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**AIMING HIGH:** Karma Tenzing took this photograph of the southeast ridge of Mt Everest on 15 May. Later expeditions experienced serious crowding, and 10 climbers died on the mountain in the spring 2019 climbing season.



# NATURALLY NEPAL

The country marks World Environment Day on 5 June. This year's theme is #BeatAirPollution. The message for Nepal's policy makers is to ensure that economic development and growth do not come at the cost of the destruction of our natural assets.

The debacle on Mt Everest during the spring 2019 climbing season proves the need for sustainable tourism. In this issue, two summiters and a mountaineering instructor weigh in on the debate, including how the ecology and economy are intertwined.

*Nepali Times Green Issue.*

KARMA TENZING

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

# #BeatAirPollution

The theme of World Environment Day 2019 on Wednesday 5 June is air pollution, and how to reduce it. This is not just a health issue for individuals, but one that affects the planet we live on.

Research has shown that air pollution is so bad in parts of northern India, eastern China and the Kathmandu Valley that it reduces the lifespan of people by an average of four years. Even if action is taken immediately, and greenhouse gas emissions are capped, in the best-case scenario one-third of the remaining glaciers in the Himalaya will be gone this century.

Whatever we do to stave off the climate



BIKRAM RAI

crisis will take many years (beyond the lifetimes of those living today) to show results. However, action taken today to tackle air pollution can have immediate impact. Removing suspended soot particles can even reduce melting of the ice and snow in the Himalaya. The black carbon increases glacier melting by up to 20% because dirty snow absorbs more sunlight.

But more importantly, cleaning up the air will make it safer to breathe, improve quality of life and reduce the cost burden on families and countries of medical treatment. The toxic miasma that used to blanket the Kathmandu Valley on winter mornings is now a year-round, 24-hour phenomenon.

A recent survey of 200 Kathmandu residents on their perception of pollution (page 6-7) found that every respondent felt that dirty air had impacted their lives. They were aware of where the pollution was coming from: traffic, road dust, brick kilns and open garbage burning. Respondents also knew what needed to be done: improving public transport, completing road construction on time and placing emission controls on cars and brick factories.

Residents also know that public transport and public health are linked, the survey found. Politicians sometimes acknowledge that they are aware of the seriousness of the issue. So, we know what the problem is and we know the solution. Nepal just lacks the political will and an understanding of the urgency of the emergency in order to curb air pollution. In fact, Kathmandu's dirty air is the most vivid proof available of governance failure, lack of accountability and corruption.

We thought local government elections would solve the problem because elected mayors and ward committees would be more

accountable. Alas, no such luck. Nearly two years after winning polls and assuming office, local governments have been busy feathering their own nests, making recklessly unrealistic promises and lurching from one blunder to the next.

Kathmandu Valley's five mayors came together last year for a conference organised by ICIMOD to hear from Mexico's ambassador to Nepal, Melba Pria. She gave them a checklist of how Mexico City cleaned up its air: a strategic shift to reliable public transport, control of all open burning, improving the quality of fuel, use of catalytic converters, strict vehicular emission controls and moving smokestack industries away from the city core.

The solution, therefore, has to be structural, not piecemeal. It needs vision and a plan to be responsive to the need to protect the people's health. When greed and selfishness become part of the job description of politicians, it may be unrealistic to expect the public interest to suddenly take precedence. But we do not even have the luxury of waiting to clean up our politics to clean up the air. It is the air we are breathing right now, and it cannot wait.

Elsewhere, politicians only woke up to pollution crises when they found out they were also affected. For example, when London's Thames River had turned into a sewer 100 years ago, politicians acted only because the stink made it impossible for Parliament to sit at Westminster. And it was only when elderly politicians started dying of respiratory failure caused by pollution from coal burning that British legislators finally passed the Clean Air Act.

In Kathmandu, we are already at a point where the air is so bad it could shorten the lifespan of politicians. That is when they may act, but don't bet on it. Enlightened self-interest was never a hallmark of our rulers. As Arnico Panday argues on page 9, emissions of short-lived carbon pollutants like soot particles can be tackled locally. This

will improve public health, save money by making more efficient use of energy and even reduce glacial melting.

As we see from the survey in this issue, Kathmandu's air pollution could now have an impact on land prices as people move to less polluted areas. It is already driving people out – some respondents say they may leave Kathmandu or even emigrate because of the bad air.

The national budget presented to Parliament on Wednesday is based on classical economics; it does not take into account ecosystem services, and the need to balance economic growth with environmental protection. Air pollution in Kathmandu is a representation of this skewed policy in which the government is so dependent on vehicular taxes that it has ignored public health costs.

**Nepal just lacks the political will and an understanding of the urgency of the emergency in order to curb air pollution.**



**Beat Air Pollution**

Partners:

## 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Kathmandu was rocked by bombings by a Maoist faction this week, while exactly 10 years ago Hindu extremists set off a bomb inside Assumption Church in Jawalakhel, killing three people. Our editorial in edition #453 of 29 May-4 June 2009:

*'The perpetrators of last week's fatal blast at the Assumption Church in Dhobighat were terrorists, pure and simple. No religion preaches violence. No interpretation of Hinduism can justify such brutal slaughter of innocent human beings.'*

*Nepal's Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu and other religious leaders showed unprecedented solidarity by arriving together at the church in Jawalakhel within hours of the blast. Nepal's 10-year class war is in danger of being transformed into ethno-religious violence. Not because the people want it, not because there are genuine grievances but because certain political power centres want to use religion as an excuse to foment anarchy and violence.'*

*The lack of governance and the absence of the state is often the root cause of communal, ethnic and religious violence. That is where the treatment should begin.'*



## ONLINE PACKAGES



SMOKE SCREEN

Vehicle owners in Kathmandu need to pass an annual emission test, but many just buy Green Stickers over the counter while some even have them home delivered. Visit the Department of Transportation Management at Ekanta Kuna to see how it's done. *Story on page 6.*



BINA THEENG TAMANG

Besides being a poet, Bina Theeng Tamang is also a full-time teacher at a government school, a mother, a daughter-in-law, a counsellor, a prominent member of her Tamang community in Taulung, a social worker and an entrepreneur. In this month's Lightroom Conversation, we capture the different shades of Tamang, as she recites 'Ba', a poem close to her heart. *Story: page 11.*

### CORRUPTION

Sadly if you point it out, or speak the truth you are accused of 'negativity' ('No shame', #961). So instead of being the supportive person you thought you were, you become shunned and shut out. The current efforts to quiet down the journalists makes me question, will there ever be a chance for the country to grow and improve?

Steve L Roberts

■ Everyone who genuinely wishes for a prosperous and developed Nepal has to read this report, understand it and take action to erase this systemic, viral corruption. Denial will only allow it to continue.

Alex Ferguson

### SOMALIS IN NEPAL

Very sad story (' Naples-bound Somalis find themselves in Nepal', Gopal Gartaula, #961). Cruel and selfish world. I really hope they will find some help specially for the child with renal failure. God bless.

Khadga Girel

### TOOTLE

Interesting, but I wonder if the use of motorcycles as public transport could have a bigger adverse environmental impact than when compared to using buses ('Three toots for Tootle', Sonia Awale, #961)? Isn't Kathmandu polluted and overpopulated enough?

Kamana Rai

### CHAUPADI

My heart is so heavy with stories like this still coming out ('The curse of being new mothers', Prakash Singh, #960)! These women deserve so much more! My continued prayer is that they see their value and know their worth!

Kirsti Lach

### TOURISTS AND ROADS

Tourists don't like roads ('Nepal's Grand Trek Road', Kunda Dixit, #960). Tourists don't want to walk along a road. The further you can take a tourist from a road the more valuable the experience will be.

Robert Vermont

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Starting Nepal's green school movement

by Sheelin Teo  
Surkhet has a new, community focused, eco-friendly school that could be a model for others. Kopila Valley School is employing green technologies like rammed earth, rainwater harvesting and solar cookers that replace LPG. This field reportage was our most popular last week, with readers commending the initiative. Read the full story at nepalitimes.com and get a guided tour of the school.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

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### Naples-bound Somalis find themselves in Nepal

by Gopal Gartaula  
Read this age-old story of human trafficking, this time of Somalis who were lured with the promise of Naples but ended up in Nepal. Many readers condemned this inhumane action and few questioned the legitimacy of Somali refugees in Nepal. Join the discussion online.

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## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Nepali Times brings special coverage of efforts to make mobility inclusive in Nepal. @DeupalaMonika @yuvrajstory and Prabhas Pokharel report on tetraplegic adventurer Jeeza Williams, and disabled-friendly trekking routes and hotels in Nepal.

**Wendy Werner IFC @wendywerner4**  
Everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of #Nepal, no matter their ability level. Excellent initiative! @2020visitnepal

**Anil Pokhrel @anilpokhrel**  
Nepal is making a start in inclusive adventure tourism with disabled-friendly trekking and other facilities. Tks @NepaliTimes

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
At Kopila Valley School in Surkhet, rainwater lasts all year. Solar panels generate electricity, and solar cookers are used to cook food. Sheelin Teo reports on this school employing rammed-earth technology with an eco-friendly philosophy.

**U.S. Embassy Nepal @USEmbassyNepal**  
We are proud of your amazing work Maggie Doynel! Maggie is the founder of Kopila Valley School in Surkhet, a @CNN Hero 2015, and also the Board Member of @FulbrightPrgrm Commission in #Nepal. "Starting Nepal's green school movement" @NepaliTimes

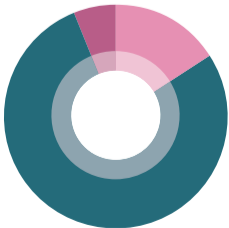
**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Kathmandu's overcrowded public buses are virtually impossible for the visually impaired and people with disabilities. A new generation of motorcycle ride-sharing apps are helping make their travel safe, convenient, and affordable. @SoniaAwale reports

**manohar budhathoki @drmanohar04**  
Will be trying #tootle motorbike rides in Kathmandu in the summer when I visit. The government must help facilitate such user friendly initiatives but it's a big ask given the power nexus between transport unions, civil servants, politicians in #nepal

Weekly Internet Poll #962

Q. Do you think Kul Man Ghising will be found to be corrupt?

Total votes: 249



Yes: 16%  
No: 78%  
Can't say: 6%

Weekly Internet Poll #963  
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you think the government issues too many climbing permits for Everest?



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# How to clean up Kathmandu’s air

We just need the political will to push solutions through

The least we expected from this new federal republic with its elected governments at three levels and numerous institutions paid for with our tax dollars, was that they would ensure we did not have to breathe toxic air. Even water is secondary to air as an essential ingredient to life.



1/2 FULL  
Anil Chitrakar

Cleaning up the capital’s air should be the number one priority of the Valley’s five municipalities, the national and provincial governments. Air pollution hurts everyone, no matter how much money you have or where in the Valley you live.

Hence, if we are to believe that the political leadership actually cares, clean fresh air in Kathmandu is possible. Not easy, but possible. That is unless some people are making so much money from bad air in the capital, and sharing the loot with their political masters, that they don’t want it cleaned up. But even those crooks themselves have to breathe the poisonous air they create.

Dust is the main culprit and hence, following the example of the people of Boudha, a small revolt will be required by the people, of the people and for the people who want clean air. The slogan has to be: ‘If Boudha can do it so can we.’ Over the last three decades, many good ideas have been successfully



BIKRAM RAI

tried to tackle air pollution, but they were never scaled up for impact.

Remember the electric trolley bus from Tripureswor to Bhaktapur, the conversion of diesel three-wheelers to electric ones, cheaper kerosene dyed blue to deter adulteration with diesel and petrol, green stickers on vehicle windshields (*see page 6*)? All these initiatives were piloted, and then just left to rot. It would take only a small push to effectively scale them up, along with monitoring to ensure no one is scamming the system.

Some readers may be aware that every time you tank up at the petrol station, you pay a pollution tax for every litre of fuel. How much has been collected in nearly 30 years, and where is it stashed?

Why not use it to invest in a fleet of electric buses connecting heritage sites, hospital and schools, where we could install electric vehicle charging stations?

Let us follow the money and not write another donor proposal. When The Kali Gandaki Hydroelectric Project was being negotiated in the 1980s, we imagined we could create an electric Light Rail Transit system around the Ring Road and use the revenue to repay the Asian Development Bank for the loan for the train and Kali Gandaki. We lost — diesel buses and motorcycle companies won. Two-wheel riders now have to put up with rain, dust, heat and choking exhaust fumes because of the government’s failure to get its priorities right.

Plants need carbon dioxide, and they sequester it as carbohydrates and cellulose. Those carbohydrates become food for animals, while the cellulose props up plant structure. Many homes in Kathmandu still have a few trees left, and their owners should get annual tax rebates for caring for them or if they plant more trees.

All open spaces, riverbanks and streets should be lined with fruit and flowering trees, financed by some of the taxes we pay. In 1997, all businesses along Darbar Marg contributed Rs5,000 to plant trees. There are still stone plaques on each tree with the names of donors. Today, Darbar Marg is a boulevard of purple mimosa. Trees, parks, rivers, ponds and wetlands are the lungs of the city

and deserve the same treatment and care.

The city needs more cycle lanes and pedestrian streets; business will actually benefit. We Nepalis are walkers — traditionally we had to walk everywhere, carrying heavy loads. We even carried cars over mountains before we had roads. People today need to be reminded that walking is OK. At least heritage sites, parks and office areas should be made vehicle-free.

Brick kilns and open garbage burning contribute nearly half of the air pollutants in the Kathmandu Valley. Both are easy to control. Brick kilns can be relocated and upgraded to burn more efficiently (which is also more economical). Mexico City stopped open burning just by imposing fines.

E-commerce and connectivity will greatly reduce the need to drive and pollute the air. This should be an integral part of cleaning Kathmandu’s skies. We pay our bills via e-Sewa now. Green Growth aggregates orders for fresh vegetables and fruits and delivers them to your home, efficiently eliminating the need for individual trips to the market. Smart Paani’s rainwater harvesting can do away with diesel tankers’ frequent trips in the city.

We all know air pollution is a problem. We all know what the solutions are. We just need the political will to push them through. 🇳🇵

**Anil Chitrakar** is the President of Siddharthinc.

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### Turkish Airlines offer

Turkish Airlines Kathmandu has introduced special fares to selected destinations in Europe (Milan, Hamburg, Paris, Munich, Frankfurt, Rome, Zurich, London). The scheme targets the Lions Club convention on 5-9 July in Milan. This special offer is valid for travel from 15 May to 30 June, and subject to availability.



Frankfurt, Rome, Zurich, London). The scheme targets the Lions Club convention on 5-9 July in Milan. This special offer is valid for travel from 15 May to 30 June, and subject to availability.

### Laxmi Bank in Province 5

Laxmi Bank inaugurated its 104<sup>th</sup> and 105<sup>th</sup> branches at Gulariya in Bardia district and Tulsipur in Dang, respectively. With the additions, the bank now has 12 branches in Province 5, which will offer a full range of retail banking services customised to meet the needs of individuals and small businesses.

### Unlimited data roaming

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### Nepal Economic Survey

Economic growth in Nepal in the fiscal year 2019/20 is predicted to be 7%, according to the Nepal Economic Survey released this week. Minister of Finance Yubaraj Khatiwada stated that growth of the country's economic, physical and social infrastructure in the year 2018/19 was satisfying and that absolute poverty declined to 18.7% of the population.



**कानून बमोजिम लिनुपर्ने इजाजत नलिई वा इजाजत पत्र नवीकरण नगराई वा इजाजत प्राप्त व्यक्तिको मृत्यु पश्चात हकवालाको नाममा नामसारी नगराई वा अन्य जुनसुकै तरिकाले नेपाल राज्यभित्र कोही कसैले अवैध हतियार र खरखजाना राखेको भए यो सूचना प्रकाशित भएको मितिले ३५ (पैंतीस) दिनभित्र नजिकको प्रहरी चौकी, जिल्ला प्रहरी कार्यालय वा नेपाली सेनाको व्यापकमा अनिवार्य रूपमा बुझाउनु हुन नेपाल सरकार (मन्त्रिपरिषद्) को मिति २०७५/११/१८ को निर्णय अनुसार यो सूचना प्रकाशित गरिएको छ ।**

यसरी हातहतियार र खरखजाना बुझाउन ल्याएमा यसअघि ती अवैध हातहतियार र खरखजाना राखेको कारणले मात्र त्यस्ता व्यक्तिलाई कुनै कानूनी कारवाही नचलाइने हुँदा तोकिएको समयभित्र अवैध हातहतियार तथा खरखजाना अनिवार्य रूपमा बुझाउनुहुन सम्बन्धित सबैमा जानकारी गराइन्छ । यदि इजाजत प्राप्त नगरी आफूसँग रहेका हातहतियार तथा खरखजाना तोकिएको अवधिभित्र स्वेच्छाले नबुझाएमा त्यस्ता व्यक्ति उपर प्रचलित कानून बमोजिम कारवाही हुने व्यहोरा समेत सूचित गरिन्छ ।



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# BAD AIR

A public perception survey among Kathmandu Valley residents conducted last year shows near unanimous agreement that pollution levels are bad and getting worse. Volunteers fanned out across the Valley asking residents about the pollution level in their neighbourhood, their commuting habits and their perspective on actions needed to improve air quality.

Carried out by Air South Asia and Clean Up Nepal, the survey results understandably show that with a few outliers, most people living inside the Ring Road found the air they breathe Bad or Very Bad. Generally, the air was considered to be cleaner the further the respondents lived from the city core. However, the perception of air pollution was worse along busy intersections outside the centre, like Chabahil, Kalanki or Koteswor.

Only along the foothills, in Mata Tirtha, Budanilkantha or Changu Narayan, did people feel the air quality was better. And there was only respondent (in Godavari) among 212 interviewed who considered air quality to be Excellent.

Asked to answer if air pollution had diminished their quality of life, 99% of respondents said it had. Asked how, most noted respiratory problems, chronic cough, sore throat, asthma attacks, lack of concentration and skin rashes, while other complained of clothes getting dirty. Interestingly, some included foul smell from nearby streams as ‘air pollution’, and said the stench was ‘unbearable’. Some said they did not take morning walks anymore, or venture into the streets during rush hour, and if they did, always wore masks.

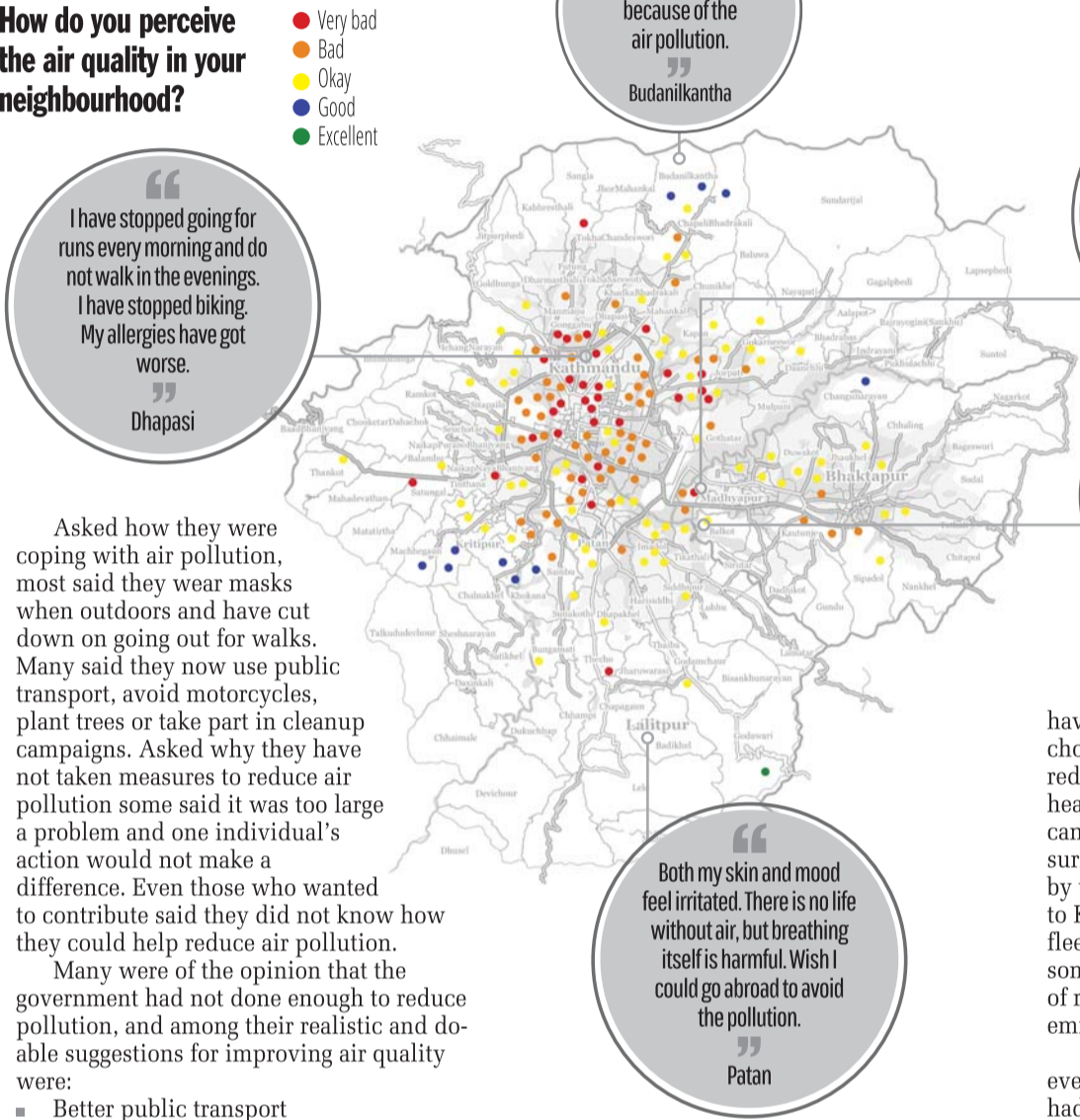
“Having fresh air to breathe is a human being’s most basic right and that right has been violated to an unimaginable extent in Kathmandu,” said one Naya Bazar respondent.

Asked what they think are the main sources of air pollution in their area, more than 90% cited road-side dust caused by widening and delayed construction, vehicle pollution and open garbage burning. (see graph) Many noted that open spaces were shrinking, trees were being cut and plastic waste was burnt openly on streets. Outside the Ring Road, many of the complaints were about brick kilns and factories emitting smoke.



MONICA DEUPALA

## How do you perceive the air quality in your neighbourhood?



Asked how they were coping with air pollution, most said they wear masks when outdoors and have cut down on going out for walks. Many said they now use public transport, avoid motorcycles, plant trees or take part in cleanup campaigns. Asked why they have not taken measures to reduce air pollution some said it was too large a problem and one individual’s action would not make a difference. Even those who wanted to contribute said they did not know how they could help reduce air pollution.

Many were of the opinion that the government had not done enough to reduce pollution, and among their realistic and do-able suggestions for improving air quality were:

- Better public transport
- Subsidy for electric vehicles
- Timely completion of road construction
- Tree planting
- Proper waste management
- Relocation of brick kilns

“If the dust from the roads is minimised, half the pollution problem will be solved,” felt one survey respondent in Maitidevi. However, when asked if they were satisfied with the government’s actions to date to

control air pollution, a majority (84%) said they were not satisfied at all, and no one (0%) said they were satisfied to a large extent. (see chart)

According to one resident of Bhaiseapati: “The government could do lots more, but it is not willing to do anything although it has plenty of funds. They should get real experts to work on this problem.”

Air pollution in Kathmandu appears to

have got so bad that it is affecting people’s choice of where to live. This could ultimately reduce land prices along areas considered heavily polluted. Kathmandu residents who can afford it have already bought farms in surrounding districts, which have been sold by villagers moving in the opposite direction to Kathmandu, or abroad. Many say they are fleeing air pollution in the Valley. Indeed, some respondents even said they are thinking of relocating outside the capital, or even emigrating because of the bad air.

Some, like this respondent in Thapathali, even noted that the family’s medical expenses had shot up because of medical treatment for respiratory ailments: “The air quality is getting worse compared to previous years. The air we breathe mainly contains particulates that are inhaled and affect our respiratory system. We are suffering from frequent headaches and eye irritation. We have to spend a lot of money on expensive medicines. If the air quality improved, we could use the money for recreational activities to improve our physical fitness and mental health.”

# GREEN STICKER = GREEN LIGHT TO POLLUTE

## Sonam Choekyi Lama

Vehicle owners in Kathmandu need to pass an annual emission test, but many just buy Green Stickers over the counter while some even have them home delivered.

Given the number of diesel buses and trucks spewing toxic black smoke in Kathmandu, it is no surprise that most drivers cheat. Lackadaisical and time-consuming inspection, corruption and the lack of political will have made a mockery of Nepal’s strict emission standards.

The 2003 standards require four-wheelers registered in 1980 or before to emit carbon monoxide (CO) less than 4.5% of total gases, or not more than 1,000 parts-per-million of hydrocarbons. Vehicles registered after 1980 cannot exceed 3% of CO. If they do, they do not get a Green Sticker. It seems straightforward, but the route to getting dirty vehicles off the road is full of twists and turns.

“There is no political will,” sums up the executive director of Sajha Yatayat, Bhusan



SONAM CHOEKYI LAMA

Tuladhar. “If there was, this system would work perfectly.”

Bypassing the system by bribing inspectors is the most common method of getting a Green Sticker. A test costs Rs50, but for Rs500 middlemen will get you a sticker without a test. It is Rs1,000 to have the sticker delivered at home.

There are artificial delays and queues

at the Department of Transportation Management at (DoTM) Ekanta Kuna to tempt time-pressed vehicle owners to fork out Rs500 for the Green Sticker.

“I don’t think keeping the vehicle in line for a week is cost-effective; why wait in a queue? It is much easier to just pay under the table,” admitted Suraj Tamang, a driver at Ekanta Kuna earlier this month.

There are just two emission monitoring centres in Kathmandu Valley for more than 400,000 four-wheelers. Up to 200 vehicles visit the DoTM every day, and some eight diesel and four petrol cars fail the test daily on average, said Yam Bahadur Chhetri at the DoTM.

If they cannot get the sticker under the table, drivers go to elaborate lengths to pass the test, adjusting the carburettor and then getting a garage to make it a smoke belcher again after they get the sticker. Traffic police rarely check if a car with a Green Sticker still has a smoky tailpipe.

But with rising awareness about air pollution in Kathmandu and the contribution of vehicular emission, many are asking why if driving under the influence (known by its Nepali acronym MaPaSe) was so easy to control, the same cannot be done for car exhausts.

“It can be like MaPaSe — some people sometimes may evade checking, but overall the system will work,” says Tuladhar, who suggests deploying police with emission testers at busy bus terminals like Ratna Park.

Tuladhar says 20% of vehicles cause more

than 50% of the pollution, so getting rid of half the pollution should be as simple as cleaning up 20% of the cars.

But the best solution would be a strategy to switch to electric public and private transport, he adds. All two-wheelers in China are already electric, like 80% of public transport in Hong Kong, and Indian cities like Ahmedabad now have full electric public transportation.



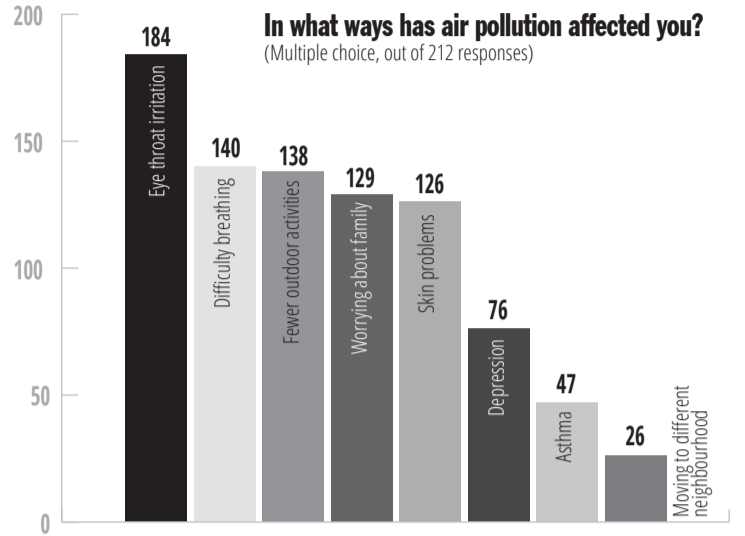
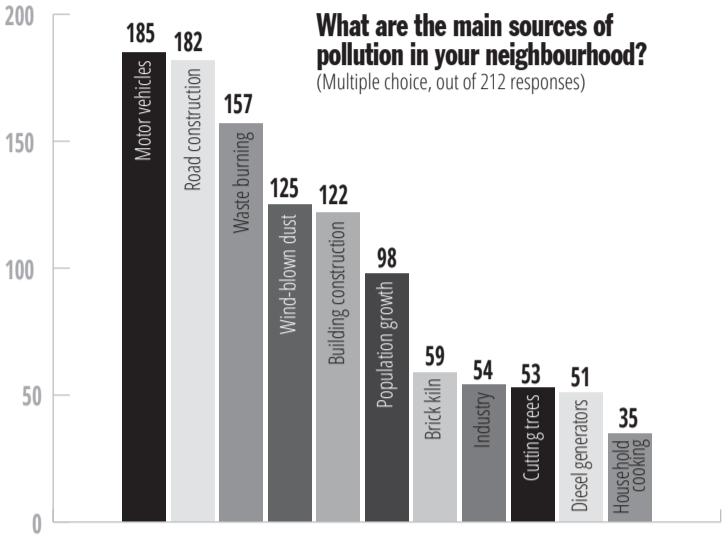
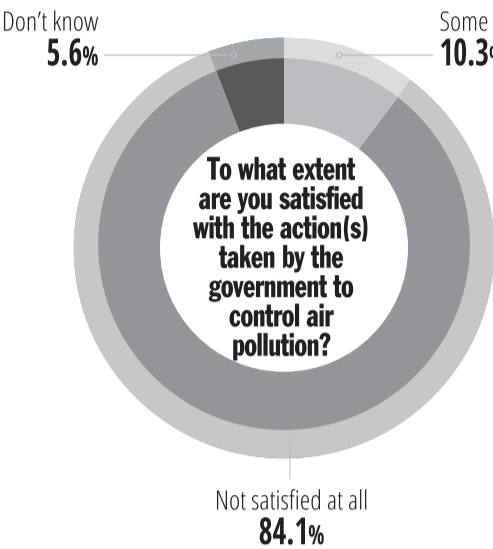
Visit the Department of Transportation Management at Ekanta Kuna to see how vehicular emissions are tested. Listen to a driver explain how he bribed staff to get a Green Sticker without having to pass the test.

# Solution to pollution

How open data can help clean up the air we breathe in Kathmandu



We are now entering the pre-monsoon season as the over-heated plains send updrafts sweeping up the mountains. Expect thunderstorms with high wind across the mountains, with brief sharp showers towards evening. Maximum temperatures in Kathmandu will go down a bit due to the cooling effect and the filtering action of sand haze in the air. Mornings will be clear with weaker sun.



**Pallavi Pant**  
and **Anobha Gurung**

Air quality across Nepal has been deteriorating over the years. The average PM2.5 (concentration of particles smaller than 2.5 microns) in Kathmandu has increased from 88 to 100 µg/m3 between 1990 and 2017. The country needs a sustained and holistic long-term approach, not stop-gap measures, to control the main pollutants from vehicular emissions, waste burning, dust from roads and construction sites, brick kilns and cooking with biomass.

The national government has taken some action for air pollution mitigation, but most sources are linked to civic and governance issues. For example, open garbage burning as a source of air pollution can only be solved through systematic changes in waste management.

Action on air pollution hinges on the availability of reliable information on trends, sources and impacts of pollution. Nepal's national government has invested in air quality monitoring and currently there are more than 15 monitors across the country, including five real-time monitors in Kathmandu Valley.

Real-time air quality data from these stations is available online but the website does not support access to historical data. The US Embassy has also set up two air quality monitoring stations in Kathmandu; its hourly results are available live on [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com), through the SafaHawa App. Daily averages for every week are also published in the print edition of *Nepali Times*, and historical data can be downloaded. Drishti, a citizen-led, low-cost monitoring network, is active in the Valley and publishes daily air quality data.

There is a growing body of scientific research on trends in air quality, sources of air pollution and possible impacts on health. Innovations are allowing access to large, open datasets, which in turn are being used to design effective policies. In line with global developments, the demand for and use of open data has grown significantly in Nepal, and organisations such as Open Knowledge Nepal are leading the charge.

In India, Urban Emissions is using government statistics available in the public domain as inputs for an air-quality forecasting project, together with satellite data and other open datasets. This is helping to raise awareness and enable cities to tackle local air pollution issues in a targeted manner. In Pakistan, availability of data on air pollution through the Pakistan Air Quality Initiative has enabled conversations around the dinner table in homes, as well as in the country's courts, leading to proactive measures to tackle air pollution.

Through a growing air quality monitoring network and other research data, Nepal is well positioned for effective action on air quality management. Credible air quality data allows advancement of critical scientific knowledge and helps design effective policies and interventions.

Access to public data on air pollution,

both air quality and energy use, urbanisation patterns and transport can help improve the understanding of patterns of air pollution and influence targeted plans. Availability of data also allows evaluation of effective action to improve air quality, helping us measure our success as well as understand gaps.

Availability of open data on air pollution

can enhance visual storytelling, ultimately leading to community-level action and innovation. Easy availability of real-time data on air pollution in Kathmandu Valley through apps and the media can enable Nepalis to stay informed about the quality of air they breathe and ultimately help make choices that can lead to cleaner air for all.

Unlike many countries facing deteriorating air quality, Nepal is a step ahead. Thanks to the successful establishment of air quality monitoring, there are now research findings about local and regional sources of pollution, seasonal patterns and possible solutions.

A good foundation of data to work with has been built; all we need to do is

collaborate and work towards solutions to improve air quality. 🇳🇵

**Pallavi Pant** is an air quality scientist and works on public engagement projects. **Anobha Gurung** is an environmental health scientist who has worked on issues related to air pollution and health in Nepal for the last 10 years.



## Weekend Brunch

**Join us every weekend for a rejuvenating time with friends and family over an indulgent brunch.**

Day : Every Saturdays and Sundays

Rate : NPR 2,699 per person inclusive of unlimited buffet brunch, swimming, complimentary drink and kids activities.  
\*Unlimited selected beverages can be availed at an additional rate of NPR 400++

Venue : The Cafe

Time : 12:30 PM - 4:00 PM

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**LIVE FOR NOW !**

# Toxic bubble

How to turn public outrage about air pollution into action

Kathmandu is the centre of everything in Nepal: power, administration, public education, tourism, hospitals. Till the late 1970s, the Valley’s built-up areas coalesced around historical settlements. After the 1990, the cities saw exponential growth, a process accelerated by war and declining agriculture in the countryside. Lack of jobs drove Nepalis first to Kathmandu and then overseas. The remittances that workers abroad sent back in turn fuelled the Valley’s real estate boom.



CLIMATE FOR CHANGE  
Ajaya Dixit

Urbanisation, unplanned growth, lack of public transport and endemic corruption have enveloped Kathmandu Valley in a smog blanket most days. Nearly 38% of this air pollution is from vehicle emissions; other sources include dust from roads, excavations, debris of demolished buildings, construction sites, brick kilns, open burning of plastic and solid wastes, inefficient hospital incinerators, rice husk/coal/wood-burning industries, crushers and mixers, asphalt plants and metal and automobile repair units.

The World Health Organization says the mean annual and 24-hour concentration of PM2.5 (particles smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter) in the air should be less than 10µg/m3 and 25µg/m3 respectively. In Kathmandu Valley, both parameters are much higher year-long, and the capital is among the top 10 most polluted cities in the world.

Air pollutants also blow in from north India, making the problem a transboundary one. Exhaust from commercial jets and short-haul aircraft contribute too, but is overlooked. Once inhaled, the fine particulates are carried via the bloodstream to our cells, where they can cause strokes, dementia, mental retardation, pulmonary disease and cancer.

The pollution is directly related to poor governance — procedural lapses, almost non-existent regulation and enforcement, and a system of national, provincial and municipal governments either incapable or too steeped in greed to deal with it.

The overall outcome has been the growth of a concrete jungle without any form, aesthetics or character, with polluted water, land and air as by-products. Not only does Kathmandu have a serious

air pollution problem, but its summer days are now urban heat islands because open spaces have been built over.

Residents of the capital know they have a problem: they breathe it every day. Politicians and bureaucrats are also aware. Yet public outrage is not translating into action. The best way to end air pollution is to begin with its source. This year, Nepal’s petroleum import bill is likely to exceed Rs220 billion, double the amount three years ago.

A year ago, the government gave a positive signal by reducing customs on the import of electric cars and buses to 10% and 1% respectively. All electric vehicles are now also exempt from annual road tax. This is not enough. Despite the tax rebate, Kathmandu has no operating electric buses because of the high upfront cost, although they bring multiple, long-term benefits: zero emissions, improved health, use of indigenous hydro energy and lower fuel import bills.

More than 500 electric cars and 1,500 electric scooters now use the Valley’s roads. About 12,000 e-rickshaws ply in Tarai towns. Electric transport, including charging stations, must be part of the urban future, with pedestrian walkways, bicycle lanes, open spaces and green belts as other key elements.

In the meantime, the government must proactively pursue low-hanging fruit, such as requiring interagency coordination to minimise roadside dust, banning the burning of plastic and solid waste, and working with households, the private sector and citizen groups to minimise air pollution. Other immediate actions should include rigorous pollution test of vehicles and fuel quality, improving the condition of roadside workshops and making brick kilns and incinerators more efficient.

These pursuits would require mapping of pollution sources, monitoring, data analysis, adaptive policies and demonstrable actions. Understanding the policies that neighbouring countries are implementing to phase out fossil-fuel vehicles is needed to avoid the risks of Nepal becoming their dumping ground.

As we take these measures, let us place images of our children in front of us, as a reminder that actions taken today will save their health and that of their children. 🇳🇵

*Ajaya Dixit is Executive Director of Kathmandu based ISET-Nepal. His monthly column, Climate for Change, deals with the impact of global warming in Nepal.*

# AIR POLLUTION DANGER THAN SMOKING

Sonia Awale

Despite public awareness and relentless media coverage, Kathmandu’s air quality has worsened in the past two years. But public outrage does not seem to translate into action to clean up the air.

A road-widening spree, earthquake destruction and delays in fixing streets dug up to replace water mains has turned the Valley into a dust bowl. There has also been a 25% increase in the number of vehicles on the roads.

The theme for World Environment Day (5 June) is #BeatAirPollution. China will be the host nation and will showcase its dramatic progress in cutting pollution.

In Nepal, 35,000 people die annually due to illnesses caused by polluted air. Average life expectancy is reduced by at least

four years in the worst-affected areas like Kathmandu Valley, Chitwan and other parts of the Tarai.

“Air pollution is a silent killer and while it is difficult to quantify its health impact, hospitalisation due to serious respiratory diseases has increased sharply in recent years,” says chest specialist Raju Pageni at HAMS Hospital in Kathmandu. “It is now causing heart attacks, kidney diseases, osteoporosis and dementia. Air pollution is more dangerous than smoking cigarettes.”

Non-smokers in Kathmandu are now suffering from diseases that you would expect to see afflicting chain smokers. And residents of the capital who smoke get a double whammy.

“Controlling tobacco in Nepal is already such a big challenge, but Kathmandu’s degrading air quality has doubled the disease burden,” says health activist Shanta Lal Mulmi.

## MASKMANDU

There are dozens of types of masks available in Kathmandu. There are cloth masks and surgical ones, some are disposable but many use replaceable filters. Prices range from Rs10 to Rs10,500. Most make various performance claims based on lab tests but factors like the mask’s fit play important roles. Take your pick, but remember the best thing is to reduce the source of pollution.



**DISPOSABLE MASKS WITH FILTER**  
■ Rs100  
■ Roughly 1-week time limit



**RESPRO MASK**  
■ N95  
■ Made in UK  
■ Price: Rs5,000-7,000, (filters Rs2,500-3,500)  
■ Suitable for running, for bikers and those with dust allergies  
■ Filter to be changed every 3-4 months



**METRO MASK**  
■ Designed in Nepal, made in China  
■ Blocks 99.9% of PM2.5 particles  
■ Price: Rs1,500 (mask), filter (Rs500 for two)  
■ Suitable for daily commuters  
■ Filter usually changed once in a month

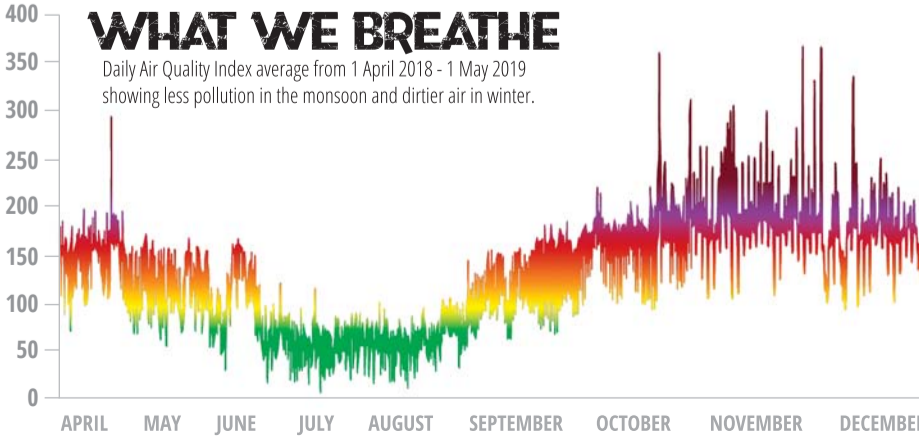


**NAROO MASK**  
■ Made in Thailand  
■ N95, 99% UV protection  
■ Price: Rs3,500-4,000  
■ Reversible mask with breathable holes but no filter



## WHAT WE BREATHE

Daily Air Quality Index average from 1 April 2018 - 1 May 2019 showing less pollution in the monsoon and dirtier air in winter.



# ON IS MORE EROUS MOKING

Ironically, World No Tobacco Day falls on 31 May, just four days ahead of Environment Day.

Because Nepal's national government and municipalities have done little to reduce risk, citizens have adopted their own methods of personal protection: wearing masks, installing air purifiers at home and office, cancelling morning walks, and monitoring air pollution levels on apps before allowing children to play outside.

There are dozens of varieties of masks available in the market, along with air purifiers that cost more than Rs130,000. But public health specialists discount their efficacy and stress that the best solution is to reduce air pollution at sources.

"A mask at best is a temporary solution and does not block harmful gases. Their effectiveness also varies depending on the work place, environment and fitting. Because indoor air pollution levels

are also high, ideally you would have to wear a mask 24 hours a day," says Pangeni.

Air pollution is also the main environmental risk factor for non-communicable diseases like cancers and lung diseases, concludes a recent report by the NCD Alliance and the Forum of International Respiratory Scientists: "The challenge is great, but the cure is straight-forward... it must be met by national, regional, local and personal responses. Collective action from many sectors is needed to assure that everyone can breathe clean air."

Indeed, a long-term solution requires policy level intervention and coordination between all branches of government.

Electrified public transport would have been a good place to start, but 6 months after Prime Minister KP Oli launched an electric mobility action plan to turn at least 20% of public vehicles into battery-operated ones by 2020,

progress has been slow.

The government slashed taxes on electric vehicles, but much of the supporting infrastructure required, like charging facilities, uninterrupted electric supply and adequate parking lots, has not even been planned.

"The first step in controlling air pollution is with electric public transport because vehicular emissions make up the majority of pollutants in Kathmandu's air," says environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar.

With neighbouring India and China committed to manufacturing only electric automobiles by 2030, Nepal will be forced to go electric. Getting prepared now will make that transition smoother.

The US government held a meeting in Kathmandu this month of its embassy staff specialising in air pollution based in 30 Asian countries. On hand was Marcia Bernicat of the US Bureau of Oceans and International Environment and Scientific Affairs. "Dealing with a problem that is transboundary in nature requires strong regional cooperation," she said. "When you can frame the problem in terms of how many people are dying and how much productivity is lost, then it becomes much more urgent."

Quantifying the socio-economic impact of air pollution on a country will be vital in raising awareness among the public as well as policy makers and leaders, but as we have seen in Nepal it does not immediately lead to policy change. 🇳🇵



ARNICO PANDAY

## One Atmosphere

When we reduce air pollution, we reduce the impact of climate change



GUEST COLUMN  
Arnico Panday

The global theme for this year's World Environment Day on 5 June is air pollution — very apt in a year that saw the release of three major reports that together clarify that the causes and solutions of air pollution and climate change are intricately interconnected.

This information helps citizens, researchers and policy makers perceive 'one atmosphere' within which short-lived climate pollutants and longer term carbon dioxide impact the air we breathe. It is within this one atmosphere also that these pollutants aggravate climate change.

The flip side of the climate action coin is that air pollution worsens our climate crisis. Black carbon, ozone and other climate-impacting pollutants contribute to additional temperature increase beyond that caused by long-lived carbon dioxide. Our glaciers are melting faster because of air pollutants. Pollutants also profoundly impact the monsoon, and several recent severe flooding events in both of Nepal's neighbouring countries have been attributed to air pollutants modifying clouds, changing how much rain fell where and when. The IPCC's Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 Degrees, released in October 2018, raises the alarm that concerted and rapid action is needed to avoid the catastrophic impacts of climate change that will occur if global average temperature increase exceeds 1.5C. This is the report that inspired Greta Thunberg and other students to go on climate strike demanding that climate emergencies be declared. As those strikes articulate, climate action must occur over the next decade or it will be too late. This will require reducing not just carbon dioxide emissions, but also short-lived climate pollutants.

The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment released in February 2019 by ICIMOD, summarises the current state of knowledge about changes, vulnerabilities and risks faced by the Himalayan region, as well as opportunities in clean energy and other sectors. High mountain areas warm faster, so even a 1.5C global average temperature increase implies a 1.8C-2.2C increase in the Himalaya, with a loss of one-third of glacier volume.

The Himalaya is often called the 'Third Pole' because it is the world's third largest store of frozen water. But that store is dwindling rapidly, which in turn impacts water and food security. The report also describes the affects of extreme air pollution on people's health, as well as on surface temperature, agriculture and the monsoon rains.

For every 100,000 people, 100-200 die from air pollution each year in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan. Out of 51 cities in the region in the WHO air quality database, 50 have air pollution levels above recommended guidelines: 12 have levels more than 10 times above the guidelines.

A third assessment report points to the solutions. Air Pollution in Asia and the Pacific: Science-Based Solutions was released by UN Environment in January 2019 and identified the 25 most promising measures to reduce both air pollution and climate change in Asia. These include:

- scaling up enforcement of vehicular emission standards and post-combustion controls in industries;
- implementing next-stage measures that are not yet major components of clean air policies, such as preventing forest fires, reducing burning of agricultural crop residue and improving brick kiln efficiency;
- setting priority goals that have benefits for the atmosphere, such as switching to clean cooking and heating, increasing power generation by renewable sources, improving public transport and reducing leakage in oil and gas production.

Implemented together by 2030, these 25 measures could allow much of Asia's population to breathe clean air, while contributing to a reduction in average global temperature increase. The three reports provide a coherent narrative of the interconnectedness of air quality and climate issues in our region and beyond, of the cost of inaction and of available solutions.

The problems and solutions of air pollution and climate change are interconnected: they are both related to human interaction with the atmosphere over a wide range of temporal and spatial scales. The challenge before us is to address these multi-sector, multi-scale issues in a coordinated manner. We can learn from others by looking at how Mexico City and Beijing have reduced their air pollution in a short time. 🇳🇵

**Arnico Panday** is ICIMOD's Senior Atmospheric Scientist and the coordinator of its Atmosphere Initiative.  
[arnico.panday@icimod.org](mailto:arnico.panday@icimod.org)

## COSTLY IS NOT BETTER

Researchers at the University of Edinburgh recently concluded that surgical masks blocked 80% of particles sized 0.007 microns. Similarly, a University of Massachusetts study found that the good old surgical mask blocked 60% of 0.03 micron particles, and over 90% of 1 micron and 2.5 micron particles. Of course, a mask's effectiveness depends on how well it fits on the face, but a simple, disposable surgical mask can be more cost-effective than those fancy looking expensive ones.



### VOGMASK

- The only washable N99 mask
- American brand made in Korea, EU certified
- Blocks particles up to 0.3 microns, has carbon filter for gases
- Price: Rs2,500 (S size), Rs3,200 (M), Rs3,500 (L and double valve)
- No filter
- Lasts 6 months when used 6 hours/day depending on pollution
- Ideal for cycling and jogging

### 3M DISPOSABLE MASKS

- N95
- Rs85-250
- Can last up to a week

### SURGICAL MASK

- Rs10
- Blocks 80% and more of PM2.5 particles
- Disposable after 2 days

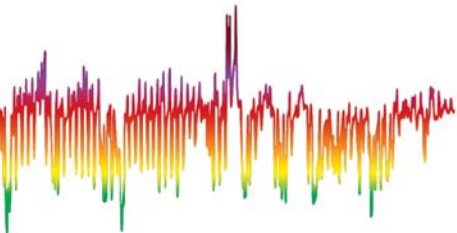
### 3M VFLEX 9105

- Disposable
- Made in USA
- N95 particulate respirator
- 95% filters aerosols also
- Rs1,000



### TOTOBOBO MASK

- N92, N96 and Pro Plus, blocks dust and PM2.5 particles up to 92%, 96% and 99.99%
- Made in Singapore
- Rs4,000 (mask), filter: Rs2,500 (N 92), Rs3,800 (N 96), Rs2,500 (Pro Plus)
- Filter should be changed in 14 days but given Kathmandu's pollution some change it even once a day
- Suitable for bikers



EVENTS



Top of the Mountain

Celebrate 100 years of the birth of Sir Edmund Hillary with a lecture, View from the Top of the Mountain, by mountaineer Billi Bierling. She will illustrate her tales about dangers and thrills on the peaks with beautiful slides of mountains. 31 May, 10:30am onwards, Rs500, Hotel Shanker, Lazimpat (01) 4410151

Paint N’ Sip

Paint while sipping a drink and make sushi at the same time! Have fun and help raise funds for a drinking water project for Shree Kotila Basic School in the Karnali region. 1 June, 12-4:30pm, Chhahari Retreat, Budhanilkantha 9808052091

Prelaunch of Danfe

Drop by for a prelaunch and fundraiser for Danfe Arts and see the works of artists exhibiting at the summer show in the UK. Danfe Arts is a touring show that aims to showcase Nepali art around the world. 2-7 June, 10 am onwards, Fire And Ice Pizzeria, Tridevi Sadak (01) 4250210



Phulchoki Hike

Go on a refreshing hike to Phulchoki this weekend with your friends and family. 1 June, 7am-5pm, Rs1,000, Phulchoki, 9803684220, 9860860734, 9861226000

Sagarmatha Next-Waste

Explore this exhibition of the works of six artists whose works are created from waste in the Kathmandu Valley. The artists were selected for the Sagarmatha Next-Waste to Art project competition. 2-5 June, 10-5pm, The Taragaon Museum, Boudha (01) 6201035



Eco food wraps

Learn how to make your own eco beeswax or soy wax food wraps and understand the aesthetics of reuse, recycle and rethinking. 31 May, 10am-1pm, Rs3,800, BLISS Pure Foods 9808732378

Dhukuti Open House

Explore an exciting range of products, from textiles and copper to ceramics and furniture, at the launch of Dhukuti’s New Product Collection 2019. 2 June, 11-4pm, Dhukuti, Kupondole (01) 5535107



Asanas Workshop

Participate in a 10-day advance asanas workshop with Yogi Kabindra. Become a proficient asana teacher. 2-12 June, 1:30-3:30pm, Yogmandu, Minbhawan 9803266533

World Cycle Day

Join a cycle rally by Nepal Cycle Association on World Cycle Day this Saturday. Help raise urban cycling agendas and support sustainable transportation. 1 June, 7-11am, Kathmandu Durbar Square 9843655442

MUSIC



Euphoric Music Fest

Enjoy good Nepali music? Drop in to the Euphoric Music Fest to hear renowned artists like Albatross, Cobweb, Sabin Rai and the Band, Rohit John Chhettri and the Band, The Act and 5 55. 1 June, 1-9pm, Bhrikuti Mandap grounds, 9803180211

ZeroMile

The electronic duo of ZeroMile will be performing this weekend. Enjoy the blend of classical/folk music with contemporary electronic melodies and rhythms. 1 June, 8pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel (01) 5528362



Pravin Collective

Pravin Collective and The Band will be playing at Moksh this Friday. Enjoy the end of the month with some tuneful music and tasty food. 31 May, 7-11pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel (01) 5528362

Shanti Thatal

Shanti Thatal will be performing in the May edition of the Paleti series, with Bimala Century Pradhan and Anjali Pradhan. Music composer and singer Thatal has more than 200 songs. 31 May-2 June, 6-8pm, Rs1,000, Nepa-Laya, Kalikasthan (01) 4439786/4412395, 9803919266

Open Mic

Celebrate different kinds of performances and cross-cultural sharing within the open community at Nexus. Featured artist is Simanta Pudasaini, a writer and rapper preparing to release his first Rap album, ‘Parda’. 4 June, 6-9pm, NexUs Culture Nepal, Patan (01) 5522393

DINING

Beer & Kabab

Savour the combination of beer and kabab with 14 different kabab varieties in a special summer menu, at discounted rates. Bawarchi, Baber Mahal Revisited (01) 4263720



Utopia

Located away from the clamour of Jawalakhel’s noisy streets, Utopia features Newari dishes as well as French, Italian and other continental cuisines. Ekantakuna, 9849592412

Buingal

A multi-cuisine restaurant and bar great for a casual get-together with relatives and friends. Vegetarian sekuwa is finger licking good! Maitidevi (01) 4421393



Chez Caroline

Tucked away free from the street noise and fumes, this is the place in Nepal to visit for authentic French and continental cuisine. The restaurant now offers catering and takeaway services too. Try their Profiteroles au Chocolat and Choux pastry filled with vanilla ice cream and hot chocolate sauce. Baber Mahal Revisited (01) 4263070/ 4264187

Friday Night BBQ

Enjoy good food and indulge in relaxing music by the Tattwo Band every Friday along with your friends and family. 7pm onwards, Rs2,500, Hotel Shangri-La, Kathmandu (01) 4412999 Ext. 7518

GETAWAY



The Famous Farm

This three-storey boutique hotel in the subtropical Middle Hills west of Kathmandu is Nuwakot’s best kept secret, along with the historical palace of the district. This little traditional house has a lot of rich cultural heritage to share. Kuwapani, Nuwakot (010) 413044

Tranquility Spa

De-stress, relax and pamper yourself to a wide range of massages at any of the spa’s nine branches in Nepal. www.tranquilityspa.com.np, 980-1076721

CG Retreat

Opened to the public eight months ago, CG Retreat was previously used as a private golf course by billionaire Binod Chaudhary. Located in an industrial park, this 9-hole course (par-64 over 18 holes) is maintained to an exceptional standard. Devchuli - 02, Nawalparasi, 9826444611, 9805442901



Godavari Village Resort

Spread over 14 lush green acres, the resort offers mountain views and traditionally-styled cottages and buildings overlooking rice fields. Godavari (01) 5560675

Soaltee Westend Premier

The new hotel stands out for its elegant architecture and interior design. It is the first hotel in Nepal be certified for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, awarded by the US Green Building Council for following strict energy-saving and eco-friendly criteria. Nepalganj (081) 551145



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OUR PICK

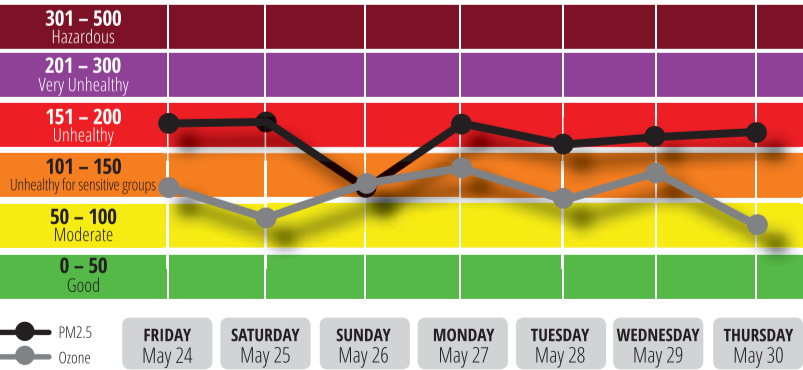


Opened in Kathmandu on 31 May

The much awaited biography of Elton John is finally being released, after almost two decades of rumours. The movie traces the life of a shy child who grows up to be a flamboyant star, and contains many fantasy scenes. Directed by Dexter Fletcher, the movie stars Taron Egerton, BryceDallas Howard and Richard Madden.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 24-30 May



The air quality in Kathmandu this week, especially for harmful particles smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter, has been consistently in the 'Unhealthy' zone. Despite a fresh breeze and passing showers, it looks like the air cannot be cleaned fast enough because of the buildup of fumes from vehicles. Added to this is the smoke from the wildfires that have been burning out of control in the western Tarai for 3 weeks. Satellite images clearly show the soot covering most of Nepal up to an altitude of 3,500m. The ozone concentration is also high, due to increased daylight hours and two-wheeler emissions. For an hourly live update on AQI go to www.nepalitimes.com https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/

# Bina Theeng Tamang: More than a *maichyang*

Born in 1980 in Hetauda, Bina Theeng Tamang writes in Nepali and Tamang. Her first collection of short stories, *Chuki* (Chuki), was published in 2012, and her collection of poems, *Raato Ghar* (Red House), featuring 32 poems in Nepali and Tamang, was published in 2015. I first heard of Bina through writer Maya Thakuri, who called her a young new exciting poet with a loud voice.



**LIGHTROOM CONVERSATION**  
Muna Gurung

But Bina is not only a poet, she is a full-time teacher at a government school, a mother, a daughter-in-law, a counsellor, an important member of her Tamang community in Taulung, a social worker and an entrepreneur.

“I got together with three other women from the community to build two tunnels full of roses and marigolds. We sell to florists all over Kathmandu,” she says. Later, when she takes me on a walk to visit these tunnels, I see how labour-intensive and time-consuming this work is.

As we prepare for the interview, it is already early evening. Bina has come back from a full day of teaching. She has prepared bowls of pasta for us and has told her mother-in-law that she will be busy for the next couple of hours. We sit in her writing room, which she tells me was hard to acquire.

In this month’s *Lightroom Conversation*, Bina and I talk about the kinds of homes that language can build and break. When asked why we need poets and writers at all, Bina says, “To choose to invest on a writer is to choose to build a good society.”

## Muna Gurung: Your family is from Hetauda?

**B:** Nuwakot, but my parents moved to Hetauda. They ran a little shop outside a high school. We never had a lot of money but as far as I can remember, I always got whatever I asked for. I was pampered. Ama was Ba’s second wife and I was their only child. I have an older brother from Ba’s first wife, but he didn’t stay with us in Hetauda. I got all the attention. When Ba went to Raxaul in India, he brought back fancy dresses and crates of sweet mangoes...

## M: It sounds like a dream.

**B:** All of it disappeared quickly in 9th grade, though. That year, my parents moved to Kathmandu but I stayed back to complete my schooling. Our shop was not doing well, so they had sold our house in Hetauda and bought a small, sunless plot of land in Balaju. Then one day, Ama called to say that she wanted to see me. When I arrived in Kathmandu, I found out that they had arranged my marriage to a Tamang boy who was my age, but only studying in 7th grade. All I remember thinking was: He is so short!

## M: This is your husband we are talking about?

**B:** Yes. He is taller than me now. (Laughs). My parents agreed to the proposal because my husband’s family said they did not want any dowry and that they would let me continue my studies. Our *swayambar* was simple: my husband’s family brought a rooster, some sel roti and alcohol, and then we exchanged rings. But I still went to school and did not live with his family. On the 5th day after SLC, I came to this house.

## M: And you have been here ever since.

**B:** Yes, I came here in 1995 when this entire place was a village. I still call Taulung a village. The people here may have fancy three-storey houses now, but their way of living, being and thinking have



SIKUMA RAI

not changed much. Back then, there were large rocks everywhere and the forest was much closer. So imagine, a freewheeling, cycle-riding girl from Hetauda is suddenly dropped in a village in Kathmandu. There were only Tamang families here and they all spoke in Tamang. My parents spoke to each other in Tamang, but I never learned it. In Hetauda, I mostly had Chettri and Bahun friends, and like them I did not eat buffalo meat and I operated in Nepali. After moving here, I woke up early in the morning and went to the forest with other women to collect firewood and fodder for the cows. I learned the language through them, the neighbourhood kids and my in-laws.

## M: And now you are one of Nepal’s few women writing in Tamang. How did the language sit on your tongue?

**B:** With a lot of discomfort. I am still told that I do not have the tone right, like I am speaking like an outsider. Writing in Tamang came a lot later, though. I joined Padma Kanya Campus after I got married, but when I gave birth to a son, I quit school. The baby was big and healthy, a full 4 kilos! When he was born, the doctors at Teaching Hospital paraded him around. They could not believe that a 17-year-old girl could give birth to a baby that big. When they saw the father, they laughed at how tiny he was. But, that baby died. He was only three months old.

## M: I am so sorry.

**B:** I was young, you know. I did not even know how to feed him. Both my breasts got infected and the milk would not come out. The baby was drinking buffalo milk. But one day, he got weaker after each feeding. By night time, he was no longer alive. Later, we discovered that the pot used to heat the milk had a thin residue of insecticide, maybe to keep the flies off.

## M: What was his name?

**B:** (Pauses) You know, I don’t even remember what we called him.

## M: Do you remember what the loss felt like?

**B:** Right after his death, I remember feeling sad. But then I got pregnant soon after. I stopped thinking about him almost instantly. I think about him sometimes, but then I remind myself that if he had lived, perhaps I would not have had the three kids I have today. I realise no matter how hard it is to raise kids, it is good to have many of them. Later in old age, even if each child were to visit one day a week, it would fill the week. I will not feel lonely.

## M: I cannot imagine being 17, having just lost a child and living in a home and language that is very far from what you know.

**B:** I knew that I could not just stay at home, so I looked for a job. A small private school nearby was looking for a teacher and an SLC graduate could qualify. But my in-laws did not want me to work –

Who will milk the cows? Who will fetch firewood? Who will feed the animals? Who will cook? I asked my mother-in-law if they would be OK with me working if I finished all the work. So, I would wake up at 4 in the morning to do all the house chores and then head to work. I was being paid Rs1,200 a month, but every rupee was worth saving my sanity. Later, when I got pregnant again and gave birth to my second daughter, I had to quit the job. I remember I was at my parents’ place when I had her. When we told my in-laws, they did not even come to see the child or send for me. A few days later, Ama put me in a cab and I went home. My in-laws were not happy. They began to pressure me to have another child right away, a son this time. They treated me like a faulty machine. You know, I was pregnant for the fourth time, but when we found out it was a daughter, we did what we had to do. A few years later, when I finally had a boy child, my in-laws began to shower me with praise. Sometimes I even felt loved by them.

## M: Did you write your way out of these dark times?

**B:** No, I did not. I only wrote when I had an argument with my husband. I began to work at Jai Bhadrakali, a government school here in Taulung and I still teach there. Being around others who had higher degrees made me want to go back to school again. So, I enrolled at a +2 college in Nepaltar, where I was teased for being a tourist, juggling housework, children and teaching. I barely had time to attend classes, so I made brief appearances. But somehow, I passed and then I went to Budhanilkantha College. It was there that I started writing. The first time was for a writing competition. I did not know how to make a story, or what it means to have characters or conflict, but I had just heard news about a bus crash and I wanted to write about it. Apparently, the bus was carrying a groom and his side of the family. They were on their way to pick up the bride. I wrote the story from the bride’s point of view.

## M: And?

**B:** I won the first prize, which was a notebook and a pen. It felt like a sign that I should write more. Then came social media — I saw people writing and sharing poems on Facebook. I began to write a few poems myself, and whatever I wrote, I got positive comments from my online friends. It was through one of these friends that I was referred to Majheri Dot Com. With the encouragement of writers like Tibbet Darlami and Ramesh Kandel, Chuki came to life.

## M: On the cover of that book, your name appears as Sunagava.

**B:** I don’t use that name anymore. I found out that orchids have to depend on something external, like a tree bark or moss, to grow. As a writer, I did not like that metaphor. But I was naïve at the time of acquiring this pseudonym. I thought it was cool. But I was just clueless. When I was writing the

stories that appeared in Chuki, I had no idea about how a story should be written, what it should entail or how characters should be developed. Nowadays, when people say they have read my first collection, I always cringe. Those are not the best stories. I wish I could rewrite the first story, because I did not do justice to the main character, Chuki.

## M: How would you rewrite it?

**B:** I would make Chuki marry that man. (Laughs) She deserves to be happy. But when I was writing that story, I thought that women needed to be able to sacrifice their happiness for others, especially her children. Such garbage.

## M: Your collection of poems, *Rato Ghar*, is the first collection I have read that is written both in Nepali and Tamang. Even the poems in the Nepali section of the book feel, for lack of a better word, Tamang. I have always felt somehow uninvited by the Nepali language, because my parents spoke ‘impure Nepali’ and growing up I was always ashamed of their ‘Gurung tone’, and my own, too.

**B:** You know, Ba brought my older brother from Nuwakot to Hetauda with hopes of sending him to a better school. But jojo didn’t speak Nepali and he struggled a lot. After a year, he went back to the village. Being a teacher today, I finally understand that he was being bullied every day for speaking in his ‘Tamang tone’. Jojo spoke with an a-kaar, so all his a’s were emphasised. For instance, ghar became ghaar. At my school today, even teachers laugh at the Tamang students who speak a ‘funny Nepali’, or they look down upon them and say, ‘They don’t know how to speak Nepali’.

## M: And the naming of your characters. To name is to create and assign power. I especially love the name Shyangmhendo. What a heroine.

**B:** It was completely intentional and political on my part. If we write about many Shyangmhendos, and many fathers who are called apas, and brothers who are jojos, maybe in 10 years’ time our society’s imagination will stretch and grow? How many stories of the same Ram, the same Sita, can we read anyway? In an event at Dang, a man from the audience said that it was unjust of me to use Tamang words in my Nepali poems because how was he supposed to understand anything? I got a little annoyed and I said to him it was never unjust when we had to read all the Sanskrit, all the difficult words in Nepali, flipping through pages of the dictionary to understand a single sentence. But now that some of us are using a Tamang word here, another there, you’re feeling agitated? (Laughs). The thing is, people in the room clapped, so we know this change is desired, is needed.

## M: I love that you do not seek permission. How did you learn that it was more than OK to drop Tamang words as you write in Nepali?

**B:** I had seen another Tamang writer, Phulman Bal, do this in his work. His book was called *Mahabharatki Maichyang* (The Maichyang of Mahabharat). Those two words could not be more polar. Here is Mahabharat, a Sanskrit epic, and then here comes a fiery unmarried Tamang girl, our maichyang. Outside of the Tamang community, I had seen Kiranti writers, such as my friends Swopnil Smriti and Chandrabir Tumbapo, write fearlessly using their languages in Nepali. These people had created a setting, and it made it easier for me to enter.

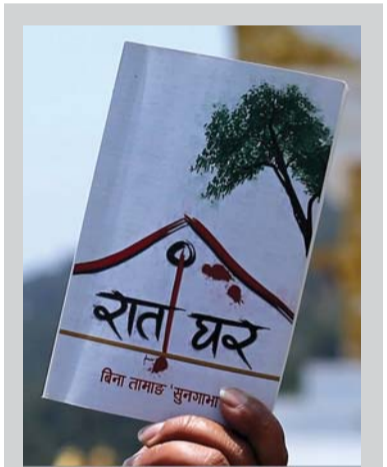
## M: Do you write fluently in both the languages now?

**B:** Nepali is my mother tongue. I think and write in Nepali, and then I translate it into Tamang. My Tamang is still shaky, and I will be the first to admit. When I look through the Tamang section of *Rato Ghar*, I cringe. My Tamang readers tell me that I could have done a better job, and I agree.

## M: If Nepali is home, what is Tamang to you?

**B:** My tongue does not know Tamang but it is set in my bones. It is also the language that established me as a writer. I was writing in Nepali but my circle was small and I was not getting much notice. Once I started writing in Tamang and got published in a monthly journal called *Tamang Daihang*, I was seen. Although my Tamang was not perfect, the Tamang community turned me into the writer I am today. The language lifted me.

*Lightroom Conversation is a monthly page in Nepali Times on interesting figures in Nepal’s literary scene. Muna Gurung is a writer, educator and translator based in Kathmandu. For more of her work, visit munagurung.com.*



**Smoke and Ama**  
Translated by Muna Gurung

Sunmaya,  
Do you know something?

It is hard to light the stove in our house.  
But when the flames come on,  
I see smoke  
and Ama, who like Shakira,  
break dance

Sometimes over the thin cow’s full udders  
sometimes in the fields above our house  
sometimes at our own door,  
Ama moves her hands –  
saryaksuruksaryaksuruk  
like an artist

I feel like my mother is taking part in some  
reality show. But  
the judges are rude.  
They are shutting their eyes, closing their  
ears,  
and making loud noises.

That is why  
she is kicked out each time  
from this reality show of life

But even then –  
Ama still dances in the smoke  
that rises from a stove  
so hard to light.



Besides writing poetry, Bina Theeng Tamang is also a teacher, mother, daughter-in-law, counselor, social worker and entrepreneur. In this month’s *Lightroom Conversation* multimedia, we capture the other sides of the writer as she recites a poem close to her heart. [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

# YETI AIRLINES' JOURNEY TO CARBON NEUTRALITY

## MEASURE

Using GHG inventory tool, the calculated carbon emission was 19,665 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e. Our aircraft operations were responsible for nearly 19,648 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions, with our vehicle and facility operations producing only 17 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e.

OUR MAIN EMISSION SOURCES

AIRCRAFT

VEHICLES

FACILITIES

TOTAL FOOTPRINT IN 2018

19,665 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e

- THIS IS EQUIVALENT TO PLANTING -

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TO GROW OVER 10 YEARS

## REDUCE

From 2017, we reduced our emissions through fleet upgrades and reduced fuel use. In future, we will initiate to reduce emissions from our main source of emissions, i.e. aircraft operations and build private-public partnerships to make greater impact together as per the Government of Nepal in the 2013 Action Plan on CO<sub>2</sub> Emission Reduction.

OUR STRATEGY FOR REDUCING EMISSIONS

FLEET & EQUIPMENT UPGRADES

MORE EFFICIENT FLIGHT OPERATIONS

STREAMLINED GROUND PROCEDURES

IMPROVED AIRPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

PUBLIC AWARENESS & STAFF TRAINING

## OFFSET

We have embarked journey of carbon neutrality by purchasing certified emission reduction equivalent to 2018 emission through UNFCCC Carbon Neutral Now platform.

As an airline industry highly depend on fossil fuels, we seek to offset any unavoidable emissions through feasible technological replacements and carefully selected projects from credible and certified sources.

CREDIBLE & CERTIFIED (CERs)

We source carbon credits from UNFCCC - certified Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) Projects

OFFERS SDG CO-BENEFITS

We support projects that offer win-win situations by contributing to broader SDGs in Nepal.

## REPORT

Based on the baseline set by GHG inventory, we ensure transparent and detailed reporting, inform strategic and technical decision-making, and raise ambition since 2018 and in the years to come to contribute further to achieve broader sustainable development goals.

REPORT

MEASURE

REDUCE

OFFSET

CLIMATE NEUTRALITY

(tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e)

Year	Total	gram CO <sub>2</sub> e Per kilometre
2016	14580	171
2017	18113	159
2018	19648	127

Comparison of carbon emission per kilometre

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**CASHING IN:** Finance minister Yubaraj Khatri unveils the national budget for the coming fiscal year at Parliament on Wednesday.

**BARONESS IN TOWN:** Elizabeth Grace Sugg, British Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development, interacts with people in Surkhet during a visit for UKAid.

**REMOTE VISIT:** Former Prime Minister of New Zealand Helen Clark meets a women's group in Khumbu this week, gathering information about agriculture, education, and tourism.

**JUMPING JACK:** A lakhe dance performed at Tundikhel, Kathmandu on Wednesday to mark Republic Day.

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# Crowd-funding from Mt Everest

Ivān G Somlai

If a 22-seater Twin Otter flying an expedition from Kathmandu to Lukla packed in 60 passengers so as to make a bit of extra cash, the risks would be frightening. Some might even refuse to board, and demand refunds.

Fortunately aviation rules are strictly enforced, but no such regulations to limit climbing permits seem to exist for Mt Everest. Hence the monstrous traffic jam we witnessed this week on the summit ridge.

The Nepal government collects \$11,000 in permit fees from every climber, and jobs are created. But there is a fundamental lack of understanding of the nature of mountaineering. When there are more people climbing the highest mountain in the world than the multitude of easier to reach lower peaks does this mean it is simply easier to climb Mt Everest? Or is it that more people can afford it? Have physical and mental competencies increased? Is there a scheduling problem? Can anyone imagine the crisis if so many climbers were trapped by bad weather at high altitude?

No one administering the permits seems to take into account what it is like to desperately try to descend while hundreds are climbing in the opposite direction. The potential for fatalities is mind-boggling.

## The Nepal government has a fundamental lack of understanding of the nature of mountaineering

It is one thing to be permitted to climb — and climbers have to know and understand the risks of altitude, weather, equipment, physical and mental exhaustion — but it is quite another to get a permit for an adventure wherein regardless of one’s preparation, aptitude, skill and knowledge, the whole affair could be kyboshed because of the unexpectedly high number of simultaneously permitted groups. By allowing so many expeditions to be on the mountain at the same time, the government puts the entire mountaineering sector at risk.

Disgruntled permit holders have reported being unable to get near the summit, even though ability and all other factors would allow them to do so. The health and safety of all those caught in such traffic jams is seriously jeopardised, and there is considerably heightened risk for Nepali support staff. Over-crowding also results in increased environmental damage to the mountain area.



Higher charges and a limit on numbers is one way to operate, especially on the death zone of Mt Everest. But changing the current system from no limits to a predetermined maximum would be, in and of itself, insufficient without official checks. Unanticipated and unregulated rush hour at extremely high altitude is playing Russian roulette. If capping leads

to better control of crowding, then it should definitely be used as one of the methods, along with practical scheduling and limits to overlapping.

It is time (indeed it has been time since the 1970s) to seriously review and analyse, as well as update and upgrade, all related regulations. The goal should be to develop a workable, sustainable, monitoring and enforcement system to ensure the long-term viability of mountaineering, trekking and the environment.

Territoriality must not creep into the relationship — there ought to be a standing advisory committee for mountaineering, which would schedule climbs, establish rules and monitor implementation.

Especially when we are considering the participation of tourists from around the world, with the potential for international repercussions, it behoves the Nepal government to establish a committee to provide an organised forum for discussion with key stakeholders on emerging technical and process issues in mountaineering. 🇳🇵



Ivān G Somlai is the Director of Ethnobureaucratic in Canada, has been associated with the Himalayan Rescue Association, and served as an instructor for the Nepal Mountaineering Association.

# Most days it’s not so



Even as the photograph by Nirmal Purja Magar (*see page 12*) of the traffic jam on Mt Everest went viral globally with damning stories of overcrowding on the world’s highest mountain, other Nepali climbers have posted photographs that show just the opposite.

Among them is Karma Tenzing, a teacher educated in New York who has returned to Nepal to set up his own school and who summited Mt Everest on 15 May.

“The photograph of the traffic jam went viral, with every media in the world using it, and I felt it misrepresented and exaggerated what was happening on the mountain,” Tenzing told *Nepali Times* after returning to Kathmandu this week. “It is a once or twice a year phenomenon that has been portrayed around the world as an every-day event at the summit.”

Tenzing said he was prompted to post his own photographs showing a relatively deserted Hillary Step on the southeast ridge of Mt Everest.

“I had the mountain to myself and spent an hour on top,” he added.

Karma Tenzing posted this on Twitter on 24 May:



Weird seeing non-mountaineers voice opinions about the rush to summit of #Everest. No, don't cap the number of climbers! These are “real” climbers who’ve paid their dues & are qualified & remain. With only 3-4 clear window days to summit, this will happen every darn year. I feel you should voice yourself only if you’ve been in the mountains and climbed the deadly Khumbu Icefall trying to avoid any killer falling ice, climbed to Camp 3 with brute *jumar* strength, pulling yourself up for hours and hours and then

to Camp 4 where the air has hardly any oxygen. Finally making it to the summit dead tired after 12 hours of intense climbing (with 3 days of no sleep & non-stop walking) only chocolate bars for nutrition. After that, making it down to Base Camp walking for 2 days calculating every step in case you slip & fall. Only then, I'll hear your opinion. PS: Even with very little climbers on the 15th and 16th, folks perished in Camp 4 and above. In the end, the climb to the summit aint a catwalk or easy as in photos. #Stupidity

Tenzing admits that with 300-plus climbers and their guides on the mountain and only a three day weather window this spring, it was inevitable that there would be a crowd on top. But he stressed this is not a regular happening. Tenzing said it would be a bad idea to cap climbing permits, and suggests other methods to regulate climbing so it is more orderly.

After the news of overcrowding continued to go viral and the mainstream media started picking it up, Tenzing could not bear it any longer and tweeted again on 28 May:

# Nirmal Purja on his viral Everest

Nirmal Purja Magar of Myagdi is attempting to set a record by climbing all 14 mountains above 8,000m in 7 months. To date, he summited Annapurna I (23 April), Dhaulagiri (12 May) Kanchenjunga (16 May) both Everest and Lhotse (23 May) and Makalu (25 May). Climbing the 6 peaks within 31 days is itself a record.

Magar, 35, joined the British Army Special Forces in 2003, the first Gurkha to do so. But climbing mountains was more important to him than a well-paying job. So

he quit on March 2019 to begin the climbs, which he is doing for the charity Project Possible.

Magar’s photo of the ‘traffic jam’ on Mt Everest on May 25 went viral, with many prominent international media using the image without credit. On Twitter, Magar expressed outrage over the unauthorised use of the photo, claiming he risked his life to get take it. He was disappointed that agencies used the photo without credit or payment at a time when his project needs funding.

*Nepali Times* talked to Magar as

he descended from Mt Everest and before leaving for Pakistan.

NT: What is your objective in climbing 14 mountains above 8,000m in 7 months?

I want to show human capacity, I am not climbing to set any records. My competition is only with myself. I was born in a small village in Myagdi. I want to prove that no matter what your background, you can do things considered impossible if you have the right thinking.

My second objective is to raise awareness of the impacts of climate



# crowded on Mt Everest



ALL PHOTOS: KARMA TENZING



#Everest unfairly trashed via viral image of “traffic jam” on May 22, 2019. Below are REAL photos of my climb to #Summit on May 15. Devoid of jams & I spent an HOUR at summit. With only a 3-4 day weather window & ~300 #EverestSummiteer annually, jams will exist. Spread the truth!

## photo

change. In 2014, me and my team had melted the snow at Ama Dablam base camp to cook food. Last year there was no snow there. Thirdly, I want to help promote tourism in Nepal, contribute to the success of Visit Nepal year 2020, and be engaged in social work. NT: It is a very ambitious task. In 2017, I did not feel tired even after I climbed Everest, Makalu and Lhotse in 5 days. I ended up walking for 18 hours after the helicopter could not come to Makalu base camp due to bad weather. That was when I thought

that I could do something more on the mountains for charity. NT: Why Project Possible? I wanted to show that anything is possible with positive thoughts and proper management. My life experiences have also taught me that anything is possible with patience and determination. NT: What kind of reactions have you been getting to the campaign? Even respected mountaineers have told me that it is not possible to scale 14 mountains in 7 months. But I have now done six in 31 days. When we started climbing

Annapurna, we had doubts. But then it got easier. NT: Your photo of the traffic jam on Everest led to negative comments about climbing management in Nepal. Yes, the traffic jam happened because all climbers wanted to get to the top at the same time. The crowd must be managed. For example, we climbed Annapurna in April. Maybe the Everest climbing season can be opened up earlier too. Nature is for everyone, and climbing mountains shouldn’t be reserved for the rich. 🇳🇵



DAMIEN FRANCOIS

## Because we are there

Damien Francois

Somehow I knew I would be back to try to climb Mt Everest this spring for my fifth attempt. I was at Base Camp on 18 April 2014 when an avalanche from the West Shoulder killed 16 high-altitude workers on the Khumbu Icefall. The next year I was sitting again at Base Camp, at 11:56 on 25 April 2015, when the Khumbu Glacier groaned and heaved below me. That time the sound was not from beneath, but above. The earthquake broke off a piece of Mt Pumori, which fell on Base Camp. The wave of snow and ice killed 16 Nepali porters and guides and two foreigners. Both years, expeditions were called off. I returned in 2017 but had to turn back due to bad weather. Then in 2018, incredibly, it was too hot to climb as the reflected sunlight turned the Western Cwm into a parabolic mirror. We passed a dead Russian climber at Camp 3 and tried to rescue a Nepali guide, but it was too late. I knew that if I did not do it this time, I would never come back to Mt Everest. This year, I had a good feeling right from the start, as we improved our speed during rotations. However, we were worried right from Base Camp that although the numbers of climbers was more or less equal to previous years, everyone was moving up at the same time to make it in time for the same weather window.

Ultimately, the responsibility for survival lies with the climbers themselves

There were queues on the icefall, and you could see hundreds of headlamps lighting up the ice blocks above and below us. More than 300 climbers, with their high altitude guides, all seemed to be moving up together as the weather, which had been unstable, suddenly cleared.

We started the final ascent at 9:30PM and I managed to keep speed as night gave way to dawn over the blanket of clouds covering Tibet. Reaching the South Summit, I looked at the bumper-to-bumper traffic ahead on the summit ridge and told my partner: “Safety first. This is dangerous, we should head back.”

It looked horrific: people were going up and coming down at the same time along the same rope, along a knife-edge ridge, clipping and unclipping as they passed each other. I waited for our expedition leader Jamling Bhote for about 30 minutes, and seeing the rush had eased a bit we decided to give it a go.

We climbed over the Hillary Step, and after another 30 minutes we were on the summit with two dozen or so other climbers. There was some euphoria but no wild rejoicing. I was just stunned to be there, with no possible higher point to reach. It was an enormous pleasure to take in the landscape — the Rongbuk Glacier below us, Mt Makalu in the distance.

To the west, I spotted the saddle on Ganesh, where I had once set foot, and beyond it the familiar shape of Manaslu. Incredibly, we were looking at mountains nearly 400km away, right across Nepal. Heading down we came across a dead American climber at the Hillary Step, who we heard later had suffered a heart attack. He was alone, a backpack covering his face. My goggles were frozen over, and I nearly tread on him as I slipped and injured myself when my crampons hit rock.

It is hard to say if the deaths this year were due to the long waits above 8,000m. There are complex factors at work. For example, a Sherpa who fell on the Lhotse Face apparently had an epileptic attack just as he was changing his safety.

The problem this year was not so much the overcrowding but inexperienced Indian and Chinese climbers holding everyone up. Many of them were on short ropes literally being dragged by their Nepali guides, even on semi-flat glacier sections. I saw an Indian client being slapped by a guide at the South Col. Another Indian man was collapsing one hour into the Khumbu Icefall. In stark contrast, members of the Indian Army team were skilled and extremely strong.

Everyone who is on Mt Everest has made a conscious decision to be there. It is their choice. It becomes problematic when people do not do the right thing on the mountain, which ends up costing someone else’s life.

Mountaineering is dangerous; you cannot make it 100% safe. We just try to move through a dangerous environment as safely as possible. Simple exhaustion is the number one cause of death up there. Fitness is a key element, but even the fit will die. Waiting at altitude can be a problem — that is why you need a reputable team that does not scrimp on oxygen. Everest is not easy. The Icefall and the Lhotse Face involve technical climbing at altitude.

The Nepal government must work with mountaineering companies to ensure climbers have the requisite skill to be there. Certificates won’t work because they can be bought. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with the climbers themselves.

Nisha Bhote of Everrequest Expeditions, who climbed with us, put it best: “To be on top was like a dream. But I also saw how easily it can become a nightmare.” 🇳🇵

*Damien Francois is a climber and author of The Holy Mountains of Nepal. This was his 19th expedition in the Nepal Himalaya.*



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# Future of Mt Everest

Since it doesn't have anything better to do, GONe has gone and sent an expedition to find out exactly how high Mt Everest is, despite our strong protests. Why did our grapplement have to be such a smart ass, anyways? What if the bastard is indeed knocked off, and Everest is shorter than previously thought? Imagine what that would do to our national morale, our territorial integrity and our gastroenterology as a nation if Chomolungma is no longer the Goddess Mother of the Earth, but only an Aunt?

Nepal may as well commit national hara-kiri if Mt Everest is no longer the highest peak in the world. It is an unthinkable, nightmarish scenario. For one thing, what will become of all the products that are named Everest this or Everest that? Everest Bank will have to change its slogan to 'Our Interest Rates Are Second Highest'. Everest Hotel will no longer be 'Nepal's Top Hotel'. Nepal Tourism Board may have to alter all its posters to say 'Nepal: The Land of Everest. We Were Greatest Once.' And 8848 Vodka will have to alter its bottle labels to 8488.

Expedition members are now back busily crunching numbers, and will announce their findings in the next fiscal year. This leaves us enough time to cook the data, or if need be, allocate a few arabs and corrodes to ensure that the mountain maintains its stature as the highest on the planet in order to protect our fragile national ego.

It is in our ultra-nationalist interest to come up with a cunning plan to retain Everest's stature. There are now so many climbers who want to get to the top that GONe should make it mandatory for every climber not just to pay \$11,000 each in royalty, but to carry 20kg of rocks from Base Camp and deposit it at the top. If my calculations serve me right, this year alone we could have added another 12m to the summit height if all climbers and guides did their bit. For this we can elicit the help of expeditions from the Chinese side, since their reputation would also be tarnished if Everest is found to have shrunk.

GONe should issue permits to double the number of permits, and instead of bringing down trash from the mountain as currently stipulated, climbers would have to take all the oxygen cylinders and uneaten noodle packs, and deposit them at the summit.

If we do that, my back of the envelope math shows Everest's height will cross 9,000m above mean sea level by 2025. This means the mountain will be even more popular, and to handle the bigger numbers of climbers, GONe may have to install a funicular up the Icefall, moving walkways across the Western Cwm, a cable car to the South Col, and an escalator from there to the View Tower Restaurant & Bar at the summit.



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