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DIWAKAR CHETTRI

Musical chairs

When it finally happened Wednesday night, the much awaited ministerial reshuffle was a mere shuffle. Prime Minister KP Oli presided over a game of musical chairs in which many ministers kept their old seats, others swapped them, and some were unceremoniously unseated to be replaced by newbies.

The reshuffle, as well as the mass resignation of a dozen prime ministerial advisers last week, was a decoy more than a genuine attempt to assuage public disillusionment with the NCP government's non-performance. The real purpose was to defuse discontent within the party, and put loyalists in charge during Oli's prolonged absence for

kidney treatment abroad.

The two alpha males of Nepali politics, Oli and NCP Co-chair Pushpa Kamal, also agreed to divide up their work. Dahal will now be caretaker chair of the NCP and has agreed to let Oli serve three more years. He knows the prime minister may not be able to serve his full term.

After letting go of his advisers, Oli brought back three of the most influential ones to the Prime Minister's Office. In the reshuffle, those with the most important portfolios were retained: ministers of home and foreign affairs, finance and defence have kept their jobs, while the health and law ministers have swapped portfolios

for reasons unknown.

Two popular ministers with relatively better reputations for integrity were sacked: Minister of Federal Affairs Lal Babu Pandit and Labour Minister Gokarna Bista, who dismantled the mafia fleecing Nepali overseas contract workers. Within months of being appointed labour minister two years ago, Bista shut down Malaysian companies and their Nepal-based affiliates for exploitation of workers.

Ironically, the very day that Bista was removed in Kathmandu, in Kuala Lumpur a high court was conducting a trial of Malaysia's former interior minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi for involvement in the migrant visa scam, which included getting kickbacks from companies overcharging Nepali workers.

Hamidi was arrested in June 2018, soon after a crossborder investigation by this newspaper, *Himal Khabar* and

Malaysiakini exposed corrupt Nepali and Malaysian officials and private companies earning more than \$450 million from over 600,000 Nepali workers between September 2013 and April 2018.

In Nepal, police arrested 44 individuals involved in the Malaysia visa scam, but they were either released on bail or cleared by the Supreme Court. No former minister, MP or party leader was ever investigated, and it was Gokarna Bista himself who eventually lost his job. Labour cartels with political protection had lobbied in the corridors of power to have Bista removed.

Oli sacked Infrastructure Minister Raghubir Mahaseth for delays in road and other projects, but Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa, who failed to break up bus cartels, and Water Supply Minister Bina Magar, who let the Melamchi project lapse, were retained. Nepalis hoping that a change of guard at Singha Darbar will improve governance may be disappointed yet again.

Ramu Sapkota

MAKING NEPAL
POWERFUL
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



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MAKING NEPAL POWERFUL

It is that time of year again — another Power Summit is taking place. The agenda and content of this conclave 21-22 November was no different from all past summits: the need for large reservoir projects to meet winter demand and river regulation, pricing of peak power for export, and balancing supply-demand. And as always, the elephant in the room is India’s strategic interest in Nepal’s water resources.

Going back to the *Nepali Times* archives for coverage of past summits, we noticed a pattern. None of the big reservoir projects like West Seti or Tama Kosi 3, designed primarily to export power to India, ever got off the ground. In fact, the state actively sabotaged them. It is no secret in trade circles that regulated flow of water from the Himalayan tributaries of the Ganges, and the involvement of Chinese contractors, raised hackles down South.



SURAJ KUMAR BHUIEL

Similarly, attempts to invest in large solar farms in the trans-Himalayan region of Upper Mustang were abruptly cancelled by the PMO this year, apparently due to opposition from up North.

So, there isn’t just one, but two elephants in the room. The inability of successive Nepal governments to steer an independent energy policy and gain backing of its large neighbours stymied large projects. Investors were also deterred by government indecision, red tape and blatant extortion.

The Power Summit this week, organised by the Independent Power Producers’ Association of Nepal (IPPAN) with the motto ‘Powering the Asian Century’, is thrashing out these same issues. At a time when Nepal needs a new paradigm and strong political will for energy security, the same politicians who failed to deliver since 1990 are in power. It would be naïve to expect much from them.

The miracle is that despite governments actively discouraging investors, Nepal has now emerged from a decade of power cuts, new energy projects are coming into operation every other month, and the popular head of the Nepal electricity Authority (NEA), Kulman Ghising, is saying that the problem now is not lack of electricity but people not using what is generated.

Indeed during this monsoon, Nepal

Nepal needs a clear business strategy for import substitution through energy self-sufficiency.

actually exported power to India for the first time. Yet Nepal’s widening trade deficit with India will not be redressed by exporting power, however much politicians like to boast that we can. The country’s national strategy should be to generate enough power to slash tariffs so that Nepalis can afford electricity for cooking and setting up small and medium-scale enterprises.

As energy entrepreneur Gyanendra Lal Pradhan argues in his commentary ‘Decentralising (hydro)power’ in this edition (*page 14-15*), the PMO must fast-track its plan for 6 hydropower projects in 6 provinces in 6 years. This would generate enough electricity for Nepal to phase out power imports from India, which this fiscal year amounted to Rs20 billion. LPG imports could be cut by Rs60-70 billion if enough Nepalis switched to cooking with electricity, and electric railways would cut diesel imports by Rs100 billion. In total, Nepal would save Rs200 billion — a third of its total import bill from India.

As Kushal Gurung of the Energy Development Council writes in this issue (*page 14-15*) Nepal must complement hydropower by picking the low-hanging fruit of solar and wind.

Mustang alone has the potential to generate 3,000MW from solar and wind projects. Transporting 60m turbine towers to remote areas will present a problem, and wind generates power only in the afternoons when demand is lowest. Solar will not address evening peak demand. Even so, these two renewable energy sources can be built much faster than hydro, and are becoming cost-effective even for battery storage.

But there are several things that need to happen before that. First and foremost, Nepal’s politicians need to get their act together — a tall order at a time when they are pulling in different directions, and the Prime Minister is going to be absent for an extended period. Extortion, corruption and local opposition to large projects need to be urgently addressed if Nepal wants serious investors to fast-track investment. Political focus is critical because of overlapping jurisdiction over inter-provincial rivers, as well as negotiations with India to allay its fears over large reservoir projects.

The NEA unbundling has to be implemented so that reforms like time-of-day pricing, solar net metering for households, further reducing system loss and pilferage, and aggressive promotion of LED can happen.

As with everything else in Nepal, the answer to exploiting our vast energy potential lies in governance and vision. We need a clear business strategy for import substitution through energy self-sufficiency.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

On the 40th anniversary of UNICEF in Nepal 10 years ago, former Under-Secretary General of the United Nations Kul Chandra Gautam praised Nepal’s achievements in child welfare. On the 50th anniversary, it looks like progress has stalled.

Excerpt of Gautam’s comment in Nepali Times #477 of 20-26 November 2009:

‘In 1970, Nepal had the 12th highest child mortality rate in the world. By last year, we had moved ahead of 50 other countries, to rank 62nd. During this period the under-five mortality rate went down by nearly 80%, from 250 to 51 per 1,000. Four decades ago, 400,000 children were born every year, but 100,000 of them died before reaching their fifth birthday. Last year, 732,000 children were born, but less than 40,000 died. Forty years ago, barely a quarter of school-age children went to primary education. Today 90% of children enrol in primary school, including a majority of girls.’



Times.com

ONLINE PACKAGES

WHAT'S TRENDING



PEDALLING SUCCESS

In the second installment of our Made in Nepal multimedia column, meet Rupesh Shrestha, who overcame adversities by focusing on a business that was also his passion. His Epic Mountain Bike store is credited with leading the way to making mountain biking a popular sport in Nepal.

Story: *page 4*.



THIS KUMARI LIVES DIFFERENTLY

The Kumari of Bhaktapur leads a very different life than her counterparts in Kathmandu and Patan. She goes to school and plays with friends. Find out more in this video and story: *page 7*

AI IN NEPAL

There’s definitely no shortage of talent in Nepal (‘Bringing Silicon Valley to Kathmandu Valley’, Sonia Awale, #984). The country is well capable of accelerating towards AI/R&D or technology in general, provided we have the right infrastructure, political stability and good incentives from government to support emerging companies.

Arjun Kharel

MULE OVERLOAD

Thanks for this informative article (‘Too many mules on the Everest trail’, Alton C Byers, #984). What about an immediate fix — a law banning mules from Everest National Park? Use more yaks, and continue to work on issues of how to transport food and waste up and down the mountain trails.

Linda Jay Jackson

■ A very interesting piece. I would take yaks over mules any day.

Mike Day

KUWAITIS ON AMA DABLAM

Now the government will mobilise the army to protect the peaks next. (‘Kuwait flag on Ama Dablam to be investigated’, *Nepali Times*, www.nepalitimes.com). Expect a bunker and machine gun posts on all of our mountain peaks.

Dipak Gurung

■ Nepal government should take action either against the climbers or the agency responsible for this stupidity.

Puspallata Ke See Devkota

KANGCHENJUNGA

Personally, I think Kangchenjunga Base Camp is still one of the most pristine trekking routes in Nepal, where you can mingle with the local people. Eat and sleep like a local rather than a tourist (‘The Lumba Sumba Passage’, Henry Edmundson, #984).

Mukum

THE ASS, WHO?

I really want to know the face behind the Ass, the writer. He/she has been my imaginary idol for a long time, and the writings are the best pieces that I go through in a Nepali newspaper.

Bidhya Sharma



Cars before roads in Nepal

by Anil Chitrakar

Nepal does things backwards. Pokhara saw aircrafts before it saw an automobile. We set up a university before we built a network of schools. We plan to distribute wealth before we have found ways to create wealth. Let us finally start putting the horse before the cart.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Bringing Silicon Valley to Kathmandu Valley

by Sonia Awale

For those who think Nepal is too underdeveloped to make full use of artificial intelligence, think again. The country has been making inroads into AI, developing intelligent software and producing cutting-edge engineers. Read the story and watch our video on the *Nepali Times* site.

Most popular on Twitter

Kuwait flag on Ama Dablam to be investigated

A row broke out in Nepal after a Kuwaiti expedition to Mt Ama Dablam (6,812m) unfurled a flag of record-breaking size from the summit last week. The Nepal Government says it is investigating the matter but many readers took to the net to condemn the flag unfurling. Go online for the full story and feedback.

Most visited online page

Nepal’s first, and forgotten, tunnel

by Gopal Gartaula

In all the current media hubbub about proposed highway tunnels, it may be worth remembering that Nepal’s first ever highway tunnel was built as far back as 1917 in Hetauda. Get the details only at nepalitimes.com.

Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

Times

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Nepal’s first ever highway tunnel was built as far back as 1917 in Hetauda. Even Swiss geologist Toni Hagen was impressed when he saw the structure in 1950, expressing surprise at such a sophisticated tunnel in the largely underdeveloped country.

“

”

Dharma Adhikari @dharmaadhikari

Once again, great story by Gopal Gartaula. Doubly surprised that this story remained hidden for so long even as the “tunnel” discourse intensified in the media in recent years as never before.

Times

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

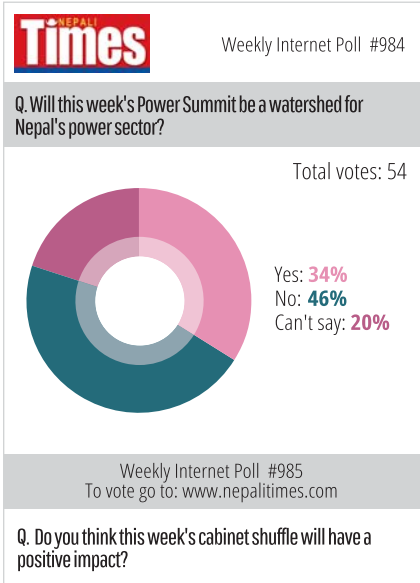
Nepal’s development dilemma is that we have got things backwards. Cars were carried by porters to Kathmandu before it even had roads. At next week’s Power Summit, let us put finally the horse before the cart, writes Anil Chitrakar.

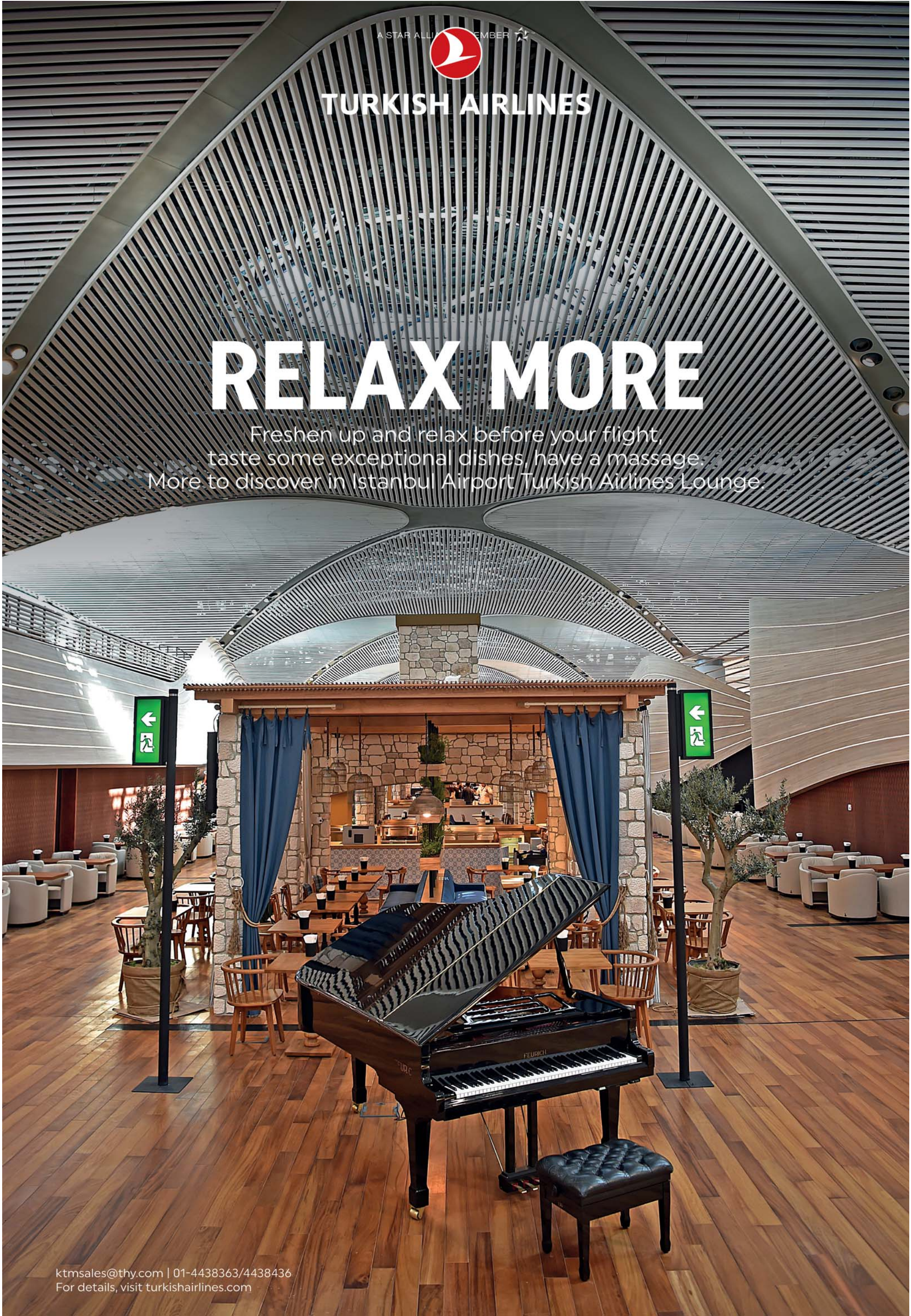
Angel @Angel21732723

Yes, I would consider this to be a Hamletian dilemma of the Nepali economy. Precisely delineated.

Prakash Moktan @PRAMOK

More than ‘cart before the horse’ scenario, it was a ‘where there is a will there is a way’ situation.





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Rupesh's epic journey

No obstacle was too great for mountain bike entrepreneur

Rupesh Shrestha was nearly paralysed after a spinal injury, and his business was on the verge of bankruptcy. Just when he thought things could not get much worse, he lost his wife to cancer.



MADE IN NEPAL
Naresh Newar

Today, Shrestha is a living example of someone who turned adversity into accomplishment, using a positive mental attitude and persistence to transform a small bicycle shop into one of Kathmandu's top mountain bike stores.

"When you are on the edge you learn so much about life, and it was my passion for business that drove me to success," says Shrestha. "You can either get stuck or move forward."

Five years ago, after suffering a prolapsed disc, he was hospitalised then bedridden at home for months. It was rigorous physiotherapy and yoga that saved him from paralysis.

Against his father's advice, he had set up Epic Mountain Bike in 2000, when he was just 20. Shrestha was ahead of his time because Kathmandu was not yet ready for mountain biking, and the business did not do well.

Then tragedy struck: his wife was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer and despite treatment she died in 2016.

"This was a very difficult time for me, but during the 13-day mourning period I did a lot of self-reflection about life. It was the support and counselling from my friends and family that helped me to move on," recalls Shrestha. The trick was to put his



energy completely into his mountain bike store, understand the market, promote cutting-edge technology and focus on making the venture successful.

"At that time, 80% of my clients were westerners and 20% Nepali — today it is just the reverse," says Shrestha, who sees many urban Nepalis now adopting the sport, taking advantage of the country's challenging topography and stunning scenery to undertake adventures on two wheels.

He went to Singapore to train himself in the potential for mountain biking, and read and researched the subject starting with the bible of the sport, *The*

Complete Book of Mountain Biking, by mountain biking pioneer Gary Fisher.

Back in Nepal, Shrestha restarted his shop in Jhamsikhel and trained staff to become mechanics. "I was very passionate about this business, not only to sell bikes but to get more Nepalis interested in going out to the great outdoors. This is both fun and environment-friendly."

Shrestha started mapping mountain-biking routes around Kathmandu Valley, giving enthusiasts on-the-spot training to develop biking skills and techniques. Outside Kathmandu, his sister company, Epic Rides Nepal, started guided tours,

taking cyclists for one-day trips to Hetauda and Chandragiri Ridge, and then longer and tougher 10-day grinds in Mustang and Annapurna.

The company organised even longer 21-day trips to Lhasa, cycling 1,000 km. This September, Shrestha's team organised the first of a kind, 12-day biking trip for Nepali riders in Colorado and Utah.

"Since the beginning we targeted Nepalis because that made the business sustainable," says Shrestha, adding that his Nepali customers have helped his company grown to an annual turnover of Rs20 million today.

Shrestha is also involved

DEFEAT TO FEAT: Rupesh Shrestha (*left*) overcame personal tragedy to transform his small shop into one of Nepal's most successful mountain bike companies.

Epic Mountain Bike is one of the pioneers of mountain bike adventures in the country, with many Nepalis taking up tours organised by the company.

Nepali bikers in the Annapurnas (*below*), one of the world's most dramatic mountain bike terrains. Epic Mountain Bike has also started organising trips for Nepali bikers in Colorado.

in various charities, organising awareness campaigns through annual bike rallies on Breast Cancer Day in memory of his wife, donating the proceeds to hospitals to treat cancer patients who cannot afford treatment. He also helps with an HIV/AIDS treatment centre in Kirtipur.

Rupesh Shrestha's advice for success is to muster courage, patience and passion, and learn from failures. And finally: "Only get into a business doing something you are really passionate about, and don't rush it. Never give up." 🇳🇵

PEDALLING SUCCESS



Meet Rupesh Shrestha, who overcame adversities by focusing on a business that was also his passion. His Epic Mountain Bike store is credited with leading the way to make mountain biking a popular sport in Nepal.

nepalitimes.com





Lisa Honan

A horrific incident on the morning of 6 September 2019 changed Muskan Khatun's life forever. The 14-year-old was attacked with acid on her way to school. Images of a recovering Muskan went viral on social media. Messages of support poured in from strangers, celebrities visited her bedside, popular Indian actors called her on video. Muskan, which means smile, might be one of the luckier survivors. Her family supports her wish to get an education, the Nepali public has praised her for staying positive and despite her harsh scars, she remains hopeful for the future. Between 2010 and 2017, Burn Violence Survivors (BVS-Nepal), a Kathmandu-based NGO, has recorded about 40 cases of acid attacks annually. On several occasions, these attacks have led women to develop depression. Half of the suicide cases in Nepali women aged 15-49 follow burn violence. On 25 November, as we mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls, we must

remember Muskan's plight and think about what more we can do to help end all forms of gender-based violence. I am encouraged that the Government of Nepal has declared Nepali year 2076 as the year for ending gender-based violence. The federal government, along with provincial and local authorities, is working hard to ensure that the campaign's messages trickle down to the local level. Gender-based violence has many different forms and varies in magnitude. To make sense of it all and support the government's initiatives, having good data is crucial. This gives the work better direction by identifying pertinent issues and informing good decision-making, especially where resources are limited. In my short time in Nepal, I have been fortunate to engage with heads of governments at all three levels, as well as with women human rights activists and community leaders. I am convinced that the Government of Nepal has taken ending gender-based violence seriously. The UK is happy to be supporting this work in Nepal, along with several other donors, multilateral agencies and civil society

Using numbers to fight gender-based violence

On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls on 25 November, let us pledge to help end gender-based violence.

actors. Our global strategic vision for gender work has five main components, all of which need to be underpinned by good data if we are to be successful in eliminating gender-based violence. Data shows us that education plays a critical role in helping reduce the instances of gender-based violence. While 49% of Nepali women who experienced gender-based violence at home were illiterate, only 13% who had higher than secondary level education had similar experiences. The UK's Girls' Education Challenge focuses on communities that have fallen behind in educating the girl child. There is lots of room for progress, but data shows that overall, only 53% of currently married women use a method of family planning, with 10% using a traditional method. Three out of every 5 women who began using a contraceptive method in the 5 years before the survey discontinued the method within 12 months. Because there are more new stories around gender-based violence, it tends to give the impression that people's awareness has also improved. However, data has helped us identify that we need to do more work around building awareness of violence against women and girls: 78% of Nepali women and girl survivors of gender-based violence have never sought any help, including from the police or even getting checked by a doctor. 66% of survivors remained completely silent about the violence. In Nepal, women spend more hours doing paid work and shoulder more than three times the amount of unpaid labour as their male counterparts. Despite this, women earn

less money and own but a small percentage of the country's wealth. Although Nepal has one of the highest rates of economic participation by women in Asia, most women do lower skilled, insecure jobs that pay less than men. Only 11% of women own their own piece of land, while only 8% of women own a house. Nepal's new Constitution has put more women in decision-making roles than at any point in Nepal's history. One way for these decision-makers to be effective at their roles is by being able to understand and use data to make evidence-based decisions. Our Evidence for Development program (E4D) aims to improve the quality of such data, including better data disaggregation, to provide better information to policy and decision-makers on specific groups of people, including women. It also trained civil servants to understand and use data better. Working with data helps us to continually assess our work to tackle gender-based violence, better understand the current challenges and empower women and girls to take control of their lives. This is why DFID is supporting the upcoming 16 days of activism, with a social media campaign focusing on how data can help us address gender-based violence. Publishing this data helps us work in an open and transparent manner. The numbers hold us to account for the state of things and push everyone to do more. 🇳🇵

Lisa Honan is the Head of Office for the UK's Department for International Development (DFID Nepal) in Kathmandu.



**BIZ BRIEFS**

Turkish in China

Marking 20 years of flying to China, Turkish Airlines is connecting Xi'an to its network as its fourth destination in mainland China.



Xi'an flights will be thrice a week from the end of 2019 and will increase gradually as the 2020 summer schedule begins.



Yuletide at the Hyatt



For its yuletide celebration, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu invited guests from various walks of life to the hotel's Presidential





Suite for a cake mixing ceremony. The culinary team plated dried fruits and nuts to immerse in liquor for the delectable festive cakes.









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The trips before TripAdvisor

Media promotion and press freedom were done differently then

In ancient times, prior to the advent of social media and the internet, we did well using traditional print, newspapers and magazines to spread the word that Nepal was the fashionable cultural destination of choice and a must-visit for discerning adventurers.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

It was my job to brief the press and ensure a constant stream of travel, wildlife and adventure articles about Tiger Tops and Mountain Travel Nepal. Those distant days of innocence predated the invention of fake news, Twitter storms, Instagram poses and Facebook rants.

Us tourism operators were not forced to worship at the altar of TripAdvisor ratings, flinch before the terrors of instant online feedback, or tremble at deliberate disinformation by a disgruntled customer.

Disagreement with a published opinion resulted at worst in throwing the offending journal across the room in disgust or, if you were British, in a restrained rustle of newsprint to express your irritation. There was time to cogitate and ruminate before a response was required, not the instant flick of a 'like', hasty hashtag or damning emoji. Wafer-thin blue airletters were written to parents and friends, and queuing expectantly and often disappointed at poste restante near Sundhara was part of a backpacker's routine.

Not that I'm regretting the communication limitations of the old days, as the daily hours spent gazing at the sleek black beauty of my iPhone will testify. But a different approach was demanded in the 1970s, when we had to laboriously punch a tape to send a message by telex, or wait for a cabled telegram to be delivered to our Durbar Marg offices. Telephone was confined to a crackly line via India, if you were lucky.

Often guests would walk in through the glass-panelled front doors, adorned with tiger head logo and the blue Pan Am symbol, before news of their arrival had landed on our desks. All reservation lists and communication with the outside world from our Chitwan lodge was by hard copy in a livid green drawstring cloth handbag carried on the daily flight.

In order to promote Nepal tours and treks, we wooed editors, writers and journalists with tempting free trips and unusual story lines. All kinds of clever ideas were dreamed up to cost-effectively achieve the column inches and even multiple pages of coverage so coveted to encourage international markets to visit our remote Himalayan kingdom.

I soon learned that fashion magazines appreciated an exotic jungle backdrop to contrast with haute couture and evening gowns, and so Tiger Tops achieved many pages in *Vogue*, *Harpers & Queen*, *Town & Country* and the like by hosting supermodels and fashion photographers, with their entourage of stylists and wardrobe of clothes.

We persuaded outdoor



Tiger Tops naturalists were only too happy to escort this French fashion model during a *Vogue* magazine shoot in the Chitwan jungles in the 1970s.



Hillary Clinton, then First Lady of the US, brought her own press corps of over 40 media followers during her Chitwan visit in 1985.



adventure clothing companies to shoot mail order catalogues along Himalayan trekking trails or draped over jeeps, and gained gratuitous editorial by winning awards from travel publications. Luxury names such as Tiffany, Cartier and Louis Vuitton brought their exquisite collections to be photographed amidst the bamboo and thatch of our wildlife camps, resulting in glamorous printed advertisements and coffee table books presenting their brands to a target audience we sought to attract to Nepal.

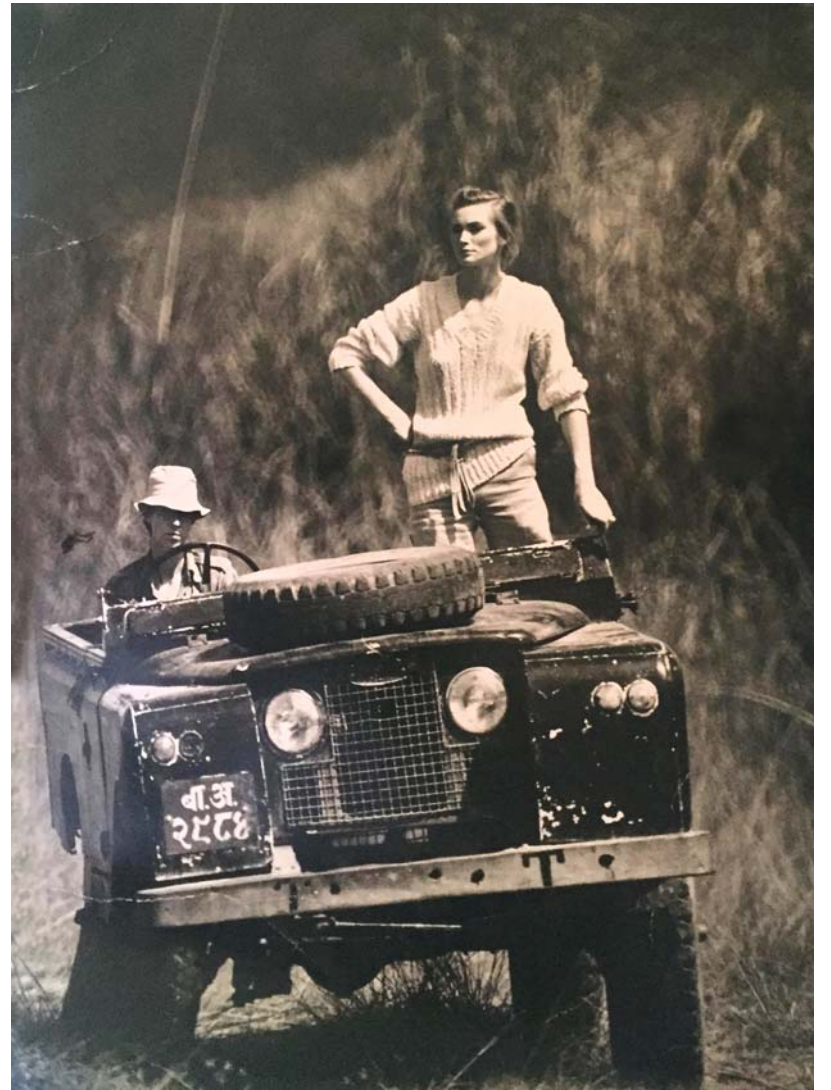
Royals, celebrities and special events were particularly helpful in creating a media frenzy that we could leverage to promote the country. During the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1980 we achieved great coverage of the Royal Trek until the murder of John Lennon knocked Nepal off the front page of the world's newspapers.

Commissioned by a UK glossy, Don McCullin, arguably last century's most celebrated war photographer, frolicked on the

Meghauli polo field capturing unique images of elephants and personalities pounding happily around the pitch in pursuit of a very small ball with very long sticks. Don not only helped put Chitwan on the map during an early world elephant polo championship but also trekked into the Annapurnas, then returned on holiday to Kathmandu on one of his honeymoons.

Even though we nurtured and cherished our visiting media guests, we had no control about what they would actually write. Freedom of the press is an essential central pillar of a functioning democracy, but that did not stop us trying to influence media stories with crafted suggestions that supported our market image. It did not always work.

Nepal has long suffered from the 'Everest, highest rubbish dump in the world' sobriquet, even long after the Sherpas organised the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee to solve the problem.



Lisa Choegyal driving supermodel Anna Andersson during a *Harpers & Queen* shoot with French photographer Francois Lamy in Chitwan in 1977.

Tiger Tops achieved great coverage of Prince Charles' Nepal visit (*far left*) in 1980 until the murder of John Lennon knocked it off the front pages.

Tennis great, Martina Hingis (*left*) poses for the press at the Tiger Tops elephant camp in the 1980s.

"Good news," I greeted a newspaper journo as he prepared to fly to Lukla. "The Khumbu is now clean and free of trash. Chris Bonington told us only last week he saw more rubbish on the streets of London than on the trails of the Everest region."

"That's nice," retorted the writer, dourly. "But my editor has told me to write a story about the rubbish on Everest, so that's what we will publish."

Despite such frustrations, I enjoyed dealing with the vagaries of the press corps. On one memorable occasion I found myself in the lair of one of the most notorious media barons — the Murdoch empire headquarters in Sydney. But I was not at News Corp Australia to generate copy. Patriarch Rupert Murdoch's eldest son, Lachlan, had asked me to stop by to discuss arrangements for his honeymoon.

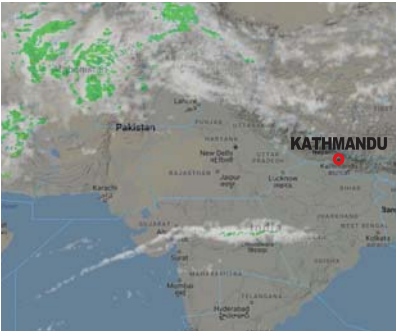
Graduating to the inner sanctum, I was ushered into a blinding sunlit office. Lachlan

was an engaging kid in 1999, with an athletic build and thick brown curls, his desk strewn with photos of Labradors. We talked dogs and trekking and it soon transpired that after Nepal he was keen to include Bhutan to wow his blond British model fiancé, Sarah O'Hare.

"Because it's the one place our private plane can't reach — due to the pilot restrictions landing into Paro. I want to take her somewhere special. It will be fun for us to fly commercial."

It turned out to be a memorable honeymoon as the couple arrived from Sydney economy class on Thai International — despite our best efforts we were unable to clear business seats. Lounging after dinner on our Kathmandu sofa, Lachlan and Sarah held hands and laughed at our concern. "It was a novelty for us to fly commercial and to fly economy. No worries."

I sighed with relief. Freedom of the press took on a whole new perspective. 🇳🇵

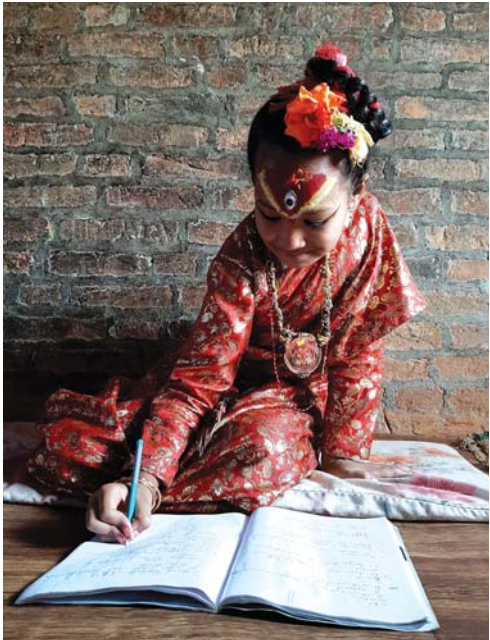


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Going places together - qatarairways.com



Shriluna Shrestha

Nine-year-old Jeebika Bajracharya, the current living goddess of Bhaktapur, enjoyed all the attention she got during Dasain dressed as the Kumari. Clothed in dark red, with vermillion covering her forehead and her eyes accentuated by *gajal* stretching to her temples, she makes a dramatic statement — especially as she is walking.

In contrast to the living goddesses of Kathmandu and Lalitpur, the Kumari in Bhaktapur has much more freedom. In Kathmandu, she is rarely allowed to leave the Kumari *Chen* sacred house for the living goddess, and when she does, her feet are not supposed to touch the ground.

Bhaktapur’s Kumari however, casually strolls around the city to meet friends and family. She lives with her parents, goes to school, studies in the fourth grade and plays outdoors with other children in the area, like any other regular girl child.

Only during Dasain, when her devotees came to seek her blessings, did she have to sit for hours in the Kumari *Chen*. Throughout the festival, she stayed with the family of Rukmani and Nhuchhe Ratna Shakya, the hereditary caretakers of the living goddess in Bhaktapur.

A city enveloped in tranquillity and traditional cultural values, Bhaktapur embarked on this unique tradition of worshipping the Kumari during Nepal’s Malla dynasty. The practice of picking a Buddhist girl child as an incarnation of Hindu goddess Taleju is still considered an important one in Kathmandu Valley.

When asked if the freedom given to the Kumari has diminished the value of the living goddess in Bhaktapur, Nhuchhe says, “We never had restrictions like that for the Kumari in Bhaktapur in the first place. We cannot preserve our tradition and the goddess’ strength by confining her within a house or keeping her away from her parents.”

“Even on usual days, when she is not



ALL PHOTOS: SHRILUNA SHRESTHA



staying with us or is walking to school and playing outside with other kids of her age, our respect towards her is consistent. By giving her access to school and education, we are preparing her so that she will not find it difficult to return to normal life after the end of her tenure as a Kumari,” he adds.

Pushpa Ratna Shakya, a professor at the

Central Department of Buddhist Studies in Tribhuvan University, lives next door to the Kumari *Chen* in Bhaktapur. He explains some other ways that the city’s worshipping of the living goddess differs.

“The everyday worship of Kumari is done at her home by her parents. The important rituals during Dasain were performed by

priests in the Taleju Temple in the Mul Chok in Darbar Square, which is home to Goddess Taleju.”

“On Navami (the ninth day of Dasain) we worshipped our Kumari with 9 to 15 other girls who are also worshipped as temporary Kumaris during the length of the festival. We worship them as the nine manifestations of Goddess Durga, as the Navadurga Gana,” Shakya says.

“It is our ritual and tradition that makes the Kumari of Bhaktapur special. I do not think these rituals are performed elsewhere to the living goddesses in Kathmandu or Lalitpur,” he adds. “Our traditional rituals are more sophisticated, but left in the shadows.” 🇳🇵



The Kumari of Bhaktapur leads a very different life than her counterparts in Kathmandu and Patan. She goes to school and plays with friends. Find out more in this video and story.

nepalitimes.com

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The art of living

Judith Conant Chase has lived in Nepal for nearly 50 years, and now has a museum and book to showcase her collection of household items



Kunda Dixit

Many of the everyday items Nepalis traditionally used in their homes are going or gone. So have the words that described them. Plastic buckets have replaced brass *gagro*. Linoleum floors have taken the place of *sukul* straw mats.

Most young Nepalis do not know what *petaro*, *sakari*, *chulesi*, *dalo*, *doko*, *theki*, *dhiki*, *dheri*, *kolhu*, *sandook* or *mandro* mean. Nepali words that described many of these objects are now extinct. Tharu words for utensils, Gurung vocabulary for household furniture and Rai or Limbu terms for farm equipment are all endangered.

Judith Conant Chase has been



in Nepal for nearly 50 years, and has made it her life's work to collect and preserve many of these traditional objects. In 2012, she set up the Living Traditions Museum at the Amatya Sattal in the Changu Narayan complex to house her collection, so it could be seen by as many Nepalis as possible. By preserving the objects she has also saved the Nepali words for them.

When the earthquake struck on 25 April 2015, Kathmandu Valley's oldest monument zone was badly damaged. Some of the 1,300-year-old Licchavi era temples went down, the museum was damaged, but the exhibits were intact (including the Tharu clay pot hanging from the rafters in the photo, right). The structure has now been rebuilt, and Chase is trying to have the museum reopened in the new year.

Travelling across Nepal in the 1970s, Chase admired the

simplicity of people's lives, their cheerfulness despite hardships, and the everyday handmade objects they used around the house — like the umbrella that Gurung villagers in Bhujung wove from *nigalo* strips and leaves, which Chase found ingenious because it also kept a farmer's back dry while bending over to tend the fields.

Maithili jewellery fascinated her, especially the sculpted silver bracelets that had strips joined into a ripple pattern. Over decades of being worn during work, the metal was weathered and polished into a shiny metallic brilliance. *Doko* baskets are perfectly crafted through a technique handed down from generation to generation of Gurung families, as are the felted carpets and capes of villagers in Ghandruk, and in Kathmandu the intricately carved *bapa*, used as a shrine in Newa homes. Another example, from Humla, was the colourful Nyinba woollen greatcoat,



बालबालिका माथि हुने हिंसा, दुर्व्यवहार, शोषण भएको, जोखिमपूर्ण अवस्थामा रहेको वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने

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of a secret that everyone else knows that I am just beginning to glimpse, frustrating and enticing together.’

She marvels at the ‘hanging life support system’ of Tharu homes, where food and storage items dangle from the ceiling, where protective smoke of the central fire preserved and cured stored food items. This was technology developed over centuries ‘out of a particular set of natural resource and household needs’.

‘The lives of the Nepali people and their art objects are elegant, inspired, vigorous, humorous, vibrant, romantic, sometimes even a bit wild,’ writes Chase. ‘They are woven, hammered, carved, turned, painted out of the hand of artists, both household and professional.’ 🇳🇵

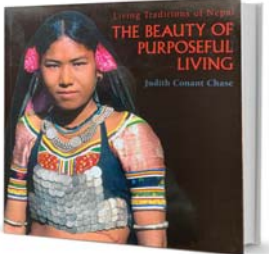
worn once a year during festivals (pictured overleaf).

All these items, lovingly preserved, will be returned to their cubicles and exhibit cases once the Living Traditions Museum reopens. Chase’s book, *Living Traditions of Nepal: The Beauty of Purposeful Living*, is an encyclopaedic guide to the artefacts, and more.

The voluminous 440-page, coffee table book is superbly illustrated and designed, and divided into sections representing the Himal, Midhills, Tarai and Kathmandu Valley. The text is arranged like extended captions, and interspersed with extracts from Chase’s journal of four decades ago.

Chase decided to use her journal entries because the words recorded her feelings more accurately at the time, making the memories so much more real.

One such extract, after seeing a sadhu at Pashupati on Shivaratri: ‘I feel invigorated, intoxicated, inspired, as if being in love. There is a whole way of being in the world that I had only sensed dimly... There is a feeling



The Beauty of Purposeful Living: Living Traditions of Nepal by Judith Conant Chase
Serindia Publications (July, 2019)
Hardcover: 440 pages, \$100
ISBN: 978-1932476-90-3



A life in the most precious place on earth

Judith Conant Chase still remembers flying into Kathmandu in October of 1974, looking out of the window at the wrinkled terraces of rice fields, forested hills and the snowy mountains beyond, and telling herself: “This is the place.”

The American had come to Nepal to try to climb a mountain in the Langtang Valley, and 45 years later she is still here. Along the way, she has done pioneering work to document Nepal’s crafts,

joined an ashram, started an organic agriculture movement, collaborated on a project to market ceramic products and started a museum.

“Nepal was so casual, and of the earth. It connected to nature in so many ways in the puja and the way people worshipped,” recalls Chase, who resonated with the Hindu mantra ‘*Satyam Shivam Sundaram*’ —

truth is God, and God is beauty.

She travelled across Nepal, and while many foreigners at the time marvelled at the scenery outside, Chase was drawn to the interior of people’s homes and the everyday objects they used: wooden storage bins, straw mats, bamboo baskets, clay vessels, metal craft.

Chase never rushed through the countryside. She lingered and learnt from families she stayed with, collecting beautiful objects and understanding their traditional use and significance. She kept a journal, knowing that one day she would want to write a book and perhaps set up a museum.

Both the museum and the book have happened. *The Beauty of Purposeful Living* and

the Living Traditions Museum in Changu Narayan complement each other. The museum was badly damaged in the 2015 earthquake (left), has been rebuilt, and nearly five years later it is to reopen.

“It was so impressive to me that there were no roads, and yet people were so capable, so self-sufficient,” Chase recalls of her travels through Nepal in the 1970s.

Chase met and married Jim Danisch in a Hindu ashram in Banepa in 1984. Danisch worked on a ceramics promotion project in Thimi for the German agency, GTZ, training locals to make glazed pottery and developing a new type of kiln. The two went back to California to set up a pottery business, but soon found they were getting too old to chop firewood and cut grass, so one day Judith told Jim: “Let’s go home.”

They returned to Nepal, where they worked on a farm in Kavre, and put together the Living Traditions Museum (See review, opposite.) After Jim died in 2016 in Dhulikhel, Judith continued working on her book and rebuilding the museum. All the while, the organic farm in Kavre demanded a lot of her time — helping villagers with pesticide and chemical-fertiliser free agriculture, preserving traditional seeds and the biodiversity of the forests.

“Nepal in the monsoon is just so intoxicating. There is all this variety of words in Nepali for different types of rain, and the vegetation is so lush because of the warmth and moisture — there is extraordinary growth, which you do not have in a temperate climate,” explains Chase.

In an experiment, she set aside a 1 sq m test plot in Kavre to study and classify every kind of plant that grew in it. There were 27 types, but she could identify only 18 of them. Chase thinks Nepal’s soil and fertility is so rich that artificial fertilisers are not needed — all the nutrients are already in the soil.

Does it not pain her to see Nepalis not valuing nature, and the farms of Kathmandu Valley being replaced by urban sprawl? “It is not just Nepal, it is happening all over the world,” she says. “It is not exceptional, but it is tragic. Much is gone, but the vibrant traditions continue. Kathmandu Valley is one of the most precious places on earth.” 🇳🇵

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Thangka Painting

Thangka is a Tibetan Buddhist painting typically done on fabrics. This workshop will teach you how to draw and colour Tibetan style clouds and waves. No professional artistic skills required!

23 November, 9:30am-2pm, Rs1,000 per person, Utpala Cafe, Boudha, 9823534931

Baidam

Decades ago, in a time forgotten, Pokhara was called Baidam. It was quaint and a distant place to non-natives of the town. Prabod Shrestha's art exhibition depicts Baidam in all its glory through 21 pieces of screenprint works.

29 November-24 December, Bikalpa Art Centre, Pulchok (01) 5013524

Setsu Suzuki

The Dairy My Art = My Sutra is an exhibition of drawings and sculptures by Japanese artist Setsu Suzuki, whose work typically deals with the relationship between reality and art.

17-30 November, 11am-5pm (Except Saturday, 12pm-5pm), Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited (01) 4218048



HUB Talk

This week's HUB Talk features Kesang Tseten, a Nepali filmmaker whose work has been screened in festivals worldwide. Come hear about his passion and journey making documentaries.

27 November, 6:30pm onwards, HUB, Thamel, 9866273244

Christmas Market

Christmas is just around the corner and before the eve arrives, buy your loved ones something from this sustainable art market. 23 November, 1pm onwards, The Yellow House, Sanepa (01) 5545655



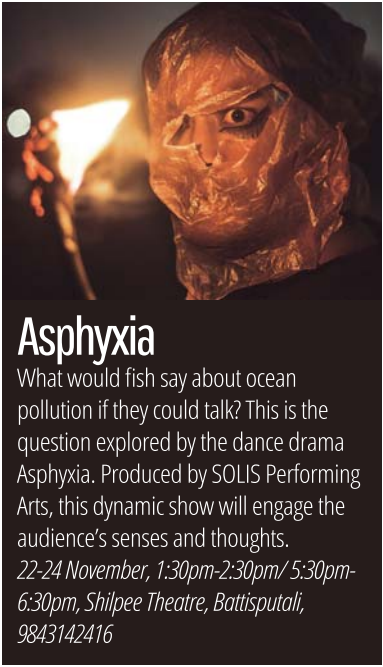
Gharial talk

Gharials are one of the most interesting and strangest looking animals in Nepal. Few remain, despite intense conservation efforts. Wildlife Conservationist Phoebe Griffith will share about her efforts to save the gharial in Chitwan National Park, and why you should love the animal as much as she does. Hosted by the Cultural Studies Group of Nepal.

29 November, 10:30am onwards, Rs500 (non-members), Hotel Shanker, Lazimpat

Occupy Tudikhel

The 'lungs of Kathmandu', Tudikhel is one of the largest free public spaces in the city. But the people are tired of the misuse of the space and are gathering to protest for its better management. Every Saturday 8-10am, Khula Manch, Tudikhel



Asphyxia

What would fish say about ocean pollution if they could talk? This is the question explored by the dance drama Asphyxia. Produced by SOLIS Performing Arts, this dynamic show will engage the audience's senses and thoughts.

22-24 November, 1:30pm-2:30pm/ 5:30pm-6:30pm, Shilpee Theatre, Battisputali, 9843142416

Hatti Hatti

A pioneer of sustainable wear in Nepal, Hatti Hatti turns 5! Come celebrate their anniversary with a market and the unveiling of new designs.

23 November, 10:30am-6pm, Hatti Hatti, Ekantakuna, 9849835444



Adrian Pradhan

Adrian Pradhan rose to prominence as the lead singer of one of Nepal's most beloved bands, 1974 AD. As a soloist, Pradhan has redefined his music style, opting for soothing ballads and an acoustic sound.

23 November, 7pm onwards, CASA Lounge & Bar, Darbar Marg (01) 4246865

Karaoke Night

Looking to show off your vocal skills? Think you can carry a beat and sing on tune? Then Karaoke Night is perfect for you. But if you'd like to reserve your voice for the shower then come support other artists!

22 November, 5:30pm onwards, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Jhamsikhel (01) 5009221



SUCHI

SUCHI is a Norway born, UK raised and Indian influenced DJ whose music is bound to get you on your feet dancing to the beat.

22 November, 9:30pm onwards, LEVEL-3, Labim Mall, 9843865450

Techno Night

Julian Starke's documentary, *French Waves*, explores techno music through the lens of the younger generation in France. After the film screening, enjoy a techno music set at the rooftop bistro!

26 November, 5:30pm onwards, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Jhamsikhel (01) 5009221

Forever More

The Forever More festival invites music lovers and enthusiasts from all over Nepal to celebrate a variety of genres, from R&B to funk,

23 November, 4pm onwards, Tickets: Rs500, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, 9813281815



White Zambala

Tucked away in a hidden alley in Boudha, White Zambala has the best Tibetan comfort food in the area, including sweet and sour pork, shredded potato and amazing dumplings.

6am-10pm, Boudha, 9866999999

Dhaba Festival

Indulge in Punjabi food at the annual Happy Singh Da Dhaba food festival. Dhabas are roadside eateries in India that sell local cuisine, but this food festival elevates the Dhaba to gourmet level.

18-30 November, 10am-10:45pm, Rs1,950++ per adult, Soaltee Crowne Plaza (01) 4273999



Raithaane

Eat your way through Nepal at Raithaane, a restaurant committed to using locally sourced foods. Each dish on the menu is linked to different communities of the nation, so you can eat everything from east to west.

12pm-7pm, Patan Darbar Square, 9801002971

The BLVD

The in-house restaurant at Hotel Royal Singi serves healthy and gluten-free meals that are packed with flavours. And with great dessert options, The BLVD will satisfy even the sweetest of teeth.

Lal Durbar, Kamaladi, (01) 4424190/ 4424191



TAZA

Taza has the softest pita breads, perfectly spiced shawarmas and an assortment of Middle Eastern dishes that will have you yearning for more.

11am-8:20pm, Pulchok, 9860960177



Pataleban Vineyard

Take a stroll through the vineyards of Pataleban, gaze at the panoramic view of Kathmandu Valley and sip aromatic wines during your getaway to this idyllic resort.

Chisapani (01) 4316377



The Little House

A quaint stay in the middle of green rice fields, The Little House is a place to enjoy beautiful views, relaxing walks and scrumptious food.

Khokana, 9841370022

Gorkha Gaun Resort

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

Gorkha, 9801010557



Hotel Annapurna View

Situated at 1,600m atop Sarangkot, this boutique hotel offers breathtaking views of the snow-capped mountains and Phewa Lake. Catch a glimpse of the panoramic scene of the Annapurnas in the dining area.

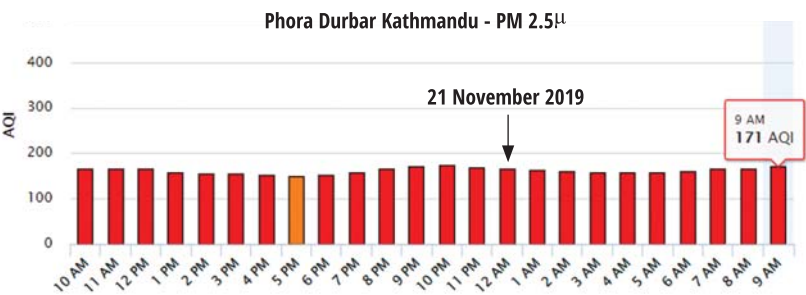
Sarangkot, Pokhara (01) 443566

CG Retreat

Once the private getaway of billionaire Binod Chaudhary, this hotel and 9-hole course is open to golf enthusiasts and visitors seeking an escape from the city. With cosy and luxurious rooms and activities for everyone, the CG retreat is perfect for families.

Devchuli - 02, Nawalparasi, 9826444611, 9805442901, www.cg-retreat.com

AIR QUALITY INDEX



This week, we present a graph not showing our usual daily average of Kathmandu's Air Quality Index, but presenting hourly readings at the US Embassy monitoring station at Phora Darbar. And what we see is quite worrying. The AQI reading for suspended particulates smaller than 2.5 microns, which are so tiny that they can cross the air-blood barrier in the human lung, is in the dangerous Red Zone every hour from 10AM Wednesday to 10AM Thursday. At 9AM Thursday it was 171 — at that level most cities in Europe would declare an emergency and close schools. For hourly readings go to [nepaltimes.com](https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/).

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OUR PICK

Opened in Kathmandu on 22 November

Frozen broke many Disney stereotypes when it released in 2013, not least the idea of Prince Charming, which the studio itself had established in mainstream media. Will Frozen 22 recreate the charm? Fans of the princess duo Anna and Elsa await with bated breath. Directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee, the animated film features the voices of Kristen Bell, Josh Gad, Idina Menzel and Jonathan Groff.

Activists decry animal slaughter at Nepal temple

Court rulings and public awareness may reduce sacrificial blood-letting in Gadimai this year

Sewa Bhattarai

Mahagadimai Municipality of Bara district is preparing for an influx of millions of visitors next month for a once-in-five-year mass animal sacrifice that has tarnished Nepal’s image as a peaceful and compassionate nation.

The little town of Bariyapur has gained international notoriety for the Gadimai Mela, where pilgrims from India and Nepal who have had their wishes fulfilled congregate at a temple to sacrifice animals in gratitude. The blood-letting has sparked outrage, and activists managed to get Nepal’s Supreme Court to rule against the wanton killings in 2016.

“There are so many animals, and many are not even beheaded cleanly because the knives are blunted by the mass slaughter. Sometimes they have to hack the animals many times, and they take hours to die,” says media personality Saroj Nyaupane, who co-filed the writ petition at the Supreme Court with advocate Arjun Kumar Aryal.

Nyaupane adds: “The animals are not even being killed for food. Nepalis take great pride in the Buddha being born in Nepal but such cruelty is against Buddhist principles.”

Despite the court ruling, the government has not banned the practice. Bara’s Chief District Officer Phanindra Mani Pokhrel told *Nepali Times* his administration is trying its best to discourage the sacrifices.

“We have held discussions, and spread the message discouraging animal sacrifice through local radio and newspapers. But we cannot suddenly stop it right now. Activists also need to work on it constantly rather than just before the festival,” Pokhrel said.

Mahagadimai Municipality is preparing in earnest for the



NHUCHHE MAN DONGOL



BUFFALO VERSUS COCONUT: A man wields a large knife before starting the slaughter water buffaloes at Gadimai Temple premises in 2009 (above).

A poster advocating an end to animal sacrifice, posted on the bloodlessgadhimai page on Facebook and Instagram. It substitutes a coconut for an animal as an offering to Gadimai (left).

festival, scheduled to begin 3 December. Mayor Shyam Yadav says tents are being erected and toilet facilities will be built for the huge influx of devotees and their animals. In 2014, there were an estimated 6 million visitors, and roughly 250,000 water buffaloes

and goats were killed. This time, far fewer animals are expected to be slaughtered because of court decisions in India and Nepal and as a result of growing public awareness.

Activists have raised issues of not just animal cruelty, but also

the lack of visitor accommodation, environmental impact, hygiene, pollution and the health and condition of the animals. This year, the government and the Gadimai Operation and Development Committee have promised to take care of most of these issues.

In earlier years, the Chamar community consumed the dead buffaloes, but younger members of the group are boycotting the meat this year. Says Dalit activist Manoj

Ram: “It’s not just about the meat, but also self-respect. Society looks at us with distaste because we eat leftover sacrificed buffaloes. We want to stop that.”

Legend has it that the Gadimai Mela started about 200 years ago when a man sacrificed five drops of his own blood to the goddess for a fulfilled wish. Over the years people substituted defenceless animals for human blood.

The temple committee has refused to budge on the practice despite the outrage in Nepal and globally. “We do not sacrifice animals — people come from far away bringing their animals. If they are not able to fulfil their vow their faith is broken, and we cannot have that,” says Ram Chandra Sah of the temple committee.

While activists say the festival has brought shame on Nepal, the temple is proud that it has put Gadimai on the world map. Devotees see criticism of the festival as an attack on Hinduism, and accuse western activists of double standards for not being outraged when millions of turkeys are killed at Thanksgiving.

French actress Brigitte Bardot and British actress Joanna Lumley have spoken out against it, earning the festival further notice and international criticism.

Yet, the strongest voices against the bloodletting are from Hindus themselves, who say the festival is not an ancient tradition and not deeply rooted in religion. Animal rights activist Pramada Shah says the sacrifices go against religious teachings.

She says: “The killings are carried out in the name of religion. But Hinduism does not teach people to torture animals. It is religious malpractice, like *sati* and untouchability, and we need to reform it.

The Supreme Court decision is not enough. We need stronger laws, and an effective awareness campaign among communities who practise it.” 🇳🇵

BEAT SENSITIVITY FAST

Works in 60 seconds

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Feasting on documentary films

From the inaugural documentary *Indus Blues*, it became evident that a lot of the entries at the Film South Asia 2019 festival this week in Kathmandu could not be shown in their home countries. Such is the squeeze on free expression in the Subcontinent that Kathmandu became a relatively free space where the screenings could happen.

The documentary genre evolved to use film to explore, explain and expose facets of modern society largely missed out by fictional cinema or mainstream journalism. It has got new life in the post-truth, alternative-fact age by daring to dig deep and shine a light into the dark, hidden corners of our societies, so that we can see, hear and act on the concerns of people and places in the periphery.

At a time when democracy, freedom of expression, pluralism, inclusiveness and non-violence are all under threat from elected demagogues in South Asia and beyond, the work of these courageous documentary makers is more important than ever.

Whether or not it was deliberate, Film South Asia also delivered a number of striking pairings. *Abu* and *The Next Guardian* for instance, were screened on consecutive nights at Yala Maya Kendra, and both trace a family's hope for their son and provide reflections on cultural attitudes towards sexual orientation.

Abu is a portrait of a patriarch, and the tale of the ebbs and flows of

family relationships seen through the eyes of filmmaker Arshad Khan. However crippling the undertow of misunderstandings, secrets and lies that exist in his family, its members still draw close, bound by love but tethered in pain as they explore life as migrants and grapple with the politics of religion, sexuality and family expectations.

The oppression felt by the filmmaker in his youth is palpable: we feel his father's disapproval or his mother's avoidance in the recordings of his well-documented childhood. In the end, fear and oppression might dissolve into love and forgiveness, but the family secrets and lies remain, settled deep into the fragile stillness of resignation and silence.

Silently too, and nodding to sleep, a young Bhutanese boy deigned to be the next guardian of his family's monastery suffers his father's gentle verbal lashings and pressure to take on the role and become a monk. His sister's sexual orientation is pragmatically and matter-of-factly attributed to her past life in a half-comic spiel the father delivers to the camera.

A well-paired set of observations on India's diversity was served with *Chai Darbari*, followed immediately by *Growing up in Ladakh*. Both are exquisitely filmed, and capture the inherent beauty of India's varying lands: Ayodhya and Ladakh. Where *Chai Darbari* features heated masculinity of various political positions jostling for a voice amidst the moments of clamour and calm in an

ancient city and hotbed of conflict, the latter follows two young girls growing up in isolated desert mountains, nourished by familial love and community and supported by their school and elders as they undertake a gruelling pilgrims' progress called Gotchak.

In another thematic pairing, *Janani's Juliet* and *Badshah Lear* are adaptations of two of Shakespeare's most famous plays, and with aplomb they bring the Bard's humanist dramas to life in two different Indian contexts. *Janani's Juliet* follows director Koumarane Valavane and his actors as they adroitly weave the story of star-crossed lovers from warring families into the fray of India's caste system and the warped tragedy of so-called 'honour killings'.

Two films featured bamboo. The one from Bangladesh, *Bamboo Story*, won the main trophy at FSA 2019. A multi-layered ethnographic study using outstanding cinematography, the film provides empathy and respect for an unnoticed floating population shuttling between a forest and an urban jungle. The other bamboo film from Nepal, *Winter Tap*, co-winner in the student category, is a small-is-beautiful tale of how not to waste resources in the process of accessing water in a remote mountain village.

The festival closed with a screening of two films, one about a rooster running amok in a Mumbai household's small flat, and the other featuring four dog-loving eccentrics in Kolkata. The humans who adopt them exist precariously, whether on the cusp of life and death, sanity and madness, or crammed in cages and tethered to things they cannot fathom.

Pariah Dog cleaves into the underbelly of Kolkata, to show a world where people live isolated, desperate lives. Those caring for community dogs are doing so as much to assuage their consciences as to address a yearning for companionship, purpose and recognition in a world fast atomizing into anonymity, where they themselves may be considered pariah. *Tungrus* is darkly comic as it traces the fate of a handsome broiler rooster who seemingly has it good, ruling the roost and terrorising the family. His fate is painfully bleak, in a scene at once comical and horrific.

Life and art are one. Art exists only with life and life thrives only with art. Film South Asia 2019 was a documentary feast where the mind could thankfully still be free.

Sheilin Teo and Kunda Dixit



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA/RSS

ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN: President Bidya Devi Bhandari administers the oath of office to cabinet ministers Thursday following Prime Minister KP Oli's reshuffle on Wednesday. Two women ministers were removed, but none were added.



ROSHAN SAPKOTA/RSS

SPORTING SHAKE: Former captain of India's cricket team and UNICEF goodwill ambassador Sachin Tendulkar meets the former captain of Nepal's cricket team, Binod Das, during a friendly match in Kirtipur on Saturday.



SOALTEE CROWNE PLAZA

FOOD DIPLOMACY: Indian ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri inaugurates the Punjabi Food Festival 'Happy Singh Da Dhaba' at Soaltee Crowne Plaza in Kathmandu on Monday.



QATAR AIRWAYS

VISIT NEPAL: Qatar Airways Country Manager for Nepal, Mohamed El Emam (centre), with winners and participants of Break on Everest, a joint promotion campaign of the airline and Sabre Nepal to promote Visit Nepal 2020.



YETI AIRLINES

GREEN DRINKS: Yeti Airlines has replaced plastic cups with paper cups on all its flights. The Resident Representative of UNDP, Nepal Ayshanie Medagangoda Labé (left) welcomed the move, which will eliminate over 600,000 plastic cups yearly.



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Women dropped from cabinet, some cling to key posts

Shurojung Pandey and Pushpa Dhungana in *Naya Patrika*, 21 November

नयाँ पत्रिका

The Constitution has ensured 33% participation of women in all government entities. But the percentage of women in the cabinet continues to decrease. While two women have been removed from the cabinet in Wednesday's reshuffle, none have replaced them. With this, the representation of women in the cabinet falls to 8% from 16%. After Minister for Women, Children & Social Welfare Thammaya Thapa and State Minister for Agriculture Ramkumari Chaudhary were removed from the cabinet, only two women remain: Minister for Land Management and Cooperatives Padma Kumari Aryal and Minister for Water Supply Bina Magar.



RSS

Setopati, 21 November

सेतोपाटी

Deputy Speaker of Parliament Shivamaya Tumbahamfe has refused an offer from Prime Minister KP Oli to become a cabinet minister.

According to the Constitution, the speaker and deputy speaker must be of different genders and from different parties. When they were elected in 2017, Speaker Krishna Bahadur Mahara was from the Maoist party and deputy Tumbahamfe from the then UML.

Things changed after the unification of the two parties into the NCP. Now that Mahara in detention for alleged rape, and the speaker's seat is empty, the NCP cannot contest the post since the deputy speaker is from the NCP. Hence, Oli is trying his best to lure Tumbahamfe out of her current post, so that NCP can announce its candidate for speaker.

According to sources, Oli personally called Tumbahamfe, but she refused on grounds that the move would leave the House of Representatives in disarray. "The deputy speaker will not go for a ministerial post immediately," said Shekhar Adhikari, press expert of the Parliament Secretariat. "She informed the Prime Minister of the complicated situation in Parliament." Oli is reportedly still trying to convince Tumbahamfe to take up his ministerial offer.

Meanwhile, one female minister kept her post despite being ranked as a low performer. The Prime Minister's Office had reviewed the past year's performance of all ministers, and Bina Magar, Minister for Water Supply, ranked lowest on the list. Yet, she has not been sacked as she happens to be the daughter-in-law of Prachanda, co-chair of the NCP. As speculation rose in the media that Prachanda was pressuring Oli to keep Magar in her role, Prachanda's secretariat issued a statement stating that a cabinet reshuffle was the Prime Minister's prerogative, and Prachanda was not acting to influence it. However, the reshuffle announcement proved everyone right: come hell or high water, the acting chair's daughter-in-law Bina Magar would not lose her job.

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Decentralising (hydro)

Fast-tracking 6 projects in 6 provinces in 6 years would catapult Nepal’s development

Gyanendra Lal Pradhan

Nepal has the fifth highest hydropower potential in the world. Besides electricity, which can be used for peak energy supply, hydropower reservoirs can also play a role in regulating water in rivers, flood control and irrigation.

With federalism, Nepal has the potential to decentralise hydropower along with political power. All seven provinces, except Province 2 in the Tarai, have enormous capacity to develop hydropower to generate downstream benefits, such as increasing agriculture output, boosting tourism and generating employment.

The government’s current budget includes a provision to develop one large hydropower project in each province. Prioritising water value first and peak energy second, Nepal can double its megawatt potential by maximising storage and daily peaking of run-of-river projects, while regulating river flow.

All this would allow 5.4 million households across Nepal to gradually replace imported cooking gas and traditional firewood with cheaper electricity, reducing Nepal’s trade deficit and improving health by eliminating indoor pollution from open kitchen fires.

If each family consumes 1KW of energy and if 3 million families switch from cooking gas and firewood, we will need 3,000MW in the morning and evening peak hours, which can be provided by



An energy windfall for

Wind and solar farms in Mustang can complement Nepal’s hydropower possibilities

Kushal Gurung

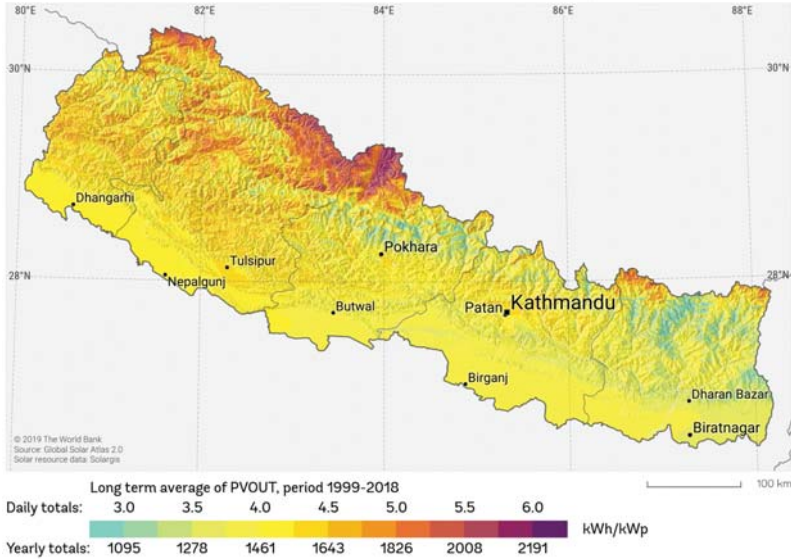
Last month saw the historic signing of the Nepal-India Energy Joint Steering Committee agreement to build the new Butwal-Gorakhpur 400KV crossborder transmission line. When completed, it opens up the possibility of Nepal exporting surplus power to regional markets like India and Bangladesh from power projects in the Marsyangdi, Kali Gandaki and Budi Gandaki corridors. With so many hydropower schemes in the pipeline, Nepal may soon have surplus energy at certain times of year, which makes crossborder transmission lines imperative. Discussions about Bangladesh’s desire to import up to 9,000MW of electricity means Nepal must have a clear business model for the regional electricity market.

Besides hydropower, the new crossborder transmission line has also opened up the prospect of large-scale wind and solar farms in cold, windy and cloudless regions like Mustang and other trans-Himalayan districts.

A Global Atlas prepared by the World Bank shows Mustang is ideal for wind and solar energy development. Just using 2% of the district’s land area for solar could yield a generation capacity



EDCW



of 3,000MW, along with 1,200MW through wind energy projects. (*See accompanying maps*).

Some will question the need to go for wind and solar in a country with such abundant hydropower potential. However, wind and solar are the fastest growing energy sources globally, accounting for more than 70% of new energy addition since 2013.

Low cost and speed of installation make these technologies attractive even in countries with hydropower. Some of the potential for wind and solar power in Nepal

will be discussed at the Independent Power Producers’ Association, Nepal (IPPAN) Power Summit 2019 in Kathmandu, 21-22 November.

Latest solar auctions have seen prices drop below two cents per KW/h. In India, the Adani group built the 648MW Kamuthi solar power project in Tamil Nadu within one year. It is unimaginable to build a hydro project of such a size so fast.

To be sure, building wind and solar projects in Mustang would not be a cake walk. Transmission lines and road access remain challenges, although they are improving

and could be surmounted if the resources are allocated. The 10m wide Beni-Korala highway currently under construction would be a notable step forward.

A 220KV substation is being built in Dana, 40 km from Jomsom, but land acquisition and environmental approvals are major roadblocks. The entire district falls inside the Annapurna Conservation Area and existing rules require environmental impact assessments for new energy projects — even though nothing would be more environment friendly than

renewable energy development.

Red tape and overlapping jurisdiction between municipal, provincial and national government make the entire approval process more arduous than the construction itself. Likewise, almost 99% of the land in Mustang is government-owned, and buying or leasing it requires official approval, which could also take years. Without resolving these issues, it will be difficult to attract investment, domestic or foreign.

The onus is on the federal government to come up with a

power



NT ARCHIVE

new mega-projects designed to generate 15,000GWh. Of course, the distribution system would need to be improved and demand side reforms have to be in place.

The market value of the electricity generated could reach Rs180 billion, which would replace the import of Rs100 billion worth of cooking gas, Rs20 billion in transportation and petroleum products, and Rs50 billion worth of electricity for industries. With millions of people using electricity in the kitchen, indoor air would be healthier.

The main problem for the provinces today is that they do not have this supply, which is impeding industrial development and job creation. Developing hydropower will replace high-value raw materials and energy imports, and allow gross value addition compared to investment in other sectors.

Income from selling the energy could provide the provinces with the resources to fund their own development projects. Initially, identifying and developing 500MW projects in each of the six provinces would generate a total of 3,000MW. The Nepal Electricity Authority's current electricity rate of Rs12/unit would provide each province Rs30

billion in gross income — a total of Rs180 billion that could increase GDP by 10%.

This plan would need the central and provincial governments to work closely together, with Kathmandu providing the financial guarantee and licenses for the provincial governments to develop projects.

Cost of financing is a major component of the outlay in hydropower. Domestic banks loans at 13% interest would cut into profits, so projects would need international financing at 1-2% for 25 years. The Non-Resident Nepali Association could be the bridge to connect Nepal with financial assistance schemes like the Chinese Government's BRI, the US Millennium Challenge Corporation, and others.

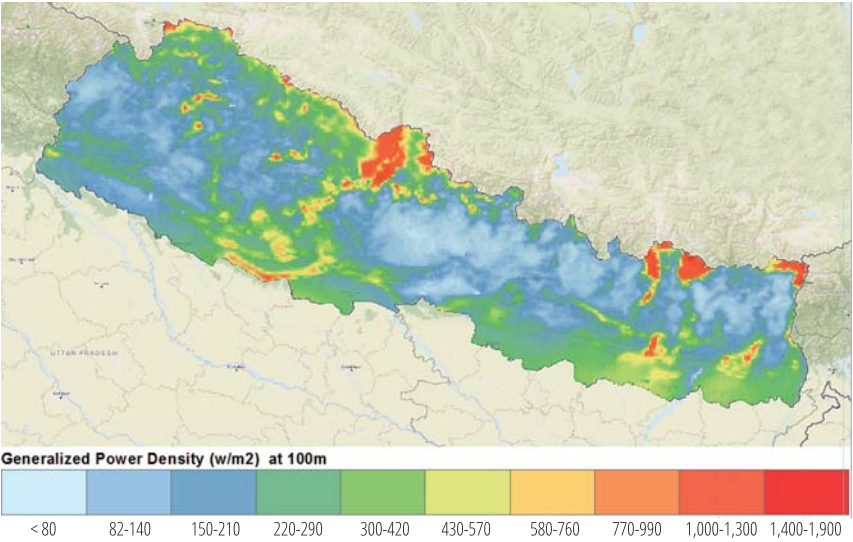
Nepal could also seek financial assistance from the Export-Import (EXIM) Bank of China, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Exim INDIA Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Department for International Development (DFID), World Bank Group, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Export-Import Bank of Korea and others. Financing hydropower development of 5,000MW would require \$12 billion in soft credit, to be paid back in 30 years, and earnings from these projects can easily sustain provincial development expenses.

The Nepal Government's 6 projects for 6 provinces would take 6 years to come into production after necessary preparations, such as a study report, environmental impact assessment, land acquisition and lease. A cabinet decision is all it would take to fast track the process, and construction could begin by the second year. 🇳🇵



Gyanendra Lal Pradhan is a member of the Confederation of Nepalese Industries, and is associated with Hydro Solutions.

Nepal?



solution, and with a two-thirds majority in Parliament, the ruling party has an historic opportunity to move fast. One solution could be to replicate the successful model of the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI), a central government undertaking formed under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy dedicated to developing large-scale, grid-connected solar and wind projects. Registered as a power trader, its role is to auction and manage solar and wind farms. SECI develops large-scale projects then auctions them to

independent power producers (IPPs) to build, own and operate. SECI then signs 25-year deals with the lowest bidders, buying the power from them and selling it to state electricity-distributing companies at a nominal premium. The SECI model is a win-win for IPPs and utilities, which do not have to spend time and resources to develop projects, while utilities get electricity at a competitive rate due to the bidding process. Exporting electricity is arguably our biggest opportunity to reduce the trade deficit with India, and

POWERFUL: Solar and wind demonstration project in Mustang (*far left*). The trans-Himalayan region is ideal for solar electricity because it is cold and dry.

Maps showing the locations in Nepal with the best potential for solar (*left*) and wind generation (*right*).

together with hydropower we must also pick the low hanging fruits of solar and wind energy. If we want to do it big and quick, we must develop gigawatt-scale wind and solar projects in Mustang, where it is realistic to generate and export 3,000MW of solar and wind power within five years. 🇳🇵



Kushal Gurung is CEO of WindPower Nepal and head of the Energy Development Council.

The Water Emergency

The climate crisis will force Nepal to rethink hydropower and crossborder river sharing

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was agreed in 1992 to deal with the increasing atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide. In 1992, carbon dioxide concentrations had reached 356 parts per million (ppm) compared to 286 ppm in the 1850s. Today, with 411 ppm of CO₂, the world faces a climate emergency. Despite advances in renewable energy technology, fossil fuel use has continued to rise and emissions are still growing. Meeting the Paris Agreement's goals, agreed to in 2015, appears increasingly hard.



CLIMATE FOR CHANGE
Ajaya Dixit

Higher heat in the atmosphere due to increasing concentration of CO₂ has made the global hydrological cycle erratic, including over the Himalaya region. Seasonal rainfall patterns are significantly different than in the past. Local

farmers already speak of having to adjust to rainfall regimes that differ completely from their past experiences. And this is only part of the story complicating water management.

Over the last 150 years, reservoirs, dams and barrages that divert water to farms, cities and industries have significantly altered the natural hydrological cycle. High-capacity pumps also increasingly bring water from very deep aquifers to the surface. Untreated human waste from cities and effluent from industries are dumped into rivers and water bodies. Embankments already constrain the natural flow in many rural areas.



ALTON C. BYERS

But flooding is no longer a rural phenomenon. Haphazard urbanisation blocks streams and rivers. Floods caused by short duration, intense rainfall inundate new areas because existing drainage paths cannot safely discharge them. With 70% of South Asians expected to live in urban areas by 2050, urban flood risks will increase manifold.

Climate change-induced impacts exacerbate these development challenges and create a bleak scenario for the future of water. The Himalayan ice and glacier system is a case in point. Examination of satellite images suggests that between 2000 and 2016, eight billion tonnes of ice storage was lost, twice the amount lost between 1975 and 2000.

Snowmelt sustains the low flows of the Kosi, Gandaki, Karnali and Mahakali rivers, all of which feed the Ganga. Changes in snowmelt dynamics and the hydrology of the Himalayan system will not only affect downstream water users but also significantly stress existing water-sharing treaties between Nepal and India.

Each of these four rivers has a barrage at the Nepal-India border, and Nepal and India have signed river-water treaties that specify the water allocation regime for all of them, except the Karnali. Nonetheless, conflicts between Nepal and India still exist, and could escalate. In Bihar, complaints about the diversion of Ganga waters by upstream barrages are rife. The changes in low flows will extend to the treaty between India and Bangladesh on sharing of the Ganga's waters.

Changes in rainfall patterns due to climate change over the Nepali midhills and Tarai will also change the hydrology of Nepal's rain-fed rivers. Drying midhill springs and declines in groundwater tables across the Tarai and valleys due to excessive extraction beyond natural recharge rates will stress the provision of basic water services and make their management more difficult. Though it is unlikely that all Nepali rivers will run dry immediately, seasonal scarcity due to changes in the hydrological regime will significantly increase.

The prevailing water paradigm, which focuses on irrigation, hydropower and drinking water in separate silos, prevents the successful management of these developmental and climate-related challenges. The current response to flood management, for example, is not only siloed but also episodic. Once the monsoon departs in September, we forget about floods. We accord little priority to consideration of the bio-diversity in rivers or to water's central role in our cultures.

Hydropower development and inter-basin water transfer projects dominate the Nepali state's imagination while ordinary people worry about when the next supply of water will be delivered. The beds and banks of rivers are unscrupulously mined to meet construction industry needs by a nexus of real estate promoters, truck cartels, politicians and bureaucrats.

These complex challenges around water will require structural changes and societal level solutions very different from business-as-usual practices. For management of water we need a new social charter that adheres to the following principles as sacrosanct:

- Water has multiple meanings, uses and users
- Rivers must have enough clean water in them to sustain biodiversity
- Rivers need unconstrained space to safely discharge flood water, including in urban areas
- Waste cycles and hydrological cycles must be different
- Flowing water has holistic value and is not a waste.

Without upholding these principles in all economic and social development activities, it is unlikely that water problems will improve with time. A commitment to their implementation will only be the starting point for balancing competing needs of multiple users of freshwater, conserving its quality and quantity and adapting to the impacts of climate change. When water is scarce, successful adaptation to the climate emergency will be only a mere aspiration. Its realisation will be close to impossible. 🇳🇵

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



ELEVATE
YOUR EXPECTATIONS



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BLENDING RESERVE WHISKY
A BLEND OF ENGLISH GRAIN SPIRIT AND 8 YEARS OLD PEATED
SCOTCH MALT WITH SPRING WATER FROM THE HIMALAYAS
FINISHED IN OAKWOOD SHERRY BARRELS IN NEPAL

BLACK CHIMNEY

FIRST BARREL
THE IMPORTED PEATED
SCOTCH MALT IS FINISHED
WITH SPRING WATER FROM
THE HIMALAYAS AND
MATURED FOR 8 YEARS
IN OAKWOOD SHERRY
BARRELS IN NEPAL

SECOND BARREL
THE IMPORTED PEATED
SCOTCH MALT IS FINISHED
WITH SPRING WATER FROM
THE HIMALAYAS AND
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There is no doubt that nothing stirs the super patriotic spirit in all of us more than gazing up at a flag flapping proudly as we shoot the breeze. That is why we never let our flag flag. And when we get tired of singing the national anthem in front of the same old flag, we try to break some records by making the biggest flag ever, and draping it over the side of a convenient mountain. Which is what the Kuwaitis did on Ama Dablam this month.

Speaking for my own asinine self, I am a bit puzzled about the whole hulabaloo. What the Kuwaitis did was no different than what we Nepalis do all the time with our double triangle.

Look at our flag at Mandala, proudly waving in the polluted air even though its edges are fraying and the red has turned into a lighter shade of pink — the message it gives is that we may be one of the poorest countries in Asia, but we rank a glorious 124 in the Transparency International Corruption Index, even beating Ukraine.

What makes Nepal really unique is not Mt Everest, Lumbini, or even Pappu Construction. It is our double triangle. So let us proudly tell the world that not all flags have to be boring rectangles. In conclusion, let me flag an important point: why not flog our flag at prominent landmarks around the world for #VisitNepal2020?

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