Nepal’s Supreme Court has been overturning Prime Minister KP Oli’s moves to remain in office one by one, and this week began hearings on his second dissolution of the Lower House on 22 May.

Petitioners at the Constitutional Bench on Wednesday and Thursday went beyond just questioning Oli’s gambit, they blamed President Bidya Devi Bhandari for complicity.

They did not just want a restoration of the House, but Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress (NC) to replace Oli.

President Bhandari’s rejection of Deuba’s claim prompted 166 MPs from a five-party alliance to file writ petitions in the Supreme Court’s Constitutional Bench on 24 May. A final verdict is expected in two weeks. That decision will determine whether the House is reinstated, making Deuba prime minister for a fifth time, or if Oli continues.

Oli’s latest setback was Supreme Court decisions reversing his appointment of 20 ministers, and overturning a Cabinet move to amend national park regulations to give Yeti Holdings a hydropower license in Langtang. The petitioners and defence lawyers have been allocated 15 hours each to present their case. Central to the debate will be whether President Bhandari was fair in rejecting claims by both Deuba and Oli that they had a majority in the House to form a new government.

On 21 May, Oli claimed he had the support of a majority in the House that he had himself dissolved by counting the total membership of the UML and the Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) — even though in both parties who had defected to Deuba’s camp.

For his part, Deuba presented President Bhandari with 144 actual signatures of MNs from the NC, Maoist Centre as well as dissidents from the UML and JSP. Only 136 votes were needed for a majority.

Lawyer Sandhu Thapa argued: “Why does the president require any proof other than 144 signatures? Who gave the president the authority to choose her own prime minister, taking away the right of the MPs?”

Last week President Bhandari’s office sent in a written explanation that the Supreme Court did not have jurisdiction over the Office of the President.

However, petitioner Bimal Bahadur Karki argued: “The president invoking 76(3) was for the formation of an alternative government, not to reinstate the same government. The president should have told Oli, you are no longer prime minister.”

Oli, who has survived many earlier cliffhangers, probably expects the Supreme Court to reinstate the House, and plans to demonstrate a majority by wooing back dissident UML MPs and the JSP in a floor test. To do that he will need at least 136 of the total 212 UML members, as well as at least 20 from the Manchaha Thakur faction of the JSP.

However, the tenor of lawyers’ arguments show they will not be satisfied with the restoration of the House — they want President Bhandari’s decision to disqualify Deuba’s claim to be prime minister revoked.

Tulja Manjhi
Disastrous planning

What will lift Nepal into a golden age of hydroelectric potential — or so we were told. Over and over again, the mantra has been repeated that Nepal’s 70,000MW of energy that will propel Nepal into a golden age of prosperity. The government in mid-March invested in Nepal and it is 100% true, even though we share it with China. They are not just talking about disaster-prone Himalayan topography, the Himalayan mountains, and the world’s highest mountain range, and its geology makes the terrain inherently prone to slope failures.

The country has some of the highest sediment loads of any river in the world because of the constant weathering of the mountains. Himalayan topography blocks the southwest monsoon, forcing it to deposit 80% of its load on its slopes in three months. All this puts Nepal at risk from landslides and avalanches, earthquakes and cloudbursts, flash floods and catastrophic bursting of dammed rivers. These natural phenomena have been happening for millions of years. They become disasters only when humans start settling along the floodplains.

We may be tempted to conclude after last year’s deadly landslide season and last week’s devastating floods that these disasters are getting worse. But are they? It may just be that more people are settling in high-risk areas, and visual depiction can be immediately disseminated because of the spread of media.

It is this hydropower projects that were either under construction or already feeding electricity to the grid, were knocked out of action in Central Nepal on 12-14 June. One of them was the 46MW Super Mali project in Kaski. The damage runs into billions of rupees, and it will take at least a year for many of these projects to be commissioned.

The much-delayed $900 million Melamchi water supply project has been badly damaged in its headworks and although it was officially inaugurated in April, its real operation may now be pushed back by six months.

On 18 June, China sent word that the Bonges River had been dammed by the landslide and it could affect the Tamakoshi valley downstream in Nepal. Dolakha authorities alerted the population. Luckily, the river was only partially dammed and the damage was closed and the danger passed. But for the time, the $500 Million 980MW Upper Tama-Koshi project that was slated for opening next month, was at high-risk.

The only good thing we can say about the construction so far is that it could be worse.

But we have to be even more careful about where and what kind of infrastructure we build, especially hydropower engineering. Construction that does not use cut corners is a wake-up call that we ignore these moving mountains at our own peril.

As poorly-designed hydropower projects are being constructed haphazardly, hydropower licenses have been issued in geological fragile sites without vetting, and with little risk assessment of future maximum discharges. Allowing river beds to change and the Chuse to be plundered will mean worse disasters in the future. The climax crisis has already added the threat of glacial lakes outburst floods to an already high-risk region.

Hydropower plants have been cleared out so that if one is knocked out, it will not have a serious impact on national supply. If Upper Tamakoshi was already operational and had been damaged by the flash flood from China, it would have taken out nearly one-third of Nepal’s present power capacity.

The other lesson is not to put all our eggs in the hydropower baskets. Nepal now needs a more flexible energy mix with cheaper and quicker to install on-grid solar farms generating power even in dark times.

This will reduce over-dependence on hydro-energy, and lessen the pressure on these rivers by disturbing their natural flow and endangering biodiversity. Times like these call for a political leadership that understands Nepal’s multiple disaster risks, how they are being exacerbated, and how they can be reduced, and prepare to minimize the impact.

When it rains, it pours

Most are superimposing an image of 980MW Upper Tamakoshi that is itself important in the short-term perspective of taking care of societal needs.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Nepal’s local governments lead from the back

By Abhishek

Most people think of local authority as a dirty job while we work to design and implement policies for the entire nation. In this particular context, most share their nix in this philosophy as they are not getting any benefit in the immediate or short term.

Nepal’s wild elephants are also on the move

By Grishma Dhungana

Conservation slogans and lessons are being used on a single lorry to reduce tourism and conflict in the national parks and conservation areas.

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HIGHEST HONORS COME WITH HIGHEST STANDARDS

We have been awarded the Diamond Status by APEX Health Safety independent audit powered by SimpliFlying for our efforts in ensuring the highest standards of hygiene and safety for our passengers.
Lonely wait of Nepal’s elderly for 2nd dose

Running out of time for their second doses of the Covid-19 vaccine has added to the woes of Nepal’s seniors

Deepali Shrestha

The narrow alley of Manu Tale in the heart of Kathmandu, 37-year-old Sunilchandra Pradhan spends her days watching tv news, waiting for word on the second dose of the Covishield vaccine. In March, when Nepal became one of the first countries in the region to start Covid-19 vaccinations with Covishield vaccines for people over 65, Pradhan was among 1.4 million elderly Nepalis who got the jabs. But it has now been 12 weeks, and time is running out for the second dose to boost their immunity against the coronavirus.

“I am scared to even go out, and my relatives have been helping me in procuring supplies. Maybe getting the second dose would have been easier if I had taken the Chinese vaccine instead,” says Pradhan who is a childless widow.

Since the lockdown she has not been able to even visit her extended family. She passes the day watching television while talking to the children of the family that rents her downstairs’ apartment.

“Last year, I wasn’t that concerned, and I also didn’t understand much about this disease. But this year, I saw how many people were suffering because of hunger and the new strain of Covid-19. This time the situation is serious, and I am worried,” says Pradhan.

Only 8.5% of Nepal’s 30 million people have received the first dose of vaccines, and just 2.4% have got both shots. Over 800,000 elderly people above 65, mainly in the rural areas, have yet to receive even their first dose. This week, Lalitpur municipality is inoculating people above 75 with second doses from a leftover stock.

“Many elderly Nepalis are waiting for their second doses of Covishield, but a lot more have not even got the first dose of Chinese VeroCell because of inadequate responses from the government,” says Krishna Murzel Gautam, of the non-profit, Ageing Nepal. “The elderly who have got both doses tend to be from privileged and affluent sections of society.”

Aside from the vaccine, the pandemic and the nationwide lockdown has been most challenging for the elderly, who are living alone or only with their partners. Apart from the fear of the coronavirus, many have other pre-existing ailments. In Biratnagar, Sitla Kafle and her husband Manjhi, both in their sixties, showed Covishield symptoms last year. Sitla’s symptoms were mild but Manjhi, who is a liver patient, recovered after much difficulty. Their only daughter lives in Australia, but was unable to come home due to travel ban. Neighbours and relatives helped out.

“We couldn’t go out since both of us had the virus. It was difficult,” recalls Sitla. Once they recovered, both got vaccinated with Covishield just like Pradhan, they are also awaiting the second dose.

Before the pandemic, the couple used to travel in India every three months for Manjhi’s follow-up at a hospital there. But as the second dose was delayed, they had to get checkups in Biratnagar. But even that has not been possible now because of the lockdown.

“It is very risky,” says Sitla. “For now, we are in regular contact with the doctor. But if something happens, things are going to be very tough. We would have felt safer with the second dose.”

Even before the pandemic, Sunilchandra Pradhan had a host of ailments that included chronic neck pain and regularly occurring diarrhoea. But she has to deal with a deep sense of forboding not just about her previous afflictions but also Covid-19.

“When I hear the news about people dying of hunger and because of Covid, it scares me. I don’t know what is happening,” says Pradhan. Pokhara Bihark, a professor at the School of Public Health and Community Medicine in BP Hastings

Kathmandu eases lockdown

After nearly two months, the lockdown in Kathmandu Valley has been relaxed after the government confirmed no new cases on Friday. But with some relaxations in place, the authorities said they will continue to monitor the situation until November 29. Despite this, keeping the economic impact of the lockdown in mind, the government has allowed relaxing restrictions, allowing only private vehicles on the roads, allowing the opening of eateries and allowing a limited number of employees in hotels to stay in their jobs during this lockdown, and there are fears of widespread hunger and poverty.

Japan aid

A total of 209 billion yen in generation has already arrived in the government, the country government has signed the agreement with the Nepali to procure 314 additional oxygen generators. Japan government.

Khalith Euro 2020 scheme

Digital wallet Khalti has launched a prepaid and wire campaign for Euro 2020 winners who participate with the most current payments system. A scheme worth Rs 20,000. Any Khalti user can participate by spending at least Rs 200 from their bank account. While cashing back, must use their mobile number and an account. Each day, 10 correct predictions will get 5% of Khalti coupons.

Monsoon relief

Tens of thousands of farmers are facing concerns following heavy rains. A total of 8.3 billion in government relief is being provided to those affected. The government contributed Rs 2 billion to 215,000 workers in the 2020-21 hardship assistance programme.

New Hyundai Palaisde

Hyundai’s 15th anniversary is in full swing. The Korean vehicle company is celebrating its 15th anniversary by giving away 15 new Hyundai Palaisde.

897 billion for new hydropower

The government has approved a new power project worth Rs 897 billion for two hydropower projects. The 25 MW and 19th 25 MW power project on the Marsyangdi River will be completed in two years. The government has also identified a site for a 25 MW power project on the Marsyangdi River. The government is planning to start work on this project within a year.
Anger grows in Nepal over Covid vaccine delays

“Nepalis died for Britain and India, now they are letting us die.”

● Aliaha Sijapati

O

rage is growing against India and Britain, despite Nepal’s long association with these nations and the country’s dependence for vaccines as the second wave of Covid-19 ravages the country.

Critics on social media and press commentators have reminded India and Britain that Nepal’s neighbours have shielded their blood to defend them through wars in the past two centuries, and Nepal’s Rana rulers had been particularly generous in donating money to institutions in British India and the UK itself.

On 16 June, Gurkha veterans in Delhi and blowing bagpipes staged a demonstration outside the British High Commission in London, with family members carrying banners that read “We fight for you. Help us fight Covid-19 in Nepal”, and “Gurkhas Live Matter.”

In May, British celebrities, war veterans, mountainers, public health specialists and vaccine researchers wrote an open letter to Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab appealing for emergency medical equipment and vaccines to Nepal.

They included Sir Jeremy Farrar, Sarah Gilbert, Andrew Pollard, Sir Chris Bonington, Joanne Lumley, Michael Palin, Gen Sir Sam Cowan, and many others. Gurkha veterans Capt Ram Bahadur Limbu, one of only five living recipients of the Victoria Cross, signed the letter from his home in Kathmandu.

A similar appeal was made to the US government through the Covid Alliances 100 killed as far back as early May.

Albeit, Britain, the United States, and other European countries continue to fly in oxygen generators, PPEs and medical supplies. But Kathmandu on relief flights, they have not sent what is most needed now—vaccines.

China, on the other hand, has donated 2 million doses of its Sinopharm VeroCell vaccines, and Nepal has applied to receive another 4 million doses from Beijing.

To be sure, Nepal was gifted 1 million doses of the Covaxin Astrazeneca by India as early as March as part of its “neighbourhood first” policy, and the government had assigned an advance to the Serum Institute of India for another 5 million doses. Only 1 million were delivered.

Britain also co-funded 2.258 million Covishield vaccine doses to Nepal via the COVAX facility, but only 348,000 were delivered in April before India stopped its export.

Kathmandu has repeatedly made special appeals to New Delhi to at least send the remaining 1 million Covishield doses to Nepal, and to Britain to rush supplies so that 1.4 million eligible Nepalis who have been waiting for their second doses now for more than 12 weeks get their jabs before their immunity runs out.

Even though some individualsEuropean countries are willing to donate their surplus or unused Astrazeneca or Pfizer shots to Nepal, the EU has insisted that it go through the COVAX channels which will take 60,000 doses by the end of the year. But that would be too late for those waiting for second doses.

Last month, First Vice President Vidya Devi Bhandari announced that all second doses will be given to countries in South Asia, but there is no mention of when and how many are for Nepal. The G7 leaders last week pledged another $3 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines, half of it to be delivered by end-2021.

There are no signs of actual vaccines being trialled for shipment to Nepal. Most Nepalis blame their government for being too busy with internal power struggles to secure adequate vaccines in time.

Nepal’s embassies, especially in New Delhi, London and Washington DC have come under special criticism for not being able to convey Nepal’s urgency.

However, there is also deep hurt that Nepal is being treated so shabbily in its time of need, especially by India and Britain.

Blood sacrifice

Of the 600,000 young Nepali men conscripted to fight alongside the British in the two world wars, nearly 50,000 were killed in action. Thousands of Nepal soldiers have died fighting in the Indian Army against Pakistan and China since Indian independence.

Archivist Sunita Khadgi says the sacrifice of Nepal soldiers should be honoured, and also the generosity shown by Nepal’s Rana rulers towards institutions in British India and in the UK in the past.

Prime Minister Chandpa Shumsher handed over Rs 300,000 (a lot of money in those days) to key machine guns for its soldiers in British regiments. And in 1914, an ambassador of Chandra Shumsher handed over a personal gift to the British War Office in London — a 25-gallon glass canteen for British infantry.

“Nepal was a poor country, but it is shocking to see how genrous its Rana rulers were in supporting the British,” Khadgi says. They were giving away what was essentially made by poor Nepalis in the name of diplomacy. It is time for Britain to return the favour.”

Another newspaper clipping from The Times of World in 1916 reports on a ‘special gift’ of Rs 2,000,000 from the Nepalese government and Rs 100,000 from the prime minister personally to Viceroy Lord Hardinge in India as donation towards the British war effort.

Although the second wave appears to be cresting in Nepal, just as it is in India, the disease is still spreading in the community in the remotest parts of the country where there are scanty testing or treatment facilities.

Public health officials say the death toll and infection rate is probably three times higher than what is officially reported.

On Wednesday, 2,421 confirmed Covid-19 cases were reported nationwide, with 2,222 fatalities. This puts the total number of deaths so far to 4,664.

There are still 25,320 active cases, with most in home isolation, but there are 734 in ICU and 231 on ventilator support.

On 22 June, after two months of lockdown, the authorities eased restrictions with ‘smart lockdown’ rules. However, public health experts say that relaxing the rules when only 4% of the population has been vaccinated is sure to mean another surge.

After inoculating the 1.4 million people above 68 who are waiting for their second doses, Nepal needs to vaccinate at least 75% of its adult population for which it will need more than 40 million doses soon.

Former United Nations Secretary General and Nepal diplomat Gyan Chandra Acharya told Nepali Times: “I don’t see a possibility of Nepal getting vaccines from India now, but the West is hoarding more vaccines than it needs. What is stopping them from sending the urgently needed second doses to Nepal?”

What sucks, activist Khadgi says is the historical injustice of it all. Having studied Nepal British relations, he is most disappointed at the way Britain is treating Nepal.

The UK may be Nepal’s main donor today, but in the past successive Rana prime ministerslavished presents on the British royalty.

Khadgi, who lives in Qatar, has uncovered archival material about Sir Shumsher, single最大的 gold coins to Queen Victoria, even Jung Bahadur, who was the first royalty from the Subcontinent to visit Britain in 1900, showered expensive presents on Queen Victoria.

Last year, Shumsher paid tribute to the Centre for Molecular Dynamics the nature of Nepal’s second wave is changing. While hospitals in Nepal needed oxygen during the peak of the infections in May, now it is vaccines that is most needed.

“Nepal has historical relations with India and the UK, but it is disappointing that particularly Britain has not done much in terms of vaccines. There have been pledges, but when will they get here? In 2037?” he asks. “We get stuck with COVAX. Britain should send us doses directly since we helped defend their Empire. We are not begging. Nepal died for Britain, now Britain should help Nepal live.”

British Gurkha veterans and their family members in London on 16 June, calling the British government, among other demands, to rush vaccines to Nepal.
Sambhu Kumar Mandal is from Shaurmadi in Bihar. Like hundreds of other migrant workers from India, they have been in Nepal working on reconstruction jobs after the 2015 earthquakes.

What they did not realize is that the district most affected by these earthquakes would be ravaged by yet another disaster six years later—the deadly flash floods on 14-15 June. Mandal and dozens of other carpenters, plumbers, and painters had been working in Sindupalchok, hired by people rebuilding homes that had been destroyed in 2015. One week after the massive flood, some of those same homes they helped rebuild are buried up to the second floor in sediments.

Ironically, Indian migrant workers have filled jobs left vacant by young Nepali men from base who themselves have migrated to Qatar or Malaysia.

“When we crossed the bridge after work on Tuesday, the water was rising, but we didn’t think anything of it,” Mandal, 38, recalls. “We cooked, ate and went to sleep, but suddenly at night there was a big commotion and we saw the water rising. We ran to high ground and saved our lives. We could not sleep the whole night.”

On Tuesday, Mandal and a dozen other Indian workers were helping their employers dig up valuables in rooms that were buried up to the ceiling. Others are busy retrieving furniture and anything else that can still be saved.

The street of Melamchi Bazar is buried in mud, there are people’s possessions scattered everywhere, and by the river that now flows through homes, there is the stench of bodies.

Officials here estimate that at least 16 people are still missing, although the official death toll in Sindupalchok is 17, among them Chinese, India and Nepali staff of the Melamchi Water Supply Project group.

Satellite images from Sentinel and Planet Labs show that landslides triggered by the 2015 earthquakes in the Melamchi and Indrawati basins (two major) grew bigger during heavy precipitation on 15 June as the monsoon broke over Nepal.

There is a very large slope slide below the village of Donguffling that appears to have blocked the Melamchi River, and it was the river breaching through this and other landslides that caused the devastating flood downstream.

In Melamchi, the municipality’s head of social security Yadev Khadka is busy collecting data of fatalities, and damage to classify families according to the urgency of their need. He is also coordinating three meals a day and blankets for 30 families with 100 individuals who are sheltered in a school above the town.

“We are doing what we can, but because the road up the river has been cut off, we still have not heard from outlying areas about casualties and damage,” Khadka says.

There is more rain forecast, so the municipality is on high alert since the unstable slopes could block the Melamchi and Indrawati Rivers again. It is also trying to use excavators to divert the river to its original channel, away from the town.

Many of Sambhu Mandal’s colleagues, including a carpenter who lost all his belongings when his room was submerged, have returned to Bihar. But he and a few others are staying on since they are still needed by employers to mop up.

“We will also go to Kathmandu in a few days, and try to find work there,” says Mandal in smooth Nepali from the years he has spent here. “After that I may even come back to Melamchi, since there is bound to be more reconstruction work.”
**DIGITAL EXHIBITION**

Documentary photographer Nabin Bajal, under a grant from the British Council, has worked with independent UK curator Anna Gill to present a digital exhibition on the province of witch accusation and persecution in Nepal. Watch the exhibition at: http://doculab.co.uk/report

**NEPAL READS**

Explore acclaimed works of poetry, non-fiction and memoirs by authors like Billy Ray Belknap, Kali Cheng, Timo, Mike Yudkin, Donna Kiang, Sandeep Jamatia and Susmi Balaki during Nepal Reads: Gender and Sexuality 2021. Get in touch with them on Facebook page to sign up for the event.

**JUNE - SEPTEMBER**

**SHORT STORY COMPETITION**

Anthology Magikta’s short story award is open to original and previously unpublished short stories in the English language. The stories submitted must be on the theme of ‘Memory’ and must not exceed the maximum of 1,500 words. Submission deadline: 15 July. Fee: ¥750.

**MANDALA WORKSHOP**

‘Thinking of leaving earth? Create a side of the all mine time at home!’ Join the Online Mandala workshop organised by Happy Craft Tools and start with the basics of the artform. Get more details on Happy Craft Tools’ Facebook page.

**DINING AT HOME**

**SWEET FIX**

Keep that humid afternoon of bay with healthy, hand-poured poppies. Come to Shop at Shop. Market in Lime, and Blackberry Ingram pop; head to Facebook for details or order from the Sweet Fix website: 82063138

**CAFE SOMA**

Pick from Soma’s breakfast sandwiches, burgers served with potato wedges and fries, and desserts. Or get the special Rice & Walnut salad as a healthier option. Know more: @82067373; Blackstone 82067373

**GRILL DURBAR**

At Grill Durbar, there isn't anything that can't be grilled. Try the signature grilled chicken and the Durbar Free. Check out the Facebook link to take away details: @82067373; Blackstone 82067373

**PH099**

Enjoy mouth-watering Remix menu food including fresh, bush M. Samachar, Vomita-salt and curries, along with Yomita's national staple, the delicious Pho. Check out the menu on your collage: @82067373; Blackstone 82067373

**RAITHSAANE**

Comprising of locally sourced food, every dish at Raithsaane's menu is connected to different communities of the nation. Take a gastronomic tour of Nepal right from home. Look at the menu online: @82067373; Avon Donetsk Square, 82067373

**PODCASTS**

**UNBOUND**

American novelist Virginia Woolf, attempts to capture two mid-century of women’s writing in the vast literary world of India. The novel, which is thought to be a short novel, will remain a major work for all ages, and was rarely given space in major literary collections.

**A LITTLE LIFE**

American novelist Katherina Suskie, attempts to capture two mid-century of women’s writing in the vast literary world of India. The novel, which is thought to be a short novel, will remain a major work for all ages, and was rarely given space in major literary collections.

**WHILE THE GODS WERE SLEEPING**

Dialogue: New in Nepal: While the Gods Were Sleeping: a personal memoir about the early days of her marriage to a Naxal leader, the cultural and cultural life of all the Naxal and the challenges of an aspiring anthropologist with the political backdrop of the last days of the Rasthak, and a stirring democracy movement.

**THE BULLET AND THE BALLOT BOX**

Aditya Ashurkar’s recently published book, The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Story of a Moral Revolution, chronicles the days and nights of Nepal’s democracy conflict, its dramatic escalation to power and equally dramatic downfall.

**LORE**

Each episode of Lore is an examination of dark historical facts that explores the mysterious creatures, tragic events, and unusual places that fill the pages of history, read more on Twitter.

**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

As expected, there has been a small drop in air pollution since the lockdown rates were relaxed on Tuesday. Despite the rise, there are even lower than what we have seen in recent years.

**OUR PICK**

Aylik, Woman of Kuts’s 2018 Kenyan romantic drama film that premiered at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival, is the story of two young women Kena and Niki, daughters to political rivals fighting for the same position in a local election in Nairobi. The relationship is seen against the backdrop of the two women’s relationships with their families, their father’s political ambitions, and the disease surrounding the Kuts regions. (Photo: Sundance Festical)

**YOU HAVE HIGH STANDARDS.**

SO DO WE!
Keeping up with content creators

Cool apps that go into the casual content creator’s toolbox

I
t’s 2021, and everybody is a content creator. If people are not leveraging social media to do their own personal branding, they are using it as a free space to market their small business, their online startup, book club, social enterprise or homemade lemonsade.

TECH AWAY
Samia Shah

A picture is not just clicked and posted. Well, it is, but not before it is adjusted, colour corrected, filtered and given a pretty frame, possibly with text accompanying it. Fitness instructors are pushing out workout videos on Instagram, startup-CEOs are writing blogs on LinkedIn, mothers making videos are getting bookings via Facebook comments, and dermatologists are giving skin tips through TikTok videos.

They all know that content is king. Some may be getting paid for it, and some may not, but they’re all motivated to stay online and keep talking.

People no longer need to ponder at the gatekeepers of entertainment, thanks to the web. Social media is a seemingly endless playing field. ‘Selling’ because algorithms give more reach to content that receive more engagement, plus a lot of content creators have entire teams hired to handle their pages, while we fumble with our browser tabs. Besides, if we are all publishing content regularly, we are also dealing with increasing competition to get our content liked, shared or commented on.

Content with images get more views than written content, and studies show video content proves to be the most engaging and persuasive format of all communication. Not everyone has a filmmaker, video editor or professional photographer in the family to lean on. Hence, content creation apps have become a staple in every mobile phone—at least, of those who prefer to be self-dependent and tech-savvy.

Millenials today are posting stunning (influencer-level) photographs and Gen Z kids are sharing videos to express themselves. So, what are they using to create creative content? Here is a list of five apps that go into the casual content creator’s toolbox.

CANA

The all-rounder superstar of content creation, Canva has given many budding graphic designers a run for their money with its ability to create drag-and-drop designs of everything from a Facebook cover photo to a 3D presentation cover to a marketing brochure in both digital and printable file formats.

It is the market leader mainly because it offers user-friendly and customization options like no other product. Whether you use it on mobile or desktop, with a little practice, you can design beautiful posters, social media posts and invitations like a professional would, in very little time. Canva puts the ‘fun’ in ‘can-do’, and it even offers colour palettes, complementary font combinations, free vectors and responsive templates so that you never have to start with a blank page. The best part: it isn’t just about creating images.

Canva is perfectly suited for those looking to design business cards, educational workbooks, newsletters and flyers as well. All in all, if you don’t have the time or bandwidth to master professional software like Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, Canva is your saviour!

INSIDE

Let us say, you have a beautiful portrait photo, but you want it in square (1 x 1) ratio without cropping any of it, so that it looks better on your feed. Enter InShot, the app that shot to fame for its canvas size options to edit your photos to suit the platform you are placing them on.

Do not underestimate InShot’s capabilities by its welcome screen, a minimalist three-button page that asks whether you want to create a Video, Image or Collage. This app is quite the multitasker and easily one of the essential image and video editing apps that make content packaging a breeze.

When it comes to videos, InShot helps stitch video clips into one longer video, letting you adjust speed of footage as well as add music from an assortment of free tracks available on the app itself (for those unfamiliar with common photo editing features like adjusting the levels of contrast, warmth, saturation and grain, preset filters can give pictures or videos a more polished look and character to it, without wasting any time).

ADOBE SPARK

For a creativity app that lets you design stylish layouts in vivid colours that will up your social media game in no time, it’s surprising how little people even know about Adobe Spark. You don’t have to be in branding or social media marketing to enjoy the benefits of this sophisticated app that is quite simple to use. Kickstart logo design by gathering and compiling ideas using Spark, on your logo idea, create professional looking Instagram Highlights that impress your followers, or create cool videos and let loose your imagination.

A lot of people pit Canva against Spark, but being an Adobe product, Spark does seem to produce more professional looking content and if you are not a beginner, Adobe Spark will definitely give you more visual value for your efforts. Unique features like a separate editor that lets you create beautiful web pages and the ability to record audio (for voiceover) while you record your video, give Spark a clear edge over other apps in the digital content creation realm.

QUIK

For a slick video editing app that does not insist on adding its watermark (VivaVideo and BeCut do) in exchange for being able to use it for free, Quik is the answer. Developed by GoPro primarily for Instagrammers who want to capture their own moment or action-packed memories, without spending hours applying every transition, cover, and soundtrack. Quik also offers a convenient menu of ready-to-use templates that encapsulate almost every mood, with colours, fonts and elements to evoke a specific style. A clever problem solver, this app has its own library of special photos or videos beforehand to edit into something nice later. Instead of having to scroll through hundreds of files in your gallery to find that one candid gem. The app is so smart, it will even collect content from the photo gallery and create animated videos, like Google Photos does, and serve it up to you every week. User does not have to do anything and they have content at their fingertips.

There are dozens of other apps, but let us end this list with a few special mentions: Adobe Premiere Clip for simply arranging and cutting video clips without rich features, Adobe Lightroom for making average photography look stunning with a few smart filters and touch-ups, and Door for using beautiful typography (words in attractive font) and creating next level Stories.

Samia Shah is a designer by nature, a writer by profession, and branding content helps her develop her keen interest in text and digital culture.
The real cost of Nepal’s setting up of livelihoods

The pandemic makes Nepal poorer and ruins the economy, but the government has no solutions

Anita Bhetwal

A
fter two months in which there were news reports of all cases and fatalities every day, the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic appears to be cresting in Nepal, but it has left the economy in ruins with a crisis-ridden government offering no hope to citizens.

At its peak in mid-May, there were more than 6,000 new infections and up to 250 deaths daily. And that was just the official count, models put the figures at least twice as high. However, the real impact of the pandemic is in the country’s economic meltdown, with more than half the employed losing their jobs.

The Covid-induced lockdowns have pushed at least 8 million Nepalis below the poverty line, which means they are now unable to access food and water, basic health care and education. This has completely reversed Nepal’s gains in poverty reduction in the past ten years.

Back in March, at the tail end of the first wave, Himalmedia’s tv magazine Saglo Samva interviewed farmers, tourist guides, hotel operators and taxi drivers most affected by the lockdown.

This week, the team revisited each of the same people to find out what had become of them. Their stories are a microcosm of a society ravaged by the pandemic, where the poor have got poorer.

Nepalis suffered at least five months of lockdowns in 2020, and another nearly two months this year. The restrictions were eased this week, even though the daily number of fatalities and active cases are higher than when the lockdown was imposed on 29 April.

The pandemic and the lockdowns have disabled every sector. Some 1.1 million people in the hospitality industry have been directly impacted by the pandemic and more than half of Nepal’s lost their jobs in the past month alone.

Yet, the government has no clear plans to provide alternative employment opportunities for those who lost their jobs. In fact, it has been too preoccupied with a political power struggle for most of the pandemic to plan a real exit strategy.

Every response to the crisis has been too little, too late.

On Tuesday, even though other districts prepared to relax their lockdowns just as Kathmandu did, Nepal saw 5,632 new cases and 41 fatalities. There are a total of 52,648 active infections, 782 of them in ICU and 218 in ventilator support in hospitals across the country.

Public health experts are already warning of a possible third wave and urging the government to make preparations for increased contact tracing and hospital treatment to avoid much devastation.

Milked dry

Buffalo milk is the only source of income for farmers in Kamal village of Banke district in the western Tarai. But many of the dairy farmers were unable to sell their milk during the lockdowns in 2020. Later, they didn’t get a good price and the Dairy Development Corporation was slow to pay even what they were owed.

“The market is closed, there is barely any feed for the cattle. We are working day and night, but for nothing,” says Mahal Prasad Yadav, who has 150 buffaloes, but little income since the pandemic.

The farmers took loans to buy feed and took care of the buffaloes, but the second wave has quashed the little hope they had. They were hoping the government would announce a relief package in this year’s budget. But their hopes were dashed.

“We are bursting to pour the milk into the drains, there are no consumers for these cows. I would be happy to feed my buffaloes at a loss and there is no telling how long it will last,” says Suresh Pandey of the SF Dairy in Nepalgunj.

“The government should boost the morale of farmers and local businesses, subsidize their electricity or promote Nepal goods by stopping import from the third country.”

Down and out

While some worry about paying millions in bank loans, daily wage labourers worry about the next meal. Kunahi Lama has been operating a rickshaw in Kathmandu for 38 years, but his business is down and out. He barely gets one ride a day, and mostly depends on people distributing free food.

“It’s easy for the government to tell us to stay home and eat healthy, where is the money? It doesn’t even allow me to beg on the streets. At least they should distribute rations for people like us,” says Lama. “If I get help, at least I will be out of this mess.”

Baburam Bhattarai is an ASAP every day, and if it is his lucky day he will get a client or two to carry loads for them. Otherwise, he sits on the steps passing the day with other jobless porters. Before the pandemic, they used to carry loads for Asian’s many shops. Sometimes, good samaritans offer them food, but that is rare.

“I just wish I did not have to sleep hungry and locked down would end soon, that is all I wish for,” he says.

Pandemic makes the poor poorer

There is empirical evidence that the second pandemic wave has further impoverished Nepal’s poor. Every modest estimate, some 8 million Nepal’s have been pushed back into poverty (the increase is due to Covid-19 induced lockdowns), in this week, Saglo Samva’s magazine. Shankar Sharma, former ambassador to the US and vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission spoke to Kanak Mani Dixit. Excerpt.

Kanak Mani Dixit: We went back to people we had interviewed four months ago, and found that their situation had further declined. Do they represent the current Nepali society?

Shankar Sharma: They are an accurate representation. There are three categories that have been hit the hardest by the pandemic: the first are subsistence farmers below the poverty line, this also includes disadvantaged groups. The next are people in the informal sector whose livelihood has been ended with the extended closure of the market. Then there is the hospitality industry and unlike others, they haven’t been able to pick up after the first wave because the impact of the lockdown on the travel industry in the long term, businesses had loans and now their debt has accumulated.

These impacts are directly reflected in our macroeconomic numbers. Economic growth last year was 2% and this year it won’t be more than 1%. Similarly, the World Bank estimates that the pandemic has pushed 9 million people in Nepal back below the poverty line.

Would you say that because it is not monetised rural subsistence living is fading better?

Back during the Maoist insurgency, some development partners had conducted a study about people who had migrated to cities due to their work. They asked people if they would go back to the village once the peace accord was signed, 93% of the respondents said no.

One of the main reasons behind this was Nepal’s agriculture couldn’t compete with Indian and Chinese produce. This also led to more people migrating abroad. Experts have suggested the concept of contract farming, which is also included in this year’s budget, and will do well for the country.

But one of our biggest problems in our inability to identify the poor. The government has developed 13 cards for their identification, but 25% have a place on the list and 25% are those who have listed themselves in hopes of getting some relief. As a result, the real poor have been deprived even of their social security fund.

What should we do to boost our morale and of the country?

The affected people are those in rural Nepal but they also have an advantage of three levels of government. But it is still the responsibility of the central government to provide relief worth at least two months at rusty rate per day for the people. Unfortunately, there is no mention of this in the budget this year.

The Nepal government has also allocated a total of 11 billion for training in the last two budgets but hasn’t been able to spend that money. This fund should be used in skill development for Nepal’s poor. Effective spending of the budget is a must. Similarly, the government should support cottage and small industries so that they don’t close down. If we lack funding, we could use loans and grants we have received from international development partners.

Despite the pandemic, there is still talk about Nepal graduating from Least Developed Country (LDC) status to a middle-income country. Where is the happiest?

Following the pandemic, the United Nations has set a new deadline for the LDCs to graduate to lower-middle-income and middle-income countries. The good news is that we have made some progress in our per capita income, and the fact our economy is now dependent on multiple factors is a positive sign. But what is worrying is that our economic growth is still lower than the average growth of underdeveloped countries. This means we will have to work more on increasing our living standard.

It is said that Nepal is not a poor country, but the government just cannot seem to spend their development budget. If they were held more to account by civil society and media during this pandemic that might help?

I think that is an appropriate conclusion to make. The government will always play the usual role, but it is important to highlight the importance of civil society and journalists in creating awareness about various programs at the local level such as the Prime Minister’s Awareness Scheme, which goes a long way in reinforcing elected representatives in villages and towns.

>> This piece is part of the Venal Nepal series in the Times of India, published on 25 June 2021. The series delved into the nation’s economic challenges during the pandemic and the government’s response, highlighting the need for a comprehensive strategy to address the poverty and inequality crisis. >>
Big businesses have their own woes. The three-star Airport Hotel in Kathmandu has seen only a handful of guests in more than a year. The hotel’s original staff of 200 is down to 10, and only 10 of its 62 rooms are kept serviceable.

“We are doing much worse than last year, we did survive 15 months somehow, there were some domestic tourists, but then the second wave happened and it destroyed what little we had,” says owner Binayak Shah, adding that he has not been able to pay the monthly installments on its loan for 17 months.

He adds: “I have no income, so how can I pay them? This means sooner or later, the bank is going to blacklist me, and put this hotel up for auction.”

One of the hardest-hit sectors is tourism. And while professionals of most fields have had to cope with the challenges brought on by the pandemic, tourist guides have been unemployed for more than a year now.

Four months ago, tourist guide Shankar Bhattarai had taken up teaching to make a living but was spending all his free time researching about Nepal’s history and culture to better prepare himself for when the tourists would come back post lockdown. But the second wave killed what was left of Nepal’s tourism.

He has since given up any hope of normalcy and is constantly worried about debt collectors. Hoping for an alternative for tourist guides like himself, he was further depressed with this year’s budget.

“There were provisions only for the big hotels and travel agents, we didn’t find ordinary tour guides like us anywhere in the relief packages,” says Bhattarai who had been a tourist guide since 2011. “I’ve tried my best to promote Nepal through my work but at our time of need, we have no government support. I now question myself about staying back in Nepal.”

Unserviceable

THE COST OF SECOND WAVE

Back in March, at the tail end of the first wave, Himalmedia’s tv magazine Saglo Samaj interviewed farmers, tourist guides, hotel operators and taxi drivers most affected by the lockdowns.

This week, the team revisited the same people to find out what has become of them.

“Saglo Samaj is aired on DishHome Channel 130 every Monday evening at 8:30pm.”

The Cost of Second Wave

Within the lockdown last year, a bank employee named Ganesh Tamang lost his job and the loan of Rs 500,000 that he had taken to buy a van for his transport business. With no other source of income, he now runs his village and raises livestock. “I often feel like we are part of a wrong country, to a wrong family, and at the wrong time. I was 30, have come to this anywhere else?” he says.

Saglo Samaj has a sister namedRashmi, and a family of young children dependent on him. But his job has been taken away, and he has had to leave his job.

“On the advice of banks and financial institutions that they give you a few months until after the lockdown,” he said. “But they will not be able to get us out of the strain, by this we will be able to get up, with or without government help,” says Shaharai.

Taken for ride

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Smartass lockdown

Everything about living in Nepal these days is smart, and getting smarter. When he got elected, Kathmandu’s Mayor declared that he could make the capital a “smart city”. It may not seem like it to a casual observer, but he is making progress.

Smart politics

The reason lockdowns are so easy to enforce in Kathmandu is because we have been trained well to be looked up. First we had 30 years ofピンchaют, then the dawn of democracy ushered in the glorious era of political showdowns, when there were so many bands that we needed a website to just keep track of them. The way it worked was that a disgruntled political party wanted to show a grunted party who was boss, it instigated a couple of touts on the Ring Road early in the morning. After that, the public willingly stayed home in support of this ingenious non-violent form of civil disobedience. Unfortunately, after the new constitution, most political parties had been too lazy to organise lockdowns. But there is hope, the 5-party Alliance announced this week that Kathmandu will be a smart city again with daily street protests.

Smart trash

By closing down the Sikkim Landfill site from time to time, our over-smart city encourages a circular economy and lets trash pile up on roadways, allowing street fauna to forage on it. What remains decays organically, producing compost that recycles valuable nutrients back into the soil, and protects our urban biodiversity.

Smart Alec PM

Aside from a smart mayor, we also have a Smart Party PM. People call him Prime Minister Wily, or the Old Fox, but he should call himself the Old Mule. From one mule to another, I must say this guy has stunning dexterity in general and asses in particular. Every time it looks like this is the end, he pulls another bunny out of his hat. How many times does he have up his hat, anyway? The government is now down to a Gang of Five, so the only way for the opposition Gang of Five to keep up the pressure while the ball is in the Supreme Commander’s Court is to declare a nationwide smart shutdown during this smart lockdown.

Smart street smart

One way to protect the city’s smartness is to make sure the streets are permanently dug up. This is deliberate. There is no better way to make people street smart, keep them on their toes, alert, bight-eyed and bushy-tailed, than to have dusty tracks along public thoroughfares. This also prepares for next year’s tourism by preserving the Valley’s rusty charm. Tourists don’t come to Kathmandu to see smooth asphalt roads and functioning traffic lights, they can do that in Singapore.

Smart sewer

Aside from roads, what gives this smart city its distinctive ambience and unique aroma is the Bagmati River. Nepal’s capital may have been declared open defecation free, but it still has a Sewage Canal running past our religious sites. When Nepalis exclaim “Holy shit!” they mean it literally.

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