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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

IN A SURVEILLANCE STATE

While citizens of Western democracies try to get their governments to combat the misuse of their private data by internet companies, here in Nepal the concern is about the state itself prying on citizens.

Silicon Valley companies whose values exceed the GDP of medium-sized countries thrive in collecting and selling data in the free market of surveillance capitalism. As these companies become more powerful, governments, specially in Europe, are under pressure to protect the privacy of citizens. Nepal, on the other hand, seems to want to practice surveillance communism.

What alerts us to this looming danger is the recent convergence of the Criminal Code penalising social media content, the Media Council Bill, and the Information Technology Bill with the Special Services Bill and the acquisition of sophisticated eavesdropping technology by the state.

No doubt, all governments need surveillance technology to control crime and terrorism by giving the intelligence community the proper wherewithal. But in all democracies, there are legal safeguards in place to protect unwarranted spying on citizens that would infringe on their

fundamental right to privacy.

What is worrisome in Nepal is that the state security apparatus and investigation agencies are not just being allowed to import surveillance technology: the government is simultaneously pushing legislation that would remove current restrictions on their use.

This is made even more dangerous by the fact that it is happening at a time of unprecedented impunity, the collapse of accountability of public officials, an epidemic of extortion and corruption, and an open politico-criminal nexus. The past record of the hacking of Nepal government agency websites and the rise in cybercrime does not inspire confidence in confidentiality safeguards.

Nepal's spy agencies have been on a shopping spree to import Russian, Chinese and Malaysian speech forensics technology, CCTV cameras, SIM locators, Digital Information Systems, Mobile Device Management Systems, and International Mobile Subscriber Catchers.

The Central Investigation Bureau has acquired SIM locators that will allow it to pinpoint where the user is without having to go through a telecommunication provider and obtain a court warrant.

In most democracies, governments make laws to protect the privacy of citizens. Nepal makes laws to snoop on them.

The National Investigation Bureau which has been brought directly under the Prime Minister's Office this month called for bids to establish a Digital Information System to integrate the data flow of various security and intelligence agencies. The Nepal Telecommunication Authority is soon getting a Rs1 billion Mobile Device Management System to keep track of phone users from the Malaysian company Nuemera (M) Sdn Bhd, which was linked in 2017 to a data leak involving 46.2 million Malaysian mobile phone accounts.

The government has also loosened regulations governing the use of CCTV cameras, and the import of these devices doubled in 2019 to Rs970 million from the previous year. The Special Services Bill in Parliament would also allow International Mobile Subscriber Identity (IMSI) 'Catcher' that can intercept and tap phones. The use of these surveillance devices is so sensitive that the European Court of Justice has actually outlawed them.

The Special Services Bill gives the chief of the National Investigation Bureau the sole authority to tap phones, without a court permission. Given the prevalence of blackmail and extortion against political and business rivals, the risk of abuse of this spyware is unacceptably high in Nepal. For example, police last week leaked CCTV footage of an altercation at Kathmandu domestic airport between a female police officer at the security check and singer Astha Raut. A state agency that has no qualms about flouting rules governing proper use of footage has no right to be tapping phones.

Putting together these recent decisions, new laws and bills pending in Parliament, the ruling NCP seems intent on extending control, spying on citizens to intimidate them, and silencing dissent. In most democracies, governments make laws to protect the privacy of citizens. Nepal makes laws to snoop on them.



BHANU BHATTARAI

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Prime Minister Oli last week accused editors of "not having a heart", and his ruling NCP is trying to push laws restricting press freedom. Not much different than ten years ago when it was the Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led Maoists who were doing it. Looks like the ex-democratic UML is no fan of a free media. Excerpt from an editorial in #487 of 29 Jan-4 Feb 2010.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal has done it again. He is once more blaming the messenger, the 'big media houses' for undermining his party. Usually when a politician repeats his accusation, it reinforces its significance. But with Dahal, the ranting now seems to have the opposite effect. He has cried wolf so often that the remark made during a speech in Sindhuli on Monday went either unreported, or was relegated to the inside pages.

Yet there is a sinister undercurrent here. The Maoists have made no attempt to hide their contempt for the notion of a free press, just as they have for nonviolent pluralistic politics. Dahal went on to accuse the media of being 'anti-nationalist.' This has always been the Maoist method.



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ONLINE PACKAGES



There is money in garbage. Much of Kathmandu's trash can be recycled and reused, and there are now start-ups that help that happen. Learn about the business model behind one of them, Khaalisi, in an interview with its founder Aayushi KC. Story: page 4.



The Visit Nepal 2020 mascot yeti is in the news, but for the wrong reasons. It has hurt religious sentiments, and many people think it is crass. It looks like we either love it or hate it. We ask the public in Thamel, Jamal, Darbar Marg and Labim Mall what they think of 'The Thing'. Story: page 12-13.

AGNI SAPKOTA

In every country there is tough screening of potential candidates for appointments to such positions to make sure that they are clear of any wrongdoing but in Nepal having criminal records and getting involved in corruption seems to be basic qualification ('Speechless', Sewa Bhattarai, #994). What has to be done to clean this mess?

Ramesh Shrestha

■ I am seriously 'speechless' about the Speaker choice and also how women candidates still don't count despite having all the qualifications.

Shikha Prasai

■ I imagine it would be very difficult in Nepal to find someone with political aspirations that was not guilty of corruption or misdeeds.

Stewie McLean

WHAT'S TRENDING

Nepali ultra-marathoner's anti-litter drive

by **Bipin Thapa**

Nepal's international ultra-marathon champion Mira Rai's initiative to clean mountain trails started with Champadevi. A team of 65 volunteers including legendary trail runner Bhim Gurung and SAG Gold Medalist Anupama Magar have collected 80 bags of trash till now. Visit nepalitimes.com for the most popular story of the week.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most popular on Twitter

Speechless

by **Sewa Bhattarai**

A person charged with murder has replaced former Speaker Mahara, who is charged with rape. The ruling NCP's slew of controversial decisions has raised doubts about its commitment to transitional justice. Concerned readers wrote in with their thoughts regarding the decision. Go online to read feedback to last week's page 1 story.

Most commented

Khumbu shuts trekker clinics

Two clinics that saved the lives of hundreds of trekkers and porters in Nepal's Khumbu region since 2003 was forced to close by a commercial clinic and helicopter company. Read full story on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
A British holiday company @TravelEyesLtd brings visually impaired & sighted #tourists to #Nepal. Find out how pairs of sighted & #blind travellers experience #Kathmandu Darbar Square, streetwalking in Thamel & paragliding in Pokhara. @sanghamitra_reports

lexlimbu @lexlimbu
Nice to see Alex who I met during the @SeeAbility Morocco Mt Toubkal trek feature in this @NepaliTimes story on travel for visually impaired + sighted people by @TravelEyesLtd #VisitNepal2020 #Nepal

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Community health workers in Bayalpata Hospital in Achham have given up the practice of menstrual banishment chhaupadi & it's making a difference. It's when local women take the lead to end the practice that it is most effective, writes @martydlogan

Isha Nirola @ishanirola
One of the greatest honors of my life has been leading & learning from these incredible CHWs. These women are making positive change in their communities, fighting against the insidious practice of menstrual isolation and moving the needle on universal access to healthcare. #UHC

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



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Nepali entrepreneur turns trash into cash

The story behind the entrepreneur behind the Khaalisisi initiative

Real entrepreneurship is about innovation, executing ideas, consistency, not giving up easily and not worrying too much about finding investors immediately.



MADE IN NEPAL
Naresh Newar

Prospective entrepreneurs do not need an MBA from an expensive international university: they start with a great idea and a bit of money, and they set about implementing the idea step by step.

Aayushi KC, 30, is a good example. She quit a secure job at an international aid agency to start her own company, Khaalisisi Management three years ago.

Khaalisisi uses a digital platform to link garbage sellers and buyers for waste transactions. It was an unusual idea, and many thought KC had lost her mind.

“Every time I shared my idea, people laughed and ridiculed me. Nobody had done this kind of business before and so everyone was sceptical,” she recalls. But she was determined to use this sustainable business solution to clean up Kathmandu.

It wasn't easy, as KC had no technical background on information technology, recycling waste or garbage management. All she had were the facts and a motivation to make her idea work.

She did her own research and met experts and people who were



KHAALISISI

already recycling garbage. And it was after meeting Kathmandu's waste collectors that KC learnt how waste management works in practice.

There are about 13,000 collectors in Kathmandu alone, and there was already a network of people managing waste by recycling in their own way. KC decided to partner with them.

“They are the real waste entrepreneurs who deserve to be respected and the society needs to dignify their hard work and not disrespect them,” says KC (*pictured at centre, above, with collectors*). She shares that one of the best rewards for her is to see collectors get more respect after they started working with Khaalisisi, which

provides them with uniforms and ID cards. The company employs 300 collectors, who are known as Khaalisisi Friends.

The way it works is this: Khaalisisi connects the collectors with waste sellers through the Khaalisisi digital platform, social media and phone apps. Waste sellers, mostly city residents with a lot of trash, contact the Khaalisisi team for a pick-up. The company then contacts the waste collectors, who make house calls to purchase the waste. Recyclables are then sold on the market, and Khaalisisi gets a commission.

This process has apparently helped waste collectors increase their incomes. They no longer need to roam neighbourhoods on their

bicycles, shouting to attract the attention of residents.

In just three years, Khaalisisi has become a recognized brand gaining popularity in Nepal and abroad for its novel approach to sustainability. In 2018, Forbes listed KC in its 30 Under 30 Social Entrepreneurs, selected from thousands of online nominations. In December she was one of the top five youth social entrepreneurs out of 1,000 competitors from 90 countries to speak during the World Bank Youth Summit in Washington DC. The Asia Society also included her as one of the 2019 Class of Asia 21 Young Leaders.

“This is a business-for-profit initiative, but as a company we also have a social responsibility to

educate people on how to manage their own waste and create a better environment starting with our own neighbourhoods,” says KC, whose team also visits schools to urge them to manage their own waste. The government also needs to step in to give incentives to people who actively reduce, recycle and reuse, she says.

Khaalisi and other business initiatives involving waste management are gaining traction as awareness grows worldwide about sustainability, environmental degradation, plastic pollution in the rivers and seas and the climate crisis.

“There was nothing extraordinary about our business idea. We all have great ideas but they will come to nothing if we fail execute them. I acted on a simple idea and that was the starting point to build this company,” says KC. 🇳🇵

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT



There is money in garbage. Much of Kathmandu's trash can be recycled and reused, and there are now start-ups that do just that. Learn about the business model behind one of them, Khaalisisi, in an interview with its founder, Aayushi KC.

nepalintimes.com

Golden gods

This week Siddhartha Art Gallery offers a rare opportunity to view the works of two celebrated Tibetan thangka artists, Tenzing Dhargay and Lobsang Tseten (*pictured*). Viewers will be able to observe the beauty and intricacy of the painters' works of devotional art, as well as the unique specialties of the paintings of their school when compared with the thangkas with which we are more familiar.

The thangka tradition dates to antiquity and paintings were originally commissioned for temples and religious shrines. Artists used colours found in nature, grinding stones by hand. Four schools of thangka art developed in Tibet over time, and some of them share many similarities with Kathmandu Valley paubha art.

There are, however, many ways to distinguish artistic works of various Himalayan traditions. Chief guest Rinpoche Tsepri Lopon Tulku pointed out during the exhibition's inauguration that while Indian-influenced paintings of Buddha have his shawl going over his left shoulder and leave his right shoulder bare, Tibetan paintings have the shawl coming over the right shoulder. The Rinpoche praised the two artists for using original stone colours and real gold in the paintings.

“I am not saying this just to flatter them, but because they authentically represent the ancient art,” he said.

Tenzing Dhargay is a tenth-



generation artist of the Khari Khangsar family who, like most thangka painters, learnt the art by assisting his father.

Belonging to the Menri school, he has painted both peaceful and wrathful deities. “Many people have asked why we paint such scary figures. In Tibet we believe that the soul wanders in limbo for 49 days after death, where there are many demons. If children grow up looking at these figures, then they will not be scared of death,” he explained.

But thangka is changing. The Menri school uses green colour profusely, and detailed backgrounds including waterfalls, trees and other natural features. Dhargay has kept the dominance of green, but experimented with the background, leaving that of

many of his paintings bare.

Lobsang Tseten's works are large, intricate pieces depicting the Buddha at the centre surrounded by many other deities. Depending on the level of detail, the paintings may take up to 6 months to create.

The fourth-generation artist is also of the Menri school and started learning with his father at age 12, but then went on to study contemporary art in Canada.

He adds: “I have come back to this form because of a concern for it. It is disappearing in its true form, and my work is an attempt to preserve that.” 🇳🇵

Sewa Bhattarai

Tibetan Thangka paintings by celebrated Tibetan artists 28 January - 11 February Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal Revisted

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and Turkey from Kathmandu valid from now until 29 February for travel till July and is subject to availability.

TATA spares

TATA Motors Genuine Parts and SIPRADI Auto Parts launched TATA Motors' genuine motor oil for its wide range of commercial vehicles on 24 January.



Shangri-La Goes Green

Shangri-La Hotel and Resort is continuing its commitment to environmentally friendly practices with a tree-plantation initiative organised last week.

British Council

British Council Nepal hosted its 3rd Annual Education Symposium on 28 January. The theme of this year's event was 'Inclusive Education'. The event brought together researchers, policy makers, teachers, administrators, private sector and development partners.



IMF Nepal

An International Monetary Fund team led by Ms. Laura Jaramillo visited Kathmandu during 5-17 January to hold discussions for the 2020 Article IV consultation.

Qatar Airways

A signing ceremony was held on 26 January in Doha between Qatar Airways and the Philippine Football Federation. The agreement officiated Qatar Airways as the Title Sponsor of the Philippines Football League until 2022.



Oil-rich Gulf turns to renewable energy

Kunda Dixit
in Abu Dhabi

Increased frequency of climate-induced weather extremes and public opinion pressure are forcing even major fossil-fuel exporting countries in West Asia to make a push towards renewable energy.

In January alone, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) hosted the UAE Energy Forum, the World Future Energy Summit, the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week and a Future Sustainability Summit.

From February until the end of the year, Dubai will host the International Conference on Renewable and Sustainable Energy, the International Conference on Green Energy and Environmental Technology, a Green Week and a Congress on Biofuels and Bioenergy. Oil industry conclaves that used to focus on global price trends, prospecting and new oil fields now include plenary panels on solar and wind.

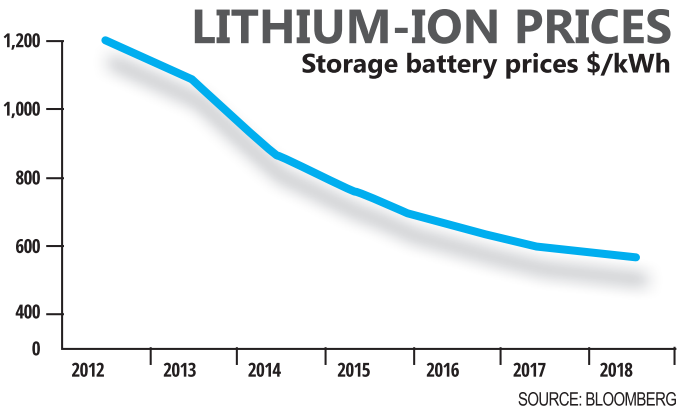
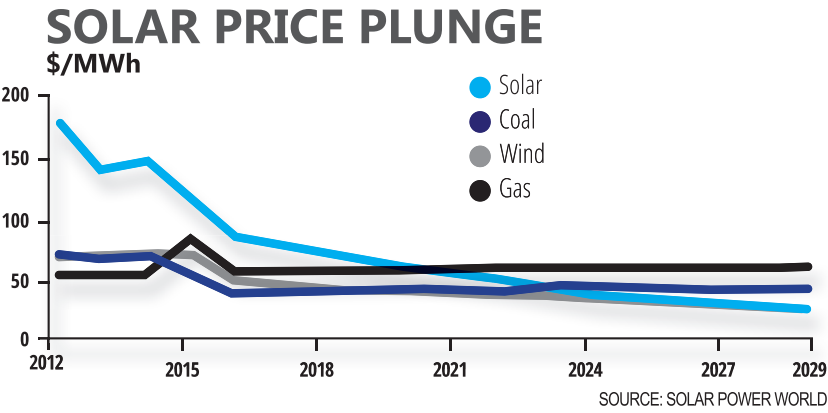
The UAE is the world’s 7th largest exporter of crude oil, with 5.5% of market share, but it is promoting itself as a low-carbon country. Masdar City, designed by Foster and Partners architects as a model for sustainable urban living, is coming up on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi. A 10MW solar farm outside Masdar City provides power for its office buildings, which include the regional headquarters of Siemens and IRENA (the International Renewable Energy Agency).

“We are serious about energy security, and we have a strategy for an energy mix that includes renewables,” said Suhail bin Mohammed Faraj Faris Al Mazrouei, UAE Minister of Energy and Industry, at the opening of the UAE Energy Forum earlier this month. That decarbonisation plan would mean that by 2050 the country will be producing 38% of its energy from gas, 44% from renewables and 6% from nuclear. The use of clean coal will drop to 12%.

In that tiime, petroleum-based energy will drop from the current 91% to 41%, and renewables will go up from today’s 9% to 59%



KUNDA DIXIT



in the Gulf region. Nearly 90% of the UAE’s 10 million population are expatriates and the country’s per capita carbon footprint is 23 tons per year. Although a low-carbon trajectory would reduce domestic emissions, the UAE will remain a major exporter of fossil fuels into the future.

The writing on the wall was clear in Abu Dhabi throughout January – conference delegates felt there was no option but to move from oil to gas, and promote utility-scale solar and wind power.

Saudi Arabia is turning into ‘Solar Arabia’ by integrating Concentrated Solar Power (CSP) with its existing thermal plants

to generate nearly 2GW.

The UAE itself is aiming to cut CO2 emissions by 70%, with Dubai installing the largest single-site solar park in the world to produce 1,000MW, which will be upgraded to 5,000MW in the next ten years. A 700MW CSP plant will generate electricity even after dark through the use of molten salt storage.

“However much we shift to renewables for transportation or electricity, we will still have to rely on oil and gas because we have to balance the baseload at night,” explains Jan Zschommler of the DNV GL, a Norway-based sustainability consultant group.

The cost of solar photovoltaic panels have

dropped by more than 90% in the past ten years, and the price of lithium ion batteries have dropped by 80% and onshore wind turbines by 75% in the same period. By 2025, it will be cheaper to build and run electric cars than it will be a petrol vehicle.

However, even if half of all the cars in the world are electric, the demand for oil and gas will grow into the near future. Says Nobuo Tanaka of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation: “Even if light vehicles go electric there will be increased demand from aviation, ships and trucks as well as the petrochemical industry. That may be good news for the Middle East, but it is bad news for the planet.” 🇸🇦



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Enjoy Responsibly

No lovelier spot than Kakani

The plot was gifted to the British envoy in the 19th century as a country retreat by the reclusive Ranas

As an egotistic control freak, Jim Edwards did not like surprises. It was with bad grace that he grudgingly permitted me to arrange his 50th birthday celebration, but it drove him mad that he was not in charge of the details and kept in the dark about the lunch party location: the British Ambassador's bungalow at Kakani.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

An added problem was that Jim went to great lengths to avoid any birthday, like most people who considered themselves immortal. Late one evening warming his hands around the Bardia campfire, I overheard him declare: "I'm never going to die! I simply can't imagine a world without me." In his element, Jim was hosting friends at Karnali, the steep riverbank carved by last monsoon was marked by a rough fence of fallen branches.

He was deadly serious. Jim's entire focus and massive talent was for life and living, and he had no pretension or spiritual aptitude to ponder the next world. Insisting on always being the centre of attention, life was never dull in his orbit. Jim created an infectious vortex of energy and manipulated a whirl of complex relationships.

That morning, 24 November 1985, the advance guard had been sent ahead to prepare lunch in the needle-carpeted grounds of the ambassador's historic home, nestled amidst the pines high on a ridge north of Kathmandu with an expansive view across waves of hills to the white peaks. Jim had insisted on overseeing the guest list, and the rented bus was loaded up with family, friends, and my Tiger Tops and Mountain Travel colleagues.

It was my task to bring Jim



FINN THILSTED

in his red range rover, an early extravagance and one of the first models off the Solihull assembly line, muttering and grumbling all the way up the tortuous switchbacks. By Balaju, past the reclining Vishnu in his water garden and traversing beneath the trees of Nagarjun's royal forest, Jim had already guessed our destination. The narrow road climbed past heaps of huge radish (*mula*) for which the land was renowned, today superseded by strawberries and trout. Turning right before the main road drops away to Trisuli, we reached the Tamang village of Kakani at a refreshing altitude of 6,660 feet (2,030m), and entered the hallowed ground and clipped lawn of the British bungalow. With cheering guests waiting to surprise him, it took all Jim's self-control to revert to his normal affability.

The lunch conspiracy could not have been concocted without the collusion of the ambassador, Anthony Hurrell. Kakani was



gifted to the British envoy in the nineteenth century as a country retreat by the reclusive and xenophobic ruling Ranas. In the exclusive purview of successive ambassadors, its use and worth over the years has waxed and waned at their personal whim.

John Denson, British Ambassador 1977 to 1983,

was an enthusiastic user and published much of what we know of its history. He wrote in 1984: "The sense of isolation and claustrophobia, since the Resident was confined within the Kathmandu Valley, was great and led to a request for somewhere in Nepal where he could breathe. The Maharajah (Prime Minister) agreed

that a tract of land could be granted near Kakani, where our present bungalow still stands. ... At one time there was a miniature golf course, and the Resident moved there for a part of the year." As Desmond Doig noted, the fairways straddled the ridge and "must have been hell on caddies."

During their tenure 2006 to 2010, Dr Andrew Hall and his wife Kathy cherished the old bungalow, despite its discomforts, and used it regularly to impress visiting ministers and fellow diplomats. The grounds and woodland were alive with birds and butterflies, marigolds and scarlet poinsettias against a piercing blue sky. "I loved that place - Dudley Spain first took me there for a picnic in 1969, and later we spent as much time up there as we could manage: wreathed in clouds with only leeches for company in summer, stunning views but terribly cold - even with a huge log fire - in winter."

The second British Resident, Brian Houghton Hodgson, living in Kathmandu from 1820 to 1843 in various roles, was first provided with a cottage at Koulia, a spot about five kilometres along the ridge north west of Kakani. There are also sketchy references in 1863 to a country house in Bhaktapur "for the use of the Residency", but no details. When the Koulia "log cabin" was razed by lightning, it was replaced by the Kakani bungalow sometime in the mid to late 1800s - the date unknown.

Lost films and forgotten diaries show the cumbersome process of reaching the Kakani outpost in those days, by horse, sedan chair and porter support. In the words of the East India Company Resident, Henry Lawrence in 1845, "A lovelier spot on earth the heart of man could scarce desire," although his wife Honoria Lawrence also complained about the leeches. In corsets and stays, yesterday's memsahibs must have been an intrepid lot.

Runners were the only means of communication, later supplemented by a heliograph. This WW1 device was used for signalling morse code by means of a movable mirror reflecting beams of sunlight, with direct line of sight to the residence in Lainchaur, now occupied by the Indian embassy. "I suspect that its main purpose in those heroic days was to demand extra supplies of gin!" wrote John Denson.

Other than Jim's birthday, I have been invited over the decades for various ambassadorial 'picnics', more often elaborate sit-downs served by teams of Embassy staff. Only once I spent a night, echoing with vanished footsteps. We photographed the bungalow for *Kathmandu Valley Style* and Desmond Doig painted it in *My Kind of Kathmandu* (above, left). The Gurkhas built a cottage next door, a park commemorates mountaineers killed in Nepal, and along the ridge Thai's memorial garden overlooks the 1992 crash site, a sombre reminder of past disasters.

In 2015 the earthquakes destroyed the old bungalow at Kakani, and British safety regulations forced its dismemberment. The next chapter of its long history awaits to be written. ■

Above the clouds with Yeti Airlines

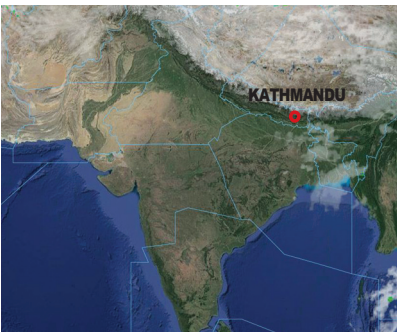
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Even before the snow from last week's westerly system has had time to melt, there is more snowfall passing through the high mountains late Friday and into Saturday. Most weather stations in Nepal measured up to three times more rain and snow this winter compared to a normal season. While this is welcome for farmers, the snow has blocked some mountain highways for more than a week. There will be passing clouds in the lower valleys, with mist and fog, and it will remain unseasonably cold.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
15° 4°	13° 3°	14° 3°

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PHOTOS: BIKAS RAUNIYAR

Narayan Humagain left his native Kavre in the 1980s and headed to India in search of work. His first son Binod was born a few years later in Kolkata. Determined that his son would not suffer as he had, Narayan worked hard to give him the best education possible. With great difficulty, he got Binod admitted to Kolkata's St Xavier's College. By 2008, Binod was an honours student in the final years of his Bachelors in Commerce. He was determined to make it big so he could lift his family out of poverty. He partnered with his friend and classmate Sagar Daryani, who was from a well-to-do family, and the two decided to start a fail-safe business.

On a trip they made to Darjeeling together, Binod and Sagar came across a momo outlet for the first time. The dumplings were so delicious that the pair began dreaming of an India-wide chain of momo restaurants. With an initial investment of just INR30,000, and even before graduating, they started the first Wow Momo stall in a small garage in Kolkata. Twelve years later, Wow Momo has over 300 outlets in 15 Indian cities and the company is valued at \$12 million. Wow China is their latest spin-off venture, by which they seek to bring mainland Chinese cuisine to the subcontinent.

Binod's path to success was not without hurdles, but along the way he and his partner found prominent investors like Sanjeev Bikhchandani, chair of naukri.com, and Padmashree-award recipient IT entrepreneur Saurabh Srivastava. Sachin Bharatiya of the venture-capital firm Lighthouse Funds is the fast food chain's latest sponsor. Last month at the Visit Nepal 2020 Conclave in Bangalore, Binod was trying to keep a low profile amidst dignitaries like Nepal's ambassador to India Nilambar Acharya, former Indian Ambassador to Nepal KV Rajan and many big businessmen. His next stop after the

conclave was the inauguration of the latest Wow China outlet in Kolkata. Wow Momo prides itself in employing differently abled people and works with non-profits to support various causes. In the future, the company aims to open five cancer hospitals with its own investment and to provide medical care for those unable to afford it. The soft-spoken 30-something with a ready smile said in a mixture of Nepali and English: "It is unbelievable how fast the chain has grown and spread. Hard work always carries its rewards, but we have to give back to society." **Bikas Rauniyar** in Kolkata

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Nepal's other attraction: the night sky

The Himalaya can be a haven for stargazers if steps are taken to protect the darkness



ALEX TREADWAY

Outnumbering the stars

2020 saw the start of a program to launch thousands of new, low-orbit satellites to enable faster global internet access. The creation of an American aerospace company founded by Elon Musk, SpaceX Starlink satellites could soon outnumber the stars in the night sky. Amazon and other tech

companies are also reaching into space for better satellite communications.

However, because of the lower orbit of these satellites, they are much more visible from earth at night as they reflect sunlight. SpaceX itself plans to have 12,000 of these in space by the middle of the decade. One

astronomer's projection of what this might look like from earth is dizzying: lots of tiny bright lights zipping across a firmament that was once deep and still.

Tens of thousands of these reflective objects would outnumber the approximately 9,000 stars that are visible to the naked eye in a natural dark sky. And even when satellites die, they continue to orbit the earth as space debris.

These new, highly visible satellites have already begun to mar astrological observations and scientists worry that their presence will impact on our ability to understand the physical universe beyond the stratosphere. SpaceX has responded to these concerns by giving the underside of some of its satellites a dark coating, but it has yet to be seen to what extent this will remedy the problem.

Astronomers find that part of the difficulty is that legislation has not kept pace with technology. There are no national or international regulations on sky pollution or protections of astronomical research.





YEVHEN SAMUCHENKO



JEFF DAI / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Himali Dixit

In 2016, *National Geographic* listed Sagarmatha National Park as one of the world’s five best stargazing sites on the planet. The magazine used a photograph by Jeff Dai of Gokyo by night, showing stars but also the glare of lights from guest houses (*above*).

The publicity drew attention to what mountaineers, trekkers and Himalayan villagers had known all along – that the region below Mt Everest has great astrotourism potential because it is located far from any big city, and it is above the dust and haze.

“Our remoteness is our resource,” says tourism expert Gyan Nyaupane, a professor at Arizona State University. “Instead of trying to be like the West, we should preserve what we have, including the darkness of our night sky. If we want quality tourism, we must determine what we can offer better than others can. We must create a niche for ourselves.”

Indeed, Nepal’s darkness could be its unique selling point. To protect the Himalayan night sky from light pollution, tourism experts say, the country should take steps to limit illumination and design outdoor light fixtures in such a way that they do not outshine the constellations.

A study by Nyaupane and his students found that stargazers are also interested in other nature-based activities such as trekking, rafting, observing wildlife, birdwatching, and nature photography. Nyaupane emphasizes, “Since a large segment of tourists visiting Nepal are nature-based tourists, astrotourism adds significant value to our existing tourism products.”

Park offices, army barracks, and scattered settlements are the only sources of artificial light within Nepal’s national parks, but the night sky can also be polluted by excess illumination from nearby cities and villages in the buffer zones. Even national parks like Chitwan can benefit if tourists know they can go on safari by day

and stargaze by night. Because Nepal has been late in electrifying rural areas, it may be easier here to encourage ecologically sustainable lighting that creates less glare.

The world has changed rapidly in the last century and many of the things we once took for granted are now precious and dwindling resources -- like breathable air, unpolluted water, and the diversity of plants and animals in our forests and fields. Now, we are in danger of losing the darkness of the night.

The view of the heavens once prompted awe and wonder at creation, and humility at our place in the universe. It inspired artistic expression and led to the development and flourishing of astronomy and astrology, but it is now unavailable from much of the planet.

The Italy-based Light Pollution Science and Technology Institute says 80% of the earth’s landmass suffers from light pollution, and for 99% of people in Europe and the United States, the night sky is obscured by artificial lighting.

People are now travelling across the world in pursuit of dark skies. Identifying this as a top tourism trend in 2019, premier travel publisher *Lonely Planet* wrote: ‘Across the planet, travellers are now seeking out the world’s last-remaining dark skies where they can get a clear, unpolluted view of the stars.’

In 2001, the International Dark Sky Association (IDA), which works to protect the night skies for present and future generations, began to offer certification to national parks around the world in recognition of their effort to preserve the dark sky.

Certification has not meant eliminating illumination: measures include making sure essential lighting points downwards to where it is needed, eliminating upward leakage and thereby also reducing energy wastage.

The IDA has so far certified 77 parks, most of them in remote areas of the US and Europe, boosting astrotourism. Many of the Dark Sky Parks have set up observatories so as to add value to the astrological experience on offer. 🇳🇵

Photographing the night sky

One of the world’s foremost photographers of the night sky finds Nepal to be one of the best places on the planet to see the stars and to take pictures of them.

Ukrainian photographer Yevhen Samuchenko has been to Nepal three times to explore remote locations to take night pictures, and finds Langtang to be one of the most picturesque places for night sky views.

“I am impressed by the magnificent mountains and landscapes, as well as the opportunity to observe the clear starry sky of the Himalaya without the light pollution from big cities,” Samuchenko says.

Samuchenko took the photos featured here (*above, left, and on page 1*) during a trek of Langtang valley in 2017, after pre-selecting the exact points for the shoots during the day and experimenting with different lenses.

“For this picture, I settled on the fisheye lens, which allowed me to effectively compose the Gosainkunda lake and the foreground. I dedicated it to the memory of my father and called it the

‘the calmness of eternity’,” says Samuchenko who used an exposure time of 46 seconds at F3.5, ISO2500, 10mm of his Nikon D5200 with a Tokina 10-17 fisheye.

Gosainkunda Calmness of Eternity (*page 1*) has won Samuchenko several wards including runner up for the CNN Travel Photographer of the Year 2019, which had 20,000 entries from 140 countries. The photo was also exhibited this month at the London Science Museum, which has named Samuchenko Science Photographer of the Year.

Milkyway above the Ocean of Clouds (*above*) was exhibited in London by the Royal Photographic Society in 2018.

Adds Samuchenko: “I like night photos for their slow pace. You can break away from the bustle of the day, and the long exposure does not interfere with the contemplation of the starry sky. Watching the majestic night sky makes me feel like a small particle of the universe, merging into a single whole with it.”

More photographs by Yevhen Samuchenko: <http://q-l-n.com>



YEVHEN SAMUCHENKO

Wildlife needs darkness, and so do we

Plants and animals depend on the day-and-night cycle of light and darkness. The darkness of the night enables countless species to rest, reproduce, feed, and hide from predators. Artificial lighting, including clouds brightened by reflection, illuminate areas far beyond the direct source of light. This impacts behaviours of animals essential to their survival. Scientists are only now beginning to understand the severe effect that artificial lighting has had on biodiversity since the industrial revolution began 200 years ago.

Human beings, like other animals, are guided by circadian rhythms. Research shows that the intrusion of light into the night correlates to an increased risk of health problems including obesity, diabetes, depression, sleep disorders, and certain forms of cancer.

EVENTS

MUSIC

DINING

GETAWAY



Crêpe Day

Celebrate La Chandeleur, France's crêpe holiday, and make your own French pancakes.
3 February, 10am-12pm, Alliance Française

namasteNepal

This year's Kathmandu Contemporary Art Exhibition is titled "namasteNepal". It features 14 Nepalese and 21 Korean contemporary artists.
1-6 February, 11am-6pm, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal (01) 4220735

Kitab Jatra

Kitab Jatra 2020 features talks by authors, library-making activities, 30 exhibitions of new and rare books, quirky literary curiosities and introductions to start-ups. This is a literary event you should not miss.
1 February, 10am-6pm, The Everest Hotel, Baneshwor (01) 5245088



Thangka Art

Marvel at the Thangka paintings of celebrated artists Tenzin Dhargay (Phenpo Tendhar), a 9th generation Thangka painter, and Lobsang Tseten, a 4th generation Thangka painter (see page 4 below).
28 January-11 February, 11am-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal (01) 4218048

Object in Focus

The 4th series of Object in Focus features artist Nabendra Limbu. The object in focus is "खाजा घरमा मुस्कान (A smile in a public place)."
6-15 February, 10am-5pm, Taragaon Museum, Hyatt Regency, Boudha (01) 6201035



Affinity

Artists Ishan Pariyar and Sabita Dangol are life partners. This joint exhibition depicts their journey as a couple and their emotions and passion for one another.
6-10 February, 10am-5pm, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal (01) 4220735



History and Future

Storycycle aims to bring unique stories into the limelight. This exhibition features stories told by members through words and visuals.
4-9 February, 11am-4pm, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal (01) 4220735

Night of Ideas

The annual Night of Ideas celebrates ideas from different countries, cultures, topics and generations. This year's theme, "Being Alive", will be addressed from multiple perspectives by the panel.
30 February, 3pm-5pm, Hotel Himalaya, Pulchok (01) 5009221



Nattu Shah

Natasha Shah, popularly known as Nattu, will be performing at London PUB for its "Last Friday of the Month" event.
31 January, 6pm onwards, London PUB Kathmandu, Darbar Marg, 9865438599

Love Juice

Love Juice is a musical group that plays traditional and contemporary music from all over the world. Their mantra is to spread the "juice of love" through their music.
31 January, 6:30pm-10:30pm, Bikalpa Art Cafe & Bar, Pulchok, 9851147776



Fusion & Blues

Listen to the musical collaboration between Asian fusion band Kanta dAb and Canadian bluesy rock musician Ross Green.
1 February, 8pm-11:45pm, Shisha Lounge & Bar, Thamel (01) 4701104

BNC Open Mic

Grab a beer, order some good food and get on stage for open mic night at BNC.
Every Thursday, 7pm onwards, Beers N'Cheers, Jhamsikhel (01)5524860

ATC Music Fest

This year's Around the Corner Music Festival features artists like Sanjeev Ghising, Sushant Ghimire and more.
1 February, 4pm-10pm, Around the Corner Cafe, Bansbari, 9861631197

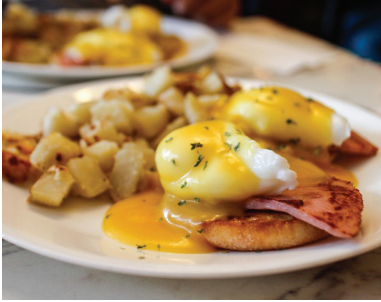


Kairos Cafe

Kairos serves great, customisable breakfasts where you can choose from various sorts of pancakes, bagels with an assortment of cream cheeses and burritos. Their latte art is also one of the best in the city.
7am-9pm, Jawalakhel, 9813493902

Himali Farmer's Kitchen

This restaurant serves classic Nepali dishes like bhatmas sadeko, aloo jeera and sukuti alongside khaja sets.
9am-11pm, Chaksibari Marg, Thamel



Cafe Soma

For a sunny spot to grab brunch and for mouth-watering desserts, head to Soma's Baluwater location. If you're looking for a work space, the Jawalakhel location is perfect for you.
8am-8pm, Jawalakhel (01) 5528732/Baluwater (01) 4415792

Phalano Coffee Ghar

This casual eatery serves great coffee, filling sandwiches and special baked goods in record time.
7am-9pm, Pulchok (01) 5534555



Cibo Bistro

If you're heading to Cibo Bistro, be prepared to leave feeling full and happy. The carefully curated menu of pastas, pizzas, salads, appetizers and desserts will have you wanting each and every single dish.
10am-10pm, Pulchok (01) 5541940



Kathmandu Guest House

Kathmandu Guest House is a favourite of frequent visitors to Nepal. The converted Rana mansion has offered comfortable accommodations, airy rooms, beautiful gardens and great prices since 1967.
Thamel (01) 4700632

Waterfront Resort

Located just beyond busy Lakeside and at no more than a glance from the stunning Peace Pagoda, Waterfront Resort offers the best of both worlds. Here, you have access to the solace of nature but you are also just a five-minute resort-shuttle ride away from the bustling tourist hub.
Pokhara (61) 420004



Hotel Baha

What better way to start your day than with the beautiful view of Bhaktapur Darbar Square and a homely meal of rice, lentils, vegetables, meat and pickles?
Bhaktapur (01) 6616810

Hotel Kido

This Japanese-style hotel offers a humble and comfortable stay. Their in-house restaurant, Tamura, also serves some of the most authentic Japanese dishes in Kathmandu.
Prashuti Griha Marg (01) 4243189



Maruni Sanctuary Lodge

Chitwan National Park is home to a wide range of flora and fauna. From the comfort of the cabins and cottages of this lodge, you can take a peek at the wandering wildlife and serene nature.
Sauraha (01) 4700632

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OUR PICK

Opens in Kathmandu 24 January

The Will Smith action franchise has been a regular entertainer for many years now. This time Smith and his partner Martin Lawrence are back from retirement to hunt more bad guys and blow up more cars. Leave your brains at home and enjoy this high-speed thriller directed by Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah.

AIR QUALITY INDEX KATHMANDU, 24 - 30 January

301 – 500 Hazardous							
201 – 300 Very Unhealthy							
151 – 200 Unhealthy							
101 – 150 Unhealthy for sensitive groups							
50 – 100 Moderate							
0 – 50 Good							

PM2.5
Ozone

FRIDAY Jan 24 SATURDAY Jan 25 SUNDAY Jan 26 MONDAY Jan 27 TUESDAY Jan 28 WEDNESDAY Jan 29 THURSDAY Jan 30

Most weather stations in Nepal measured up to three times more rain and snow this winter when compared to a normal season. But clearly this wasn't sufficient to clean up the air of particulate pollution this week. The daily average of concentration of pollutants at Kathmandu's city centre was consistently high with the peak on Tuesday where it nearly touched the Maroon 'Hazardous' level by crossing the AQI 300 threshold -- 10 times higher than the WHO standard for air quality.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Nepalis caught up in Hong Kong protests

Many left Kathmandu fed up with protests, but some Nepali students join demonstrations

Will Patterson
in Hong Kong

When Hong Kong was thrown into a political crisis last year after the autonomous region proposed a bill that would allow Beijing to extradite Hong Kong criminals to mainland China, the territory's Nepali community was ambivalent.

Many were fed up with violent demonstrations and national shut-downs called by political parties back home in Nepal, and were dismayed that street protests followed them to Hong Kong. However, some Nepali students here have joined the protests, and have even been arrested.

Protests have gone on for eight months, and continued over the Chinese New Year and despite the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak.

Hong Kong's 25,000-strong Nepali community has been directly impacted. 'Little Nepal' in the Jordan neighborhood saw some of the most violent clashes.

Two Nepali students, Jenny Rai and Rosemary Limbu, were arrested during protests on 1 October.

"I just came out for my city," Rai told *Nepali Times*. "This is where I was born. I'm sure if this happened in Nepal, they would have gone out just like me without any regrets."

On the day of Rai's arrest, she was grabbed by an officer from behind while she was trying to run away. He pinned her to the ground, pressing her face to the metal shutter of a closed shop. She yelled out her name – a common practice among arrested protesters so witnesses can

inform family and friends.

After Rai was taken into a police van, officers looked up her identity. She says one officer made multiple derogatory remarks about her Nepali ethnicity. As an ethnic minority and someone who now has an arrest record, Rai is worried about her future and that of her family.

Rai spent 48 hours in custody with no contact with the outside. She was released on the understanding that police would

continue to seek evidence for prosecution.

"If I had to do this again, I would. How can I have any regrets? I would never regret showing my support for Hong Kong," she said.

Other, mostly older, Nepalis are wary of getting swept up in the movement, either because it may affect their jobs, or because they believe no good can come out of challenging Beijing.

"Being a minority, the Nepali

community does not want to take sides," explained Hong Kong-based journalist Dambar Krishna Shrestha. "All they want is peace and stability to get on with their lives."

When Hong Kong was still a British colony in 1967, Gurkha police were deployed to quell deadly ethnic riots. A proposal to use Gurkhas again to defend Hong Kong's MTR transit network against vandalism was rejected after criticism that it would provoke a backlash against Nepalis.

Protests have continued since Rai and Limbu's arrest, and the recent addition of the Wuhan coronavirus to Hong Kong's political landscape has further complicated matters.

Face masks have become part of the city's daily attire, dredging up memories of the 2002 SARS outbreak. Schools and universities have cancelled in-person classes until 17 February — extending the Chinese New Year break to three weeks.

Concern about the virus and anti-government sentiment seem to be merging. On Sunday night, angry locals and protesters demonstrated against a quarantine facility near a residential area. 🇳🇵



JAGAT AMBU GURUNG



Hong Kong's *Jana Andolan*

A Nepali photojournalist formerly with the Maoists is now documenting the protests on-going in Hong Kong, and says the demonstrations seem to follow him wherever he goes.

Jagat Ambu Gurung, 53, (*pictured left*) says he has not missed a single protest. He even leaves his job during working hours to follow the street demonstrations.

"I have always been a risk-taker and there is still a bit of rebellion in me from my days as a youth in the *andolan* for democracy back home," says Gurung. "My 13-year-old son, who speaks Cantonese, updates me regarding the protests, helping me to be in the right place at the right time. I documented the 2014 Umbrella Movement as well."

Gurung was born in Hong Kong to a British Gurkha father, but spent much of his youth in Chitwan with his grandparents. During the Panchayat period, he worked as a reporter for *Chalpa* weekly and also wrote for *Bimarsha*.

After the first *Jana Andolan* of 1990-91 brought democracy

to Nepal, Gurung worked in South Korea for four years as a reporter and photojournalist, documenting the lives of Nepali migrant workers for a local newspaper.

In 1995, he decided to move to Hong Kong and later started working for the Nepali paper *Everest*. It was after joining the online news portal *HK Nepal* that he decided to focus primarily on photojournalism.

"The protests here are different from back home. Nepal has a longer history of rebellion; people in Hong Kong are just beginners," says Gurung. "The demonstrations here are still relatively safe in comparison, even though there are now crackdowns on the press."

Gurung became a member of Communist Party of Nepal (Masal) in 1985 and then Ekata Kendra, before joining the Cultural Wing of the CPN (Maoist) during the conflict years. He remained with the party until 2008, when he became disillusioned with the sycophancy and nepotism.

"We fought a war but not much has changed," says Gurung who describes himself as a straight-shooter who does not kowtow to anyone for favours. Like many descendants of Gurkha servicemen, Gurung now works in construction. He is employed by HK Electric, a power project on Lamma Island.

When the pro-democracy demonstration reached Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Gurung came across some Nepali students who had not left the campus compound for days. He found that they had joined the movement against their families' wishes and under peer pressure.

"I tell them not to be involved in it and if they are, first and foremost to be safe," says Gurung, who himself has been to both the Ninja and pro-Beijing demonstrations and says the Nepali community in Hong Kong is worried about the stability of the island.

He adds: "Many Nepalis are concerned that they might have to return back home but I think that unlike the hospitality industry, the impact of the protests will hit us in about two years' time when we Nepalis have to renew the contracts for our construction jobs."

Sonia Awale

“लोभ, लालच र प्रलोभनमा नपरौ अब: लैङ्गिक हिंसा विरुद्ध लागौ सब।”

“समन्वय, सहकार्य र साझेदारी सरकार: लैङ्गिक हिंसाको अन्त्य मानवअधिकार।”

“सीप, सृजना र रोजगारी सहित अघि बढौ: लैङ्गिक हिंसा र दुर्यवहार हामी नसहौ।”



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क्रमिक मुद्दती खाता

“ अब म पनि खोल्छु मुद्दती खाता ”

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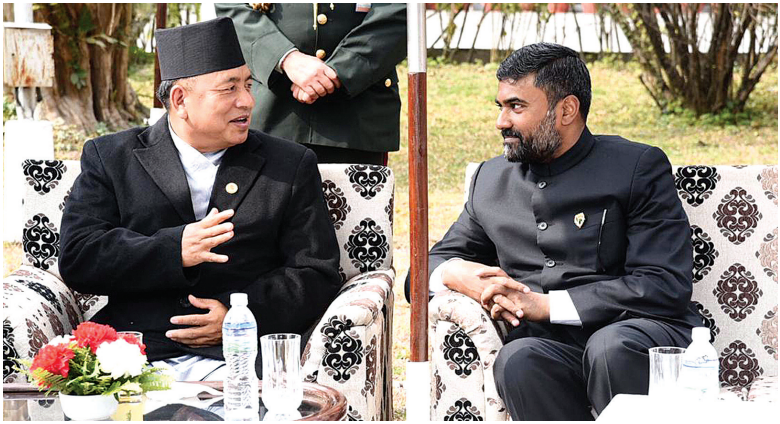
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RATNA SHRESTHA/RSS

STATE OF THE STATE: President Bidya Bhandari and Prime Minister K P Oli at the swearing-in ceremony of the new Speaker of Parliament Agni Sapkota at Shital Niwas on Monday.



INDIAN EMBASSY

MEN IN BLACK: Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun and Charge d' Affaires of the Indian Embassy Ajay Kumar during a reception on Sunday to celebrate the 71st Republic Day of India.



UNITED NATIONS NEPAL

REMEMBERING NOT TO FORGET: Bashkim Bituci of the European Union, Israeli Ambassador Benny Omer, UN Resident Coordinator Valerie Julliard and German Ambassador Roland Schafer at the launch of a month-long educational program about the Holocaust in Kathmandu Valley schools.



US EMBASSY

HERITAGE LIVE: US Ambassador Randy Berry at the consecration ceremony on Wednesday of the recently restored 16th-century Char Narayan Temple in Patan Darbar Square. The temple had collapsed in the 2015 earthquake.



KASA STYLE

HIGH END FASHION: National and international models participate in the Mt Everest fashion runway held at Kala Pathar by the clothing brand Kasa Style to promote sustainable fashion and spread awareness about climate change.

Sanghamitra Subba

Earlier this month, at the start of the Visit Nepal 2020 campaign, colourful and larger than life fiberglass sculptures of squatting yetis appeared overnight at Kathmandu landmarks.

Those who didn't know about the tourism campaign were bewildered by the 2-metre tall figures that were installed imposingly in Boudha, Kathmandu Darbar Square, Thamel and various malls.

"At first glance, I thought it was a statue of Hanuman or Mahabir. When I looked closely, it seemed like a laughing Buddha. But it was only later that I found out that it was a yeti mascot," recalls Deepak Prasad Shrestha of the Indra Jatra Organising Committee.

Many others voiced similar sentiments – they either had no idea what the figures were or wondered why these yetis were suddenly all over town. The yeti mascots, as other multiple painted fiberglass sculptures like the Buddy Bears in Berlin and the cows of the New York Cow Parade, are attempts to bring diverse artistic expression into the public sphere.



The yeti – selected by the Visit Nepal Year organisers and conceptualised as a mascot by US-based Nepali artist Ang Tsherin Sherpa – is a mythical creature of Himalayan folklore. The Visit Nepal 2020 secretariat felt it was a fitting symbol of Nepal's unique mystique.

Out of the 108 statues that have been planned for completion by the end of the year, only 20 have been painted over by various artists, sold and displayed. The artists have the freedom to paint their yetis as they please. The figures are valued at Rs500,000 each and are sold by the artists independently.

The VNY2020 organisers bought four statues to display in rotation in public spaces in Kathmandu. Private companies and organisations like Labim Mall, The World Bank and Jyoti Group have

The Visit Nepal 2020 yeti mascot has been met with bewilderment and some outrage

bought the mascots and displayed them on their premises in support of the tourism campaign.

But there has been criticism regarding the funding of the yeti statues and speculation about where the revenue from sales is going.

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it, it's abominable



ALL PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA



ABOMINABLE SNOWPERSONS: (*l-r*) Yeti mascot at Labim Mall in Patan remains, even though four out of the 20 deployed across Kathmandu have been removed after protests.

The Visit Nepal 2020 yeti figure in Kathmandu Darbar Square was spray painted by protesters who opposed the use of the Kumari's third eye on its forehead.

The yellow spotted yeti figure was mistaken for a deity while it was stationed in Boudha, and some devotees were seen bowing to it this week.

Niki Shrestha at the VNY 2020 secretariat says, “We want to make it clear that this isn’t a government- or Tourism Board-funded project. The revenue from the sales of the statues goes to the artists who dedicated their time and effort to supporting the tourism campaign.”

The use of religious and cultural motifs on the statues of the mythical creatures has also seen criticism. Two of the yetis that were stationed in Kathmandu Darbar Square this week had Kumari themes to them. In one, by noted artist Erina Tamrakar, the living goddess’s third eye was painted on the yeti’s forehead. In another, there was an image of the Kumari on the yeti’s back. Locals of the area, calling these depictions “insensitive”, spray-painted over them and over other religious iconography that the artists had used.

Deepak Prasad Shrestha of the Indra Jatra Committee says, “The Kumari is a living goddess, who is only brought out once a year. We were so surprised to see it being painting on a creature that does not even exist.” Those statues have since been removed from the area.

Curator Sangeeta Thapa of the Siddhartha Art Gallery says, “I think the yetis are a beautiful concept and I feel sad that an artist’s work was vandalised like that. There should have been better dialogue between the public and the organisers on what to do with the statues instead of ruining a piece of art.”

In the coming year, the yeti mascots are to be displayed at airports and locations around the world, bringing the once elusive yeti to places near and far. 🇳🇵



Watch a video of the public reaction to the painted yetis that are the mascots of Visit Nepal 2020. While some were confused by the figures, others did not understand what the fuss was about, saying they were a bold expression of the artistic freedom enjoyed in Nepal.

Valentine's at Jagatpur Lodge

ACTIVITIES:

- A complimentary glass of wine with Valentine's Day Dinner
- Tharu and Darai Village Walk to have a glimpse of local life
- Mini Jeep Safari at the community forest
- Boating
- All Meal Included (Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner)
- Breakfast with Nature
- Slide Presentation/Documentary on flora and fauna
- Tharu Culture Show for groups of 10 and above
- Visit to the Crocodile Breeding Centre

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Date: 14th – 16th February 2020

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JAGATPUR LODGE
BY ANNAPURNA

Why Nepal must watch

Because: we border China and infected individuals with no symptoms can transmit disease



Sameer M Dixit

The ongoing outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus in China, also called the Wuhan coronavirus, has now affected at least 20 countries. Approximately 7,700 cases have been reported with the majority being diagnosed in China.

The total fatalities have crossed 170, a majority of them in the Hubei Province in which Wuhan is located. Nepal has reported its first confirmed case: of a student studying in China who had been visiting Nepal when diagnosed.

Viruses of the coronavirus family have historically caused diseases of the respiratory tract in human populations worldwide. Recent outbreaks included the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002 and the Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012. Both affected thousands of people and were in some cases fatal.

SARS killed 10% of infected individuals while MERS was fatal in 37% of the infected population.

The current fatality rate due to the Wuhan coronavirus is 2.2%. If we are to describe this statistic in reverse, about 98 percent of those infected with the virus do not die.

The question then is, why is there so much concern regarding this outbreak, given the relatively low mortality rate in comparison to previous coronavirus outbreaks?

The first reason is that the Wuhan coronavirus is ‘novel’. This term is used in viral epidemiology to indicate a new strain, one which has not been detected previously in the population. Scientists therefore do not have adequate information regarding

Being in Beijing during the coronavirus

A Nepali student in Beijing feels safer in the hotspot of a global pandemic than in his own country

Rastraraj Bhandari in Beijing

For the past week, I have been under voluntary lockdown in Beijing because of the rapid spread of the coronavirus in China.

A trip to the supermarket to stock up on supplies made me feel like I was living post-zombie apocalyptic breakout, fleeing not attacks from the infected, but people who happened to cough or sneeze. Holed up and subsisting on instant noodles, I cannot wait till I can fly out of Beijing. I have no knowledge of when I will be back, as many universities in Beijing have requested students not to return until further notice.

As during the 2002 SARS pandemic that infected more than 5,300 people and killed 349 nationwide, the Chinese government has sought to contain the crisis by putting large numbers of people in quarantine – this time 50 million. By Thursday, the the number of coronavirus-related deaths in China has risen to 106 with those confirmed ill crossing 3,000.



MADISON PLASTER



HANNAH ROSE KIRK

GOING VIRAL: Deserted Peking University campus on 26 January (*left*), and long queues at Beijing Airport for fever check this week (*above*).

Embassies continue to work for the wellbeing of their citizens, and neighbouring countries such as Mongolia and North Korea are reported to have shut their borders with China. Kathmandu airport has a special arrival area for planes from China, with officials scaling back the target of getting

500,000 tourists from the mainland in 2020. The Chinese government extended the Lunar New Year holidays, and employers have added buffer periods before employees are required to be at work.

As in many crisis situations, there are more unknowns than knowns. While Wuhan seafood

market was initially believed to be the source of the new virus, a study published this week in The Lancet of 41 hospitalised patients with confirmed infections challenges that hypothesis.

An article published in Science magazine by Daniel Lucey, an infectious disease specialist at

the University of Georgetown, asserts: ‘The virus came into that marketplace before it came out of that marketplace.’

Transparency from the government in reporting the crisis also continues to be questioned within and beyond China. While state-run media channels such

Coronavirus, but not panic



Confirmed cases:

7,821

Deaths:

170

As of January 30, 2020 at press time

the characteristics of the virus to provide evidence-informed public health instructions on containment and treatment.

Second, unlike SARS and MERS, this virus has an incubation period of up to 14 days and asymptomatic infected individuals can transmit the disease to others during that time. Even infected individuals who show improvement can continue to transmit the virus.

The R0 (pronounced 'r naught') value of this virus is estimated at 3, meaning that an infected person on average will transmit to three other persons.

This is considered a high infectivity number, but still lower than that of SARS or MERS.

The Chinese authorities have put strict measures in place in Wuhan to try to contain the spread of the virus. However, this may not be enough as many infected individuals may have already traveled out of town by the time the measures were enacted.

Wuhan has a population of 10 million, and many had begun to travel in advance of the Chinese New Year this week. Experts at Imperial College London have estimated the number of infected to already be around 100,000.

We can therefore expect more cases around the world as infected individuals travel and transmit the disease. However, once again, the question emerges of what the reported fatalities so far are among this large number of infected individuals. Could it be that the virus is spreading but not causing too many deaths?

Nepal has seen regular outbreaks of respiratory diseases including seasonal influenza, 'avian influenza' and 'swine flu'. The Nepali media often reports cases of 'unknown viral disease'. The Nepal government had established screening centres for

the coronavirus at airport and border checkpoints even before the first infected person was diagnosed in Tibet on Monday.

The National Public Health Laboratory is working with private hospitals and laboratories to provide timely and accurate diagnostics of the Wuhan coronavirus with technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO).

Cases are being referred to Sukraraj Tropical Infectious Diseases Hospital as the focal center and the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division is monitoring signs of possible outbreaks in country. The Ministry of Health and Population has directed all private hospitals around country to have ventilator-supported ICUs on standby should those be required.


The state mechanism appears to have learnt from weaknesses is showed during the SARS and H1N1 (swine flu) outbreaks of the past. However, accurate clinical diagnosis of this disease is going to be a challenge given the likelihood of infected individuals arriving at checkpoints showing no symptoms and because individuals infected with other viruses like influenza or other, weaker strains may show similar symptoms as those infected by the Wuhan coronavirus.

Screening is the only way of identifying the maximum number of cases entering the country and preventing those

from infecting the population. There have been no further coronavirus infection cases reported in Nepal since 25 January. The first case, reported on that day, is so far the only one.

Global media reporting of this outbreak has focused on fatality rather than recovery, and appears to have failed to notice that the WHO, with its expertise and access to data, has not yet declared the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency.

The experience of having made the 'premature and hasty' decision to terminate the 2009 influenza A (H1N1) – or swine flu – outbreak a pandemic still being fresh, this time WHO has decided to monitor the situation closely before making any decision in this regard.

The WHO has focused on China as a priority for action while observing rest of the world. This does not mean we can be complacent, as the threat of the virus mutating into a more severe form is real. However, it also does not help to panic. We need to look at the numbers, listen to experts in the field and move ahead accordingly. 



Sameer M Dixit is a public health research scientist at the Centre for Molecular Dynamics Nepal.

scare

as CGTN are showing hundreds of medical personnel voluntarily traveling to Wuhan out of a sense of duty to the nation, and staging cases of people recovering from the virus and heading back home, people continue to question the scale of the crisis as reported by the government. In fact, officials

in Wuhan have directly blamed Beijing for forcing them to withhold information till it was too late.


While previous experience – including the air pollution crisis in 2008 and the 2002 SARS pandemic – suggest China has not been the most transparent in reporting crises, the rise in social media and the internet usage means that complete lack of transparency from the government might be not just impossible but also counterproductive.

But in fleeing China for Nepal, I cannot question but wonder if I am safer right here in Beijing. A day after the first coronavirus case was confirmed in Nepal, two more suspected cases have emerged. While countries around the world are working to determine how to best respond to the crisis, Nepal's government appears woefully unprepared. The Epidemiology and Disease Control Division reportedly chose not to speak to the media, following orders from

the Ministry of Health.

There is rudimentary screening and the lack of human resources and technology at Nepal's only international airport. And while China is building two health facilities with enough space for 2,300 patients over the next few weeks, the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital in Teku lacks even a dedicated isolation ward.

Friends at university get
advisories from their embassies

while I was merely forwarded a 'do's and don't' list from the Nepal Embassy through a WeChat group. I feel safer in the hotspot of a global pandemic than I would in my own home country. The crisis should serve as a reminder of why we must continue to work for Nepal's development in every way possible. 

Rastraraj Bhandari is pursuing a Masters in Economics and China Studies at the Yenching Academy of Peking University in Beijing

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License to lie

It is beginning to worry us in the journalism profession that the press gets bad press. Without beating the bush around, it would be fair to assert that in certain quarters the media has, ummm, a public relations problem. Or to put it more politely: people hate our guts.

Even if we live in an age of alternative truth, it is factually incorrect to call us presstitutes, or to state that we are self-important mercenaries, holier-than-thou hypocrites, annoyingly preachy, morally repugnant nosey parkers, arrogant hacks who hunt in packs, and smug skunks. Actually, we are much worse. And if you have any problems with that, well, tough luck.

Blaming the messenger is not new. The Right Honourable Genghis Khan was known for his draconian Media Council Bill which allowed his junta to legally hang reporters up by their own petard at strategic points along the Belt Roadway to Kashgar.

We have, of course, moved away from such crude and ruthless methods of controlling information. Today, our rulers are governed by international covenants such as the Universal Declaration of Humane Rights and its Article 11 which states, inter alia: ‘Every citizen has the right to freedom of expression, but no freedom after expression. Citizens can propagate and believe in fake news without let or hindrance and regardless of class, caste or creed.

Media has the inalienable right to impart gossip, innuendo and cat videos to an unsuspecting public.’

Modern newspersons today exercise much greater self-confidence, self-esteem and self-censorship. The Ministry of Dictation and Doublespeak has made it abundantly crystal-clear that journalists must report verbatim on official pronouncements, even when they bend the truth a bit.

This rule will henceforth be strictly enforced so that if any domestic or international hack is caught red-handed spreading the truth during a national crisis, they could have their Media License revoked. The Minister of Misinformation and Communicable Diseases now requires journalists to acquire a license to lie, which must be renewed every calendar year after passing a written exam.

They will have the option of applying for a Smart License, for which there will be tougher questions like: ‘Do editors have a heart? If so, prove it.’

Journalists can also opt for a Not-So-Smart License, which allows reporters special privileges like writing under the influence of the ruling party.

Interns can avail themselves of a Learner’s License that allows them to learn on-the-job to make things up.



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