

RECKLESS FECKLESSNESS

A drain in the middle of the road outside the gates of a school in Kirtipur had its concrete slabs removed for maintenance six months ago. No one bothered to close it after the work was finished. Students passed it every day, and at night numerous motorcyclists had been injured trying to avoid the gaping hole. A parent who complained to workers was told to mind his own business. Calls to KUKL went unheeded.

On 27 October, as the city readied to celebrate Tihar, soft-spoken yoga tutor Shyam Sundar Shrestha went bicycling to Chobhar. When he did not return home till late at night, his mother and relatives called around. Police found his body the next morning inside Kirtipur's open drain. An autopsy showed he had drowned in sewage.

After this paper printed the story, readers sent in many photographs of similar death traps all over Kathmandu Valley: ditches, gaping potholes, open manholes. The 2015 earthquake, the road expansion, laying of Melamchi water pipes, repairs of mains, and lately digging for a new sewage network have



KUNDA DIXIT

repeatedly torn up Kathmandu's busiest thoroughfares. Contractors never adhere even to the minimum safety standards of installing warning signs, fencing off dangerous areas, and paving the streets after digging them up.

Aside from the clear and present danger to pedestrians and vehicle users, the decrepit state of Kathmandu's streets has worsened the Valley's already unbreathable air. As our weekly graph of the daily air pollution averages (*page 10*) and the live hour-by-hour pollution updates on our homepage sourced from the U.S. Embassy monitoring station at Phora Darbar show: Kathmandu air quality index is one of the worst in the world. At this level of toxicity, residents of Kathmandu will on average lose nearly four years of their lives.

In Nepal, we are used to recklessly feckless governments that fail in the state's primary function of protecting citizens. Nepal's killer highways claim 2,000 lives for every 100,000 vehicles annually. The figure for Japan is just 7 for every 100,000 cars. While many vehicle fatalities are caused by

careless drivers, most are the result of the poor condition of roads, lack of enforcement of traffic rules, the absence of highway dividers, fencing and guard rails. The only reason the fatality rate is not higher is that the surface of city roads and highways are so rough that vehicles are forced to go slow.

All this points to criminal negligence on the part of the state. That, in turn, is abetted by a fatalistic culture that ignores prevention, maintenance and safety. A combination of corruption and a complete lack of accountability on the part of elected officials and bureaucrats has turned our sidewalks, roads, highways, bridges, airports, and cities into death traps. Passing the buck and lack of coordination are blatant.

For a long time we blamed Kathmandu's kleptocracy, and hoped that last year's elections to three levels of government would finally decentralise responsibility. It has been more than a year, but most municipalities are governed by the party that rules in Kathmandu, and its culture of poor governance has trickled down to the

grassroots. There are syndicates in every sphere of business, and many of them are hand-in-glove with national and local politicians. This greedy neo-elite has honed rent-seeking into a fine art. Structural corruption and pre-paid appointments of jobs in the bureaucracy have reduced the impact of public spending.

There is plenty of cash to go around, but the Centre is loath to hand over the purse-strings to provincial and local governments. Development budgets go unspent because no one can decide who gets the cut.

An investigation in this paper recently showed that one-third of elected mayors were contractors, owned construction companies, or had excavators they rented out to municipalities they lead.

Elections should have been able to fix all that, because in a democracy, legitimacy comes not just from being elected but from performance. But winning an election in Nepal has more to do with party affiliation than accomplishments while in office.

Poor governance has a direct impact on urban planning, infrastructure, safety – and is often a question of life or death, as in the tragic martyrdom of Shyam Sundar Shrestha.

As one of the mourners at his memorial said: “All three levels of government are responsible for the death of this citizen. And it goes right up to the Prime Minister's office.”

“All three levels of government are responsible for the death of this citizen. And it goes right up to the Prime Minister's office.”

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The *Nepali Times* issue #425 of 14-20 November 2008 ten years ago carried an editorial that reads like it could have been written today. At that time, the Maoist party had just been elected to office with a landslide. Ten years later, the party is in government with a near two-third majority. But the frustrations are the same. Excerpt:

'Nepal's revolution was supposed to lead us towards a New Nepal. A new set of elected leaders was supposed to bring us a new vision and infuse citizens with hope and a sense of national purpose. Nepalis haven't yet given up hope. They want to give the government they elected a chance to prove itself both in improving their daily lives and also by charting a new future for this country. We are suffering the byproducts of the insurgency: criminality, bribery, extortion and breakdown in law and order.

In Nepal, a revolution that was fought at great human cost has ironically habituated people to kidnappings and corruption. Even if the lives of Nepalis don't improve, we need to have a perception that things are on the mend: that delivery of services is happening, that jobs are being created, that wealth is being spread. The present culture of impunity, the surge in crime and corruption do not give us that perception.'



ONLINE PACKAGES



BELLES-LETTRES

Watch video of calligraphy classes in which students learn to write in the sacred script of Kathmandu Valley, the Ranjana alphabet, which spread from Nepal to Tibet, China and Japan in the 14th century. There is a growing interest among young Nepalis to rediscover these beautiful letters. *Story: Page 8-9*



POLIO HUNT

Nepal saw its last polio case in Rautahat in 2010 and was declared polio-free by the WHO in 2014. But Nepal is not out of the woods yet, says Thomas Abraham, the author of the new book *Polio: The Odyssey of Eradication*. Watch him explain the threat of the re-importation of the poliovirus in Nepal. *Book Review: Page 11*

GURKHAS

Nepalis who fought in WWI and WWII did not know how to read and write ('Lest We Forget', David Seddon, #934). They did not know the reason why they were fighting, or that their sacrifice would change the course of history. They fought primarily for the money and pension, which they could not get back home. This continues. Nepalis are still fighting in different types of wars around the world just to earn money. The only way to relieve Nepalis from the fighting other people's wars is by keeping the talented and innovative citizens in Nepal for economic development.

Mahabir Pun

■ Thank you. When I saw the names of Nepalis soldiers who fought under Burma and East India regiments on the walls of Menin Gate in Belgium, I felt a pang of regret because we know nothing about these soldiers and the sacrifices they made to fulfill the greed of a handful of rulers back home.

Huma Bokkhim

NEGLIGENCE

Criminal negligence of the highest degree ('Don't go quietly into the night, Kunda Dixit, #934). Who was the ward chair? Who is the mayor? Relatives of the victim should sue them. The government should also declare him a 'martyr' and compensate his family.

Shyamal Krishna Shrestha

■ A really poignant profile of Shyam Sundar Shrestha, and what a tragic needless loss of life. There are many others who have fallen victim to a callous state and a government that does not take seriously the responsibility to protect its citizens.

Jan Petersen

WORK ABROAD

One of the reasons why Nepali youths migrate and work outside is that the chances of climbing up the prosperity ladder with hard work is much higher abroad ('Success in Nepal means not having to work', Anil Chitrakar, #934).

Sunil Paudel

KUKUR TIHAR

México is thankful to you all in Nepal for inspiring us to honour animals ('Mexico adopts Kukur Tihar, #934!')

Martha Dau

WHAT'S TRENDING

Mexico adopts Kukur Tihar

Readers on social media were thrilled to discover that Nepal's tradition of celebrating Kukur Tihar has spread to Mexico. Go online to read this short piece about how, why, when and where Mexicans celebrated their pets at www.nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most visited online page

Most popular on Twitter



Lest We Forget

by David Seddon
On the centennial of the World War I Armistice, this analysis encapsulating the struggles of Gurkhas and the subsequent political and socio-economic impact on Nepal generated many comments about the bravery of all Nepali soldiers who fought and died in the World Wars. Join the discussion online.

Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Gurkha involvement in #WorldWar1 eventually played a part in a growing dissatisfaction with the poverty and underdevelopment of Nepal, and in increasing demands for social, economic and political change in the 1920s and 1930s.

Avash @AvashPiya
As the world commemorates the centennial Armistice Day in remembrance of those who lost their lives in the Great War, the Nepali state continues to disregard the lives of thousands of its men whose contributions were instrumental in gaining Nepal's legitimate status.

Jan Møller Hansen @janmolhan
Well written article. A story of bravery and loyalty that should not be forgotten.

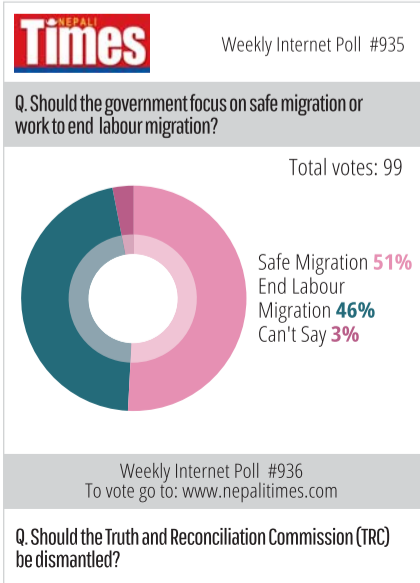
Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Soon, there may be more Nepalis working outside Nepal than in Nepal. It is foreigners who do most work here, and Nepalis only seem to work hard outside of Nepal. Anil Chitrakar explores in this week's column, 1/2 Full.

Anna Stirr @annastirr
Anil Chitrakar notes that many Nepalis are actually choosing to work in Nepal, but these Nepalis need to be respected as much as those who go abroad.

Rajesh Manandhar @rajeshmdr
Bitter truth.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Sabitri Shrestha looked alone and forlorn at the 13th day commemoration for her son, yoga instructor Shyam Sundar Shrestha. His death has exposed criminal state negligence about road safety and the lack of bicycle lanes.

Professor A R T @AmulyaSir
What has the criminally negligent state done to assuage her pain? Has there been a public apology or martyr money? Have any guilty officials and supervisors lost their jobs or are being jailed? Where is justice? Where is any action to prevent such mishaps?





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Turkish marks 5 years of Kathmandu flights



PHOTOS: SIKUMARA

Turkish Airlines marked five years of its Kathmandu-Istanbul connection with a fun-filled afternoon of entertainment at Gokarna Forest Resort last Friday. *Nepali Times* spoke to Turkish Airlines General Manager for Nepal, Abdullah Tuncer Kececi at the event. Excerpts:

***Nepali Times:* How do you assess the past five years of your airline connecting Nepal to the world?**
Abdullah Tuncer Kececi: With the launch of its first flight to Nepal in 2013, Turkish Airlines has been exposing its unique hospitality and quality service to the market, and promoting Nepal as a tourism destination. With our ever-expanding fleet and by flying to 122 countries, the worldwide network has worked as an advantage for Nepal.

In 2018, we increased our capacity by 12% compared to the

previous year. We have resumed daily flights this year, and we plan to make it daily all year round from next year. Since 2013, the trade volume between Turkey and Nepal has increased five fold. In addition, we are focusing on the 2 million tourist target of Visit Nepal 2020 and we are working to be the major contributor to reach this goal.

What would you say are your unique selling points in the Nepal aviation sector?

Turkish Airlines has been investing heavily on customer



satisfaction within the past years and is trying to bring out new products to passengers. Within this scope, Turkish Airlines strives to be one of the top major global airlines. Through its strong network and state of the art service, we hope to offer our guests a seamless travel experience.

And where does Istanbul's new airport fit into all this?

Istanbul has been one of the most important cities in the world, and has a unique geographic advantage for global aviation. Our new hub at Istanbul Airport will service 90 million passengers per year, but after the completion of all phases, its service capacity will reach to 200 million passengers a year. The first terminal is the biggest terminal building under one roof in the world with an area of 1.3 million sq m. It will also have world's largest airport

duty free, and the airport will be revolutionary in terms of the use of new technology and service implementation, and our passengers can take advantage of its services and comfort.

What are your future plans for Turkish Airlines in Kathmandu?

It may be worth remembering that we are not just an airline. We are the flag carrier of the Turkish Republic, and representative of Turkish hospitality. So along with bridging Nepal with rest of the world, we aim to continue bridging our cultures. By ever expanding fleet and flight network, we will continue to be the main supporter for Nepal's tourism and trade. Parallel to the tourism targets of the country, we will be increasing our frequency. Since we came here as the best airline of Europe, we will continuously work together with all stake holders of aviation industry.

Happy Singh Da Dhaba



PHOTOS: SIKUMARA

All the food at Happy Singh Da Dhaba tastes so different that one wonders if it is really Punjabi food. The dishes here do not have a strong masala aroma or make you feel heavy and stuffed. It is so surprising that this rendition of Punjabi highway food does not even leave a colour or grease on fingers.

That is exactly what Chef Rajinder Singh Paul from Punjab and Executive Chef of Soaltee Crowne Plaza Yuba Raj Pokhrel were aiming to do: blend traditional preparation with the therapeutic properties of spices. The two chefs are collaborating to introduce ethnic cuisine of Punjab in Kathmandu through the Happy Singh Da Dhaba food festival.

"In old times, people in Punjab or any other place did not use too much fat or masala in their food. To give them strength to work harder in the fields, they survived on whole foods like lassi and corn rotis, which were super healthy and tasty," explains Singh.

But slowly foods were commercialised. People built on the presentation and appearance rather than its nutritional values. "So now, we are bringing back the forgotten traditions of food preparation and serving", adds Chef Pokhrel.



Yuba Raj Pokhrel (left) with Rajinder Singh Paul

Indeed, the items at Happy Singh Da Dhaba have their own distinctive flavours and aroma, discernible after the first bite. Every dish is made from fresh ingredients and freshly pounded spices. No use of refined flour, or fats, synthetic vinegar, soya sauce, artificial flavours or colourings, nothing that is unhealthy. And everything is cooked in slow heat and charcoal, and served in earthen pots, giving all dish the

authentic flavours of Punjab.

Colourful paper decor hangs above the venue that is filled with the sound of Punjabi music. Old movie posters on the walls of the stalls which have their own typical Punjabi Dhaba names. If one still does not get the Punjabi feel with all this, then there are waiters and chefs dressed in kurta, salwar and turbans.

Happy Singh Da Dhaba is Soaltee's annual food festival which gets refined and improvised every year with inputs from international and in-house chefs. This year, Chef Singh Paul was invited over to create more hygienic and healthy Punjabi dishes that reflect his progressive yet grounded-to-the-root approach.

Chef Singh is actually a post graduate in physics who has been cooking for 40 years now. He combines his knowledge of science and passion for culinary art. His approach is using fresh and nutritious ingredients, using proper and sustainable vessels to cook and maintaining proper temperature while cooking. That is a physicist doing the cooking.

Guests are suggested to start their dinner with drinks like *Thandai*, *Jaljeera* or *Masala chhans*. Move on to Butter chicken, *Keema gurma kajeli with pav*, *Sarsoun da saag*, *Pindi chana*, *Harea dal*, *Patiala biryani* or Tandoori roti. And end it with *Khaur rabdi*, *Gajrella* and *Anjeer burfi*.

And while tea is available everywhere in Kathmandu, this drink is still the major recommendation. Spices like cinnamon sticks, ginger, cardamom, cloves are pounded instantly and put into the boiling milk and water to make the aromatic masala tea. 🇳🇵

Sikuma Rai

3 November – 7 December
 Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal
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 (01) 4273999

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Recruiting responsibly

The U.S. Embassy this week held a joint event with USAID and National Business Initiative for fostering ethical and fair recruitment practices in the foreign employment process for Nepalis. Key representatives from the government, private sector, civil society, development organisations attended.

World Bank visit

World Bank Vice President for South Asia, Hartwig Schafer, concluded a five-day visit to Nepal during which he met PM KP Oli, Finance Minister Yuba Raj Khatriwada,



Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation Barsha Man Pun and private sector representatives. Meanwhile, the World Bank and IFC issued a new report Creating Markets in Nepal on tourism, agribusiness, education, health, and IT to accelerate productivity.

Brazilian Smiles

Turkish Airlines signed a Frequent Flyer Program Agreement for Miles&Smiles with the Brazilian-based Azul, allowing its



members reciprocal mileage accrual and redemption opportunities from 1 January.

4 routes to Europe

Qatar Airways announced the return of its recently-launched seasonal routes to Antalya, Bodrum, Mykonos and Málaga, with more flights and upgraded aircraft on two routes from May 2019.

Newer iPhones

Generation Next Communications, the authorised distributor for Apple products, launched iPhoneXS, XS Max, XR in Nepal at its stores Evo Store, Future World, Oliz Store and Quality Computer Birtamode.

Triple camera phone

The Chinese smartphone brand HUAWEI officially launched its flagship model Mate 20Pro, which has the Triple Leica camera setup with ultra-wide-angle lens, in Nepal. The phone, priced at Rs129,900, has features such as AI performance with Kirin 980, 4200 mAh battery and advanced security.

prabhu BANK

Banks biting off more than they can chew?

Nepal's anks have once more entered the dark tunnel of scarcity of loanable funds. Commercial banks have misinterpreted the monetary environment for three years in a row -- they lend aggressively during the first quarter, and run out of steam thereafter until the final quarter of the fiscal year.

GUEST COLUMN
Suman Joshi

The seeds of the trouble were sown five years ago. As the IMF puts it in its most recent South Asia Regional Update, 'Loose monetary conditions, along with a fourfold increase in banks' paid-up capital in the two years to mid-2018 required by the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), have fueled a strong credit expansion. Private sector credit growth has averaged 22% (y/y) in the past two years, even as the NRB maintains ceilings on banks' loan-to-deposit ratio and the loan-to-value ratio on car loans.'

Nepal's financial landscape is heavily skewed towards banking. According to a recent World Bank report, banks account for 87% of financial sector assets in Nepal. Private equity and venture capital space are still in nascent stages. The private sector thus largely depends on bank debts, and in their absence, businesses have had to postpone plans or slow down operations. This has resulted in increased cost or lost opportunities.

Recurring credit crunches, which last several months every year, have impacted the economy as a whole. Key responsible parties here are:

- Government of Nepal for its inability to spend on capital expenditures

The onus is on the banks collectively to manage public perception and repair the community's battered image



- NRB for instigating the crisis and then offering regulatory forbearance that encourages banks to push prudential boundaries
- Banks which appear to be driven with the sole objective of servicing increased capital

Nepal's economic growth over past two decades has been largely led by the private sector, in spite of ineffective governments and inefficient bureaucracy. Banks should refrain from pointing fingers at NRB or the government. The NRB has not always been pro-active, its regulatory approach has often

been 'one step forward two steps back'. The government's norm has always been to bulk up capital expenditure towards the end of the year. We want NRB and the government to be more responsive, but it will be a gradual process at best. And frankly, the banking business has thrived even in this environment, so let's be reasonable.

As the most transparent sector of the economy, the onus is on the banks collectively to manage public perception and repair the community's battered image. Here's a list of items they need to consider:
1. Anticipate better, and get your

basics right. Will the market offer sufficient new deposits to fund growth in loan books? Nepal may be more stable politically, but with compromises from bureaucrats and politicians, it will be a while before their Key Performance Indicators align with Nepal's aspirations for rapid economic growth. It is unrealistic, this early, to expect government spending to veer from tradition to follow a desired timeline that match banks' need for new deposits.

2. Who is winning that debate in the boardroom? Most banks appear to have adopted a strategy to grow

lending books aggressively to meet shareholder expectations of return on equity. The impact of this on their lending behavior is worrisome. What is the quality of loan assets banks are booking when they are expanding at 22% while the economy grew at 3-4% annually over last few years? Also the continued contribution of banks to real estate buoyancy may someday come back to haunt them. Excessive reliance on real estate as collateral has affected a loan officer's approach to lending. Under the current loan loss provisioning norms and multiple banking context, it is possible to keep masking bad loans, which raises doubts about quality of profits. The IMF has singled out this challenge and suggests: 'Rapid credit growth underscores the need to accelerate banking sector reforms. Building on the recent amendments to the regulatory framework, loan classification, provisioning, and banks' risk management practices should be upgraded.'

3. Is it possible that many banks have bitten off more than they can chew by expanding their operations and branch network rapidly? Frequency of operational risk events suggests that quality of human resource and internal control mechanisms need significant improvement.

Banks have finally acknowledged the need to adopt digital channels of delivery. Better late than never. Even so, there is little chance of sufficient investment happening here. It is not enough to link bank systems to a digital payment platform. A key driver for consumer uptake is a cultural shift within individual banks to champion digital banking services.

Clearly, Nepal is an over-banked economy with smaller banks struggling to stay relevant. Industry experts agree that there is a case for reduction in number of banks. Market prices are currently at interesting levels for more capable banks to consider acquiring other institutions. It may be easier said than done, but if there is an industry-wide resolve, the ducks will line up. 🇳🇵

Suman Joshi is a former banker and Founder and Chairman of True North Associates, a private equity firm.

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A house in Budanilkantha

Building a house from scratch in Kathmandu Valley is not as easy as it sounds

With the privilege of building a house from scratch in Kathmandu Valley comes a sneaking suspicion that in reality it is more akin to an onerous curse. The only land we could afford was way out on the far rim of the Valley, roads were rough, building supplies unreliable, and contractors even more so.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

By 1990 Tenzin and I were weary of Kathmandu landlords – something about renting their houses turned the most civilised owners into unreasonable fiends. Sangjay was six and Rinchen at four years old had already lived in four different homes – not that he seemed to mind the endless upheavals.

A systematic scan of outlying areas took us on weekend searches down the radial roads that stretch outside the Ring Road. Having scoured the possibilities of Godavari (no sun), Bhaisepati (too far south), Thankot (too many trucks) and Sankhu (too tortuous), we eventually settled on the north, beyond Bansbari.

We struck lucky one kilometre past the huge Vishnu who reclines on his watery snakes, sculpted in mysterious black stone protecting the Valley from his Budanilkantha eyrie, high above what used to be the sacred lake before being drained by Lord Manjushri's sword.

On the hill to the gate of the Shivapuri National Park, accessible only by a dirt lane with no telephone links and minimal electricity, we settled on a series of rice terraces bordered on one side by the headwaters of the Vishnumati River and on the other by a sylvan stream that has long since dried up. Mr Vaidya had the foresight to buy up large tracts along the river, and offered us first choice of whichever plot we preferred.

Of course we chose the topmost section with the best aspect and shaded by Nepali poplars lining the river bank, but what clinched it for us was the scattering of huge granite boulders, vestiges of a



Vishnumati House below Shivapuri Peak after completion, and Eric Theophile's design (below).

massive avalanche rockfall many centuries ago. We oriented the house around those ancient stones, creating a series of small pools with the sound of running water and a rock garden by the veranda through which generations of children have scrambled and explored. A surprising number of guests remark: "It must have been a job moving those rocks!"

Sheltered by the Shivapuri forest rising behind us, we had no glimpse of white peaks but were compensated by the benefits of all day sun, plentiful water and extensive views south across the entire Valley. Being a thousand feet above the Valley floor, the

microclimate kept us cool in summer and warm in winter, sited safely above the chill morning mists that shrouded the view beneath us like the legendary lake, with Swayambhunath peeking above the fog, the mythical floating lotus island with its hallowed blue flame.

It was two years before the first sod was turned, if that is the right expression, and two more years to build – no wonder the process is considered a curse. Inspired by the work of Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust and Goetz Hagemuller's restorations of Bhaktapur, Patan Durbar and Kaiser Mahal, we were fortunate to have Eric Theophile design the

house, but it was the brilliant Rohit Ranjitkar who had the hard grind of supervising the construction and managing all the component parts: brick-layers, plasterers, engineers, plumbers, electricians. Once the building chaos had retreated, Muni Rana helped with the planting.

We were very particular to use vernacular architecture and traditional design themes with thick mud mortar and brick walls, local materials and chingati tiled roof. Strengthened to withstand earthquakes, which it did in 2015, we used a minimum of concrete but lots of wood imported from Malaysia. Not everything worked and there have been compromises

along the way – loo flushing and water heating is less than perfect, the chimney still smokes, central heating never worked and damp patches persist on some walls.

Tenzin complained that one third of the cost of the house went into timber floors and ceilings, but despite all the frustrations we were delighted with the result – a peculiar blend of neoclassical Rana meets Patan Museum Malla Newar, with Tibetan chests and carpets. The newly created spaces and empty rooms soon filled with echoes of family life, permeated with memories of friends and visitors.

This month is the 24th anniversary of the auspicious day that we first moved in on 12 November 1994. Since then, the boys have grown up and left, the garden and birdlife have flourished, and willow and bamboo cut back to protect the foundations. Generations of family dogs have raced around the lawn, disturbed the flowerbeds and, amidst much grief, been buried in the grove at the bottom of the garden.

Other than that, very little has changed. When the earthquakes dislodged a few tiles, caused some superficial cracks in the plaster and separated the veranda roof from the main house, we chose to repair it exactly as before: even the colours we painted the walls did not change.

Vishnumati House has stood the test of time for our needs, but we did not succeed in convincing others that it was a desirable architectural model that reflects the glorious heritage of historic Nepal. Although thousands have since undertaken the onerous task of building a home in the Kathmandu Valley, very few have attempted to emulate the sublime architectural styles of their Malla and Newar ancestors.

Even our book Kathmandu Valley Style, published in 2008 to celebrate the adaptations of traditional design to modern living in private houses and hotels, has failed to stem the tide of comfortless concrete monstrosities that cloak our once-emerald Valley. 🇳🇵

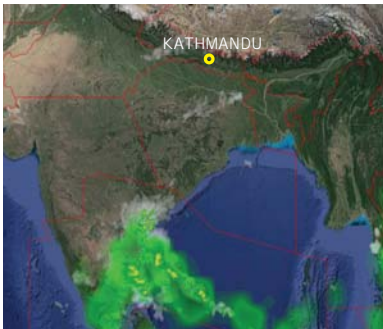


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The thick haze of this past week will persist into the weekend and beyond. There is nothing we can do about it because most of it is from the pollution blown in by southerly winds from the north Indian plains. It forms a thick layer from the ground level up to 3,000m. The filtering action on sunlight means that the maximum temperature will fall to 21 over the weekend, but the minimum will be elevated because of the blanket effect of the pollution. Some cloud cover over the high mountains, but mainly clear elsewhere.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
22° 8°	21° 9°	23° 9°

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The craft of art

A family of painters explores the universe beyond thangka

Sewa Bhattarai

There used to be a time when Tibetan devotional art meant murals and thangkass. Not anymore. An internationally-renowned Sherpa family has given modern meaning to the historic art form.

Tulku Jamyang, 41, and his brother Ang Tsherin, 50, learnt thangka painting from their famous father, Urgen Dorje Sherpa. He did not just teach his sons the craft of the art, but also the spiritualism behind it.

However, as they grew up, the brothers found the format too rigid and formless, and with little room for personal exploration. Even as they turned to more private expressions, however, their creations today display clear influences from the early roots.

“My works are not thangka, they portray my personal take on today’s society and politics, the feeling of being out of place everywhere, whether as an ethnic minority in Nepal, or an oriental man in the West,” explains Ang Tsherin, whose art often depicts alienation and displacement. Buddhist deities wear socks and underclothes in unconventional postures.

Tulku Jamyang lives a hermit-like existence in his studio in Kathmandu, but is a keen observer of the changes he sees around him. A young woman wears a gown of rhododendron clutching on to a Starbucks mug, and in another commentary on the slow pace of development in Nepal, seven sloth bears represent the seven provinces of Nepal.

These and other paintings by Tulku Jamyang are on display and sale at the *Changing Lanes* exhibition at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. The artist’s technique is to burn tiny holes with incense on paper that give the works a meticulous dot matrix texture.



PHOTOS: SEWA BHATTARAI

He combines this technique with western motifs like Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Last Supper*, Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*, and Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*. “I include these western motifs because this is how Nepali society is changing,” explains Jamyang, who portrays migration and alienation through a painting of Nepalis in different ethnic costumes sitting at a table like in *The Last Supper*.

Jamyang spent 11 years as a monk in a monastery, which gives his art a dense and spiritually layered appearance. Not only do they contain his own interpretations of the Buddha, but the act of burning holes with incense sticks to create his images is itself a spiritual performance. The process has to be so precise that a single mistake can ruin the entire painting, so for Jamyang the total concentration it requires is

like meditation.

“I use all the *pancha tatwa* or the five elements that together represent truth -- earth, sky, air, fire, and water -- in my paintings. My canvas is the earth and incense sticks are fire. When I blow on them, I use the air, and the liquid colours represent water. When they are displayed in space, that is the sky element.”

Ang Tsherin, for his part, is self-taught. His abstract style evolved from his own exploration into modern art and interactions with fellow artists of many nationalities. Though his work may look contemporary, he admits the technique is derived from thangka art that he learnt from his father as a child.

Though both brothers turned away from thangka, today they find appreciation and concern for the Tibetan and Nepali devotional

art form. “As a child, I used to be ashamed that I was learning this art,” recalls Tsherin. “At that time it was seen as something uneducated people did for a living, and was not respected. It was cooler to be doctors and engineers.”

It was in the United States in 1998 that Tsherin saw the traditional paintings of his community through Western eyes, began to appreciate its richness and grew concerned about its degeneration – with commercialisation and the loss of the philosophical underpinning of the art.

Tsherin relocated back to Nepal last year after 20 years in the US. He adds: “I only realised the value of my heritage after I saw it respected abroad. I now want to pass on that appreciation to the next generation of Nepali artists. If the artworks of living masters like my father can be

BROTHERS IN ARTS: Tulku Jamyang and his brother Ang Tsherin learnt traditional thangka painting from their famous father Urgen Dorje Sherpa, but have struck off into more creative styles.

treasured by museums, then it will also inspire a new generation. That will be a step towards conserving it.”

Tulku Jamyang agrees: “The artist must survive for the art to survive, so we must take care of the artists. Economic survival is important, and in the case of thangka, so is respect.”

At 75, their father Urgen Dorje, continues to be active and is currently restoring a monastery in Tatopani. 🇳🇵

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Kathmandu's Ranjana renaissance

Monika Deupala

Over the Tihar festival this month, while most people were busy worshipping cows, dogs and cows, an unusual group of people had gathered in a temple in Patan. They were not carrying marigold garlands and vermilion powder, but bamboo pens and bottles of ink.

The week of the Nepal Sambat 1139 new year was an appropriate time for another Callijatra workshop in which participants are tutored in writing the ancient Ranjana script, which originated in the Kathmandu Valley civilisation and is derived from early Lichhavi alphabets.

Ananda Kumar Maharjan was demonstrating Ranjana calligraphy and teaching a class of eager students how to write 'nhudaya bhintuna' (happy new year) in the ornate script of the Newar people.

Maharjan, 35, has been working as a font and graphic designer, and the idea for the calligraphy classes evolved from a Facebook group he set up three years ago. He says, "The response was so encouraging, with enthusiasts sharing their writings with the hashtag Callijatra, that we decided to expand the exercise."

Sunita Dangol was a student who is now a tutor herself, and is encouraged that the classes are gaining popularity. At the recent Itumbahal Cultural Festival, Maharjan and Dangol set up a stall to show people how to write their names in the script.

"The calligraphy workshop was unplanned, but the response was overwhelming," says Dangol, who went on to conduct 12 other workshops with the Nepal Lipi Guthi.

The decorative alphabet designed by Kathmandu Valley artisans was used in early scriptures, and manuscripts, and was transported north to Tibet, China, Korea and Japan in the 14th century with Arniko.

Ranjana letters can be seen at the Great Wall of China, artefacts belonging to Kublai Khan, as well as in temples in Korea and Kyoto. (See story, below).

Maharjan says that the script spread with Mahayana Buddhism as it travelled from Nepal to Tibet and China. "The Newars were traders who crossed the Himalaya as far back as the 11th century, and the spread of Ranjana was later assisted by Bhrikuti and Arniko taking Kathmandu Valley religion, architecture and culture to China," Maharjan explains.

Lately, young students in Kathmandu Valley have developed an interest in learning about their rich culture and heritage and Ranjana is enjoying a renaissance.

Dangol explains that Ranjana uses the Kutaksher method of vertical writing and used it as a code. "Ranjana was not just a decorative script but the flourishes served as a secret message system that was hard to understand, and even more, was hard to write," she added.

Maharjan is now trying to design different versions of Ranjana script in a digital format. Meanwhile the Callijatra team is working on learning materials including animated videos, interactive dotted books for learning to write Ranjana for children. The team is also practicing beautification of the font and producing tutorial videos for YouTube.

BELLES-LETTRES



Watch video of calligraphy classes in which students learn to write in the sacred script of Kathmandu Valley, the Ranjana alphabet, which spread from Nepal to Tibet, China and Japan in the 14th century. There is a growing interest among young Nepalis to rediscover these beautiful letters.

nepalitimes.com

The script of the sc

Sewa Bhattarai

in Beijing

The Great Wall of China is one of the world's most famous landmarks, but what is less well known is the historical link between this World Heritage Site to another one 4,000km to the south in Kathmandu Valley.

Here on the white marble Cloud Platform of the Juyongguan Section of the Great Wall 60km from Beijing, visitors come across ancient Buddhist inscriptions that tell the story of the influence of Nepal on the Yuan dynasty in the 13th century.

At the base of the Great Wall is an arch built in 1345 and inscribed with Buddhist sutras in six languages: Mandarin, Tibetan, Uyghur, Mongolian, Tangut and Sanskrit. Kublai Khan and his

descendants had to pass under the script of the Buddhist scriptures when they visited nearby temples.

What is surprising is that the Sanskrit lines inside the arch are not in the usual Devanagari letters, but in the Ranjana script that originated in Kathmandu Valley.

Ranjana is called 'Landzha' in Mandarin, and can be found in religious monuments across Tibet and China, having travelled with the spread of Mahayana Buddhism, whose main texts including the Pragma Paramita are written in Ranjana.

Many sects of Buddhism had already spread to China through Central and South Asia more than 2,000 years ago, but they were overlaid by Mahayana Buddhism after Princess Bhrikuti took the sect to Tibet in the 7th century from Kathmandu Valley. The practice of inscribing Buddhist scriptures in a distinctive Nepali style have been documented from this time.





PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

riptides

At the Great Wall and other monuments, an enduring testimony that Nepal’s Ranjana alphabet spread to China with Buddhism



PHOTOS: SEWA BHATTARAI

Cultural historian Satya Mohan Joshi believes that tradition began as early as the 7th century in China after the arrival in Beijing of Priyajiv, the ambassador of King Narendra Dev. In his book on Arniko, Joshi cites a 1,400-year-old stele inscribed with the *Usnisa Vijaya Dharini Sutra* in the Xian Museum. However, Ranjana was not in the picture yet, and these scripts may have been the precursors of Ranjana. Ranjana started appearing in Buddhist monuments after the 12th century.

Ranjana alphabet was derived from the Brahmi script and originally developed in Nepal in the 11th century, which is why some say it should be called the ‘Nepali script’.

“In Nepal the Brahmi developed into the Lichhavi script and the Nepal script, which further was transformed to Ranjana,” says Devdas Manandhar, a forceful proponent for the preservation of

Ranjana. “The Nepal script was uniquely Nepali and has a very distinctive way of writing the vowel ‘ae’ which carried over to Ranjana.”

However, other scholars say the script originated in Bengal and transferred to Nepal along with other cultural heritage after Buddhism was overrun in northern India. Buddhist scholar Basanta Maharjan says that the Ranjana letters were beautified and preserved by the Newars of Kathmandu Valley, from where it travelled to Tibet, China and on to Korea and Japan.

“Tibet’s religion and philosophy were influential not just in China but in Mongolia in the north and Kashmir in the west. The version of Ranjana found in all these places is distinctly Nepali, and that is something that we can be proud of,” says Maharjan.

Nepali art and philosophy got another boost in China from Arniko, the Kathmandu architect

who travelled to Beijing in the 13th century to help Kublai Khan build temples and monuments with Buddhist symbolism, and leave a Nepali imprint in the ancient architecture of China, Korea and Japan.

Satya Mohan Joshi researched Arniko in China, and is convinced it was Arniko’s influence that helped spread the Ranjana script. The White Dagoba built by Arniko in Beijing in 1279 still stands today, and contains many distinct Ranjana inscriptions. The Cloud Platform at the Great Wall was built almost a century after Arniko reached China, and shows his influence because on top of the arch are Garuda, crocodiles, and other carved elements which look like they have been transplanted from Kathmandu.

The Ranjana script was used in a new golden stupa built in Beijing’s Patachou as recently as 1960 to house the Buddha’s tooth relic. “The prevalence of this script

is an example of the enduring influence of Arniko, and the close cultural links between Nepal and China,” says Joshi.

Arniko created the White Pagoda on Kublai Khan’s command, and it was then a symbol of the unification of China under Yuan dynasty. Today the Miaoying Temple museum in Beijing acknowledges his work as ‘a great symbol of cultural exchange between Nepal and China’. That Nepali art, architecture and the Ranjana script were so widespread in China are proof of this historical trans-Himalayan connection.

Devdas Manandhar says that Ranjana is Nepal’s gift to Asia’s culture, and is still seen from Kashmir to the Great Wall of China, and in Japan. He explains: “Since the Ranjana script was associated with the Buddhist scriptures, it is always found above doors, so that you never stepped on the holy fonts.” 🇳🇵

EVENTS



Micro Galleries

On the theme of empower, Micro Galleries exhibits art works reclaiming the unused and forgotten public spaces. Its opening is happening in three courtyards of Patan. Live music, art, art tours, projections, party lights, workshops, talks and music.

23 November- 7 December, 6pm onwards, Nagbahal Water Spout, 9803553123

Cultural Film Fest

Held countrywide, the first Nepal Cultural International Film Festival showcases full-length features, shorts, experimental films including fiction animations and documentaries on issues of women, children, youth and adults.

23-26 November, 10am onwards, Nepal Tourism Board, (01) 4912829, nctc.org.np

Nepali Musicians

A book release of Nepali Musicians by Peter J. Kathak, followed by guitar recital by Hari Maharjan.

25 November, 3:30pm onwards, British Council, Lainchaur, (01) 4237700



Shakuntalako Aunthi

A realistic play about ordinary living and simple lifestyle describing the basic human behavior. The play revolves around an amateur theater group who has to stage a play and finds similar events occurring in real life. Written by Surendra Varma and directed by Suraj Malla.

23 November- 22 December, 5pm onwards (also 1pm on Saturdays), Shilpee Theatre Nepal, Battispatali, (01) 4469621

Same Time Next Year

A Tony award winning romantic comedy play written by Bernard Slade. Two people, married to others, develop a deep emotional intimacy as they meet once a year for two dozen years.

23 November- 15 December (except Tuesdays), 5pm (on Saturdays 1:30pm as well), Kausi Theater, Teku, 9861315317

Planet Nepal 5

Aiming to minimise the overuse of plastic products, Alliance Française organises a festival incorporating panel discussions, theatre art performances, live music by Kutumba, photo contest, art exhibition, workshop, children activities, and a lot more.

24 November, 10am-6pm, Lalitpur Metropolitan Office, Pulchok, 9843067788

Lakhamari Bhoé

The well-loved Nepal Bhasa songs for children written by poet Durga Lal Shrestha have now turned into books in three different languages, with illustrations by six Nepali artists. Join in for its launch.

25 November, 11am-1:30pm, Forest Garden and Main Courtyard, Patan Museum, Patan Durbar Square, (01) 5521492



Against sexual violence

A 16-day campaign against sexual violence in public transport hopes to generate countrywide involvement to ensure safety for women travelers and others.

24 November, 2-3:30pm, Sajha Yatayat Depot, Pulchok, (01) 5552141

Contempo Indonesian Colors

Indonesian contemporary artists in Kathmandu for a collaborative art exhibition.

28 November-1 December, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, (01) 4220735

Crane conservation talk

A special talk program “Saving Buddha’s Crane: Challenges and Opportunities for Crane Conservation in the context of Lumbini and its farmlands”, with special guest Dr George Archibald, Co-founder of International Crane Foundation, USA.

25 November, 10am onwards, Local Development Training Academy Hall, Jawalakhel, 9841245514

MUSIC



Jamarko Jatra

The third folk music festival by Project Sarangi will showcase musical instruments and have live performances from ethnic groups from all over Nepal.

24 November, 1:30-7pm, Patan Museum, Patan Durbar Square, (01) 5521492

Full moon serenades

Put some moonshine on your plate, by the bonfire, with delectable cuisines and classical music strung in the background by Sarod Maestro Suresh Raj Bajracharya.

23 November, 7-10pm, Yala Mandala, Kwalkhu Road, Patan, 9818239744



The Cash Cows

The Cash Cows (UK) have come all the way from lowly busking on the streets of the world to rock the stages of major festival and now in Kathmandu. Good times guaranteed!

23 November, 8pm onwards, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamsikhel, Rs500, 9841226397

Full moon concert

A Friday night for devotional songs, Thumari by Madhusudan Khanal and Tabala colo by Achyutram Bhandari.

23 November, 4-7:30pm, Kirateshwar Sangeetashram, Pashupati area

Silence festival

Metal bands from Canada, UK, Australia, China, and Nepal coming together for the biggest metal music festival in Nepal. Cancer Bats from Canada putting the stage on fire.

24 November, 12pm onwards, Tangalwood, Naxal, Rs1,000, (01) 4428655

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 23 November

Based on a legendary character that stole from the rich to distribute to the poor, Robin Hood will grace the silver screen once again with Taron Edgerton and Jamie Foxx in the lead. This time around, in this action-thriller the war-hardened crusader Robin of Loxley is trained by commander to rob and revolt against the corrupt English Crown.

DINING



The Yard

Catch up with friends and family over a glass of wine at the restaurant with cozy patio and picnic benches. Continental and spicy local food to go with reggae music by Joint Family Internationale.

24 November, 3-7pm, The Yard by Oasis Garden Homes, Sanepa, Rs300, (01) 5532965

Happy Singh Da Dhaba

Enjoy the Ultimate Desi Dhaba experience with a rich variety of local delicacies cooked to perfection.

23 November- 7 December, 6:30-10:45pm, Rs1,950 (++) per person), Rs1,100 (++) for child below 12 years), Sundek, Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, (01) 4273999

Shangri-La Gyakok

The hotel and its resort in Pokhara are bringing out their pot first for Tibetan Hot Pot, also known as Gyakok, for this winter. Indulge in warm and nutritious bowls of stew, meat, veggies and side dishes.

23 November- 31 December, 11am-9:30pm, Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs1,999, (01) 4412999

The Chimney

Whole Roast Turkey, done the classical way with traditional stuffing, sweet potato mash, gravy and cranberry sauce, available to go. A delicious festive menu also available.

23 November- 23 December, Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, (01), 4248999 Extn: 2865



South India Food fest

Witness the best from the coastal region of India with mouth-tingling authentic specialties curated by Chef Thirumal Mohan from Marriott Whitefield Bengaluru, India.

23 November- 2 December, 6:30-10:30pm, Kava Restaurant, Fairfield by Marriott, Thamel, Rs2,199 (net per person), (01) 4217999, 9801227613

GETAWAY

Atithi Resort & Spa

Continuously on the top ten lists of hotels in Nepal by TripAdvisor, the resort is a quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities. Spend a night or two here to make it remarkable.

Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 1466760



Grand Norling Hotel's Resort

Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel which provides a spacious bedroom with adjoining bathroom, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer herds, and not to forget, the garden.

Gokarna, (01) 4910193

Meghauli Serai

Relax with fine dining and wildlife safaris in Chitwan at Taj Safari's luxurious lodge.

Chitwan National Park, 9851218500



Tranquility Spa

Nepal's largest spa company has opened its doors at Soaltee. The new outlet has Ayurvedic therapy, a well-equipped gymnasium, fitness hall for zumba, aerobics, yoga and meditation practice, swimming pool with reverse osmosis water, unisex beauty salon, and tennis clay court all under one roof.

Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, (01) 4280890/4280990, tranquilityspa.com.np

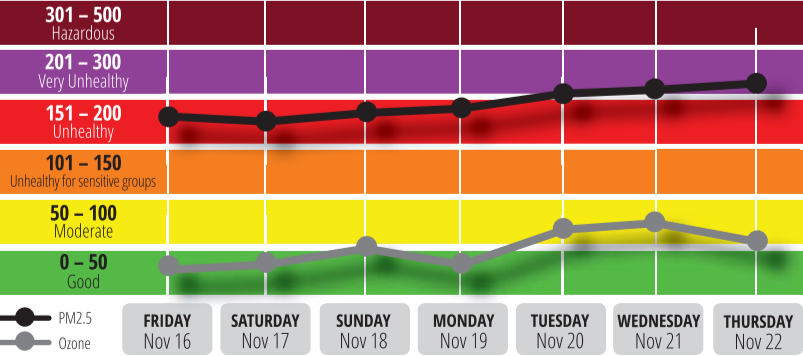
Retreat at Damaar

A retreat for contemplators and creators in an undisturbed sanctuary to enrich and enlighten your inner self.

Bethanchowk, Kavre, 9851052442

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 16 - 22 November



As expected, Kathmandu Valley's pollution combined with wind-blown pollution haze from the Indo-Gangetic plains have made the air quality the poorest so far this season. AQI has hit 200 regularly during the morning and evening peak traffic hours, but also at night because of the inversion layer. Street level ozone is also picking up because of the higher volume of motorcycle traffic. Follow live AQI updates on nepalitimes.com and on <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>



Health at home is an organization which facilitates home based health care services. Health at home service promotes health care i.e., out of hospital setting to the clients. Being the first of its kind in the whole South Asia, Health at Home is here to cater to the needs of those who desire health care facilities to be delivered at their doorsteps.

Doctor on call Visit by qualified and well experienced doctor generalist.	Nursing Care 24 hours nursing care at home by qualified and experienced professionals.
Lab on Call All kinds of lab related work by professional lab technician.	Physiotherapy on Call Physio/Electro/Acupuncture therapy by qualified and experienced physiotherapist.
Elderly Care Assistant Fine and professional care by our qualified and experienced care giver.	Travel Support for Sick Clients Travel support for sick clients are provided by professional.
Appointment Management Appointment management with required doctors in different hospitals.	Equipment Rental & Drug Supply Drug supply at your doorstep and best quality medical equipments in rent.



UNICEF

Sonia Awale

Polio eradication is one of the most ambitious public health initiatives undertaken in human history. Launched in 1988 by the World Health Organization (WHO) the campaign aimed to rid the world of the virus by 2000. But 30 years on and \$15 billion later, even though polio cases worldwide have been reduced by 99%, there are still isolated pockets of the disease. And unless every last case is removed, there will always a chance that the infection will come back.

Encouraged by the eradication of small pox, WHO launched the campaign in 1988. The organisation debated the wisdom of spending so much time and money to exterminate a disease when there were many other more pressing health concerns like malaria, TB or diarrhoea that kill many more people.

Thomas Abraham, a journalist who taught health reporting at the University of Hong Kong, has tried to answer this and other questions in his new book *Polio: The Odyssey of Eradication*. He says polio was held hostage by geopolitics, and traces the reason why countries opted for a weak vaccine against a strong virus. The author concludes that future global campaigns that zero in on just one disease must be weighed against the necessity of upgrading public health, especially in poorer countries.

In Nepal, indigenous polio was eliminated in 2000 after the country responded to WHO's eradication goal

POLIO HUNT

The historical behind the scenes saga of the nearly-successful global campaign to eradicate polio

by adding polio to its successful campaign of vaccination against other diseases. However, there were still polio cases in Nepal brought over the border from India. The last case of polio was detected in Rautahat district in 2010, and Nepal was finally declared polio free four years later.

In response to a query from *Nepali Times* this week, however, Abraham said Nepal is not out of the woods yet. "If polio re-emerges in India, particularly UP and Bihar, this would be a major challenge to Nepal," he said. "Also, if levels of routine childhood immunisation fall in Nepal there is a danger of outbreaks of vaccine derived polio, as we are seeing in a number of countries."

Even though polio has been largely removed, there are still cases in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria where vaccination campaigns have been thwarted by religious extremists. Ironically, enmity between India and Pakistan and the heavily guarded border between the two countries has minimised the risk of polio spreading via India to Nepal.

Polio derived from oral vaccines

has emerged as a new threat to the eradication campaign. By 2016, WHO deployed a combination of Inactivated Polio Virus (Salk vaccine) and bivalent oral vaccine to prevent further outbreaks.

"Routine immunisation levels need to remain high in order to maintain Nepal's polio-free status. Luckily, we have a strong disease surveillance system to detect any new polio cases," said Jhalak Sharma Gautam of the Department of Health Services.

Polio is one of the oldest diseases to afflict humans, but it wasn't until the beginning of 20th century that there were outbreaks in Europe, North America and Australia. US President Franklin D Roosevelt was paralysed by poliomyelitis, and because of this the US threw considerable political influence and funds to back polio vaccine research.

The first was the Salk vaccine that used inactivated poliovirus, and protected individuals injected with right dose, but it did not stop the transfer of the disease. The Sabin vaccine in 1961 employed a weakened poliovirus to be administered orally. It was cheaper

and easier to use and protected individuals from paralysis as well as stopped polio transmission, which eventually led to it being chosen as a tool of eradication.

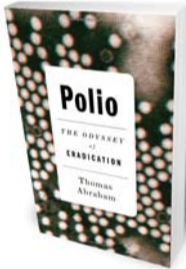
Despite its success, the Global Polio Eradication campaign has been criticised for its huge cost and for widening the gap between local health needs and global health programs. In his book, Abraham puts his experience as a foreign correspondent to good use by visiting the frontlines of the battle against polio in Pakistan, India and Nigeria. He writes about the assassinations of polio vaccinators in Pakistan and Afghanistan by the Taliban.

A considerable portion of the book deals with a long-standing debate about whether targeting a single disease for eradication should take precedence over strengthening national health systems. This resonates with WHO's own reluctance to endorse polio eradication for a long time in favour of a strong primary health care system.

This book is a recommended read for public health professionals, but it has lessons for anyone who

wants to better understand the inner workings of health systems, donor agency priorities, and what goes on behind the scenes in Geneva.

Abraham is neither an epidemiologist nor a medical practitioner, he is a journalist with over 25 years of experience covering conflict, politics and health. Maybe that is why the book reads more like a thriller with an engaging real-life account of what goes right (and what can go wrong) in the fight against a disease-causing pathogen. 🇳🇵

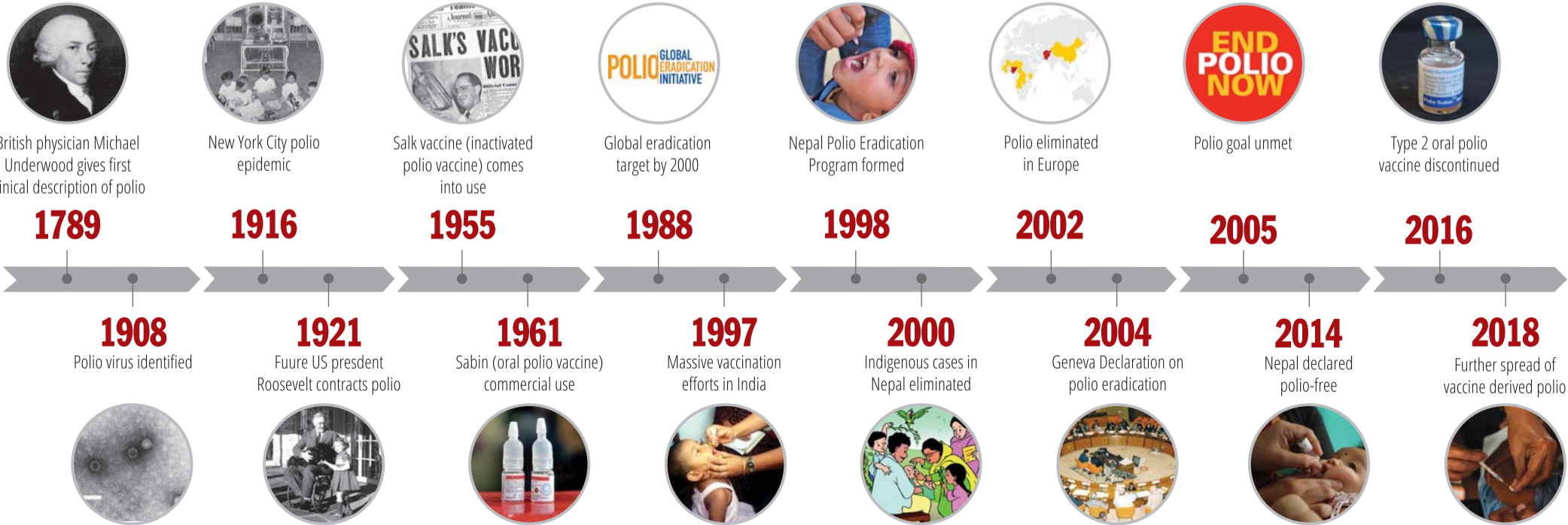


Polio: The Odyssey of Eradication by Thomas Abraham
HURST & COMPANY, LONDON, 2018
£25



Nepal saw its last polio case in Rautahat in 2010 and was declared polio-free by the WHO in 2014. But Nepal is not out of the woods yet, says Thomas Abraham, author of the new book *Polio: The Odyssey of Eradication*. Watch him explain the threat of the re-importation of the poliovirus in Nepal.

nepalitimes.com





US EMBASSY / TWITTER

MUTUAL BENEFIT: US Ambassador to Nepal Randy Berry meets Finance Minister Yuba Raj Khatriwada to review the economic partnership between the two countries in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



NAVIN BHATT

ON A HIGH: The inaugural session of the 12th Mountain Medicine World Congress in Kathmandu on Wednesday. More than 200 delegates from 30 countries are taking part.



YETI AIRLINES

WOMEN POWER: An all-female flight crew of Yeti Airlines flew an all female UN Team led by visiting Deputy Secretary General of United Nations Amina Jane Mohammed and UN Resident Coordinator Valerie Juilland on a flight last Friday.



SEWABHATTARAI

HOLY WALK: Hundreds of Muslims gathered to mark the birth of the prophet Hazrat Muhammad in Kapilbastu on Wednesday.



THAI AIRWAYS

BRIGHT AND COLOURFUL: Thai Airways provides blankets to monks at Royal Thai Monastery in Lumbini on Sunday to mark the 50th anniversary of the airlines flights on the Bangkok-Kathmandu route.

Delhi’s deadly air

Shashi Tharoor

NEW DELHI – A diplomat friend returning home after less than three years’ service in India, was asked at his exit medical examination how many packs a day he smoked. When he protested that he was a staunch non-smoker, the doctor commented that x-rays of his lungs showed otherwise. All he had done was breathe Delhi’s air, three smoggy winters in a row.

It really is that bad. When November comes, New Delhi begins to choke on a thick blanket of smog that chokes lungs, corrodes throats, and impairs visibility. It’s not just Delhi’s notorious diesel fumes from car and truck exhausts. There are also factories spewing smoke, charcoal braziers on the sidewalks, coal stoves used by roadside vendors, and agricultural stubble burned by farmers in Punjab and Haryana. Delhi had just three ‘clean air days’ in the whole of 2017. The worst air quality is in winter, when polluted air meets winter fog and is trapped.

Poor air quality is now costing India at least 1% of GDP every year in respiratory diseases, reduced productivity, and increased hospitalization, and may be reducing Indians’ lifespans by three years. According to the State of Global Air report published by the Health Effects Institute, the absolute number of ozone-related deaths in India rose by a staggering 150% from 1990 to 2015. The economic implications of deteriorating air quality are equally ominous. Welfare costs and lost labor income



due to air pollution amounts to nearly 8.5% of India’s GDP.

Moreover, a recent study revealed that India’s toxic air is also dissuading executives from accepting assignments in Delhi: people are turning down lucrative jobs in order to save their lungs. In 2015, the *New York Times*’ former South Asia correspondent, Gardiner Harris, explained that he was leaving his post prematurely because merely living in Delhi was damaging his children’s health. Harris wrote that Delhi is ‘suffering from a dire pediatric respiratory crisis in which nearly half of the city’s 4.4 million schoolchildren have irreversible lung damage from the poisonous air’. So he picked up his kids and left India.

Most Indians don’t have that choice. They must live with respirable suspended particulate matter that becomes lodged in the lungs and impairs breathing.

A study of Delhi schoolchildren between four and 17 years of age found that key indicators of respiratory health and lung function were 2-4 times worse than in schoolchildren elsewhere. And the damage was irreversible.

India needs to make improving air quality a national priority. It needs to create state and national action plans for clean air; set tough new targets for thermal power plant emissions, factory chimneys, and automobile exhausts; and establish a proper air pollution monitoring system. And it needs to act fast. Already, 13 of the world’s 20 most polluted cities and towns are in India. More than a million Indians are dying every year because of bad air.

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Shashi Tharoor, a former UN under-secretary-general and former Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, and author of *Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century*.

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Ex-guerrillas regret the war

Devendra Basnet in *Nagarik*,
22 November

नागरिक

Yogendra KC of Ramechhap was recruited into the ‘people’s war’ launched by the Maoists to overthrow feudalism and install a people’s government in Nepal. Twelve years after the war ended, he runs a footpath shop. In spite of all the political ups and downs of the past decade, it has made little difference to this former guerrilla, and he has no desire to remember the painful days of war.

“I joined because I dreamt about changing the face of the country, but the war destroyed me. Now, I just want to get on with my life from this shop,” he says. KC joined the Maoist militia in 2001, and went on to be a platoon commander.

A year previously, he was



Yogendra KC

Chitij Magar

Khem Prasad Budha Magar

working in a garment factory in Kathmandu when the security forces arrested him on the charges of being a Maoist. “I knew nothing about the Maoists but they jailed me for six months,” he recalls. After his release, he went to Dhanusha and worked as a waiter, but he had an altercation with some soldiers posted there and he became their target.

“The army kept harassing

me, and accusing me of being a Maoist even though I wasn’t. So, fearing for my own safety, I joined the Maoists,” says KC who then receiving military training, and actually led his unit in numerous battles. KC says his dreams to change the nation were dashed after the peace process. He was compelled to opt for self-retirement. “The party had agreed to integrate us into the Nepal Army based on

educational qualifications,” he says, “but ironically it was the same bourgeoisie education which we fought against that was the requirement. “

After the peace process, KC received Rs500,000 compensation and went to Dang to start a business. But after the ice-cream factory he started went bankrupt, he now sells seasonal items in his footpath shop – the main source of income for his family of four. KC now feels that joining the Maoists was a waste of time, and there are many like him who are feeling pangs of regret. Khem Prasad Budha Magar from Rolpa is another ex-guerrilla. “I took up arms to build a new nation, but am struggling now to sustain myself.” After witnessing his father’s murder by the Royal Nepal Army, Magar joined the Maoists at age 10 to seek revenge.

The child soldier grew up in the Maoist militia.

After the peace agreement, he could not be rehabilitated into the army because he was only 17 and the minimum age requirement was 18. “I was eligible to fight in wars but the Maoists declared that I was ineligible to receive rehabilitation,” says Magar, who doesn’t want to get involved in politics, preferring to work in a construction company.

Also working in construction is Chitij Magar, who was an assistant commander in the Maoist militia ever since the beginning of the conflict. “I joined because I suffered many injustices and discrimination,” recalls Magar, who could not join the Army because of lack of schooling. “There was no way I could receive education that I was fighting against,” he says.

Magar regrets joining the Maoists and says that he and his comrades were tricked by their leaders. He says: “We were just stepping stones for the big shots to climb over.”

Foreigners in Nepal’s prisons

Himal Khabarpatrika,
11-18 November

हिमाल

As many as 898 foreigners are currently serving time in Nepal’s prisons, according to the latest data released by the Department of Prison Management.

Not surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of foreign prisoners are Indians. Nepal shares a long and porous border with two of India’s poorest states with high crime rates. So it comes as no surprise when one finds out that three in every four foreign prisoners doing time in Nepal are from India.

Of the 682 Indian prisoners languishing in jails in Nepal, 41 are women. Foreigners are serving jail terms in Nepal mainly for drug peddling, kidnapping, rapes, human trafficking, murder, cheating, wildlife poaching and IT fraud. Indians outnumber other foreigners in almost every crime except visa overstay, bank fraud, counterfeit currency and child abuse.


What is interesting is that the second highest number of foreigners

in detention are from Bhutan, a tiny Himalayan kingdom with which Nepal has restrained people-to-people ties. But what could explain this is a large number of Bhutanese refugees languishing in eastern Nepal for the last three decades. Although over 100,000 refugees from Bhutan have been taken to the US, Australia, Canada and other countries, some 6,000 refugees are still in Nepal.

After nationals from Bhutan (70), Bangladesh (47) and Pakistan (21) are number three and four on the list of foreign prisoners in Nepal. Only 76 foreign prisoners are from outside these four South Asian countries. Foreign prisoners from outside the region are in single digits, except China (10), but this figure also includes Tibetans.


As many as 19 foreign prisoners are from Africa, and 15 are from Europe, including the notorious French ‘Bikini Killer’ Charles Sobharaj. There is only 1 American.

The higher number of foreign prisoners is lodged in Jagannath Deval jail in Kathmandu (108). Most of them have been slapped with jail terms of more than five years.



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HIGH ALERT

This week, Kathmandu hosts an international conference on mountain medicine


The 12th Mountain Medicine World Congress is being held in Kathmandu 21-24 November, with more than 400 delegates from over 30 countries taking part. The biennial conference is being organised by the International Society for Mountain Medicine (ISMM) together with the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) and the Mountain Medicine Society of Nepal. The Congress will continue to focus on science and research, and offer a comprehensive overview of ongoing topics of interest in mountain medicine, including emergency mountain medicine. Located in the Central Himalaya with some of the highest terrain in the world, and a popular destination for mountaineers and trekkers from all over the world, Nepal is an ideal venue for the Congress. Nepali climbers have accompanied expeditions for many decades to the world's highest mountains not just in Nepal, but all over the world. In addition, an increasing number of young Nepalis are discovering their own country, and can be found in large numbers on trekking trails that used to be frequented by foreigners.

Nepal also has a long history of research in mountain medicine starting with the Silver Hut studies in the early 1960s, one of the first to look at the effect of high altitude on the human physiology. The Sherpa people are probably the most studied, breath-analysed and blood-taken community in the world, as scientists try to find out how their bodies have evolved to high altitude living. Even today, many Himalayan expeditions have medical research components, like the study of two mountaineers who were on Mt Everest this spring, while their twins stayed at sea level. The goal was to research possible changes in their gene expression.

Local organisers of the Kathmandu conference this week are mostly young Nepali doctors of the Mountain Medicine Society of Nepal (MMSN) which is dedicated to keeping the Himalaya safe by researching and increasing awareness of mountain medicine. They will be presenting findings on altitude illness, cold, avalanche hazards, search and rescue, exposure to ultraviolet radiation, etc. The conference has offered 80 scholarships for young Nepali doctors to attend the meeting with support from Maniraj Neupane, an internal medicine intern in Pittsburgh.

The Himalayan Rescue Association has been a pioneer in mountain medicine in the Himalaya for almost 40 years, with its clinics in Pheriche and other popular trekking and mountaineering routes. Among the speakers at the conference are Peter Hackett who has done pioneering research into mountain medicine as medical director at the HRA, and David Shlim who has studied traveller's diarrhoea (*see their contributions, alongside*).

At altitude




Mt Everest
8,848m

Oxygen concentration is only one-third of that at sea level. This is called the 'Death Zone' because the body tissue starts to die.


Everest Base Camp
5,300m

If not properly acclimatised, climbers may develop pulmonary or cerebral edema.



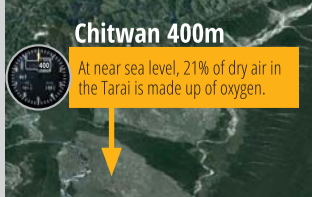
Lukla 3,000m

Flying directly to Lukla, many visitors feel headaches and dizziness. The air here has 70% of oxygen at sea level.



Kathmandu 1,200m

Some people flying directly from sea level may feel mild symptoms of altitude illness. Air here has 80% of oxygen concentration at sea level.



Chitwan 400m

At near sea level, 21% of dry air in the Tarai is made up of oxygen.

As trekkers, mountaineers and other visitors to the high mountains climb higher, they can be affected by altitude sickness especially in its life-threatening forms like high altitude cerebral edema (HACE) and high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE). The initial symptoms of acute mountain sickness (headache and nausea) are warning signs that need to be addressed by descending immediately. Not heeding the signs means the lungs start filling up with water, and excessive brain swelling at altitude or HACE may lead to psychosis, violent behaviour, and eventual death. The Himalayan range, which includes 14 peaks above 8,000m, and begins where the European Alps reach their highest point. Mt Everest and other mountains nearly jut into the stratosphere. Hypoxia that climbers feel in the Himalaya is much greater and much more medically significant than in the Alps, or other mountain ranges in the world. In his inaugural keynote to the Congress in Kathmandu on Wednesday, Peter Hackett reminded the audience that the best antidote to altitude illness is still to take the patient down while administering bottled oxygen.

How Pheriche was put on the world map for modern mountain medicine

Peter Hackett

Kathmandu is hosting the XII World Congress on Mountain Medicine 21-24 November, and the location is indeed appropriate considering that it was in the Nepal Himalaya that modern mountain medicine made great advances in altitude illness. Acute altitude illness requires two things in order to happen: 1) a person not adjusted to high altitude, and 2) going high quickly, faster than the body has time to adjust. Before the advent of modern transportation, no one could travel high enough fast enough to get into much trouble. Altitude illness is therefore mainly a problem of modern times. The largest experience with altitude illness prior to the advent of trekking in Nepal was when the Indian Army, in the Sino-Indian war of 1962, was airlifted rapidly to over 5,000m. Although foreigners started walking around Nepal in the early 1950's, larger scale trekking

Going to great



Trekkers

population until we were able to join forces with a US Army research lab in Bangkok called AFRIMS, which was the best diarrhoea lab in the world at that time. They were able to check for a wide number of bacteria and viruses that could not be detected in ordinary labs. The research demonstrated that most diarrhoea in travelers was due to bacteria, which were susceptible to a short course of antibiotics and ended the illness within 12-24 hours. It turned out that the symptoms of bacteria-caused diarrhoea were remarkably consistent: sudden onset. In contrast, the less common causes of infection, such as Giardia and amoebas, had a gradual onset of illness that was more tolerable, but slowly wore the traveler down. This insight into diarrhoea allowed us to arm trekkers with antibiotics and simple instructions on how and when to use them. The advent of what is called 'empiric self-treatment' of diarrhoea completely changed trekking in Nepal. Diarrhoea was now an inconvenience rather than a trip-ending occurrence. Within a few years, empiric self-treatment became the standard for most travelers headed anywhere in the developing world. Our focus initially was on diagnosis and treatment, and subsequent attempts to find ways to help prevent diarrhoea were not very successful. The traveler's best efforts at choosing



Solving the problem of diarrhoea among Himalayan hikers changed travel medicine around the world

David R Shlim

When I first visited Nepal in 1979, the causes of diarrhoea in travelers were not known, and there was no effective treatment available. Trekkers were stranded in the mountains when they became too sick to walk and were often abandoned in teahouses by their friends. Some had to be rescued by helicopter. Long-planned trips were ruined. Many did not come to Nepal because of their fear of falling ill. When I joined the CIWEC Clinic in Kathmandu in 1983, we discovered that we were the first clinic in the world seeing travelers at their destination. We struggled to solve the problem of travelers' diarrhoea among our patient

heights to prevent altitude illness



HRA

only began in the late 1960's. Trekkers, unaware of the risks of ascending rapidly, began to die on their treks. The number of evacuations and deaths became alarming to the fledgling trekking industry and the few agencies in operation at that time banded together to start the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) in 1973, organised by a former Peace Corps Volunteer named John Skow.

John Dickinson, who began work at the old Shanta Bhawan Hospital in Patan in 1969, became the receiving physician for severe cases of altitude illness. He and Dr Bond, the pathologist, published the first series of autopsy findings in trekkers dying from altitude illness. This work brought the world's attention to the problem of altitude illness in Nepal, a rather mysterious condition that stuck down perfectly healthy young people venturing into thin air. Dickinson became the first medical advisor to the HRA.

Under the leadership of Tek Chandra Pokharel, Mike Cheney, Dawa Norbu Sherpa and Robert Reiffel in the early 1970's, the HRA staffed an aid post in the village of Pheriche, at 4,300 m on the path to Everest (*left*).

When I first passed through Pheriche in 1974, the post was staffed by an American nurse and a famous climbing Sherpa, Tashi. Wanting to stay in Nepal, I volunteered for the next season, and many seasons after that. I became the medical director of

the HRA until 1983 when David Shlim (*see his contribution below*) became the medical director after he moved to Nepal to run the CIWEC Clinic.

In Pheriche, I conducted the first studies of altitude illness in trekkers. We ended up suggesting a schedule that included rest days on the ascent to Kala Pattar. This new schedule cut the incidence of altitude illness in half but did not completely eliminate it.

We demonstrated the value of Diamox (acetazolamide) in preventing altitude illness. A 1977 paper in the Lancet was the first large study of altitude illness in a civilian population, and put Pheriche on the world map as a center for altitude illness research.

The HRA now operates the clinic in Pheriche and a clinic in Manang, on the Annapurna trek. These clinics have been, and still remain, the best clinical experience a doctor can get in diagnosing and treating altitude illness. The HRA is currently operated by an all-Nepali board of directors with Buddha Basnyat, a former student of Dickinson's, as medical director.

Nepalis are not immune to the effects of altitude illness. Trekking guides, porters, and climbers have all suffered, and all too frequently, died of altitude illness in the course of their jobs.

Basnyat was the first to study the risk of altitude illness in Hindu pilgrims to

high altitude sites in Nepal. Just because they are Nepali and have the Himalaya in their backyard does not offer immunity to the effects of low oxygen at high altitude.

Pilgrims to events such as the Janai Purnima Festival are generally low-altitude people who ascend far too rapidly, such as from Dhunche at 1,960m to Gosainkund Lake at 4,380m, in only 48 hours instead of a safe 4 days. The HRA provides a temporary health camp at the lake for pilgrims and treats many cases of severe altitude illness, preventing deaths and difficult evacuations.

The most auspicious development in mountain medicine in Nepal is the large cadre of young Nepali physicians who are now intensely interested in high-altitude medicine. Mentored by Basnyat, these young doctors are carrying on the tradition of quality care of victims of altitude illness, research on causes and treatments, and developing systems of administering care to diverse populations.

The Nepal Himalaya and the HRA, are still a backbone of modern mountain medicine. 🇳🇵



Peter Hackett is a world renowned high altitude expert and a leading authority on altitude illness, and the effects of altitude on people in the mountains.

with the trots



KUNDA DIXIT

what foods to eat could not control the fact that most diarrhoea was transmitted by errors made in the kitchens of restaurants: mistakes in the preparation, handling, and storage of food.

Diarrhoea also proved to be seasonal, with the pre-monsoon months having double the risk compared to the rest of the year. When we later matched this with local data, it was also true for Nepali children. Although the exact reason for this seasonal increase is not known, it does coincide with the main housefly season in Nepal.

Flies lay their eggs in human stool, are attracted to food in the kitchens, so faecal bacteria on their feet contaminate the food. One of the biggest breakthroughs in Nepal is the program to eliminate stool from the open environment where it can attract flies. Dubbed Open Defecation-free Zones, the installation of water-trap toilets in these areas has greatly reduced the risk of diarrhoea to both tourists and locals.

Foreign travelers and expatriates are like Nepali children in one key respect: they are both equally susceptible to bugs that cause diarrhea. We studied expatriates who moved to Kathmandu and found out that they each had an average of 3.2 episodes of diarrhea per person in the first year. This turned out to be the exact same number of episodes that an average Nepali village child would have.

We were also able to show that

long-term expatriates gradually developed immunity to the diarrhea bugs, just as Nepali children do. Over a period of 2-5 years, the risk of getting diarrhoea, and the severity of the illness, goes way down. This is why diarrhoea is not a major problem among adult Nepalis.

Although antibiotics have greatly decreased the suffering of travelers and have helped support the tourist industry by giving visitors more confidence in traveling to Nepal, the wider availability and use of antibiotics by the general public in Nepal has resulted in more resistant bacteria. The antibiotics that treat diarrhoea have changed several times in the last 35 years.

The long-term solution to travelers' diarrhoea is to improve the hygiene in the host country, which improves the health of both locals and foreigners. Restaurant hygiene has already improved a great deal, and there is far less stool in the open. Nepal pioneered the diagnosis and treatment of travelers' diarrhoea in the world and has also demonstrated that decreasing the risk of diarrhoea among locals can also reduce the risk for foreigners.

We look forward to a time when the level of hygiene in Nepal is such that children can grow up without the constant risk of illness, and the concept of travelers' diarrhoea no longer needs to be discussed with travelers. 🇳🇵



David R Shlim MD is the former Medical Director of the CIWEC Clinic Travel Medicine Centre, and a past president of the International Society of Travel Medicine

At a time when cynics abound, national morale is sagging, and there are rumours of the Koirala clan getting together again, we need something to fill our patriotic hearts with a longing for the days of yore when Nepal was still great, our borders stretched from Sutlej to Teesta, and we were a self-sufficient nation of nettle eaters.

We may just be too lazy to count our blessings. Take the garbage and plastic on the streets: they are vibrant symbols of our hard-won freedoms, and a sign that this country is steaming ahead to a prosperous future. We are already rich enough to be a throwaway society and free to litter wherever we want, this means we are half-way to arriving at Middle Income State status ahead of schedule.

Proof that we are not a vassal state anymore is how Nepal's grabberment is so independent and sovereign, it allows roads to be in a state of disrepair for decades, and leave people free to fend for themselves. Which other country has such a laissez-faire system, allowing citizens liberty and self-determination?

No matter what anyone says, we love our country, trash and all. After all, this is the land of brave Bal Bhadra, even if he defected to Ranjit Singh's army. We are the nation of Sagarmatha, even if two-thirds of the mountain is actually in China. This is the country of the Danphe which has been

hunted nearly to extinction. We honour Asian Wild Elephants by depicting them in 1,000 rupee bank notes to show how much we value them (the cash, I mean, not the elephants.)

Buddha and Sita were borned even before Nepal became a UN member state. The Chinese would still be barbarians if Amiko hadn't taught them how to build dagobas. So, no nation should underestimate us. We are a dynamite between two boulders. No sacrifice is too great for us to safeguard our freedom to dump trash wherever we want within Nepal's sovereign territory.

The question now arises, how far does our territory go? Time is right for the Federal Government to restore Nepal to its former glory and recapture territory we lost to the British in 1816. Slight problem: if we have to go to war to get it back we might be fighting fellow-Nepalis since they also serve in the Injun Army.

A less costly military solution would be if retired Gurkha commandos captured Church Crookham and raised the crimson double triangle over the Johnny Gurkha Bar and Grill. Nepal's annexation of this bit of Britain would right a historical wrong. And it would be easy, since the town has Nepali street names, and is technically already Nepal.



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