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MUSTN'T BLAME EVERYTHING ON CLIMATE CHANGE

There is a tendency on the part of governments to blame everything on climate change. It lets them off the hook. In Nepal, a politician once even said Kathmandu’s garbage problem was caused by global warming.

Many of Nepal’s chronic crises, like food insecurity, under-development, inequality and poor governance, pre-date the climate emergency. Government neglect, apathy and the failure of past authoritarian and democratically-elected leaders to address these structural problems are why Nepal is in the state it is in today.

The climate emergency is just the latest crisis to hit Nepal, making all our pre-existing problems worse. Climate change crowds out the other crises because it is treated as a standalone problem.

Many of the measures the government

says it plans to take in response to the global climate crisis should be carried out anyway, regardless of whether the earth is warming or not. For example, we should switch from a fossil fuel-based economy to renewable energy, we must promote solar and take local adaptation measures because our economy demands the efficiency — not only because Greenland is thawing.

Let’s face it: what we do or do not do in Nepal is not going to save the planet. With an annual carbon footprint of 0.12 tons per capita (Qatar’s footprint is 40 tons) Nepal’s contribution to atmospheric carbon is negligible.

But, for the past three years, Nepal has imported Rs20 billion worth of electricity annually from India, generated by coal-fired thermal plants in Bihar, doubling the average Nepali’s carbon footprint.

This is on top of the Rs100 billion worth of diesel, LPG and petrol that Nepal will import from India this fiscal year. The growth in Nepal’s petroleum use is the fastest among South Asia countries, and has more than doubled in the last two years. Since it is all imported, this has increased our trade imbalance with India.

Yes, there is a need to address historical emissions by industrialised nations that have brought about global heating, and Nepal’s demand in international fora for resources for climate adaptation is fair. But India, China and Indonesia now exceed the total carbon emissions in Europe and North America combined. The Asia-Pacific is now responsible for half of global carbon dioxide emissions.

For Nepal, adaptation and mitigation must now go hand in hand. We need to adapt to erratic weather, extreme rainfall events, and be prepared for future glacial lake outbursts. But Nepal also needs to cut emissions -- not just to save its glaciers from disappearing, but to save our economy from collapse.

We could do with budgetary support to implement national strategies to build up carbon stock and reduce dependence on fossil fuels, but ultimately it is about planning smart and being energy efficient.

It is not that Nepal is not moving in the right direction. It is just that it is not moving fast enough. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) under Kul Man Ghising got a lot of credit for doing away with power cuts by scrapping the black market in electricity through dedicated circuits and importing the shortfall from India. This monsoon, Nepal actually managed to bank power in India for the first time.

In anticipation of a surge in electric vehicles, NEA plans to install 30 fast-charging stations along highways. Ghising has called on consumers to switch to induction stoves and rice cookers in the kitchen to replace LPG use. It will be cheaper for families, reduce Nepal’s import bill and slash carbon emissions.

Much more needs to be done to invest in solar power, including installing more large-scale generators with storage capacity and household-level rooftop panels.

With reverse metering NEA can buy back electricity in the daytime, and one recent calculation showed that Kathmandu Valley alone could generate 100MW using solar even if only south-facing rooftops were used. The beauty of it is

that there will be minimum system loss in transmission. To even out demand, NEA needs to be freed of the stranglehold of its political unions so it can introduce seasonal and time-of-day tariffs.

The spread of community electricity bodes well for reducing pilferage and other losses. There has been a surge in new private investment in hydropower plants in the 5-20MW range all over the country. This gives villages the power to adapt to climate change -- water can be pumped up from rivers for year-round irrigation in the Karnali and elsewhere.

It is time Nepali officials stopped using climate change as an excuse, and started upscaling measures that we know work to reduce our petroleum import, salvage the economy and help save the planet.



KUNDA DIXIT

Nepal also needs to cut emissions, not just to save its glaciers from disappearing, but to save our economy from collapse.

Covering Climate Now

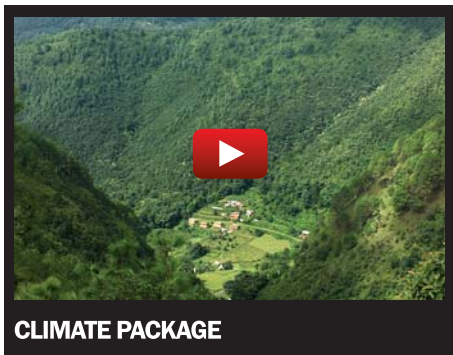
10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Reading this State of the State column by CK Lal from Nepali Times edition #468 of 11-18 September shows us how far we have come, and how things are no different from 10 years ago:

'Despite a concerted disinformation campaign against the Maoists, it is Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal's hubris that lies at the centre of the parliamentary deadlock in the Constituent Assembly. Under Nepal's leadership, the UML boycotted the entire winter session of Parliament in 2001, so he must know the difficulty of extricating an opposition party from a self-destructive, confrontational course. Koirala and Nepal need to accept that there is no place for their old antagonism in the present scheme of things. They need to make peace with Pushpa Kamal Dahal for their own good and for the future of peace and democracy in the country.'



ONLINE PACKAGES



CLIMATE PACKAGE

Nepali Times has joined more than 220 media outlets from around the world for Covering Climate Now, committing to run a week's worth of climate coverage in the lead-up to the UN Climate Action Summit in New York, on 23 September. This issue includes coverage of forestry, vector-borne diseases and climate change, a new cryosphere report, aviation and carbon credits. Watch video with summary of the content.



FIRE AND ICE

CO₂ from burning fossil fuels traps sunlight in the atmosphere, leading to the greenhouse effect, which warms the earth's surface. This is melting Mt Everest and the glaciers flowing down from it at an unprecedented rate. Join us on an aerial survey of the Khumbu and watch for yourself the melting of permanent ice and snow, and its impact on a billion people downstream.

SOCIAL MEDIA

How fitting to talk about social media addiction on social media ('So, you want to quit facebook?', Reeti KC, #976). Should be shared so that it reaches as many people as possible.

Samyek Shrestha

■ The only reason I have not deactivated my Facebook account is due to its messenger app, which I use daily to talk with friends from around the globe. I stopped using the main Facebook app about a year ago because it was all about people bragging, memes, fake news and click bait. Instagram is the same. I'm glad I've stopped using it. These sites only help increase anxiety and jealousy between people.

Chiran Aryal

PANGOLINS

Great work, NT!

Sam Cowan

■ I had never heard of a pangolin until I went to Nepal ('Better Nepal-China connectivity helps wildlife smugglers', Sonia Awale, #976).

Linda Jay Jackson

■ I watched a show about them two days ago. Like ivory, they are being slaughtered for their supposed medicinal purposes. How sad.

Maggie Irwin

POWERFUL ART

Very strong piece by the artist due to his heritage and artistic practice ('God and superman', Sewa Bhattarai, #976). It is concept and appropriation in one, but it is more, sharing responsibility what is defining art in all cultural related consequence. Congratulations.

Karin Pernegger

BOOK REVIEWS

Wonderful reviews ('Adventures in Robert Macfarlane's Aboveworld and Underland', Kunda Dixit, #976). Brilliant writer at his best.

Daniel Lak

WHAT'S TRENDING



Listen to Nepal's young changemakers

by Anil Chitrakar

There has been a dramatic shift in the way young Nepalis work for social change. Some have built robots that can operate in Nepali and help differently-abled persons. Others are tinkering with artificial intelligence. They need our support.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

So, you want to quit Facebook?

by Reeti KC

Do you feel like you are missing out when you're not on social media? Do you constantly check your phone? Have you tried disconnecting from networking sites? If not, you might want to after reading this report. Visit nepaltimes.com to join the discussion online.

Most popular on Twitter

Most commented

Can Nepal invest in the cloud?

by Ganesh Acharya

A group of overseas Nepalis wanted to invest in cloud computing in Nepal. It took a year for them to register the company, during which a company they set up in Bangladesh already started working. What hinders investment in IT in Nepal? Go to our website to find out.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Its face, hair and headgear are those of a Tibetan Buddhist deity. But it is attired like a modern superhero, and poses with one arm thrown in the air, Superman style. Ang Tsherin's Sherpa's statue is the object in focus at @TaragaonMuseumuntil 13 Sep.

Ed Douglas @calmandfearless
Loving this. To infinity, and beyond.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Networking sites are no longer confined to personal sharing but are being adopted by politicians & activists for their campaigns. This has larger implications for Nepali society, politics & development. Review of Nepal media survey @SoniaAwale

Kim Pearson @professorkim
Nepal is still in the process of solidifying its civil society institutions. Watching this development with some concern.

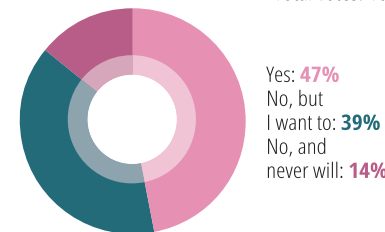
Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
PM KP Oli is back home after undergoing treatment for his ailing kidney in Singapore. His personal physician says he can resume normal duties. For details of what's afflicting the executive head of the country, read this piece by @ramusapkota

Leguwa Khola @HinkuKhola
The fact that leaders known for their 'nationalist' credentials go abroad for their medical treatment sums up the hypocrisy of our political system. They even have the audacity for a grand homecoming. No doubt the airport was closed for several hours as the PM arrived.

Times Weekly Internet Poll #976

Q. Have you tried going on a social media detox?

Total votes: 104



Weekly Internet Poll #977
To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Are you making personal sacrifices to help fight the climate crisis?



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Tourism, aviation and carbon

If Nepal hits its 2 million tourist target in 2020, travellers will emit up to 4 million tons of carbon

Sanghamitra Subba

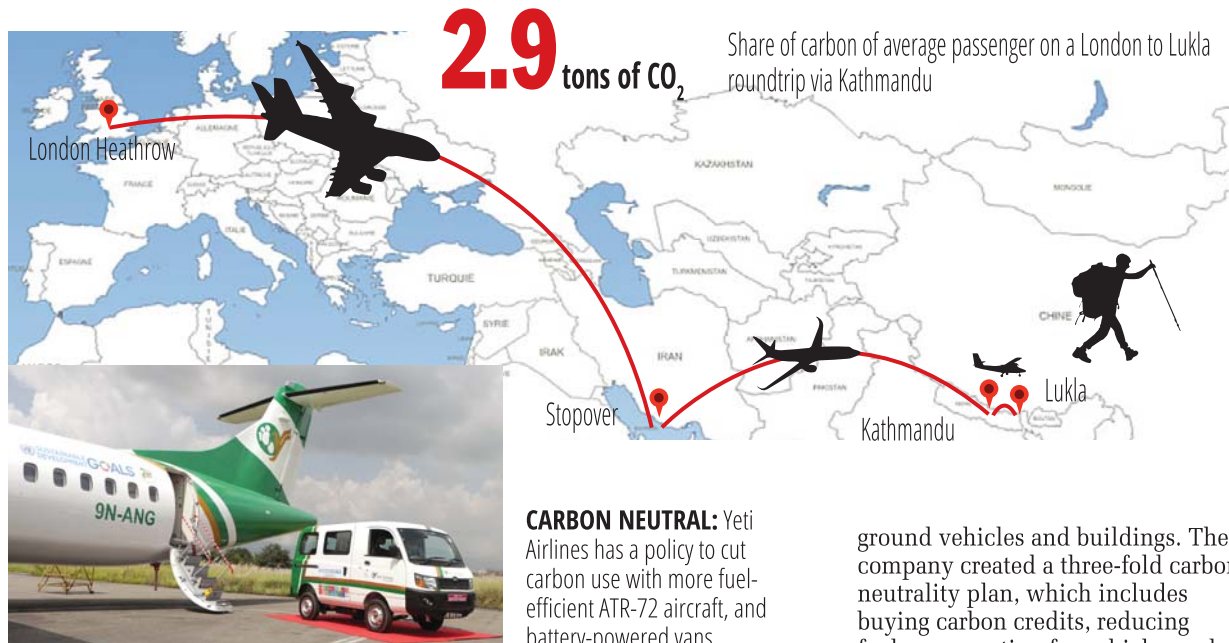
Last month, young climate change activist Greta Thunberg sailed across the Atlantic Ocean for 15 days on a zero-carbon yacht. After the UN Climate Action Summit, she will sail on to Chile for another climate meeting. Thunberg is trying to show people around the world that reducing one's carbon footprint may be difficult, but it is possible.

But for the 2 million tourists expected to arrive in Nepal next year, sailing is not an option. Road travel is not feasible. Their only mode of entry into Nepal? Flying.

With growing global awareness about the climate emergency, many air travellers have started thinking about cutting down on travel. Those who do take to the skies can shop on Google for carbon credits to offset the fossil fuel they burn.

A roundtrip flight on a modern wide body airliner from Europe to Kathmandu emits nearly 3 tons of carbon dioxide per passenger. With Nepal expecting 2 million tourists arriving in Visit Nepal Year 2020, passengers could be emitting a total of more than 4 million tons of carbon next year.

Although civil aviation contributes only 3% of the carbon dioxide that is blamed for the greenhouse effect heating the planet, the proportion is growing



at 5-10% a year. Airlines like Emirates, Jetstar, Qantas and Delta are at the forefront of offsetting carbon emissions with bio-fuels or by buying carbon credits to offset their emissions. Qantas claims it has been carbon neutral since 2007 by offsetting 2.5 million tons of carbon.

However, many environmentalists say carbon offsetting does not go to the heart of the problem: cutting consumption, and being less wasteful. Besides, they question carbon offsetting itself, which has become a big

business.

In Nepal, Yeti Airlines has made an effort to offset its carbon emission by fulfilling the UN's Sustainable Development Goal #8, which targets climate action to reduce carbon emissions.

With help from the UN Development Programme, Yeti conducted a carbon audit, then implemented CO₂ reduction measures with help from Impact Solutions, which designs sustainability solutions for businesses.

Yeti Airlines had to offset 19,655 metric tons of CO₂ emitted by its aircraft,

ground vehicles and buildings. The company created a three-fold carbon neutrality plan, which includes buying carbon credits, reducing fuel consumption for vehicles and replacing its fuel-guzzling BAe Jetstream 41s with ATR-72-500s, cutting emissions per flight by 20%.

Yeti bought carbon credits from a hydropower company in Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh in India at 50 cents per metric ton of carbon. Both companies used the funds to plant trees around their project site and improve their operational efficiency.

While Yeti says it would have preferred to purchase UN certified credits locally, the ones available in Nepal have hefty price tags and are limited.

"Buying carbon credit at \$15 per metric ton of carbon from REDD at \$5 per metric ton of carbon from the Alternative Energy Promotion

Centre (AEPC) was not viable for us," explained Yeti Airlines CEO Umesh Rai.

One problem with carbon credits is that there is no guarantee funds will be used for the activities they are designed for. The credits may go to credible companies, but planting trees and commitments to energy efficiency need to be monitored.

Yeti Airlines is also moving to reduce plastic use, and has replaced half a million plastic cups with paper ones and donated its tyres to Shanti Sewa Griha, a non-profit group that that recycles and upcycles them. It is also trying out Mahindra electric vans to replace its petrol ones.

Adds Rai: "Each of our vans travels 150km a day and emit 5 tons of greenhouse gases a year. If we convert all our vans into electric, we will not just save money but reduce our carbon footprint as well."

While these efforts are admirable and set a precedent for other airlines in Nepal, environmental activists say offsetting carbon emissions offer only a band-aid solution. However, Yeti's Rai says: "Once you start the journey to go green, you gain momentum. There is a shift to a greener mindset in the company, but real change will only come with greater public awareness."

This story is part of Covering Climate Now, a global collaboration of more than 220 news outlets to strengthen coverage of the climate story.

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'The Kiss' tops Click2Win



'THE KISS': Ankit Shrestha (above, centre) with Turkish Airlines Nepal Manager Tuncer Kecici and Kora organiser Raj Gyawali. (left) Shrestha's winning photograph of the even.

The photo of two riders in the Kathmandu Kora Cycling Challenge embracing and kissing each other as the cyclists get ready to be flagged off has won the Click2Win contest by Turkish Airlines and with it a return ticket from Kathmandu to any destination in Europe with the carrier.

The picture, by Ankit Shrestha and captioned 'The Kiss', selected as one of the finalists and then put up in social media for voting. The Kiss received 1,500 likes and was declared winner.

Click2Win was organised by Turkish Airlines, co-sponsor of the annual Kora Cycling Challenge. "This is the best season for cyclists to experience nature in and around Kathmandu Valley during the monsoon, and we hope participation in Kora will increase every year," said Abdullah Tuncer Kecici, General Manager of Turkish Airlines in Nepal.

As mountain biking gets more popular in Nepal, the number of participants in Kathmandu Kora has been rising exponentially, from only 35 in 2011 to more than 3,000 this year.

"The Kora has actually helped kickstart the cycling industry, and drummed up business in the monsoon, a season when they were not doing anything," said Kora organiser Raj Gyawali. "In fact, this year there were no bicycles to be found in Kathmandu -- they were all booked for the Kora."

Turkish Airlines also announced the winner of Turkish Airlines Art Competition 2019 on theme 'Flying with Turkish Airlines: Dream Destination' on 11 September.

Vipassana Dhakal from Rato Bangla School wins a ticket to her dream destination Turkey along with a guardian. Forty-six schools participated in the art competition.

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Five Star Airlines

Turkish Airlines was named 2020 Five Star Global Airline at the APEX (Airline Passenger Experience Association) Awards in Los Angeles on 9 September. Entries



were judged in five sub-categories: seat comfort, cabin service, food and beverage, entertainment and Wi-Fi. After the feedback was reviewed, Turkish Airlines was awarded a five star average for the third successive time.

Yeti for Everest

Yeti Airlines has collected 45 tons of recyclable waste from the Everest region



since March 2018. In partnership with the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee,

Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality, Himalaya Club Lukla, Blue Waste to Value and the UN Development Programme Nepal, Yeti plans to airlift a further 30 tons of waste to Kathmandu in September.

APEX awards

Qatar Airways won three accolades in the 2020 Airline Passenger Experience Association's (APEX) Passenger Choice Awards, announced at the APEX/IFSA Awards Ceremony held in Los Angeles on 9 September. The airline was recognised for Best Seat Comfort, Best Cabin Service and Best Food & Beverage, as well as being named a 2020 Five Star Global Airline.

Dish Home

Dish Home has announced various packages available through fund transfer. Prices have also been discounted: the Medium package is Rs4,200 instead of Rs4,800, Basic Plus is Rs4,500 instead of Rs5,100 and Medium Plus is Rs4,998 instead of Rs5,700, and so on.

Yak and Yeti Chef

Hotel Yak and Yeti has welcomed new Executive Chef Arindam Bahel. The Chef is a dynamic professional with 18 years of indigenous as well as international experience in culinary operations and guest service. Mastering Indian and various international cuisines, he has also appeared on many food tv shows.

prabhu BANK

Climate Summit leads packed UN agenda

Thalif Deen
in New York

The United Nations will host six high-level plenary meetings during the start of the 74th session of the General Assembly in late September, including the Climate Action Summit, in a bid to kickstart ailing multilateral diplomacy.

The meetings are being viewed mainly as an attempt to revive multilateral diplomacy at a time when a rash of hard-right nationalist leaders, including US President Donald Trump, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines and Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary, are either rooting for authoritarianism, abandoning international treaties or undermining multilateralism — not necessarily in that order.

Regrettably, they are joined by a fistful of other leaders, both from the North and the South, including from Russia, Italy, Burma, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Poland and Turkey. The UN is expecting over 180 world leaders, including foreign ministers and high-ranking government officials, to participate in the six-day mega event.

Greta Thunberg, the dynamic young Swedish activist, will also be at the UN climate meeting, scheduled for 23 September, to dramatise the need for common action and to symbolise the essential role that the UN can play.

The Climate Action Summit is intended to put world leaders on the hot seat so they reveal



UN PHOTO/MARK GARTEN

ZERO CARBON TRIP: Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, 16, sails into New York Harbour on 28 August. She will attend the UN Climate Action Summit, and sail on to Chile for another climate conference.

concrete, realistic plans to fulfill the pledges countries made in the Paris Agreement in 2016. Via the agreement, countries should reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45% over the next decade, and to net zero emissions by 2050.

The multilateral bodies and global treaties that have taken a beating include the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Human Rights Council, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Trans Pacific Partnership agreement, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Paris Climate Change agreement.

As one delegate puts it: “It is either a resurrection of multilateralism or a prelude to an obituary for international order.”

Scheduled to take place 23-27 September, the meetings will cover a wide range of political and socio-economic issues on the UN agenda, including climate change, universal health care, sustainable development goals (SDGs), financing for development, elimination of nuclear weapons and the survival of small island developing states facing extinction from rising sea levels.

Speaking to reporters last month, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that multilateralism is under attack from many different directions precisely “when we need it most”.

“In different areas and for different reasons, the trust of people in their political establishments, the trust of states among each other, the trust of many people in

international organisations has been eroded and ... multilateralism has been under fire,” he complained.

On the upcoming six summits, Guterres warned, “the people of the world do not want half measures or empty promises. They are demanding transformative change that is fair and sustainable.”

But will the talk-fest produce concrete results or end up being another political exercise in futility?

In an interview Jayantha Dhanapala, a former Sri Lankan Ambassador and UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, said: “As we survey the graveyard of multilateral security, environmental and economic agreements underpinning the mutually beneficial liberal order, fires burn 20% of the lungs of the world in the Amazon and even the Arctic has its tundra burning.”

“And the numbers of refugees fleeing violence and persecution are the highest in recorded history.”

With the unrivalled superpower under the quixotic leadership of Donald Trump, even developing countries like the Philippines, Brazil and others have abandoned global norms, Dhanapala says.

“A rule-based international order is collapsing before our eyes and Britain is on the brink of a messy Brexit while trade wars ruin Sino-US trade and drive the world towards a ruinous recession and the end of sustainable development.”

Martin S. Edwards, Associate Professor and Chair, School of Diplomacy and International Relations at Seton Hall University, says: “I think you’re right that the depth and breadth of the work that the UN is launching is more than

just symbolic.”

With Bolsonaro set to address the General Assembly right before Trump (on 24 September), their comments will mirror each other, and will be in stark contrast to many of the other delegates, he added.

But the important thing, he pointed out, is that there’s needed substance here. “The US might well sit out the Climate Action Summit, and that’s fine. The work of the UN and the member countries will go on without it”.

As for the SDGs, he said, this is a signature UN initiative that needs more attention and focus. “The world is not on track to reach many of these goals, and without greater commitment by member governments, they are not likely to be met by 2030. With the US disengaged from many of these discussions, it falls to the Secretary-General to recommit leaders to these goals,” Edwards noted.

James Paul, a former executive director of the New York-based Global Policy Forum, says, “This is a time of great international uncertainty and instability. What does this mean for the UN as a cluster of high-profile meetings approaches? And what can we expect from these events?”

“My sense is this: nationalistic enthusiasm is now waning at the popular level and posturing leaders are under increasing pressure from below to deliver more than rhetoric,” said Paul, author of the recently-released book, *Of Foxes and Chickens: Oligarchy and Global Power in the UN Security Council*. (IPS)

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खुसी ON गरौं!

Bhutan is on the move

The world’s first carbon-negative country absorbs more CO2 than it burns

Our flight arrived 45 minutes early. “Only in Bhutan, never in Nepal,” grinned a retired army general, shouldering his golf clubs and duty free at Kathmandu airport, heading for a weekend on the golf course.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

On landing at the unique traditional Paro airport, the mountain air fizzed and buzzed with excited tourists snapping selfies and Bhutanese rejoicing on return. Having admired the white Himalayan giants from afar, passengers shared palpable relief at the safe descent, with farmhouses, fields and rocky crags flashing by just beyond our wingtips (*right*).

The Druk Air dragons coil confidently on the orange yellow aircraft tails, and helpful women in colourful *kira* (traditional dress) stamp us into the country from behind fragrant wood desks. Outside, men dressed in *gho* (traditional robe) and knee socks take trouble to assist those caught out by the early arrival to link up with their drivers. Ah yes, the familiar magic of Bhutan is already weaving its spell.

When Bhutan first opened to tourism in 1974 it was not long before I had a chance to visit with our client, Lindblad Travel. The Swedish visionary entrepreneur, Lars-Eric Lindblad, represented Bhutan from a corner of his New York office draped in prayer flags and woven cloth, and first advised His then-Majesty on the ‘high value, low volume’ model of tourism.

Although I only got to Paro and Thimphu on that first visit, from the tortuous roads we spotted otters playing on the riverbanks, and I was captivated by the royal pageantry, ubiquitous archery, claret-clad monks and intense potency of the fortress dzong.

I have helped with tourism, movies and events in Bhutan on a number of occasions. In 1992, Bernardo Bertolucci strutted the stone flagged courtyards of the massive Paro Dzong, directing with flair and flailing arms the feature



film *Little Buddha*, more ambitious and elaborate than ever again attempted in that holy precinct.

Special permissions were needed from the royal government for such an unusual invasion, and my quest graduated from officials in the rows of humble wooden sheds that housed the civil service, to the carpeted offices and corner stairways in the main seat of government in Thimphu, the Tashichho Dzong ‘fortress of the glorious religion’.

Ravens called and pigeons circled as we negotiated the guards and stepped through the huge doorways into the grey stone precincts, our Bhutanese escorts adjusting their raw silk sashes of formal respect. Sloping walls glowered above us to the painted eaves and massive roofs, and the quarters of the ruling monarch were indicated to us with due deference through the next courtyard. When the rare permission was granted, with typical charm the Foreign Minister hosted us to a celebratory dinner, sitting on carpeted benches

and eating red rice, cheese and chillies off small carved tables.

A decade later we were back to prepare a national ecotourism strategy, consulting for the tourism authority under the unforgiving eye and dishevelled *goh* of veteran Thuji Nadik, never one to suffer fools. With our WWF clients we trekked into the back blocks of Bumthang, through flowering rhododendron forests, remote palace strongholds and rural villages, staying in richly decorated houses with sparse impoverished interiors.

We happened to be in Thimphu on 9/11, watching the New York drama unfold on a flickering screen in our favourite Yeedzin Guesthouse. The King called every American in the country to personally condole them, and the monk body dedicated days of prayers to those lost in the Twin Towers. By a twist of fate, I stayed in that same guesthouse room last week, little changed since 2001,



with familiar erratic service, creaking wood floors and wobbly taps, but now dwarfed by international brand hotels — a six-lane bypass runs alongside Thimphu’s old archery ground.

For Thuji and his team we returned several times with the ADB, working on Buddhist circuits and ecotourism. Driving to Mongar and Trashigang in the far east with our Nepali aviation colleagues, we inspected existing and proposed airports, trekking up hilltops to assess feasibility and enjoy the flowers, forest and mountain scenery.

Near Trongsa we were rewarded with golden langurs leisurely crossing the road and, in the marshy valley of Phobjica, the sacred black-necked cranes honoured us with their elegant disdain. Communications in those days were so difficult that the Civil Aviation director in Paro was surprised when we reported that Yonphula airstrip, close to the

Arunachal Pradesh border, had been recently resurfaced.

During a job with the Norwegians, checking out tourism and environmental implications of a proposed hydropower master plan, we indulged in fly-fishing for trout in the pristine rivers. Strictly catch and release, the rules permit fishing only when out of eye-sight of any religious monument, dzong, chorten or stupa. One of Bhutan’s less likely exports is hand-tied flies for the world’s recreational fly-fishers.

Bhutan is the first country in the world to become carbon negative: its forests absorb more carbon than its inhabitants burn. But although much admired as an astute national policy, Bhutan’s uniquely-managed, pre-paid tourism — with its tiny population of some 800,000 people and gross national happiness brand — is hard, probably impossible, to replicate elsewhere. Amongst our recommendations was to evolve the tourism strategy to ‘high value, low impact’, using financial mechanisms to control visitors at sustainable levels, nurturing the cultural ‘Bhutan style’ for visitors. And to find ways that more tourism benefits can stick in the countryside, something at which Nepal has been far more successful.

Bhutan these days is on the move. Lofty electricity pylons march across the country, competing with the hosts of fluttering prayer flags that clamber up the steep ridges above the valley floors. Construction sites have come to characterise the creeping city perimeters of Paro and Thimphu as Bhutanese crowd in from the countryside, and pressure from Indian tourists threatens Bhutan’s grip on its carefully crafted tourism objectives.

New hotels and apartment blocks faithfully reflect the carved and painted vernacular architecture of this last Himalayan eyrie, but new roads scar the hillsides and laden trucks grind their way up from India. The swarm of smart imported SUVs have to watch out for horses and mules grazing unfettered along the roadside, avoid the dogs supine in the sunshine, and steer around cows sleeping on the warm tarmac.

But some things never change in this blessed kingdom. They still proudly wear their glamorous national garb, blithely manage their dependence on India, ignore the thorny issue of refugees, and zealously guard their traditions, navigating the cultural clash of ancient and modern. The Bhutanese must be the only nation on earth who so genuinely and universally adore and revere their royal family. Inspirational they are too, and I for one am happy to be bewitched by Bhutan. 🇧🇹



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Technically, the monsoon rains should taper off by mid-September, but the trend is that rains linger till October. Two low-pressure troughs are hovering over Odisha and the Bay of Bengal. Kathmandu Valley will continue to see isolated heavy showers over the weekend, some of it thundery, mainly in the later afternoon and night, with misty mornings. Maximum temperatures will drop a notch.

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BIKRAM RAI

Long settled in Germany, Karma Tamang is making moves to return to Nepal — as a politician

Sewa Bhattarai

As hundreds of thousands of Nepali youngsters leave the country in search of greener pastures, a trickle have started to return with the intention of contributing what they can for the country. Karma Tamang, 43, is one of them, recently moving base from Germany to Nepal after two decades in Europe.

Tamang is soft spoken, articulate and highly educated, not traits one normally associates with Nepal’s politicians. But that is what she wants to be: her passion for politics has led her home, leaving behind a husband and two teenage children.

Tamang’s father was a driver in Kavre, before the family shifted to Kathmandu for his four children. After completing high school

from St Xavier’s College, a German friend helped Karma go to Germany for higher education in 1995.

She graduated in computer science at the University of Kiel, the first person in her family to attain a degree. She married a German man in 2003, had two children and worked in an IT firm. One day, she decided to quit and return to Nepal to become a politician.

“I always knew that I would come back to Nepal, that was a part of the deal with my husband,” Tamang tells us. “I would have returned earlier, but my children were young and there was a war going on. Now is the right time: the children can take care of themselves, I am at the peak of productivity in life, when I can give my best.”

Tamang is busy renovating her house and looking for a school for the children. They have given their wholehearted support

for their mother’s move. And she wants them to live in Nepal for a year before they decide where to go next.

But why politics? Like many of her generation, Tamang felt disillusioned with governance failure in Nepal, and wanted to see politics here driven by values.

“Mainstream political parties in Nepal have the right intention and ideologies, but the wrong approach,” she says. “We have democracy but we need to work to make it sustainable, with the right practical approach. We need to practise value-based politics. Empowerment of women and youth, and use of technology is central to this idea.”

Tamang joined the Bibeksheel Nepali party soon after it was founded in 2012 by a group of idealistic young Nepalis, offering an alternative to the established parties. She recruited members in Europe, and now wants to run for a post in the party’s central committee and eventually contest legislative elections. Tamang wants to ultimately work on IT policy in Parliament.

Bibeksheel Nepali did not win any seats in the 2017 federal election and 2 of 110

seats in the provinces. But that does not deter Tamang: “The party has long-term vision, we dream of being in leadership in the next 15 years. For now, we want to make people more aware of work ethics, value-based politics, and management.”

Tamang is now working on a PhD on non-violent movements and is unfazed about her lack of practical experience in Nepal and the prospect of confronting men entrenched in government. She says: “By now, we know that power corrupts. The Nepali people’s hopes for politics of values have been dashed by every party that has ruled. To avoid that, we need checks and balances, which will ensure that politicians and parties remain true to their ideals.”

For someone who has lived outside Nepal for so long, Tamang speaks Nepali fluently and naturally, but she has picked up some European ways. She finds order and coordination missing in Nepal, specifically in politics. “I know it is going to be a big challenge for me. People here may expect me to work in the same laid-back style, but I am here to change things, even if it is difficult.” 🇳🇵

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Mosquitoes move up m

Global heating has fanned the spread of vector-borne diseases like dengue across the Himalaya

Sonia Awale

With over 8,000 reported dengue cases and an estimated 80,000 infections in five months, Nepal's viral fever epidemic this year has gone viral. So far six people have died, and dengue has spread to higher altitudes where mosquito-borne diseases were unheard of. In Kathmandu Valley it has struck ministers, politicians, businessmen, even doctors and their families, but it has also drawn attention to tropical diseases migrating to the mountains. Agriculture Minister Chakrapani Khanal, renowned ophthalmologist Sanduk Ruit and Nepal Communist Party leader Bamdev Gautam are all down with fever, but the government's response has been inadequate.

"Vector insects are moving up the Himalaya as warming increases, and so are the diseases they carry. Climate change is leading to changes in the geographic pattern of diseases," said Meghnath Dhimal of the Nepal Health Research Council. His research has shown that mosquitoes do not just travel to higher altitudes in vehicles, but increasingly complete their lifecycles in what used to be colder places.

"Not just dengue; at any moment you can also have outbreaks of Chikungunya, Japanese encephalitis and Zika in the mountains of Nepal due to global warming," Dhimal says.

This year's unusually wet monsoon in Kathmandu Valley provided suitable breeding grounds for mosquitoes. The increased mobility of Nepalis has helped spread diseases like malaria, dengue and encephalitis to higher valleys. But it is climate change that has made disease-carrying mosquitoes themselves migrate to higher altitudes and latitudes.

While mosquitoes and the microorganisms they carry now thrive in places that used to be

BAD BITER: The dengue-carrying female *Aedes aegypti* mosquito (above) can now survive in higher altitudes and latitudes where it could not before because of climate change.

The Third Pole is warming faster th

... and even more rapidly than the Earth's north and south polar regions

Kunda Dixit

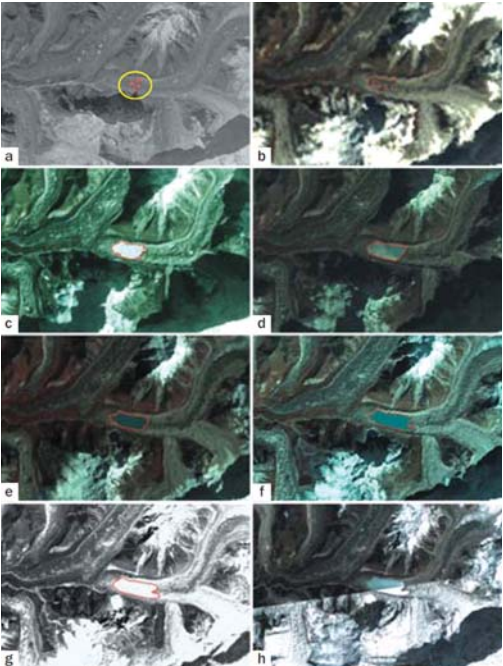
Climate scientists are shocked at the melt rate of Arctic sea ice and the Greenland ice-cap this summer, but the alarm bells are ringing even louder in the Himalaya.

The 4,000km Himalayan arc is dubbed 'The Third Pole' because it has the biggest ice mass after the earth's north and south polar regions. After this year's record heat, scientists say they may have to revise upwards predictions about how fast it is melting.

"Nearly a third of Nepal's area is above 5,000m and is technically the Arctic," says economist and former Water Resources Minister Dipak Gyawali. "And it is reasonable to assume that what is happening in the Arctic is happening in our Himalayan Arctic."

Himalayan ice cover is melting even faster than the poles because the mountains are situated astride the tropics. Gyawali warns it is not just about receding glaciers, but uncertainty about how climate change will affect precipitation.

In a report earlier this year titled *Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment: Climate Change, Sustainability and People*, the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) predicted the Himalaya would lose more than one-third of its ice by the end of the century, even if global average temperatures are capped at a 1.5°C increase above pre-industrial levels by 2050.



ARCTIC HIMALAYA: NASA satellite images of Imja Galcier near Mt Everest taken in 1962, 1975, 1983, 1989, 1992, 2000, 2006 and (above) in 2010, showing expanding lake. From an aircraft flying near

But after this northern hemisphere summer, scientists warned the poles are already seeing levels of melting that was supposed to happen 30 years from now. If current emission trends continue and forests are cut at the present rate, the world could be hotter by up to 6.5°C by 2100 — melting two-thirds of Himalayan glaciers.

In July, scientists from 60 countries met in Kathmandu to start working on the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 6th Assessment Report, due in 2022. Many of them admitted they may have to revise previous predictions because warming was happening faster than estimated.

Himalayan peaks are already warming up to 0.7°C faster than the global average because of a phenomenon called 'elevation amplification'. Many of these projections will form part of an IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere, to be released on 23 September at the Climate Action Summit in New York during the UN General Assembly.

To be sure, there are mountain regions nearer the equator with smaller ice mass that are melting even faster than the Himalaya. Andean glaciers in Bolivia have shrunk by half in the past 50 years, and Kilimanjaro

has lost nearly all the ice on its summit in the past 100 years.

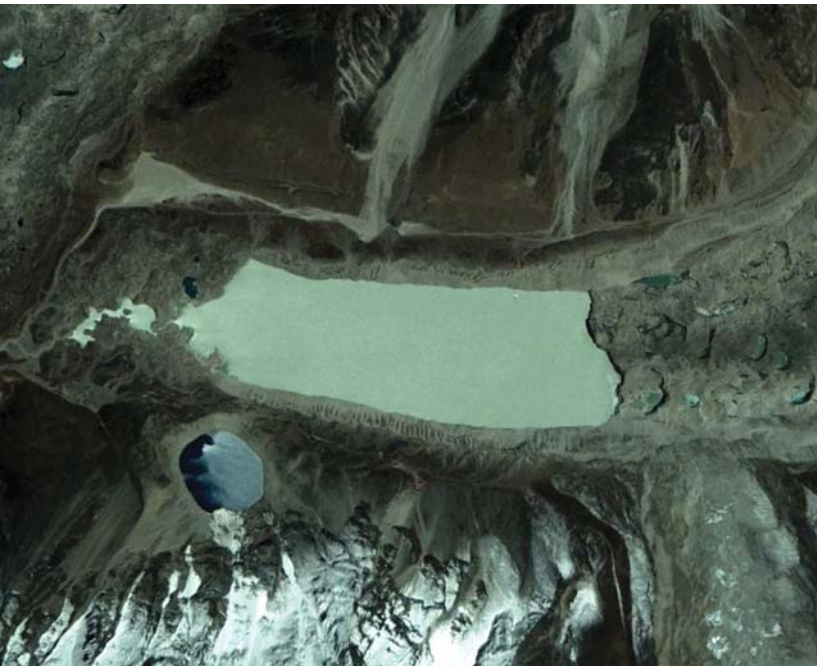
The loss of Himalayan ice will have even more devastating consequences because there are about 1.3 billion people living downstream who depend on its rivers. Glaciers in the central and eastern Himalaya are already receding up to 30m per year.

Climate models show that spring flow in the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers and their glacier-fed tributaries will rise till 2050 as the earth warms, but will start decreasing after that because there will be no more ice left to melt.

Already, 60% of the water withdrawn for irrigation in the Indo-Gangetic Basin originates from snow and glacier melt — and the dry season flow of most Himalayan rivers is almost entirely snow-fed.

"The mountains are the pulse of the planet, and that pulse is telling us that we are in a climate crisis," warned ICIMOD Director General David Molden at a Cryosphere and Society Forum on 28-29 August in Kathmandu. "The impact of climate change is felt hard in mountains, with temperatures rising faster than the plains, resulting in changing ecosystem and agricultural patterns, changing rainfall and river flows."

For the first time, the forum this



NASA



Mountains as the earth warms

too cold for them, extreme heat in the plains is killing off the insects. Recent studies have shown that dengue, malaria and other vector-borne infections are now found in areas where they were not before, and have disappeared in places where they were common.

In 2014, ecologists at the University of Michigan found the first hard evidence that malaria travels to higher altitudes during warmer years. Another study by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine confirmed that the movement of malaria is temperature dependent.

Nepal has set a target to eliminate malaria by 2022, and the climate crisis adds to the challenge, while also stressing the need to expand existing health programs to districts previously unaffected by the disease.

“We need a climate-relevant and sensitive health system so that we are prepared for more frequent outbreaks,” added Dhimal. “This means training healthcare personnel and ensuring a robust monitoring, evaluation and surveillance mechanism.”

Ironically, the Kathmandu hospital that is supposed to control infectious diseases has become an epicentre for the spread of the virus because of overcrowding. When one 24-year-old banker based in Pokhara travelled to Teku to confirm her dengue status, she met many others like her from Dharan, Hetauda and Salyan.

“Relatives waiting on their infected family members were also starting to get sick because the mosquitoes there were biting everyone,” she said.

Dengue is spread when a female *Aedes aegypti* mosquito bites an infected patient and then bites healthy people within the following week. The mosquito can bite up to 10 different people before she has had her fill, which is why multiple members of the same



Anopheles

Bite humans and mammals indoors and outdoors at night
Lays eggs on ponds, marshes, swamps.

About **460** species
Over 100 transmit malaria

family are falling ill.

“We are receiving more than 500 cases per day and more than 70% of those I oversee have been tested positive,” said Sher Bahadur Pun, Chief of the Clinical Research Unit at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital in Teku. “Our response is not proportionate to the enormity of the crisis. We are risking our own health to treat infected patients.”

A female *Aedes* mosquito lays from 500-1,000 eggs in her lifetime, and if infected, all her eggs are also infected from birth and the epidemic multiplies. The best strategy to stop this cycle is destroying mosquito habitat, experts say. Personal protective



Aedes

Active day biters preferring humans.
Lays eggs singly in still, clear water in the dark, like inside used tires, flower pots, pools.

More than **950** species
Can spread dengue, chikungunya, Zika fever, West Nile virus and yellow fever

measures are equally important.

“No one is safe since the mosquitoes are everywhere, from plains to the mountains,” said Prakash Prasad Shah of the Epidemiological Diseases Control Division. “Also, fogging is not effective — it only kills adult mosquitoes. We need search and destroy missions and this requires a collective effort.”

After Dharan started an anti-dengue campaign by targeting the mosquito’s breeding spots, there has been a drop in the four-month outbreak there. Similarly, dengue cases in New Delhi fell 80% after 2015 due to a massive public awareness campaign.

Only 10% of those infected with the



Culex

Bite humans mostly at night, both indoors and outdoors
Lay eggs in rafts on polluted water bodies.

Over **1,000** species
Can spread West Nile virus, Japanese encephalitis, filariasis

dengue virus show symptoms and need further treatment. Very few suffer from complications due to haemorrhage and internal bleeding. Of the four types of dengue viruses, most Nepalis seem to be afflicted with the milder forms, either type 1 or 2.

There is no vaccine or definite treatment for dengue fever yet. Patients are kept under observation and given supportive treatment for fever and with a blood transfusion if there is a drop in blood platelet count. 🇳🇵

This story is part of Covering Climate Now, a global collaboration of more than 220 news outlets to strengthen coverage of the climate story.

man expected



KUNDADIXIT

Mt Lhotse in 2012 (right).

year brought together scientists and local communities from across the Himalaya so as to bridge the knowledge gap between researchers and local people. The idea was to see how climate change affects water supply, energy and food security for people in the Himalaya, and to offer solutions.

“The impact on farming, tourism and hydropower is already being felt, the question is: what are we going to do about it?” said ICIMOD climate expert Arun Bhakta Shrestha.

The yak cheese factory in Nepal’s Langtang Valley has been in continuous operation for the past 55 years, but is facing an existential

crisis because the glaciers that used to feed springs have dried up, and the weather has become erratic.

“The avalanche in 2015 was a sudden disaster that hit with no warning,” said cheesemaker Gyalpu Tamang, who lost relatives and friends, also herds of yaks. “But this climate crisis is a slow-moving disaster, and just as serious.”

Attending the forum were farmers from Mustang. One of them, Narendra Lama, said villagers who depend on glacial melt to power water mills, irrigation, hydro-electricity and drinking water are already seeing the impact.

Lama said: “Some of us have been forced to leave our villages because of the shortage of water. Springs have gone dry. We need scientists to tell us what to do.” 🇳🇵

This story is part of Covering Climate Now, a global collaboration of more than 220 news outlets to strengthen coverage of the climate story.



Nepali Times has joined more than 170 media outlets from around the world for Covering Climate Now, committing to running a week's worth of climate coverage in the lead-up to the UN Climate Action Summit in New York, on 23 September. This issue includes coverage of: forestry, vector-borne diseases and climate change, a new cryosphere report, aviation and carbon credits.

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EVENTS



Indra Jatra

Indra Jatra is an 8-day celebration of the god of rain, Indra. Locally known as Yenyā, the festival includes dancing masked demons and gods and goddesses, as well as a chariot procession across town.

Journey to Yarsa

Film Southasia’s Nepal Retrospective, a month-long showing of Nepali documentaries, presents *Journey to Yarsa*. This film, directed by Dipendra Bhandari, follows the journey of a man in search of the prized yarsagumba. 19 September, 5:30pm-8pm, Rs50 per person, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan (01) 5552141



Comic Con

This year’s Comic Con Nepal is a tribute to the late Stan Lee, legendary comic writer and the man behind the Marvel Cinematic Universe. You can’t miss the spectacle of carefully curated costumes and the vibrant energy of cosplay fans in Nepal. 13-14 September, 10am-7pm, Heritage Garden, Sanepa, 9801221421

Book Fair

Shiksha Nepal presents Nepal’s largest national book fair. There will be games, food, a photo booth and more than 10,000 books for sale. Bring one children’s book for entry. 13-14 September, 10am-5pm, Pragya Pratisthan Bhawan, Kamaladi, 9851001569

Ollie Horn

Pig in Japan depicts the journey of Ollie Horn, a failed lawyer turned minor celebrity in Japan. Laugh out loud as Horn tells his hilarious story. 19 September, 5:30pm-7:30pm, Rs700 per person (pre-booking required), House of Music, Thamel, 981358266



Matt Davis

Matt Davis, in his comedy show, BadFamiliar: Live, shares his story as a veteran comedian and a world traveller. Listen to his hilarious anecdotes about his interactions with different cultures, languages and people. 17 September, 6pm onwards, Rs700 per person, House of Music, Thamel, 9813582661

Photo Exhibition

Celebrate 70 years of Nepal-France relations with a photo exhibition, which opens 17 September at 5:30pm. 18-30 September, 10am-5pm, Alliance Francaise de Katmandou, Jhamsikhel (01) 5009221

Backto Back

To celebrate relations between Nepal and Germany, Goethe-Zentrum Kathmandu presents a week of workshops, exhibitions and talks. Pre-registration for each event is required for entry. 16-21 September, Timings vary, Goethe-Zentrum Kathmandu, Near UN park (01) 4250871

Vivaha Utsav

Hotel Royal Singi will be hosting ‘Vivaha Utsav’, a wedding exhibition showcasing products from 23 vendors. 19-20 September, 10am-5pm, Hotel Royal Singi, Kamaladi (01) 4424190

MUSIC



Akhil Sachdeva

Listen to Bollywood musician Akhil Sachdeva and Nash band play their greatest hits. 13 September, 8pm onwards, Turtle Lounge and Club, Thamel, Tickets: 9840074282

April Rush

Eat at one of the best restaurants in Nepal and listen to the jazzy sounds of band April Rush. 13 September, 7pm onwards, Chimes Restaurant, Sanepa (01) 5549673

Reggae/Hiphop

Listen to the eclectic sounds of Cultivation, a Nepali reggae musician and Webster, a Canadian hip-hop star. 13 September, 6pm-9pm, Alliance Française Katmandou, Jhamsikhel (01) 5009221



Axe Band

The band behind beloved Nepali classics like “Chiya Bari ma”, “Lukna Deu”, “Ma Audai chu” and “Timro Najar le” will be performing. 13 September, 8pm onwards, Rs1,500 per person, Prive Nepal, 9801090111

Sundown

Enjoy the night with great techno and electronic music by various DJs. 13 September, 2pm onwards, VIP Restaurant Lounge Bar, Thamel (01) 4218012

DINING



Blenders

Get your cold ‘shake in a reusable bottle at this new milkshake bar. Their exciting flavours and cute light-bulb shaped bottle will keep you coming back for more. 10am-9pm, City Centre, Kamal Pokhari, 9851219100

Brunch

Relax this weekend laying by the pool and indulging in Annapurna Hotel’s lavish brunch. Every weekend, 11:30am-3:30pm, Rs 1,499++ per adult / Rs1,099++ for children under 12, Annapurna Hotel, Poolside (01) 4221711



Vesper

What better way to spend the evening than indulging on freshly baked pizza, lasagnas and appetizers, with a wine to complement every dish. 10am-10pm, Jhamsikhel (01) 5009240



Sun Cafe & Bar

Sun Cafe & Bar’s expansive menu offers anything from bara and chatamari to Chicken seekh kebab, all at affordable prices. 9am-10pm, Jhamsikhel, 9851213574

Kebab & Pizza

While kebabs and pizza may sound like a strange combination, Turkish Kebab & Pizza Hub does justice to the two vastly different foods. 11am-9pm, Ekantakuna, 9813787447

GETAWAY



Gorkha Gaun Resort

While there is much to do in Gorkha, after you see the lush natural setting of Gorkha Gaun Resort and settle into your homely room, you might not want to leave. Gorkha, 9801010557

Borderlands Eco Resort

Eco-adventures await in the nature surrounding Borderlands Eco Resort. Get away for the weekend and embrace your inner daredevil. Borderlands Eco Adventure Resort, Sindhupalchok (01) 4381425, 9801025111



Kantipur Temple House

With its red brick walls, wood carvings, floor seating and traditional courtyard, Kantipur Temple House resembles the palaces of old Nepali kings, on the outskirts of Thamel. Thamel (01) 4250131

Sacred Valley Inn

This quaint getaway in Pokhara has rustic stone walls and is surrounded by lush greenery. Even if you don’t stay in their humble accommodations, sit by the beautiful garden with a cup of tea next time you’re in the area. Lakeside, 984605352



Glacier Hotel & Spa

Also known as The Harbor, this boutique hotel is becoming a favourite of many frequent tourists to Pokhara. The chic style, spacious rooms, luxury amenities and fantastic in-house restaurant will keep you coming back each time. Lakeside (061) 463722



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OUR PICK

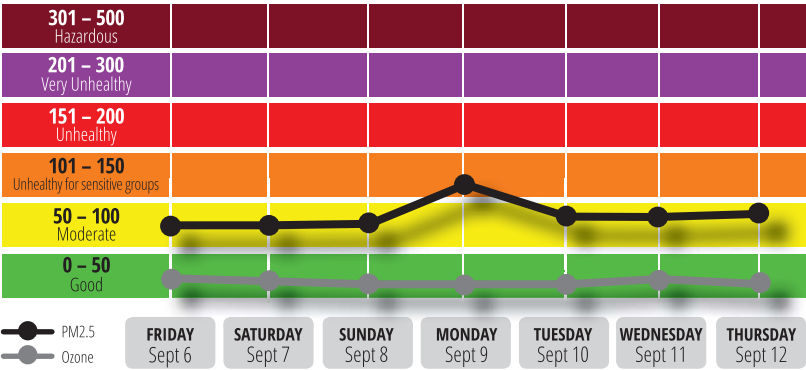


6-15 Sep., Kausi Theatre, Teku

True West is the story of two brothers who seem to be exact opposites. They envy each other’s lifestyles, until they find out that they are quite similar in their male machismo. This American drama is enjoying a revival because its theme of toxic masculinity has a worldwide resonance today. Directed by Deborah Merola, the play stars Divya Dev and Alejandro Merola.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 6-12 September



The Air Quality Index in Kathmandu measured at the US Embassy station at Phora Darbar shows the concentration of particulates below 2.5 microns at relatively safe Good (green) and Moderate (yellow) levels, thanks to frequent monsoon showers washing away the pollutants. However, it is important to remember these are daily averages and there are spikes during rush hour. For live hour-by-hour AQI levels go to [www.nepalitimes.com](https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/) on PC or mobiles. <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Protecting Kathmandu's historic roofscape

Preserving tiles saves Nepal's architectural heritage, but is also climate-friendly

Anne Feenstra

There are many types of traditional roof tiles in Kathmandu: broad tiles, slender tiles, half-cylinders, or the elegant *jhingati*. Before concrete buildings started sprouting up with flat roofs, the Valley's old towns all had distinctive sloping red-tiled roofs.

Even though houses with traditional roofs are now rare, tiles are being put to all kinds of creative uses, including to reduce the energy cost of cooling or heating homes and offices. One such example is a rooftop pavilion at the headquarters of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Khumaltar (*see box*).

Terracotta tiles are hard to beat in terms of sustainability and climate responsiveness, compared to concrete slabs or steel sheets. Concrete is all the rage today because of its supposed strength and water-resistance, but it makes buildings costly to heat or cool.

Well-made roof tiles are common in traditional architecture, dating back to



ALL PHOTOS: ANNE FEENSTRA/SMA



Mesopotamia. In the Middle Ages, the clay was moulded by men on the tops of their thighs, and tapered down to the knee naturally, allowing the tiles to overlap each other. Cuzco in the Peruvian Andes, historic Lijiang in China and Dubrovnik on the Adriatic coast all offer stunning roofscapes, and have World Heritage status because of their tiles.

Kathmandu Valley's roof tile grid is unique in the world. The *jhingati* has a distinct non-linear feel, almost like scales on a pangolin's armour. The crafted roof, with its ingenious overlaps and slightly rotated grid, protects the interior of the historic buildings

from slashing monsoon rains.

The tiles come in a spectrum of carmine, scarlet-red, vermillion and tangerine orange colours. Upon close observation, one can even see palm and thumb prints of the potters who moulded each piece by hand decades, sometimes centuries, ago.

Wang Shui, the first Chinese to win the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2012, saw many historic villages had been razed to make way for the new Ningbo Museum in China. As the architect of the museum, Wang Sui worked with building materials from the houses that were torn down.

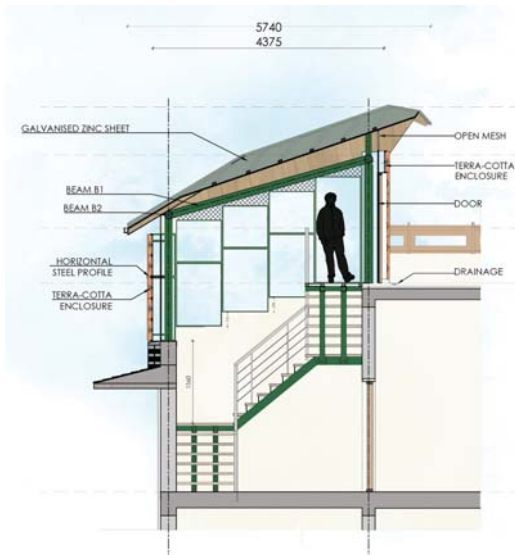
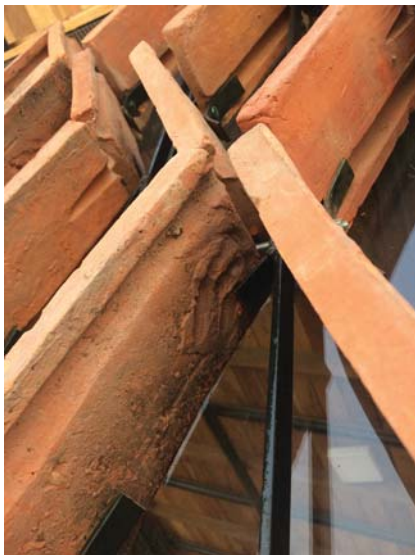
Wang Sui felt that bricks and tiles had memory and identity, and that there was a relationship between people and building materials. The museum was completed in 2008 and recycled bricks and roof tiles in its construction.

Each tile and brick in Kathmandu today has a history, a tale to tell about the forgotten potters who moulded them from the Valley's clay soil, fired and fitted them on roofs. They are a part of our heritage and should be preserved, re-used or upcycled. 🇳🇵

Prof Anne Feenstra is a laureate of the Global Award for Sustainable Architecture 2012 (Paris) and set up Sustainable Mountain Architecture in Nepal in 2013.

Covering Climate Now

Upscaling *jhingati* tiles



UPCYCLING: The *jhingati* tiles are held in light metal frames with two clasps. Each tile forms an evocative mini louvre and is placed in families that make up the superior panels.

At the head office of ICIMOD in Kathmandu, Sustainable Mountain Architecture (SMA) designed an experimental project to upcycle nearly 1,500 tiles salvaged from the ruins of buildings after the 2015 earthquake.

The design provides improved access to an open-air meeting room and future individual work stations by carefully cutting open the existing concrete roof slab and adding a light and sturdy steel structure.

For safety and orientation, filtered daylight was needed from all four directions of the pavilion and staircase. But making it from glass only would drive up

temperatures in summer and make it too cold in winter. This is where the *jhingati* proved useful.

Although it would be best if the *jhingati* were returned to the roofs they once protected, after the earthquake they were stacked by ruins and were deteriorating. Some had been used to make garden walls to replace bricks.

Many schools that were quickly rebuilt after the 2015 earthquakes did not re-use traditional tiles. Children fainted in some cases, as the radiation heat inside became too much under galvanised steel roofs. Monsoon rain made it impossible to hear the teacher.

Traditionally, these petite 200 x 105mm fired clay

tiles stick to the roof on a fresh layer of clay, while a 8mm linear depression grips two tiles. The tiles absorb heat, are UV resistant and are effective in varying humidity levels.

The tiles were collected, cleaned and they are now on all four facades of the ICIMOD pavilion as a 'brise soleil'. They capture the diffused daylight, while keeping the harsh, direct sunlight out (*pictured, above*).

This climate-responsive design obviates the need for air-conditioning or additional heating. The passive solar energy through the filtered light keeps the pavilion comfortable. An inserted mesh between the roof and tops of the four walls makes natural cross-ventilation possible. In the hottest

months, an open door increases the natural chimney effect of hot air going up and out. In the night, four 18W LED lights provide ample illumination.

The *jhingati* tiles are held in light metal frames with two clasps. Each tile forms an evocative mini louvre and is placed in families that make up the superior panels. The subtle diamond-shaped pattern casts soft silhouette shadows, creating a spatial elegance.

Upcycling is one of the ways the Nepali non-profit team at SMA gives expression to its designs. They elicit architectural support to Nepali builders while drawing lessons from vernacular wisdom. 🇳🇵



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PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

Now, Lucknow

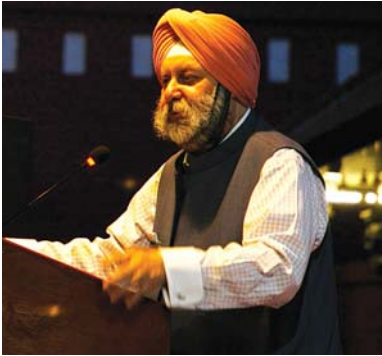
“I see some of the guests eyeing the *galouti kebab* and let me tell you, it is not my intention to stand between you and the kebab,” said the always jovial Indian Ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri as he inaugurated the Lucknowi Food Festival at Hotel Radisson last week. Indeed, many of the invited guests followed his advice and made a beeline for the mutton.

The festival of Lucknow cuisine brings Kathmandu closer to the dishes of northern India, centred in the seat of the Mughlai nawabs. Lucknow specialities are as easy to eat as they are difficult to make. The *galouti kebab* is one of them.

“The chicken is finely minced, mixed with aromatic spices, and pan roasted,” said Master Chef Shabir Ali as he demonstrated the technique at a live kebab stall. Ali, who came in specially for the festival from Radisson Lucknow, has prepared a kebab so fine that it melts in the mouth, going well with the *ulte tawa ki roti* (flatbread cooked on an upside down pan).

Vegetarians need not miss out on this famous dish, as there is a veg lookalike, *soy ki tikki*, made in the exact same manner but using soybeans. *Sheermal*, a plump, rounded bread with generous doses of saffron, is just the right accompaniment to these spicy starters.

You can also begin your meal with flavourful *paya ka shorba* — a clear soup made from lamb — or the dense and filling



vegetarian option, *makai dhan ka shorba* (maize and coriander soup). For appetisers you can have the spicy *chana maslewala*, made of chickpeas, or the mutton-based *gosht ke sev*.

No Lucknowi cuisine is complete without the biryani, and that is where the longest lines formed on opening day. Whether you go for the vegetable version or the chicken one, it contains a delightful mix of rice, spices and vegetables or meat. The biryani goes well with pungent and sour *raita* (flavoured yoghurt), and other accompaniments, like *nawabi kofta* (potatoes stuffed with dry fruits and simmered in tomato gravy) and *mahi korma shaan-e-gomti* (rich chicken gravy). The *dal khushk Lucknowi* is something new to the Kathmandu palette: uncooked mung dal soaked and mixed with raw tomatoes and onions.

Then there are the varieties of Lucknowi desserts — from cold kulfi to piping hot *badam ka halwa*. One has a choice of hard *revdi* (ball of jaggery and sesame seeds) or the soft *ravdi* (sweetened condensed milk with spices and nuts). There seemed to be a lot of sweet teeth around last week at the Radisson, because everyone was trying everything. 🇮🇳

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TREE-MENDOUS

Community management and outmigration have helped Nepal double its forest area in 25 years

Peter Gill

New analysis of historical satellite imagery indicates that Nepal’s forest area has nearly doubled, from 26% of land area in 1992 to 45% in 2016. The midhills have experienced the strongest resurgence, although forests have also expanded in the Tarai and in the mountains. This makes Nepal an exception to the global trend of deforestation in developing countries.

These findings may come as a surprise to readers who regularly hear about deforestation. Indeed, recent infrastructure expansion projects seem to pit development against nature. Protesters have pushed back against the felling of trees for the Ring Road expansion project in Kathmandu, as well as the plan to cut down 8,000ha of jungle in Bara district for a proposed airport in Nijgad.

But the new research, conducted by a NASA-funded team whose members are based in the US, Switzerland and Nepal, does not indicate that Nepal has been free from deforestation in recent decades. Rather, the data show that on average, more new forests have grown up than have been cut down. As a result, there has been net forest gain.

Jefferson Fox, a geographer at the East-West Center in Honolulu who is the project’s principal investigator, thinks it is important to acknowledge Nepal’s forest successes, even if localised deforestation remains a problem in parts of the country.

“When I did my dissertation work in the early 1980s, Nepal was all over the international press for deforestation,” he says. “Now that Nepal has turned it around, it can’t get any attention!”

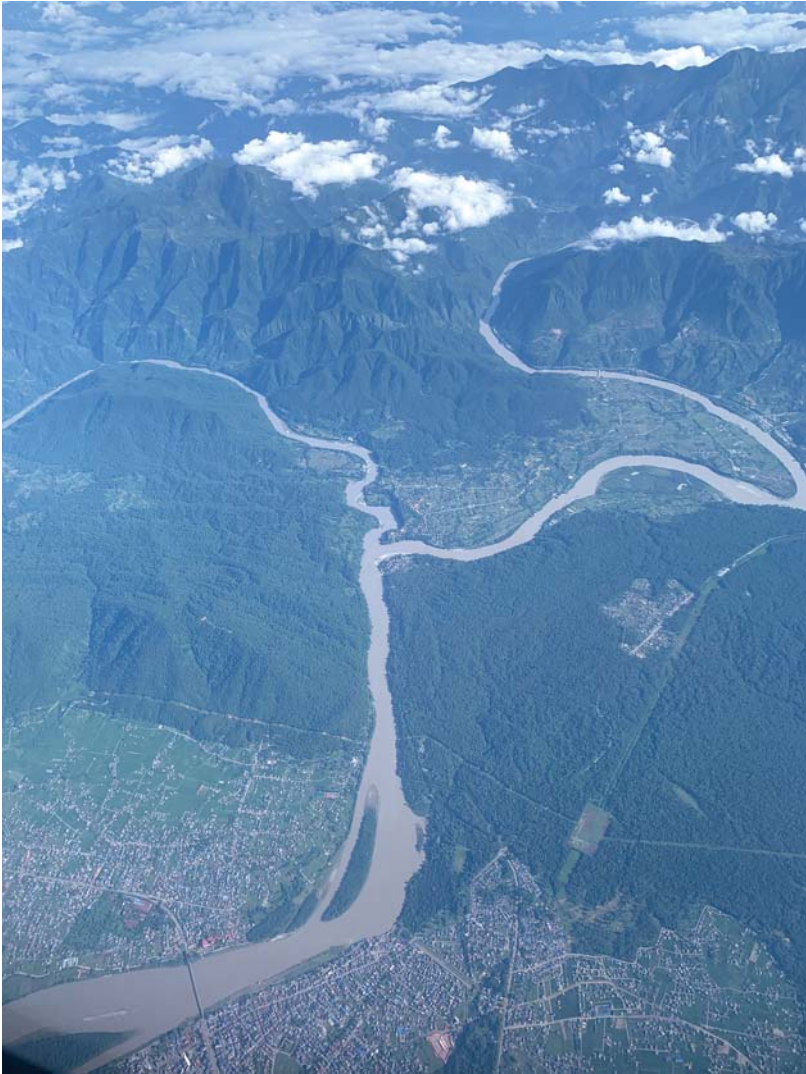
From 1950 to 1980, Nepal lost much of its forest cover. Deforestation was due in part to a growing rural population that cut trees to harvest timber and convert land to agriculture. Nepal had nationalised all forests in the 1950s, but the government was often ill-equipped to oversee them. Bureaucrats were frequently unaware, or turned a blind eye, when villagers cut trees for household use, and sometimes they colluded with commercial loggers to illegally exploit timber.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the government began handing over what eventually amounted to 1.8 million hectares of national forest land to communities to manage. Unlike government officials, local communities were seen to have a vested interest in preserving forest resources for long-term, sustainable use. They also were better positioned to monitor forests and enforce rules for harvesting forest products.

Fox’s research team found that areas with high rates of community forest membership experienced the most forest recovery, implying that decentralised forest management has played a key role in Nepal’s reforestation.

Demographic changes have also been important to forest recovery. Although Nepali villagers have migrated to India for seasonal and military work for centuries, migration to Gulf countries, Southeast Asia and beyond has exploded since the 1990s.

Migrants’ families often

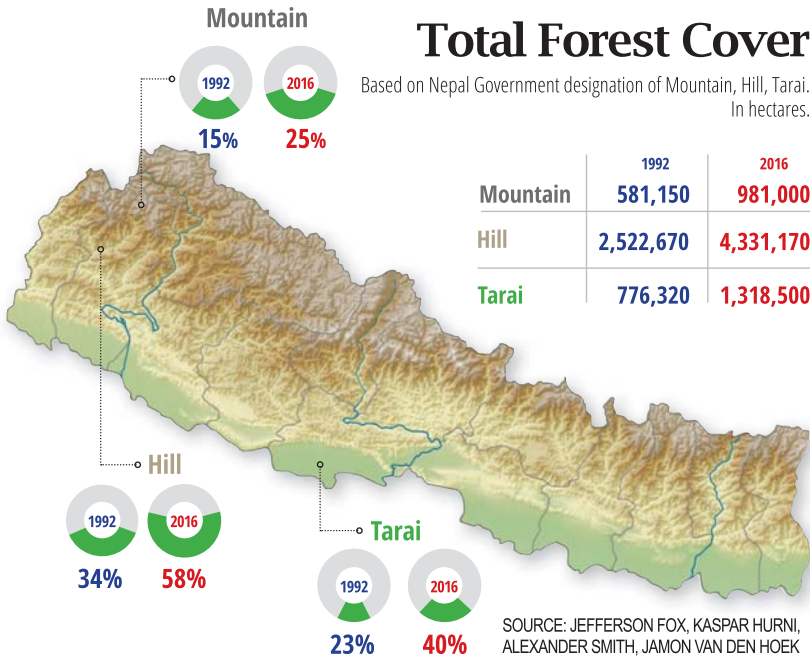


abandon marginal farmland because they lack the manpower to use it, allowing forests to naturally regenerate. Likewise, the families often harvest fewer forest products, like firewood, because they have more money to purchase alternatives, such as LPG. Fox’s team found that areas of Nepal where people receive the most remittances have also experienced greatest reforestation.

The data also indicate that Nepal’s forest gains have been concentrated in the midhills.

This is not surprising, because community forests are widespread in this region and outmigration and agricultural land abandonment are increasingly common. The data also show that forests have expanded in the Tarai, despite greater population growth, fewer community forests and more conflicts over resources there. However, gains in the Tarai — and in the mountains — have been smaller than in the midhills.

Importantly, forest extent is not the same thing as ecological



value, which can vary greatly from forest to forest. For example, young, dry, and isolated forests do not provide as good wildlife habitat as old-growth and riverine forests, or forests located along wildlife corridors. Similarly, a forest on a steep slope helps reduce soil erosion, giving it conservation value that a forest in a flat area may not have.

Fox’s team is not the first to analyse Nepal’s forest cover change using satellite imagery. A group at the University of Maryland (GlobalForestWatch.org) has monitored forest change globally since 2000. In Nepal, its data show there has been forest loss — the opposite of Fox’s team’s findings. This data has been cited by numerous academic studies and the media, including this newspaper.

Both the old and new data were generated using computer algorithms that look at historical satellite images to determine — based on the colour and shade of pixels in each photograph — what is forest and what is not. Forests are

considered to be any area with at least 50% canopy cover — meaning that, looking from the air, at least half of the ground is obscured by trees. (This may not sound like much, but the FAO standard is only 10%.)

While the Maryland team used algorithms designed for application around the world, Fox’s team have created algorithms specifically tailored for Nepal. Alex Smith, a member of Fox’s team who is also a PhD candidate at Oregon State University and a current Fulbright-Hays scholar in Kathmandu, says that image-analysis algorithms designed for worldwide use can be inaccurate in Nepal because of the mountainous terrain.

By contrast, his team’s algorithms use topographic correction techniques to compensate for shade and other visual distortions caused by steep slopes. Furthermore, they ensure their algorithms are accurate by cross-analysing results with other high-resolution photographs of the same areas — a process known



CANOPY COVER: Nepal's midhills have seen the greatest increase in forest cover over the past 25 years. Outmigration from villages and the success of community forests like this one in Chitlang of Makwanpur district have contributed to the regrowth.

Aerial view last month of the northern edge of Chitwan Valley (*below*) showing Bharatpur, the confluence of the Narayani and Kali Gandaki rivers and thick forests on the Chure and Mahabharat ranges.

PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT

as 'ground truthing'. For these reasons, the results are probably far more accurate for Nepal than the University of Maryland data.

Some would argue that because Nepal nearly doubled its forest area since 1992, it can spare a few thousand hectares here or there for infrastructure projects like Nijgad. But according to Smith, this is not the upshot of his team's research.

"Our study provides a big-picture view about what is happening, but the decision to convert any specific forest should be taken after considering local factors as well," he says.

These might include the potential benefits of the infrastructure project weighed against the value of the forest as wildlife habitat and as a source of resources, cultural values and aesthetics for local people.

Infrastructure aside, some people argue Nepal should allow more timber harvesting, which has hitherto been tightly regulated, as long as it is accompanied by sustainable forest management. Proponents of this approach say that forest-based industries could boost the economy without leading to deforestation, because trees would be replanted once cut.

Sceptics counter that ensuring long-term sustainability would be difficult, given pervasive problems with corruption and short-term thinking among leadership.

The new research by Fox's team does not provide conclusive evidence for one side or the other. Decisions about how much, and where, to harvest will inevitably involve balancing conservation and development objectives.

However, the research does highlight the continued importance of community forestry. "Local communities have put in a huge amount of effort conserving these forests," says Smith. "Whatever happens next, you want to keep people invested." 🇳🇵

The global media, world leaders, celebrities and environmental activists have expressed alarm at the mass arson in the Amazon rainforest, even as Hurricane Dorian and the heatwaves of this northern hemisphere summer underline the seriousness of the climate emergency.



CLIMATE FOR CHANGE
Ajaya Dixit

The Amazon spans nine South American countries, and the vast continental forest was a biodiversity hotspot even before the fires were started by farmers emboldened by Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro's encouragement to clear trees to make way for farms.

The Amazon acts as a vast sink for atmospheric carbon. Scientists say preserving forests and re-greening degraded land is the single most effective way to reduce carbon in the atmosphere, as the world works on slashing emissions.

Mass burning of forests not only releases more carbon into the atmosphere, but also decreases the capacity of the planet to absorb carbon dioxide. Besides this, forests also fulfil critical life-affirming functions, such as maintaining water quality, sustaining biodiversity and regulating micro-climates and weather processes.

However, Brazil does not have a monopoly on forest destruction. In 2017 and 2018, massive forest fires in California raged for weeks, killing 100 people. Fires started by farmers clearing forests for agriculture and palm oil plantations in Kalimantan and Sumatra blanket Southeast Asia in smoke every year.

Forest fires have also become more common in Nepal and across the Himalaya. In March 2009, following the failure of winter

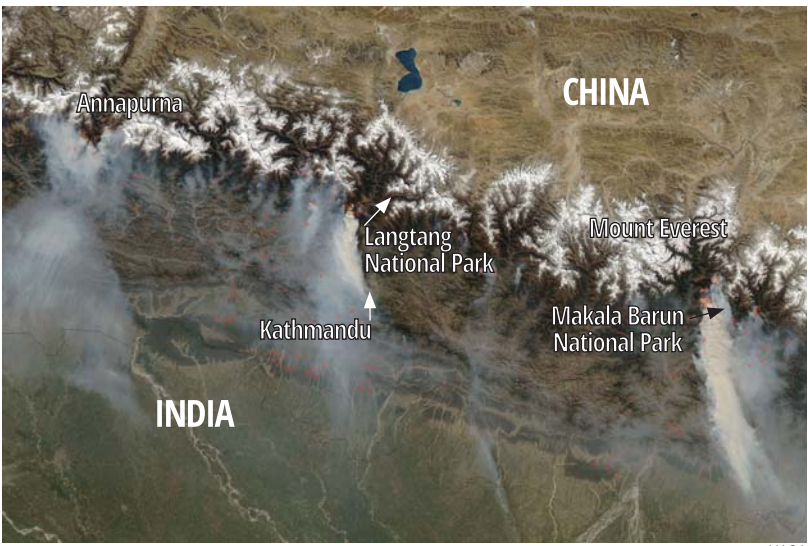
rains, enormous fires raged across the country destroying more than 105,000ha of forest land, and killing 43. (*See NASA satellite image below.*) In the past year there have been 2,771 fires in which 89 people have been killed, according to the National Emergency Operation Centre. Damage to property and livestock totalled Rs4 billion.

Big multiple fires, like these during spring, lead to black carbon or soot being transported by prevailing up-valley winds to be deposited on the snow, reducing its ability to reflect sunlight, and increasing ice melt during the spring thaw. Measurements on the Yala Glacier in Langtang have shown that up to a quarter of the ice melt is now due to dirty snow — the rest is caused by rising global average temperatures.

Increasingly rapid warming of the earth's surface, erratic rain and droughts make forests more vulnerable to fires — even in Nepal's successful community forests, which have helped increase the country's total canopy cover (*see story on page 14*).

There has been a global effort to compensate countries, forest dependent people and local custodians for protecting forests instead of cutting them down. After a conference in Bali in 2007, Nepal got involved in the program Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+). Despite transfer of global funds to forest groups, uncertainty about the mechanism, technical considerations on measurement, and avoiding loss of the carbon stock have prevented REDD+ from being more effective, efficient and equitable. Moreover, in Nepal with its leaky bureaucracy the benefits rarely reach local forest user groups.

Other issues, such as unclear tenure rights, limited access to resources for forest dependent



NASA

UP IN SMOKE: Failure of successive monsoons led to massive fires across Nepal, shown in a NASA satellite image from 12 March 2009, which covered almost the whole country in smoke. There were similar fires this spring.

people, lack of governance reforms, centralising tendencies of forest departments, inequitable benefit sharing and the poor implementation of social and environmental safeguards, continue to plague programs like REDD+. Overharvesting, illegal logging, infrastructure and conversion to plantations make conservation more difficult when we need forests more than ever before.

Forests have inherent intrinsic value: they cool the air, sustain biodiversity, provide food, absorb carbon and produce a range of other ecosystem services. Yet, rising temperatures will introduce new risks, making forest areas more susceptible to fires, including in Nepal. The land turns dry during non-monsoon months, fanning fires that in turn destroy vegetation and undergrowth, exposing more land surface to erosion during rains and increasing the sediment loads on rivers, leading to more flash floods.

Already burdened with growing enough to

feed their families, small-scale farmers across Nepal will find it increasingly harder to adapt to this changing reality. Without pragmatic measures involving communities and buttressing local capacity to address fires, the climate crisis will bring risks to the very idea of banking carbon in forests across Nepal.

The Amazon fires should remind us of the urgency of formulating policies for least developed countries like Nepal, policies that emphasise building institutional capacity backed by resources to deal with potential large-scale forest fires. Without this effort, the past success of Nepal's community forestry programs could be in serious peril. 🇳🇵

Ajaya Dixit is research adviser at the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (ISET-Nepal) and contributes this column *Climate for Change* monthly.

This column is part of Covering Climate Now, a global collaboration of 220 news outlets to strengthen coverage of the climate story.



Trees, politics and greed

Mukesh Pokhrel
in Bara

Political battle lines are being drawn over the proposed new international airport in Nijgad, turning the mammoth project into a Province 2 vs Kathmandu tug-o-war. This threatens to overshadow the concerns of environmentalists that the \$6-billion airport is not economically viable and would destroy the last remaining hardwood forest in Nepal's eastern Tarai.

On 1 September the Forest and Environment Minister of Province 2, Ramnaresh Yadav, said he would not allow trees to be cut in Nijgad to make way for the airport. There was immediate reaction in Bara, Parsa and Rautahat districts, which are adjacent to the proposed airport site, and Minister Yadav was burnt in effigy.

"There is conspiracy to move the airport from Nijgad to Saptari. We will never accept relocating it," said Ajay Patel of the Samajbadi Party Nepal of Bara district.



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

Till last year, the controversy over the proposed airport centred on environmental grounds because the site is a biodiversity hotspot. Critics said it was not an airport project but a logging concession, and accused politicians of ignoring alternatives that would not involve cutting trees. They also said the expensive new airport made no business sense.

However, Nijgad has now become a political football within

Province 2, as well as with the federal government in Kathmandu. Even politicians from Madhes-based parties in Bara, Parsa and Rautahat who were against the airport are now saying there is no alternative. All politics is local, goes the adage, and nothing proves that better than this sudden turnaround.

Responding to criticism from constituents, even Province 2 Chief Minister Lalbabu Raut and Speaker Saroj Kumar Yadav are now saying the airport must be built in Nijgad and nowhere else. Raut represents Parsa, and Yadav was elected from Bara. Till last year, both had raised environmental concerns.

Now, people of the eastern Province 2 districts of Bara, Parsa and Rautahat suspect Ramnaresh Yadav is raising environmental concerns because he wants the airport moved to his constituency in Saptari. They have also labelled

environmentalists 'anti-Madhesi'.

In 2014, a cabinet decision handed over 8,000ha of primary hardwood forests in Bara to the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) for the project, saying it was needed because Kathmandu airport was too congested. Even though it is 70km south of Kathmandu, the airport will be linked to the capital via a fast-track highway now being built.

Project chief Om Sharma rejects the claim that 240,000 trees will be felled. He says it will be no more than 10,000 in the first phase, for the terminal building and the first 3km of runway, because most of the project site is not forested, but is home to the settlement of Tangiya. However, this has raised another problem: resettlement and compensation for 1,500 households in Tangiya.

Says environmentalist Chanda Rana, who is spearheading opposition to Nijgad: "This is the wrong project, at the wrong time in the wrong place. It goes against all our global commitments to protect nature. Why is the forest, a wildlife migration corridor, being cut when an alternative site is available?" 🇳🇵



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CELEBRATE RESPONSIBLY

Anti-national anthem

All rise. We begin this week's column with the mandatory singing of Nepal's national anthem. Ready? All together now, and with feeling: 'Resham Phiriri, Resham Phiriri ... ek nale bundook ...'

The anti-nationals who are against the singing of the nationalist anthem in Pashupati every evening should be ashamed of themselves. These nay-saying nabobs don't have nothin' positive to say about nothin'. How can the country ever get ahead if we do not have the discipline to be proud of our country precisely because there is so little to be proud of? Haven't you seen the great stride GONe took by actually installing a baggage carousel in the domestic airport? No previous grabberment was able to take such a Great Leap Forward. And we managed to wangle 5,000 tarpaulins from China. Yay!

My considered opinion is that the Minister of Marxism & Tourism should not stop at having people to stand in an upright position during the national anthem in cinema halls. He should extend it to all spheres of national life. Here are some suggestions:

- The notional anthem being played at Pashupati's evening prayers is a good start. But it should be extended to nearby cremations which should henceforth be preceded by playing Nepal's jaunty national anthem so that we can give our dear and departed ones a patriotic send off as they commence their next incarnation in the afterlife. The deceased shall be required to stand up one last time for the duration of the tune.
- All international Nepal Airlines flights descending into Kathmandu airport shall play the national anthem on the cabin intercom as the aircraft enters Nepal's air space. At this point, all passengers will be required to stand even if the Fasten Seat Belt sign has been turned on.
- Nepalis are not allowed by law into the country's many casinos. In order to help Police nab Nepalis who are gambling away, management will play the national anthem at regular intervals. Nepalis will naturally stand up, allowing security personnel to remove them from the premises.
- The national anthem shall be played not just at the beginning of all football matches in the National Stadium, but also after every goal is scored. But only if it is scored by the Nepal team.
- All wedding ceremonies during the current mating season shall be preceded with a rendition of Nepal's folksy national anthem. Groom and bride, as well as invited guests, can dance to the anthem if they so desire.
- All ATMs that have not yet been hacked by the Chinese will play a fast-paced version of the national anthem before dispensing cash.
- All Nepali nationals on mountaineering expeditions will now have to sing the national anthem live on Facebook with gusto and in unison with other team members on reaching the summit of Mt Everest. Non-Nepali climbers can sing *Resham Phiriri*.



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