Nepal by night

In 2016, National Geographic listed the Everest region as one of the world’s five best stargazing sites on the planet. Where else can our Milky Way galaxy be seen reflected in a lake, as in this image (above) taken by Ukrainian night-sky photographer Yevhen Samuchenko?

Far above the dust and haze, and away from urban light pollution, a Himalayan trek offers stargazers views of the night sky no longer possible in much of the planet. People are now travelling across the world in pursuit of dark skies, and Lonely Planet identified this as a top tourism trend in 2019.

Nature reserves in many countries can now receive certification from the International Dark Sky Association, which works to protect the night sky from light pollution. So far, 77 parks in Europe and North America have received Dark Sky certifications for eliminating illumination, and ensuring that essential lighting points downwards.

After having waited long for electrification, many Nepalis are happy about 24-hour lighting. But poorly designed light fixtures in places like Swaya, Ghodung Phoksundo, Langtang or the Mt Everest region spoil views of the night sky.

Experts say that maintaining the darkness of popular sites should be a priority to attract 'astrotourists'—those who would travel here for the naturally dark night sky. Mountains by starlight are a tourist attraction, just as daytime scenery, wildlife and cultural heritage are.

“Light is seen as an indicator of development and we have to change that mindset. Let us only use as much light as we need,” says Cyan Suryapate, professor of sustainable tourism at Arizona State University. “Nepal must regulate excessive light and declare dark sky parks.”

Most trekkers come to Nepal to admire the night’s Himalayas, but some are visiting for the primal comfort of darkness. This is why Yevhen Samuchenko travelled here thrice in search of ideal night-sky photography locations.

Nepalis do not need to give up modern conveniences to reduce light intrusion at night. Outdoor fixtures that prevent upward leakage of light not only protect the darkness, but also save energy. Blue spectrum LED light disrupts the nocturnal behavior of animals, so outdoor lights should be turned off when not needed. Human beings are also biologically hardwired to follow circadian rhythms and are healthier when the night is dark.

“My favorite places in Nepal for night sky are Langtang and Gesinkunda,” says Samuchenko. “Night photography there allowed me to feel like a small particle of the universe.”

This photograph (above) of Gesinkunda, titled ‘Calmness of Sorrow’, won Samuchenko several awards as well as runner-up position for CNN Travel Photographer of the Year 2019, a competition with 20,000 entries from 140 countries.
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, especially 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 agencies the tools to control crime and corruption. But the concern is about the state itself prying on citizens.

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

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala lost a crucial vote on his official residence plans, and his ruling NCP is yet to reveal how it plans to proceed. The much-awaited final year ago was set for the Kathmandu Metropolitan City with millions of rupees pumped in by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

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 saying now seems to have the opposite effect. He has now come off as the one who is repeating a speech during a press conference that he had delivered earlier, but without an end-part, or even a conclusion.

Yet there is a sinister undertone behind this. The Maistas have made no attempt to hide their concern for the notion of a free press, just as they have for nonviolent pluralism. But we also have to be mindful of what might be the end result of getting used to authoritarianism. This has always been the Maistas’ method.

ONLINE PACKAGES

What’s Trending

Nepali ultra-marathoner’s anti-litter drive

Nepal’s international ultra-marathon champion Niraj Khatiwada has started an anti-litter campaign called ‘Run for the earth’ with Champawat. A team of 150 volunteers including legendary ultra runner Ramesh Shrestha and Dipendra Mahato have collected 600 bags of trash from the earth make the most popular story of the week.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most popular on Twitter

Speeches

A person charged with murder has replaced former Speaker Mahat, who is charged with rape. The ruling NCP’s decision to continue the division has raised doubts about its commitment to transitional justice. Concerned readers wrote in with their thoughts regarding the decision. Go online to read feedback on today’s page 1 story.

Most commented

Khumbu shuts trekker clinics

Two clinics that saved the lives of hundreds of trekkers and guides in Nepal, Khumbu since 2002 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 @Thulekayltd has scrapped its plans to useapping software to track tourists. Find out more about apps and Airdrop travel hacking techniques by searching on Pinterest. @airdrops @travelhacking @NepaliTimes

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Community health workers in Butwal are now using the practice of mental health counselling to help tourists who are going through depression. ‘It is a difference. It’s when local women take the lead on this practice that it makes more sense,’ writes @leolivior. @NepaliTimes

Isha Minda @ishaminda

One of the greatest heroes of my life has passed away, leaving behind memories that will never die. We all miss you, Chitra. These women are making positive changes in their communities. Learn about the inspiration of mental health counseling and mental health counseling and mental health counseling and mental health counseling and mental health counseling.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most visited online page

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KIRPA JOSHI

In the last 10 years, Nepal has made considerable progress in the fight against deforestation. The National Investigation Bureau (NIB) has been instrumental in enforcing laws against illegal logging. The agency has seized thousands of trees and dismantled illegal sawmills.

The NIB has also been successful in busting illegal timber smuggling rings. In one such operation, the agency seized over 500 cubic meters of timber from a local forest.

In addition to these efforts, the government has also initiated several programs to promote reforestation and the use of alternative energy sources. The Ministry of Forestry and Environment has launched a number of initiatives to encourage the planting of trees and the use of cleaner energy sources.

The government has also worked closely with international organizations to fund and implement reforestation projects. The country has received financial assistance from countries such as the United States, Japan, and Germany.

Despite these efforts, the problem of deforestation remains a significant challenge in Nepal. The government needs to continue its efforts to protect the country’s forests and promote sustainable development.

Santosh Aryal

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Nepali entrepreneur turns trash into cash
The story behind the entrepreneur behind the Khaisaliis initiative

Waste not, want not
There is money in garbage. Much of Kathmandu’s trash can be recycled and reused, and there are now startups that do just that. Learn about the business model behind one of them, Khaalisisi, in an interview with its founder, Aayushi KC.

Golden gods
This week Siddhartha Art Gallery offers a new opportunity to view the works of two celebrated Tibetan thangka artists, Tenzing Dhargyay and Lhamo Tsering (painted). Visitors will be able to observe the beauty and intricacy of the paintings’ works of devotional art, as well as the unique specialties of the practitioners themselves. The exhibition is located at the art gallery in Sankhu, where you can visit and see many similar works together with the paintings of Khamsumo Valley artists.

Turkish Airlines
Turkish Airlines has introduced special Economy and Business Class fares to seven destinations in Europe, America and Turkey from Kathmandu to Istanbul and back. The flights are available on Turkish Airlines’ official website.

TAA Airports
TAA Airports has announced the launch of new flights to Paris and Brussels from Kathmandu.

IMF Nepal
An international conference on the theme of the year’s event, ‘The Indebted Economy’, was held in Kathmandu on 5 January 2020.

Qatar Airways
A signing ceremony was held on 26 January 2020 at the Zenko Law Office, Qatar Airways, and the Philippine Football Federation. The agreement will be effective for the 2022 FIFA World Cup.
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 Richoils and Biorefinery. Oil industry execs that use to focus on global price trends, prospecting and new oil fields now include列为 pain points on solar and wind.

The UAE is the world’s 7th largest exporter of crude oil, with 5.8% 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 DEWA (the International Renewable Energy Agency).

“We are serious about energy security, and we have a strategy for an energy mix that includes renewables,” said Khalid bin Mohamed Faraj, Director General, UAE Ministry of Energy and Industry. In the opening of the UAE Energy Forum earlier this month, that desalinisation plant would mean that by 2050 the country will be producing 25% of its energy from gas, 44% from renewables and 6% from nuclear. The use of clean cost will drop to 12%.

In that time, petroleum-based energy will drop from the current 95% to 41%, and renewable energy will go up from today’s 9% to 59%.

In the Gulf region, nearly 90% of the UAE’s 10 million population are expatriates and the country’s per capita carbon footprint is at 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 20GW.

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 1.6GW, which will be upgraded to 5.0GW 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 baseline at night,” explains Jan Zachmeier 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. Saya Nozomu 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.”
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.

A so an egotistic control freak, Jim Edwards did not like surprises. It was with bad grace that he was forced to arrange his 50th birthday celebration, but he drew him into it. He was not in charge of the details and kept in the dark about the lunch party venue that he was to host: the British Ambassador’s bungalow at Kakani.

An added problem was that Jim went to great lengths to avoid any birthday, like most people who considered themselves immortal. Late one evening, having won him over to the idea, he left, saying: “I simply can’t imagine a world without me.” To his credit, Jim was hosting friends at Kakani, the steep riverbank carved by last monsoon was marked by a rough fence of fallen branches.

Dead was steady. Jim’s entire focus and massive talent was for life and living, and he had no patience for spiritual pursuits, no need to ponder the next world. Instead he was always on the lookout for his next triumph. He had succeeded in his orbit, Jim created an infected 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-capped grounds of the ambassador’s historic home, nestled amid the pines high on a ridge north of Kathmandu with an expansive view across valleys and hills to the white peaks. Jim had insisted on overlooking the guest list, and the rented bus was loaded up with wine, beer, cigars and my Tiger Tops and Mountain Travel colleagues.

It was my task to bring Jim in his red range rover, an early extravagance and one of the first models of the Sikkim assemblage line, mattering and shaking all the way up the tortuous switchbacks. By noon, past the reclining Vishnu in his water garden and traversing beneath the tree of Nagpuri’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 trinit. Turning right before the main road drops away to Trishuli, we reached the Tamang village of Kakani at a refreshing altitude of 6,600 feet (2,000m), and entered the hallowed ground and clipped lawn of the British bungalow. With cheerful guests waiting to surprise him, Jim took all Jim’s self-control to rejoin to his normal affability.

The lunch conspiracy could not have been concocted without the collusion of the ambassador. Anthony Harrell, 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 with their personal whim.

John Densen, British Ambassador 1977 to 1983, was an erudite scholar and published much of what we knew of its history. He wrote in 1984: “The sense of isolation and claustrophobia, since the Residency was confined within the Kathmandu Valley, was great and led to a request for somewhere in Nepal where he could breathe. The Maharajah (Primo Ministro) agreed that a tract of land could be granted near Kakani, where our present bungalow still stands.”

At one time he thought of having his golf course, and the Resident moved there for a part of the year.” As Desmond Deo noted, the fairways straddled the ridge and “must have been lost in the 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, butterflies, and a scarlet peacock against a piercing blue sky. “I loved that place. I might have been better off had I not been there for a picnic in 1969,” and 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 1830 to 1843 in various roles, was first provided with a cottage on Kala, 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 Resident”, but no details. When the Kala “log cabin” was burned by lightning, it was replaced by the Kakani bungalow sometime in the mid to late 1860s – the date unknown.

Lost items and forgotten dinner shows the cumbersome process of reaching the Kakani outpost in its days of bestial, sedan chair and porter support. In the words of the East India Company Resident, Horace Lawrence in 1845, “a lover of good things who could scarce desire.”, although his wife Henrietta Lawrence also complained about the leeches. In corsets and stays, yesterday’s mosquitoes must have been an intolerable lot.

Runners were the only means of communication, later supplemented by a heliport. This WW11 device was used for signalling purposes by means of a movable mirror reflecting beams of light, with the line of sight to the residence in Leitza, now occupied by the Indian embassy. “I suspect that its main purpose in those bomb days was to despatch extra supplies of gin” wrote John Densen

Other than Jim’s birthday, I have been invited over the decades for various ambassadorial ‘pilgrimages’, more often elaborate sit-downs served by teams of Embassy staff. Only once I spent a night, eating with washed hands. We photographed the bungalow, for Kathmandu Valley Style and Desmond Deo painted for ‘My Kind of Kathmandu (above, left).’ The Gurkhas built a cottage next door, a park commemorates mountainiers killed in Nepal, and along the ridge that’s memorial garden overlooks the 1992 crash site, a somber reminder of past disasters.

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

KATHMANDU

Nareyn 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, Nareyn worked hard to give him the best education possible. With great difficulty, he got Binod admitted to Kolkata’s St Xavier’s College.

By 2006, Binod was an honours student in the final years of his Bachelor’s 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 Bhusal, who was from a well-to-do family, and the two decided to start a full-scale 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 INR 30,000, 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 Azim Premji Trust, and Padma Shree award recipient, IT entrepreneur Saurabh Srivastava. Sachin Bhansali of the venture-capital firm Lighthouse Funds is the fast food chain’s latest sponsor.

Last month at the Virat Nepal 2020 conclaves in Bangalore, Binod was trying to keep a low profile amidst dignitaries like Nepal’s ambassador to India Nishwar Adhikary, former Indian ambassador to Nepal KV Sahaj and many big businessmen. His next stop after the conclaves 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 Ranjan

PHOTOS: BIKAS RAJAN

PHOTOS: BIKAS RAJAN

PHOTOS: BIKAS RAJAN

PHOTOS: BIKAS RAJAN

PHOTOS: BIKAS RAJAN

PHOTOS: BIKAS RAJAN
Nepal’s other attraction: the night sky

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

Outnumbering the stars

2023 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, has already begun to worry astronomers and scientists who are concerned about the impact of thousands of these satellites on the night sky.

However, because of the lower orbit of these satellites, they are much more visible from Earth at night as they reflect sunlight. SpaceX 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 striking: one of the brightest stars shining across a sky that was once deep and dark.

Tens of thousands of these reflective objects would outnumber the approximately 3,000 stars that are visible to the naked eye in a natural dark sky. And even when satellites die, they continue to orbit the earth at an incredibly high speed.

These new, highly visible satellites have already begun to affect astrophotography and astronomy, and scientists warn that their presence will impact our ability to understand the physical universe beyond the atmosphere. 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 if this will alleviate 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 space pollution or protections of astronomical research.
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 Himalayas without the light pollution from big cities," Samuchenko says.

Samuchenko took the photos featured here above, left, and on page 3 during a trek of Langtang valley in 2017, after pre-selecting the exact points for the shots during the day and experimenting with different lenses. "For this picture, I sat on the fishesy 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 'calmness of eternity,'" says Samuchenko who used an exposure time of 66 seconds at P35, ISO 2000, 12mm of his Nikon D3600 with a Tokina 10-17 fishye.

Gosainkunda Calmness of Eternity (page 3) was won Samuchenko several awards including runner up for the CNN Travel Photographer of the Year 2018, which had 26,000 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.

Milkway above the Ocean of Clouds (above) was exhibited in London by the Royal Photographic Society in 2018. And Samuchenko's take of the 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://s3.is.com

Wildlife needs darkness, and so do we

Plants and animals depend on the day- and night cycle of light and darkness. The darkness period provides countless species to rest, reproduce, feed, and hide from predators. Artificial lighting, including streetlights, household lights, and television screens, can substitute for the natural darkness. This impacts behaviors of animals essential to their survival. Scientists are only beginning to understand the long-term effect that artificial lighting has had on biodiversity since the industrial revolution began 250 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.
GETAWAY

Kathmandu Guest House
Kathmandu’s Guest House is a favourite of frequent visitors to Nepal. The converted Kuna mansion has offered comfortable accommodations, amenities, beautiful gardens and great prices since 1967.

Waterfront Resort
Located just beyond busy Lakeside and at no more than a glance from the shining Peace Pagoda, Waterfront Resort offers the best of both worlds. Here, you have access to the allure of nature but you are also just a five minute resort shuts ride away from the bustling tourist hub.

Hotel Baha
What better way to start your day than with the beautiful view of Bhaktapur. Barab Square and a hearty meal of rice, lentils, vegetables, meat and pickles?

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.

Maruni Sanctuary Lodge
Chilwan National Park is home to a wide range of flora and fauna. From the comfort of your room and cottage, you can take a peek at the wandering wildlife and mesmerise nature.

DIINING

Cibo Bistro
If you’re heading to Cibo Bistro, be prepared to be seized with delight. The carefully curated menu of pastas, pizzas, salads, appetizers and desserts will have you wanting each and every single dish.

Phalano Coffee Ghār
This casual eatery serves great coffee, filling sandwhiches and special baked goods in record time.

ATC Music Fest
This year’s Around the Corner Music Festival features artists like Sunrere Gthing, Sushant Ghimire and more.

Hotel Baha
Grab a beer, order some good food and get on stage for open mic night at ATC.

Hotel Kido
Very Unhealthy
201 – 300

151 – 200

101 – 150

Unhealthy for sensitive groups
15 – 100

9 – 50

Good
5 – 10

1 – 4

Very Good

Air Quality Index

KATHMANDU - 24 - 30 January

301 – 300

261 – 300

201 – 260

151 – 200

101 – 150

51 – 100

0 – 50

Ozone

Nitrogen dioxide

PM2.5

PM10

PM10 / PM2.5

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 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

Hong Kong

When Hong Kong was thrown into a political crisis last year after the autonomous region proposed a bill that would allow bringing 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 proposal to use Grazia 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 additions 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.

Hong Kong’s Jana Andolan

A Nepali photojournalist formerly with the Maoists is now documenting the protests 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, “I am 15 year-old, who speaks Cantonese, updates me regarding the protests, helping democracy back home,” says Gurung. “My 13-year-old son, who 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 lockdowns on the press.”

Gurung became a member of Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in 1985 and then Ekata Kendra, before joining the Cultural Wing of the CPN (Maoist) during the conflict years.

“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 British Gurkha soldiers, Gurung works on 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 left the campus compound for days.

He found that they had joined the movement against their former classmates. When asked why, they replied that “All they want is peace and stability, we are weary 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, Grazia police were deployed to quell deadly ethnic riots. A proposal to use Grazia again to defend Hong Kong’s MTR transit network against vandalism was rejected after criticism that it would provoke a backlash against Nepalis.

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

The protests here are different from back home. Nepali students who had not left the campus compound for days.

Gurung remains with the party until 2008, when he became disillusioned with the sycophancy and nepotism.

In 1995, he decided to move to Hong Kong and later graduated from Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Gurung came across some Nepali students who had left the campus compound for days.

He found that they had joined the movement against their former classmates. When asked why, they replied that “All they want is peace and stability, we are weary 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, Grazia police were deployed to quell deadly ethnic riots. A proposal to use Grazia again to defend Hong Kong’s MTR transit network against vandalism was rejected after criticism that it would provoke a backlash against Nepalis.

“I just came out for my city,” Rai told Nepal 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 his 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 follow them to Hong Kong. After the autonomous region proposed a bill that would allow bringing 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.

“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, “I am 15 year-old, who speaks Cantonese, updates me regarding the protests, helping

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“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, “I am 15 year-old, who speaks Cantonese, updates me regarding the protests, helping democracy back home,” says Gurung. “My 13-year-old son, who 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 lockdowns on the press.”

Gurung became a member of Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in 1985 and then Ekata Kendra, before joining the Cultural Wing of the CPN (Maoist) during the conflict years.

“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 British Gurkha soldiers, Gurung works on 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 left the campus compound for days.

He found that they had joined the movement against their former classmates. When asked why, they replied that “All they want is peace and stability, we are weary 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.”

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**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.

**High End Fashion:** National and international models participate in the Mt Everest Fashion runway held at Kala Patthar by the clothing brand Kasa Style to promote sustainable fashion and spread awareness about climate change.

**Remembering Not To Forget:** Bashkim Dituc 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.

**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.

**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.
it, it’s abominable

Niki Shrestha at the VNT 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 Durbar Square this week had Kumari themes to them. In one, by noted artist Shiv Manakar, the Kumari’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 even 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 painted 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 bad 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 running 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.
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 28 countries. Approximately 7,000 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.

Virtues 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.

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

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-apocalyptic apocalyptic scoreboard, flying not attacks from the infected, but people who happened to cough or sneeze. Holed up and submitting an 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 2003 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 90 million. By Thursday, the total number of coronavirus related deaths in China has risen to 108 with those confirmed ill crossing 3,000.

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 Lu, an infectious disease specialist at the University of Georgetown, stresses, “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

As of January 30, 2020, at 10:30 am

Confirmed cases: 7,821
Deaths: 170

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.

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 travelled out of town by the time these measures were enacted.

Wuhan has a population of 11 million, and many had begun to travel in advance of the Chinese New Year this week. Reports 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 Nepali government has 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 diagnosis of the Wuhan coronavirus with technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO).

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

The state mechanism appears to have learnt from weaknesses is shown 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 term 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 declaration in this respect.

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 Datta is a public health research scholar at the Center for Mineralogy & Geochemistry in Nepal.

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As seen on CCTV 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 2003 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 seeing 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 2,500 patients over the next few weeks, the Sukedhara Tropical Infectious Diseases Hospital in Tinku jacks even a dedicated isolation ward.

Friends at university get advices 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 possible way.

Rastriya Bhandari is pursuing a Master in Economics and China Studies at the Renmin University of Beijing.
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 pressstilts, or to state that we are self-important mercenaries, holier-than-thou hypocrites, annoyingly preachy, morally repugnant money-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 Human Rights and its Article 19 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 impact gossip, innuendo and cut videos to an unsuspecting public.

Modern newspaper editors today exercise much greater self-confidence, self-esteem and self-censorship. The Ministry of Dictation and Double speak has made it abundantly crystal-clear that journalists must report verbatim on official pronouncements, even when they bend like truth a lot. 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 Disease 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, 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.

The Act