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BIKRAM RAI

Mobile Nepal is hooked on YouTube

With 96% of Nepali households now owning mobile phones, the country is fast reaching phone saturation. Of those with the devices, 61.5% have smart phones, and this proportion is expected to spike sharply in coming years.

At present only 26% of Nepalis use the internet on a daily basis, but as more people upgrade to data phones, and to better connectivity and bandwidth, the online population will grow – with implications for society, politics and the e-retail economy.

One of the most important shifts in the past two years has been the explosive growth in YouTube use – up from virtually zero in 2018 to 34% last year, and then almost doubling to 60% in this year's survey. (See graph, right)

The annual Nepal Media Survey is carried out by Sharecast Initiative, and this year involved 4,830 respondents in 48 districts

from all seven provinces in January and February.

Comparing data for the past three years allows us to track changes in the spread and popularity of platforms, devices and apps and also to break down data by province, gender, age, ethnicity, education, or income.

"The most striking revelation in this year's survey is the

surging popularity of the YouTube platform," explains Madhu Acharya of Sharecast Initiative. "The proliferation of new YouTube channels in Nepal is fed by this voracious demand for videos on mobile devices."

Still, YouTube has a lot of catching up to do, as nearly nine million Nepalis now have Facebook accounts. The survey showed

that 88.7% of respondents were on Facebook. But this was only a marginal increase from last year, which may suggest that the platform is maxing out. Answers to a multiple-choice question revealed that 35.6% are also on Messenger and 7% on WhatsApp, both owned by Facebook.

Sharecast disaggregated the data for Facebook to show that there were more men using it (94%) than women (82%), and more unmarried people on it (94%) than married (87%). The word 'internet' is often used synonymously with 'Facebook' by Nepalis, and when it comes to the proportion of Facebook users among survey respondents, there is almost no difference between the lowest income bracket (88.5%) and the highest earners (87.9%).

If this is surprising, so is it that more people in rural areas (88.6%) use Facebook than in the cities (87.5%). Most Nepalis with Facebook accounts are in the 16-44 age group, however the app has a strong user base even among people above 60, (81%) which could have to do with parents' desires to communicate with grown children studying or working abroad.

There are significant differences in the demographics of Facebook and YouTube users. City-dwellers tend to be on YouTube more (71%) than villagers (48%), and only 22% in Far Western province say they watch videos there (possibly because of lack of bandwidth). Perhaps most surprising is that YouTube channels are most popular among people above 60 -- could it be that older people are clicking on religious programs?

The sustained popularity of the Imo messenger app is possibly due to the large numbers of Nepali workers in West Asia. Breaking down the responses shows that nearly twice as many women said they used Imo than did men, and most of these were from poorer families in rural areas.

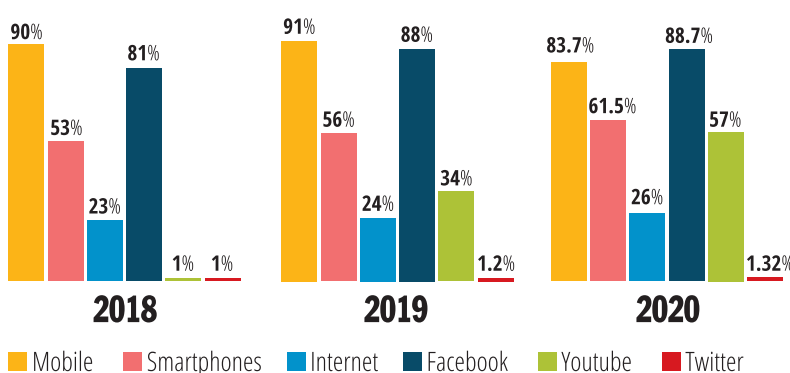
Among other apps, despite the apparent popularity of TikTok, only 3% of survey respondents said they used it. Interestingly, the number of women TikTok users was more than double that of men users, and most were unmarried. Although Twitter posts are quoted often by the mass media, the numbers of its users are still low (1.3%) and while many city-based startups use Instagram for marketing, only 3% of Nepalis are on the platform.

Kunda Dixit

More Survey Results

PAGE 8

RISE OF VIDEO Tracking percentage of users 2018-2020



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GOING PLACES TOGETHER



Sahina Shrestha
Digital Products
Strategist

As the results of the Sharecast Initiative Nepal Survey 2020 featured in this issue (page 1,8) show, Nepal is going digital in a big way. There is a dramatic increase in ownership of mobile devices, a vast amount of video content is being uploaded on YouTube and Facebook, and internet use is set to grow further with demand for smartphones and data plans.

Following this trend, Nepal’s media companies are also opening up to the use of digital tools in storytelling. There has been an explosion of news and entertainment portals and YouTube channels. It is fair to say that the *Nepali Times* was one of the pioneers of online journalism in Nepal. It was ahead of the pack in 2000 when it started a digital edition even before making a splash with its first print copy.



Over the years, even as the hardcopy version took precedence, we made sure to experiment with data visualisation, audio-visual content and interactive graphics. After the 2015 earthquake, *Nepali Times* adopted a digital-first policy, uploading content online before a version appeared on Friday in print.

Today, as more of our audience meet us online, we are rethinking not only our product but also our business model. Journalism worldwide is increasingly dependent on and being influenced by the likes of Facebook, Google and Twitter. These are no longer ‘just platforms’ for our content. On the one hand we compete with them for audience and ad revenue, and on the other we rely on them for technologies and dissemination.

With shrinking budgets and revenue pressures, ‘legacy’ newsrooms like that of *Nepali Times* are being forced to think innovatively with the resources we have. As a traditional news organisation seeking innovation, growth opportunities and sustainability, we will continue to explore new platforms to distribute content and grow audiences. We will continue to work around the algorithms and experiment with social- and mobile-optimised formats that are shareable and quick to ingest.

I am glad to be back at *Nepali Times* in this new position just as the paper marks its millennial milestone and am looking forward to streamlining a new media strategy for the future.

Sonia Awale
Associate Editor

Welcome to this 1000th print edition of the *Nepali Times* weekly that also celebrates the 8 March International Women’s Day. It has been a two-decade long journey, during which my predecessors who have transitioned through this newsroom have witnessed history first-hand: the war, the 2001 palace massacre, the royal-military coup of 2005, restoration of democracy, a prolonged political transition, the earthquake, the Blockade and finally federal elections in 2017.



The earthquake struck on my first week as an intern at the *Nepali Times* five years ago. Reporting on the aftermath of the disaster was like being thrown off the deep end. In 2017, after completing my master’s in digital journalism, I returned to the paper with a focus on covering health, environment and the climate crisis.

Unlike other newsrooms, the *Nepali Times* does not have much hierarchy, and we are not rigid about beats. I was involved in the team that redesigned the online edition of the *Nepali Times*, which has seen a three-fold increase in reader numbers in the last three years. We have tried to bring the newsroom and the audience closer, refined our multimedia content and come up with original, in-depth coverage of a Nepal outside Kathmandu.

For the past two decades, the *Nepali Times* newsroom has pursued context and process, rather than simply covering events. This gives the hard copy edition a longer shelf-life, and the archives impart research value to Nepal-related topics that will be useful into the future.

Every week, *www.nepalitimes.com* has more than 100,000 unique visitors, most of whom have bookmarked the homepage and begin browsing there, instead of clicking on story links on social media. The average reader spends five minutes per page, which is remarkable in an age of short attention spans.

Nearly half of the *Nepali Times’* readership online is women, mostly in the 25-34 age group. Contrary to common perception, more than 80% of readers are Nepali, and 35% reside in Nepal. Most diaspora readers work and study in the United States, India, the UK, Australia and the Gulf, in that order.

Thank you, readers for being with us the past 1,000 times. We in the *Nepali Times* newsroom look forward to the next 20 years of making sense of the three-pronged crises of democracy, media and climate that Nepal and the world face today – and trying to find solutions.

Alisha Sijapati
Correspondent

Starting when I was six years old, my grandmother had me read the headlines from the Nepali newspapers out loud to her every morning. She enjoyed hearing me read the news and as I became a better reader, I read whole articles to her. My interest in journalism developed from this morning practice that we still share.

My career as a journalist started with internships first at *The Himalayan Times* and then at *Himal Southasian*. The journey of a trainee journalist is not always rosy, but these experiences taught me a lot. Later, as a full-time reporter at *The Kathmandu Post*, I was on the culture beat, but also had the opportunity to do business reporting and some investigative stories.



Leaving a large daily for the smaller newsroom of the *Nepali Times* has been a big change for me. This place is a breath of fresh air. There is a calmness here even during frantic deadline pressure, and as media becomes faster paced the way our newsroom operates has lessons for everyone.

In preparation for this 1000th issue of the *Nepali Times*, my colleagues and I flipped through the archives of the paper, and I got a glimpse of its underlying philosophy of ‘solution journalism’.

This means not limiting ourselves to a description of the problem, but looking beyond the current difficulty and searching for answers. It may take the form of analysis or profiles of people who have overcome obstacles despite tremendous odds. The *Nepali Times* has consistently and doggedly pursued issues that matter, always holding out for a better future and suggesting how we might get there.

After seven years in journalism, there are some important understandings that I take with me from one newsroom to another. I believe that we journalists work for our readers and viewers and that we must be accountable to and sensitive towards those we write about even as we strive to uncover wrongdoings through honest and unbiased reporting.

Monika Deupala
Photojournalist

Two years ago, during my internship at the *Nepali Times*, my editor told me: “You have the eye to see things others don’t.” That was the first time anyone had recognised my passion for photography.



Soon, I was a *Nepali Times* staffer, but while shooting events I saw how few of us women were out there taking pictures. This is a problem. In a competitive field, the gender gap manifests in people not taking women as seriously. I am still not very confident in crowds.

There are advantages, too: being women gives us access that many male colleagues would find difficult. But it will take time to make people understand that female photographers are good on their own merit, and not because of their gender.

Back in high school, I was part of a class group that monitored the daily newspapers. We had to arrange them in rows before morning assembly. I was not much of a reader, but was intrigued by the photographs. I told my teacher I wanted to be a photojournalist, and he frowned, asking if I thought it was a profession for a woman. But I pursued my goal. I took a media course in college, bought my first DSLR, and honed my camera skills during class assignments.

The last two years at the *Nepali Times* have been a journey of self-exploration for me. I understand my abilities now beyond limitations, and have more confidence travelling alone to new places and talking to strangers I am photographing. This paper has shown me what true professionalism is.

Sanghamitra Subba
Reporter

Fresh into my first job, I entered the welcoming, sunny and dog-filled newsroom of the *Nepali Times*. I came in as an intern, bright-eyed and ready to learn from the editors and reporters whose work I had admired as a student rifling through the colourful newspaper every Friday in the library.

Into my first week, I was invited to join a journalism dialogue between graduate students from India, Pakistan and Nepal. Those three days provided a crash-course in crossborder journalism, and fired my interest in reporting. This was the first of many amazing opportunities that I have had working at *Nepali Times*.



With the freedom to pursue the topics that I wanted to and the generous encouragement of newsroom colleagues, I covered everything from community homestays in Panauti to multiethnic marriages. At every step, I received the generous guidance of seniors, who taught me everything they knew about being an effective interviewer, editing videos and most importantly, maintaining composure during even the most challenging assignments.

This women-dominated newsroom has been both a source of inspiration and a reliable support system. While my peers struggle to find their footing in other jobs, I have a positive work environment that has helped me grow as a multimedia reporter, and as a woman finding my way in the world.

FEEDBACK



NEPALI TIMES ON YOUTUBE
Nepal’s underrated video channel (‘For the love of Lapsi’, Alisha Sijapati, #999).
Mirak Limbu

LAPSI LOVE
Mouth watering lapsi’s pickle! Your post made me take out all my *lapsi ko titaura* supply and enjoy them on Saturday afternoon.
Priti

THE GOOD AND THE BAD
Brilliant (‘COVID-19: Both danger and opportunity’, Marcia Chen, #999). What a great observation.
Robert Markovich

INDIAN CHINESE
I wonder where in China those families are from (‘Righting the wrongs done to India’s Chinese’, Kunda Dixit, #999).
Ida Leung

NEPALI TIMES
Why is it that only *Nepali Times* seems concerned about issues that matter? Be it earthquake, climate change or sustainable tourism? Why are other media leaders clouding their judgment around the digestive gases of politicians?
Dinkar Nepal

WAR CRIMES
Unfortunately, no justice is yet served. Deeply moving conflict-era letter to Rolpa’s Nepali family via Nepali Times (‘Last letter to Rolpa’s Nepali family’, Dinesh Subedi, Nagarik, #999)
Phanindra Dahal

■ I am supremely concerned about the mistreatment and abuse of people, and it’s a slap in the face when one of the accused is standing in Parliament as the Speaker.
Steve L Roberts

CLIMATE AND COVID-19
Excellent article and good points raised. (‘The climate connection to Covid-19’, Rashtraj Bhandari, #999). When will leaders of the world take on climate change as a reality?
Michele Adler

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Excerpt from *Nepali Times* #492 of 5-11 March 2010:
In an editorial 10 years ago this week, *Nepali Times* wrote about rising land prices leading Kathmandu Valley’s farmers to sell property. The story is moving to read today, when the valley’s farmland has already been wiped out and real estate prices and rentals continue to soar. An excerpt:

Urban sprawl is gobbling up Kathmandu’s farms at an unprecedented rate, and may wipe them out within a couple of decades. From 1976-2009, the proportion of cultivated land in Kathmandu dropped from 61% to 40%. Experts say the average farm size has shrunk considerably too. Farmers have found it more profitable to sell their farms, usually to people seeking to build houses, than work on them, as rapid urbanisation has caused land prices to surge ahead of agricultural yield. The rising cost of living has hastened the process.



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Nepal’s history foretold

Those who do not learn from the past are destined to repeat it

When the *Nepali Times* was preparing to launch two decades ago, many Nepalis were sad, frightened and looking for ways to leave areas affected by armed conflict, and then Nepal altogether.

A few decided that the future would depend on what we did and how effectively we did it. Twenty years later, Nepal is at peace with numerous challenges, but at least it is at peace.



½ FULL
Anil Chitrakar

Nepal went from war to peace and from monarchy to republic, it inducted some of the guerrillas into the national army, it held elections at all three levels of government under a new federal constitution, and the ruling party promises citizens stability and a better quality of life. The earthquake, the Indian blockade, endemic corruption and a lack of trust in government, businesses houses and political parties have slowed things down.

Throughout these last 20 years, the *Nepali Times* team had a ringside seat to history being made. It worked hard and worked smart and issue after issue, it kept the hopes and aspirations of Nepal as high as it could with facts, data, images, animation, analysis and, yes, even humour. The colourful and elegantly designed pages of the *Nepali Times* became conversation pieces every Friday, raising public consciousness about critical issues and allowing people to form communities and organise for action.

The paper became a catalyst, and provided a medium for small and big actions around health, environment, the



economy, gender and justice. Confused by day-to-day politics, many of us readers looked forward week after week to stay informed and to make personal and collective decisions based on what the *Nepali Times* covered, analysed and projected.

But even while the *Nepali Times* marks this 1000th issue, the future of free press and the financial viability of publications cannot and should not be taken for granted. People in power have tried to manipulate or control the media to consolidate power and personal

wealth. Media outlets that do not fall in line are under attack. The legacy media, already under financial strain because of the internet, is also facing pressure from the government. This newspaper has been made to suffer for its independence. It has been attacked by both the extreme left and the extreme right in the past 20 years.

These thousand issues of the *Nepali Times* are fully archived, and a site search of any subject will show that this archive provides a valuable window on Nepal’s recent history. Future generations of historians will find a handy narrative of how Nepal made its great transition. And perhaps a book summarising the times of *Nepali Times* would ensure that history is not written by the winners.

As regular writers for the *Nepali Times*, we crave ‘shelf life’, which these archives give us. And this means remembering not to forget what we lived through in the past 20 years, so that we do not repeat the fearful times of conflict, the royal massacre, the communal riots of 2004, or the abuse of human rights in the name of revolution that has left deep scars in Nepali society.

The earthquake united the Nepali people unlike the politics that divided us. Disasters seem to bring out the best in us, and politics the worst. In the next two decades Nepal will reap what it has sown in the past.

The unresolved issues in the Constitution and the challenges related to identity politics, correcting historical wrongs, growing pollution in the Kathmandu valley, corruption and fraud are what we will now be grappling with. To stay tuned, read the *Nepali Times*. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc and writes this fortnightly column ‘½ Full’ for the *Nepali Times*.



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Turkish Airlines

Samsung Nepal announced a new partnership with Turkish Airlines on 2 March which will allow all Samsung customers pre-booking the Galaxy S20



and S20+ smart phones special discounts from Turkish Airlines along with a chance to qualify for a grand lucky draw for one business class roundtrip ticket to any online Turkish Airlines destination.

IATA Awards

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) announced on 3 March that nominations are being taken for the second edition of the IATA Diversity & Inclusion Awards, which recognises and encourages industry excellence. Nominations can be made in the following three categories: Inspirational Role Model, High Flyer, and Diversity & Inclusion Team Award.

Soaltee Crowne Plaza

Soaltee Crowne Plaza is hosting the Russian national karate team from 1-9 March. The team is in Nepal to promote



sports and strengthen the relationship between Russia and Nepal. The visit is supported by the Russian Embassy, VNY 2020, and the National Sports Council.

NMB Bank

NMB Bank launched an enhanced variant of its Home Loan product, with a fixed interest rate of 11% per annum for 5 years. The maximum tenure under NMB Home Loan Fixed Interest Rate is up to 25 years.

NIC Asia

NIC ASIA Bank donated Rs300,000 to Shree Devasthan Secondary School in Sunkosi on 4 March. The school will use the funds to purchase supplies.

Thai health measures

Thai International has added new precautions in view of the Covid-19 spread. Flights to high-risk destinations will now not have pillows and blankets, nor hot or cold towels. Since the epidemic began, cabins and cockpits have been fumigated after every flight.





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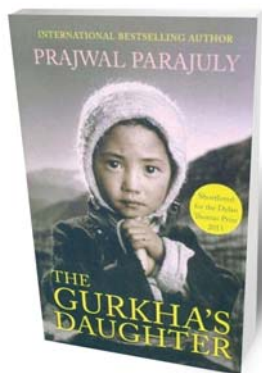
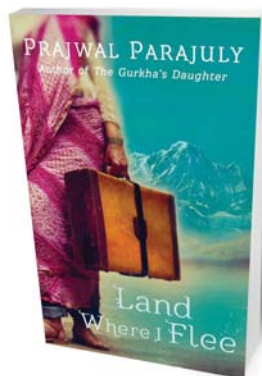
Prajwal Parajuly on Indian- Nepali hybridity

Prajwal Parajuly speaks to Filip Noubel about how Nepali and Indian-Nepali identities are experienced. Excerpts:

Filip Noubel: You are a Nepali-Indian English-language author, grew up in Sikkim, and have been invited in March to the Paris Salon du Livre (Book Fair) to represent Indian literature. How do you relate to this mix of cultural and linguistic affiliations?

Prajwal Parajuly: I am an Indian of Nepali heritage, with parents from two different countries. I also grew up in a former Himalayan kingdom, Sikkim, that was annexed by India in 1975. I think it's perfectly okay to get goosebumps when one hears 'Jana Gana Mana', the Indian national anthem, but to feel more at home in Kathmandu than one does in any big Indian city. It's okay to pledge allegiance to one country and have a lot in common with another.

I consider both English and Nepali my first languages. I think and dream in English but often pray in Nepali. Nepali is a beautiful language: I can speak endlessly about the onomatopoeic deliciousness you find in abundance in it. We laugh *galala*. We spit *pyachcha*. We sit *thyaachakka*. I have on more than one occasion called my novel *Land Where I Flee* a love letter to the Nepali language.



What a privilege it is to represent Indian literature at a book fair in Paris. It brings a spotlight on books one wouldn't have ordinarily picked up; it brings up the importance of translations. Translations will keep the world sane.

Why are mixed or shifting identities such an important source of your inspiration?

In 2001, a group of us visited Bombay and Goa. We often confronted confused looks from 'heartland' Indians. Gangtok may loosely rhyme with Bangkok, but that was still no reason for a fellow Indian not to know where it was. We were thought of as being from Thailand or Bhutan. Many Indians didn't even know that Sikkim was a part of India. Anyone who grows up in the northeast of the country will have encountered questions of identity more than the average

Indian. There's no escaping it for the Nepali-Indian who has to stress her nationality every time she mentions her ethnicity. The northeast is almost always a footnote in the average Indian's consciousness.

Who are the Nepali and Indian authors who deserve more global attention, possibly translation, according to you?

Where do I begin? Narayan Wagle, who is likely the biggest-selling Nepali-language writer in the world, deserves to be translated widely. I would also mention Nepali-language writer Indra Bahadur Rai. Tashi Choppel, whose *How to Collect a Folktale* was recently published by Rachna Publications, deserves global readers. He's undoubtedly one of the best poets in the country. Others include Chetan Raj Shrestha, Sandip Roy and Sumana Roy. For

us to understand Nepal through non-fiction, Sujeev Shakya's *Unleashing the Vajra* is a must-read. I am also looking forward to Amish Raj Mulmi's new book on Nepal and China. Sanu Lama and Bir Bikram Gurung, Nepali-language writers from Sikkim and Darjeeling, also deserve a worldwide readership.

Your books have been and are being translated. How closely do you work with your translators?

I work very closely with the translators. I enjoy the process, a translator's interpretation of my work. Benoîte Dauvergne, my French translator, and I had worked before for a wonderful French magazine called *Jentayu*. Collaborating with her on *Fuir et revenir* felt like being reunited with a close friend. My parents translated my book into Nepali. My characters often speak in Nepali, so for their conversation to be rendered in English by me entailed a process of translation. In many ways, my translators are translating conversations that are already translated. Translators are such amazing people. To translate is a selfless act.

What's the reading culture like in India and Nepal now?

You've caught me at a strange time. I just discovered that pirated copies of my books have infiltrated the market. I guess I should be flattered because the bottom line is that people are reading. Of the hundreds of challenges I face as a writer, I never thought tackling counterfeit copies would be right up there. It is a most exciting time to be a writer in India if the proliferation of literary festivals is any indication. I am amazed by what I see at Rachna Books, my hometown bookstore. The store has become a tourist destination. Imagine a bookstore being on every must-visit list! People are reading, and books sell. When in Kathmandu recently, I went to Nepalaya, my Nepali-language publishers, and saw that the Nepali translation of *The Gurkha's Daughter* had sold over 10,000 copies.

Isn't that wonderful? The book being read by the very people it was about in the very language the characters speak in? Heart-warming. The book has reached the most remote corners of Nepal.

Global Voices










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Legacy media retains readers despite social media spread

Kunda Dixit

The results of the Sharecast Initiative Survey 2020 show that the proliferation of mobile internet has put pressure on print and broadcast media, and that although the audience for traditional media has shrunk in the past, it is holding on to its readership for now.

Ninety-six percent of Nepal’s households own at least one mobile device and more than half of those are smart phones. This means that the spread of 4G wireless is bringing millions more Nepalis within reach of mobile data. In fact, the survey shows a surprisingly narrow urban-rural digital divide. The surge in mobile-based internet use is clearly visible in the sharp rise in YouTube users from single digits to 56% in three years.

Nepalis have benefited from instantly available news and easy access to video on pocket devices. The biggest impact of the migration of readers to the internet is on advertising -- as the audience goes online, advertisers are starting to follow the eyeballs.

While only 26% of respondents said they used the internet every day, daily logins are highest among the educated (60+%), and among civil servants (54%). A stark geographical digital divide persists between Bagmati Province (41%) and Far Western Province (6%).

Some 4,830 respondents in all seven provinces were surveyed by Sharecast Initiative in January and February this year to measure their ownership of communication devices, mass-media consumption patterns, and views on the press. The annual poll also tracks the popularity of radio and television channels and current trends in social-media engagement and internet user habits.

The survey shows a profound proliferation of news and entertainment portals and YouTube channels, with legacy media scrambling to play catch up. Surprisingly, listenership of Nepal’s rural FM radio stations has not decreased, staying at about 28%.

Nearly half the respondents said they relied on FM radio for local



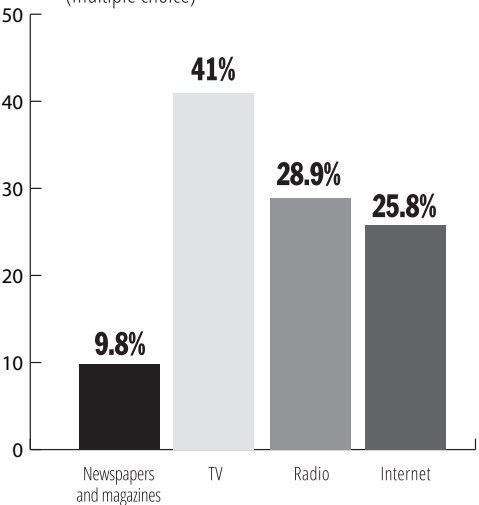
SHARECAST

METHODOLOGY

Nepal Media Survey 2020 is a national-level poll and part of an annual effort by Sharecast Initiative Nepal. Field work was carried out between 16 January and 15 February 2020. The total sample size was 4,830, covering 48 districts in all seven provinces. Sampling considered three main factors: geography, ecological region and place of residence. The margin of error is +1.2% at national aggregate. Interviews were conducted face to face at the interviewee’s residence using the Ona digital data collection tool on GPS-enabled mobiles and tablets. Sharecast used multiple measures for data accuracy and quality. The process was led by Madhu Acharya, Bhumiraj Chapagain, Ramesh Adhikari and Balkrishna Khadka. www.sharecast.org.np info@sharecast.org.np

WATCH, LISTEN, READ

% of respondents using TV, radio, newspapers and internet daily (multiple choice)



news, and interestingly, Facebook was the source of local news for 20% of them. Most people do not have a radio receiver at home anymore, and 90% listen to radio programs on their mobiles.

The total number watching television every day is much higher at 41%, and like with radio this figure has stayed constant for the past three years. Not surprisingly, the numbers watching television daily was twice as high in cities as

in villages.

The number of people reading newspapers has actually increased from 6% in 2018 to 9.8% in the latest poll. More men than women read newspapers, and readers tend to live in the cities and belong to a higher income bracket. Sobering fact: 78% of Nepali women say they do not read newspapers at all.

Despite the drift towards the internet, however, the proportion of people who say that they rely on

traditional media for national and international news has increased slightly in the past three years. In 2018, 36%, 38% and 4% of respondents said they got their information from radio, television and newspapers/magazines respectively. By 2020, those figures were 45%, 47% and 8%.

Nepalis may follow social-media posts, but only 2% said they trust the information on them. The mainstream press is not seen as

credible either, but the level of trust in radio, television and newspaper content is higher than the trust in social media. The reason most people said they do not read print newspapers and magazines is because these are not available in their localities. 🇳🇵

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आफ्नो बचतलाई सुरक्षा र उचित मूल्य दिन आजै ग्लोबल आइएमई बैंकमा खाता खोल्नुहोस् ।

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EVENTS



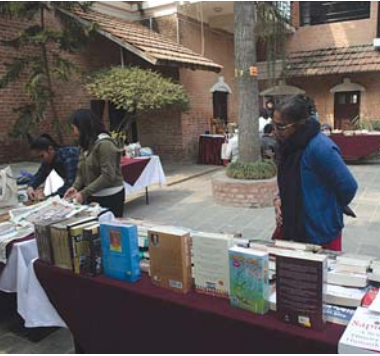
Holi
Mark the festival of colours with your family, friends and loved ones. Celebrate responsibly.
9-10 March

Dev Rana documentary
Watch *Dev Rana: Music through and through*, a documentary about the 45-year musical journey of the legendary drummer.
7 March, 12pm-2pm, *Bihani Social Venture, Dhobighat*, 9813228579



The Art Market
Celebrate art and womanhood at and get spoilt silly by Mama's gluttonous goodness! The Art Market comes to Mamagoto to celebrate strong women. Activities and retail therapy available for children and adults.
7 March, 1pm-5pm, *Mamagoto, Lazimpat* (01) 5545655

Bikalpa Farmers Market
Visit the Bikalpa Farmers market for green products, organic food and vegetables, recycled products and thrift goods. Activities for kids are included as well.
7 March, 8:30am-1pm, *Bikalpa Art Center, Pulchowk* (01) 5013524



Aitabaré at Dhokaima
Shop for sustainable products like organic honey, vegetables and eggs, fresh baked goods, books, and locally made artisan crafts at this Sunday market.
Every Sunday, 8am-12pm, *Dhokaima Cafe, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka*, 9803228588

MUSIC



Gaule Bhai
Enjoy a blend of Nepali folk and western music that sounds like the amalgamation of Tamang Selo and rock.
11 March, 8am onwards, *EVOKE, Jhamsikhlel* (01) 5532021



The Elements Live
See The Elements performing live Nepali music.
6 March, 8pm onwards, *Tickets: Rs500, Tito's Pub and Lounge, Jhamsikhel*, 9841647747

Tribute to Kishore Kumar
Aanand Karki and Suraj Singh Thakuri pay tribute to music legend Kishore Kumar to celebrate the start of spring. Opening performance by Subheksha Rai Koirala.
6 March, 7pm-12am, *Entry: Rs1000, Los Escobar's, Gairidhra*, 9841945952



B-8Eight Live
B-8Eight are back after a year-long hiatus. Join them and sing along.
6 March, 7pm-3am, *Tickets: Rs 1500, Privé Nepal, Tahachal*, 9801090111



Live by Metronome Band
Immerse yourself in music from traditional Nepali instruments with the Band Metronome.
6 March, 5:30pm onwards, *Glassy Junction Bistro Lounge, Kirtipur*, 9843680921

DINING

Russian Food Festival
Experience the very best of Russian cuisine as celebrity chef Andrei Zanin and his assistant Maksim Vovna make delicious traditional dishes. Enjoy traditional Russian dance performances, music and art.
4-12 March, 6:30pm-10:30pm, *Tickets: Rs1999 ++, The Fun Café, Lazimpat* (01) 4411818

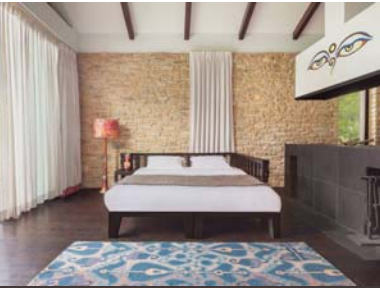


Haopin Hotpot
If you plan on visiting Haopin Hotpot any time soon, make sure to take a couple of friends with you because hotpot is best had with a side of good and hungry company. Haopin offers a wide variety of meats and vegetables with which to create your own flavourful soup and delicious sides to tide you over while it cooks.
10am-10pm, *Narayan Chaur*, 9808064999

Rain Restaurant
Take in the view of Patan and Jawalakhel and grab a Thakali set, braised pork belly or assortment of tacos at Rain Restaurant
Jawalakhel, (01) 5548508

GETAWAY

Newa Chén
This hotel is reminiscent of the golden era of the Malla Dynasty. The open rooms and courtyards evoke the palaces of those who once ruled the Valley.
Kobahal, Lalitpur (01) 5533532




The Pavilions Himalayas
This resort has Nepal's first lake-side tented luxury eco-villas that offer every amenity that you could possibly need. The spa also has some of the best treatments, guaranteeing rest and relaxation.
Chisapani, Pokhara, 975600 8117

Chhaimale Village Resort
Its grounds dotted with pear trees, this resort is an ideal destination for anyone seeking to escape the madness of Kathmandu's cities.
Chhaimale (01) 4268121






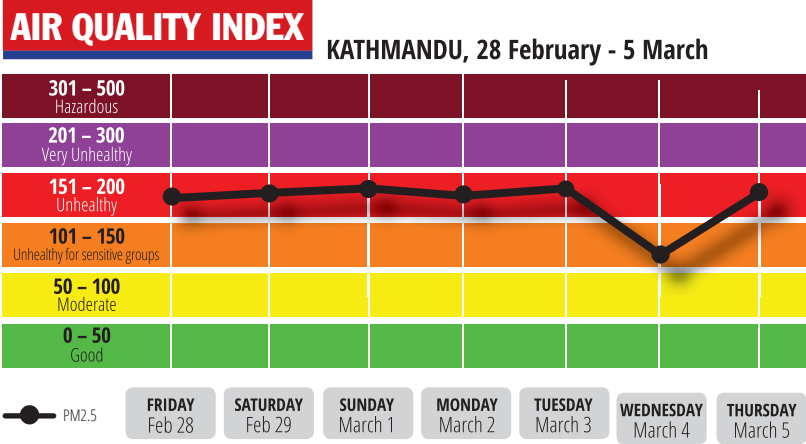
Going places together - qatarairways.com



KATHMANDU


Westerly disturbances are coming in thick and fast this season, with another low-pressure front enveloping most of Nepal on Friday and Saturday. Expect overcast skies and moderate to heavy rain in places. There will be brief periods of sunshine, until the rains taper off on Sunday. Minimum temperature will stay in the single digits until Holi on Monday when we will finally see signs of a real spring.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 18° 9°	 18° 7°	 21° 8°




Rain during the week reduced pollution levels, improving the Air Quality Index (AQI) at Kathmandu's city centre. At times, just after showers, AQI actually fell to the 'Good' Green Zone, albeit briefly. Daily averages remained in the 'Unhealthy' Yellow Zone. Rain expected over the weekend should wash off some of the pollutants. For hourly live AQI readings go to www.nepalitimes.com.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI



HARVEST RAINWATER

KRIPA JOSHI



Water is a precious resource and becomes even more precious as the world's population grows. Rain water can be harvested to use around the house and garden. It is specially good for plants as it is naturally devoid of chemicals and hard minerals. Rain can be collected in many ways, from the most simple vessels to elaborate systems. You can create a simple DIY water-harvesting system using a barrel, a screen for filtering and a tap.



Disney Pixar **ONWARD**

OUR PICK

Opens in Kathmandu 6 March

In a suburban fantasy world in which the citizens once had magic, elf brothers Ian and Barley receive a prearranged gift from their deceased father. This magic staff allows them to bring him back for 24 hours but it malfunctions, causing only half their father to appear. In this adventure-filled Pixar movie, Ian (Tom Holland) and Barley (Chris Pratt) embark on an exciting, albeit dangerous quest to bring back the rest of their father before it's too late.



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Hydro Power	1002.12	5.09	0.51 ▼
Finance	670.7	0.62	0.09 ▼
Non Life Insurance	6424.68	224.39	3.62 ▲
Manu.& Pro.	2668.37	52.19	1.99 ▲
Others	704.8	0.19	0.03 ▼
Micro Finance	2382.45	30.34	1.29 ▲
Life Insurance	7947.68	310.49	4.07 ▲
Mutual Fund	9.9	0.18	1.74 ▲

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INDIAN EMBASSY

WELCOME TO NEPAL: India's new ambassador to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra presents his credentials to president Bidya Devi Bhandari in Kathmandu on Thursday.



BONITA SHARMA/TWITTER

WOMEN LEADERS: Researcher Pratiba Pandey, sports star Ayesha Shakya, journalist Avasna Pandey, entrepreneur Bonita Sharma and computer engineer Sonika Manandhar during an event organised by Women Lead Nepal last week.





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www.fireandicepizzeria.com

COVID-19 revives Nepal’s WASH drive

Sonia Awale

Many Nepalis woke up on Wednesday to an early-morning SMS from the Ministry of Health and Population: ‘Let’s wash our hands with soap and water regularly and if possible refrain from going to crowded places to be safe from coronavirus disease. Cover your mouth and nose while coughing or sneezing.’

The public service announcement was aimed at stopping the spread of COVID-19, but will revive Nepal’s hand-washing drive to control other infections like diarrhoea and typhoid that kill mainly children.

COVID-19 has now hit 78 countries. New infections and fatalities are tapering off in China, but the outbreak is spreading in Iran, Europe and the United States. Visit Nepal Year 2020 has been shelved, the Sagarmatha Sambaad postponed, and the US Embassy has put off its Independence Day celebration at Phora Darbar.

“There is still widespread lack of awareness about hand-washing, even right here in Kathmandu among marginalised communities,” says Diwakar Acharya, principal of Pulchoki School in Godavari.



ECO SOAP BANK NEPAL

“Schools play an important role in educating children, their families and the community as a whole. This becomes especially important with the rise of new emerging diseases like coronavirus.”

Nicky Lama of Eco Soap Bank Nepal, which supplies recycled hotel soap to schools, has been visiting government schools in Kathmandu to train children in hand hygiene. “We have been training students and teachers so parents are also sensitised. It is a protective measure against not only coronavirus but already existing

seasonal flus and common infections like typhoid,” says Lama.

Nepal was declared free of open defecation last year, and is a model for the region. While this is dramatic progress from 1990 when only 6% of households had toilets, public health experts have raised questions about poorly maintained toilets and lack of water supply.

In a 2018 study, the Global Sanitation Fund Programme found that 3% of households in communities declared ‘open defecation free’ did not in fact have

toilets, and that in 5% of families who had a toilet at home, at least one member continued to defecate outdoors.

“Despite declaring open defecation free, toilet infrastructure is not always optimum, septic tanks are now filling up and availability and quality of water is questionable, particularly in urban slums,” says Sandhya Chaulagain, Hygiene officer at WaterAid Nepal. “But most health workers are focused on curative measures and often wait for the outbreaks to happen instead of preventing them.”

The additional challenge for the WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) campaign in Nepal comes from the lack of clarity about jurisdiction and roles of each tier of government in the new federal structure. A new bill on WASH is undergoing review at the parliament.

Good news is that some municipalities have started collecting household-level sanitation, hygiene and water data using the GIS-based app NWASH. Says Govind Shrestha, policy specialist at the NGO WaterAid Nepal, “Moving ahead we need to find and then reach all the areas that do not have proper water and sanitation facilities yet. The challenge is to reach all 753 local bodies and as soon as possible.” 🇳🇵

RECYCLING SOAP

Nicky Lama was volunteering at a hospital in Cambodia when she met Samir Lakhani, of Eco Soap Bank fame and Top Ten CNN Hero of 2017. She was so moved by his commitment to improve child health that she decided to return to Nepal and bring with her the campaign of collecting used soap from fancy hotels and recycling it to improve hygiene in schools.

Thousands of children die unnecessarily or fall sick due to diarrhoeal dehydration and typhoid. These illnesses have faecal-oral transmission, which can be easily prevented through regular



handwashing.

Lakhani founded Eco Soap Bank in 2014 with the aim of saving, sanitising, and supplying recycled hotel soap for the developing world. The soap bank is currently operating in ten countries: Cambodia, Laos, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and now Nepal.

The Nepal branch works independently from the network and was set up three years ago. It networks with 23 hotels in Kathmandu including the Hyatt Regency, Hotel Annapurna, Soaltee Crowne Plaza and Kathmandu Guest House. Women in its Swaymabhu workshop process the soaps to produce 7,000 bars of recycled soap per year, most of which are distributed in government schools in parts of Kathmandu Valley.

“At the moment we are a small set-up, but we plan to expand to hotels in Chitwan and Pokhara, set up workshops there, employ many more disadvantaged women and help spread hand-hygiene awareness in schools,” says Lama, who is now country director of Eco Soap Bank Nepal.

After finishing high school in Kalimpong, Lama went to the UK to study International Development. She then worked in Zambia, introducing tablet computers in community schools. Later, in Cambodia, she volunteered at a children’s hospital.

Eco Soap Bank Nepal is looking to collaborate with agencies working on the WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) campaign. “We want to not only promote eco soap banks but also create employment and spread the message about handwashing with a focus on the prevention side of healthcare,” says Niall Kavanagh, an adviser to the Nepal operation.

The added benefit of the Eco Soap Bank concept is that it promotes a cost-effective hygiene product that also reduces waste generated by the hotel industry. Says project coordinator Narendra Lamichhane: “There is a misconception that recycled goods cannot be used. We need to change that, while at the same time creating jobs for women.”

ACTIVITIES:

- Tharu and Darai Village Walk to have a glimpse of local life
- Mini Jeep Safari at the community forest
- Boating
- All Meals 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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Women who fly high



Etihad Airways Vice President for the Subcontinent, Neerja Bhatia (above) is in Kathmandu this week to honour four Nepalis on the occasion of International Women's Day. *Nepali Times* asked her about the awards.

Nepali Times: Etihad Airways recently marked 15 years of service to the Subcontinent. How has the journey been so far?

It has been incredible. Etihad launched daily flights between the UAE capital, Abu Dhabi, and India in September 2004, which quickly grew to 12 destinations across the Subcontinent including launching flights to Nepal in 2007. Since then we have flown over 1.5 million passengers between Kathmandu and Abu Dhabi.

In Nepal, we recently introduced our newly retrofitted A320 with streaming, improved legroom and new dining menus to this route. The increased capacity provides business and leisure travellers with convenient timings to travel between Kathmandu and Abu Dhabi and seamless connections across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

The new Midfield terminal in Abu Dhabi will have 65 aerobridges, and the Abu Dhabi Airports Company is conducting tests on major elements of the facility.

What are the advantages of having US immigration clearance in Abu Dhabi itself for transit passengers from Kathmandu?

For guests from Kathmandu, New York, Chicago and Washington are amongst the top destinations in the USA, with New York ranking the highest. One of the key drivers for this is the US Pre-Clearance facility offered by Etihad. Our guests are able to pre-clear U.S. Immigration and Customs at Abu Dhabi International Airport before boarding their US-bound flights.

The US preclearance has been extremely popular with air travellers, particularly those from the Subcontinent and provides Etihad guests the unique opportunity to pass through all required checks including US customs, immigration and security conveniently before they board their flight, enabling them to avoid queues on arrival.

The US preclearance means baggage security screening meets United States TSA security standards, allowing travellers connecting on to US domestic flights to have their baggage checked from Abu Dhabi to their final destination.

Etihad is using biofuel on its 'Greenliner'. Can this be realistically upscaled?

Yes, definitely – that is the objective of the program. We

launched the first-of-its-kind 'eco partnership' known as the Greenliner programme in partnership with Boeing in November. The specially-themed flagship Boeing 787-10 Dreamliner and other aircraft in the 787 fleet will be used to test products, procedures and initiatives designed to reduce carbon emissions.

You are in Kathmandu to mark International Women's Day by awarding Nepali women and Etihad's own Nepal manager is a woman. What are some other gender milestones in your carrier?

Yes, our entire senior management team in India are women, including myself. Head of Marketing for the Subcontinent is Pooja Sharma, Cargo and Logistics Commercial Director is Latha Narayan, and the Etihad Regional Airport Manager for the entire Subcontinent and Africa is Shermeen Kajeer.

Etihad is committed to fostering a culture of inclusion and to establishing and supporting a workplace where all 20,369 Etihad Aviation Group employees, from over 150 countries, are valued, respected and supported. Emphasis is placed on supporting diverse talent to maximise engagement, contribution and advancement as well as creating targeted development programmes to accelerate the advancement of women. Today, 6,770 of the employees at Etihad Aviation Group are women. 🇳🇵

Women in travel awards

Etihad Airways on Thursday honoured three of Nepal's most senior women professionals in the travel and tourism industry and one young professional in hospitality alongside its top travel partner agents at its annual travel awards at the Aloft Hotel.

Ambika Shrestha

President of Dwarika's Group of Hotels & Resorts, Honorary Consul of Spain in Nepal.

Shreejana Rana

Executive Director of The Annapurna Group, President of Hotel Association Nepal, and Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Lucky Cheetri

Founder at Empowering Women of Nepal (EWN) and Three Sisters Adventure Trekking.

Bidhata Shrestha

Joint Managing Director, The Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu



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Women guides
earn more

Sonam Choekyi Lama

Eighty women enrolled in the Nepal Mountain Academy’s training for trekking guides this year, more than double the number last year. No doubt some had heard the demand for female guides is so high that they can earn more than their male counterparts.

Nepal’s first women-run trekking company, Three Sisters, was founded 20 years ago in Pokhara, but of the 17,164 licensed guides in Nepal only 886 are female.

Lhakpa Bhuti Sherpa, President of the Nepal Mountain Academy (NMA), remembers when male colleagues asked what the point was in training women as trekking guides when they couldn’t obtain a license. “Why not?” she recalls replying.

Indeed, as women become more educated and travel more, they see opportunities in being guides. Many trekking groups are all-female or have many women among their members and they prefer women guides, who seem to understand their needs better.

“We have women here who have climbed Everest; we have conservationists, financial managers, graduate students and even homemakers. I feel very proud to see them getting the confidence to join,” says Sherpa.

Prospective guides must complete 35 days of classes and field work in rock climbing, emergency response, environmental awareness, and learning about cultures.

“I cannot wait to lead my first trek,” says Sunita Dahal, 28, who is married and has just finished her guide training.



Shanti Rai was awarded a fellowship in 2018 for Solo Women Travellers, and the experience convinced her about what she should do with her life. “After my 90 days travelling alone through Nepal, I felt what I had seen and experienced was so authentic that I wanted to share these stories and journeys with the rest of the world, and to inspire other travellers like me,” says Rai.

Deurali Chamling, 35, climbed Mt Everest in 2018, but says society is always putting limits on what women can and cannot do. She says of being a guide: “I can travel places, earn and meet a whole range of interesting people from all over the world — there are so many advantages.”

NMA’s Sherpa started out as a porter and later became a kitchen worker and a guide. She says the number of trekking agencies run by women is growing, and so are the number of female guides they hire.

“Today female guides are in high demand, and they can earn more than males,” says Phunjo Jangmo Lama from Tsum Valley, who is the first female helicopter long-line rescuer and an Everest summiteer.

She says: “Mountains and trekking know no gender – it is the strength of an individual that matters. If women are given the opportunity they can perform any kind of strength work.”



DENTAL PROBLEMS लाई IGNORE होइन टाढा राख्नुहोस्

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Female guides juggle work and home

Sushma Barali

Nepal's trekking industry has been dominated by male guides, but a growing number of women are entering the profession as their reputation for reliability spreads.

Female trekking guides are paid well, but guiding is seasonal work and women find they are not encouraged in it by their families and society at large. Many are forced to abandon their jobs after getting married.

One of Nepal's seniormost women guides is Neena Singh Skambraks, (*above, left*) who has 30 years of experience. She remembers taking her first group of Japanese trekkers to Dhulikhel when she was just 19.

"I had no work experience and family and friends made fun of me," recalls Skambraks, whose career took off after she learnt to speak Japanese and gained experience taking clients to Annapurna and Everest Base Camps.

Maya Gurung (*above, below*) owns her own company, Everest Women Treks Expedition, and is a climber herself, but it is a challenge for her trainees to stay on the job. "There is a general lack of support from families and disapproval of society," she explains.

Gurung climbed Mt Everest in 2008 as part of the 10-member First Inclusive Women's Sagarmatha Expedition, and realised then that there were very few women in the climbing industry. She set up her company not just as a business, but with the aim of training young trafficked women in mountain survival, self-defence and hospitality.

Love of mountains is in Dawa Yangzum Sherpa's blood. She started training and working as a high-altitude guide ten years ago

and climbed Mt Everest in 2012. Since she got an international mountain-guide certificate, she has been busier than ever with expeditions and with training aspiring women climbers.

Sherpa (*above, right*) believes that women have the added responsibility of overcoming pressure from colleagues and customers to prove that they are capable of doing their jobs professionally.

Dolma Pakhrin is executive director of Sherpa Encounter Treks and Tours, and says that female guides are in high demand from clients because they have built a reputation for reliability. "Women trekkers and older tourists who visit Nepal ask for female guides," she adds.

Male guides are not subject to the kind of suspicion when they travel with female clients that female guides are subject to when they travel with male trekkers. Such double standards make many female guides quit their jobs after getting married.

"Disapproval from family, societal pressure, uncertainty about the future as well as the restriction on work after marriage means many female guides have not been able to stay on," explains Maya Gurung.

Take Goma Thapa, who became a trekking guide against her parents' wishes because they did not think it was a respectable job. "Even though I earn my own living, my family still tells me to go find a real job," says Thapa, who was criticised for "wandering from place to place without getting married."

Financially independent, Thapa has decided not to get married at all because it would mean quitting her job. She says: "It is our responsibility to set an example to the next generation to resist those who restrict women from working for career goals." 🇳🇵

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KISHOR KAYASTHA

Coming soon: Ani Choying, the movie

As she enters through the door, a radiant smile on her face, the living room fills with her peaceful, positive energy. Dressed in a maroon jacket and robe, Ani Choying Drolma sits down to talk about how life has treated her since the *Nepali Times* first profiled her in 2002 (*below*).

“We have come a long way, haven’t we?” the 50-year-old nun asks.



#88 5 - 11 APRIL 2002

In Nepal, Ani Choying is best known for her breakthrough single ‘*Phulko aankha ma*’. Even though she has a larger fan base internationally for her mesmerising chants, Ani says there is something special about being admired by your own people.

After fleeing a violent home at the age of 13, Ani Choying entered a nunnery in Kathmandu, where she was ‘discovered’ by a passing American singer. Over the past 20 years, she has produced more than a dozen albums and performed in concerts all over the world. Her biography *Singing for Freedom*, which describes her journey of transformation from a frightened child to a peaceful, singing nun, has been translated into 14 languages.

Ani Choying says she has no desire for human passion. The only wish she ever had was to develop inner peace and to fight her demons. Ani is a familiar sight on the Pharping road as she drives her blue SUV to and from Kathmandu. Since 1998, she has been involved with the Nun’s Welfare Foundation and Arya Tara School, where she looks after 300 novice nuns and monks.

“I think I have led my life to the best and these children give me further purpose, they give me happiness,” says Ani Choying, who, in addition to being called ‘the singing nun’, is often referred to as ‘the progressive nun’ for her social-welfare activities, which she funds with earnings from her concerts. Sipping hot water, she discloses that a film-maker is shooting a biopic of her, but she does not want to divulge details just yet.

“I want to spread peace and happiness through my songs and thankfully, I have received such compliments abroad even from those who don’t understand the Nepali language,” she says. “I was not initially ready for a biopic but now, at 50, I am ready. I have led a beautiful life and maybe the world can soon see this life pictured on the screen. Why not?” 📺



A goddess a

Preeti Shakya has only a hazy recollection of her first year of being a Kumari living goddess at the age of three and a half. She had no inkling at the time of the importance of her position or the reverence with which she was regarded.

Shakya became the royal Kumari in 2001 and lived at the official residence of the living goddess in Basantapur for eight years until the end of her tenure in 2009. During that time, her parents visited her once every week, not as family, but as worshippers.

When they visited, Shakya addressed her parents, as per protocol, as she would any other devotee. “My caretaker and his family became my family,” remembers Shakya (*left*), now 22 and an undergraduate student of business.

She keeps in touch with Gautam Shakya and his family, visiting her Kumari-days home as often as she can. She meets even more regularly with Gautam’s sister Durga Shakya, whom she calls Durga *phupu*. “I am very close to her,” Shakya says.

Trail-running trail blazer

Catching up with Mira Rai six years after *Nepali Times* first profiled her

Lately, world-renowned trail-runner Mira Rai is busy with documentary filming, physiotherapy, organising the fifth Bhojpur Trail Race, inspiring young Nepali athletes through her Mira Rai Initiative, and preparing for a competition in Europe.

When she’s not travelling the world, changing lives or adventuring in remote Nepal, Mira tries to make time for wall climbing and bicycling. *Nepali Times* first

and the international sports scene. Having participated in ultra-marathons and trail runs around the globe, Rai has an impressive repertoire of races under her belt. “Every race is my favourite!” she says, but her most memorable is the Mont-Blanc 80km marathon she completed in 2015.

“Nepal had just been devastated by the earthquake and I wanted to be first in order to lift the spirits of fellow Nepalis,” recalls Rai. “I just kept running and running and when I placed first, it was my proudest moment, one I will never forget.”

A knee injury last year kept Rai off the trails. Taking a year off after surgery, Rai has been in physiotherapy to regain her former mobility. She has used the time to expand the Mira Rai Initiative to promote trail-running, support female athletes and launch an anti-litter campaign.

Rai credits former Maoist comrade Anupama Magar, the national karateka who gained recognition in the 2019 South Asian Games, with supporting her throughout her journey. The two met when they were guerillas in their late teens, and found they shared a deep passion for sports.

“My *dosh* has supported me throughout my career, and I do not know what I would have done without her,” Rai says fondly of her roommate, who has been especially supportive this past year as Rai has been recovering from her injury and unable to participate in marathons.

Even with a knee injury, Mira Rai does not stop. She says: “As a young girl from remote Nepal, I never even dreamed of the opportunities I’ve had. With this initiative I want to give other young Nepalis an opportunity to accomplish what I have. I want to keep running till the end.” 📺

Sanghamitra Subba



#731 7 - 13 NOVEMBER 2014

featured Rai (*above*) in 2014 when she was just starting her running career. She was hot off her very first ultra-marathon race then, and the 23-year-old went on to win three more international races after being noticed by Trail Running Nepal.

Now a part of the international Salomon Running Team, Rai is a household name in both the Nepali



From *kamlari*

Shanta Chaudhary’s journey from *kamlari* to Member of Parliament has been a long and difficult one. The harrowing details of her childhood as a slave are recorded in her 2013 biography *Kamlari Dekhi Sabhasad Samma*.

At the age of eight, Chaudhary was ‘leased’ for Rs7,000 to her ‘owner’ in Dang, and years of trauma followed. “I could withstand the physical pain,” Chaudhary told the *Nepali Times* in a profile from 2012 (right). “But what was unbearable was not being able to see my parents.”

Chaudhary had a burning desire to go to school as did the children of the family she was indentured to, and to read and play like others her age. But all she was allowed to do was stand in a corner and watch the family’s children dress in their uniforms and leave for their lessons. As a teenager, Chaudhary

mong people



#58 31 AUGUST - 6 SEPTEMBER 2001

When Shakya returned to her old family home at age 11, she knew no life other than that of a goddess and found it difficult to adjust. She says, “I had forgotten how to walk because I wasn’t used to walking as a Kumari, I was carried around everywhere.” On the streets, she felt like people were staring at her, and the vehicles that passed frightened her. “I was seeing a car for the first time in my life, and it was surreal and scary.”

Shakya found it difficult in school, too. But the teacher introduced her to the class as a former Kumari, and her classmates were

has returned to normal. Shakya is a fourth-year Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) student at Prime College, and will decide what is next after graduation.

Since pictures of Shakya as Kumari are still around, people occasionally recognise her on the streets, and that makes her happy.

Shakya looks back at her time as Kumari with fondness. “For someone to be the Kumari, her birth chart has to match the King’s. It is a matter of pride for me that out of so many girls, I was chosen. It still makes me feel special.” 🇳🇵

Shristi Karki



GOPEN RAJNT ARCHIVE

ri to MP

Bonded child labourer to CA member



Shanta Chaudhary, 52, former CA member, was addressing a conference on child labour earlier this month, speaking confidently about the need to end the exploitation of children. But when she started speaking about her own past, she broke down and wept. Chaudhary was forced to become a bonded child labourer in her own home when she was eight. She remembers her husband's family kicking and beating her mercilessly for the slightest mistake. “I could hear the physical pain,” Chaudhary said. “But what I could not hear was not being able to see my parents.”

The violence she faced as a child inspired her to struggle against bonded labour. Her own family was not very supportive because they thought rebelling against the system would take away their only source of livelihood. Chaudhary, her parents and her six sisters continued working as bonded labourers long after it was made illegal. “We were working like hell, earning and since we didn't have any land we had to work for the landlords as bonded labourers,” she explains. Chaudhary's journey from a bonded labourer to the CA was a long and difficult one. Even after she came to Kathmandu and sat in the Constituent Assembly, she faced continued from other representatives and the media because she could not read and write.

But she taught herself not just to write, but also to read technical papers at the National Resource Committee which she chaired. Chaudhary whose husband Harsha Lal also worked as a karnam has been her strongest support, taking care of their two children while she was busy trying to complete Nepal's new constitution. Now that she is free from her CA duties, she plans on finishing her autobiography by the end of this year. “We fought against bonded labour so that our sons and daughters wouldn't have to go through the suffering we experienced. But there are still many young children who are being robbed of their childhood,” she says. “The first step is for politicians to practice what they preach and not use underage domestic help in their own homes.”

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A daily freedom for Karmans, 2011

Karmans in Darg, 2015

#611 29 JUNE - 5 JULY 2012

defended herself from unwanted advances of men in the household and married her friend Harsha Lal for companionship and to keep herself safe.

Chaudhary's desire for justice led her to join the UML party and she was nominated to the Constituent Assembly in 2008. Along the

way, she taught herself to read and write. Chaudhary was diagnosed with cancer of the uterus in 2016, but is responding well to treatment.

“I have struggled a lot in my life, and I got to tick cancer off my list too,”

Chaudhary told us this week in between Parliament committee meetings. She takes her job as a law-maker seriously and says that after her tenure in Parliament is over, she will continue to work to remove the last vestiges of modern-day slavery from Nepal.

She adds: “I want to fight for those who cannot stand up for themselves. I never want a child or any human being to go through the same pain and struggle as I did.” 🇳🇵

Alisha Sijapati



MICHAEL MONTANO

Pratima Sherpa swings for pro

The 20-year-old golfer on how life has changed since her first tournament in 2017

To Pratima Sherpa, the golf course is home, literally. She was born and raised in a small storage shed on the Royal Nepal Golf Course in Kathmandu.

Growing up, Sherpa watched men dressed smartly in polo shirts and white pants swing shiny golf clubs on the vast grassy course below the airport. She wanted to do the same and so her father, a security guard at the course, crafted a makeshift club for her out of wood and Sherpa spent hours practicing her swing. There has been no looking back.

Sherpa was just finding her footing in Nepal's golf scene when the *Nepali Times* first profiled her four years ago (*below*). She went on to win national golf competitions and

“Sometimes I have a tournament and a midterm exam on the same day and those days can be very hectic,” she laughed during a recent phone interview with *Nepali Times*.

When she met him, Sherpa's idol Tiger Woods advised her to work on her course management. “I still remember him saying ‘Hi Pratima!’ when we first met,” recalls Sherpa. “I don't think I'll ever forget that or the fact that he said that my swing was perfect.”

During her meeting with Woods, Sherpa was filming for an ESPN documentary, *A Mountain to Climb*, which chronicled her journey from the 2017 Qualifying School tournament in Kathmandu to her stay in California, where she is hosted by a couple eager to support her golfing career.

Tanya and Michael Montano had read Oliver Horowitz's article about Sherpa in *Golf Digest* in late 2016 and had soon after travelled to Nepal to visit their daughter Sophia, who was in the country for a semester abroad. While in Kathmandu they decided to reach out to the young golfer.

Sherpa stayed with the Montanos in Santa Barbara, California for two months in 2017 and trained there in preparation for the Q School tournament that would take place back in Kathmandu that September. “They are my family,” Sherpa says of her hosts. “They've supported me, loved me and cared for me as much as my own parents have.”

With the help of her host family, Sherpa became the first Nepali to compete in the The Symetra Tour in 2019, a tournament organised by the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA). After she finishes college in 2022, Sherpa will be eligible again to compete in the Q School tournament and thereby try for professional status in Nepal. No matter what changes in her life, Sherpa has her eyes set on one goal: to be Nepal's first female professional golfer. 🇳🇵

Sanghamitra Subba



#835 2 - 8 DECEMBER 2016

attract the attention of international media like the *Los Angeles Times*, *Golf Digest*, and ESPN.

Sherpa moved to California a year and a half ago and her life there is a world apart from the golf shed behind the third hole in Sinamangal, where her parents still live. In her second year at Santa Barbara City College, Sherpa attends public speaking, business and math classes, practices golf for three hours, goes to the gym for two hours and does homework before bed. On weekends, she frequents a nearby beach with her friends and host family.

we have kept up the reporting on the lack of closure for survivors and families of victims. Lately, we have consistently followed the impact of the climate crisis on the Himalaya as part of our focus on the environment.

What value do you see in having a complete online digital archive of back issues?

One of our most important assets is our archive. It offers a complete history of Nepal over the past 20 years. The archive is used a lot by researchers, academics, teachers and even novelists. We ourselves use it a great deal in the newsroom because a site search puts all the events and trends of the past two decades at our fingertips. We also value our partnership with Digital Himalaya because all 1,000 print editions of the paper are available as freely downloadable PDFs.

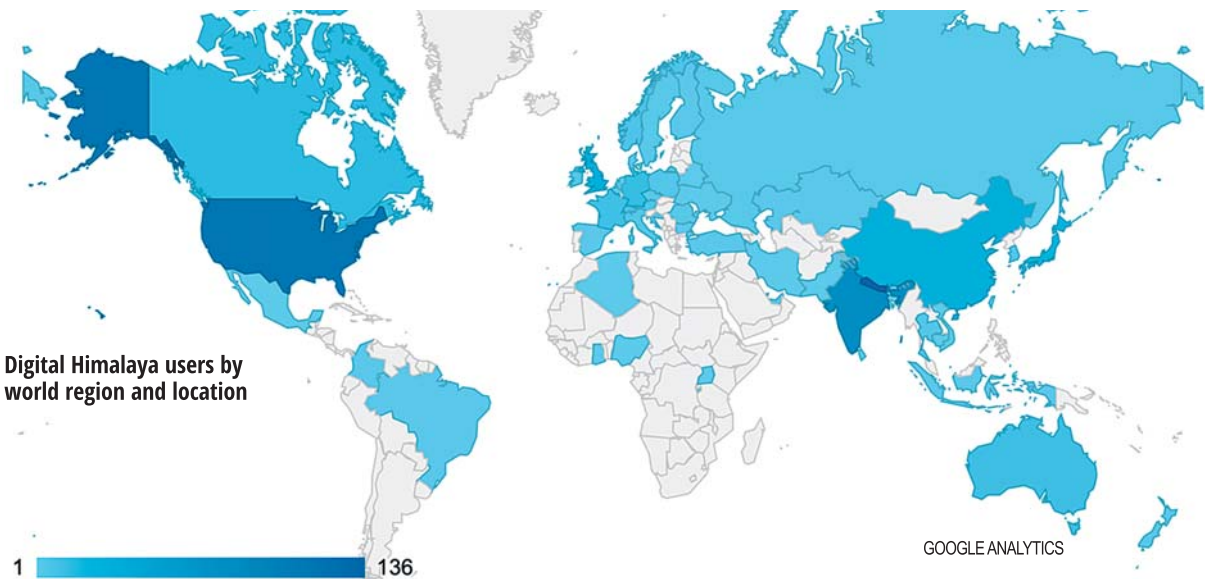
What are your aspirations for the next 1000 issues of the *Nepali Times*?

We will keep doing what we are doing, with in-depth field reporting and expert analysis to make sense of Nepal's fluid socio-economic and political state, and to uphold press freedom. We also want to maintain the quality of language and design, and tweak the online content to make it even sleeker and easier to navigate for the 120,000 loyal readers we have every week in Nepal and around the world.



Mark Turin teaches at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. He has lived and worked in Nepal for over 25 years.

16,600 pages of *Nepali Times* on Digital Himalaya



Twenty years ago, in December 2000, a group of four anthropologists and historians at the University of Cambridge embarked on a project to develop new methods for collecting, protecting, and connecting collections of cultural and intellectual material from the Himalayan region in ways that would widen access through emerging digital platforms.

Sarah Harrison, Alan Macfarlane, Sara Shneiderman and I named this pilot project 'Digital Himalaya'. We began by digitising historical ethnographic collections held in universities and archives across Europe to protect them from obsolescence and decay, forward-migrate them to new platforms as standards changed, and share them back with their originating

communities in the Himalayan region and online.

When we launched Digital Himalaya, we naively imagined that we were building a web portal primarily for users in the Global North who would have unfettered access to the internet through fast broadband networks and that communities in the Himalaya would be better served by DVDs and hard copies held at institutes, colleges, and universities across Asia. The project also aimed to provide such materials to our colleagues in the region.

We turned out to be quite wrong. Of the more than 500,000 unique 'sessions' that Google Analytics has recorded, 19% have been from Nepal, 16% from the United States, 10% from India, and 8% from the United Kingdom. It is particularly satisfying that almost

100,000 web users in Nepal have accessed our content, offering a comprehensive challenge to our early assumption in 2000 that the 'West' would have the web and the 'Rest' would have hard discs and DVDs.

Of the 500,000 hits that the site has received since we started to track in 2005, only 9% have been from mobile devices and 2% from tablets, with the remainder being from desktop or laptop computers. However, the use of handheld devices to access Digital Himalaya content has increased dramatically over time. In the last year alone, mobile devices accounted for 25% of all visits, and given the increasing penetration of 3G mobile services across the Himalayan region, we can only expect this trend to continue.

Some of our heaviest users are downloading PDFs and films from our website using solar- or hydro-powered satellite broadband internet connections in Himalayan locations that would traditionally be described as remote, as they have no vehicular access and unstable access to the electricity grid.

We are proud of our collection of newsprint from the Himalayan region, and in particular of the complete archive of the *Nepali Times* PDFs that we host. Aside from a few early issues that were scanned, the page spreads of the *Nepali Times* are 'born digital', meaning that the content can be comprehensively searched.

Thanks to a Python script written by my University of British Columbia colleague Sathish Gopalakrishnan, I can report that the full *Nepali Times* archive of 999 PDFs clocks in at 8GB and runs to 16,600 pages of text. This collection offers a unique snapshot of 20 years of English-language publishing in Nepal, not to mention a rich insight into the changing landscape of media advertising over the same period.

The Digital Himalaya team, Komintal Thami in Nepal and myself in Vancouver, uploads the newest *Nepali Times* pages on PDF every Saturday, as soon as we receive it from Sanubabu Tamang at Himalmedia. 🇳🇵

Mark Turin

Visit the *Nepali Times* archive on Digital Himalaya to download any or all issues: <http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/nepalitimes/>

Times change, but the *Nepali Times* stays the same

Marty Logan

It was easy for me to get in the door of the *Nepali Times* after I first moved to Nepal in 2005: Editor Kunda Dixit and I shared ties with the Inter Press Service News agency – me from North America, he from Asia.

What I liked about the *Nepali Times* then is what I still admire it for now: its reporting is issue-based. It does not focus on the *what happened?* of daily news but tries to get at the *why is it happening?* Other English papers in Nepal are increasingly adopting this approach, and I often see *Nepali Times* stories echoed in their pages.

The downside of this, I see as I click through the archives, is that it reveals that things change slowly. It is frustrating to read 15-year-old articles about famine and malnutrition in the Karnali that could have been reported yesterday. So little has the situation in some parts of the region advanced.

Deficits in maternal and child health, quality education, reliable water supply and gender equality still make headlines 20 years after the *Nepali Times* started reporting on them. But I need to temper my impatience -- statistically, progress has happened, it just takes longer than I want it to.

When I arrived in Nepal 15 years ago we were a larger group in the newsroom than we are today, which is hard to believe considering that the 2020 team produces the paper version and a continuously updated news website. Back then, we printed out the pages on

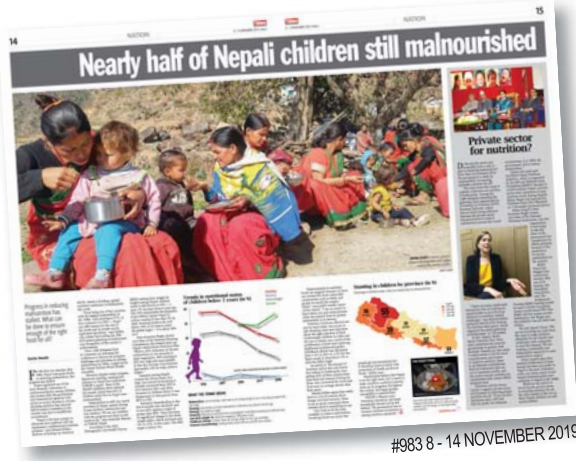
been reduced by larger images and graphics over the years, is now balanced with the appreciation that online versions of articles can run much longer than in the paper.

As befits its name, the *Nepali Times* keeps changing as the years pass, adding columnists — women and men — and deep-diving into topics, like labour migration, that other media simply skim. It has benefitted from its sister publication *Himal Khabarpatrika* and from cross-border projects with other media in Asia. Yet despite these changes, I know that if I approach Kunda Dixit with (yet another) article about malnutrition and maternal deaths, he will find a place for it because it remains an important issue.

Such relentlessness is unique. I would probably have thrown in the towel years ago if I found myself writing eerily similar editorials about the corruption and incompetence of official Nepal decades apart, or editing again a story about shortages of medicines at health posts. *Nepali Times* tenaciously takes a spotlight to these issues year after year after year. That is worth celebrating. 🇳🇵



Marty Logan is a writer, editor, and communications all-rounder who is lucky to call both Canada and Nepal home.



Thursday and each of us took turns reading each one for errors. Today, copy-editing is done mainly online, by one or two staff, while others rush to put the finishing touches on a video or update social media channels.

When I returned in 2016 it was slightly annoying to see the written paper was not the centre of everyone's attention on deadline day, but I have come to admire the online/offline juggling done by the current writers and editors. And my disappointment that space previously reserved for text had

ONWARD

Manjushree Thapa

I'm so old that I remember a time — back in the hoary 1990s — when you couldn't expect flair, or at times even fluency, from Nepal's English-language media.

My grasp of the Nepali language was poor then. I had to rely entirely on the English-language media to understand my society. This put me at a distinct disadvantage vis-à-vis my peers who could read the Nepali-language press. They understood not only what was happening in the nation, but how everyone—and they—felt about it. Their intellectual lives were rich with nuances I could not begin to grasp.

The *Nepali Times* stands as testament that those days are gone. Thanks to this paper, *The Kathmandu Post*, and more recent publications such as *The Record*, English-language media has finally come of age in Nepal. And we are all more intelligent for it.

Nepali society has always suffered from a cultural chasm between those who are fluent in the national languages and those who are limited to English. The former group is grounded in the complex lived reality of this society, and can draw upon local histories, languages, knowledge bases, and intelligence systems to understand and analyze the contemporary moment. The latter group has

money. English has been a hothouse language here -- the language of diplomats, aid industrialists, expatriates, foreign academics, travelers, and a handful of nationals educated in private schools or, like me, abroad. Together, these people wield vast power.

It would seem obvious that they try to learn the national languages, but this has not been the case. Neither has it been easy. When I decided to learn Nepali, I took year-long lessons and diligently pored over shelves of Nepali-language literature. (I then began to translate what I was reading for a biweekly column in this newspaper.) This investment of time and effort paid off for me: reading the work of my peers in the original language has enriched my own writing.

To expect everyone to do the same is unrealistic. What the country needed — and has now produced — was a critical mass of bilingual Nepalis to help bridge the chasm between English and the national languages. This could happen only after the 1990s, with the proliferation of English-medium schools and, crucially, with the right to free expression.

Today, when I read the *Nepali Times*, I do so for the multifaceted examination of a complex society. I read Muna Gurung's interviews with contemporary women writers whose work I crave to read. I linger over Diwakar Chhetri's smart,

735

ORSHO



INSIDE VALLEY

Durbarmarg, Capitol Building.
Contact No: 014244748, 9843833871, 9819133595
Chabahil Chowk, Beside Chabahil Plaza Entrance Gate
Contact No: 9819009338
Ason, Kamalakshi, Opposite to Prime Bank
Contact No: 9851065706, 9808631557
People's Plaza, Shop no. 107
Contact No: 014157590
Koteshwor, Opposite to Prime Bank
Contact No: 9841368259, 9866474767
Kumaripati, Opposite to Janata Bank
Contact No: 9843144204
Eyeplex Mall, 1st floor, Shop no. 24, New baneshower
Contact No: 9860806194

Old Baneshwor, Bhimsengola
Contact No: 9851066632
Civil Mall, Sundhara
Contact No: 9861584279
New-Baneshwor
Contact No: 9851019207
Balaju Bypass
Contact No: 9851068289
BG Mall, Gongabu, Shop no. 19
Contact No: 9814145265
Basundhara, Beside Ishan Hospital
Contact No: 9851193433, 9843028501

OUTSIDE VALLEY

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Dharan, College Road
Contact No: 9824311855
Biratnagar, Traffic Chowk
Contact No: 9824311855
Bahrabise-4, Sindhupalchowk
Contact No: 9851047099
Birgunj, Adarshnagar, Beside Kailash Hotel
Contact No: 9855021294
Dang, Ghorahi, Beside Kalika Tel Mill
Contact No: 9813338636
Butwal, Singh Complex
Contact No: 9857025137, 9817507475

Chitwan, Narayanghat, The Town Center, Lion's Chowk
Contact No: 9855052851
Jhapa, Damak, Mishal Bazaar, Namuna Marga
Contact No: 9852670837, 9815099351
Bhairahawa, Prahari Tol, Infront of Siddhartha Bank
Contact No: 9857034359, 071438229



MADE IN NEPAL

UNLEASH
YOUR
CALIBER

History in (not such) a hurry

Sangeeta Thapa

Manjushree Thapa (to name a few) have written for the paper. The *Nepali Times* archives give us a window onto 20 years of our nation's socio-political and cultural history: the decade-long bloody civil war which led to 16,278 deaths, the peace process, the restoration of democracy, the promulgation of the new

Choegyal's writings that take us back to a time when Nepal was still Shangri-La and not the paradise lost it is today. *Nepali Times* also covered cultural activities and happenings: Nepathaya's nationwide peace concert tours during the insurgency, Jazzmandu, book launches and reviews, various literature, film and theatre festivals, the Kathmandu International Art Festival, Photo Kathmandu, the Kathmandu Triennale (left) and reviews of art exhibitions in the city's galleries. The preservation of Nepal's tangible and intangible heritage has also been an area of focus with the *Times*.

Nepali Times has consistently covered the critical issue of climate change and its ramifications for a country where the melting of Himalayan glaciers can displace populations and create climate refugees. But my favourite pieces in the *Nepali Times* are those

by The Ass, which are befittingly featured on the back page. It gives us the opportunity to laugh during the darkest hours of our nation's history, and at the absurdity of the Nepal's present-day politics. 🇳🇵

Sangeeta Thapa is Director of the Siddhartha Arts Foundation and Siddhartha Art Gallery in Kathmandu.



stylish cartoons. I scan through the listings to pick out cultural events that interest me. I read about the latest political fiasco and ongoing outrages, and, inevitably, I marvel at The Ass: how does the Donkey maintain such a robust sense of humour after all these years?

I also always stop to appreciate the diversity of voices in the *Nepali Times*, and in particular, the vibrant presence of women writers, reporters, columnists, and editors. It is the presence of all of these women that has always made this

paper feel like home to me. This, truly, is something the paper can teach the Nepali media, which, like Nepal's polity itself, suffers from a vast overrepresentation of men, particularly of the so-called high castes. The resulting group-think, echo-chamber uniformity, and insularity do great harm in politics. In the media, they prevent the public discourse from reflecting Nepal's extraordinary diversity of experience.

Freedom of expression — so late to arrive in Nepal, so hard won, so very precious—only strengthens from vigorous exercise. As in many other parts of the world, in Nepal, the polity is giving in to authoritarian impulses. It falls on Nepal's media to defend the rights and freedoms of citizens. This is best done when all of the media—in all languages — speaks out in its diversity.

Onward. 🇳🇵



Manjushree Thapa wrote the fortnightly 'Nepaliliterature' column in *Nepali Times* 2000-2004 with translations of Nepali-language writers.



constitution that finally got written but is already contentious and why this is so, the nomination of our first President, the earthquake, the Blockade, the birth of the federal states, the political upheaval in the Tarai, load shedding and the hero Kulman Ghising who busted the darkness imposed on the nation by the power mafia.

I have enjoyed the film column by Sophia Pande, Sewa Bhattarai's art reviews, and Lisa

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20 REVIEWS IN 20 YEARS

In 999 issues the *Nepali Times* has reviewed hundreds of books, from political thrillers on the Maoist conflict to novels and travelogues. Excerpts from selected reviews:

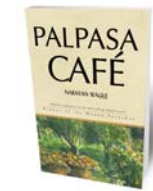


Chapamar Yubati Ko Diary - Tara Rai
Review by Rubeena Mahato
#579
18-24 November 2011



The Tutor of History - Manjushree Thapa
Review by Indra Bahadur Rai
#65
19-25 October 2001

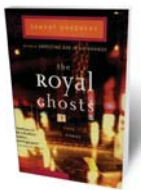
For us Nepali-speaking readers the Nepali world presented in the novel is in some senses a given. We proceed to read the novel with prior knowledge. This, however, should not make us complacent that we know all there is to learn about ourselves and our society. The novel having been written in English, a language alien to the community described, assumes the aspect of clinical detachment and so the picture that emerges is, in large measure, an evaluation of us. A mirror is held to us and the picture that results is not as we might be used to or as we might like it to be. Incidents, remarks and conversations, however seemingly stray or redundant, are organically organised and form parts of a connected whole. Thapa has, while writing the novel in English, refused to follow the easier way of catering to the taste of westerners or pandering to their preconceived notions. For her, writing is a mission, a sacred covenant between the writer and the Nepali people.



Palpasa Cafe - Narayan Wagle
Review by Kunda Dixit
Issue #256
15-21 July 2005

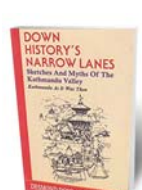
Not only is this novel as fresh as an open wound, the author's imagination makes Nepal's real unfolding tragedy come alive with raw urgency. The plot is rendered in a non-linear style that is experimental in the world of Nepali fiction. Wagle's Nepali is simple, colloquial and his voice is genuine and sincere. Drishya comes across sometimes as being unnecessarily abrasive, but Palpasa is an authentic diaspora daughter caught between love for her motherland and alienation from her adopted home.

Narayan Wagle's book can be called an anti-war novel. It drags us to the edge and forces us to peer down at the abyss below. It is being released this weekend and is going to be talked about for a long time.



The Royal Ghosts: Stories - Samrat Upadhyay
Review by Kunda Dixit
#308
28 July-3 August 2006

The Royal Ghosts employs Upadhyay's trademark prose, a bare-bones use of the English language and a minimalist style. At a time when English language novelists from the subcontinent lather their magical realist plots with self-conscious wordplay to try to be original, Upadhyay uses understated language to mirror the understated emotions of his characters. It is the difference between a line drawing and a baroque painting. Each of the stories is woven around a plot that turns on the tensions that buffet middle class Nepali society in its headlong dash towards modernity. There are neither easy answers nor safe conclusions as the characters come to grips with arranged marriages, the generation gap, relationships, incest, mental illness and homosexuality. The sexual subtext is treated with subtlety: love lost, love unspoken, love squandered and love regained. All the while in the background are the shattering historical events of Nepal's recent past: the royal massacre, the insurgency, pro-democracy demonstrations.



Down History's Narrow Lanes: Sketches and Myths of the Kathmandu Valley - Desmond Doig and Dubby Bhagat
Review by Sonia Awale
#461
24 July-30 July 2009

The long-awaited new edition brings back to us Doig's exquisite line drawings of Kathmandu Valley temples, bahals and stupas (carried in weekly installments in this paper from 2000-2005 under the banner 'Saving Faith'). And it's not just the drawings, the language also has fairy-tale quality to it with chapter titles like: 'The Gate of the Vermilion God', 'Where Serpents Breathe Fire', 'The City Vishnu May Have Built', 'The Jewelled Gift of the Snake God', 'The Gorge of the Flaming Sword'.


They're about shrines we pass every day on the way to work, now dwarfed by taller, more recent constructions. It's about festivals in our midsts. It is therefore essential reading not just for expats but also for Kathmandu residents who have forgotten about their rich heritage.

Doig and Bhagat look at the Valley's history and myths, the shrines and courtyards of the Newari towns and their origins. Like a cherry on top are the illustrations which give the book a fairy tale aura by putting the story-telling and the sketches side-by-side. But above all, the book makes it possible for readers to sense the antecedents of this mythical land and its mysterious past.



Jeevan Kaanda ki Phool - Jhamak Kumari Ghimire
Review by Supriya Sharma
#516
20-26 August 2010


In one of the most telling passages in the book, Ghimire refers to herself as a mother to her writing, and her desire to have her 'children' succeed on their own is analogous to her longing to be a worthwhile child to her own mother, and a valuable and talented member of her own society. It isn't a stretch to say that she got what she wanted. Ghimire's prose is lucid, her expression clear. Though certain passages and chapters contain redundancies that prevent them from achieving the same fluidity and poignancy that others possess, she is still able to weave in and out of memory with great ease, with sarcastic wit and a fantastic sense of humour. Her disdain for pity and the patronising attitudes around her is reflected in her desire to be known for more than her ability to write with her foot, and her continuing thirst for liberty and self-expression moves her life, and her writing, forward.



The Gurkha's Daughter - Prajwal Parajuly
Review by Shreya Thapa
#649
29 March-4 April 2013

Though there is some criticism to be made about the almost unoriginal content (how many more stories of low/middle-class Nepalis are we going to have to read?), Parajuly manages to succeed where many have failed: his stories are actually convincing. While others have attempted to tell the tale of everyday lives, Parajuly portrays characters and scenarios that Nepalis can identify with, non-Nepalis can learn from without being misled, and that everyone can enjoy. There is no selling out, no vanity, or pretence—all of the stories are absolutely believable.

At first, the tales may leave you unsatisfied—one questions if the author didn't reach the depths he could have. But it becomes quickly apparent that wanting more is the carefully crafted effect of realistic characters who instill emotional attachments.




Kamlari Dekhi Sabhasad Samma (Nepali) - Shanta Chaudhari
Review by Samman Humagain
#670
23-29 August 2013

After the CA was dissolved, Shanta decided to write about her life. And what a life. Told in simple, heartfelt sentences, you have to fight back tears as you learn of the tragic injustice that little girls like Shanta had to suffer. But there is little bitterness or resentment here, only a determination to set things right. Between the lines, you get a glimpse of the fierce fortitude of this remarkable woman.




A Home in Tibet - Tsering Wangmo Dhompa
Review by Kunda Dixit
#673
13-19 September 2013

It is difficult to read *A Home in Tibet* without a deep dull ache inside when you come to sentences like these: 'Here in Tibet live the people my mother taught me to love before I met them. We are family, and love has undetermined aptitude and great hunger.' You need not be Tibetan to recognise the universal emptiness of homelessness, and the joys of reunion with one's roots. Confront cruelty with kindness, harshness with hope, seems to be Tsering Wangmo's message as she ends the book with a final prayer: 'There is great strength in believing that things will eventually right themselves. Because they must.'



The Living Goddess - Isabella Tree
Review by Kunda Dixit
#701
4-10 April 2014

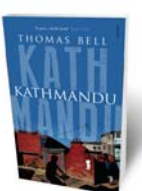
Because it is written by a journalist, *The Living Goddess* is heavy on research and interviews as it delves into the cultural history of the tradition of the living goddess. There is not a lot of it that is new there, but Tree digs deeper to investigate the symbolism and faith that has allowed the Kumari tradition to evolve and survive several regime changes in Kathmandu in the past centuries. Tree goes back to the history of the Malla dynasty in Kathmandu Valley and the Shah kings from Gorkha who conquered them in 1767. The Kumari tradition may have emerged as a Mahayana Buddhist practice, but is inextricably tied with the Devi-worship of Hindu kings and the emergence of Kathmandu as a centre of tantric beliefs and rituals. For Prithvi Naryan Shah to arrive at Hanuman Dhoka Palace on the day of Indra Jatra and touch the feet of the Kumari was a dramatic public relations move, and attempt to ensure that the Valley that he had finally conquered would accept him as king.



Battles of the New Republic - Prashant Jha
Review by Anurag Acharya
#711
13-19 June 2014

Battles of the New Republic is a meticulously researched book, a tale of aspiration, conviction and empowerment, as well as about anger and dejection with hopes dashed. The plot is almost cinematic with an array of emotions including passion, empathy, ambition, envy, greed, lust, betrayal and revenge. In that sense it is a political thriller.


Jha ends with a note of hope, a tinge of optimism, to remind us of the momentous changes to which he had a ringside seat.



Kathmandu - Thomas Bell
Review by David Seddon
#727
10-16 October 2014

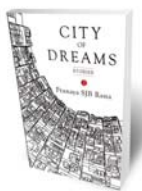
The first part of the book explores the city as mandala or microcosm, in part through the attempts of successive (mainly Western) scholars to 'unpeel' the history and pre-history of the ancient Malla kingdoms, and in part through visits by the author himself to parts of the city where the past still permeates the present as in the structure and layout of the buildings, the narrow lanes and choks, the temples and the monasteries. The ancient trade routes are still visible in the street plans of Kathmandu and Patan. 'The mandala is more than a map of the city. It is a social and political ideology, a description of the order of the universe, which is repeated in a well-ordered city here on earth.'

Bell's *Kathmandu* is part of the wider Nepali political economy, and while his central preoccupation is with the city itself, he does not confine himself to it. Nor is he only concerned with buildings and structures, as a journalist his main source of information is conversations. He talks with all and sundry: with Maoists in the field, with politicians, with members of the army and the police, with expatriates. He listens to the ordinary and extraordinary citizens of Kathmandu, who speak often with great authority and insight.



Lost in Transition - Kul Chandra Gautam
Review by Rubeena Mahato
#785
4-10 December 2015


Lost In Transition attempts to dig deeper and presents a more nuanced and sensible understanding of our problems with clear and detailed way-forwards. Despite the heaviness of the subject matter, it is a tremendously hopeful book, laying in concrete terms a roadmap with which Nepal can prosper and achieve stability. The epilogue of the book discusses the Indian blockade and what Nepal can do to initiate negotiations and secure its interests against larger and hostile neighbours. What carries the book beyond its rigour is its sincerity and impassioned defense of democratic values and principles. At the very beginning one gets a glimpse of what inspires the writer. With an earnestness characteristic of his humble beginnings from a village in Gulmi, Gautam speaks of an identity that binds all Nepalis, a pursuit of shared prosperity for themselves and their children. And it is this desire to leave a better Nepal behind for future generations, that resonates throughout the book.



City of Dreams - Pranaya SJB Rana
Review by Rabi Thapa
#789
1-7 January 2016

Why should a book review begin in such didactic fashion? You may only want to know if *City of Dreams* is good, or bad. But in freely indulging himself in both social realism and fable, Pranaya SJB Rana (pic) has rather forced this reviewer to approach his debut collection of short stories crab-like, each pincer holding up a quite different species of fictive āhārā.

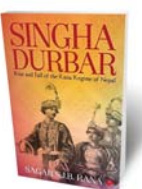
In truth, I dove straight in. The eponymous opener, about a man who likes to walk the streets of Kathmandu, and the next, about a man who stumbles across an intermittent muse on the streets of New York, sucked me into a phantasmagoric landscape strongly reminiscent of Calvino and Borges, both declared inspirations of Rana. The stories charmed me, just as the author's winning entry to this year's Writing Nepal had, which told of a man who can't stop taking photos. I was convinced Rana had grown tired of documenting – perhaps he felt enough had been made of the preoccupations of Kathmandu's middle class – particularly given the visceral realism of earlier stories of his. The prose was accomplished, the possibilities rich; I felt a rare excitement.



Thamel: Dark Star of Kathmandu - Rabi Thapa
Review by Smriti Basnet
#854
14-20 April 2017

Thamel is a poignant tale of the city we lost to time. Thapa reminisces about the good old days. His almost lyrical words transport the readers to a bygone era, away from its concrete present ('... the new, brash Thamel that spins every which way from Narsingh Chowk fades from the senses, giving way to a typical Newar tol of cramped brick houses with tiled roofs ...').

Interspersed with accounts of real people – a recovering junkie, a band member, a sex worker, a nonagenarian shopkeeper who has been witness to changes in the area and many other interesting lives – he lays Thamel's soul bare. For a book that has covered the area and its multiple facets, it is surprisingly not a complicated read. What adds extra value and depth are the small excerpts from works of King Pratap Malla, Shakespeare, Nietzsche, different proverbs and text at the beginning of the chapters written by the author.




Singha Durbar: Rise and Fall of the Rana Regime of Nepal - Sagar SJB Rana
Review by Kunda Dixit
#861
2-8 June 2017

This inter-generational involvement of a Rana in Nepal's democratic politics makes *Singha Durbar: Rise and Fall of the Rana Regime of Nepal* a compelling and unprejudiced history of Nepal's other royal family from 1847-1951. Sourced from archival material, historical memoirs in Nepali, interviews with members of the Rana clan, and an unpublished diary of his father, Sagar Rana's book is meticulously researched and in places moves like a thriller.



The Wayward Daughter - Shradha Ghale
Review by Sewa Bhattarai
#939
21-27 December

The Wayward Daughter succeeds in her deliberate attempt to portray a rich cross-section of Nepali society, showing how caste, class, and gender influence everyday life in Kathmandu. The story is about growing up in a multifarious, almost dystopian world that Nepal has become. Youngsters abandon traditions for modernity, as they prepare to go abroad for higher studies.



Healed - Manisha Koirala
Review by Rupa Joshi
#939
21-17 December 2018

She was just 19 when she starred in her first movie in Bollywood. As a fresh face from the mountains and with her enormous talent, Manisha Koirala shone in the Indian film industry in the 1990s, winning many prestigious awards. At one point in her busy career, she was doing a dozen movies a year, working exhausting 18-hour days. Fast forward to 2012 through a string of unsuccessful romances and films, a failed marriage, and alcoholism, Manisha came face to face with death.

In 2012, she was diagnosed with last-stage ovarian cancer. How she dealt with the crisis and how she came out a survivor, extricating herself not just out of the clutches of the disease, but also the rut that her life had fallen into, is the dominant theme in her new book *Healed*.

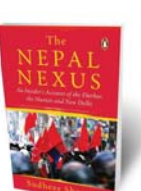
Manisha's tale meanders through the darkness of her feelings of fear, panic and pain and oscillates between glimmers of hope and shadows of hopelessness. It is a book of self-discovery, where the author honestly and minutely analyses her own life, her decisions, her 'toxic relationships' and mistakes. It combs through events and people that shaped her, and allowed her to overcome the disease.



The Beauty of Purposeful Living: Living Traditions of Nepal - Judith Conant Chase
Review by Kunda Dixit
#985
22-28 November 2019

The voluminous 440-page, coffee table book is superbly illustrated and designed, and divided into sections representing the Himal, Midhills, Tarai and Kathmandu Valley. The text is arranged like extended captions, and interspersed with extracts from Chase's journal of four decades ago. Chase decided to use her journal entries because the words recorded her feelings more accurately at the time, making the memories so much more real.

One such extract, after seeing a sadhu at Pashupati on Shivaratri: 'I feel invigorated, intoxicated, inspired, as if being in love. There is a whole way of being in the world that I had only sensed dimly... There is a feeling of a secret that everyone else knows that I am just beginning to glimpse, frustrating and enticing together.'



Nepal Nexus - Sudheer Sharma
Review by Alisha Sijapati
#997
14-20 February 2020

Nepal Nexus, the English translation and updated version of the 2013 bestseller Prayogshala by editor Sudheer Sharma, offers readers a vivid account of Nepal's ten-year conflict, the 2006 people's movement, the fragile transition that followed, to the Maoists' subsequent rise to power. The English version was translated by Sanjaya Dhakal for Penguin India and released last year.

Sharma, who was and is once more the editor of Kantipur, begins with a personal account of his experience as a war reporter during the time of the state-Maoist conflict. Although he describes the book as an inside account of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), the reader finds it more of an account of Prachanda's rise to power, and only tangentially of the party he led. Sharma has a soft corner for Prachanda, and does not conceal his sympathies for the erstwhile revolutionaries. 'It is my view that the major credit for restructuring the state should go to the Maoists,' may come across to many as giving too much credit to the CPN(M) for what was essentially a violent shortcut to power. To be fair, the journalist in Sharma tries to be objective and balance his views with those of others with explanations, experiences, and interviews.

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Story of Nepali history

2000: Constitution tinkering
Twenty years ago too, the UML was pushing for a constitutional amendment. A much younger-looking K P Oli, Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhulanath Khanal were pictured on the front page. Excerpt from page 1 of #18, 24-30 November 2000:

The week after Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai spelt out his group's demand to scrap the 1990 Constitution, everyone from the left to the right wants to tinker with the ten-year-old document. Even the main opposition UML couldn't resist it, and the central committee came



up with a number of reasons why ten years of democracy have failed to deliver. The conclusion reached by the UML is: it is not inept politicians, not poor leadership, not bad governance, not even corruption; democracy has failed because we have a bad constitution.

2001: The kings are dead, long live the King
The palace massacre of 1 June 2001 nearly wiped out Nepal's entire royal family. King Gyanendra, who had just been enthroned, spoke about the



need for the country to pull together. The *Times* quoted him on page 1 of #46, 6-14 June 2001: *"This was an unimaginable tragedy in our country's history. Nepal has had to live through a series of sorrows. But we must bear with it and we must behave responsibly. We must prevent people from taking undue advantage of this crisis to threaten our sovereignty, democracy and constitutional monarchy."* - King Gyanendra after his crowning at the Naasal Chowk on Monday, 4 June.

2002: Nation in grief
Fifty-six Royal Nepal Army soldiers were killed in a Maoist attack in 2002 in Mangalsen of Acham district, one of the heaviest casualties during the war. This exposed the army's lack of preparedness and poor intelligence. Excerpt from a field report in #82, 22-28 February 2002:

Just about everyone in remote Achham district was expecting a major Maoist attack the week of the sixth anniversary of the start of the 'People's War'. But no one expected it to be



such a devastating defeat for the government, and such a rout of the security forces. Mangalsen residents are still in a state of shock witnessing the unspeakable carnage and brutality during a long night of terror.

2003: Spring in the heartland
Japanese journalist Kiyuko Ogura visited Rukumkot for an eye-witness report of how the conflict was affecting ordinary Nepalis caught in the crossfire. Excerpt from #139, 4-10 April 2003:



The mid-west is red: rhododendron forests are aflame, the valleys are crimson with simal blossoms and the trails are festooned with red Maoist banners. The arrival of spring cloaks this blood-soaked land in new flowers of hope with

the ceasefire, blurring the evidence of the seven-year insurgency. In western Rukum, fields of dukku, flowering radishes, undulate in the gentle breeze. Peach blossoms confetti the paths of Rukumkot. The evidence of war is only apparent when we reach human habitation.

2004: Bad blood in Beni
British journalist Thomas Bell was one of the first journalists from outside to reach Beni after the battle there that killed at least 200 people. Beni's citizens shut themselves inside their homes, hiding under beds to the sounds of gunfire and explosions all night and into the next morning. Excerpt from Bell's reportage #189, 26 March - 1 April 2004:



The police and soldiers guarding the police base fought from 10:30 on the night of Saturday, 20 March, until six the next morning against thousands of Maoists, until their ammunition ran out. Those who survived either fled, or were taken prisoner. Down the road, the soldiers at the army base kept fighting till daylight and most of their casualties took place in the morning.

2005: The week that was
King Gyanendra's surprise military coup toppled Sher Bahadur Deuba's government, dissolved Parliament, and brought heavy censorship of media. Pages of the *Nepali Times* could go to press only after two Royal Nepal Army officers read every word and expunged criticism. The paper appeared the next morning with white holes in the print. Excerpt from #233, 4-10 February 2005:



On 1 February 2005 at 10 AM, King Gyanendra Shah read through a teleprompter for 28 minutes in a special studio inside the Narayanhiti Royal Palace. In the royal proclamation, the former monarch criticised political parties for misusing their parliamentary privilege, lambasted the Maoists for their terrorism, sacked Sher Bahadur Deuba (without naming him) for having been incapable (once again), and announced he was taking over the chairmanship of a new council of ministers for a period of up to three years.

2006: Scrubbed
The astonishing success of the People's Movement surprised everyone, most of all the agitating parties. Gyanendra restored parliament in April, 2006, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Girija Prasad Koirala signed a Comprehensive Peace Accord. Excerpt from a page 1 analysis from #326, 8-14 December 2006:

The 21 November, 2005 peace agreement was a rebirth in many senses: for Nepal, for Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and for Girija Prasad Koirala. Koirala can finally mask his sordid

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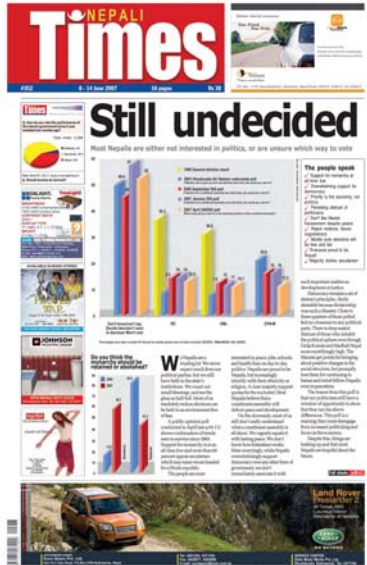
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behaviour from 1991 to 2001. He can make the political connection between his present and what he was before 1991. Similarly, Dahal has washed his hands of the blood of thousands of Nepalis whose lives were lost during the ten years of conflict. He can separate himself from those who still think that a society can be violently transformed into utopia.

2007: Still undecided

Two years after the ceasefire, the page 1 story 'Still Undecided' summarized results of a Himalmedia public opinion poll. The survey exposed what Nepalis thought about the monarchy and the future of Nepal. Excerpt from #352, 8-14 June 2007:



A public opinion poll conducted in April shows continuation of trends seen in surveys since 2003. Support for monarchy is at an all-time low. The people are more interested in peace, jobs, schools, health than in day-to-day politics. Most Nepalis believe that a Constituent Assembly (CA) will deliver peace and development. On the downside, most do not understand what a CA is all about.

2008: Changing of the guard

2008 proved to be a landmark year for Nepal as the newly elected CA abolished the 240-year monarchy. On 27 May, king Gyanendra held a press conference at Narayanhiti Royal Palace and then exited the palace, making Nepal a republic. Excerpt from #401, 23-29 May 2008:



When the newly elected CA sits for its first meeting at the BICC on 28 May, it will ratify the abolition of the monarchy before it even starts drafting a new constitution. To make things easy, king Gyanendra could vacate the palace on 27 May itself. If he wants to make it difficult, he could try to stick it out and face protests at the gates, which could turn ugly. The election was an overwhelming win for republicanism, with the royalist forces seeing a rout.

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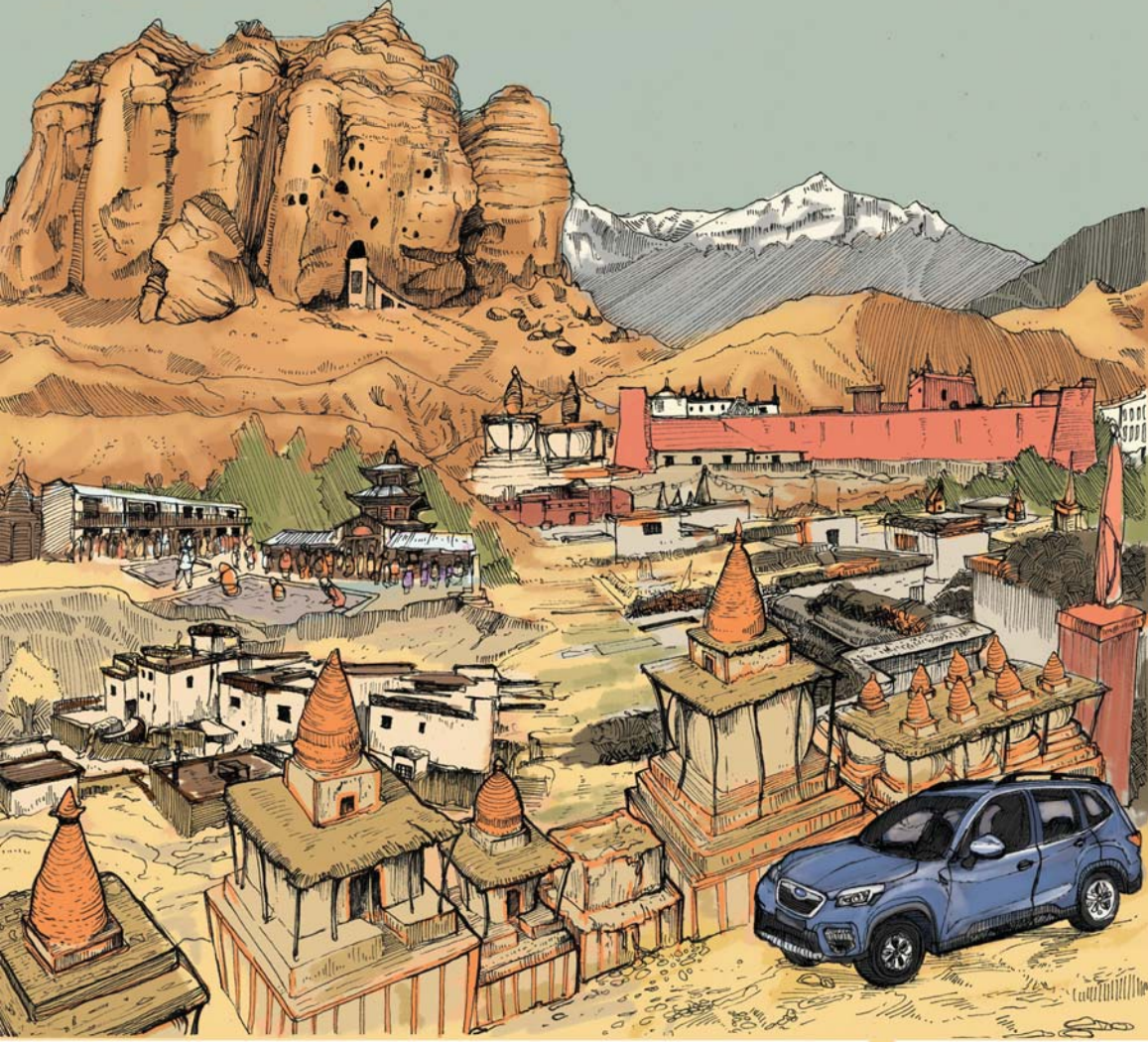
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2016: The blockade that benefitted no one except smugglers

Nepal lost over 200,000 jobs, inflation hit double-digits, post-earthquake reconstruction was delayed and the economy was devastated by the Indian blockade. Excerpt from a report in #795, 12-18 February 2016 after the five-month blockade had been lifted:

Now that the blockade has been lifted, it is important to ask who benefitted from this five-month siege of a landlocked nation still recovering from a devastating earthquake? The answer: no one but smugglers.

Nepal's ruling parties, against whom the blockade was imposed, survived the five months of siege by playing the nationalist card, but did not gain anything out of this crisis, either. Even India, the real enforcer of this blockade, failed to benefit. Instead New Delhi squandered the goodwill it had earned after Prime Minister Modi's visit last year. The Madhesi Front was the pawn in this Great Game, and is probably the biggest loser.

2017: Into a state of uncertain stability

This story analyses the 2017 elections that brought the same old politicians back into government. Excerpt from issue #887, 8-14 December 2017:



After the last phase of elections to three levels of government under the new Constitution on Thursday, the question on most voters' minds is not who will win. It is whether the new government structure can ensure political stability. Whoever wins, the new government will be keenly watched to see if it behaves any differently from the political cartel of the past, whether Kathmandu will really devolve power, and if that sets Nepal on a path to development, job creation and prosperity.

2018: Kleptocrats in Kuala Lumpur and Kathmandu

A cross-border investigative piece revealed the collusion between politicians and businessmen in Malaysia and Nepal to loot migrant workers. Excerpt from a report in #919, 20-26 July 2018:

A deeply-rooted nexus of politicians,

businessmen and bureaucrats in Nepal and Malaysia have looted more than Rs5 billion over the past five years from vulnerable Nepali migrant workers desperate to seek work in Malaysia. The scam involved powerful Malaysian businesses with close links to ministers and officials in the Barisan Nasional coalition of former Prime Minister Najib Razak and implemented by their agents in Kathmandu who had contacts with influential politicians and bureaucrats in Nepal.

2019: Terrifying assessment of Himalayan melting

A review of the ICIMOD report that showed the impact of the climate emergency on the Himalaya is worse than predicted. Excerpt from #956, 8-14 February 2019:



Himalayan peaks are warming between 0.3 to 0.7oC faster than the global average, and the loss of Himalayan ice will have devastating consequences for 1.6 billion people living in the mountains and downstream countries. Climate models show that summer flow in the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra and their snow-fed tributaries will actually rise till 2050 as the glaciers melt away, but will start decreasing after that because there will be no more ice left. Glaciers are receding up to 30m/year.

2020 Which way Nepali politics in 2020?

Just two months into the new year, there is instability again as Prime Minister KP Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal struggle for supremacy. Excerpt from new year issue #990, 27 December 2019 - 2 January 2020:



The two power centres in Nepal today are not the opposition NC and the ruling NCP, but two Communist alpha males locked in a power struggle. This will continue to impact directly on policy decisions, appointments and ultimately even the country's leadership in 2020. The prognosis is that Dahal may decide that it is not worth the risk to try to replace Oli, and content himself with being a powerful party supremo.

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Ms Yak & Yeti

On any given day, General Manager Monika Scheiblauber can be seen making her way over the polished wood floors of the Yak & Yeti Hotel, her smile gracious and the lilt of her speech easily recognised as German.

Scheiblauber is the first woman general manager of the hotel located off Darbar Marg and the only woman general manager of a five-star hotel in Kathmandu Valley at the moment. Before she came to Nepal in 2017, she managed hotels in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Thailand, Malaysia, and Bahrain.

"It has been more than two years that I have worked in this organisation and I feel at home, with an overall sense of warmth and belonging," says Scheiblauber, who says she had always dreamt of visiting Nepal. "I have made wonderful memories here that will stay with me forever."

Although Scheiblaue always wanted to visit, she had never imagined that she may one day live and work in Nepal. "It was never on my bucket list," she admits. But since her arrival, Scheiblaue has been fascinated by the country's rich heritage, cultural diversity, variety of cuisine, age-old festivals and kind people.

Scheiblauber encourages more young women to join the hospitality industry at higher managerial positions. "I feel we are living in a constantly changing world and it is empowering that women are given more opportunities in today's context," she says. "Women tend to have high emotional intelligence, which is extremely important in the hotel industry where people serve people."

In her two years at Yak & Yeti Scheiblauber has overseen the restoration of Lal Durbar, the re-launch of The Chimney, the hotel's oldest restaurant, and the establishment of Spice Room, a fine-dining Indian restaurant. The iconic Lal Durbar, built by Bir Shumsher Rana in 1885, was turned into Nepal's first hotel

for international clientele, The Hotel Royal, in 1977 and now comprises one of Yak & Yeti's two wings. Its distinctive façade has been faithfully restored. The red marble used inside was originally shipped from Italy and carried by porters from Kolkata to Kathmandu and the building now houses the hotel's conference facility.

The new Spice Room serves an array of elevated north and south Indian dishes. The Chimney, for its part, is 50 years old and houses a 60-year-old copper chimney. The restaurant rebranded itself as a 'fun-dining' restaurant in 2018 but continues to serve such dishes as Russian borscht and Chicken ala Kiev, timeless classics introduced by Boris Lissanevitch when he established the restaurant and for which it has been known. 🍷



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Sanghamitra Subba

In many parts of the world, women ambassadors can face prejudice that their male counterparts do not. Women diplomats, especially those with young children, are not expected to occupy senior positions. But female envoys to Nepal take this in stride, and appreciate the importance of their presence in challenging those assumptions.

“It is interesting to have a conversation with people before they form an opinion about me based on my role,” says British envoy Nicola Pollitt, who often introduces herself by name and does not mention her ambassadorial title. “But it’s difficult to go for long without someone asking directly what I do and they are often surprised when I tell them – particularly if I am with my two young children at the time.”

Out of 27 ambassadors currently resident in Kathmandu, seven are women: the envoys of Bangladesh, Brazil, China, the European Union, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The UN resident coordinator is also a woman.

The first woman ambassador to Nepal was American diplomat Carol C Laise, who held the position for seven years from 1966 to 1973, while her husband Ellsworth Bunker was the US ambassador to South Vietnam. Laise was the only female ambassador in Nepal at that time.

“I’ve experienced only positive reactions, very warm and welcoming. Nepali women are very happy to see women ambassadors and are encouraged by it,” Swiss envoy to Nepal Elisabeth von



MONIKA DEUPALA

KASTO HUNUHUNCHHA: British ambassador Nicola Pollitt, (right) who speaks fluent Nepali, recently on a trip outside Kathmandu.

Swiss envoy Elisabeth von Capeller (above) says Nepali women feel encouraged to see a woman ambassador.

Capeller told *Nepali Times*. “For many, women ambassadors are role models.”

Pollitt is the first female British ambassador to Nepal, and adds that in many countries it is easier to accept women from outside the country in positions of power than to break down the barriers to empowering women at home.

She says: “Nepal is an open society and I have been welcomed here without prejudice. Many Nepalis are hopeful that as countries like the UK and others appoint female ambassadors in



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public-facing roles it will help promote the appointment of women in other spheres and professions. I have been pleased to find that many men are also delighted to see my appointment, and more and more are looking for ways to support and promote Nepali women.”

In her second term as the Swiss ambassador, von Capeller has seen significant changes in the status of Nepali women. She says: “The biggest and most positive change I see is in the younger women. Compared with the past, their self-confidence has increased substantially. Among many factors, education has certainly contributed to it.”

There is a greater gender disparity in politics and diplomatic services than in other professional fields. According to the 2019 report ‘Women in Politics’ by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women, only nine countries have half or more ministerial positions occupied by women, and in only three countries are 50% or more parliamentarians women.

Nepal ranked 36th in the world in percentage of women in parliament and a low 123rd in terms of women in ministerial positions. As for women in the foreign service, there has been a slow but significant increase. Three of the Government of Nepal’s current ambassadors are women: those to Oman, Japan and Israel.

For International Women’s Day on Sunday, British envoy Nicola Pollitt has a hope: “I wish women all over Nepal the courage, strength and determination to take opportunities and fulfil your potential. Without your active participation, Nepal will not fulfil its potential.”





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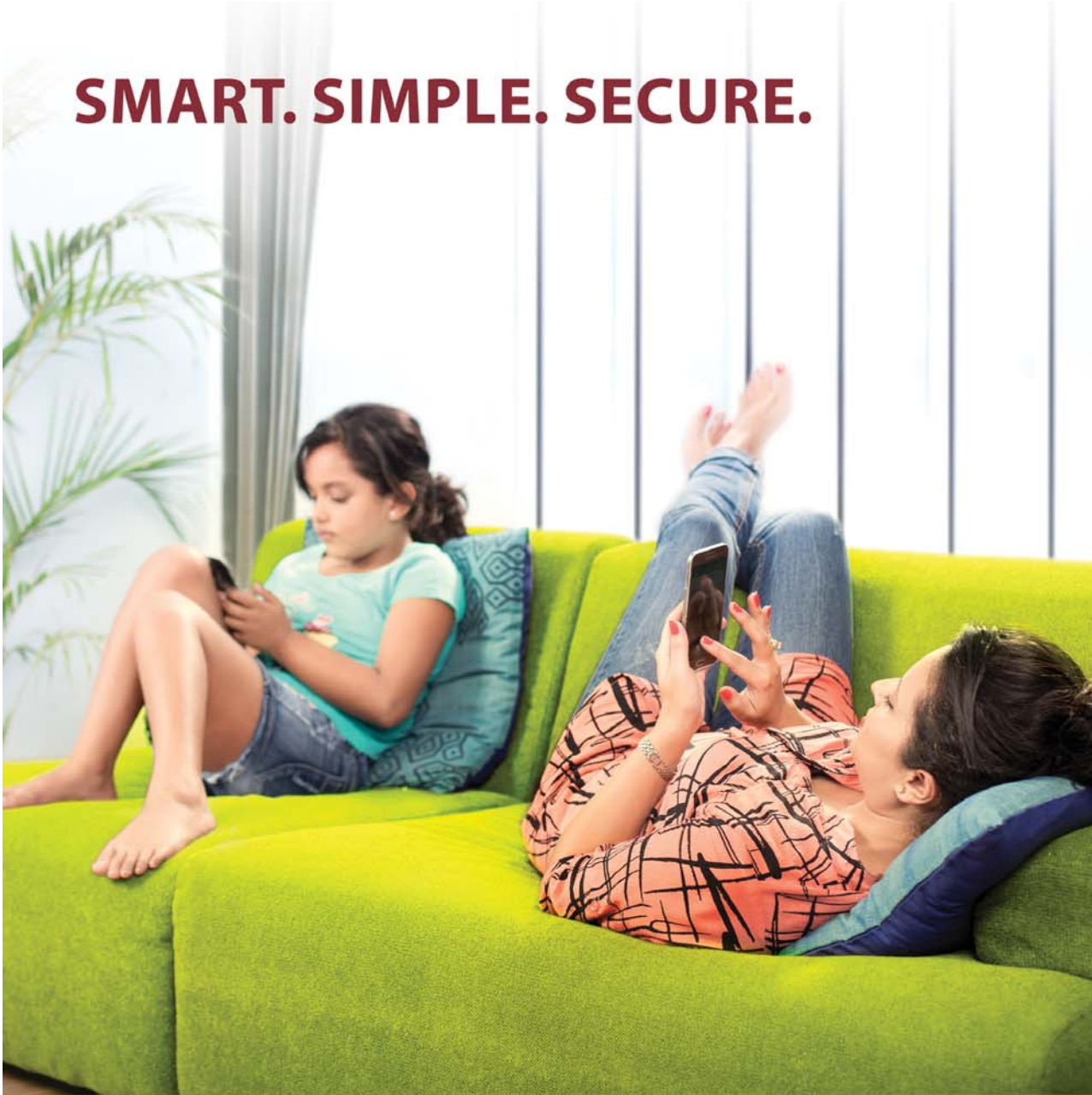
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Forgotten woman who sheltered communist activists

During the days of absolute monarchy, Nepal's communists were underground and organising their party. Many people risked their lives to provide shelter for them.

One of them was Balkumari Thapa of Hatiya of Makwanpur district, where a landmark meeting of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), under the chairmanship of C P Mainali, was held during the 1989 pro-democracy movement.

The first meetings of the All Nepal Women's Association, the women's wing of the CPN, were also conducted in Thapa's home. Recalls Shanta Manavi, founding member of the association: "She let us use her home at great personal risk to organise."

In 1979 the police killed 16 people in a safe house used by communists in Dhankuta, and Thapa was aware that something similar might happen in her house. So she deployed her three sons to keep a look-out whenever party leaders met there. And when they spent the night, she herself stayed awake on sentry duty.

It all started when Thapa had to take her sick son to hospital in 1964. She had to break her journey at the house of Badri Prasad Khatiwada, an underground communist party cadre who worked full-time as a teacher. He converted Thapa to communism, explaining it in terms of the imperative to remove exploitation and to fight for equality and justice.

Now 83, Khatiwada recalls, "I went to Balkumari's house after school on Fridays, collected everyone nearby, and taught classes in communist theory."

Balkumari's husband Tilak Bahadur Thapa was an anti-malaria health worker, and was not interested in politics. With all the party workers who had to be fed, the Thapas ran out of food, and she had to farm to earn the money to buy more provisions.

"There was no way of knowing how many people would drop in. Sometimes there wouldn't be any food at home, so I borrowed rice, flour, and other essentials from the neighbours," Thapa recalls.

In 1979, Thapa became a Female Community Health Volunteer and that made it easier for her to travel and mobilise without raising suspicion. By 1981, she had become an active party member and her job included safe-keeping and delivering party documents, organising women, and teaching classes.



GIMME SHELTER: Balkumari Thapa at home in Hatiya of Makwanpur, where she gave shelter to many of Nepal's current-day communist leaders when they were waging an underground struggle.

Manu Sigdel, whom Thapa taught, is currently the chairperson of NCP Makwanpur. He remembers: "The party was more important to her than her own family."

Thapa was arrested and detained for a day in March 1988 for defying a government ban on celebrating Women's Day. She has since held key positions in the All Nepal Women's Association and currently holds an advisory position within the Nepal Communist Party.

Only after the ban on political parties was lifted in 1989 did Thapa not have to offer a secret safe house anymore. After that, everyone forgot about her selfless devotion to the party.

After Thapa fell ill in 2007, the government did arrange for a pacemaker at Gangal Hospital free of cost, and the Hetauda municipality provided her with financial support.

Mukunda Koirala of the NCP in Makwanpur is critical of his party for forgetting Thapa's sacrifice. He says: "Those she sheltered are now in power, but they have forgotten the people who put them where they are now."

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Think Ahead

Rocky buggers

Nepali folk songs are a fascinating blend of rhythm, melody and poetic lyrics. And it is the harmony of these three important musical elements that makes departing tourists hum 'Resham Firir' under their face masks even when a thermal gun is pointed at their foreheads. What makes the song so hummable is that the beat goes exactly like 'Buffalo Soldier'. But it may also be the deep symbolism in the lyrics, as seen in this second stanza of the chorus:

एकनाले बन्दूक, दुईनाले बन्दूक, मृगलाई ताकेको, मृगलाई मैले ताकेको हैन, मायालाई डाकेको ।

Translation:
One-barrel gun, two-barrel gun, aiming at a deer.
I ain't aiming at no deer.
I'm aiming at you, my dear.

The words are laden with latent longing, and the poignant juxtaposition of gun violence and love lends the song an ominous sense of foreboding in these troubled times. Another vintage folk song evokes nostalgia for a time when the world was young, and love was innocent:

ए कान्छा, मलाई सुनको तारा खसाइदेऊ न, त्यो तारा मात्र हैन, जून पनि भरि दिउँला ।

Translation:
She: Hey Dude, get my gold ring through the metal-free x-ray
He: Not just your ring, I'll even smuggle 33kg of gold for you

See? Nepali folk songs may sound like they are all about love, but they carry hidden messages. Another popular tune imparts information about the significance of the birds and bees in cross-pollination:

म साहुरी हुँ राधा, तिमी आँप मञ्जरी हो ।

Translation:
Radha, I am your honey bee
And you are a mango tree.
And there is this one:

रातो टीका निधारमा टलक्क टल्कियो, छातीभित्र मायाको आगो सल्कियो ।

Translation:
Red dot on your forehead shining brightly,
Flame of love in my chest burning fiercely.
Oh, electricity wire, wire, wire
Let's meet on Saturday, if you're not tied up already.

A song seemingly about unrequited love actually underlines the importance of high-voltage transmission lines in the MCC, and how without grid connectivity we may face load-shedding again on Saturdays. Hydropower is a recurring theme in Nepali folk songs, as we can see in this next one:

पानको पात माया तिमलाई सम्झ्छु दिनको रात मस्याइँदी सलल ।

Translation:
Beloved betel leaf,
I think of you day and night
In the Marsyangdi powerhouse.

Even this smash hit has a hidden message:

घाँस काट्ने खुर्केर, आयो जोवन हुर्केर कसलाई दिई यो जोवन ?

Translation:
I have grass, pot is legal again, yay!
Want me to roll you a joint?

Some folk songs are about river beds ideal for boulder mining:

ढुङ्गे बगर दाजै, ढुङ्गे बगर माया छुँदैछ, हल्ला नगर ।

Translation:
Rocky bugger, bro, rocky bugger
Sign the MoU, and I'll pay you hush money.





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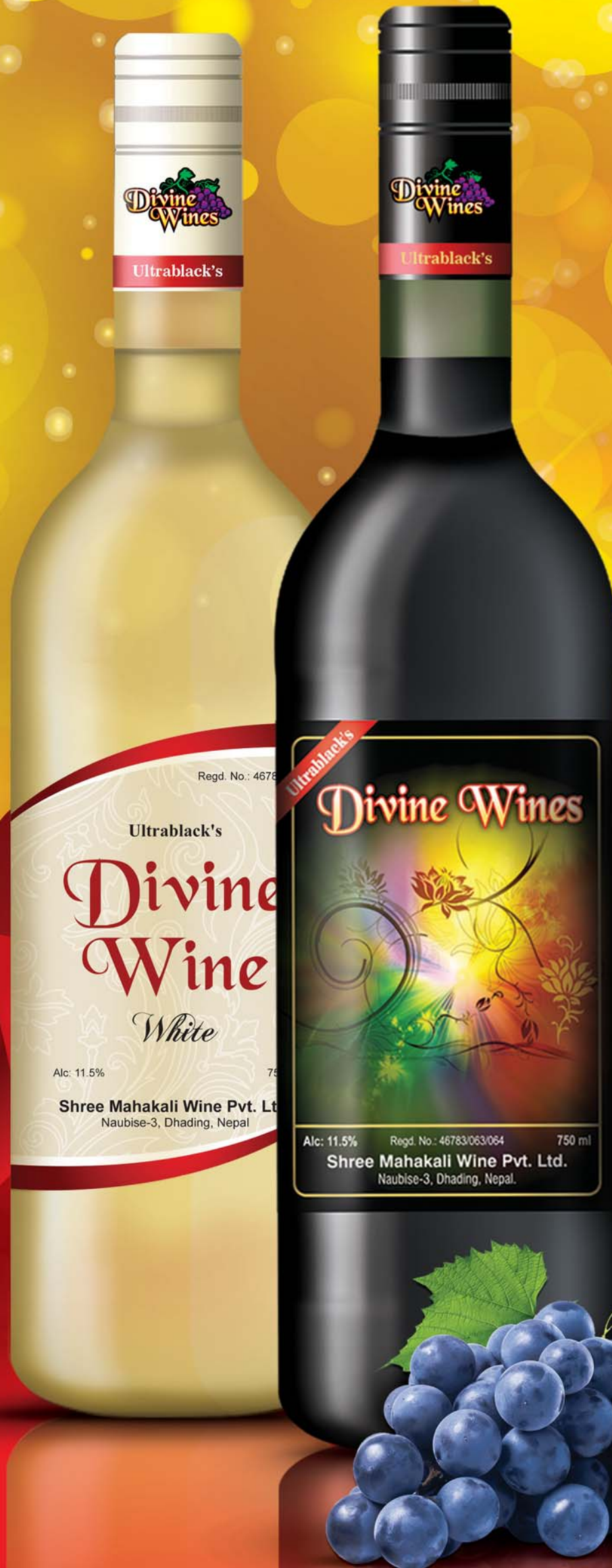
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