A Kathmandu Spring

The Nepal Communist Party (NCP) has by now squandered the overwhelming mandate it got in the 2017 elections to govern for five years, and its future now rests on an impending decision by the Supreme Court. While the verdict could go either way, one of the two NCP factions is going to lose out.

Whether it will be the establishment faction led by Prime Minister K P Oli or the breakaway group headed by Pushpa Kamal Dahal, will be decided in the upcoming weeks. Oli says it is preparing for snap polls in April-May, while Dahal loyalists are in the streets demanding a reinstatement of the Lower House.

Both are trying to demonstrate popular support by mustering bigger crowds, and thus influence the Supreme Court and the Election Commission. Both sides say they are confident that the rulings will be in their favour.

Nepal’s current political crisis is not a result of any great ideological disagreement, but a personal power struggle between Oli and Dahal. This may be why rallies by both Oli and Dahal have been packed with cadres and people based in from the districts, while most people watch the daily rallies from the televisions (above).

Whichever way the Supreme Court verdict goes, Nepal’s politics will be tumultuous as leaders jockey for supremacy, even as regional geopolitics influence the outcome. Beijing has been openly lobbying to keep the NCP intact, while the Indo-American alliance would like to see Nepal’s communists split and weakened.

“Even if the House is reinstated, a new struggle for supremacy will begin within the party to form an election government,” predicts political commentator Shyam Shrestha. “It will not be as easy as before when the NCP had a two-thirds majority, and the permutations and combinations of coalition-building will be wide open.”

If the House is restored, Dahal sees the NCP faction forming a government in coalition with the Nepali Congress and Janata Samajwadi Party Nepal. But if the Court rules in favour of the dissolution, he sees political chaos.

Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali admits the uncertainty is due to the wait for the Supreme Court decision. He says, “But once it rules in favour of dissolution, that will stee the country’s mood towards elections. The conditions are right for polls, the Nepali Congress, Janata Samajwadi Party and smaller parties are all ready, there are no security issues, and the Election Commission is prepared.”

However, the political future of Oli and Dahal will also rest on the Supreme Court’s decision on the 13th petition that are currently being heard. Oli’s ambitions will be dashed if the House is reinstated, while Dahal and his supporters will suffer a setback if it is not. The Court’s decision has become a prestige issue for both sides, with Dahal hinting that the court is influenced by Malhazar.

Some in the NCP fear the possibility of an election actually bringing the two factions of the NCP closer, but Central Committee member Beduram Bhushan disagrees. “There is not too much blood. I see zero percentage possibility of verification,” says Bhushan, a Dahal loyalist.

If the House is restored, the Dahal faction will have to choose between election or agitation. However, it may not be so easy for Dahal and his supporters to “unleash a hurricane” as he has threatened.

Bhushan says his party has no plans for election. “Even if the House is not restored, there will not be an election. Why plan for something that will not happen?”

For Oli, restoration of the House is equally fraught. He will either have to resign, or face a no-confidence vote in Parliament. 

Mahesh Paudel
End of war is not peace

Communist parties the world over are planning to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Vietnam War. They reject the view that the war was a victory for the United States. They are calling for a new anti-war movement.

In Nepal, the Maoist party used to commemorate “People’s War Day” on 13 February with much fanfare. This year, except for a book launch by former Maoist ideologue Bal Krishna Bhattarai, the celebrations were largely uneventful and unnoticed.

Most of the youth who were involved in the waging wars now represent the state and the Maoists who were till 2006 executing UML radicals now live in harmony with the local leaders who had earlier killed, or forced into exile.

There is no doubt that the Maoists have regrouped as well as the forces inside and outside Nepal that help them in their cause. The Maoists have become more united and less factionalistic, partly due to the shocks they have experienced.

Nepal is now a secular, federal republic, but this has not made much of a difference to the everyday life of citizens. In fact, the promises and sacrifices of the revolution have been squandered, and political parties, partly catering to a handful of a Nepal state and even monarchy are gaining traction.

The Maoist party itself is divided between those in the government of Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli and others loyal to Maoist expatriates Prachanda. Other former UML leaders have joined hands with erstwhile Maoist comrades. Wartime enemies have not been addressed, and the state is solely ensuring that the transitional justice mechanism is toothless.

The end of war has meant peace, but the legacy of war will still be seen in the residual violence and impunity, the message is that you can get away with extortion and murder, rape and torture.

An armed struggle was not necessary for political change in 1996. Violence was never the only solution.

Himalayan Tsunami

The hill stations in Nepal and Tibet were hit by a devastating earthquake on 25 December 2004, killing thousands. The earthquake was a result of a subduction zone of the Indian and Eurasian plates.

Dreaded Blizz
deep is Nepali word for snow. On 10 February in 1988, a major snowstorm hit the eastern part of Nepal, killing over 700 people.

Most popular on Twitter

Most commented

Most reached and shared on Facebook

What’s trending

ONLINE PACKAGES

FROM THE FRONTLINES

Twenty-five years after the Maoists declared victory on 13 February 1990, some journalists in the region remember their own experiences reporting at the conflict. Full story at page 425.

SACE\N SAVES NATURE

Residents of Kail and surrounding districts in Garur Budhi practice rituals for the maize harvest. The rituals are believed to bring forth a bountiful harvest.

WOMEN MARCH AGAINST RAPE

Following the passing laws restricting women under 14 to practice Magh Bihu and the rapists and rapists of all age ah up to 17 if violators, women took to the streets.

Cleared to land

Nepal government has cleared to land 250 hectares of land at three locations in Rupandehi district. The land is now available for allocation to local farmers.

Nepal Times

NEWSPAPER

Nepal Times is the only English daily newspaper of Nepal, printed in Kathmandu. It was founded by Barun Karki and Prativa Pradhan in 1982. It is edited by Dr. Dipak Malla and published by Times Media Pvt. Ltd. It is distributed in all major cities and towns of Nepal.

Nepal Times (Times Media Pvt. Ltd.)

Nepal Times is the only English daily newspaper of Nepal, printed in Kathmandu. It was founded by Barun Karki and Prativa Pradhan in 1982. It is edited by Dr. Dipak Malla and published by Times Media Pvt. Ltd. It is distributed in all major cities and towns of Nepal.
TIME TO MEET AGAIN:
ERZURUM

Have a healthy journey with all precautions taken down to the smallest detail for your in-flight safety.
Sonia Awale

Even as Nepal completes the first phase of its Covid vaccine drive to inoculate frontline health workers and other high-risk groups, new hyper-spread variants of the coronavirus, as well as vaccine dental, have raised concerns about the efficacy of the campaign.

Public health experts, however, say the government must continue its vaccination drive to reach as many vulnerable people as possible with a better communication strategy and more aggressive promotion.

Nepal is one of the first countries in the region to start a Covid-19 vaccination drive. But the first phase saw a moderate turnout with only half of the doctors, nurses, PCHVs, security personnel and cleaners prioritised by the government inoculating themselves because of the safety concerns and hesitancy.

This forced the Health Ministry to expand the first phase to also include civil servants, diplomats, bankers and journalists so that it could use up the 1.8 million doses of Covishield vaccine donated by India last month.

With additional 2.25 million Covishield doses under the WHO’s COVAX initiative arriving in Nepal by early March and another 2 million that the government is in talks to purchase from the Serum Institute of India, officials are gearing up for the second phase of the vaccination for people above 55 years and those with comorbidities starting from 7 March.

This will be followed by the age group 40-54 and those below 40 years of age.

The Department of Drug Administration has also approved Chinese vaccine Sinopharm for emergency use, clearing the way for 500,000 doses of the vaccine that China has offered.

“The campaign will now be community-based. Unlike the first phase that was facility-based, we will take the vaccine to the people and ensure higher coverage,” assured Shyam Rai Uperey, head of government’s Covid Vaccine Strategy. “And as per the WHO recommendation, our advisory groups will soon finalise their decision to provide the second dose between 8-12 weeks.”

Public health experts say that the emergence of new variants should not dissuade the government from discontinuing or scaling back its vaccination drive.

“An RNA virus will have variants. It is a given, we have to live with them. In fact, we might have our own variant in South Asia, but we should keep on vaccinating and saving lives,” says Surendra Dixit of the Centre for Molecular Dynamics Nepal.

Of the multiple variants circulating globally, the one first identified in the UK called B.1.1.7 is more widespread, and have been detected in Nepal in travellers arriving from Britain. The good news is that AstraZeneca Covishield vaccine has been found to be effective against the strain.

However, a trial involving 1,000 people in South Africa claimed that Oxford’s jab offered only minimal protection against mild and moderate cases of the variant B.1.351. Experts caution that it may be too soon to declare the vaccine ineffective because the study was conducted in a small population of young people.

In Brazil, a variant called P.1 has been found to contain a set of additional mutations that may affect its ability to be recognised by antibodies, adding to the challenges.

“What’s important in this debate is that even if one were to confine Covid, the vaccine will prevent people from getting severely ill and dying,” says Buddhika Senarath of the Patan Academy of Health Sciences. “Trials and emergency use are so far has strongly addressed safety concerns regarding Covishield, so we can’t let news of variants put a damper on the vaccination campaign.”

The nationwide vaccination campaign is taking place at a time when Nepal and the rest of the South Asia is reporting much fewer cases and fatalities, much of which is attributed to the limited contact tracing and herd immunity in major cities after large chunks of the population developed resistance against SARS-CoV-2 after contracting Covid.

But the lack of surveillance, seroprevalence studies and antibody tests mean that researchers have not been able to confirm localised stimulus.

“The government is unwilling to conduct a study despite interest from aid agencies. Results from these studies would have helped us better prepare vaccination strategy at a time when we face great resource constraint,” says Dixit.

Nepal also needs to continue with vaccine diplomacy and look into other shots, in particular, Chinese Sinovac and Bharat Biotech’s Covaxin. Both, the vaccines use the whole inactivated (doubled) virus, because of which they are unable to infect people or cause pathological effects but display the immune system to mount a defensive reaction against the virus.

Sivamadee carried global headlines when it was found to be only 10-44% effective in trial in Brazil, whereas it performed better in Turksin (95% efficacy). Covaxin is also controversial because of its emergency use among the frontline healthcare workers in India despite not completing its phase three trials. It will do well for Nepal to keep track of their trials with the government aiming to vaccinate 72% of its eligible population above 18 years. People aged 55 and above make up 11% of Nepal’s population whereas the 40-54 age group account for 13%. People aged 18-39 made up nearly 40% of Nepal’s 28.8 million population in the 2011 census.

In the meantime, the government needs to ensure the equitable distribution of the vaccine to the remotest parts of the country with the most of which groups high in priority. Public health experts say that with cases rising again in India, Nepal could also see a spike as people become complacent and mingle more.

Says Sheer Bahadur Pun of the Infectious Disease Hospital in Tokha, “We have been given this vaccine with fewer cases and fatalities. We need to utilise this time to vaccinate the elderly so that the most vulnerable in our communities are protected if and when the next wave hits.”

Nepal’s Covid-19 Vaccine Lineup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vaccines</th>
<th>Doses</th>
<th>Procurement</th>
<th>Arrival date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Covishield</td>
<td>1 million</td>
<td>Government of India grant</td>
<td>25 January (being administered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covishield</td>
<td>2.25 million (in total doses required for 30% of Nepal’s population from start)</td>
<td>With 50.6 million pdf, Rs. government support under WHO Covax</td>
<td>March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covishield</td>
<td>2 million</td>
<td>To be purchased by Nepal government from India</td>
<td>March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinopharm</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>China government grant</td>
<td>Pending March</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fuel price hike again

Nepal’s Oil Corporation has increased the price of petroleum products, petrol and diesel by Rs 0.14 per liter. The price of diesel, petrol, aviation fuel and kerosene has increased by Rs 0.16 per liter and 1.05 pdf, the price of petrol is now Rs 86.14 per liter, while diesel and kerosene costing Rs 79.17 and 77.93 per liter.

The petrol price has now jumped to Rs 86.14 per liter. The petrol price in the last week of December was Rs 84.7 per liter.

SJM Bike Gallery

Nepal’s first motorcycle museum, SJM Moto opened on 12 February. The gallery houses a collection of historic motorcycles and also serves as a retail outlet for customers to buy new and reconditioned two-wheelers and parts with the same.

TAI Forever range

Sparrow Trading has introduced pre-booking of TAI’s latest range of postman concept with modern and powerful engine in Nepal. The engines are of two and four-stroke engines and are safety from Global NCAP.

Nishan Magnite

Nishan Motors Corp. has set to launch the new Magnite 1.2L, following the launch of the Magnite 1.5L. The car will be available across all Nepal showrooms, and on the official Magnate Nepal website.

Horseracing

The best horse racing event of the year, The Kingfisher Equestrian Festival 2021, sponsored by Kingfisher, the premium beer of the Kingfisher range, will take place on 13 February.

The event will feature both the English and Indian disciplines of horse racing, and will be held at the Royal Chitwan National Park.

The event will feature both the English and Indian disciplines of horse racing, and will be held at the Royal Chitwan National Park.

International market for new UV44 continues

Make in India, Made for the World
K2 and life’s other mountains

Minga G recounts his journey before and after the acclaimed Nepali winter ascent of the world’s second highest mountain

When he was a boy, Mingma Gyalje Sherpa, used to look out the window of his home in the Rolwaling Valley at the imposing west face of Mt. Cho Oyu. It was dwarfed by higher peaks nearby like Gauri Shankar and Meningtrung, but the 8,188m high mountain’s sheer beauty had an irresistible pull.

His village was at 4,200m and the young Mingma would take the family yaks herding in high pastures up to 5,500m every monsoon and gaze at the surrounding peaks from sunrise to sunset.

“My relatives would bring back chocolates from foreign climbers, and I used to think that if I became a porter, I would also get to eat lots of chocolates,” he smiles.

At age 19, he joined his uncle who was with a Japanese expedition on Makalu. He reached 6,800m but had to turn back due to bad weather. He joined another expedition on Lhotse, which also abandoned the climb halfway. In 2009, he climbed Mt. Everest, and later climbed it five times, but he always had the urge to climb for himself and not for others.

Mingma G, as he was called himself, decided to climb Cho Oyu solo to fulfill his childhood wish, and also because it was more difficult than the higher peaks he had climbed. Everyone told him it was a crazy idea, and he himself agreed. He made it to the top in 2015, was lost for two days on the way down, but survived.

Mingma is a climbing legend climbing other challenging Rolwaling peaks like Chekigo and Paricio, as well as other climbs of Ama Dablam and Himal.

Mingma G is that new breed of Nepali mountaineers who do not just help foreigners get to the top, but climb for the sheer adventure. That is why he decided to take on K2 in December 2020—because the second highest mountain had never been climbed before in winter.

Located in the Karakoram on the Pakistan-China border, K2 lives up to its nickname as the ‘savage mountain’. One in every four climbers has been killed in trying to climb it. This year alone, four climbers died on K2.

K2 is very steep, frequent rockfalls and avalanches, and demands technical skills at high altitudes. To do this in winter, when temperatures reach -50 Celsius with hurricane force winds had been considered impossible.

“It was very difficult. It was very cold,” says Mingma G with typically laconic understatement.

Because of his own background, Mingma G empathizes with the plight of the people from Baltistan, Pakistan. “While trekking base camp, they were carrying our load but they were eating less, sleeping on snow in thin sleeping bags and thin mattresses… they are the ones who made our K2 successful in the beginning,” he writes on his Instagram.

Mingma’s all-Nepali Nepali expedition arrived at Base Camp in December after a four-day march and immediately started fixing ropes on the mountain. As founder of Imagine Nepal, Mingma and other Nepalis had financed their expedition with a GoFundMe campaign because of loss of income due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

After numerous setbacks due to weather and poor health, Nepali member of three other expeditions decided at Base Camp to make their own attempt to climb K2. This was his chance to make an assertion of national pride and endorse homed-made Himalayan mountaineering competence.

“It was a spontaneous decision, we met Nima Paraj and talked about climbing together not for individual glory, but for national pride, so we teamed up,” he recalls.

On the night of 14 January, the ten Nepali climbers were in Camp III at 7,800m. The wind was howling, it was bitterly cold, and team members were reporting signs of frostbite, and the altitude was beginning to take its toll.

‘It took us three or four minutes to cover every step,’ Mingma recalls. ‘K2 is much more difficult than Mt. Everest.’

The ten climbed all day, past the Bottleneck, the treacherous near-vertical slope with blue ice, and finally the gentle slope before the summit dome. There, the Nepalis had decided not to go to the top one by one, wait for everyone 10m below the summit, and walk up collectively.

It was 5pm on 16 January when they joined hands, sang the Nepali national anthem and took collective steps to the summit where they waved Nepali double triangle flag. They had done it: the first ever winter ascent of K2, the latest and greatest feat in mountaineering for the team.

“We did it to make the segment about who arrived first irrelevant. We climbed the peak together, we sang the national anthem together,” says Mingma, who considers it his most important climb.

After all those Everest summits, Lhotse, and even the difficulties on Cho Oyu, K2 in winter was a whole new dimension.

But Mingma has barely any time to rest. He has a busy schedule ahead in 2021, with plans to climb Ama Dablam in March, Mt. Everest, and Lhotse again in April-May with clients. In June, he is going back to K2 and other Karakoram peaks. In September, he will be in Kathmandu only for two days before heading off to Mannali.

Even with all the physical and mental toll that climbing takes, Mingma is happy doing what he is doing. There is a tinge of concern that he puts his family members through so much worry, but they also understand that climbing is his passion.

Mingma’s other worry is that he can only sustain his own climbing by guiding clients to summits. This is a dangerous profession, and as he gets older he will have to find ways to pay for his own future adventures.

But the smile on his face shows that he is not really that worried. “I’m young now, I’m strong. Everyone wants me to climb.”
A as Nepal experienced the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic just as the rest of the world did, the value of local broadcasters was amplified like never before. Large parts of rural and semi-urban Nepal depend on local broadcasters for reliable information, a premium product during the pandemic.

Covid-19 also pushed local community radios into an existential crisis, with sources of income drying up as business sponsors themselves tried to survive. The situation was worsened with many community volunteers and staff falling sick.

Coupled with lack of connectivity and electricity supply added to difficulties in operation. The work-from-home solution did not work for local radio stations, especially in remote areas with low bandwidth.

Despite this, and not withstanding a slow start, community radios continued to broadcast, disseminating information to the most vulnerable.

Broadcast media, especially community radio is still the most accessible form of mass communication in Nepal. Community radios operating in locations poorly served by the government and commercial broadcasters are the most important link between the marginalized, and public service providers, including government offices, especially in times of a disaster.

Out of the approximately 800 FM radio stations in Nepal, close to half operate as not-for-profit media outlets, mostly in rural and semi-urban locations. Signals from community radio transmitters cover almost the entire population of the country. This is not a small achievement, especially when contrasted with Nepal’s fledgling governance and human rights situations.

The pandemic also brought to the fore the gaps in the Nepali media ecosystem and the community radio sector.

Raju Langrya’s broadcasting programs in his village are supported by family members at home during the pandemic (above).

Raju Langrya’s broadcast programs have also been airing programs on the Covid-19 situation (left).

Next year, Nepal’s broadcasters will be marking an important milestone. It will be 25 years since the first non-governmental broadcaster, Radio Sagarmatha, was founded in 1997. By virtue of being the first non-governmental broadcaster in all of South Asia, Radio Sagarmatha has contributed significantly to Nepal’s reputation in the world of community broadcasting.

It is, however, ironic that despite its elevated profile in the country and to some extent internationally, the community radio sector has been left to its own devices. In the lack of any legal recognition by way of a community radio policy and the absence of relevant laws and regulations, the sector is beset with maladies and malpractices.

Community radio all over South Asia suffer either a ‘no-policy’ or ‘poor-policy’ situation, and Nepal happens to fall under the latter category.

As community broadcasting gradually comes to terms with the pandemic, it is time for renewed attention to the call for local radio friendly policies. In most of Nepal’s neighborhood, community radios are controlled by applying unreasonable restrictions in terms of transmission power, content, advertisement space, and so on. Local radio stations cannot operate freely, and have restrictions in news and current affairs.

However, appropriate policies and regulations can help resolve some of the main problems that prevent the sector from operating at its full capacity and potential, especially at times of emergencies. Distance broadcasting, decentralized production and provisions for remote broadcasting must be pursued.

It is urgent to bring in the idea of emergency broadcasting during disasters, with a clear strategy and timeline. This policy will also lead to resource implications, that have to be sorted out.

Connection between policy and practice is often direct and deep. As with every disaster, the consequences of this pandemic too have been more devastating for those that were already vulnerable in the community. Reviewing and refining of strategies and practices of the stations are required to correctly address these situations.

The capacity of community radios to be inclusive is strongly linked to the way NGOs and cooperatives—which happen to be operating the greatest number of community radios in Nepal—are structured. Any discussion about enhancing access to community broadcasting needs to be coupled with revising the way non-governmental organizations are set up.

The need for strengthening further effective grassroots communications mechanisms so that voices hitherto unheard can be heard, has been even more amplified by this severely disruptive pandemic. Community radios are often the only way to bring perspectives of those living in poverty into the decision-making processes. Losing community stations to a disaster will mean losing the most critical communication link with vulnerable populations. The support received from national and international actors, has prevented that from happening, so far.

Community radios must continue doing what they are meant to do, which is to provide correct, appropriate and relevant information to the local groups in dialects and languages that are best understood locally. At the same time and collectively as a sector, the rest of the media ecosystem needs to step up advocacy for policy reform.

The rise of nationalism (populist nationalism, religion or economic development) has shrunk the spaces for civil society actors. They are either chased out or co-opted.

The well-known activist and author Arundhati Roy once wrote that ‘Silence is really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard. It is clear that efforts from various quarters are still silent towards this end.

Community radios can and must try to change the status quo.

Suman Basnet is the Deputy Director of the World Foundation of Community Radio Broadcasters, ANR, (Annex-Pakistan)

Tuning in to radio during Covid-10

The importance of keeping local broadcasters going during disasters was felt more than ever during the pandemic.
Nepal’s class divide

How motivated young teaching fellows are changing lives of students through remedial education

Tom Robertson

When I taught in a Nepali government school, the biggest problem I faced was poor facilities. Motivated teachers don’t need much beyond chalk and a blackboard. The biggest problem was that so many children studied below their grade level.

In Nepal, many Grade 6 students read at Grade 3 level. Many Grade 7 students cannot add or subtract, much less multiply or divide. Students lag behind by three or four years, and not just a few students, sometimes half the class may be behind.

This is an enormous problem, made worse by Covid-19. Few schools recognize the issue, or have skills and resources to address it. Public school teachers are too busy dealing with daily challenges. Students are therefore missing the chance to learn.

Nepali students fall behind for many reasons. Some come unprepared for Grade 1 or 2, others get pulled out of school temporarily and never catch up. Some attend school irregularly, or struggle.

While the problems children face at home are socio-economic, the barriers at school are many: untrained or regular teaching, low teacher expectations, and poor school management.

Schools where students fall behind rarely have the skills or resources needed to help them catch up. Some schools give up on them, dismissing the students as not capable instead of investing more time in helping them out. Low expectations become self-fulfilling.

Many students lose confidence and drop out. They decide school is not worth the time, and join their parents in earning an income for their families. Or, they stay in school and move from grade to grade, year after year. Lacking a base to build upon, they lag further and further behind.

In subjects like Math or English that scaffold skills one on top of another, the students often just go through the motions, copying things but not understanding, and not really learning anything.

Students either fail, or they do not move to a higher standard. Cheating is widespread. That is how high school students, despite years of study, can barely read or write in English or Nepali. Many of the students are from diverse backgrounds who speak their mother tongue at home. This is a tragedy, but also a social justice issue.

These who lag behind come from poor families, often Dalit or ethnic minority communities. Many are girls.

The solution would be to catch the problem when the children first fall behind in primary school. At that point, they are only a few lessons behind their friends, not years and years, and there would still be time to build a solid base.

“It’s never the students’ fault,” says Niharika Manali of Changing Stories Nepal, which was founded in 2018 with an innovative approach that builds from the premise that all students can learn, and that we wrongly blame low performing students instead of admitting we are all responsible for their lack of opportunity.

Changing Stories first identifies struggling primary students. At its school in Helambu and Dang, it assesses literacy and numeracy to determine the 15 lowest-performing students in grades 3, 4, and 5. Then, for 30 days, the students are tutored with two hours of extra Nepali and Math, either before or after school.

The stress is an actual student learning, and the students are tested during and at the end of the program. Last year in Dang, the program had 26 groups of 15 students each.

The remedial classes are taught by ‘Fellows’ of the organization, who are talented, motivated college students trained by Changing Stories. While giving a helping hand to others, the young adults learn skills and experience and develop a taste for community service.

“I was teaching Grade 9 near Kathmandu, and I think that many didn’t know the English alphabet. I realized they needed an intervention long before high school,” explains Manali. “I had a good job in Kathmandu. But I thought I could be of more service working with public schools. The privileged students I was working with didn’t need me.”

She says schools make quick decisions about what children can and cannot learn, and who can and cannot label students as irredeemable from a very young age. “The problem is not with the students. The problem lies with the current system, that we blame students instead of saying, ‘Hey, maybe we can like students for everything,’” she adds.

In Dang at the start of the year, only 37% of students could read simple words, and only 18% could read a 4-sentence paragraph. At the program’s end, 81% could read words, and 66% could read short sentences.

In baseline math tests, only 9% could do two-digit addition problems. After the program, 87% could. Fewer than 1% of students could solve a 2-digit carry-over subtraction problem, or multiply. Afterwards, about half could do both.

Changing Stories recorded similar progress in Helambu, and have just started another year in Dang. The program seems like a fantastic bargain, for 90 sessions of 2-hour classes, each Fellow earns NPR4,500.

Training costs and staff support add a little. But imagine the benefits, and compare them with the costs: students sitting in classrooms year after year instead of learning—leaves a lifetime of underachievement.

On a visit to Dang last year, I saw for myself why Changing Stories gets results. In a carpeted classroom painted in cheerful colours with student work on display, a Changing Stories Fellow worked with students on subtraction problems.

She explained concepts with piles of bricks (small bamboo sticks) sitting on the floor next to her students. She smiled, but pushed when necessary. She believed in the children even though many others had abandoned hope.

A Grade 4 student told me: “I like this class. Miss teaches well. If I don’t understand, she shows me.” Another student said, “Before I knew only addition, now I know subtraction. Now it comes easily.”

I could see and hear the pride and self-confidence in these children.

Tom Robertson

The author is the founder and CEO of the Buck family’s entire educational line: Buck Learning, based in Kathmandu. He teaches on the Btec program as an online tutor in Nepal and the UK.
There is no better way to understand the Mundum cultural belief system of the Kirat people than to walk across the mountains of eastern Nepal and let dreams take over. The Mundum Trail traverses the important landmarks of the Rai-Limbu ethnic groups, and their way of life that blends shamanism, animism, and Shiva worship. Mundum has parallels to Australian aboriginal oral traditions and folklore that revered nature.

First introduced in January 2018 to trekkers, the trail passes through important sites of these indigenous Kirat groups from Chakhesan Bhanjyang on the Khotang-Biplipur border across Mehrung, Maiyung, Latur, Shilichung peaks, then on to the holy Shalpa Pokhari to Biplipur and ends at Maiyung and Suntale peaks. [See map, below]

The trail is of moderate difficulty, with the highest point at 4,192m, and being off the beaten track there are not many tea houses, so camping is necessary in the wilderness. There are some lodges in Diktel. Biplipur and basic amenities at Shalpa Pokhari, but trekkers are advised to carry tents.

The trail commands a sweeping panorama of the eastern Himalayas with views of most major eight-thousanders, including Mt Everest (8,848m), Lhotse (8,516m), Makalu (8,485m), Cho Oyu (8,188m), and Kangchenjunga (8,586m).

There are lesser peaks that are more prominent because they are nearer: Karyolung, Ama Dablam, Thamserku, Kangtega, Chamlang, Baruntse, Jannu, and even Gauri Shankar and Langtang far off on the western horizon.

Besides the views, the trek is also a deep dive into Mundum culture, its rituals, landmarks, and way of life. The Kirat groups here speak 10 different languages, with new dialects in every next village. Besides them, there are a sprinkling of Sherpa and Tamang communities with their own culture and language.

Shalpa Pokhari and Shilichung Peak are two of the most important sites in Mundum culture, and a pilgrimage destination for the Rai and Limbu people. Legends speak of Salpa Pokhari being the inhabited place of the creator goddess, Suminma and the Sky God, Purushag from Kirat mythology.

Because of the heavy rainfall the region receives, the Mundum trail has great ecological diversity, with wildlife, birds, and plants found in great abundance in verdant slopes, wetlands, and wetlands. The rhododendron, conifer, and bamboo cloud forests team with red panda, goral, danfe pheasant, deer, leopard, Himalayan black bears.

The transition from temperate to alpine landscape yields to high altitude meadows where villagers bring livestock to graze in the monsoon. Grazing animals is an important part of life in Mundum culture, and the trail passes many sheds housing yak, sheep, cows, and water buffalo.

Hiking through the settlements, it is clear that the Kirati people have been living in harmony with nature, with their way of life is closely tied with the biological diversity of their habitat.
Contemporary relevance of Mundum oral wisdom

Despite my ethnic background, it was only later in life that I derived beyond the literary importance of my Mundum discovery that it was the original philosophy of life of my people.

The more I learned about the Limbu heritage, the more I realized the need for just the material science and anthropology of Mundum culture to its fragile beauty and its cultural completeness.

Since then, I have spent the most important years of my life to collect, edit and translate into Nepali language, facets of Mundum culture before it is obliterated by the relentless march of modern education, science and technology, migration and the process of globalization.

My introduction to Mundum began after meeting the linguist, Prof R.K. Sprigg of the School of African and Oriental Studies, who showed me photographs of hawbook Limbu manuscripts stored at the India Office Library by Brian H. Hodgson in 1864. Sprigg and his wife stayed with us in Samsarovashina for a month then back, but the importance of preserving Mundum culture still did not grab me. It was only after I read Iman Singh Chemjong’s Kirt Mundum that I really became aware of the importance of researching and preserving Limbu script, literature, culture and history.

Mundum is an oral tradition that has been passed down from one generation to the next in song, verse, fables and chants with its own creation myth.

Mundum Trekking Trial

- Bairagi Kainla

explaining the importance of human co-existence with nature and the importance of its protection: why we need to strike a balance with the web of life. It contains a wealth of lessons from past human experience in ensuring its own survival.

The emergence of human beings is regarded as the pinnacle of evolution, but after being lifted up, the Creator was forced to become invisible. This left human beings helpless in their ignorance, and thus began their suffering. They were consumed by greed, envy, ambition, anger and cruelty. However, Mundum offers a solution to this tragic outcome, and the rise of existence. This is a human made dilemma, and humans can find a way out of it. There is still hope if humanity can strive for freedom from the cycle of birth and death through good karma. Death can be defeated by doing good, and a realization of man's place amidst the completeness and beauty of creation.

It is not enough to believe in goodness, Mundum teaches us to be good in our actions towards other people and to nurture as well. The Earth is not just for human beings, we have to share it with other living things. Their survival will determine our survival.

This collective wisdom of the ages is an important message to us today as we strive to save life the Planet from human short-sightedness and avarice.
**EVENTS**

**Jazz Brunch**  
Experience a laid-back Saturday afternoon with live jazz music, brunch, and a specially designed cocktail and artisanal bread. For reservations, please call 9841514035.  
25 February, 9AM, Kathmandu Marriott Hotel

**Le Sherpa market**  
Support local businesses. Shop for fresh fruits, vegetables, cheese, bread, meat products, honey, and much more.  
Saturday, 9AM-5:30PM, Le Sherpa, Mahendrapul

**Kirtipur Photo walk**  
Kirtipur is organizing a photo walk to encourage people to see Kirtipur through photography. Experience life on the hills, capture the moments on film. Registration required.  
26 February, 7AM

**Santha Party**  
Join Santha Nepai’s house party for an evening of classic dancing. Strictly gentlemen only.  
26 February, 7PM, House of Khokana, 600770023

**SHOES**

**Dandy Lions Live**  
Brindal Art Cafe is hosting a special musical performance by indie band Dandy Lions, who will be performing originals as well as some covers.  
19 February, 3PM, Brindal Art Cafe

**6 Paatra ko Chailaap**  
Shyam Theatre is back on stage with a new play, 6 Paatra ko Chailaap. The play is reflective of issues on caste discrimination, class difference, and gender-based discrimination.  
19-22 February, Shyam Theatre

**Cycles of Impenetrability**  
Visit an artistic display of lithographs, engravings, and woodcuts by Roli Raj Lama at Siddhartha Art Gallery.  
20 February - 16 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery

**PERCEPTION**  

**DINING**

**Fresh Bakes**  
Fresh Bakes offers a variety of baked goods and pastries, such as cupcakes, muffins, and cookies.  

d.

**La Dolce Vita**  
La Dolce Vita, an Italian restaurant, offers you the opportunity to enjoy a variety of Italian dishes. Visit them today!  

**The Village Cafe**  
Head to The Village Cafe for fresh, delicious, home made Nawa cuisine. Order the menu.  

**OUR PICK**

**Kholo: A Cycle of Life**  
Kholo is a mini festival that celebrates the rich heritage and culture of Nepal. It is a great opportunity to experience the local art, music, and food.  

**REALITY**  

**Kailash K Shrestha**  
Kailash K Shrestha is a renowned Nepali filmmaker known for his documentaries and feature films. His works have been featured in numerous international film festivals.  

**Korean Series in Nepali Language Every Thursday at 8:30 PM on REALITY**  

**BHALABALIKA MAVIDHI HUNE HINDA, DURUWACHA, GOGON SAROKO, JIJEKSEMAURANA ABASTHANA RIKOKE WA BHALABALIKAUKI URUPANCHE RIKOKE CHHANE BHAIT HETAIKANAIKO PISE NALANEKO FOEN: N 9098 MA KHABAR GARI**
Riding on waves of colours
Tulikaa Kala’s seven-month long exhibition series will span 7 genres and 28 artists

Shriwati Karki

Inside Dhokaiima Cafe’s Van Gogh room, Arksel Pradhan’s photo-collages are like splashes of colour on black walls of a dark room.

They form part of an online art platform, Tulikaa Kala’s solo exhibition series, Khin 2.0. It makes him the first artist-of-the-week among the 28 classic and contemporary Nepal artists whose works are set to be on display in this unique show spanning seven genres in as many months, showcasing photography, ceramics, printmaking, contemporary, Pabhas, sculpture, and new media art.

Visitors to the one-room gallery are immediately captured by “Building Dreams”, a collage of two men reconstructing ruins floating on clouds, with a fiery sun and the blackness of the night sky looming in the background. Pradhan makes his smaller framed photographs on his phone with a photo-editing mobile application. His collages are a mix of social media posts, pictures sent by friends. Sunflowers are a recurrent motif and seem steeped in personal meaning. They look like the sun over pictures of those displaced by the earthquake, or like a compass, show the way to a traveller on a motorcycle, or create a juxtaposition of a young woman’s life in London and her roots in Nepal.

Clouds and the night sky also feature prominently, which he says might be a subconscious reflection of his name on his art. Pradhan’s collages are vibrant, vivid and hold personal meaning and anecdotes. “That picture,” he points to one photo, laughing as he talks to visitors, “will always remind me of veg-momos.”

A series of four simple, instant photographs titled ‘Buja’, features an elderly woman and the ruins of her home in Sindhupalchok, a striking contrast to the rest of his work on display. An aspiring filmmaker, Pradhan took the photos while working on an earthquake documentary.

Buja stares solemnly into the camera, hands placed carefully on her knees, barefoot. “We bought her a new pair of chappals, she promptly threw them away,” recalls Pradhan. “I knew I had to photograph her.”

Tulikaa co-founder and curator, Ujun Nohbu Gurung says the gallery wanted to show that art is not stagnant, it is constantly evolving. Art should be really powerful, but the curator, layout, and space have to sync with the art to accentuate it,” Gurung says.

Indeed, much attention has been paid to the displays here, from the muted lighting to the back walls. Sunil Shumsher Rajbhandari at Dhokaiima says his Van Gogh room was an ideal place to showcase Nepal art. “I had been to some of Ujon’s other exhibitions, and thought the way he presents the artwork itself was unique. His vision is different, and he uses the space as much as the art itself.”

Rajbhandari added.

Tulikaa is not only organizing the exhibition series for the next seven months, but providing an online platform to connect Nepal’s art community. Gurung entered the art some as a collector, but realized that Nepal had barely scratched the surface of talent, and the art scene had untapped potential.

“We knew we had to come up with something radical to promote art to the masses,” he says. “We thought that it might be the time for an online platform.” Thus began the years-long process of research.

“The digital space offers more possibility for curating—we can experiment, and play around with the design and layout,” Gurung explains.

He also realizes how instrumental social media has been for artists to showcase their work and for audiences to discover it. “Platforms like Instagram are helping artists make money and build a brand,” he says. And as if to evidence his point, a visitor comes over to introduce himself to Pradhan as one of his followers on social media.

The team planned to launch Tulikaa in early 2020 when the pandemic hit. “We thought it would be detrimental turned out to be quite helpful, because everyone was home and on the Internet,” says Gurung, who did 27 online shows during the lockdown.

Co-curator Samikshya Shrestha is optimistic about how platforms like Tulikaa, new art festivals and museums will help propagate Nepal art and artists.

Gurung adds: “We need a lot more institutions and lots of fresh ideas. We will catch up with the rest of the art world, we just need to ride those right waves.”

Mark Ujon’s A Date of Art, Tulikaa’s 1st marching exhibition event at Dhokaiima, a signing and web on 29 August.
Nepal’s health-tech industry is here to stay

A look at mobile apps that are spearheading a digital shift in Nepal’s medical industry

I have learned anything from 2020, it is that nothing is more important than keeping fit and addressing health issues to avoid compromising one’s immune system. Due to the lockdown and the pandemic, many people have been faced with issues big and small and did not or could not visit the doctor without the fear of getting infected. This gave rise to health and medical support apps that consolidate, modernize and disrupt the Nepali medical industry, all at once. Helping connect the mobile to doctors and hospitals via just a few of the many digital assisting apps that help us stay healthy and worry-free.

Hamro Doctor
Hamro Doctor is a super handy, app that offers all kinds of medical support and informative services. From professional online medical consultations with certified doctors, these online consultations are convenient and half the price you pay to visit doctors physically. They offer information, including but not limited to an index of doctors according to field of medicine, a detailed menu of health checkup packages offered by private hospitals and ambulance service contact listings. There are also blogs, articles posted by doctors and live chat forums where users can ask specific health questions to doctors.

In addition, various health services into digital departments such as Coronavirus, Skin and Sex, Sugar, Thyroid and Heart, ENT, Gastro, and Women’s Health. It’s convenient for users to search for immediate help in the concerned department of health. All this, without the hassle of waiting rooms, standing in queues, wasting time filling paperwork and at the billing counter. Additionally, a health data dashboard, blood donation information service and a feature that allows uploading of medical reports are also available on the app.

Not only does Hamro Doctor democratise and make expert medical support widely available for all Nepalis, it also makes socially awkward zones such as mental health problems and sex or genital related issues easier to address. Providing it to the private and one-on-one direct nature of online consultation.

Jeeve
Jeeve is a professional, attentively designed one-stop health app. It offers a range of health services including appointments, the option to upload your prescription to smooth out ordering required medications. A database of over 1000 doctors offers 100% online consultations and a convenient e-commerce section with over 25,000 products such as medical devices, baby products, personal care items, ayurvedic medicines, orthopedic accessories, dental care and much more.

In case the user has difficulty finding the concerned category, they can also use the search bar on top to find the product they’re looking for. Positive customer reviews confirm that Jeeve does not charge delivery fees, allows ordering from different vendors in the shopping cart and also offers competitive prices that are often cheaper than the nearest drug store.

The Namaste Doctor feature has been particularly helpful for patients to choose from, allowing them to consult with a doctor digitally without having to visit them at their clinic. The app version includes not just 1 but 2 consultation sessions, 15 minutes of video calling, privacy access, as well as lab and medical reports to make the consultation experience fully satisfying for the patient. Another useful feature of the app is the user’s ability to create profiles of their loved ones as well as their family members, and have access to their medical records and history all in one place.

Cura Health
Cura Health was built to make sure that people can seek medical help without losing out on value time, digitally via this app. The app is designed to bridge the gap between patients and medical professionals. Unlike other health and medical apps, users cannot create a home page without registering or signing in.

In order to increase its number of users, NepMed has a referral and rewards system that helps users earn wallet balance whose they introduce others to the app. The app keeps updating its home feed with quick tips and also promotes additional unique features that will attract users to use the app soon, such as a medicine reminder, BMI measurement tool, and medical referral lists. However, since users don’t make a single day of regular medication.

Drugs Nepal
Drugs Nepal is a brilliant single-speciality app that offers free, detailed information about thousands of drugs available in Nepal. It’s main advantage is that it is available for offline use after the first time of loading the app, by storing all the information locally. The user needs to simply open up the app when connected to WiFi or mobile data and the updated information gets automatically synced for offline use again.

This digital medicine directory also allows users to search either by generic or brand name, and filter results by the use of the drug. The directory looks appealing at first, but the lack of images and detailed information on the pages, like missing info on the word "NULL" in certain categories are unexpectedly disappointing. With improvement on the data entry side and minimum front-end tweaks, this purely informative app can be a less used but lightweight, to keep handy at all times. Because this app does not require two-way communication between complaints and user inputs or information uploads yet, it is one-dimensional.

Hamro Swasthya
The Ministry of Health and Population officially launched this app in April 2020 with a quick response measure to the global Coronavirus pandemic. It requests nationals of the country to help improve contact tracing and track people who seem to have accidentally spread Covid-19. It also offers a warning feature when the user is in close proximity. However, without an extensive main menu and comprehensive search bar, it leaves much to be desired. Use of the app has the potential to go a long way. Until then, cure your customer loyalty and appreciation with satisfying booking services that help patients visit doctors at hospitals, thus helping save time every time they make a trip to the doctor’s.

NepMed
NepMed is a digital healthcare provider that is available on both web and mobile, offering medical shopping services and connecting users to doctors, lab services, vaccination services, digital health record storage facilities, and tips on staying fit and happy. Caming, NepMed operates in Kathmandu and Chitwan but aims to soon expand to other major cities of Nepal. NepMed puts a focus on secure payment (128-bit SSL encryption), non-exchangeable as well as affordable products offered by reliable professional parties, to ensure customer satisfaction. The Health Library is a blog section that is filled with articles that bust myths, clear doubts, share benefits of different foods - plus, keep the audience informed on with Coronavirus, dengue, liver and other superb relevant health problems.

Sanyash Shah
The lingering trauma of war
15 years after opposing sides in Nepal's conflict made peace, a victim's fight for truth and justice continues

Pratibha Tuladhar

Last October, a letter came for Kiron Chaudhary from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). It was a summons, so the letter took several months for it to reach her husband’s home in Kalai, a small town in Sankhuwasabha district. The letter had made a recommendation to the government to pay Chaudhary NRs 400,000 as compensation for her ordeal during the insurgency, and to arrest the perpetrators.

The conflict lasted from 1996-2006 with a loss of more than 17,000 lives. There are still 3,500 missing, and these have never been a specific number for those resumed or still suffering from mental trauma. Kiron Chaudhary is one of them. She was in April 2002, four

villages of government security personnel arrived at the village in Kalai district and entered her house. Chaudhary, a schoolgirl at the time, was accused of being a Maoist supporter.

"They accused me of being involved in the Lambi bombing, and asked me how many people I had killed," recalls Chaudhary. For the next 18 days, she was lashed, fed and tortured into submission.

"I can only remember that everything was red with blood. My menstruation cycle had not begun then, but in detention, I started to bleed. I could not tell if I was menstruating or bleeding from being raped regularly."

More than 18 years later, Chaudhary continues to suffer from the physical and psychological trauma. In her mid-40s now, she suffers a fractured pelvis from beatings, and the severe injuries caused to her reproductive organs by repeated rapes.

"I have been married for more

"You think, we ink"

Cheque print

We have Web printing press

United Multi Printers Pvt. Ltd.,
Hatton, Lalitpur-23, Nepal
01-5250017, 01-5250018
info@unitedmultiprinters.com www.unitedmultiprinters.com

than six years, and I cannot have children. When my in-laws ask, my husband is kind enough to say it is because of him," explains Chaudhary. The couple still spends a quarter of their income on her medicines.

The letter from NHRC last year gave the couple some hope, and they spent some time in Kathmandu last week, visiting people at the Commission. But they came away confused about the process of getting the compensation money.

"We went to the Commission to ask them what we should do with the letter, and they said we have to go to Finance Ministry and Home Ministry, but we don’t know anyone there," Chaudhary said. She had already spent ten days in Kathmandu waiting in government offices, trying to get noticed. But this is not new to her. Chaudhary has been in Kathmandu every few years following up on her case. On most occasions, she’s walked from office to office, waiting on people until she runs out of savings.

She registered a case with the NHRC against the perpetrators in 2013. But it was only after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up two years later that it received some attention. But with 63,000 other complaints, progress on individual cases like hers has been slow.

"It all depends on the Cabinet now," an NHRC official told Nepal Times, requesting anonymity. She added, “We have already issued a letter recommending the government pay her compensation and take action against some individuals in the security force who violated and tortured her.”

Mean while, Chaudhary’s life stagnates along. A storm last April, blew away the thatched roof of her house, and destroyed her documents, including her citizenship certificate. “We received too much rain last year and the by plowed out of the pond before they could grow to full size. It was a bad year for fish farming,” says Kinca’s husband Gnanesh. “We grow just enough rice to last a few months, but with her medical expenses, we never have enough.”

Last year, Gnanesh spent a few weeks going down to Lamjung, learning Korean. He also cleared the Employment Permit System (EPS) exams, but with the pandemic, his migration plan is on hold. "We thought if I work abroad for a few years, we can save some money for her treatment."

Kinca also requires physiotherapy for back, but the nearest hospital is two hours’ bus ride away. Most days after field work, she cannot sit because of the pain.

Kiron Chaudhary was detained, tortured and raped in two different army bases in Kailali. When she tried to go back to school after her release, she was ostracised and forced to drop out. For a year, she had to report to the police every day, and the villages called her, “Sari ko lahai”. So many people have died in my family in the last few years, I find myself very alone, with the same problems that never leave,” says Chaudhary, with a catch in her voice. She tries not to think about her past, and has tried many ways of moving on. In 2012, she briefly joined Surya Bahadur Thapa’s Rastra Janshakti Party, hoping that political affiliation would ease her life in some ways, but quickly realized she had no time for politics.

"Peace is not peaceful. From withdrawing inward to shun memories that would send her into fits, she has learned over the years to live with the past. But every time she hears of another woman who suffered similarly during the conflict, and the government doing nothing to help, she feels like the cycle is a perpetual one. "I am not the only one, am I?" she asks, in reference to recent cases of rape. "Even the officer at the Commission said that there are so many like me. Will they even do something about that? If I get the money it would at least pay my medical bills.”

The NHRC official said the Commission has been following up on conflict-era cases, and has been pressing the government to include individual cases like Kiron Chaudhary’s on the agenda.

"It would be easier for everyone if the government made the decision and sent the compensation amount to be released to the local governments so that they don’t have to keep coming to Kathmandu," the officer says. "But with the political mess we are in, it doesn’t look like that will happen soon. And it’s always the victims who keep suffering.”

See some images there!
From the frontlines of...:

Twenty-five years after the Maoist insurgency started on 13 February 1996, five reporters remember the people caught up in the "People's War"...

Families torn apart

In February 2000, we traveled to the Maoist heartland at Rolpa, Rukum and Parbat. We wore combat gear, and our cameras were loaded. The problem was that the police were in the area and would not allow us to travel unescorted. We eventually hired a local guide and went on our own.

In Rolpa, we met a family who had lost a child in the conflict. They were living in a small village on the outskirts of the town. The father was a farmer, and the mother was a teacher. They had three children, but only one was left.

The father told us, "We lost our son in the war. He was only 10 years old. We heard that he was killed by the police. We have tried to get justice for him, but nothing has been done."

We visited the gravesite and spoke with the family. They were very grateful for our presence, and we shared some food with them.

On our way back to the town, we met a group of children playing in the streets. They were very happy to see us, and we took some photos of them.

Power of the gun

Children would follow us everywhere. They were very small, but they knew a lot. They would ask us questions, and we would answer them. They loved playing with our cameras, and they were very good at it.

One day, we were walking down the street when we saw a group of children playing with a gun. We asked them where they had found it, and they said they had taken it from their parents. They were very excited, and they showed us the gun.

We asked them if they knew how dangerous it was, and they said they were just playing. We tried to explain to them that guns were very dangerous, but they didn't seem to understand.

We left them there, and we continued on our way. It was a somber reminder of the violence that had plagued the region for so long.
Nepal’s war

The smell of fear

In October 2004, we took a helicopter from Kathmandu to Kathmandu, flying over the mountains of Chamling and the Karna, River. On the left we could see Kathmandu, where for years previously the Royal Nepal Army had killed 36 workers building an airstrip, mistaking them to be Maoist guerrillas. We were in the heart of the conflict zone to understand how the war was affecting ordinary people in the Karnali.

Kathmandu was remote then, as the highway was still being built. At the end of the first day’s walk in Pokhara, we saw some children either down from tree tops and scampers off to the village. We found out they were Maoist ‘schoolchildren’ on errant duty. The local Maoists held a village gathering that evening and paraded us on the stage, accusing us of being soldiers and ‘royal mongrels’. The language they used during interrogation that night was straight out of the Khmer Rouge.

Two years later, 56 soldiers were killed in a Maoist attack in Phan. Finally let off the next day, we were detained again in Kathmandu by 15-13 year-olds with guns. They could not read, and held our passports upside down. “We are now in the armed struggle phase of our revolution,” said one youngster.

Along the trail, we passed a group of women guerrillas who gave us red salutes and gripped us in firm handshakes. It was a surprise to see such empowered young women in what was at that time, a part of western Nepal most steeped in patriarchy.

As we got closer to the spectacular mountainous terrain of the Kathmandu Valley and the snow-capped Annapurna in the distance, there were signs of war damage. Ruins of destroyed homes, charred buildings, empty silent streets. There was no laughter from children, they peered at us from behind upstairs windows, no one talked to strangers. You could smell the fear in the air.

Kamal Dutt

Overpowering truth

The National Human Rights Commission was sending a team to investigate the massacre of 18 Maoist cadre in Dhemchu on 17 August 2003. It included former Chief Justice Krishna Jung Karmacharya, former Attorney General Bhim Bahadur Bista, forensic physician Harihar Awan, advocate Hari Prasad and myself. We reached Dhemchu 11 days after the killings and found the fresh graves.

Local Maoists had gathered at the home of Yubesh Moktan. The army encircled the house, and those who could, escaped. The others were rounded up, and were led off up towards the Siling forest with hands tied behind their backs. The army unit was led by Major Ram Muni Pokhrel. Down in the village, people heard calls for help, and then gunshots.

The villagers helped us exhume the bodies, and Harihar Awan went down to examine them one by one. He would dictate the details, which I noted down and shared with Hari Prasad. The stench of rotting bodies was overpowering. Villagers would recognize the faces, and point to them, saying: “That is Bishnu Maya, That is Lila.” Most had been shot at point blank range in the forehead.

A young man handed me a VHS film roll. We developed it, and found images of the bodies had been thrown over the edge after being killed. And there was a photograph of a local man named Baburam Tamang, the only one without a gunshot in the forehead, but in the arm. It looked like he had died to death.

Villagers told us that night they had heard someone up the mountain call out for help. “Ama, anna.” But they were too afraid to go up and check. We think it was a dying Baburam Tamang.

The villagers had later buried the bodies, wrapping them in cloth and bag. Nearby was a pile of half-burnt personal effects of those who had been killed. Among them, I found a necklace belonging to Bishnu Maya Thapa Magar, one of those who had been killed.

Kamal Dutt

FROM THE FRONT LINES

Thirty-five years after the Maoist insurgency started on 31 December 1976, the journalists who covered the war remember their own experiences reporting on the conflict.

TATA MOTORS

ALTROZ

THE GOLD STANDARD

Price starts at Rs. 29.99 Lacs

Available in Petrol

Zoomed out

Now that I have one year of experience of Zooming around, the wealth of experience I have amassed makes me a self-appointed expert on conducting webinars, video conferencing, e-meetings and bar crawling in augmented reality. Which must be why some of your eager beavers out there want to know about do’s and don’ts on Zoom. My general answer is that all behavioral traits we exhibit in physical meetings apply equally during virtual interactions.

So, for instance, if you are rude and grumpy in face-to-face meetings you are perfectly within your rights to be an e-jack on Google Meet. The idea is to be your true self, and not deceive anyone by being someone you are not, just because you are meeting in cyberspace.

And that brings me to FAQs from readers who have specific queries, and in the interest of public harmony and world peace, I will endeavour to answer some of them below:

Q: What is the proper dress code during a Zoom meeting?

This depends on a case by case basis, and subject matter of the aforementioned Zoom event. For example, if you are participating in an online Annual General Meeting of the Mal Mal Hut Club, it is perfectly okay to be stark raving mad. In fact, it would be a statutory requirement or such a situation to be completely excused on sanity.

However, if it is your weekly Rotary Club meeting then it is acceptable to attend the Zoom in one’s underpants. The rule of thumb is that zoom niples is a big no-no, whereas no one will notice if you are stitchless. For gentlemen, the recommended dress code would be tie, business joker, biker shorts and ski-flaps. For ladies, a slip dress wear top with a comfortable micro fiber hipster undervest and a pair of tuxedo pants.

I hope that answers your question.

Q: What is the proper etiquette while Zooming on one’s mobile?

The advantage about Zooming on a phone is that you are tethered to your desk, and can move about freely while the only confines of your home.

This adds a new touch of intimacy and an element of infamy to monotonous Board Meetings that go on and on. It is perfectly pandemic. Therefore, that you have no urge to attend to a call from nature while an ongoing Zoom call.

If such a scenario should transpire it is perfectly acceptable to walk over to the loo while taking your mobile at arms distance with one hand. However, it is considered rude to turn your video off while the meeting.

Q: Is it also rude to be muted during an online class?

Yes, it is very rude. In fact, your entire undergraduate must be able to participate with the ambient sound in every frame to give the lecturer a degree of authenticity, and the professors an idea of what their students are up to. After all, communication is a two-way process and the teacher would live to hear important feedback from your end. Or the Accent checker.

Korean Series in Nepali Language

Every Thursday 8:30 PM on Reality TV

Channel No.: 102