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The homecoming of Nepal's g

● Alisha Sijapati

Nearly 40 years after it was stolen from Patan, a rare stone statue of Laxmi-Narayan finally landed at Kathmandu airport on 13 April, raising hopes that thousands of other religious objects from Nepal will also soon come home.

The 800-year-old androgynous idol was wrenched out of its shrine in July 1984 from Patan's Pakto Tole where it was being worshipped till the day it was stolen. The figure surfaced briefly in 1990 at a Sotheby's auction, disappeared again, and was later spotted at the Dallas Museum of Art where it was an 'exhibit' since 2007.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) handed over the statue to the Nepal Embassy in Washington on 6 March, and it took some time for the documents to be processed before the gods could finally be returned to Nepal.

"The deity will now be handed over to the Patan Museum, and we are preparing all the needed logistics here before it can be restored to its original temple," says Damodar Gautam, Director-General of the Department of Archaeology.

Locals had made a replica of the statue that they worshipped after the original was stolen. Other religious objects that have been returned to



AMITABH JOSHI



LAIN SINGH BANGDEL

The original 12th-century Laxmi-Narayan stolen in 1984.

Nepal have also been sent to the Patan Museum for safe-keeping so they will not be stolen again.

The process for the deity to be restored to its original space is lengthy. Community members have to reach out to the District Office in Lalitpur for paperwork for security purposes. While the bureaucratic wheels grind on, priests at Pakto Tole are already working to set an auspicious date for the special chamma puja reinstatement of the idol.

"When we bring back our God, there will be celebration and a procession so that the world knows and understands that items from our living heritage is not to be stored and exhibited in their museums or private collections," says Chiribabu

Maharjan, Mayor of Lalitpur Metropolitan City.

Although overjoyed by the Laxmi-Narayan homecoming, community members are in a dilemma about what to do with the replica they have been worshipping since 1993.

Dilendra Shrestha, a board member of Patan Museum and himself from Patko Tole, says, "Even if it's a replica, it is still our god, and we will make arrangements to house both our gods."

Shrestha says that for cultural and religious reasons, the original Laxmi-Narayan may not be kept as the central god anymore, as one of its hands was broken during transportation across the world. Gods that are damaged cannot be

kept as the central idol in the temple even though they are worshipped, according to local belief.

"Most likely both the original and replica will be kept next to one another, however, the decision will be a collective one from the community," Shrestha says.

A photograph of the 15th-century deity was first published in *Images of Nepal*, a 1984 book by Indian historian Krishna Deva. Later, it was included by Nepal's art historian Lain Singh Bangdel in his book *Stolen Images of Nepal*.

The collective effort of bringing Laxmi-Narayan home has set a remarkable precedent in repatriating stolen gods of Nepal, and has been a collective effort of historians, academics, activists, investigation

agencies and the government of Nepal and the United States.

American artist Joy Lynn Davis who has documented stolen religious objects through her art is glad the Laxmi-Narayan is back to where it belongs. She had painted the Patko shrine with the missing deity depicted in gold.

"The day the Laxmi Narayan arrives in Nepal, I will be the happiest person—so many people and organisations have worked on this. The only way to protect them is to increase awareness about their significance. We have a lot of work to do, Laxmi-Narayan is just the beginning," Davis told this paper earlier this year.

Indeed, an investigation by the *Nepali Times* tracked another deity

prabhu BANK

Biodegradable plastic in Nepal

A Nepali company has tried to address the growing problem of plastic pollution in Nepal by manufacturing biodegradable plastic products. The government had tried and failed several times to impose a ban on single use plastic, and the throwaway items have clogged drains and rivers across the country. Many of these take more than 500 years to decompose in dumping sites.



Now, Kathmandu-based Jain Trading Concern is introducing plastic bags and other items that degrade within three months of disposal. Although this does not reduce the use of plastic, it is a first step in reducing the amount of garbage on landfill sites, dumping sites and rivers.

Biodegradable plastic bags, garbage bags, straw, fork, spoon, grocery bags, stand up pouches, cling film and even bubble wraps are now available from Jain, or through Daraz and the CleanNepal2021 campaign.

"Our primary aim at the moment is to help switch from single use plastic in offices, household dustbins to a biodegradable alternative," says Bunty Sethia of Jain Trading Concern. "Even though many people know about the dangers of plastic, eliminating it fully from our lives is difficult."

Sethia says that if alert consumers start boycotting single use plastic asking manufacturers and service providers to use the biodegradable variety it could improve solid waste management in Nepal.

Every year, nearly 2 million plastic bags are used once and thrown away in Kathmandu Valley alone,

making up 15% of all garbage that goes to landfill sites or is burnt. Every day, an estimated 150 tonnes of plastic end up in Nepal's garbage dumps.

Some cities like Ilam and Dharan have tried to ban plastic bags altogether, but it has been difficult to enforce. But there are more than 250 companies that import pellets needed for manufacturing plastic bags, and they have a strong lobby with the government—making previous bans ineffective.

Turkish ties up with Mega Bank

Turkish Airlines has partnered with Mega Bank Nepal Limited on travel facilities for the bank's debit and credit card holding clients and employees for special discounted fares and extra luggage facilities upon presentation of their cards. The facility is available for travel with Turkish Airlines flights..



General Manager of Turkish Airlines in Nepal Abdullah TuncerKececi and Deputy CEO of Mega Bank Nepal Limited Raveena Desraj Shrestha signed the MoU at a function at the bank premises.

Ncell's New Year Offer

Ncell Axiata Limited has launched the Same to Same Double Offer. Customers will receive additional data bonus on every recharge and double data as bonus on data packs and Ncell Data Saapati.



World Bank predicts recovery

The World Bank's latest Nepal Development Update predicts a gradual economic recovery for the country from the Covid crisis in fiscal year 2021. Easing of social distancing, rollout of vaccines for priority populations and good monsoon harvests are expected to create economic growth of 2.7%.

The report outlines export promotion, attraction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

and reducing trade costs as some measures to achieve export competitiveness for successful economic recovery. Nepal's annual merchandise exports could increase 12 times to \$9.2 billion. This is why the country is missing out on creating 220,000 jobs, says lead author of the report, Kene Ezemenari.

Imports and remittance are expected to recover slowly while exports remain stagnant. Revenue performance will stay weak as spending rises on vaccines, economic relief and development projects. Industrial activity is projected to remain below pre-pandemic levels until fiscal year 2022.

However, tourism may not recover properly without readjusting to a post-Covid market. With a full recovery only expected in fiscal year 2023, planners have a slim time frame to make tourism more sustainable.

Kavalan Whisky in Nepal

Kavalan Single Malt produced at Kavalan Distillery and imported by Evo Beverages, is now in Nepal. The brand was awarded the Best Rest of The World Single Malt, Best Taiwanese Single Malt, Best Single Malt of the year and more for its various whiskeys.



EU debt relief for Nepal

Nepal is among 28 countries to receive a debt service relief amounting to 4.299 million (Rs582 million) through a European Union contribution of 183 million to the Catastrophe Containment Relief Trust (CCRT) set up by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The CCRT aims to provide debt service relief on instances of disasters and catastrophes to the poorest and most vulnerable countries.

Jutta Urpilainen, European Commissioner for International Partnerships, said: "Team Europe continues to stand in solidarity with its most vulnerable partners in this difficult period so resources are freed up for the most vulnerable people."

EU Ambassador to Nepal Nona Deprez added, "We are happy to share the good news and believe that the debt relief will create a fiscal space enabling Nepal to move to a green, resilient and inclusive recovery from the COVID pandemic."

She added that the debt relief for Nepal is in line with the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's Global Recovery Initiative, which called for linking investments and debt relief to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

Bajaj showroom in Phidim

Bajaj has inaugurated its new showroom in Phidim for sales, services and spare parts of Bajaj motorcycles. The dealership has been granted to Samridhi and Brothers Auto Pvt Ltd, where the showroom will be housed.



Tahoma Terrace Opens

Kathmandu Marriott Hotel's new Mediterranean restaurant Tahoma Terrace is now open from 4 PM to 10 PM, serving signature items like Mezze platters, manakish and barbecues on Arabic grills.

gods

The repatriation of Kathmandu's stolen religious objects appears to be gathering pace



ERIN L. THOMPSON

In Sotheby's catalogue in 1990.



ERIN L. THOMPSON

The deity in the Dallas Art Museum in 2014.



ALISHA SIJAPATI

The copy of Laxmi-Narayan in Patko Tole since 1993.

stolen from Gahiti in Patan in the 1960s to the Denver Art Museum.

That figure of Uma-Maheswar has been cited in several books by art historians, including *The Art of Nepal* by Pratapaditya Pal in 1974, Stella Kramrish's *Manifestations of Shiva*, Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1981, Krishna Deva's *Images of Nepal* in 1984 and most notably, in Lain Singh Bangdel's book *Stolen Images of Nepal* in 1987.

According to its website, the Denver Art Museum has mentioned the 'known' provenance of this Uma-Maheswar dating back to 1968

from Sundaram Works of Art and Handicrafts in India, till it acquired the statue in 1980 as a gift from the private collection of Jane F Ullman and Edwin F Ullman.

Sanukaji Maharjan, now 80, remembers how the deity had been stolen in the 1960s, was found and stolen again from Patan's Bhandarkhal Garden.

"The first time it was stolen we fixed the statue firmly to the wall so that thieves couldn't take it away again, but we were wrong," recalls Maharjan. Since it was stolen 60 years ago, he is one of few people in

Patan who remember the statue and its importance to the community.

"I am already in my 50s and the statue was stolen even before I was born, with time the Uma-Maheswar has been more like a bedtime story for us and we will do our best and work on giving it a permanent space in its home," says Dinesh Maharjan of the Gahiti Tole Committee.

Slok Gyawali, founder of Nepal Pride Project based in Portland, Oregon who has worked persistently on repatriating the Uma-Maheswar, has been in touch with the Denver Art Museum.

In one e-mail exchange acquired by *Nepali Times*, the Museum wrote: 'We continue to have confidence in the propriety of the provenance of the piece. Though we had been aware of the Stolen Images of Nepal publication, we are unaware of any substantiated claims of theft of this piece; indeed, other publications discuss the piece without reference to a theft.'

Gyawali then got in touch with 90-year-old Ted Ullman, scion of Jane and Edwin Ullman. He told Gyawali that his parents are not to blame, and after hearing from the Denver Art Museum he will be happy to write a letter of support for Nepal's efforts to repatriate this and other religion objects from Asia.

The Nepal Embassy in Washington DC told *Nepali Times* it is in touch 'informally' with the Denver Art Museum. It added that the Department of Archaeology had finished its forensic archaeological report and submitted it to the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kathmandu is waiting for the report to begin official correspondence with the Denver museum.

After the Laxmi-Narayan that arrived in Kathmandu on Monday was handed over to the Nepal Embassy in Washington last month, the Manhattan's District Attorney's Office transferred three other artifacts to the Nepal Consulate in New York: a 13th century carved temple eave depicting an Apsara, a 14th century gold seated Buddha in Bhumi-sparsa Mudra, and a 15th century seated Ganesh.

The District Attorney Office

said the repatriation was part of its ongoing effort to return stolen and looted antiquities seized from the illicit collection of Subhash Kapoor, who was arrested in 2012. Along with heritage activists, Nepal government agencies are also stepping up efforts to bring back the stolen gods from museums and private collectors all over the world.

Lost Arts of Nepal in its Facebook page published two statues from Nepal that are in possession of the Metropolitan Museum of Art ('The Met') in New York. They include a 9th century 'Shiva in Himalayan Abode with Ascetics' which was originally a part of Kankeswori Temple at Shobha Bhagwati in Kathmandu, and a 16th century Nrityadevi originally from I-baha bahi in Patan.

The religious objects appear to have been stolen so long ago that people in those neighbourhoods have no recollection of the gods that once resided in their temples.

'Since The Met previously has sent two statues back to Nepal voluntarily, I am confident they can do the same this time too,' the anonymous Facebook page admin of Lost Arts of Nepal wrote back in response to a *Nepali Times* query. Activists who have reached The Met have been told that the museum's legal team is investigating the matter.

There are indications that the repatriation of Nepal's stolen statues will now gather pace. Government officials here say the Art Institute of Chicago has said it is ready to return a 8th-century Chaturmukhi Shivalinga on 16 April.

One stop Solution

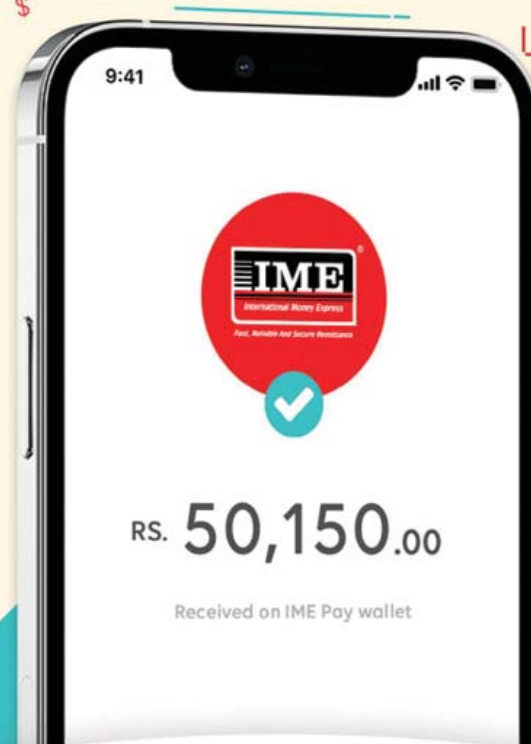


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Baby was buried under the rubble for 22 hours on 25 April 2015 and survived. But his family still struggles to cope with life.

● **Monika Deupala**

In a sparse rented room with pink walls, six-year-old Sonish Awal is preparing for his online Nepali class (pictured above) on a smartphone, leaning on a table propped up with a paint bucket.

His sister Sonia is coaching the first grader, the baby made famous as Nepal's 'Miracle Boy' for having survived 22 hours under the rubble of the family's home in Bhaktapur that was destroyed in the 2015 earthquake.

"He is playful and inquisitive, he keeps asking me when we will rebuild our house," says Rashmila about her son, whom she describes as a happy child who likes to play with other neighbourhood children and watch tv.

The family's single room has a sewing machine in which Rashmila sews clothes for additional income. She has no answer for her son's persistent questions about rebuilding their house.

Her husband Shyam is a truck driver, but the pandemic and lockdowns have reduced his income.

When the earthquake struck at 11:56AM on 25 April 2015, Rashmila was out shopping, she rushed back as the ground shook. At their home, Sonia picked up her four-month-old brother, and tried to rush out of the room. A cupboard fell on top of them, and the house came down on top of them.

Sonia was unconscious when she was rescued a few hours later, and was rushed to hospital. But Sonish could not be found. Nepal Army rescuers had given up, but were called back in the morning when Rashmila heard a faint wail from under the rubble.



AMUL THAPA

Miracle Boy, six years after

They found Sonish covered in dust, with just a scratch in his leg. The photograph of soldier Dipak Rai and other rescuers holding the baby got widespread play in the national and international media. In Nepal, the rescue brought a ray of hope to a nation in shock after the disaster that left nearly 9,000 dead and 22,000 injured.

Shyam Awal was driving his pickup at Jadibuti, when he felt like he was losing control of the vehicle. He turned around and drove back to Bhaktapur, and seeing all the destroyed buildings, he feared the worst.

There was a heap of rubble where his home used to be, and his son buried somewhere inside. He rushed to the hospital to find his daughter Sonia was still unconscious. His wife Rashmila was inconsolable.

"The whole neighbourhood came together for the rescue but each time, it was another corpse that we pulled out, we had given up hope of Sonish surviving so long after the earthquake," recalls 39-year-old Shyam.

When they heard the faint cry from the ruin of their four-storey home late into the

night, Shyam at first thought it was a dog. But as it became clear that it Sonish whimpering.

"We could hear the baby but pulling him out was another story altogether, I was panicking the whole time, knowing he was down there but we couldn't do much," recalls Rashmila. "When they finally pulled him out, he was covered in dust. Today, he just has a scar on his left thigh to remind him of the miraculous survival."

After his online exam this week, Rashmila walked Sonish to the ruin of their house that collapsed six years ago. The debris has been



Quarter of Nepalis still hungry during pandemic

A year into the Covid-19 crisis, Nepalis have more food but still suffer under-nutrition

Nepalis continue to suffer from pandemic-induced food insecurity even as Nepal sees the first signs of the second wave of Covid-19.

A new report released last week shows that 16.8% of households have inadequate food consumption, and nearly 2.7% had insufficient food stock to meet their needs. 43% of children between 6-23 months did not meet the minimum recommended dietary needs.

The survey was conducted in December 2020 by the UN World Food Programme (UN-WFP) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, with support from the Australian government. It is the third in a series of nationwide surveys to assess the impact of Covid-19 on household food security in Nepal. The first two rounds were conducted in April, and August 2020.

The survey covered 4,416 households from all seven provinces, and was collected through live telephone interviews.

The highest prevalence of food insecurity, as measured by poor nutrition, was found in Karnali Province, accounting for 4.7% of



WFP NEPAL

households, followed by Province 2 (3.8%), Gandaki (2.7%) and Sudurpaschim (2.5%).

Families have adopted negative livelihood coping strategies to address food shortages such as borrowing money, harvesting immature crops, selling livestock, household assets, or even house and property.

The good news is that the

food security situation has been gradually improving, with a smaller proportion of households consuming inadequate diets in December 2020 compared to August and April 2020. More than 3 out of 4 respondents reported having food stocks, of which nearly 50% had more than one month's worth of food stock.

"The findings from the survey

indicate gradual improvements in terms of the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on food security and livelihoods. Yet, the aggravated conditions persist and continue to affect Nepali households," states the report.

"The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on job loss and income reduction remains notable and can further put pressure on income

generation and livelihoods. Such prolonged exposure to adverse conditions, together with the upcoming lean season, can, in turn, lead to further risk of food insecurity."

Easing of restrictions and opening of economic activities, as well as recently harvested summer crops and assistance from various government and aid agencies, are likely the reasons for the improvement in food security.

However, analysis of the survey data shows that there is deepening food insecurity in areas that are chronically more vulnerable like western Nepal.

In fact, more households remain food insecure during the pandemic than five years ago. In December 2020, 17% of households had inadequate food consumption, but in December 2016 the figure was 15%.

In the survey, households with low education levels, a chronically ill member, female-headed households, and households living in rural areas were found to be more food insecure.

Similarly, loss of income was the largest among large and medium traders (48%), remittance recipient families (46%), followed by daily wage labourers in agriculture and cash crop producers (33%). A total of 25% of non-agriculture daily wage labourers reported having a loss of income source followed by 11.6% agriculture-related daily wage labourer. 🇳🇵



Photographer Amul Thapa's iconic picture of four-month-old toddler Sonish Awal after being rescued by Nepal Army soldier Dipak Rai and his team (*far left*).

Another photo of the rescue on the front page of *Nepali Times* the Friday after the quake (*inset*).

Sonish, now 6, shows the exact spot where he was buried under the rubble for 22 hours before being rescued (*left*). The family home is still in ruins, six years later.

Sonish with his mother Rashmila, who heard her baby's faint cry from under the rubble and got rescuers to resume the search (*above*).

earthquake

cleared, but the space is empty.

After his ancestral home was divided between the brothers, Shyam Awal ended up without a land title, his portion of the property is likely to be acquired by the municipality for a road-widening project. The family is planning to build a one-storey house for now, and save on rent.

Amul Thapa, who took the now-iconic image of Nepal Army rescuer Dipak Rai lifting Sonish from the rubble, visits the Awals regularly, but is frustrated by the state's apathy towards the survivors.

"The rescue bought the family international fame, even the Prime Minister visited them but they remain where they are, their house is the only one left to be rebuilt in that lane," says Thapa.

Nepal Army that played a crucial role in the rescue of Sonish has been paying for the education of both the Awal children through a scholarship they set up for until they graduate from high school. After finishing his primary school, Sonish will attend the Army's high school in Sallaghari.

Sonish, who celebrated his sixth birthday

in October, does not remember that fateful day, but he has grown up looking at the images of himself. Pointing at a cut-out of his picture from a newspaper from six years ago, he says he wants to become a soldier when he grows up.

At the site of the rescue, Rashmila asks her son where he was trapped. Sonish has been told the story so often that he points to the spot above a half-buried door, and replies cheerfully: "Right here, I was underneath here."



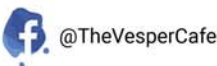
Watch this video of the Miracle Boy of Bhaktapur, six years after he was pulled out alive from the ruins of his home. Sonish Awal is a happy boy, but his family struggles to cope. They have had no help from the state, and do not have smoney to rebuild their house.

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Himalayan red rice is

A viral photograph makes
rage in health-conscious

● **Monika Deupala**
in Jumla

Jumla's *marsi* red rice earned some notoriety in 2018 after a photograph went viral on social media of Prime Minister K P Oli and Premier-in-waiting Pushpa Kamal Dahal tucking in a lavish meal.

At the table with plates of red rice was business tycoon Durga Prasai, and the image made *marsi* synonymous with political cronyism. However, all the free publicity also boosted demand for Jumla's red rice in Kathmandu, where the government last month recognised it as a local brand.

Marsi was brought under the government's food trade management last month, and is being lifted in bulk by the government from Jumla to be sold in Kathmandu. Its price is fixed at Rs225 per kg, and all this has turned out to be good news for farmers of Jumla and Sinja valleys, known for the highest altitude where rice is cultivated in the world.

Red rice used to be sold only by businesses that promoted organic products in Kathmandu, but thanks to all the publicity, *marsi* has gone mainstream. It is now packaged and sold in supermarkets, or home delivered at up to Rs300 per kg.

All this is also good news for consumers, since red rice has much greater nutritional value than polished white rice. Himalayan red rice is pigmented and is packed with flavonoid antioxidants, protein and fibre, making it much more suitable than white rice also for those with cardio-vascular disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity.

Most of the nutrients in grains of red rice are contained in the bran which gives it a nutty flavour, and the rice is eaten unhulled so as not to lose its most wholesome part. In white rice, the

healthy bran is removed and most of what remains is carbohydrate.

"*Marsi* is the highest cultivated rice in the world, grown at above 3000m, and takes almost nine months to harvest," explains rice expert Rajendra Uprety. "It is not mass-produced like other types of rice, and the environment it is grown in and the absence of pesticides makes it very healthy. The only fertiliser used is manure."

Here in Sinja and Jumla, spring has arrived and with it the preparation of the once-frozen terraces for this year's rice crop. There is no need to wait for rain here since there is plenty of water for irrigation from the Tila and Hima rivers which are swollen with snowmelt.

Shanta Kumai is waiting at the local watermill to get her millet harvest pounded into flour. "I'm expecting my son to visit soon. Men from most of the families have migrated down to the plains for work, but they come home when it is time to plant the *marsi*," she says.

While much of the farm work is now done by women, they wait for the men to help with the ploughing of the fields. Seasonal migration for employment has been one of the main means of making an income for the men in Sinja, but come March-April, they return home to renew the annual agricultural cycle of planting *marsi* rice, before leaving for their jobs again.

Women pounding *marsi* is a common sight in the villages of Jumla district. Reddish-brown when harvested, the glutinous grains take a lightly purplish texture when cooked, and retain the nutritious ingredients.

Dal Bahadur Buda, 45, owner of an eatery in Gothijyula Bazar in Sinja says he has noticed a sudden spurt in buyers of *marsi* rice.

"Previously, visitors would buy beans, apples, potatoes, local medicinal herbs and tea. But these days, the demand for *marsi* rice has picked up," he says. "In the past, we were tempted by what

Kathmandu ate and we always used to wonder what white rice tasted like. But after getting to know the health benefits of *marsi*, we have gone back to our own red rice."

Pankali Budha, 49, from nearby Okharpata village also has childhood memories of the smell and taste of red rice. She would tag along with her father to Mugu when she was young to trade the family's *marsi* crop.

"Many local shepherds walk to Mugu and to the Chinese border to sell the rice. There used to be interpreters who helped us barter our rice, potatoes, beans and sheep for salt, spices and blankets from China," she remembers.

Those days are over. The new Karnali Highway, all the publicity surrounding *marsi*, and a more health-conscious population means red rice has a ready market in Kathmandu and other cities.

Even while red rice has leaped from Twitter to farmers' markets in Kathmandu to become a nationally recognised food item, there is still no market system or infrastructure in place in Jumla for farmers to sell the rice.

The growing popularity of the *marsi* has also created the possibility of a new source of income for the people of Jumla. But, as is often the case, the farmers who actually grow the crop still get a small piece of the pie.

Still, the popularity of *marsi* rice has lessened somewhat the demand in the Karnali and far-west for white rice, and the red variety is also bought by food-for-work agencies as wages for road-building labour.

Trader Sundar Upadhaya from Sinja says that since the region does not have to worry about pests because of its low temperature, storage of the crop has not been a hassle so far.

But putting in a system to trade the local produce would make it easier for local farmers to promote the rice in the market. 🇳🇵





Malayan S red hot

es Jumla's *marsi* rice all the
conscious Kathmandu



Now, Marsi Beer

True to the adage that all publicity is good publicity, businessman Durga Prasai has used the unsavoury reputation that red rice got after his viral photograph to launch his own Marsi Beer brand.

Prasai earned considerable notoriety after the photo of him having lunch with K P Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal (*above*) at his home in Thimi went viral three years ago, and people even started teasing him as "Mr Marsi".

Prasai decided to turn this to his advantage by building a brand around *marsi* to rehabilitate the goodness of red rice as well as his own name. He bought a brewery in Nawalparasi (reportedly for Rs4 billion) and went from 'lunch to launch' by selling the bottles in the market. The beer is said to be made from 70% barley and 30% red rice.

Prasai had organised that lunch to mediate the final negotiations for the merger of the Maoist Centre led by Dahal and Oli's UML. The electoral alliance of the two parties propelled them to victory and the unified Nepal Communist Party had a near two-thirds majority in Parliament after the 2017 election.

However, things soon went sour between Dahal and Oli until the Supreme Court ruled on 7 March that the NCP should be disbanded into the Maoist Centre and UML again. Since then, Prasai has been seen to be hedging his bets with Oli, and even got the prime minister to inaugurate his cancer hospital in Birtamod. Oli then assured Prasai publicly that his B&C Teaching Hospital would soon get affiliation from Kathmandu University.



EVENTS



Clay sculpture workshop
Join sculptor Bishal Sharu Magar's clay portrait sculpture workshop. A series of discussions and performances will introduce participants to basic techniques, hand skills, and styles of the artform.
18 - 24 April, Kirtipur Thai Bihar



Narayanthan cleaning campaign
Harimat Foundation is organising a cleaning campaign to encourage proper care and disposal of plastics around Kavrepalanchowk's Narayanthan area.
16 April, 6pm, Panauti Village

Hike for Nepal
Kickstart the new year with a group of professionals and expert guides specialising in cultural heritage tours, hiking and trekking, this time from Godam to Khanikhola. Register on Hike for Nepal's Facebook Page.
17 April, 7am - 6pm



Boudha farmers market
Buy fresh and organic fruits and vegetables, fresh baked goods, and other delicious goodies. Support local products and farmers, and follow physical distancing guidelines.
Saturdays, 8am-5pm, Utpala Cafe, Boudha

Virtual heritage tour
This instalment of the Virtual Heritage Tour series designed by Story Cycle will take viewers on a journey to Barpak in Gorkha— six years after the village was torn in the devastating 2015 earthquake. Make reservations on a Google form at Story Cycle's Facebook page.
23 April, 4pm-5pm

ONLINE ARCHIVES



Real Stories
Go to the Real Stories YouTube channel to watch compelling award-winning documentaries from all over the world. Watch factual films about war, crime, mental health, technology and more.

MyLoft
Find thousands of books to read or listen to, from fiction to plays, non-fiction and self development. Check out The British Council's MyLoft App and gain free access to educational and recreational resources. Register for the Digital Library.

Storytime from space
Perfect for young kids with an interest in astronomy and space exploration, the Storytime from Space series features astronauts on the International Space Station reading children's literature. Find the playlist at <https://storytimefromspace.com/library/>

Night Vale
Welcome to Night Vale is a twice-monthly podcast from the fictional desert town of Night Vale, where every conspiracy theory is true. Find on YouTube, Stitcher, or Apple Podcasts. The Night Vale website has a recommended list of episodes to start listening from.



Botanical garden tour
Google Earth's Stop and Smell the Flowers is a journey through eleven of the most breathtaking botanical gardens and arboretums around the world from countries like Russia, Sweden, and Canada, to the Netherlands.

DINING



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

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

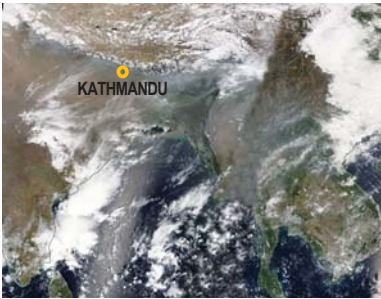


OR2K
Dive in and lap up the refreshing Matbucha or roll along with the falafel grenade at this exquisite Turkish restaurant. The beaten copper bowls at OR2K will take every visitor's palate on a flight to the middle-east.
Thamel (01) 4422097



Places Restaurant and Bar
A testament to how vegetables can be used in a variety of creative and tasty ways, Places has an entire plant-based tasting menu—from vegan pizzas to vegan comfort food—all in one place.
Thamel (01) 4700413

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

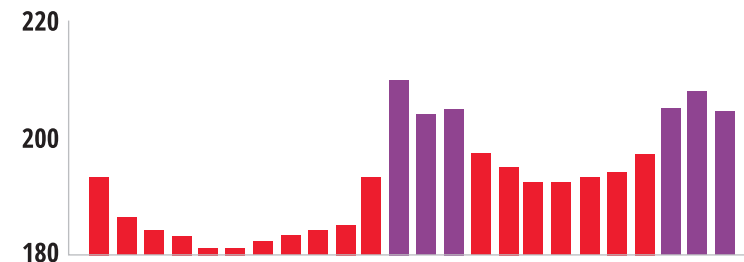


There is no let-up in the dry spell that has dessicated the countryside making it highly flammable. The temperature is also rising, and with stronger afternoon wind, there is increased chances of wildfires spreading to areas not yet affected by the blazes in the past months. There is a chance of some thunderstorms and rain, mainly in the western mountains. This may bring some short sharp showers in Kathmandu as well into the weekend. We hope.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 14°	25° 13°	26° 12°

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 14 - 15 April



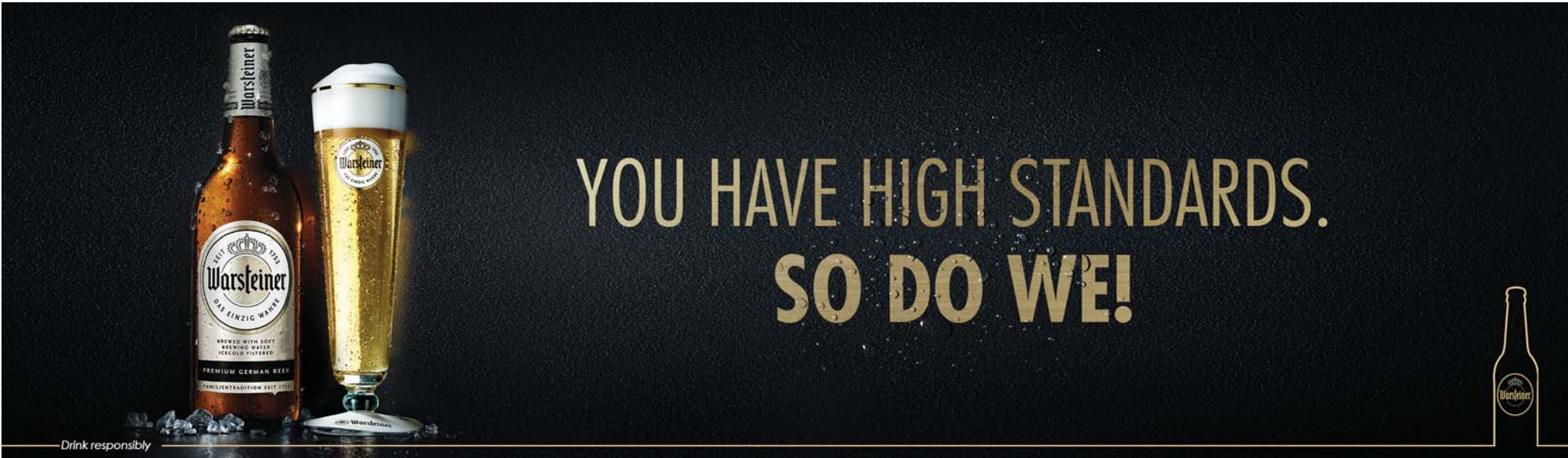
AQI from 12pm 14 April - 12PM 15 April measured at Phora Darbar

Without rains, the wildfires have continued to spread across the country. In the past week, it has been smoke from fires in western Nepal and the Indian state of Uttarakhand that have been blown across the Himalayan foothills by prevailing winds. This has added to Kathmandu Valley's already bad smog situation. There may be a slight respite to the worst wildfire season in Nepal's living memory if a westerly front advancing into Nepal brings much needed precipitation. Go to www.nepalitimes.com for live hour-by-hour AQI measurement for Kathmandu city centre.



OUR PICK

In writer-director Ritesh Batra's 2013 feature film debut *The Lunchbox*, housewife Ila Sehgal—hoping to inspire some romance in her stagnant marriage—packs delicious lunches for her husband and sends it to his office through Mumbai's famed dabbawalas. However, a mix-up one day leads to the lunchbox getting delivered to widower Saajan Fernandes, who works as an accountant. Thus begins a friendship between the two, deepened via letters passed through the eponymous lunchbox every day. Stars Irrfan Khan, Nimrat Kaur, Nawazuddin Siddiqui, and Nakul Vaid.





Everything you wanted to know about mountains

Pokhara's International Mountain Museum is open again after the Covid-19 shutdown

● **Shristi Karki** in Pokhara

After a year of shutdown, Pokhara's International Mountain Museum is once more welcoming visitors – mostly students and Nepalis.

The carefully curated museum tries to encompass everything about mountains everywhere, with a special emphasis on the Himalayas. The architecture of its angular roof itself resembles mountain peaks, and three 8,000m mountains are visible from the museum's tall north-facing glass windows – Annapurna, Dhaulagiri and Manaslu.

The museum has everything from anthropology, culture, exploration and adventure on the mountains. It depicts hardships of living in difficult terrain, the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the Himalayas, the geology of the world's loftiest mountain range, and mountaineering memorabilia.

"This is not just a museum, we made it a space for learning and research. Everyone is welcome here—tourists, students, researchers, or academics," says Kul Bahadur Gurung of the Nepal Mountaineering Association that manages the museum that first opened in 2002. "These exhibits mean a great deal to Nepal's mountain communities and the museum is crucial to tourism in Pokhara."

The museum showed up to a 37% annual increase in visitors before the pandemic, with the highest single-day visitor record of 3,000 in 2018. Visitor numbers plummeted to nearly zero for most of 2020, and only recently started to pick up again with student and domestic tourists.

The exhibition space is divided into two floors, and the building itself is airy and expansive, with lots of natural light, and the multi-coloured steel beams holding the roof giving the hall an

impression of added height. To the left lies a Buddhist gumba, indicative of how Buddhist faith is interwoven with Nepal's mountain communities.

There are three main sections, the first of which is the 'Hall of Mountain People'. The first three exhibits show mountain communities around the world, the flora and fauna in the mountains of Taiwan, Japan and Slovenia, with mannequins dressed in the traditional garb of those regions.

Nepal's own mountain communities are also exhibited, starting with the Sherpa people, to Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, Pun, Gurung, and Chhantyal communities. Their lifestyles are showcased with cooking utensils, farming tools, musical instruments and even traditional weapons.

Further along, the basement opens up to the 'Hall of Mountains', which begins with posters of the 14 peaks above 8000m—10 of them in Nepal. The posters, the kind one would perhaps find hung on a travel agent's office, are offset by the personal accounts of mountaineers with photos.

'On the narrow range, we held hands in exultation, then the surface beneath our feet began to crumble and seemed likely to break away, so I straddled the ridge like a horse,' reads Toshio Imanishi's account of his Manaslu ascent.

A few feet away are rocks from various parts of Nepal with their age ranging from 2.5 million to 570 million years. We are reminded that the 'Yellow Band' on top of Mt Everest is actually limestone, and was once at the bottom of the ocean.

One would have hoped that the exhibits were better designed, and maintained, and not just a random collection of dusty artifacts in glass cases. But this being Nepal, one has to be

glad this museum even exists.


There are sections on early Himalayan explorers like Ekai Kawaguchi, Eric Shipton, Tilman and Toni Hagen. But perhaps the most interesting and informative part of the exhibition for visitors would be the one on the history of mountaineering expeditions, with some of the early climbing equipment that forces visitors to wonder how early mountaineers

ventured into the 'death zone' with clothing and boots like that.

No mountain museum would be complete without the threat that the climate crisis poses on the mountains, and there is a whole section showing the consequences of the rapid melting of the ice.

From the vantage point of the ground floor, it is easy to see that the museum is filling up with the afternoon crowd. Three women

take pictures in front of the utensils in the Hall of Mountain People.

A couple of young children run around Lama Ngawang Kochha Sherpa's mandala on display in front of the Taiwanese exhibit. It looks like a normal day in normal times where people take day trips to the museum, but for the Covid-19 masks covering the visitors' faces. 

<http://www.internationalmountainmuseum.org/>




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HELPING HANDS: UNDP Nepal donated rapid antigen test kits to be deployed at health desks in Far-West and Lumbini Provinces.



ANZAC CONNECTION: Nepal's Ambassador to Australia and New Zealand Mahesh Dahal with New Zealand's honorary consul in Nepal Lisa Choegy and Australian Ambassador Felicity Volk last week in Kathmandu.



HOLY WATERS: Locals and tourists take a boat ride on Phewa Lake in Pokhara on Wednesday to mark Nepali New Year despite thick smoke haze.



ABOVE IT ALL: Despite the second wave, Everest Base Camp was abuzz this week with climbers once more after the pandemic closed mountaineering and trekking for a year.

Tap, Track, Trace and Test

Tackling Covid-19 through mobile apps

Countries across the world are using technology to organise, manage, prevent and track Covid-19 rates, while Nepal has fallen behind in the pandemic app race.

China, being the first country to contract Covid-19, was naturally first off the mark to launch a 'health code' app nationwide. Installing



TECH-AWAY
Saniaa Shah

the app was made mandatory by the government, and while many labelled it a breach of privacy and part of China's state surveillance system, it was also the only effective way to control the virus across a wide population.

The app directed people to stay indoors, report their travel history and share knowledge of any symptoms they may be experiencing. Each user then received a coloured QR code to indicate their infection status: red for those considered infected by the virus, yellow for those who may have come into contact with a Covid-positive person, and green code for those who seemed fine and virus-free. Public spaces could only be accessed with a green QR code, to ensure that a Covid-positive individual doesn't enter, say, a shopping mall and endanger others.

India followed China in its contact tracing app (CTA) strategy and method when Prime Minister Modi's office set up a committee to guide and quickly launch the 'AarogyaSetu' app. AarogyaSetu is Sanskrit for 'the bridge for liberation from disease'.

It was pretty clear that the Indian government was activating a robust PR campaign around the app as soon as it was launched on both Android and iOS app stores. Indian celebrities such as national cricket captain Virat Kohli and Bollywood actor Ajay Devgn endorsed the app via video clips requesting citizens to safeguard themselves from getting infected. The app crossed 100 million downloads and broke Pokemon Go's record of being the fastest growing app ever.

It has been one year since the app came into mandatory practice, and now airports, malls, clinics and local businesses ask Indian citizens to show their AarogyaSetu app to report their Covid status before they come into contact. As in China, the app uses the green-if-negative and red-if-positive simple colour-based communication.

The app is not based on prediction but strives for accuracy in reporting. In major cities like Mumbai, the government sends a home testing medical team to test members of households, and if their report is positive, it automatically updates their Covid status on the app, which is linked to their Aadhar Card (government-issued ID).

In the United States the federal government did not launch an official app or impose any mandatory rules to use CTAs. Instead, local governments collaborated with Apple and Google to develop regional apps relying on Bluetooth technology, but only for those who wish to use it. These apps ensure user safety by promising not to store personal information on their servers. A survey revealed that roughly 39% of US citizens

supported or accepted the use of CTAs to control the pandemic, compared to a whopping 80% in China, indirectly suggesting that the Chinese have more trust in their government institutions than the Americans.

Unlike these large economies that developed quick action digital tools under tight timelines, Germany came up with the 'Corona-Warn-App' months later, without any rush, taking its time to tackle possible data privacy issues. The download of the German app is voluntary, and it is designed to respect people's privacy by not permanently storing personal information.

Iceland launched its 'Rakning C-19' last April, being the country with the highest penetration of any CTA in the world (40% of Icelanders were adopting apps). However, the Icelandic Covid response team claimed that the app alone did not result in high impact. Manual tracing techniques like phone calls were more effective and required alongside the digital tool.

Iceland and a few other European countries have been proponents of free but responsible movement, trusting the citizens to follow guidelines without requiring hefty fines that force them to conform. Sweden, however, has flatly rejected the idea of an official tracking app, despite having more COVID-19 cases than neighbours Denmark and Finland.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and other West Asian countries have rolled out CTAs with Bluetooth tracing, but Qatar has gone a step

further warning that citizens who do not cooperate and install the app may face up to three years in jail.

Bahrain set a record this year by being the first country with a CTA that allows users to book free vaccine appointments via the 'BeAware' app, even letting people choose between the Pfizer-BioNTech and Sinopharm vaccines. Bahrain quickly became the second mostst vaccinated country in the world after Israel.

Here in Nepal, the government launched the 'Hamro Swasthya' app to disseminate information about the pandemic. It is a collaboration between several IT startups and the Ministry of Health and Population to financially and technically support the government in developing an effective app.

With over 300,000 app downloads and over 5 million site views, the app offers national Covid-19 updates, but not regional or local detailed information that would help people navigate their areas smartly. There is no guarantee of data privacy or any marketing campaign launched to promote the app's usage.

This lack of transparency and quality of software development is classic governmental mode of functioning. It is ticking the basic boxes and producing a low-cost, low-quality product that neither attracts nor engages the user with well-planned, well-designed communication.

Hamro Swasthya is available in both English and Nepali, and the top feature is the Covid self-assessment test that is a questionnaire asking the user to fill personal information along with answers to questions about symptoms faced and recent travel (note: it does not ask for domestic travel history, only international) in order to make an educated guess on whether the user has contracted the virus or not.

There is a section on plasma donation, with a form for both donors and those who require a blood donation. Another feature is the suspect report, where anybody can complain about anybody who they suspect is a Covid-positive individual. This feature is clearly not thoroughly thought out, as it can be easily misused.

There is a nationwide map to guide people to the nearest hospital, but there is plenty of room of improvement regarding the UX/UI and information provided (lack of address and phone numbers). The best sign of a good app is how often it is improved and optimised. But as the government started rolling out vaccines, information regarding availability is missing in Hamro Swasthya. 🇳🇵



The ball is in Nepal's cricket court



● Prakash Guragain

It was the final of the 2018 ICC World Cricket League in Windhoek, and Nepal was in dire straits. Needing 195 runs to win, the team was down to its last wicket at 144.

Sandeep Lamichhane and Karan KC then pulled off a heroic and historic last stand of 51 runs to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. They won the coveted One Day International (ODI) status, and Nepal was in the same league as cricketing heavyweights England and India.

"I was a proud coach witnessing history unfold," recalls Jagat Tamata, who now coaches the Nepali women's team. "I will never forget those incredible moments."

But three years after the miraculous win, Nepali cricket's meteoric progress has hit a snag.

Nepal is competing internationally in April after a 13-month pandemic-induced pause. Coaches and players alike have bemoaned the lack of international exposure, and its impacts on the game's development.

To be sure, there are age-old problems plaguing Nepali cricket. The International Cricket Council (ICC) suspended the country's

After corruption, infighting and Covid, Nepal's cricket is ready for bigger things



cricketing body Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) from 2016 to 2019 for politicising the sport.

Corruption and infighting is rampant within governing bodies but crumbling sports infrastructure has not been able to support local talent either.

"Unnecessary meddling is an obvious problem, but we are taking small steps to rectify that," assures CAN President Chatur Bahadur Chand. "With the backing of fans, media and sponsors, we hope to continue important tournaments and increase exposure."

One such tournament, the Everest Premier League, is due to resume in September 2021. Headlined by marquee players like former national captain Paras Khadka, West Indies icon Chris Gayle and New Zealand pinch-hitter Corey Anderson, the tournament is expected to usher in a new era of fast, exciting and competitive cricket to the country.

The sudden rise of cricket in Nepal has transformed the game from an elite pastime to a beloved sport of millions of fans. Imported from Britain in the late 1940s, cricket was first played on four pitches across Tundikhel. CAN was set up in 1946, and soon tournaments under Rana patronage attracted established players from India.

"We first started out at Tundikhel, then fanned out to every empty space available," recalls former cricketer Raju Basnyat. "Cricket really took off once the Tribhuvan University turf ground was completed."

Towards the end of Panchayat, the Royal Nepal Army restricted access to the grounds. Tournaments were cancelled and cricketers faded into obscurity as international exposure decreased.

Cricket made a comeback with Nepal's first-ever international tournament, the 1996 ACC (Asian



international cricket scene. The country progressed to the second round of the Under-19 World Cup in 2000 and qualified for four successive editions, beating star-studded teams along the way.

"Defeating established teams like New Zealand and South Africa are moments I will always cherish," says current national team Captain Gyanendra Malla. However, Nepal's performance over the 2012 and 2014 editions were disappointing.

"While Test cricket-playing nations get better, we remain static," explains Malla. "We have to make the base strong before expecting results at the senior level."

Nevertheless, Nepali cricket has improved significantly over the last decade. Under the tutelage of noted Sri Lankan coaches Pubudu Dassanayake and Roy Dias, Nepal jumped from lowly minnows to just missing out on the Twenty-20 World Cup knockouts in 2014. Another celebrated coach, Aussie Dav Whatmore, has recently been appointed head coach, much to the delight of fans and team members.

The next logical goal is achieving Test-cricket status--the most revered format of the game.

Nepali cricket has all the ingredients to get there. A conveyor belt of young talent, a wealth of experience and passionate fans must now be supported by a system focused on rebuilding infrastructure and keeping politics and corruption off the cricketing pitch.

Says Jagat Tamata: "Coaches cannot perform miracles. The fans have their hearts in the right place, but a supportive cricketing system must be in place." 🇳🇵

Watch Saglo Samaj tv magazine program every Monday at 8:30pm on DishHome Channel 130.

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Nepal to conduct census

Country's changing social demography will be explored, even as it confronts a 2nd coronavirus wave

● **Shristi Karki**

Nepal is being engulfed by a second Covid-19 wave, but that has not deterred the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) as it puts finishing touches to an ambitious National Population and Household Census scheduled for 8-22 June.

The first four census from 1911 to 1941 were primarily head-counts conducted to gather data about able-bodied Nepalis who could be sent to fight the British Empire's wars overseas. However, the censuses since 1952 have documented the country's changing social demography.

Each national census since then has shown increased diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion and languages spoken. This year's census is Nepal's 12th and because of greater social awareness, inclusion and empowerment, it is expected to add to the country's linguistic and ethnic richness.

"The democratic wave in Nepal after 1990 played a major role not only in collecting better census data on ethnic/caste, linguistic and religious groups but these data have also become instrumental in understanding the interethnic and inter-religious relationships among various groups of people," writes Dilli Ram Dahal in the 2014 *Population Monograph of Nepal*.



Nepal's topographical range and its location astride the Himalaya has given the country ethno-linguistic diversity unparalleled in the world. The first modern census of 1952-54 was also the first to collect data on languages spoken, and all following census have asked respondents their 'mother tongue' and their 'second language'.

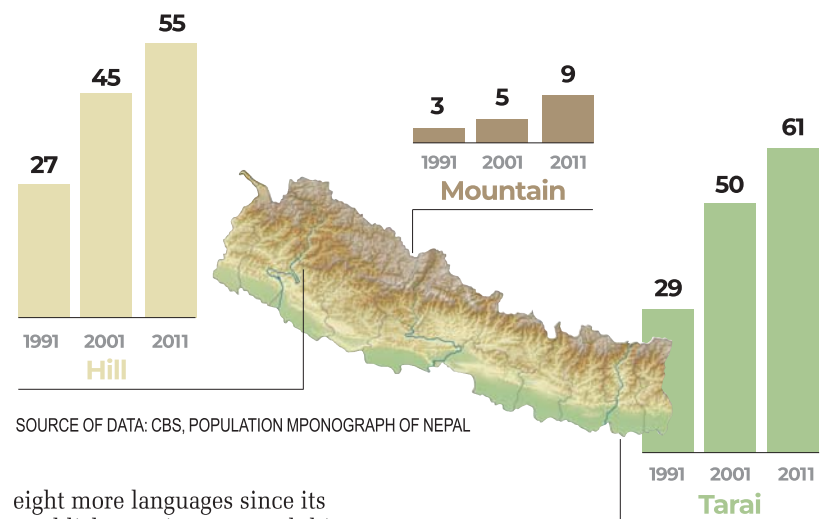
The 1952 census put Nepal's language count at only 44, and the number actually decreased in the three subsequent censuses, to 36 in 1961, then more dramatically to 17 in 1971. In fact, responses to census questionnaires on social demographic data shows a direct correlation to Nepal's political

and socio-cultural evolution. For example, the number of languages began to increase from the 1991 census onwards.

"The status of Nepal's languages and linguistic diversity have reflected well in Nepali censuses only during periods of democracy, and not in times of tyranny and autocracy," explains Lok Bahadur Lopchan of the Nepal Language Commission. Indeed, fluctuations in the language count correspond with major political upheavals in Nepal's history.

The 2011 census puts the official number of languages at 123. However, the National Language Commission has identified

Census results in 1991, 2001 and 2011 for total languages spoken in Nepal, disaggregated into Mountain, Hill and Tarai.



SOURCE OF DATA: CBS, POPULATION MONOGRAPH OF NEPAL

eight more languages since its establishment in 2016, and this is expected to be reflected in this year's count.

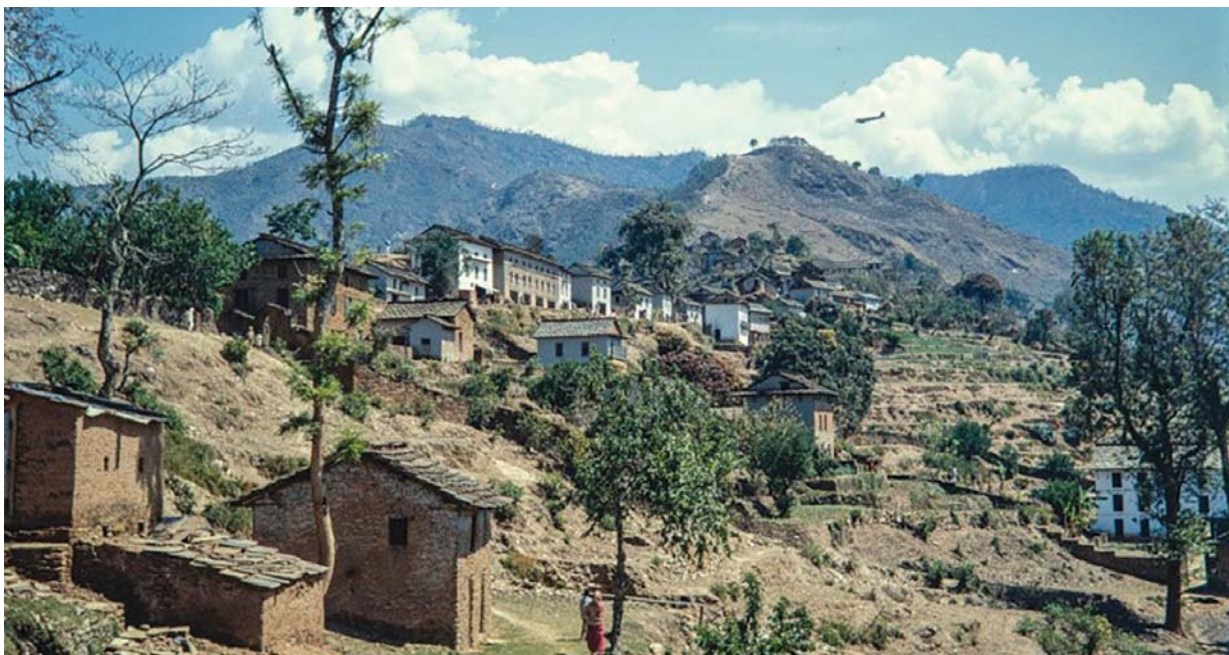
Yet, even as new languages are identified, some of Nepal's indigenous languages are in danger of becoming extinct. The 2011 census identified 37 languages having less than 1,000 speakers as being endangered. Among them, the Dura, Kusunda, and Tillung languages have only one speaker each left, and may not even register in this year's census.

In a bid to better understand Nepal's linguistic diversity and identify the status of languages spoken, the Commission and CBS

have introduced a new question to the language section in the census forms. In addition to 'mother tongue' and 'second language', respondents this time will also be asked to mention their 'ancestral' language.

"Since the language of teaching and communication is predominantly in Nepali, the mother tongue for many people across Nepal's ethnic communities has become Nepali as well. Adding ancestral language to the questionnaire will help us

Remembering the 1961 census



Adventures in the first national census after King Mahendra's coup

● **Bhairab Risal**

Sixty years ago, I arrived at Kolmuda of Kailali district as part of a 14-member team to help conduct the sixth decennial national census in far-western Nepal. It was March 1961, and in those days because of the lack of roads, we had to travel across India to get from one part of Nepal to another.

The first part of our journey was on the Tribhuvan Highway

from Kathmandu to the Indian border. But the newly-built road was blocked by a landslide, and our bus swapped passengers with another bus going to Kathmandu.

From Dhangadi in the Tarai we walked up rough trails to Doti, Bajhang, Achham, Bajura and Dadeldhura. Fellow travelers were traders selling ghee and buying salt, spices, and clothes. Far-western Nepal is remote even today, but back then it was at the edge of nowhere.

There were no lodges or tea houses along the trail, and we often had to camp in the forests and cook food in the clearings. In the Tarai, the jungles were teeming with wildlife and we could hear tigers roaring by night. We lit fires to keep predators away.

After King Mahendra dissolved Parliament and established the Panchayat system in December 1960, former MPs were deployed in different roles across the country. Many of them were appointed to serve as governors -- a strategic move by the king to further weaken the party system.

But governorship was still a powerful position, so much so that of the only two concrete buildings in Dhangadi in 1961, one was the home of the governor, and the other was the prison.

Silgadi in Doti was still what it looks like today: a ridge-top town with cobblestone streets and traditional houses with slate roofs. Because it had some Newar

settlers from Kathmandu Valley, Silgadi had neighbourhoods named Asan and Indrachok.

We set up our census headquarters near the market, next to the prison, in a house we rented for four months. Then, the census work began. Enumerators would leave for their designated areas with data forms and documents. Officer Dharmanath Gajurel, my wife Sushila, and I stayed back at the census office.

Sushila had accompanied me as a representative of the Everest Dialogue Committee which conducted interviews with governors and sent them back to Kathmandu where they would be published in newspapers, or broadcast via Radio Nepal. The governors I met were happy with me, because other governors did not get as much media coverage as they did. We then walked to Dadeldhura and Baitadi to conduct the census with two assistants in tow. I met with Governor Devendra Bahadur Tumbahamphe of Dadeldhura and Governor Satyanarayana Jha of Baitadi and then crossed over to India to get to Darchula, and later Bajhang via Pithoragarh in India. In Bajhang, we met the headmaster of Satyavadi High School, who like many teachers across Nepal at the time, was Indian.

We even reached the farthest point you could go from Kathmandu in those days: the villages of Gunji, Nabi and Kuti in the disputed Kalapani and Limpiyadhura territory. The fact that the government of Nepal had actually conducted a census there in 1961 has been cited as irrefutable proof that the territory east of the

main channel of the Kali River has always been a part of Nepal.

It took us another 15 days to return to Silgadi via Thalara and Khaptad. We also observed the census in southern Doti, which was going smoothly. I am 96 now, but then as a young man I had no problem walking up and down those rugged and remote mountains.

Sixty years ago, as now, far-western Nepal was far behind the rest of the country. There were few educated people, and health and nutrition levels were dismal. If we saw any white houses with tin roofs, we understood them to be schools. Teachers from around the villages were deployed as enumerators during the census, but there were not enough schools in the region so recruiting data collectors was a challenge in itself.

Enumerators collected data through household and individual questionnaires, and earned four paisa for each person whose particulars they collected. However, it was difficult to find enumerators we could rely on. Some would consider four paisa too little to bother going after every individual, while others would over-count and exaggerate the figures to earn more money.

My position was equivalent to that of a branch officer, whose salary was Rs225, as I walked across far-western Nepal for the 1961 census. 🇳🇵



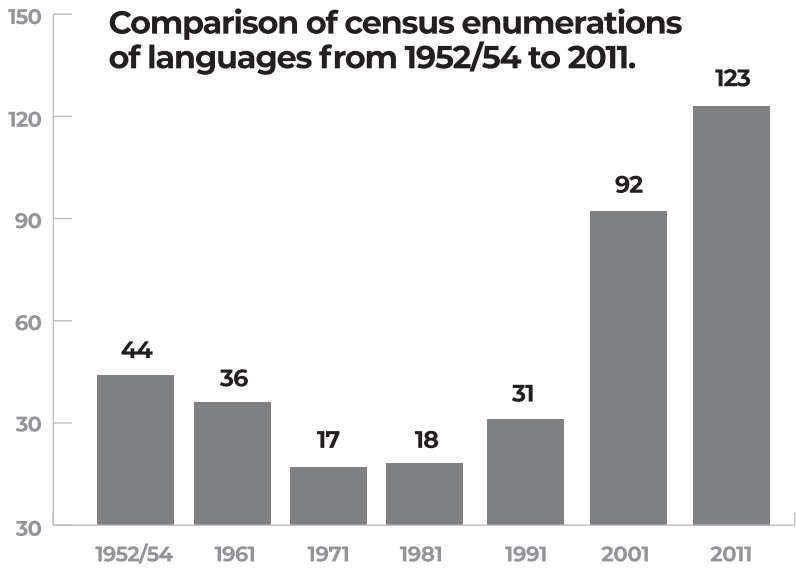
Bhairav Risal, 96, is a veteran journalist and environmental activist.

amidst Covid-19 surge

ascertain which languages have lost speakers,” Lopchan explains. “If the respondents answer openly, we might get more accurate data, and there is a possibility that the total number of endangered languages will be double of what it is now.” Unlike fluctuations in data related to language, the number of Nepalis practising various religions has continued to increase ever since Nepal began to keep faith records in the census of 1952/54. The 1952 census recognised only three major religions: Hindu, Buddhist, and Islam. Jainism and Christianity were added to the census in 1961, Kirat in 1991, Sikh and Baha’i in 2001, and Bon and Prakriti Dharma being the latest additions in 2011.

However, even as the absolute number of Nepalis practising various religions increase, the percentage of Nepalis who identify as Hindu has declined over the years from 89% to 81% of the total population. Meanwhile the percentage of Nepali Christians has continued to increase from zero in 1952 to 1.4% of the population in 2011.

The gradual decline in the percentage of Nepal’s Hindu population has brought to the forefront conversations about religious freedom after the country became secular, but has also been a cause for concern about religious conversion and proselytisation by western and Korean Evangelical



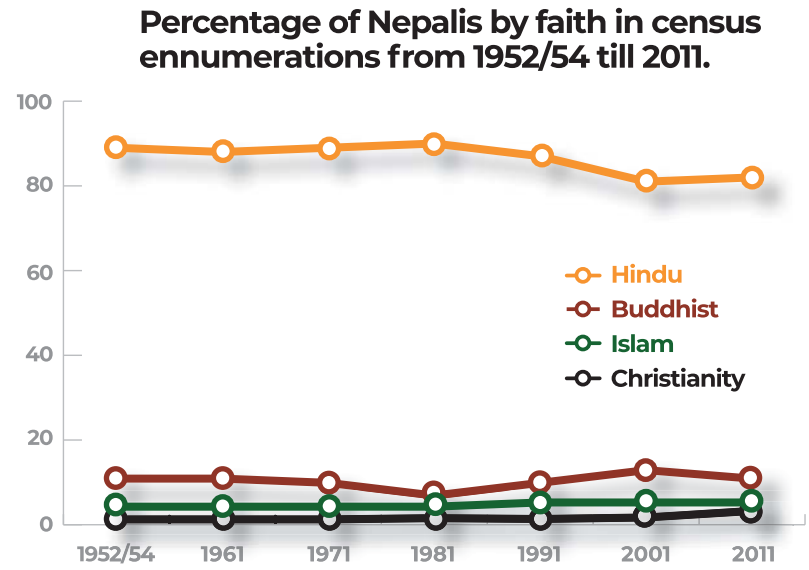
groups in recent years.

Revealingly, the 2011 census showed that the number of Nepalis identifying as Christians was 85,000 in urban areas and almost 290,000 in rural areas.

‘As most of the Nepali people live in rural areas, it is natural that there are more people following a particular type of religion in rural areas. But it also gives a strong message that rural people could be motivated more easily to change their religion if external factors play a role in following their religious faiths or values,’ writes Dilli Ram Dahal in the *Population Monograph of Nepal*.

This also raises concerns about how individual respondents might hesitate to be forthcoming about their religious identity due to a pressure to say they belong to the same faith as their family members, or fear of ostracisation if they admit to following a different religion. But census officials do not believe these issues will affect the accuracy of data this year.

“Religion is an individual choice, and as such, respondents are free to disclose their religion regardless of family or ethnic background,” says Tirtha Raj Chaulagain of the CBS. “Our



enumerators are trained to ask questions individually to each member of the household, so we anticipate little error in data as far as religion is concerned.”

Even though an individual or community’s ethnic identity is intricately tied to a sense of linguistic and religious belonging, caste and ethnicity were only included for the first time in the 1991 census, 40 years after Nepal began to keep records of language and religion. Sixty caste or ethnic groups were identified in the 1991 census, 100 in 2001 and 125 in 2011.

‘The rise in the consciousness of identity, and the consequent desire to project one’s group as distinctive and unique, has also contributed to the increase in the number of caste and ethnic groups,’ writes Pitambar Sharma in his 2014 analysis of the 2011 census, *Some Aspects of Nepal’s Social Demography*.

Yet even as Nepalis seek to carve out separate identities in the current socio-cultural climate, studies and experts acknowledge that there is a gap in data due to the absence of extensive surveys to identify Nepal’s distinct ethnic compositions and cultures. 🇳🇵

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Updated tourist information

Nepal's tourism planners urgently need to update the country's guidebooks so that visitors arriving in Kathmandu know exactly what to expect, and are not taken by surprise that the country still exists. Here are some suggested revisions to *A Rough Guide To Nepal*:

FACTS ABOUT NEPAL: Nepal is the oldest nation state in South Asia and the youngest republic in the world. It is sandwiched between India and China, and is rich in history, geography and a bit of arithmetic. Nepal is a growing nation. Its mountains are rising at 1cm a year, and its land area increased by 335sq km to 147,516 sq km last year. It can be said that Nepal is still in its expansionist phase.

GETTING THERE: Nepal is an adventure destination, and half the fun is getting there. Kathmandu is connected to the rest of the world by regular international flights, however visitors may find it easier and more convenient to simply transport themselves spiritually in the supernatural realm through time and space to get to Nepal through psychic translocation.

WHAT TO BRING: Due to the global pandemic, there are some common sense precautions every visitor must take before embarking on a trip to Nepal: masks, sanitisers, visors, latex gloves. Even if you are not planning to climb Mt Everest, it is mandatory to disembark at Kathmandu Airport breathing through a mask and a supplemental oxygen apparatus strapped to your back. This is because Kathmandu is now officially declared to be in the Death Zone.

Because of climate change, it is also a good idea to check the temperature forecast before flying out to Nepal. Pack your flip-flops, tank tops (for ladies) and sleeveless t-shirts (for gentlemen) for the leisurely walk up the stupendous Khumbu Waterfall to the green pastures of the Western Cwm.

HEALTH TIPS: The good news for travellers is that small pox has been eradicated from Nepal. You also don't need to be overly concerned about the Covid-19 second wave because there

are more serious vector-borne diseases you have to worry about. Here is an abridged list of all the exotic afflictions you can contract while in Nepal: diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, rabies, hepatitis A, B, C and D, typhoid, cholera, leprosy, yellow fever, giardiasis, amoebic dysentery, Japanese encephalitis, meningococcal meningitis, scabies, syphilis, kala azar, bilharzia, malaria, dengue, tuberculosis, diarrhoea, gonorrhea, and motion sickness.

It is recommended that you start taking your vaccines against all the above mentioned plagues at least one year prior to your scheduled departure date and present the certificate before check-in at the city of origin.

TIMEZONE: Nepal is 15 minutes ahead of India, but far behind the rest of the world.

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS: Nepal is a land of festivals. Predicting the exact date for Dasain, Tihar and other religious holidays is not easy, since unlike the Gregorian Calendar, the country follows a Lunatic Calendar.

USEFUL PHRASES:

On arrival at Kathmandu airport:

Is this the line for PCR forms? = Yo PCR firm ko line ho?

Is this the line for temperature check? =

Yo temperature cheque ko line ho?

Is this the line for visa on arrival? =

Yo visa on arrival ko line ho?

Is this the line for online visa? =

Yo online visa ko line ho?

Is this the line for visa fee? =

Yo visa fee ko line ho?

Is this the line for metal-free X-ray? =

Yo 33 kilo soon ko line ho?

As you can see Nepal Immigration is "fully on-line".

While on a trek:

There are fleas in my bed, I'm going back to Tokyo =

Malai udus ra upiya le tokyo.

I want donut and jam. = Euta chukka jam dinos.

Greetings and civilities:

How's it hangin', bro? =

भात खानु भो?

Whose father can do what? =

कस्को बाउको के तागत?

Which way to Pashupatinath? =

श्री पशुपतीनाथले हामी

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