



If it was not for the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate emergency would have been the main topic of discussion the world over in 2020. In Nepal, politics would have still dominated the headlines, but erratic weather and receding snows would be much more prominent in the collective consciousness.

The Himalaya is warming between 0.3-0.7°C faster than the global average, causing extreme weather and water shortages.

The 2015 Paris Climate Agreement pledged to reduce carbon emissions to cap global warming at ‘well below’ 2°C of pre-industrial levels. Countries agreed to voluntary carbon cuts under Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Nepal is among 196 countries submitting its NDC on 12 December, the fifth anniversary of the Paris accord. The draft proposal is being circulated for comments, but it has met with lukewarm response from activists who say it either does not go far enough in some areas, or is too ambitious in others.

At 0.29 tons of annual carbon emissions per capita, Nepal has one of the smallest footprints in the world (the US is 16 and Qatar is 37). But it is rising sharply and Nepal’s growth in CO₂ emission is highest in South Asia, mainly because of increasing petroleum imports (*see page 12*). But the lockdowns in 2020 proved that fossil fuel use can be reduced, and air pollution cleaned up.

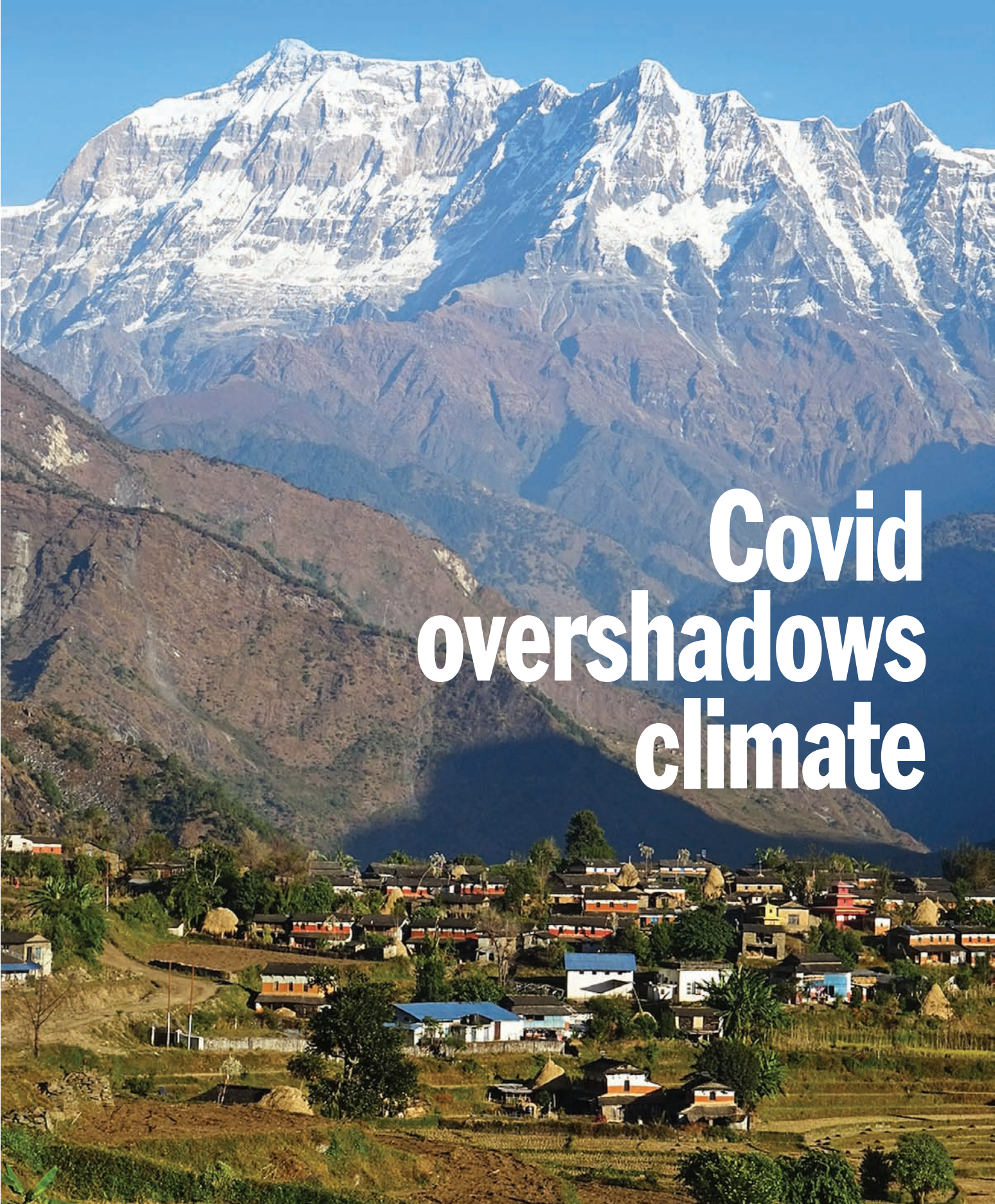
Nepal’s ‘Enhanced NDC’ has set a target of turning 25% of all private vehicles sales, including two-wheelers, to electric in the next five years. It also aims to make 20% of all new four-wheel public transport battery-powered by then. Planners hope to increase these numbers to 90% and 60% by 2030.

The NDC also pledges to generate 15,000MW of electricity by 2030, more than ten times today’s capacity. There will be 200km of an electric rail network, and 25% of all households will use electric stoves. Installing an additional 50,000 household biogas plants and 500 large scale plants will shrink Nepal’s carbon footprint further.

Says Manjeet Dhakal, adviser to the Least Developed Countries support group at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): “We cannot have economic development at the cost of nature. It is now time to lead the charge by committing to net-zero by implementing the targets set.”

Activists say Nepal has a poor track record in implementing plans, and the NDC does not go far enough, for example in non-fossil transport. Sajha Yatayat’s Chair and environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar says: “Motorcycles make up 80% of all vehicles, if we can convert them to battery power, and electrify public transport, we can cut emissions drastically. It will require subsidies and investment, but if the government wants to do it, it can.”

READ MORE:
Blueprint for a net-zero Nepal
PAGE 12



Takam village of Myagdi District. While the mountains melt due to global warming, Nepal's petroleum imports rise sharply.

JOY STEPHENS

Indeed, if Nepal could act so decisively with lockdowns to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, it could take the urgent action necessary to meet Paris climate targets. In fact, with its low carbon footprint and clean hydropower potential,

Nepal can lead the way. Secretary at the Ministry of Forest and Environment Bishwo Nath Oli says the NDC outlines Nepal’s plans to reduce its carbon footprint, and also adapt to the changes

already altering the Himalaya. He adds: “We are among the countries most at risk from climate change, so our main concern is how to prepare communities to adapt to the impact.”
Sonia Awale

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

No binary foreign policy

Kathmandu’s cognoscenti suffer from low esteem about Nepal’s geostrategic importance. However, the international community also does not give the Nepali state due recognition.

It is time to change the narrative. Nepal’s world standing did suffer during its internal conflict, with UNMIN painting an exaggerated picture of the Kathmandu establishment as regressive, oppressive and status-quoist. That vision still colours the West’s outlook.

While this bias is distressing, it is the role of India and China that have a direct bearing on Kathmandu’s self-perception and its sense of agency. But tension between Beijing and New

Look where we are at: Nepal has managed a peace-process that is more or less homegrown. In all likelihood, the country will get its first full-term prime minister since the Rana regime ended in 1950, and this relative stability had a healing effect, even if Prime Minister K P Oli’s government keeps goofing badly on governance.

Nepal’s ‘soft power’ potential is as yet un-recognised by its own citizens, let alone deployed for the good of self and others.

Commentators tend to look at the sudden downturn in relations between global and regional powers as a zero-sum game, as if Kathmandu can do nothing but be trampled.

There is another way to look at it. Nepal is a country to be reckoned with as the US, China, India and others at the global high table seek to carve out their spheres of influence.

Nepal’s position amidst this push and pull must be one of self-confident independence – publicly rejecting demands to take sides, refusing to accept that an enemy of an enemy is a friend. Through its long history of independence and geopolitical neutrality, Nepal is capable of charting a course of geopolitical equidistance and socio-economic engagement.

Kathmandu must take the true ‘middle path’, emanating not from frightened neutrality but a disavowal of the need to prove loyalty to any one power.

While we should be happy about the flurry of visits to Kathmandu from the North and South, not all the arrivals have been welcome. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi might have sought to embarrass Prime Minister Oli by sending the head

of his spy outfit as a special emissary, but the overture ended up insulting the Nepali state and people. The Indian Army Chief who arrived for the traditional courtesy visit had earlier implied that Nepal’s stance on Limpiyadhura was at the ‘behest’ of China.

Not to be outdone, on 29 November the Chinese are sending State Councillor and Defence Minister Wei Fenghe to Kathmandu. What was wrong with sending State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi? To both New Delhi and Beijing, Kathmandu’s message should be: ‘We have had enough of being perceived only through your security lens.’

After dispatching a spy and a general, India is finally sending Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla to Kathmandu this week. New Delhi will find a trustworthy friend in Kathmandu when it stops micro-managing. Nepal will never be part of any anti-India alliance, but Nepal’s foreign policy is its own.

The newfound confidence in Kathmandu despite the crisis in the ruling NCP means that Nepal can stake its position. The message that Harsh Shringla can take back from Kathmandu is that it is time for Prime Minister Modi to make a conciliatory visit to Nepal to start mending the frayed relationship. Beijing is invited to take notes.



Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali meeting visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla on Thursday in Kathmandu.

Delhi constricts the wriggle room for Nepal’s diplomacy, with its two major political parties required to take sides.

New Delhi’s nervousness regarding Beijing’s plans have led to Kathmandu dumbing down on foreign policy as well. And Beijing’s intention to become a player in Nepal’s domestic politics needs to be checked.

Much of Nepal’s politics of the modern era has been spent trying to ward off New Delhi’s interventionist arm. Kathmandu has leaned over backwards to exaggerate China’s importance to counterbalance this. But things have changed as the global influence of a rising China becomes palpable.

The arrival of the Tibet Train in Kerung and the prospect of cross-Himalaya connectivity have suddenly brought mainland China closer. Beijing has jettisoned the Himalayan spheres of influence policy that had existed since Chou En-lai, who sagaciously told Nepali leaders to maintain good relations with New Delhi.

China’s current ambassador in Kathmandu Hou Yanqi, is on overdrive trying to convince leaders of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) to stay together, and the Nepali polity has been lax in alerting her that this activism is inappropriate. If such direct political involvement continues, Beijing is sure to face a backlash similar to the one New Delhi has had to deal with. China should learn from India’s mistakes in Nepal.

For its part, Kathmandu should appreciate its own international standing because it may be surprised to learn that there is little to be embarrassed about. We just need to abandon our constant social media-led self-flagellation about how inept and feckless we are.

China should learn from India’s mistakes in Nepal.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

In this regular feature, we look at how much things have remained the same in Nepal in the past 20 years. And much of the political culture, lack of development, governance problems and environmental deterioration have remained unchanged over the past two decades.

But some things do change for the better. After Nepali Times published this investigation on fuel adulteration on the front page of its issue #19 of 1-6 December 2000, the government decided to adjust the price of kerosene and diesel so that there was no more mixing. The adulteration was not just costing the government revenue, but it was destroying truck and bus engines, and making air pollution worse.

Excerpts from the story:

Our investigation has shown that from the moment the ‘mother stock’ of petrol and diesel enters Nepal from India, there is systematic adulteration every step of the way: along the side of the highway to the Nepal Oil Corporation depot at Amlekhgunj, in the distribution network from Amlekhgunj to Kathmandu, at petrol pumps all over the country. The protection racket goes up the NOC ranks, to the politicians. And everybody gets his share.

Krishna Upreti of New Sita Oil in Parsa, Chitwan, told us bluntly that there is no way he can make a profit without mixing kerosene with petrol and diesel. “By the time I sell my petrol it is almost 50 percent adulterated,”



he told us. “If adulteration was stopped, half of all the petrol pumps would go out of business.”

We checked if Upreti wanted his name used in this story. “Go right ahead,” he told us. The fact that petrol pump owners can say such things on record is an indication of how barefaced and brazen the crime has become.

Adulterated fuels make exhaust gases more poisonous, worsening the pollution crisis, causing acute respiratory infections and other ailments. Adulteration of diesel has a different effect, kerosene additive lessens diesel’s lubricating function, leading to faster wear and tear of the pistons.

The second tier of adulteration takes place at the petrol pumps where owners, by their own admission, add kerosene to diesel and petrol. In Kathmandu, NOC’s general manager, Madan Raj Sharma, says the corporation has taken action against those who are caught, but laments: “We do not have the capacity to do nationwide spot checks.” Just as well, given how much money seems to change hands during spot checks.

Sharma says the government’s move to lower kerosene prices from Rs 26 to Rs 22 after opposition pressure will boost adulteration.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



PROUD TO BE A SIKH

Meet Lal Bahadur Karki, who came to Kathmandu as a young boy and converted to Sikhism at the Kopundole Gurudwara along with this wife and son. Watch how the family is preparing a quiet celebration for Guru Nanak’s 551st birthday on 30 November. Story: [page 7](#).



MUSEUMS REOPEN

Visitors are now allowed into Shree Sadan, King Birendra’s private residence following the cabinet decision to reopen museums after eight months. Take a tour of the perfectly preserved time capsule to see how the King lived. Story: [page 5](#).

COVID VACCINE

I am sure the govt will ensure all remote areas get the vaccine (‘Vax Populi’, Sonia Awale, #1036) in an expeditious manner, you know, just like with DRs, health posts, electricity, water, and earthquake relief ... no problem!

Roger Ray

- Whenever the vaccine does come, it will take years to make it accessible to all the poor people of Nepal and other poor nations.

Vipin Sangwan

TIGER CONSERVATION

This is really exciting and positive news for Nepal (‘Kali Karnali jungle corridor proposed’, Mukesh Pokhrel, #1036). I too have heard rumours of tiger sightings in the mid-hills of Nepal, a ‘bagh’ with stripes. It would be great to see a wildlife corridor established across the whole of the Mahabharat range of Nepal. Some awareness raising campaign will be needed to reassure locals worried about tigers in their vicinity. What a great un-anticipated outcome from the Community Forest projects of the 1990s.

Joy Stephens

- With global warming, more animals will be moving up the mountains. Create more corridors for them.

Ann Petersen

JAILED ABROAD

This is so sad, all those years could have been wonderful for the family (‘Nepali jailed 40 years without trial in Kolkata’, Tufan Neupane, nepalitimes.com). They must have tried to find justice for so long but the failed system obviously didn’t help. I hope he unites with his family at last and lives life as he deserves.

Dipu

- Thinking how many more Dipaks are in prison around the world while loved ones await their return home.

Suraj Ghimire

FAITH AND RELIGION

Your religion can be within you. A temple is a focus point. (‘With temples locked up, Nepalis improvise’, Madison Wrobley and Rajani Maharjan, #1036) You can focus from within yourself.

David Bruce

- Temples might have been closed, but God is everywhere. Bad days will definitely be over soon. We should not loose heart.

Debadatta Panigrahi

AMA DABLAM

This sheikh should concentrate his energy on ensuring free and fair working conditions and salary rates for the Nepali migrant workers in Qatar. (‘What is it about Ama Dablam’, #1036). No one of influence in Qatar can be taken seriously in any matter as long as workers are not enjoying fair conditions in Qatar. Henning Nilausen

- Where is all the snow?

Lochan Gyawali

- Masks, Travel Restrictions and Lockdowns are just for poor people.

Alex Ferguson

Times.com



When will Nepal’s Covid vaccine turn come?

by Sonia Awale

Nepal may be one of the last countries to get a vaccine, but even then the poor will be at the end of the queue unless there is an effective strategy for distribution. Visit nepalitimes.com for full story and read feedback. Follow us for the latest updates on Covid-19 vaccine development.

- Most reached and shared on Facebook
- Most commented



Kali-Karnali jungle corridor proposed

By Mukesh Pokhrel

When researchers installed camera traps in the forested mountains of western Nepal last year, they didn’t expect to also capture shots of a tiger. This highest ever tiger sighting in the country has prompted calls for a new conservation zone. Go online for details in this field reportage.

- Most popular on Twitter



What is it about Ama Dablam?

Nepali Times

What is it about Ama Dablam, the dangerous peak on the trek up to Everest Base Camp, that keeps drawing mountaineers, even during the coronavirus pandemic? Find out in this feature in our website.

- Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#Editorial With a never-ending battle for supremacy between K P Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the country is being held hostage in a ‘clash of cults’.

Hemraj Khatiwada @HemrajKhatiwad8
True that! It’s the people of Nepal being held hostage in a clash of cults and suffering massively due to lack of governance and management amid #COVID19.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#Nepal will possibly be one of the last countries in the world to get a #vaccine against #COVID19. But will the government ensure the poorest in the most remote areas aren’t left out? @SoniaAwale on how the Covid-19 vaccines could play out in Nepal.

Abhaya Subba @AbhayaSubba
Well then there goes our 2021... Maybe we can all make an effort to make sure that the vaccine is available sooner to us.

Prakash Moktan @PRAMOK
Well the rich countries will get their doses first and survive to exploit the poorer nations. That’s the vaccine story.

Forester @kuenvmgt504
And the politicians will capture all the first doses even before ICU patients and doctors

Jayashree Balasubramanian @jai_amma
Love the headline. Vax Populi!

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
There has been little progress in prosecuting war crimes despite court orders requiring investigations to proceed. Read how this inaction has entrenched impunity in post-conflict Nepal, and in recent cases of serious human rights violations.

Mohna Ansari @MohnaAnsari
The [transitional justice] commissions do not have the authority to prosecute and I have not seen any progress by the government to address accountability. We have been saying that victim demands should be at the center. But nobody is listening to the victims.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
We kicked off the week with a high concentration of pollutants in Kathmandu’s city centre. Starting Tuesday, the daily average Air Quality index came down to ‘Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups’, due to smoke haze from crop residue burning in North India which has diminished for now.

wigbert @markooj
Kathmandu is a wonderful city apart from this



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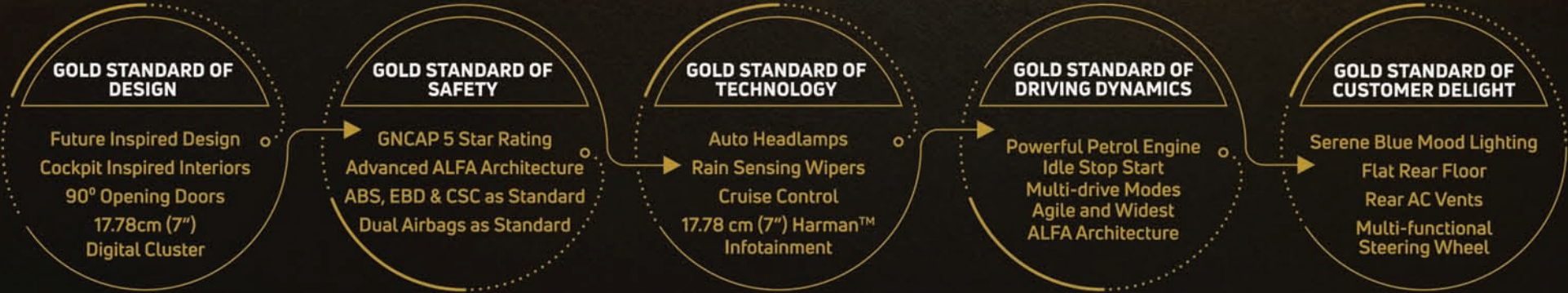
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A postcard from Jan Morris 1926-2020

Remembering the last surviving foreign member of the first expedition to climb Mt Everest in 1953

The last surviving foreign member of the first victorious Everest expedition died at the ripe age of 94 just prior to midday on 20 November 2020 at her home in North Wales.

Jan Morris was unrecognisable from the heavily bearded, Oxford educated, ex-army journalist who strode across Advanced Base Camp



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

for a congratulatory handshake in a typically British fashion with the triumphant Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa. Now, only Kancha Sherpa from Namche is still with us from the historic 1953 British team.

With an exclusive commission from *The Times* of London, James Morris was embedded as a member of the John Hunt-led expedition, but never ventured far up the mountain on his arduous assignment.

'I was no climber, was not particularly interested in mountaineering. I was there merely as a reporter.' Terrified that someone might leak the glorious news of the first ascent, his Base Camp message was concealed in a pre-arranged code carried by Sherpa runners then telegraphed from the British Embassy in Kathmandu: 'Snow conditions bad stop advanced base abandoned yesterday stop awaiting improvement.'

Back in *The Times'* newsroom, they knew what he meant and the glad tidings ricocheted around the globe on the auspicious morning of Queen Elizabeth's coronation. The world's highest mountain had been conquered, Sir Ed was knighted and Tenzing Norgay put Nepal firmly on the map. For the first time the Sherpa name resonated worldwide, just as the hidden kingdom of Nepal was unlocking its secrets and beginning to allow foreign visitors.

At the time of his Sagarmatha scoop, James Morris was already happily married to Elizabeth Tuckniss, daughter of a tea planter who both confirmed mutual love at first sight. Their 70-year love story would produce five children, including their son the poet musician Twm Morys, and the partnership survived the death of an infant and James' transition into a woman.

Elizabeth said: 'I never stopped loving James or Jan. It did not make any difference to me. We still had our family. We just carried on.' Forced to divorce, they remained together in a 'civil union'.

Author of over fifty books including British histories, an empire trilogy, travelogues and personal reminiscences, the irrepressible and articulate Jan Morris transitioned from James during the unsympathetic 1970s.



Writer, reporter, historian, traveler, and trans pioneer, Jan Morris died on 20 Nov 2020.



At the 2008 funeral of Sir Edmund Hillary in Auckland, Jan Morris chats with Lydia Bradey, New Zealand's most successful female mountaineer.

COLIN MONTEATH

An ostensibly highly successful man's man, he had in fact felt all his conscious life that at heart he was female. Her ground-breaking memoir *Conundrum*, written 46 years ago about risky and experimental surgery, is an elegant classic of the gender genre and still in print, a slender volume that poetically and comprehensively addresses today's transsexuality debate.

Reflecting on her transition, Jan said: 'I would never use the word change, as in "sex change" for what happened to me. I did not change

sex, I really absorbed one into the other. I'm a bit of each now. I freely admit it.'

I was delighted to be introduced by London publishing connections to this highly accomplished, cerebral and exciting writer during our 1973 research on Marco Polo — I had wangled my way as the only female member of a British film team driving overland from Venice to Central Asia.

A daring reporter and tireless traveller who had crossed deserts and scaled mountains, her gender

transition the previous year was not our focus. We consulted Jan Morris about our route and particularly the intricate details of ancient Venice, one of her most popular books and home to Marco Polo, the peripatetic 13th century trader whose *Travels* about journeys to China had first revealed the orient to avid European readers. I remember Jan as strong, straightforward, enthusiastic and helpful, lots of hair and heavy jewellery.

Baring her soul, *Conundrum* was published the following year in 1974. In response to my no doubt naïve gushing fan letter about the book's profound effect, admiration of her bravery and reminder of our Marco Polo meeting, Jan's handwritten postcard to me arrived dated 30 October 1974 from their home in Bath.

Recently I retrieved her card during a Covid clear out, a precious reminder of a long-gone encounter, although the casual multiplicity of our respective travels struck me as completely extraordinary in these static times. Despite the sentiments in her card, Jan and I did not meet up on her return from 'S Africa and Australia in the New Year'. I had already returned to Nepal, and stayed.

The next and last time that I would meet Jan Morris was at Sir Edmund Hillary's funeral in 2008. In

the well-kept hallowed grounds of Auckland's Government House, the great and the good of New Zealand and world mountaineering were gathered to mourn the national hero's passing.

Under the spreading trees of the gently sloping garden, the sun shone weakly on the Governor General's reception that followed a rare state funeral in the cathedral, led by Prime Minister Helen Clark. Jan attended as a government guest along with the bare handful of surviving 1953 members.

I was there with Elizabeth Hawley and the five officiating Sherpa leaders, although by the time we arrived from the crematorium the shadows were lengthening and the crowd was thinning. The day before we had been sitting with the family around Lady June's Remuera kitchen table when Jan arrived down the carpeted staircase directly from her London flight, a booming presence bearing flowers, slightly awkward and wonderfully untidy with wild white hair and another chunky necklace.

A prolific and eclectic writer, in her 2018 'thought diary' *In My Mind's Eye*, Jan explained that her daily exercise was a thousand steps a day down the narrow green Welsh lanes lined with stone walls with distant views of the sea. 'The thousand paces is my self-imposed basic discipline, rain, shine or earthquake,' she wrote. As I trudged in dutiful circles during the worst of the lockdown, I remembered her regimen.

Jan Morris has reached the end of her 'tangled life' and set off on her greatest journey. But even in death she plans never to be separated from Elizabeth, the love of her life. When buried together on a small island on the River Dwyfor, their headstone will read: 'Here are two friends, at the end of one life.' 🇨🇪



Go online to watch Jan Morris, legendary travel writer, in animated conversation with Recce editor Don George on May 8, 2013, at *The New York Times* Center.

nepalitimes.com



James Morris, on commission for the Times of London, congratulating Edmund Hillary as he arrives back at Advanced Base Camp from the summit of Everest 1953.

ALF GREGORY



Narayanhiiti Palace Museum reopens after eight month long closure during the Covid-19 crisis.

BIKRAM RAI

Museums reopen after 8 months

Closed most of the year, visitors are allowed back in museums and art galleries

Alisha Sijapati

Since March, Nepal's museum curators have been in deep despair due to the extended Covid-19 lockdown, and the ban on public gatherings.

But finally, some museums opened their doors from Sunday after the Cabinet decision to allow visitors into the facilities. Especially benefiting from this will be children who have also not been able to go to physical classes for most of 2020.

Patan Museum, Nepal's world-renowned establishment and a premier repository of Hindu-Buddhist devotional art, is set to reopen later this week.

"We are really excited about reopening, without visitors, a museum is dead," says Suresh Lakhe of Patan Museum, who is working on a temporary photographic exhibition in collaboration with the Kartik Nach Preservation Committee that will also be open to the public this week.

The closure of museums like Patan, Chhauni, or the International Mountaineering Museum in Pokhara has also meant a loss of revenue, and financial strain in the upkeep of the facilities. All museums have adopted health protocols with limits on the number of visitors in the display areas, open windows, as well as mandatory masks.

Since the government gave the green signal, the Nepal National Museum in Chhauni opened to the public on 20 November, but there were not too many visitors since most did not know about it.

On Sunday, the Narayanhiiti Palace Museum also reopened with visitors allowed into Shree Sadan, the private residence of King Birendra, for the first time in 20 years.

There is a lot of anticipation about the opening of the new wing where King Birendra lived with Queen Aishwarya and Prince Nirajan and Princess Shruti. All four were killed in the 2001 palace massacre.

The rooms have been kept intact, just as they were on 1 June 2001. Prince Nirajan's room still has his college class timetable stuck to the wall, the alcove bar has a bottle of the king's favourite brandy, and the cot where Birendra's favourite dog slept is exactly where it was 20 years ago.

Museum chief Bheshe Narayan Dahal and his team have worked right through the lockdown to make Shree Sadan ready for public viewing. There were up to 150 people waiting in queue even before the museum opened its doors on Sunday morning at 10am.

Said Dahal: "Public response so far has been phenomenal, and there



Shree Sadan, King Birendra's family home opened to visitors on Sunday for the first time after the palace massacre in 2001.

are more people interested in Shree Sadan than the main Narayanhiiti Museum."

Although the government has also allowed art galleries and exhibitions to restart, some are not taking any chances yet because of the sustained surge in coronavirus cases in Kathmandu Valley.

At Taragaon Museum, Roshan Mishra's hands are full. He is busy with the archives, documentation, and renovation of the museum that is run by the Saraf Foundation. He says he is in no rush to reopen the exhibition space, keeping in mind the risk it might bring to the visitors as well as employees.

"If we open the museum now, we'll just have about three to four people walking in every day and it's not really feasible, so our focus is more on documentation and archives until we reopen possibly in January," says Mishra.

The lockdown has actually been a blessing in disguise to curators like Mishra who would otherwise be too busy for research, and design new shows.

Even though the museums were locked up for eight months, staff there also worked on renovation and maintenance. The National Museum in Chhauni has finally finished reconstruction of a wing that was damaged in the 2015 earthquake.

"It's time we get back to operations, this is the new normal, and for how long can we stay idle?" asks Jayaram Shrestha of the Chhauni museum. "The Cabinet decision was good, better late than never."

Keeping in mind the Covid crisis, mandatory precautions will be put in place such as wearing masks, hand washing and sanitisation. The museums are required to be decontaminated every morning and evening. Visitors are also required to maintain physical distance, and at Shree Sadan, for example, only 10 people will be allowed to enter certain sections of the museums at one time.

In Pokhara, International

Mountain Museum has been receiving 10 to 20 queries every day about when it will reopen. Shankar Bahadur Gautam at the museum says, "This is such a huge relief, museums are for gaining knowledge and have an educational function. So, if we strictly follow the Covid protocols, there is no harm to re-open."

Siddhartha Art Gallery at Baber Mahal Revisited has been shut since March, and did not opt for online exhibitions like other galleries. Siddhartha's Sangeeta Thapa explains: "Collective viewing and physical presence is important for the visual arts and the difference between government museums and private art galleries is that museums are bigger and can ensure physical distancing. We do not have that kind of space, and we cannot compromise on the safety of the artists, our gallery staff, and the visitors."

The gallery is planning to open its doors by mid-January with an exhibition of artists Jagadish Moktan and Priyanka Singh Maharjan. Thapa is also gearing up for the mammoth Kathmandu Triennale that was to begin next month, but has been postponed to 26 October-26 November 2021.

Thapa adds: "Since the festival is for both locals and the international community, we cannot take the risk now. Which is why it has been postponed till next year." 🇳🇵



Visitors are now allowed into Shree Sadan, King Birendra's private residence following the cabinet decision to reopen museums after eight months. Take a tour of the perfectly preserved time capsule to see how the King lived.

nepalitimes.com

prabhu BANK

Longer quarantines?

Nepal's Ministry of Health has recommended everyone entering Nepal by land or air will have to stay in



quarantine for 14 days revising its previous recommendation of a 7-day quarantine.

The recommendation has been greeted with skepticism. Said one travel trade executive: "First you had the stupid rule that only foreigners who want to trek and climb a mountain are allowed. What if they wanted to go white water rafting, or paragliding, or for an elephant safari? Why only trekking and mountaineering? And now you have another layer of uncertainty."

The government seems to be working at cross-purposes. The Ministry of Tourism has asked the CCMC to open Nepal to all foreigners, as long as they follow tests and quarantine protocols.

On Wednesday the Cabinet decided to agree to the Nepal-India 'air bubble', raising hopes for flights to resume soon. Tens of thousands of Nepalis in India and Indians in Nepal have been stranded for months because of the lack of flights.

Film Awards winners

The two Global Sustainability Film Awards 2020 (two GSFA) has in partnership with Difficult Dialogues announced winners of eight competitive and two nominated awards. The online awards were announced with four Difficult Dialogues panel discussions on global sustainability that

included Nepali participants as well as the finale of the Daring Debates.

Difficult Dialogues panels over five days focused on Global Sustainability, and was attended by sustainability experts, filmmakers, businesses, non profits and highlighted the current environmental crisis and suggested solutions.

"This year going virtual over five days gave us more time to provide a better experience for filmmakers and the visibility to showcase our youth ambassadors and their work," said Surina Narula, Founder of Difficult Dialogues and the two GSFA.

The winners of Daring Debates which featured college finalists from India, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Africa, USA and Sri Lanka were also announced. Gloria Oziolu Alonge from University of Lagos, Nigeria, was

declared winner for the motion while Aditya Dhar from Harvard University won against the motion.

City Express awarded

City Express Money Transfer has won the Popularity Award for Promoting Legal Remittance Services with Social Impact at the RemTECH Awards conducted in Miami on



THE RemTECH Awards

18 November attended by 32 participants from around the world. This marks the first time Nepal has won an international award for social impact in the remittance field. The RemTECH Popularity Award has been supporting the provision of better service to immigrants to streamline and rely on cross-border remittances each year.

Qatar Airways Qmiles

Qatar Airways has extended the duration of Qmiles awarded to its Privilege Club members by 36 months. Additionally, the



carrier has exempted booking fees and made award flights available for up to 49% less, so members' existing Qmiles will take them farther than before.

Khukri Rum gets award

Nepal's legendary Khukri Rum has won a Gold Medal at the London Spirit Competition 2020. This opens up prospects for Nepal's favourite spirit brand, which first came out 60 years ago, to be exported



abroad, says the maker of this world class rum, The Nepal Distillery. What really launched the brand was during the coronation of King Birendra in 1975, when the distillery brought out the rum in a khukri-shaped bottle.

Nearly half-a-century later, the dagger and the premium Coronation Rum it contains is still a favourite souvenir item for Nepalis going abroad. It is also exported to 11 countries including Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Italy, the US.

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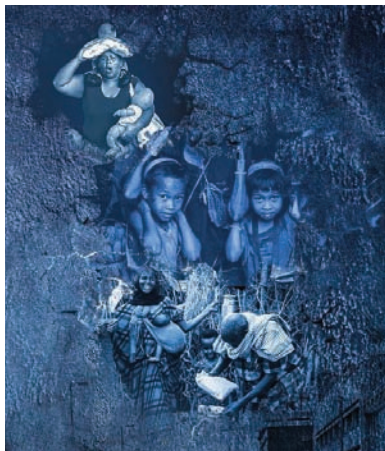
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EVENTS



Film festival
The Human Rights Film Center's eighth Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival is going to be virtual. Watch 52 featured films, short films, animated films, and documentaries from 29 countries through Chalachitra TV at <https://www.chalachitra.tv>.
25-30 November

Art Saturday
ArtSaturday is a weekend studio art session from Artudio under the mentorship of celebrated artists, designers and creative professionals. Head to the website to book seats for the weekly virtual sessions.
Every Saturday, 9am-11am, Fee: Rs350/session, 9823490390

Documentary screening
The Society for Cultural Anthropology has reviewed and featured Kesang Tseten's 2012 documentary *Who Will Be a Gurkha*, which shows the rigorous selection process of Nepali youth into the British Gurkha. Watch the documentary at <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/film-who-will-be-gurkha>.





Organic Farmer's Market
Support local farmers. Buy fresh organic produce, delicious baked goods, dairy products, honey, homemade *achaar* and more at the Budhanilkantha Organic Farmer's Market.
Saturdays, 8am-5pm, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, 9851245426



TFN Fellowship 2021
Apply for the Teach for Nepal Fellowship 2021. The intensive leadership training program is designed to tackle pressing issues like education inequality and quality of education in Nepal while preparing young people to become effective leaders. Applicants must complete and submit an *online application* at <https://www.teachfornepal.org>.



Seeker
Seeker tells award-winning stories about the natural forces and groundbreaking innovations that impact lives, the planet, and the universe. Look for their videos on technology and medical advancement. Find Seeker on YouTube and Instagram TV.

Reply All
A podcast that features stories about how people shape the internet, how the internet shapes people, and how to survive the internet age. Listen on Stitcher and Apple podcasts.

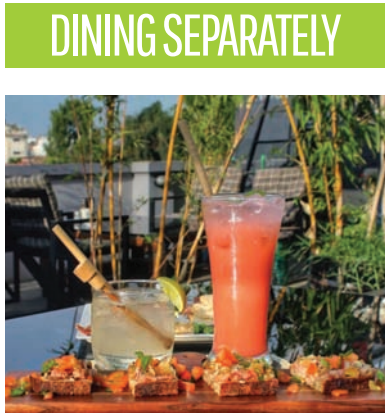
Museum tours
Google Arts & Culture has teamed up with over 2500 museums and galleries around the world to bring everyone virtual tours and online exhibits of some of the world's most famous museums.



Comic Library
Find a variety of comic books available from the British Council Digital Library, including comics such as *Star Wars*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and Disney classics. Visit the website to find out more.

Nepal Literature Festival
Listen to Nepali literary figures, artists, politicians, and people in the public eye talk about the Nepali literature landscape. Head on to YouTube and start from the 2019 festival.

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Enjoy good food and card games on Mojito & BBQ Saturdays at Pauline's rooftop. Don't miss the fresh watermelon and coconut mojitos with the grilled BBQ.
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Pangra Express
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9801084777



La Casita
La Casita is the go-to place for the best of Spanish food. Choose from a selection of tapas, tacos, paella and burgers. Don't miss Churros for dessert.
Boudhanath, 9808311240

Dhokaima Cafe and Bakery
Head to Patan Dhoka to stock up on cakes and bread, and also to spend quality time for leisurely lunches, weekend brunches and quiet dinners in physically distanced tables.
(01) 5522113





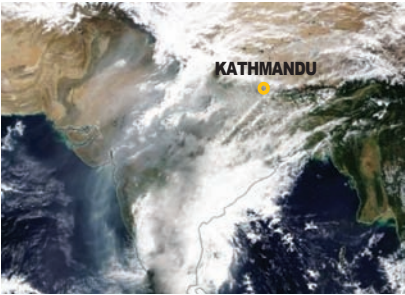
Hankook Sarang
Satisfy the hankering for Korean food during the lockdown and enjoy a variety of mouthwatering dishes like Tteokbokki, Samgyeopsal, Jeyuk Bokkeum and more from Hankook Sarang. Call for additional details.
(01) 4421711

French Bakery
Enjoy scrumptious breakfast from the French Bakery. Get the tummy-filling breakfast platter, or the bacon and egg sandwich. Also order from a variety of delicious cakes and muffins. Check out the menu for more.
(01) 4251998



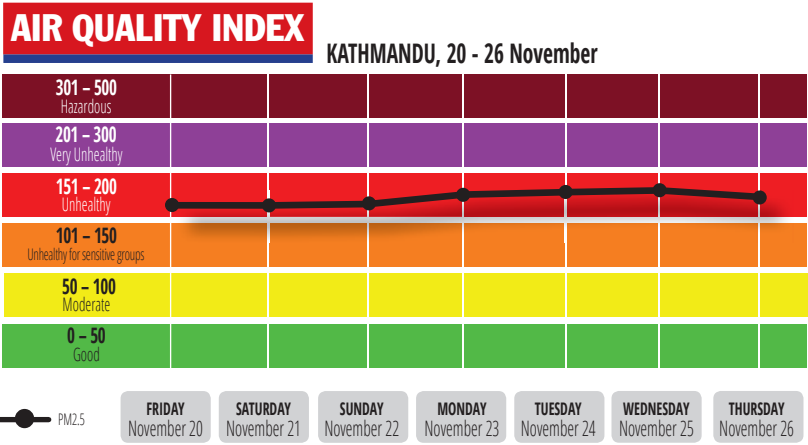
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We are watching closely Cyclone Nivar that is moving across southern India that will push some cloud into eastern Nepal, as well as a westerly system bringing the second snowfall of the season to parts of northwestern Nepal on Friday. Some residual cloud will move swiftly over Kathmandu on Friday, but without precipitation. The weekend should be fine with misty mornings and breezy clear afternoons.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 22° 8°	 23° 6°	 23° 6°



This week, we were in the red 'Unhealthy' zone where the daily average Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu's city centre got worse each day of the week. The concentration of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns was in the 'Unhealthy' level throughout the week. Unless there is pouring rain to clean up vehicular pollution, or a breeze to blow it away, Kathmandu's AQI is bound to get dirtier in the days ahead. Stay safe, this is just one more reason to mask up and avoid going out.

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

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



REDUCE USE OF FOSSIL FUELS



Burning fossil fuels (like coal, oil, and gas) results in carbon pollution, which causes global warming and climate change. They also create local air, land and water pollution. Time and again oil spills wreak havoc on the ecosystem. We need to push towards renewable energy sources, such as wind, water and solar power. At the same time, we can also contribute to reduce the use of fossil fuel. The pandemic has brought about a natural reduction in transportation and air travel which could be carried on even afterwards. The development of video conferencing has enabled more people to work from home and conduct business meetings online. When it is safe to do so people can also opt to use public transport more.
#FridaysForFuture



OUR PICK
Created for the online streaming service Netflix, the new coming-of-age miniseries *The Queen's Gambit* has garnered rave reviews worldwide. Based on the 1983 novel by Walter Tevis and directed by Scott Frank and Allan Scott, the series is centred on Beth Harmon, an orphan chess prodigy, and her rise to becoming the world's greatest player while dealing with personal turmoil. The show stars Anya Taylor-Joy and Bill Camp in lead roles.

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

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Nepali Sikhs prepare for Guru Nanak Day

Small Sikh community gears up to mark holiest day on calendar amidst a pandemic

Alisha Sijapati

Just as Nepal's many festivals have been muted in 2020, the Sikh Gurudwara in Kathmandu wears a forlorn look as it prepares for Guru Nanak Day on 30 November.

There are just a few caretakers at the Guru Nanak Satsang Gurudwara, and they are preparing for a small celebration on the three day festival this weekend that marks 551st birthday of the Sikh guru.

To be sure, even before the Covid-19 crisis, Nepal's Sikh community has been shrinking – many went to India or migrated overseas in a process that started during the Maoist conflict. There was a time when the Gurudwara in the Kopundole neighbourhood used to see queues of people for the vegetarian langar meals outside the gates.

This year, for the first time in decades the Gurudwara will not be serving free vegetarian meals for guests irrespective of caste, religion or status. Sikhs believe this is service to the community as per instructions from Guru Nanak.

“The Covid-19 cases have been spreading so rapidly in Kathmandu that we may just allow 20 to 40 people in batches into the shrine and have a quiet celebration,” says Pritam Singh of the Guru Nanak Satsang Gurudwara.

In the Kupondole-based Gurudwara lives the head priest Daler Singh Bhaji, who says: “If we have to remain far apart, so be it. We cannot risk our lives in the name of celebration. We can celebrate in full once the pandemic is over, this can wait.”

Sikhs first came to Nepal in 1869, following the exiled queen Maharani Jind Kaur, wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The queen sought asylum and lived for a decade in Thapathali's Charburja Darbar across the Bagmati River from where the Gurudwara is now located. She established a number of small Gurudwaras across the Valley by placing the 1,430-page holy book *Guru Granth Sahib*.

While the Gurudwara in Kupondole is the most prominent and relatively new shrine, the first *Guru Granth Sahib* was actually placed in Nepal by Sri Chand, Guru Nanak's son in the Balaju forest, in what is now called Prachin Udasin Shri Guru Nanak Muth.

There are other lesser-known Gurudwara in the Valley: Rajeshwori Udasin Nirmal Akhada and Guru Nanak Muth Udasin Bhimeshwor, both in the premises of the Pashupati Conservation Area and three others in Shobha Bhagwati.

While many Sikhs settled in Kathmandu Valley, many in Maharani Jind Kaur's large retinue, settled in Nepalganj. A second wave of Sikhs arrived in Nepal, driven away from Pakistan during the Partition in 1947.

Sardar Amarjit Singh is 65, and remembers his parents' struggle in making Nepalganj their home after being forced out of Lahore during the Partition. Today, Amarjit runs a medical shop and a fuel trucks for Nepal Oil Corporation in Nepalganj.

“I was born and brought up in Nepalganj, so this is my home and Nepal is my country. With so many Sikhs in Banke district, I do not feel like an outsider at all,” he adds.

Many Nepali Sikhs first worked driving and owning trucks as roads were built in the mountains. Pritam Singh came to Nepal after being introduced to King Mahendra in 1959, and his friends and families soon followed and the clan has grown over the past decades.

Today, Pritam Singh no longer has a transport business. He is the



With the pandemic this year, the Gurudwara in Kupondole wears a deserted look ahead of Guru Nanak Jayanti on 30 November.



Preeti Kaur



Pritam Singh



Lal Bahadur Karki and his wife Bhim Kumari who converted to Sikhism, and identify with its tenets.

Proud to be a Sikh

Every morning, a short man in a yellow Sikh turban and blue surgical mask walks down Kupondole doing his daily chores: buying vegetables or chatting away with neighbours.

Incongruously, his name is Lal Bahadur Karki. Born in Ramechhap to a Chettri family, he was sent as a child to work for a rich family whose house is now the Sikh shrine, Guru Nanak Satsang Gurudwara in Kupondole.

Karki chose to remain and serve at the shrine after his employer sold the house to the Sikh community. He eventually converted into Sikhism and now wears a turban and has a distinctive long white beard.

“I was young and so attached to the place that over the time I became very close to the Sikh religion and its teachings,” says Lal Bahadur, whose wife Bhim Kumari, and family have also converted to Sikhism. Even his son, who is a migrant worker in Malaysia wears a turban.

“People often get confused by our surname and appearance,” he says, “they judge us, but we are used to it by now. It's our faith and belief in God.”

Amidst the Covid-19 crisis, Karki along with his wife and other members of the Sikh community are now preparing a quiet celebration for Guru Nanak's 551st birthday on Monday.

founder of Modern Indian School, and the chief elder of the Sikh community in Kathmandu Valley.

Many younger Sikhs have moved out, and the third generation of Nepali Sikhs are making their mark all over the world. Jaspreet Singh Sethi, 29, fondly recalls his grandfather Manmohan Singh Sethi who helped build Patan Hospital.

Now based in Sydney, Jaspreet Sethi works for Ikea. Even after having lived away from Nepal and his parents for over 13 years, Jaspreet says, “Nepal will always be my home and there will always

be that sense of belonging, my heart and mind is there.”

Another Sikh who has carved a niche for herself is Preeti Kaur, a singer in the Nepali entertainment industry. Although she has the fame to her name, she yearns to receive Nepali citizenship which she has been struggling to get for over years.

She is now working on her new single, *Chimlora Aakha*, due for release next week on her YouTube channel. She adds: “There is the identity issue, but my family and I like to live a quiet life here, is there any other option?” 🇳🇵

Set the elephants free

Chitwan can be promoted as a completely ride-free, chain-free area for elephants

Michelle Szydlowski

Humans and elephants have shared environments for thousands of years, but what might surprise readers is that a quarter of the world's Asian elephants live in captivity.

These elephants are a vital and vibrant part of Nepal's history, and their use has been documented since at least the fifth century in areas as diverse as war machines, living monuments to regal power and wealth, rewards for service and currently as tourist transport.

Elephant tourism has become a major financial windfall for businessmen in the Chitwan National Park area, and photos of elephants on the streets of Sauraha have become synonymous with the location. Visitors to the area often mention their desire to 'see elephants' in both the wild and in captive settings. Tourism vendors must keep up the appearance of happy animals in idyllic settings in order to maintain a steady flow of income.

However, there is no 'sound science' supporting elephant-backed tourism, and no studies that provide data that shows anything but substandard conditions in the majority of stables within the area.

In fact, I have spent the last four years as a rhino and elephant researcher in Nepal, and have just completed an assessment of the stables in Chitwan.

In a series of articles, Brown, et al found that elephants in tourism venues varied in weight, fecal glucocorticoid measurements (a sign of stress), and other hormonal studies depending upon their management techniques and expected performance of duties.

In a few studies, the elephants used in safari rides showed better weights and lower concentrations of certain stress hormones than those used in exhibition-only venues. However, while these analyses were conducted by reputable sources, the *Nepali Times* article misrepresents their results. Rather than conclusively exonerating elephant captivity, these studies called for further research, acknowledging that the weight differences may be due to the practice of overfeeding sweet treats such as bananas and sugar cane to elephants kept in exhibition/visitation stables.

In addition, being chained or kept in one place impacts exercise habits of these individuals, and increasing their activity via non-riding activities may be needed. Further studies showed that simply being exposed to humans was a stressful event, causing spikes in the stress hormones of captive elephants.

Hopefully, new measures such as an examination of secretory hormones, will allow researchers to assess positive or negative experiences in elephants.

Other oft-quoted studies used by tourism agencies to promote elephant rides include those which say that the bullhook is not a danger in and of itself. This is a very true statement, just as any weapon is essentially harmless when disconnected from a human.

Sadly, much traditional mahout knowledge regarding safe elephant handling has been lost,



Safari elephants on the streets of Sauraha.



Elephants frolic on the Rapti River during a monsoon downpour.

LUCIA DE VRIES

and bullhooks are now used nearly exclusively for fear and beating-based training, along with nails, knives, and sticks.

Experienced mahouts have moved on to better jobs to escape the stigma of being low-caste or poorly-paid, researchers have found, leaving younger or inexperienced men to handle elephants using dominance and violence. Beatings often take place in view of visitors, and present tourists with a negative view of Nepal. There are no laws specifically protecting elephants in Nepal, and this lack of legislation puts an uncomfortable spotlight on the country.

A reality that animal welfare advocates must acknowledge is that one cannot simply expect elephant rides to stop overnight. Those of us working in elephant research and welfare acknowledge the need for a gradual change which provides training and better employment opportunities for mahouts, financial stability for owners, and opportunities for local community members who rely on elephant tourism for their survival.

By pushing for better elephant standards, we are not clamouring to immediately eradicate elephant tourism. In fact, most researchers realise that government-owned elephants are a necessary part of anti-poaching, emergency rescue and wildlife census activities. During the monsoon season, these elephants remain the only way to enter the park.

Happy elephants

The elephants at Tiger Tops Tharu

Village, who were participants in my study, have significantly different lives than most elephants in Nepal. These elephants are kept in chain-free enclosures, and have a large number of well-trained and experienced mahouts to care for them and are allowed more agency in their daily activities.

In addition, the staff of Tiger Tops has agreed that they will no longer purchase elephants once this herd passes. But these humane conditions are aberrant for captive elephants in Nepal.

Surveys into the health and welfare of privately-held elephants have shown nutritional deficiencies, physical deformities and injuries, wounds from abuse and abscesses from saddles, death from preventable disorders, stillbirth and near-constant reproductive issues.

The majority of elephants in the Sauraha area are not allowed to recline for rest, get dirty or dig (a necessity for foot and joint health), but are instead chained by front and back legs. Recumbancy for sleep is incredibly important for elephant health, as is digging. Simple, inexpensive changes to stables — such as providing dirt for the expression of natural behaviours or more appropriate nutrition — would be a game changer for the elephants of Nepal.

Look, don't touch

The captive elephants of Nepal also represent a population which may impact the life span of wild elephants in the area. Because they carry diseases such as TB, found in at least 23% of the captive

population and has recently resulted in the deaths of two government-owned elephants, they risk passing along a variety of bacteria to wild populations.

Furthermore, studies have shown that the pressure placed on forest resources by captive elephants impacts the availability of resources for wild elephants. Preserving these endangered species in their natural habitats should be a priority for the government of Nepal, and allowing the keeping of captive elephants in shared spaces is a risky practice.

Because Nepal is a CITES signatory, the trade and sale of these endangered species is illegal. No amount of description of peaceful jungle walks or 'ethical' activities will change the fact that the use of these animals for commercial purposes is illegal.

Owners should refrain from buying or selling elephants in the future, as a sign of their commitment to creating lasting changes in Sauraha. Visitors to the area should be aware of the laws surrounding elephant trade, and consider this fact when booking travel to areas advertising elephant tourism.

Currently, there are multiple plans in place to create a non-riding sanctuary in the Chitwan National Park area of Nepal, and NGOs such as Jane Goodall-Nepal and World Animal Protection have been in talks for years with the local elephant owner's cooperative group about this issue.

If all owners agreed to stop tourist riding, these organisations, and others, have indicated that there would be a great deal of financial support available. But because there have been holdouts among cooperative members, talks have stalled for the time being.

There is now discussion of a cooperatively-owned facility housing a few of the members' elephants which will provide viewing of elderly individuals and riding of younger ones. However, this hardly fits the definition of a true sanctuary.

Instead, Sauraha has the unique opportunity to become a completely ride-free, chain-free venue due to the relatively small number of captive elephants, and the acknowledgement by owners that these elephants now

require a change in treatment and management.

These owners have the chance to establish Sauraha as a more ethical tourism venue, while still creating income for themselves and maintaining employment opportunities for marginalised communities of mahouts. This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance for Nepal, and the elephant owners, to create a world-recognised facility. Hopefully, owners will embrace this opportunity and create lasting changes in the elephant industry.

Luckily, there is already one smaller NGO in the Chitwan area working with local stakeholders to purchase elephants out of riding situations, and quietly transfer them to true sanctuaries. In addition, other organisations are working with hotel owners to lease elephants, keeping them off safari.

In addition, there are other ethical venues open for tourist visits. One way to ensure your destinations are animal-friendly or ethical is look at the access offered to living animals. If the venue allows human touching of animals, then it is best to avoid. Use your tourist dollars to support facilities that care about animal health and welfare. Look, but don't touch.

The bottom line

No one wishes to ban tourism in Nepal. It is a beautiful location with much to offer, and has set a high standard in preserving natural habitats for wildlife.

What must change, however, is for tourists to take responsibility for their own impacts on both wild and captive elephants as well as local communities. This endangered species deserves our respect and better treatment in return for their years of hard work.

They deserve a life with proper nutrition, agency, and space. Well-informed tourists will continue to visit the area, and should use their tourist dollars to support ethical activities and stay in hotels that promote chain-free corrals and well-nourished elephants. 🇳🇵



Michelle Szydlowski is a PhD candidate with the University of Exeter Anthropology Department. Her research focuses on pachyderm-people relationships in Nepal, captive elephant welfare, and sustainable tourism.

ISAZ



Loss of their favourite grass due to the spread of invasive vines have forced rhinos to venture outside Chitwan National Park, like this juvenile in Sauraha last year.

SAGAR GIRI

Climate change: new threat to Nepal's rhinos

They endured habitat loss and poaching, now endangered rhinos are at risk from the climate crisis

Mukesh Pokhrel
in Chitwan

Nepal's population of one-horned rhinoceros that survived hunting, a shrinking habitat and wildlife trafficking are now faced with a new threat: changes in their living environment due to a rapidly-warming atmosphere.

Eight rhinos have been found dead inside Chitwan National Park since 11 July – half of them due to unprecedented floods on the Narayani River that submerged their grassland habitat.

The latest rhino to be washed up on the river bank on 7 October, followed two days later by a rhino that fell into the Balmiki-Gandaki irrigation canal and drowned.

One of the rhinos is believed to have been shot on 10 September by poachers taking advantage of the lockdown, the first such instance after four years of zero rhino poaching in Nepal. Rhinos have been rescued from the brink of extinction in Nepal's Tarai plains, Chitwan alone has 605 of them, with a dozen more in Bardia National Park.

"The rhinos have overcome many threats, but climate change has brought about a new challenge," explains Shantaraj Gyawali, who did his PhD on rhino conservation. He says erratic weather, including heavy rains and floods during the monsoon and prolonged drought in the dry season have altered the rhino's riverine habitat.

Rhinos, tigers and other species that need watering holes in the dry season are suffering because many of them have gone dry. Part of the reason is increasingly erratic weather with too much rain in the monsoon, and too little in spring. The water table has also gone down due to over-extraction of groundwater by farmers outside the park.

The Department of National



A rhino washed down to India in a flood in 2017, being tranquilised and returned to Chitwan National Park three years later in August (above). After watering holes inside Chitwan National Park started drying up in spring, rhinos loitered around Sauraha for a drink in the river (right). The rhino's favourite grasses are being over-run by invasive mikania vines (below).



KUNDA DIXIT

Parks and Wildlife Conservation has dug 500 ponds in the Tarai parks, with another 200 being readied for coming dry season. It has also tried to restore native grass in the floodplain grazing area of rhinos, and other ungulates that are prey for tigers and other carnivores.

The drowning deaths of rhinos this monsoon season has worried

Chitwan National Park authorities, who blame unprecedented heavy rainfall probably due to climate change.

Eight rainfall measurement stations across Nepal this year registered record-breaking precipitation. Of these, seven were in the upper reaches of the Narayani River watershed in Kaski,



CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK

Baglung, Syangja, and Parbat.

Kaski district registered a record-breaking 4,519mm of rain in July-September, 33% higher than normal. Lamjung and Kuma district also saw highest-ever rainfall ever recorded. Chitwan itself had 3,130mm of rain this year, much higher than the annual average of 2,450mm.

All this rain was funnelled down to the Narayani through tributaries, to inundate the grasslands and forests of Chitwan National Park, catching many wild animals unaware.

"When rhinos die of natural causes, we are not overly worried," says Ashok Ram of Chitwan National Park. "But when rhinos drown, or are washed down to India by floods then it raises alarm bells."

Indeed, in 2017 a sudden flood on the Rapti and Narayani rivers swept away wildlife, including rhinos, across the border to the Balmiki Tiger Reserve in India. Nine of the rhinos were repatriated to Chitwan a few months later. Another rhino that had been missing was finally traced, tranquillised and returned to Nepal in August.

There is no indication if whether this year's floods also washed rhinos to India, but the increasing

frequency and intensity of floods is worrying Nepal's conservationists, who blame climate change

In addition, new invasive plant species have replaced the favourite grass fodder for rhinos, wallows have gone dry, driving rhinos out of the park into Chitwan's tourist towns like Sauraha and Meghauli.

In fact, the sight of rhinos roaming through streets have become a tourist attraction. With it, there have also been instances of rhinos being electrocuted or poisoned by buffer zone farmers fearing loss of crops.

Ashok Ram of Chitwan National Park says he has noticed rhinos now moving from the east to the western edges of the park: "We do not know why this is happening, but they could be searching for better grazing or watering holes."

The tall grass along the floodplains and oxbow lakes along the Rapti and Narayani Rivers are being replaced by invasive species like mikania vines, banmara, and new plant varieties that are favoured by rising global average temperatures.

Adds Ram: "Climate change threatens to undo Nepal's success story in rhino and nature conservation." 🇳🇵

Women impacted more by pandemic economy

But the Covid-19 crisis is also an opportunity to increase female participation in the labour force

As Nepal's economy takes a nose dive due to the global pandemic and faces a looming unemployment crisis, what is often missing in the discourse are the special needs of women who depended on income from the informal sector.



COMMENT
Isha Sharma

The Covid-19 crisis does not come with a single set of challenges, and nor can its effects be tackled by a one-size-fits-all policy intervention. This is especially true of the impact on Nepal's women who were either in the pink-collar labour sector, or did unpaid household work.

Estimates show that about 70% of Nepalis were employed in the informal economy in pre-Covid days. Most of them have now been rendered jobless, and among them the percent of women that are less likely to return to such work is higher than for men.

Nepal's working population above the age of 15 in 2018 was 71.5% of the total 30 million population. Of them, the proportion of working-age females was actually higher with 11.53 million – as opposed to 9.2 million males.

Only 8.5 million Nepalis of working age were in the labour force, either employed or in search of employment. And among them only 2.8 million (22.5%) of the women in the labour force had jobs. The informal sector was the highest employer of workforce (62.2%) of which 66.5% were female while 59.7% were male.

These numbers have been severely skewed during 2020 with the onset of pandemic, especially for those employed in the informal sector. A World Bank Report projects Nepal's economy to grow by a meagre 0.6% after an average growth of 7.3% for last three years.

Those employed in the informal sector in towns and cities are more vulnerable to such a sharp economic slump, with many of them at a higher risk of falling into extreme poverty – compared to those in rural areas who can rely on subsistence farming for sustenance.

As more young Nepali men leave for the cities or employment in India and overseas, it was projected that the domestic labour force would be feminised. However, the problem in such sectors, apart from the lack of availability of jobs for women, was that they lacked basic facilities to



DEEPENDRA BAJRACHARYA/NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE



PAUL JEFFREY/NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

accommodate female workers.

Similarly, women were more likely to cede regular employment opportunities to male members of the family, while they concentrated on household work.

Traditional norms have deprived many Nepali women of agency in decision-making about their education or careers. Often, this results in young women dropping

out of school or college, quitting their jobs, or even opting for positions below their preference or qualifications.

Conventionally, women working outside their homes are still considered frivolous. Some are judged to be pursuing a hobby, rather than making an incumbent career move like their male counterparts.

Depending on their socio-economic background, women are either encouraged or discouraged to work outside their homes. Surprisingly, surveys have shown that more women from poorer households are encouraged to bring in income to support their families compared to women in the higher socio-economic brackets.

Typically, it is expected of a

woman to give up salaried work or studies when traditional gender roles demand. For many, the choice comes down to financial independence or conforming to such roles and 'taking care' of the family.

As a consequence of these perceived gender roles and traditional societal structures, women are trained in certain sectors, often regarded as 'pink-collar' jobs. They are then dissuaded from exploring other opportunities which might have better pay scale and growth.

Entering into an industry traditionally dominated by men is a whole other challenge for women with limited experience, and these work spaces lack the infrastructure for female employees and are usually hostile towards them.

With additional burden posed by the pandemic, it is crucial to understand why Nepal needs to increase its female labour force participation rate. Small and Medium Scale Enterprises have been crucial in driving the economy, and with more women employed in such sectors, both consumption and production are likely to increase.

Such growth can pave the way for creation of more jobs. An increase in the financial status at both micro and macro levels would mean the spending would rise, in turn, amplifying the demand for goods and services – leading to a surge of money circulation in the economy.

Employment of women outside their homes would generate opportunities for domestic workers as well. One of the biggest challenges women face for abstaining work is the burden of unpaid household work.

Converting the unpaid labour into an active household employment industry would not just increase the workforce participation rate, but add value to 'menial' chores and liberate women from societal shackles. This would further expand the job market.

With the pandemic bringing additional challenges and new uncertainties, it is essential for Nepal to pursue policies and inject appropriate stimulus to avail all such opportunities.

Nepal has roughly 35 years before transiting into an aged society. There is no time to waste if Nepal is to harness its biggest asset: its people. The Covid-19 crisis may be the impetus to encourage great female participation in the work force. 🇳🇵

Isha Sharma is an ACCA (Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) student in Kathmandu.



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A tale of two viruses

Lessons for tackling the Covid-19 crisis from Nepal's successful effort to reduce HIV/AIDS prevalence

Jhabindra Bhandari

Nepal is facing a rapidly spreading Covid-19 contagion somewhat similar to the surge of HIV/AIDS during the 2000 decade, and the country's success in reducing the scourge has important lessons for fighting the current pandemic.

Given the epic dimensions of this emergency, there is a need for the kind of national unity and solidarity for concerted action that we saw 20 years ago to tackle the socio-economic challenges of the coronavirus pandemic.

Just as with HIV, SARS-CoV-2 is having a severe impact on the most vulnerable communities. While one virus is air borne, and the other spreads through the exchange of bodily fluids, getting the message out on prevention and safety measures are important for both diseases.

In addition, the current pandemic crisis threatens to undo a lot of the progress that Nepal has achieved in reducing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS from 0.3% of the adult population in 2007-8 to 0.13% today.

Nepal's AIDS response worked because of effective partnership with civil society which was crucial to find local solutions while we waited for the anti-retrovirals to become available. The free distribution of this therapy also set an important precedent for Covid-19 in providing Nepalis with access to vaccines and treatments when they are ready.

As in HIV/AIDS, Covid-19 response should place affected communities at the centre. More importantly, it should be a rights-based approach grounded on equity and justice. These lessons from the HIV response provide critical insights for governments and development partners to build resilient health system which will be as effective, accountable and inclusive.

The first HIV case in Nepal was diagnosed in 1988. After this, the epidemic evolved from low prevalence to a concentrated epidemic. Key populations such as sex workers, injecting drug users, migrants, prisoners, transgender people, and gay men and other men who have sex with men are at high



BIKRAM RAI

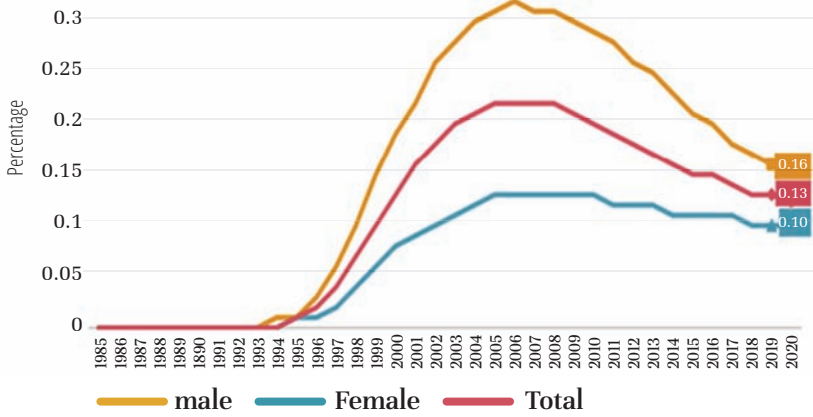


risk of acquiring HIV infection. Discrimination and social exclusion makes them more vulnerable.

Despite global progress, millions of people around the world are still at risk of contracting HIV infection, and AIDS remains a leading cause of death among women of reproductive age and young adolescents.

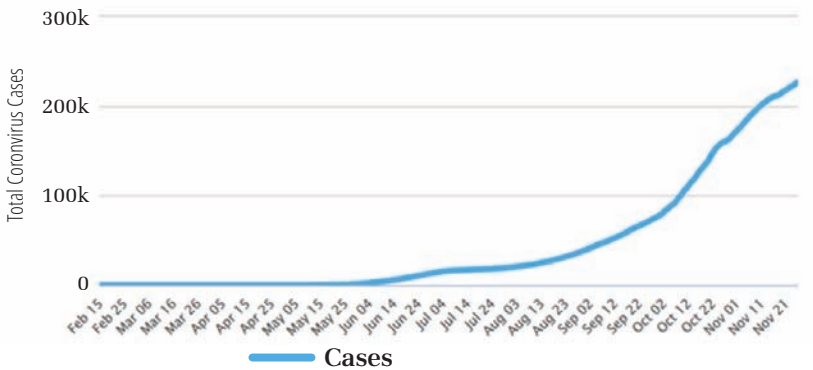
Nepal has made remarkable progress in its HIV response over the past decades. According to National Centre for AIDS and STD Control (NCASC), an estimated 29,503 people are currently living

HIV prevalence among Nepal's adult population (15-49 years) 1985-2020



SOURCE: NATIONAL CENTRE FOR AIDS AND STD CONTROL, MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND POPULATION

Total Covid-19 cases



with HIV in the country. Despite the reduction in the prevalence rate, much more needs to be done.

In order to further reduce the incidence of HIV infection among key populations, a range of development partners and civil society organisations are reaching out to key populations with prevention, treatment

and care services across the country. Community-based HIV interventions are largely guided by National HIV Strategic Plan (2016-2021) that focuses on scaling up innovative prevention services to young key populations.

Despite impressive progress, HIV still continues to be a public health challenge because services

are still limited in remote districts. People living with HIV still do not have easy access to treatment and care in health facilities.

There is a need to reduce disparities in access to treatment and care by addressing human rights, gender-based violence, stigma and discrimination which continue to hinder access to HIV services for key populations. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2016 Political Declaration on a fast-track to end AIDS epidemic by 2030. This requires an accelerated expansion of comprehensive HIV services across the country.

The global 90-90-90 targets aim for 90% of people living with HIV knowing their HIV status, 90% of people who know their status receiving treatment, and 90% of people on HIV treatment having a suppressed viral load.

However, there are significant gaps in Nepal to access treatment services that need robust health sector response. And those targets can only be met with strong political commitment, community engagement and resilient health system. And on top of this challenge, we now have the public health crisis caused by Covid-19.

Both epidemics require a sustained multi-sector response to mitigate its adverse socio-economic impacts on individuals, families and communities. Meaningful engagement of people living with HIV and evidence-based actions can significantly reduce the burden of HIV in developing countries.

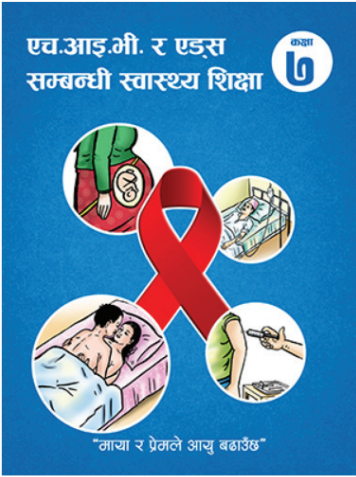
The role of civil society networks and media has been instrumental in spreading awareness, reducing stigma and ostracisation, and they have shown it is possible to break the silence that surrounds HIV, and practice safe behavior.

Over the years, national networks of people living with HIV and other key populations are playing critical role to empower poor and vulnerable populations in accessing essential health services. In Nepal's remote communities, they have been delivering antiretroviral medicines to the homes of people living with HIV during the coronavirus pandemic. Community ownership is cornerstone of the civil society response which is why strengthening civil society response is crucial to reaching out the people living with HIV and other marginalised communities for the services they need. It is also equally important to enhance social accountability of local governments in order to ensure sustained provision of comprehensive HIV services in the communities.

Political commitment for universal health coverage is therefore crucial to ensure no one is left behind and the rights of key populations are protected. This is instrumental in enabling legal, social and institutional environments for Nepal to reduce the prevalence rate even further.

On World AIDS Day on 1 December, we also have to remember that gender inequality and HIV risks are inextricably linked. Adolescent girls and young women face particular challenges that can leave them at high risk of unwanted pregnancy, violence and HIV.

Many are still unable to access the sexual and reproductive health services they need. Sexual and gender minorities face even more difficulty in accessing health and other social protection services. 🇳🇵



HIV/AIDS awareness campaign poster, and another one depicting preventive measures for Covid-19.

Jhabindra Bhandari is a senior doctoral research fellow in global health, is presently national consultant with UNAIDS.

Nepal’s climate targets are either unrealistically ambitious, or unnecessarily ambiguous

Sonia Awale

The global pandemic hijacked 2020 and reset priorities, but countries now need to regroup and renew their commitment to cap global warming at well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, as agreed in Paris in 2015.

On 12 December, it will be the fifth anniversary of the signing of the landmark climate accord when 196 countries, including Nepal, will be presenting their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to reduce the impact of the climate crisis.

NDCs are voluntary commitments by countries to reduce their carbon footprints, but there are doubts that a world in the throes of a Covid-19 induced economic crisis will not follow through on past commitments – even as scientists warn that the earth is warming much more rapidly than forecast five years ago in Paris.

The Himalaya is literally a hotspot because the mountains are warming faster than the global average. But activists say Nepal’s own ‘Enhanced NDC’ does not go far enough in mitigating carbon emissions, or adapting to the impact of the climate emergency.

The document has been put up for public comment and is subject to revision. Its highlight is that Nepal for the first time mentions ‘net-zero emission’ as a future goal.

But the document does not give a timeline to achieve it, and only says that the country will formulate ‘a long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategy’ sometime next year.

In the region, Bhutan has already declared itself carbon neutral – meaning its forests absorb more than the CO₂ it emits. China, responsible for 28% of total annual carbon emissions, recently pledged peak emission before 2030 and attain net zero by 2060. President-elect Joe Biden has committed that the US, which contributes 15% of CO₂ annually, to zero carbon emissions by 2050, as have Japan, South Korea and the UK.

India, the fourth largest CO₂ emitter globally, is lagging, but has been investing heavily in solar power, and setting targets to electrify railways and phase out diesel and petroleum vehicles by 2030.

Nepali activists say the country’s NDC could have gone much further to set realistic firm pledges, since it is starting from such a low carbon base.

“We could have easily set a target of net-zero by 2050. In fact we can achieve it by 2030 if we are really committed,” says environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar. “Our emission is negligible, we are a low-carbon economy and have much cleaner sources of energy like hydroelectricity at our disposal.”

A report in 2014 showed that Nepal’s forest area had doubled in 25 years, and it absorbed half of Nepal’s total emissions from burning fossil fuels. However, another report showed that carbon emission was rising faster than vegetation cover, and frequent wildfires were themselves pumping more CO₂ into the atmosphere.

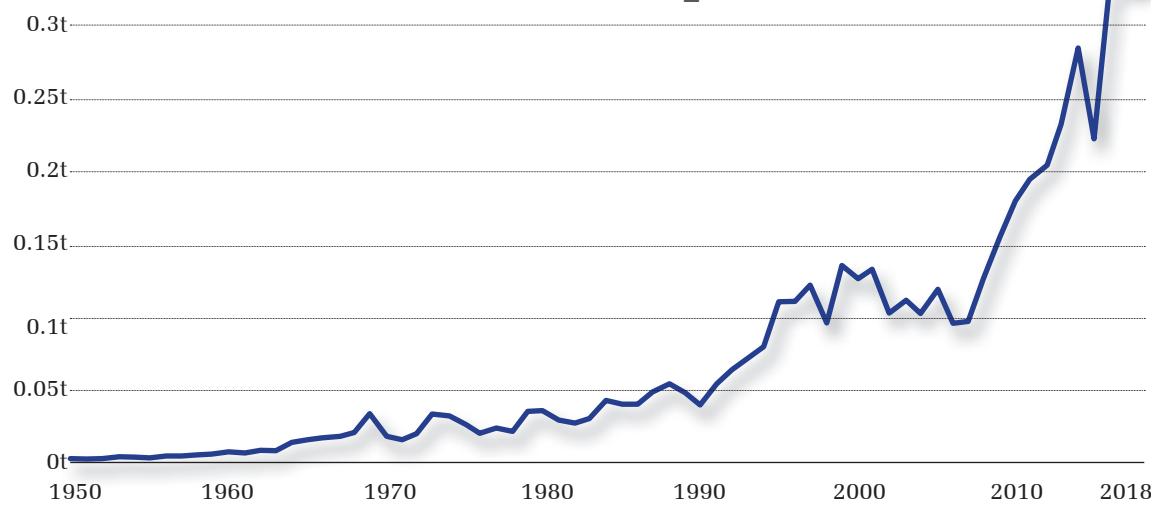
Manjeet Dhakal, adviser to the Least Developed Countries support group at the UN Framework

Blueprint for a net-zero Nepal



NEPAL OIL CORPORATION

Nepal's annual per capita CO₂ emission



are too conservative, says Bhushan Tuladhar. “Our targets are often too ambitious or too relaxed. With the new NDCs, we can see this pattern in sectors such as industry, waste and agriculture which are either too vague or too conservative,” he adds.

Planners have also not taken into account that the cost of electric vehicles is already at par with diesel vehicles of the same capacity, and will decline further as the price of lithium ion batteries continue to fall. Increased affluence means more people will opt for two-wheelers and automobiles, most likely electric, especially as India and China phase out production of diesel and petrol vehicles.

While Nepal’s voluntary commitment sets a target to reduce coal consumption and air pollution from brick and cement industries by 2030, it does not mention how, and by how much. The NDC document only says the government will ‘formulate guidelines and establish mechanisms’ by 2025 to monitor emissions from large industries.

On the waste sector, the NDC says that by 2025, 380 million litres/day of wastewater will be treated before discharge to natural courses, and 60,000 cubic meters/year of faecal sludge will be managed. But it has targeted only 100 of Nepal’s 753 municipalities for waste segregation, recycling and waste-to-energy programs by 2030.

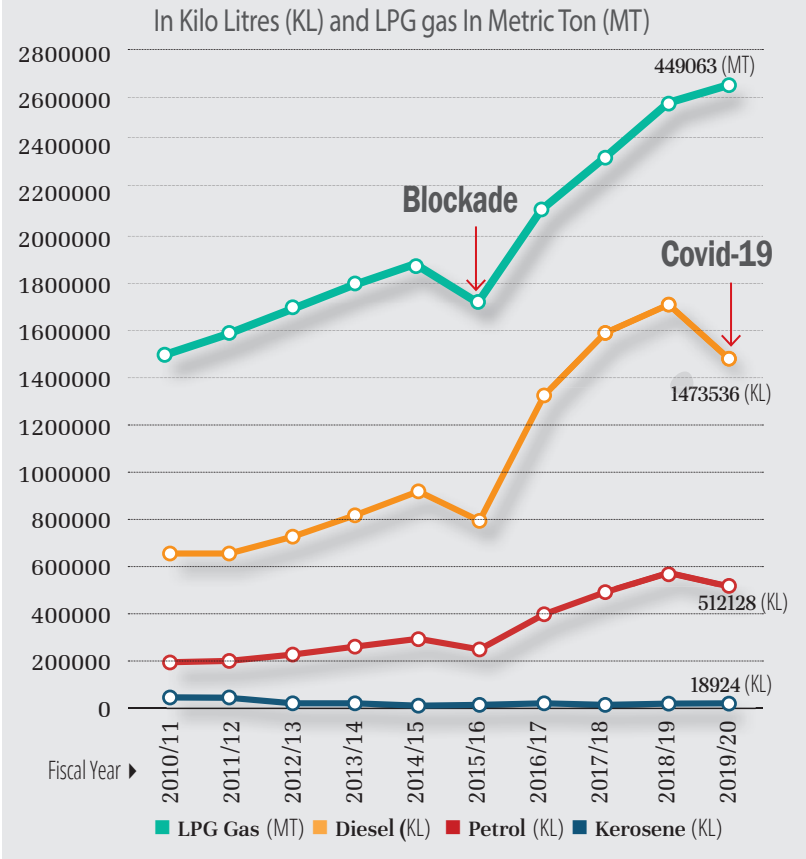
Nepal’s 2016 NDC pledged to increase forest cover to 40% of the total area, but the country exceeded the target and current forest cover stands at 44.74%. The new NDC has included more community forests, and forecasts that 60% of Nepal’s area will be forest, pledging to stop deforestation of the Chure range.

Similarly, intercropping, agroforestry, conservation tillage and climate-smart agricultural technologies are all mentioned in the NDC, but missing conspicuously from the discussion is farm mechanisation.

Nepal aims to increase hydroelectricity generation from the current 1,400MW to 15,000 by 2030. Of this, 5,000MW is an unconditional target, and the remainder is contingent on funding from the international community. In fact, Nepal will need \$25 billion to meet its NDC targets, and most of this will be dependent on foreign aid.

Manjeet Dhakal admits the targets in the new NDC may not be ambitious, but he says they are realistic. He adds: “For the longest time Nepal was the most vulnerable to climate change. But time has come for us to show our leadership and commitment to net-zero by implementing the targets set.”

Nepal's imports of petroleum



SOURCE: NOC AND GON

Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) says: “I am confident we will achieve net-zero by 2050. But what is important in this discussion is that, while we may be among the smallest emitters, our emissions are increasing and forests are not absorbing CO₂ as they used to.”

Nepal’s annual per capita carbon emission is one of the lowest in the world at 0.29 tons. In comparison, an average American pumps out 16 tons of carbon every year, and Qataris burn 37 tons. However, Nepal’s per capita emission is rising significantly due to the growing

imports of petroleum and thermal electricity from India.

As new roads are built and more vehicles imported, Nepal’s main driver of fossil fuel consumption is the transportation sector. Motorcycles account for 80% of all vehicles in Nepal, and phasing them out for battery-powered two-wheelers would significantly reduce petroleum imports.

Electric public transport will need subsidies from the government and investors but it also means utilising Nepal’s clean energy from hydropower and further reducing

our carbon footprint. Last fiscal year, Nepal’s petroleum import reached Rs200 billion — 2.2 times higher than the country’s total income from exports. Imports of diesel, petrol, aviation fuel and LPG went down slightly in 2020 due to the pandemic and lockdowns (*see chart*).

Switching to electric public transport and battery vehicles to reduce the petroleum import bill by just 10% would save Rs21 billion a year, also cleaning up the air. Air pollution killed 41,000 people in Nepal last year. This winter that risk for patients with respiratory issues is combined with Covid-19 complications.

Bishwo Nath Oli, Secretary at the Ministry of Forest and Environment says: “We plan to produce 15,000MW of clean energy by 2030 and we need a strategy so that it is properly consumed and utilised. Electrification of transport is the best way to go about it, along with electric stoves and biomass to cut emissions significantly.”

Nepal’s Enhanced NDC has set a target of turning 25% of all private passenger vehicles sales, including two-wheelers, to electric. It also aims to make 20% of all new four-wheel public transport battery-powered by 2025. Most of Nepal’s three-wheel vehicles are already electric.

Planners hope to increase these numbers to 90% and 60% by 2030. Similarly, in 10 years Nepal aims to develop 200km of electric rail network.

But activists are sceptical. Prime Minister KP Oli had declared in 2018 that 25% of all vehicles in Nepal would be electric by 2020. But then, Finance Minister Yubaraj Khatiwada scrapped tax subsidies for electric vehicles in this year’s budget, although his successor has restored some rebates for smaller battery powered cars.

But even if targets are met, they