



Prime Minister K P Oli is known to play brinkmanship. He only relents when he is cornered, and even then a truce is only to buy himself more time.

Ironically, this was exactly the tactic used by Oli's party rival Pushpa Kamal Dahal when he was still Chairman Prachanda – the Maoists used every ceasefire period to regroup before launching another offensive.

In the past year, Oli has been using every trick in the book: carrots and sticks, divide-and-rule, false promises and feint attacks to counter challenges against his leadership of the party and government from the Dahal faction.

This time, too, after a Dasain ceasefire, Dahal and his allies made their move: piling pressure on Oli to call a secretariat meeting of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) and giving him a written 48-hour ultimatum. Oli ignored it, and Dahal gave him an extension. Just before that deadline expired, Oli made his counter-move on Wednesday – calling the meeting himself for 12 November 4pm in Baluwatar.

Oli had been publicly warning of a plot to oust him, and on Wednesday during an inspection of the Arun III project site in Sankhuwasabha, he assured the crowd that rumours of his political demise were exaggerated. On his helicopter ride back, however, he seems to have decided to call the secretariat meeting.

Oli has often threatened to split the party if Dahal and his ally Madhav K Nepal pushed near the edge. In case they did not believe him, Oli recessed Parliament, threatened an ordinance to allow a party split, and re-registered his previous UML at the Election Commission,

In the past two weeks, things had been deadlocked. The Dahal faction kept insisting on a Secretariat meeting to thrash out the power struggle within the party once and for all. The Oli group kept threatening to boycott any meeting it did not call, and not adhering to decisions taken in its absence. But why has a Secretariat meeting taken such inordinate importance?

"All we want is for the Secretariat to sort out the distrust between the two leaders which has

paralysed the country," said NCP Standing Committee member and Dahal loyalist, Surendra Pandey.

Meanwhile former speaker Subhas Nembang, who is close to Oli, says the prime minister is willing to call a Secretariat meeting at any time, but it has to be done as per rules. "He has always been ready to have a meeting any time," Nembang said.

The previous Oli-Dahal ceasefire involved an agreement between the two to sort out their job descriptions: Oli serving

out the rest of his term as prime minister, and Dahal handling party affairs. But this truce soon broke down after Oli unilaterally appointed three new ministers and ambassadors last month. Dahal and Nepal felt insulted.

Dahal is expected to raise this strongly at Friday's meeting of the nine-member Secretariat in which he has a majority. But one cannot underestimate Oli's ability to pull rabbits out his hat by wooing Dahal loyalists with lollipop Cabinet positions.

"We can't stand this constant irritation in the party, every week there is some distraction. We got the MCC, they stopped it, we tried to do the reshuffle, they had objections. How long will this go on?" said one angry member of the Oli team.

Oli has been making fresh overtures to his former UML colleague Madhav Nepal to convince him that Dahal will

dump him once his usefulness is over. He has sent mediators to talk to Nepal, but so far it looks like the dissidents are united.

Bihar-watching

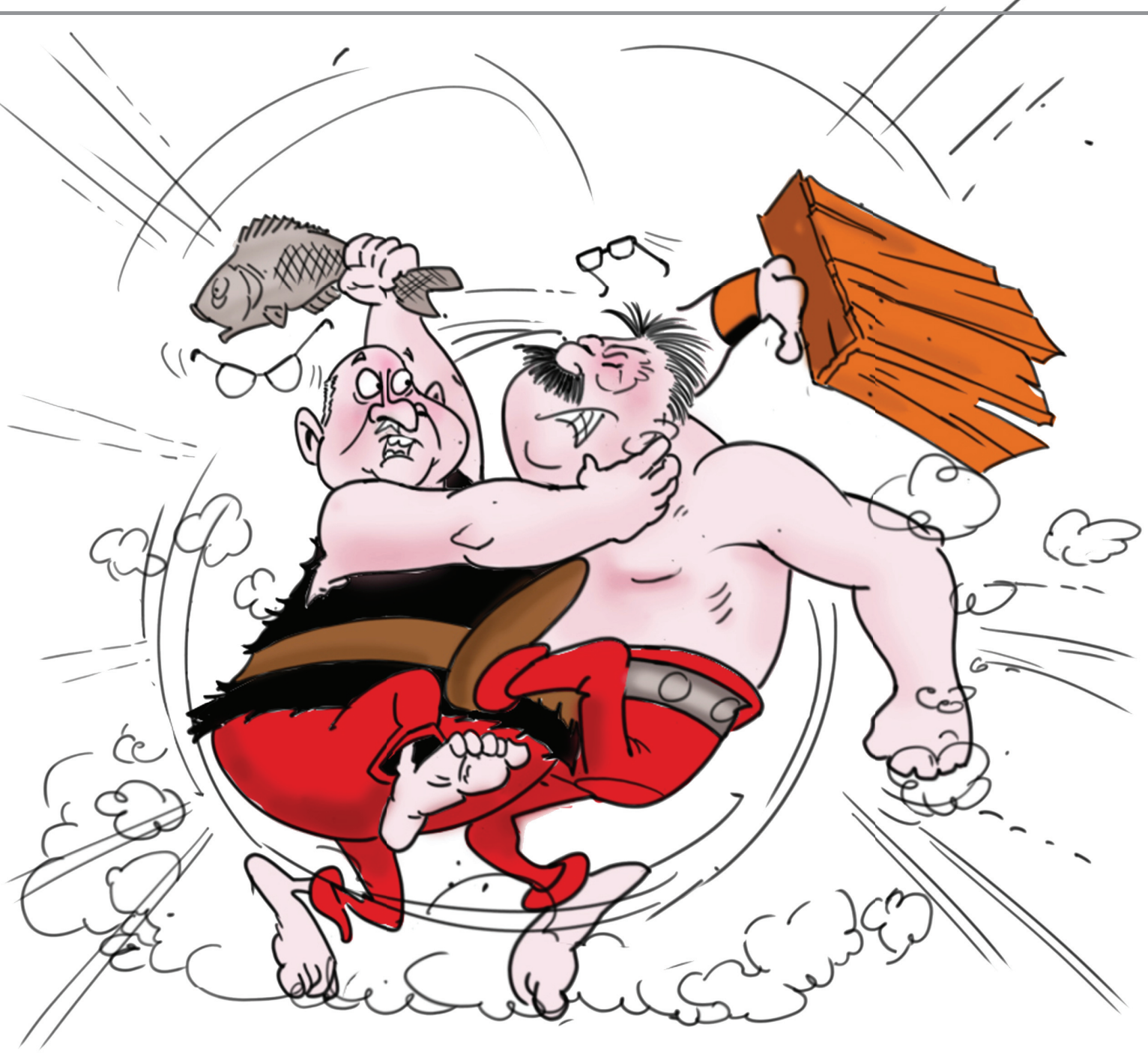
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

Said Surendra Pandey: "The main issue is whether the prime minister can make decisions on his own, or whether he should listen to the party. If that is sorted out, there will be peace. If not, anything can happen."

Mukesh Pokhrel

At it again

Illustration: DIWAKAR CHHETRI



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Bihar-watching

As elsewhere in the world, Nepal's media is consumed by the US elections and its aftermath, including Donald Trump's refusal to concede. But the lack of interest in Kathmandu to another election that just happened right across our southern border in the Indian state of Bihar is puzzling. Unlike in the past when there used to be booth capturing and dozens of deaths, the



voting and counting in Bihar has been much smoother than in America – all this went largely unnoticed in Nepal. Bihar may be a state within India, but if it was a country it would be among the top ten most populous with 120 million people. It would have been even bigger if Jharkhand had not been carved out twenty years ago. More than 70 million Biharis are eligible to vote, and there was a 55% turnout in the three phases of the state assembly elections despite the pandemic. India has recorded 8.6 million confirmed cases of coronavirus, and there have been 130,000 deaths. Bihar alone has more than 220,000 cases, but the number of deaths so far is about the same as Nepal: 1,300. Although the daily caseload has decreased in Bihar, the election and the upcoming Diwali and Chhat festivals are expected to lead to a surge. Bihar's election is the first state polls in India being conducted during the Covid-19 crisis, and was seen as a referendum on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose BJP swept to power in general elections in 2014, and won a second landslide last year. Modi has been blamed for mishandling the Covid-19 crisis and the lockdown, during which millions of young Bihari men had to trudge back to their villages from all over India after losing their jobs. Although the BJP got fewer votes than in the 2017 state election, it will be the power behind the throne in Patna. The reason Bihar is important for Prime Minister Modi is because it is the only one in north India's Hindi-speaking 'cow-belt' that the BJP does not rule by itself, but through its ally, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal

United (JDU). The JDU-BJP coalition won 125 of 243 assembly seats. Nitish Kumar has been in power since 2005, and although he showed much promise then with development and service delivery in India's poorest state, banning liquor and curbing crime, his popularity has been waning of late. Exit polls had shown him trailing badly, and the BJP being punished for economic woes. But India's pollsters have once more been proven wrong. The surveys strongly favoured Tejaswi Yadav of the opposition Rastriya Janata Dal (RJD), the son of Laloo Yadav, who is in jail for corruption. The RJD and its Mahagatbandhan that includes the Congress, got only 110 seats. The smaller Lok Janashakti Party (LJP) led by the charismatic Chirag Paswan championing the cause of Bihar's Dalits

was also shown in polls to be doing well, but the LJP won just one of the 135 constituencies it contested. Bihar's politics is impacted by its entrenched caste and religious divisions, but with more than 20 parties these vote banks are beginning to fragment. Birganj-based journalist Chandra Kishore, a keen Bihar-watcher, says the caste and religious undercurrents have always had an impact on the politics of Province 2, and this could be amplified in Nepal's own 2022 federal elections. Bihar's caste and Muslim vote will affect the Madhes, as will a rise in crime or political instability. Bihar gets a lot of bad press within India (even Nepal) for having poor development indicators. Kathmandu ignores the neighbouring Indian state even though its Jogbani and Raxaul checkpoints handle most of Nepal's trade. Nepal is also important for Bihar: most of Nepal's rivers empty into the Ganges in Bihar, and an estimated 200,000 Biharis work in Nepal's construction industry, and the informal sector. Bihar's development in infrastructure, health and education also lifts living standards in the borderlands of Nepal. Although it is the JDU and Nitish Kumar that has won Bihar, it will be the BJP that will be calling the shots in the state. The party had lost six state elections in the past two years, and this win has major implications for the BJP since there are critical state elections in West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu next year. The fact that Modi has emerged unscathed from the pandemic and economic crisis has implications for all of India's neighbours, including Nepal.

left billowing in their wake was a clear sign that this was a mistake, and the government banned Vikrams in 1999 when their emissions became intolerable. Smooth-talking environmentalists aided in the clean-up by discussing science like politicians extolling the virtues of democracy, but the owners of Vikrams were not turning green without some sort of payback. So the government allowed them modern replacements, the microbuses. Getting rid of the 3000-odd diesel Vikram tempos was tough because they had influential owners. The 641 operators given permits to import replacement microbuses were also given subsidies—75 percent off the import duty on diesel engine microbuses and 99 percent off for those running on petrol. Each of the larger diesel microbuses cost around Rs 1.4 million after the reduced duties, and most have been funded by bank loans. The repayment plans demand an average payment of Rs 30,000 a month for five years. The microbuses do earn enough to meet the banks' demands. A microbus doing the Lagankhel-Ratnapark stretch ferries around 600 people a day spending an average of 28-30 litres of diesel. This nets the operator between Rs 1,700-2,000 after fuel costs and wages. That's close to Rs 60,000 a month. But for the city, the 250 Vikram-replacements cruising the streets are creating new problems, congestion and more pollution. From the archives of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

ONLINE PACKAGES



DOG DAYS

Kathmandu's community canines already seem to sense that their special day is coming soon on 14 November, Kukur Tihar. But for Rashmi Tuladhar, every day is dog day. She has been taking care of 100 dogs. Watch a day in her life and of her furry friends. Story: [page 7](#).

EVEREST

Construction of new roads is welcome but disregard for the environment is unfortunate ('Nepal building a highway to Everest', Surendra Phuyal, #1034). Use of dozers in construction is not sustainable and has a high risk of landslides, and natural resources might diminish.

Sushil Gajurel

• I can see many benefits in taking the road that far (but no further). Few tourists would choose 14hrs to KTM on difficult roads but it would serve as a vital alternative and return income for jeeps bringing supplies in.

Simon Bamford

• I get that people need to get to places. But most of the people in the Everest trekking route above Kharikhola are focused on trekking as an income not taxi services. I'm sure Uber won't invest there.

Paul Akshaye Ramble

• It is only going to Chaurikharka for the purpose of alleviating flight delays due to bad weather, sometimes for many days, in and out of Lukla. Not sure how effective it will be in rainy times as they will have many land slips.

Sue Chamberlain

• This project will destroy the wilderness and the business of the lodges along the former trekking trail. Nobody will stay there any longer like it happened on the Annapurna Circuit. I will not return to Khumbu or other places in Nepal because of blatant lack of care for the environment.

Eckhard Schlöder

TIGERS

Very informative article revealing the unsung heroes of tiger conservation in Nepal ('Unsung heroes of Nepal's tiger recovery', Smriti Dahal, #1034), detailing their contribution.

Rajan B Baral

• A must read. Indigenous communities play a critical role in conservation efforts in Tarai. It has been a privilege to work with all three groups mentioned here - Bote, Tharu, and Musahar. But this articles also misses other contributing people such as Darai. Also important to acknowledge that not all indigenous people have the same social and socioeconomic status. For example, there are many Tharu homestays, not a single owned by Musahars, perhaps because they are Dalit.

Aashish Jha

COVID-19

The least we can do for the elderly in the house is to be proactive in taking precautions and sacrifice our urge to mingle around and get out of the house unless required ('Spared at first, elderly hit hard by Covid', Sonia Awale, #1034). Karma will catch us if not Covid. Let's keep the elderly safe.

Alina R Shrestha

• This is scary news... Gives rise to the suspicion that young 'uns are catching it, older family members are in turn contracting it from them, and these older citizens end up fighting the hard fight against the virus. We must be careful for the sake of our families!

Saniaa Shah

CONCRETE JUNGLE

Since the article was written, it only got worse ('East-West City', Mukesh Pokhrel, *Nepali Times* archive). No scenic route, all the concrete places look the same. It is a shame.

Sonja Rusticus

TROLLEY BUS

Trolley busses were electric and this proves that it's still possible to reduce the level of pollution in Kathmandu ('Not so long ago', Daniel E Edwards, *Nepali Times* archive).

Lui Vium

• Our leaders of so-called New Nepal dismantled and got rid of these trolley busses, instead of enlarging its reach. What short-sightedness!

Lal Bahadur Nepali

• We got to ride on the trolley bus to Bhaktapur, and yes - there were fields in Kupundole. I lived there from 1976.

Ben-Erik Ness

Times.com

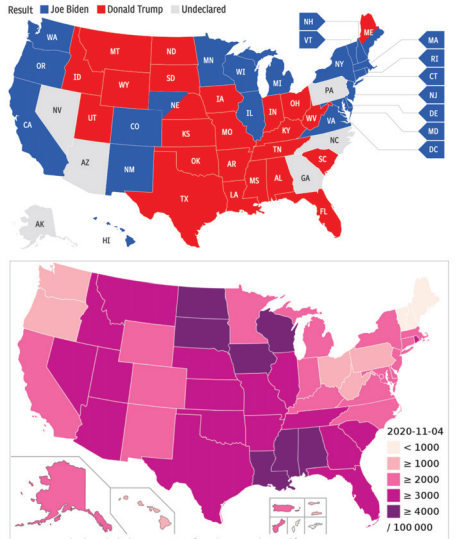


Unsung heroes of Nepal's tiger recovery

by Smriti Dahal

Nepal serves as a global tiger protection success story, despite a decade-long civil war, floods and earthquakes, tumultuous politics. The unsung heroes of this remarkable achievement are the indigenous people engaged in community conservation. Full story on [nepalitimes.com](#)

Most reached and shared on Facebook



(Un)United States of America

by Kunda Dixit

This analysis on the relative merits of Biden vs Trump for Nepal even as the counting dragged on was widely shared on the twittersphere. Biden is now the president elect, and the world is keenly watching Trump's next move. Biden's bold climate initiative and its impact on the Himalayas on [page 8](#).

Most popular on Twitter



Nepal building a highway to Everest

by Surendra Phuyal

New road linking Lukla to the rest of the country will transform the region, not all of it for the better. It is due to open by December 2022, and work is going on despite the pandemic. Visit our website for the field reportage and join the online discussion.

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QUOTE TWEETS

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Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Enterprises have gone out of business, millions have lost their jobs and sunk below the poverty line. #Nepal's macroeconomic picture looks rosy, but the ground reality is different.
- 

Hemraj Khatiwada @HemrajKhatiwad8
Only Nepalis know the price we paid due to the negligence and carelessness of Nepal Govt. The time crucial to plan a strategy to tackle the #Covid situation, our ruling party was busy in internal tussle.
- 

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
"Action to stem air pollution will not just remove a persistent urban hazard, but also reduce the spread of Covid-19 into the future," writes @dixit_ajaya in his column Climate for Change. #airpollution #COVID19
- 

Sujeev Shakya @sujeevshakya
#insightful article from @dixit_ajaya in @NepaliTimes. Nepal's sky can be this clean!
- 

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
How many #igers in #Nepal? There is enough prey and territory to support a larger tiger population in Chitwan and Parsa National Parks, says a new study. #tigerconservation
- 

Prakash Moktan @PRAMOK
...enough to sustain a healthy number of poachers!

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Twenty years ago this week in *Nepali Times* issue #17 (17-23 November 2000) a report looked at the public transport scene in Kathmandu. Not much has changed. Toyota microbuses were then replacing polluting diesel Vikram three-wheelers. The 'micro' systematised public transportation and helped curb the congestion in the Valley, but two decades later the problem has got worse. Moreover, the rise in vehicle numbers have added to the air pollution in the capital as well as increased trade deficit with India. Nepal with its clean hydroelectricity should be pushing for battery-operated vehicles and prepare infrastructure for electric mass transit. The Covid-19 crisis has only added urgency to the need of cleaning up the air.

Excerpts of the story:

While the debate over efficient and clean mass transportation continues, daily commuters in the Valley are enthusiastically exploring their different options. The new microbuses are posing stiff competition to a motley collection of Safa electric vehicles, creaking buses remaindered from highway duty, and minibuses left over from 70s overland journeys to Nepal. Diesel tempos, the old Vikrams, made their government-approved appearance on the roads in the early 90s when Kathmandu was trying to cope with a sharp increase in daily commuters. The blue smoke they



left billowing in their wake was a clear sign that this was a mistake, and the government banned Vikrams in 1999 when their emissions became intolerable. Smooth-talking environmentalists aided in the clean-up by discussing science like politicians extolling the virtues of democracy, but the owners of Vikrams were not turning green without some sort of payback. So the government allowed them modern replacements, the microbuses.

Getting rid of the 3000-odd diesel Vikram tempos was tough because they had influential owners. The 641 operators given permits to import replacement microbuses were also given subsidies—75 percent off the import duty on diesel engine microbuses and 99 percent off for those running on petrol. Each of the larger diesel microbuses cost around Rs 1.4 million after the reduced duties, and most have been funded by bank loans. The repayment plans demand an average payment of Rs 30,000 a month for five years. The microbuses do earn enough to meet the banks' demands. A microbus doing the Lagankhel-Ratnapark stretch ferries around 600 people a day spending an average of 28-30 litres of diesel. This nets the operator between Rs 1,700-2,000 after fuel costs and wages. That's close to Rs 60,000 a month. But for the city, the 250 Vikram-replacements cruising the streets are creating new problems, congestion and more pollution.

From the archives of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

Once in a Halloween Blue Moon in Kathmandu

Unlike in the West, people of the Himalaya are totally at ease with the mystery of their lunar calendar

The lichened terrace wall chaffs the back of my legs and jasmine scent floods the night air as I wait for the blue moon to rise. The gradated rosy glow of sunset has etched the forest trees a black silhouette against the sky fading along the Kathmandu Valley rim. A chorus of crickets shrills in the bushes, and my bare feet can just detect the lost glow of afternoon sun in the terracotta tiles.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

Blocked by the bulk of Shivapuri looming behind the house, the dappled golden orb was slow to reveal herself above the horizon, sailing stately into the navy night sky. The rare spectacle of a spooky full moon on Halloween 31 October visible all around the globe has not occurred since 1944, 76 years ago deep in the last dark days of World War II. The next one will not be until 2039. I shivered, even though it was not a cold evening.

It's complicated, but a so-called blue moon is when a year has 13 full moons instead of the usual 12, the name given to the third full moon in a season that has four moons (normally a quarter year has three full moons). However more recent usage refers to when two full moons fall within the same month, as happened the other night very exceptionally on Halloween.

But one thing is sure – the moon never looks blue and the event is not particularly unusual. A normal lunar cycle is 29.53 days, so two full moons are squeezed into one month about every two or three years, or seven times in 19 years to be exact. Although the origin of the name is hazy, I like the fanciful speculation that the term is derived from archaic English *belewe* or *belaewe* meaning 'to betray' because the extra moon "betrays the usual perception of one full moon per month."

So why 'once in a blue moon' to denote something that almost never happens, extremely seldom, absurd or an indefinitely long time? Under extraordinary and rare atmospheric conditions the moon has been known to appear blue, and indeed sunsets turn green and the sky red, due to dust and smoke particles caused by prolonged droughts and the volcanic explosions of Krakatoa, Mount St Helens, and Pinatubo.

In the West we have become dislocated from the celestial cycles, preferring our high days and holiday dates fixed and predictable on the annual calendar. Moons get a bad rap, unreliably made of green cheese and linked with lunacy, and blue moon crooners allude to sadness and loneliness in their songs. Easter is one of the few annual moveable feasts in the liturgical year, preceded by Lent and Holy Week and finishing with Pentecost, fifty days later. This week we mark Poppy or Remembrance Day in memory of all those lost in conflict, fixed at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the moment that the Armistice was signed in 1918.

On the other hand, people of the Himalaya are totally at ease with the mystery of lunar calendars which determine all religious festivals, life celebrations and even government rule in Nepal, as well as *tsechu* in Bhutan, *purnima* Hindu rituals and Buddhist traditions. Comfortable with uncertainty, astrologers presided over everything from royal decision making to sacred ceremonies, to ordinary existence, rites of passage, and practical concerns such as auspicious dates for travelling, initiating projects and even finding missing property.

Soon after arriving in Nepal, some cash went missing from a bedroom in the Sanepa guest house where I was staying. To resolve the acrimony and accusations, the whole household repaired to a low dark room deep in the Kathmandu bazar, traipsing up a narrow staircase with bowed heads to settle around a lady psychic seated against the wall. A blue shawl shrouded her head and a shy little boy leaned against her knee. Swaying forward she muttered incantations, then consulted the boy's palm that had been carefully smeared with a shiny black paste. We waited in awed expectation. Sure enough, the revelation on that tiny hand was able to describe a clear vision of someone entering the room, opening the trunk and taking the money. The thief was



A rare Blue Moon rising over Kathmandu on 31 October. There will not be another one till 2039.

KUNDA DIXIT

identified, and we all returned home satisfied and relieved.
Cosmology governs the sequence of

spectacular festivals that mark the Valley's seasons and 12-year cycles, integral to normal existence for local inhabitants and core

tourism attractions for visitors. I used to bike and hike through the dirt lanes and paddy fields to distant villages and far-flung temples, sampling the celebrations, witnessing the *pujas*, and processing with the pilgrims. I mixed with the colour-drenched crowds who concentrated in the Darbar Squares for vibrant festivals observed unchanged over centuries.

One Indra Jatra I found myself in the royal Rana magnificence of the great room of Kathmandu's Hanuman Dhoka Darbar, overlooking the square thronged with worshippers and pyramids of people packed onto the temple steps. As privileged guests we mingled with ministers, generals and diplomats in that imposing space beneath the sculpted columns, glittering glass chandeliers and grand vaulted windows. From our vantage on the stucco balcony, we could look directly into the intimacy of the Kumari's chariot and feel the fervour of the masked dancers.

For me it was a once in a blue moon memory, especially precious as that wing of the palace was later destroyed in the 2015 earthquake. 🇳🇵

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Tengboche abbott's last wish

The late Rinpoche had asked that amulets be distributed to protect his Sherpa people from the coronavirus

Devansh Mehta
in Tengboche

Anxiety caused by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the collapse of a tourism-dependent economy appears to have deeply worried the head monk of Tengboche Monastery below Mt Everest who died on 10 October at age 86.

Nawang Tenzin Zangbu cared about the spiritual and material welfare of his people, and ever since he became the Rinpoche, he had worked tirelessly to make tourism a key element in lifting living standards of the Sherpa people, and help pay for conservation and clean-up of the Everest region.

His death comes at an unfortunate time for the Khumbu, as the pandemic overwhelms Nepal's fragile health system and affects business from trekking and climbing for most of 2020, causing great economic hardship to porters, guides, hotels and others dependent in the Everest region.

"This year he had too much to think about for the people, and this stress may have resulted in his early death," Pemba Gyanzen Sherpa, the Gerku (custodian) of Tengboche Monastery told us. He believes stress about the impact of the pandemic on the local population of the Khumbu may have played a role in hastening the Rinpoche's demise.

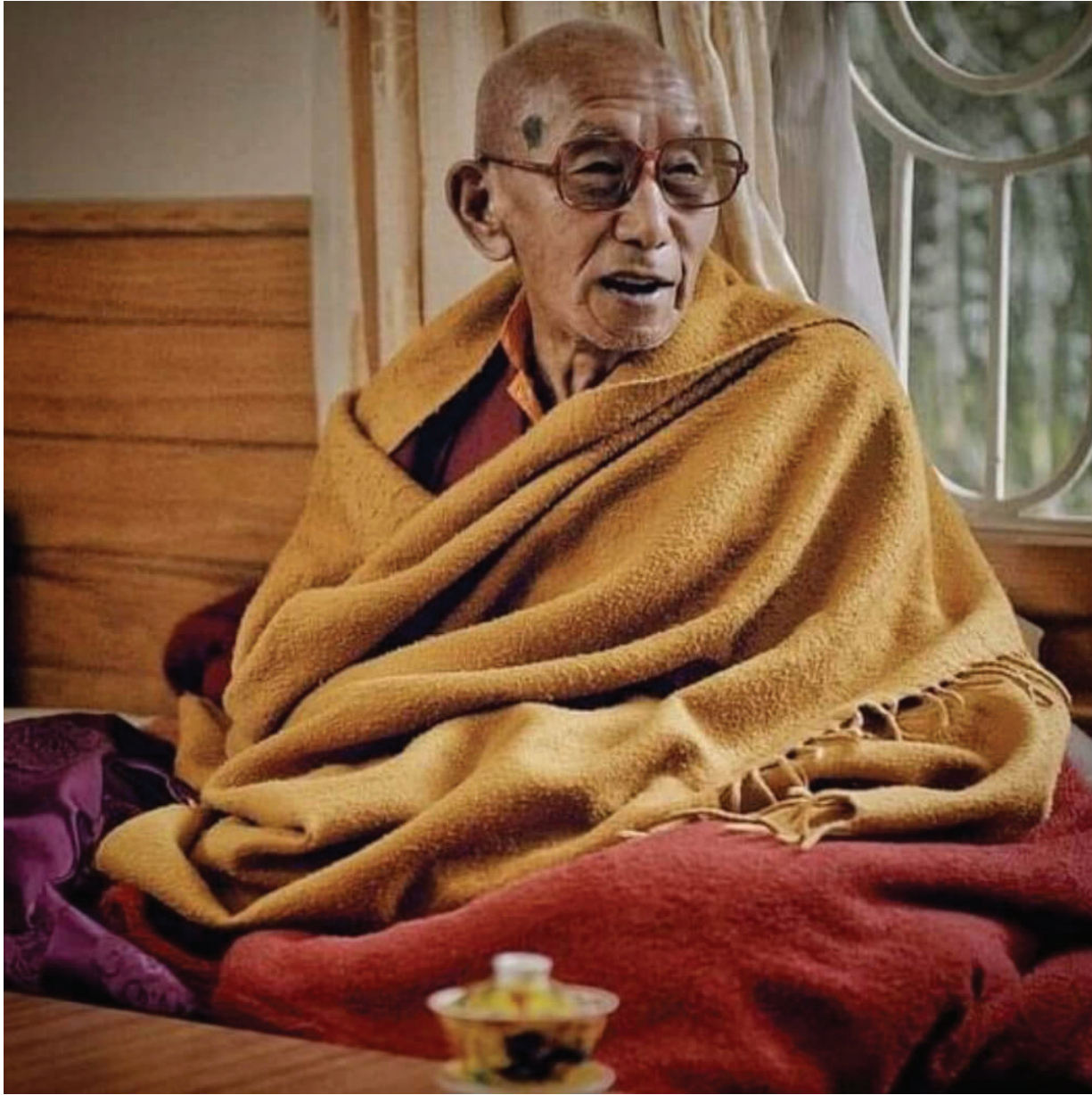
"On the day he died, the Rinpoche called me. He said that he was worried about this virus and wanted to protect all the people in Khumbu," said Pemba.

The two then drew up plans for assembling and distributing protective *buti* amulets to all the people living in Khumbu. These pouches containing herbs and other material are believed to ward off illness and protect the wearer from ill fortune.

Two days before he died, the Rinpoche had come down to Namche from Tengboche and was not feeling well. Upon reaching, he requested to have a shower. His caregiver feared that a shower would worsen his health, and so replied that it was not possible as there was no change of clothes.

The Rinpoche had difficulty breathing, and Pemba recalls that they tried giving him oxygen, but he pushed away the tube. He then made an action with his hands, immediately after which he passed away.

The Rinpoche was born to a Sherpa family in Namche on the same day as the Dalai Lama in 1935, and was recognised at age five as



The Rinpoche last year.



The Tengboche Monastery's gate wore a deserted look last week because of the Covid-19 crisis brought trekking nearly to a halt. Pemba Gyanzen Sherpa, the Gerku (custodian) of Tengboche Monastery (right).



DEVANSH MEHTA

The amulet prepared by the Monastery as per the Rinpoche's last wish for distribution to the people of Khumbu to protect them from the coronavirus. The altar for the Rinpoche at Tengboche Monastery where his body will lie for 49 days until his reincarnation (right).



the incarnation of Lama Gulu who founded Tengboche Monastery in 1916. He was sent to Tibet to study Buddhism, and returned to the Khumbu in 1956 to head the Tengboche gumba – three years after the first ascent of Mt Everest.

After he died on 10 October, the Rinpoche's body was brought back to Tengboche where he will lie in state for 49 days while prayer vigils are held for his timely reincarnation. After that the monks will determine whether to cremate the body or preserve it in a stupa near the Monastery.

The Rinpoche had been a quiet but steady presence in the Khumbu. Besides presiding over religious ceremonies for the Sherpa people, he oversaw important initiatives like the formation of the Sagarmatha National Park.

Later on in life, he became increasingly concerned about the garbage along the Everest Trail and on the mountains left by expeditions and helped set up the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee. He also spoke of his worry about how the people of the mountains had to bear the brunt of climate warming through no fault of their own.

Ever since he was selected to be the high Lama and right up to his death, he would wake up at 3AM to read advanced Buddhist texts. Pemba recalled how he and other monks requested him to discontinue this practice, and sleep a little longer to preserve his deteriorating health. However, the Rinpoche replied that it was too late to change his habits, and he would continue getting up early till his dying day.

October-November is also the time for the annual Mani Rimdu festival in Tengboche to commemorate the death of the Lama Gulu. Now in its 103rd year, Mani Rimdu has been held every year, and it appears it will not be cancelled this year despite the pandemic nor the death of the Rinpoche.

"The Rinpoche always celebrated the festival and would never have wanted us to miss it for any reason," said Pemba. "Even when he was ill, we always did the Dorche Semba prayers, and the dances for the festival."

The monks at Tengboche these days are busy, some of them praying through the night for the Rinpoche's timely reincarnation. Others are rehearsing a dance performance and completing the Dorche Semba ahead of the festival. Moreover, the Monastery is also raising funds and working out the logistics to fulfil the Rinpoche's dying wish of distributing the *buti* to all the people of Khumbu.

"Foreseeing the possibility of his death, the Rinpoche made plans so his demise would not affect the local population of Khumbu," explained Ang Nima Sherpa of Khumjung, adding that the Rinpoche's duties would be handled by the Defuk Rinpoche of the nearby monastery of Pangboche.

Meanwhile, details of the successor Rinpoche will appear to Sakya Trichen, the high Lama's close friend and the 41st head of the Sakya order of Tibetan Buddhism. After he provides a name, teams of monks will have to go and search for the family selected.

The reincarnated Rinpoche will then have to pass a test, including remembering incidents from the lives of the earlier Tengboche Rinpoche. Upon completion of the test, he will be sent for training at different monasteries, after which the Rinpoche's position at Tengboche will be occupied once again. 🇳🇵



MONIKA DEUPALA

E-shopping boom during Covid-19

Mega sales like 11.11 prove online retail is set to grow dramatically in the coming years

Alisha Sijapati

Infi Store had just begun its operation when the government announced a nationwide lockdown in March to contain the spread of coronavirus. Eight months later, the company with its out-of-the-box marketing strategy for delivery in partnership with Pathao ride service, has boomed.

Infi's collaboration with Miniso and innovative schemes like home delivery of live mountain goats and chicken for Dasain, were all the rage with customers who were wary of venturing to markets because of Covid-19.

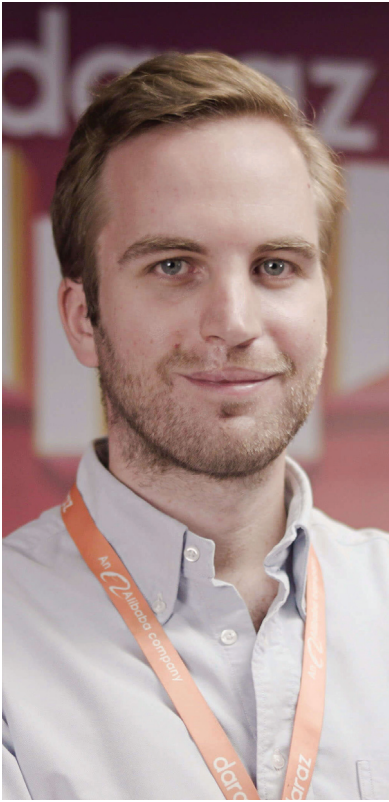
"We surprised ourselves, our business picked up because of the pandemic fears," explained Yeshu Thakali of Infi Store.

While Infi was the right idea at the right time in Nepal's nascent e-commerce ecosystem, pre-existing establishments like Daraz and Sasto Deal continue to dominate the online shopping market.

Daraz, which is a subsidiary of China's Alibaba, this year launched a pandemic iteration of its 11.11 shopping festival timed for Tihar, announcing heavy discounts on products with jacket advertising in all Kathmandu dailies and portals on Wednesday. For the third year in a row, 11.11 has taken urban middle class Nepal by storm.

"For us, 11.11 is the biggest sale day in the world led by Alibaba and every November eleventh is a learning process," Lino Ahlering, Managing Director of Daraz told *Nepali Times*.

Indeed, Daraz seems to have learnt from mishandling of 11.11 delivery in past years. "2018 was slow, 2019 was fast, 2020 will be much more faster," Ahlering said. "We are learning from our past mistakes and to rectify them we have added 700 people only for



Lino Ahlering, Managing Director of Daraz.

delivery and 200 extra for customer services."

Because of early warning and experience about the Covid-19 pandemic from sister companies in China, Singapore and other South Asian markets, Daraz appears to have been better prepared to take advantage of the lockdown and pandemic.

Another online shopping company that has seen unexpected growth during the past months is Sasto Deal, which recently partnered with India's Flipkart. When Sasto Deal started out in 2011, Nepal's Internet penetration rate was only 9%, it has now grown to 60% and is rising rapidly.

"The e-commerce potential for Nepal looks more promising than ever, and the Covid-19 crisis with the spread of the Internet has opened up new arenas, including outside Kathmandu Valley," says Sasto Deal's co-founder Amun Thapa.

Daraz came after Sasto Deal and with its aggressive promotion, took the online retail market by storm. After tying up with Alibaba, it has also benefited from the experience of the larger group with global discounting events like 11.11, which has become a household word and many Nepalis now look forward to the festival sale.

Despite the Covid-19 crisis,

e-commerce companies have pulled out all stops to gain trust from Nepal's customers, traditionally wary of shopping online and restricted by micro-credit payment restrictions. Collaboration with international partners, India's Flipkart for Sasto Deal, and China's Alibaba for Daraz have helped with technology and promotion skills.

"Nepal's culture matches with India so much more, and it was a feasible idea to get in products from Flipkart," explained Thapa. "Competition is always good and it makes the ecosystem healthy and professional, and competing with an Alibaba affiliate was a huge challenge and also a big learning experience."

Indeed, Flipkart has the experience of competing with the global giant online store Amazon in India. Both Thapa and Ahlering believe that the Nepal online retail market is big enough for both of them, and has the potential for tremendous growth. If it wasn't, they say, the international partners would not have joined in.

Ahlering of Daraz said that in a developing market like Nepal, there are always challenges to make the whole e-commerce ecosystem much more professional. "Alibaba would have never invested if it did not see a potential here in Nepal. We are very bullish about the market, a lot of people get access to products and that is a win-win situation for the e-commerce market," he added.

Sasto Deal recently also got a \$1 million investment from the Dolma Impact Fund to help the company achieve a milestone target of Rs1 billion in annual revenue within the next 18 months.

Watching the two giants of e-commerce is Yeshu Thakali from Infi Store, and he thinks the two were equipped with technical knowhow and experience of online retail to dive right into the market and seize the opportunity offered by the lockdown, just as his delivery startup did.

However, the Covid-19 crisis has also presented new obstacles for e-commerce, the growth is not matched by government policies and laws which have not caught up with the age of online commerce.

But if the government can get its act together, there is one important lesson from this year's pandemic crisis and the festival season — online shopping is here, not just to stay, but also grow dramatically in Nepal in the coming years. 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK

Nepal census

Despite Covid-19 crisis, Nepal is going ahead with national census next year and the country's population is expected to cross 30 million.



The Central Bureau of Statistics is deploying 43,000 enumerators across the country from 8-22 June, 2021 interviewing every household and digitally count not just the number of Nepal is, but also find out their socio-economic status.

The 2021 survey will cost Rs4.5 billion and will have a total of 80 questions. For the first time, the survey will also provide accurate statistics on household property, livestock, profession, migration, income, skilled human resources, access to banking services, health and education status.

It will also include a community survey, one of the first in the world, to access availability of government services, disaster preparedness and access to natural resources.

The census results are expected to show improvements in school enrolment, a lower fertility rate, and population growth rate, and income. The census may also show that Nepal's 'youth bulge' on its population pyramid will be wider. But there may be some indicators, like the sex ratio and migration, that may show lack of progress.

Ncell Covid campaign

Ncell is collaborating with the Health Ministry and UNICEF Nepal to promote physical distancing, proper use of masks and hand hygiene to raise awareness about Covid-19 pandemic.



Ncell had also contributed Rs100 million in the government-established Covid-19 Infection Prevention, Control and Treatment Fund to help procure personal protective gears, health equipment and

testing kits. It has also been supporting the COVID-19 Crisis Management Centre in contact tracing and identifying infected people since mid-April 2020.

Ncell also recently opened a centre in Bhairahawa from where customers can acquire all services and additional free mobile data offer for a limited time.

Nepal-Hong Kong money transfer

Nepalis in Hong Kong can now use WireEase Remittance to send money through City Express Money Transfer in Nepal. The sender can deposit the amount in any bank account in Nepal either through direct account transfer or wallet deposit and their beneficiaries in Nepal can receive their payments through over 10,000 payout locations of City Express



Money Transfer.

The bank transfer and wallet deposit services can be accessed free of cost until November 30, 2020.

PURE EV in Nepal

Indian Electric Vehicle Company PURE EV has entered Nepal market with its premium model 'EPluto7G' and aims to gain 10% of market share in the two-wheeler EV sector by end of 2022.



The vehicle offers top speed of 60 km/h and battery warranty for 40,000kms. The model comes with a 2.5 kWh portable battery that can travel 100kms on a single charge. PURE EV is partnering with White Lotus Motors for distribution in Nepal.

prabhu BANK

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EVENTS

13 November, Kaag Tihar

Crows are worshipped on the first day of Tihar.

14 November, Kukur Tihar and Laxmi Puja

This year, Kukur Tihar and Laxmi Puja fall under the same day. It's a day to celebrate the man's best friend and worship Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, and the holy cows.

15 November, Mha Puja
The Newa community worships oneself on this day. People elsewhere pay homage to Gobhardhan, an avatar of Lord Krishna. It's also a new year day: Nhu Daya Bhintuna in the Newa calendar.

16 November, Bhai Tika

Brothers and sisters celebrate their bond and pray for protection from Yama, the harbinger of death.

FREE FILM VIEWING

KIMFF-COVID RESPONSE INITIATIVE

KIMFF

Every year in December, Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) brings a plethora of extraordinary films from all across the world. While the festival has always demanded physical presence in the past, this year keeping in mind the Covid-19 crisis, the festival is set to go virtual with free film viewing from their website. The 2020 iteration will have 18 films to watch.

10-14 November

For more: www.kimff.org

Mt Everest Diaries

In 2008, Shailee Basnet climb Mt Everest and then led the Seven Summits Women Team which became the world's first female group to scale the highest peak in each continent. Basnet who is a mountaineer and a comedian is set to bring many funny aspects of this lifetime adventure on stage through 'Mt Everest Diaries'.

28 November, 5: 45 am NST

Tickets available at: shaileebasnet.com

Otaku Next virtual showcase

For the first time since their launch in 2014, Otaku Next, which began the popular cosplay event in Nepal is going online. The event will be divided into eight segments--Cosplay showcase, chronicles, and Q&A among others. To participate in the event, visit their various social media channels.

27 November

FESTIVE BINGE MODE

101 Dalmatians

The Story of 101 Dalmatians

101 Dalmatians

While Walt Disney's 101 *Dalmatians* have been remade over and over again, watch the first classic animated adventure made in 1961. The film tells the story of Dalmatian puppies who are kidnapped by Cruella de Vil, who wants to use their fur to make coats.

Hachi: A dog's tale

Cuddle with your pooch this cold festive season and shed a bucket full of tears which is bound to happen after you watch *Hachi: A dog's tale*. Based on a real life story set in Japan, the 2009 movie depicts the undying love and loyalty of the Akita dog Hachi to his human best friend portrayed by Richard Gere.

HACHI:

Beethoven

The cute Saint Bernard will surely melt anyone's heart in this classic family comedy *Beethoven*. Binge watch Beethoven and its franchise beginning from the 1992 classic film. The movie is based on the dog who is named after the music composer Ludwig van Beethoven.

Beethoven

Turner and Hooch

Reversing the years, head back to 1989 and watch Tom Hanks and his cop partner Beasley the dog's adventure on solving various mysteries in California. The movie was one of the biggest blockbusters of the year. Get into that time machine and enjoy this cop-comedy-drama.

TURNER & HOOCH

DESSERTS ON DELIVERY

Taza Treats

For those unversed--Taza, a Syrian restaurant based in Patan has another subsidiary Taza Treats that sell Meditterian delights for the first time in Nepal. Celebrate Tihar at home with Taza's amazing Baklavas.

Instagram: [Taza treats](https://www.instagram.com/tazatreats)

Lakuri cafe

Surprise your brothers and sisters with beautifully customised cakes and cupcakes this Bhai Tika from Lakuri Cafe in Baluwatar.

Contact: 9803477038

Tasty Donuts Nepal

Have you heard of special Lindt donuts? Recently opened online desert store, Tasty Donuts offers a wide range of flavours for donuts previously unavailable in Kathmandu. Share these special treats with your siblings and family this Tihar.

Instagram: [tastydonuts.nepal](https://www.instagram.com/tastydonuts.nepal)

Gift packages

Order special Bhai Tika packages of your choice online from these stores:

Annamaya has a special healthy box full of healthy goodies inside for Tihar. Contact their Instagram page to know more on the goodies.

Box of happiness, Lovebox Nepal, Kachuwa Ka are few online gift pages that will customise your gifts within budget.

Connect them all through their Instagram page.

oneworld

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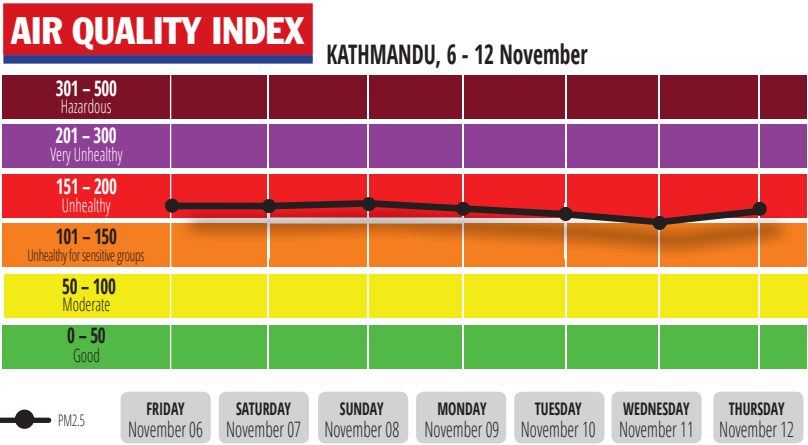
KATHMANDU

Look at this satellite image of the Subcontinent taken on Thursday at noon. The smoke haze over north India caused by crop residuet burning is still there, but luckily for us in Nepal it is being blown away to the south. This means we can look forward to a sunny and crispy Tihar weekend. The unfiltered sun will be brighter, raising the maximum temperature to 25C. the minimum will dip to the single digits.

FRIDAY 25° 10°

SATURDAY 24° 9°

SUNDAY 25° 10°



We have painted the town red with the dirty air. Daily average Air Quality Index in Kathmandu's city centre in the last seven days was consistently above 150, well into the red 'Unhealthy' zone. Crop residue burning continues across north India as well as vehicular emissions in Kathmandu were the reasons. But a fresh westerly is blowing away the smoke, so we can look forward to relatively cleaner air quality this weekend. But evening and morning peaks will still be at unhealthy levels. For hourly AQI measurements, go to www.nepalitimes.com

<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI

DON'T BUY FUR

For centuries, animals were killed for their meat and their fur was worn for warmth. Fur is still used in traditional ceremonial clothing the world over. But now, fur has become an item of luxury and fashion, and fur farming has become big business. Animals are commodified and they live and die in misery. Millions of minks, rabbits, foxes, and other wild animals spend their entire lives in cramped cages, deprived of any social or natural behaviours. In the wild, animals caught in leg-hold traps suffer excruciating pain for days without food or water. Each year, around 100 million animals – including millions of dogs and cats – are killed for their fur worldwide. More than 50 minks are killed for just one coat. Fur also requires toxic chemical treatments to stop rotting and decomposition. Animal waste runoff also causes immense greenhouse gases and soil and waterways pollution. Far from being a natural resource, fur production is an intensely toxic and energy-consuming process.

#FridaysForFuture

OUR PICK

Released 20 years ago, *Harry Potter* series has now gained cult classic status, the movies and the books continue to be the first pick for many. Starring Daniel Radcliffe as Harry Potter along with Rupert Grint and Emma Watson as Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* based on JK Rowling's bestseller on the wizarding world is still worth a watch.

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

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।

नेपाल सरकार

सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग



Rashmi Tuladhar at home with one of her dozen resident dogs.

All photos: SHRISTI SHERCHAN

Every day is Dog Day

For Rashmi Tuladhar, strays need care all year round not just on Kukur Tihar

Shristi Sherchan

Kathmandu's community canines already seem to sense that their special day is coming soon on 14 November, Kukur Tihar. That is when they are ritually worshipped as the messengers of Yamaraj, the god of death.

But for Rashmi Tuladhar, every day is dog day.

Ever since she was a child, she took care of the dogs and cats in her *tole* – these were not abandoned strays but community pets. No one owns them, but everyone does.

Over the years, Rashmi's bond with dogs in her neighbourhood grew, and today at age 40 she has been taking care of several generations of dogs, while keeping some of the more needy ones in her own house in Asan.

The pandemic has been tough on Kathmandu's community dogs, there is less food to rummage through and many butcher and food shops are closed. And, ironically, while dogs will be worshipped on Saturday morning by being fed treats, Tihar fire crackers will scare the wits out of them in the evening.

Rashmi Didi, as she is affectionately known in her neighbourhood, gets up before dawn every morning. Not to



One of Rashmi's resident senior dog looks out of the window awaiting her return from her feeding round.

visit the temples as some of her neighbours, but to prepare the morning meal for the 100 community canines that she cares for: from Asan to Ratna Park, and as far as Ghanta Ghar. Rashmi keeps another dozen or so seniors and injured dogs in her cramped ancestral home.

"Many people just see them as filthy animals who are always breeding endlessly, so they either do not take care of them or mistreat them," says Rashmi while on her daily rounds to check up on the dogs in her neighbourhood.

The dogs recognise her from afar, and run towards Rashmi, tails wagging furiously. For Rashmi, there is less of a religious motivation to appease the god of death in this work. She is driven

more by compassion for fellow sentient beings.

She gets help from animal welfare organisations Animal Nepal and Catmandu Lovers to sterilise and vaccinate the dogs and cats, and also treat those who are sick or injured. "Their help has made me realise that there are good people in this world too," she says.

Rashmi herself is handicapped, her right hand is partly paralysed. From a young age, she faced discrimination and bullying for being a 'cripple'. She says she still cannot understand how people can be so cruel, adding that her special bond with dogs probably comes from identifying with the way the animals are also mistreated by humankind.

"For me, humans are the ones



Rashmi Tuladhar feeding community dogs in her neighbourhood in Asan during her morning rounds.

more difficult to deal with in this world," she explains matter-of-factly. "I have seen people abandoning their own pets on the streets, some leave them to suffer in cages. I cannot understand why they bring home a dog or a cat only to leave them on the streets."

While on her morning rounds, Rashmi's neighbours stop by to chat with her. Strangers sometimes ask her why she is feeding the dogs, and they cannot understand why she does it.

"These animals cannot express themselves in a way we humans understand, they cannot ask for help. People are mean to them, they throw hot water or rocks, beat them with sticks," she says. "Some people even say hurtful things even while I am feeding them. But

at least these dogs know not all humans are nasty in this life that we are living together."

Although she may sound despondent, Rashmi sees hope in young people in her neighbourhood who stop by to pet the dogs she is feeding. Many say they do not have dogs at home, but would like to have one. Rashmi recognises every dog on the streets by their names, and introduces them to the children.

After completing her daily round, Rashmi heads home to feed and care for her own resident dogs, who yelp happily to see her return.

She says: "This is what makes me happy. My disability does not affect me so why should it affect others? I just hope people were kinder." 🇳🇵

A Biden presidency, climate and the Himalaya

The United States re-entering the Paris climate accord will be a huge deal for the Nepal Himalaya

Sonia Awale

With just 4% of the world's population, the United States is responsible for over 15% of annual global carbon emissions. What America does or does not do will affect how fast the Himalayan ice cap will melt during this century.

Which is why Joe Biden's win in the US election is such a big deal for the global environment, including the Himalaya. Biden has announced he will reverse Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, which ironically came into effect on 4 November, the day after the US vote.

The Himalayan arc from Burma to Afghanistan is the biggest storehouse of fresh water after the two polar regions, and it is warming between 0.3-0.7°C faster than the global average. The loss of Himalayan ice would have devastating consequences for 1.6 billion people living in the mountains, and in downstream countries.

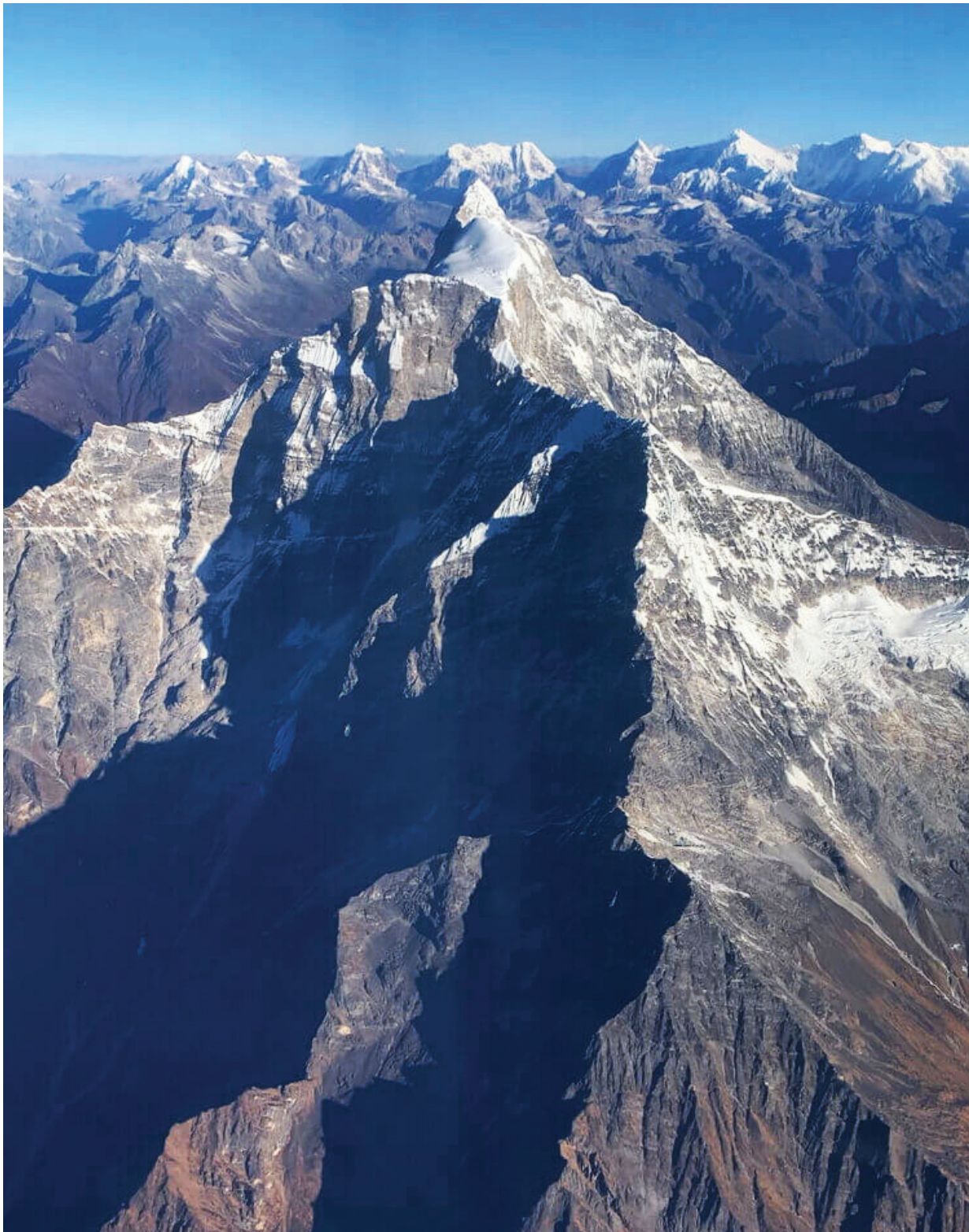
"Reversing these warming trends will begin with Biden's commitment to re-joining the Paris agreement, as the US is not only one of the world's greatest climate offenders but also one of its best potential leaders and sources of needed funding," said Alton C Byers of the University of Colorado, who has studied Himalayan glaciers for the past 30 years.

The Paris Agreement aims to cap the global temperature rise in this century 'well below' 2°C by reducing carbon emissions through renewable energy technologies, and protecting forests and biodiversity.

But rejoining the Paris accord will be the easy part. Much harder for the Biden presidency will be overcoming domestic opposition to cutting emissions at home, push rapid transition to clean energy, and funding global carbon reduction initiatives.

The Biden administration may be more supportive of projects like USAID efforts in the past that have helped Nepal become a global leader in glacial lake risk reduction, adaptation, and climate mitigation measures.

"These projects are in need of resurrection, along with the development of renewable energy technologies, sustainable tourism, and other opportunities as part of



The south face of Mt Gauri Shankar (7,134m) on the border between Nepal and China is bare rock, and shows how dramatically the snowline has receded, and the glaciers have shrunk.

KUNDA DIXIT

Nepal's post-coronavirus recovery plans," Byers added in an email interview with *Nepali Times*.

Joe Biden ran on a bold climate action platform, unveiling a \$2 trillion investment plan with a promise to clean up the energy sector by 2035, boost renewables and create high paying green jobs.

The Biden-Harris win has raised hopes among environmentalists around the world, but the world has a lot of catching up to do to reverse Trump's systematic effort over the past four years to undermine climate mitigation measures. The new administration in January will also likely face a serious opposition from a possible Republican-led Senate as it seeks to transition America off fossil fuels.

"To regain credibility on climate, the US now has to show the world that it is on a path to net zero emissions by 2050, only then can America press other high-emitting countries to act with the urgency required by the climate crisis," added Adam Stern, a California-based climate leader, formerly with the Environmental Defense Fund.

"If Biden can restore the role of science in determining US climate policy, he may also be able to focus world attention on regions like the Himalaya that are already experiencing extreme climate changes," said Stern, who has written about energy use in Nepal's Khumbu region.

International climate policies will have a lasting impact on the

Himalaya where measurements of ice mass, temperature rise, glacial shrinking and receding snowlines have been more serious than previous estimates.

However, experts say that Nepal also has to do its bit to accelerate its shift to solar and hydropower in generating electricity for transport and household use. And since nearly a quarter of melting of Himalayan glaciers is attributed to the deposition of soot and dust on the snow, transboundary collaboration in pollution control is a must.

Since October, for example, northern India has been blanketed by thick smoke from crop residue burning, and this black carbon is being blown up to the snows by

prevailing westerlies. And as winter sets in, industrial and vehicular pollution will be trapped by inversion across the Indo-Gangetic plains and ultimately reduce the reflectivity of Himalayan ice cover.

Air pollution was already decreasing the average lifespan of tens of millions of people in north India by 3.7 years. It killed 42,100 people in Nepal last year alone, studies show, and this winter that risk for patients with respiratory issues is combined with Covid-19 complications.

The causes and solutions of air pollution and climate change are intricately interconnected, both largely affected by human activities over time and space. In fact, short-lived pollutants like black carbon, ozone and other gases exacerbate global warming.

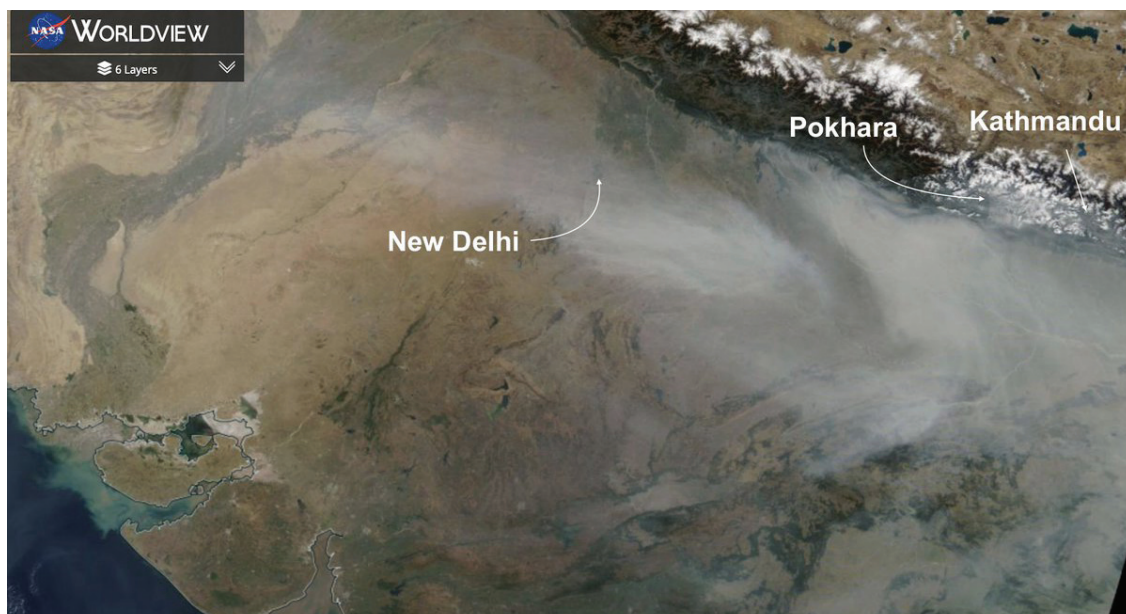
"Dark coloured pollutants such as soot particles from diesel and forest fires absorb sunlight and warm up the air at the altitude at which they are located," explained atmospheric scientist Arnico Panday. "If they warm the air near snow or ice surfaces they can contribute to melting. And when dark particles, including windblown desert dust, settle on snowfields or glaciers they can darken the surfaces and melt the snow and ice. Certain air pollutants therefore accelerate glacier melt in the Himalaya."

Even though a Biden presidency has given some hope for climate activists in the Himalaya, they point out that China has overtaken the United States, responsible for 28% of total carbon emissions in 2018. Carbon emissions in China and India are growing at a faster rate than in North America, and the two countries already contribute 37% of global greenhouse gases annually.

So, while a greener America will help, the real action to slow Himalayan melting will have to come from the immediate region. The good news is there are already proven clean technologies for brick kilns, cement industries, solar and hydro here in Nepal and in South Asia. Governments need to incentivise these, provide subsidies, and investors need to back them up.

"Air pollution has never made it to the priority of our politicians, their mentality of focusing on short-terms gains like tax revenue over long-term gains can't be changed," says Manjeet Dhakal, adviser to the Least Developed Countries support group at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

He adds: "We must deploy our own young population to lobby and take part in climate action. What happens in the United States, whether international funds will be available will only help temporarily. We must cut emissions at source, educate our own people about the cost of the climate crisis, and provide alternatives." 🇳🇵



Crop fire smoke moves across North India on 7 November to blanket Nepal's mid-mountains.

NASA EARTH



Photograph from the International Space Station on 28 January 2020 of the Tibetan Plateau (left) and Kathmandu circled.

NASA

In just 2 years, a Nepal peak becomes snowless

The bare rock face of once-icy Mt Saipal has flabbergasted scientists and locals

Basant Pratap Singh
in Bajhang

Mountaineers, scientists, climate researchers, and local shepherds are all flabbergasted by a 7,000m high mountain in remote far western Nepal which seems to have lost almost all snow in the past two years.

The long glacial valley below Mt Saipal offers one of the most iconic mountain views in Nepal, its rare beauty enhanced by the sheer inaccessibility of the place. It takes an hour-long flight from Kathmandu, an arduous 12-hour jeep ride over treacherous switchbacks, and a week of trekking to get to Ranikharka at the base of the mountain.

Rajendra Dhama is 41 years old, and first trekked up to this stunning valley in 2002. Since then, he has been there every year with fellow villagers to graze sheep and pick yarsagumba.

"It was a difficult journey to take the sheep up those paths, but once up there it was like heaven, with the ice wall of Saipal right above us," Dhama recalls, "I would not get tired of looking at the frozen face of that beautiful mountain. And sometimes when there was not much work, I used to walk up to the turquoise glacial lake and right to the base of that gigantic wall. Saipal is beautiful in every season, even when it is cloudy and you only get an occasional peek at it."

Dhama used to spend months up there, collecting the valuable caterpillar fungus on the moraine slopes below Mt Saipal, which is 7,031m high and the second-highest mountain in the range on Nepal's western border with India.

The meadows have lush grass in the summer, and the yarsagumba fetches a good price from middle men who take them up to the border to sell to traders in China, where the fungus is believed to have therapeutic properties in traditional medicine.



The South Face of Mt Saipal (7,031m) in October 2008.

October 2008

WANDA VIVEQUIN

In the 2017 local elections, Dhama stood for Chair of Saipal Municipality and won. But even after that, the mountain constantly beckoned him, and he has been lobbying to make Mt Saipal the centre of a new tourism destination project. So, this Dasain he took the MP of the Federal Parliament Asha BK to his favourite place. What he saw shocked him.

"The south face of Saipal was virtually snowless, I could not believe my eyes, I could not recognise the mountain I knew by heart," he says. "How could all that snow have suddenly melted, especially when peaks lower than Saipal still have snow?"

Jabbare Bohara is 72, and has been walking up to Ranikharka since he was 10 to graze sheep in

the monsoon. He tells us: "In the last 60 years, I have never seen anything like it. It is just bare rock. It used to have snow even during periods of long drought."

Strangely, this winter Bajhang saw record snowfalls, the heaviest in 25 years. Even the lowest point in the district at 917m was covered in snow. Dhama's theory is that because of the excess snow this

winter, there might have been a huge avalanche that took all the snow down.

However, the more likely explanation is climate heating that has caused glaciers to shrink, and snowlines to retreat at an unprecedented and accelerated rate across the world's highest mountain range.

In a report last year, the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) predicted that at the rate the mountains were melting, one-third of Himalayan ice and snow would be gone during this century. And that was just their best-case scenario.

Indeed, visitors have noted that Nepal's other famous mountain, Mt Machapuchre (6,990m) north of Pokhara, this year looks like a black rock pyramid. Glaciers in eastern Nepal have been replaced by large and expanding lakes.

Saipal's south face is almost vertical, and it is not easy for snow accumulation. In winter the jet stream lashes Himalayan peaks above 7,000m with high winds, blowing away even the snow that clings to the rock face.

Studies done in Langtang Glacier and other parts of Nepal have also shown that deposition of soot particles from industrial pollution and forest fires on snow slopes accelerate their melting by 20%. Since Saipal is directly north of the industrial heartland of north India, experts say it may be getting the dust and soot which reduces the snow's reflective capacity, melting it faster.

"It may be a combination of a steep south-facing rock face and global warming which triggered a massive avalanche that swept the snow down," says Arun Bhakta Shrestha, a climate expert at ICIMOD. "It is all the more puzzling because this happened in a year when there has been heavy snowfall. This needs more study." When shown the most recent photos from last week, a member of an unsuccessful Spanish expedition to Mt Saipal two years ago also expressed surprise that so much snow could melt so quickly on a 7,000m peak.

Even Sudeep Thakuri, a professor of environmental science at Tribhuvan University is astonished. He says: "From the pictures, I notice that the south face has lost not just its snow but also the ice cover. It must be a combination of climate change and high winds." 🇳🇵



October 2018

PHOTOS: BASANT PRATAP SINGH



October 2020

New Delhi's new dealings in Nepal

Imperious ambassadors, eager princelings and invasive spy-masters -- Kathmandu has seen, and survived, them all

Kanak Mani Dixit

When Kathmandu Valley was still known as *Swoniga* (three cities), back in the medieval Lichhavi-Malla era, the Ganga plains did not send diplomats or spies here, they sent rulers. The Lichhavi arrived from nearby Vaishali, and later the dynasty of Mallas from Tirhut/Karnataka.

The unifying king Prithvi Narayan Shah instructed his followers and successors to be wary of the East India Company, which was then galloping across the Indo-Gangetic plain in conquest and about to swallow Avadh. He chastened the British with devastating defeat at the battle of Sindhuli Gadi in 1767, and it was only after the Kathmandu Darbar under Bhimsen Thapa became territorially ambitious in its eyes that the Company Bahadur waged war. The guerilla tactics of the Gorkhali *fauj* were no match for the heavy ordnance deployed by the Viceroy, and Kathmandu sued for peace.

The Treaty of Sugauli (1815) not only reduced Nepal to its present size and shape, but it also extracted concession in the form of a residency in Kathmandu, and that is when, for the first time, the consolidated southern power became a player in the Nepali polity. The political actors were in thrall of the British Resident at Lazimpat (from 'lodging part', according to some) and Lainchaur ('lain' from 'civil lines') and the sheer military power he represented. And the kings and *bhardar* nobility were not above using it to benefit when it suited them.

This proclivity continues, with Nepali politicians cosying up to Indian interlocutors (diplomats, spies) while in power, and turning virulently anti-Indian when out. The best example is the Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, always taking matters to an extreme, who wrote supplicatory letters to Indian intelligence agency heads, and yet dug trenches to ward off an Indian invasion.

In the mid-19th century, the polymath diplomat Brian Houghton Hodgson was the resident Machiavelli of Kathmandu, playing a delicate game of supporting and warning various factions in the Darbar, even while treading a fine line with the Governor-General in Calcutta. One tool often used was safe passage to Banaras for Darbar dissidents, and their upkeep in the holy city as a useful political pawns.

Hodgson supported the rise of Jang Bahadur who, following his 1850-51 visit to Queen Victoria's England (and then France), decided that siding with the Company was geopolitically the best option for Kathmandu.

The lasting gift of the Ranas to Nepal, utilising all the goodwill they had amassed with the British colonial powers, which enriched them beyond belief, was to negotiate and sign the Nepal-Britain Treaty of 10 December 1923, under which the British accepted Nepal's sovereign status. The country was

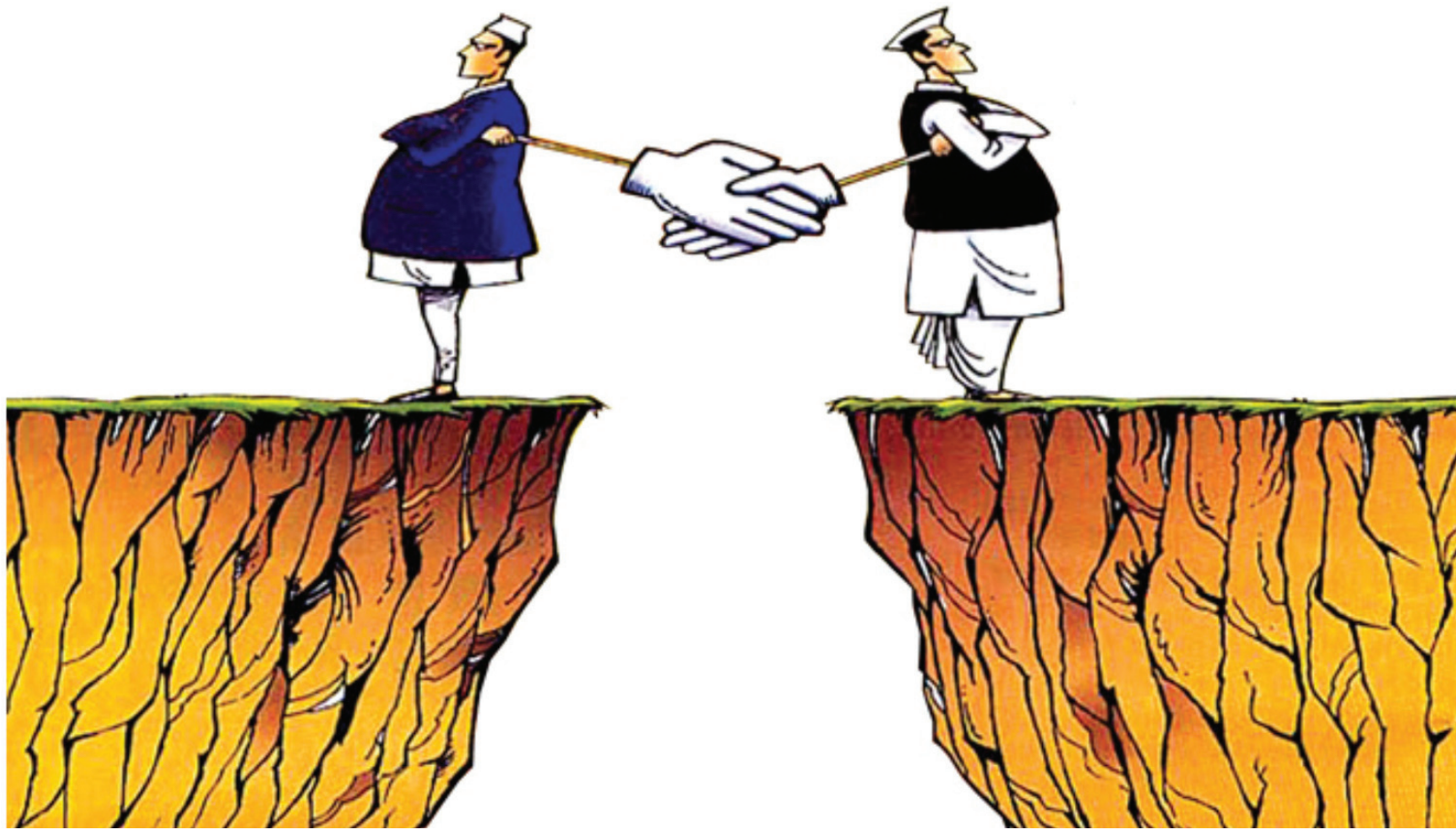


ILLUSTRATION: SUBHAS RAI

lifted above the level of princely states of the Subcontinent which were much richer than Nepal and potentially more powerful, and made Nepal a one-of-a-kind power within the otherwise colonised Subcontinent. This, in turn, would provide protection when the point of acquisitive Indian Independence arrived.

The shift of the colonial capital to New Delhi in 1938 pushed Kathmandu into an era of uncertainties, with the security of Calcutta's cosmopolitanism overtaken by the New Delhi's unabashed imperium, whoever the rulers may be. Thereafter, India's transition from colony to self-rule meant that the nuanced relationship informed by culture and history was dumped for a power relationship.

Young political activists from Nepal saw that Rana rule would not end unless the British were pushed out of the Subcontinent, and enthusiastically joined the struggle for Indian Independence. In the process, they developed deep links, as equals, with India's emerging political class. Little did they know Independence would make the new Indian rulers – politicians as well as members of the civil service – don the mantle of the departed colonials. The haughty posture of the Indian interlocutor is matched only by the obsequiousness of the later generation of Nepali politicians, which continues to give many Delhi-wallahs today a sense of empire.

Dakota Diplomacy

One turning point in the relationship between Indian and Nepali politicians can be said to have occurred in 1950 at a meeting between the newly anointed Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, and his erstwhile fellow-revolutionary Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, still a freedom-fighter against the Ranas. When a DC-3 aircraft loaded with money looted from the Rana customs point at Birganj landed at Safdarjang Airport in Delhi, Nehru had the aircraft surrounded by security and the cargo confiscated. Later, at Teen Murti House, the livid prime minister confronted Koirala. BP understood that the 'bilateral' dynamic between the

two comrades had changed, and from a fellow revolutionary Nehru had transformed into a head of government with attendant interests and responsibilities.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's attitude towards Nepal has since been adopted by successive prime ministers right down to Narendra Modi (except the internationalist and regionalist I K Gujral) and the ambassadors, diplomats, visiting and resident spooks. While Nepal's sovereignty was left intact in the course of India gaining Independence, this did not mean that New Delhi's influence waned. The Ranas were so weakened that in formal ceremonies the Indian ambassador had an elevated place in the dais. Nehru made a charade of three-way talks between himself, the Ranas and the Nepali Congress, while foisting an interim government on Nepal with a Rana as Prime Minister and the revolutionary Nepali Congress in secondary position. Indian bureaucrats attended and guided Nepal's cabinet meetings, and India went on to place more than a dozen listening posts in the mountains to monitor Chinese activities.

The severely weakened Rana regime, just before it fell, signed a treaty of peace and friendship with India on 31 July 1950. The treaty has rankled Kathmandu's political class, starting with the fact that it was signed by a Nepali prime minister and an Indian ambassador. However, the treaty did lay out reciprocal obligations among equals, such as mutually acknowledging 'the complete sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of each other'.

Nepal provides a refreshing change from the larger nation-states of South Asia, for being a country of heterogeneous population and a size that ensures the citizens are not too far removed from the fount of political power. While there are enough inherited and extant issues of mal-development, marginalisation, exploitation and Kathmandu-centricism, Nepalis have the possibilities of making the 'nation-state' work more than elsewhere – and not just because it is the oldest in the Subcontinent.

As long as Nepal was an absolute monarchy, the

understandings and adjustments were made at the highest level between Narayanhiti Royal Palace and 7 Race Course Road, so there was little for diplomats – or espionage agents – to do. The Royal Nepal Embassy at Barakhamba Road was little more than a post box of the royal family, and government secretaries negotiating with Indian counterparts never had much leeway, always waiting for instructions from the Royal Palace Secretariat.

The fall of absolute monarchy in 1990 was a demand of the Nepali people. But the show of political solidarity by Indian politicians including Chandra Shekhar was important, and is used by many kneejerk analysts to cry Indian heavy-handedness. It was the People's Movement which ushered democracy and the new Constitution of November 1990, but it is also true that the new polity with its multiple power-centres provided more opportunity for Indian diplomacy to engage as well as for the spreading tentacles of the Indian intelligence, particularly R&AW and IB.

How these external and internal espionage agencies divided (and continue to carve up) the Nepal turf between themselves is a matter for some scholar/researcher to pick up in the days to come, for nothing that is done so openly should remain unremarked or un-analysed.

Nepal became a playground for all kinds of Indian actors, and in hindsight, it becomes clear that so many roadblocks in bilateral relations have to do with the fact that one hand of the Indian state often did not know what the other was doing. Down the timeline this is seen in the rise of the Maoists (when some agency seems to have been involved in training the rebels), the Indian blockade of 2015 (when someone in a darkened New Delhi cubbyhole decided to teach Nepal a lesson for going its own way in adopting the new Constitution) and the latest India-Nepal tangle on the ownership of the Limpiyadhura-Lipu Lek stretch north of Kumaon (where the Indian Army's plans to inaugurate the road to the Lipu Lek pass was not communicated to South Block).

In the democratic era since

the 1990s, India got active in influencing Nepal in various ways, from relatively benign to nefarious. Gradually a point of view developed with the political class that you had to have 'New Delhi *dahina*' if you wanted to move ahead in politics. Within its own geopolitical space, with the rise of Chinese interest and activity in Kathmandu still years away, Nepal was in a unipolar space where New Delhi's goodwill became essential for success in national politics.

However, in equal and opposite measure, India's tight embrace helped develop an anti-Indianism among the intelligentsia, also to be used by politicians out of power. It would seem that India was all-power and all-capable in pulling strings and levers on Nepal, often getting 'credit' for things it had no role in. For some in Kathmandu it seemed as if India's entire foreign policy had nothing better to do than destabilise Nepal. The more likely scenario was that New Delhi's rulers were so preoccupied elsewhere that the diplomats – and intelligence agents in particular – ran amok, with the policy-makers in New Delhi completely oblivious until after the damage was done.

The rise of the Maoists in Nepal gave different Indian functionaries further room to frolic. While at least some entity in the Indian security establishment seems to have worked to impart training to Maoists, other parts of the Indian establishment sought to take advantage of the weakening of the Nepali state during the conflict. When challenged on Maoists having a free run of India to make forays into Nepal, Ambassador Shyam Saran told this writer back in the day: "We can't locate our own Maoists, how do you expect us to keep track of yours? India is a big country!"

The decisive entry of Indian intelligence into Nepal happened at the hands of the Maoists. The Nepal Army, which had kept out of the fray for six long years after the start of the conflict in 1996 while the Nepal Police very inadequately tackled the Maoists, finally picked up the gun, and after a few debacles gradually got the upper hand. The rebels felt the heat and began to look for a way out. Once a schism between the supreme Pushpa

Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) and chief ideologue Baburam Bhattarai (Laldhoj) had been patched up, it is said with the interlocution of Indian intelligence, the two leaders wrote a letter to the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee asking for a hearing.

National Security Adviser to Prime Minister Vajpayee, Brajesh Mishra, directed the Maoist duo to write to the Intelligence Bureau, an instruction they dutifully complied with. Before long, the Dahal and Bhattarai had a deal with India’s spy-masters, and thereafter the Maoists had the run of India without having to face harassment, and they found it easy to make forays across the length of the Nepali border. Meanwhile, the Maoist leadership holidayed in Gurgaon and Noida.

This deal between Indian intelligence and Nepal’s Maoists meant that the leaders of the democratic parties of the Nepal, too, were forced to deal with Indian spooks in order to make contact and conduct negotiations with Dahal and Bhattarai, even as King Gyanendra was developing autocratic tendencies in Kathmandu. Indian intelligence thus got into the inside track of Nepal’s polity.

The 12-point deal with the Maoists that led to the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006 was negotiated between the Maoists and UML and NC leaders in and around Delhi. It was obvious that the Indian authorities were in the know, but it would be excessive to say that India brokered or directed the deal, as some self-flagellating Nepali analysts would have one believe. The reason the 12-point deal was vital, even if it was negotiated in a foreign land, is that in 2005 an average of 7-8 Nepali citizens were dying every day at the hands of fellow Nepalis.

Before long, the activism of the apparatchiks evolved from ‘handling’ Maoists in India to overt dealings in Kathmandu. Lainchaur’s diplomatic function was eclipsed by the agents even as the country got into the difficult phase of constitution-writing, where too they pushed and pulled. When we say India was micromanaging affairs in Nepal, it rapidly came to mean micro-manipulation by Indian intelligence officials.

Having made themselves comfortable in Kathmandu, the apparatchiks realised that they had a handle on the running of a good-sized country, not possible anywhere in the world. And so, with the blessings of the PMO in New Delhi, the spies went outward, and wayward. Perhaps the leadership felt that the perceived security threat represented by the open Nepal-India border required ‘handling’ Nepal differently than any other country, but again and again the adventurism has come back to haunt India. For example, the Blockade stiffened the spine of Nepalis and hence the state, and made Nepal look for the northward passage for commerce and connectivity, and elevated K P Oli to the prime ministerial seat with overwhelming mandate.



King Mahendra with Prime Minister B P Koirala. Nepal was not big enough for the two of them.

The question that has not been answered to satisfaction is why the spy agencies have been allowed to function so openly in Kathmandu. The utility of a spy agency is said to optimum when its work remains hidden, with full deniability. Yet in Kathmandu the only thing the agents do not do is give out visiting cards saying ‘Station Chief’. Amongst all the shenanigans, a Nepali may be forgiven for taking solace in the fact that the spooks are above ground and very visible – something to be said for transparency.

In India’s engagement with Kathmandu, the Nepali side has been increasingly confused by who to believe, where the buck stops. They have had to decipher from the plethora of acronyms – MEA, NSA, IB, R&AW, PMO and so on. Who is in the driver’s seat? Lately, at the very least there has been evolving clarity, that it is not the behemoth MEA but the personage of the National Security Adviser Ajit Doval with shoulder-to-shoulder proximity to Prime Minister Modi who calls the shots.

As the Constitution-writing got underway in 2008, one can imagine that the Indian diplomatic corps was perturbed by what was being done by the agencies on the ground and in corridors of power in India’s name. In the meantime, the Nepali politicians had no choice but to engage with the intelligence fellows, either the station chief, or the R&AW or IB bosses who came on secret visits without doing much to hide their presence. Is a spy agency that does not bother to be undercover actually more benign?

During the term of the first Constituent Assembly, some extraordinary mind in New Delhi decided to use the opportunity to create a ‘buffer’ for India by proposing a One-Madhes-One-

Pradesh formula for federalism. Any demographer, geographer, anthropologist or sociologist – let alone a politician – would have said that this was a crazy idea, to have a strip that is 500 miles long and less than 20 miles wide along the stretch of a Tarai so full of demographic, linguistic diversity, and which were connected economically to the hills and to the south across the border.

While many have remarked that during the 2000s, the US began to outsource its Nepal policy to India, the more egregious reality was that Indian establishment itself had outsourced much of its Nepal policy to the intelligence agencies. From my time as a law student in Delhi University in the late 1970s, I knew that the best the brightest applicants to Indian officialdom joined the IFS, IAS and IPS, in that order, and not the intelligence agencies. What would Nepal have to bear, being thus saddled with spies who were neither capable nor accountable?

Besides the attempt to co-opt Madhesi politics, Indian intelligence in coordination with the Embassy tried to control Nepali politics through the appointment of Lok Man Singh Karki, a defrocked former bureaucrat and power-broker. At that time when the influence of Indian intelligence was at its peak, and the entire political class from the opposition leaders to the prime minister and president blanched. The term they all used when challenged as to why they agreed in 2014 to Lokman Singh Karki’s appointment was “*badhyata*”, that they had no choice. The last chapter on the Karki episode has yet to be written.

To give them due credit, the politicians of Nepal were responding to reality when they rolled with the punches that the Indian political, diplomatic and intelligence establishments threw at them. Besides, for all the pressures to kowtow to India, the careers of individual politicians required that they not to be seen as doormats for India – only the Madhesi politicians were not given that privilege.

When the time came, after the failure of the first Constituent Assembly, and for the second one to adopt the Constitution in September 2015, the New Delhi establishment decided unilaterally that the date should be pushed back to accommodate what it stated were Madhesi concerns. Then Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar was sent as personal emissary

by Prime Minister Modi to stall the proceedings in 2015, he arrived with a viceregal attitude only to be roundly rebuffed. To show its displeasure, and indicating the lack of knowledge or caring about Nepali society’s sense of self and its resilience, New Delhi imposed an economic blockade on Nepal starting 23 September 2015. A narrative was sought to be created that the closure was actually the handiwork of Madhesi activists blocking off the rest of the country and fellow-citizens.

Excesses of the Kathmandu-centric state, and the harsh response of the security agencies against the demonstrators who were part of the Madhes Movement and the scores of deaths which resulted, are yet to be properly investigated and accountability assigned. Similarly, the Blockade was imposed by New Delhi for its own supposed ends rather than for any category of the Nepali population. The Indian mainstream media once again became a readymade ‘force multiplier’ for the Indian state, given its proclivity to speak from government handouts when it comes to foreign affairs, particularly in South Asia.

The Indian Blockade helped accelerate Nepal’s moves to open up its northern border for commercial connectivity, including third-country transit. The resistance to the action in Nepal proved to a surprised political class in New Delhi that the manhandling would not work, and one hopes that this lesson would become part of institutional memory. On the whole, Nepal as a country emerged stronger for having passed the test with resolve, and unity among most demographic categories, a collaboration between the people and selected political leaders and selected civil society stalwarts.

After the Blockade was lifted, the relationship was gradually rebuilt, and Modi and Oli began having easy telephonic conversations. But then in May 2020, the two countries were again taken to the brink with the Limpiyadhura crisis. The Survey of India published a new official political map so as to display the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir, but even as it angered China with regard to Aksai Chin, the publication highlighted once again for Nepalis the fact that the area where India kept its Kalapani garrison as well as the entire Limpiyadhura Triangle was shown to be in India. But matters only took a strident course in Kathmandu after Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on 8 May inaugurated a track built through the territory claimed by Nepal.

Not to be outdone, the Indian Chief of Army Staff M M Naravane piped up to imply publicly that Nepal was being put up by China to raise the Lipu Lek issue, setting off an uproar in Kathmandu. It has taken nearly eight months for things to cool down enough for the general to make the traditional goodwill visit this week to Kathmandu, long delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the fallout of his remark.

One would have been forgiven for thinking that there could be no going back after the series of setbacks, but it turns out the Indo-Nepal bilateral relationship is made of sterner stuff. With the passage of time, emerging global alignments, and the skirmishes with the PLA on the Ladakh frontier, Modi seems to have decided it was important to make up with Kathmandu. The ice was broken with Oli picking up the phone to greet Modi on the occasion of India’s Independence Day on 15 August. In reply, Modi said he would be sending a special emissary to Kathmandu to talk things over.

When the emissary did come on 21 October, it turned out to be Samant Kumar Goel, head of the external intelligence agency R&AW, leading a team from various wings of the Indian government. Modi had pulled a fast one, and sent his top spy-master.

The deputation of the R&AW Chief to Nepal was a decision of Narendra Modi, and it reflects upon his exclusive way of conducting foreign policy out of the PMO via his security adviser, Ajit Doval, rather than through India’s foreign service superstructure led by Foreign Minister S Jaishankar that has been left twiddling its thumbs.

The fact that the Goel delegation arrived while Vinay Mohan Kwatra, Indian Ambassador to Nepal, was in New Delhi for consultations may or may not be significant. But it has been suggested that the deputation of Goel has less to do with an intention to deliberately demean Kathmandu, and more the result of a power struggle in New Delhi between the various agencies on who is to take the lead on Nepal. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the trip has damaged the fabric of bilateral relations, the Nepali public has once more been made wary. Oli has enough to answer to the Nepali public in terms of poor governance despite a unique opportunity to govern a full term – which has not happened in Nepal since the Ranas were ousted in 1950.

Whenever India intervenes, sooner or later Nepal reacts. Nepali citizens have developed a razor sharp political sensitivity, one which is missed by most outsiders because the political discourse is conducted near-exclusively in Nepali. Sending a spy chief as emissary has not gone down well with public here. The unique India-Nepal bilateral relationship across the open border must go back to being managed by political and diplomatic players.

Nepal is a natural friend of India and the cultural bonds are strong, and they go deep. But Nepal is also an independent, sovereign nation-state and that cannot be changed. In the suddenly fraught international arena, India should want to keep Nepal as a natural friend. When there is transparent communication between the two countries based on the conduct of politics and diplomacy, Nepal will have the space to develop its democracy, make its own mistakes and to learn from them.

India itself needs a politically stable Nepal for its security as well as the economic growth of the border regions, which happen to be among the most densely populated and poorest parts of South Asia. But if New Delhi looks at Nepal only through the geostrategic prism rather than include the economic, cultural, social and environmental lenses, it can only undermine its own national interest.

What seemed like a genuine attempt to update and lift bilateral relations to reflect modern-day realities, was the empanelling of the Eminent Persons’ Group of India and Nepal, which worked over two years to produce a report, one which evidently contains fine recommendations to the two governments. The group was formed with individuals selected by the two sitting prime ministers Modi and Oli during their first terms in office. And yet, because Prime Minister Modi does not want to open the report, it has gathered dust for nearly two years.

New Delhi’s lack of attentiveness to Nepal and the repetition of its mistakes have added to grievances in Kathmandu. When will India learn that it is only hurting itself, as it knowingly or unknowingly hurts Nepal? 🇳🇵

A longer version of this analysis is online at <https://www.nepalitimes.com/here-now/new-delhis-new-dealings-in-nepal/>



Head of India’s external intelligence agency Samant Kumar Goel arrives in Kathmandu with a 9-member entourage on a special Bombardier Global 5000 aircraft. PHOTO: @THE WOLFPACKIN



Lain Singh Bangdel's legacy lives on

Two decades after he died, family, friends and students say Nepal ought to value its foremost artist more

Alisha Sijapati

On 15 September, a UK-based art promotion site MutualArt sent an auction notification to its over 500,000 members. For sale was a rare 1955 watercolour painting of a woman, and it bore the signature of Nepal's foremost artist, Lain Singh Bangdel.

Within two days of the announcement, the painting was bought for £100, and that price understandably left Nepal's artist community, connoisseurs of Nepali art and Bangdel's own family members disappointed.

"The 100 pound auction price is extremely low for someone of Bangdel's stature," stated Sangeeta Thapa, art curator and director of Siddhartha Art Gallery. "Nepali artists and their artwork are finally getting the momentum they deserve, but this is dismal."

Thapa is a lifelong admirer of Bangdel's work, and says she owes a lot to "Lainji" to launch her own career in art. She worked with Bangdel's daughter, Dina, in promoting Nepali art in the international arena. Dina's sudden death left a deep void in the country's art scene, Thapa says, and Nepal will probably never have a better father-daughter duo than of the Bangdels.

The auction in September was organised by the UK-based Burstow & Hewett via The Abbey Auction Gallery, and the watercolour portrait was under the lot #1063. But this is not the only Bangdel painting that has been sold abroad at such a low price: three other abstracts were sold via a Canadian auction house, Westbridge Fine Art Auction House, in 2016 and 2017, each at less than 700 Canadian dollars.

"In places like Canada, we can assume people haven't heard enough about Bangdel and that could be what determined the price," says art crime professor Erin L. Thompson at the City University of New York.

Dina's husband Bibhakar Shakya is also saddened to see the latest auction price: "Most of the paintings are in our collection at home, and my father-in-law never really sold paintings, he mostly gifted them in the later years of his life."

Shakya has been keeping Lain Singh Bangdel's legacy alive with their son Deven, cataloguing the collection of 300 to 350 of his father-in-law's paintings at their home in Sanepa. He also plans to publish the English translation of Bangdel's book *Langada Ko Sathi*, and find a permanent gallery for the paintings.

"It was Dina's dream to carry on in her father's footsteps, it is my responsibility to pick things up from where she left," says Shakya, who says Bangdel could write as beautifully as he painted.

Lain Singh Bangdel was born to Ranglal Rai in 1919 near Darjeeling. As a child, he would paint everywhere, even on the walls of his home and street with images of gods and goddesses. Ranglal worked at a tea estate, and one day came home with a small collection of postcards given to him by his British employer. Bangdel was only eight then, but the images of various Impressionists and post-Impressionist artists, Corot, Millet, Monet, Manet and Turner were



Lain Singh Bangdel paints a portrait of Bal Krishna Sama in 1975.

AGAINST THE CURRENT



A 1974 portrait of Bal Krishna Sama by Lain Singh Bangdel.

PHOTOS: BIBHAKAR SHAKYA



Dina Bangdel, who died in 2017, leaving the work to preserve her father's legacy incomplete.

etched in his young mind. More than the others, Bangdel said later it was the French painter Corot whose work 'captured his soul' and inspired him to pursue his passion.

It was only in high school that Bangdel came to realise that he wanted to be an artist. In 1939, he joined Calcutta Arts College. Calcutta was where he met Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray, and the two became lifelong friends.

In 1952, Bangdel enrolled at the French National Art School in Paris. Part of the cost was defrayed in a strange way. Bangdel had painted a portrait of Bal Krishna Sama and it impressed General Keshar Shumsher Rana so much that he sent over Rs5,000, quite a hefty sum in those days.

In Paris, Bangdel was introduced

letter from his friend B P Koirala to return to Nepal. Koirala went on to become Nepal's first democratically elected prime minister, but within a year was removed in a coup by King Mahendra in 1960. It was then Mahendra who convinced Bangdel and his wife Manu to return from Europe to Nepal.

In 1961 after moving to Kathmandu, Bangdel got a job at the Royal Nepal Academy and eventually became its vice-chancellor. He later went on to become the founding general-secretary of Nepal Art Council and the New Art Circle, where he taught 15 talented new artists for free.

Bangdel also wrote three Nepali-language novels between 1948 to 1951, *Muluk Bahira*, *Maitighar* and *Langada Ko Sathi*. They were tales of struggle and hardship of families in the mountains. Bangdel's eyes saw the world: he lived through wars and revolutions, he saw pain, angst and misery all around him, and he transferred them to canvas and text.

In later years, Bangdel went on to become an art historian and was an activist lobbying for the return of Nepal's stolen religious objects. He wrote *Early Sculptures of Nepal* (1982), *2500 years of Nepali Art* (1987), and *Inventory of Stone Sculptures of the Kathmandu Valley* (1995). However, his most important book, and one that is still as relevant today as when it was written in 1989, is *Stolen Images of Nepal* which documented 300 missing religious objects from Kathmandu. Most of them are still missing.

Bangdel built the home in Sanepa with his wife Manu Kumari Thapa, a nurse, who figures prominently in his biography, *Against the Current: Life of Lain Singh Bangdel*. In the book, Bangdel narrates his beautiful love story with Manu and her undying support for all his work. She went on to become a matron in Prasuti Griha, and is now in her mid-90s, still living in the home she built with her husband in Sanepa.

Dina was the sunshine of Lain Singh and Manu's life. An only child, she was her father's confidante in the later part of career as an art historian, and shared the same passion for Nepal's heritage and their preservation.

Dina Bangdel and Bandana Thapa were childhood friends, and they used to walk school from home together during which Dina would share extraordinary stories of her adventures with her father, of going to various heritage sites and taking

pictures.

"I remember Dina's excitement when she narrated her father's work to document stolen idols and we could all feel her passion even when young," Bandana Thapa recalls.

Dina's death left a lot of her work to preserve her father's legacy incomplete. But Lain Singh Bangdel lives on through the brush strokes of his students, some of whom have now become accomplished artists themselves.

Abstract painter Jeevan Rajopadhyay studied under Bangdel till the year he died, and has only fond memories of a gentle and patient teacher. "If it wasn't for Bangdel Sir, maybe I would never have been an artist in the first place," he said.

Rajopadhyay was also shocked by how little his teacher's painting fetched in an European auction. He said: "Even in the nineties, Bangdel's paintings were selling for at least Rs500,000 in Japan's Fukushima Museum. He is the father of Nepal's modern art. We need to value his work more."

Excerpts from *Against the Current: The Life of Lain Singh Bangdel*:

Bangdel's life:

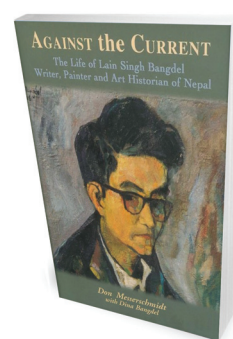
Lain Singh changed his name from Rai to Bangdel in 1939, and as Lain Singh Bangdel he eventually became an able interpreter of Nepal's economic and intellectual Diaspora, with its poverty and personal sorrows in villages existing side by side with the comparatively rich and inspiring intellectuals of towns. The socio-cultural traditions that the youthful Lain Singh grew up among profoundly flavored his life, guiding his scholarly development throughout a distinguished and multi-faceted career.

Meeting Satyajit Ray for the first time:

The table where Lain sat belonged to someone named Ray who was away from the office for a few days, he was told. 'One morning near the end of my first week at about 10 o'clock, a tall and imposing man I'd never seen walked in and came directly to my desk. He spoke to me in Bengali: 'Arrey, kokhon eley?' (Hello, when did you arrive?) It was Ray's typical greeting on first meeting someone, a hallmark of his personality. Then he said, 'This is my table. Are you sitting here?'

Lain did not know what to say. He had not been introduced. Then the stranger asked somebody, 'Why don't you provide another place for this gentleman?' Only then did Ganguli come over and introduce the stranger as Satyajit Ray whom he addressed familiarly as 'Manik Babu'.

Space for Lain was arranged right next to Ray and in time they got to know each other, who each was, their interests and so forth. They were immediately attracted to one another, as fellow artists and inspired young intellectuals.



Against the Current: The Life of Lain Singh Bangdel

Writer, Painter and Art Historian of Nepal by Don Messerschmidt with Dina Bangdel Painter and Art Historian of Nepal

Orchid Press, 21 July 2006
258 pages