**Sonia Awale**

After immunising over 1.6 million Nepalis against Covid-19, the government now plans to administer the rest of the 600,000 jabs that it has in stock for second doses starting 10 April. But it needs at least another million shots to cover all those who inoculated in the first and second phases, as well as to complete the inoculation of those 55 years and above.

The Health Ministry is banking on the remaining 1.6 million doses of the AstraZeneca Covishield that it purchased from the Serum Institute of India. That consignment was not delivered on 15 March as promised after an Indian court banned export of vaccines before demand at home is met.

The next batch of Covishield vaccine under the COVAX initiative is also not expected before May. However, the current suspension of vaccinations in Europe, Thailand and other countries may ease the worldwide shortage somewhat.

“We will go ahead with second doses as planned, but the third phase aimed at the age group 55-64 will depend on vaccine availability and as of now we don’t have dates on when they are arriving,” admits Shyam Raj Uperti, head of the Government Covid Vaccine Strategy told Nepali Times.

The Chinese government, on the other hand, has increased its gift of Sinopharm vaccines to Nepal from 500,000 to 800,000, but China has insisted that Nepal send a plane to collect it from Beijing.

The shortfall in supply and procurement challenges forced the Health Ministry to allow private companies to import vaccines, including the Covaxin manufactured by Bharat Biotech in India.

“The private sector can help bridge the gap in procurement limitation as well as allow people with the means and the interest to get vaccinated, but all this must be monitored and regulated,” says Sher Bahadur Pan, a virologist at the Pokhara Hospital.

Average coverage was 73% of the eligible population in the first two phases, all of whom with the Covishield AstraZeneca vaccine. However, media reports of the suspension of that vaccine in European countries this week due to fear of blood clot among some recipients may increase vaccine hesitancy in Nepal.

The suspensions have baffled public health experts who warn that there is neither enough data to justify the decision, nor adequate evidence to blame blood clots on the vaccine. The fact that there have been no serious side effects in Nepal has increased the acceptance level of the vaccine in the public and among frontline health workers in Nepal.

“The EU might have different standards from ours but it might be a good idea to monitor serious side effects,” says epidemiologist Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa. “However, the vaccine has been safe in this part of the world, so its benefits far outweigh the risk.”

Some experts think the suspension of the vaccine campaign in Europe may actually be a blessing in disguise for Nepal, which is facing delays in shipments of Covishield it ordered as well as remaining doses under the COVAX initiative from the Serum Institute. That delay and the higher price tag was blamed on a rise in global demand.

So far, the government has only administered Covishield in Nepal and health authorities here see no reason to discontinue the vaccine without a real causal link between AstraZeneca and the blood clots.

The EU decision to suspend AstraZeneca is very random and counterproductive, it was probably influenced by politics,” says Buddhi Bhattarai of the Patan Academy of Medical Sciences.

“There is evidence this vaccine is safe and protects us specifically from severe symptoms of Covid-19.”

Meanwhile, assured by the vaccination drive and a dramatic drop in infections, Nepalis have gone back to normal, and many have forgotten about precautions.

With parts of India hit by a second wave with over 37,000 new cases and 171 additional deaths on Wednesday, experts have advised the Nepali government not to let up on communicating the need to mask up and avoid crowds.

“Officials have stopped testing and are focusing only on vaccinating but even those who have been inoculated must remember that they can still be carriers,” Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa told Nepali Times from Kathmandu.

“We have to continue to take safety precautions as if the pandemic is not over, which it is not.”
Not out of the woods yet

This year 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 then the number of cases had exceeded 18,000 and there had been 49 fatalities.

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

There was another lockdown, but it lasted just before the festival season, leading to a rise in opium production and fatalities in October. The daily caseload peaked at 5,700 and the deaths daily hit a high of 40-45 in November. (See figure)

Therefore, 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 14-16 March, there were only 70 positives. There have been many months this year with no Covid-19 deaths reported. The number of active cases nationwide is now below 900.

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

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 upturn of active cases in Nepal; after dropping to 736 on 1 March, it has gone up to nearly 9,000 again.

The government’s health communications should be moving in high gear warning people that the virus is still around, two to three weeks away from mask-wearing and avoiding crowds, as well as to encourage people to take the vaccines. While fears about Covid-19 may drive people to be more cautious, it may also make them more available in Nepal (See page 2).

It is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared in fighting this pandemic.
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“The goal is empowerment and independence of women.”

Nepali Times caught up with Supreme Court Justice Sapana Pradhan Mallia 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 Mallia: It has evolved from discourses around the rights 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 rules 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 hope 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 indications 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 2020 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 few, others have been amended. Women have been guaranteed rights to participate in political decision-making and have been granted the right to have a consensus for divorce, and we have made legal strides to increase participation in the socio-political process.

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

The credit must go to those who filed Public Interest Litigation cases in the courts, which led to them dismissing discriminatory clauses or modified them to make them non-discriminatory.

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 MeToo movement, 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 birth tests. The awareness brought about by political movements and national emergencies compelled 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 unbiased 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 marginalized groups?

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

In fact, 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 of 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 our work reflects otherwise. My appointment was mixed 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 marginalized and delegitimized in the judiciary. For instance, our level of education and knowledge of legal and judicial matters are frequently questioned, secondly, women are branded too emotive, easily given to fear and weakness. Thirdly, we are subject to resentment and objectification because some people consider that women should hold their positions due to their gender and not their qualifications.

But there is also cause for optimism. At present, 79% 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 fulfill careers.

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

The primary need is to 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 growing 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.

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 conditions of expatriate workers and employers and protect them from exploitation and abuse, restrictions of the sponsor system and are for many more flexibly in labour laws.

Labour rights activists are cautiously optimistic, and say the red carpet is 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 standards of the Saudi labour market for migrant workers.

This is a long time in the decision by the Saudi government and we welcome it, I am optimistic is this a positive step towards reforming the system," Nepal’s ambassador to Saudi Arabia Prasad Singh Khipu told Nepal Times.

SANE webinar

Nepal’s participation from the least developed country (LDC) status was welcomed at a South Asia Webinar on Trades, Contracting Out and Work Abroad (SANE) 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 on the new five-year transition phase, spokesmen said.

Global IME branches

Global IME Bank opened its 13th Branch in the Karnali region and two branches in Gorkha district. Following these, the branches section of the bank has reached 255.

Everest Bank in Gaighat

Everest Bank has inaugurated its 107th branch at Gaighat, Dhapasi on 29 March, and it was inaugurated jointly by Sandhyal Kumar, deputy general manager and Gourav Bhagat of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Gaighat.
“What can be more fulfilling than saving lives?”

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

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 530 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 upscale 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 frontline maternity workers face the wrath of local communities when mothers and babies die.

Bhatta 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 sees 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 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 guides 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 Nepalis 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.”

Happy mothers deliver in the remote Dhading village of Ch Surga who used to deliver babies at home surrounded with their babies. They were sent to the nearest trained as skilled birth attendants.

Renowned birthing centres of Myagdi rural municipality 5 is a sight of new equipment for institutional deliveries.

Nurses are trained to become skilled birth attendants in remote Kotahat village where there is no doctor.

Surya Bhatta at One Heart Worldwide (OHW) right gear entrepreneurial skills learnt as a business shark in the US to return to Nepal to help save maternal lives in rural health posts.
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 Sagle Samajy magazine program talked to civil society members, legislators and journalists to try to come up with answers.

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 10% of women needed to be elected to the House of Representatives and the National Assembly. By the time the second election of 1991 came around, almost no female candidates ran at all because they were required to not run for office, as a result of which 10,000 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 arms in 1996 when the conflict began. The state then realized that women could fight as well. The Maoist movements corrected women. Women’s involvement in the armed struggle and the Second People’s Movement at 2005 sent a subtle message that women could carry guns, they could do anything.

Rita Sah
Activist

Under the multi-party system, it was the need of the Madhesi community to be addressed, among which a state was most important. The needs of Madhesi women and Madhesi parties increased under the multi-party system, as leaders like Soula Rai, Beni Vallery and Chhathral Rai stepped into politics. It negated to this the issues of the Madhesi community and women in particular, have not progressed.

It was the Madhesi who for the first time raised the issue of inclusion, and the internal organization of the Madhesi, which inspired them to participate in the internal uprising, did not have the means and means that self-determination and self-government.

Kailash Rai
Researcher

A big turning point was the 1970 general election, which was the first general election in Nepal after 1931. It was the first time that women had the right to vote and to be voted for.

With the Maoist armed struggle, women, Dalits, sugals and other minority communities felt they were finally in positions of leadership, especially women as guerillas. In the community, Dalits, sugals and tribals were more active than women.

Durga Sob
Activist

On the other achievements after the restoration of democracy was the freedom to speak about persecution towards women, Dalits and sugal communities. A few women have been tipped in terms of education, employment, participation, ending unemployment, discrimination against women, and ending violence in the Sassit community.

What is the case for the armed conflict? It is clear, what type of conflict will be the struggle for the closure of 15 years? What did those 17,000 people sacrifice for their lives? Many Dalits lost their lives during the conflict, but what was the case when the people of my community also have to live like unconscious?

Pradip Pariyar
Activist

A few numbers were raised and the state was pod. The state was pod and the Madhesi community was pod. The state was pod and the Madhesi community was pod. The state was pod and the Madhesi community was pod. The state was pod and the Madhesi community was pod.

Ganesh Biswokarma
Activist

The Gorkha community participates in the People’s Movement. Following the 1990 constitution, which had strengthened the concept of democracy and introduced a new political system, the Gorkha community participated in the political process and gained representation in state institutions. However, the issue of discrimination and marginalization faced by the Gorkha community remained unresolved.

Dambir Chemjong
Tribhuvan University

The 1990 movement did not promise the jungal struggle. The main demand of the multi-party system under a constitutional monarchy was met after this. The indigenous peoples demanded that they be able to make political parties, but the Election Commission did not go down for this. The interim prime minister himself, during the 1941 general election, said that the state was pod, and the state was pod. The Gorkha community also supported the movement, demanding recognition and representation in state institutions.

Times
19 - 25 MARCH 2023 #1893

Nation
SAGLO SAMAJ

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.

Hari Sharma
Researcher

There have been momentous changes in my lifetime during the past 36 years since the First People’s Movement. However, did these changes lead to genuine transformation of state structures 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 federal constitution.

With the armed conflict of 1996-2006 we realised that the system was not able to fulfill 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 2015 Constitution seems to prioritise group rights, like the proportional electoral system that we have adopted, inductive 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 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 elite class 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 standoff from a sociopolitical point of view. Three former prime ministers have been in leadership for the past 30 years.

Over the last 20 years, a certain political party has 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 not have a monopoly over all its resources.

Democracy without political parties is unthinkable because we and our resources are under the stronghold 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 eyes 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 reservation, and where a select few have a monopoly over rights and wealth can never be democratic. The politics of prohibitions will always hinder the politics of pluralism.
Many of us have fond childhood memories of the spectral lights of fireflies. Shimmering little firebugs, they thrill us with their staccato flash light shows through the darkness. Across the world, even in Nepal, ponds and ditches are a kaleidoscope of bioluminescent splendour. But fireflies have long since disappeared from the urban areas of the world. In others, the numbers of fireflies have declined sharply, even promoting the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to list a Firefly Specialist Group in 1981.

"We grew up playing with fireflies, chasing them around Tulikiket, but these days are long gone," comments Tanka Bhusnik 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 have all contributed to the decline of fireflies across the globe. The decline of fireflies indicates a degradation of the ecosystem, especially wetlands. Yet, there has been no systematic study of the status, scope, and habitat of the firefly population 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 colors in New England.

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

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

In Pokhara, butterfly researcher Anuradha Parajuli says, "I have nostalgic memories of fireflies from my childhood, but at the city's concrete jungle, I hardly see even one firefly these days."

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

"Extra income from the firefly boat tours was crucial in subduing environmental issues in Malaysia's Kuala Selangor. Fireflies can promote unique, insect-based night tourism with indigenous communities, such as Tana and Chitwan in Nepal."

Says butterfly expert Shibas Khadka, previously with the National History Museum: "Firefly tourism opens up a lot of opportunities for finding more species. This, in turn, will promote their conservation."

But fireflies are still the biggest threat to fireflies as it reduces the beetle's breeding success. Bright lights from buildings, vehicles, and street lights 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 prey upon them. If conservation and tourism efforts should take all of these into account," adds Tanka Bhusnik Shrestha.

"Fireflies can be a gateway 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 range, 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 trapping 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.

Shabha Khadka 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."

**Soni Awale**

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

**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.**

**Diphloea marginiflava** was spotted at 2,000 m in Keveri, so was Luciola ovalis, but the most common species found throughout Nepal is Luciola cruciata, pictured left.

Fireflies prefer hot and humid conditions and are therefore found in the plains and the mid-altitude valleys of Nepal between July and August – its petals, streams, marshes, and rivers. Fireflies usually emerge 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 code, glowing to varying degrees during the larval 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 the 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 breakthrough 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 nature\'s habitat untouched
**Events**

- **Bilingual Language Exchange**
  - Held at the same time, this event is designed for those who speak multiple languages. Participants are grouped into pairs and given a time limit to speak in two languages, rotate with a new partner, and continue the conversation. The goal is to improve language skills and cultural understanding.

- **Star Gazing**
  -每月一次的活动，让参与者在专业望远镜的引导下，观测夜空中的星座和天体。活动将在晴朗的夜晚举办，参与者可以带上望远镜或租用。

- **Lounging in Ramathra**
  - 美丽的小镇拉马特拉，是一个悠闲的休息地点。活动将包括一场露天音乐会，参与者可以在大自然中欣赏音乐。

**Online Archives**

- **Free Netflix documentaries**
  - Netflix is offering a series of free documentaries on environmental issues.

- **Sustainable Summits 2020**
  - Summit on sustainable and renewable energy solutions. Participate in discussions with experts in the field.

**Dining**

- **Cafe Mozart**
  - A cozy café with Italian cuisine and a relaxed atmosphere.

- **Electric Pagoda**
  - A unique dining experience where electricity is the main theme.

**Air Quality Index**

- **Kathmandu, 12 - 18 March**
  - The AQI for Kathmandu is expected to be in the moderate range.

**Offside**

- **Kholo: A Love Story**
  - A romantic drama about love and tradition.

**Our Pick**

- **Boju Bajai**
  - A documentary on the traditional rice cultivation practices in Nepal.

**About Town**

- **Bhalu Tree**
  - A tree planting event organized by the local community.

- **Rumana's Tree**
  - A unique tree species that is believed to have medicinal properties.

**Dining**

- **Cafe Mozart**
  - A cozy café with Italian cuisine and a relaxed atmosphere.

- **Electric Pagoda**
  - A unique dining experience where electricity is the main theme.

**Online Archives**

- **Free Netflix documentaries**
  - Netflix is offering a series of free documentaries on environmental issues.

- **Sustainable Summits 2020**
  - Summit on sustainable and renewable energy solutions. Participate in discussions with experts in the field.

**Dining**

- **Cafe Mozart**
  - A cozy café with Italian cuisine and a relaxed atmosphere.

- **Electric Pagoda**
  - A unique dining experience where electricity is the main theme.

**Air Quality Index**

- **Kathmandu, 12 - 18 March**
  - The AQI for Kathmandu is expected to be in the moderate range.

**Offside**

- **Kholo: A Love Story**
  - A romantic drama about love and tradition.

**Our Pick**

- **Boju Bajai**
  - A documentary on the traditional rice cultivation practices in Nepal.

**About Town**

- **Bhalu Tree**
  - A tree planting event organized by the local community.

- **Rumana’s Tree**
  - A unique tree species that is believed to have medicinal properties.
Ashim Shakya’s digital hyper-realism

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

goddess, and old News houses transformed into guitars and statues. 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 psychological. Yet Shakya tends 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 Dhakshala Gallery will open on 24 March. Dawn 24, a wij of life is opening at Dhakshala Gallery on 22 April.

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. Khelo 2.0 Curator Uyen Nhu Huong Vong bought terracotta, ridden logs being sold for firewood to frame Shakya’s art in the gallery space, and proped them up like post-quake Kathmandu streets.

Shakya takes months to painstakingly work pixel-by-pixel on his work. “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. He has almost a smile.

As an introverted 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 Mahakali’s Epiphany and Mellow Dwellings II, which is his best-seller with eight copies sold.

“...the combination of music, the crowd and infrastructure were hard 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 in dreams, and he wakes up to visualise his idea. Shakya burst into Nepal’s art scene after the 2015 earthquake and blockade for his surrealistic digital images: animated temples floating weightlessly above a valley shrouded in smoke and dust, fearsome manifestations of anthropomorphic gods and goddesses, and old News houses transformed into guitars and statues.

Alisha Srijapati

The black walls, dark caves-like interior of the Van Gogh Room at Dhakshala Cafe deepens the apocalyptic mindscapes displayed in first physical exhibition of digital art by Ashim Shakya.

The manipulated images blend photography and graffiti images to communicate heritage loss, environmental degradation, climate change, ruinous urbanisation—all with gut-wrenching visuals.

A colossal cost- powered sewing machine stitches soulless suburbia into a bucolic countryside, pressure cookers let off steam from Kathmandu Valley’s red hot furnaces, 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 realities for everybody.

Over a dozen of Shakya’s artwork created since 2013 are on display at the gallery till 24 March, part of Tulika Kala’s solo exhibition series, Khelo 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 CITRadar Award last year (above).

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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 KP Oli’s own UML boycotted it.

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

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

TECH-WAVE: Samia Shah communicating with friends across the world, and unlimited entertainment are all perfectly wonderful reasons to use the Web, but we 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 solution. 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 subjects like 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 certification from the institution 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 institutions names in education, such as Yale, Stanford, Harvard, University of Michigan, UC Berkeley, Wharton, Cambridge and more. Coursera currently offers 100+ courses by partnering with universities across the globe, while EdX, a not-for-profit company, offers about 2,600 and was born from the idea of free and accessible education for all. Coursera’s strength lies in its 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, TedTalk is perfect. From the makers of the famous Ted Talks, TedTalk spreads ideas with animated video lessons that feed curious minds and offer good 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 aggregate site of excellent free educational resources, with over 1500 courses listed on it, along with over 1000 movies, free ebooks, and much more.

Ubiquity is a great option for those who want short, skill-smart videos that help build skills and navigate the job market or just pursue a hobby you always wanted to, such as learning the ukulele. The platform takes a democratic, self-fueled-for-all approach, which means that the course creators and instructors aren’t academically recognised but trained by Ubiquity to effectively administer a unique course. Ubiquity 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-economical 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, Alien and Udacity offer courses developed by themselves that are gender paced, and they’re well-known for online gaming courses. They also offer diploma courses and learning paths that offer related courses so that you can specialise better.

Kadence 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. Kadence 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 pyjamas at any time of the day or night, saving time on commute, 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 miss 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.

WOMEN OF THE WORLD: Australian Ambassador, Felicity Volk with female parliamentarians during flourish Women Summit (2017), this week in Kathmandu.

IN THE LINE OF FIRE: Rescue personnel perform emergency drill at Pashupati Hospital, on Wednesday.

PHOTO: KANCHAN RAI
PHOTO: KANCHAN RAI
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 Himalayas, 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 Kishanganga on 7 February, killing 209 people and damaging four hydroelectric 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 Renu Glacier in the Nanda Devi (7,264m) massif, and the disaster happened in winter when the super-glacial ponds were frozen.

Scientists have concluded that a 300m wide section of the face of Renu Peak broke off at 3,500m, and the kinetic energy of an estimated 22 million m$^3$ of falling rock also melted low deposits from a previous avalanche in 2016 (image right).

Ultimakaleshwar recorded its warmest January in six decades this year, and winter storms the previous week that had deposited new snow, too. Also, some parts had higher elevations, and rocks can come loose when the meltwater from the Chamoli flood were not caused by a GLOF as there were no significant glacial lakes in the area, writes a group of researchers led by Arun S Shrestha in a recent paper for the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

Researchers at the Unchehra Centre for Climate Change at Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru used geologic thickness mapper data to detect a sub-surface lake containing 4.5 million m$^3$ of water stored in a bedrock depression near the Nanda Devi Glacier terminus that could have caused the flood.

But scientists note that not all Himalayan hazards can be attributed to the climate crisis. An identical rock slip on Annapurna IV in Nepal in 2012 caused a flashflood on the Seti River that killed at least 72 people. The deadly earthquake-snow avalanche on Lamjung in 2013 killed nearly 200 people. A flood that blocked the Arun River in July 2017 was traced to a rock fall that caused a glacial lake to top over.

Such ‘buildcrater’ events, 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 earthquakes.

Gyawali says a solution is better-planned infrastructure that takes into account known hazards. As the Chamoli flood showed, expensive hydro-electric projects located closest to the highest mountains are more at risk.

He says smaller hydro-power 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 hydro-power projects are on rivers like the Tamur, Arun, Dudh Koshi, Rame Koshi and Budi Gandagi.

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, is now the added threat of climate-induced disasters.

Gyawali says: "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

To commemorate World Poetry Day on 21 March, Nepali Times caught up with young Nepali poets

Pratibha Tuladhar and Sahina Shrestha

...To hold with poetry, with memories, with my mother's food—maybe not my mother's belly,
To hold the memory of turning nineteen in quarantine. To hold with waiting. To hold with this poem. To hold with how long. (Mukhamorsch Limbu)

Your friend sends you half a poem by Mukhamorsch 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. But home can also be just a memory and you find out why as you read When I First came from Nepal by Limbu:

Min's falling 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 rest of sweet citrus flirting.

There are nights when you turn to poets and prayers. The world closes in upon you sometimes and sometimes pushes you away, leaving you on the fringes, staring at the inner circle, where you feel you do not belong.

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

Deepa Bohora beams at the night 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 Tidli, who showed me that I could also write poetry," she says of Yukta Sajalcharaya, 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 is her friend. But in 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 starting to spin 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.

Avand Vijay Gurung

Deepa Bohora

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 Kathmandu, so she becomes the little girl again, who runs through 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 twice a day. It 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 2000 campaign to double its visitor arrivals to 2 million last year, much of the hope was pinned on recruiting the volume of tourists from China and India.

Chinese Ambassador Heng Yen posted pictures of herself on social media on New Year's eve 31 December 2019 to promote Nepal among Chinese 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 said only 2,585 were for Chinese nationals.

This is more than 3% 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 passe becomes. 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 last year with the joint announcement of the roughly 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 travel. It shows details of inoculation and antibody tests through a QR code on a WeChat app. Although those are now in widespread use in the mainland for visits to restaurants, and domestic travel by train and planes, there is not yet an acceptable international standard for vaccine passes.

Besides, Beijing has continued to 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 tourists 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 vaccine 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 China 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 predict 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 tourism 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, the global 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.
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 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 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 we’re out there, defending the line, they become the ones who stand against us. And in that, they’re opposed by the government, while being tasked at oppressing us," says Chari.

And so his poem, Pyadhya, traverses the minds of traffic police, policemen and soldiers.

"Those toes locked inside boots bind too, they get stuck on by thieves and they yearn for the feel of the grass..." (translated from Pyadhya)

"Look at how many ways poetry has been used in history," Chari says. "Poetry was taught to us by pandits 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 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 garden," says Chari. Like Deepa Bhole, 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 Bhole and Chari have formed their own circles where poets come together to write and perform.

Chari and his friend Prakash Zimba, Rupesh Bhattachary and Shuvangi Khokha perform together under the name, Kaveree. In memory of the forgotten poets that frequented a small red house next to Kathmandu, during the reign of Pratap Malla. The king was the patron of the poets. And there in a red house in the heart of old Kathmandu, the streets would reverberate with verses as poets wove a mesh with their worlds. It is this memory that has been created into a legacy by the young poets, even as they struggle with other challenges of being poets.

"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 we also care 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 expectation of a predictable shelf-life, he says. And yet that does not deter the courage of Bhole, who has hopes someday to pull together a book of her poems. "That’s the dream, I’ve been carrying, Saturday, I’d like to do a book of my own," she says. "My words have done what my father’s sweet heart’s done.

When theikes of Rupi Kaur and Nayyina Waled stormed Instagram’s little house with their anecdotes, poetry appeared to have found a new platform for survival. 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 protest, the crowd chanted as Sapa Sani Pariyo invoked. At dawn Sita Nai Sambhu, refuting to the submission that Nita had to adhere to. And it is a sentiment that resonates with many women writers of the decade.

My country cries over burnt flag, borders, the birth ions gods, not the bodice of deadened dead girls.
My country says I am a Goddes.
Noha RayamGui’s a poem published in Lalit magazine is steeped in sadness and anger. There is no protest in her words:

My country asks me for my father’s name. Man who are dead or have become ghosts they own me more than the woman who birth me.
My country asks me to love this motherland:

"Writing poetry is creating something beautiful out of sometimes money and ugly emotions. It also means proclaiming and reclaiming power from those experiences," says RayamGui.

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 motherhood while being force to disrespect mothers, who are allowed to birth children but never allowed to be mothers.

But to not be citizens is not limited to being unable to pass down your identity to your children. It can sometimes be hanged in memories of who we were and who we have become. Away in Oxford, Mukhang Limbu’s life unfurls to his audience on his Instagram stories as he cooks masala 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 poems through foods as much as it does in unflinched, dashing sentences.

Away from home, we often discover ourselves more closely. Home, then becomes an idea. Home can be a slice 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 sit at home can be a sandwich sandwich eaten during a conversation with strangers you have just begun to trust.

And as those 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.
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-assisted support, the country might make a smooth transition from being a "least developed country to a slightly less poverty-ridden country.

This is all very good news and calls for jubilation. However, the government should declare a three-day national holiday so that we can all have a break and let the 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 committed to the country being firmly on the path to stability and prosperity that they haven’t had to lift a finger, and therefore have not had the time in the world for extra-curricular activities like trying to unceremoniously amuse 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 tizzy-hurry to attain middle-income status, and lose 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 from development projects meant to benefit the poorest of the poor, anymore.

Actually, we should strongly object to the UN downgrading 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 up with the industrialized 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 Ever-more Industrialized Country unless we collectively increase our carbon footprint. Which is why the government is bent on removing the last native forest in the eastern Tani to build a mega-sauna in Nijgad just as global relations is going belly-up. The idea is to strike while the iron is hot.

3. Another proof that we will soon be overtaking Western Industrialized Countries is our speedy vaccination drive. While Europe is still struggling to inoculate the elderly, Nepal has already given boosters 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 2.3kg of Uranium 238 isotopes in Rounska last week means that Nepal is on its way to secretly acquiring the necessary materials to proceed with the radioactive material into fissile U235 at its clandestine top-secret nuclear deterrent facility in Ghushan. We will soon have a stockpile of atomic bombs to add to the war bonds we already have, via Commodities Prachanda, Lallanbati, and Ranadi. 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 complained Prime Minister K P Oli to Pesh, and said no country in the world has a head of government with four kidneys. With these super-human demi-gods incaiting us, our state of steering abroad gloriously towards a flotilla of cockroaches.

7. And just in: Kathmandu is getting free 5G. This is a final proof that we are already a Last but not least Developed Country.