Making up is hard to do

It was a defining image of the last year of internecine warfare between the two top leaders of the Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML).

Prime Minister KP Oli and former prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal are looking out over Kathmandu from the 11th floor of the Marriott Hotel. Nepal is pointing in the general direction of Singh Darbar, and the two appear to be enjoying the view together.

But that picture (above) was deceptive. The attempt on 21 April to patch up differences did not end well. “Of the four hours over two days they were together, they spent three-and-half hours blaming each other,” confided a Nepali aide.

An Oli adviser compared the quarrel to a “गॅग-गॅग” — an epic clash between two UML alpha males that goes back two decades. After the UML united with the Maoist Centre in May 2018 following their election victory, KPO promptly fell out with Pushpa Kamal Dahal. MKN sided with Dahal, bolstering his strength against Oli within the party.

“There is a trust deficit between the two leaders that has built up over the years, but it is not ideological,” says a member of the UML mediation team. “It can easily be resolved if the two sit down together and find middle ground.”

Oli finds it unforgivable that Nepal went over to Dahal and even supported Sheh Bahadur Deuba of the Nepal Congress to replace him as prime minister. Nepal was with 126 MPs to File a writ at the Supreme Court to challenge Oli’s dissolution of the House on 21 May and to make Dahal prime minister for the fifth time.

Nepal’s main gripe is that Oli does not listen to him, behaves like a dictator, has sidelined his supporters, and has even tried to overturn the Constitution to get his way. Increasingly isolated, Oli sent Nepal an olive branch with a six-point proposal to return to a pre-unification UML Central Committee.

But even that letter had ambiguous language that evoked suspicion that Oli was out to pull a fast one again,” Chandra Budathoki of the Nepal camp told Nepal Times.

The compromise plan centres on whether Oli is willing to go back to the composition of the 229-member UML Central Committee before he had diluted it with 38 of his own loyalists on 14 May 2018.

That should be fairly straightforward, but Oli’s single-mindedness does not allow it. Some of the prime minister’s own trusted advisers admit privately that they are exasperated by him being surrounded with yes men, and spewing out vitriolic abuse at Nepal. With the Supreme Court deciding next week on writ petitions, Oli is working on Plan B to cobble a majority in the House in case it is restored. For that he needs the UML to remain united with support of Nepal.

Says a member of the mediation team: “The party will not function if we stay united, and it will be weakened if we split — either way, both sides suffer.” The body language of the two leaders does not indicate a desire for accommodation. -

Santa Gha Magar
No vax? Ask for Mask.

Much has been said about "vaccine superpowers" and how instead of leveling out rich and poor, it has widened inequalities. Nepal today is living proof of this.

The government launched a mass covid vaccination across all seven districts of the country and has got more than 90% of the population vaccinated. If we look at the percentage of people vaccinated in the last few months, we can see that the government has made good progress.

At the same time, the world is facing a new challenge with the Delta variant. This variant is more virulent than the original virus, making vaccinations necessary to contain the spread of the virus.

The Delta variant is a cause of concern for many countries, as it is more transmissible than the original strain. The government needs to take immediate action to contain the spread of the virus.

The Delta variant has been identified in several countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and India. It is more contagious than the original strain of the virus and has been responsible for a surge in cases in many countries.

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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.
Giving start-ups a head start

Despite obstacles, start-ups emerge as exciting new outlets of Nepal’s economy

A bout 250 years ago when King Prthivi Narayan Shah made Kathmandu the capital of unified Nepal, he realized that the city had great potential as a business centre, complementing its role as a trading hub.

He allowed in businessmen from Rajasthan in India to set up shop and allow entrepreneurship to flourish, a move expanded later by Privy Councilor Rana. One reason entrepreneurship did not have deep roots in Nepal was the concept of orthodoxy, a 19th century notion with job security. That is why the start-up culture took so long to start up and morph in Nepal. The proliferation of, and exposure to the Internet and the recent advent of international private equity firms, accelerators and incubators have paid a pivotal role in making this happen.

Since 2017, successive government budgets have mentioned start-ups and allocated money for their establishment, but without clarity and development. This year’s budget was no different; it also set aside Rs1 billion towards building a start-up ecosystem, including concessional loans.

What the previous governments had missed out on, this one seems to have acknowledged: start with defining a start-up. A voluminous document is doing its job to thoroughly understand the barriers and loopholes of our bureaucracy for comments from experts. Until they come up with a definition, let us say a start-up is an innovative idea that uses technology to address unmet demands in the market.

In the United States, the start-up sector is a $3 trillion business. In South Asia, India leads the pack with over 20,000 Start-ups in operation, of which 100 are unicorns with a combined market cap of $240 billion. Bangladesh, Pakistan and even Afghanistan have understood the importance of this sector to the economy.

Internationally, some 90% of start-ups fail to take off. Nepal has invested in 600 start-ups, all in Kathmandu, and the risk appetite for new investments is limited partly because of the absence of an enabling environment.

The cost factor for starting a tech business in Nepal is lower than anywhere else with a constant flow of eligible young graduates well versed in English who are relatively computer literate. The bandwidth for connectivity is getting better. It is an untapped market, an imitator of international success stories for local markets can be implemented, and the population is young, and growing.

Top challenges with the lack of legal and policy environment posing the greatest risk. Ideas are the premise of any start-up. Intellectual Property Right (IPR) is the most important legal resource for safeguarding these ideas, which in Nepal remains a draft and has been in discussion for quite some time.

The current law was formulated in 1984, and does not address developments that have occurred worldwide since then. A lawyer recently remarked that when he tried to register a trademark for puppy feed, the application was denied because a tobacco company had already registered it.

Thankfully, the Supreme Court gave a verdict on the Kanai Naradal case a few years ago, which protected trademarks. Still, laws need to reflect international best practices for this sector to operate.

Listing start-ups is also a great hurdle. Banks are reluctant and risk averse to lend without collateral. If a loan is secured, it is not nearly enough to meet the requirement and equity is difficult to come by. The ones who have demonstrated that they have the ability to serve a niche market and can show potential to scale up have been successful to secure equity financing.

The start-up industry is evolving despite the lack of an enabling environment. The resilience shown by these entrepreneurs has steadily improved, and the appetite to invest in them is gaining traction.

Examples include ride-sharing apps that made the government change its policy, e-commerce platforms that have engaged with the government to facilitate the sector, and companies that realigned business plans to accommodate government policies.

A cloud service provider had to create a hybrid model because government officials could not comprehend what it was, and that data could be secure. They needed to see actual physical infrastructure.

But start-ups are resilient, and they will continue to comply with the authorities to accommodate them as they continue to grow. They have adapted to the situation and have introduced internal safeguards to secure their ideas in a less IPR environment.

Some are nothing but direct agreements, developing in-house products knowing that there will be disrupters in the market six months down the road and, focusing on networks as a strategic asset. The government’s new regulations would hopefully put it in a facilitating role to create a platform for ideas to grow with the help of mentors from academics and the private sector. Nepal’s start-up ecosystem is still in its infancy, but it is making headway in terms of legal and regulatory framework in place, will thrive. One day there will be a Nepali unicorn in the making.

Siddhant Pandey’s piece is sweeter than | of Amritesh Pushkar (MSc in Business)

Canadian Covid relief

A Canadian special flight brought over 16,000 units of PPE, 27 ventilators and other health care equipment to Kathmandu on Monday to help Nepal fight the pandemic. The Canadian government had previously funded $31.5 million for UNICEF to procure oxygen concentrators and ventilators. CDN aid to Nepal Cross-Cutting Project and $150,000 to ROK-funding to support intermediates services in the country.

Canada is proud to send additional relief material to Nepal that will help save lives of those suffering from Covid-19,” said Denise Kent, Canada’s Acting Ambassador to Nepal.

Upper Tamakoshi completed

The construction of the Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower project in Dolakha district has been completed, and will generate power of 5.5 MW from the 17 turbines, each with 26 MW capacity each. “If there is no technical problem, we will turn on the new Monday morning and start generating electricity from the first unit,” says 963 Terrestrial Director Dipak Pramanik. The power will be sent to the national grid through the Ganga dam shikara 1000 MVA, which is also being tested.

Tata Nexon EV

Tata Motors is one soon opening booking for its electric car, Tata Nexon EV, scheduled to be launched in July. The Nexon 170 km electric in India January 2020 had sold more than 4,000 units, capturing 6% of Indian electric car market. “The Nexon EV will not only promote Nepal government vision of electrifying the auto industry, but also realistic the way we can preserve green technology,” says Mayank Bhatt of Tata Motors.

Covid assistance

Rewati Nepal, 86, of Baluwatar, was admitted to Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu for Covid-19. He is a resident of Baluwatar. The hospital has taken all necessary steps to remove patients in need. It has also increased its Covid-19 Compassionate Volunteers (VCO) to 60.

Remdesivir made in Nepal

The Department of Drug Administration (DDA) has registered four new companies—DHL Healthcare Private Limited, Saarniko Chemicals Private Limited, and Adarsh Pharmaceuticals Limited, to produce remdesivir, a drug used for Covid-19 patients. Said under the brand name ‘Remdax’, each vial of the US FDA-approved drug will cost Rs2,500.

World Bank loan

Nepal has signed an agreement for a concessional loan worth $150 million from the World Bank to post-Covid recovery as well as a support in ongoing large-scale development projects, create jobs, mobilize markets and support green growth. This assistance will improve the tax and customs system, public investment management, environmental regulation and debt management to further strengthen Nepal and support green mainstreaming,” says Finan Secretary Shikesh Kumar Dhungana.

Top Turkish brand

Turkish Airlines, Turkey's national carrier, has once again been named the country's most valuable brand for the fifth time in a row with a brand value of $1.4 billion.

Meanwhile, the airline announced the week that passengers' hand luggage, including that of the EU's 25 countries, including Bangladesh, Nepal, South Korea, India and Nepal, will not be allowed to enter Turkey due to tighter security measures.

Turkish Airlines until further notice because of the spread of the Delta strain. However, Turkish Airlines passengers from Kathmandu can still transfer to their destinations elsewhere.

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Hope, hyperbole and hypocrisy of COVAX
The realpolitik of vaccine nationalism and how it impacts on countries like Nepal

As a previously unknown new coronavirus (COVID-19) struck the world in 2019-2020, public health experts recommended universal mask wearing, physical distancing, lockdowns and travel restrictions, while awaiting the arrival of preventive vaccines and effective therapeutics.

A

On two sides of the Atlantic, contrasting approaches emerged to tackle what came to be known as the COVID-19 pandemic. On one hand, there was the energetic leadership of US president Donald Trump (ascended by his Brazilian buddy Jair Bolsonaro), who denied the seriousness of the pandemic or peddled miscellaneous medical cures.

Blaming China and WHD was Trump’s pet project to hide his own policy failures. But he also invested billions of dollars to backroll several American pharmaceutical companies to speed up the preparation of COVID vaccines through his Operation Warp Speed.

Consistent with his Americas first policy, vaccines were sold or given away to friendly countries depending on the MAGA Leader’s mood.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the European Union (EU) was led by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the new Nordic partners. They declared that they would achieve “vaccine nationalism” and embrace the principle that a COVID vaccine is a “global public good” to be made available and affordable to all.

Encouraged by this idealistic vision, WHO launched a clamor for global access. “Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator” that would speed up COVID vaccine production, and equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatment, and vaccines. The ACT Accelerator brought together a who’s who of the global health partners that were governments, scientists, businesses, civil society, and philanthropists. Including the Gates Foundation, GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, the Global Fund, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the World Bank and the WHO.

The most important pillar of the ACT Accelerator was the COVAX (COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access) initiative, or COVAX. It is hosted and administered by GAVI, and its main vaccines procurement and delivery partner is UNICEF. A high-level COVAX coordinating mechanism with representation of a variety of donor countries and multiple technical groups is responsible for ensuring equitable allocation of doses among COVAX vaccine recipients worldwide.

COVAX is divided into COVAX high-income countries (HICs) and low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs) that generally rely on donor funding to cover some costs, but also purchase some more with their own resources.

A mechanism called the Advance Market Commitment (AMC) guarantees the purchase of a large quantity of vaccines to incentivize manufacturers to produce doses and tell them at an affordable price. Initially, countries were expected to capitalise on the COVAX facility with a contribution of $9 billion to purchase at least 2 billion doses of vaccines to meet the needs of some 20% of high-risk groups in participating countries, including front-line health workers and senior citizens.

COVAX was hailed as a futuristic model of enlightened international cooperation to ensure that vaccine development and delivery progress at a speed, scale, and access never seen before in human history.

While some low countries patiently waited for COVAX to be fully deployed, richer countries, particularly the G7 and EU members, decided to jump the queue and cut bilateral deals for their own citizens. Not to be left behind in the competition for public relations and profits. China, India and Russia, the three major vaccine producers outside Western Europe and the US, engaged in carefully calculated “vaccine diplomacy” to bolster their image of solidarity with LMICs.

COVAX remained under-funded and unable to compete with the HICs that quickly seized the lion’s share of vaccine manufacturing from the manufacturers, often exceeding their initial requirements.

By August 2020, the Trump administration had signed seven bilateral deals for 260 million doses, enough to vaccinate 140% of its population.

The Biden administration substantially increased this. The US was not behind in reserving half of the doses secured through two deals. The UK signed five bilateral deals for 270 million doses, equivalent to 225% of its population. Canada was at the head of the class reserving four times more vaccines than the total requirement for its population.

These bilateral deals severely undercut COVAX’s ambition of becoming the global coordinator of vaccine procurement, allocation and distribution. By the time it managed to secure about $3 billion it needed to procure and deliver the promised vaccines to 92 poorer countries in June 2021, manufacturers had no more vaccines available, or practically all their production was contractually committed to the HICs.

COVAX was caught in a Catch-22. Whereas initially it did not have enough money to buy the vaccines, now it has the money but there are no vaccines in the market. Besides HICs hoarding a huge cache of excess vaccines, two other problems are responsible for the global vaccine shortage.

The second huge wave of COVID infection in India in the Spring of 2021 led to it ban the export of the AstraZeneca Covishield vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII). This was a big shock for both COVAX and lower-income countries like Nepal. But an even bigger and more systemic problem has been the unwillingness of a handful of Big Pharma multinationals to give up their exclusive patent rights to produce vaccines and medications. Although the World Trade Organization (WTO) on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) provides for waiving patent rights in the case of life-saving vaccines and medicines, in public health emergencies like global pandemics, most HICs have refused to grant such waivers.

President Biden did express a willingness to consider waiving the intellectual property rights for COVID vaccines. But the same European leaders who loudly proclaimed Covishield vaccines as “global public goods”, have suddenly and hypocritically renounced waiving the IP rights as a condition to acquire vaccines.

The hypocrisy is compounded because billions of dollars, euros and pounds of public funds were given to private Big Pharma companies to accelerate research and development of new vaccines for which we now claim exclusive patent rights to maximise profits for their private shareholders.

The G-7 countries were there high hopes that the G-7 Summit of the world’s richest democratic countries in June would lead to a breakthrough in Covid response, revive COVAX and accelerate delivery of vaccines to developing countries.

The IMF had estimated that an investment of $850 billion would not only save the lives and protect the health of millions, but would help revitalize the world economy and yield a return of $25 trillion by 2025. Sadly, the G-7 accounting for 60% of the world’s economy did not pledge even 6% of the investment recommended for the global vaccine shortage.

The G-7 commitment to donate less than one billion doses of the surplus vaccine they have hoarded, and that too over an extended period stretching well into mid-2022, was a disappointing face in the drama of newer and deadlier Covid variants raging countries like Nepal, much of South and Southeast Asia and Africa.

COVAX estimates that it needs 2 billion doses in 2021 to reach the most vulnerable 20% of people in the developing world, and 11 billion doses to reach herd immunity by 2022. Also, if current trends continue, if COVID’s patent waiver is not granted and technology transfer is not facilitated to vastly increase and diversify vaccine production in many more countries, it may take decades before people in LMICs can expect to reach herd immunity.

The People’s Vaccine Alliance estimates that, at the current rate, low-income countries could take 57 years to fully vaccinate their populations. Whereas G-7 countries are likely to reach that milestone in the next 6 months. Of the 2.5 billion Covid-19 vaccine doses administered worldwide so far, only 4% were provided to poorer countries by COVAX.

COVAX has been criticized for being too slow but falling to deliver. GAVI, which administers COVAX, made some early commitments on its equitability founding principles by agreeing to certain global standards to supply vaccines through direct bilateral contracts with several vaccine manufacturers, even though COVAX was struggling to deliver minimal quantities of vaccines to LMICs.

Gavi managed to procure through COVAX 1.6 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine while Nepal (a country of similar population size) only received 4,000,000 doses. An alleged irony is that some of those AZ vaccines in Canada remain unused and saw the verge of expiry, whereas 1.4 million senior citizens in Nepal are desperately waiting for their second jab of the AZ vaccine.

Despite pressures from the UN, COVAX and other initiatives are important building blocks towards a faster and more equitable global solidarity: Imperfect as they are, it is better than nothing. Better than nothing because organisations striving to harness the power of partnership than a dog in a tech digest is to be avoided by narrow national or other parochial interests.

Some of the weaknesses and hypocrisy seen in the early functioning of COVAX are not the result of its model being wrong, but because some of its key sponsors are not playing by agreed rules.

In a world of sovereign nation-states, leaders have a legitimate responsibility to protect their own populations first. The concept of vaccine nationalism is understandable and should have been built into the design of initiatives like COVAX from the start—although promoting vaccine nationalism must be its ultimate objective.

COVAX is not putting all its eggs in one basket. It is exploring all other options to meet as many as possible of its goals. It is in the interest of countries like Nepal to help build a more robust COVAX to help the world better cope with future pandemics.

Kul Chandra Gautam is a former Senior Group Director, Secretary General of the WHO, and a former Director-General of the IARC, the IARC, the author of Global Cancer from Sante, My journey from the World Health Organization to the Swiss Cancer Institute. He is also a former head of UNICEF.
Angel meets an angel

Angel, the dog that grew up greeting passengers at Kathmandu airport is herself flying to a new home in Canada

• Sonia Awale

Before all flights were grounded during the Covid-19 lockdown, last year, dog trainer Anja Kapali was at Kathmandu airport to see off a street dog being adopted by a family in Canada. When he was surrounded by a pack of hungry strays.

One of them stood out, a snow-white one that was calm, gentle, and made the rest of the pack that lived in the pre-departure area, sit and nuzzle. After a few seconds, the red-nailed rescued dog being sent off (photo, left) observed Kapali. Kapali noticed the dog whenever he came to arrange for the departure of one of the rescued dogs, and she always sat next to the pot carriers — as if to say her own farewell to the dogs that were leaving.

Every time I came to the airport, she was there, guarding the kennel while we waited for the dogs to be put on their flights,” says Kapali. Another woman, who helps 14 rescued dogs in his Ramu’s Animal Dog Training Centre (named after her own pets) in Kathmandu.

Kapali noticed that with flights mostly cancelled during the lockdown, the once-busy dogs at the airport had become emaciated because there were no humans to feed them. So, he tried to offset the effect by dog snacks every time he was at the airport.

The white dog now has a name, Angel. And she is at the KAT Centre which works for animal welfare in the Valley. Angel has already got her shots, and her travel documents sorted out before departure.

Angel’s life at the KAT Centre was struck by Angel’s claim: three months ago at the airport when he was chasing another batch of rescued dogs.

I have never before come across a street dog like Angel, she is just as well behaved and intelligent, as if she has been trained, she gets along with the other dogs and she understood me,” says Dahal. As founder of Temple Dog Rescue in Canada, who supports animal welfare organisations in Nepal, also noticed Angel in airport photos taken by Kapali, and in videos posted by KAT Centre. It was she who named the dog ‘Angel of Tribhuvan’.

Angel’s travels have been a frequent visitor to Nepal and was always moved by street dogs buddled in cardboard boxes at street-side garbage piles near Swyambhu. One afternoon three years ago, she followed a puppy to its mother and siblings living on a sidewalk. She started feeding them daily, but the mother and litter were in bad shape. She took them for treatment at the KAT Centre, but the vet was only able to save a female puppy.

Angel named the pup Dawn, and adopted her. With Dawn by her side in Canada, Maplestone’s Temple Dog Rescue has been helping KAT Centre with fundraising to carry on with its work in feeding and sheltering Kathmandu’s community dogs, which have been going hungry during the long lockdown. Temple Dog Rescue also helps place dogs up for adoption with new families, and has helped find homes for dozens of stray from Nepal and Egypt. And it has found Angel a home.

The four-year-old is being adopted by an award-winning Canadian activist against domestic violence, and will soon have a large 20-foot property to explore in Canada. ThoughGooglemaps, Angel now also has a one-way ticket and is waiting for her own flight from Kathmandu airport, where she said goodbye to so many of the street dogs she was raising her home and lots of space to run around and play.”

Angel’s story about being an airport dog was so compelling that the airport staff was very proud of her fundraising, and soon she will have a loving home and lots of space to run around and play.”

Maplestone told Nepal Times by phone.

Although Angel’s dog, the庙 Bull, animal welfare activists are busier than ever caring for street animals

Nepali conservationist among Rolex awardees

Rinzin Phunchok Lama is among recipients of this year’s Rolex Awards for Enterprise

A new generation of Nepali environmental activists is filling the void left by the tragic 2006 Ghunsa crash that saw the loss of many pioneering conservationists including Hucks Gurung and Chandra Gurung. Rinzin Phunchok Lama, the first graduate in environmental science from Humla district, is one of them.

In an announcement on Monday, Lama was named among five laureates of this year’s Rolex Awards for Enterprise for his role in promoting local indigenous knowledge and biodiversity conservation in Nepal’s trans-Himalayan region.

Born and raised in one of Nepal’s remotest regions, Lama was inspired and mentored by 1981 Rolex Laureate, wildlife biologist Rodney Jackson, who spent four decades of his life protecting the threatened snow leopard, and initiated the first-ever radio collar study on the big cats in western Nepal 40 years ago. But Lama has taken a step further making it his life’s mission to protect not only the snow leopard, but other threatened high-altitude species like the Himalayan wolf, Himalayan black bear, wild yak, Tibetan pika, musk deer that live at altitudes from 3,000m.

“The trans-Himalayan ecosystem, which includes most of Nepal’s highland, is very fragile and increasing human activities are threatening it constantly. Thus, there is an urgent need for a conservation project which addresses an integrated approach to conservation and livelihood,” says Lama.

Humla district in Nepal’s northwestern corner bordering China and India has long suffered from state negligence, and is one of the least developed parts of the country. Only 1% of its land is suitable for farming, leading to one of the highest rates of food insecurity in Nepal. Economic opportunities are hard to come by.

Now, the climate crisis has added to the challenge. Lama’s long-term solution to overcome the threats to the biodiversity is to engage local people from Humla, particularly young environmental graduates and empower communities to become the stewards of the land. The young scientist plans to enhance and engage current conservation activities to promote local leadership in conservation. One of the priority areas is educating and training people in law enforcement to discourage illegal hunting, logging and forest fires.

Lama’s other focus is developing livelihoods for communities.

Lama is collaborating with a herbal and agricultural products company in Humla to develop a model for technical support to local agents who want to establish small businesses. He is also conducting a feasibility study of potential brick-making trails to promote sustainable use and working with local women skilled in making the traditional artefact to generate jobs.

Lama’s project is science-based and uses field surveys and camera trapping techniques to establish the baseline number of mammal species, while supporting the development of new enterprises that will expand the livelihoods for local people’s source of income. At the same time, Lama will combine research with traditional knowledge and indigenous Buddhist philosophy to educate the citizens of Humla in environmental conservation.

“I want to show that, if given opportunities, local people can lead exceptionally and are capable of managing large-scale conservation projects and community engagement as real stewards of the land,” he adds.

Since 2014, Lama has been actively involved in research and conservation of high-altitude wildlife in Nepal. In 2015, he won a Wildlife Conservation Network scholarship and was the recipient of the WWF Nepal Conservation Award in 2020. Lama obtained a master’s degree in International Nature Conservation from the University of Göttingen, Germany, and Lincoln University, New Zealand. Currently, he is a conservation biologist and Conservation Program Director at Third Pole Conservation and an environmental advisor to Humla’s elected representatives.

Other recipients of the Rolex Awards this year are American Felix Brooks-church, working on malnutrition in Tanzania; Chad’s Hinda Gumare Shrikman, linking indigenous knowledge to combat climate change in the Sahel, Gina Moseley from the United Kingdom who is looking into climate change in the Arctic and that is offering advice to those who are exploring mesopolar reefs and their biodiversity.

The five laureates will receive funding for their projects, and a virtual event celebrating the awards will be held at the end of year. The Rolex Awards were set up 45 years ago to mark the 50th anniversary of the world’s first waterproof wristwatch, the Oyster. It supports exceptional individuals with innovative projects that expand the knowledge of the world, protect the environment – helping to preserve habitats and species – and improve human well-being.
Kathmandu’s nightlife

The lockdown provides an opportunity to tick off nocturnal wildlife from the mammal list.

Lisa Chegoly

It is day six of our wildlife catching exercises, trying to entrap a huge bamboo rat (also recorded by Hodgson in Nepal in 1841) for Stuart Chapman — one of the few specialists he has never seen. A new big tick for his mammal list.

After a career in conservation, only 24 people in the world are in front of him. Stuart’s natural competitiveness is thwarted by the pandemic and rivals are craving abroad — the unifying world of mammalogists.

“The Fawn-colored mouse from Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge was a big win. I need to bag some more now,” species.

Our garden is not big and suffers from a ruthless gardener and four energetic dogs but still has proven to be teeming with nocturnal wildlife.

“Three species identified are the bandicoot Rattus indicus and lesser Himalayan Kattus nivalis who seem to inhabit bamboo, and the avicularia Avicularia avicularia who are the fellows you see in the creeper around the area. They strongly suspect the bamboo rat is also there Cnemys hemprichii. After these, I’m desperate to get onto the Tibetan plateau to find a pika (Ochotona hirta siberica).

Not all after-dark critter activity in the garden is benign. The main suspect for killing the stately stand of bamboo are the bandicoots, turning the waxy yellow stems streaked with deep green into sickly flat ochre, the dead forms a brittle rattler in the evening breeze. In the quiet of the night the chomping rats are sometimes audible, although the holoma standpoint the tangle of roots are expanded by the dog digging ferociously into the roots.

Although there used to be mousers and squirrels, we seldom see them because of the dogs. They also drive away the monos who visit when the trees are fruiting, and occasionally catch an unfortunate snail. Because of our proximity to Shivapuri National Park, wild night time hunting usually signals a passing cat, or even a leopard. I’ve seen both in

ground, their fragile wings and fruit lifespans filled the vacant sunset and caused a feeling of tension, the leaping swallows and darting fruit bats. “Feeding frenzy,” says Jon, “pestilence of the fruit bats from hibernation, at its maximum altitude range in your garden,” says Stuart.

Brushing the flying slats off our hair and eyes, we realize these repulsive insects have colonized the outside room, comforted the foundering and are devouring the wooden floor. There is a limit to our tempest tolerance — time to call the caretaker to save the building. Stuart, however, is committed to wildlife. He is adamant that if being removed the rat will not climb the trap, which is a metal box held with a tarry animal, the rat is not left too long to get too hot, but too cold, too wet or too stressed.

Laxman has watched Stuart decent from his rodent net, into a clear plastic bag for examination before being let behind the garage, but that was the much smaller trick. It is a tricky manoeuvre. One greater bandicoot might decide the same transition makes a bid for safety, veering through Stuart’s experienced hands.

It is a dark raining June night, and Laxman helps me think I should check its tail myself as he attempts to tip it into a transparent bag on the front doorstep.
The four dogs look with intense, narrow eyes, darting Harti the Cookbook, the Kam, the gardener. Mohn the night guard and me to my pyjamas,以防万一有什么不测, and we all have an excellent view of both. When the bandicoot’s escape route takes him straight past me into the house. The duskiers stand up to fifteen feet behind him, rising from their feasting behind furniture, pursued by brooms and dustpans through the room - by the time we eventually open up the kitchen, I have climbed on a chair with Stuart’s bearded face grinning on with concern on my shoulder.

“Such a handsome looking animal!”

US suspends dog imports

The U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) has barred dog imports from 22 countries from the country in the past months due to fears of rabies and other diseases that could be transmitted to domestic animals.

Laxman’s last week spent on a farm with Jalpa Municipality to turn the city into an animal-friendly environment, in the hope that it will be a model for other municipalities in Nepal to better care for street animals with anti-mosquito vaccination campaigns, sterilisations, and control measures.

Animal welfare organisations are often asked why they pay so much attention to dogs when people are also suffering during the pandemic. Shoba Shrestha of Shoba’s Care asked them to think: “Looking after suffering animals is also a part of what it means to be a human being.”

Not all street dogs in Kathmandu are abandoned, many are community dogs. But many of them are diseases. It is also necessary to feed them, but not to give them garbage piles to survive.

Jinak Kapali says he has noticed growing awareness in communities about the need to take care of dogs all year around, and not just worship them during Kali Puja. Nepal’s animal care organisations have increased their profile, and there is now better response when abandoned dogs are put up for adoption.

Unlike in the past, we now get inquiries about street dogs for adoption, although many more still prefer popular dog breeds,” says Dhalah of Kathal Center.

“Helping a dog volume with us is more important thanA dogs homeless evaluation with us is more important than dogs that dogs and those that are not pure breeds. Which is why the animal welfare organisations have helped with finding homes for dogs that have been abandoned in acid attacks, or were roaming freely in traffic accidents.

Adda Magistrate of the Temple Dog Rescue: “Street dogs can be just as gentle and loyal as a pet and will look after our own breed, they just need a chance and that is what we are doing.”

The last time I’ve been in Kathmandu has been back in 2018, and I’ve been watching the city’s development and growth. The streets are cleaner, and the population has increased. The air is fresher, and the people are more aware of the environment.

The lockdown has provided an opportunity to tick off nocturnal wildlife from the mammal list. Lisa Chegoly, an expert on mammalogy, has been working with the Kathmandu Wildlife Trust to identify and catalogue the different species found in the city. She has identified several new species, including the Himalayan rat and the Kathmandu rat.

During the lockdown, the team has been able to collect more data on the local wildlife, which will help in understanding the impact of human activities on the ecosystem. The lockdown has also provided an opportunity for people to reconnect with nature and appreciate the beauty of the local wildlife.

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“Such a handsome looking animal!”

Pokhara’s royal egret sanctuary

The former summer palace of Nepal’s royal family has turned into a bird sanctuary.

Krishnamani Baral in Pokhara

A year after Nepal’s monarchy was abolished in 2008, most of the property of the royal family was nationalized, and some of them like the Rattas Muddel in Pokhara have reverted to nature.

Located at the edge of Phewa Lake, the property has become a sanctuary for a large flock of egrets which now nest on bamboo groves in the abandoned garden. The property is owned by Queen Mother Rattas. King Mahendra’s wife, who is still alive and lives in a part of the former Narayan Singh Palace in Kathmandu.

Located at Pokhara’s Lakeside and thick forested slopes of Ramnath on the other side of the lake, the neighbourhood has seen a resurgence of biodiversity. Kings, queens and their entourage do not visit anymore, the cattle egrets have made it their palace. And since the streets below leading to the boat-hiring area is deserted now because of the lockdown, the egrets seem to find the area even more appealing. Local villagers say that although some nests have always nested at Rattas Muddel, their numbers have gone up dramatically in recent years because of urban expansion. In Pokhara’s lakeside and the province to the lake where the egrets like to fish.

As the monsoon rains arrive, the cattle egrets have put on their tan plumage for the breeding season. They nest by the hundreds, on the upper branches with adult birds flocking back and forth bringing insects and small fish for the hatchlings, and twigs and reeds to build the nests.

The cattle egrets are breeding almost unabated because the bamboo forest is scant in a Nepalese sunny spot, which means the soldiers are also guarding the birds. While some birds fish, others fly further afield to pick off grazing water bullock and plovers, often resting on their shoulders.

The egrets also face natural disasters like thunderstorms and hail which break their eggs and kill the chicks. The mother egrets do not leave their nests, guarding their young through wind, rain, or hail.
Learn French
Join Karama Language School’s 6-week long online French language classes for all levels. Get details on Facebook.
Fee Rs. 3,990

Soonya virtual studio
Join Soonya Wellness and Yoga center’s virtual studio for yoga sessions available to everyone for self-practice at home. Sessions are available on prior appointment. Go to the Soonya Wellness Facebook page for details.
9878499367

Le Sherpa Farmers Market
Shop for fresh and organic vegetables, fruits, cheese, bread, meat products, honey, and much more. Physical distancing guidelines apply.
Soonya, 4th floor, 12:30pm, Le Sherpa Mahalay

Writing Wednesday
Keep your fellow Kathaulas to put up a prompt for WritingWednesday, designed for 5 minutes of specific short novel writing. Kathaulas will put up the prompt on Facebook. Share itables in the comments on Kathaula’s Facebook page. To share anonymously, send the story in Kathaula’s DTM at kathaulagmail.com

Photography contest
Send in up to 10 photographs for The Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management (CIWEM), WaterUse, and Nikon’s Environmental Photography of the Year 2022. Eligible submitters, only photographs taken since 1 January 2022. Deadline 31 July

Dining at Home

Achaar Ghar
Enjoy home-cooked meals along with various dishes of pickles prepared using recipes passed down from generations. Order various thalis, or try the pickle-infused panta. Look at the menu on foodmandoo.com.
(01) 5001059

Belgian Waffles
Get mouth-watering waffles from Belgian Waffles Nepal. Order the classic Belgian Chocolate Waffle, or the Klee and Cream Waffle, Maple Waffle and more. Delivery options on Facebook.
(01) 5046837

Haadi Biryani
Enjoy rice-cooked biryani from Haadi, seasoned with a secret spice blend that evokes the biryani experience. Head to Facebook for takeaway and delivery details.
(01) 4804844

Organic Smoothie Bowl
Perfect for those looking for healthier food options. Organic Smoothie Bowl and Cafe offers fresh, fast and Instagram-worthy smoothie bowls, snacks, drinks and more. Call to order. 58757697

Events

Lockdown Toun

VOICES WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

AMMIX

DAVID BALL

MURALI K.V.

KEVIN ROY

OUR PICK

In this 2019 South Korean series based on a graphic novel and a musical, a Korean student born in Japan becomes a drummer after his Korean-born neighbor dies in a plane crash. However, a demonic mastermind in Vietnam, where a Cape Town family has traveled to be near his grave, makes him believe that the demon might not have been accidental after all. As tensions rise, he will have to learn to embrace the greed and corruption that led to the crash. Trailer: See Kwon Ji-Young; Lee Sang-yeob; Shin Sung-rok; Moon Jeong-hee; and Lee Sung-jae.

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Coping with Covid FOMO
Tips to seeking real human connection and attaining contentment during the pandemic

A year and half after the Covid-19 outbreak, parts of the world are opening up and moving on from the pandemic life to how things used to be before.

It is natural to experience fear of missing out (FOMO) from months of being trapped at home with limited interactions with people and lack of activities as we are hard-wired to seek face-to-face connection as humans.

People experience FOMO for many reasons: unhappiness, loneliness, and comparing themselves to others, assuming that they have it better.

However, the high levels of FOMO are linked to excessive use of social media and watching other people doing more than you. It is a Catch 22 because we use social media to combat loneliness, but watching others have fun only adds to feelings of loneliness and anxiety.

These days, FOMO levels largely depend on where the individual resides as that determines completely different levels of socialising, travelling, or being locked down. One reason FOMO has been challenging is due to the unceasing re-opening after lockdowns across countries.

We seek and value human connection, and watching others have more freedom than us can have a damaging effect on our mental health, especially when others are partying without masks while we remain cooped up at home with no end in sight.

Before you feel too discouraged, there are a few techniques we can practice to overcome FOMO:

1. Practice gratitude
   It sounds like a cliché, but one of the most valuable skills in daily life is gratitude. While one may feel grateful for life, it can be your health, your family, or even your access to the internet because you are among the minority that can check what is happening worldwide.

2. Establish social media boundaries
   Limit checking social media before bed to stop you from too much. A study suggests that limiting social media to 30 minutes a day can significantly reduce anxiety and loneliness.

3. Take a shower
   The quarantine can make you lazy and neglect self-care and hygiene. It might seem simple, but taking a shower daily can help you feel relaxed. It helps cleanse your mind like your body.

4. Moisturise daily
   Whether it's unscented or scented, take care of your skin. Give yourself a massage and remind your skin that it's always loved, even in this chaos.

5. Wear comfortable clothes
   Leaving home can make you want to try on your outfit for yourself. Maybe wear something that is associated with happy times. It is your body. Treat it with care.

6. Drink cold water
   Staying home all the time can feel monotonous, and it is easy to reach out to unhealthy habits when you are bored. On the other hand, you might be thirsty that can be perceived as hunger. Keep your body hydrated because there are only benefits to drinking water.

7. Cook food
   There is something therapeutic and relaxing about cooking. It doesn’t have to be fancy, and it can be as basic as soap, salt, and add vegetables to it. Enjoy the simple flavors instead of eating everything out of a packet.

8. Clean something every day
   It doesn’t have to be your entire house. Organize a drawer and sort inside clothes to donate, dust the countertops, tidy your bathroom or hang them in your closet. Get down the bathroom sink.

9. Spend time outside
   Whether it is in your garden or your terrace, sit on the ground and watch worldfamers on grass. Talk to your plants or look at the clouds. Start small and increase it slowly. Do not forget your sunscreen.

10. Create something
    It can be art, poetry, or a dish. Visit a sweater, learn a new language or take an online class. Use the extra time constructively by attempting something you may have always wanted to do but never got around to.

11. Talk to someone
    Call a family member or a friend and have a chat. Do not keep the entire conversation about Covid-19 and how awful you feel. Instead, catch up on old times and things you plan on doing, talk about fun memories. Keep complaining to a minimum.

12. Hug your pet
    If you have a cat or a dog, spend time with them. Your pets are as happy to have you around, and letting them know you still live will make the road and feeling better for you to go.

Overwatching Facebook and Instagram can make it worse. We know what we see on social media is inaccurate, yet we cannot help but believe it. Let’s keep the hours we spend on our phones at a minimum. Easier said than done but give it a try and see a difference.

Because FOMO is strongly related to social media usage, it is essential to focus on genuine connections instead of vacantly living an imaginary life on the internet. Take small walks and make changes, whether by spending time with family, the garden, or your pets.

Engaging in activities that connect me with the real world will give us a better sense of belonging and significantly decrease anxiety. It can make you happier, and we could all use that now.

Take care of yourself and be there for others.
The extraordinary lives of ordinary Nepalis

Journalists turn story-tellers bring out the tales of courage and fortitude

Shrihti Karki

The Euro 2020 matches are live on television, and many are watching the replay the next morning. But what is really going on in Nepal these days is a short program of grandmothers playing a football match in the mountains of Lamjung district.

Two teams made up of members of the local Mother’s Group of Shringing village face each other on a school football ground. The clip is part of the social media accounts of the web series Herne Katha, and is accompanied by a running commentary, complete with slow motion replay of a free kick that is saved by goalkeeper Vali Ghalat.

“We saw the grandmothers playing, and I thought shouldn’t I also go and do it before I die,” says 67-year-old Ghalat.

Posted on YouTube and broadcast on community radio stations every alternative Tuesday at 4:30pm, the web series Herne Katha has unfolded stories of struggle, survival, and triumph — a message relevant to a time when Nepalis are suffering such hardships.

In 2003 when they took up a job at the same radio station, Kumar had come to Kathmandu after high school and enrolled in a journalism program, having, as he puts it, fallen into journalism. Chapagain had also always wanted to be a journalist. As their careers progressed, their paths would continually cross.

“In those early days, our work almost exclusively involved going to the Reporters Club and waiting around for the politician of the day to give their speech,” recalls Kumar. Chapagain nods, adding: “We would have to go to hotels to cover workshops and conferences.”

They covered, Chapagain on the floor and Kumar on a balcony chair, and complete each other’s sentences with the ease of two people who have been colleagues for a long time.

In locked-down Lalitpur, their office is quiet but for the sporadic minnie outside and the occasional click of the mouse as the editor, Sandesh Purakary, works in the other room on an upcoming project.

Kumar and Chapagain both worked for BBC Media Asia’s debate program Saha Khaal as producers. Chapagain would eventually become the producer of the popular show, a role that content, says Kumar.

Editor Sandesh Purakary joins in the conversation, and says it is good for them to get to know the story that is most important. And it has to be told with a minimalist approach in editing and camerawork, so that there are no distractions from the story itself.

Purakary is a virtual editor, and relatively new to the team. He says about his previous job, “I used to sit in the editing room and I could probably tell that a politician would say and when even before I saw the clip. That is why I quit.”

Three years on, things are changing, and the storytellers agree it is largely due to the increasing reach of YouTube, with 60% of Nepal surveyed saying they use the platform. Almost 50% of the Herne Katha viewership is in the 15-35 age group and the program is very popular in the Nepali diaspora.

“Once, in a remote village of Ashram, a young man asked if I was from Herne Katha,” says Chapagain, who says the views on YouTube and being frequently on the trending list proves that their program is sparking a powerful positive message.

“Their stories, our stories have come from the audience themselves,” Chapagain says. One them can be quite demanding, but Nani Maya is patient and tries to meet their requests.

“I went abroad on my first show,” says one. “Make my skin look smooth and less dark,” demands another, “can you get rid of the lines in my face?”

Nani Maya replies: “I will make you look like a heroine in a Bollywood movie.” There are peaks of laughter from the women.

Golchhola village is a local bab in Sima Valley with government offices, banks, and a rural market residents of many surrounding villages travel there for official documents, to deposit money, and to do some shopping.

Nani Maya Buda has been running her small shop here selling electrical goods for 25 years. The shop has a mobile phone, batteries, watches, flashlights, and other goods. Receiving the demand for maphot for citizenship certificates, bank forms and school admissions, her husband started the small photo studio.

After he got a salaried job, he got his wife to take over the shop, and also trained her to take and edit pictures in a rudimentary studio, which is just a white cloth hanging on the wall outside the shop where there is more light. Customers sit on an empty oil drum while Nani Maya tiles their hair.
faces just right.
“J learned quickly, but made mistakes at first,” Nani Maya recalls. “Once I accidentally formatted the entire drive and lost all data, and sometimes I waste too much paper while printing photographs.”

Nani Maya’s daughter died in an accident, and she now lives in a rented room with her husband and a younger son. The older son goes to school in Bukhara.
She is now well known in the village, and the shop is usually crowded, especially at school admission time when she is taking pictures back-to-back of young students. She is thrilled that they have a chance at education that she never did.

During festivals and religious functions, people in this region dance the dende, holding hands.

Earlier, Nani Maya would have joined them, but these days she is too busy taking pictures and videos. Some of the dancers give her their phones to take pictures of them.

After a day at work in her shop, she rents out her husband’s Canon EOS 7D. “I want to save and buy a better camera like this someday.”
Overachiever govt

From time to time, as our nation state marches ahead in the drumbeat of history, we have to remind ourselves of the tremendous achievements of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and its steadfast adherence to the dialectical materialism espoused by Comrades Groucho Marx and John Lennon.

Because of space limitations, we cannot go into too much detail of its accomplishments here and now, but we will continue to list (in alphabetical order) in future instalments of this column.

1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has attended many virtual meetings with the international community for the procurement of vaccines, and has put donors on notice that Nepal will not take their promises lying down anymore— we will take it standing up with our hands outstretched. Beggars can’t be choosers, but we have chosen to be beggars out of our own free will, and that choice should be universally respected.

2. The Asa has lost track of who is Nepal’s most influential Foreign Minister at this particular moment in our nation’s history, but whoever it is, he seems to have put vaccine diplomacy into top gear. He has instructed Nepal’s undergraduate ambassadors and RLC-pass potentialites to launch a diplomatic offensive, which means they have to be as effective as possible as diplomats.

3. Many may have noticed that P modeling has put itself on a war-footing to access vaccines. This means we are ready to launch a preemptive strike to ensure supplies from rich countries that have over-vaccinated themselves.

4. In a major breakthrough Nepal this week established diplomatic relations with Strom Leone.

5. Many pools poohed the prime minister when he pledged to turn Nepal into Singapore within five years. He has accomplished his goal. All Nepal has now attained the same annual per capita income as the village of Singhaupur in歌唱ap district. And prime minister incoming Comrade Lotus Flower has clarified that when he once promised, during an unscripted moment, to make Nepal like Switzerland, he actually meant Switzerland. The error is regretted.

6. It is unfair that the Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City gets so much flak when he has been working tirelessly even since the pandemic began to dismantle and disperse the charity organisation providing free lunches to daily wage earners. His message is clear: there is no such thing as a free lunch in the universe. And this breaking news: in another brave and selfless move a special hit squad of the KMC has risked life and limb to courageously erase a mural dedicated to Nepal’s frontline health workers at the Dilli Bazaar intersection.

7. Despite being busy with matters of state, it is commendable that three years after it came to power the government has solved the most pressing need this country has ever faced: providing vaccines to members of the judiciary. Who said such feats could not be accomplished in our lifetime?

8. To reassure the starting community, the Under-Filmed Ministry is preparing an Economic White Paper. It is so called because it is completely blank.