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GOPEN R.

BORN IN NEPAL

Giving birth is a life or death issue in Nepal. Even though the maternal mortality rate dropped from 1,000 per 100,000 live births 40 years ago to 239 today, inadequate birthing facilities is still a problem. But attention is now also shifting to preventing pregnancies.

There is a big unmet need for contraceptives: nearly a quarter of women surveyed nationwide in 2016 said they were not using birth control, even if they need it. Social stigma, patriarchy, ignorance and lack of access were reasons.

Nepal's contraceptive prevalence rate is 52%, but in remote Bajura it is only 34%. Although progress is being made, we are still a long way from the government's target of raising the rate to 75% by 2030.

As our reports in this edition from Bajura and Chitwan show, (*page 14-15*) there are cultural hurdles. With husbands away working for long

periods, their wives are reluctant to use contraceptives because of what others will say. The result: women suffer unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and ultimately struggle to take care of large families.

Almost every woman who visited a hospital in Bajura on a busy day last month had the same story: their husbands were away and they did not use birth control. Some were suffering from botched abortions.

More than 800 abortion cases were registered in Bajura last year. Just one hospital in Achham terminated more than 600 pregnancies in one year. Meanwhile, Nepal's total fertility rate has dropped from 6 in 1960 to near-replacement level at 2.05 today, and the country's population growth rate is also down from 2.5% in 1990 to 1.1% today. Surveys in Province 2 and Far-western Province have shown a clear correlation between unwanted pregnancies,

child marriage and fertility in regions with entrenched patriarchy.

Among Nepalis, 21% use injectable contraceptives, 10% are on pills, 10% use condoms, 8% have IUDs and only 3% have implants. Depo-Provera was among the most used injectables, but it was difficult to administer and painful. Now, the government, with donor support, is field-testing in Nawalpur and Sindhuli a lower-dose injectable called Sayana Press, which could make contraceptives more accessible to women.

Interventions like these, the government hopes, will reduce unwanted pregnancies, thus preventing unsafe abortions and reducing the number of women who have to take care of larger families.

Complications during pregnancy or at childbirth are the leading causes of death among girls aged 15-19 in low-income countries like Nepal. Unwanted pregnancies also hamper women's education and economic independence, and impact their family life, fuelling an intergenerational cycle of poverty and poor health.

Sewa Bhattarai in
Bajura and Nawalparasi

WELCOME TO THE WORLD: A baby swings in a hammock at a brick kiln in Lalitpur on Tuesday as its mother works nearby.

Trash-free Everest Trail

PAGE 8-9



Jung Bahadur's destitute descendants

PAGE 7

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REDUCING LABOUR PAIN

The Nepal Communist Party government, with Prime Minister KP Oli at the helm, is nearing two years in office. It has been taken to task for non-performance and under-performance. And rightly so. When it does take a decision it is usually the wrong one, like the project to fell a vast tract of forest for an airport that may never be built, or sabotaging Melamchi.

There is a lot to be critical of about the present government. They give profound speeches, make wild promises, pass the buck, come up with excuses and when nothing works, threaten the messenger of bad tidings.

Yet, there are ministers in government who are working quietly behind the scenes to get things done.

They do not say much, they speak softly and carry a big stick. The late Minister of Tourism Rabindra Adhikari was one of them, and he multitasked to get various projects off the ground. His death in a helicopter crash in April was a tragic loss for the country.

Alas his successor, Yogesh Bhattarai, though full of youthful energy and ambition, has fallen into the trap of making populist proclamations and issuing daft orders like playing the national anthem during evening prayers at Pashupati.

Another NCP Young Turk in the cabinet who we do not hear much from is Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security Gokarna Bista. Even as energy minister in the Jhalnath Khanal administration in 2012, Bista was known for his low profile and no-nonsense style.

In May 2018, as labour minister, Bista took the unprecedented step of stopping Nepalis from going to Malaysia to work, soon after a crossborder investigation by this newspaper, *Himal Khabarpatrika* and *Malaysiakini* exposed corrupt Nepali and Malaysian officials and private companies overcharging more than Rs5 billion (\$450 million) from over 600,000 Nepali workers between September 2013 and April 2018.

It was regime change in both Malaysia and Nepal that allowed the recruitment mechanism to be overhauled. Officials and private companies in Malaysia, with political protection in the Barisan Nasional coalition of former Prime Minister Najib Razak, worked with influential brokers in Kathmandu to cheat Nepali workers.

In July, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission began prosecution against Malaysia's former Deputy Prime Minister

and Internal Affairs Minister, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi. Among the many charges against him was taking a \$10 million bribe to permit company Ultra Kirana become a One Stop Centre for visa processing and labour migration from Nepal and other countries.

No one has yet been charged in Nepal. Instead, Minister Bista came under pressure from powerful businesses with political protection, who had been profiting from fees levied on Nepali migrant workers.

Despite this, Bista's ministry pushed through an MoU with Malaysian Minister for Human Resources M Kulasegeran last year, which requires employers to pay for visa fees and air tickets of Nepali workers, as well as for other facilities.

It took almost a whole year for the technical details of that deal to be worked out by a joint working committee, which finalised them in Kuala Lumpur on 12 September, opening the door for the resumption of Nepali workers going to Malaysia.

All credit for ironing out this deal goes to Ministers Bista and Kulasegeran, who have kept the welfare of workers at the forefront of all negotiations. As the minister told this newspaper in an interview last week, the goal has been to ensure that workers are not exploited,

spend less on fees, earn decent pay and are treated well in the workplace.

Nepali migrant workers have been made to jump through hoops to get their paperwork done. They face harassment and demands for payoffs every step of the way before departure. Bista insisted on tackling this culture and making it as convenient as possible

for workers to get the necessary tests and documents before departure.

In fact, one of the reasons for the delay in negotiations was Nepal's insistence that the 37 institutions the Malaysians had recognised to do medical tests for workers needed to be increased to 122, and be located throughout the country. The ministry is also working to allow Nepali missions abroad, as well as provincial governments, to renew work permits.

As with everything else in Nepal, laws and agreements are not enough. There are too many vested interest groups that have profited for too long from the sweat and blood of poor Nepali workers who will want to see this agreement fail.

But let us give credit where it is due. And at this paper we are committed to keeping readers informed on progress.



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

Too many vested interest groups have profited too long from the sweat and blood of poor Nepali workers and will want to see the new agreement with Malaysia fail.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepali Times edition #470 of 25 September -1 October 2009 looked forward to the Dasain break:

Dasain is here! So much has changed these past two decades — we've moved from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy to state-at-war to republic to absolute chaos and we're still not done — but for Dasain, the song remains the same. Perhaps not quite the same. Commercialism is rife, but whatever the naysayers bang on about, Dasain remains a quintessentially Nepali festival.

Whether you choose to celebrate it or not, when you see the kites flutter in the vigorous seasonal winds, when you see determined-looking family units trooping around your neighbourhood with huge plasters of tika on their foreheads, for an instant at least, one hopes we'll all remember our connections with this great festival, forget our differences and think of them as the diversity that could still make us a great nation.



ONLINE PACKAGES



JUNG'S DESTITUTE DECENDANTS

On Jung Bahadur's death anniversary, his destitute descendants perform rituals at Kal Mochan Temple in Kathmandu. Find out more in this video and story: [page 7](#).



NOT SO UNPLANNED

The unmet need for contraceptives is still having adverse impacts on women's health, especially in remote areas. Follow our reporters to Bajura for the story of Parvati Thapa, whose health and life have been endangered many times. Story: [page 14-15](#).

MIRACULOUS SURVIVAL

Congratulations on the remarkable work done ('Man survives steel rod piercing his head', Ramu Sapkota, #978). Fantastic.

Prakash Khatri

■ This is such a rare occasion where an attempt was actually successful. Kudos to the whole team.

Sandesh Pokhrel

COSTLY AIRPORT

Excellent report ('High cost lays aviation low in Nepal', Sharad Ojha, #978). Visit Nepal 2020 should focus on issues like this rather than pointless waste of taxpayers money on irrelevant international promotions.

Virat Sjb Rana

■ Highest fuel and landing fees, yet the poorest of facilities — that is Tribhuvan International Airport. Nicely done *Nepali Times*.

Samriddhi Rai

■ Paying more for less to line the pockets of politicians and administrators.

Stephen T Eckerd

■ Inefficient and badly maintained airport. I love Nepal but it's an agony to go through this airport every time. Where does all the money go? Or into who's pockets/ accounts does the money disappear?

Eira Torvinen

■ What a shocker!! I was aware it is the worst airport in the world but not that it is the most expensive. Shame on you leaders of Nepal.

Anand Agrawal Rateria

■ As long as the government and CAAN is involved in the management of the airport things won't change. The management need to be handed to a private sector.

Raghu Shrestha

■ Corruption is hurting our country's image and economic development.

Pakhrin Raj

■ And also with domestic air tickets costing four or five times the amount Nepalis pay, doubling the transport costs to visit Nepal and places like Rara and Dolpo, this is a big turnoff for potential visitors.

Marianne Heredg

WHAT'S TRENDING

Man survives steel rod piercing his head

by *Ramu Sapkota*

Neurosurgeons in Nepal recently treated an extremely rare and risky case: removing a steel rod lodged in Raharman Tamang's head. This is a story of his survival, a blow-by-blow account by the surgeon who treated him. Read and watch this widely shared report and video.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

High cost lays aviation low in Nepal

by *Sharad Ojha*

Why does Kathmandu Airport have one of the highest fuel and landing charges in the world? And how does it limit tourism prospects for #VisitNepal2020? Get all your answers in this investigation that was extensively shared on social media and join the discussion online.

Most popular on Twitter

Most commented



Why Nepalis are flocking to Okinawa

by *Charlene Chua*

Nepalis make up by far the highest number of foreign workers in Okinawa. Why do they like the laid-back, tropical island in Japan so much? Visit our website to find out why.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
COSTLY AIRPORT
#Kathmandu airport has the highest fuel and handling costs of any airport in the world, and yet the poorest facilities. High cost lays #aviation low in #Nepal.
Read full story by @Sharad_KTM

Bibhushan Khadka @biblomatic
It's a very disturbing matter to be honest. Having a direct negative impact on the economy is a problematic subject. This needs to be addressed.

Shubhash Wostey @wostey
Most expensive operating costs in the world
Poorest airport facilities/services
Chronic airport congestions
+EU restrictions
Shall we first pay attention here? Can make boutique airport later.

Indrakl @Indraprajapa
For every country its international airport is the main gateway for accessibility and growth of the country. For the success of Visit Nepal 2020...the international airport should have been the main priority...if you have a good airport, the tourists will come.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Raharman Tamang was using a circular saw to cut a steel rod at a metal shop in #Bhaktapur when a section of the rod snapped off and pierced his head. Read & watch video to find out how doctors at Neuro Hospital successfully operated on Tamang.

Mona Bomgaars @monabomgaars
Follows a history of great neurosurgeons in Nepal.

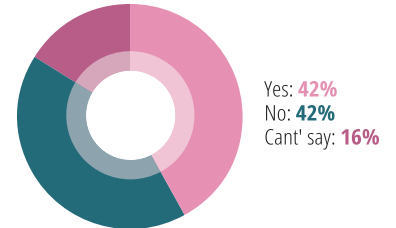
Nomad Within @jubin182_
Hats off to those doctors for giving Raharman a new life, astounding!



Weekly Internet Poll #978

Q. Should the government lift the ban on women going to West Asia as domestic workers?

Total votes: 134



Weekly Internet Poll #979
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Who is to blame for the poor state of women's health? Federal government? Provinces? Others?



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Now, connect to satellite through Android

Smartphones are now so smart they can be used as satphones

As the mobile phone network expands and it is possible to get a 4G signal atop Mt Everest, you might think the era of satellite phones has come to an end. Think again. There are all kinds of reasons why satellite phones still come in handy in a ruggedly vertical country like Nepal, where there are still nooks and crannies that lack a mobile signal, or where satphones provide convenient data and voice connections during disasters.

During the war, Maoist guerrillas kept in touch with units across the country through satellite phones. Technology has advanced rapidly since then, and today's satphones are less bulky, cheaper and have surprisingly affordable service plans available locally.

But the latest, Thuraya X5-Touch, looks nothing like a satphone. It is actually the first Android-based

satellite phone that can also be used as a smartphone. It has a 5.6in touchscreen, 2GB of RAM, 16GB of expandable storage, an 8MP rear camera and even a 2MP selfie snapper.

The phone is always on dual mode, with one SIM working on 1G-4G networks where available, while the other SIM connects to a satellite. To make a satellite call, a user simply pulls out the retractable antenna and dials. The beauty of it is that platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are on the unit. This phone is ideal for those who make frequent international travels to hard-to-reach places. The set has a price tag of about Rs200,000.

The other popular new model is the Thuraya XT-PRO. Although bulkier than the XT-Lite model introduced three years ago, the PRO is a professional



device for real adventurers, or those who work in extremely remote areas. The phone is as rugged as they come, is fire and waterproof and has a GPS locator, along with a special SOS button for emergencies.

The XT-Lite is still popular and available in Nepal, and although it is much cheaper than other satphones at Rs110,000, it does not have data.

Infrequent travellers might consider a Sat Sleeve, which turns an existing smartphone into a satphone via an app. This device has been around for five years, and is still the cheapest, most convenient way to use satellite-based communication.

At Rs70,000 the sleeve allows the mobile to be used as a cellphone as well as a satellite



phone when there is no cell signal. The sleeve fits most iPhone models and Androids, and its internet capability is always on for web browsing, email and social media.

Independent import of satellite sets is not allowed in Nepal, so both device and service have to be bought through local providers like Constellation in Sanepa, which has most of the phones and equipment in stock. Its customers are mainly mountaineering expeditions, the United Nations and Kathmandu-based embassies, as well as disaster relief agencies.

radius, for up to five devices. It provides WiFi data speeds up to 444kbps and works by pointing the dish to a satellite.

The other popular service offered is the Iridium Extreme PTT ("Push To Talk"), which is essentially a satellite based walkie-talkie. Unlike Thuraya, which uses satellites in geosynchronous orbit, Iridium satellites are in low-Earth orbit. The company has now replaced all its satellites with updated technology, making it possible to offer services like the Extreme PTT.

The only requirement is that both users need to have the same handset, so they can be in constant communication without the need to dial-up. This is perfect for domestic airlines, mountaineering expeditions and hydroelectric projects, or post-disaster rescue and relief, when personnel have to be in constant touch.

Constellation has even sold M2M (machine to machine) satellite units that transmit air pollution measurements, glacial lake levels or snow cover data in real time to monitoring stations in Kathmandu.



UAE-based Thuraya also provides the IP+, a terminal that works as a satellite-based router for data applications over a 10m

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BIZ BRIEFS

Turkish rising

Turkish Airlines' international-to-international transfer passenger figures increased by record numbers in August, rising 9.4% over the same month last year. The airline's load factor was

84.8%, while cargo/mail volume grew 11.5%. Domestically, the load factor grew 0.6 points, while North America and the Far East increased by 0.4 and 0.3 points.

Himalayan Art

The Himalayan Art Festival will be held 29 September-3 October at Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal. Lok Chitrakar, a globally-recognised master of traditional Paubha painting, will attend and his painting Sadakshari Lokesvara will be exhibited.

Training by Genese

Genese Solution is collaborating with UK Aid's Skills for Employment Programme to provide cloud computing training to 2,000 IT students in Nepal, and subsequently offer job placement nationally and globally. The training covers job roles such as Application Developer, Cloud Support Engineer, Cyber Security Specialist, Data

Integration Specialist, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning Developer and Digital Marketer.

Qatar codeshare

Qatar Airways has announced codeshare cooperation with China Southern Airlines starting in January 2020, after Qatar acquired 5 percent of China Southern in December 2018. The agreement will let China Southern passengers book travel on Qatar flights between Guangzhou and Doha and Beijing and Doha, permitting one-stop connections to more than 80 destinations in the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

Hyatt awarded

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu has been recognised with a South Asian Travel Award (SATA) in two categories: Leading Family Resort and Leading Luxury Hotel / Resort

in Nepal, at the 4th annual SATA award ceremony held in Sri Lanka. "With the upcoming Visit Nepal 2020, this recognition sets the benchmark in luxury and family resort choice for guests travelling to Nepal," said Hyatt General Manager Rajesh Ramdas.

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Dad’s deception

How an international wedding ceremony was saved by translation

The dark interior of the Om Restaurant on Freak Street was my favourite hangout when I first arrived in Nepal. Run by three groovy, long-haired brothers, refugees from eastern Tibet, it was one of the few eateries in the Kathmandu of the 1970s.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

Tenzin, the eldest, was destined a decade later to become my husband, but I hardly remember him from those days. Busy establishing the family carpet factory, he made only occasional appearances, but I do recall a dark floppy moustache and his reputation for a bevy of foreign girlfriends. I liked his air of mysterious purpose.

The fried rice, noodle soup, momos and cheerful welcome at the original Om were a staple of the world traveller community, along with Yin Yang’s apple pie, and our favourite sizzling chicken on the Crystal Hotel rooftop with the historic city spread beneath us.

It was from that lofty terrace one monsoon afternoon in July 1973 that I imagined watching the smoke rise and the fire engulf most of the seven courtyards and 1,700 rooms of the Singha Darbar

palace, conveniently consuming all government records.

The Om restaurant was not destined to last forever either, and became a casualty of Nepal’s shifting allegiances in the Tibetan resistance movement and China’s ping-pong diplomacy. By 1978 it had closed.

When I came to marry Tenzin — in the Winchester registry office in the summer of 1986 — the Om brothers decided it was too hard for their aging mother to face the dreadful reality that her favoured eldest son was wed to an Englishwoman. She still regarded him as a monk in Lhasa’s Sera monastery, where he had studied as a teenager.

Tenzin had recently brought her out of Tibet to re-join her two husbands in Nepal, following three harrowing decades during the Cultural Revolution — being the wife of Khampa leaders, her treatment was particularly harsh and she could never properly use her right arm without wincing in pain.

Due to her perceived fragility, Tenzin and my relationship had to be concealed.

My emotions ranged the full gamut from hurt to anger to irritation to sadness to denial, and finally to resignation with this strange family impasse. First one baby, then a second son were born to us, squeezing into the diminutive Alpine Cottage in a quiet corner of Bansbari beneath a spreading fig tree. But my boys could not



be enjoyed by their Tibetan grandmother, even though she lived just down the road in Bodnath, finding exiled solace in her daily devotions and spinning prayer wheels. I suspected she must have been aware (Kathmandu Valley is a small place) but that she chose not to know, which in some ways was even more distressing.

Things came to a head when my English father and stepmother travelled to Nepal in 1987. Dad had hosted our wedding reception on an expansive green lawn in Hampshire, and was much relieved that his troublesome eldest daughter had found such a polite, good and gentle man to marry. Arriving from Edinburgh,

enthusiastic to meet Tenzin’s family and bearing gifts of Scottish shortbread and tartan rugs for the in-laws, I did not have the heart to explain the reality of our situation.

So early one December evening our breath condensed in the air as we skirted the stupa at dusk, wrapped in scarves and padded jackets against an unusual chill. Baby Sangjay had been left at home. The Bodnath *kora* was crowded with mountain pilgrims escaping the worst of the winter cold in their highland homes. Flush with fervour, an elderly woman in a pink headband prostrated towards the white dome and pervasive painted eyes — a wave of robed boy monks disconnected from their prayer-wheeling to flow around her like a gentle river through the last of the light. Our footsteps echoed on the stone flags amidst murmured prayers and the clunk of prayer wheels, but we were more focussed on our mission to introduce the in-laws.

I was apprehensive trooping up the concrete steps behind my father and stepmother to the modest apartment behind the stupa, my only consolation being that we safely had no language in common. Tenzin’s parents were courteous but cautious as *katas* were offered and we settled onto carpeted and cushioned seats.

“Tashi deleki!” his father nodded benignly. Neither had learned Nepali. A heater glowed bleakly in the dim room, sweet tea was served, and there were wooden bowls

of *cupse*, nuts and dried fruit on the painted tables. A web of wrinkles was etched deep into my mother-in-law’s bronzed face, betraying a lifetime of gritty wind and harsh realities on the Tibetan plateau. Her wooden prayer beads were never far away.

But I needn’t have worried. Tenzin, his brothers and their smiling complicit wives carefully stage-managed the deception, translating every word between their Tibetan dialect and English. My uptight British father pontificated about the joys of cross-cultural marriage and far-flung families, a suitable reply was translated back to us, and the gifts were ceremoniously exchanged.

Tenzin’s parents were gracious and patrician in their sombre Khampa clothes and straitened circumstances — it was only afterwards that I learned they had been told we were some random acquaintances from Tenzin’s time in the United States.

It was several years later, without any words being spoken, that our marriage and young family were tacitly admitted to be acceptable after all. Just like that, without any fuss, it was over, and the boys and I could all be together at Kathmandu Khampa gatherings. Dad never returned to Nepal and went to his grave unsuspecting, always professing delight with the hospitality of his extended Tibetan family. 🇳🇵



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Two cyclonic systems, one over the Arabian Sea and the other at the Bay of Bengal have injected new life into the monsoon. A cooler westerly air mass is blowing moisture over the mountains, dumping huge amounts of rain over the Himalaya. The danger is that it is falling over already saturated slopes. Intermittent rain will continue through the weekend, with a drop in maximum temperature.

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Jung Bahadur's destitute descendants

Gopal Gartaula



MANISH PADEL

“If it pleases your highness, please partake of your repast,” says a woman dressed in a frayed kurta, using the courtly language of Nepal’s royalty.

The words seem completely out of place in the simple rented flat on the banks of the Manahara River in Kathmandu. Yamjit Pratap, 81, nods in assent, and sits on the dusty floor for his meal of dal, rice and vegetable curry.

Few in this run-down neighbourhood know that Yamjit Pratap is a descendant of Jung Bahadur Rana, who took power in a bloody coup in 1847 and founded a dynasty that lasted till 1948. But unlike other flamboyant members of the Rana clan who carry the ‘Jung Bahadur’ as their middle names, he lives in penury with his wife, ‘queen’ Narayani.

Yamjit Pratap is the sixth generation after Jung Bahadur, tracing his ancestry through his father Shiva Pratap and forebears Chandra Pratap, Yuddha Pratap and Jagat Jung, Jang Bahadur’s oldest son. Jagat Jung was married to Tika Rajya Laxmi, the daughter of King Surendra Shah, which was how the Rana and

Shah dynasties secured family ties in those days.

When Jung Bahadur died in Bara in 1876, family infighting for succession soon broke up the clan. The Shumshers, descended from Jung’s brother Dhir Shumsher, chased Jung’s family out of the Kathmandu Valley. Remnants of the Rana clan who are today found in Sindhuli, Dhankuta, Palpa and Nepalganj, are also descendants of Jung Bahadur’s immediate family.

Yamjit Pratap’s own ancestors had settled in Parewa Danda of Sindhuli, and needed special visas to come to Kathmandu for family functions, festivals or medical treatment. Yamjit Pratap himself got a job in Biratnagar to support his family, and even bought some property. But he came to Kathmandu in the 1990s and filed a case in the Supreme Court to claim inheritance to Jung Bahadur’s property.

The Supreme Court decided in his favour, ruling that the property by the Manahara belonged to Jung Bahadur’s descendants. The family got back the land after 121 years but after dividing it among the many families, Yamjit Pratap got only a tiny plot

— and even it has not been transferred to his name because of bureaucracy. He has filed three more cases, including for the land surrounding Jung Bahadur’s property around Kalmochan Ghat in Teku.

Yamjit Pratap’s son Nirakar works for an airline in Kathmandu, and can barely support the family of five. Despite this, the neighbours still call Yamjit Pratap by his royal appellation, ‘raja saheb’, which he finds quite natural. Yamjit Pratap is irritated that his children had to read history books in school that accuse his ancestors of plundering the country.

“We have a hard time paying for our basic necessities, if we fall sick we do not have money for treatment,” says Yamjit Pratap, who recounts family lore about Jung Bahadur, his brilliance and his meteoric rise in Nepali politics.

There is a large portrait of Jung Bahadur in the home, and even after so many generations Yamjit Pratap’s family still perform an annual memorial ritual for an ancestor who so dramatically changed the course of Nepali history.

MAN OF HISTORY: In a simple rented flat on the banks of the Manahara River in Kathmandu lives Yamjit Pratap, 81, who traces his ancestry six generations ago to Jung Bahadur, who established a dynasty that ruled Nepal 1847-1948.



On Jung Bahadur’s death anniversary, his destitute descendants perform rituals at Kal Mochan Temple in Kathmandu. Find out more in this video and story.

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SONIAAWALE

Everest fights

(against garbage)



Alton C Byers
in Khumbu

Mount Everest has been called the ‘The World’s Highest Garbage Dump’ or ‘The Toilet Paper Trail’, but the international media has missed the good news: that Sagarmatha National Park is the cleanest it has been since tourism started in the 1960s. And it is about to become even more garbage free as every visitor will be asked to volunteer to take 1kg of trash back for collection by recyclers at Kathmandu airport.

The spring 2019 climbing season saw another surge of international media coverage, with daily stories of ‘traffic jams’, newly exposed garbage, bodies and helicopter parts that surfaced as the mountain thawed due to climate change.

Some 400 tons of plastic, metals, glass and other refuse is generated each year by lodges catering to the tourist industry, the bulk of it burned and buried in some 75 community landfills located near villages along the Everest Trail. Burnable garbage includes plastics that poison the air, contaminate the water, and create new health hazards for humans and livestock alike.



Namche Bazaar in 1973



Namche Bazaar in 2015

It hasn’t always been this way. When I first visited the Khumbu in 1973, there were no lodges, the total number of tourists per year was under 2,000 and virtually no solid waste was produced. Food came in reusable packaging (doko baskets, cloth bags) and meals consisted of rice, lentils, potatoes and some vegetables.

By the 1980s and 1990s, a few lodges started being built and trekking groups camped in village potato fields rented out by

landowners. By the early 2000s the rush to build lodges to feed and shelter the growing numbers of tourists took off, transforming the cultural landscape. With lodges came both greater tourist numbers as well as an increased demand for consumables like beer, whiskey, wine, bottled water, fruit cocktail, sunscreen, TVs and batteries, with their non-biodegradable packaging. It all ended up in refuse pits to be routinely burned.

Going by the international press narrative,

the problem is bad and getting worse. Are the Sherpa people, Sagarmatha National Park and the government doing nothing about it? Far from it. More than 20 years ago, the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC) was launched as a local initiative to manage waste. Since then, the SPCC and its partners have installed 106 waste collection centres throughout the park, banned glass beer bottles, organised annual Base Camp clean-ups, conducted compost trainings, and

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Everest s back

(e and bad press)



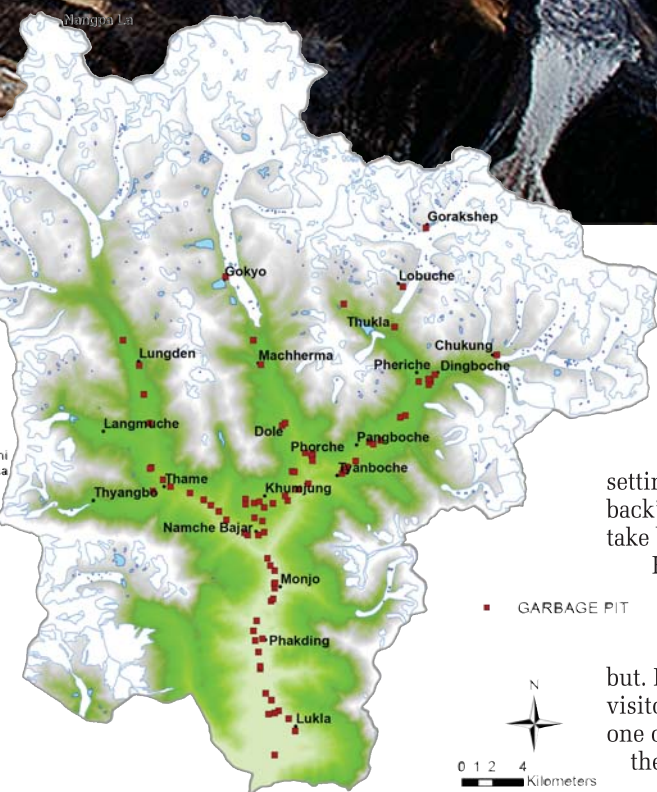
GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT: (*left to right*) A yak hauling rubbish from the Everest Trail pauses at Monjo.

Garbage pits along the main trail are usually hidden.

Panorama from above Pheriche looking south at Ama Dablam. Landfills are particularly problematic in the alpine zone above 4,000m, where the decomposition process is much slower than at lower, warmer and more humid environments.



ALL PHOTOS: ALTON BYERS

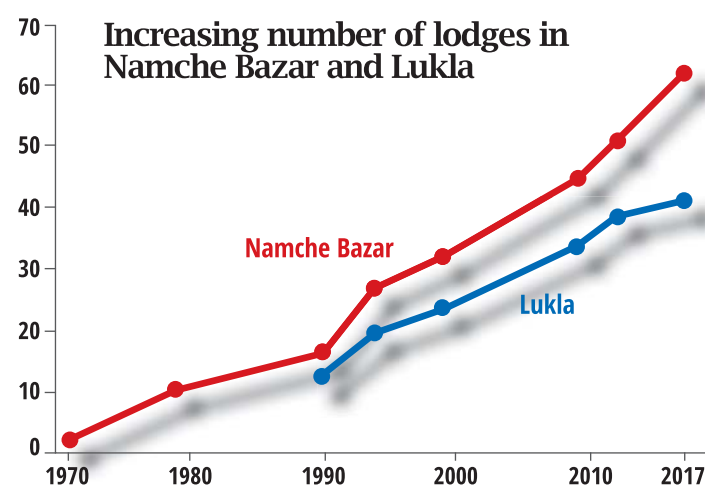


stakeholders were looking for innovative new ways to manage the waste of 60,000 trekkers and climbers, plus their support staff, who are in the park every year. The SPCC is now working with Sagarmatha Next, which is setting up segregation stations for a ‘carry me back’ program, where every tourist agrees to take back 1kg of waste to recycling centres in Kathmandu.

The trek from Lukla to Everest Base Camp has long been referred to as the ‘toilet paper trail’ — today it is anything but. In spite of the growing numbers of visitors, support staff and pack animals, it is one of the cleanest and most beautiful treks in the high mountain world.

Of course, a lot more needs to be done.

Participants at the Namche and Kathmandu workshops stressed the need for innovation to deal with solid waste in a location-specific way, while being sensitive to local culture and values. The first step is establishment of waste separation centres, pre-processing facilities (shredding, compacting, baling) and finding way to transport the material to recycling centres in Kathmandu and elsewhere. Some of the aluminium and plastic waste is already being turned into ‘Everest Art’ to be sold for fund-raising. Aluminium cans are also converted into utilitarian objects like frying pans and other utensils. Human



waste can be addressed through new solar technology, and more efficient septic tanks can prevent leakage.

As a first step, Colorado and Arizona will be working with the local government ahead of the autumn trekking season to follow up the recommendations of the workshops. A landfill-free and waste-free Sagarmatha National Park, where garbage is not burnt, can be a reality in a few years. It could provide a much needed model for other mountain areas

where the problems of tourist-related solid and human waste management exist.

The difference is, things get done in the Khumbu. 🇳🇵

Alton C Byers, PhD, is a mountain geographer, conservationist and mountaineer specialising in applied research, high altitude ecosystems, climate change and glacier hazards. Field work for this project was supported by a grant from the National Geographic Society.

Garbage disposal sites in Sagarmatha National Park

continually look for new and innovative solutions to the challenges of managing the waste generated. Not much of this is reported by the international media.

During two solid-waste workshops facilitated by the University of Colorado and Arizona State University in Namche Bazaar and Kathmandu last month, local

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EVENTS

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GETAWAY



A Painting Review

This exhibition is a collection of portraits, traditional Nepali subjects, abstracts and landscapes, both real and imagined, by Mike Krajniak. 26 September-4 October, 10am-5pm, The Taragaon Museum, Boudha (01) 5178105

Thai Festival 2019

Enjoy the culture of Thailand, with many restaurants serving the South-east Asian country's cuisine and stalls displaying Thai wares. 28 September, Shangri-La Hotel, Kathmandu (01) 4371410



The Last Honey Hunter

Ben Ayer's *The Last Honey Hunter* documents the last harvest of wild cliff honey by a tribe of Kulung Rai. Watch this critically acclaimed film about one of the most riveting cultural activities in Nepal. 27 September, 10am onwards, Rs500 (half price for students and senior citizens), Hotel Shanker (01) 4410151

Kite Workshop

With Dasain right around the corner, kite-flying preparations are being made. Learn how to make your own kite in this workshop. Only for kids aged 4+. 28 September, 3pm-5pm, Rs800, Giggles, Naxal

15 years in Nepal

French photographer Michel Mee's collection of photographs from his time in Nepal, titled *Exposition Photo*, will be shown. 27 September-25 October, Patan Museum, 9841830748



Art In Carpet

An exhibition of Nepali carpets by Kaleen Carpet. 26-28 September, 11am-6pm, Bougainvilla Events, Tripureswor (01) 4220087

Karkhana Mela

Spend a day with your kids watching a play, participating in workshops and taking part in fun activities. 28 September, 11am-4pm, Karkhana, Gyaneswor (01) 4429963



'night, Mother

'night, Mother is a play by American playwright Marsha Norman. Adapted to Nepali elements with English dialogue, this Katha Ghera production stars Loonibha Tuladhar and Akanchha Karki. 20 September-3 October, daily at 6pm (Saturday at 1pm also), Kausi Theatre, Teku, 9861315317

Asha Dasain Mela

Support ASHA, a non-profit that provides assistance to survivors of domestic abuse, by visiting its Dasain pop-up market. 28 September, 11am-6pm, Labim Mall (01) 4370160



Boudha Rock Fest

Local music festival Boudha Rock Fest this year features Bipul Chettri and the Travelling Band, Skin & Bones and more. 5 October, 2pm-9pm, Boudha Fulbari Ground, Boudha, 9813836319

Blues n' Roots

Kathmandu Blues n' Roots is back with its annual one-day music festival. This year Nepali bands such as Kathmandu Catz, Newaz and The Himalayan Connection will be performing, along with international artists like Mr. No Money Band and Boy and Bear. 28 September, 2pm-10pm, CALM, Naxal, 9861024813



Nadège

Nadège's accordion concert will leave you swaying to their music and itching to dance along. 27 September, 5:30pm-7:30pm, Alliance Française de Katmandou (01) 5009221

World Tourism Day

In celebration of World Tourism Day, an exclusive musical performance by Kutumba and Kanta dAb dAb will be held. All proceeds will be donated to Nepali artists attending WOMEX. 27 September, 6pm-9pm, Patan Museum

Spark Music Fest

Spark Music Fest is Nepal's leading electronic music event. International and national artists will be performing. 27-29 September, 10am onwards, Rs2,000 per person, Lele, Lalitpur, 9860862220



The Yard

The Yard is one of the best eateries in the Kathmandu Valley. With their use of organic ingredients, smashing flavours and great presentation, The Yard never fails to serve you a meal you won't forget. 7am-9pm, The Yard by Oasis Garden Homes, Sanepa (01) 5532965

European Bakery

European Bakery is beloved by locals for their freshly baked goods, homemade ice-cream, delectable cakes and affordable prices. Their special Saturday donuts are a must for a good weekend. 6:30am-7:30pm, Baluwatar (01) 4422047



Noir Fennel

New to town, Noir Fennel is already creating a buzz with their Indian-French fusion dishes. Try the oven-roasted rack of lamb seasoned with herbs. 11:30am-10pm, Lazimpat (01) 4410463

Chu-La

Chu-La might just be the very first place in Nepal to serve a good Philly Cheese Sandwich. With freshly baked bread, local cheeses and high quality ingredients, the sandwich is a must. 11am-7pm, New Baneshwor (01) 4105200

Canova Cafe Coffee

This casual cafe not only serves good coffee but also a surprisingly light and flavourful masala dosa. 7am-10pm, Maitidevi, 9801023759



Gangnam Galbi Barbeque

Korean barbecue, grill and stick food, a.k.a. galbi, will tempt you as you watch it cook and will definitely tantalise your taste buds. 11am-9:30pm, Naxal (01) 4434780



Heritage Hotel

Enjoy the Festive Fiesta offer for one night and two days. Take a dip in the pool or have a mocktail for free. 10% discount on all food and drinks. Pokhara, 61-462125

Newa Chén

This hotel is reminiscent of the golden era of the Malla Dynasty. The open rooms and courtyards embody the palaces of the family that once ruled the city. Kobahal, Lalitpur (01) 5533532



Mountain Glory Forest Resort

Situated just 15 minutes away from Lakeside and at the banks of the Seti River, this resort offers the best of both worlds. Dovilla, Pokhara, 9856064223



The Inn Patan

What was once a traditional brick and timber Newari house has been transformed into a beautiful heritage hotel. Experience the vibrant history of Patan Darbar Square during your stay. Patan, 9851066897

Shambaling Boutique Hotel

This Tibetan-style boutique hotel offers cosy rooms, comfortable amenities and access to the heart of Boudha. Boudha (01) 4916868



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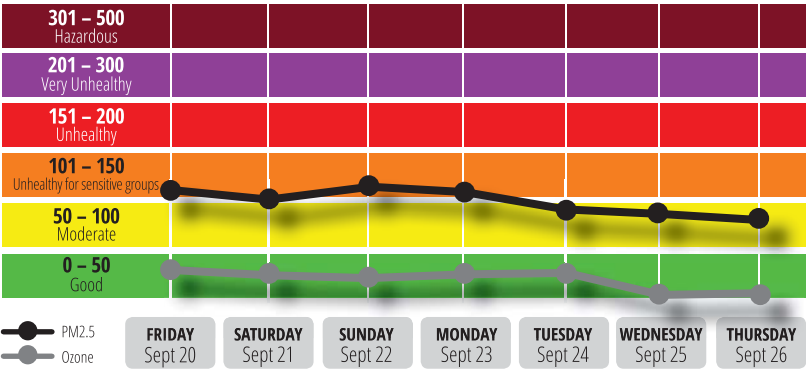


Opened in Kathmandu on 27 September

Abominable is about teenager Yi from Shanghai, who encounters a young Yeti on the roof of her apartment. Their meeting turns into an adventure when, joined by Yi's friends Jin and Peng, they name the Yeti 'Everest' and go on a journey to the highest point of Earth to reunite him with his family.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 20-26 September



Despite the heavy rain this week, there has been a mysterious spike in the air quality Index (AQI). Usually, heavy rain washes particulate matter from the air, even if just for a few hours. This week, the daily averages show the concentration of harmful particles sized 2.5 microns and below to be in the orange band, meaning Unhealthy for sensitive groups. Perhaps it's because of heavier traffic below the holiday season. <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Mustang in shadows and light

Books look at Mustang's past, record the present and ponder its future

Kunda Dixit

This time of year Mustang is a profusion of colour: lapis lazuli sky with dazzling clouds, purple fields of buckwheat, ripening golden barley terraces, Dhakmar's towering red cliffs, yellow rocks, salmon sunsets.

So why would Kevin Bubriski and Sienna Craig publish a photo book called *Mustang in Black and White*?

As Tibetologist Charles Ramble explains in the preface, 'Mustang: Black and White, But Never Gray', the Kingdom of Lo was historically perceived as a 'dark' corner. Even early Bon Tibetans found the place forbidding and inhabited by demons.

But Ramble gives Mustang's 'darkness' a positive attribute. 'Sometimes, darkness is the best place in which to see the cosmos in its full radiance,' he writes. Anyone who has gazed up at the Milky Way from the starlit landscape around the ancient monastery at Lo Gekar will know what he is talking about.

Mustang is technically in Nepal, but is part of the trans-Himalayan plateau, situated on what used to be the shores of the Tethys Sea. Exposed boulders high on cliff faces were once strewn on the banks of the prehistoric Kali Gandaki, which cut through the mountains as they rose, lifting fossilised ammonites that once crawled the ocean floor.

Bubriski writes that Mustang's colours have always fascinated him, adding: 'My choice to represent Mustang in black and white was motivated by the dramatic power of how the bright sunlight and deep shadows transform the physical earthen forms and shapes of *chörten*, *gompa*, mountains, ladders and doorways into visually powerful and compelling compositions.'

Bubriski first came to Nepal in 1975, spending two years in Humla as a Peace Corps volunteer. Most of his photographic life has been in darkrooms working with black and white prints, eschewing the digital camera. Finally giving in, he now uses a smartphone app for square black and white images with artificially frayed edges.

Artists have been inspired by Mustang to use various medium to capture its richness. Robert Powell took to water colour to depict Mustang in his book *Earth Door Sky Door: Paintings of Mustang*. Bubriski explains his choice of black and white photography: 'As the reality of the colour world was distilled by my eye... I found the visual transformation and abstraction intriguing with what it added, yet also with what it took away.'



Sienna Craig is an anthropologist who first travelled to Mustang in 1993, and has kept coming back for research. In stark, poetic prose in chapters that take us town-by-town up the trail, she describes how the place is changing with outmigration, the arrival of the road and mobile connectivity.

Even the climate breakdown is forcing

villages to relocate and swollen glacial lakes' bursts regularly bringing down destructive torrents of grey mud paste and boulders. There are now vast apple plantations where it was once too cold for orchards.

Change is a constant in Mustang today. The trails at Tsarang have hoof marks next to tractor tyre tracks. Mule trains are being replaced by Boleros, young men in Adidas caps and Nike sneakers loiter by sidewalk shrines, waiting for travel documents that will take them to Korea or Iraq. With no men to work the fields, diesel threshers do the harvesting. The sound of K-pop wafts with the wind in the poplars in Choser.

Yet even with change, the ruins of ancient forts blend back into the cliffs they were built on. Eroded by the wind, it is hard to tell what is monastery and what is mountain — they are embedded in each other.

'Has the wind carved this landscape to resemble the ruins of ancient buildings? Or are these manmade remnants of an ancient civilisation?' asks Craig. Maybe both, as abandoned homes dissolve back into the landscape. In exquisite monochrome and lyrical text, Bubriski and Craig have captured



Mustang in Black and White
by Kevin Bubriski and Sienna Craig
Vajra Books, 2018
152 pages, Rs 4,000



A Blessing for the Land: The Architecture, Art and History of a Buddhist Convent in Mustang, Nepal
by Charles Ramble, John Harrison, Christian Luczanits and Nyima Drandul
Vajra Books, 2018
143 pages, Rs 4,000

Mustang in a photo frame of time 'neither past nor future, just present'. Change has come to Mustang, but Mustang will keep its mystery and darkness.

Charles Ramble has himself co-authored a new book (also published by Vajra) on the abandoned settlement of Chuksang, where once stood a 17th-century nunnery. *A Blessing for the Land* traces the history of the head lama of Künzang Chöling, who dedicated his monastery to the land, choosing the slope on the other side of the Kali Gandaki known as 'Convent Ridge'. Although on the academic side, the book is part-archaeology, part-architecture, part-anthropology, but mostly it is deep history.

Ramble and other authors work with archaeologist Nyima Drandul from Mustang, who is a descendant of the Künzang Chöling nobility. *A Blessing for the Land* and *Mustang in Black and White* are both available in Kathmandu book stores, and are fascinating journeys in time and space. Both books force us to rethink Nepal's diverse cultural history, and to ponder how much more of our past we do not yet know as we plunge into an uncharted future. 🇳🇵



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SEP 2019 INTAKE

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PHOTOS: REETI K.C.

Java in the Himalaya

The spiral metal staircase leads to a glass door. A gentle push and you bathe in the aroma of coffee. The grinding of beans, clanking of cups and gurgling of a freshly brewed cuppa, and you are in coffee heaven. Located in the centre of the city, Himalayan Java in Lazimpat is a perfect hub to work, get together with friends, or just drop in for some coffee on the way to work.

The new franchise launched a month ago is already as busy as other Himalayan Java outlets around the city. However, this one is a little different, and you notice it the moment you enter the café. The interior has a rustic feel, with an unfinished cement floor, uncovered metal bars that support the roof, and unique furniture. Each table and chair is unique, in look and feel.

There's a big couch, a tall comfy chair, and a colourful metal seat. And one cannot miss a brown



couch for one, for those who come alone and want to feel special. Anku Sherpa from Kathmandu Mandal Eatery (KME), a Himalayan Java partner, told us that the furniture choices were made by five of his colleagues.

Overall, the place feels like a large attic, with its mismatched furniture, glass walls and bookshelves, all enticing you

to stay just a little longer. But the highlight of the décor is the movie camera that was used to shoot 1991 Nepali movie Deuta, starring Rajesh Hamal, the iconic film that kicked off the career of the country's biggest screen star.

Himalayan Java is rightly best known for its coffee, but little is said about its growing food menu. It is on par with the java, and a must try. The most popular dishes are fish and chips, spaghetti with meatballs and sandwiches and burgers. The fish has a perfect crunchy outer crust and soft meat inside, the spaghetti is cooked just right and the burger patty is fresh and meaty. Vegetarians have equally good options, and pizza will be available in coming weeks.

With indoor and outdoor seating and ample parking, Java in Lazimpat is a hideaway. Get there before it is found out.

Reeti K.C.



RED NATIONS: Prime Minister KP Oli, Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal of the Nepal Communist Party sign an agreement with Chinese Communist Party official Song Tao during this week's meeting on communist ideology in Kathmandu.



HIGH PLACES: Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali and his spouse Saraswati Gyawali with US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump at a reception hosted by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, in New York.



WOMEN POWER: UN Women Nepal's Gitanjali Singh, Ayshanie Medagangoda-Labé, Country Director of UNDP Nepal, and UN Resident Coordinator Valerie Julliard sign an agreement on gender equality and women's empowerment in development and the humanitarian response.



HOLIDAY FUN: Women professionals, entrepreneurs and social activists participate in fruit soaking, the first step in preparing Christmas cakes, at an event organised by Radisson Hotel in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

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Nepal-France ties in photos

Nepal and France might be celebrating 70 years of diplomatic ties, but the links between the two countries began to be forged centuries earlier.

In the 1600s cloth merchant Jean-Baptiste Tavernier became the first French citizen in Nepal, according to the book *Six Voyages* of Baron Aubonne, published in 1676. Other merchants and missionaries followed, including the Jesuit priest Dorville in 1665, who mentions the two cities of, 'Catmandir' and 'Patan' in one of his accounts sent to Rome. In the other direction, the 1908 European trip that inspired Chandra Shumsher's modernisation drive also included a stop in France.

All these events, and much more, are on display at Alliance



Française Kathmandu, in a photo exhibition marking Nepal-France ties over the centuries. Highlighted are the past 70 years of the modern diplomatic relationship, with photographic evidence filling the white walls of the auditorium, including the Prime Minister KP Oli's visit in June 2019.

The exhibition reveals some interesting and previously unknown facts about France in Nepal, such as the French influence in the military uniform of Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa. Also, the sword of Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana was gifted to him by Napoleon III, and is currently in the National Museum of Nepal.

Photographs display Gurkha soldiers fighting alongside

French soldiers in World War I and II, those bonds ‘formed in blood’ crucial to the nascent diplomatic relationship between the two countries.

The last part of the exhibition highlights bilateral development projects and meetings, conversations and exchanges between the countries' leaders and officials during the last 70 years.

The photo exhibition is colour-coded: the red section exhibits photographs from the years before diplomatic ties, blue indicates pictures taken during the past 70 years and green is used to highlight photos of the bilateral projects carried out by the two countries.

The exhibition will remain open until 30 September at the Alliance Française Kathmandu in Dhobighat. 

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*Conditions Apply

A promotional banner for the JazzMandu 2019 festival. The banner has a dark blue background. On the left is the festival logo, which includes a stylized sun/moon icon, the text 'SURYA NEPAL', and 'JAZZMANDU 2019' with '17th kathmandujazzfestival' below it. In the center, the date 'OCTOBER 17 - 23' is written in large, bold, yellow letters, with the tagline 'MUSIC FOR UNITY, PEACE & COMPASSION' underneath. On the right, a yellow box contains the text 'ARTISTS 2019', followed by a list of artists and their countries: 'FABY MEDINA FRANCE', 'TROPIC GREEN SINGAPORE', 'PAUL TYNAN & JAKE HANLON CANADA', 'ADRIAN CROOKSTON / PALOUSE FORRO USA', 'RSxT GERMANY', 'CADENZA COLLECTIVE NEPAL', and 'BLUE FRET NEPAL JOONI NEPAL'. At the bottom right, the website 'www.jazzmandu.com' is listed next to social media icons for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.

Nepal far from hitting

Social stigma, misconceptions still hamper access to birth control

Sewa Bhattarai
in Bajura

Parvati Thapa, 39, looks lost as she wanders into the district hospital in this isolated northwestern corner of Nepal. She and her husband have walked a whole day to get here, and they just found out she is 20 weeks pregnant.

Thapa already has three children, and after they were born she lost four sons one after another. After her menstruation stopped, she suspected menopause but now knows she is pregnant for the eighth time.

“My husband is away for months at a time, tending cattle in the mountains. Why should I use family planning when we meet so rarely?” asks Thapa, who looks much older than her age.

Like most women in the remote mountains, Thapa has never used contraceptives. Doing so carries a stigma for married women with migrant husbands, and there are misconceptions about the different methods available. The result is that women suffer unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and end up with large families they are unable to take care of.

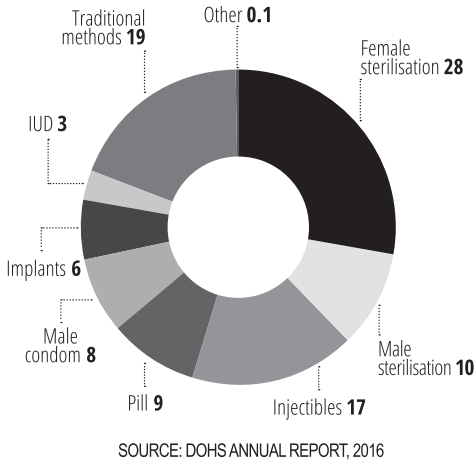
Nepal’s contraceptive prevalence rate is 53%, but in Bajura it is only 34%. Although this is a dramatic improvement from 20 years ago, it is still a long way from the government’s target of 75% contraceptive prevalence by 2030. The fact that the use of modern family planning methods has plateaued since 2006 points to further deterrents.

“The family planning rate is really low in Bajura because a lot of the men migrate to India for work,” says nurse Dhankala Khadka at Bajura District Hospital. “If the husband is away and the wife wants to use birth control, she is often questioned about fidelity and may be ostracised by her community. Even husbands do not support them.”

Almost every woman who visited nurse Khadka on a busy day last month had the same story: their husbands were away and they did not use birth control.

There were 804 abortions in Bajura in the past year, which Rohit Giri of

Users of contraceptive methods
53% of married couples use contraceptives in Nepal
47% do not use any method



Bajura District Hospital says is very high: “Most who come to us are married women with children, and the abortions are due to the lack of birth control, which leads to unwanted pregnancies.”

In Bayalpata Hospital in neighbouring Achham district, the story is much the same — it performed 660 abortions in the past year. Bhawana Rawal, 33, has had two abortions at the hospital in the past five years and admits she does not use birth control.

“I already have two children, and do not need any more, but I got pregnant twice by accident,” she says. “I still do not want to use contraceptives in future.” Rawal did try a Depo-Provera injection once but says it made her bleed too much. Other women have the same complaint. For those who do not want to use a permanent contraception, many felt pills were a hassle to acquire and take every day, and IUDs hurt.

“Unwanted pregnancies often lead to anaemia because women lose so much blood,” says Kalawati Setthi, a nurse at Bayalpata Hospital. Nearly 40% of women in Far-western Nepal were found in a survey to be anaemic — most of them pregnant and breastfeeding.

The government has put up posters in rural hospitals to encourage contraceptive use but at this rate, it is unlikely that the target of 75% contraceptive use will be reached. 🇳🇵

Trends in family planning use

Percent of married women age 15-49 using family planning





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contraceptive target

Demand, but no supply

According to the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2016, there is a 24% unmet need for family planning in Nepal — a quarter of women who need contraceptives are not using them. A report by Population Services International (PSI) Nepal found that unmarried youth aged 15-24 and married women aged 20-24 are the groups that use contraceptives the least.

Married women like Parvati Thapa at a clinic in Bajura last month (left), normally tended to use contraceptives after their first child, and exposure to information about family planning through health workers and current users of family planning, as well as talking about it with husbands or relatives.

Unmarried youth were likely to discuss family planning only with their sexual partners and most used condoms over other methods, which were bought and kept by the male partner. In contrast, married women visited health facilities themselves and chose the type of method they wanted.

Unmarried youth, especially adolescents, had a higher unmet need and were more vulnerable to stigma associated with family planning. The report argues that the term 'family planning' only applies to married women and their plan to have children, whereas there are many contraceptive users who have no intention of having children, or use contraceptives to prevent sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs).

When a woman goes to a public health facility for contraceptives, a register is filled out, which includes a column for 'husband's name', which is another deterrent for unmarried women. Though the husband's name is optional, there is no column for the wife's name when it comes to male contraceptives like condoms or a vasectomy.

A report by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) about sexual and reproductive health says complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19 in low-income countries like Nepal. Unwanted pregnancies also hamper women's education and economic independence, and impact their family life, fuelling an intergenerational cycle of poverty and poor health.

NOT SO PLANNED



The unmet need for contraceptives continues to have adverse impacts on women's health, especially in remote areas. Follow our reporters to Bajura and trace the story of Parvati Thapa, whose health and life have been endangered many times.

nepalitimes.com

MONIKA DEUPALA

More choice for family planning

Although Nepal's contraceptive prevalence rate has increased dramatically, from 7% in 1981 to nearly 60% today, social taboos, patriarchy and unavailability mean that many women still do not have access to birth control.

It usually falls on women to take the initiative, since many men refuse to use condoms or get a vasectomy. Popular contraceptives used to be the pill or Depo-Provera, an injectable that needs refrigeration and must be taken at a clinic, but the dosage is high and the injection painful.

Now, women like Shanti Adhikari, 43, in Chitwan, (pictured, right) who have always used Depo-provera for short-term contraception, have a new choice: Sayana Press.

Adhikari's husband, who works as a security guard in India, will be coming home for Dasain, so she is at the health post in Nawalpur for her Depo-Provera progesterone hormone injection, which prevents pregnancy for three months.

But auxiliary nurse midwife Sharada Rimal (pictured, left) tells her about Sayana Press. Its advantages over Depo-Provera are that it comes with its own small needle, the dosage is much smaller, it is less painful and can be self-injected.

"Everyone in my neighbourhood comes to this health post for contraceptives, but no one told me about this new injection. The needle looks much smaller, I think I will go with this one," says Adhikari, 43, as Rimal proceeded to inject her in the thigh.

Sayana Press, a successor to Depo-Provera, is being launched in Nepal in two districts: Nawalpur and Sindhuli, by the reproductive health agency Ipas Nepal in coordination with the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Ministry of Health and Population (MoH). The drug has already been tried and approved, and is available for use in 40 European countries.

What sets Sayana apart from Depo-Provera is the smaller dosage (104 mg compared to 150), it comes with its own needle, it can be stored at room temperature and is injected sub-



SEWA BHATTARAI

cutaneously (just under the skin), rather than in the muscles like Depo-Provera.

Injectable contraceptives are the most popular reversible contraceptive among women, for a variety of reasons. Adhikari says she does not like pills because she has to remember to take them every day, and, because of her age, she wants to be discreet about using them.

While most other methods, like IUCDs, implants, condoms and pills, are visible and can be discovered by others, an injection leaves no traces. 52% married couples use contraceptive in Nepal: 8.9% use injectables, 4.6% are on pills, 4.2% use condoms, 1.4% use IUDs and only 3.3% use implants. 9.8% use other traditional methods. Some have gone for permanent contraception, with 14.7% preferring female Sterilization and 5.5% male Sterilization.

"Depo-Provera has been in use for 50 years, but it was so popular and effective not much further research was done on it," explains Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa of Ipas. "But WHO studies found that a much lower dosage was enough."

Health workers like Rimal confirm that Sayana Press is much easier to inject, more portable and less painful. Though it is self-

injectable in some countries, in Nepal, where it has been undergoing trials in 14 health facilities of Nawalpur and Sindhuli since 5 September, it will only be administered by health professionals.

Bhim Singh Tinkari of the MoH Family Welfare Division says that since 7% of pregnant women still die from unsafe abortions, making contraceptives easily accessible can save lives. Binod Bindu Sharma of the MoH links contraceptives to women's choice and empowerment. "The availability of contraceptives is important for women's rights, since it lets women choose when and how many children to have," says Sharma, adding that the ministry is making Sayana Press available for free in health facilities.

Lisa Honan, head of DFID Nepal, links contraceptives with women's economic potential, adding that the country can make better use of women in the workforce if they have better choices of contraceptives. "DFID is committed to providing Sayana in any volume in Nepal until 2022 through UNFPA (the UN Population Fund), and would help Nepal scale it up all over the country if the results of the feasibility study are positive."

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Kathmandu traffic FAQs

I come to you today with yet another column containing an update on the latest traffic rules in Kathmandu. To those of you who are muttering under your breath, “Oh no, not another article with silly driving tips!” let me just say that you have no choice. Take it or leave it.

In this day and age you can never have enough pointers on how to negotiate traffic on our streets, because the rules keep changing. So, without much ado about nothing, it is time for another periodic update with answers to frequently asked questions about driving in Nepal:

the rules may change. Kids sitting on the fuel tank are required by law not to wear a helmet, but they can wear Daddy's shades and a silly cap if they so wish.

Q: What are the rules on overtaking?

A: The first thing to remember is that we never over take in Nepal we always take over. We are very territorial about the 10m radius of asphalt around us on the street, and woe betide anyone who deigns to trespass this space. And that includes you over there, yes, you on the wheelchair with two children on the zebra crossing.

Q: On which side of the road does one drive in Nepal?

A: Those of you who thought that in Nepal we drive on the left side of the road are wrong. That rule has just been changed, and all motorcycles are henceforth required to drive on the right side (which used to be the wrong side) of the street at all times and weave suicidally in and out, dodging oncoming trucks and buses.

The left side of the road will now only be used to park bricks, cement, steel rods and other construction material.

Q: What is the latest on helmets?

A: As we go to press at 1900 hrs UTC on Thursday, you are not required to wear a helmet if you are a pillion rider who is the wife of the driver, but please check back with us in an hour because

Q: Are there any specific things I need to know about VIP movements?

A: Yes, I'm glad you asked that question because an incorrect answer could land you in jail.

Q: Besides chickens, are there any other things crossing the road that we need to watch out for?

A: Buffaloes, goats, ducks and other livestock have right of way and can cross the road at any time, anywhere and without warning. It is up to the driver behind the wheel to use telepathy to figure out what their intentions are. Dogs, on the other hand, don't cross the road but will race you while barking their heads off. Don't worry about them, unless they are wearing helmets.



The Ass



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