UP IN SMOKE

The air has finally cleared after a week in which hundreds of wildfires engulfed the Himalayan foothills and the Tarai, shredding the whole country in smoke. The Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu spiked to record levels for days on end (see graph).

Despite showers on Wednesday and Thursday over parts of the country, the fire calamity is not over yet. Projections show that the concentration of harmful particles below 2.5 microns in Kathmandu will continue to remain at unhealthy levels for another week.

One factor was the extended winter drought, with only 12mm of rain from October-March compared to 177mm, the same period last year in Kathmandu (see chart).

“Drought cycles are nothing new but this year we had an exceptionally dry winter, and pre-monsoon is also projected to be dry across the country,” says climate expert Namendra Dalal.

The forest floor also had more flammable biomass than usual because last year’s lockdown had prevented villagers from collecting fodder grass and deadwood.

The spring fire season of Baisakhi (April-May) has not even started yet, and although the 15mm of rain over the mid-mountains on Wednesday evening helped, we are not out of woods. This is also the season of lightning strikes which could spark off more fires.

The lesson from this year’s record-breaking fires is not to forget about it till next year, but prepare for it by spreading awareness about fires, and dissuading farmers from setting slopes alight to allow green shoots to grow for grazing.

The other lesson is that, bed as the smoke haze was, it just made existing urban pollution mainly from vehicle exhaust, worse.

Says atmospheric scientist Narad Paudel: “We have learnt that the absolute worst air quality in cities like Delhi, San Francisco, Sydney or Kathmandu is found when there are importing smoke from large nearby biomass fires. But it is the vehicles and industries that have large year-around emissions.”

The past week has been a perfect storm of wildfire, vehicle emissions, cross-border industrial pollution, as well as a thick plague of wind-driven smog from the Arabian and Thar deserts. The fires themselves were fanned by strong, up-valley afternoon winds.

The cumulative impact of vehicle exhaust, open burning, and industrial pollution throughout the year is much more harmful to health than a week of smoke, activists say.

Says clean air activist Ishwara Tuladhar: “This week’s forest fires just made the existing air pollution in Kathmandu worse, we should be doing a lot more to reduce vehicular exhaust, brick kilns and open garbage burning.”

Sonu Alewal
Political"
Political smokescreen

There is political mismanagement suffocating the country, and like the smoke shrouding Nepal for the past week, there’s no immediate end in sight.

An environmental crisis is never just about the environment; its causes have political, economic, and social underpinnings. Extreme weather events caused by climate change have led to displacement, displacement has led to conflict, and conflict has led to more destruction.

Disasters, too, have political roots. There is nothing natural about “natural disasters.” An earthquake does not kill people, corruption that allows building permits for illegal, standard-construction down at once, and flooding cannot always be blamed on heavy rains; they become human disasters because of poor drainage in new infrastructure.

Disaster preparedness is all about foreseeing risks, putting preventive measures in place, and when a calamity does strike, having search and rescue and rehabilitation tasks on standby.

The newly formed Disaster Preparedness and Risk Management Authority has a long list of the dangers that this country is cursed with: earthquakes, landslides and rockfalls, floods, droughts, wildfires, lightning strikes, glacial lake outburst floods, landslides. And this does not even include disease outbreaks, road traffic accidents and deaths due to preventable causes.

More than 7,000 children still die in Nepal every year from diseases that can easily and cheaply be prevented with clean drinking water, or smokeless kitchen fireplaces. That breaks down to 20 children who die every day across the country, mainly in poorer, remote parts of Nepal. They do not make the news because they are not all killed suddenly in one place where there’s a camera to record the tragedy. But it is an unacceptable crime that should garner banner headlines in the media: “9 Kids Died Today.”

But the media does not because that is the nature of the public relations beast. It only responds to a narrow definition of all the news that is fit to print. The news business is not happy with predicting disasters, they respond nearly always after a disaster strikes, and then there is a mad scramble to chronicle the damage.

The media is also not so good at covering slowly creeping disasters, the ones that get worse bit-by-bit and are difficult to measure—the increase in carbon dioxide concentration in the air, or the winter fog in the Tarai that is worsening every year.

Newspapers and journalists are not primed to cover positive trends, improvements, solutions, or progress. We take out adversarial role so seriously that most reporters think it is not their job to cover development.

In a democracy, media is the essential feedback loop to highlight problems professionally before they become unmanageable, or to cover individuals or communities that have reported obstacles and save lives by being prepared for known hazards.

The media’s failure in serving this essential public service function hurts governments, policy-makers and politicians off the hook. They can shrug and pretend that they didn’t have too much disaster to strike.

It is because Nepal’s politics is a disaster in itself, that we have this unprecedented wildfire catastrophe this week. In satellite pictures, we saw the entire country in Ramechhap, and the smoke haze was so thick it was off the charts. No one remembers it being so bad for so long. And it will happen again if the next government is not capable of dealing with it.

Those in government knew all along that this was the fire freeway. Every year, there are devastating fires that take a toll on trees, property and forests. This year, it should have come as no surprise that these fires would be worse because winter precipitation was only 16% of normal in Central Nepal.

The Met Dept could have sounded an early warning, but didn’t. Even worse, the fire started as early as November, and then spread to different parts of the country, until it became just one nationwide one.

Nepal’s leaders are too busy in political firefighting to fight actual fires that are ravaging the country. It took some time to douse the flames, when will it rain on Nepal’s discredited politics?

STATE OF DISILLUSIONMENT

Wildfires have never threatened Nepal as much as in recent days, and while the government has been slow to react, Nepal today is facing a full-blown climate crisis.

Karma Shrestha

**Wildfire and Air Pollution**

Nepal’s natural beauty is under threat from the mountain of pollution.

Sneha Koirala

**Women Survive Pandemic Economy**

Nearly 5 million more women were unemployed in Nepal as a result of the lockdown.

Hishur Saha

**Inequality and Women**

In agreement with the global rule that impact of poverty and gender gap is higher for women,

Rajeev Shrestha

**Youth Unemployment**

Since Nepal has never been severely hit by the global financial crisis, the impact on the Nepalese economy is relatively small.

Arya Shrestha

**Access to Childcare**

The lockdown cannot be allowed to become the norm, except for the poorest and most vulnerable.

Nepal Times

**Inequality of Education**

The lockdown has exposed the serious inequality between rich and poor in the country.

Sanjeev Shrestha

**Access to Education**

The lockdown has exposed the serious inequality between rich and poor in the country.

Nepal Times

**Access to Children**

The lockdown has exposed the serious inequality between rich and poor in the country.

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**Access to Women**

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**Access to Women**

The lockdown has exposed the serious inequality between rich and poor in the country.

Nepal Times
TIME TO MEET AGAIN: MANCHESTER

Have a healthy journey with all precautions taken down to the smallest detail for your in-flight safety.
Delayed dreams for Korea-bound Nepalis

Nepal migrant workers have been waiting for more than a year to join jobs in Korea

Upasana Khadka

From his early years, Bhim Oli from Dang knew that he wanted to go abroad to work and earn so that he could support his family. His dream, like that of many others, was to work hard and make a comfortable living for his family.

On the top of that list for overseas job destinations was Korea. But the suspension of the South Korea’s Employment Permit Scheme (EPS), language training, food and lodging expenses in Kathmandu were exorbitant.

For the majority of Nepali migrant workers, the Gulf and Malaysia are final destination countries. For EPS, Korea was a means to an end. He took a stint in Qatar as a waiter so he could save up enough to focus on his Korean language tests.

The now familiar acronym EPS usually conjures up images of tens of thousands of Nepalis lining up to register for the mandatory Korean language tests. Since 2008, over 65,000 Nepalis have applied for jobs in South Korea through this program in the agriculture and manufacturing.

The dream itself has been taken by a staggering 65,000 Nepalis, but less than one third of the test-takers eventually get a job in Korea.

After telling his 18 months in Qatar, Oli returned to Nepal with savings of Rs 50,000. He was out of luck as the test-takers eventually get a job in Korea.

“I studied around 18 hours a day for the language test—had not studied hard that for my SSLC, 12th or Bachelors, but I finally passed it,” says Oli. Undertaken, he studied, it was unexpected for the job.

92,000 individuals took the test that year, of which only 12,000 passed. Sedat was selected to work in an aluminum company. He was thrilled when the cab driver informed him in May 2020, to let workers head to South Korea. But none of the migrants have been able to travel.

Frustrated, and knowing that there were thousands of others in his situation, Sedat started a group called EPS Struggle Group and staged a protest at the Mandala in Kathmandu. They have held three such protests in the last year.

The group has met labour ministers, Korean and Nepali authorities. While they are not yet satisfied by the promises they remain persistent.

The absence of a Nepal embassy in Seoul for the last two years has affected active diplomacy. The issuance of visas has been stopped due to public health concerns. Until last week, Nepal was included in the red zone. But as of last week, they have lifted Nepal from this category and partially started issuing visas in certain categories, like for students,” says Indra Gautam, Director of the EPS Department. “Gradually, they will start issuing visas for EPS workers as well and we are putting in the necessary requests.

The men who have been waiting report that they have not just lost face in their families, but also money and suffered overwhelming mental stress.

“We have invested so much time and money and cannot afford to give up on our dreams. But this has been dragging on for so long, we cannot invest in businesses here, migrate to another country because we will be left either here or there as this will eventually work out,” he says.

Since 2008, Nepalis have been taking their chances in this highly competitive program alongside competitors from 15 other countries from South and Southeast Asia. The annual quote has fluctuated, which is attributed to the domestic labour demand in Korea as expressed by employers, diplomatic fees, and the number of workers who oversubscribe their legally allotted time that can penalise the country quota in the subsequent years.

The volume of workers from Nepal and Cambodia, in particular, had become relatively more important over the years. One of the reasons for this is the rising share of those workers in the agricultural sector. The number to be hired from Nepal remains uncertain.

Nepalis who pass the EPS exams are educated, whereas the jobs they are offered are sawing wood, digging ditches, as ‘Girr’, dangerous and demoralising. Mismatched expectations along with dependencies from families are unbearable for some.

Some migrants succeed to the pressure as has been previously reported in Nepal Times. Of the 143 deaths of Nepalis between 2009 and 2018, for example, 63 were suicide cases which get the attention of policymakers from both countries but little by way of action.

It is not just new workers who have been impacted by Covid-19. Of the estimated 10,000 EPS workers stranded, a significant number are committed workers who completed over four years of stay already and were returning.

The Korean government has imposed a ‘4 years 10 months’ cap, to ensure that migrant workers under EPS cannot qualify for permanent residency, which is available to other foreigners after they reside legally for five years.

Prakash Shrestha, a member of the EPS Struggle Committee, is a returnee migrant, who wants to go back to Korea to the same employer. “Once we land in Korea, we already dream of returning to Korea as committed workers for another 4 and ten months, so we can double our savings,” he says.

One of many calls is organised by the EPS struggle Committee in which Nepali migrant workers presented from going to Korea have taken part (October 12). Prakash Shrestha and others have met with Nepali and Korean officials (above) in an effort to raise concerns about the jobs waiting for them in Korea.

Prior to moving to Korea, Shrestha worked in a restaurant in Kathmandu but was not able to save much with his monthly earnings of Rs 12,000.

He competed with 64,000 individuals taking the EPS exam in 2014. His starting salary in Korea was Rs 12,000. By the time he left in 2019, he was earning close to Rs 30,000 a month.

He was supposed to return at the end of February 2020 as a ‘committed worker’ but has been stuck in Nepal. “I was so close to flying out and resuming my job that would have been safe for the next four years. What a difference a few days can make,” adds Shrestha.

“My employer has been patient and is willing to wait for me. Having worked with the same employer for four and a half years, we have developed trust so I feel fortunate,” says Shrestha. Like many others, he is now waiting for the announcement to be allowed to fly back to Korea.

Global IMF E-card money card

Global IMF Bank is launching ‘Global E-Card’ Card to pay the purchase of goods and services from about 60,000 merchants in about 140 countries. The customer can pay up to Rs 600 from Nepal.

GE Grid Infrastructure

GE Renewable Energy Grid Solutions business has now an Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) strategy to upgrade three hydroelectric stations in Shrir, Barathal and supply which will deliver uninterrupted electricity to households in the power scarce regions.
The road to success

How hard work and patience helped lift a bus conductor in Ilam to becoming an entrepreneur

Naresh Newar in Ilam

It is a story that 37-year-old Sushil Thapa had been waiting all these years to tell his 13-year-old daughter, one that panned across episodes of his struggles before she was born.

When he was 22 years old, Thapa eloped with the love of his life, his college friend, Nisha Fago. Little did he know at that time that his family would discourage him for marrying someone from a different ethnicity.

When he entered his home with his bride, his parents asked him to choose between his Limbu wife and them. He naturally chose the one he had already committed himself to for life.

"Being the only son in my family, I thought they would welcome us home. But instead, they asked us to leave. We left with nothing except a few kitchen utensils and a blanket," says Thapa.

In their journey together of being estranged from their respective families, Nisha and Sushil supported each other. "She was the one reason that I managed to survive and she gave me a lot of confidence. And today, I tell everyone my wife was the one behind my success," explains Thapa.

The newly-wed couple did not have any cash with them at the time, so Fago sold all her jewellery to start a small cosmetic shop in Ilam Bazar. The shop ran successfully for some time, but the couple had to pay off and eventually ended up selling their shop.

Plunged into financial hardship, Thapa and Fago were faced with the challenge of finding jobs. While college days were dotted with the memory of their romance, incomplete college degrees did not do much in terms of job prospects.

The only employment Thapa could find was to work as a bus conductor, something he did not want to do. But he had no choice.

"Society looks down on khalsai and it’s one of the most undervalued jobs where you can easily be exploited. But I was determined to start somewhere to put food on the table," says Thapa.

He managed to save money and could afford one meal a day for both himself and his wife.

In the months that followed, he learned to drive. When he found a job as an ambulance driver for a hospital, life started looking up.

The salary was good and there were other benefits. He was able to save some money and eventually he bought a second-hand Maruti van and hired a driver to run his taxi service, while he continued working as an ambulance driver.

In a few years, he bought an off-road jeep and started running long route taxi service from Ilam to Kathmandu. His journey as an entrepreneur had begun.

"I learned a lot about how to become a taxi entrepreneur. I also managed to secure a loan to buy more jeeps that helped to increase our income," says Thapa.

Today, their family is doing very well, Thapa says.

He has managed to buy a piece of land in Dumak, where he plans to build a small house for his family.

"Going to foreign countries for education or jobs should not always be our alternative. There are lots of opportunities in Nepal. If you know how to tap into them. But of course, it takes time to become successful," he says.

And he throws in a nugget of wisdom: "In our life, there is no work that we should be ashamed of. What we should be ashamed of is being a social parasite."
Getting away with killer liquor

One year after 29 people were killed by homemade alcohol, culprits remain unpunished

Late last month, the 16th anniversary of gang rape and murder in Dhaulagiri, 15 people died of a mysterious illness in a single village (in Mahottari). A few weeks later in a Dhanusa neighbourhood, another 18 people died with similar symptoms—severe headache and vomiting.

These two tragedies have long disappeared from the media headlines. And so has their cause: the consumption of homemade liquor.

Nepal has laws against adulteration of food and the sale of edibles past their expiry date. Yet, a year after the deaths in Dhaulagiri, 2, no one has been found responsible, there has been no justice, and no compensation for the families of the victims.

Rajendra Devi Singh, her husband and many others had eaten and drunk there, she killed my husband,” says Rajendra Devi Singh, adding that the woman was later chased out of the village.

Most alcoholic drinks contain various concentrations of the organic compound ethyl alcohol (C2H5OH) which is used in cleaning fluids and disinfectants, but it is also present in wine and beer, and has addictive psychoactive properties. However, when alcohol and not just alcohol is inhaled, it can cause blindness and even death.

“Earlier, the villagers used to sell alcohol from molasses or grain, but as consumption grew they started adding all kinds of material including urea fertilizer,” explains journalist Rekhamala Mahato. “Driven by demand, there are many underground distilleries under which there’s no regulation and quality control. The cases who die are the poor who cannot afford commercial alcohol.”

Mahato says that despite the series of deaths in the past year, there are no entries in the police records of people who have died of alcohol poisoning. “There is absolutely no government monitoring of this problem, there is no concerted effort to raid the distilleries and confiscate the equipment,” he adds. A month later in Dhanusa, 14 people died with similar symptoms, and there too the locals at first feared a coronavirus outbreak. The local authorities then went house-to-house to ask about where the dead had been in the past 24 hours, and that is how it was traced to a local house selling homemade liquor.

“People cannot stop people from drinking, the fatalities are due to poor governance and a weak state,” says consumer rights activist Jyoti Bansiya. “They have a two laws against harmful food items, even though they do not specifically relate to poisonous or adulterated alcohol. But people who consume alcoholic beverages declare that selling the product is liable to be tried for manslaughter. The Alcohol Law of 1975 stipulates taxes on the sale of alcohol products, and also prohibits the sale of alcoholic beverages without a license.”

However, despite the spate of deaths, no one has been tried and punished for these crimes in Dhanusa and Mahottari last year. In fact, some of the perpetrators are carrying on with the same business.

“Usually, the police act after the deaths have occurred. What is the point of tariff? Preventive action could have saved the lives,” says Mayor Sah. “We are not going to solve this problem if we catch the culprits after people have died, and then let them go after some time in jail.”

However, the issue in Dhanusa and Mahottari is that even one year later, no one has been caught. So there is no question of letting anyone go. Police inspector Prakash Bista says one of the sellers of liquor was investigated after the events last year, but could not be arrested because of the lack of evidence.

“Surely is it means to be poor, we have a hand-to-mouth existence,” says a relative of one of the victim, Sivanarayan Mahato. “We do not have the power to pursue justice or compensation.”

This week’s Saglo Samaj takes us to Mahottari and Dhanusa where it has been almost a year since 29 people died by consuming poisonous liquor. Yet those who produced it are unpunished.
Nepal relaxes entry for tourists

After much criticism about unnecessary hassles for tourists, the Nepalese government has further relaxed entry formalities for foreigners arriving by air.

Tourists visiting Nepal no longer have to stay in mandatory hotel quarantine for five days as long as they have a PCR negative report before boarding, and again test negative on arrival in Kathmandu. They have to stay in a hotel until negative test result. Tourists will also now be eligible for visa on arrival at Kathmandu airport, as long as they can provide necessary documents about their itinerary approved by the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) or the Department of Tourism (DoT). The government has also done away with the $5,000 travel insurance requirement.

Although at first glance it looks like the government has streamlined a previously cumbersome and confusing process, tour agencies say it still leaves a lot of grey areas that could still create unnecessary muddles.

"Why do arriving foreign passengers have to provide travel itineraries approved by the tourism authorities? What if they are here to visit relatives or friends?" asks an exasperated airline executive, whose job it is to check passenger documents before they board flights to Kathmandu.

Indeed, the new directive stipulates that the same documents that are needed for visa on arrival also have to be presented at the check-in counter before Nepali-bound flights. These include: a PCR negative report taken not earlier than 72 hours before departure or a vaccine certificate, travel itinerary approved by the NTB or DoT, proof of hotel booking.

The Cabinet decision was made on 17 March, but details were only published in English on 29 March. Although the decision to relax rules seems to be aimed for the spring tourist season, it comes a little too late and after many potential visitors had already cancelled.

"Most trekkers or mountaineers make preparations months in advance. Very few will just get up and go because they can get visas on arrival," said one trekking agent.

The government's rules have flip-flopped with each new guideline in the past year, adding to the confusion. The latest directive does clear the air, but it is still vague and leaves a lot to the discretion of immigration officers at Kathmandu airport.

Many tourists had cancelled plans to visit Nepal because of the difficulty in getting visas in countries where there are no Nepali missions, and even where there are embassies, they complained that staff in the visa section were either not picking up the phones for enquiries or did not have the correct information.

No quarantine required, and visa on arrival allowed now, but conditions apply.

The Tourist Arrival Management Protocol 2077 passed by the Cabinet states: "Tourists wishing to visit Nepal should have their agents contact the DoT or NTB for a recommendation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Department of Immigration and convey the necessary documents to the tourists."

Among the list of documents required for visa on arrival, are airline check-in and a recommendation letter from Department of Tourism/Nepal Tourism Board for participation in any tourism activities within Nepal.

Again, that list does not mention the recommendation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Immigration Department. Nor does it clarify what the requirements are, for foreign passengers who are not going on a trek or expedition.

Aside from the confusing discrepancy, adding another layer of bureaucracy will turn tourists off, say tourism entrepreneurs.

The directive requires all arriving tourists to get a PCR test immediately upon arrival in coordination with the concerned Association (or their own cost) if the report is negative, tourists can continue their itinerary...if positive, the tourist must continue to stay in hotel quarantine..."

The directive comes as Nepal braces for a second wave, mainly from travellers from India where there has been a surge in new cases. The daily new case load exceeded 76,000 on Monday for the first time this year.

To be sure, there are countries with much stricter requirements. China, for instance, actively discourage foreign visitors with a 1-month quarantine and an swabs. Some European countries do not allow their citizens to leave the country unless they can prove it is an essential reason.

Nepal's new directive does not lay out any extra precautions for passengers from Delhi, the only Indian city from where flights are allowed to Kathmandu at present. For Indian tourists arriving in Nepal through air route, the existing provisions will remain as per the Nepal-India Travel Bubble Agreement, it says.
Ghandhyam Rajkarnikar still has fond memories of the wide pond near his house in Kathmandu. As a child, he played along the edge of Kumal Pokhri, named after the lotus that once grew profusely on it. The lotus does not grow anymore, the pond has shrunk, and in the past months its water has been drained to make way for commercial development. Wild grass has taken over the dry bed, where a fisherman used to take his boat out to catch fish to sell in the market. “We would ask him to pick us some lotus flowers from the middle of the pond,” recalls Rajkarnikar, now 80, and whose family owns Krishna Prasad Bhandari, one of the oldest bakeries in town.

Ever since Mayor Kishya Sundar Shukla of Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) tried to repeat what he tried to do in Rani Pokhari, heritage conservationists have been up in arms to stop the use of concrete to beautify a water body that served to recharge Kathmandu’s groundwater and had cultural significance.

Mayor Shukla’s team calls it a “fusion” project to merge modern urban needs with traditional heritage. But activists have been up in arms about the use of concrete, and the construction of a forced cement lotus in the middle of the pond.

“If you do not allow aquatic plants and animals to grow naturally, they will die and that is why the use against concrete is dangerous for biodiversity,” says land and water management

Kathmandu Valley’s ponds need to be revived, not just restored

- Alisha Sijapati and Sahina Shrestha
When it comes to conservation of ponds, Bhaktapur is leading the way and involving local communities in conserving and restructuring ponds. Join our video team on a trip.

Lost lotus ponds

The sky is overcast, Bhaktapur’s Kamal Bhagya is dotted with people enjoying the serenity of this ancient pond above. Sixty-year-old Chandra Bir Pradhan wades past them, pushing a trash trolley, collecting litter. He has been the sole caretaker here for decades, employed by the Kamal Bhagya Sthabat Samiti to assure the lotus pond is clean. In the next few months, this historic pond will be handed over to the Bhaktapur Metropolitan City by the Nepal Army, and it wants to ensure more visitors and augment local income.

Heritage activists, historians, and water heritage conservationists have hailed Bhaktapur as an example of how heritage should be preserved amidst rapid urban expansion. The city’s efforts to revive its ponds and cultural sites has important lessons for Kathmandu, Patan, Thimi, and Kirtipur.

Patan’s Kamal Pokhari, for example, was buried under a parking lot by the Lalitpur Metropolitan City itself. And its idea of beautification is to use the remaining pond with glazed tiles and a fountain in the middle. The Kamal Pokhari in Bode, Thimi is embalmed in a legal battle between the public and one Gyalpo Sherpa who claims that he had bought the pond from a woman called, Kanchi Pokhri. The locals argue that she had contracted the pond for fish farming during the Panchayat years, and would have no legitimacy for its sale.

Elsewhere in Kathmandu, there are only memories of extinct ponds. Few know that the Dasheshwori Stadium is built over a vast lotus pond. Other ponds now have structures like the Chhupra Centre built over them. With the ponds gone, so have the rituals, festivities, and folklore that were associated with them.

Kathmandu’s ponds were not just seen in the sentiments of the local News people, they were a well-thought-out plan by people of the past who understood the valley’s ecology. The loss of those ponds is a loss of that knowledge in a world that is fast losing to invasive urban development.


directly for agriculture, and for flood control. This knowledge was passed down to the Licchavi and Malla periods.

The ancient kingdom built an elaborate network of akhikha canals that channelled water from springs on the Valley rim to ponds, till water spots, and wells. The News people of the valley created three types of ponds with varying functions to maintain the hydrological balance.

Ponds upstream from towns acted as buffer reservoirs that stored rainwater, and recharged the aquifers. They also helped reduce the risk of floods in the settlement during the monsoon, and in the dry season provided water for irrigation and household use.

Rani Pokhari and other ponds in Lainchaur, Lagankhel, Pulchowk, Riddhik Pokhari, Bhaktapur’s Rani Pokhari and Bhati; Pokhari are some examples of ponds built for this purpose.

The ponds built within settlements were smaller and were mainly used to recharge aquifers and for rainwater harvesting. The recently restored Pim Bahal Pokhari in Patan, Purna Chand, Khilch Pokhari and Bhati Pokhari are examples of these local ponds.

Ponds downstream from settlements had flood and landslide control functions, with Chokh Pokhari in Patan being an example.

Kathmandu Valley was hydrological civilization that understood the value of water conservation, and had an intricately engineered water management system sited to the topography. It dated back to the Khas and Licchavi era, 1500-2000 years ago, and passed down to the more recent Malla period. Hills and slits walls in the towns were fed through aquifers, and to ensure that there was flow of water even during the dry season, ponds were built as reservoirs to recharge the groundwater. These ponds were in turn fed through akhikha canals.

In the 1980s, the Rasam introduced piped water, replacing the traditional water system. But the modern systems were not able to cope with the rapid urbanization of Kathmandu, especially in the past 30 years.

One of the reasons Kathmandu Valley civilisation thrived in the past was because of its intricate water system, of which ponds were an important part,” explains Joshi.

Much of this network of canals and ponds are now destroyed. The stone spouts are mostly dry. The Ring Road expansion destroyed much of Patan’s underground akhikha canals. And the ponds started going dry because of the loss of replenishment through the water channels, and encroachment.

Encroachment conservatively say that Kamal Pokhari and other ponds in Kathmandu Valley need to be revived, not just reconstructed. This meant restoring the original water channels and the natural well characteristics with an understanding of their ecological and cultural importance.

Nepali Times asked Shakyu to respond to the criticism. He said, “Kamal Pokhari was already a lost case, sewage and garbage was being dumped. As soon as the contractors finish their work we will fill it up with water.”

The KMC says it will “beautify” Kamal Pokhari and will retain its originality. The water will be recycled so that it does not gather algae.

Engineer Prem B Shrestha Ranjit is coordinator of the Kamal Pokhari Restoration Project, and says, “There will be smaller ponds at the four corners of the pond, lots of lotus flowers will be grown to ensure that the pond retains its identity.”

Ranjit disclosed that the pond will be first filled with its million litres of Melamchi water, and topped off with water pumped from a deep well.

Activists say all this is proof that the KMC has no idea about the ecological and cultural importance of Kathmandu Valley’s network of ponds like Kamal Pokhari and Rani Pokhari. They point to Gobhara Pokhari in Hanmandu which was also lined with concrete in the name of “redevelopment.”

According to the Ancient Monuments, Monuments Preservation Act of 2003, using concrete in a historical monument is prohibited and is subject to penalty. With an approaching, Ram Bahadur Kunwar of the Department of Archaeology refused to comment.

Sanjey Adhikari of the non-profit group Pro-Public has filed a petition at the Supreme Court to stop reconstruction at Kamal Pokhari. But three months have passed since, and there have been no hearings.

As the struggle between the city and heritage activists drags on, Kamal Pokhari is dusty and overgrown with weed. Stray dogs roam about, and neighbourhood children play in the dry bed.

Ponds act as biogasifiers, they allow the intake of rainwater into the groundwater which helps maintain the groundwater table,” says Joshi. “When the surface is sealed with concrete, rainwater cannot reach the ground and the groundwater table drops.”

Without ponds and open fields to ensure that Kathmandu Valley’s groundwater is recharged, there is the danger of sinkholes and land subsidence. The valley’s early inhabitants had a network of ponds to recharge aquifers, so water would be stored underground for use in the dry season through wells.

While most big cities in the world are located near a sea coast or alongside rivers, Kathmandu Valley had its own unique system. People settled on elevated land and the fertile river beds were, and under a parking lot by the Lalitpur Metropolitan City itself. And its idea of beautification is to use the remaining pond with glazed tiles and a fountain in the middle. The Kamal Pokhari in Bode, Thimi is embalmed in a legal battle between the public and one Gyalpo Sherpa who claims that he had bought the pond from a woman called, Kanchi Pokhri. The locals argue that she had contracted the pond for fish farming during the Panchayat years, and would have no legitimacy for its sale.

Elsewhere in Kathmandu, there are only memories of extinct ponds. Few know that the Dasheshwori Stadium is built over a vast lotus pond. Other ponds now have structures like the Chhupra Centre built over them. With the ponds gone, so have the rituals, festivities, and folklore that were associated with them.

Kathmandu’s ponds were not just seen in the sentiments of the local News people, they were a well-thought-out plan by people of the past who understood the valley’s ecology. The loss of those ponds is a loss of that knowledge in a world that is fast losing to invasive urban development.

Nepali Times asked Shakyu to respond to the criticism. He said, “Kamal Pokhari was already a lost case, sewage and garbage was being dumped. As soon as the contractors finish their work we will fill it up with water.”

The KMC says it will “beautify” Kamal Pokhari and will retain its originality. The water will be recycled so that it does not gather algae.

Engineer Prem B Shrestha Ranjit is coordinator of the Kamal Pokhari Restoration Project, and says, “There will be smaller ponds at the four corners of the pond, lots of lotus flowers will be grown to ensure that the pond retains its identity.”

Ranjit disclosed that the pond will be first filled with its million litres of Melamchi water, and topped off with water pumped from a deep well.

Activists say all this is proof that the KMC has no idea about the ecological and cultural importance of Kathmandu Valley’s network of ponds like Kamal Pokhari and Rani Pokhari. They point to Gobhara Pokhari in Hanmandu which was also lined with concrete in the name of “redevelopment.”

According to the Ancient Monuments, Monuments Preservation Act of 2003, using concrete in a historical monument is prohibited and is subject to penalty. With an approaching, Ram Bahadur Kunwar of the Department of Archaeology refused to comment.

Sanjey Adhikari of the non-profit group Pro-Public has filed a petition at the Supreme Court to stop reconstruction at Kamal Pokhari. But three months have passed since, and there have been no hearings.

As the struggle between the city and heritage activists drags on, Kamal Pokhari is dusty and overgrown with weed. Stray dogs roam about, and neighbourhood children play in the dry bed.

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**EVENTS**

**Sukhbaroe**
Enjoy a weekly Friday evening market at Sukhbaroe, with a mix of intriguing local products to be added every week, as it goes along. Support Nepal’s small businesses, women-owned and led, as well as other unique locally manufactured items at this special weekly market.

2 April, 6pm, Sukhbaroe Cafe

**After School Music**
Buy local products, listen to some live music and witness live puppetry, and open mic sessions at the Table Marker by Terra Family.

3 April, 7pm, the panna house

**Kholo 2.0**
Digital Art. Razesh Budhathoki's work will be on display as a part of the seventh month-long exhibition series, Tulku's Khātā 2.0 - A Cycle of Life.

17 February - 27 August, Dan Sagh College, Bhaktapur cafe

**Biloba Language Exchange**
Become fluent in any language while making friends with native speakers online. Get access to a host and gain your meaning skills, both oral and written. Visit their online page.

4 April, 6pm

**ONLINE ARCHIVES**

**Shilphee Theatre**
Plays from Shilphee Theatre are on a YouTube channel. Watch COFA, and their adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s Henrik Ibsen’s <i>Peer Gynt</i>.

**DINING**

**Fresh Bakes**
Home in town, fresh bakes set up a few tables and serves a myriad of baked items, cakes, coffee and a variety of doughnuts. Pick up their pasta-filled doughnuts or browse through other food products for breakfast, lunch or dinner.

0505702288, Thamel

**The Fusion Bar**
Here’s some magic from our bar - unwind by the poolside at the Fusion Bar in the Saway’s Hotel to indulge in the sense-of-ambience. Witness the fines art of mankind, tending you with the array of drinks and food.

(01) 4675717, Boudhanath

**Patan Museum Café**
In the eyes of calm in the midst of a bustling metropolis and indulge in delectable food and beverages, at Patan Museum Café.

(01) 3303671, Patan Durbar Square

**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

KATHMANDU, 26 March - 1 April

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The graph above shows how smoke that enveloped Kathmandu above the Air Quality Index (AQI) is recorded for each day from March 26 to April 1. On the rise in seven days this week, Kathmandu’s city centre recorded dangerous concentrations of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns. All who observers on Wednesday and Thursday showed up less temporarily, but on to that reality as we head to another dry spell after the week. Check out our lead on the trends (page 5), and its graphical representation (page 9).

**OUR PICK**

What We Do In the Shadows, a horror-comedy reimagined by New Zealand writer-director Jemaine Clement and Taika Waititi, follows centuries-old vampires scientists Vago, Vladislav and Dracula, who grapple with the complexities of life in Wellington in the 21st century, while trying to track a newly turned vampire in the business of the undead experiences. Starring Clement, Waititi, Jonathan Brugh, Miriama Rirripa, and Mia Bodyth.
The anatomy of a flower

Neera Joshi’s unique paintings of plants combine scientific accuracy with botanical art

Joshi got her Master’s degree in Botany from Tribhuvan University in 1995. Although her father, Ramkrishna Joshi, was a noted artist, it was only in 1998 that she considered art as a career after her Master’s. “Becoming an artist had never crossed my mind, although I was raised surrounded by art,” she says. For picking up the paintbrush relatively later in life, Joshi hopes that she will bring new life to her work. She says, “But I studied botany.”

She studied in Nepal, a country rich in biodiversity and scientific accuracy. She has been working with botanical artists since 1998. Although botanical artists also work with herbaceous, a collection of preserved plant specimens, she usually documents flowers in her field sketchbook, later referring to them to translate her art to watercolour. If the plant is small and manageable, she says, “But I studied botany.” Joshi’s collection of botanical art is the best in Nepal. Her work has been displayed at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, and more recently at the Weizen International Botanical Art Exhibition, whose three of her paintings were exhibited virtually, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Most Nepalis don’t know indigenous flowers from exotic ones, which is especially concerning at a time when conservation of biodiversity is so important,” says the artist, who also trains students and budding Nepali artists at her Studio Petals. Joshi says, “This will help in education, conservation and research.”

Neera Joshi’s collection of botanical art, The Beauty of Nepal/Flower, will be exhibited in Kathmandu. (ARTICLE)
NATURE MANTRA: World wildlife fund Nepal appointed Nepal’s singing nun Ani Choying Drolma as its Goodwill Ambassador. Picture: Chhewang Gurung of WWF.

FIRE DRILL: Local fire brigades in Kathmandu training on firefighting, rescue and hazardous material handling.

SUPPORT BURMA: fights against to the citizens in Burma demanding total release of political prisoners and restoration of democracy.

TECH-AWAY
Sania Shah

If you have not jumped on the mobile wallet bandwagon already, or if you have dived too fast but want to know more before diving into the digital payment lifestyle, here is a quick recap of the top five e-wallet platforms in Nepal.

eSewa: Nepal’s first online payment gateway (outside of e-banking) was launched in 2009 and has grown to become the top choice when it comes to mobile wallets. eSewa got the first mover advantage in the fintech sector, having accumulated more partners and built many tie-ups so that users can beef up a true one-stop-shop for regular payments.

IME Pay: IME Pay is a relatively new player in the digital wallet market, but being associated with one of the largest remittance companies, IME Remittance, it is not minor. IME started late but caught up fast by launching aggressive, widespread marketing campaigns across media and brand building tactics like sponsoring major Nepali TV shows that receive thousands of viewers every day.

PrabhuPay: PrabhuPay is a fintech platform that is a subsidiary product of the corporate giant Prabhu Group, comes with its perks. PrabhuPay lets users pay various utility bills as well as transfer funds within the PrabhuPay network. The app is simple and easy to use, but customers have mentioned issues with KYC form updating, lack of partnerships with popular banks and the much-maligned feature of peer-to-peer money transfer that other mobile wallets offer by default.

With a smooth, simple UI/UX along with a web application to match. Kathal is a step ahead with easy onboarding of new merchant accounts, a real-time dashboard, and automated reports, salary distributions, and other e-banking options for companies, easy website integration for e-commerce sites, and a creatively pitching itself as a marketing strategy for lesser known businesses that need online visibility.

Having tied up with over 40 banks, Kathal is no small fish and is in the market for the long haul. Besides being convenient and offering the same services as eSewa (or similar features), Kathal makes itself known for being not only customer-friendly, but business-friendly to boot.

THERE are an estimated 4 million digital wallet users in Nepal now. They have graduated from ATM debit/credit card to e-banking and mobile banking to the M-wallet movement. A smartphone with a mobile number with internet access is the only tool one needs to make payments quickly and conveniently.

IME Pay is catching up with the rest. However, a lack of transparency and information for customers along with occasional technical issues confirm that IME Pay has some ways to go. This is a classic case proving a new business lesson: investing time and effort in consistent product development and improvement is more valuable for long-term loyalty than spending on marketing and dramatically increasing sizes.

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Following the footsteps of IME Pay, PrabhuPay similarly partnered digital payment systems. The Nepalese government is working towards digital adoption by digitizing government transactions (due to tax payment options), launching the National Payment Gateway, establishing many projects like ConnectIPS, ContactRTGS and Electronic Cheque Clearing (ECC). But nationwide restrictions imposing a one-time transaction limit of $4,500, daily limit of Rs10,000 and monthly limit of Rs50,000 force the masses to heavily depend on physical cash and cheque payments. With digital literacy awareness, infiltration for new users from the private players themselves and incentive-based strategies built for disadvantaged people, Nepal’s fintech market can grow.

The future is here. We know a healthy digital economy can be corruption-free, efficient and empowering for Nepal across all income strata.

Sana Shah states that “digital technology, tech can help Nepal rise.”

Water, electricity, TV and other utility bills, school fees, movie tickets, flight or bus tickets, insurance premium payments, important fees to be paid to government bodies, or mobile balance top-ups, eSewa is the go-to app for it all. Transferring funds from one user to another is just a few finger taps away, making it easy for Nepalis to lend or borrow money, casually purchase consumer goods and even help family and friends financially. To ensure user security, eSewa has enabled biometric security (fingerprint verification) as well as PIN and password features. That said, the app does store users’ personal data to regularly enable transactions, as do all such apps.

Kathal: Fast-forward to 2017, Kathal gives eSewa a run for its money, as it were, quickly rising to become Nepal’s second most-preferred e-wallet, thanks to a strong, creative tech team. Kathal set the new standard of a digital payment app with “The Voice of Nepal” to become the official singing and payment partner boasted its popularity and brand status. With a few upgrades on the mobile app, lag and glitch fixing, and a significant push in tie-ups with partners, PrabhuPay can keep up with its competitors.

With other digital wallet platforms entering the scene, such as Pay2, a promising entrant that enticing users with high cashback offers, and iPay, a Muncha.com product that is best suited to online shoppers; Nepal’s fintech sector is moving at a rapid pace. The Covid-19 crisis catalysed this trend, with users forced to use digital payment methods for necessary money transfers during the lockdown in 2020. With smartphones becoming increasingly affordable, widespread internet penetration across the country, thanks to mobile data services, and the younger generation rooting for a cashless economy, urban Nepal has quickly moved from a cash-dependent economy to become digital.

However, lack of education and literacy also implies lack of digital literacy, hence, banking fees and lack of access to banks are major reasons why the less developed rural and densely populated areas of Nepal are far from ready for

Pandemic propels Nepal to a mobile wallet economy

Nepal’s e-economy rapidly goes digital

then

now

TECH-AWAY
Sania Shah

NATURE MANTRA: World wildlife fund Nepal appointed Nepal’s singing nun Ani Choying Drolma as its Goodwill Ambassador. Picture: Chhewang Gurung of WWF.

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Write fearlessly, she said

The difference women can make as mentors

Jyoti was standing just outside the gate when I stepped out. I walked past her hurriedly, on my way out to work. She caught up with me.

Hello, I said. Hello, she smiled. My father is asking if you will tuition me, she asked. Tuition, what? I asked in return. I’m not sure.

Oh, if you will teach me. Teach you what? I laughed lightly.

Teach me. She smiled again. I said: Okay. Let me think about it. Let’s talk about this later.

I smiled and she smiled back.

Rushing to work, I kept thinking about how she had besoined when I had said okay. And inside my head I was already starting to plan what I could teach her. The opportunity that had presented itself to me drummed an excitement in me. I was being given this chance to influence a young mind and how much I could do to help her discover...


When I was 11, one of my uncles had given me a book. Here, he had said, presenting it to me. Pretty As You Please (365 Recipes for Young Ladies). Read it when your period comes, he had said. And it did come soon after.

The book had exactly 365 chapters, beginning with what it means to be a lady. So, a lady was a woman, not which introduced the idea of class.

The book had a list of instructions on a number of things: how a young lady should sit, how she must speak, how she must walk. A lady is never supposed to sit like a man, she must sit with her legs together. She must speak with her voice calm and low, and walk in the same manner, calmly. Never rush!

The book also prescripted the correct way to laugh. Do not open your mouth and laugh like boys do. Laugh softly with your hand before you, just so that you can hide your embarrassment a little.

Years later, I had retrieved the book from a box of old things and dumped it into the carton going out to trash. I am not a pretty girl, that is not what I do.

The book did have a couple of useful tips though — exercises for menstrual cramp, and on how to ask a male friend not to touch you. But do it politely, it said. I can barely recall what else the book had, but what I do remember is that I had gobbled the book down.

At that time, I heard the term ‘act like a lady’ so often in school that I was convinced that was the only way to behave. Never sit with your legs spread out. Be kind, polite and gentle—all very well, but also to male friends who touch you in ways you do not like.

So, when a boy punched me, I would say ‘ow’ in pain but never retaliate. When a family friend tripped me on the floor and plopped me down to the marble floor, the cold, hardness of it stinging my back, while he put abut on my face, again, I did not retaliate.

When another boy slammed my hand with a water-filled balloon and when the balloon fell on the road without bursting, I merely crushed it under my feet so that he would not pick it up and use it against me again. I did not pick it up and throw it back at him or tell him he was being a jerk. I had to be polite, right? Even in my aggressions. That is what the book said. And I had read the book too many times.

In those days, my access to books was limited to the Krida Suryana. And while mysteries were still my genre, Nancy Drew Case Files were still not allowed because she had a boyfriend. And Agatha Christie, you could read a page or two in the library, but not borrow. So yes, I read Pretty or you Please-on-repeat, until I knew some recipes by heart: a good girl takes care of everyone around her.

It was a while before Nancy Drew and other books happened. But it was not until I turned 14 that I met Little Women. I won the book as a prize. Spelling competition. And it was then that my impulse to run was validated. It was possible to be a girl and want to only read and write and not be a boyfriend, like in March — the girl who changed the lives of millions of young women.

Over the years, though, I find myself gravitating towards the idea of Aunt March. I’ve often wished I could have one to whisk me out of certain situations, but now, I want to become one. For her, maybe for Jyoti. I make a mental list of books for her. I imagine explaining books to Jyoti. I plan assignments for her. She will be rewarded with a new book every time she finishes her assignment.

Her first assignment will be around A House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros. When I hand her the book, I will ask her to open to the chapter, ‘A house of my own’ and ask her to read aloud:


Only a house quiet as a snow, a snow put on by a man, like son as paper before the poem.

I summise at Jyoti’s surprise and the sense of familiarity the words might evoke in her as she reads. I imagine she will shut the book and look at me and smile at me in acknowledgement. And I smile to myself.

Solution: Jyoti is a remotely above in Nepal Times. She’s one of the many people who care, who champion in her author’s life.
The carbon footprint of Nepal’s tourism

The post-pandemic period will be an opportunity to do tourism in a better way

Sonia Awale

Even the most optimistic scenario that it will take at least five years for Nepal’s travel industry to recover from the pandemic impact. Nepal’s tourism industry has an opportunity to be a ‘better normal’ and to evolve a tourism model that does not damage nature and heritage, but rather enhances them—a clean industry that is environmentally and socially sustainable.

Carbon emissions from international journeys may actually not be necessary at all, and when they do travel, passengers are now more aware of their carbon footprint.

“Low carbon footprint tourism that benefits the minimum number of local businesses is the only way forward,” maintains Shilshila Acharya of the Himalayan Climate Initiative (HCI).

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has adopted the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) requiring member states to voluntarily offset carbon starting this year. This may mean individual passengers will not have to offset themselves, but the additional cost of carbon credits might trickle down to air fares.

Energy promotion Centre (EPC) is the only Nepali entity that offers carbon credits mostly to biogas, micro-hydrop and wind energy, with buyers and rates already fixed.

Pre-Covid, voluntary offsetting internationally was at an all-time high with a 149-fold (increase between 2008-2018) and $4.5 million tons of emission reductions generated worldwide.

The demand for voluntary offsets has grown exponentially, often leading to oversupply of carbon credits in countries like India and China.

Carriers claiming to sell 100% green carbon credits, which is why it is crucial to check a project is certified.

Smart experts say offsetting does not tackle the root of the problem, which is wasteful consumption.

They say the priority must be to reduce emissions at source, and not to tax passengers’ guilt by buying offsets.

Buying carbon credits should go hand-in-hand with a domestic reduction in the way they add.

“For a landlocked and tourism-dependent country like Nepal, sustainable tourism can be achieved,” says Shilshila Acharya of the Himalayan Carbon Initiative.

“But air travel is only one aspect of green tourism. There is domestic transport that needs to transition away from fossil-fuel and the energy-intensive hotel industry that can make strides by reducing its carbon footprint.”

Even though Nepal boasts that it has maintained 40% of its area under forest cover, and has targets for switching to renewable energy, less than 2% of the electricity generation activities like haphazard road-building, sand mining on rivers, as well ecologically disastrous projects like hydroelectric schemes.

“We might not be able to do much regarding international aviation, but we can improve the way we generate and use electricity, mass transport, mobile winding, use electric vehicles and save billions,” says energy expert Magesh Lumadhi.

“Think of tourism projects in the areas that rebuild the structure of #esocial housing projects in the atmosphere.

Passengers calculate the carbon they burn on a trip, and buy equivalent credits from organisations working on projects such as biogas, reforestation, hydropower, water treatment or solar energy.

“’It would be ideal if Nepal could offer a locally-based offset system, for example through community forestry or social impact projects to tourists could increase the benefits of their trip to Nepal,” says Robin Boustead, promoter of the Great Himalayan Trail, who is researching the effect of climate change in Sagarathau National Park (near Augla, Dhanepal).

“Such a program could become a significant point of differentiation for Nepal and put tourism and the climate agenda in the spotlight, especially as the Himalayas are suffering so much.”

At the moment the government’s Alternative

Calculate your foot size

A passenger must wonder how much of their travel’s carbon footprint is due to personal circumstances. There are multiple active sites developers begin with INFOS. The North American and the EU, for example, have initiatives that take into account the carbon footprint of passengers and their carbon credits based on how many people are expected to travel. It is clear to see how different carbon footprint tools are to even more modern and advanced-based as companies engage in international demand.

In a report on the impact of climate change in the Sagarmatha National Park, the Bristol University of Great Britain’s researcher, Andrew Clifton, found that the average impact person is responsible for 185 kg on a return trip to Kathmandu.

“Anyone is responsible for their 185 kg on a return flight from Kathmandu to Lhasa,” he says.

“Air travel has a 0.5 emission factor, but domestic transport is 0.5 kg CO2 per passenger.”

Not everyone can afford to fly, that is why there is a need to create a carbon offset scheme that allows people to reduce their carbon footprint.

On top of that, there are 75-100 mostly Arkos (Himalayan) species on the list of the world’s rarest birds and butterflies. The species are vital to the health of the ecosystems and play a crucial role in the overall biodiversity of the region.

EPC has launched a campaign to raise awareness about the carbon footprint of tourism.

EPC CEO said, “The campaign is designed to raise awareness about the carbon footprint of tourism and to encourage people to take steps to reduce their impact. The campaign aims to promote sustainable tourism practices and raise awareness among tourists and local communities about the importance of preserving the natural environment.”

EPC is working closely with local communities, businesses, and government agencies to promote sustainable tourism practices and reduce the carbon footprint of tourism. The campaign includes various activities, such as workshops, seminars, and events, to raise awareness about the carbon footprint of tourism.

EPC is also working with hotels, restaurants, and other businesses to help them reduce their carbon footprint. The campaign includes training programs, sustainability audits, and other initiatives to help businesses reduce their environmental impact.

EPC is collaborating with the government to develop policies and regulations that promote sustainable tourism practices. The campaign includes awareness-raising activities, such as workshops and seminars, to help the government understand the importance of promoting sustainable tourism practices.

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It treads lightly on the land

Madi Eco-village

The Madi Valley is deep in...
A self-reliant Nepal

Once in a while, amidst all this gloom and doom, we detect a silver lining, a light at the end of the tunnel. A ray of sunshine. I am, of course, referring to the heartwarming piece of news this week that Nepal is now self-sufficient in chicken and eggs.

Although we should not be counting our chickens before they hatch, this is a phenomenal piece of good news. It means we will finally be putting an end to the scientific riddle that has bedevilled mankind since the dawn of human history: which came first, the chicken or the egg?

We have it on good authority that it was neither. What came first was the rooster that impregnated the hen. I know, many of you are thinking we are getting ahead of ourselves. But, where did the rooster come from? Was he also not from an egg born? He is right. Hadn’t thought of it, let me make a mental note of that, and get back to you.

But I digress from the main point on the agenda this week, which is that self-sufficiency in poultry products is closer than ever. Nepal’s Human Asset Index is on an upward trajectory, and the country is well on its way to graduating to Middle Kingdom Status.

Unlike many of us, Nepal had already achieved self-sufficiency in various commodities that are of strategic importance. But, being a modest nation of humble means that does not like to boast its own trumpets unassumingly, we did not make a big song and dance about it before. However, now in strictest confidence, we can reveal to you this highly classified list of items in which Nepal is self-sufficient:

- Instant Noodles, Nepal now makes enough to show how the country is capable of feeding its population many times over.
- Uranium, the factory of a nuclear fallout of Sinjari in Khajuraho last month is proof that the country does not have to rely anymore on imports of fissile material.
- Iron Rods, the number of commercial steel bars in our current tally must mean that Nepal has now formally and definitively entered the Iron Age.
- Gold Biscuits, till not long ago, Nepal had to import all its gold from abroad countries. We are pleased to announce that herewith Nepal does not import any gold, we just make it.
- Alcohols, the Nepalese governments concerted efforts to promote nation-made and import substitute has pay-off in the form of self-sufficiency across the entire beverage industry, both in terms of production and consumption.

It is only natural to ask how did this happen, and why? The answer to these and related questions is not entirely straightforward. But, the key to understanding the transformation is to look at the broader context of the country’s economic development over the past few decades. Nepal has made significant strides in various sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, and services.

The government has played a crucial role in this transformation, through policies and investments in key areas such as infrastructure, education, and health. The private sector has also contributed significantly, with a number of successful enterprises emerging across various industries.

The result of these efforts is a stronger, more self-reliant country that is better equipped to face the challenges of the future. Nepal is now a nation of a nation of people, self-reliant and proud of its achievements.

The Ass