutants. Ground-level inversion occurs almost every day during winter in the Valley, and has the effect of concentrating pollution throughout the city.

The stronger the inversion, and deeper and stronger the stable layer, which makes it harder for a parcel of air to rise as it will be relatively colder, hence deeper, than the surrounding atmosphere. Consequently, it is spread downwards. Hence, pollutants suspended in the bottom layer of the atmosphere are confined within the inversion layer. The shallower the depth of inversion, the higher the concentration of air pollutants, even with the same amount of emission load, from being confined in a smaller volume near the ground.

On most days during the winter, ground-level inversion is gradually established in the Kathmandu Valley from the evening and intensifies in the night, but it weakens as it is turned away by the sun during the morning, dissipating by noon. Once the inversion decays, the bottom layer of air mixes with the higher levels of the atmosphere, leading to lower levels of pollution at the surface.

In addition, as the wind picks up towards the afternoon, much of the pollution is blown to the east, leading to a reduction of the concentration of pollutants in the Valley.

From the afternoon of 3 January till the morning of 6 January, Nepal was under the influence of a widespread disturbance, and the most parts of the country were covered by high clouds (Figure 3) with light scattered precipitation in the western parts.

The overcast condition, however, prevented the sun from dissipating the inversion and prevented the mixing of the lower atmospheric levels with upper layers over most parts, including Kathmandu Valley.

It is possible that limited surface inversion did not fully disrupt on these days, though it would have been weakened and lifted slightly higher in the afternoon. This is also supported by the relatively calm winds recorded in the afternoon of 4 and 5 January, at Kirtipur and Khumaltar stations (Figure 5).

Daily average AQI PM2.5 values in stations outside Kathmandu valley remained more or less stable from last week of December to 5 January, which goes to show that the higher concentration of PM2.5 in the Kathmandu Valley on 6-9 January was mostly contributed by the local sources. Moreover, the relatively lower levels recorded at Nagarkot station on the other side of the Valley was likely due to a confinement of pollutants.

With the passage of western disturbances, the sky over Kathmandu Valley became clear from the early morning of 6 January. As a result, the layer of air with the higher levels became possible, thus leading to subsequent dissipation of pollutants from the valley floor much sooner than anticipated.

Short-term changes in the weather conditions can lead to a significant variation in the level of air pollution in the Kathmandu Valley. It is important to note that adverse weather conditions alone can significantly enhance the pollution levels, while other socio-economic activities remained subdued after the onset of Covid-19 pandemic in the last spring.

More collaboration among the government agencies engaged in air pollution monitoring and forecasting, and researchers is required. Moreover, there is a need to strengthen the capacity of various agencies so that the data can be used about prevailing pollution levels and forecasted about impending episodes of hazardous pollution levels.

Participating to share information about pollution is essential for making valuable returns on recent investments made by the government in establishing and maintaining online air quality monitoring and meteorological stations.

Jagdishwor Karmacharya and Shanti Kandel are with the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) and Kathmandu University respectively. For results, inver, tweets and reports on the subject are available on the website www.dhm.gov.np.
Land of milk and money

Ganesh Baburam Shertha was a civil servant to his native Pokhara, and his mother made pu水域kai at home and the children packaged it for sale in the market. The milk sweets sold like, well, hot puসkai, and Shertha invested NRs 70 to new equipment to increase production. His mother could not keep up with demand. Soon, he left the government job and started a confectionary business making candies, toffees and chocolates. But the business could not grow fast as it could have because of the lack of new materials: mainly milk and sugar. When the government decided to privatise the Dairy Development Corporation (DDC) in Pokhara, the family acquired it and launched a dairy processing business.

Today, Sujal Dairy is one of the most remarkable success stories of privatization and business growth in Nepal. It is the tale, not just of self-made entrepreneurship, but how just one business idea can have such a dramatic socio-economic impact on a region, or even a country.

Twenty years ago, Pokhara used to be known for its milk production. But even though household dairies produced a lot of milk, and there was no market for the surplus, the DDC had ‘milk holidays’ and there was no incentive for farmers to increase productivity.

Once Sujal Dairy came into the picture with demand for new value-added products and a powder milk plant, milk production shot up. The veterinary industry thrived, farmers took loans to invest in buffaloes and cows. But it did not happen all at once. “We had to start from ground zero,” says Narayan Shertha, Ganesh Baburam Shertha’s son who looks after the family’s dairy business in Pokhara. “We worked with Laxmi Bank to provide microcredit to farmers, but the dairy industry is a long gestation business and it takes time for full-scale production, so we initially faced a milk shortage at our plants.”

The livestock needed to be procured, they needed artificial insemination, the feed supply chain had to be established, and a cold chain needed for delivery. All this took more than three years.

Nirajan Shertha says a dairy business and brewery are similar with pasteurisation and equipment made by the same companies. But a litre of beer sells for NRs.500 while fresh milk sells for NRs.100.

Organic Annapurna

Gandaki, which built Nepal’s biggest biogas plant in Pokhara has launched Annapurna Organic Fertiliser to boost farm productivity and reduce the country’s chronic dependency on imported chemicals. Annapurna Organic Fertiliser comes with a manual on how to apply for crops, vegetables and fruits. It keeps the soil chemical-free and increases its productivity, as well as helping reduce infection and pest infestation resulting in higher yield for the farmers. Each sack contains 15 different nutrients including phosphorus, nitrogen, potassium, iron, boron, copper and zinc. Gandaki Uja can produce 3,000 tons of fertiliser a year.

Based in Pokhara, Gandaki Uja was set up in 2007 by Kushal Gurung and is being supported by the group Business Oxygen (SOU), which helps entrepreneurs running Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to scale up by injecting equity and providing technical assistance.

The company has enlarged household digesters into an industrial-scale plant that uses climate-friendly technology to turn livestock and farm waste into inorganic methane gas, which can generate imported LPG. The effluent is dried to make organic fertiliser.

The technology can be scaled up to significantly reduce Nepal’s growing trade deficit with India and slash its import bill. Annual LPG import from India is currently worth Rs 30 billion, which has grown four-fold in the last decade, making up 2.5% of Nepal’s total import bill. Similarly, the country imports 300,000 tons of chemical fertiliser a year, while the demand is 400,000 tons.

Nepal’s corruption and fertiliser prices go hand in hand. Only five months ago farmers faced a shortage, which is projected to lead to a decrease in rice production despite a healthy monsoon last year. However, reliance on hybrid seeds and subsidies will increase farmers’ dependence on chemical fertiliser.

Government and aid agencies working on agriculture can help businesses investing in alternatives like organic fertilisers and industrial biogas to scale up with incentives as has been done with hydro, solar and wind power. The need is that Nepal is already a world leader in locally-designed household biogas digesters.

Across the country, there is over 300,000 biogas, which has significantly improved the health of people while reducing deforestation.

Rezival of trout farms

One of the many downstream industries in the Kaski hills that benefit from trout farming is the vegetable, poverty, mushrooms and trout farmers. During peak tourist season in spring and summer, a dry stone wall is left with demand and food items had to be imported from Delhi to Karachi.

One of the investments that has taken a direct hit from the collapse of tourism has been trout farming. However, with the arrival of tourists, demand in trout farmers, as well as the revenue expected from catering in Pokhara for trout businesses is up.

Banking on Pokhara

Noodle central

When the history of how instant noodles started in Nepal is written, Pokhara will have a prominent mention. It was exactly 36 years ago on 5 February 1985 when Himalaya Foods of Pokhara started production of its now famous Rasta instant noodles. Rarely had Nepal seen the promotion of a new brand as aggressively as the mass media at the time as Kasa. The catchy jingle in the radio commercial still echoes in the minds of those who were teenagers then.

Himalaya then launched a differently-flavoured Aasa noodle. Since then new noodle brands have grown, literally like mushrooms, however Rasta and Aasa have maintained a loyal following because of their distinctive taste.

Today, Rasta is exported directly from Pokhara to the United States, Canada, and the Aasa – mainly in those in the Nepali diaspora who miss its taste.

“There was a shortage of new materials during the lockdown, and we cut production by 25% but we are now back to ten tons daily,” says Amit Thapa, General Manager of Himalaya, who sponsors the Asian Games sports events in Pokhara.
Save snakes to save nature

Why this Pokhara native seeks out the reptiles that others revile, to protect them

Unlike those who recoil from the sight of venomous snakes, Rohit Girij shank these increasingly endangered cold-blooded reptiles need to be protected.

At an age when his friends would either run away from snakes or try to kill them with sticks, Girij was fascinated by these creatures that used to stiffer around in the fields near his home in Pokhara.

He thinks his obsession with snakes started with watching National Geographic documentaries exclusively on cable TV. Once a snake was spotted in a neighbour’s garden and there was panic in the locality, but the 14-year-old calmly hooked the snake with the end of a stick, took it out of the writhing reptile and released it into nearby bushes.

It was a green pit viper, and the young boy’s courage became the talk of the neighbourhood. For Girij, it was the beginning of a strong bond with the animals that have religious and cultural importance in Nepal. Since then he has been committed to rescue more than 700 snakes.

“At that moment, I was thrilled to be holding this amazing creature,” recalls Girij, who is now 22, and like the sky creatures he handles, hides behind his hoodie almost like he is trying to stay undercover. “The best part was, he was not afraid of me either. He was just curious.”

Residents of Kaski and surrounding districts call him up several times a day when there is a snake in the vicinity that needs to be removed and released. Subtropical Pokhara Valley with its many hollows and boulders is an ideal habitat for snakes. Rohit is among a handful of snake rescuers in the country, and always has a snake hook and bag ready.

In March last year, when snakes are more out and about than usual, he usually rescues five to ten snakes a day. Girij comes across as a quiet, withdrawn man, but he is fearless when it comes to snakes, even if they are the deadly vipers, or king cobras.

Just watching a video of how he hooks a writhing snake and shows it into his bag is chilling enough. But to think that Girij is risking his life every time he catches a snake to save it shows his extreme motivation to the task.

“It’s not that I am fearless. I take calculated risks. Knowledge is the key. If you know the type of species you are rescuing, you can decide accordingly. Different snakes behave differently,” explains Girij.

The first instant with most people is to kill a snake, but Girij says that it is because the creatures are misunderstood by many. Indeed, snakes get a bad press and snake-like attributes are used to describe humans who are cruel, untrustworthy, or sly.

“Snakes are labelled as dark and uncharismatic, which has caused confusion about these beautiful creatures. I want to be able to change that,” Girij says.

On his many rescue missions, he makes it a point to explain the value of snakes in maintaining the ecological balance of nature.

“Snakes play an important role in the food chains of ecosystems. Areas where snakes are removed often have a population explosion of rodents, which affects agriculture,” says Girij, who has YouTube videos in which he counsels people about saving snakes. “When people are made aware of the relation of the reptiles to the ecosystem, they prefer to have them removed rather than killing them.”

An undergraduate student of biology at Tribhuwan University Campus, Rohit Girij uses Instagram, YouTube and Facebook to raise awareness and document his rescue missions. His photographs, videos and research papers on snake conservation have encouraged others to walk the same wild terrain.

But he has a note of caution: “I don’t want to influence people to do something that they are not equipped to do. There have been instances when people have lost lives while trying to imitate snake handling for the sake of showmanship. That is very risky.”

Girij is a loner, and enjoys being in nature by himself. He says he is not after fame, and had to be coaxed into agreeing to do this profile. His drive for conservation is purely led by his compassion for the species.

“Snakes are so intriguing because they are so seemingly unimportant about everything around them,” he says. “It is just a creature being itself, a pure soul. It doesn’t know that it is so earnestly hated and loved. Which is why I love them.”

Rkuli
#GarvaKaSaathNepali
Thrills and spills

One of the most dramatic growths in Sarangkot has been in paragliding. The first paragliding company was established in 1993. The market was flooded in September, paragliding took off as companies offered 50% discounts for tourists.

There are now 12 paragliding companies which operate out of the village. The season is from September to December. Even as the streets are emptier than usual, the skies are dotted with paragliders and gliders, with the yaku-yaku paragliders from Sarangkot, the excitement palpable among tourists lining up to buy tickets. At a check on the equipment preparation of a flight, pilot Ayush Shah notes that he has seen more tourists lining up to paraglide than any other time.

Nepal has been adversely affected by the pandemic. Says Krishna Bhandari, chief paraglider, Nepal makes up 10% of the total paragliders annually. This year it’s 10%.

Paraglider companies do a total of 600 flights a day during the winter season. The paragliding season begins at the end of the ski season, and continues till March 31.

The three ultralight companies which operate are ice flying flights to the Annapurna from Pokhara airport, and also offering an interest in iLTA guests.

Paragliding also has zip-line and bungee jumping, but these are not a tourist attraction as the other adventure sports.

Highland Adventures offers just one tour a day, but at Rs 2,600 per person, the zip-line is still keeping its operational high.

And the zip-line is still keeping its operational high.

But because of social media posts, the number of Nepalis using the zip-line and bungee jumping is increasing.

In the past, people were afraid to go.

But because of social media posts, the number of Nepalis using the zip-line and bungee jumping is increasing.

In the past, people were afraid to go.

But because of social media posts, the number of Nepalis using the zip-line and bungee jumping is increasing.
Pokhara,” says Lakuman Basnet of the Restaurant and Bar Association of Nepal (RSBAN), Pokhara.

Small clothing and handicraft shops owners at Lakeside note that although domestic tourists do not Glyph as much as the foreigner, the purchases are crucial to keep them afloat. Taxi owners like Keshab Basnet now makes only a few local sightseeing trips, but says there are Nepalis who book his car for the whole day.

“Live music still break out of numerous bars and restaurants during the evening, but the pandemic has affected Pokhara’s once-vibrant nightlife. “The business is alright during the weekends with Nepalis but there is not much traffic on weekdays,” says Yogesh Bhattarai of the popular Jaya Bar.

Car rentals are also gearing up to open its doors. “We were closed for a year, but did not wait any longer,” saysy the night club’s Armit Patri.

Dhepa Lama’s Mountain restaurant reopened after the lockdown and has been operating with less than 10 staff. He says that although the pandemic brought business in the restaurant business, he has not given up hope. “We survived an insurgency and an economic blockade, so this crisis doesn’t faze us,” says Lama, expressing Pokhara’s indomitable spirit. “We see the hope of brighter days.”

Although Nepali visitors have rescued businesses for now, Gopi Bhattarai of Pokhara Tourism Council says: “Because of the investment that has been made by Pokhara’s tourism entrepreneurs, it is clear that we cannot survive without the income from domestic tourists.”

Hit hard by the pandemic, Pokhara’s economy revives with a little help from Nepali tourists.

CLEARED TO LAND

Hike hype

Nepal Tourism Board has used the pandemic period to come up with new trekking trails and destination, including the Sikle-Kuti-Tail Trail and the Mardi Himal Trellis to North Annaurna Base Camp (see pages 15-23).

The best promotion has been Nepal photos posting photos and videos of their trekking trips to Mardi Himal, Mardi peak or Kanchenjunga (see above) to new destinations besides the usual Poon Hill and Ghorepani.

Indeed, Shrawan Pradhan from Kathmandu decided it would be well worth a visit to the Gurung village of Sikle after having watched travelogues and blog posts. When a wide of an avalanche at Kaphang Lava went viral last month, there was a spurt in trekkers to Sikle.

“The trails around Pokhara has a player for everyone, and every adventure,” says Pradhan. “This always been the perfect gateway location for me, but it also offers with family and friends. Since foreign travel is restricted, Nepal are discovering Nepal.”

Realising this, Nepal Tourism Board is forming a Domestic Tourism Board which will work towards streamlining ways to encourage domestic tourism to destinations like Pokhara. “Domestic tourism needs to be more organised. BTS’s effort will create opportunities for organised trekking and mountain biking among domestic tourists.”

There is a silver lining in the absence of international trekkers, the fact that Nepalis are venturing forth where they did not go before.

“Recover wise, the mountain tourism industry is at a dearth right now. There’s no need to worry,” says Sandeep Pradhan, the Chairman of Trekking Agencies’ Association of Nepal. But he says it’s encouraging to see adventure tours Nepal on the rise.

For domestic backpackers, the pandemic has proven to be an opportunity to discover their country. “With the lockdown, many were seen returning to their villages and ancestral homes. Many started exploring beyond the normal trekking routes and discovered new trekking trails while showcasing them to other Nepali trekker on social media,” says Rohit, one of the five members of Clubamer, a band of young Nepali travelers based in Pokhara.
On location in Pokhara

Shooting spree for Nepali cinema as city cashes in on its scenic beauty

Academy Award-winning actress Ningi Thapa and Poonam Singh star in the upcoming film, "Pokhara," directed by Wieki Ahuja. The film, a historical drama set in the 19th century, is being shot in various locations around the city.

"Pokhara is a special place," says Director Wieki Ahuja. "The landscape is breathtaking and the people are warm and welcoming. We are幸运 to be here and hope to bring a new perspective to the film industry with this project."

The film, which is scheduled for release in 2023, promises to be a visual treat with its stunning scenery and talented cast. Expect to see it on your screens soon!
Pokhara, the education hub

Its scenic setting, a more relaxed urban life has made Pokhara not just a tourism destination but also an educational hub. Pokhara has a long tradition of hosting good residential schools, and is seen by many families as a desirable alternative to Kathmandu for their children. With better road and air connectivity, Pokhara’s importance as an educational centre is likely to grow in future. Nepal Times spoke to five Pokhara educationalists about the importance of their work.

Khem Lalak
CEO, GATE Vocational – FAB School

What is your school’s role in promoting tourism in Gandaki Province?
We are already the preferred school for many employees in the hospitality sector in Pokhara and beyond. That is because our graduates demonstrate a high level of professionalism and commitment for their chosen profession, and we strive to continually improve the quality of the tourism sector in Pokhara and Gandaki Province, where tourism is the mainstay of the economy. The service sector needs and demands highly competent and committed human capital that needs to be continuously improved as younger people go jobs.

It looks like Pokhara has become a hub for schools like yours. We constantly believe that Pokhara should be developed as a Nepali education hub, and this school is our contribution. The federal government must reform some of the outdated policies like the bir ijno system. The school has a strong role in providing technical education, and we are looking forward to opening a new campus in Pokhara for hospitality management training.

Bhuma Gurung
Chair, Informatics College Pokhara

Why did you choose to locate your British degree college in Pokhara?
It was astonishing to see Pokhara’s youth migrating to Kathmandu and abroad for higher studies. We felt we had to do something to reverse that trend. We collaborated with London Metropolitan University, who have a history of strong educational links during the 1980s and 90s. They have a Centre for International Education (CIE) and a current BSc in the International Student Experience. The first BSc degree college in Pokhara and represents a milestone in education here.

How were classes affected during the Covid-19 pandemic?
The Informatics College, which is a part of the University of the West of England, opened online in 2020 and introduced a new online degree course in Cybersecurity in 2021. The college has also introduced online classes for its existing courses and has plans to expand its online offerings in the future. The college has also introduced online classes for its existing courses and has plans to expand its online offerings in the future.

Milan KC
Principal, Pokhara Montessori International School

Are you planning to reopen classes soon?
Currently, our school is still in lockdown mode, following the health and safety protocols. We are planning to reopening classes soon, keeping the health and safety of our students and staff in mind.

How did you conduct classes during the lockdown?
We suggested the school to online learning. There were many online classes being conducted by teachers across the country. In our case, we conducted online classes using Zoom, Google Meet, and other online platforms. The students were required to attend online classes regularly and submit their assignments online.

Rajana Joshi
Principal, Pokhara Engineering College

How is your college contributing to Nepal’s higher education from Pokhara?
Our college is one of the leading institutions in Nepal, providing quality education to students in various fields of study. We offer a wide range of courses in engineering, commerce, management, and other related fields. Our college is affiliated with Tribhuvan University and is one of the leading institutions in Nepal.

Kiran K.C.
Principal, La Grandeau International College

What is the outlook for Pokhara as an education hub?
Pokhara is known for its stunning natural scenery, rich cultural heritage, and vibrant lifestyle. The city is home to many universities and colleges, attracting students from across the country and beyond. The city’s strategic location, as a gateway to the Annapurna region, also makes it an ideal destination for international students. With the development of the airport and road network, Pokhara is poised to become a major education hub in the region.

What plans post-Covid?
We plan to expand our facilities and offer more courses in the future. We are also planning to introduce more online and hybrid learning options to cater to the changing needs of students.

Rajana Joshi
Principal, Pokhara Engineering College

Why did you choose Pokhara as the location for your college?
Pokhara is a city with a long history and rich cultural heritage, making it an ideal location for a college of engineering.

Kiran K.C.
Principal, La Grandeau International College

How was the pandemic for your school?
The pandemic has been a challenging time for our school. We have had to adapt to online learning, which has been successful in keeping our students engaged.

Kiran K.C.
Principal, La Grandeau International College

How did the online classes go?
We have transitioned to online learning and have been able to keep our students engaged.

Kiran K.C.
Principal, La Grandeau International College

What is the outlook for Pokhara as an education hub?
Pokhara is an excellent location for education due to its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. It is a hub for tourism, making it an excellent location for international students.
Under Biden, hope for Nepali migrants in US

In the four years of the Donald Trump administration in the United States, there have been few full-scale immigration review actions. The model of the rule of human rights and social justice organizations like the US-based Human Rights Watch has been more visible.

Kishor Rai, a Nepali lawyer in the US, says the new administration has sent a clear signal to the international community that it is ready to address the issues of migrants and refugees.

The Biden administration has already taken steps to review the immigration policies and has announced several initiatives to support migrants and refugees.

Nepali Times: First off, how is Adhikari working on TPS?

Palbani Benjamin: Adhikari has been around since 2005, and we have had several meetings with officials of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to discuss the TPS program.

Adhikari fought hard to get TPS status for Nepal and it required advocacy, lobbying with congressional members and coalition partners to push the Obama administration in that direction. The Nepal Embassy had sent a letter requesting for TPS status, but that was not enough. Lobbying is key.

It was important as it would give Nepalis, including undocumented workers, a legal status, allowing a large number of international migrants to work legally in the US.

In the past, we have been fighting for the status through legal means, but in the past, the Trump administration canceled it for many countries, including Nepal.

We are still pushing for permanent residency for TPS holders, but it takes a couple of years at minimum. In the meantime, we have to challenge it and buy time. But we can’t afford to lose any more time.

We started working with American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other legal organizations in 2018, and we have a nationwide search for plaintiffs who could represent Nepal. We filed the case, and we won a positive decision from the judge. Even if TPS was terminated, people could not immediately deport people who had been living in the US for a long time.

The judicial branch investigates the national government.

In September, the 9th Circuit Court backed the government’s decision to terminate the program. On the arguments of the case, it was racially biased, that the Trump administration had broken the rules and protocols, and that you cannot deport the children of US-born children — but on the basis that the judge in the lower court who wrote the ruling did not have the authority to do so.

Our lawyers appealed this decision, and the new administration did not support the termination of TPS holders.

Nabarada Ghimire: The frequent changes and uncertainty can be nerve-wracking for TPS holders because their lives are in limbo.

There is a lot of uncertainty about their future but there is also hope. Every time the TPS is terminated, we have used litigation to allow them to remain legally in the US, which has helped build trust.

But more importantly, we have helped empower TPS holders to share their stories, told their leadership skills, empower them politically and be part of the movement. They have been the faces of the TPS, and we are now as well.

In 2019, we mobilized 300 Nepali TPS holders in September. Over 150 came to DC in the midst of the pandemic to advocate, and they have taken ownership of this movement. It is because they turn out to share their stories, to lobby in DC to be a part of the movement that they are being heard and have a role in changing what happens in Congress.

Palbani Benjamin: For Adhikari, it is not about being their ‘saviour’, but ensuring that they have the power to change the laws and policies that directly impact them. Politically empowering the most important communities and working in coalitions with like-minded organizations from other communities to pressure those in Congress, is what creates change and how we have succeeded so far.

What do you think will change for TPS and other Nepali visa holders under Biden?

Palbani Benjamin: A big part of our litigation strategy has been to keep the pressure on to get into a more progressive immigration policy. With the Biden administration and a more friendly Democrat-majority Congress, there is now more room to push our demands.

In fact, just a few days ago, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris said that she wanted to introduce legislation for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and TPS recipients from day one to provide them Green Cards, so we are now a wait and see scenario.

The other strategy is to look at a settlement of the case and see what comes out of it. From the very beginning litigation by itself was not going to give us what we wanted which is permanent residency. It is a tool to extend the timeline to fight for permanent residency.

We have already started having discussions and the transition team of the Biden administration and are looking towards a redesignation of all countries to maintain their TPS status.

If redetermination is not possible, we are also asking for other ways to help TPS status holders to stay in the US.

One such alternative is to get Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) which will allow those who have lost TPS status to get DED status which can be designated by the President. Redetermination requires Department of Homeland Security to do country assessments and it is a complex process that involves the embassies and the State Department for a 12-month extension. We are hopeful that if there is a redesignation, it will be for all TPS countries and not on a country-by-country basis.

But both these have the ultimate objective of buying time to help TPS holders with permanent residency through Congress. The President doesn’t have to prove to provide permanent residency, it is up to Congress to pass the legislation which Biden will then have to sign off on.

We were involved in writing the legislation of HR 6 (American Dream and Promise Act) 2019. We made sure that all Nepalis who were in the US in 2015 and qualified for TPS but did not get it would also qualify for permanent residency. This means 30,000 Nepalis in the US, a big deal.

We are fighting a bigger fight than just TPS. We are also looking at comprehensive immigration reform. It is broken, and reform is overdue by decades, so we want to push for comprehensive immigration reform including a pathway to permanent residency for undocumented workers or those in the middle if it is warranted.

Within it, that is to make sure TPS holders and DACA recipients get permanent residency.

Adhikari is not necessarily going to work with diversity visas, but we expect the Biden administration to roll back the limits on diversity visas by the Trump presidency.

What was the status of undocumented workers during the pandemic?

Nabarada Ghimire: The vulnerability is relative. TPS workers at least had work permits and pay taxes. Undocumented workers were disproportionately impacted. Because they do not pay taxes, they did not get benefits like everyone else. In addition, they also did not have insurance or the confidence to access healthcare. Adhikari supported 768 Nepalis financially. It is very easy to forget that undocumented workers are doing essential jobs as well. It is because a domestic worker takes care of a doctor’s child, while she is at the hospital fighting to save lives.

Many undocumented workers are still under a lot of financial and mental stress, especially those who have spent an enormous amount of money to come here through illegal channels, and continue to pay lawyers or locals back home.

Palbani Benjamin: Undocumented workers do not have desk jobs, they have to be physically present at their workplaces, which increases their level of risk to exposure.

There is some potential confusion on support for PR in the case of seasonal workers. What is the right for what essential worker means, it is also the delivery workers, Uber, Lyft drivers and food delivery workers. Any pro-immigrant benefit that goes to essential workers should go to them as they are doing essential work during the pandemic.

What has Adhikari’s engagement with elected officials like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for the Representative for New York’s 14th Congressional District been like? And your experience mobilizing voters of Nepali origin?

Palbani Benjamin: Our focus for Adhikari is about building the power of Nepali speaking workers, but services do not just come from anywhere. It requires fighting for policy changes, building relationships with elected officials including Congress members, state representatives and city officials.

They understand that we provide something unique: we have direct access with the most impacted community of Nepali speaking individuals, and as numbers speak in politics there is trust in the message.

Nabarada Ghimire: When we first started in 2007, there were not many Nepalis with voting rights, but that has changed and so has our civic engagement network.

The good thing is that those who have returned have kept their promises, which has been encouraging whether it is work on health insurance for TPS holders, bill for nail salon workers, language justice for health provision in hospitals, litigation for TPS and so on. We choose who we work with, based on issues. If there is a common cause, we engage with them as representation is important.

Palbani Benjamin: Representation is important. We full understand representation but also people who take our interest, support us, and can be held accountable, not just to those who vote for them but also to everyone including those without voting rights in their districts whom they represent.
Why is there vaccine hesitancy in Nepal?

Communicating efficacy of Covid-19 jabs and making it more accessible will increase coverage

A recent research paper on the medical journal, Lancet called Russian Sputnik V safe and effective (91.6%) based on interim results from its phase three trials. Sinopharm has had efficacy ranging from 86% to 79%.

So far Covishield is the only Covid-19 vaccine registered at Nepal’s Drug Development Administration, even though South Africa has discontinued its use because it was found not to be effective against a new strain of coronavirus found there.

“For us to administer Sinopharm and others, we need a different strategy; get an approval from a health authority in the manufacturing company and a study of its side effects in similar populations,” explains Adhikari.

There is also an on-going debate about the use of different vaccines for the same individual. Experts agree on using the same vaccine for both the first and second dose as far as possible, but a mix of two different shots is also being advocated given there is a limited stock of vaccines of one kind.

Vaccines are here at a time when positivity and fatality rates are going down in Nepal. Multiple factors have been credited to this: fewer tests and contact tracing, large chunks of the population developing immunity against SARS-CoV-2 after contracting it and the natural peak and fall cycle of infectious diseases.

But one cannot ignore the possibility of another wave as seen frequently in the US and Europe and continue to wear masks, maintain physical distance and practice handwashing.

Says Sher Bahadur Pun: “This is the right time to vaccinate and be better prepared for possible next wave by strengthening our health infrastructure and human resources while continuing to follow safety measures, we must use this period to the fullest.”

SHANGRI-LA

KATHMANDU

LOVE PACKAGE

NPR 9999 NET PER COUPLE

Inclusions
- Meals, Sanitizer & Welcome Drink will be provided on arrival.
- Accommodation in Deluxe Room.
- Airport Pickup / Drop.
- Valentine’s Celebration.
- Complimentary Breakfast.
- 25% off on Food and Beverages.

LOVE PACKAGE

NPR 8888 NET PER COUPLE

Inclusions
- Meals, Sanitizer & Welcome Drink will be provided on arrival.
- Accommodation in Deluxe Room (Free Upgrade to first 6 couples).
- Complimentary Breakfast.
- Valentine’s Celebration.
- 25% off on Food and Beverage. 20% off on SPA and 40% off on Trails End Bar.

Shangri-La Kathmandu, Nepal | +977-1-442999 | +977-984377735 | info@hotelsangrila.com

Valentine’s Day Special Offer

NPR 3499 NET PER COUPLE

Inclusions
- Meals, Sanitizer & Welcome Drink will be provided on arrival.
- Accommodation in Deluxe Room.
- Complimentary Breakfast.
- Complimentary Welcome Drink.
- 40% off on Food and Beverages.

Valentine’s Day Special Offer

NPR 3999 NET PER COUPLE

Inclusions
- Meals, Sanitizer & Welcome Drink will be provided on arrival.
- Accommodation in Deluxe Room.
- Airport Pickup / Drop.
- Valentine’s Celebration.
- Complimentary Breakfast.
- 25% off on Food and Beverages.
**ONLINE ARCHIVES**

**Shilpee Theatre**
Rapid from Shilpee Theatre is on YouTube channel. Watch, Comment, and subscribe to get latest Nepali Hoddle Galler.

**Digital Archaeology Foundation**
Look at historical photographs from Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur durbar squarers, and watch 3D reconstructed videos of temples around Nepal. Visit the Digital Archaeology Foundation website for more details.

**Global Nepali Museum**
First National museum in Nepal that features Nepali art and artifacts housed in museums around the world. Go to the museum website and watch videos about sculptures, paintings, and contemporary art, and other Nepali cultural objects.

**OUR PICK**

**2020 release, science-fantasy action film, Monster Hunter**
Is based on and video game series. The movie stars Will Smith and Tom Holland. Two former allies on a hunt for a legendary creature.

**Khole**

(Photographer: Aakash Pradhan)

**Aakash Pradhan**

Feb 12 - Feb 18
Van Gogh Gallery

**Khole**


**DINING**

**Juicy Cafe**
For those craving for some tempting yet health-conscious food, look no further than The Juicy Cafe. It’s located in a vibrant street right by the lake. The menu has 50 years of experience in hospitality all around the world which is reflected in the diverse range of options.

**Kasto The Restaurant**
Kasto creates a symphony of various flavors to provide its visitors with food that is divine. Garnished through a decade, it is a splendid outdoor restaurant with an inviting low seating indoor area, a casual bar and a panoramic panoramic view of Fewa.

**Natsoul Korean Restaurant**
After welcoming guests into its heart, Natsoul plates Korean barbecue, kimchi and plenty of pork and chicken dishes. Try their special samgyeopsal—sliced pork belly, pan fried at the table to be dipped in sauce and red hot chili, wrapped in fresh lettuce.

**Fresh Elements**
At Fresh Elements, it is believed that everyone deserves to eat real food, grown on the mountains. Savor their specialty gourmet salads, fresh juices and smoothies, live grilled and creative entrees.

**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

The air quality index for the day is fair. The AQI for Kathmandu Valley, which was seen in January at an average of 51.00, has dropped to 32.00. The pollution level is considered to be low, and the air quality is considered to be good.

**EVENTS**

**Pokhara International Marathon**
Pokhara Marathon is an event held every year by the Trail Sidewalks team and other aligned organizations of Pokhara, aimed at promoting awareness of health and peace. Run to promote the spirit of the valley at witness a runner complete at first place. 13 February, Pokhara football stadium

**Mardi Himal Trek**
To develop a women-friendly tours to trend and explore Nepal Fully, a team of women have planned to embark on a journey up to the Ruga Lumpur. Mardi Himal on the occasion of Women’s Day. 8 March join them for the cause. 4-10 March

**Our pick**

- **2019 release, science-fantasy action film, Monster Hunter**
  - Based on and video game series
  - The movie stars Will Smith and Tom Holland
  - Two former allies on a hunt for a legendary creature

- **Khole**
  - (Photographer: Aakash Pradhan)
  - Feb 12 - Feb 18
  - Van Gogh Gallery

**Dining**

- **Juicy Cafe**
  - For those craving for some tempting yet health-conscious food, look no further than The Juicy Cafe. It’s located in a vibrant street right by the lake. The menu has 50 years of experience in hospitality all around the world which is reflected in the diverse range of options.

- **Kasto The Restaurant**
  - Kasto creates a symphony of various flavors to provide its visitors with food that is divine. Garnished through a decade, it is a splendid outdoor restaurant with an inviting low seating indoor area, a casual bar and a panoramic panoramic view of Fewa.

- **Natsoul Korean Restaurant**
  - After welcoming guests into its heart, Natsoul plates Korean barbecue, kimchi and plenty of pork and chicken dishes. Try their special samgyeopsal—sliced pork belly, pan fried at the table to be dipped in sauce and red hot chili, wrapped in fresh lettuce.

- **Fresh Elements**
  - At Fresh Elements, it is believed that everyone deserves to eat real food, grown on the mountains. Savor their specialty gourmet salads, fresh juices and smoothies, live grilled and creative entrees.

**Air Quality Index**

- The air quality index for the day is fair. The AQI for Kathmandu Valley, which was seen in January at an average of 51.00, has dropped to 32.00. The pollution level is considered to be low, and the air quality is considered to be good.
How about Valentine’s Day in Pokhara?

Lockdown delivery

A t Pokhara went into lockdown, and tourists stranded in hotels and locals would not venture out for provisions, the city’s Subway Department Store outlet sprang into action with home delivery. The store transformed itself overnight into an online home delivery service and customers placed their orders with SMS or social media. The deliveries were made with all safety protocols in place, and tourists provisions from Subway’s Kathmandu depot.

All staff were issued, and the store worked with the municipality to ensure that there was no shortage. The group suffered losses at all its outlets across the country, but things are returning to normal in Pokhara.

The revival of domestic tourism has given mentors hope that soon international tourism will also pick up again.

POKHARA MONTESSORI KINDERHOME

“The Child is truly a miraculous being. This should be felt by the educator.”
Dr. Maria Montessori

OUR BRANCHES

SIDDHARATHA CHOWK
Bagaletole (Near Shishu Bikash Kendra)
Pokhara-8, Nepal
Tel: 061-537879 (off.)

DEEP BRANCH
Way to Lambachaur
Tel: 061-442277 (off.)

DAMSIDE-17
Damside-Pokhara
Woy to Peri Bista, Tel: 061-467575

E-mail: pokkh@hmail.com, URL: www.pokharamontessori.edu.np

Admission Open

Direct & Full-time
UK UNIVERSITY

Degree

BACHELOR IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
BACHELOR IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
Bachelor of Business Administration
Bachelor of Computing

Students from any faculty can apply

Informatics College Pokhara
Gardan Hospital Chowk, Maiti Pokhara-7, Kathmandu
061-538 115
info@icp.edu.np
informaticscollegepokhara.com
**Dreaded bliss**

How society’s pressure for women to marry has more to do with cruelty than culture

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is the importance of emotional support and genuine connections that help keep our sanity during these difficult times. We know that having a caring partner is more helpful than having no one during challenging times, but having no partner is better than being in a bad relationship.

I used to feel a lot of frustration and resentment towards those who asked me such questions and made those comments but maybe because I am much older now, I want to give them the benefit of the doubt that maybe they do not know how their words are affecting others. However, it is time for them to be aware.

It is important, irrespective of age, to acknowledge the consequences of what we say to others. It is important for children and adults to know and remember that you cannot take words back after they have been spoken, and that it is important to be mindful and aware of what we say and to whom.

Think before you speak is a useful advice for everyone, not just children and young people. Can we also request and expect that from the older generation? Before you say the first thing that comes to your mind to other people’s children, try to imagine how it would feel if someone said that to your children.

We all grew up in a society where people were groomed, and we make up stories about us. Let’s try to stop that and try to give the next generation the life we wish we had. Let women choose their freedom and the way they live their lives. Let women choose their own happiness, whatever it maybe be. Let’s let women be happy if they want to get married and let them be happy if they don’t.

Anjana Raghbhandary, women’s rights activist, said that Nepali parents face life-time peer pressure to get married.

---

**SUMMIT TO LAKESIDE**

Nepal 101 team facilitated in Pokhara. Ten Nepalis climbed the world’s second highest mountain (8,848 m) on 19 January, 2020.

---

**LIFE TIME**

Anjana Raghbhandary

Just another example of how some Nepalis have no sense of boundaries when it comes to others, it does not matter how modern they are. The problem is not that they do not know what they are saying is affecting others, the problem is that they do not care to think how it is potentially hurting others.

Ironically, those people are extremely private when it comes to their own families. This is more than a cultural issue. This is a matter of lack of compassion and being blatantly cruel to those that they do not care about.

At first glance it may seem societal but when you look deeper, you will notice that it has more to do with intentions and lack of empathy. People need to keep in mind that this is an extremely sensitive issue where boundaries need to be respected, and unfortunately, most of the time they are not.

What most people do not realise is the amount of stress and pressure it puts on the women and their families especially when they are already dealing with many other stresses caused by the pandemic.

Maya, 29, is a smart and accomplished professional who is financially stable and is giving back to her community. When asked what frustrates her about Nepali family gatherings, she said: “My extended family told my mother that someone is looking to get married so they assume I should be interested. It’s not cool at all. The whole concept of marriage drives me. Thankfully, my parents don’t pressure me.”

I recently met a young uncle always asking me “विन भन्नी छैसु?” What is the party?”

I always responded with an uncomfortable smile and would walk away, trying to avoid being disrespectful to him. In reality, respect goes both ways, and we learn from our elders how to respect others.

Another friend of mine, who is also 29, said that her parents nudge her about plans to get married because of her age, and how it makes her feel like a failure for not having found someone already.

When it comes to most parents, it comes from a place of concern and love, but they don’t always understand how it makes their children feel. Perhaps, the parents forget how the idea of marriage make them feel in the past or it is possible, they didn’t feel the same pressure as their children do today. I do know that people in our parents’ generation were more patient and more tolerant than us.

Assuming the pressure to settle down and get married was more in the past, I wonder if some women, who experienced the same scrutiny in their youth, became more juded and continued the tradition of treating other young women the way they were treated. It is sad. Experiences either make you wounded or wise.

Some ‘sisters’ can be kinder because they understand as they experienced the same frustration. They wanted and knew that it is not okay to make others feel the same discomfort and pain someone in the past had made them feel. That is the kind of sanity, I want to be.

One of my friends in the US told me that it is hard for Indian women to find husbands because they can go to their mothers and say “Mom, I am a loser, find me a husband.”

I am at a loss for words when some Americans tell me about their perception of South Asian matrimony. The societal and cultural pressure to get married has made marriage quite restrictive to many people. Honestly, the idea of marriage is beautiful because it is a union between two people and their families to provide support and companionship.
Model for post-Covid ecotourism
Halt to road project in fragile bio-diversity hotspot revives conservation hopes

O

nithologists Carol Inskipp, Rupertina Karmacharya and Prem Thapa on how their lobbying has halted a controversial road project in a northern Chitwan forest and restored hope for the rare Spiny Babbler and other endangered wildlife.

In April 2019 our report in Nepal Times highlighted the serious threat posed by a new road through the Gedi-Sirichuli watershed and its rich wildlife habitat in the Mahaharan Range. Last week, the Chakamana Municipality in Chitwan district halted its construction and re-routed the road to save the forest.

The road serves the remote, under-developed region inhabited mostly by the Chepang people, and the road had been forcefully constructed by the people of Matho Kanle to Chitgobher and Gedi.

See also: Protecting the last home of the Spiny Babbler

The region also has historical significance because of an 18th century fort, and is exceptionally rich in biodiversity. In fact, the Gadi-Sirichuli forest has been designated an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area by BirdLife International and Bird Conservation Nepal.

It is one of a network of sites around the world which are of international value for birds and other wildlife. Gedi-Sirichuli is a stronghold of the Spiny Babbler (Turdoides nipalensis), the elusive bird found only in Nepal and nowhere else.

Local people from Gedi objected strongly to the new road because it would destroy their only water source, and result in landslides. Indeed, rockfalls from the new road have already damaged the forest. If construction had continued, it would have dried up the only two remaining water sources for eight villages.

A 2015 survey in Chitwan after the earthquakes concluded that the geology of the region had been disturbed, and the slopes were too unstable for unplanned road building.

Now, there is good news. Last week, Chakamana Municipality halted the construction of the road, and passed the budget for an alternative alignment suggested in this newspaper two years ago for the road to go via Thapali and Munatar to Gedi. This new route will be far less damaging to the environment, as well as connect more villages to Gedi.

The Chakamana Municipality acted with foresight to protect both the watershed and the environment. It also opens up opportunities for Gadi-Sirichuli to develop low-intensity sustainable tourism through nature and culture tours.

Such small-scale ecotourism could bring good advantages including additional income to the Chepang, Magar, Gurung and Chhatri communities here, and could be a model for similar areas in other parts of Nepal.

If the Municipality designates the area as ‘Gadi-Sirichuli Watershed and Bird Sanctuary’, it will be a recognized destination for tourists interested in pristine forests with rich wildlife. Indeed, it would be the first bird sanctuary in Nepal. Local youths could be trained as guides by the Bird Education Society (BES), a Sarasba based NGO that has been monitoring the district’s birdlife since the 1990s and has recorded sightings of 320 species of birds, with new ones continually being added to the list.

Some of these are very rare like the Red-faced Liocichla, sighted here four years ago for the first time after the 1960s. There are also 15 mammal species including the splendid Black Giant Squirrel and Assamcass Muskox. The richness of birds and other wildlife will undoubtedly attract naturalists from overseas as well as many from Nepal.

The region’s other attraction is the historic Gudahadgi Fort, located above Gedi village, which was built by the Shah kings 350 years ago to protect Nepal from attacks from the south by the British East India Company. The fort lies on the top of a 1,271m mountain top with a sweeping panorama of Himalanchi-Manaslu to the north as well as a magnificent view of the Chitwan Valley to the south.

The rich traditional culture of the Chepang, Gurung and Magars inhabitant can also be a draw, and provide additional income to the indigenous people of the region. There are already new homestays in Gedi and Taloa Kanle, that offer visitors a place to stay and immerse in local traditions and wildlife tourism.

BES is providing homestay training in a sustainable and eco-friendly way for local people, many of whom are from marginalized communities. The Municipality will now have to invest in proper homestays, improve trails, train locals and conserve bird, and other biodiversity would be highly beneficial to ecotourism development here.

When local villagers find they are benefiting financially from such grassroots tourism, they are much more likely to actively protect their wondrous forests with its bio-diversity. And this is also the kind of post-Covid tourism model Nepal should strive for.

ADMISSION OPEN IN ENGINEERING BACHELOR PROGRAMS

- Civil Engineering (4 yrs)
- Computer Engineering (4 yrs)
- Architecture (5 yrs)

Eligibility: 10+2 or A Level science (Biology group also). Diploma in Engineering or equivalent with at least 2nd division or C grade (aggregate in Theory & Practical) in A levels.

Last date of form submission: 3 Falgun 2077 (15 Feb. 2021)

Entrance Examination: 4 Falgun 2077 (16 Feb. 2021)

Time: 11AM

Application forms can be obtained from the college reception or online.

Pokhara Engineering College (PEC)

Phirke, Pokhara-8, Kaski | Tel: 061-531209/ 528530
E-mail: info@pec.edu.np

"Committed to Excellence in Technical Education"
The Other

Following the footsteps of Maurice Herzog to Annapurna, 70 years after the first ascent of a 8,000m peak

Bimal Kadel in Myagdi

In Pokhara, you do not go to the mountains; the mountains come to you. This is one of the most fascinating spots in the world, a tropical valley less than 1,000m in elevation but hanya 25km from Mt Machapuchre at 8,993m.

Pokhara's other-worldly scenery is what draws visitors from all over Nepal and the world. It is a place where the senses take in the energy and radiance of creation. The mountains glow in the fresh morning light, shine brightly all day, and are phosphorescent in the moonlight.

Pokhara is the launching pad for numerous expeditions to the Annapurnas, and the starting point for treks. But 70 years ago when Nepal was still under Rana rule and a French expedition came to climb Annapurna, its climbers did not come here. They marched straight up from Butwal in the Tarai.

In December last year, a 23-member team from Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) Pokhara, and the Trekkers' Agency's Association of Nepal (TAAN) Pokhara chapter and Annapurna Rural Municipality set out to explore North Annapurna Base Camp. The idea was to use the pandemic break to find new trekking destinations, and to develop this historic route.

The trek we took would follow the footsteps of the French Annapurna Expedition of 1950, and re-visit their march-in to the mountain. It is now known as the Maurice Herzog Trail, after the climber who, with Louis Larche, made the first ascent of an 8,000m peak — two years before Mt Everest itself was climbed. Herzog became a global celebrity, and his adventure classic Annapurna made him even more famous, with 11 million copies sold in many translations.

Herzog's book also brought the Nepal Himalaya into the global spotlight. The book is not just about the final climb. It contains details of the exploration of the Kali Gandaki Valley at a time when there were no reliable maps. They had to find their way through uncharted territory to find the mountain they wanted to climb. Then they need against the onset of the monsoon to break a trail up the Mardi Gorge to North Annapurna Base Camp.

Our own journey began in Pokhara with an eight-hour bus ride to Tukche, and another six hours to reach Lower Darchyang, which has none of the most-enchanting waterfalls in Nepal.

We immediately hit the trail to reach Upper Darchyang, our destination for the day. From here on, the trail is almost exactly as the French climbers and their hundreds of porters must have seen it in the spring of 1950. And like trekking in most of Nepal, it is one steep climb followed by another steep descent.

This takes a toll on the knees, but after three hours of this, we soon get used to it as we reach our destination for the day, with the rock and ice south foot of Mt Nilgiri looking over us.

Setting up the camp site that night under a sky full of stars, we can imagine how difficult it must have been for Herzog's team to navigate through this rugged terrain without proper maps or GPS. Indeed, this was the first international expedition given permission to climb by the Nepal government at a time when historical changes were set off in the region — the British had left India, and Nepal itself was witnessing the last days of British rule by the Rana dynasty.

The expedition had permission to climb either Dhualagiri or Annapurna, the two eight-thousanders separated by only 10km on either side of the Kali Gandaki, which at this point is the deepest gorge in the world. After Surya from Paris to Delhi and Lucknow, the French climbers arrived with their gear at the base camp to be joined by expedition under Ang Tharkey and hundreds of porters.

The expedition found Dhualagiri too difficult to climb, and could not even locate Annapurna, since it was hidden behind Nilgiri and Tilicho Peak. They sent survey parties to explore and finally decided that the north face of Annapurna, despite avalanche risk, was not too technical.

The march up the Mardi Khola was an adventure almost as challenging as climbing the mountain itself, especially since Herzog and his team did not know where they were going and had to first locate the mountain they wanted to climb.

And that is where we found ourselves the next morning, gazing at the mountains towering above us as they caught the golden rays of the rising sun. Very few trekking guides and climbing expeditions have come this way in the last decade, and it was all untouched wilderness. No towns or tea houses, everything had to be carried.

This also means there were hurdles every step of the way — narrow, slippery trails, landslides and rockfalls, and fragile log bridges. We came face-to-face with Himalayan black bears several times, both humans and bears shocked by the encounter.

The forest path was continuously uphill, and even as the sun went low on the horizon, there was no sign of our camp site. It soon got dark, and the night was pitch black. It was time to set up our tent and have a warm dinner. The next day we were retracing the steps taken by Ang Tharkey and three other French members of the expedition as they explored the deep canyons of the Mardi Khola to see if it had a passage to Annapurna.

There were lots of wild bee hives dangling like black stalactites from the cliffs above. But we had to keep our eyes on the narrow trail, and in the steep sections we even needed ropes. There were parts where the trail completely disappeared, and there was no way forward or back. Instead we used the sound of the running river.

Finally by mid-day we reached...
ABC Trek

the wild and tumbling Miniri Khola and had lunch by its icy waters, crossing it on a makeshift bridge of boulders and logs. There were more steep slopes with treacherous loose boulders on the other side where we needed to be roped up. But we finally made it to the night stop at Chhetrapur.

We spent the night in a dreamlike trance with visions of growing rivers, roaring waterfalls, chipping boulders in the underground, gritty ridges and the mule path touching silent sky.

The highlight of the fourth day was the Phuthsho Falls, which was true to its onomatopoeic name as the water fell through a single hole in the rock onto a turquoise pond. We were now at 3,500m and the trail crossed the river along narrow planks precariously placed between boulders—nothing to hold on to and nothing to stop you in case you lost your footing. One shivered and felt the icy waters gushing below.

Yet, we could not but pause to admire these polished boulders that had been rounded, sculpted by water flowing through them over years. One can almost imagine millions of years of erosion in the landscape as the river cut through the rising terrain. It was now getting bitterly cold, and despite dinner around a campfire on the fifth day, our only thought was to keep ourselves warm. Even the beauty of this wild wonderland failed to impress us through the bone-chilling cold.

Base Camp was a stone hut with a tin roof. One side was open, with a stupendous view of the glacial lake, but it also allowed an icy wind to come through turning the room into a deep freezer. We called ourselves inside the sleeping bags with layers of clothing, but they were no match for the cold, and sleep was out of the question. It was minus 10°C at Calcaus with wind chill at base camp at 4,600m.

A massive avalanche rumbled down the north face during the night, bringing the snow dust to the base where it lingered till morning, suspended in the air. So much beauty, and yet how brutal and violent nature could be.

Morning light illuminated the north face, with its sickle cliff and the vast ice slope leading to the 8,000m summit of the world’s tenth highest mountain, K2, the world’s second highest. Is often called a ‘Killer Mountain’, but it is Annapurna I that has the highest death rate among eight thousanders. Since Herzog and Lachenal, 357 climbers have been on top of Annapurna I from both sides, but 60 have died in the attempt. This gives Annapurna a mortality ratio of 38%. K2 is 29%.

Herzing recounts in Annapurna the heroic life-and-death struggle with primitive equipment and violent weather to get to the summit at 6PM on 3 June 1950. But the descent was even more treacherous, deluged with lack of oxygen, exhaustion, snow blindness, and severely frost bitten, the two finally staggered down in white-out conditions, surviving barely in a snow cave, and an avalanche.

The chill that ran down my spine as I gazed at the golden summit that morning was as much from the cold as from the realization of the sacrifice it took in those days of Himalayan mountaineering to accomplish the feat. I bowed to the forces of existence with deep reverence and divinity.

Just like Herzog’s team, we started our trek back down. We were doing this in winter, but the French expedition was racing against time to traverse the Miniri gorge before the monsoon submerged the trail and washed away the bridge. They barely made it out.

However, Herzog and Lachenal had to be carried in 80lb on porter back even while the expedition doctor kept amputating their gangrenous fingers and toes one by one as they made their way down to Lehe, and then over the next month down to the Indian border.

From there, Herzog went by train to Raxaul from where, even in his state, he travelled via Shillong to be invited by Prime Minister founding Rara and the French Ambassador. Herzog sitting painfully in a chair with his hands bandaged.

We hiked a lot easier. The road has now reached Narchyang, and from there were driven back to Pokhara. Our bodies were aching, but our spirits were jubilant as the energy of Annapurna coursed through our veins.

As the bus climbed the last ridge, and the rays of the setting sun cast a pink light on the south face of Annapurna, lights of Pokhara came into view. The dark forests rushed by and were wrapped by the blanket of night.

It was humbling to think that the hardships we endured were negligible compared to what the French climbers and their Nepali guides and porters went through. 73 years ago negotiating unchartered territory with fancy equipment.

Every adventure has its rewards, and by reliving history on the North Annapurna Base Camp trek we were metamorphosed by the adventure. All of us were indelibly changed, and are now a part of what we experienced.

Annapurna is managed by the Nepali nation’s pride in Pokhara.

---

"HOTEL WITH THE BEST VIEW IN POKHARA"

Rejuvenate with us at our little hilltop Retreat. To avail our special offers, kindly contact us at:
+977-98412848
info@raniban.com

"IMMERSIVE IN NATURES FINEST"

A proud product of Himsheer Foods PVT. Ltd.
Anti-corruption Antigens

There has been a lot of hair-pulling and bemoaning ever since Transparency International revealed recently that Nepal slipped four places in the rankings of the most corrupt countries in the world system, from 117 to 121.

In 2019, Nepal was ranked 115th among countries deemed most corrupt but last year during the pandemic we overtook (or, undertook, depending which way you are counting) four other countries to be 117th.

Many in Nepal view this as a matter of national shame and proof that we are a failed state. But that is looking at the glass as half-empty. I see the glass as half-full, and time for a refill. Under the Oligarchy we can drink and be merry as if there is no tomorrow.

There are some misguided calls for GONI to acquire the Anti-Corruption Vaccine that has recently got FDA approval after Phase 3 trials in South Africa and India. This move threatens to put Nepal back decades, even centuries, as khukuri is eradicated, and we lose our way of life.

We have learnt through the graveyard that MOFA has engaged in ‘vaccine diplomacy’ to inoculate Nepal against corruption starting with frontline workers in the Department of Immigration, the Tax Office as well as the Commission on the Indictment of Abuse of Authority. Fortunately, because Nepal is so late in the game to reserve its stock of the vaccine, it does not look like we will get the doses before elections.

Corruption has been harnessed into a fine art in Nepal. Temple statues depict Jesus gifting baskets to those higher up in the divine pecking order.

Without corruption, Nepal would grind to a halt. Why would anyone in their right mind want to get rid of one of the only things that work well in this country? How are you ever going to get your driving license, or expedite your passport? No one can get an ambassadorial appointment if the pre-paid system is abolished, or become henchmen of Nepali Oil Corruption. The Fast Track will never be completed if contractors can’t pull a fast one.

Without corruption, Nepal would be an unequal society. Golf spreads the wealth around and invades the playing field, it squeezes the system so that the wheels of government can turn, and it raises Nepal’s per capita GDP. Without bribes and kickbacks, we would not have made the progress we have in lifting millions out of extreme poverty.

This is why we want the Lower House restored so roundabouts, metalled, malls from the medical-industrial complex, fossil fuel cartels, geos and war culprits can regain their rightful places in the federal Laxaltlaw.

The anti-corruption are right. Nepalis do not need anti-corruption antigens, we should legislate graft and make it contribute to the national economy by taxing it. This will turn Nepal into a more transparent nation since every time someone slips a bribe in the Land Office, he will be slapped 13% VAT on the spot.

And we should aim to go even lower in the Transparency International Rankings. Even if it means we have to bribe someone in Berlin.