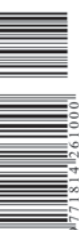


For more details,





# Not out of the woods yet

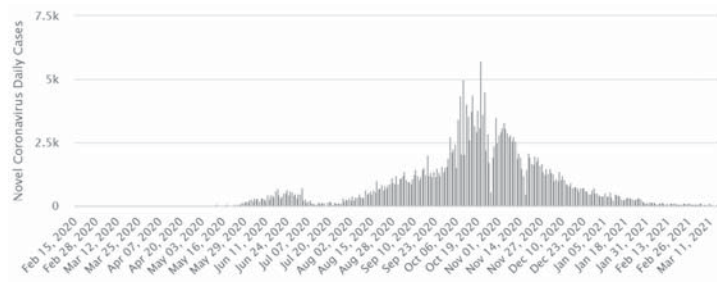
This week marks one year since Nepal was completely shut down to stop the spread of Covid-19. On 24 March 2020. The country ground to a complete halt till 21 July, by which time the positive cases had exceeded 18,000 and there had been 40 fatalities.

Travel restrictions were eased even as the pandemic raged in India, returnees brought the virus to the Tarai cities, and there was community spread in the mountains.

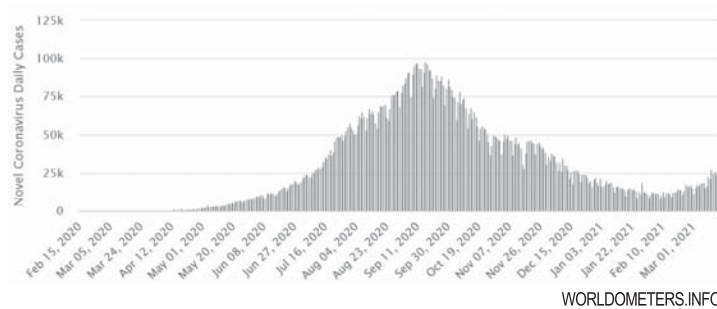
There was another lockdown, but it was lifted just before the festival season, leading to a sharp spike in infections and fatalities in October. The daily caseload peaked at 5,700 and the deaths every day hit a high of 40-45 in November. (*see figure*).

Thereafter, the positivity rate, patients in ICU, as well as the total daily fatalities declined steadily. Out of the 3,311 PCR tests done in a 24-hour period on 14-15 March, there were only 79 positives. There have been many days this month with no Covid-19 deaths reported. The number of active cases nationwide is now below 900.

## NEPAL



## INDIA



return to normal life, the daily cases and deaths kept going down.

Epidemiologists said it could be the first signs of 'herd immunity'. Because the virus spread so rapidly and rampantly across India in mid-2020, it seemed to have burned itself out as more people had antigens.

However, the new surge is worrying because it means the virus is fighting back perhaps with local variants, as well as exploiting the tendency for people once more to move about without precautions.

Although surveys have shown that half the residents of crowded cities like Delhi and Mumbai may have antibodies, the other half that does not and is vulnerable.

All this should set alarm bells ringing in Nepal. Something was protecting both Indians and Nepalis at the beginning of the pandemic, and there was a false sense of security that South Asians may be less susceptible. That was not entirely accurate. Once more, there is complacency that herd immunity will protect us. That may also be a wrong assumption.

Epidemiologically, Nepal tracks India. So, health authorities here have to watch trends carefully, especially infection rates in bordering Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. So far, although the total cases have risen in India, there has not been an increase in the fatality rate. That is good news, and may mean the virus variant is weaker.

From Kakarbhitta in the east to Banbasa checkpoint in the west this week, there were long lines of Nepalis waiting to enter India, but the flow of people into Nepal was unrestricted and unmonitored.

The other reason to be wary is that whatever conditions led to the new surge of Covid-19 in India also exist in Nepal: people not adhering to physical distancing and mask wearing and moving about as if the crisis is over. There has been

a slight uptick of active cases in Nepal: after dropping to 736 on 1 March, it has gone up to nearly 900 again.

The government's health communications should be moving in high gear: warning people that the virus is still a threat, to continue mask-wearing and avoiding crowds, as well as to encourage people to take the vaccine. While fears about Covishield may abet vaccine hesitancy, it may also make them more available in Nepal (*see page 1*).

It is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared in fighting this pandemic.

## The new surge of Covid-19 in India is a warning that Nepalis cannot let their guard down.

Looking around Kathmandu Valley today, and even more so in the outlying districts, it seems as if Nepalis think the pandemic is over. Nepalis are letting their guard down, even though there is an aggressive resurgence of the coronavirus in parts of India.

India recorded nearly 37,000 new cases on Wednesday, the highest single-day spike since December. Daily deaths have also climbed steadily to 187 on Monday. Hardest hit by the second wave is the western state of Maharashtra parts of which are locked down.

In December, public health experts were puzzled by the sharp decline in caseloads in India and Nepal. The two countries were bucking the global trend, and despite crowded living conditions, poor surveillance and a

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepal's community forestry program has won international praise for dramatically restoring the country's tree cover, from 29% in the 1990s to 45% today, representing more than 1 billion tons of carbon stock. Once barren hillsides have been replaced by dense forests rich in biodiversity and populated by wildlife.

The biggest credit to this accomplishment goes to the 22,236 Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) spread across the country, much like how local communities have had a major role in all of Nepal's success stories.

Yet, back in 2001, the government proposed an amendment to the Forest Act 1997 that threatened to take away communities' right to protect and manage community forests.

The 2015 Constitution then placed national forests under the authority of the provincial governments. But the Local Government Operation of 2017 gave back rural municipalities their right to protect, use, manage, monitor, regulate as well as formulate and implement laws. This was short-lived as the Forest Bill drafted in 2019 once again tried to curtail the rights of CFUGs.

After all this back and forth, our only suggestion to the government: don't try to fix what ain't broke.

Excerpts from the editorial of issue #34, 20 years ago this week:

It is difficult to find things that are going right. But one of the most



visible success stories of the past ten years has been the spread of community forests throughout the midhills of Nepal. It is success on such a grand scale that the increase in the chlorophyll content of the vegetation is now visible from outer space.

Kavre and Sindhupalchok are districts that pioneered community forestry and showed us all what could be achieved through local motivation, devolved decision-making, and transferring ownership and control of natural resources to the village level through true decentralisation and grassroots democracy. If there is one group of unsung heroes that deserve the next Right Livelihood Award, it will be the thousands of village chairmen, forestry user groups and women's

organisations that manage and protect woods across the land. This national achievement is now threatened by a proposed amendment to the Forest Act 1997 that seeks to undo the 1993 Community Forestry law that made much of this success possible. Once more, our rulers have shown that they cannot see the forest for the trees. Once more they are ruining in one fell swoop what has been achieved by decades of hard work and commitment by villagers all over Nepal. Once more corrupt national level politicians with a bureaucracy in cahoots is equating forest with timber, and nothing else.

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



Why is Nepal in a state of perpetual revolution? Why do leaders who have suffered and sacrificed so much for the cause of democracy let the country and people down as soon as they come to power? Watch clips from *Saglo Samaj* tv magazine program, and read interviews on page 6-7.



Join Naresh Newar on a visit to eastern Nepal, where a charity is upgrading birthing centres with new equipment and training nurses in mid-wifery. All this is helping reduce Nepal's maternal mortality rate. Story on page 5.



Young Nepali poets turn to poetry, not just as reprieve, but also as a means to express their anger, their frustrations, and their love and longing. To watch the poets read and perform their poems as well as talk about their relationship with writing, go on the Nepali Times YouTube Channel.

### BOYS WILL BE BOYS?

Excellent read ('Boys will be boys is not an excuse,' Anjana Rajbhandary, Issue #1052). 'It is important for all parents to have a conversation with their sons on the proper way to treat women, and it is a difficult conversation to have but they are usually the most important.' - rightly said.

Samir Nepal

### CHILDWORKER INTO ATHLETE

I hope for the best for Asha and the other girls ('The steadfastness of a long-distance runner', Drishna Shapit, Issue #1052). May God bless you all with a wonderful life ahead.

Ram Shakya

- I have met quite a few girls who had come to Kathmandu as kids for a better life but ended up in hands of traffickers and were exploited. The bus-park area is full of such kids. Many are forced and coerced into prostitution. I think the attitude of Nepali society of treating women as objects contribute to these issues being ignored and sidelined.

Calix Dázeroth

### BULL MARKET

Well described, crucial reforms are needed in NEPSE ('Despite politics, Nepal's stock market is bullish,' Santosh Pokharel and Sudymna Dahal, Issue #1052).

Kabindra Burlakoti

### SAVE NIIGAD

Unnecessarily logging so many trees of Nijgad Forest might cause frequent disastrous floods and wreak havoc on surrounding areas that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate crisis ('Nepal must save Nijgad Forest to receive climate funds', Kashish Das Shrestha, Issue #1052). The green funds should be used for its original purpose.

Marty Logan

- SaveNijgad needs a global spotlight. Inviting SEJ and other investigative journaos to dig into their rstory. This is about saving a forest as much as it is about people, environmental injustice, deep corruption, greenwashing and climate impacts on an already vulnerable country.

Trishna Gurung

- "Destroying forests would be devastating for Nepal". So true! Need to look at option for airport and preserve the forest.

Bishow Parajuli

### NCP PVT LTD

As a proud member of Janajati community, one of the marginalised communities which has been recently called up by Prachanda in his recent speech to fight alongside him, I would like to kindly decline the offer ('NCP Pvt Ltd', The Ass Issue #1052)

Gyurme Sherpa

Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### From the frontlines of Nepal's war

by *Saglo Samaj*  
Twenty-five years after the Maoist insurgency started on 13 February 1996, journalists who covered that war remember their own experiences reporting on the conflict. Read the full story on [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com) and watch video that was most shared last week.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



### Nepal must save Nijgad Forest to receive climate funds

by *Kashish Das Shrestha*  
Government plans to clear-cut Nijgad Forest, the last remaining tract of native hardwood jungle in Nepal's eastern plains. SaveNijgad.org is a campaign to address this. Go online to join if you feel strongly about it.

Most popular on Twitter

Most commented



### Nepal should now allow visa on arrival

by *Sonia Awale*  
Soon, vaccine passports might be essential for all international journeys. But before that, government needs to ease entry procedures and reopen tourism to restore the livelihoods of millions of Nepalis. Full story on [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com).

Most visited online page

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
Clear-cutting the last native forest in eastern Tarai to build a \$3.4 billion airport violates climate commitments by Nepal's government and its development partners.

**NaranKlyphree** @NaranKlyphree  
Nijgad Forest must be protected at all costs.

**Annie Gardner Vaidya** @ann05081961  
We have to stop the clear cutting. It has so many consequences too dire to even imagine.

**Ed Douglas** @calmandfearless  
Nepal is cutting down forest to build a new airport. Hard to take the government seriously now when it talks of climate change.

**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
50 Women from Nepal comes with the claim to 'change the way you see the world', and it might if you give this book a chance.

**Sujala Pant** @SujalaPant  
To all the inspiring women out there, may we know them, may we be them, may we raise them.

**Bhumi Ghimire** @BhumiGhimir  
Wonderful set of very-well made list of women.

**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
Putali Baje and the metaphor of metamorphosis A British teacher whose love for butterflies made him stay in Nepal, and become a citizen.

**Eves Social Distancing** @EvelynMoktan  
Wow like him, I remember Fr Cap Miller who loves Nepal, glad NT covered Putali Baje, strikes many good chords in life :)

Times

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# “The goal is empowerment and independence of women.”

*Nepali Times* caught up with Supreme Court Justice Sapana Pradhan Malla to discuss progress of Nepal's feminist movement, and the legal challenges that lie ahead. Translated excerpt:

***Nepali Times:* How far has the Nepali feminist movement come?**

**Sapana Pradhan Malla:** It has evolved from discourse about the right to education and property, child marriage, exploitation, harmful religious and socio-cultural practices to 'inter-generational feminism' where young women, men, and even children can raise their voices for the right to privacy, rights of different genders, languages, geographies and religious minorities, encompassing the rule of law and the democratic process as a whole.

**Where does Nepal stand among South Asian nations in terms of women's rights?**

If we look at the Gender Development Index, Nepal tops the list of countries in Asia that have made progress in terms of women's empowerment. Nepal's Constitution is among the most progressive in South Asia for gender equality and the implementation of women's rights. We have indicators to support the claim. However there are many other pressing issues, most importantly regarding citizenship, that need to be addressed.

**What are these indicators?**

Our 2000 study 'Discriminatory Laws in Nepal and Its Impact on Women' found 118 articles in 54 laws that were discriminatory towards women, the most explicit of which were the ones on citizenship, property, human trafficking, education, employment, reproductive health, marriage and divorce laws.

Since then, apart from the citizenship law, others have been amended. Women have been guaranteed rights to property, stricter sentencing has been introduced for those convicted of rape, marital rape has been criminalised, abortion has been made legal, and we have made legal strides to increase participation in the socio-political process.

**Were these achievements a result of political movements or feminist movements, or a mixture of both?**

The primary credit goes to those who filed Public Interest Litigation cases in the courts, which led to them dismissing discriminatory clauses in some cases and issuing directives to formulate new laws in others.

Political movements played a significant role in women's issues, as women actively participated in the two People's Movements as well as in the Maoist armed conflict, because they no longer wanted to be left behind. Similarly, the unique needs of women were also brought to the forefront



during the earthquake when there was a demand for birthing tents.

The awareness brought about by political movements and national emergencies cemented their independent identities and the need to protect them, as well as giving a voice to their experiences.

**What does it mean for women to see other women represented in positions of power?**

Seeing women in positions of power can set a powerful and reinforcing example. In particular, Nepali women who have held the highest offices — like the office of the President, the Speaker, and the Chief Justice — are symbols of women rising through the ranks within unbalanced power structures. They should thus be role models for all women. If there are sensitive men in influential positions, it can also impact change that is in favour of women.

**Does the feminist movement address the needs of marginalised groups?**

Every marginalised community, be it in terms of language, geography, religion, or gender, faces different challenges. As such, feminism too does not reflect a uniformity of ideology among all those who identify as feminists. Indeed, we have a diversity of opinion and differ and disagree on various issues, for example the legalisation of sex work, or abortion.

In fact, the ways in which women choose to participate in the feminist movement itself may vary. Some may take to the streets, while

others take the legal route and go to the courts. Others might affect change by participating directly in the political process. The point is that women should take whatever opportunity there is to raise their voices.

But whatever path they take, the goal is equality. And those of us who are in a position to affect change should work with the collective national interest at heart.

**Former Chief Justice Sushila Karki said she was uncomfortable in a system dominated by men. Do you have a similar experience?**

Many people are of the belief that women have no judicial or legal knowledge, and it is up to us to make sure that our work reflects otherwise. My appointment was mired in controversy, but no one questioned my judicial capability and knowledge because they were aware of my professional background.

**What are biases against women in the judiciary?**

There are several ways in which women's work and experiences have been minimised and delegitimised in the judiciary. For instance, our level of education and knowledge of legal and judicial matters are frequently questioned. Secondly, women are branded too emotional, easily given to fear and weakness. Thirdly, we are subject to resentment and objectification because some people consider that women have achieved their position due to their gender and not their qualifications.

But there is also cause for optimism. At present, 70% of students enrolled at the Law Campus are female, and women consistently rank at the highest positions in the Bar Council exams. The challenge is to retain women in their professions, and unburdening women of household responsibilities and obligations will play a role in ensuring that they are able to have fulfilling careers.

**What should be the next path for Nepal's feminist movement?**

The primary need is economic empowerment and independence for women. Legal provisions and amendments mean nothing if they cannot be accessed because women are financially beholden to someone else. In addition, the legal complexities surrounding citizenship need to be resolved. It is also important that women play active roles in policy formation and decision-making. The movement should also focus on how women can advance in the fields of science and technology.

Another pressing issue is cybercrime. Given that there is no clear jurisdiction on the use of technology, international cooperation is very important. At the same time, there need to be institutional mechanisms within the country to tackle cybercrime and hold criminals to account.

But mostly, these changes will happen when we are able to change people's perspectives. Women need to show that they are capable of doing that. Change is possible, what it requires is collective effort.

prabhu BANK

## Saudi labour reforms

Saudi Arabia, a major destination for Nepali migrant workers, on Sunday announced reforms intended to make them less vulnerable to exploitation. The reforms



are said to improve the kafala system that ties workers to employers and exposes them to mistreatment and abuse, restrictions of the sponsorship system and allows for more job flexibility in favour of workers.

Labour rights activists are cautiously optimistic, and say the real challenge lies in how effectively they

are enforced. The reforms have been in the cards since November, and took effect on 14 March and are aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the Saudi labour market for migrant workers.

“This is a landmark decision by the Saudi government and will benefit migrant workers. I am optimistic as this is a positive step towards reforming the kafala system,” Nepal's ambassador to Saudi Arabia Mahendra Prasad Singh Rajput told Nepali Times.

## SAWTEE webinar

Nepal's graduation from the least-developed country (LDC) status was welcomed at a South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) webinar on Tuesday. The potential loss from losing preferential market access when Nepal graduates from the category of LDC can be overcome by negotiating better regional and trade deals in the next five-year transition phase, speakers said.



Minister of Industry, Commerce and Supplies Lekh Raj Bhatt, Posh Raj Pandey of SAWTEE, Gyan Chandra Acharya, Pushpa Bhusal, Shekhar Golchha took part in the webinar.

## NIBL's Thaili

Nepal Investment Bank Ltd (NIBL) has launched its own digital wallet service called 'Thaili' with the goal of reducing physical visits to the bank and ATMs. This allows customers to quickly send and receive e-cash for no transaction

cost. Thaili.com.np also allows account holders to do e-banking, including drawing overdrafts.

## Global IME branches

Global IME Bank opened 2 new Branchless Banking Units in Goregaon and Ares Bazaar of Rolpa district. Following these, the branchless section of the bank has reached 255.



## Everest Bank in Gaighat

Everest bank has inaugurated its 102nd branch at Gaighat, Udayapur on 10 March, and it was inaugurated jointly by Sandhir Kumar, deputy general manager and Gajendra Bhagat of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Gaighat.





Happy mothers (*left*) from the remote Dhuseni village of Okhaldhunga who faced complicated deliveries pose before being discharged with their babies. They were saved by nurses trained as skilled birth attendants.

Renovated birthing centre of Phediguth rural municipality is clean, bright and has all necessary equipment for institutional deliveries (*below, left*).

Nurses are trained to become skilled birth attendants in remote Khotang villages where there are no doctors.

Surya Bhatta of One Heart Worldwide (*below, right*) used entrepreneurial skills learnt at a business school in the US to return to Nepal to help safe motherhood facilities in remote health posts.

## “What can be more fulfilling than saving lives?”

Social entrepreneur fulfils promise to his mother to improve maternal care in rural Nepal



our people always dependant on international aid. We need to be innovative by taking risks with new ideas.”

The partnership approach for upgrading birthing centres through cost-sharing is innovative, and one that encourages local ownership, clearly outlining outcomes. It went ahead because local governments under Nepal’s new federal structure were willing to start implementation immediately.

“Entrepreneurship is needed in the social sector not for profit making, but for creating quality service that can go up to scale,” explains Bhatta. “Social entrepreneurship is all about evidence-based work that guide organisations to reduce risks and help improve through sustainable local health systems. There are challenges in Nepal, but there are so many opportunities to overcome them through partnerships like this.”

Bhatta makes a case for Nepal to return home after higher education overseas, just as he himself did after graduating from Dartmouth in the United States, fulfilling the promise he had made to his mother that he would make a difference for as many Nepali mothers like her as possible.

He says, “I am proud of the team we have built, I feel we are making a difference especially for rural communities. What can be more fulfilling than helping save lives?”



A NEW BEGINNING

Join Naresh Newar on a visit to eastern Nepal, where a charity is upgrading birthing centres with new equipment and training nurses in mid-wifery. All this is helping reduce Nepal’s maternal mortality rate.

Stories of birthing are not the kind of conversation that children in Nepal usually have with their mothers. Surya Bhatta’s career path, however, took a new turn when his mother shared her own story of how she survived a near-death complication when she was giving birth to his elder sister.



MADE IN NEPAL  
Naresh Newar

His mother was married at 11, and had her first baby at 16. Access to health services in their home village in Dhading was limited at the time, and she suffered from severe postpartum complications.

“Luckily, my mother survived but we all know many Nepali mothers still face similar risks due to poor maternal health,” says Bhatta, now executive director of

One Heart Worldwide (OHW), a US-based organisation working in Nepal.

At 34 Bhatta is proud to be playing a role to save the lives of mothers. Although the country has made vast improvements in reducing the maternal mortality rate from 539 per 100,000 live births 25 years ago to 240 today, it is still unacceptably high.

An estimated 2,000 new mothers still die in Nepal every year — most of them because health posts are not properly equipped and staffed. The maternal mortality rate also went up in 2020 because the lockdown and pandemic prevented many mothers from getting to hospitals or birthing centres.

Bhatta and his colleagues have been working to improve maternal neonatal health care, and with a 70-strong team is setting up birthing centres and hospitals in Nepal’s most remote districts to upgrade care for mothers and babies.

Starting from five villages of

Baglung in 2010, One Heart has expanded to 21 districts and helped renovate and equip more than 500 birthing centres in 164 municipalities where road access is still limited. The centres work with local municipalities on a cost-sharing public-private-partnership formula.

Many government health posts in rural municipality wards are under-resourced and often struggle to even buy standard maternity delivery beds and lifesaving equipment. There is inadequate infrastructure for pre-natal, delivery and post-natal care, and a chronic shortage of trained midwives in rural areas.

Nurses are not trained to handle complicated cases during and after delivery, and as frontline maternity workers face the wrath of local

communities when mothers and babies die.

Bhatt and his team have zeroed in on training nurses at health posts to become skilled birth attendants, an intervention that directly saves lives. One Heart’s trained nurses and renovated birthing centres now care for more than 72,000 pregnant women across Nepal annually.

“Even during the pandemic rural municipalities were able to find resources to share half the cost of construction to renovate the birthing centres,” says Bhatta who works in partnership with local governments and community groups.

Bhatta sets program priorities after consultation with local elected representatives, tries to raise money locally, and then tops it up by competing globally for international grants. He says, “We can’t make





# Nepal's cycles of revolution

Why is Nepal in a state of perpetual revolution? Why do leaders who have suffered and sacrificed so much for the cause of democracy let the country and people down as soon as they come to power? Two episodes of Himalmedia's *Saglo Samaj* tv magazine program talked to civil society members, legislators and journalists to try to come up with answers.



**Rita Sah**  
Activist

Under the multi-party system, it looked like the needs of the Madhesi community would be addressed, among which citizenship was most important. The access of Madhesi party women to political parties increased under the multi-party system, as leaders like Sarita Giri, Renu Yadav, and Chitralekha Yadav, stepped into politics. But despite this the issues of the Madhesi community and women, in particular, have not progressed.

It was the Maoists who for the first time raised the issue of inclusion, and the internal colonisation of the Madhes, which inspired Madhesi people to join the armed struggle, as did the Dalits and Janajatis for self-determination and self-governance.

**Binda Pandey**  
MP

Women played a significant role in and had high expectations of the People's Movement in 1990 against gender discrimination.

The 1990 constitution said that at least 5% of women needed to be elected to the House of Representatives and the National Assembly. By the time the second election of 1997 came around, at least one female candidate from each ward was required to run for office, as a result of which 40,000 women were elected to local bodies across the country.

But the leaders who promised equality did not do much once they came into power. Citizenship laws were made even more restrictive than before 1990. We went backwards.

Women guerrillas took up arms in 1996 when the conflict began. The state then realised that women could fight as well. The Maoist movement armed women. Women involvement in the armed struggle and the Second People's Movement of 2006 sent a subliminal message that if women could carry guns, they could do anything.



**Chandrakishor**  
Journalist

The Nepal Sadbhavana Party was established after the 1990 People's movement and fought in later elections. The party's reach was small, but it represented and kept the basic tenets of the Madhes alive when mainstream political parties had failed to fulfil Madhesi aspirations. Nepali Congress leader Mahendra Nidhi realised that the party had just been using him as token Madhesi and etched his own path.



**Kailash Rai**  
Researcher

After the end of the autocratic rule, many citizens got the opportunity to advocate for their rights, including the Dalit, Janajati, and Madhesi communities – especially women within those communities. Despite this, there is little participation of Dalit women in education, politics, and public discourse.



**Durga Sob**  
Activist

One of the achievements after the restoration of democracy was the freedom to speak about discrimination towards women, Dalit and Janajati communities. But there have been little to no changes in terms of education, employment, participation, ending untouchability, discrimination against women, and ending violence in the Dalit community.

What is ironic to me about the armed conflict is, ultimately, what did we fight for during those 10 years? What did those 17,000 people sacrifice their lives for? Many Dalits lost their lives during the conflict. But what was the use when the people of my community still have to live as untouchables?

With the Maoist armed struggle, women, Dalits, Janajatis or other minority communities felt they were finally in positions of leadership, especially women as guerrilla leaders and commanders, gave a sense of equality and social justice. It gave the impression that the Maoist revolution had brought in a new phase of Nepali society by destroying old norms and belief systems.

The Maoists promised a Magarat Autonomous Region, and heads of the Tamuwan, Kirat, Tharuhat, and Newa People's government. However, these never materialised and the issues of the Janajati people were not addressed after the conflict. This leads me to believe that they were merely used as pawns in a political game.

What did the oppressed get out of the armed conflict? At first glance, it seems like they got everything they were promised. But that is not the case. For instance, the naming of the federal provinces would have been a symbolic admission and acknowledgement of the state's decades-long oppression and exploitation of indigenous peoples. But that did not happen.



**Pradip Pariyar**  
Activist

After 1990, the Dalit community moved to obtain the right to enter temples, demanded political representation and quotas in education. In 1991, there was only one Dalit MP.

This situation will persist until there is a transformation in leadership. More than 30 years later, the main players of the anti-Panchayat movement are still in leadership. If the same people remain in power for three decades, how can the country and the citizens evolve?

The oppressed communities joined the armed conflict in 1996 because they had finally started to be seen and heard, and that gave them collective confidence. The Dalit, Janajati, Madhesi, and Muslim communities were led to believe that the Maoist movement would lead to them having their own state and that the conflict would bring about the end of discrimination and inequality.



**Ganesh Biswokarma**  
Activist

The Dalit community participated in the People's Movement, following which, fundamental rights were guaranteed to the community in the 1990 Constitution. This included making untouchability and discrimination punishable by law and introducing positive discrimination. But no law was ever made to implement these provisions.

The Dalit Liberation movement sought to end untouchability, make untouchability punishable by law, and create institutions to monitor untouchability. We also demanded that a National Dalit Commission be formed. Our demands have been met, but only as a formality.



**Dambar Chemjong**  
Tribhuvan University

The 1990 movement did not promise the Janajati people anything. But the main demand of a multi-party system under a constitutional monarchy was met. After this, the indigenous people demanded that they be able to establish political parties, but the Election Commission shot that down. The interim prime minister himself, during the 1991 general election, said that Janajati activism was communal, not political. Because Nepal had been a Hindu state for a long time, laws based on religion had infringed upon the socio-cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions of the Janajati community. But the suggestion that Nepal become secular under the 1990 Constitution was not heeded.





## “Collective or individual rights?”

### Hari Sharma Researcher

I have seen momentous changes in my lifetime during the last 30 years since the First People's Movement. However, did these changes lead to genuine transformation of state structure and welfare of the people? There is cynicism and disillusionment in the public.

The 1990 People's Movement was purely for political freedom. However, the Constitution formed after the movement reflected that our national Nepali identity was diverse, and that provided a framework for a liberal constitution.

With the armed conflict of 1996-2006 we realised that the system was not able to fulfil Nepal development aspirations and that the rights that had been established after the first People's Movement had not been translated into public policy, which led to a crisis in governance. By the time the Second People's Movement

of 2006 came around, the movement for identity had taken strong roots.

The Maoists also used people's search for identity strategically. But the biggest question that followed the Second People's Movement and the subsequent drafting of the constitution was that of who would represent different communities--the members of their community or the mainstream political parties.

At the root of the debate is whether individual or collective rights are more important.

Fundamentally, the 2017 Constitution seems to prioritise group rights, like the proportional electoral system that we have adopted is conducive to collective identity. But one may not agree with or trust those who have been chosen to represent them. In that case, the beauty of democracy is that if the Constitution has not been implemented correctly, there is an institutional mechanism to rectify that.

Nepal's Constitution attempted to answer questions about problems

in the representation of the Janajati community due to a lack of public policy, political accountability, and political responsibility. But instead of moving forward by defining it through public policy, we have been led to a constitutional crisis.

Accountability is of the utmost importance in public policy and democracy as a whole, whether it is the accountability over the armed conflict or over daily services and facilities provided to the people. We fought so hard to have a system that holds our elected officials accountable, but that is limited to theory.

Democracy has to be defended by vigilance. We might think that our work is done once we elect leaders into office, and the leaders might promise us that there is nothing more to worry about. But the universal truth is that as soon as people achieve any authority, they will become greedy and selfish in their quest for power.

Our political parties have evolved into syndicates, and as

such, there will be no democracy in Nepal as long as there is no democracy or accountability within political parties.

The irony is that we have protected our elitist structures in the name of protecting our old traditional values, while leaders exploit the state's resources even though they have similar resources at their personal disposal. So it is important that we look, not just at the leadership but at the socio-cultural context behind the leadership.

Even today, one of our four former prime ministers is likely to be the new prime minister. We seem to be at a standstill from a sociological point of view. These four former prime ministers have been in leadership for the past 30 years.

Over the last 20 years, a certain political party I've been studying closely has not been able to expand its base, party membership is divided into factions and sub-factions. And unless it expands its

support base, a certain subsection of the party will forever have a monopoly over all its resources.

Democracy without political parties is unthinkable because we and our resources are under the stranglehold of those parties and their leaders. But ultimately, the people should be able to choose their leadership since there is little possibility to form new parties through social movements.

Individual rights, individual responsibility, collective rights and collective responsibility must be merged because a society cannot be built without individual freedom. And there cannot be an independent society without an autonomous and independent citizenry.

Our responsibility does not stop on the day that we cast our ballots. On the contrary, it is our responsibility to keep the egos of our leaders in check, to hold our leaders accountable, and to strengthen our voices.

Nepal is a testament to the fact that democracy is characterised by diversity. A country that has no minority, no resistance, and where a select few have a monopoly over rights and resources can never be democratic. The politics of prohibition will always hinder the politics of pluralism. 🇳🇵



Watch video clips of interviews with legislators, civil society members and journalists as they try to explain why there is widespread public disillusionment with the political leaders who fought for democracy, but let the system down in two episodes of *Saglo Samaj*.

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Saving  
glow worms  
can help  
protect  
Nepal's  
ecosystem  
and unique  
night tourism

● Sonia Awale

Many of us have fond childhood memories of the जुनकीरी firefly, chasing the fascinating lightning bugs through fields and forests. Across the world and in Nepal, poets and singers have waxed eloquent about the blinking light of the nocturnal insects.

But for a creature so admired, there has not been much of an effort to study and protect them. As elsewhere in the world, firefly numbers have declined sharply, even prompting the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to set up a Firefly Specialist Group in 2018.

"We grew up playing with fireflies, chasing them around Tundikhel, but those days are long gone," laments Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha, a noted Nepali naturalist. "Fireflies need a pristine environment, and their very presence signifies undisturbed nature."

Fireflies belong to a family of beetles called *Lampyridae* and evolved alongside dinosaurs 100 million years ago. But habitat destruction, rampant pesticide use, light pollution and climate change now threaten to put the lights out on all 2,200 species of fireflies so far identified.

The decline of fireflies indicates a degradation of the ecosystem, especially of wetlands. Yet, there has been no systematic study of the status, scope and habitat of these glow worms in Nepal.

"The number and diversity of firefly species are unknown in Nepal and researchers have not given priority to these insects," says Hum Gurung of Singapore-based Birdlife International Asia, who is promoting firefly tourism in Malaysia, and developing a participatory citizen scientist group to study fireflies in Nepal.

Gurung says firefly conservation must begin with first researching them and planning a sustainable eco-tourism model based on firefly viewing, just like the cherry blossom season in Japan or fall colours in New England.

"Their commercial value will add to the efforts to protect them," he adds.

But in Nepal, these lightning bugs that were once ubiquitous in gardens, jungles, riverbanks, and even streets and playgrounds in the towns have all but disappeared. Where did they all go?

In Pokhara, butterfly researcher Surendra

Pariyar says: "I have nostalgic memories of fireflies from my childhood, but as the city's concrete jungle spreads I hardly see even one firefly these days."

Elsewhere in Japan, Southeast Asia and South America, the charismatic beetles with their bioluminescent courtship displays have turned into a major attraction for nature and wildlife tourists.

Extra income from the firefly boat tours was crucial in curbing overfishing in Malaysia's Kuala Selangor. Fireflies can promote unique, insect-based night tourism with indigenous communities in Bardia and Chitwan in Nepal.

Says butterfly expert Bhaiya Khanal, previously with the Natural History Museum: "Firefly tourism opens up a lot of opportunities including the possibility of finding more species. This, in turn, will promote their conservation."

Artificial light however is the biggest threat to fireflies as it reduces the beetle's breeding success. Bright lights from buildings, vehicles, flashlights, and even cell phones can disrupt firefly mating.

Nurturing and protecting the habitat is equally important, especially as the bugs spend most of their life cycle in a larval stage and require several months or even up to three years, to develop into adults.

"We need to understand their lifecycle and its role in the ecosystem, what it feeds on and what preys upon them and our conservation and ecotourism efforts should take all of these into account," adds Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha.

Fireflies can be a 'gateway bug' to get tourists and locals interested in conserving many other insects, often ignored in favour of tigers, rhinos and wild elephants. Nepal is a model for wildlife conservation but its efforts in protecting smaller organisms are nearly non-existent.

But first, proper conservation mechanisms must be put in place so that spreading firefly tourism does not end up destroying the very insect it is trying to save.

A new study published in the journal *Conservation Science and Practice* provides the first comprehensive review of the geographic scope, magnitude, focal species, and other attributes of the major firefly tourism sites worldwide.

The rapid proliferation of firefly tourism could mean new threats such as inadvertent trampling of female adults and degradation of larval habitats during tours.

"Ultimately we have to change our destructive development methods and work on urban planning that takes into account the health of an ecosystem," adds Hum Gurung, also co-author of the paper.

Bhaiya Khanal agrees that conservation and development should go hand-in-hand. He says, "New infrastructure projects must not ignore these creatures, we must proactively protect them before they are forever gone." 🌿



## Fireflies in Nepal

Only three species of fireflies have ever been recorded in Nepal, and even those were when the first British naturalists came to Kathmandu in the 1830s.

*Diaphanea marginellus* was spotted at 2,000m in Kavre, so was *Luciola ovalis*. But the most common species found throughout Nepal is *Luciola cruciate*, pictured left.

Fireflies prefer hot and humid conditions and are therefore found in the plains and the mid-mountains valleys of Nepal between July-August -- in ponds, streams, marshes and rivers. Fireflies usually are not found above 1,200m altitude, so Kathmandu would be at the upper limit of their habitat.





# Night of the firefly



## What makes them glow?

Fireflies have a romantic morse code for every occasion, whether it is to find a mate, or to scare off predators. It could be a steady glow or a flashing light, differing in duration, timing, colour, and repetition.

All 2,200 identified species have their own blinking codes, glowing to varying degrees during the larva stage but most lose their light-emitting capacity by adulthood. Fireflies are also active during the day when they use chemical signals or pheromones to attract partners.

Fireflies also emit a lightning signal when threatened by predators, or to protect territory. The light comes from a chemical reaction called bioluminescence, and the glow is not hot, but cold to touch.

The lower abdomen of a firefly consists of calcium, magnesium, and a naturally occurring chemical called luciferin. But it is a superoxide ion, an extra electron, that is responsible for pale yellow, green, sometimes orange or blue flickers during hot summer nights.

The reaction can be harmful to living tissue, but it does not affect the insect because the reaction is contained and happens quickly. The toxic luciferin molecule could be the key to a breakthroughs in cancer research and therapy.

## Keep shining

These small but thoughtful steps can help us revive firefly populations:



- 🦋 Turn off unnecessary outside lights
- 🦋 Avoid pesticides, go organic
- 🦋 Keep water bodies clean and chemical-free
- 🦋 Plant native trees
- 🦋 Leave natural habitat untouched





## EVENTS

**Star Gazing**

Astronomers Manisha Dwa and Suresh Bhattarai will conduct telescopic exploration of the Moon, Mars and the Orion Nebula.  
20, 27 March, 17 and 27 April, Vivanta Hotel

**Ride to Lomanthang**

Gear up and ride along with experienced riders of the KTM team on the ultimate road and gravel traveler. Be ready to escape out from the hustle and bustle of the city to another epic adventure. Registrations are open.  
21 March, 8am

**BlaBla Language Exchange**

Become fluent in any language while making friends with native speakers online. Get access to a host and plan your lesson plans, text chat rooms and more. Visit for more.  
28 March, 5pm

**SOUL IN SHADES**

AN EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
SRAVASTI GHOSH DASTIDAR  
MARCH 26 - APRIL 2, 2021. 11:00HRS - 17:30HRS

*Siddhartha*  
ART GALLERY

**World Water Day**

This year the celebration of World Water Day in Lalitpur will be based on the theme with focus on water resources protection and conservation. Paschim Paaila in collaboration with ENPHO with the support of #BORDA, under the Integrated Urban Water Management (IUWM) project is organizing this event.  
20 March, 10am, Lalitpur



As the days get longer and warmer, there will be cloud buildup by afternoon. Some of these will unleash thunderstorms in the coming three days, with short brisk bursts of rain. These would be more intense if the sun was not filtered by windblown sand being transported by the westerly wind from the Arabian and Iranian deserts as seen in this satellite image on Thursday afternoon.

**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

KATHMANDU, 12 - 18 March



PM2.5  
FRIDAY March 12 SATURDAY March 13 SUNDAY March 14 MONDAY March 15 TUESDAY March 16 WEDNESDAY March 17 THURSDAY March 18

Thanks to a dry summer, wildfires and increasing vehicular pollutants, the concentration of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micron soared above 200 this week, taking the daily average Air Quality Index (AQI) to the 'Very unhealthy' purple zone. Adding to it was windblown sand transported all the way from the Arabian and Iranian deserts (pictured, top). AQI in the Kathmandu city centre is only likely to worsen even if we are headed to for possible brief bursts of rain and thunderstorms in the coming days.

## ONLINE ARCHIVES

**Journeyman Pictures**

Watch groundbreaking award-winning factual films about some of the most burning issues across the globe including politics, the environment, and the current pandemic. Find Journeyman pictures on YouTube.

**Free Netflix documentaries**

Netflix has released some of its documentaries for free on YouTube for educational purposes in light of the global coronavirus pandemic. Watch the award-winning documentary Our Planet from Sir David Attenborough to start.

**Sustainable Summits 2020**

Listen to Sustainable Summits global leaders speak out on World Environment Day. SUSTAINABLE SUMMITS 2020: A POST COVID19 VIEW FROM THE TOP is an online 50 minute programme in which some of the conferences' inspirational leaders deliver powerful messages on the future mountain environment. Watch videos on YouTube.

**BOJU BAJAI****Boju Bajai**

Listen to Itisha Giri and Bhrikuti Rai as they talk from across two continents about politics, media and feminism in South Asia.

**OFFSIDE**

A FILM BY JAFAR PANAHİ

**OUR PICK**

In Jafar Panahi's 2006 film *Offside*, a young woman disguised as a man sneaks into the Azadi Stadium in Tehran to watch the World Cup qualifying match between Iran and Bahrain because female fans are prohibited to enter football stadiums. Failing to evade security, she is put in a holding pen with other women caught under similar circumstances, from where they try to follow the match. Stars Sima Mobarak-Shahi, Shayesteh Irani, Ayda Sadeqi, Golnaz Farmani, Mahnaz Zabihi, and Nazanin Sediq-zadeh.

**Seeker**

Seeker tells award-winning stories about the natural forces and groundbreaking innovations that impact lives, the planet, and the universe. Look for their videos on technology and medical advancement. Find Seeker on YouTube and Instagram TV.

## DINING

**Cafe Hessed**

Savour exquisite fine doughnuts, cupcakes and everything in between at Cafe Hessed. Pair the baked item with some good coffee or tea.  
Pulchowk (01) 5530993

**Cafe Mozart**

With a tint of Viennese charm, Cafe Mozart serves customers a wide array of baked cookies, bread, pastries along with famed grilled baguette sandwiches. Enjoy a winter evening on the lawn as if on a Piazza in Florence.  
Jhamsikhel, 9840735589

**Electric Pagoda**

For those looking for an al fresco dining experience, Electric pagoda will not go amiss. From the great menu, colourful lights, to cats strolling around the place, EP's evening ambience is highly recommended by visitors.  
Saat Ghunti Marg (01) 4700123

**Organic Smoothie Bowl**

Resting around the corner of The Radisson Hotel in Lazimpat, Organic Smoothie Bowl and Café plates fresh, fast and Instagram-worthy smoothie bowls, sandwiches, drinks and more.  
Lazimpat, 9843514612

**Rhino Cafe**

Rhino, serving the only siphon coffee in town, is a quaint little cafe run by a Japanese artist. Choose coffee beans from Colombia, Ethiopia, or Nepal and satisfy post-coffee cravings with deliciously loaded sandwiches.  
Jyatha Marg, 9818829546



बालबालिका माथि हुने हिंसा, दुर्व्यवहार, शोषण भएको, जोखिमपूर्ण अवस्थामा रहेको वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने

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नेपाल सरकार

सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग





AMIT MACHAMASI

● Alisha Sijapati

The black walls, dark cave-like interior of the Van Gogh Room at Dhokaima Café deepens the apocalyptic mindscape displayed in first physical exhibition of digital art by Ashim Shakya.

The manipulated images blend photographs and graft images to communicate heritage loss, environmental degradation, climate change, ruinous urbanisation – all with gut-wrenching visuals.

A colossal coal-powered sewing machine stitches soulless suburbia into a bucolic countryside, pressure cookers let off steam from Kathmandu Valley's red hot furnace, a teacher conducts class inside a rice cooker, a gigantic ice cube melts on a mountain top sending water cascading down the slopes.

Shakya's surreal digital images have a nightmarish quality, as if they are products of fearful dreams. But no, they are everyday reality for everybody.

Over a dozen of Shakya's artwork created since 2012 are on display at the gallery till 24 March, part of Tulikaa Kala's solo exhibition series, Kholo 2.0, that is showcasing work by 28 classic and contemporary Nepali artists till August.

"I think a lot, and I am completely immersed in the subject I am trying to convey," Shakya says, pointing at the painting *Solitude* that won the CGTrader Award last year (*above*).

Shakya only makes 20 prints of each digital work, and has sold four these to buyers in Germany, Singapore and Nepal.

The theme here is obviously climate change, but Shakya does not want to be obvious. *Solitude* can mean many things to many people, it transcends the planet's current anthropogenic crisis, forces us to think of the nature of nature, impermanence and the riddle of existence. Kholo 2.0 Curator Ujen Norbu Gurung bought termite ridden logs being sold for firewood to frame Shakya's art in the gallery space, and propped them up like post-quake Kathmadu streets.

Shakya takes months to painstakingly work pixel-by-pixel on his artwork. "If I put my heart and soul into something, I will finish it regardless of anything happening around me," he says, pushing back frizzy locks, his beard almost eclipsing a smile.

As an introvert child, Shakya was drawn to physics and spent most of his days locked inside his room, fiddling with electronic gadgets. But this just made him more self-sufficient, and art became an outlet to let his thoughts out.

After brief animation courses in his late teens, Shakya learnt to paint with acrylic on canvas and graduated to digital art with his work in video games.

"Digital art gave me the freedom to express my creativity and emotion and taught myself the techniques with experimentation," he says, pointing out two of his favourite works, *The Mahakal's Epitome* and *Mellow Dwellings II*, which is his best-seller with eight

copies sold.

"The combination of music, the crowd and infrastructure were lucid for me when I was working. I could feel that I was a character in the piece and enjoyed the emotions that played inside my head," he says.

The artist is nocturnal. Sometimes inspiration comes

## Ashim Shakya's digital hyper-realism

New media artist shocks us with psychedelic images of Kathmandu's dystopia



goddesses, and old Newa houses transformed into guitars and *sarangi*.

Born and brought up in Kathmandu, the city is Shakya's muse. He draws inspiration from its rich heritage and its dystopian urbanisation. The themes are dark, the subject matter heavy, and the approach psychedelic. Yet Shakya treads lightly, leaving the images dangling in the mind's eye to make what we want of it.

He says, "The universe is ever-evolving. We humans are just specks. I don't take the human species too seriously. Nature will survive, the Earth will go on without us." 🇳🇵

Shakya's exhibition at Dhokaima Café's Van Gogh room will run until 24 March. *Kholo 2.0 – A Cycle of Life* is ongoing at Dhokaima Cafe until 27 August.

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PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

**MUSICAL CHAIRS:** President Bidya Devi Bhandari called an all-party meeting on Tuesday to find a solution to the current political impasse but some senior party leaders from PM K P Oli's own UML boycotted it.



AMIT MACHAMASI

**RED LEADER:** Jhalnath Khanal addresses the national meeting of CPN-UML Madhav Nepal group in Kathmandu, on Wednesday.



EMBASSY OF ISRAEL

**HELPING HAND:** The Embassy of Israel donates medical equipment including anaesthesia ventilator, patient monitor and electrocardiograph to Patan Hospital on Monday.



RADHIKA KANDEL/RSS

**IN THE LINE OF FIRE:** Rescue personnel perform emergency drill at Pokhara Airport, on Wednesday.



FELICITY VOLK/TWITTER

**WOMEN OF THE WORLD:** Australian Ambassador, Felicity Volk with female parliamentarians during Flourish Women Summit 2021, this week in Kathmandu.



# The internet : A land of free learning

As we approach one year since the first lockdown, let's get back to being productive and learn online

The Internet is possibly the greatest invention of our time, and the reason is simple yet powerful: it provides access to an immense amount of information. While daily news, social media, business purposes,



**TECH-WAVE**  
Saniaa Shah

communicating with friends across the world, and unlimited entertainment are all perfectly wonderful reasons to use the Web, let us not forget about learning for free – something that makes the Internet, truly a blessing.

Not all of us can pay thousands of dollars and fly across the world to pursue an amazing course or degree; thus, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) are a saviour. From Introduction to Machine Learning (York University from Canada offers this) to Climate Change Mitigation in Developing Countries (designed by the University of Cape Town), courses offered online range across subject areas like: the social sciences, history, science, IT, math, business management, arts, health, education, personal development skills, and even specific fields of study like architecture, law, psychology, religion, philosophy, astronomy and natural sciences. These aren't casual blog style educational videos but actual courses with professionally-designed curriculums, weekly syllabi, homework assignments, student discussion forums, user reviews and ratings, and official certificates from the institute that you can receive upon successfully completing the course – but of course, you have to pay for that last one.

Two of the biggest names in the online learning platform market are Coursera and EdX. Both offer courses from some of the biggest institutional names in education, such as Yale,

Stanford, Harvard, University of Michigan, UC Berkeley, Wharton, Cambridge and more. Coursera currently offers 3000+ courses by partnering with universities across the globe, while EdX, a non-profit company, offers about 2,650 and was born from the idea of free and accessible education for all. Coursera's strength lies in computer science and business courses while EdX excels at humanities and earth science courses, but both provide a wide gamut of courses that need to be sifted through using their website search bar and filters.

For those who don't want to commit long hours and prefer bite-sized videos, TedEd is perfect. From the makers of the famous Ted Talks, TedEd spreads ideas with animated video lessons that feed curious cats and offer great content for teachers and school students. Teachers can also create customised lessons, structure an assignment around a video and assess students' engagement online.

OpenCulture is a great aggregator website of excellent free educational resources, with over 1500 courses listed on it, along with over 1000 movies, free ebooks, and much more.

Udemy is a great option for those who want short, skill-smart videos that help build skills and navigate the job market or let you pursue a hobby you always wanted to, such as learning the ukulele. The platform takes a democratic, by-all-for-all approach, which means that the course creators and instructors aren't academically recognised but trained by Udemy to effectively administer a unique course. Udemy courses aren't free, but they are extremely affordable and a bang for the buck.

FutureLearn is England's answer to Coursera, a lesser-known quality-conscious platform that partners with leading British and Australian universities or organisations to offer 2500 odd online courses

to over 10 million learners and counting.

For those looking for something off the beaten track, Alison and Udacity offer courses developed by themselves that are gentler paced, and they're well-known for online programming courses. They also offer diploma courses and learning paths that offer related courses so that you can specialise better.

Kadenze is cool option for those who are interested in the arts and creative technology. It brings together artists, musicians and engineers to deliver niche creative arts education with passion and professional excellence. Kadenze fills the gap of arts-focused platforms, reassuring students and parents that arts and technology can also lead to immensely successful, fulfilling careers that aren't the conventional definition of a promising path.

Some of us want to spend time learning but also use the opportunity to add value to our LinkedIn profile. For this, look no further than MOOCs from the best American universities; Harvard Extension, Stanford Online, Open Yale Courses, UC Berkeley Class Central, MIT OpenCourseWare and the Carnegie Mellon Open Learning Initiative are all great names to note.

Being able to log into class in your pajamas at any time of the day or night, saving time on commutes, maintaining digital records of all learning material and being able to use video, a highly engaging format, to process information, are all excellent advantages of online courses. But lack of peer-to-peer collaboration and real interaction, being unable to raise your hand and ask questions and not getting an immersive classroom experience are all valid drawbacks. Nepal is still a place where a college degree and "real institute" are considered legitimate and valid, whereas online courses aren't trusted enough, making it questionable on the resume. 🇳🇵



# Non-climate causes of Nanda Devi flood

Although Himalayan disasters pre-date climate change, it is smart to be prepared for both

- **Medha Gelli**

More than a month after the catastrophic flashflood in Chamoli district of the Indian Himalaya, scientists say that the cause was failure of a rock face, and not just the result of a glacial lake burst caused by climate change.

Early reports had suggested that the flood that raced down the Rishiganga on 7 February, killing 200 people and damaging four hydro-electric plants, may have been caused by a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF).

However, analysis of satellite images show that there were no lakes on the Ronti Glacier in the Nanda Devi (7,816m) massif, and the disaster happened in winter when the supra-glacial ponds were frozen.

Scientists have concluded that a 500m wide section of the face of Ronti Peak broke off at 5,500m, and the kinetic energy of an estimated 22 million m<sup>3</sup> of falling rock also melted ice deposits from a previous avalanche in 2016 (*image, right*).

Uttarakhand recorded its warmest January in six decades this year, and winter storms the previous week that had deposited new snow. Ice also cements rock at higher elevations, and rocks can come loose when it melts.

'The Chamoli flood was not caused by a GLOF as there were no significant glacial lakes in the area,' write a group of researchers led by Arun B Shrestha in a recent



Other disasters on Himalayan rivers are caused by *bishyari*, a local word that refers to a floods due to a landslide blocking a river to impound a lake that suddenly bursts, as what happened in Jure of Sindhupalchok in 2014.

Another catastrophic example is the co-seismic mountain slide that blocked the Seti River about 500 years ago, creating a huge lake that then burst depositing the 200m thick sediment layers on which the city of Pokhara is now located.

Nepal's former water minister and hydropower minister says. "Even if the earthquake was not directly caused by climate change, it could have been a disaster because of the extreme weather events."

Himalayan floods pre-date climate change, and are caused by the vulnerability of fragile mountains to natural and human-induced processes like use of heavy earth-moving vehicles.

Such 'bulldozer terrorism', has exacerbated the frequency of landslides in central Nepal after the 2015 earthquake, according to a recently published paper in the journal, *Progress in Disaster Science*.


After analysing remote sensing data, researchers conclude that although the number of landslides had started falling after 2015, there has been an uptick since 2017 possibly due to the proliferation of rural road construction around the time of the elections.

Gyawali suggests a solution is better-planned infrastructure that take into account known hazards. As the Chamoli flood showed, expensive hydro-electric projects located closer to the high mountains are more at risk.

He says smaller hydropower plants in side tributaries rather than the main stem of major Himalayan rivers to mitigate the danger would spread the risk.

But most of Nepal's planned large hydropower projects are on rivers like the Tamor, Arun, Dudh Kosi, Bhote Kosi and Budi Gandaki.

The Himalaya is a young and unstable mountain range that is battered by a heavy monsoon three months a year. Into this high-risk zone, there is now the added threat of climate-induced disasters.

Says Gyawali: "We cannot completely remove these disasters from happening, but we can try to understand them and plan to minimise the risk." 



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# Young Nepali poets in search

● **Pratibha Tuladhar**  
and **Sahina Shrestha**

...To hell with poetry, with memories,  
with my mother's food- maybe  
not my mother's biryani-  
To hell the memory of turning  
nineteen  
in quarantine. To hell with waiting. To hell  
with this poem. To hell with how long.  
(Mukahang Limbu)

Your friend sends you half a poem by Mukahang Limbu, with a note at the bottom: Found this gem online and thought to share with you. You go back and read it a couple more times, the way you do with poetry that reaches into you to touch certain chords and you instantly know you've found a place to go to.

But home can also be just a memory and you find out why as you read *When I first came from Nepal* by Limbu:

*Missing the feeling of home  
I smell the iron rust  
of the Municipal Gardens.  
The sour tang of home still sits  
on the tip of my tongue  
like the zest of sweet citrus fizzing.*

There are nights when you turn to poetry for reprieve. The world closes in upon you sometimes and sometimes pushes you away, leaving you on the fringes, staring



Anand Vijay Gurung

at the inner circle, where you feel you do not belong.

You discuss the imposter syndrome with your friend. What can one really do to become authentic in a world that constantly tests? Often, there is only so much to do. Perhaps it is to be and to live as you are and bare yourself to the core, even between strangers.

Deepa Bohora beams at the sight of you, asks you your name and smiles as though you are not a stranger but an old friend. She instantly engages with you in

conversation about her childhood, about her struggle with Lupus.

"It is poetry that salvaged me. And Yukta Didi, who showed me that I could also write poetry," she says of Yukta Bajracharya, poet and writer.

As you navigate a busy street in Patan together, Bohora tells you about her father's work in India and about a fan that was her friend when she was a child. And there is that poem she narrates, about this fan. *The fan.*

The fan is her friend. But in



Deepa Bohora

her poem, she becomes a friend to the fan. The fan goes on to tell us the story of the little girl with Lupus, strung in her own metaphor of healing. The device, which has been sitting in her house for years, gathering dust, warped with spider web, becomes a symbol of her own yearning to recover.

When the fan is repaired and once again starts spinning off cool air, Bohora writes a second installment about its restoration. And as the fan rises from its ashes to become a device of use again, what we really see is Bohora's recovery.



Saras Chari

"I write poetry because I like to tell stories. There are so many stories in me and in the people around me. That's why I write poetry," says Bohora. But poetry comes to her like a song, like the humming of the fan on a hot summer's day in Surkhet, so she becomes the little girl again, who runs around her village telling everyone the fan has been fixed.

That healing she finds in poetry is shared experience for many. "They say we are all poets at least once in our lives. And that is when the heart breaks," says Saras Chari.

## When will Chinese tourists return?

Nepal's tourism industry will not revive until China resumes outbound group travel

● **Christopher Tan** in Hong Kong

When Nepal launched its Visit Nepal 2020 campaign to double its visitor arrivals to 2 million last year, much of the hope was pinned on increasing the volume of tourists from China and India.

Chinese Ambassador Hou Yanqi posted pictures of herself on social media on New Year's eve 31 December 2019 to promote Nepal among outbound tourists from China. Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) recruited famous actress Xu Qing to be its Goodwill Ambassador to promote Visit Nepal Year in China.

Nearly 200,000 Chinese tourists visited Nepal in 2019 after free visas were announced, and NTB was hoping to at least double that figure in 2020. Tourists from China had already started streaming in over the Chinese new year holiday last year when the pandemic struck.

Exactly one year ago on 23 March, Nepal went into lockdown and the tourists had to be quickly evacuated on repatriation flights. The numbers plummeted to zero between March to September of 2020.

Arrivals have only started picking up. Of the 18,000 tourist visas issued at Kathmandu airport in January-February this year, the Department of Immigration says only 2,585 were for Chinese nationals.

This was less than 5% of the arrivals for the same two months in 2019, and many of them were traders and workers on Chinese projects and not strictly 'tourists'.

In the short term, the hope for Nepal's tourism industry hinges on how effective vaccination passes become. In an optimistic scenario, rapid vaccination campaigns in China and India, and their travel bubbles could allow some tourists to venture to Nepal on holiday. Nepal as a destination got a lot of nationwide publicity in China



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA/NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

last year with the joint announcement of the newly calculated height of Mt Everest.

On March 9, China became the first country to launch a digital Covid-19 vaccination certificate for Chinese citizens planning cross-border travels. It shows details of inoculation and antibody tests through a QR code on a WeChat app. Although these are now in widespread use in the mainland for visits to restaurants, and domestic travel by train and plane, there is not yet an accepted international standard for vaccine passes.

Besides, Beijing has continued its ban on

outbound tour groups, and this limits Nepal's ability to attract tourists from China, with or without vaccine passports. Several southeast Asian countries like Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia that depend on Chinese tourism are trying to set up a travel bubble with China. The Thai authorities are trying to open up the country by July to Chinese tourists, and if that happens they expect 8 million tourists by the end of the year.

Chinese officials have said that they will be talking to countries around the world about accepting the country's vaccine

passport, and it is expected that some of the 40 countries that have so far imported or used Chinese-made Sinopharm or Sinovac vaccines may be the first to do so.

China has increased its gift of Sinopharm vaccines to Nepal from 500,000 to 800,000, but Nepal will have to send a plane to Beijing to get them.

However, any substantial change in Chinese tourist arrivals will likely only occur in the fall of 2021, if it happens at all. According to Chinese media, only 40% of eligible Chinese citizens will be vaccinated by the end of June, with this number creeping up to 64% by the end of the year.

It is unlikely for Chinese restrictions on outbound travel to lift until the late summer or early fall of this year. While the outlook for this year's tourist season is bleak, there is hope for some respite next year. Once tourists can provide information on their inoculation status, restrictions on arrivals and quarantines can be lifted.

It is still highly unlikely that Nepal will see a return to numbers like the estimated 1.2 million tourists that visited the country in 2019. This reflects a global trend.

Some experts project that global long-haul travel will not properly resume until 2023 or 2024, which may be too long for many industries to survive. The start of Nepal's spring trekking season is usually a goldmine for the tourist industry. In a normal year, Nepal earns up to \$700 million from the tourism which provides direct employment to 1 million people.

With the Covid-19 pandemic halting travel worldwide, Nepal's once-resilient tourism industry faces an anxious wait. Even with growing rates of vaccinations worldwide, Nepal's full-reopening to foreign tourists hinges on a complex web of factors.

Visitor requirements deter many. They require a visa from an embassy abroad, and need to show proof of a reservation at a hotel for a one-week quarantine. 🇳🇵



# of poetic license

He says he started writing poetry as a form of expression away from a childhood scarred by bullies.

"First it was that, and then at some point, I realised that I had some talent, but as I grew older, I realised it was my only talent. And so I write to see where I fit in this society and to talk about issues that are misinterpreted," says Chari.

When a series of anti-government protests were staged in Kathmandu in 2020, Chari noticed how at each one of those events, the public was pitted against the government security personnel. “They’re not our foes. They’re one of us. Their families are one of us. But when they’re out there, defending the line, they become the ones who stand against us. And in that, they’re oppressed by the government, while being tasked at oppressing us,” says Chari.

And so his poem, *Pyadha*,  
traverses the minds of traffic police,  
police and soldiers:

*Those toes locked inside boots  
bleed, too,  
They get sucked on by leeches  
and*

*They yearn for the feel of the  
grass...*

(translated from *Pyadha*)

“Look at how many ways poetry has been used in history,” Chari says. “Poetry was taught to us by pundits to propagate religions. Poetry was used to teach, but also to control. It has also been the medium for expressing love, just as much as it has been used to stir

rebellion. Poetry is powerful," says Chari.

Anand Vijay Gurung, who sits in the audience as Chari performs his verse on stage says that poetry serves its own purpose. “Or wait, why must it even serve a purpose? That’s a difficult question to answer. If a piece of poetry inspired you to feel more intensely, it has served its purpose,” says Gurung, who likes to think of poetry as a word game. And so in his poem, *We Are All Migrants*, he writes:

*...to navigate their way in a world  
and find  
The elusive perfect nest  
etched in their mental  
maps.*

“Poetry is pretty much everyone’s game,” says Chari. Like Deepa Bohora, he too found a community in the Word Warriors, a spoken word poetry group. And while Gurung calls writing a lonely task, Slam poets like Bohora and Chari have formed their own circles where poets come together to write and perform.

Chari and his friends Prakash Zimba, Rupesh Bhattarai and Shuvangi Khadka perform together under the name, Kavindrapur, in memory of the forgotten poets that frequented a *sattal* rest house next to Kastamandap, during the reign of Pratap Malla.

The king was the patron of the poets. And there in a rest house in the heart of old Kathmandu, the streets would reverberate with

verses as poets wove a mesh with their words. It is this memory that has been created into a legacy by the young poets, even as they struggle with other challenges of being poet.

“Poet, but paid” is painted in white on the black tee shirt Chari wears. “We get invited to events, often to perform or to judge, but no one cares to pay for our time or expression. Poetry is not respected,” Chari expresses his frustration.

And his sentiment is seconded by Gurung: "Nepali society respects writers and poets but there is no support system to serve that vocation. There is no reward monetarily and often, poets pay for their own books to be published."

Gurung's anthology of poetry, *Dandelion Snow* was published in 2020, and most of the people who bought his books have been friends. Poetry books are published with the expectancy of a prolonged shelf-life, he says.

And yet that does not deter the courage of Bohora, who hopes someday to pull together a book of her poems. "That's the dream, I've been carrying. Someday, I'd like to do a book of my own," she says. "My words have done what my father's sweat hasn't."

When the likes of Rupri Kaur and Nayyira Waheed stormed Instagram's little boxes with their anecdotes, poetry appeared to have found a new platform for revival. While it has also given

birth to debates about what really is poetry, then, if it can be dashed off in incomplete sentences and expressions.

“At least it’s helped other poets see, that it is possible to sell,” says Gurung.

In Kathmandu, a surge in performance poetry was seen in the last decade with Word Warriors performing at different events, raising pertinent personal and political questions, while also creating space for young writers to form their own groups.

But poetry has also been used to challenge. In the recent anti-government protests, the crowd cheered as Sapna Sanjeevani recited: *Ab hum Sita Nai Banbo*, refusing to the submission that Sita had to adhere to. And it is a sentiment that resonates with many women writers of the decade.

*My country cries over  
burnt flags,  
borders,  
the birth lore of gods,  
not the bodies of desecrated dead  
girls;  
My country says I am a Goddess.*

Neha Rayamajhi's a poem published in LaLit magazine is steeped in sadness and anger. There is sarcasm. There is mostly protest in her words:

*My country asks me  
for my father's name.  
Men who are dead,  
or have become ghosts  
they own me more than the women  
who birth me:  
My country asks me to love this  
motherland.*

“Writing poetry is creating something beautiful out of sometimes messy and ugly

emotions. It also means claiming and reclaiming power from those experiences," says Rayamajhi.

Her words are representative of the new generation of Nepali women, who dare to question traditions passed down to them and laws that threaten to bind them. The refrain carries the irony of the idea of motherland while being force to disrespect mothers, who are allowed to birth children but never allowed to be citizens.

But to not be citizens is not limited to being unable to pass down your identity to your children. It can sometimes be tangled in memories of who we were and who we have become.

Away in Oxford, Mukahang Limbu's life unfolds to his audience on his Instagram stories as he cooks meals with fellow students and lives the life that has the semblance of a typical university life. But this award winning poet recreates the idea of home in his posts through foods as much as he does in unfinished, dangling sentences.

Away from home, we often discover ourselves more closely. Home, then becomes an idea. Home can be the taste of a vegan ice-cream made from cashew milk in Manhattan, sometimes. But home can also be fried-rice eaten on repeat when you live far away from home.

Home can also be friends who do not ask you questions, just as home can be a tandoori sandwich eaten during a conversation with strangers you have just begun to trust.

And so these lines by Limbu  
resonate with so many of us:

*I know now  
In this place, where I did not know,  
the things I did not know  
embrace me in ways  
I didn't know.*



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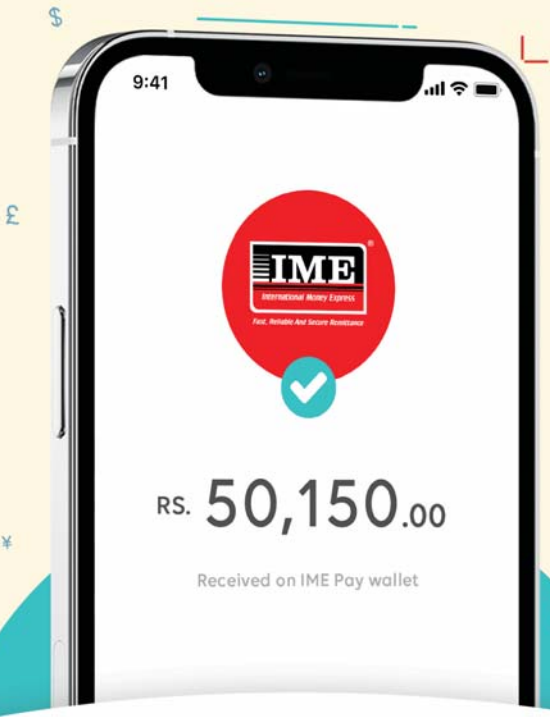
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## Last, but not least

Finally, the UN Committee for Development Policy has deemed that Nepal is now sufficiently prosperous enough to graduate from the 'Least-Developed Country' status to becoming a 'Developing Country'. Shorn of UN-ese, what this means in practical terms is that by 2026, Nepal will make a smooth transition from being a Shithole Country to a Slightly-Less Shithole Country.

This is all very good news and calls for jubilation, the government should declare a three-day national holiday so that we can all laze about and let this momentous recognition sink in: we didn't even know we were rich!

This is also a fitting tribute to the vision and level-headedness of Nepal's political leaders who have been so confident about the country being firmly on the path to stability and prosperity that they haven't had to lift a finger, and therefore have all the time in the world for extra-curricular activities like trying to unceremoniously unseat each other.

The Ass' first reaction to the news from New York about Nepal becoming a formerly-destitute nation was: "WTF?"

Why was the government in such a tearing hurry to attain middle-incomehood, and loose all the privileges we had of being one of the poorest, and most photogenic, countries in the world? No more are we eligible for grants and handouts, have to work hard to improve living standards in the country, and cannot siphon off much moolah from development projects meant to benefit the poorest of the poor, anymore.

Actually, we should strongly object to the UN elevating Nepal to 'Developing Country' category in the next five years. The UN should have declared us an 'Already-Developed Country'.

Indeed, looking at all our accomplishments to date, Nepal is at par with the industrialised world, and is eligible to become an OECD member state. Here are some indicators which have been cross-checked for veracity:

1. The most vivid proof that Nepal is already an Advanced Economy is that it has a Minister of Forests who believes trees take in oxygen and emit carbon dioxide, and therefore need to be chopped down to prevent climate change. I heard him say that on YouTube.
2. Nepal cannot hope to be an Even-more Industrialised Country unless we collectively increase our carbon footprint. Which is why the gobblement is bent on removing the last native forest in the eastern Tarai to build a mega-aeropolis in Nijgad just as global aviation is going belly-up. The idea is to strike while the iron is hot.
3. Another proof that we will soon be overtaking Western Industrialised Countries is our speedy vaccination drive. While Europe is still struggling to inoculate the elderly, Nepal has already given bankers and journalists the jab.
4. Nepal is now self-sufficient in the production of instant noodles, and is already in a position to export this staple, fortified with essential micro-nutrients, to undernourished parts of the world as a part of its ODA program.
5. The discovery of 2.5kg of Uranium 238 isotope in Boudha last week means that Nepal is well on its way to secretly acquiring centrifuges to process the radioactive material into fissile U235 at its clandestine top-secret nuclear deterrent facility in Chhauni. We will soon have a stockpile of atomic bombs to add to the war-heads we already have, viz: Comrades Prachanda, Laldhoj and Badal. The next step is to develop a ballistic missile delivery system. As we have learnt from DPRK, that is what it takes to get some respect around here.
6. Nepal has a Minister of Education who recently compared Prime Minister K P Oli to Pele, and said no country in the world has a head of government with four kidneys. With these super-human demi-gods leading us, our ship of state is steaming ahead gloriously towards a flotilla of icebergs.
7. And this just in: Kathmandu is getting free 5G. This is final proof that we are already a Last-but-not-least Developed Country.



The Ass



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