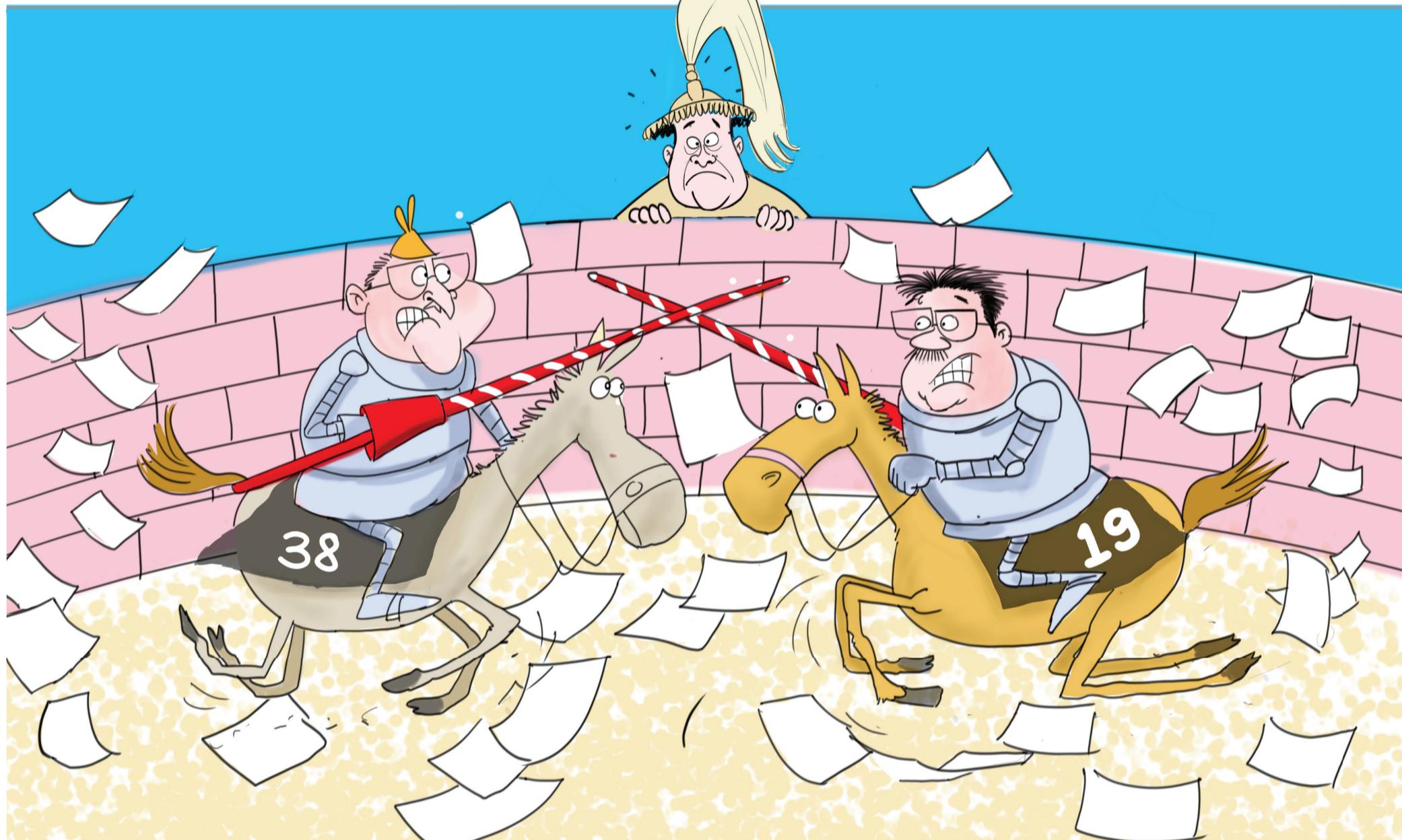


#1038

4 - 10 December 2020

12 pages

Rs 50



DIWAKAR CHHETRI

Fight to finish

The Nepal Communist Party (NCP) Secretariat meeting on 1 December coincided with Finance Minister Bishnu Poudel's birthday. Prime Minister K P Oli kicked off the proceeding by feeding Poudel.

'Let them eat cake,' seems to be the motto of the NCP. Instead of discussing response to the rising death toll from the Covid-19 pandemic nationwide, or the threat posed by the rise of the Hindu-right, the meeting was just another extension of the power struggle between factions led by Oli and his party co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

The gathering soon degenerated into personal mud-slinging between Oli and Dahal. As the temperature inside the Baluwatar meeting hall

rose, the meeting was put off till the next day.

However, on Wednesday Prime Minister Oli failed to attend, and the meeting ended with the announcement that it would reconvene on Saturday, 5 December.

This has given Oli three more days to come up with a strategy to stave off a party mutiny. Party insiders say that the anti-Oli faction is now in the mood to pass a no-confidence vote in the NCP parliamentary committee to get him to step down from both party chair and prime ministership.

Sensing this, Oli is buying time. While Dahal was holding the NCP Secretariat meeting at Baluwatar on Wednesday, Oli was holed up with advisers in another part of the prime



LET THEM EAT CAKE: Prime Minister K P Oli feeding a slice of cake to Bishnu Poudel at the start of a ruling NCP Secretariat meeting on Tuesday that degenerated into personal mud-slinging. Prime Minister Oli kept away from Wednesday's Secretariat meeting (right).

minister's residence compound, discussing his next move with close advisers.

The latest bout in this long-drawn duel involved the two party chieftains hurling written statements at each other. In response to Dahal's 19-page missive on 13 November, Oli drafted a voluminous 38-page salvo on 28 November.

Oli's trusted ally Lumbini Province Chief Minister Shankar Pokhrel is said to be for getting both leaders to withdraw their accusatory

documents, and draft a new one that will patch up the long-running dispute once and for all.

Party insiders on both sides admit that the differences are not insurmountable – they just stem from the perception in the Dahal-Nepal faction that Oli has not given them due respect, and their loyalists key appointments. But they admit

that it is now a clash of egos, and there is too much bad blood to settle it amicably.

For his part, Oli is said to be considering a range of options that are (in order of extremeness): splitting the party and forming a coalition with the opposition Nepali Congress, appointing a trusted 'young turk' to prime ministership and stepping down, wooing off Nepal, Jhalanath Khanal or Bam Dev Gautam to his side by offering them coveted cabinet or party posts in the NCP convention, or patching up with rivals by agreeing to a joint declaration.

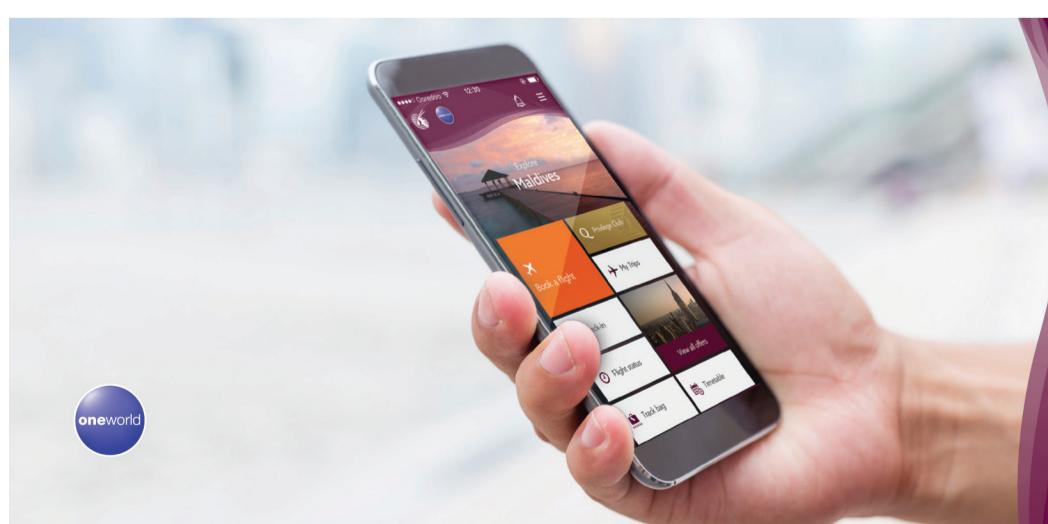
Oli is said to have told one confidante this week: "If I am forced to step down, I will pass the prime ministership to a younger generation leader."

The NCP has called a Standing Committee meeting now on 6 December, and it is expected to be a decisive one.

Reincarnating the monarchy

EDITORIAL

PAGE 2



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Preparing for the clash of empires

Visits by Indian and Chinese military, intelligence and diplomatic officials underscore Nepal's new geo-strategic status

NePAL has become one of the locations in Asia in which three large powers will increasingly intersect and collide in the coming years. China, India and the United States, and their respective friends, can be expected to enhance their Nepal portfolios in the near future.



COMMENT
Bhaskar Koirala

The utility of this role that Nepal may play, depends on a number of factors but is primarily related to the extent the country is able to assert its own independent identity — not as a measure to challenge more powerful countries, but to ensure that those powerful countries that wish to work with us are not undercutting, or let us say sabotaging, one other.

It is important for Nepal, now more than ever before in its recent history, to cultivate relationships and friendships with as many countries around the world as possible.

This will not only help to accelerate development in the country, but would be a great opportunity for Nepal to contribute some public goods into the international system, too. But what kind of public goods?

There will be a need down the line for countries like Nepal to help maintain peace and stability in what is likely to be a more turbulent and raucous period of world history in the coming decades.

Some theories in international relations predict that China will seek a premier — some would call it a 'hegemonic' — role in Asia in the near future. The same theories also look at what might be the role of India in the decades to come, as it will have not only the largest population in the world, but its youngest demographic bloc too.

How is that likely to impact the course of events in Asia? How is that likely to play out in a country like Nepal, which is sandwiched between these two giants? In what direction will the United States wish to see Nepal move? Is that going to conflict with or converge with the preferences coming out of Beijing and New Delhi?

Some of these questions already require serious assessment. Good governance has not been something



China's Defence Minister Wei Fenghe with Prime Minister Oli on 29 November in Baluwatar.

RAJAN KAFLE



Indian Army Chief M M Naravane visited Nepal on 5 November. On 29 November, China's Defence Minister Wei Fenghe came to Kathmandu, a day after the Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla.



that comes naturally to Nepal's rulers. The main concern of the Nepali people appears to be not what is the model or structure of

governance the country has, but the results (or lack thereof) that emerge as a result. A country's foreign policy is merely an expression of its

core domestic politics.

We are now at a stage where the centre of gravity of global power is shifting back to Asia. The start of the

industrial revolution in Britain had a negative impact on Nepal. It heralded the decline of Asia, and the mastery over Asia and its colonial conquest by western prowess. Asian countries had till this time not just been culturally and politically advanced, but also flexed their economic muscle.

The art and culture in Nepal during the Malla period did not just stay in Kathmandu Valley, but crossed the Himalaya to China, Korea and Japan. These Asian countries at that time were at the zenith of their power, politically and economically.

We are now at the tail end of that process that began in the 18th century with industrialisation in the Western Hemisphere, and the pendulum is starting to swing back to the East.

What should Nepal's position and role be in this transition? The country requires serious stewardship and a total commitment to a morally anchored politics. Political theory tells us that morality can never be consistent with power, and the quest for power will always triumph.

Bhaskar Koirala is the Director of the Nepal Institute of International and Strategic Studies.



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Europe now favoured destination for Nepalis

Despite pandemic, workers lured by better earnings, benefits and chance at citizenship

Nepali emigration conjures up images of migrant workers at construction sites in the Gulf or security guards in Malaysia. Falling between the cracks are the increasing numbers of Nepalis now in Europe.



LABOUR MOBILITY
Upasana Khadka

The volume of Nepalis going to Europe pales in comparison to migrant workers headed to West Asia or Malaysia annually, but their presence has been highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic when many Nepalis fell sick.

Romania, for instance, issued 29,800 work permits to foreign workers in 2019, of these 4,324 were to Nepali workers — the second highest nationality after Vietnam.

Similarly, in Poland, of the 69,000 work permits issued to Asian workers, 9,200 were granted to Nepalis who now make up the highest nationality. In 2019, the 2,273 Nepalis officially residing in Malta made them the fourth largest non-EU nationality on the Mediterranean island.

The Honorary Consul General of Nepal in Romania, Nawa Raj Pokharel, is one of the 500 plus Nepalis who has tested positive after the onset of the pandemic. He spoke to Nepali Times from his hospital bed on Tuesday.

"Workers in restaurants have been vulnerable to the economic fallout, but those working in warehousing, agriculture and construction have continued their work," he said. "I have helped place workers who lost their jobs because of business shut-down or wanted to change employment with new employers. Unless workers are undocumented, they are eligible for unemployment benefits."

A Nepali who spent two years in Qatar paid a recruiter Rs550,000 for a construction job in Romania. Although he was promised a monthly salary of up to Rs150,000, he barely makes Rs60,000 as a steel fixer at a construction site in Bucharest. Recently, he tested positive for Covid-19, and his medical expenses are being borne by his employer.

Another Nepali worker paid Rs450,000 for a job placement in Romania, and says he could not afford the recruitment cost for other Schengen countries which was up to four times higher. Although he is getting unemployment benefits, he is worried he cannot pay back the loan he took to pay recruitment cost.

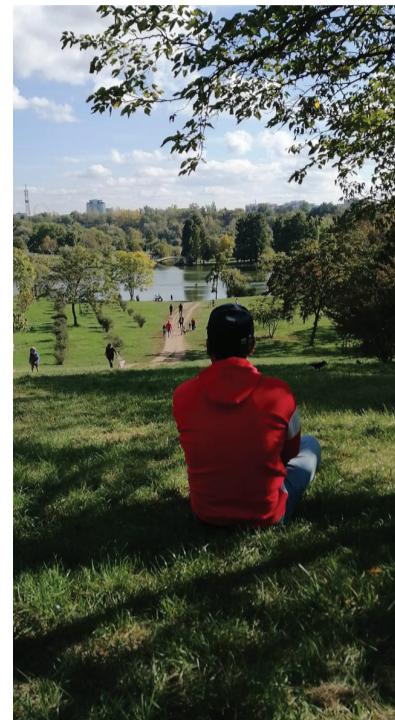
He says: "My eventual dream is to make it to a Schengen country."

Consul General Pokharel, however, says he advises Nepalis here not to try to cross over into Schengen area no matter how much agents try to lure them. "About a dozen Nepalis have been deported after they attempted to cross over on their way to Portugal, three of them recently," he says. "They will be banned from entering any European country for the next five years. It is not worth it."

In Poland, Rita works at a call centre servicing customers in the UK and US and is lucky to be able to work from home through the pandemic.

"I make less than what I made while working at a restaurant," she says.

Ramesh works in a meatpacking company in Poland which closed



A Nepali migrant worker in a park in Romania this summer, and a Nepali worker in a subway in Bucharest. In 2019, Romania issued 4,324 work permits to Nepalis, many of whom are now sick because of Covid-19.

down for three months this year during the pandemic. Luckily, he was provided 2,080 złoty (\$555) a month to pay for rent and food.

Most European countries are going through a second wave this winter, and cases have exceeded 16 million with 371,419 deaths. So far, Poland has seen 876,333 cases, Romania 422,852 cases, Malta 9,137, and Portugal 264,802 cases.

Unlike Romania, Poland is a transit country for many Nepalis who are headed into western Europe — most of them to Portugal given foreign workers can get residence and citizenship after five years. In fact, all roads in Europe seem to lead to Portugal, where there are now 16,849 Nepalis residing legally.

Twenty-year-old Hari is one of them, and he also spent nine months working as a mason in Poland first before moving on. His roommate, Manab, 23 year old Nepali paid Rs1.5 million to a recruiter to get him to the Czech Republic, spend a day there and headed out to Portugal where he believes there is a clear path to citizenship and a better future.

Officials records show that last year alone, 1,287 Nepalis acquired Portuguese citizenship — making them the ninth biggest nationality in the country.

The dream of a EU 'red passport' however comes with a price, many Nepalis have it difficult adjusting to the language, culture, and grueling hard work in a farm. The recruiter usually takes a cut, but there is not much they can do about it. Most Nepalis soon move on to Lisbon and other cities to work in restaurants and cafes. Because they are eligible for unemployment benefits, many have got 70% of their salaries for five months of the Covid-19 lockdown.

In March, Portugal decided to temporarily give migrants the facilities of full citizenship so they could access health and public service, a step which has received accolades globally. The country also temporarily regularised the status of 246,000 migrants till March 2021, among them some Nepalis.

With its mild climate and opportunities in the service sector, Malta is another destination for Nepali workers who want to use it as a stopover to western Europe. However, it is not as easy to obtain citizenship in Malta.

Nepalis like Ram, who worked in a store in Valetta have received



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Nepal-India flights

There are signs that after nine months of stoppage due to the pandemic, flights between Kathmandu and Indian cities are set to resume.



This comes as good news for tens of thousands of Nepali businessmen, students, families and those seeking medical treatment who have been stranded in India for months, as have Indians in Nepal.

The Ministry of Tourism has also been pushing for reopening India flights because the state-owned carrier Nepal Airlines is in deep financial crisis due to under-utilisation of its Airbus fleet. There used to be up to 60 flights a week between Indian cities and Kathmandu, of which Nepal Airlines flew weekly 18. The losses for the airline have been particularly heavy because of the inability to fly the money-spinning Kathmandu-Delhi route.

Everest sightseeing

Nepal's domestic carriers Yeti Airlines and



Buddha Air have restarted their Mt Everest sightseeing flights after nine months. Both airlines offer hefty discounts and buy-one-fly-two schemes for Saturday morning flights under which a passenger can take a companion in the aisle seat. Yeti's fare is the height of Mt Everest: Rs8,848.

Qatar Police row

A row has broken out over the recruitment of Nepalis for the Qatar Police which tried to bypass the country's foreign employment



rules, and in which Qatari officials appear to be involved.

The Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE), the regulatory body overseeing recruitment of overseas workers from Nepal, last week raided three companies (SOS Manpower Services, DD Human Resources and Hope International) for conducting interviews without permission for jobs in the Qatar Police.

This is not the first time recruitment for Qatar has been in a controversy. The establishment of the Qatar Visa Center (QVC), a one stop service to simplify the immigration, had also been criticised because it had been done without due consultation with the Nepal Government.

TATA 'One Day Wonder'

TATA Motors is organising 'TATA H5: One Day Wonder - It's now or never' on 6



December with a cash discount up to Rs350,000, an exchange loyalty bonus up to Rs150,000, iPhone 11 on every booking, and an exchange bonus up to Rs100,000. Another Rs25,000 bonus for early birds.

Sanima credit card

Sanima Bank has announced an 'Apply Online & Get free Credit Card' campaign with no fees until 7 December, lower EMI and discounts at hospitals, shopping outlets, hotels, restaurants.



Livon lucky draw

Bhat-bateni Supermarket has partnered with Livon for a 'Silky Hair & Smooth Ride'



contest in which a lucky consumer of the hair product wins a Yamaha Fascino 125 scooter every month. Aksa Gurung of Pokhara is the winner of this month.

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Upasana Khadka writes this column Labour Mobility every month in Nepali Times analysing trends affecting Nepali workers abroad.

EVENTS



Between Queens and the Cities
KathaSatha is launching *Between Queens and the Cities*, Nepal's first queer memoir written by Nirajan Kunwar. (*Review on page 10*) A flurry of festivities throughout the month to celebrate this milestone. Join this virtual event through KathaSatha, FinePrint and Nepal Literature Festival pages. 6pm, December.

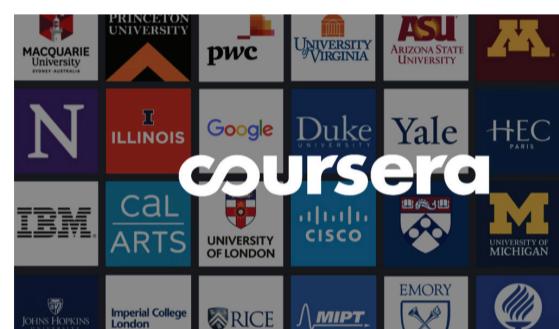
KIMFF

The Kathmandu international film festival has announced its 18th edition with a line up of 18 films in international category and 14 in the Nepali panorama section. Virtual Q&A will be followed by interactions and engagement. 10-14 December



Coursera

Interested to learn about subjects that aren't available in Nepali colleges and universities? Coursera partners with universities, organisations, and trusts around the world and provides universal access via a searchable database to free online courses covering a wide variety of topics.



Real Stories

Go to the Real Stories YouTube channel to watch compelling award-winning documentaries from all over the world. Watch factual films about war, crime, mental health, technology and more.



Global flea markets

Experience nine of the world's most iconic flea markets including France's Les Puces de Saint-Ouen, India's Anjuna Flea Market, and London's Portobello Market with this Google Earth virtual tour.

Divya

Celebrate Nepali art and artists. Check out the work of 17 traditional artists online through Tulika Kala's website. The artwork is also available to purchase.

DINING SEPARATELY



Organic Smoothie Bowl & Cafe
Resting around the corner of The Radisson Hotel in Lazimpat, *Organic Smoothie Bowl and Café* plates fresh, fast and Instagrammable smoothie bowls, sandwiches, drinks and more. 9843514612



Cafe Mozart

With a tint of Viennese charm, *Cafe Mozart* serves a wide array of baked cookies, breads, pastries and their most famous grilled baguette sandwiches. Enjoy a winter evening on their lawn as if you're on a Piazza in Florence. Lalitpur, 9840735589



OR2K

Dive in and lap up the refreshing Maibucha or roll along with the falafel grenade at this exquisite Turkish restaurant in the heart of Thamel. The beaten copper bowls at *OR2K* are set to take your palate on a flight to the Middle East. (01) 4422097



Rhino Cafe

A quaint little cafe run by a Japanese artist while serving the only siphon coffee in town. Choose the coffee beans from Columbia, Ethiopia or Nepal and satisfy your post-coffee hankering with their loaded sandwiches. Jyatha Marg, 9818829546



Places restaurant and bar

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This satellite image taken on Thursday at noon clearly shows blue pollution haze over north India, as well as Cyclone Brevi moving across Sri Lanka towards the Arabian Sea. A shallow depression over north India will bring a cold wave as well as clouds over Central and Eastern Nepal, with chances of isolated drizzles, with snow in the mountains down to 3,500m over the weekend.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
20° 6°	20° 5°	20° 5°

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 27 Nov - 3 Dec



Kathmandu had consistently 'Unhealthy' air in the 'Red Zone' above 150 on the Air Quality Index (AQI). In fact, during peak traffic hours, it went even higher to the 'Very Unhealthy' level. There are chances of passing drizzles this weekend, so that might clean up the air temporarily, but cloud cover is forecast which means the sun will not be able to burn off the smog. For hourly AQI readings, go to: www.nepalitimes.com

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

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

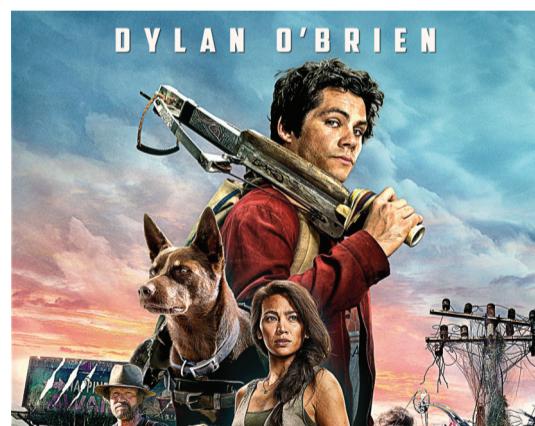
KRIPA JOSHI



REFUSE SOUVENIRS MEDICINES AND TALISMANS WITH ANIMAL PARTS



Wildlife trade is the largest direct threat, after habitat destruction, against species survival. Wildlife and animal parts are trafficked, and sold for souvenirs, traditional medicine or talismans. Some illegal wildlife trade are well known, such as the sale of ivory, sea turtle shells and the skins and bones of snow leopards, cheetahs and tigers. However, even if it is not illegal, countless other species are similarly overexploited. In many tourist areas, we can find exotic souvenirs made from animal parts or even live animals. But just because these items are for sale does not make it ethical or legal to purchase them. We have control over what, where and if we purchase items which can impact the survival of a species. #FridaysForFuture



OUR PICK

A perfect movie for the Covid times, 2020 adventure film directed by Michael Matthews *Love and Monsters* follows a young man on his journey to reunite with his girlfriend in a post-apocalyptic world. But don't let its simplistic plot fool you. Released digitally via video on demand due to the pandemic, the monster movie with a heart has since garnered much praise for its story telling, visual effects and for Dylan O'Brien's 'Joel' and his dog 'Boy'.

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 गरौ।



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The Everest Trail has been spruced up during the pandemic for a new influx of visitors expected next year.

ALL PHOTOS: ANG RITA SHERPA

Everest Trail repaired during pandemic

Made jobless during the Covid-19 crisis, Sherpa communities have cleaned and upgraded trekking facilities

Ang Rita Sherpa

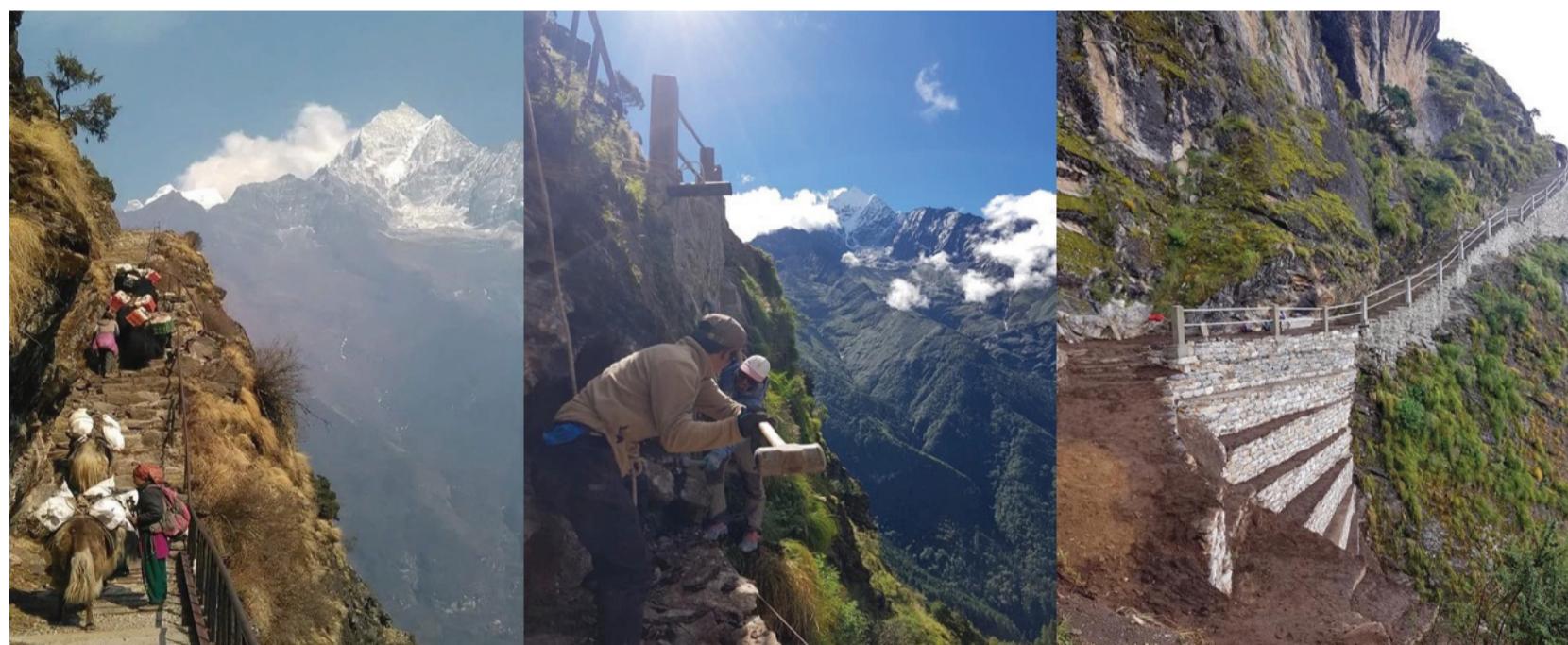
The Nepal government had declared 2020 Visit Nepal Year with a target of attracting 2 million tourists, and there was a lot of hope here that the increased footfall would bring more income. But the Khumbu region was sealed off at the height of the spring tourist season in March and remained closed for non-Nepalis till 17 October.

Since then trekkers have trickled back, marvelling at how clean and quiet everything is.

The reason it is quiet is that there are hardly any visitors along the trails, and a coronavirus outbreak in Namche kept even limited visitors away since October. But the reason the Everest region is clean is that local communities have used the crisis to build back better.

To be sure, the global pandemic has been a mixed blessing for the Sherpa people who live below Mt Everest. On the downside, the shutdown meant that the region's economy suffered a direct hit. Many families lost their seasonal source of income from trekkers, many had taken loans to build lodges in anticipation of more trekkers in 2020.

For the thousands of porters, kitchen staff, yak and pony caravan owners, and traders it has been



Guard rails and steps have been installed in many unsafe parts of the Everest Trail between Namche and Tengboche during the Covid-19 lockdown by local communities.

an unimaginable disaster. Lukla airfield, which used to get 60 flights a day, was closed after the last trekkers flew out in March. It only reopened in early October, and foreign trekkers and mountaineers were allowed back from 17 October.

The Sagarmatha National Park got more than 60,000 visitors in 2019 – nearly ten times the local population of the region. So far this year, it has got only 4,000, and most of those after October has been Nepali tourists. The National Park's income has been sharply reduced, affecting its conservation work.

Sherpas who usually travel to the other parts of the world for work as mountain guides and other jobs have not been able to go this year. Sixty households in Khunde, for instance, have members that used to travel to Norway every summer to work on hiking trails there. The families have been deprived of that income.

Another negative side-effect of the lockdown was an increase in poaching. The National Park saw one of its most serious cases in April when six rotting bodies of the endangered Himalayan musk deer and a gold eagle were found caught in wire traps. Altogether 54 other traps set by poachers were found and dismantled. There was also an increase in illegal logging.

Despite all this, the pandemic has had silver linings. Carbon emissions dipped, there was almost no carbon monoxide in the air for six months. Particulates, sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxide concentrations dropped. Mt Everest was even visible from Kathmandu for the first time in many years.

The peak itself got a much-needed respite from the traffic jams of previous years after the government cancelled all expeditions to the mountain. Popular destinations like Gokyo

Lake got a chance to revitalise itself from the pressure of tourism.

Nepali mountain guides and porters, who did not get any clients in 2020, were instead engaged by local communities in repairing and upgrading trails and bridges and cleaning up. Complaints by visitors from previous years about the poor state of trails, trash management, lack of signage, etc were addressed.

An example of work accomplished during the lockdown is the response of Khumjung which made some dangerous sections of the Everest Trail safer, as damaged bridges were maintained. Most volunteered for the work under the principle of 'for the villagers, by the villagers, to the villagers', in the firm belief that that 'every problem provides an opportunity'.

Some who have returned from similar work in Norway and elsewhere put their new skills to good use in rehabilitating the trails

using local materials.

The youth of Khunde, Khumjung, Thame, and Namche were self-motivated to make a great effort to conserve and preserve the cultural heritage of their people and respect the gift of their ancestors. Overgrown *mani* walls and *chaitya* along the trails have been repainted and cleaned up.

For the first time, many Sherpa children who would otherwise have been in school in Kathmandu were at home and could observe important rituals like the Dumji festival in June and Mani Rimdu this month.

The women's group in Khumjung had used the lockdown period to clean their neighbourhoods and put in place a waste management system that has set an example for other communities in Nepal. ☎

Ang Rita Sherpa is Chair of The Partners Nepal.



Gurkhas in the trenches of France during World War I. More than 20,000 Nepali soldiers were killed fighting for the Allied Forces between 1914-1918.

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

Diary of a Nepali soldier in France

Writings of an unknown World War I Gurkha soldier surface in Germany after 107 years

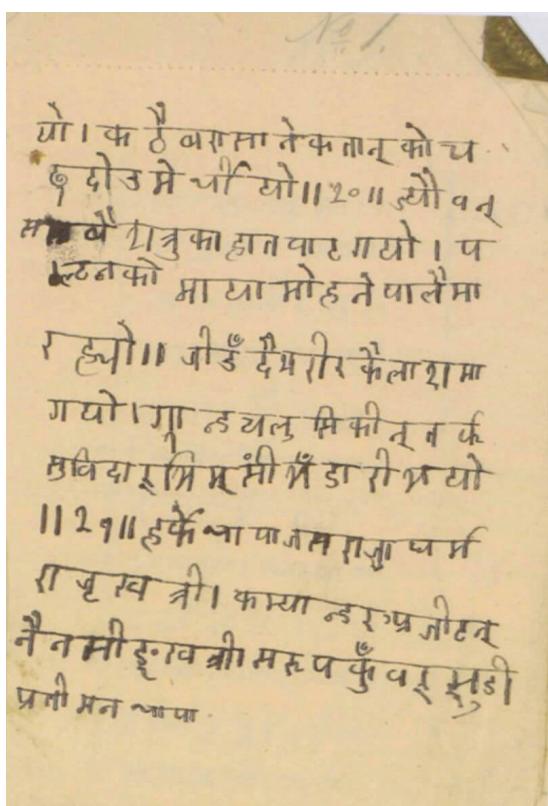
Shree Bhakta Khanal

Books have been written about the legendary bravery and sacrifice of Nepal's Gurkha soldiers. Officers have extolled their obedience and cheerfulness despite hardships and danger. The world has an image of Nepali soldiers in the battlefield: fierce but always smiling.

But historians have pored through letters and diaries written by Gurkha soldiers from the two World Wars to paint a slightly different picture — Nepalis in the trenches of Flanders Field or below the cliffs at Gallipoli, homesick, terrified, cold and miserable. Many of these letters home were held by military censors, and are archived.

Now, a diary written by a Gurkha sergeant in the British Army during the battle of La Bassée in northern France during World War I in 1914, and retrieved by a German officer, have revealed a whole new side to the Gurkha legend, one that confirms the traditional bravery, but also their human side.

Lieutenant Alexander Pfeiffer was with the Kurhessische Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 11 and found the diary of a Nepali soldier in La Bassée on



Pages from the diary of an unknown Nepali soldier with a verse, and a list of names, possibly of prisoners of war.

20 December 1914 after a fierce battle against Allied forces of the British and French Armies. The battle had lasted from 12 October till the end of December. The name of the Nepali soldier, and whether he died in the battlefield or as a prisoner of war, are not known.

Lt Pfeiffer's great-grandson Philip Cross found the documents and the khukri while going through his family effects. He is in the process of translating his great grandfather's diary into English, and also getting the diary of the dead Gurkha sergeant translated into English and German.

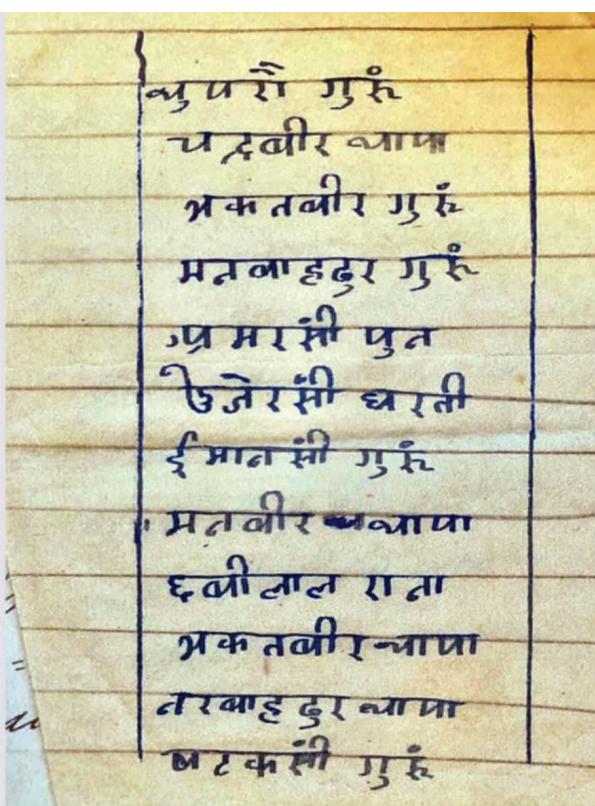
Lt Pfeiffer writes in his diary about the fearsome reputation of the



Gurkhas among the German troops: 'I found quite a few letters written in Indian script. They are fierce warriors. We are afraid of them. They use their knives to cut up the enemy,' he writes in one entry.

It appears that Lt Pfeiffer's job was to go through the bodies of dead enemy soldiers to find out if he could find any intelligence of what the Allied forces were up to. That appears to be how he got hold of the diary, photographs and even the khukri.

The first page of the diary of the unknown Nepali soldier (above) is in verse with numbered lines. It lists the names of the writers' young friends who were killed or



We are the living dead who have gone to heaven
Subedar Bhimsi Bhandari (21)
Harke Thapa Jasraja Dharma Khatri
Commander Pasitan Nainsingh
Khatri Swarup Kunwar Pratiman
Thapa'

The second page of the Nepali soldier's diary (left) has the names of Gurkhas which, interestingly, are the same names found in the same order in the papers of Lt Pfeifer in which he lists the names of Gurkhas taken prisoner. The German phonetics also closely resemble the way the unknown soldier has written the names in Nepali, for example, by spelling Gurung as गुरुं (Gurun).

Lt Pfeiffer's note in his own diary entry reads as follows:
Found with a Gurkha sergeant major. The content of the notice page no. 1 says: The soldiers of the section (Battalion) should be treated with love, friendliness and kindness. Every person, who carries out the rules of his religion, according to law and order, receives his payment (will be happy). The orders of the commanding officer should be carried out precisely and immediately. The content of the notice paper no. 2 is as follows. Names of the Gurkhas:

1. Thuparau Gurun
2. Chandrabir Thapa
3. Akalbir Gurun
4. Manbahadur Gurun
5. Amarsingh Gurun
6. Udjersingh Charti
7. Imansingh Gurun
8. Manbir Thapa
9. Chhabilal Rana
10. Akatbir Thapa
11. Narbahadur Thapa
12. Schatasin Gurun

On investigating some of these names, British Army records show that Chandrabir Thapa was a rifleman in the Second King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles (Sirmur

taken prisoner, the hardships they endured. From the penmanship and vocabulary and the use of numbered verse, the soldier appears to have learnt his Nepali probably from a village priest who used to be the only literate person in the villages in Nepal in those days.

यो कठै बराजोबन सबै शर्तका छातबाट गयो ॥२०॥ पल्ननको माया मोह नेपालमै रह्यो जिजँदै मरी कैलाशमा गयो । सुवेदार भीमसि भण्डारी भयो ॥२१॥ हर्के थापा जसराजा धर्म खत्री कम्यान्डर प्रजीतन नैनसि खत्री सरूप कुँवर प्रतिमन थापा

Translated, the lines read:

*Poor fellows, their youth was taken away by the enemy's hands (20)
Their love of the military was left behind in Nepal*

Rifles). Manbir Thapa was a sergeant in the First Battalion of the First King George V's Own Gurkha Rifles (Malaun Regiment), and his service number was 1896 and he was killed in action on 20 December 1914 in La Bassée. We even know Manbir's father's name was Parasram Thapa and lived in Dohadi village in western Nepal.

Chhabil Rana's service number was 2114 and he was a rifleman with the Second King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles Second Battalion (Sirmur Rifles) and he was also killed in action on 20 December.

Records at La Bassée show that there were other Gurkha soldiers killed in the battlefield or taken prisoner who are not on Lt Pfeiffer's diary list. One of them is Haribal Thapa who, according to the Sir Kukri & Co blog was a rifleman in the First King George V's Own Gurkha Rifles (First Gurkha Regiment).

His service number was 2952 and he died on 24 January 1915 while he was a prisoner of war in a German camp after being captured in La Bassée. His grave can still be found at a military cemetery outside Berlin. Haribal Thapa's documents show that his father was Dal Kishore who lived in Perung in today's Majhkot of Tamahu district.

Lieutenant Alexander Pfeifer's diary, as translated by his great-grandson, has many references to the Gurkhas who were their enemies and served in the British Army. Among them are entries dated 20 December 1914, the day of the fierce battle during which the 12 Gurkhas listed above by the unknown Nepali soldier were probably taken prisoner:

- I was woken up at 5:30am on 20 December 1914 by the sound of cannons and gunfire. Someone opened the door to the room where I was sleeping. He was the überjäger from our machine-gun company. He was so frightened he could not even speak properly. Our machine-gun company had been over-run by the enemy. He said they (the Gurkhas) used their curved knife to cut the throats of our comrades, and killed everyone they could find. I woke up the others and related this news to them.
- After the end of the battle, I witnessed a horrific sight. The dead and wounded covered the ground. There were some British and Indian (Gurkha) soldiers, who were in eternal sleep next to our artillery position. Some were headless, others did not have limbs. We took what we could from the dead. I got one of those curved knives, tobacco, food in tiffin boxes.
- We were fighting these Indians (Gurkhas) who had their heads shaven. They were short and stocky, and very agile. One of them who was a prisoner of war said that the Gurkhas were terrified of the cold. They were afraid of the snow and freezing weather. They will soon bite the dust.
- The Gurkhas have a reputation for being brutal, aggressive and fearless, but in their hearts

bis einem solchen Gurkafeldwebel gefindet.

Der Inhalt des Notizblattes № 1 lautet:

Die Soldaten der Abteilung (Bataillon) soll man mit Liebe, Freundlichkeit und Güte behandeln. Jeder, der sich nach den Vorstufen der Religion (nach Gesetz und Ordnung) beträgt, bekommt seinen Helm (wird glücklich). Die Befehle des Kommandant-Ajutant sollen genau und promptly ausgeführt werden.

Der Inhalt des Notizblattes № 2 lautet:

Die Namen der Gurkhas:

*Thupkarau Gurun
Chadrabir Thapa
Bhakatbir Gurun
Manbahadur Gurun
Amarsing Pun
Udiprasing Gharti
Imansingh Gurun
Manbir Thapa
Dablat Rana
Bhakatbir Thapa
Kurbahadur Thapa
Sekhatkising Gurun.*

The same names in the Nepali soldier's diary also appear in the diary of Lt Alexander Pfeifer, and in the same order. Courtesy: Philip Cross



Among Lt Alexander Pfeifer's effects was this khukri possibly taken from the same Gurkha soldier who wrote the diary. PHILIP CROSS

they are kind, peace-loving and spiritual people.

The Nepali soldier's diary, written by hand 107 years ago, says a lot about the war and the warriors from Nepal. The soldier was writing about fellow Nepalis in his own, and possibly other units, listing carefully the names of the dead and those taken prisoner. The names in the poem are probably of those who were killed in battle, but we cannot be sure. The other list, because of its similarity to the list in Lt Pfeifer's diary in German, could be of those who were taken prisoner on 20 December.

But that opens up a puzzle. How come the list of dead soldiers in Nepali soldier's diary is in the same order as the list of prisoners in German in Lt Pfeifer's diary? Nepali writer Satis Shroff who lives in the southwest German town of Freiburg has read Lt Pfeifer's notes,

and deduces that the list contains names of Gurkha POWs and the commanding-officer is instructing his subordinates to treat the soldiers well and to allow them to practice their religious rites as they are used to. Shroff infers that the Gurkha who wrote the list of names is dead because there is no mention of a handing-over of the diary.

It is not clear if Lt Pfeifer is just translating the Nepali soldier's diary, or if those are his own instructions. The German officer's own diary was ultimately found more than a century later by his great-grandson. We do not know what the Gurkha's name was, where in Nepal he was from, and what happened to him.

To add to the puzzle, Manbir Thapa, whose name is among the 12 listed in the German and Nepali soldiers' diaries, is also on the FindGrave.com list of those killed in action on 20 December



Lt Alexander Pfeifer, the German officer among whose papers was the diary of the Gurkha soldier, and was recently retrieved by his great-grandson. PHILIP CROSS

1914 in the battle of La Bassée and buried at Indian Cemetery in La Rochelle in France. Here is a partial reproduction of the list of those killed from the First King George V's Gurkha Rifles (Malaun Regiment) on that day with their father's name and hometown:

Rifleman Buddhiman Thapa
Father's name and address:
Sukhbhar Thapa, Lamjung

Lance Corporal Kharak Bahadur Gurung
Father's name and address:
Jasbir Thapa, Lamjung

Rifleman Bahadur Gurung
Father's name and address:
Asu Bahadur Gurung, Lamjung

Rifleman Rana Bahadur Rana
Father's name and address:
Kulman Singh, Serung

Rifleman Pritman Thapa
Father's name and address:
Sarbjit Thapa, Graham

Rifleman Ransur Thapa
Father's name and address:
Purnabir Thapa, Bhirkot

Rifleman Haribaran Thapa
Father's name and address:
Pratiman Thapa, Bhirkot

Lance Corporal Lal Bahadur Gurung
Father's name and address:
Sriman Gurung, Gorkha

Besides the uncertainty of war, the Gurkhas who sailed across the oceans to a completely new country, climate and food must have suffered badly from culture shock. Many had boarded troop ships from Calcutta or Bombay and arrived in Europe at the beginning of winter in 1914. Their main hardship was caused by the extreme cold because they did not have enough warm clothes while in the wet trenches. Many wore military trousers on top of their surwal.

They had never been trained in trench warfare, and did not know how to dig them. They were not used to fighting in such cold. The Germans found out from the Gurkha prisoners of war that the Nepalis feared the cold more than the enemy they were fighting, according to Alexander Pfeifer's diary.

Most of the fighting men from Nepal could not read or write, and no one ever wrote their stories for them, so there is very little written documentation of what they went through. There must be so many hidden stories of unknown soldiers that we will never get to hear about. Yet, they are a part of our people's history, and a forgotten chapter in the history of Nepal.

Those who returned alive from the front, used to dock in Bombay and take the train via Banaras, where they all bought copies of the Nepali *Ramayana* translated by Bhanubhakta Acharya. One of the major ways in which the holy book got to the far corners of Nepal was through these demobilised Gurkhas returning home.

The Battle of La Bassée lasted three months with the Germans first gaining the upper hand, and then being repulsed by British Army reinforcements from the Lahore Division and Gurkhas. The British suffered more than 20,000 casualties, of which 1,600 were from the Indian Corps, including Gurkhas. The Germans recorded 6,000 killed.

Many of the Gurkhas captured in France and Belgium were transported to prisoner of war camps in Germany. There, some of the prisoners had their voices and songs preserved in early recording machines that had just come into use.

Nepali professor Alaka Atreya Chudal of Vienna University has been translating from Nepali into German some of these testimonies recorded between 1914-1918 in a prisoner of war camp of Halbmondlager in Wünsdorf 40km away from Berlin.

The 100 or so recordings contain Nepali folk tales, songs, poetry, and folk riddles that have immense linguistic and cultural value because they are preserved in audio from more than a century ago. The recordings are now in the archives of Humboldt-Universität in Berlin.

Says Prof Atreya: "These folk material bring out the sorrow, prayers, suffering, longing for home and family of the Gurkha prisoners from long ago."

Shree Bhakta Khanal is an investigative journalist and author of *An Arduous Path*.



Gurkha prisoners of war. Their voices recorded in song and stories are now in the Humboldt Museum archives.



Between Queens and Kathmandu

Niranjan Kunwar's book captures universality in a way that also celebrates uniqueness

Sahina Shrestha

A lot happened in 1999. I turned 18, finished high school and got accepted by an American college. And the internet, which had crept into the Nepali marketplace, finally made it to my bedroom. The arrival of the Internet coincided with a key moment in my life – my coming to terms with my sexuality.

So begins Niranjan Kunwar's memoir *Between Queens and the Cities*.

Over the next 300 or so pages divided into six parts, Kunwar takes us on a journey that spans two decades, from the neighbourhoods in New York to the *gallis* and *bhattis* of Kathmandu.

Between Queens and the Cities is a beautifully crafted coming of age story of a gay man in Nepal navigating life while exploring his identity and finding a place to call home.

The book begins when Kunwar is 19 in New York. Freed from the constraints of Nepal, he enjoys the independence America has to offer. He promptly falls in love with New York, making plans to return to the city once he graduates, and he does.

He works as a teacher, first at a private school in the city and then in a school in Brooklyn. He finds his friends and falls into a routine. But then life creeps in, the commutes are too long, the mornings too early. Paper works for green card falls through and over time he returns to Nepal to pursue a literary journey.

All these are punctuated by fear and anxiety he has regarding his sexuality, the relationship with his parents, and the need for love and acceptance.

It is difficult to capture universality in a way that also celebrates uniqueness, but Kunwar does that skillfully. By choosing the

themes that he did, Kunwar has made his story matter not just to him but to the readers as well.

As anyone who has called NYC their home at any point in life can attest, the city does that to you: it makes you fall in love with it. Only in New York will you pay the deposit for an apartment with half-clogged bathroom and return happy and content.

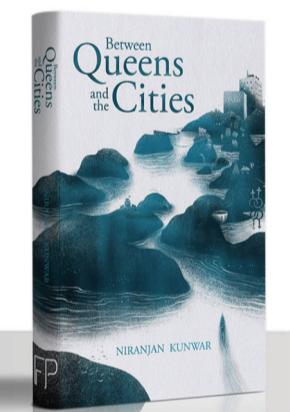
Living in a foreign country can also be lonely, and the paperwork frustrating. As an immigrant, there is a sense of not belonging, the conscious sense of otherness even with the closest of native friends.

But anyone who returned to Nepal after spending time away from home can also relate to the feeling of being robbed of freedom once back, the confusion and the self-doubt of whether they have made the right decision, as well as the uphill task of rebuilding their lives and relationships with friends and family, and finding or starting over a career.

When it comes to the stories of LGBTIQ individuals, it is easy to fall into the trap of a dominant narrative. Through repetition and often limitation of the stories and voices we hear we create a stereotype of the community that does not justify the broader identity. Kunwar while admitting his privilege attempts to reveal the community's wide diversity, through his own story and those of others.

In the final part of the memoir Kunwar tells the stories of Rukhsana, Bhakti and Sadhana, Aditya, Esan, and Sudip and Apekshya. Their stories each unique in their experiences but tied by the thread of highlighting parts of a marginalised population that too often remain invisible and ignored.

Kunwar sweeps his life beautifully into words. Reading the book is like listening to a friend narrate his life story. He does not spend too much time in details and is eloquent and earnest in his storytelling. *Between Queens and the Cities*, is a great addition to the (finally) emerging literary works from the community.



Between Queens and the Cities

Pages: 305
Publisher: Fine Prints
Launch: 5 December 2020

Excerpts:

"What about the bathroom?" I asked the broker. The paint on the wall was chipped; the bathtub was half-filled with water. "No need to worry," he assured us. "They are still working on it. It will be complete by the first week of June."

The work in the bathroom never got completed. The memory of my first year in New York is tainted by the perpetually half-clogged bathtub. Aliza and I had to plan our showers; one waited for almost an hour for the tub to drain completely after the other one had used it. We made numerous phone calls to the management of the building, took turns waiting for the plumber to show up.

**

Anyone who leaves one's homeland owes some kind of return. This is what I believe. I believe that circular is natural and linear is artificial. A back and forth process leads to growth and adventure while a one-way mindset can be limiting.

I keep thinking of that moment in New York when I decided to return. It was late afternoon in March, dusk was approaching

fast. After wrapping up the day's work, I called my lawyer to inquire about my green card. I remember the brusque tone of her voice – Had I not read the emails she had sent- and her message, "Sorry."

At that moment, I remember, for the first time, a flicker of courage, a small guiding voice inside me. I sat down after clicking the phone shut. And I remember deciding. That moment, that room, on that day, I remember deciding that it was time to return.

**

There's routine, there's regularity, then there's reporting. I try to capture raw emotions before they mature and mutate. Certain dialogues demand urgent documentation. Sometimes, I pay more attention to these tasks than refining aspects of my craft.

A modest readership emerges. That is another reason why I write. Because I remember how growing up gay in Kathmandu felt like. When I was younger, there were no stories about Nepali men who liked men. And we know how stories can inform and teach, can show us the way.

More about the launch: <https://www.kathasatha.org.np/events/between-queens-and-the-cities>.

Sahina Shrestha is Digital Products Strategist at Nepali Times, and did her Masters at New York University.



Niranjan Kunwar talks about his upcoming memoir *Between Queens and the Cities*, the journey to writing the book, and discusses the issues concerning the LGBTIQ community in Nepal. Watch video in our YouTube channel.

nepalitimes.com

Women leaders set example for rest of Nepal

Imagine if this women-led municipality in the Tarai was upscaled nationwide

Laxmi Basnet
in Nawalparasi

After the first elections under federalism in 2017, Hupsekot became one of only two municipalities in Nepal in which women were voted both chair and deputy.

Laxmi Pandey of the Nepali Congress was elected chair, and Kopila Malla of the UML was voted vice-chair. In the three years since, Hupsekot in Nawalparasi district has exemplified how this has made all the difference in the quality of education, agriculture, nature conservation, and now Covid-19 control.

Hupsekot is Nepal in a microcosm in more ways than one. It encompasses the Mahabharat and Chure ranges, as well as the Tarai, and these days when the air is clear the Annapurnas are visible to the north. Hupsekot is also an example of what is possible for the rest of Nepal.

Under the 2015 Constitution a vice-chair or deputy mayor has to be a woman, but Hupsekot and Jumla elected women to both positions. Now, imagine if Hupsekot was replicated in more of Nepal's 736 municipalities and 17 metropolises.

"Because both of us are women, it has been easier for us to work on delivery of social services to our people," says municipality chair Laxmi Pandey. "In many other local governments we see the male chair and female deputy chair having disagreements."

Indeed, while in Kathmandu even men from the same ruling



Hupsekot Rural Municipality recently inaugurated a 10-bed coronavirus-dedicated hospital. Municipality chair Laxmi Pandey is dressed in red, at centre.

ALL PHOTOS: LAXMI BASNET

Nepal Communist Party (NCP) are forever quarrelling, here in Hupsekot it does not seem to matter that Pandey and her deputy are from different parties.

"Sometimes, problems arise when there are party-based decisions from Kathmandu, but we manage to resolve them amicably," says vice-chair Malla. "We have worked together well in the past three years."

In its very first meeting, this village municipality decided to provide Rs5,000 for institutional delivery in government facilities to promote safe motherhood. Back then the village had only one birthing centre, it has added two more in the recent years.

Now, even those who can afford private hospitals go to government hospitals because services have been upgraded. So far 1,008 people have received the institutional delivery incentive.

Nawalparasi district borders India, and earlier this year it became a hotspot for Covid-19, as Nepalis returning from India brought the virus home. Hupsekot instituted a strict quarantine and contact tracing rule, and last month it opened a dedicated 10-bed hospital for coronavirus patients.

Pandey and Malla then worked together to encourage local youth as well as returnees to take up farming instead of migrating back to India or overseas for work. A big chunk of the rural municipality's annual budget is spent on grants for communities investing in



Municipality Chair Laxmi Basnet presents agriculture equipment to local farmers as part of her government's effort to keep young men from having to migrate out.



Laxmi Pandey says it helps to have a woman as both the municipality chair and deputy to deliver social services to the people.

is available also in the Magar language.

Hupsekot's scenic beauty and places of religious significance make it a popular destination for visitors. And the municipality is now trying to add to its eco-tourism appeal, planting 5,000 rhododendron saplings under the 'One Student One Laligurans' campaign as well as holy pipal plantations around its pilgrimage sites under a municipality subsidised program.

"Ultimately, we plan to create a natural and pristine environment and cultivate rudraksha commercially. This along with religious tourism will provide regular income for our municipality," Pandey adds.

The municipality is also working to raise income of female-led households by training women to produce value added goods from maize husk, and is already engaging them in knitting winter wear. The municipality then takes the responsibility of marketing the products.

An inter-generational skill transfer program is also in operation so that the village doesn't have to rely only on outside trainers to learn new skills.

About two years ago when the municipality advertised for two employees, some 60 single women applied for the job. During the interviews, they shared their hardships in finding a reliable source of income. While the municipality office wasn't able to employ them all, this gave Paudel a much-needed push to plan a program specifically targeting single women.

"Women in rural areas, especially single women, do not have a reliable source of income. Society looks down on them. But that won't be the case if the local government steps in to support them," says Pandey.

Since last year, the municipality has started allocating a budget for 'Single Women's School' under which widows come up with their own plans for regular income generation.

The fact that both the chair and vice chair are women helps, and they are leading the charge with progressive plans and policies. This is in stark contrast to other municipalities where the women deputies are undermined and harassed by their male colleagues.

Says Pandey: "We have to use the five years we have been given by working for the people. Bitterness and dispute will only hurt our voters. Our sole focus is on fulfilling our responsibilities."



Vice-chair Kopila Malla (in brown sari) with Chair Laxmi Pandey inspect a road upgrading project in Hupsekot.



Why Nepal's Covid-19 figures are deceptive

The positivity and recovery rates go down, while daily deaths stay up

Sonia Awale

Going by the Ministry of Health figures, Nepal's Covid-19 pandemic has peaked, and the number of daily cases, the positivity rate and the number of active cases are all going down.

The recovery rate now exceeds 90%.

Is Nepal turning the corner on the pandemic? Experts say no.

The number of fatalities is at an all-time high. There were 29 deaths reported each on Monday and Tuesday, taking the total to 1,538. And the reason the daily case rate is lower is because the government is conducting fewer tests, there is virtually no official contact tracing, and active cases are at home and going to hospital only when they are really serious. These are ideal conditions for community spread.

"The fact that the fatalities are increasing, especially in Kathmandu, won't allow us to say that fewer people are getting infected. This coronavirus isn't going anywhere just yet," explains Sher Bahadur Pun of the Ministry of Health. "Yes, the positivity rate has gone down, but the government has also more or less stopped contact tracing."

Since the government started charging for RT PCR tests and hospital admissions, patients and their families are reluctant to have tests despite symptoms, and do not want to go to hospital. The rates have remained high because those infected during Dasain-Tihar are developing symptoms. The current marriage season is another super-spreader event.

There are 77 hospitals and labs across the country conducting an average of 9,000 PCR tests a day, which went down from a daily total of 15,000 after the government directive to charge Rs2,000 for PCR tests in public facilities.

The positivity rate went down, which is a good thing – but it happened for the wrong reason. In October a quarter of people tested came out positive, it is now down to 15% despite the onset of the winter season.

"The risk cannot be underestimated based on numbers of infected people by reducing tests



MONIKA DEUPALA

itself at a time when increasingly more people are getting sick or dying of coronavirus," says infectious diseases specialist Pravat Adhikari.

"This argument would be valid only if the infection rate goes down despite an increase in total tests. However, very few tests are being conducted at the moment."

In fact, such hidden positives lead to more unidentified Covid-19 deaths, adding to the risk. It is

reckless of the government to still not launch low-cost PCR tests with quick results, adds Adhikari.

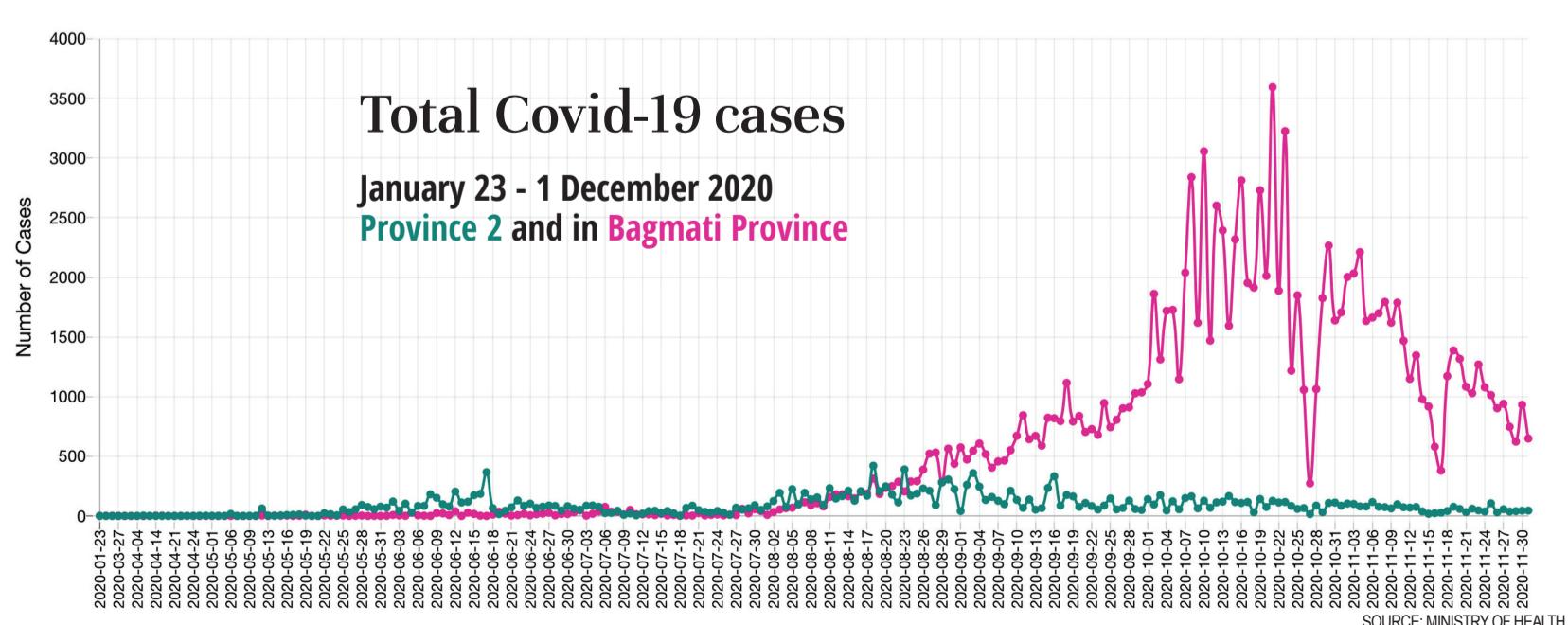
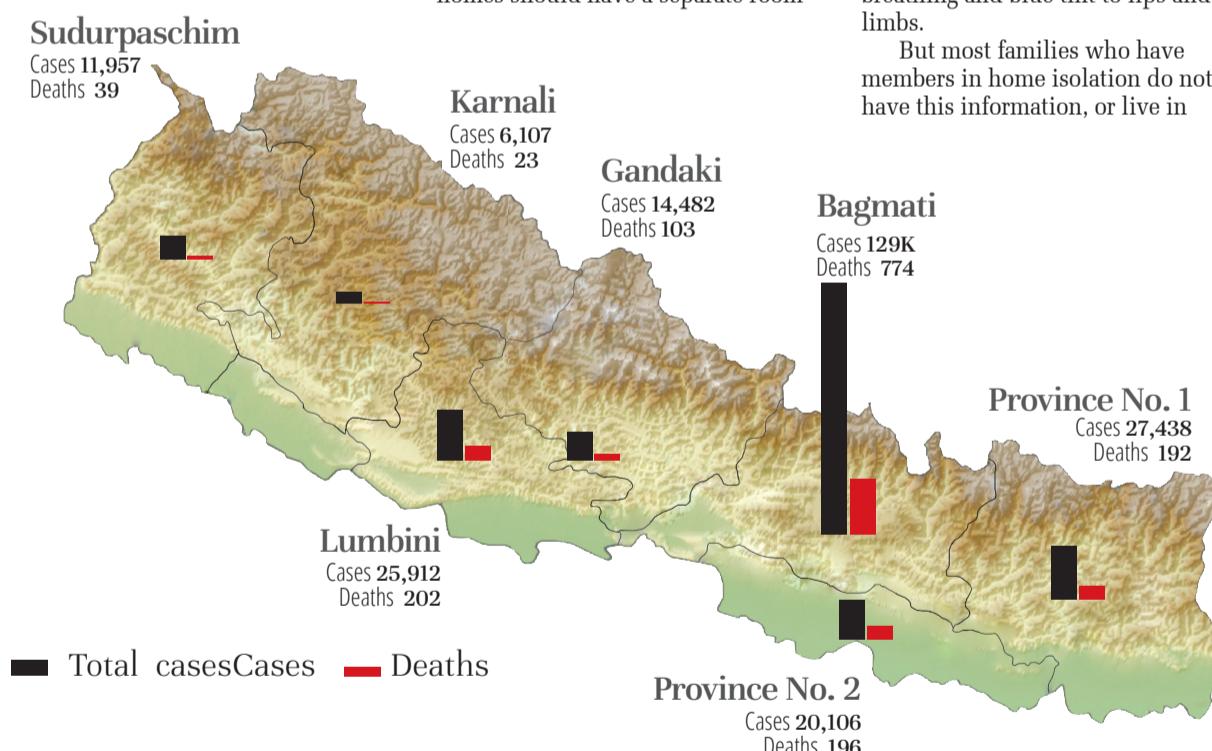
The problem is further exacerbated by unmanaged home isolation, and quarantine cases. According to the Ministry of Health, 10,741 people across seven provinces are self-isolating at home, often without much resources or knowledge on how to manage their condition.

Ideally, asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic people self-isolating at homes should have a separate room

and a bathroom. Patients should confine themselves in their rooms, wash their own utensils, wear masks while going to the toilet and sanitise it after use and wipe touch points with disinfectant.

Individuals need to keep track of their temperature and symptoms, measure oxygen saturation level if possible, take paracetamol for body ache and fever and make sure to eat nutritious food. One must be aware of danger signs: oxygen level below 93, chest pain, difficulty in breathing and blue tint to lips and limbs.

But most families who have members in home isolation do not have this information, or live in



such crowded quarters that it is impossible to fulfil all precautions. Conflicting directives from the government haven't helped.

At one point, overwhelmed with the surge of Covid-19 cases in Kathmandu, the Ministry of Health spokesperson Jageswar Gautam advised people live on television to go to hospital only if they feel faint. By then it is too late because it means the patient's oxygen saturation is already dangerously low.

The government has left the people to their own devices, and ignored expert advice on increasing the number of beds in wards with basic oxygen supply instead of spending money on ICUs and ventilators.

"When I tested positive for coronavirus and had slight difficulty breathing, I called a government health expert for advice, and he himself dissuaded me from going to a public hospital," says Rajendra Dahal, Editor of the magazine Shiskyak. "This is why the death rate is going up, while the positive totals are going down. People are at home, and their oxygen levels are falling, and they have no idea. The main point is that the people have lost their trust in the government health system."

The chief consultant at the Infectious Diseases Hospital in Teku Anup Bastola agrees that the risk has been heightened because health experts are unaware about the actual condition of people isolating at homes. "Nepalis have a tendency to not visit hospitals until it's too late. We have found that this is even more true for coronavirus," he says.

With much of the 2020 overshadowed by the pandemic and its impact on all the sectors, young people wanting to get back to their lives are now ignoring the signs and symptoms, preferring not to voluntarily test in case they might have to isolate for two weeks.

Even according to government figures, the number of people testing positive in Kathmandu Valley is not going down. With the marriage season, and people intermingling indoor in banquet halls, the surge is not expected to subside. At Pashupati Aryaghat, there are five times more cremations happening compared to the same period last year, according to reports. It is not clear how many of these extra deaths are due to Covid-19.

The movement of the younger people has had a direct impact on the elderly, as they take home the virus and make parents and grandparents seriously sick. People in their sixties and above now make up over 60% of Covid-19 fatalities in Nepal.

Even without the added risk of coronavirus, senior citizens are prone to pneumonia and other chronic respiratory illness in winter. Public health experts advise being alert in regards to their condition even before they complain of symptoms and keeping communication channels open.

Says Sher Bahadur Pun: "These are extraordinary times and we need to take extraordinary measures to protect the more vulnerable among us. Until we get a vaccine, we must realise our responsibility in containing the virus and not become a medium for more deaths."

