Kathmandu Valley with the Jogajal Himal Range in the background on 10 May, 2023 (above), and on 6 April, 2023 (below).

BAD AIR

The Air Quality Action Plan requires the government to declare an emergency if the Air Quality Index (AQI) crosses 300, and close schools, reduce traffic and control open burning. As far back as 8 January, AQI had already gone up to 400 in Kathmandu Valley as smoke from wildfires combined with vehicular exhaust. No one heeded the warning signs. On 26 March, as the fires spread nationwide, AQI crossed 632. The government closed schools for four days, but there was no emergency response to control fires. All this week, AQI has been between 300-450. The exceptionally clean air during the lockdown last April allowed people in Kathmandu Valley to see Mt Everest, 200km away. It proved that most pollution in Kathmandu is from vehicles. This year, on top of the diesel exhaust, there is the smoke from wildfires. This is the fire season when farmers burn the undergrowth in forests to allow green shoots to grow for their livestock. But with a dry winter in which central Nepal received only 10% of its normal precipitation, and the dry spell continuing into spring, the fires spread rapidly. The fires have been unprecedented. What is worrying is the extent and duration of this year’s fires. Scientists are reluctant to make a direct correlation between climate crises and individual weather events, but there are indications that there is indeed a link.

Untangling the knots

There are just so many layers of party and factional interests, alliance and dalliances, marriages of convenience and messy divorces, ego, ambitions, and personal vendettas involved, that it is difficult to delve beyond daily headlines about who stood where in the by-election.

We must start with the central protagonist, the man everyone seems to love to hate, Prime Minister R P Oli. He has proved all pundits wrong by surviving both medically and politically. This does not look like a man who has two kidney transplants—he appears stronger ever.

Oil has become such a central figure that a faction of the main parties just can’t find coalition partners—they are all divided depending on whether they support the prime minister or not.

First, his UML itself is divided, with the Nepal faction behaving like an opposing party. Oli’s strategy now is to woo away Nepal loyalists like Bimal SC Bhadra, who President Bidya Devi Bhandari sent to meet him last month.

The Maoist Centre has also lost its senior comrades to Oli’s Cabinet. Ram Bahadur Thapa, Top Bahadur Ramjanjali and others.

The party renounced its stand on NDP and is now on Tuesday, but cannot seem to decide what to do next.

A Nepali Congress (NC) Central Committee meeting this week called for the resignation of Prime Minister Oli. But the meeting started five hours late because of a disagreement between Shahul Hameed and Kamala Prasad Poudel whether or not to join a coalition government led by Oli.

It’s a choice in the main opposition NC has put the third and fourth parties, the Maoist Centre and the Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP), in a bind. They do not have the numbers by themselves to challenge Oli. However, there is a discourse also within the NC and the JSP against Oli as the leader. Oli himself needs the NC to form the new government if the UML loses the support of the Maoist Centre.

However, even though Dahal threatened last week to pull the rug from under the UML, his Maoist Centre’s founding committee meeting decided that time was not ripe to do so. The Maoist has 54 seats, and the decision to withdraw support for the UML, which has 112 seats, Prime Minister Oli will have to seek a vote of confidence in the House. Oli will need 138 MPs on his side to win the vote, and will court the UML with 54 seats on both sides. Dahal knows that the decision to withdraw support is there to have discussions and he has called Oli to form an election government, and Maoist leaders know that early elections will be discussed.

With all four parties tangled over their support and opposing in Primary Minister Oli, therefore, Nepal politics is hopelessly knotted up.

## Online Packages

### WHAT'S TRENDING

**Delayed dreams for Koraput's Jawnpali Nandals**

by Odisha Monitor

Koraput’s Jawnpali Nandals have been sitting on the 边际 for the past few years. They want the government to provide them with funds to build a temple. But the government has not yet taken any action.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**

Most popular on Twitter

**Nepal's e-commerce rapidly goes digital**

by Online Times

In today’s digital age, e-commerce has become the norm. In Nepal, the e-commerce market is growing rapidly, with more and more people shopping online.

**Most commented**

**Nepal relaxes entry rules for tourists**

by Main Times

After much criticism about entry rules for tourists, the government of Nepal has relaxed the restrictions on tourists for longer stays.

**Most visited online page**

## Quotable Tweets

**Nepali Times**

"What you see on the surface is only a small part of the story. There is a lot more to learn about the people and their culture. Let's all work together to promote the richness of our culture and heritage. #Nepal #CulturalHeritage"

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**Nepali Times**

"In the ever-evolving landscape of digital media, it's important to keep up with the latest trends. Let's stay connected and embrace the power of social media. #SocialMedia #DigitalMedia"
WISHING YOU AND YOUR BELOVED ONES A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR. WE HOPE 2078 BRINGS YOU LOVE, PEACE AND HAPPINESS.
JSP as Nepal’s king-maker party

“I have given my word to Oli that I will not turn against him”

The man of the week in Nepali politics is Jana Samajbadi Party. He is being courted by both the Maoist Centre, the Nepali Congress and the K P Oli-led UML.

The country has been mired in political games, ever since the Supreme Court restored the House of Representatives on 23 February. However, after the Supreme Court delivered its verdict to reconstitute NCP (UML) and NCP (Maoist Centre) on 7 March, there has been an impasse.

The UML is the largest party in the House with 121 seats. In order to maintain, it needs the backing of one of the other parties in the house— the NC, Maoist Centre and Janata Samajbadi Party.

The Parliamentary arithmetic is such that the UML needs the JSP to form a new government, or to survive a possible no-confidence vote. The Maoist Centre can only withhold its support for the UML if it can get the numbers from the NC and the JSP.

The NC itself requires the JSP MP’s on its side to ally with the Maoist Centre. Which is why various political leaders have been making a bee line to the Mahant Thakur residence in Sanepa Thimi this past week.

The UML is not in favour of forming a partnership with NC, the chief opposition in the House, with 63 seats in the lower house. The Maoist Centre which has 54 MP’s, have repeatedly stressed on withdrawing their support to the government at any given time. In this scenario, the 54 seats held by the JSP will be enough to bail out the government. The leader of the Oli faction says the possibility of forming a government with the JSP is ‘highly probable’. As per the demand by the JSP for the release of Baburam Bhattarai, the government has not just consultations with the JSP, but the team has already started deliberations. So, in the JSP all set to form a coalition with the UML, Mahant Thakur spoke to Nepali Times about his preference.

Your name has also come up as a possible Prime Minister. Mahant has been mentioned only when there is a major crisis. People from the Madhesis are brought to the fore only when a crisis is required during protests. During the premiership of Baburam Bhattarai, after Nepali Congress and UML declined to head towards the poll under his leadership, my name was suggested. Even now, the circumstances are dire and there seems to be public support, as well. But to actually be nominated as a Prime Minister, an agreement has to be reached in the House.

Oli has not offered you to become the Prime Minister?

No, he has asked me to not resign. How Nepali Congress and Maoists offered the JSP leadership of a new government?

Both Congress and Maoist have sought our support. But they have not asked us to take leadership. During a meeting with us, Shri Baburam Bhattarai said he would not table a no-confidence motion, but that if the office of Prime Minister comes up, he would think about it. He offered to make a coalition government with our support, but we said that we would not form a coalition until our demands were met.

By whom will your party decide whom to support in the government?

The first executive committee meeting scheduled for today could not be held due to inadequate representation. An executive committee meeting is scheduled to be held on Friday, in which the party chief is expected to be present at the meeting had not been finalized. More work is being done to correct the issue, so the meeting is yet to happen. Now that the ball is over, we will soon be fixing a date for the meeting. It will discuss our stance and decide the future of the party.
He shot down a fighter, then shot to fame

Nepali soldier in the Indian Army recalls bringing down a Pakistani jet in the Bangladesh War

Gopal Dahal

I was a busy December morning in 1971 at the strategic Chicken Neck frontline between India and what was then East Pakistan. Dhon Bahadur Rai had been watching a squadron of five Pakistan Air Force F-4s circle above his position. Suddenly, one of the planes peeled off and dropped a bomb that landed close to his bunker. The sleek jet then looped back and started strafing the Indian Army positions.

Dhan Bahadur was at his 7.62mm LMG (light machine gun) position, and took aim at the plane as it swept low for another pass. “I fired at it in bursts, and I saw it pull away trailing smoke. Soon, it caught fire and crashed. We saw the pilot parachute out, and the plane was buried in a crater about 5km away,” Dhan Bahadur recalls.

The pilot was captured, and became a prisoner of war. Within a week on 16 December 1971, Pakistan had surrendered, and Bangladesh was born.

Dhan Bahadur, now 73, grewocardmom in his unvisited village of Nundihati in Sikkim-Darjeeling in the mountains of eastern Nepal where as a child he herded the family’s livestock, without an opportunity for schooling.

At age 19, he walked across the border to Thimphu and joined the Indian army. In 1971 he was stationed in the Indian Army’s Goitka regiment. He was shortlisted, and assigned a number for 11 months of military training.

Dhan Bahadur is actually a Tamang, but the Indian Army recruitment officers presumed he was a Rai like other Nepalis who had joined up. So, when he went to Delhi with his wife and grandfather to receive the Vir Chakra medal from Indian President V V Giri in 1972 his name was given as Dhan Bahadur Rai.

Like many of his compatriots, Dhan Bahadur is a modest man, and describes his role in downing the plane. When other units of the Indian Army also claimed to have shot down the Pakistani plane, he did not pass on the credit.

In the end was the Pakistani pilot Flt Lt Wajid Ali Khan who as a prisoner of war provided the evidence to prove that it was indeed Dhan Bahadur’s bunker from where the shot were fired that brought down the plane.

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Nepal’s other pandemic: road fatalities

More people die on Nepal’s highways every year than in all natural disasters combined

● Anita Bhetwal

On 12 December 2019, residents of Kathmandu of Kirtipur district woke up to a loud crash. It was 5AM. A bus had careened off a hairpin bend and plunged 500m down the mountain, killing 17 passengers and wounding 18 others. They were pilgrims on the way back from the Kalinchowk shrine. A little over a year later, the tragedy has become part of the deadly statistics of Nepal’s highway accidents in which an average of seven people die every day. “There was a pile of bodies, some with their limbs severed. I had never before seen such a horrendous sight,” recalls Mithu Mishra. “All we could do was help lift the bodies and place them in ambulances.”

Tara Bahdur Karki is still traumatised by the memory, and cannot walk past the site without recalling that fatal day. “The entire slope was covered with bodies and there were more under the bus. After a while, we lost count, or we kept pulling them out of the wreckage.” Most of the accidents are preventable, and the causes are mainly poor road condition and reckless driving. The pandemic of highway accidents kills as many Nepalis every year as all the natural disasters combined. In fact they are so common that most Nepalis are desensitised by the numbers. From July 2019 to July 2020, there were a total of 54,000 road accidents in Nepal resulting in 12,000 deaths of people mostly in the age group 15-40 years. This number went down sharply during the Covid-19 lockdown. Highway fatalities declined by half to less than 700 in March-August 2020, compared to the same period the previous year. By the Dasain Tihar festival in November 2020, with restrictions removed, the number of deaths on the roads again spiked to 242 after falling to 52 in May.

“In developing countries like ours we have fewer accidents but more casualties because of our mass transport. But we often forget about those wounded, they are subjected to a life of economic hardships and trauma beyond our imagination,” says former Superintendent of Police Jagat Man Shrestha.

On average, 40 people are injured on roads across the country each day. In 2019, there were nearly 13,000 highway and road accidents in which 2,736 people lost their lives and 10,731 were seriously injured. Those who survive often have traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries, requiring long-term or life-long rehabilitative care.

Journalist Gajendra Budathoki was on his way home one rainy night when the blinding headlight of an oncoming bus from the wrong side of Dharan hit him. He was thrown from his motorbike to skid off the road. A spinal cord injury has paralysed him from the waist down.

“I would never go faster than 60km/h and my friends used to poke fun at me for being slower than a bicycle but now I’m forced to live the rest of my life bound on a wheelchair,” he laments.

According to the WHO Global Status on Road Safety 2018, only 8 in 100,000 people die of highway and road accidents in developed countries, but the number soared to 27.5 in low-income nations like Nepal.

A Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport study has found that 76% of highway accidents are caused by drivers who do not follow traffic rules, or are speeding.

Tagger drivers get Rs1,000 per trip so they try to make as many roundtrips as possible. I have seen them make five per night, driving even as they drive off the wheels. If they don’t kill people, who will?” asks the chief of Lalitpur Metropolitan Police Sunil Adhikari.

Traffic police have now deployed speed guns to check speeding at the accident-prone Saldobato-Gwanele road. They penalise up to 100 commuters a day, many of them in motorcycles that are going at 60km/hour in the road with a speed limit of 30km/hour.

Road maintenance or lack thereof is another major cause of traffic accidents. Local governments need to wait for the budget to maintain road safety while the Department of Roads is unable to add crush barriers on highways. “Our roads are narrow, bad, and frankly not the kind we should have built,” accepts Arjun Thapa, head of the Department. “Priority on road construction without proper infrastructure planning is to blame.”

Roads are synonymous with development in Nepal. Every election, politicians promise highways to boost their vote banks. There are excavators clawing away at the mountains all
Says road safety analyst Kamal Panday: “Well-constructed roads prevent accidents, but we have made ours ignoring technical and engineering aspects because new roads bring in votes, and maintenance doesn’t.”

All automobiles are subjected to mechanical inspection tests every six months. Those that fail are not allowed on the streets. But testing centres across the country are not functional as vehicles are certified based on manual (visual) inspection alone.

The design of vehicles can also factor in crucial life and death situations. For example, tipper truck drivers have blind spots on the sides which prevent them from seeing motorcyclists. Moreover, the bumpers of these heavy load vehicles is 3.5m above the ground, making them lethal in a collision. Many countries including China, Brazil and Japan have now added 360-degree cameras for tipper drivers.

“Our tippers are not fit for highway and city traffic, their only purpose is to carry raw material from mine to construction site,” says Namraj Ghimire of the Department of Transport Management.

An important aspect when it comes to traumatic road traffic accidents is the transportation of the wounded to the hospital without further aggravating their condition. “We have seen many cases of careless handling leading to unnecessary damage to the spine resulting into death,” says Raja Dhakal of the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre in Sanga.

The departments responsible to ensure road safety all pass the blame to one another when questioned.

Traffic police complain that they do not have enough human resources. The Department of Roads states that most roads in Nepal are now under the purview of local governments. The Transport Service Department simply does not bother about vehicular inspections.

It is therefore up to the public to make their voice heard and make government agencies feel more responsible.

“Civil society, media and investigators must start a discourse to wake up the uncaring state to wrench this calamity from its roots,” says activist Anandaranj Joshi, who used to be a truck driver in Western Nepal.

There is a consensus among experts that road engineering suited to the geography of the place and mechanical knowledge is crucial to reducing road accidents. Similarly, traffic education paves a long way in preventing road fatalities and must start at homes and schools.

Says former SP Ilang Man Shrestha: “Traffic enforcement gives us a quick result but it will be temporary. To prevent as many road accidents as possible, we must revamp our education system and upgrade engineering.”

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After all traffic in Nepal and India came to a halt during the coronavirus lockdown last year, photographer AbhiSattu Gautam Shakyā pointed out that if the air was clear enough, Mt Everest could be seen from Kathmandu.

On Tuesday, he went back to the exact spot in Chobar from where he had taken the photograph last year at 5:00 PM just before sunset to point his camera in the general direction of the original shot, and clicked the shutter. The visibility this week was less than 2km.

"Last year, I was super excited to document the panoramic views of Kathmandu with the Himalayan backdrop," Shakyā recalls. "I did not feel like leaving the spot till nightfall."

In the past four months, as wildfires continued to burn, the whole country has been shrouded in thick smoke that has not lifted for weeks. After some rain on 2 April, there had been a short respite, but Kathmandu's Air Quality Index (AQI) has gone back to above 300 for the past five days.

"This year, the poor visibility felt both alarming and suffocating because of the smoke. I just took the photographs and left the spot," Shakyā told Nepal Times.

With no reference of mountains in the background, Shakyā missed some of the vantage points where he had stood last year. This year so bad the city had disappeared and only some of the high-rise apartments in Thumikhel were faintly visible through the dirty yellow haze.

Categorizing the panoramic images seemed seamless last year, the camera easily focused on Kathmandu landmarks and mountains beyond due to clear weather and soft light from the golden hour. This year the

### NEPAL'S SMOKE
Views of the Himalayas from Kathmandu during the lockdown.
KY MOUNTAINS

During the lockdown last year, and this week.

The air quality has remained so poor for so long is that there are thousands of fires right across eastern and central Nepal, as well as parts of Uttarakhand in India. Deficient precipitation in winter and spring, possibly a result of climate change, had dried up the forest floor, making this year’s fire season the worst in living memory.

The fires have been unprecedented in extent and duration. They have added to the already serious pollution from vehicular emission, brick kilns and open garbage burning in Kathmandu Valley. In mid-March there was also a lot of wind-blow sand from the Arabian and Indian deserts.

There have been years like the winter of 2008-2009 when there were huge fires in the high mountains blowing plumes of smoke over Kathmandu. But these lasted only a few days after the rains arrived.

The Department of Meteorology and Hydrology says there are no signs of a major monsoon system to bring rain or to blow the smoke away. There have also not been local convection systems along the mountains during this spring’s storm season so far.

The scale of the blazes is too extensive for local firefighters, and there has been no effective national effort to douse the flames. This means the fires are likely to continue until they burn themselves out.

Fire burning through the dry underbrush along the East-West Highway in Rutland this week.

Another NASA Worldview image in the visual spectrum on 6 April at 11AM shows the extent and spread of the smoke all over Nepal.
Events

Bhaskar Swar
As an Italian by birth with a German upbringing, Bhaskar Swar's approach to organizing a German wine festival in Kathmandu is no different. Through his company, Mayfair Events, Swar has brought the German Taste Festival to Kathmandu for the second time. The festival features wine tastings, live music, and food from around the world. It is a great opportunity for wine lovers to sample some of the finest wines from Germany and other countries. 
31st March, 13th April, 21st April, 28th April

Saturday Kabam Bazaar
Join the vibrant Koubam Bazaar this Saturday, where you can find a variety of handcrafted and locally sourced goods. This bazaar is a great place to find unique gifts and souvenirs for yourself or as presents for others. 

Kholo 2.0
A three-month-long exhibition, Kholo 2.0 – A Gyare Of Life, is the longest exhibition in Nepal history. It features over 1000 works of art, showcasing the diversity of Nepal's art scene. The exhibition is a great opportunity to appreciate the art and culture of Nepal. 

Nepal Impact Marathon 2021
This year's Nepal Impact Marathon is a race to raise funds for different causes. Participants can choose to run, walk, or cycle the 42km route. It's a great opportunity to support a good cause while enjoying the beautiful scenic views of Kathmandu Valley.

Online Archives

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

Seeksr
Senior Soil's award-winning stories about the natural forests and groundbreaking innovations that impact trees, the planet, and the universe. Look for their videos on technology and medical advancement. Find Seeksr on YouTube and Instagram TV.

Dining

Boju Bajai
Listen to the Giri and Bihari kais as they talk from across two continents about politics, media and feminism in South Asia.

Tamarind
Unwind at Tamarind, a multi-cuisine restaurant housed in a retro architecture and separate glasshouse. Enjoy an extensively by a team dedicated to innovation and finesse. The menu is redefined every six months, keeping in mind the patrons preferences.

Roadhouse Cafe
Enjoy a meal on woodfire pizzas, surrounded by the colors of Masculine coloress, wooden furniture and mosaics on the walls. Set the table at any height and adjust the top to a giveaway.

Jazz Upstairs
Join us for a mouthwatering dinner with outdoor space offering cocktails and 있을수록.

Around the Corner
With the restaurant theme of ‘Time’ in nature, this menu is inspired by the natural sounds of chirping birds, the swaying of bamboo trees and the rustle of leaves—all a sojourn to showcase here in Kathmandu.

Multi-Cultural Cuisine
Here is a place that serves Indian, Nepali, European, Asian & Continental

About Town

It’s no surprise that Kathmandu’s Air Quality Index stayed in the hazardous range all week after imposing a lockdown on 3April after the rains in Central Nepal. The smoke covers the whole country, but is concentrated along the Kathmandu Valley where it’s trapped by inversion. This affects the visibility and cross-border industrial activity. There might be a slight easing due to prevailing westerly winds, but that will also add to the fires. Keep your masks on against both pollution and Covid.

Kholo

Kholo’s the hub for Nepali films and art quality Kathmandu-based filmmakers. It has been showcasing short films and documentaries in a number of genres, attracting a steadily growing audience. Kholo is a hub for Nepali filmmakers and artists, where they can showcase their work and connect with viewers. A movie shot in Kathmandu.

You Have High Standards. So Do We!

Drink responsibly
Kathmandu in monochrome

Photographer captures the duality of Kathmandu through the black and white

Shristi Karki

At 29, Omar Allam is already a world traveller: born in Switzerland, he has spent time in Cairo, Istanbul, New York, New Delhi, Dubai, and the past three months in Kathmandu.

A childhood passion for cameras meant that he was filming everything from family holidays to friends skateboarding. Growing up as the son of an Egyptian diplomat, he completed a degree in photography at the Pratt Institute in New York, transitioning from film to stills. He sees photography fit his personality more, since it was a more solitary art form.

“Compared to all the places in the world I have been to, Kathmandu is a joy to photograph,” says Allam. “Because other than the landscape and culture, it is the people who define the city. I have been blessed to have had all these magical people cross my path.”

Like most visitors to Kathmandu, Allam was drawn to Pashupati during Shivaratri to photograph the holy men who congregate there to smoke their chillums and pose for pictures. Taking photographs of selfies (or with them) at Pashupati has become something of a tourist thing, but Allam’s black and white images have an ethereal quality, perhaps because one is not distracted by the vibrant colours of the face paint or the backdrop.

“I am always following the light, and I see photos in the real world in black and white,” he says. “It lends itself nicely to my visual language. It has a timeless quality to it, and black and white captures ideas of duality, light and dark, good vs evil.”

Allam says he has always been fascinated with things considered ‘old world’, like ancient Egyptian occult practices, and he has a love for vintage cars. He thinks that is why he is drawn by black and white photography, because it plays into nostalgia.

“Photography in Kathmandu has been a deeply rewarding experience,” he says. “Taking photos for me is not about the final product. It is a process of discovery. It comes from being open and vulnerable to fleeting situations, and the physical act of going out into that meditative space and being out in the world, is the fun part.”

What role is there for a photographer when everyone with a mobile and Instagram account can take pictures and show them to the world? Allam admits it is easy to be lazy and click the shutter aimlessly to capture the ‘decisive moment’.

“You can easily fall in the habit of just taking random photographs and hoping one of the shots will have the right composition, exposure, etc., whereas with film photography since you are limited to 36 shots per roll, and since it has become increasingly expensive to develop film, there is much more awareness of what is happening within the four corners of the frame when I look into the viewfinder,” he says. “Everything is more considered.”

Allam has two exhibitions opening in Cairo next month, and a long-term photo project in Egypt. Some of the photographs will be from Nepal.
Watch the video accompanying a new installment of Anjana Rajbhandari's column Life Time in which she talks about how it is important to educate boys about the way they should treat other genders, to ensure the safety of women.

How many of you have slept in a menstrual hut? The idea of a ‘menstrual hut’ might sound ridiculous to many but it is a real thing. In some parts of western Nepal, women are made to sleep in huts and even cowsheds away from their homes during menstruation. In addition to being a clear violation of human rights, there are numerous cases of horrific experiences women have while observing this practice, known as Chaupadi.

Practiced by Hindu families in Nepal and some places in northern India, Chaupadi is a menstrual taboo which considers periods to be dirty and impure. Women are at risk of physical and sexual assault during the time they spend in these huts every year, coupled with cold temperatures and mice threats.

The practice was banned in 2005. In 2018, it was criminalised. But the practice still exists in the absence of severe penalty. Currently, anyone who is charged and convicted for forcing a woman to observe Chaupadi is subject to a three-month sentence and/or a fine of a few thousand rupees. But the consequences slapped by the government on the guilty have done little to deter people from giving up the practice altogether.

Lack of proper hygiene, safety and privacy during periods is one of the main concerns for women living in such shelters.

But the practice of Chaupadi is not confined to western Nepal. A mutated version of the practice is observed even in progressive cities like Kathmandu. In some households in Kathmandu, girls are not allowed to touch books during and after their period for three to seven days, making it harder for them to compete against boys in school. In cities, many families still do not allow the women in their families to go to the kitchen, touch the water tap or the refrigerator. Menstruating women can only eat and drink what is given to them.

The rules prescribed to girls during menstrues is much worse. In other parts of the country, all of them clearly bottled down to the patriarchy and society’s need to control women.

It has always been extremely frustrating to me to witness a society that chooses to be advanced in some areas and traditionalist in other ways. Being selectively progressive and conveniently conservative does have strong undertones of cruelty.

Most Nepali women have said that menstrual taboos is mostly enforced by elder family members and religious leaders because they probably grew up watching the same thing repeat itself in every generation.

Nepal’s patriarchal society plays a huge role in enforcing such rules. But as women, some of us still feel aspects of it because it can be hard to change them if you grow up in that environment even if it does not make sense.

Gone are some of the menstrual taboos when I went away for college because if I did “not cook for myself during my periods, no one else would.” However, the practice has been so deeply ingrained in me, that despite living abroad for 20 years I am still unable to light the incense and pray to goddess during the four days.

The belief is so deeply instilled in my psyche that I still feel a slight awkwardness buying tampons at drug stores. Every morning, I still light an incense to three Hindu deities in my house except for the four days of Na Chha. I do not want to force change; I want to evolve naturally.

I understand now that it is difficult to completely change your ways, but it is impossible to try to see things from another’s perspective. But most people never try. If a person who is having her period chooses to follow the rules, it is entirely up to her, but the problem is when you force it upon them, which is the case in many families.

Growing up in a Hindu family in Nepal, I learned to acknowledge and accept that periods were “dirty”. During a cousin’s wedding in Kathmandu, I was not allowed to participate in the religious ceremonies— one of the worst experiences. It was aggravated by the fact that every aunt was telling me how scary they felt for me. It made me feel like it was a bad thing to have periods and that it was bad to be a woman because I would not be in that situation if I was a man.

Growing up, I used to see commercials for sanitary pads where women would be dancing in all white running around fields or deciding to take on a sport looking extremely happy. I wondered when I would be like one of them, only to realize years later that it was all a lie because the story was completely different in people’s homes.

Girls and women are made to feel ashamed for this natural process and then treated like outsiders at home and in social settings- discrimination in the name of religion. Rejecting social stigmatisation is not meant to disrespect any culture or tradition, but a means to address the levels of awkwardness and discomfort experienced by women. Haven’t we moved forward enough in the world to not analyse and judge women who may be lacking their periods?

The other side of the story is that if a girl or woman, never gets her period, she is considered ‘baren’ which also does not have a positive connotation. Either way, women are not allowed to win. Girls need proper guidance and mentorship when they are growing up so they can understand that having periods is natural. It is not necessary for every girl to announce her period, but it is important to teach all girls that this is nothing they should be ashamed of.
The coronavirus surge in India has increased the risk of the spread of the virus to Nepal.

Nepal had started to see a slight reduction in the new cases since the start of the vaccine drive, but the latest surge in infection rates shows there is much to be vigilant about. On 7 April 2021, Kathmandu Valley reported 163 new Covid-19 cases, against the 298 cases across the country.

At a first glance, the numbers look insignificant but this is 300% increase compared to the figures from a month ago. Many of those who have tested are school children, teachers and students going abroad—most of them showing the UK strain B.1.1.7, which was first detected in Nepal back in January. “The UK variant among students point to the community spread of the new strain in Nepal and given that it’s more infectious as it is deadly, we must look into this immediately,” says virologist at Tikku Hospital Sier Bahadur Pun. Despite surpassing the US to become the fastest vaccinating country in the world, India is reporting an excess of 100,000 new cases per day now. On Wednesday, the country recorded 128,000 cases with 630 deaths. India has been registering higher cases of the B.1.1.7 variant, which is 64% more lethal than SARS-CoV-2.

The increasing infection rates in India has put Nepal on high alert and experts warn of a repeat of the previous wave last year, when imported cases from the southern neighbour led to rapid community spread. Nepal usually tracks India in health trends, and there are already signs of the second wave.

“There are three things working in favour of a possible second surge: our own cases, those being imported from India and the rise of the more contagious UK strain,” says Pun. Nepali migrant workers are already arriving in large numbers at the 1,779km long porous border between Nepal and India, as the most affected states including Maharashtra, Karnataka and New Delhi announce lockdowns and curfews. Officials have deployed tests at the Indian border, and those testing positive are recommended to self-isolate. However, returnees could easily bypass the official border checkpoints as they did last year. Saneer Mani Dixit of the Centre for Molecular Dynamics agrees: “It is not possible to test everyone at the border so we should deploy local government to test and observe the returnees.”

Health Minister Binitash Koirala Tripati told the Parliament this week that Nepal was likely to see a surge in new cases by May, while he has also turned down the possibility of another lockdown.

The Covid-19 Crisis Management Center (CCMC) has decided on antigen tests for everyone with symptoms entering the Kathmandu Valley. The government has meanwhile, instructed all local levels to set up isolation and quarantine centres. The Health ministry has also urged businesses to close after 6PM and for schools to increase safety measures. While the government has
drawn flak in the past for not doing enough to control the spread of the virus, it is the public that seems to have flung all caution to the wind this time. People have continued to crowd malls and restaurants and participate in celebrations and even attend political rallies—often unmasked and with no regard for physical distancing.

“Nepalis have not lost all the hard work that was done last year and are not following safety measures,” says epidemiologist Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa. Hazardous levels of air quality in the past two weeks following wildfires across the country has added to the challenge. With a dry spell ahead of us, respite from the bad air does not seem anywhere near in sight.

For most of this week, Kathmandu has been recording an average of 400-500 new cases per day. The government has started to inoculate frontline workers, teachers, hotel staff, Himalayan traders, among others in the age group 45-59, with ‘Vero Cell’ vaccines donated by the Chinese government. Nepali students leaving for France are also eligible for the jab.

Nepal got an early start in the vaccination drive with 1.6 million inoculated in the first and second stages of the campaign, with India’s support. But with only 500,000 doses of Covishield in the stock and 100,000 more with the Nepal Army, uncertainty persists over when the second doses will happen for all those who have taken the first jab.

With the European Medicines Agency concluding that there is indeed a link between AstraZeneca vaccines and a rare but lethal blood clot case detected in the EU, countries including the UK and Germany have withdrawn AstraZeneca from their lists and have found alternatives to the Oxford University developed jab for younger age groups. This could mean that countries like Nepal suffering from a shortage could be supplied with more doses of the Covishield shot sooner than later.

After inoculation begins in Nepal, many districts stopped testing. There are only about 3,000-4,000 tests happening in a day, mostly for people going abroad, and there is virtually no testing for the public. “Vaccination is important but so is testing and contact tracing. And we must continue to communicate about safety measures, there is no other way around wearing masks, hand washing and maintaining physical distance,” says Sherpa.
BUILT IN 1911, THE PHARPING POWER PLANT IS NOW A NEGLECTED PART OF NEPAL'S HERITAGE

Ramesh Bhushal

It was 6.30pm on 22 May 1911, and the sun had just set in Kathmandu when King Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah arrived at Tundikhel to turn on a switch to light Nepal’s first electric lamp. Nepal was the second country in Asia to install a hydroelectric power plant, commissioned by Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana, who named the project after himself (Chandra Jyoti). Chandra Shamsher had visited England eight years previously, and this was part of his grand plan to modernise Nepal with technology. Besides electricity, he established Nepal’s first college.

Built metal suspension bridges all over the country and commissioned a cargo railway from Kathmandu to the Tarai. He sent architects to Europe, and engineers and horticulturists for training in Japan. Construction of the 500kW plant in Pharping 12km south of Kathmandu began in 1987 with British engineers, and took four years to complete. All the turbines and penstock pipes were shipped to Calcutta, brought overland to Bhikhpatri and then had to be carried on porter back over the mountains to the site.

Under supervision of the prime minister’s clan, the power plant

Kumar Acharya, 53, is guided with the fork of the Pharping park.

One of the generators and electrical parts will part of the fall of the moment. The other generator is not in operation, but will also be present for the visitors.
A plant is a museum piece

was built by Tilikram and Bhusal Bhadu from the Nepal Army, the main engineer for the power house was Khilok Narasing Rana. Two engineers from England, "Babuwa Pawan" and a certain "Mr. Lintal", were also involved in the construction. Built to light the palaces of the Ranas, houses of courtiers and some street lights, the power station stored water from two springs, in Sitauna and Sush Narayani, in a circular reservoir. The Ranas first tested the electricity in a house in Khokana before connecting the wires to their palaces, to ensure it was safe.

In 1911, it had been only three decades since the world's first hydropower plant had been installed on the Fox River in Wisconsin in 1882, and a year after China built its first hydropower plant in 1912 in Yunnan province.

Despite this early start, Nepal got around to setting up its second hydropower project only 28 years later, a 640kW plant in Sundarijal in 1939. For a country with such a vast potential for hydropower, it would take Nepal another half-century to produce just 1MW of electricity.

Since 1911, Nepal has managed to produce only 1,400MW of power from its rivers, not even 2% of its total potential. Since most of the plants are of the run-of-the-river type, electricity production fluctuates with water levels of rivers. This spring for instance, due to a long winter drought, Nepal has been forced to import nearly half its peak hour demand from thermal power plants India.

Sadly, the history of Nepal's oldest hydropower plant has now been almost forgotten. Although the government declared the power plant a "living heritage" site in 1971, not much has been done to preserve the area. The power plant could be brought back into running condition, even as just a demonstration unit.

The power house, the royal guest houses and other buildings here are part of Nepal's heritage, but are crumbling. Two 350kW generators have great historical significance, but are not properly preserved. Metal pipes more than a century old, lie rusting near the reservoir.

For most of its functioning life, Pharping generated power for only three hours every night. Later, even when the reservoir started being used to supply drinking water to Lalitpur, it was generating electricity for just one hour every evening.

There is a masterplan to preserve Pharping as a Live Energy Museum with the old building renovated to house a center for hydropower development, as well as research into renewable energy sources like solar and wind.

None of that has taken off, but 24 May is still marked as National Energy Day to pay homage to Nepal's hydropower potential.
Making asses of ourselves

End up with all the dismal news? What with politics? Like a noisy parker journalist? Then we have good news for you in 2023.

Under the new guidelines of the Ministry of Information and Communication (Moin: ‘No news is good news’) the media will undergo a paradigm shift by playing a “constructive” role in covering news of new vista towers, and the new bridge in Kathmandu that did not collapse.

The following content has been vetted for veracity and is certified by the new office bearers of the Federal Democratic Union of Nepalese Journalists as fit for human consumption. It is a self-evident truth that the mass media plays an important role in our Federal Republic. As we can present the news without fear or favour, let the potato chips fall where they may.

We take our adversarial role seriously to comfort the afflicted, affluence the comfortable, hold power to account and publish every hearse that is fit to print. We make quotes up as we go along, and we think ‘off the record’ has something to do with The Guinness Book. So, forgive us our excess passion.

However, we should not take for granted the freedom guaranteed to us in the Constitution. If we are serious about defending press freedom, talk shows should not waste time in small talk, they should henceforth challenge studio guests to hand-to-hand combat. Talking heads should also be tricked in bad faith, because we are taught that if it bleeds it leads.

We hear the Gandaki Government has decided not to blame messengers anymore, it will lock them up since we are now a Lock Tautric country. From now on, Nepali journalists don’t have to think twice about saying how awesome Comrade Awesome is. They only have to think once.

There is a cozy rumor going around that we presentities are not free anymore to be psychopathic and hypocritical laws. Just sort the tv news channels; our aforementioned freedoms are perfectly intact and its hacks have never been fonder to lick or kiss ass. It is true that there is complete freedom of press in Nepal for the media to transmit live on Facebook a blow-by-blow exclusive breaking investigative news, and publicly Lynch anyone who disagrees with us.

Yet, we must not take our freedoms for granted and let complacency get the better of us. We must never forget to come when asked only to bow. We must always be prepared to print front pages in exchange for handouts. But unlike some other professions, we are not the type to take the envelope and run. Our journalistic code of ethics does not allow that — we take the cash, return the envelope, deduct 13% VAT and provide a receipt, and only after that, make a deal for it.

We backs anons swear to be true to the salt and the party line, but only once adequately compensated. There are jobs in media for watchdogs and lapdogs, we are equal opportunity employers.

As you can see for yourself in the pages of our newspapers, and indeed in this column, our aforementioned freedoms are perfectly intact. There are no calls on weird movements in Nepal, and even if there was, we ignore them as we go about adding our bylines to headlines on deadlines.

We are free to report any and all political pronouncements in exasperating detail, leaving no item out, however trivial. Thanks to laws guaranteeing the freedom of expression and the freedom to make complete asses of ourselves, Nepal’s media today is more self-reliant, self-important, self-righteous and self-concared than ever before.

The Ass

Harshiko Naya Sewa

62% लामा हुट

Mbs

WorldLInK

92 महिलाओं लागाने र 20,000/-
बाटको बिना एडिसन प्रमाण

मात्र र 98,400/-

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92 महिलाओं इन्टरनेट + नेटिव चुरिया

अफर औसत

20 Mbs र 100 Mbs वा पति

*अफर दीनित अवश्यिका लागाने मात्र