Calendar of economic change

The appointment by the Communist government of respected economist Yuba Rai Khatriwada (pictured above) as Finance Minister earlier this year was seen by many as a masterstroke. People hoped this would create jobs, maintain fiscal discipline and deliver prosperity.

Seven months later, the euphoria is rapidly evaporating as the trade imbalance worsens with imports ballooning, foreign exchange reserves shrank, and there are fears of another liquidity crisis. Prices of food, vegetables, fuel and other essentials have soared ahead of the Tihar festival.

A Nepal Rastra Bank report warns that the economy faces strong headwind despite robust growth in remittances. Last week, the Asian Development Bank forecast that Nepal’s economic growth would be 4.0% this year. The World Bank put it even lower at 4.6%. To be sure, they usually factor in possible natural disasters, institutional limitations and other constraints to project minimum growth. The National Planning Commission’s projection is 7.2%.

Khatriwada had introduced austerity measures, but his first budget plan was criticised by the opposition NC and independent economists as being laden with ‘doctored data’. Some MPs of his own party were also critical because it ignored electoral promises of more jobs, social security, big-ticket projects and an economic revolution.

In his defence, Khatriwada says the government has spent most of its energy so far in developing organisational, legal and financial structures as well as managing resources. But even he admits it is now time to start delivering results.

In an exclusive interview with Nepali Times this week, Khatriwada said development will now be expedited because policy constraints are being removed. For example, the existing Public Procurement Act will now debar contractors who bid lower than minimum cost and delay completion. A new public company is being set up to rent out construction equipment for government projects. Private companies need not plant 25 trees for every tree felled; they just deposit a tree plantation fee, which the government will use for reforestation.

Khatriwada said: “I could have announced populist programs for short-term glory, but I gave priority to achieving long-term goals.”

The WEF Group is returning to hydropower investment with Upper Aanu and Upper Tawi, and the ADB has shown an interest in other projects like Bhotekosi. But Khatriwada says Nepal needs more investment to generate 15,000MW more electricity in 10 years, but Nepal’s banking sector is incapable of lending so much and donors will not pay for energy infrastructure. He says: “We have no option but to take foreign loans, but we will accept and use them wisely.”

Om Astha Rai

Interview with
Finance Minister
Yuba Raj Khatriwada

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TB OR NOT TB

Neglect by Nepal’s rulers of the poor, the disempowered and marginalised has been a given throughout our history. Royal or revolutionary, democrats or demagogues, or all three, in the understandings has always been a mere slogan. This chronic insensitivity has been determined to get who, and who dies.

To all a decade ago, Nepal’s main pillar of public health was disease control. Even though the empire had now shifted to non-communicable diseases, there is still one infectious disease that has fallen below the radar: tuberculosis. It is obvious why, TB afflicts the poorest in the remotest part of the country.

Chandra Shumsher had tuberculosis, and many of Nepal’s kings died of it. Most Nepalis are carriers of the bacillus that causes TB, but the disease is kept in check by our immune system. Chandra Shumsher had TB, and many of Nepal’s kings died of it. The bacteria proliferate when a person becomes weaker due to malnutrition, or other diseases like HIV. Last year, 45,000 new cases were detected in Nepal, and nearly 2,000 of them died.

Although Nepal is a role model in the community-based DOTS process that requires medical supervision of the administration of antibiotic treatment to patients, the more active care and contact detection is now required. This calls for an increase in Nepal’s annual TB control budget of $1 million of which about half is met through donor contributions.

Last week in New York, the United Nations held its first ever high-level meeting on TB during which leaders adopted a historic UN Political Declaration on TB that set the World TB Day on 26 September. This largest ever gathering of world leaders hoped it could be the turning point for TB what had earlier been ignored with such meetings for diseases like HIV and Ebola.

The declaration had a checklist that included reaching 40 million people by 2022 with diagnosis and treatment, and another 80 million with preventive therapy. It is also committed to double the current $1 billion to fund the World Health Organisation, (WHO) End-TB Strategy and the Stop TB Partnership’s Global Plan to End TB.

We developed the End-TB by 2035 strategy in 2014 but it was not clear more investment and political commitment was needed. Globally and within countries, it is the poor who suffer, which means the disease is not a priority for pharmaceutical companies, the private health care industry and drug manufacturers. Tuberculosis and poverty go hand in hand: TB feeds poverty, and poverty fuels TB.

In addition to the challenge of surveillance, detection and early treatment, there is a new challenge: the tuberculosis bacterium is getting resistant to preventative antibiotics, and drug-resistant strains are spreading. Multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR – tuberculosis resistance to at least two families of MDRTB and extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis) is the other threat.

The ‘Alaska Model’ of treating all carriers seemed promising, although antibiotics would be too expensive and too difficult. Now Nepal’s TB control faces another ordeal: the two countries with the highest TB disease burden are India and China. Both have increasing numbers of MDR TB, and eradicating TB within Nepal will not be the end of the story.

There are new interventions on the horizon like the GeneXpert molecular diagnostic kit, but there are only 40 of them in Nepal and each cartridge costs the government 800,000. The Nepal Medical Trust is using drones for delivery of specimens and drugs in a pilot project in Phulchowki to overcome this access barrier. (Story page 14-21).

A national vaccination program is too complicated, Nepal’s strategy should be to adopt best practices from elsewhere like establishing TB-free zones district-by-district. One thing is clear: business as usual will make this medical disaster will be around for much longer.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The front page of Nepal Times ten years ago (Sat 26 September - 2 October, 2010) was the same sentiment that Nepal’s leaders are now returning to. The government was trying to hard sell a rickshaw in the city but there was no one to be seen. Nepal’s leaders were hoping the amount of protests and hype could be reduced.

The editors planned a story for “thick”, increase and recent increase of government spending on the 900,000. “We can’t afford to be on the back foot”.

The government spent up to $600 million on the Nepal-Tibet border in 2010, but the only thing that was reported on was the high-level meeting in New York.

In the last decade, Nepal’s leaders have seen the need to invest more in local infrastructure projects to spur growth in the economy. The government has several major development projects, like the new airport at Pokhara, that will be ready in the coming years.

Two decades ago, Nepal’s leaders were hoping the amount of protests and hype could be reduced.

WHATS TRENDS

Kathmandu’s Little Kabul

A Nepali group of Afghan refugees facing eviction from their homes in Kathmandu has been granted temporary protection by the Nepali government.

Most shared and commented on Facebook

Daughter Slaughter in Mothak

Hetauda city’s violence against women have been increasing, adding to 500 rape cases in Hetauda alone.

Most shared and commented on Twitter

Where are you going this Dasain?

Shrinkhali

As the Dasain festivities begin, this report about Nepalis spending their Dasain in foreign cities like Thailand, America and Australia, is likely to be the topic of discussion on the bulletin boards showing how devolving such attacks can happen.

Most commented on

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepal Times

The growing story of Suryakumar Regmi, who successfully made his debut in international cricket against Bangladesh:

Ashok Keshav Joshi (@AshokKJoshi)

This is what happens when the Government doesn’t provide domestic tourism. The Kathmandu-Chitwan national park which is the main reason for domestic tourism has been left to erode due to lack of funds. The government doesn’t allocate to maintain this park.

Rakesh Shrestha (@RakeshShrestha)

It is a big obstacle for those who don’t have the ethos regarding the special natural properties for their future generations.

10 YEARS AGO TODAY

The Times

Nepal Times wants to remember the times when the government spent up to $600 million on the Nepal-Tibet border in 2010, but the only thing that was reported on was the high-level meeting in New York.

Most visited online page

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“The West is even more ready than before”

Excerpts from an interview with Finance Minister Yuba Raj Khatiwada on Tuesday in which he played down rifts with Western donor agencies, or that Nepal did not want assistance for ‘soft’ sectors like human rights and democracy.

Nepali Times: It has been seven months since you became Finance Minister, what are your tangible achievements so far?
Yuba Raj Khatiwada: If you ask me how many kilometers of road or railway lines have been laid or how much more electricity has been added to the national grid, I cannot claim to have achieved much. But what we all need to understand is that the process of implementing the Constitution began only after we came to power. We had to spend a lot of time in developing organizational, legal and financial structures of provincial and local governments. However, we have made significant progress in managing resources for mega-infrastructure projects like roads, railways, airports and hydropower. We have laid the foundations, and we will now start delivering results.

How about foreign aid?
We have been able to convince bilateral and multilateral donors that our government will not waste foreign aid in populist programs for short-term gain. We will use it for long-term benefits. This is why the World Bank has agreed to provide more financial assistance to us, and other bilateral donors are also excelling. We are looking for foreign assistance especially in infrastructure like roads, tunnels, railway and hydropower. We are receiving around $10 billion in foreign assistance annually, but we want to increase this amount to $16 billion next year. We will not be able to finance the annual budget just from tax revenue.

But Western aid agencies are alarmed that the government is restricting them, and the shrinking democratic space in Nepal.
They must be worried about the National Integrity Policy, but that is not a policy that was proposed or considered by our government. We are serious about good governance, and this is not just a responsibility of the government. Donors, INGOs and private sector must also contribute. We will take measures on good governance only after consulting them. They need not worry about it.

Are you saying donors and IFIs are not transparent and accountable?
We have proof that some of them have overpowered their mandates. It is the State’s duty to act against those who disrespect Nepal’s sovereignty, integrity and national interest.

There is a sense that Nepal is now cozying up to India and China, but it is isolating its long-term Western development partners. I have heard this is the subject.

Taste of Thailand

Inside the new Fairfield by Marriott in Thamel, there are traditional Thai umbrellas, lanterns and purple orchids and Thai folk instruments play gently in the background. There is an aroma of coconut and lemon grass, and there are people in traditional Thai attire milling about. The ambience takes you directly to Thailand.

For those from Kathmandu not going to Thailand this holiday season, Fairfield by Marriott is bringing Thailand to Kathmandu this week and next week through a culinary extravaganza at its Kawa Restaurant. Tapping into the popular Thai-Israeli fusion cuisine of the Kawa restaurant of the Kawa Restaurant in its new look for the first time, the airline announced its net profit of $3.5 million, despite the increasing fuel prices.

X-mas flights

Thai Airways plans to increase flights from Kathmandu to London Heathrow from three to four daily services to meet peak demand of the Christmas season. Effective from 15 December, 13 January, the flights operated by a two-class Boeing 787-9 will depart at 6:35 from Kathmandu and return at 10:30 from London Heathrow.

Global Airline Partner

Qatar Airways has announced its official Global Airline partnership with the VIBS (Villas) Beach Resort and the owner’s name, which is Prabhu Bank.

Turkish profits up

Turkish Airlines’ total revenue increased by 39% reaching 48 billion liras during the first half of the year compared to the same period last year. Achieving the highest load factor in its history for the first half, the airline increased its net operating profit of $2.5 million, despite the increasing fuel prices.

More Pokhara flights

Thai Airways has announced five non-stop flights with 72 seats twice a week in the Kathmandu-Pokhara-Kathmandu route 7 and 8 in the morning. Because of the growing demand and the increasing tourism season, the airline currently serves 50 flights daily to the destination.

Highway loan

The Asian Development Bank has approved a loan of $150 million to support improvements to the east-west Mahendra highway. Nepal’s main domestic and international trade utility, the bank is hopeful that improving the road will boost the transport system efficiency, strengthen national and regional trade connectivity, and improve road safety.
of talk over tea in some quarters. But I have found Western donors even more ready to help us. At the World Bank headquarters, I recently met the heads of UKAID and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) who are happy that an elected government is in place and they have promised to increase their financial assistance. Switzerland and Germany are also ready to step up aid. The European Union is also saying this is the right time to increase support to Nepal. We may have opposing views on certain diplomatic issues, but Western donors are more willing than ever to help Nepal.

What is your take on the Nijgadh airport debate?

There was a proposal that Nijgadh airport will not be profitable by itself, so whichever company builds it must be given a large slice of land to develop an aeropolis to make it more attractive. The government has now discarded this proposal. We are now committed to building just an airport causing minimum damage to the local ecology. We need two runways as per the original design, but we are now building just one runway. Adding the second runway will depend on the passenger volume. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Tourism have agreed to involve the private sector in developing the airport. The revenue generated by cutting down trees in Nijgadh will not be misused.

Why is the government considering the same Chinese company for the 1200 MW Budhigandaki hydropower project without calling for an open competition?

The same company gets selected for some mega hydropower projects like Budi Gandagi irrespective of how many times an open bidding is called. This is what happened in Upper Karnali and Arun. Only a couple of other companies showed interest, but they were not qualified. That was just a waste of time. Budi Gandagi will be essentially built by us. We will dictate its design of financial management. The Chinese company will only help us get credit and restructure the project. The real debate is about how high the Budigandaki dam should be for which we need a technical review.

Our plan is to generate 15,000 MW of electricity by 2030 and we require more than 8a 300 billion for this. We cannot finance these projects on our own, and our banking system does not have the capacity. Donors will not finance such projects, either. So we must seek foreign loans, as in Budi Gandagi. The challenge is to take and invest foreign loan as wisely as possible.

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Nepal’s cities of the future

Mayors brainstorm about new ways to raise money to pay for infrastructure and services

A year has gone by since mayors were elected to head municipalities across Nepal. They came to office with great fanfare and much hope. With many hopes dashed, and public disenchantment rising, many have started to explain why they are not able to do much. It is a bit late in the day, and impatient voters do not want to hear excuses.

We know there are problems but is that not the reason we elected these mayors, is the common refrain. Remember how they convinced us that they would give us utopia in return for our votes? Last week nearly 50 mayors, their administrative and technical staff, along with resource persons from the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the Town Development Fund (TDF) came together to explore how cities can do a lot with a little by simply being creative about mobilising new and additional resources. The examples of Singapore, Ahmadabad, Dar es Salaam, Buenos Aires were cited. At the end of the two-day sessions everyone left energised because of the way they were introduced to resource for city building differently.

Bish Prasad Shrestha, the former elected mayor of Dhangadhi, used to gather people who had voted for him and ask a simple question. “How many of you have had a family member die in a vehicle on the way to hospital in Kathmandu?” Lots of hands used to go up. He asked them to contribute, if he took the lead to build a world class hospital. Dhangadhi Hospital, which is a model for an affordable facility offering quality health care was the result. He did not start with a budget or how much money the municipality had, but with the commitment to fulfill a need. Elected mayors ought to know what their citizens need and why they can trust them with their money to create a facility, service or infrastructure.

Cities, at their beginning, they are the present and they are also the future. They are densely populated, have services and shortcomings, they have cultural centres and criminals, they have parks spots and garbage dumping sites continue to attract people as they have been done for thousands of years. They have great learning centers andjobs, they have billionaires and the poor, traffic jams that seem to inspire more and more to want to own a car.

People migrate to cities with their dreams and aspirations. Some make it to the top, and no one remembers the failures. There is money, there is credit, and demand for safer or better schooling, business school to sell or buy. All this makes it a real challenge to be a mayor. Municipalities across Nepal have assets that few know about: bus parks, open spaces, forests, roads, drains, traffic islands. It could look like a dump today, but could be of huge value in the future like a water source or river front properties. Cities also have the monopoly power to build buildings. Combine these and we can see how cities are ‘make money’. One of the mayors attending the conference was very excited about the possibilities in the two days which he said felt like a compressed diploma. It would require real team work and also educating the citizens and opposition to implement the ideas.

There were practical challenges like the fact that whoever sat in Singha Durbar and wrote the rules asked the mayor to provide the vision and the deputy mayor to prepare the budget. Many mayors who used to be VDC chairs are now managing cities.

Then, there are the tens of thousands of students and graduates who are looking for work closer to home. They understand assets, asset management, city credit rating, how to attract a high city credit rating, how municipal bonds work and how to issue them. Cities across Nepal could use the skills and knowledge Nepal has a public private partnership policy that can bring in the private sector to pay for, build and manage city infrastructures that have a good revenue base. We do need a few trust-building projects across Nepal to boost confidence. Ominous will say that everything a politician promises will be funded by crowdfais or debts. But the glass is half full and today we have other ways to raise money for city services and infrastructure. The city can indeed be the engine of growth.
Innovative project revives traditional crafts and allows the elderly to keep in touch with their communities

Prakriti Kandel

Champa Devi Tuladhar loves knitting socks so much that at 76, she wakes up at four in the morning and gets to work. Having learned the skill from her sister at age 8, she has knitted consistently throughout her life. Tuladhar’s hands are never idle, as she knits away to prepare her grandchildren for the coming winter.

Lorina and Irina Shastri grew up wearing those socks. And since they were always close to their grandmother, the sisters understood their grandmother’s love for knitting and wanted to share her socks with the world. They founded Alji’s (grandmother in Newark) where six elderly makers are hard at work, creating a range of hand-made products from traditional pouches, to replicas of famous temples, bracelets and pujas sets.

“We were inspired by our grandmother to start with, but realized that everyone from her generation has some unique skill to offer, which is backed up by years of experience,” Lorina Shastri said. With six makers and five more ready to start, Alji’s seeks to expand and involve more grants (there is one grandfather so far).

Gauri Devi Manandhar, 91 (picted, right) is the latest addition to Alji’s team, and is the oldest member. She makes traditional Newark pouches called mohonas. She is jovial and energetic, and imaginative.

“I cannot move around much, but by closing my eyes, I can get to anywhere in the world,” she says with a beaming smile.

Manandhar receives scraps of discarded materials from tailoring shops, and selects the fabric to create pouches of diverse patterns and colors. She has a methodical step-by-step process.

“These are my riches and my own little factory,” she says, pointing to her scissors, cloth, and the finished products. She used to make mechas as a hobby and gave them away as presents to people visiting her home. She still does not want to make money out of selling them, but will donate the income from Alji’s to charity.

As the elderly are restricted in their movement, family has moved away, and there is loneliness setting in. The elderly need activities like these to root them in their communities. They feel most excited when their work is appreciated by Alji’s customers, they say they feel valued and rejuvenated.

“Sitting idle makes me feel sick,” says 70-year-old Juja Reina Tamang, for whom art and sculpture-making have been a lifelong passion. He makes cute little statues and dharm chakras for sale at Alji’s.

Alji’s also aims to revive inter-generational bonds as joint families split up. By signing up their elders, buying materials for making the products, coordinating communication and helping to create optimal working spaces at home, children and grandchildren can play an active role in supporting their grannies.

Champa Devi Tuladhar says she is now bonding with her grandchildren like never before. “We now actually talk about my work, and we didn’t do much of that before,” she adds.

Another aspect of Alji’s is the #AskAji campaign which wants to preserve traditional knowledge that is endangered because they have not been passed down to younger generations. People from all over the world can send in questions about recipes, crafts, textiles, or even baby message and get an answer quickly.

In the year it has been in operation, Lorina Shastri says Alji’s has a growing pool of loyal customers online through Instagram or website. “I think it resonates with people because everyone has elderly relatives at home,” she explains, “and they feel they are motivating senior citizens by selling their products worldwide.”

https://www.aljiproducts.org

GRANNIES AT WORK

Wash the heart-warming tales of grandmothers and grandkids buy with their hands, making craft items to sell. The work keeps them busy, connected to their grandchildren, extended families, and the community. Share these heart-warming stories through the Nepali Times YouTube Channel.

nepaltimes.com
The Great Himalayan Thaw

Nepal may have lost one-third of its permanent ice in the past 40 years due to global warming

Hurricane Florence and typhoon Mangkhut, droughts and record-setting temperatures this summer have highlighted the increasing threats of extreme weather events in a warming world. Although impact of climate change on weather is still not well understood, intense short duration rainfall events are becoming more frequent in Nepal and across the world.

CLIMATE FOR CHANGE

Ajaya Dixit

Nepal is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change. For the country and its people to successfully adapt, it is necessary to better understand changing rainfall patterns so new strategies can be developed for farming, drought management, flood risk reduction, a healthier landscape and more robust infrastructure and services.

The inability of global and regional circulation models to capture climate dynamics over Nepal due to low spatial resolution means that it is difficult to project future ice in temperature and changes in rainfall.

The models incorporate some differentiation between the country’s east, centre and west but do not account for the north-south topographic gradient of the Himalaya. This means existing simulations do not accurately represent the changes in monsoon circulation.

The higher elevations in the Himalaya involve three dimensions critical for the health of the water cycle of the Ganges basin downstream: snowfall, snow and ice reserves, and glaciers. This is now better understanding of the risks of glacial retreat, but there is not much on the ground study of the impact of snow and ice recession on regional hydrology.

A report in 2014 by the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) said that there were 3,808 glaciers in Nepal covering a total area of 3,902 km² with an estimated ice reserve of 312 km³. It said the total glacier area decreased by 24% between 1977 and 2010 and the estimated ice reserves by 39%. This means that in the three decades since, the tributaries of the Ganges River were deprived of an average base flow of 123 cubic metres per second of water.

The rate of glacial melt in the Himalaya due to global warming is an insidious quiet. In 2007, the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was dragged into controversy following a publication of a report that said Himalayan glaciers would all melt away by 2035. Several scientists questioned this proposition as unrealistic; the IPCC admitted that the findings were based on poorly substantiated estimates of rate of recession and for the disappearance of Himalayan glaciers and that the clear and well-established standards of evidence were not applied properly.

However, the 2014 report of ice reserve depletion, if true, should make everyone sit up because of its serious consequences. Changes in snowfall patterns as well as melting of ice reserves mean serious risks locally, to the regional hydrological system and the hundreds of millions of people living downstream.

Not much has been done to make more realistic estimates of rate of ice reserve depletion and assess its implications. The institutional response to assess changing snow dynamics and its effect on the dry season flow of snow-fed rivers has been grossly inadequate.

There are very few stations that monitor snowfall at elevations above 3,000m. Snowfall is not regularly monitored even in existing stations, except episodically when international research organizations work in partnership with DHM.

This low priority responds to the inadequate budget allocated to DHM to be Nepal’s climate science institution. According to Climate Change Financing Framework, Rs 493 (1.1% of its annual budget) is allocated to climate change. But the DFU S by using World Bank’s GCF of Rs 574 million is only 0.18% of this allocation. In the previous fiscal year, the DHM could spend only 27% of even that paltry amount.

This low spending capacity is a reflection of deeper institutional challenges, inability to set priorities, systemic apathy, bureaucratic hunger, societal inability to nurture a scientific ethos and the government’s unwillingness to transform DHM into a Nepali version of US Geological Survey to provide high quality climate services. Interestingly, it was USAID that helped establish IHM in early 1960s, but the department never really morphed into Nepal’s premier institution for research into climate impact.

The changing nature of rainfall hazards, as one of the determinates of climate change, have exacerbated vulnerabilities in Nepal. Continued low investment and apathy in buffering the country’s climate science capacity also mean that Nepal and its people are poorly prepared for future disasters induced by climate change.

Ajaya Dixit is Executive Director of Kathmandu-based ICIMOD. Nepal has the honour of being one of the main signatories of the Global Climate Change in Nepali times, dealing with the impact of global warming in Nepal.

For many tourists trekking to Mt Everest Base Camp this autumn, the trip will be an adventure of a lifetime. The thin clear air, stark landscape, ice-tipped peaks pierce the inky sky providing great Instagram backgrounds.

However, what is stunning scenery to tourists is for climate scientists an apocalyptic sight. They see dramatic evidence all around of a rapidly warming atmosphere.

Visitors returning to the Everest region after 20 years also notice changes: large lakes where there were none, glaciers too replaced by ponds, boulders and sand, the snowline moving up the mountains, and glaciers that have receded and shrunk.

All these features are visible from ground level right from the start of the trek in Lukla. The banks of the Rhoti Kosi still bear the scars of the deadly Earth flood in 1985 which washed off a large section of the Everest Trail and the hydroelectric plant in Tamak. It was caused by an avalanche falling into the Dug Tso glacial lake, causing it to top over.

Further up near Tengboche, the Imja Khola also bears signs of a huge glacial lake outburst flood that thundered down the western flank of Ama Dablam in 1977. And below the formidable south face of Lhotse is Ljun Tso, a lake 2km long that has formed and grown in the last 30 years. It does not exist on trekking maps from the 1980s. All these lakes were formed and enlarged as a result of global warming melting the ice.

The terminal moraines of the Khumbu Glacier looms 400m above Dughla. This is the debris bulldozed down from Mt Everest and surrounding peaks over millions of years, and represents the extent of the glacier’s advance in the last Ice Age. Today, the surface ice on the world’s highest glacier is all but gone due to natural and anthropogenic warming.

For an even more dramatic glimpse of how global warming is changing the Himalayan landscape, there is nothing like an aerial perspective. Nepal Times got a chance last week to take these striking images of the terrain below Mt Everest. The barren beauty of the terrain when this terrain will be stripped of much of what remains of its ice cover. The Khumbu ledge funnels
CO₂ from fossil fuel burning traps sunlight in the atmosphere, leading to the greenhouse effect which warms the earth’s surface. This is melting Mt Everest and the glaciers flowing down from it at an unprecedented rate. Join us on an aerial survey of the Khumbu!

HIMALAYAN MELTDOWN: 1. The Khumbu Glacier is the highest in the world and recession at 30m/y. It’s also shrinking. Base Camp is now 50m lower than when Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbed Mt Everest in 1953. 2. The Khumbu is the largest glacier and sea ice on the Western Cwm down to the Khumbu Glacier 10,000m below. 3. The Lhakpa is now a hanging glacier, having receded down the cliff. 4. The team did not recede in tracking maps 30 years ago. Today it’s 1.2 km long and 1 km wide. Supraglacial ponds are debris-covered glacier. 5. Green and blue mountains on the north axis Glacial Glaciers, white forest and Kala Pattar expose the moraines below. More pictures online.

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EVENTS

Kumari and the Beast
A fun and inspiring performance in collaboration with Sarthak Arts Academy to support and inspire women entrepreneurs. It is based on the legend of Goddess Kumari, a story written and directed by Durga Pradhan.
6 October, 7pm and 9pm, Russian Centre of Science & Culture, Amphitheatre, 6, Dilsukh Nagar, 10001, Tel: 8400786800

Industrial hemp expo
Cosome hemp joba and soy products, hemp breads, hempCircle Carnarvon and many more at the 4th National Industrial Hemp Exhibition.
5-6 October, 2pm, Coffice Cafe 4.30pm, Jhonnalal, 8845101979

WAKE
Bring together the diverse art forms to create one eclectic and meaningful multi-arts experience for the audience.
Nine artists, musicians, actors, poets jointly produce an unforgettable experience for the participants.
6-12 October, 4pm to 7pm (6-11 October for highlights), Nepal Art Council, Budhanilkantha, 480, For那种, Open Manopadal, Jhoriaal!

Nepal-China Expo
Trade and culture exchange at the expo with over 100 stalls showcasing a variety of popular Chinese and Nepali handiwork goods.
5-12 October, 10am-9pm, Patan Durbar Square, 9842407220, 9853713327

ART 25
A live 25-minute painting competition with four thrilling rounds of fast colors and speedy hands working under pressure. Witness the themes’ competition for free.
6 October, 2pm, Gallery, Sadan, Kathmandu, cakada@ rkinternet.

Study in Europe Fair
A higher education fair where universities from eight European countries will interact with Nepalese students for exploring opportunities and scholarship programs. If 9-10 October, 10am-5pm, Hotel Annapurna, Durbar Marg

Black Out Pride
Blackout Pride Phase II presents Jagarkarma, Ochhreer Vahani, Disorder, Strange, Margamategic, theNorway and your Kei in underground for Nepali music.
6 October, 6pm-10pm (pre-event), 6.30pm, Bagchi Bar Thamel, 9845105648

Wind-Down Friday
A wind-down Friday with an acoustic band Artika coming up with their new original songs and some covers. Slip some wine or beers and give your week a perfect send-off.
5-6 October, 5.30pm, Madina Cafe&Bar and live, Palokh, 9845117767

Frog Symposium
Inspired by Konik’s frog book, a look at a frog-finding expedition to the South China, by Yuxia Yan. The event features scientific and literature panels, photo exhibitions, children’s workshops, and more.
9 October, 10am-4pm, Dhwani Cafe, Patan Durbar

KTM marathon
Run for human rights awareness at the 12th edition of Kathmandu Marathon: marathon, half marathon, 10km, 5km run, 5km school, and school marathon (1km).
6 October, 7am-8.30pm, Dewardangang Public School, Thapathali, 9845101662

Portraits and caricatures
Nabin Nowak with specialisation in portrait paintings, and also known for his caricature and illustration plans is exhibiting at the event.
7-12 October, Joghur, Turandan Museum Contemporary Art Gallery

Narayan Gopal tribute
Remembering Swami Samrat Narayan Gopal, a tribally inspired Nepali artist, and all his time (from 1940) to 1989.
5-6 October, 5.30pm, The Fourth Works Garden Homes, Sipahipani, 9845820697 / 9845105046

Tasneem’s Kitchen
The lady at the maas last year for the festive season special Mambour Mala Puri and Vada Puri. Its finger-licking! Also order diners and more for the kha for the festive feast.
5-6 October, 12pm, Palokh, 9845102237

MUSIC

90s Hip Hop and RnB
Come out to Base Camp this Friday to listen to the 90s tunes from RnB and groovy vibes.
5 October, 7pm, Base Camp, Outdoor Lounge, Jhoriaal, 9845127207

GETAWAY

Godavari Village Resort
Spread over 14 lush green acres, the resort offers mountain views and traditionally made cottages and banglow overlooking rice fields.
Godavari, (01) 5586786

Hotel Annapurna View
The new big bang! a hotel situated at 1500m in Sarangar supplies everything: sunrise, the Annapurnas, views of Phewa Lake, serenity, and luxurious accommodation.
Gandaki, Palahi, (044) 44566

Hotel Yukhang
A new hotel built with Dutch e’s, birds from Malsu, and Shruti’s wooden crafts. A real and medina oasis to your stay or unlimited buffet dinner at the hotel.
Thamel, 4215-2310, (room), 4215-2558

CRG Retreat
Opened to the public eight months ago, this was used as a private course of the Biholm Biholm Chaudhary, located in an off-white Point, Bih Biholm course (par-4 over 18 holes) is maintained to an exceptional standard.
Kathmandu, (01) 5564617, 5564707, www.crgevent.com

Gaida Wildlife Camp
Boarding the minibus in the central area of Chitwan National Park, the camp is a great place to reconnect with wildlife. Drive to Sasuwa, and the Camp folks will take care of you from there.
Chitwan, (061) 475496-475481

ABOUT TOWN

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 28 September - 4 October

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The festival season is here, but at the beginning of the month, AQI of the last two days in the case of PM 2.5 AQI averaged has been in the "Healthy for all" concern level range. Everyone who knows the AQI levels is very happy, and the AQI levels are in an acceptable range all through the day.
https://np.gov. nepal/envairo/air-quality-monitoring
Remembering not to forget Nepal’s war

Sewa Bhattarai

Books are scattered around in a dark room, an earthen pot lies shattered to pieces, and clothes litter the floor. The sound of cricket chirping and a woman sobbingadd to the eerie atmosphere. This is an installation at Nepal Art Council, recreating the room of a woman who was forcibly detained and raped by the security forces during the 1996-2006 war. It is part of an exhibition titled ‘Memory, Truth, and Justice’ organised by Voices of Women Media and Conflict Victims Common Platform, which shares stories of more than 100 victims from both sides of the conflict. Some are audio-visual testimonies, there are photographs while others are artistic reconstructions.

“We wanted to bring these stories out because we realised that everyone was forgetting the war,” explains project manager Rikki Shahi. “The government and leaders are not doing anything. And even for family members of those killed and disappeared, memories are fading. Justice is being forgotten. We wanted to record these memories before they are totally gone, inform the public and advocate for justice.”

The ten-year war cost 17,886 lives, 1,406 were forcibly disappeared, 8,194 were maimed, millions were displaced. The conflict left deep physical and psychological scars on individuals, families, and society. Like most wars, many of the victims were civilians. Innocent bystanders lost their limbs in bus bombs, girls and women were subjected to sexual violence, suspects were tortured, former child soldiers sacrificed their childhood and are now abandoned. Conflict victims and family members have lost items they have preserved lovingly: a shirt bought from first salary, letters smuggled in with noodle packets. These items present victims’ stories with an urgency and immediacy that is lacking in the numbing statistics of war. The first person accounts, often graphic and intense, can be very hard to watch and listen to.

“Exhibition reminds us that we should be ashamed that so little has been done for the justice of conflict victims,” says Prakash Watu of the National Human Rights Commission. “These heros do not belong to the 100 people whose stories are represented here, but to the whole country.”

Memory, Truth, and Justice Nepal Art Council Until 6 October

Krishna Ghising, Dolakha

Even today, I get scared every time I hear a certain kind of music. There was music playing when I regained consciousness after 19 days in coma. It was a radio jingle which played during intervals of news bulletins of Radio Nepal. I had gone to my village to make my passport with a dream of going to Korea. On the way back to Katmandu, our bus was moving slowly when there was an explosion. Some passengers died on the spot, the injured were taken to hospital. I survived, but over half my body was paralysed because of a spinal injury. All my dreams were shattered.

I left the hospital in a wheelchair after nine months. It was a difficult time. When I was in the ambulance, I felt like I was carrying my own corpse. I wanted to make my son a famous person one day. The conflict made me incapable of looking after myself, who cannot move without the help of others.

Perhaps, it would not have been so much pain if I was born disabled. But we were made disabled. It is the duty of the state to take care of us. Instead, they humiliate us. I have spent 15 years in a wheelchair now. This is my second life. I don’t know how long this one will last.

Sharmila Chaudhary, Dang

Sharmila is the mother of Jagat Ram Chaudhary, a Kamarya who was disappeared at the age of 15. “I still put some food for my son in this plate before I eat any meal. Though he was disappeared 16 years ago, I still hope that one day he will come back to eat what I serve.”

Sandip Pun, Rukum

Sandip’s parents, Surji Prakash Pun and Parampara Gautam, were Maoists and were killed by the army. Parampara wrote this in her diary the day she left home. Sandip has transcribed the diary, but has never turned the pages to read them himself.

The day I left my son behind
My eye, a piece of heart holds me close
I tell him I am going to bring him some grapes
Son, I give him a loving kiss on the cheek
And tell him I am leaving;
On the way my mind and body are both surreal
My mind is not in its place
How can I bear the little one behind and travel to village after village;
All these things trouble my heart
The bus continued at its speed
I was feeling dizzy
My head was aching
I do not feel like eating anything
When I see bunches of grapes somewhere
Suddenly I am reminded of my son;
And my heart was troubled anew
It’s ok, I hope my son lives;
One day we will sacrifice together – 1996/11/16, Priyathaya.
Internal and external expressions

Siddhartha Art Gallery’s current exhibition hosts two completely different kinds of expressions: one is introspective and seeks to express feelings, while another is a visual exploration of social change.

On the ground floor are the paintings and installations by Munir Adl Chowdhry, titled ‘Shraddha’ - ‘The Headrest’. Frightened, scared eyes look out from white backgrounds - some heads wrapped in snakes, some protected by fighter jets. Obviously this head on a pillow is trying to sleep, but we see that it is unable to do so, tossed and turned by a sea of stormy thoughts.

Once you realise that Chowdhry is trying to deal with the loss of his mother nearly a year ago, the paintings make sense. They represent my spiritual inquiry. Shraddha is a symbol of contentment. And through it I question pain in the relentless journey of life, and the fragmentary sense of comfort and the sense of touch provided,” Chowdhry explains.

The artist uses only black and white because colours are banned during the mourning period. However, there is a colourful button in the little silk pillow floating in the air, signifying memories of his mother. Chowdhry also questions tradition, wondering why our rituals are so restrictive.

Upstairs at the gallery, Bidhata KC looks at it all from the outside. Her work is all about society’s visual elements: landscape, architecture, and decorations of Mustang. Known as a centre of Nepal’s trans-Himalayan heritage, KC documents how it is all changing with modernity. Above a wall full of ancient scriptures, modern signboards jut for space: a German Bakery here and a Yok Donald’s there. Mud walls that carry hundreds of years of history and culture are repaired in cement.

KC’s paintings are rendered in wistful shades of yellow, reminiscent of faded old pages, or of wind-blown sand. They are reminders of a forgotten time, rapidly replaced by the glare of a globalized world.

“I am trying to show my concern for our disappearing culture and heritage,” says KC. “When I went to Mustang a few years ago, I saw that instead of a traditional parasol, a plastic pink umbrella was held over the king’s head. Our heritage is our identity, and we should preserve it even while we adapt to modernity,” KC says.

While Chowdhry and KC’s internal and external worlds complement each other, a visitor can be overwhelmed by the intensity of emotion. This is one exhibition you might want to spend some time in, rather than peeping in at lunch breaks.

Sewa Bhattacharya

Styling Values: Expectations vs Reality & Simplicity - The Firstest Siddhartha Art Gallery 13-24 Oct

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Get the most ECONOMICAL B/W PRINTERS ever
Best for Office and Commercial purpose

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Comical communists

Of late cartoonists have dipped into the rising public disenchantment with the government on issues as disparate as the rape of Nirmala Panta, the proposed Nighath airport that will require felling millions of trees, and the friction between two factions of the NCP. Cartoonists have zeroed in on the government’s insensitive responses to serious issues, the seemingly nonsensical quotes providing easy fodder for satire.
The high prevalence of tuberculosis in Nepal means new tools are needed to eradicate the scourge

Sonia Awale

Access has always been the biggest obstacle in diagnosing and treating tuberculosis patients in Nepal's harsh terrain. Without reaching the poorest in the remotest villages, the country cannot meet the target of eradicating this infectious disease by 2025.

So, to find and treat patients in remote areas, health experts will soon be testing drones to fly diagnostic samples and drop off medicines in Panchthar district in Nepal's rugged mid-western mountains.

"Medical drones are ideally suited for remote Nepal where people with TB have to walk for hours every day to reach health posts for medication, and eventually we plan to scale it to other parts of the country," says Maitree Cawn of the British Nepal Medical Trust (BNMT), which is working with the Nick Simons Institute on the pilot project. (See interview, below)

The trust is also helping to mobilise rural female health volunteers in active case finding across Nepal. It is deploying the GeneXpert molecular diagnostic tool that is much more accurate in detecting TB infections than the traditional sputum swab, and can also identify patients with multi-drug-resistant (MDR) TB.

Tuberculosis is the biggest infectious disease worldwide, with 10 million new cases every year that kills some 1.5 million people, mainly in poor countries. Despite antibiotics, it is difficult to reach patients in underserved parts of the world, and an increasing number of patients are now developing resistance to commonly used drugs if nothing is done, TB could kill 50 million people by 2050.

Prompted by this alarming prognosis, the UN General Assembly last month held its first-ever high-level meeting on tuberculosis to draw attention and generate investment for TB research, treatment and diagnosis.

Here in Nepal, there were 45,600 reported TB cases last year. The last survey showed that strong previously treated cases, and multi-drug resistance was found in 10.8% of the cases, against the world average of 4.8%.

Nabam Rani, executive director of the Tuberculosis Hospital in Kathmandu, says up to 1,000,000 TB cases may be missing from that total because patients do not have access to government diagnostic facilities. She says tools like GeneXpert should be expanded to improve surveillance.

In 2014, WHO pressed a resolution to reduce TB mortality by 95% and cut new cases by 90% by 2035. But experts say countries like Nepal with very high rates of latent infections are unlikely to meet the target. Meanwhile, tuberculosis skin tests show that most adult Nepalis are carriers of the TB bacterium. At Patan Hospital this week, physician Gunwant Khatruv Khatruv was examining every patient of 50-year-old Bunam Maya Thamang who was tested positive after a sputum test, and is responding well to antibiotic treatment (above).

In Nepal, children below the age of five whose family members have positive sputum tests, and people living with HIV are provided with latent infection treatment known as Directly Observed Prophylaxis Therapy, but Khatruv says preventive antibiotic treatment for healthy adults is impractical in Nepal because 90% of people carry the bacillus.

"Even if I possibly be a carrier because I am exposed to tuberculosis patients, but I would not take this last because latency is so common," he adds.

Nepal also has the added challenge of an open border with India, a global hotspot for TB and its drug-resistant variety. "Unless TB is controlled in India, it is unlikely the situation in Nepal will improve," says Bhawani Shrestha.

"The open border means migrant workers are bringing infections home, and a lot of patients from India come to Nepal for treatment." Russia, India, China, South Africa and Brazil account for nearly 60% of all drug-resistant infections worldwide, while South Asia is home to 40% of the global TB burden with over 4 million cases. The region also has a disproportional share of TB deaths (46% of total fatalities worldwide), with a third of them because patients with drug resistance fail to respond to treatment. The SAARC TB Centre is located in Kathmandu and is involved in research, prevention and control of tuberculosis, TB/HIV co-infection.

Worldwide only 12.5% of TB patients have HIV, and the number comes down to 9.3% in South Asia, yet most of the research and investment is focused on HIV associated TB. Whereas worsening air pollution, smoking, malnutrition, diabetes and alcoholism are bigger risk factors for TB infection in the region.

"There is a large number of people with TB in South Asia, in particular India. This means they have a big enough sample size to conduct studies and trials for new drugs with shorter regimens," says Buddha Banerji of the Patan Academy of Health Sciences.

Nepali Times: How important was the UN high-level meeting on tuberculosis?

Maitree Cawn: There has been few high-level UN meetings, and this was the first ever for tuberculosis. The aims on HIV and TB have galvanised the momentum, investment and action for these diseases. So the hope for TB is that the same thing will happen and get governments and organisations to invest in research and development.

Why is TB so underfunded?

To affect the patient in the society and in a long-term program. Somebody has short-term results, especially politicians. TB needs a long-term commitment.

Isn't Nepal a success story for its DOTS program?

We have been satisfied with far too little. There are still 400,000 to 700,000 a year from a preventable, curable disease. We need to do much more and it is the right time to push for TB eradication.

Are we all potential TB carriers?

TB is hard to eradicate because of the very reason. Globally 2% of people can infect TB. In Nepal at least two thirds of the total population are carriers. It is higher in low-income groups.

How does HIV co-infection work?

People with HIV are much more susceptible to TB. Because of their weakened immune system, they either develop the infection or can pass it on to their loved ones.

Nepal Times: How much was the Nepali Medical Trust at Nepal-TB target by 2025? Excerpts:

ENDTB

Tuberculosis expert Maitree Cawn of the British Nepal Medical Trust spoke to Nepal Times this week about meeting the End TB target by 2025. Excerpts:

"Because of their weakened immune system, they either develop the infection or can pass it on to their loved ones. Globally 2% of people can infect TB. In Nepal at least two-thirds of the total population are carriers. It is higher in low-income groups."

"People with HIV are much more susceptible to TB. Because of their weakened immune system, they either develop the infection or can pass it on to their loved ones."

"We are also scaling up the GeneXpert test, a molecular diagnostic tool, which has been found to be more effective than traditional smear microscopy that misses half the cases. There are 50 GeneXpert kits in Nepal, we need to expand the network.

We hear you are testing drones. Drones are ideally suited for the geography of remote Nepal where distance poses a huge obstacle to availability of health services. We are in the process of obtaining permit for drones to transport test samples to health posts in Humla and fly back medicines if a patient has been tested positive. Drones will also allow the whole district to get access to GeneXpert tests, which is currently available only at the district hospital.

Can we replicate the Zero TB City initiative in Kathmandu?

Cities in the South Asia like Dhaka and Karachi are moving towards Zero TB, which means finding and treating every TB case using preventive therapy systematically. We should start from smaller population and expand it to bigger cities in Nepal."
Tuberculosis was neglected, underfunded and under-hyped for so long because it was mainly a disease of poor people. In Nepal, DOTS (Directly Observed Treatment, Short-course) was considered a success story with its supervised antibiotics administration to patients. But experts say new funding is now needed for a much more aggressive case detection system.

Nepal’s rapid development and population mobility makes it important for the government to step up the momentum to fight tuberculosis with better diagnosis and treatment. For this, it may need to replicate the Zero-TB City model in the region, and go district-by-district to eradicate the bacillus in all patients and carriers.

Says Maxine Green: “If we keep on doing what we are doing, we will still be here in 50 years time.”

NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.

Times.com
So you want to trek?

A

which is a highly recommended workout in which you will learn how to live with the
eccentric realities of a third-world country.

The word trek is derived from an
eriean word which means “carry your
body weight and a backpack weight for a
to, and then a vertical ascent in which for 10
days, share sleeping quarters with yaks, in
an attempt to blend in nature in the company of
friendly local people.”

Why it had to import a South African
word for the completely indigenous activity
of trekking from one Nepal village to the
next, I have never quite figured out. But I
guess the whole philosophy of trekking is
to get unsuspecting victims to pay $10 a
day for a month’s pleasure of suffering
extreme hardships on themselves so that
when they return home to their mundane
sounds monotonous existence, it all seems
like paradise.

Here are some useful tips on the joys of
trekking in Nepal and how to make it fulfilling
for mind, body and soul:

Am I fit?
The main pre-requisite to trekking is that you
should train yourself in the art of walking
straight up, and straight down like a gond.
Practise on a walk at home. One month before
trek, stop using the lift. Climb 36 floors to your
office every day, and use the stairs down. Now
multiply this by 10.

What should I eat?
Munch. This is what they give mules to eat
for breakfast on the Mustang trail so their
often bumpy can woes. Even during the steepest
inclines, adding grilled hash to propel them
over Khakuri Pass in time for lunch. Just ask
your porters those to munch.

Drink tea. Tea shops along the trail have a
wide variety of tea—so you never get tired
of Nepal’s national drink. Dal-bhat with dal,
dal-bhat with meat, dal-bhat with bread, dal-bhat with saag, or even
dal-bhat with dal-oat.

To lend out a steep uphill? There is nothing
on foot that beats the locally brewed high-acid
apple brandy. Pour a little of this into your
and wash yourself. Fly like a bird, leaving
your clothes behind in the valley below.
(Sunday Times Health Warning: Hangovers
are a pain in the ass.)

Is it safe to drink the water?
The first rule of drinks is not to drink anything
that doesn’t have the mandatory hologram
Seal of Approval of the Nepal
Bureau of Standards (NBS)
90022). Adhering to this rule
will mean that you will die of
food poisoning or your
junk food in the valley.

THE ASH

Need a battery? Get free home delivery with free home delivery.

Carlsberg It’s Friday

#TCIF

Carlsberg Probably the best beer in the world.