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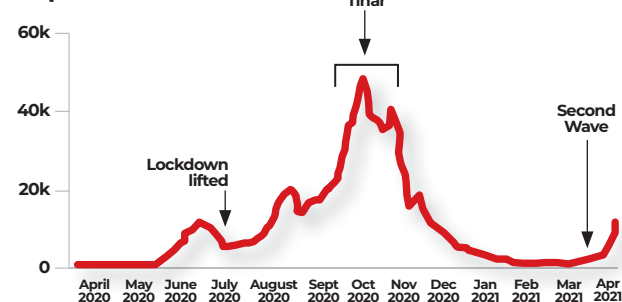
The Covid tsunami

On Wednesday, Nepal's positivity rate was 24.5%. On 21 October 2020, when the country recorded its highest daily Covid-19 cases, the figure stood at 28.5%. At the pace the virus is spreading, it will not be long before one-third (or more) of daily tests turn positive.

Neighbouring India with 315,802 new cases and 2,102 deaths on Thursday is a shocking reminder of what is next door, across an open border. People are dying waiting for oxygen, hospitals are filled to the capacity, and drugs are in short supply.

It is too late for India to vaccinate its way out of this surge, and major cities have resorted to lockdowns and curfews again. This is not a second wave anymore, it is a tsunami. And, as we saw last year, the wave is lapping at our border.

Nepal Active Cases



Yet, here in Nepal, people are going about their lives as if there is no public health emergency. One might even say Nepalis are going out and about with vengeance, unmasked and crowding in markets.

The government has more or less surrendered to the virus, and is putting the onus on citizens to protect themselves. It has shut down schools for a month, but there are still political rallies and festival throngs. Even king Gyanendra coming back from the Kumbh Mela with the virus, and celebrities like Madan Krishna Shrestha testing positive, does not seem to deter the public.

Looking at the numbers, it might look like current active cases are far below the daily average back in October. But the rate of infection is much steeper in the second wave.

We have all but forgotten how during lockdowns, pregnant women couldn't go to hospitals and how there was food insecurity and the crushing economic fallout.

Lack of preparedness at the border checkpoints, minimal contact tracing and chronic limitation of health institutions persist.

Health Minister Hridayesh Tripathi has reassured the public that there will not be another lockdown if people are more careful. Prime Minister K P Oli in his New Year message said if the public took precautions, a new lockdown could be avoided.

Nepal's economy was just beginning to recover from the impact of the earthquake and blockade six years ago when the pandemic hit. The tourism sector will now need at least five years to recover, joblessness is at its peak, manufacturing is still seeing negative growth, and agriculture yield will likely decline after a prolonged winter drought.

Nepal will conclude its vaccination drive this week after administering the second dose for those inoculated in the first phase. There are no vaccines left for the rest.

Close to two million Nepalis have been vaccinated with either Covishield or China's VeroCell shots. But the fate of the rest 19.6 million Nepalis that the government had targeted to inoculate remains uncertain. The Russian Sputnik V was recently granted conditional emergency use in Nepal, but through a private supplier.

The reasons for the new surge are late arrival of vaccines in India and Nepal. But even the limited vaccination drive made both the government and the public complacent. Contact tracing has all but ceased, and many people stopped wearing masks. The other reason is that Covid-19 and its variants had a much higher infection rate.

There are now questions about whether the herd immunity building up that was probably keeping us safe so far, is not effective any more. What is new with the second wave is that it is affecting younger people and making them sicker. Unlike in the previous surge, patients in the 30-50 age group are arriving at hospitals with entire families infected.

Doctors are now faced with the unique challenge of treating children with Covid-19. This might mean a new set of health professionals, infrastructure and equipment as well as therapy and drugs.

Major hospitals in Kathmandu are already starting to feel the pressure with a steady inflow of patients requiring ICU and ventilator support. There is now a real danger that Nepal will face the same shortage of vaccines, oxygen and essential drugs that India is suffering.

This week marks the sixth anniversary of the devastating 2015 earthquake in which nearly 9,000 people were killed. The pandemic has so far killed 3,100 people. Most of those deaths in both disasters were preventable.

The Nepal government, meanwhile, is too busy with a power struggle in the ruling party, rendering the measures to control the new surge ad-hoc and haphazard.

The second wave is already here. Hospitals are now going to be of no help. There are no more vaccines. The only way to deal with this is adopting our own precautions: mask up, wash hands, and avoid crowds.

Sonia Awale

The new surge is more lethal, but the prevention methods against the virus remain the same

ONLINE PACKAGES



Go online to watch video of Langtang as it copes with the pandemic-induced collapse of tourism, while still recovering from the deadly 2015 avalanche. Despite the gloom and doom, locals are rebuilding, hoping that tourism will recover as Covid-19 fades. Story: page 8-9.



Accompany us to the high pastures of Langtang where we speak to Dipak Shrestha, who spends three months a year in summer at 4-5,000m grazing and milking yaks to make the famous Langtang cheese. Destroyed in the 2015 earthquake, the cheese plant has risen again from the ashes. Story: page 6-7.



Accompany Sonam Lama to his native Tsum Nubri Valley, where the architect overcomes bureaucratic delay to rebuild schools and health clinics by blending traditional designs of the area, using local materials with seismic resistant elements. Story: page 14-15.

MENSTRUAL TABOO

Title should have been "Shamed for holding up humanity" ('Shamed for bleeding', Anjana Rajbhandary, #1056). We would not be here without the periods.

Lal Bahadur

PROVINCE 2 POLITICS

It is time for a re-definition of Nepali politics and what is badly needed is a national people's progressive party genuinely committed to social justice and sustainable development ('The politics of province 2', Mukesh Pokhrel and Ramesh Kumar, nepalitimes.com). This could appeal to all of those who see themselves as poor and disadvantaged and all those who look for a radical change for the betterment of the many, not the few. But it requires honest politicians committed to such a programme - who seem to be in short supply.

David Seddon

BIODEGRADABLE PLASTIC BAGS

This is a step in the right direction - of course before plastic bags everyone carried a canvas bag for shopping. We should do that now too ('Biodegradable plastic lunch in Nepal', #1057).

Hippie Trail Kathmandu Tours

• Now it's time for the government to implement a policy that will require the companies to have their products to be sold in biodegradable material or take up the responsibility of taking back their waste and recycling them.

Gyanendra Banks

SECOND WAVE

It seems most Nepalis are no longer interested in keeping themselves safe from the next, and much more lethal and contagious, wave of the virus ('Unmasking the second wave', Sonia Awale, #1057).

Guy Cotter

HIGHWAY FATALITIES

We should install CCTV cameras at zebra crossings and major junctions, especially in Kathmandu ('Nepal's other pandemic: road fatalities', Anita Bhetal, #1056). Bikers and drivers who do not abide by traffic rules should be punished, heavily fined and their license confiscated for a certain period. We need speed reading meters as well as road signs with speed limit and speed breakers to slow down divers.

Yoush Yalmo

GAUMAYA GURUNG

Gaumaya's passion for learning the language she grew up with and reconnecting with her heritage as she travels to new places is encouraging for youth to explore and appreciate the diverse beauty and culture of Nepal ('Gaumaya Gurung going places', Sajana Baral, nepalitimes.com).

Kiran Dutta Tewari

ASS

I wait a whole week just for The Ass from Nepali Times ('Updated tourist information', Ass, #1057). You will find out why once you read it for yourself.

Amir Gairhe AG

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Miracle Boy, six years after Nepal quake

by **Monika Deupala**

Four-month-old Sonish Awal survived being buried under the rubble for 22 hours, but his family still struggles to cope with life. Read full story and watch video of the family six years after the quake only at nepalitimes.com.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook



Unmasking the second wave

by **Sonia Awale**

As Nepal plunges headlong into the second wave of Covid-19, the new surge is infecting more young people and children than before and making them sicker. Follow our social media platforms for latest developments.

t Most popular on Twitter



The homecoming of Nepal's gods

by **Alisha Sijapati**

Return of the Laxmi-Narayan statue has set a precedent in repatriating stolen gods of Nepal. The Art Institute of Chicago is ready to return an 8th century Shivalinga and The Metropolitan Museum of Arts is investigating two statues in its possession. Visit our website for details.

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QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

As Nepal plunges headlong into the second wave of Covid-19, the new surge is infecting more young people and children than before and making them sicker.@SoniaAwale reports.



Lakuri @Shresth66

.....stubbornly loyal mass to their cultural values during covid surge!



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Absence of regulation and enforcement of existing laws have led to the over-extraction of some of the rarest and most valuable types of orchids.



VrkBlizzZarD @Vrkblizzard

I don't know how humans are not punishable for such an act. Killings animals, plants, destroying nature. When will this end? We are mere humans lacking humanity.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

With growing awareness, inclusion and empowerment, Nepal's 12th census scheduled for 8-22 June this year, is expected to add to the linguistic and ethnic richness of the country. @shristi550 reports.



Sankalpa Bhattarai @Sankalpa_007

This census will be a milestone for religious, ethnic and cultural clashes inside Nepal. Be prepared.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Up to 400 Indian workers are leaving Kathmandu every day for Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Hong Kong and other countries.



Prabir Rana @PrabirRana

Government should control and screen all entry points to stem the flow of Covid-19 cases rather than irrationally targeting domestic small and medium sized businesses

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Information technology, especially with mobile phones, have changed dramatically in the last two decades, even as the main actors and malaise in Nepali politics remain the same.

Back in 2001, the still not privatised Nepal Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) had a monopoly in the telephony market and limited subscribers. On the other hand, the Khetan Group was gearing up to offer its services.

20 years later today, the mobile market has grown exponentially with multiple service providers at play. A Sharecast Initiative Nepal Media Survey this year showed that, 96% of Nepali households have mobile phones (2.5 devices per home), 61.5% of them smartphones.

Close to 23 million of Nepal's population have access to the Internet and some 60% of them are using mobile data. 3G and 4G services are widespread. Nine million Nepalis are on Facebook and 60% of mobile users are hooked up on YouTube.

Excerpt from Binod Bhattarai's report from #39 20-26 April 2001 20 years ago this week:

NTC began its mobile services two years ago with 17 base stations. Problems with accessing the network emerged quickly as subscriptions crossed the initially planned 5,000 connections for the Valley. NTC now has over 11,500 mobile users in Kathmandu Valley, which was why the seven new base stations have to be built.



But NTC needs to hurry now that competition is snapping at its heels. The Khetan Group has a business plan ready and is awaiting approval of a new joint venture it is forming to handle its mobiles.

NTC hopes to connect all the new towns along the highways within a year—and highways by another year and half. This means that anywhere you are on the highways you'll be close enough to a base station—that would cover 40- 90 km depending on terrain—to be connected all the time. The time- frame looks promising, but the NTC's deadlines could change depending on how soon the bids are finalised and how long it takes the government—which is prone to delaying decisions—to select the bids and sign the contracts.

Till NTC is privatised, this is going to be a battle of two titans: one private the other public sector. And the prize is the huge mobile market. Collections in January- February this year alone was Rs 380 million. With more connections and right pricing, this is bound to increase. Common economic sense says there will be a downward revision in prices even before Khetan enters the market— provided, of course, the rest of the government sees reason, like certain sections within NTC do.

From archives material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

Times

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TURKISH AIRLINES

CANADA

Laxman Ranjit in his guise of Majipa Lakhe.

The spirit that is fire

How a Kathmandu mask dancer overcame the earthquake tragedy and rebuilt his life

MONIKA DEUPALA

● **Pratibha Tuladhar**

Laxman Ranjit walks on past the Kasthamandap, one of the Valley's oldest buildings, from which the city gets its name. There are days when he stops by it briefly. The structure that dates back to the 7th century is in scaffolding as it is being rebuilt after being destroyed on 25 April 2015 earthquake.

It was here that Ranjit, his wife Nilu and five-year-old son, Aryan, found themselves during a blood donation drive when the earthquake struck. The earth

trembled, and the wooden beams and columns of the structure started to shake. Ranjit immediately clasped Aryan to his chest and leapt out of the balcony.

He saved his son's life, but could not save his wife Nilu, whose body was pulled out of the rubble with nine other blood donors who died that day at Kasthamandap. A national level athlete, Ranjit had had the presence of mind and the agility to pick his son up and jump out as the ancient structure collapsed behind them, breaking his leg during the fall.



PRATIBHA TULADHAR

"I never thought Nilu would die," he recalls. "As they rushed me to hospital I was in excruciating pain, but I remember thinking they must have taken her to hospital as well."

When the dust from the earthquakes settled, Ranjit suddenly found himself a widower, a single father, left to care for his son and an ageing father. He would spend several months undergoing surgery and counselling. In the past six year, every time Ranjit leaves his home in Chikamuga he has to walk past Kasthamandap -- a constant

reminder to him of that tragic day.

Laxman is a torch bearer of the Ranjit clan, which performs the Majipa Lakhe ritual mask dance during the Indra Jatra festival every year (*pictured above, left, and overleaf*). Aside from that, he also leads a parallel existence as a policeman, and a national level weight lifting champion in the feather weight category.

In his guise of the Majipa Lakhe he used to put on a memorable performance every year, making him the undisputed, celebrated member of the clan of masked dancers. But 25 April 2015

prabhu BANK

Energy famine

Dismal winter rainfall, low snow-melt from reduced ice cover and droughts have seen Nepal's hydroelectricity sector produce just 460MW out of a total operational capacity of 1,418MW. This is because most of Nepal's hydro plants are not of the storage type, but run-of-river schemes.



The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has therefore been importing up to 780MW from India to meet the demand shortfall at peak hours this spring. The Department of Hydrology and Meteorology reported just 15.4 mm of rainfall in winter, which is only a fraction of the average of 60mm in November-February.

The pre-monsoon stretch of March 1 to April 15 was also drier than average, seeing just 19.6mm of rain. Besides causing unprecedented wildfires, the lack of rain also lowered the flow of rivers, reducing generation capacity.

"Entire rivers are drying up and investors are getting worried," says Surya Prasad Adhikari of Hydropower Project Struggle Committee that represents private power producers.

Small projects have been hit particularly hard, and Adhikari says 36 projects with capacity below 10MW are in serious financial trouble, while eight with capacity of 45MW are facing an emergency.

However, with the monsoon, there will be a different problem. Heavier rains and the completion of the 456MW Upper Tamakosi will create an energy surplus, and a 'spill' of 700MW that will be wasted.

Turkish to Vancouver

Turkish Airlines has good news for Nepal's diaspora in Canada. The carrier which already operates flights from Istanbul to Toronto and Montreal is adding Vancouver



TURKISH AIRLINES

to its destinations in Canada on 2 May. The flights have convenient stopovers in Istanbul for transit passengers to and from Kathmandu.

Tej Kohli & Ruit Foundation

Renowned Nepali ophthalmologist Sanduk Ruit and British entrepreneur Tej Kohli have joined forces to treat cataract patients at home and abroad via the Tej Kohli & Ruit Foundation. An MoU to the effect was signed between the two parties on 20 April at Tilganga Hospital (*pictured*).

"The agreement combines our technical expertise and Kohli's philanthropic approach to maximize the reach of cataract treatment," says Ruit. Nearly 2,000 patients were treated by the Foundation last month



in Nepal and aims to reach 150,000 cataract patients internationally in the next two years, hoping to restore the gift of sight to one million patients by 2026.

Buddha Air inter-city

Buddha Air has announced it will commence inter-city flights from 1 May, making Pokhara its hub. There will be flights from Pokhara direct to Biratnagar, Simara, and Nepalgunj in addition to existing flights from Pokhara to Bharatpur to Bhairahawa. The flights will be operated by the airlines two Raytheon B1900D aircraft and switch to ATR-72 once traffic volume picks up.

"Air travel has been considered safe during the pandemic by the Covid-19 Crisis Management Committee," says Managing Director Birendra Bahadur Basnet.

MetLife Online Claims service

MetLife Nepal has launched its Online Claims Intimation service which will enable customers to submit pertinent documents and claims online more easily. The initiative is a part of MetLife Nepal's ongoing efforts to simplify and digitise services related to online policy applications, premium payments, KYC updates, and customer services.

Subisu New Year offer

Subisu Cablenet has introduced its new year offer Internet Masta Jeewan Swastha in collaboration with Shikhar Insurance, per which customers using a bandwidth of above 20 Mbps can get free health insurance for up to Rs100,000. The offer also includes free renewal of Internet and tv services.



Mountain Cleaning Campaign

Coca-Cola and the Himalayan Climate Initiative (HCI) have joined hands with Nepal Army for the second edition of Mountain Cleaning Campaign 2021 to combat the effects of climate change in Mount Everest, Lhotse, Makalu, Dhaulagiri, Pumori and Ama Dablam. In 2019, Nepal Army, Coca-Cola and other stakeholders successfully carried out the Mt Everest Clean Up 2019, collecting waste weighing 4,892kg from Mt Everest and 5,694kg from Everest Base Camp.



SAMIR SHRESTHA



COURTESY: AMRITA MAHARJAN

changed his life. The days in hospital were an awakening. He recalls how impatient he was to get out into the world again, and how he would walk around the wards, raising the spirits of other injured survivors like himself.

Laxman Ranjit was not going to let a broken leg strap him, and he knew he would have to don his mask and go back gyrating into the Indra Jatra throng. He missed being behind the ferocious mask, the flowing brocade frock, with the bells clanking around his waist, and dashing through the streets without restraint. He also missed his life as an athlete.

Even while recovering from his

injury, the next Indra Jatra saw him supporting his brothers who were upholding the responsibility of performing the mask dance. And that is when he met Amrita Maharjan, who he would eventually marry.

"I had heard about what he had been through," Maharjan tells us. "We met through a cousin. I finally saw who the *lakhe* really was, and he was a child."

As Amrita spent more time with the father and son, she understood that she would soon have a role to play in their lives. They had a small wedding on the side of Aryan's *Bratabandha* ceremony



PRATIBHA TULADHAR

last year (pictured left, below).

"She has filled a void in our lives," says Ranjit. "Nilu left me because I spent too much time at work. I will try to spend more time with my family now."

Ranjit is now back to work as the red-haired masked demon at Indra Jatra. He says, "Once I wore my gear, I was the *lakhe*. My body found the rhythm again."

Because of his injuries, the 37-year-old finds that he can no longer compete as a weight lifter and is considering other professional options.

"I could remain a policeman until I retire and wait for a pension, but that will not be

enough to give my son a good education," says Ranjit, who has turned down offers to cameo as *lakhe* at national events.

Like all boys in the Ranjit clan, someday Aryan will inherit the mask and fiery attire, which the family regards as a source of strength, but until then the father hopes to build his son's emotional resilience.

"The spirit of the *lakhe* is indomitable, it does not cower down to anything. The demon is actually a representation of who we are as humans," Ranjit explains. "We fall, but we have to rise and we have to keep going. It is all about will power." 🇳🇵

BAJAJ

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Langtang revives its cheese heritage



KUNDA DIXIT

● Gyalbu Tamang in Langtang

It was the spring of 2015, and the trekking season was off to a good start. There was a long line of hikers on the trail along the Langtang Khola from Syabru to Lama Hotel.

Trekkers who had come earlier were on their way down, hurrying to catch jeeps back to Kathmandu for their flights out. Tourism was booming, and the people of Langtang had added floors to family homes to turn them into lodges for added income.

Langtang's economy depended on trekking and the cheese-dairy business, each helping the other. Every day, there were at least 150 tourists in Langtang, acclimatising before moving up the Valley to Kyanjin or camping in the yak pastures higher up.

I remember the morning of 25 April well. It was an overcast day, and the mountains were covered up. I had been in Langtang village with my parents for a religious ritual, and at 8AM started walking back to Kyanjin to the cheese factory where I am manager. My three children were at home, close to the cheese plant.

Just before noon, there was a deep rumble from below the ground, and the stone walls of the cheese factory began to shake, and collapsed altogether. The roof caved in and there was dust everywhere.

The ground was still shaking when there was another more ominous roar from the mountains above. Even before we could see what was coming, there was a blast of wind that knocked down everyone who was outside. Some people who had rushed out of collapsing buildings to save

themselves were blown away by the fierce wind.

Even though it was mid-day, everything went dark. The wind was blowing in dust mixed with ice, the prayer flags were fluttering wildly. It was only then that I realised we had been hit by an avalanche.



There were people with broken limbs, others had been cut by flying metal roofs, there were dead yaks near the pens. I ran home to see if my children were all right, and was relieved to see that they were safe, though shaken.

My son and one of my daughters were still hiding under the bed, as

they had been taught in school to do in case of an earthquake. It saved their lives because the avalanche and the blast preceding it had knocked down one window, and blown right through the room and out through the other window.

My next thought was about the safety of my parents. But the closer I got to Langtang village, the more worried I became. I passed relatives and friends fleeing the village, and they told me "it is all gone", or "don't go there". Yet, I pressed on.

The destruction to buildings was more severe the closer I got to Langtang. The dead and injured lay everywhere. Yaks and mules had been blown right across to the other side the valley where all the trees were flattened. The ground was white as if it had snowed, but this was all ice from the avalanche.

Langtang was all gone, most of the people, livestock and houses

had been blown away by the shock wave. The houses that remained were buried under 100m of ice and rock. There was no trace of my parent's home on the western edge of the village. My father was 62, and had been grazing his yaks. We found him five days later near the river, resting with his arms under his head as if he was sleeping. His face was turned towards where the yaks would have been, his body frozen by the ice that fell from Langtang.

My 65-year-old mother was inside the house, and we found her buried in the debris as the stone walls collapsed around her. Nearby were the bodies of two aunts, my younger sister and brother-in-law, a sister-in-law.

There were too many deaths for funeral rituals, and we just recited our mantra as they were cremated. There were 175 local people who



Langtang Cheese Production Centre after the earthquake destroyed it in 2015, and last year after it was rebuilt with new equipment, a storage facility, and a lab.



GYALBU TAMANG



KUNDA DIXIT

were killed that day, about 100 foreign tourists also perished, and there is no count of Nepali cooks, porters and support staff in the lodges. Our guess is that there were 225 of them.

The avalanche also killed 27 herders and 400 yaks that provided milk for the cheese factory. The cheese-making plant was destroyed, along with all the equipment and the storeroom with 300 kg of cheese.

Cheese-making was already in crisis in Langtang before the earthquake because the younger generation did not want to stay in the village, and if they did they were not interested in herding yaks.

But the earthquake-avalanche had a silver lining: the Dairy Development Corporation in Kathmandu agreed to raise the buying price of yak milk to Rs120 per kg from Rs90. The Swiss came back to Langtang with compensation for herders to buy

new yaks, and they put in Rs18 million to rebuild the factory with new equipment and even set up a dairy lab for quality control.

It is now feasible for farmers to take up yak herding again, and with tourism in the doldrums many have taken loans to expand their yak herds. Someone with 20 yaks who sells 50 litres of milk daily, for example, can now earn Rs6,000 a day. The cheese unit is collecting 300 litres of milk a day, and in the monsoon it can go up to 600 litres daily.

Before the earthquake, we were manufacturing 4,500kg of cheese per year, as well as 2,000kg of butter and ghee--all of it was consumed locally. Last year during the pandemic, we sent 2,500kg to Kathmandu because there were no tourists here. If it was not for Covid, we would be back to full scale production.

The factory is now able to produce more cheese than

before the disaster, the income helping raise our living standard. Lodge owners who have lost tourist income have started four new yak farms in the past year. Younger people are finding a future in cheese.

People in Langtang believe that the gods punished them for being greedy and selfish, competing with each other to build taller and bigger lodges. That is why the gods sent down the avalanche to wipe out the village, while leaving the rest of the valley intact. It may have been a warning for us to mend our ways, to be kind to each other, and protect nature.

We had started recovering from the earthquake when the Covid crisis struck. Once more, the economy has slowed down and tourism has collapsed. Still, Langtang is being rebuilt for the day when tourists will return, and we hope that we can revive what was best about Langtang, a *beyul* where the gods dwell, and look benevolently at us earthly beings. 🇳🇵

As told to Kunda Dixit



Accompany us to the high pastures of Langtang where we speak to Dipak Shrestha, who spends three months a year at 4-5,000m grazing and milking yaks to make the famous Langtang cheese. Destroyed in the 2015 earthquake, the cheese plant in Kyanjin has risen again from the ashes.



KUNDA DIXIT

Father to son

Gyalbu Tamang (*above*) grew up accompanying his father, Pasang Norbu, to the alpine meadows in Langtang's Naya Kanga, Yala and Langsisha to graze yaks. His father was one of the pioneers who worked in the Langtang Cheese Production Centre that the Swiss helped set up in the 1950s.

When Gyalbu turned 18, he got a job at the centre, and he had to get up at 4AM every morning to weigh the milk, collect firewood, get the fire going, and carry the cheese from higher up the mountains to the plant in Kyanjin. All this was familiar work for him, since he had helped his father as a boy. Swiss cheese experts Sepp Dubach and Werner Schulthess were convinced that cheese had a future in Nepal even though in the 1950s Nepalis did not really eat cheese, despite the fact that *churpi* was always popular.

The Swiss were convinced that the best way to preserve the surplus yak milk production in places like Langtang was to convert it into cheese so it could be transported to market. They felt that yak cheese from Nepal would be as good as, if not better than, Emmentaler cheese back home. They trained Pasang Norbu in Swiss cheese making, and he in turn passed it on to his son, Gyalbu.

Pasang Norbu retired from cheese factory, but not from the business of making cheese. Dairy farming was in his blood. So with his pension he bought ten yaks and carried on doing what he did before, and selling the surplus milk to the cheese factory. In summer, father and son took the yaks up to graze on the slopes below Naya Kanga. It was the herbs in the grass that gave the milk, and the cheese, its unique flavour.

On 25 April 2015, Pasang Norbu was grazing his yaks when the avalanche came down and swept him and his yaks away. Last week in Kyanjin, Gyalbu Tamang said: "My father taught me everything I know. I am just carrying on his work."

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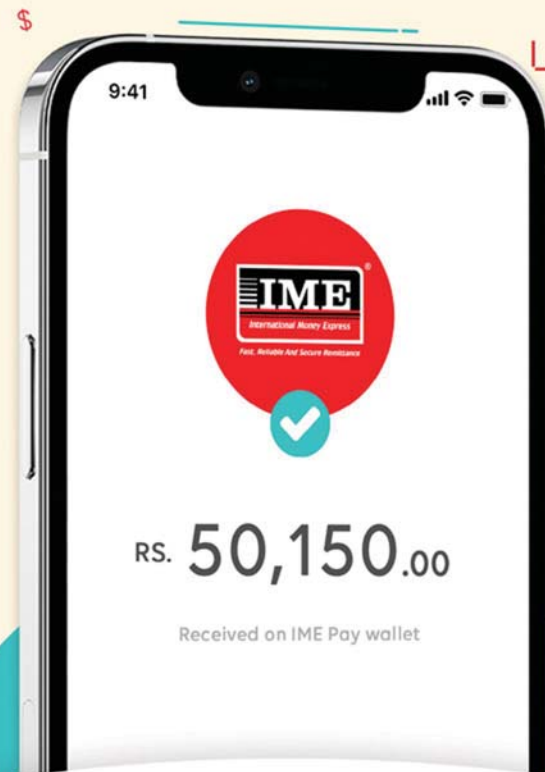


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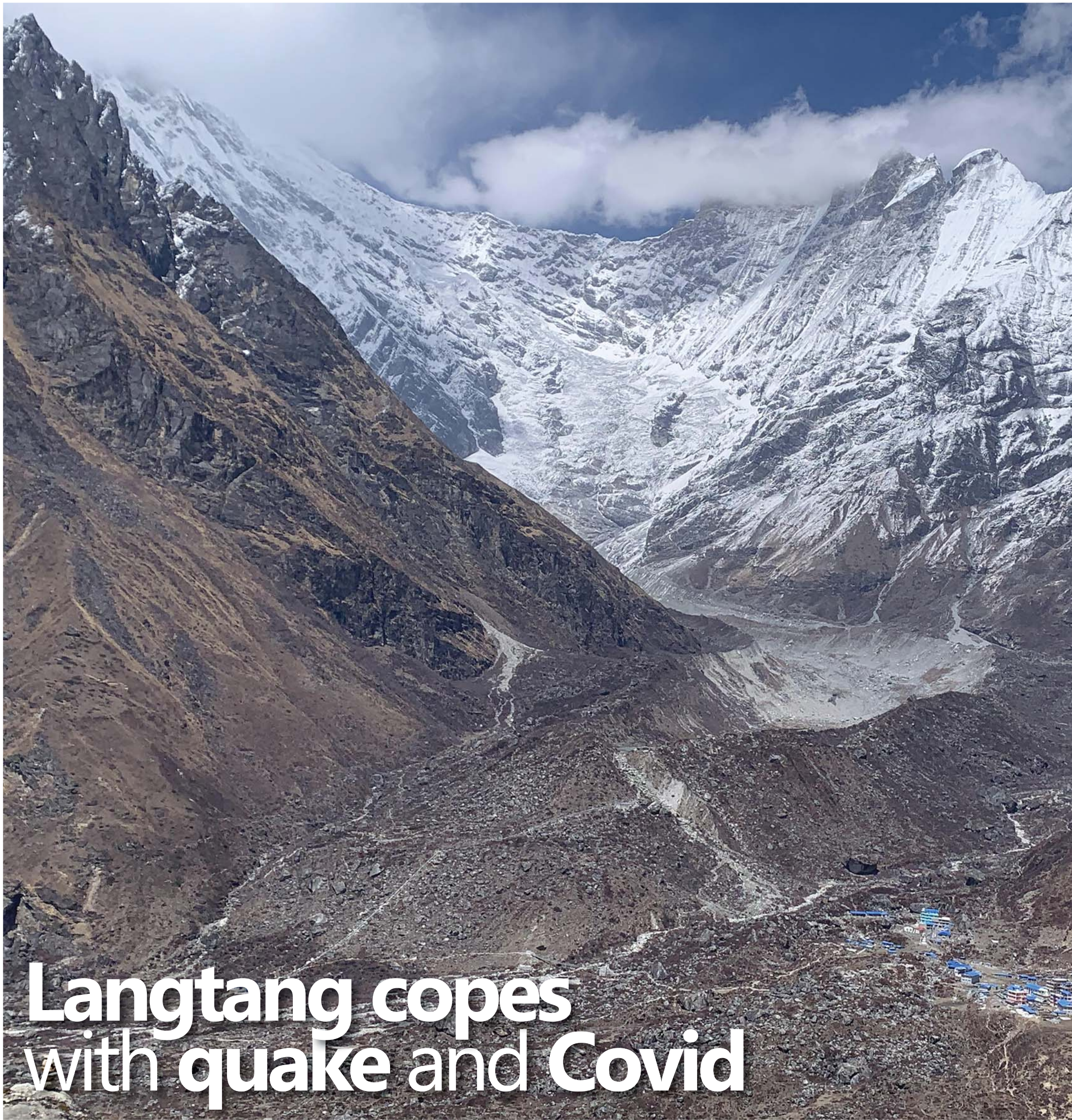
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Langtang copes with quake and Covid

● **Kunda Dixit** in Langtang

After attending a night-long vigil for a dead relative, Karma Tamang was taking a nap in a room in his Panorama Guest House in Kyanjin when he was woken up by violent shaking.

He staggered out into the balcony, down the stairs and outside. All around him, stone houses were crumbling in clouds of dust. Then there was a deeper roar approaching from the cloud-covered slopes of Langtang Lirung directly above the town.

"I knew it was an avalanche, but what we did not expect was a blast of wind so strong that it swept people and yaks off their feet and blew them away," Tamang, 55, recalls.

He ran back to the farthest room in his lodge while the dirty snow blew all around like a blizzard. "There were people with broken

limbs, faces bleeding, we rescued whom we could find, and sheltered them in the lodge," he recalls.

Tamang then realised his family was in his other guest house in Langtang village, and ran down the valley. He met hundreds of locals and tourists, some with grievous wounds, fleeing in the opposite direction.

When he reached the Army base overlooking the village, there was no village, just blocks of black

ice the size of houses, that looked like giant rocks. There was no sign of his home, where he had left his wife, sister, son and two nephews that morning.

"I had tried to wake up my son to bring him back with me to Kyanjin, but he wanted to sleep, so I had left him there," recalls Tamang, his face contorted by grief even six years later. They found the bodies four days later, half-buried in ice and boulders, on the other

side of the valley.

No one knows for sure how many people died in Langtang's co-seismic disaster just before noon on 25 April 2015, but its physical and emotional scars are still visible everywhere.

There used to be up to 150 trekkers every day passing through Langtang village before the earthquake, the numbers had started picking up again and lodge owners were so optimistic that they

Six years after the deadly avalanche, survivors endure the Covid-induced collapse of tourism.



Karma Tamang, who lost his wife, son, sister and two nephews in Langtang in 2015.



Sumjo Tamang's husband was killed in the avalanche, and herself suffered a broken leg.



ALL PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT



AYMERIC CLOUET

were adding rooms and expanding restaurant space.

That construction spree is still going on as families who survived the disaster rebuild lodges near where the village once was, and in Kyanjin. Every day, there are dozens of helicopter flights ferrying iron rods, cement and plywood in slings up the valley from Syabru.

“We had thought we had seen the worst of it after the earthquake, and took loans to rebuild our lodge, improved the facilities, but there have been no trekkers for a year now,” says Sumjo Tamang, 29, as she prepared tea in the immaculate, but deserted, dining area of her Snow Leopard Guest House.

Sumjo’s husband was in Langtang village ploughing his potato field with two yaks when the avalanche came down. His body was found 200m away. Up in Kyanjin, Sumjo picked up her baby daughter, and ran out when the

house started shaking--only to be blown away by the shock wave.

She was knocked unconscious, and neighbours found her baby in a nearby field, unhurt. When she came to, Sumjo could not move her leg which was broken in three places. Her two other daughters also survived miraculously, and



the family spent four days in a cave waiting for a helicopter rescue to Kathmandu. It took a year for her to heal and return to the ruins of her lodge in Kyanjin.

“It has been difficult without my husband and with small children, but everyone helped and we were just starting to recover. Now, they say this Covid will go on for another few years, I don’t know

how to carry on,” she says.

Even if trekking revives, there will be too much competition driving down rates. There are 40 tourist lodges in Kyanjin alone, in what used to be a tiny monastery village. Most are padlocked and their owners are away in Kathmandu, but others are using the pandemic to rebuild in anticipation that tourism will pick up again.

Alone in his empty Panorama Guest House, Karma Tamang sits by a shrine in his dining area with photographs of his wife, son and nephews who perished in the disaster.

“The earthquake was such a shocking tragedy that for a time, people here became spiritual and believed that it was divine retribution for being selfish, and for leaving the path of the dharma,” he says. “But six years later, everyone is now back to building bigger houses, they are heavily indebted,

and Covid has killed tourism. There is a lot of anxiety in the people.”

Here in Kyanjin, it was mostly the stone structures that came down in the 7.8 magnitude earthquake in 2015. So, everyone is rebuilding using reinforced concrete columns. The steel and cement is all flown in by helicopter.

On a ridge overlooking Kyanjin, the town’s Ward Chair Supa Tamang is supervising the installation of a Nepal Telecom mobile tower for which he lobbied two years in Kathmandu. As a Nepal Communist Party candidate, he was elected in the 2017 election, but is far away from the political intrigue and infighting of his party in Kathmandu.

“We survived the earthquake, and we will survive Covid as well,” says Supa Tamang confidently. “The new lodges, better facilities and mobile connectivity prove that the people of Langtang are hoping for a better tomorrow.” 📺

Kyanjin (*main picture*), left at 4,100m is the highest settlement in Langtang Valley, and has grown after people moved in following the 2015 disaster.

What remains of Langtang village today. The town and many of the nearly 400 dead are buried under 100m of ice and rock (*top*).

Kyanjin was not as badly affected, but many houses were damaged by the shock wave accompanying the avalanche on 25 April, 2015 (*above*).



LANGTANG REBORN

Go online to watch video of Langtang as it copes with the pandemic-induced collapse of tourism, while still recovering from the deadly 2015 avalanche. Despite the gloom and doom, locals are rebuilding, hoping that tourism will recover as Covid-19 fades.

EVENTS

Sirjana 2021

Visit Nepal Art Council for Sirjana 2021, a collective art show of works by members of Sirjana College of Fine Arts and Sirjana Contemporary Art Gallery.
23-28 April, Nepal Art Council

Project Ghar

Gallery MCUBE's Project Ghar will bring together artists who will present songs, dance, paintings, poems, photos sharing the stories and memories of the people of Barpak six years after the earthquake.
Until 28 April, Gallery MCUBE

Photowalk

The photowalk this weekend will take photographers from Panauti and Cheena Bhanjyang. Get details on PhotoWalk Nepal's website.
24 April, 6am onwards



Goddess Gayatri

Take some time to view this work-in-progress 68*99 cm Goddess Gayatri oil on canvas by artist Udaya Charan Shrestha.
Until 30 April, Museum of Nepali Art

Storytelling Workshop

Body & Data has opened applications for 'Kathakaa Kura: Digital Storytelling Workshop for Queer Folks of Nepal', aiming to "increase the visibility of queer folks through their stories in the digital space and put forward their multiple realities and stories." Apply at http://bit.ly/KathaKura_2021
Application deadline: 5 May

Budhanilkantha Market

Support local farmers. Buy fresh organic produce, delicious baked goods, dairy products, honey, homemade aachaar and more at the Budhanilkantha Organic Farmer's Market.
Saturdays, 8am-5pm, Park Village Resort

DINING



Little Tibet

Indulge in piping hot bowls of noodles, da-pao and mouth-watering Tibetan, Bhutanese and Nepali food. Get the Lowa Khatsa, Mustang Aloo, Sha Phale and more. Find the menu on Bhojdeals and Foodmandu.
(01) 5342656

HIKING TRAILS



Climb Phulchowki

The Phulchowki climbing trail offers astounding views of the clouds above and the Kathmandu valley below.
Kathmandu to Godawari, 19km

Hike to Kakani

Take a hike through alpine forests to Kakani. Stop for lunch at picnic spots available.
Kathmandu to Kakani, 25km

Narayanthan to Shivapuri

Drive to Budhanilkantha and start walking from the Narayanthan mandir up to the Nagi Gompa. This is one of the steeper hiking trails.
Kathmandu to Shivapuri, 10km

Pharping to Champadevi

Drive up to Pharping, then take the well-trodden trail from Hattiban Resort and hike through stunning pine forests to Champadevi.
Hattiban Resort-Champadevi, 3km



Nagarjun Hike

Hike to the forest-covered Nagarjuna hill from Balaju. Take in spectacular views of the Ganesh Mountain and the Kathmandu Valley below. Also perfect for bird-watching.
Balaju to Nagarjun, 5km

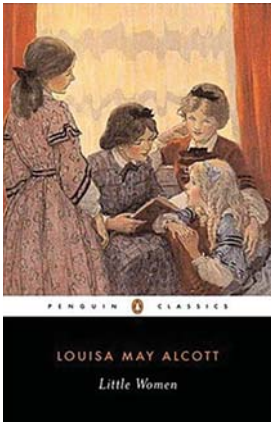
READING RECCOS

Boudha: Restoring the Great Stupa

Photographer and lifelong Boudha resident Mani Lama, as well as his friends, document the damage to the Boudhanath Stupa after the 2015 earthquake and its renovation over the next year-and-a-half in Boudha: Restoring the Great Stupa,
Rs6588, Vajra Publications

Anxious People

In Swedish author Fredrik Backman's Anxious People, a down on his luck father turns bank robber. But when the robbery goes wrong, he is forced to take people at an apartment open house hostage.
Rs1118, Booksmandala



Little Women

Louisa M. Alcott's Little Women follows March sisters Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy as they navigate the ups and downs of entering society as young women.
Rs224, Booksmandala

Kathama Aljhiyeka Prem

Kathama Aljhiyeka Prem is an anthology of 10 love stories from writer/filmmaker Sangita Shrestha., based on her series of 13 short films Katha Prem Ka
Rs337, Thuprai Books

Catch-22

Often hailed as one of the funniest books ever written, Joseph Heller's satirical take on war centres around a US Army bombardier and his cohorts' desperate attempt to stay alive during World War II.
Rs640, Sajha Kitab

unparalleled, the quality of the dishes is unmatched and the owner is unlike any other in Nepal.
Maharajgunj, 9851130043



Chez Caroline

Tucked away from the street noise and fumes, this is the place to visit for authentic French and continental cuisine The restaurant offers takeaway services too. Try the Profiteroles au Chocolat and Choux pastry filled with vanilla ice cream and hot chocolate sauce.
Baber Mahal (01) 4263070

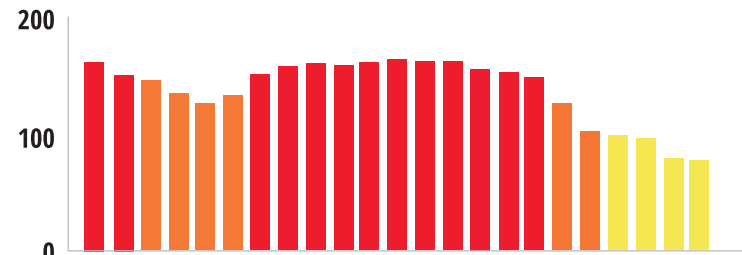


The storms of the past week blew away a lot of the smoke, and the showers doused wildfires, but we are not out of the woods yet. The forest biomass is still dry and despite all the sound and fury this week, there has not been enough precipitation. There is another month to go for the pre-monsoon showers start in earnest. This weekend will see convection buildup across the Himalayan foothills, and some of these could bring passing showers to Kathmandu Valley. Maximum temperature will be reaching just under 30 Celsius for the first time this year.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
28° 13°	27° 13°	29° 13°

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 16 - 22 April



AQI from 12pm 16 April - 12PM 22 April measured at Phora Darbar

The graph above shows just how dramatic the effect of Thursday morning's thunderstorm was on Kathmandu Valley Air Quality Index (AQI). After staying in the Red 'Unhealthy' zone above 150 all night, the rain scrubbed pollution and dust from the air, and AQI dropped to the Yellow 'Moderate' Zone from 8AM onwards. The rain also put out remaining wildfires in central and western Nepal, reducing smoke hazer as well. It is advisable to keep wearing masks, though, both to protect from harmful particles in the air, and from new strains of the coronabavirus.



OUR PICK

ShortsTV, the global home of short entertainment with the world's largest catalogue of high quality short movies and series available on TV, online and in theaters, and also the producer of original short film content for broadcasters and brands will be launching on DishHome Soon. ShortsTV is the world's first and only 24/7 HD channel dedicated to short movies and series. Available around the world, ShortsTV brings short stories to life in stunning high definition and covers the latest events in the short film industry.



Rebuilding Kathmandu after the 1934 quake

The construction of New Road 90 years ago has lessons for post-disaster urban planning

● Alina Bajracharya

Every disaster offers the opportunity to start from scratch, or to build back better. Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher Rana used the 8.3 magnitude earthquake that devastated Kathmandu to build the first planned streets in Nepal—Juddha Sadak, Sukra Path, Dharma Path and Putali Sadak.

Known till today as ‘New Road’, the intersection of these streets became the capital’s business centre. The black-topped wide streets with footpaths, shops, banks, school, newspaper offices and a fire brigade still remain Kathmandu’s nerve centre.

The epicenter of the 1934 earthquake was in Okhaldhunga, 120km to the east of Kathmandu, and it killed nearly 17,000 people in Nepal.

Immediately after the disaster, Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher announced relief measures, including helping families in reconstruction, repair and maintenance.

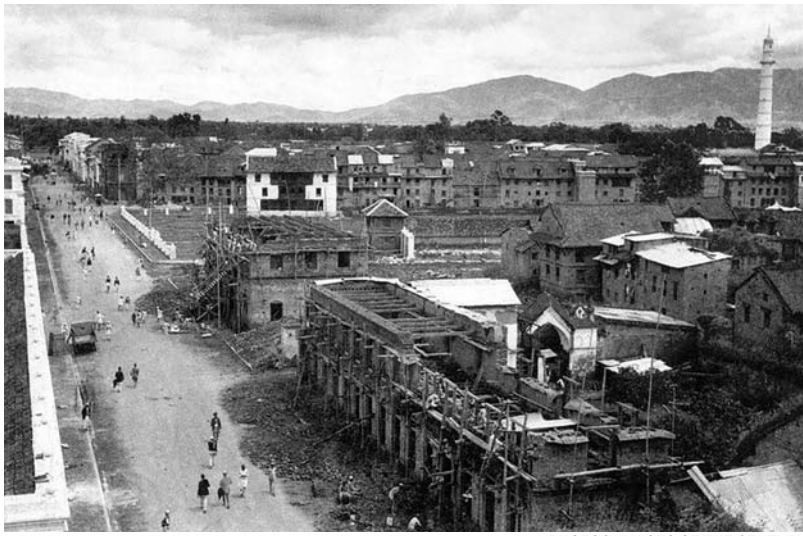


The Rana regime was autocratic, but it soon went about systematically planning, acquiring land, redistributing houses and transferring land titles, compensating and relocating original owners. Ironically, some of these streets were later named after the martyrs that the Ranas themselves executed towards the end of their reign.

The Bhukampa Pidit Udarak Adda (Office of Earthquake Relief) was set up at Mahankal temple premises to draw up plans, collect funds, and to distribute loans for reconstruction. The office also kept records of the dead and injured, livestock lost, and started a donation campaign. It requested relief from abroad, and donations were received from Britain, India and Japan.

Before 1934, the old quarter of Kathmandu was compact and densely populated, with ownership pattern much like most other parts of inner city Patan or Bhaktapur today. The narrow streets were lined with traditional brick-paved courtyards.

A wide, straight street was



PHOTOS: IMAGES OF THE CENTURY

A 1935 photograph of New Road, with the Fire Brigade building under construction in the foreground. Map of Kathmandu before and after the rebuilding, showing the New Road Indrachok intersection.

built from what is now New Road Gate to Gaddhi Baithak. Damaged houses and winding alleys that stood along the way were demolished. Water mains were installed underground, and stones used for pavement were brought from Halchok to Lainchaur using a temporary ropeway.

The façade design of each building was planned, and the new buildings laid out in such a way that they either faced an existing road, courtyard or a backyard. Whatever the size of the plot, they all had to have the same façade, whereas the internal space could be designed according to the plot owner’s will.

In Sukra Path, new buildings could not be higher than 9.2m. Elsewhere, the houses could be only three stories, the ground floors had wooden door panels for shops. Along Dharma Path, the houses could be as high as four stories, again maintaining the same details as on the adjacent street.

Of the 18 households relocated from Indrachok and Khichapokhari area, and 17 of the Marwari families continue to live along Sukra Path to this day, carrying on their traditional clothing business.

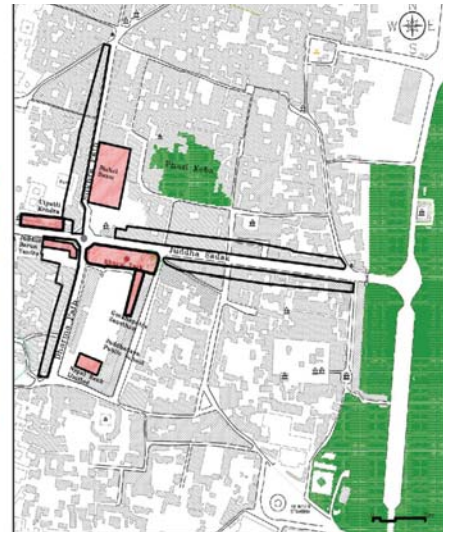
To give himself credit, Juddha Shumshere also had a statue of himself erected at the intersection of the new road named after him, Juddha Sadak, and Indrachok so that it was visible from all directions.

Three years after the earthquake in January 1937 Nepal’s first bank, Nepal Bank Limited was established in a place where there were stables for horses. Nepal also got its first fire brigade, the Juddha Barun Yantra on the road, and the first Maurice fire engine was carried over the Chitlang pass on the backs of hundreds of porters.

Post-quake town planning centralised the city’s amenities along New Road. Later, the offices of Gorkhapatra Sansthan, the municipal office,

Nepal’s first movie theatre Jana Sewa Hall, Utpatti Kendra textile shop, Juddhodaya Public School, Bhugol Park to commemorate the earthquake, were all located along this intersection.

The newspaper shop near the pipal tree became a hub for Nepal’s public sphere, and later also a centre for later anti-government protests. After completing New Road, the government started work on Putali Sadak, cutting through fields and houses. At the time these



were one of the few straight roads in the Valley, and the goal of this ‘reconstruction’ was to recover the function of society in affected areas, including restoring livelihoods, and reviving economic activity.

Much was lost during this reconstruction, including Kathmandu’s traditional neighbourhoods, its architectural heritage and intangible assets. However, it also showed that post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation is a complex process

that involved interaction of social, technical and economic factors.

Despite everything, New Road and Putali Sadak are examples of public participation, good governance, and well-executed short and long-term post-disaster planning. A testimony to its success is that nearly century later, the two roads are still hubs of economic activity. 🇳🇵

Alina Bajracharya is an architect, and this article is based on her thesis.

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PEACE PIPE: Prime Minister K P Oli and UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal met at Hotel Marriott on Wednesday to find a resolution to their dispute within the UML.



HELPING HAND: French ambassador François-Xavier Léger distributes personal protective equipment to informal waste workers in Sisdole landfill site.



BRIGHTER FUTURE: A Female Community Health Volunteer administers Vitamin A capsule and de-worming tablet to a child in Lalitpur as part of a nationwide campaign last week.



PEACE FOOTBALL: Nepali peacekeepers in South Sudan organised a football match to bring youth together as a conflict resolution exercise between various communities.



BACK TO SCHOOL: Prime Minister K P Oli on Tuesday inaugurated Patan School reconstructed after the earthquake with technical and financial support from Japan.



The faultline in my life

How I coped with the aftermath of the aftershocks of the 2015 earthquake

On the morning of 25 April 2015, my father was out running some errands, my mother was watching tv and I was trying to sleep off a headache. It is easy to remember the details of some days more than others.



LIFE TIME
Anjana Rajbhandary

I started to feel a little dizzy, and I thought my headache was getting worse. I was shaking. “Wow, I have never had a headache so bad that everything around me feels like it’s trembling,” I thought. Then, my bookshelf fell on top of my bed and I knew it was more than just a headache. At that moment, I remembered everything I was taught in school about what to do if an earthquake struck. I knew I was supposed to duck under a desk or stand in the doorway, but I did neither of those things. I ran downstairs and saw my mother sitting calmly in her chair. But before we could run outside I had to go find our dog Bubbles who was hiding under the bed in the guest room. The shaking stopped when the three of us made it to the garden. Those 55 seconds felt like forever. People were shouting and crying, the phone kept ringing, and my dad called and told us he was on his way home. In the aftermath, as we kept experiencing aftershocks for days, we spent a lot of time in the garden as a family more than we had ever before. Soon, people started marking themselves ‘safe’ on Facebook and I often wondered what happened to those who did not. Everyone was talking about the earthquake, and would continue to do so for weeks and months following that fateful day.

Thousands of private and public buildings including historic monuments and temples were destroyed, killing nearly 9,000 people and injuring close to 22,000. It was too early to start addressing the mental cost of the earthquake as people were just trying to cope with physical injuries and the financial burden wrought by the disaster. But I started working as a trauma counsellor at a hospital in Kathmandu, and twice a week I would meet survivors. I would listen to their stories and help guide them deal with their emotions. During one such session, I met an eight-month pregnant woman. Her husband had taken her mother and her sister, who were visiting her in Kathmandu, to Dharara because they had always wanted to climb the tower. She did not go because she was heavily pregnant. When the tower collapsed, her husband only broke his leg, but her mother and sister did not survive the fall. She never cried, but would often say, “I wish they missed Dharara this time too like they always did when they came to visit me.” They say as a mental health professional, you should never let patients influence your feelings and I think that is why I decided not to work as a therapist; everyone’s story affected me personally. Recently, I realised that I had not watched any of the footage from the 7.8M earthquake in Nepal. I had experienced it myself, and I did not feel the need to re-live that moment. The other day, a friend asked me if I had any Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) myself from the disaster, and I was quite offended. He told me I tended to zone out anytime someone talked about the earthquake. When someone does ask me about it, I share the facts but try not to indulge in the conversation. To this day, I feel the smallest

of vibrations, like when a truck drives past and the ground shakes a little. I do not feel comfortable climbing to the top of buildings and looking down, it makes me slightly nauseous even now. When I think about the earthquake, it is always a combination of fear, shock, anger, relief, sadness and stress, and they all blend into each other. Yesterday, while preparing to write this piece, I watched some videos of the earthquake for the first time, and it was difficult. I felt deep sadness watching the moment that changed so many lives and the course of how Nepalis would cope and continue living their lives. I realised I still remember every detail of those 50 something seconds. All of us have our own methods of dealing with life’s stressors. Some ignore them while others chose to address them. No one can be forced to move on because everyone’s reaction to trauma is uniquely different. You have to do what works for you. Some may benefit from seeking professional help. Immersing themselves in work or a hobby might be the key for others. And then there are those who talk it out with friends and families. After surviving a traumatic event like an earthquake, it can be hard to stop thinking about it, but it gets easier with time. Similarly, everyone reacts differently and they find their ways to learn to move on. Some have more difficulty than others. If you find yourself abusing drugs or alcohol to cope, it is a sign that you should seek help because the issue may be deeper than you let on. Pay attention to your loved ones and see how they are doing. Six years after the earthquake, Nepal is still recovering. And as we continue to build the city and the country, many people are also rebuilding themselves. 🇳🇵

Had a great fall, and lived

A survivor remembers the collapse of Dharara as a new tower is inaugurated by Nepal's prime minister



Sanjib Shrestha (*above*) standing near the spot where he was rescued after the Dharara tower collapsed on 25 April 2015, killing at least 70 people.

The ruin of the old tower, and the new one that is 18m higher next to it (*right*).

● **Shristi Karki**

As a rebuilt Dharara is inaugurated by Prime Minister K P Oli on Saturday, Sanjib Shrestha's eyes are fixed on another structure – the ruin of the original tower from which he was pulled out alive six years ago.

Shrestha looks out from a tea shop across the street and recounts the events that haunt him to this day. More than 70 people were killed when the 7.8 magnitude earthquake brought down the historic tower just before noon on 25 April 2015.

Originally from Ramechhap, Sanjib came to Kathmandu work and pay for his college. The youngest of five children, he had been living in Basantapur with his brothers and sister-in-law. On 25 April, Sanjib completed his morning shift at a restaurant in Pulchok, where he worked as a waiter.

"It was a Saturday, and I had plans to spend the day with a friend," the soft-spoken 23-year-old says. The friend was Ramila Shrestha, with whom he was out on a secret date that day.

"We met up, but had not decided where to go, and as we passed Dharara, Ramila wanted to climb the tower because she had never been up there before," he recalls.

They bought tickets and climbed the steep spiral stairs, and there were many people going up and down. On the balcony, it was so crowded that the two just held on to the railing, and took in the view of Kathmandu below them.

Suddenly, Sanjib felt as if the tower was swinging. He thought the height was making him dizzy. What happened next is hazy, he remembers a sensation of falling, and asking rescuers what had happened before losing consciousness.

When he came to, he was on the cement pavement outside Bir Hospital with Ramila, surrounded by other wounded survivors. Blood from a cut on the forehead had mixed with the dust, and made him unable to open his eyes. Miraculously, he had survived a vertical 61m fall with just a broken

hand, while many others did not make it.

It was late evening when he was taken to the National Trauma Centre with other wounded people. He had lost his phone, so could not call his relatives and friends. A Nepal Army soldier lent him his phone to call his brother.

Sanjib's brothers did not know he had taken the day off from work, and when they came to the hospital they could not recognise him at first because of the dust and injuries.

Sanjib spent the next 15 days in hospital, and after being discharged went back home to Ramechhap where the family home was partially damaged and he slept out in the open with his parents because of the aftershocks.

His wounds got infected, and he had to return to hospital in Kathmandu. He found another job in a restaurant where he was working until the Covid-19 lockdown last year.

"I still have nightmares, and I wake up in cold sweat," says Sanjib, but he is overcoming his fear, and it does not bother him to walk up to the ruins and point to the spot where he was rescued.

Workers in hard hats are preparing the site for the prime minister's inauguration of the new tower, and some are taking selfies.

"I can't tell if it is because the new structure is wider," says Sanjib, looking up at the newly-built Dharara, "but it somehow looks smaller than the old one."

Actually, the new concrete tower is broader than the old brick and mortar one that collapsed. Its balcony is bigger, and at 79m it is 18m taller.

Bhimsen Thapa built two minaret-style towers at the entrance to his palace in 1832. But both of them collapsed in the 1833 earthquake, and only one was rebuilt. That one had been restored after coming down again in the 1934 earthquake, only to collapse again in 2015.

Sanjib looks up at the new tower, and says, "I would like to climb it again when it is open to visitors. I will not be afraid."



AMIT MACHAMASI

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Building back a *beyul* in Tsum

● Sonam Lama

Architect returns to his roots to restore his native valley destroyed by the 2015 earthquake

I was born and raised in Tsum Nubri's Chhokangpar village in Upper Gorkha, the holy valley famous for its Kyumolung pilgrimage. From when I was in primary school, we used to look up to the mountain above us that we called Lombo.

It was only after I came to the city for my higher studies that I realised the peak above my village is also visible from Kathmandu where people call it Ganesh Himal.

From Kathmandu I went on to study architecture in Germany and graduated from the School

of Architecture at the Technische Universität Darmstadt in Germany, and at the Universidad Internacional de Catalunya in Spain.

I returned not just to Nepal, but to the land of my birth—drawn by a spiritual connection to the holy beyl valley where every monastery, mani wall, khanyi carries a centuries of history and culture.

The Guru Rimpoche is said to have visited Tsum and there is even a cave where the Mila Repa meditated in the caves of

Pirenphug. Tsum is truly a beyl, a hidden valley of such tranquility and beauty that it makes mortals contemplate eternity and transcend to a higher spiritual plane.

The 120km sacred Kyumolung circumambulation in Nepal and Tibet of Siringi Himal is now not possible because of the difficulties

in travelling to China, but pilgrims still do the partial trek on the Nepal side.

Since returning, I have campaigned to preserve the culture and heritage of the Tsum and Nubri valleys, actively trying to shelve plans to build a road that I felt would destroy our traditional way of life and everything that is precious to us.

Haphazard highways are causing irreversible damage to the culture, nature, and economy of Nepal's remote valleys. Driven by greed and graft, roads are being

built where one already exists, and where they destroy the region's culture and tourism prospects. The Tsum road will bulldoze chortens, mani walls and settlements because the alignment would have to follow the foot trails along the narrow valley.

Our way of life, language, culture is different from other parts of Nepal. It has been passed down to us through generations by our ancestors and we are duty bound to protect them. We are just temporary custodians of this heritage. We may not be able to improve on what they



Patan School built back better

The 2015 earthquake damaged 7,923 schools and 49,681 classrooms in 14 districts in Central Nepal. Of these, 6,085 schools have been rebuilt and another 1,468 are under construction.

Among the ones that have been rebuilt is one of the oldest schools in the country, Patan Secondary School, which was handed over to school management on 19 April by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)-backed Emergency Reconstruction Project.

Designed on a Japanese school architecture template, it is meant to be a model 'complete school' with multi-hazard resilient structures, it has a concrete foundation raft designed to withstand magnitude 8 earthquakes, rainwater harvesting system and solar power. (Pictured after the earthquake, during reconstruction and after restoration, right.)

The Rs320 million building with its distinctive clock tower has already become a Patan landmark. Inside, it has classrooms for Early Childhood Development up to Grade 12, separate laboratories for computer science, physics, biology and chemistry, a retrofitted and restored Rana-era



conference hall, and bathrooms and hand-washing stations with adequate water supply.

Despite the major facelift, reconstructed schools like Patan Secondary School have a shortage of teachers and students to fill new classrooms, as well as maintenance budgets from the Education Ministry.

Federal and state interference in the local-level educational process is stifling progress, as teaching standards in government schools are not improved, curricula remain outdated and teachers are underpaid and unmotivated despite the flashy new buildings.

While post-quake reconstruction should have diverted attention from infrastructure to quality of instruction and future disaster preparedness, that has not been the case. As Covid-19 pushes education towards distance learning, improved infrastructure alone will not be able to guarantee the delivery of quality education.

"The 2015 earthquake and this pandemic could have been an opportunity to upgrade both hardware and software of our education system, but the teaching standards have instead, downgraded," says Rajendra Dahal, editor of *Shikshyak* monthly. 🇳🇵



The Bihi school under construction using traditional building methods (left). The Chumling during construction, and after (above).



In 2015, the timber frame prevented the complete collapse of a building in Shya La in Nubri even though the outer stone walls fell down (above).

ALL PHOTOS: SONAM LAMA

left us, but we have to at least try to protect it.

I have travelled across the world, and am convinced that Tsum Valley is unique in many respects, and not because my family is from there. As an architect, for instance, I can see that the method of construction of old houses here is suited to local conditions, uses materials such as stone, bamboo, timber and blends with the high-Himalayan environment.

All this richness lay in ruins after the 25 April 2015 earthquake. I was in Kathmandu then, and immediately set off on the four-day walk to Tsum along trails that had been wiped out by huge rockfalls. I was devastated, but was determined to do what I could towards reconstruction and rehabilitation.

First, I trekked across the valley to assess the damage to the houses, monasteries, trails and bridges. I talked to local builders about their traditional construction methods which had been passed down from the generation before them.

I met village elders, and took their advice about seismic resistant construction methods. The challenge was to try to preserve

traditional building methods and designs, while making the structures strong enough to withstand future shocks.

This was not as easy as it sounded. For example, the new plans had to conform to the government's 17 listed designs for reconstruction to be eligible for the Rs300,000 grant. None of the designs were suitable for Tsum Valley, neither in terms of material, nor of traditional space requirements. This made my job even more complicated.

We concentrated on rebuilding schools and health posts first using designs that matched local architectural traditions, while being earthquake resistant.

Delays due to government bureaucracy was expected, and it was a given. Even after the designs for the Bihi school reconstruction was completed, for example, it took a year for approval from Kathmandu.

We had adhered to every parameter laid down by the government and sourced local materials. We chiseled stones in the traditional way, used the lighter and softer ones for walls,



using longer stones for the middle of the wall sections, known as kyangur or jakkhuyuk.

In other places we used overlapping stones called noljyak, and employed only experienced masons. We raised the walls 0.8m above the ground and used treated wooden bands at the plinth, sill, lintel and roof levels, trying them at the corners to wooden members called nas. We changed the gable end walls to

timber to lighten the structure.

The other areas where we departed from traditional design were in the roof timber trusses. Traditional flagstone and slate roofs were heavy and required thick beams and rafters to support them, which made them unstable during quakes. We also secured the truss by gabion wire to the foundation so the light corrugated metal roofing stays safe from winter snowstorms.

We also used traditional technique of seismic resistant construction with timber-only design for schools which has a wooden frame inside stone masonry envelope called nang che. In 2015, the timber frame prevented the complete collapse of a building in Shya La in Nubri even though the outer stone walls fell down.

Since the classrooms also had to be acoustically sealed, in the Bihi school we filled the gap between wooden wall panels with sawdust to reduce noise, and also insulate the rooms from the cold.

By using local materials we were not just preserving traditional architecture, village

artisans and carpenters also got jobs, and nearly forgotten building techniques were revived.

Interns from my universities in Germany and Spain have travelled to Tsum and Nubri to see for themselves what we built, and learnt about local Nepali culture as well as the reconstruction process.

Despite obstacles, we have now handed over the schools and health post buildings in Bihi and Chumling to local communities.

Sonam Lama is a native of Tsum Valley and an architect currently pursuing Hubert H Humphrey Fellowship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States.



REBUILDING TSUM

Accompany Sonam Lama to his native Tsum Nubri Valley, where the architect overcomes bureaucratic delay to rebuild schools and health clinics by blending traditional designs of the area, using local materials with seismic resistant elements.

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Inauguration nation

Of all the many accomplishments of Primafacie Minister K P Oli in the past three years of his tenure, the most remarkable is his setting a new Guinness World Record on the number of inaugurations he has inaugurated in the past two weeks.

But we worry that with all the ribbon cutting, there is going to be a serious depletion of Nepal's national stockpile of red ribbons.

Last week, the Primeval Minister inaugurated the Melamchi Project, which was first mooted during the early Lichhavi Period. The praiseworthy thing is that we did not let a minor issue like the fact that the project is still in the test-phase get in the way of its grand inauguration.

But what if Primetime Minister Oli runs out of stuff to inaugurate? What if there is nothing left to declare open? It will be a national embarrassment, with disastrous consequences for public morale.

But these fears may be unfounded. On Thursday, Primate Minister Oli inaugurated Bhimsen's Erection which will stand as a monument to national virility, and proof that the Nepali Can, and the Nepali Will (still do it).

I don't know if you noticed, but the design of Oli's Folly has been modified to look like an Inter-continental Ballistic Missile on its launch pad. This is to fool enemy spy satellites into thinking that Nepal has nuclear arsenals and urinals to act as a deterrent against any nation that harbours ill intent towards us.

The government's aim is to erect phalli like Dharara all over the country under its 'One Municipality One View-tower' campaign. This means Oli will not run out of structures to inaugurate for the rest of his PMship.

There are other National Pride Projects in various stages of incompleteness that also deserve to be inaugurated by the Primavera Minister in the unforeseeable future.

As a service to the nation, the Ass lists below various schemes that are ready for immediate ribbon-cutting:

1. Inaugurate the MCC even if they are still playing political pingpong with it.
2. Next week, inaugurate the bridge across the Trisuli River that collapsed of its own accord. After all, it is the thought that counts.
3. PM Oli promised that ocean going ships would arrive on Nepal's shores by December 2018. It's ok that they didn't, he can still inaugurate a pretend harbour on the Kosi River and declare Nepal not landlocked anymore.
4. The great thing about inaugurations is that some of them can be fast-forwarded so that the projects can be declared opened prematurely. Only 20% of the work on the Kathmandu-Tarai Fast Track has been completed, but that should not deter us from officially inaugurating it.
5. Inaugurations can also be retroactive, so the prime minister can take credit for projects that have already been inaugurated by a previous prime ministers. For example, Prime Minister Oily can re-inaugurate the Tribhuvan Rajpath all over again.
6. Or they can be futuristic. Nothing should stop the Oli government from inaugurating imaginary projects that we have not even dreamed of yet: Nepal's first nuclear power plant built with fuel rods from Mustang.
7. Depends on how desperate we are, but if we really run out of things to inaugurate, the Slime Minister can even inaugurate Nijgad International Aeropolis by ceremonially chain-sawing down the first of 2 million trees amidst enthusiastic applause from logging contractors.
8. In its manifesto, The Oligarchy promised piped gas in every home by 2020, and sure enough it can already be inaugurated.

It's just that instead of liquid petroleum gas, what we will have piped into every Nepali home is laughing gas.



The Ass

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