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 needed it. Social stigma, patriarchy, ignorance and lack of access were reasons.

Nepal’s contraceptive prevalence rate is 58%, 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 Gorkha 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 3.5% 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 Nawakot and Hindhuli 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 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. Funding an intergenerational cycle of poverty and poor health.

Sewa Bhandari writes on Bajura and Nawakot.
REDUCING LABOUR PAIN

The Nepali Communist Party government, with Prime Minister KP Oli at the helm, is nearing two years in office. It has been forced to task for two-performance and under-performance. And rightly so. When does it take a decision? Is it usually the wrong one, like the project to fell a vast tract of forest for an airport that may never be built, or expanding Bagmati river? There is a lot to be critical of about the present government. They give profound importance to flashy and wild promises, pass for the back, 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 only when it matters to carry a big stick. The late Minister of Tourism, Rabindra Adhikari was one of them, and he mulled over to various projects off the ground. His death in a helicopter crash in April was a tragic loss for the country. Also his successor, Yogeesh Harital, though full of youthful energy and ambition, has fallen into the trap of making populist pronouncements and issuing dual orders since he took over the national aircraft during evening programs in Faujahuli.

Another Nepali

Yoshita Tamang, in the cabinet we do not hear much from is Minister for Labour, Ritejung and Social Security, Gokarna Bista. Even as energy minister in the Ranjit Khanal administration, Bista was known for his low profile and conciliatory style. In May 2018, so labour minister, Bista took the unprecedented step of stopping Nepalis from going to Malaysia to work, even after a cross-border investigation by this newspaper, Himal Khadapatrika and Malaysianiseti exposed the exploitation of Nepali and Malaysian officials and private companies overcharging more than $30 million ($40 million) from more than 600,000 Nepali workers between September 2013 and April 2018.

It was regime change in both Malaysia and Nepal that allowed the recruitment mechanisms to be overturned. 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 Elita Kinerca to 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 and corruption 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 and M Kula Segaran last year, which requires employers to pay for visa fees and air tickets of Nepali workers, as well as for the baggage allowance and round trip air tickets of their workers. It took almost a whole year for the minister to secure a deal that deal to be worked out by a joint working committee, which finalised them in Kuala Lumpur on 13 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 Kula Segaran, who have wasted of workers at the forefront of all these fights. The minister told this writer during the interview last week, the goal has been to ensure that workers are not exploited, spend less fee, earn more, pay and are treated well to 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 leaving.

In fact, one of the reasons for the delay in negotiations was Nepal's insistence that the 37 institutions in Malaysia had to undergo medical tests for workers needed to be increased to 122 and be located throughout the country. The minister also allowed 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 enforced. There are too many vested interest groups that have profited too long from the exploitation of their Nepali workers who will want to see this agreement fail.

In most the give credit where it is due. And at this paper we are keeping readers informed on progress.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepal Times editor MTS (23 September, 1 October 2009) looked forward to the Deepawali

Deepawali has always been an important festival for Nepal. Good luck and prosperity are the main themes of the festival. People light up their homes and streets with oil lamps and decorate their houses with flowers. It is a time for family reunions and feasting.

This year, Nepal Times will be celebrating Deepawali with a special edition. We encourage our readers to light up their homes, dress up in traditional attire, and share the joy of this festival with us.

ONLINE PACKAGES

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Why Nepalis are flocking to Oknawa

by Bishnu Dahal

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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 rocks 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 Xo-Touch, looks nothing like a satphone. It is actually the first Android-based satphone that can also be used as a smartphone. It has a 3.5-in 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 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 Sleek, 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 Rs10,000 the Sleek allows the mobiles to be used as a satphone as well as a satellite phone when there is no sat signal. The Sleek 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 Sanapau, which has most of the phones and equipment in stock. Its customers are mainly monitoring expeditions, the United Nations and Kathmandu-based embassies, as well as disaster relief agencies.

USB-based Thuraya also provides the IP1, a terminal that works as a satellite-based modem for data applications over a 100km 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 two-way walkie-talkie. Unlike Thuraya, which uses satellites in geostationary orbit, Iridium satellite are in Low Earth orbit. The company has now replaced all its satphones 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 airliners, mountaineering expeditions and hydroelectric projects, or post-disaster rescue and relief, when personnel have to be in constant touch.

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

**Weekends Offer!**

**BNK**

**BIZ BRIEFS**

Turkish rising

Turkish Airlines’ international transistor passenger figures increased by record numbers in August, rising 9.4% over the same month last year. The airline’s said factor was 84.9%, while cargo/mail volume grew 11.5%. Currently, the bud later grew 0.6 points, while North America and the Far East increased by 0.4 and 0.5 points.

Himalayan Art

The Himalayan Art festival will be held on September 29-October 2 at Pusa Art Council, Bagerhat, Kolkata. A globally recognized name platform, painting will be held and his painting will be exhibited.

Training by Genese

Genese Consultancy is working with UK Arts Skills for Employment Programme to provide cloud computing training to 2,000 IT students in Nepal, and subsequently offer job placement nationwide 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 and Sri Lanka

Qatar Airways has announced an extra cooperation with China Southern Airlines starting January 2020, after Qatar acquired 51 percent of China Southern in December 2018. The agreement between China Southern and Qatar Airways is about to expand, and connections to China and Qatar is gradually frequenting, one stop connections to more than 80 destinations in the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

Hyatt awarded

Nepal, the capital, has been recognized with a South Asian Travel Award (SATA) in two categories: Leading Family Resort and Leading Luxury Resort.

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Dad’s deception

How an international wedding ceremony was saved by translation

The dark interior of the Om Restaurant on Park 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 Kathmandus of the 1970s.

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 startling chicken on the Crystal Hotel rooftop with the historic city spread beneath us.

It was from that lofty terrace one moonless afternoon in July 1973 that I imagined watching the stones roll and the fire engulfs 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 rejoin 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 frailty, Tenzin and my relationship had to be concealed. My emotions ranged from jealousy and anger to irritation at 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 dimly lit Alcove Cottage in a quiet corner of Baneshwor 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 Bodhnath, finding exile 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 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 condensing in the air as we skirted the steps at dusk, wrapped in scarves and padded jackets against an unusual chill, Baby Sangay had been left at home. The Bodhnath kora was crowded with mountain pilgrims scoping 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 rebel boy monks disassociated 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 clank of prayer wheels, but we were more focused on our mission to introduce the in-laws, I was apprehensive tramping up the concrete steps behind my father and stepmother to the modest apartment behind the steps, my only consolation being that we safely had no language in common. Tenzin’s parents were courteous but cautious as I was offered and we settled onto carpeted and cushioned seats.

“Tashi dekho!” his father nodded benignly. Neither had learned Nepal. A leather gloved hand in the dim room, sweet tea was served, and there were wooden bowls of cups, 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 didn’t have to worry. Tenzin, his brothers and their smiling complicit wives carefully stage-managed the deception, translating every word between their Tibetan dialect and English. My upright British father unfurled to 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 spare Khampa clothes and straightened 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’s Khampa gatherings. Dad never returned to Nepal and went to his grave unsuspecting, always professing delight with the hospitality of his extended Tibetan family.
If it please your highness, please partake of your repeat,” says a woman dressed in a braided kurta, using the country 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. Yamin Pratap, 81, nods in assent, sits on the dusty floor for his meal of dal, rice and vegetable curry.

Few in this run-down neighbourhood know that Yamin Pratap is a descendant of Jung Bahadur Rana, who took power in a bloody coup in 1847 and founded a dynasty that lasted till 1968. But unlike other flamboyant members of the Rana clan who carry the ‘Jung Bahadur’ as their middle names, he lives in poverty with his wife, ‘queen’ Narayani.

Yamin Pratap is the sixth generation after Jung Bahadur, tracing his ancestry through his father Shiv Pratap and forebears Chandra Pratap, Yuddha Pratap and Jagat Jung, Jung Bahadur’s oldest son. Jagat Jung was married to Tika Rajya Lakshmi, 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 Bari in 1879, family feuding for succession soon broke up the clan. The Thumars, descendants from Jung’s brother Lakh Shumsher, chased Jung’s family out of the Kathmandu Valley. Remnants of the Rana clan who are today found in Sinduli, Bhanuwa, Palpa and Nepalgunj, are also descendants of Jung Bahadur’s immediate family.

Yami Pratap’s own ancestors had settled in Pawa Dasdha of Sinduli, and needed special visas to come to Kathmandu for family functions, festivals or medical treatment. Yamin Pratap himself got a job in Ishnagar to support his family, and even bought some property. But he came to Kathmandu in the 1960s 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, Yamin 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 Teliya.

Yami Pratap’s son Nisakar works for a airline in Kathmandu, and can barely support the family of five. Despite this, the neighbours still call Yamin Pratap by his royal appellation, ‘najbahural’, which he finds quite natural. Yamin Pratap is irked 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 Yamin 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 Yami 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 Yamin Pratap, 81, who traces his ancestry six generations ago to Jung Bahadur, who established a dynasty that ruled Nepal 1847-1968.

Jung’s destitute descendants

Gopal Gartaula

**JUNG'S DESTITUTE DESCENDANTS**

On Jung Bahadur’s death anniversary, his destitute descendants perform rituals at Kal Mochan Temple in Kathmandu.

[nepalitimes.com]

**MAN OF HISTORY:** in a simple rented flat on the banks of the Manahara River in Kathmandu lives Yamin Pratap, 81, who traces his ancestry six generations ago to Jung Bahadur, who established a dynasty that ruled Nepal 1847-1968.
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: 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 on “traffic jams”, newly invented garbage, bodies and helicopter lifts that surfaced as the mountain burned 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 which 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.

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 (like baskets, cloth bags and metal pots and vessels) made from rice, lentils, potatoes and some vegetables.

By the 1960s and 1980s, 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...
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 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 SPCG 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. To 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 cultures and values. The first step is establishment of waste separation centres, pre-processing facilities (shredding, compacting, bailing) and finding ways 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 fire 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 Khuulong.

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

Increasing number of lodges in Namche Bazar and Lukla
EVENTS

15 Years in Nepal
French photographer Michel Mehe's collection of photographs from his time in Nepal, World Expositions-Paris, will be shown.
27 September, 25 October, Patan Museum, 9841350749

A Painting Review
This exhibition is a collection of portraits, traditional Nepali subjects, abstracts and landscapes, both real and imagined, by Mike Krajncik.
26 September-4 October, 10am-7pm, The Tangamuseum, Boudha (01) 3178100

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, Sharprun Askari, Kathmandu (01) 4321430

Arthi Carpet
An exhibition of Nepali carpets by Kaliren Carmine.
26-28 September, 11am-7pm, Bhagwantda Events, Tappa Road (01) 4220967

Karkhana Mela
Spend a day with your kids watching a play, participating in workshops and taking part in fun activities.
28 September, 11am-4pm, Kirtipur, Gyaneshwor (01) 4429966

Blues n' Roots
Kathmandu Blum'n'Roots is back with its annual one-day music festival. It's your Nepali bands such as Kamatadri, Lal Bana, and The Himalayan Connection will be performing, along with international artists like Mr. No Money Band and Babyleaves.
28 September, 2pm-10pm, OUM, Narayani, 9811024873

World Tourism Day
In celebration of World Tourism Day, an exclusive musical performance by Kambizia and Krishna Siswa will be held. All proceeds will be donated to Nepali artist's victims, WOOFEL.
27 September, 6pm-9pm, Patan Museum

Heritage Hotel
Easy to the Festival Times after one night and two days. Take a dip in the pool or have a medical treatment - 10% discount on resort food and drinks.
Patan, (01) 4429759

Nepa Chén
This hotel is reminiscent of the garden era of the Malla Dynasty. The open rooms and courtyards embody the palaces of the family that once ruled the city.
Kathmandu, (01) 4520032

Kite Workshop
With Dussera right around the corner, kites are flying in the air, which means making your own kite is being made. I earn how to make your own kite in this workshop. Only for kids aged 6-.
28 September, 3pm-4pm, Bablu, Galle, 9860000007

Getaway

ABOUT TOWN

The Last Honey Hunter
Sam Ayer's. The Last Honey Hunter documents the last harvests of wild cliff honey by a tribe of Khasi Rai. Watch this critically acclaimed film about one of the most amazing cultural activities in Nepal.
27 September, 11am onwards, 40th (half price for students and senior citizens), Vidya Bhawan (01) 4199125

Nagadi
Nagadi's accordion concert will have you swooning to their music and lighthearting dancing.
27 September, 5:30pm-7:30pm, Alliance Française de Kathmandu (01) 3003027

Ashar Dasain Mela
Support Khidir, a non-profit that provides assistance to survivors of domestic abuse, by visiting its Dasain pop-up market.
28 September, 11am-4pm, Lumbini Mall (01) 4707100

Spark Music Fest
Spark Music Fest is Nepal's leading electronic music event. International and national artists will be performing.
29-30 September, 10am onwards, 82,000 per person, Lumbini Park, 9809952229

Music

Beutha Rock Fest
This year features Bipul Chettri and the Traveling Band, Ski N Sons and many more.
5 October, 2pm-9pm, Beutha Falkon, Boudha, 9811356919

The Yard
The Yard is one of the best eateries in the Kammandi Valley. With their use of organic ingredients, sumptuous flour and great presentation, The Yard never fails to serve you a meal you won't forget.
7am-11pm, The Yard, Hotel Garden Hills, Swayambhu (01) 5333965

European Bakery
European Bakery is believed by locals for their freshly baked goods, homemade ice cream, delicious cakes, and affordable prices. Their special Saturday doughnuts are a must for a good weekend.
6am-9:30pm, Dobateshwar (01) 4423941

Mountain Glory Forest Resort
Stucked just 15 minutes away from Lakeside and at the banks of the Seti River, this resort offers the best of both worlds.
Dobateshwar, Pokhara, 9860642823

Heritage Hotel
Easy to the Festival Times after one night and two days. Take a dip in the pool or have a medical treatment - 10% discount on resort food and drinks.
Patan, (01) 4429759

The Inn Patan
What was once a traditional brick and limber Newar house has been transformed into a beautiful heritage hotel. Experience the vibrant history of Patan Darbar Square during your stay.
Patan, 9841508867

Shambaking Boutique Hotel
This elegant boutique hotel offers cozy rooms, comfortable amenities and access to the heart of Boudha.
Boudha (01) 4516986

GETAWAY

AIR QUALITY INDEX
KATHMANDU - 20-26 September

AMBIENT AIR QUALITY INDEX

950-1000

500-599

150-199

50-99

0-49

10-29

5-9

1-4

0-3

250-299

200-249

100-199

50-99

0-49

25-49

10-24

5-9

1-4

0-3


during the heavy rains in the week, there has been a negative impact on the air quality index (AQI), usually heavy rain washes out particulate matter from the air, even just for a day or two. This week, the AQI at times shone the concentration of harmful pollutants from 5 to even more than 10 in the urban areas, making it unhealthy for sensitive groups. Perhaps it is because of fewer traffic before the holy day season.
https://np.cmb.gov.np/embassy/air-quality-reading/
Mustang in shadows and light

Kunda Dixit

This time of year Mustang is in a profusion of colour: lapis-lazuli sky with dancing clouds, purple fields of buckwheat, ripening golden barley terraces, Dhamak’s towering red cliffs, yellow asas, salmon sunsets.

So why would Kevin Bukhtorik and Sienna Craig publish a photo book called Mustang in Black and White? As Tibetologist Charles Rambale explains in the preface, Mustang: Black and White, But Never Grey, the Kingdom of Lo was historically perceived as a ‘dark’ corner. Even early Bon Tibetans found the place forbidding and inhabited by demons.

‘But Rambale gives Mustang’s “darkness” a positive attribute. “Sometimes, darkness is the best place in which to see the corners of its full radiance,” he writes. Anyone who has passed up at the Milki Way from the stark land and landscape around the ancient monastery of Lo Gerak will know what he is talking about.

Mustang is technically in Nepal, but it 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 stranded on the banks of the prehistoric Kali Gandaki, which cut through the mountains as they rose, lifting fossilised ammonites that once crowded the ocean floor.

Bukhtorik 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 shadow contrast in the physical earth forms and shapes of chortens, gompas, monasteries, andDoorways into visually powerful and compelling compositions.”

Bukhtorik first came to Nepal in 1975, spending two years in Humla as a Peace Corps volunteer. Most of his photographic life has been in decorating with black and white prints, hecowhich 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 Powald took to water colour to depict Mustang in his book Earth Deep Sea Over: Paintings of Mustang. Bukhtorik explains his choice of black and white photography: “A reality of the colour world was distilled by my eye. I found the visual transformation and abstraction intriguing with what it added, yet also 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 of Tsumang have been marked out to tractor tyre tracks. Mule trains are being replaced by Beteiros, young men in Adidas caps and Nike sneakers harnessed by sidekicks television, waiting for travel documents that will take them to Korea or Iraq. With no money to work the fields, dressed thieves do the harvesting. The sound of K pop wafts with the wind in the popos in Chusir.

Yet even with change, the ruins of ancient forts blend back into the cliffs they were built on. Exposed 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 mammoth remnants of an ancient civilization?” asks Craig. Maybe both, as abandoned homes dissolve back into the landscape. In exquisite monochrome and lyrical text, Bukhtorik and Craig have captured 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 Rambale has himself co-authored a new book (also published by Vajra) on the abandoned settlement of Chosaung, where once stood 17th-century monastery. A Blessing for the Land traces the history of the head lama of Kunzang Choling, who dedicated his monastery to the land, choosing the slopes on the other side of the Kali Gandaki known as ‘Canver Ridge’. Although on the academic side, the book is part-archaeology, part-architecture, part-epistemology, but mostly it is deep history.

Rambale and other authors work with archaeologist Nynja Drandzul from Mustang, who is a descendant of the Kunzang Choling nobility. A Blessing for the Land: Mustang in Black and White are both available in Kathmandu book store, 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 plunges into an uncharted futures.

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

A Blessing for the Land: The Architecture, Art and History of a Buddhist Monastery in Mustang Nepal
by Charles Rambale, Jamie Harrison, Christian Lazard and Nynja Drandzul
Vajra Books, 2018
144 pages, Rs 4,000
Java in the Himalaya

T
he spiral metal staircase leads to a glass door. A gentle push and you bite into the aroma of coffee. The grinding of beans, clinking 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 Laxmi Chowk 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.

Anko Sherpa from Kathmandu Marketing Office (KMO), 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 Dasta, 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 moist. Vegetarians have equally good options, and pizzas will be available in coming weeks. With indoor and outdoor seating and ample parking, Java in Laxmi Chowk is a hideaway. Get there before it is found out.

Reet K.C.
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 1876. Other merchants and missionaries followed, including the Jesuit priest Davville in 1663, who mentions the two cities of "Gyanmandir" and "Patan" in one of his accounts sent to Rome. In the other direction, the 1908 European trip that inspired Chandra Shamsher's modernisation drive also included a step 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 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 Shri Man Thapa. Also, the sword of Prime Minister Jang 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 "fused 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 in 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 Bhaktapur.

Reeti K.C.
Nepal far from hitting
Social stigma, misconceptions still hamper access to birth control

Sewa Bhattarai in Bajura

Prativa Thapa, 39, looks lost as she walks to the district hospital in this isolated northwestern corner of Nepal. She and her husband have waited 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 33%, but in Bajura it is only 3%. Although this is a dramatic improvement from 20 years ago, it is still a long way from the government’s target of 70% 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 406 abortions in Bajura in the past year, which Rohit Giri of 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 Rupandehi Hospital in neighboring 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 get pregnant twice by accident,” she says. “I still do not want to use contraceptives in future.” Rawal tried a Depo-Provera injection once but says it made her breasts too big.

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 IBUs hurt.

“Unwanted pregnancies often lead to anaemia because women lose so much blood,” says Kalbati Sethi, a nurse at Rupandehi 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 70% contraceptive use will be reached.

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

A report by the Human Rights Watch (HRW) found that in remote areas, women are at risk of early pregnancy due to lack of access to contraception. The study revealed that many women in Nepal are forced to choose between having a child and their health. In some cases, the need for contraception is so great that women opt for unsafe methods, such as self-induced abortion, which can be life-threatening.

Although Nepal has made progress in reducing maternal and neonatal mortality rates, the need for family planning remains high. The government and international organizations are working to increase access to contraceptives, but progress has been slow.

The issue of reproductive rights is an ongoing challenge in many countries. In Nepal, the government has made efforts to improve access to contraception, but the lack of funding and infrastructure remains a barrier. The ongoing conflict and displacement in the country have also made it difficult to provide reproductive health services to all.

In conclusion, while progress has been made, there is still much work to be done to ensure that all women have access to the reproductive health services they need. The role of the government, international organizations, and local communities is crucial in addressing this challenge.

References:

Sensiodyne

*Sensitive teeth may indicate an underlying problem which needs prompt care by a dentist. If symptoms persist or women, consult your dentist. Use twice-daily brushing. Visit your dentist regularly.
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 muddling 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:

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 suitably 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 1100 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 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 cover. We are very territorial about the 10 meter radius of asphalt around us on the street, and we hate anyone who dares to trespass this space. And that includes you over there, yes, you on the wheelchair with two children on the zebra crossing.

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: Buffalo, 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.

DD Khadka, CD House, Chabahil, Kathmandu

The Ass