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MONIKA DEUPALA

Jabs and jab-nots

● Buddha Basnyat

The first lot of 1 million Covishield vaccines donated by the Indian government as part of its good-neighbourly ‘*Vaccine Maitri*’ campaign arrived in Kathmandu on Thursday. The challenge now is to get the jabs to high risk groups in remote areas, as well as injecting two doses to the arms of an estimated 18 million Nepalis older than 15.

Nepal will ultimately need 36 million vials of various vaccines during 2021. Fortunately, the country has a good record in maintaining the cold chain for child immunisation and multiple-dose treatment of tuberculosis.

However, there are still uncertainties about the duration of vaccine immunity and transmissibility. Nepalis will have to continue to mask up, keep distance and frequently wash hands even as the inoculation campaign

picks up momentum. Although the daily fatality rate has come down in Nepal and there are less than 5,000 active cases, the total deaths is nearing 2,000.

"This is a gift from the government and people of India to the people of Nepal who are getting the vaccines just one week after India started vaccinating its own citizens," said Indian Ambassador to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra (*pictured above*). "This is a symbol of the close ties between India and Nepal and the importance with which India views Nepal."

Because Covishield is associated with DNA for viral instruction storage and not RNA (which is more fragile) it only needs 3-6°C storage temperature. But given the history of corruption in the procurement of Covid-19 test kits and equipment in Nepal last year, there is danger of the vaccines getting through the black market to the rich and powerful first.

Health Minister Hridayesh

Tripathi says the first 500,000 doses of Covishield would start with health workers next week all over the country, and then to the elderly, both getting the second dose after three weeks.


The efficacy of the Oxford-Astra Zeneca vaccine ranges from 62% to 90% depending on the dose, and there have not been any major reports of side-effects. The World Health Organization's COVAX program in April promised that Nepal would get enough vaccines to inoculate 3% of the population, and provide a further 20% of Nepalis with free shots. But there are doubts about when these vaccines will be available because of high global demand from other developing countries.

It would have been a masterstroke if Nepal had used 'vaccine diplomacy' right at the outset by taking part in the initial vaccine trials conducted by universities and other countries. We would then have been ahead in

the queue.

There may be other breakthroughs this year. The Serum Institute of India is testing an intra-nasal vaccine administered with a nose spray and not an injection which can be stored at room temperature.

The challenge for Nepal is to acquire enough vaccines, administer both doses promptly, efficiently and equitably. The travel and migration sectors see vaccines as the game-changer to get the economy back on track. The European Union is discussing the use of 'vaccine passports' possibly to be standardised by the WHO. But it will take time for jabs to revive jobs.

There are fears that unequal vaccine availability between and within countries will divide populations into 'jab and jab-nots'. 

Buddha Basnyat is a physician and clinical researcher at Patan Academy of Health Sciences.

Polluted politics

EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

Polluted politics

Along with poor quality of education, unaffordable healthcare, lack of safe drinking water, crumbling infrastructure, Nepalis have learnt not to expect anything from any government.

So, even if they are seething inside, there is no visible outrage over the toxic air we are all forced to breathe.

In 2019 alone, 42,100 people died directly of air pollution in Nepal. Residents of Kathmandu will have lifespans reduced by up to four years due to dirty air. Even unborn babies are affected by their mothers' long-term exposure to pollutants.

Dirty air has increased chronic respiratory diseases such as COPD, asthma, cancer, and cardiac arrest. Air quality in the capital is now so bad, Nepalis are becoming 'pollution refugees' – those emigrating to escape the poisonous air.

Vehicular emissions, especially from diesel trucks and buses, make up 38% of pollutants in Kathmandu.

There are nearly 1 million two-wheelers in Kathmandu that spew out deadly gases like carbon monoxide. Yet, the number of vehicles in the Valley is increasing at 22% a year. Nepal's import of diesel has tripled in the past ten years.

Annual emission tests are mandatory, but a green sticker can easily be bought, and even home-delivered for the right price. There are no emission tests for vehicles like the breathalyser tests for drivers.

A police campaign against drinking and driving brought down the number of traffic accidents all over Nepal by 90% in the past years, saving hundreds of lives. If driver exhalation can be checked for alcohol, why not vehicle exhaust for pollutants? Governance failure. Corruption.

We know the causes of air pollution in Kathmandu Valley (vehicles, brick kilns, open fires, roadside dust, in that order). We know the solutions (emission checks, clean bricks, strict monitoring). It is not a lost cause to combat air pollution—all it needs is public pressure and the political will to implement known solutions.

As clean air activist, Bhusan Tuladhar recalls in an interview with this week's Saglo Samaj (page 14), Kathmandu's citizens rose up against diesel Vikram three-wheelers in the 1990s. The government responded by replacing them with battery-operated ones. When neighbourhoods barricaded killer kilns in Bhaktapur, the government forced them to adopt cleaner technology.

Since transportation is the main culprit,

Kathmandu's answer to clean air is an efficient and reliable mass transit system. Even better: electric public transport. The state has accumulated Rs7 billion from the prevailing Clean Air Tax on fossil fuels, use that for a clean energy transition.

But the government has been taking one step forward, two steps back. Prime Minister K P Oli announced two years ago that 20% of vehicles in Nepal would be battery-powered by 2020. But his finance minister Yubaraj Khatriwada re-imposed taxes on electric cars last year.

Polluting brick kilns are back in operation, but those will be eventually driven out by urban sprawl. Real estate prices will make land in Kathmandu Valley more valuable

for housing than clay-mining to fire bricks. The other big contributor to Kathmandu's increasing pollution is open garbage burning. In winter, about 5% of solid waste in the Valley is burnt in the open. Municipalities must have a workable solid waste

management plan, and impose hefty fines for open garbage burning.

Air pollution in Kathmandu is a direct result of political failure. It shows a singular lack of accountability on the part of elected representatives to reducing it— even if they only did it to protect their own health.

Air pollution is not just an environmental problem. When the Air Quality Index (AQI) hits 300 every day in winter, it is a public health emergency. It is an economic issue because it is proof that our economy is also going up in smoke. It is a political problem, and evidence that our democracy did not elect people who care for and protect citizens.

The central government has failed miserably, it is the responsibility of mayors, metros and municipalities to step in. The Constitution has devolved decision-making to them, and they will be held responsible by the people if they fail to act.

In summary, here are tried and tested solutions that all tiers of government can implement immediately:

- Invest in electric public transport, charging stations
- Conduct effective emission tests, enforce compliance
- Control open fires, manage and recycle solid waste
- Promote cycling, clear footpaths for walking
- Switch to clean bricks
- Promote electric stoves

there were only two days when the pollution haze had cleared by mid-day.

After last year's ban on Vikram tempos, the air looks cleaner, but this has not improved air quality along Kathmandu's road corridors in any measurable way. Yes, after the tempos were gone we stopped seeing the black smoke on the streets, but 20,000 more vehicles have been added in Kathmandu after the 350 Vikrams were banned.

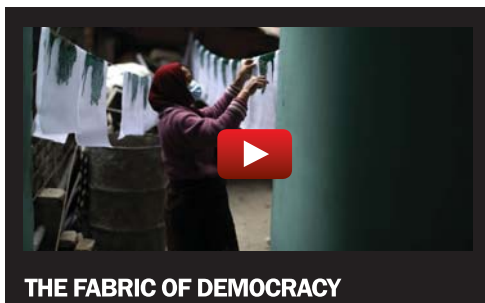
Latest measurements prove that the additional vehicles have

more than made up for the reduction of pollution, especially diesel exhaust and dust.

Air quality measurements for Kathmandu consistently show that particulate pollution are up to seven times higher than safe levels set by the World Health Organization (WHO). Some 24,000 tons of total suspended particles are spewed out into the valley's air every year, of which 7,000 tons are less than 10 microns.

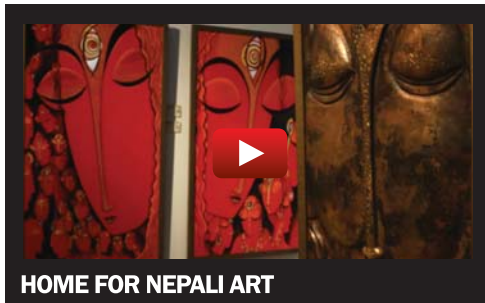
From the archives of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

ONLINE PACKAGES



THE FABRIC OF DEMOCRACY

Nepal's political turmoil has seen a rise in rallies and demonstrations all over the country and this has meant brisk business for party flag and banner manufacturers. Follow our photojournalist to a printer's shop producing 1,500 flags a day in assembly-line fashion in this video.



HOME FOR NEPALI ART

Meet Rajan Shaky, and the fulfilment of his dream to create a home for Nepali art in Nepal. The world-class Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA) exudes a perfectionist attention to detail, a place where modern melds seamlessly into traditional. Watch video profile of Nepal's first private art museum. *Story: page 5.*



OUT OF BUSINESS

Kathmandu's rickshaws used to be the vehicle of choice for people commuting short distances through the narrow, crowded alleys of the old city. Now heavily dependent on tourism, the pandemic has put a brake on the once thriving, rickshaw business. *Story: page 6.*

TOURIST GUIDES

Interesting article highlighting the situation of guides in the Covid-19 crisis ('Where have all the guides gone?', Alisha Sijapati, #1044). We like the fact that you interviewed a female guide!

Women in Tourism Nepal

- Don't retain. Re-train. That would be more productive for the future of tourism. The void will always be filled by the hungry.

Sunil Sharma

- Lots of work for them once re-opening happens. Right now, training is a good investment.

Karma Phuntsok

- Even before the pandemic, many young guides were more interested in going abroad instead of seasonal hard work at home. A lot of them were inexperienced and uninterested, as a result tourists got bad service. The government should also be offering subsidies to guides to support teahouses, maintain trails, conserve nature. But such insight simply does not exist in Nepal today.

David Winter

LEGALISE MARIJUANA

Corrupt and spineless Nepali leaders buckled under the pressure from the Americans and banned weed and it is now legal in the US ('Why Nepal must legalise cannabis', #1044). What a joke. Don't just discuss legalising it, just do it.

Shiva Nepali

- Hashish was a cash crop for poor communities in Nepal. Legalise cannabis for at least medicinal uses.

Satis Shroff

- As a Canadian with decriminalised and now legal cannabis it makes no sense to me that Nepal won't follow if it can't lead. This powerful medicinal plant comes from Nepal and the Tibetan plateau. It is your gift to the world. You own it!

Rainbow Eldor

REVIVE TOURISM

From December 2008 to January 2019 I travelled 19 times to Nepal ('Survive, revive, thrive', Editorial, #1043). But I believe quality tourism over mass visitors, new trekking trails instead of haphazard road building, revitalisation of rivers and lakes and strict architecture guidelines in the ancient centres all make up for sustainable tourism.

Eckhard Schlöder

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Be prepared

Editorial

Every Earthquake Safety Day in the past two decades, this newspaper has carried the same message: let's be prepared. The next big earthquake in Nepal is not a question of if, but when. Also watch video on why quakes are so devastating in Nepal on our YouTube channel.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Wildfires ravage Nepal mountains

A three-month drought in central and eastern Nepal has sparked wildfires across the Himalaya which has shrouded the mountains in smoke, adding to the urban and crossborder pollution. Visit nepalitimes.com for this photo feature most widely shared on social media.

Most popular on Twitter



Where have the tourist guides gone?

by Alisha Sijapati

Nepal's trekking guides reeling from the impact of Covid-19 pandemic struggle to survive as tourism braces for another slow year. Join the online discussion.

Most commented

Why Nepal must legalise cannabis

Saglo Samaj host Kanak Mani Dixit speaks with MP Sher Bahadur Tamang who is on a crusade to legalise marijuana in Nepal 50 years after the United States government forced Nepal to ban its cultivation and use.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Recognising good examples among migrant worker recruiters is as important as holding the bad ones accountable. In her column, 'Labour Mobility' Upasana Khadka puts the spotlight on overseas job agencies that practice ethical recruitment.

pradeep_paudyal @pradeep_paudyal
Makes me glad to know that companies like IMR are also players in this industry and are not charging any fees to the job seekers.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
For former drug abuser turned Everest summiteer, Wangda Sherpa, it has been a lifelong expedition against addiction. @cupoflusi reports.

Muniram Pokhrel @MuniramSharma
This is absolutely inspiring! #nepal #himalayas #mountain #changeislife

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
It is only a matter of time before the next big #earthquake but most schools in Kathmandu Valley are not prepared for disasters. @SoniaAwale reports.

कमल गहल मगर @kamalKThapa
It's my concern too. I read that next #earthquake is going to be more devastating than 2015 and it can happen anytime. Hope our bureaucracy is listening. #NepalEarthquake #Nepal

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepal's trekking guides struggle to survive as tourism braces for another slow year.

#ClimateActionNow Nepal @REVERSE_Climate
This is so sad to see! Yet another year of uncertainty for a community that has not only thrived, but has really represented the country in the international arena to the highest standards.

Governance Monitoring Centre Nepal @GmcNepal
A sad state of affairs for Nepal's internationally acclaimed trekking guides, as they struggle to survive yet another year of minimal tourism. #Nepal #Nepali

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Ganga Maya Adhikari, on the 25th day of a hunger strike demanding justice against the murderers of her son during the Maoist conflict, is in a critical condition.

Pigreen @pigreen1
Where is the surge of anger from civil society, so called public intellectuals and the media at the failure of government to deal with the issue of war crimes?

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

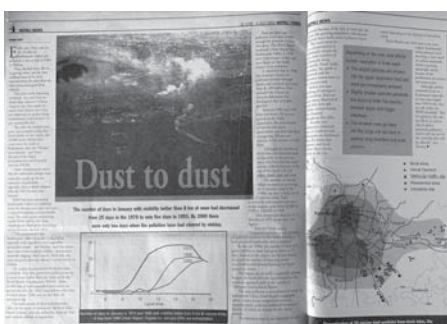
Twenty years ago, the very first prototype issue of *Nepali Times* carried an expose of the alarming air pollution in Kathmandu Valley. It was titled 'Dust to Dust' (pictured), and had a map of the most polluted areas inside the Ring Road. It warned of the health hazards, the sources of pollutants, and the most effective ways to control them.

It shames us that two decades later, we are still writing Editorials in this paper about the same subject. The only difference is that in the intervening years, the concentration of particulate matter in the air that we breathe is much higher, and toxic gases like carbon monoxide are many times more abundant because of the number of motorcycles in the Valley has grown to nearly 1 million.

This is breath-taking political failure of multiple governments since 2000, and a demonstration that democracy has not delivered accountability.

Excerpts of story from July 2000:

The main sources of air pollution in Kathmandu Valley are: brick kilns, Himal cement factory in Chobar, vehicular traffic, industries. The number of days in January with visibility better than 8km at noon decreased from 25 days in 1970 to only five days in 1993. By 2000,



there were only two days when the pollution haze had cleared by mid-day.

After last year's ban on Vikram tempos, the air looks cleaner, but this has not improved air quality along Kathmandu's road corridors in any measurable way. Yes, after the tempos were gone we stopped seeing the black smoke on the streets, but 20,000 more vehicles have been added in Kathmandu after the 350 Vikrams were banned.

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more than made up for the reduction of pollution, especially diesel exhaust and dust.

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

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Niranjan Koirala, 73

Remembering the quiet force who shaped Nepal's tourism

● Lisa Choegyal

It was a glowing autumn afternoon in Bhaktapur with the sun warming the terracotta roof tiles and moulded brick facades. Keanu Reeves had just finished shooting the kabaddi sequence in the temple square, liberally enhanced with fibre glass sculptures and carved wood trellises to transform it into Prince Siddhartha's contemporary Kapilvastu palace.

The crowd of extras lining the Little Buddha set stirred with excitement as the prime minister arrived in an official bustle of shiny black cars and watchful bodyguards, greeted by the movie's Italian director, Bernardo Bertolucci in a stylish panama hat. No one noticed Niranjan amongst his entourage, characteristically keeping in the background but without whom this film would never have been possible.

Niranjan Koirala was the self-effacing adviser to the tourism ministry who enabled us to pull off this major international movie that not only showcased Nepal's heritage, architecture and scenery to a global audience, but employed hundreds of locals and added millions of dollars representing ten percent to that years' total tourism revenue.

Niranjan had recognised its potential value for Nepal, arranged our film permit, and urged his newly elected uncle Girija Prasad Koirala, leader of the first democratic government of the recent era, to give us his full personal support.

It was 1992 and there were no less than 13 Oscar awards amongst Bertolucci's multi-national film crew, many fresh from success with the first movie shot on location in China, The Last Emperor. Thanks to Niranjan, we were granted direct access to the prime minister's office over the eight months that the production team worked in dozens of locations throughout Kathmandu Valley and Chitwan. If we encountered any hitches with the filming of Little Buddha (as it was code named prior to release), they were swiftly resolved at the highest level.

Although a fully-fledged member of the Biratnagar-based Koirala dynasty, direct descendent of the great BP and uncle of the matchless Manisha, 'Niruda' as he was known in the family wore his politics lightly and preferred a life in the shadows savouring the freedom to travel and study.

Having witnessed the upheavals of the royal takeover in 1961, he studied political science in Banaras



Niranjan Koirala on a pilgrimage to Mt Kailash in 2019 (above)

And in 1992 (left) as adviser to the Minister of Tourism with Lisa Choegyal on the Little Buddha filmset.

Hindu University and the University of California Berkeley, then worked in tourism before retreating to academia in the United States.

I met Niranjan only after he was wrenched back to Nepal public life as political adviser to the Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Ram Hari Joshi. He was an unlikely figure amongst the dusty desks, smeared windows and civil service culture, gentle but determined, smiling but steely, preferring tweed jackets and colourful sweaters, a neat moustache and thick hair curling carelessly over his collar.

The perfect person for the role, Niranjan's well-travelled vision and drive for Nepal's tourism economy was refreshingly tempered by his impatience with bureaucracy and innate political realism. "Never underestimate the complexity of running a poor mountainous country with precious few natural resources," he counselled me. At home in Boudha, he kept a pet monkey in a tree house, and his hospitality featured produce from the garden, and much talk of travel, films and books.

Despite inevitable opposition, it was during Niranjan's tenure

that Nepal's modern tourism policy was forged. The industry was liberalised by carefully opening up forbidden areas such as Upper Mustang and Dolpa to benefit local livelihoods, instituting mountain and trekking trail clean ups to beautify the Himalaya, world promotion by permitting ambitious international movie shoots such as Little Buddha, Eric Valli's Himalaya, and Enigma's Eyes of Truth, and allowing private commercial airlines to flourish within Nepal that ended the national flag-carrier RNAC's monopoly and revolutionised domestic travel.

I can envisage Niranjan humbly shaking his head in vehement disagreement with my words, but Nepal could not have achieved what it has without his wisdom and behind-the-scenes interventions. With his advocacy for aviation reform and safety, it was especially ironic and tragic that his first wife Santosh was killed in the Thai Airways disaster that year, leaving their two small sons returned from California and dazed with grief.

Niranjan attempted another stint in public life as Member Secretary of the King Mahendra Trust, now National Trust for Nature Conservation, before taking his own advice to affect political change from the sidelines, repairing to Delhi where he could indulge his appreciation of art, music, religion, history, travel and good food.

Despite losing his second wife, Ila Dalmia to cancer in 2003, Niranjan's infectious spirit and enthusiastic appreciation of civilisation endured. Until the end, his cheerful and unflinching Facebook postings from his expansive verandah and unruly garden in central Delhi were testament to his concern for a better world, relief for the oppressed, for liberal democracy and responsible leadership. Little Buddha remained something of which he was "particularly proud".

Niranjan passed away in Delhi on 3 January 2020, aged only 73, another unexpected victim of the coronavirus. As his sons Himanshu and Bhaskar so beautifully wrote, he has "departed for his next journey". 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK



Himalaya Airlines tests Lhasa

Himalaya Airlines flew its first high-altitude destination to Lhasa for a test flight on 19 January. Captain Hao Di, Vice President of Operations, led the test flight crew, which included senior captains who carried out three different landing approaches at Lhasa Airport for the validation flight.



Turkish-Roadhouse joint promotion campaign

Turkish Airlines and the Roadhouse chain of restaurants and hotels signed an agreement to implement a one-year joint promotion

campaign at an event held at Mezze by Roadhouse. Roadhouse customers will get discounts from Turkish Airlines, while the carrier's travel partners and those with Turkish Airlines boarding passes will get discounts or vouchers redeemable at its outlets.

Ncell's #fastforwardlife

Ncell has launched a new scheme for customers who change their SIM from 3G to 4G as part of the company's ongoing campaign, #FastForwardLife, aiming to encourage customers to reimagine the future through digital connectivity.



TATA Self-Reliance Campaign

Sipradi Trading Company has launched the 'TATA Motors Self-Reliance Campaign' which allows young returnees to Nepal to be financed up to 75% without collateral at an interest rate of less than 6% on the purchase of TATA commercial vehicles.



New Honda City

Syakar Trading has launched two versions of the new Honda City 5th Generation, the Honda City VX CVT and the Honda City ZX CVT, in Nepal. The new sedan will connect drivers to social and digital platforms via Amazon's virtual assistant Alexa. Price tags: VX CVT: Rs6.6 million, ZX CVT: Rs7 million.

Nepali art finds a new home

An art connoisseur's museum for contemporary and traditional Nepali art in Nepal itself

"This museum was created for the present-day artist. They should be able to enjoy fame in their lifetime," says Rajan Shakya of MoNA.

DRISHNA STHAPIT



● Shristi Karki

Just entering the basement art gallery of one of the new blocks at the Kathmandu Guest House complex in Thamel, visitors may feel their eyes are playing tricks.

Is this the Rubin Museum in New York? Visitors can be forgiven for doubting if they are still in Nepal—the subdued lighting, elegant interior exude a perfectionist attention to detail, a place where modern melds seamlessly into traditional.

Right away on entry, there are paintings of Ganesh, the auspicious elephant deity, and right next to the eyes are arrested by Raj Prakash Tuladhar's Five Yoginis, a depiction of the Buddhist guardian deities of Kathmandu.

The Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA) was set up by Rajan Shakya, the CEO and scion of the Kathmandu Guest House (KGH) group, who believes strongly that contemporary Nepali art compares to the best the world has to offer.

"Religion and art are interwoven so deeply in Nepali society. Yet most people here do not know about art even as they worship idols and temples," says Shakya. "Think about the hands of those artists, and the talent it takes to be able to invoke gods in idols, and inspire such deep faith in another human being."

Rajan Shakya became passionately interested in Nepali art after he realised that Nepal would lose the history and ownership of its creative heritage if its sculptures and scrolls continued being sold abroad without Nepalis ever having an opportunity to see and worship them.

Shakya graduated from a US university

in 1995, but did not have an academic background in art. But divine art forms run in the blood of the Newa people of Kathmandu Valley to which Shakya belongs. After returning to Nepal, Shakya began buying modern Nepali art, slowly at first, and more as he learnt more about the artists and their artifacts, and Nepal's cultural heritage.

He says, "I did not need to have studied art to feel passionately about it. Really seeing art, rather than just learn theoretically about it from textbooks, is the best way to fall in love with it. My interest was borne out of a necessity for art preservation."

"I wanted Nepalis to know that there is a place in Nepal for Nepali art, and be proud of our artists. The museum allows Nepali artists to enjoy fame in their own lifetime," says Shakya whose MoNA houses contemporary and traditional art by living Nepali artists, 85% of which is from Shakya's private collection.

MoNA's walls are festooned with contemporary art that spans styles and methods, from golden prints of Kathmandu's temples to vibrant acrylic abstracts. Up-and-coming artist Rashana Bajracharya's reimagining of Mona Lisa as a cancer survivor—serenely smiling, without hair—hangs front and centre, one frame away from Lain Singh Bangdel's painting of casually geometrical, multi-coloured roofs, titled Huts of Kathmandu.

Sarada Man Shrestha's In Quest of Water is a murky mixed media piece, portraying a woman at a दुङ्गे घरा stone spout done in earthy browns and

greens, hangs close to a pencil sketch of Queen Aishwarya. Four out of six paintings one wall are from Manik Man Chitrakar's Buddha's Life series.

"There is nothing more meaningful to Nepali artists than having a permanent space in Nepal itself," says Raj Prakash Tuladhar, whose paintings have been exhibited internationally.

Some of the paintings span generations of artists. Three paintings hang on the Arya Tara Wall of the museum, two among them completed decades apart by Anandamuni Shakya, the Nepali pioneer of 3D sketches, in 1938 and his grandson Surendra Man Shakya, in 2017.

The third Arya Tara painting, Samundra Man Singh Shrestha's oil on canvas, compared with Anandamuni Shakya's mineral pigment on canvas serves as historical documentation of how the traditional Nepali art-form, and 3D art, has evolved.

Shrestha's Green Tara is so detailed, the gold ornaments against her skin so intricately painted, that one almost expects to feel the ridges of gold and gemstones should they reach out and touch the painting.

The museum is dedicated not just to showcasing art, but also to the work and resources that go into the process. Purna P Hyoju's mineral paints are staged along with one of his incomplete paintings, as are Anandamuni Shakya's paintbrushes, Surya Bahadur Chitrakar's inkwell, and Raj Prakash Man Tuladhar's eyeglasses, a way of connecting the art to the artist, and the artist to the viewer.

MoNA opened in February 2020, but could not welcome

visitors because of the pandemic. It did hold two online exhibitions during the lockdown: a virtual 360° Covid-themed show titled tangential stress 2020 was the first of its kind in Asia.

The year of isolation gave Shakya and his team the time to iron out the kinks for the physical opening after the lockdown. Shakya hopes to eventually set up different museums for contemporary and traditional art, and hopes to expand to Patan and Pokhara, while collaborating with museums internationally.

"Art is at the forefront of the preservation of our culture and heritage," says heritage conservationist Alok Tuladhar. "But Nepali art is only accessible to the über elite, and we need to expand that circle so that more people appreciate the artwork and the artist." 🇳🇵

*Museum of Nepali Art
KGH Courtyard Thamel, Kathmandu
All artwork available in virtual exhibits: www.mona.com.np
info@mona.com.np
+977 1 4700800*

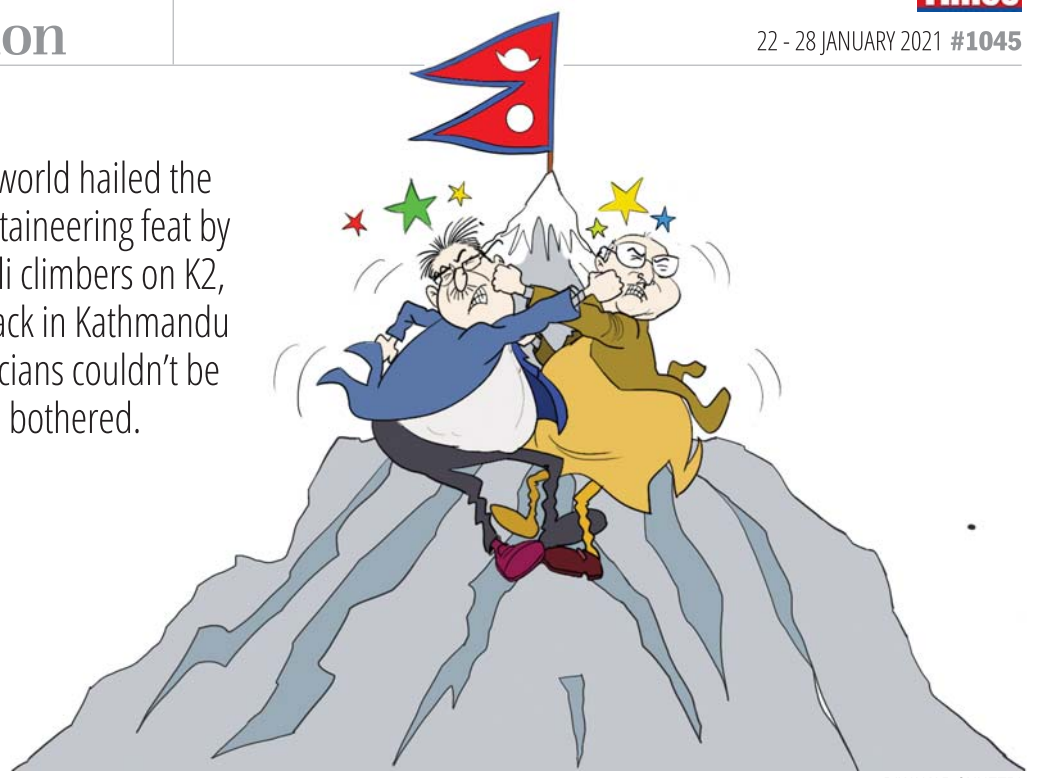


Take a video tour of the newly established Museum of Nepali Art, and listen to founder Rajan Shakya explain why Nepali art needs a home in Nepal itself. The Museum houses an eclectic collection of contemporary and traditional art that span styles and methods.

nepalitimes.com



The world hailed the mountaineering feat by Nepali climbers on K2, but back in Kathmandu politicians couldn't be bothered.



DIWAKAR CHHETRI

Nepalis on K2 make the impossible possible

While their political leaders back home in Kathmandu fought tooth-and-nail for power, ten Nepali climbers from different expeditions decided to work together last week to achieve the first-ever winter ascent of the last 8,000m peak.

In a remarkable show of solidarity, ten exhausted Nepali mountaineers waited 10m below the summit for everyone to catch up, and then took the final steps together to the top of K2, singing Nepal's national anthem in unison.

This unique demonstration of unity put the leaders of Nepal's ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) and other political parties to shame for wasting nearly three years in an endless power struggle that has paralysed governance.

Immersed in rancorous name-calling, none of Nepal's political leaders (except the RPP's Kamal Thapa) has found it necessary to mention or congratulate the climbers for their record-breaking climb that has been praised by the mountaineering community worldwide.

The winter ascent of the 8,611m high mountain on the Pakistan-China border had been attempted many times in the past 30 years, and the successful climb by the Nepalis has been hailed as a singular mountaineering achievement.

Nepal's high altitude guides have assisted many international expeditions on K2 and other mountains in Nepal to get to the top, this time they united their effort to set a world record and demonstrate that anything is possible when Nepalis work together.

The ten Nepalis from three different expeditions were Nirmal Purja, Gelje Sherpa, Mingma David Sherpa, Mingma G, Sona Sherpa, Mingma Tenzi Sherpa, Pem Chhiri Sherpa, Dawa Temba Sherpa, Kili Pemba Sherpa, and Dawa Tenjing Sherpa. Despite unrelenting wind and cold, with temperature dipping to -70Celsius, the Nepalis decided not to go individually for the record, but collectively claim the achievement on behalf of Nepal.

Nima Purja, who set his own record in 2019 by climbing the world's 14 eight thousanders in a record-smashing six months and six days, was back on K2 to repeat the climb in winter. After descending to Base Camp, he disclosed that he had climbed without the use of supplementary oxygen – which makes the feat even more remarkable.

"I took a calculated risk this time and I pressed on without supplementary O2. My self confidence, knowing my body's strength, capability and my experience from climbing the 14 x 8000ers enabled me to keep up with the rest of the team members and



NIMS PURJA / FACEBOOK

Nima Purja (*above*) and Sona Sherpa (*below*) at the summit of K2 (8,611m) at 5pm of 16 January, the first ever ascent of the world's second highest peak in winter. Ten Nepalis from three different expeditions banded together to jointly climb the mountain to show national pride and unity. Meanwhile, back in Nepal, political leaders were engaged in a bitter power struggle.



SEVEN SUMMIT TREKS

yet lead," Purja wrote on Facebook, laying to rest criticism from some that climbing with oxygen was not fair.

He added: "There are many cases, where climbers have claimed no O2 summits but followed our trail that we blazed and used the ropes and lines that we had fixed. Some of which are widely known within the inner climbing community. What is classified as fair means?"

Another member of the summit team, Mingma G is also said he was climbing without using bottled oxygen. K2 is regarded as even more difficult to climb than Mt Everest because of the need for technical climbing in the 'death zone' above 8,000m. And winter expeditions face the additional challenge of hurricane force winds and blizzards.

In an interview from his Base Camp tent on Monday, Purja told the BBC: "It was super cold and every step we climbed was an effort...

just 10m before the summit the whole team stop together and sang the national anthem of Nepal... the team members were quite emotional as well as myself, to make this impossible possible."

But K2 did claim a life this winter – that of Catalan climber Sergi Mingote, who fell into a crevasse while descending from Camp I on the same day that the Nepalis were on top.

This winter's K2 climb has been hailed in the international mountaineering community as a major milestone. Mountaineering chronicler Alan Arnette, who has climbed Everest and K2, wrote on his blog: "There have been questions why this Nepali national team was able to accomplish what world-class teams since 1987 have not. My opinion is that they worked as a unified team to get the camps and fixed line in early, they got lucky with the weather, especially in December and early January and on the summit push, they were able to stay healthy and avoid the objective dangers of avalanche and rockfall, they had a strong support team... and they were determined to show the world that Nepali climbers were amongst the best."

Canadian author of mountaineering books, Bernadette McDonald, said the Nepali team had written an important chapter in the history of high-altitude winter climbing.

She added in a Facebook post: "This remarkable Nepali success is the result of many things: their strength, their abilities in the mountains, their motivation, their willingness to suffer, an amazing weather window and an outstanding collaboration between multiple teams. They formed one unstoppable team, one that paused only once, when they stopped 10 metres below the summit to ensure that all ten members reached the top together. Brotherhood of the Rope!"

McDonald, who is updating her most recent book *Winter 8000* with the Nepali success on K2, added: "It's hard to imagine a more perfect group of climbers to make the first winter ascent of K2, climbers who have been the backbone of so many successful ascents in the Himalaya, but have rarely reaped the glory."

Nims Purja used to be in the British special forces, and unfurled a banner with the British and Nepali flags at the summit at 5PM on 16 January. He said: "What kept everyone going was that everybody wanted this to their bone to make the Nepali climbing community proud, it was that mutual support between each other that kept us successful." 🇳🇵

Pandemic puts brake on Kathmandu rickshaws

Lack of tourists and passengers threatens to put rickshaw operators out of business

● Drishna Sthapit

After 11 years of pedalling his rickshaw through the narrow alleyways of old Kathmandu, Potey Tamang's legs had to get used to being still. For close to a year now, his rickshaw business is down and out due to the coronavirus pandemic.

These days, the 48-year-old spends most days waiting in front of the Gaddi Baithak hoping for a fare. Just to kill the time, he dusts the ornate painting on the sides of his rickshaw, wipes the plastic flower bouquet on the handlebar, and checks the pedals and chain. All must be in order, just in case someone wants a ride.

Tamang's day begins in his rented room in Dhalko at 5AM. For months now, most days go by without a single passenger, while he sits under the Kathmandu sun in the company of fellow rickshaw drivers.

Before the Covid-19 induced lockdown, Tamang and his colleagues used to get plenty of hires, delivering goods or passengers through the gullies of inner Kathmandu. Tourist passengers were much sought after because they paid more, but there have been no foreigners now for nearly a year. Even with the end of the lockdown, passengers are hard to come by.

"If I get lucky with a ride or two in a day, I have money to pay for food. Otherwise, I wait here all day," says Tamang.

Kathmandu's rickshaws used to be the vehicle of choice for people commuting short distances through the narrow, crowded alleys of the old city. While there are some locals who still use the three-wheelers to move goods or quickly get to another nearby location, the business has always depended heavily on tourism. With the cancellation of international flights, like all businesses catering to tourists, rickshaws have also hit a low.

Tamang is from Kavre, and used to earn up to Rs2,000 on his best days. He and his



colleagues now struggle to take care of their families.

Another driver, Sonam says he has not had a single passenger for three days, and is struggling to pay rent and feed his family. The situation was not so bad before the lockdown. Basantapur still received tourists at the start of the year and some tourists were generous enough to part with a huge tip.

"Most of our customers used to be tourists, that is why we are having a hard time. If there were even a few local passengers at times like this, it would have been a little easier for us," says Maila Lama, 58, who has been driving rickshaws for the past 25 years.

According to Lama, use of rickshaws by the locals have gone down because more and more people in Kathmandu now own two-wheelers.

Both Lama and Tamang concur that the popularity of ride-sharing apps like Tootle and Pathao has also affected their business.

"We don't get as many local passengers like we used to because of Pathao. We normally charge around Rs100 for a ride from Durbar Square to Thamel. Pathao only Rs70," says Tamang. "Their service is cheaper, we charge more because we have to put in physical effort."

The sight of the brightly coloured three-wheelers staggering along Kathmandu's bumpy roads started to become rare as business took a back seat in the recent years. Many rickshaw operators moved on to other businesses that promised better return for their labour.

"Some of my friends are working as tempo drivers, some drive taxis, while some

are working as labourers," says Lama. "Sometimes I also feel like quitting this job and starting something else. But everything requires money and I don't have it."

The bright paint and colourful frills decorating the rickshaws are starting to pale out, as the tourist eye-candy of the past have been relegated to the parking stands. Tamang says he worries about the future of the business. He says if people stop using rickshaws, the mode of transportation will die out and people like him will have to find alternative ways to make a living.

"I am getting old and I don't have any other skill. If the situation does not improve in a few months, I'll have no other option but to go back to my village," he says.

While Tamang is already considering an alternative, Lama and Sonam are still pinning their hopes on the resurgence of tourism in Nepal. "I am hopeful that our business will improve in 2021. Once the tourists start coming to Kathmandu, we will be able to earn again," says 37-year-old Sonam.

For now, their eyes search passersby, pinning on to hope that the convenience of a quick ride will bring them a passenger or two. 📺



Kathmandu's rickshaws used to be the vehicle of choice for people commuting short distances through the narrow, crowded alleys of the old city. Now heavily dependent on tourism, the pandemic has put a brake on the once thriving, rickshaw business.

कोरोनाबाट सुरक्षित रहने तीन उपायहरू

व्यक्ति - व्यक्तिबीच कम्तीमा
दुई मिटर टाढा बस्ने



बेलाबेलामा साबुनपानीले मिचिमिची
कम्तीमा २० सेकेण्डसम्म हात धुने



घरबाट बाहिर निस्कँदा
अनिवार्य मास्क लगाउने



कोरोनाबाट आफू पनि बचाउँ र अरुलाई पनि बचाऔं

युनिसेफसँगको सहकार्यमा,
नेपाल सरकार, स्वास्थ्य तथा जनसंख्या मन्त्रालय
र
एनसेलद्वारा जनहितमा जारी

Ncell

unicef



नेपाल सरकार
स्वास्थ्य तथा जनसंख्या मन्त्रालय

What are the reasons for such a dramatic re-growth in trees in the Everest region?

● Alton C Byers in Khumbu

During the 1970s and early 1980s, it was commonly assumed by the development community that the Himalaya was approaching catastrophic levels of environmental degradation, linked primarily to growing human and livestock populations. Catastrophic consequences were predicted within 20 years, including the loss of all forest cover in Nepal by the year 2000. Although the origins of the ‘Himalayan Crisis’ models are obscure, the writer Erik Eckholm is usually credited with synthesising the popular and growing concerns of the day in his seminal 1976 book, *Losing Ground*.

Although supported by little quantitative or long-term data, a widely accepted paradigm for the international development community was established that became the foundation for dozens of multi-million dollar conservation projects throughout the Himalaya and Hindu Kush region. Especially during the 1980s, these well-meaning projects were typically designed to ‘reverse the trends of environmental degradation’ through tree planting, the introduction of ‘appropriate’ technologies such as improved cook stoves, and better land management. However, challenges to this scenario began to emerge by the mid-1980s. Largely initiated by publication of the paper ‘Uncertainty on a Himalayan Scale’, authors Michael Thompson and Michael Warburton questioned the lack of quantitative data and/or case studies in illustration of the negative trends, as well as the reliability of popular figures and statistics being used to illustrate the problem. By the early 1990s, however, the ‘Himalayan crisis debates’ began losing steam. The programmatic focus of most donors began to shift from government-led natural resource management initiatives, to those emphasising locally-led community forestry, biodiversity conservation, and new protected area programs (climate change would not surface as an issue for another decade).

A wide range of new mountain-

oriented organisations and programs emerged as a result of the ‘mountain crisis’ debates, publicity, and impact. They include the establishment of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in 1984, the inclusion of mountains within the UN’s 1992 Rio Earth Summit action plan for the 21st century (known as The Mountain Agenda), creation of the Mountain Forum in 1995, and establishment of FAO’s Mountain Partnership in 2002.

A 2019 study by the East-West Center showed that forest cover in Nepal between 1992-2016 increased from 26% to 45%, based upon the use of comparative Landsat satellite images. A recent Nepali Times article by Peter Gill show this has primarily been the result of Nepal’s community forestry programs, coupled with the massive outmigration since the early 2000s.

With the change to community-based forestry management in the late 1990s, and the growing role of remittances as a source of family income, Nepal’s forests became not only more sustainably managed, but there were also fewer demands upon their resources. Land that was formerly farmed or grazed was now allowed to return to second-growth forest.

However, many scientists believe that Nepal’s commendable increase in tree cover has not been accompanied by an equivalent restoration of biodiversity and forest function. The proliferation of new roads throughout Nepal is now being linked to an unprecedented over-exploitation of rare and medicinal plants because of easier access provided to formerly remote sites, as well as to increases in landslide frequency, slope instability, and river siltation.

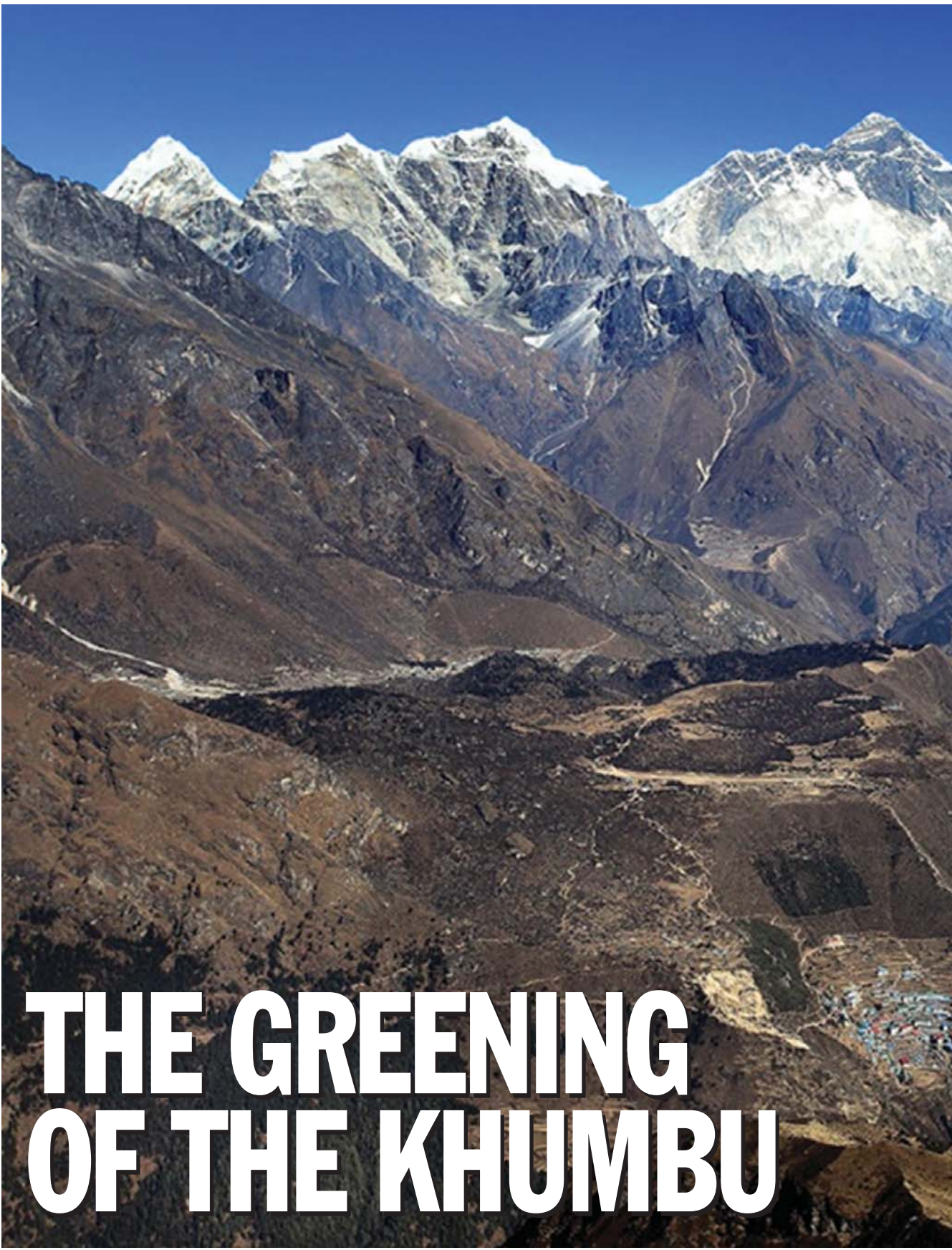
Sagarmatha National Park

In 1984, I spent 10 months in Khumbu as a PhD candidate in geography from the University of Colorado at Boulder, in part to test the credibility of these widely-accepted scenarios of degradation. The Sagarmatha National Park in the Khumbu was frequently cited as a representative case study of historical landscape stability, followed by contemporary landscape change and degradation in the High Himalaya.

Historically, this interpretation maintained that major landscape transformations were the result of 500 years of settlement, population growth, and pasture expansion by the ancestors of the Sherpa people, but that ecological stability nevertheless predominated because of the effectiveness of indigenous management systems.

Were the Sherpas really the first people to inhabit the Imja valley, crossing the Nangpa La (5,806 m) from Tibet some 500 years ago? Did they really find a thickly forested wilderness before them, stretching from today’s Thame to Namche Bazar, Tengboche to treeline at Pangboche? And were they really the ones who cleared the south-facing slopes from Thame to Pangboche of their original forest cover?

According to the region’s soils, which are capable of telling their own story... probably not. Trail cuts, cattle wallows, and slumps along



the trail from Thame to Pangboche do indeed reveal old, buried soil formations that were formed under moist cloud forest conditions, and not the dry shrub-grasslands found today.

By identifying the pollen species found in the different soil horizons, collecting and dating the lumps of charcoal found at various depths, and identifying tree species represented by each piece of charcoal, we were able to reconstruct the vegetation history of the Khumbu over the past several thousand years—and the results were surprising. Soil records suggest that moist and closed forest conditions did indeed exist some 2,000 years ago on today’s south-facing shrub-grasslands. These forests became more and more open as the centuries went by.

An abundance of charcoal throughout all soil horizons attests to the frequent use of fire as a forest

clearing tool. The final conversion from open woodland to shrub-grassland took place between 400 to 800 years ago—meaning that while most books still maintain that the Sherpa were the valley’s first inhabitants, beginning with their migration from Tibet some 500 years ago, our data suggested that people had been visiting and burning the forests on the south-facing slopes of the region for at least 2,000 years, and perhaps as much as 5,000 years ago. Thus, what the original Sherpa settlers saw when they first entered the Bhote Kosi and Imja Valleys was probably not a continuous cover of forest throughout the valley. Rather, what they found was even better—more forest cover than seen today, for sure, but also ample pasture land as a result of a thousand or more years of cutting, burning, and grassland expansion by people

living in the valleys directly to the south, quite possibly from the area of Rai settlements such as Bung.

In addition to the more quantitative methods used in our study, repeat photography provided a valuable qualitative method for better understanding changes in the physical and cultural landscape over time. The technique itself is simple: find an older photograph of a landscape, glacier, or village. Find the precise photo point used by the original photographer, and replicate it as accurately as possible in terms of identical season, time of day, weather, and camera equipment. If what appear to be changes between the two photo pairs are apparent, ground truth verification is critical to the most accurate understanding of events or processes leading up to that change, usually by establishing sampling plots in the area of question.



Namche Bazar, Kunde, and Khumjung villages as seen from the slopes of Tamserku in 1956. Note the bare, treeless hill slopes above Namche Bazar.



The same scene in 1984 with Syangboche airstrip, the enclosure above Namche planted with seedlings. Forests near Kunde changed little.



Same scene in 1995 showing a new enclosure above Namche and Mendaphu Hill with tree growth.



Imja Valley as seen from the upper slopes of Kongde Ri (6,187 m) with the Namche amphitheatre in the foreground, and Mt Everest, Lhotse and Ama Dablam behind.

LN SHERPA



LS SHERPA

The Imja Khola valley as seen from the lower slopes of Tamserku (6,608 m). Results of the soils and pollen analyses suggest that these predominantly south-facing slopes were covered by cloud forests of fir/birch/rhododendron until about 2,000 years ago. Tree cutting and burning to convert them to pastures was most likely by non-Sherpa ethnic groups from the south. Between 400-800 years ago, about the time of the Sherpa arrival, open woodlands were converted to shrub-grasslands on the south-facing slopes seen today.

Oral testimony from local residents can add tremendous insights to when, why, and how the changes occurred. Literature reviews, especially of older books written

by the early scholars, climbers, and scientists to a region, can be an extremely valuable resource as well as a source of additional historic photographs. Time lapse satellite

imagery and aerial photography can provide additional insights to more recent changes that have occurred, particularly with phenomena such as receding glaciers, growing glacial lakes, large-scale deforestation, and other major features.

In brief, replication of photographs taken of the Khumbu landscapes by the early climber-scientists of the 1950s suggested that, as opposed to catastrophic levels of land degradation reported in the literature, much of the Khumbu was still well forested, resilient, and rebounding. Landscapes that appear to be ‘degraded’, such as the shrub-grasslands of concern to researchers of the 1970s and 1980s, were in fact highly modified as a result of centuries of grazing and pasture expansion. In at least a dozen repeat photography expeditions to Khumbu between 1984 and 2018, I was able to document a steady

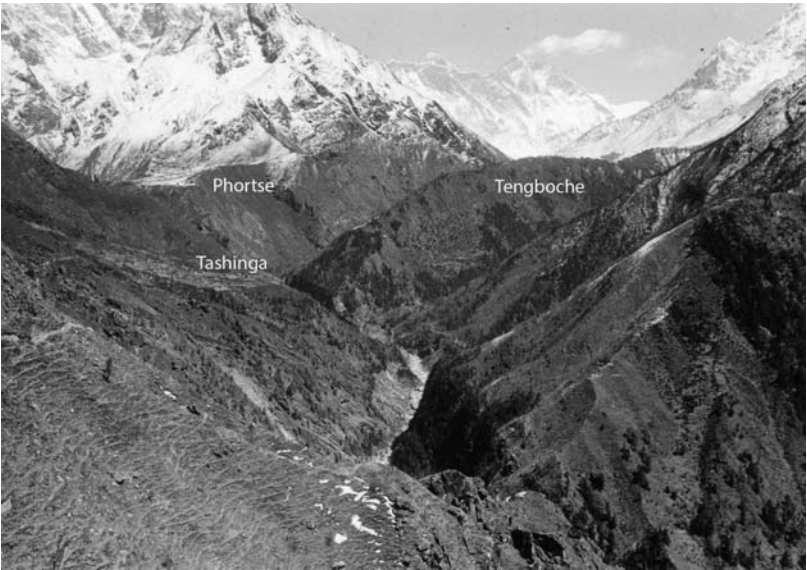


A. BYERS



LN SHERPA

By 2018, all of the exclosures above Namche and those near Kunde and Khumjung were covered with trees.



View of Tashinga, Phortse, and the Tengboche hill from the trail to Namche in 1956.

FRITZ MÜLLER



LN SHERPA

View of the Tengboche hill in 2018. Note the considerable expansion of forest and woodland coverage (*letters, a through f*) upon both the north and south facing slopes of the Imja Khola.

return of forest cover throughout much of Khumbu.

A view of Phortse, Tashinga, and the Tengboche hill from the Namche trail in 1956, taken by the Swiss-Canadian glaciologist Fritz Müller while on his way to the Khumbu Glacier. The same scene again in 2018 shows considerable growth of colonising *Pinus wallichiana* upon the south-facing slopes to the left, with fir/birch/rhododendron upon the more northerly-facing slopes to the right.

Climbers and scientists were the primary visitors to the region throughout the 1950s, with adventure tourists trickling in starting in the early 1960s. Trekking to the region grew steadily in the decades that followed, from twenty visitors in 1964, 5,000 per year in 1980, to 20,000 per year in 2000, and a remarkable 60,000 per year in 2019 (not including support staff, which easily doubles the total) dropping to nearly zero as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic from March of 2020. The Khumbu is waiting out the pandemic, making repairs and buying supplies in anticipation of a post-vaccine return of tourism in 2021 or 2022.

Diets and lifestyles have also changed considerably in the past two decades as the result of easily available imported foods. Likewise, the use of dairy and other products from yak and yak/cattle crossbreed herds is decreasing as more convenient and imported milk, cheese, and synthetic materials become readily available. While yaks and crossbreeds continue to be used as pack animals from Namche to the Everest Base Camp, their numbers are far fewer than they were a generation ago and, as a result, their pressures upon the landscape have decreased as well.

The Sherpa have long practiced an effective system of communal natural resource management characterised by the designation of shingo nawa, or forest guards, within each community. Forest management regulations imposed by the Sagarmatha National Park after 1976 have likely had beneficial impacts as well.

Since 1981, active forest regeneration programs have been

conducted by the Park, the New Zealand government and local communities which has led to a significant increase in forest coverage. Hundreds of thousands of fir, juniper, pine, and other native species have been raised in nurseries located throughout the park, and then planted in exclosures in the vicinity of major villages. Forty-five sites totaling some 165 hectares have been planted since 1981.

Climate change, warmer temperatures and increasing rainfall in Khumbu, may have facilitated more rapid tree growth. In fact, recent studies demonstrate how with increased temperatures and ascending snowlines, alpine vegetation is expanding upward to higher altitudes. Treelines, the interface between subalpine forest and alpine ecosystems, are also ascending to higher altitudes as a result of warming temperatures and decrease in cattle pressures. And glacial deposits newly exposed by melting ice are now being colonized by alpine wildflowers.

In general, the physical and social scientists who visited Khumbu in the 1950s through the 1970s were there at a time when things were far different than they are today. Landscapes at the time were under much more stress, where tourism has steadily replaced much of the previously agro-pastoral pressures.

How Khumbu now deals with the relatively new and rapidly expanding problems of solid and human waste management, freshwater contamination, and overcrowding, all directly linked to the growth in tourism, remains to be seen. But after 500 years of regularly adapting to changing political, economic, and environmental trends, I am sure that they will figure it out. 🌲

Alton C Byers, PhD is a Senior Research Associate and Faculty at the Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research (INSTAAR), University of Colorado at Boulder. His first visit to Khumbu was in 1973 as an undergraduate student of geography. This *Longread* is adapted from *Khumbu Since 1950 (second edition)* by Alton C. Byers and Lhakpa Sonam Sherpa, forthcoming in 2021.



Mithila Art Festival
The House of Mithila is back with painting sessions for keen learners. Registration required for limited seats.
23 January, 1pm, Bhaisepati



Hike for Nepal
Walk along the trails of Panauti, Naagi Danda and Kushadevi with a group of professionals and expert guides in the tourism industry specialising in cultural heritage tours, travel, hiking and trekking. Registration required.
23 January, 7am



Friday with Prasanna Shah
Unwind from the week with a cosy Friday evening at the Backdoor Pub serenaded by the lead guitarist of the band Kta Haru.
22 January, 6pm-9pm, The Village Café



Saturday Labim bazaar
From soaps to essential oils to sel roti, there is something for everyone at this biggest local market in Kathmandu so far. With more than 80 local vendors, the goal is to encourage interaction with farmers, artists & designers.
23 January, 9AM, Labim Mall

Eco Stories 2021
Eco stories has launched a three-day long pop shop in an effort to promote sustainable fashion and lifestyle. Visit the website.
21 January, 11am-6pm, Imago Dei

ONLINE ARCHIVES



Khan Academy
Looking for educational material as a student or an educator? Find necessary academic material for any subject from basic arithmetic to art and history on Khan Academy's website, or head to YouTube for multimedia resources.

Sustainable Summits 2020
Listen to Sustainable Summits global leaders speak out on World Environment Day. SUSTAINABLE SUMMITS 2020: A POST COVID19 VIEW FROM THE TOP is an online 50-minute programme in which some of the conferences' inspirational leaders deliver powerful messages on the future mountain environment. Watch videos on YouTube.

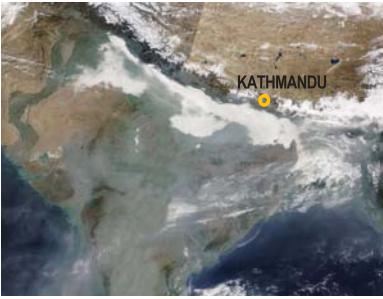


Comic Library
Find a variety of comic books available from the British Council Digital Library, including comics such as Star Wars, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Disney classics. Visit the website to find out more.

Virtual street festivals
Google's Colorful Street Fests & Carnivals is a virtual tour of eight of the most vibrant street festivals in the world. The celebrations include the La Tomatina food fight in Spain, Oktoberfest in Germany, and the Mardi Gras festival in New Orleans.



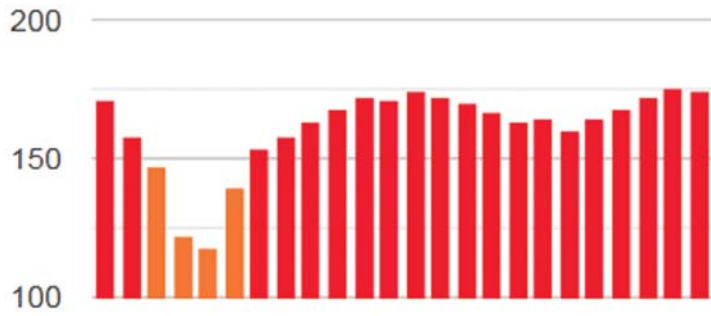
Katha Ghera
Some of Katha Ghera's plays are now on their YouTube channel. Watch Same time next year, Night, Mother, and Dayalu Rukh, the Nepali interpretation of The Giving Tree.



Still no sign of the Maghe Jhari winter rain for central and eastern Nepal. There is a westerly disturbance headed our way, but it will dissipate long before it gets to Kathmandu. The passing clouds will be rainless on Friday giving way to a sunny and relatively balmy weekend. However, the minimum temperature is expected to dip again to the 2-3 Celsius range next week.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
18° 5°	19° 5°	20° 5°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



Kathmandu's Air Quality Index this past week has been consistently in the Red 'Very Unhealthy' zone with measurements at major intersections reaching the Purple 'Hazardous' zone at rush hour. This may be lower than last week, but it is still deadly. The figure above shows the AQI measurement at Phora Darbar on for the 24 hours between 12 midnight and 12 noon 21-22 January. Except for the three hours between 2-5AM, it was all the red.

DINING



Electric Pagoda
For those looking for an al fresco dining experience, Electric pagoda will not go amiss. From the great menu, colourful lights, to cats strolling around the place, EP's evening ambience is highly recommended by visitors.
Saat Ghunti Marg (01) 4700123



Dechenling Restaurant
An oasis in the busy tourist location of Thamel, Dechenling features a beautiful beer garden open to campfires during winter. Enjoy a selection of beer with the chicken chilli, naan, and more.
Darbar Marg (01) 4412158



Tings Tea Touse
The food at Tings is inspired by travels around the world and made from ingredients available locally. Most dishes are served with green salad and home-baked bread which when combined will satisfy both the belly and the soul.
Lazimpat (01) 4414497



Cafe Hessed
Savour exquisite fine doughnuts, cupcakes and everything in between at Cafe Hessed. Pair the baked item with some good coffee or tea.
Pulchowk (01) 5530993



Himalayan Arabica
Serving more than 100 different flavours of fresh coffee along with various pastries, Himalayan Arabica is a treat for all the coffee fanatics.
Paknjol, 9851117547



Dish Home is now airing the popular Turkish series 20 Minutes starring Tuba Büyüküstün and Ilker Aksum. The show follows the story of Ali Halaskar, a history teacher with a happy family who ventures into a world of action and intrigue when his wife Melek is arrested for an attempted murder and sentenced to prison for 20 years.

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

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।

नेपाल सरकार
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय
सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

The fabric of democracy

As Nepal's politics heats up, flag-makers and screen printers do brisk business

● Monika Deupala

One sure sign that Nepal's politics is once more heating up can be discerned these days at the workshop of Mithila Printing Suppliers in Bagbazar.

The factory cannot churn out party flags and banners fast enough for the many street demonstrations that are taking place against Prime Minister K P Oli's dissolution of the Lower House.

Whether it is the anti-Oli faction of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), the opposition Nepali Congress (NC), the Hindu-right Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) or the Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP), they are all on the streets.

Even supporters of Prime Minister Oli's faction of the NCP have been holding their own rallies across the country, and they are already behaving as if they are on the campaign trail.

All these parties need flags and banners, which means flag-makers like Mithila Print Suppliers are working overtime to fulfill orders. In fact, there has not been a moment's rest for the owners and workers in the past month, ever since the House dissolution on 20 December.

Inside the printer's shop there is an overwhelming smell of wet paint, as workers use screen print to produce flags with the NC symbol of a green tree. Nearby, there is a whirl of sewing machines as tailors stitch the four stars into the NC's red-and-white flags.

"We have sold so many flags for various



ALL PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA



parties, I have lost count," says Kailash Shah, owner of Mithila Printing Suppliers. His main business used to be printing t-shirts and caps, but he diversified into flags and banners after finding there was higher demand for them.

Shah and his colleagues are struggling to meet an order for Nepali Congress flags from not just Kathmandu but all over Nepal after the party announced nationwide protests. The shop is producing 1,500 flags a day in assembly-line fashion.

The process starts with tearing up taffeta into the required size, and screen printing the party symbol on it. The ink on the flags are air-dried for a while, their borders are sewed, and then packed for delivery.

Some of these flags could be seen at the NC's demonstrations this week in Kathmandu, and at all 753 electoral constituencies across the country. The party held rallies in 67,743 wards all over Nepal this week.

The Nepali Congress itself is split between Sher Bahadur Deuba, who has not decided yet whether to join anti-Oli protests by the NCP faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal. However, his internal party rival, Ram Chandra Poudel wants to campaign for the restoration of the House.

Meanwhile, the Dahal-Nepal faction of the NCP has announced its own nationwide protests, including a big one in Kathmandu, on Friday 22 January even as the Supreme Court is debating 13 writ petitions against Prime Minister Oli's move.

Dahal himself has threatened to "unleash a hurricane" against the move, and warned its protests would no longer be "vegetarian".

Even the underground Netra Bikram Chand-led Maoist party has announced a week-long agitation to protest the government's arrest of the head of its western command, Dharmendra Bastola. The group has also threatened to enforce a nationwide strike on 23 January. 🇳🇵

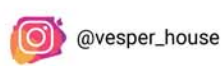
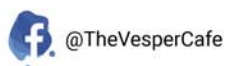
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MOFA NEPAL

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR: Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali and his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar at the Sixth Meeting of Nepal-India Joint Commission in New Delhi, last week.



JHALANATH KHANAL RSS

YOGI MINISTER: Tikapur Yogasharam marks its 23rd anniversary. Sudarpschim's Provincial Minister, Ran Bahadur Rawal attending the event on Thursday.



ROSHAN SAPKOTA/RSS

COMRADES IN ARMS: Nepal Communist Party leaders, Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal at a meeting organised by All Nepal Women's Association in Kathmandu on Monday.



MONIKA DEUPALA

VACCINE DIPLOMACY: The first lot of 1 million Covishield vaccines donated by the Indian government to Nepal as a part of 'Vaccine Maitri' campaign, arrives in Kathmandu on Thursday. Story on page 1.



CAN

HOWZZAT: Team Bagmati Province player during a cricket match against Nepal Police Club at the PM Cup Men's National Cricket Tournament in Kirtipur on Sunday.

Privacy is

In the age of smartphones under pillows, screenshots, Internet of Things (IoT) devices, location trackers and free platforms that make money off our data: privacy is rapidly becoming elusive.



TECH-AWAY
Saniaa Shah

Ever since WhatsApp's new privacy policy provoked a mass exit (leading users to impulsively switch to smaller messaging apps such as Signal and Telegram) privacy has been a hot topic in the media. But how many of us actually peruse privacy policies of every app, every social platform, every website and every device we allow into our lives?

"Privacy is no longer a social norm," Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg has been quoted as saying. This is the same man who, together with his wife, purchased a home in Palo Alto, as well as four residential properties surrounding it, just to protect their privacy.

It is not that people have changed their views on privacy after getting on social media, we are simply unaware of the repercussions of sharing information with a website. And even if we do, many of us will not know where to start when it comes to protecting personal data and reducing our digital footprint.

The truth is: the more private and secure you want to become, the more inconvenient your life will be. Start with your browser and

Internet habits, manage your social media presence better, migrate to privacy-focused messaging platforms, control your smartphone and laptop (don't give them access to everything), steer clear from IoT devices.

Privacy is like yoga: it is not just a discipline, it is a lifestyle. If you are willing to give it a shot, let us get started:

BECOME A PASSWORD PRO

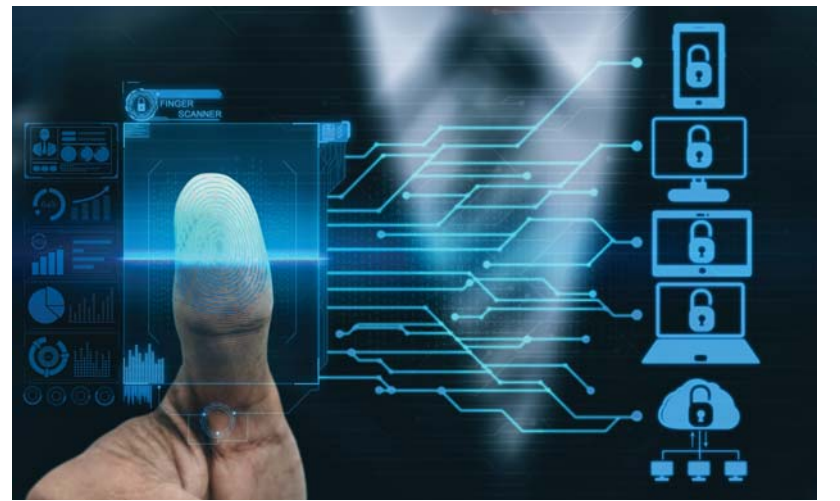
Avoid your browser's in-built password saving and managing features. Avoid weak passwords, or re-using the same password everywhere just because it is convenient. If hackers break through your common password, they will likely get access to all your accounts at once. Have trouble remembering all your passwords? Use a password manager, an online application that stores your login details in an encrypted vault (under a master password) and generates complex

passwords for you. Some of the best free password managers out there are LastPass, NordPass, Remembear, Bitwarden and Sticky Password. I personally use LastPass because it's secure, packed with useful features and easy to use.

HIKE UP YOUR SECURITY BARRIERS

'What's your mother's maiden name?' 'Which elementary school did you attend?' and 'What is your favourite food?' are questions any Facebook friend of yours could answer. Do not answer any Security Question honestly, instead create cryptic answers with an inside joke. Additionally, make sure your WiFi router is protected, use WPA2 security, and enable two-factor authentication for everything, even if it adds a few extra seconds to your sign-in process.

Regarding fingerprint log-ins and facial recognition features, biometric authentication and



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You either have it or you don't, a netizen's guide



biometric identification are exceptionally secure systems, but that does not make them 100% safe. If those databases are compromised, a hacker could get access to your biometric data, or they could be used for surveillance. While this data is more vulnerable than passwords, the good news is, such high-profile data is usually secured on a stronger level as well.

CONTROL PRIVACY SETTINGS
Disable everything in your Google 'My Activity' page. Do not give web platforms information such as your home address and disable location tracking if you can help it. When using social media, utilise the Privacy Settings to strengthen control. Do not befriend strangers, avoid public posts and avoid commenting on public platforms if you do not have your personal data on limited access.

USE ENCRYPTED APPS
Unfortunately, this means that good old SMS is not a safe way to

communicate at all. Signal Messenger is gaining popularity for its privacy-focused approach, but bear in mind that WhatsApp does still have end-to-end encryption and the option to make profile pictures and status private. Studies show that most people do not bother visiting the Privacy Settings of apps they download. Sticking to the default settings of

the app is common practice, which often is not the smartest, most secure way to use it. Another logical argument is that leaving WhatsApp is not the answer if you are still using Facebook Messenger, Google Hangouts and Zoom – the last of which has been dealing with security scandals while also experiencing monumental growth in usage during the pandemic. If you wish to truly make the switch, consider less popular but extremely privacy-conscious video calling platforms such as Linphone, JitsiMeet and Mumble.

PRACTICE SAFER BROWSING
Chrome, Safari or Firefox store cookies to track you, so it is important to clear temporary data frequently and use Incognito mode when necessary. DuckDuckGo, a privacy-conscious browser, recently hit 100 million searches in a single day, ranking #2 in the USA, only behind Google, beating both Bing and Yahoo. DuckDuckGo's primary advantage is its privacy features

which allow users to search without personal information being collected and sold to advertisers. StartPage.com gives Google results while protecting anonymity, and Searx.me is a fully open-source 'privacy-respecting metasearch engine' that is quickly becoming a favourite within the security community.

PROTECT YOUR PHONE
Every morning, most of us reach out for our smartphones before we even step out of bed. The smartphone is a device physically closest to us, which is why we need to keep it under strict control. Phones come with powerful sensors and data trackers that are constantly turned on, making it easy to extract data that can be shared with other tech companies.



Disable Analytics and go into App Settings to ensure that each app only gets permission for what they really need to perform well. Make sure you are using automatic software updates for both the operating system and applications, so that you receive the latest fixes and security updates.



With new high-end phones running on Android 8.0 and up or iOS 14 (for Apple users), you get the option of MAC address randomisation. If you have these updated operating systems, this is a huge plus because this feature protects mobile devices from being tracked as they move through Wi-Fi-rich environments. Disable NFC, WiFi, Bluetooth, Radio when they are not in use, especially when moving around in public areas. Disable unnecessary features of existing apps, and control yourself from installing apps you do not need. The more apps you download, the more likely a security breach. In short, less is more.

KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR COMPUTER
Most of the above tips are applicable for desktop or laptop usage as well. Consider opting out of computer tracking, and disabling unused radios on your computer. Installing an application like Bleachbit helps remove temporary data and clean your system, while also clearing disk space. Needless to add, public computers are a huge risk, but it is 2021 and the age of 'cyber cafes' has passed.

THE DARK SIDE OF SMART TECHNOLOGY
The bad news for gadget geeks is

that wearable tech devices (smartwatches, fitness bands, etc.) and gadgets that use IOT (Internet of Things) are not particularly healthy for your privacy. If data is not stored locally, you risk sharing all your personal information with third parties. What is more, hackers can potentially break through your wearable device to get your smartphone and get access to all your contacts, photos, videos and financial information. Choose your brands carefully, spend time understanding their privacy practices and minimise.

PRO TIP: USE VPN WHEN YOU CAN
A VPN (Virtual Private Network) redirects your internet traffic, disguising where your computer, phone or other device is when it makes contact with websites. It also encrypts information you send across the internet, making it unreadable to anyone who intercepts your traffic. That includes your internet service provider. A few of the trusted VPN providers are: Surfshark, ProtonVPN, IVPN, Mullvad and Windscribe.

Saniaa Shah writes this fortnightly column, TechAway, for Nepali Times.

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Breathing is hazardous to health

Only public pressure on politicians will clean up Kathmandu's hazardous air pollution



Rekha Thapa of Dailekh, in far western Nepal had a job in Kathmandu after graduation, but she was not able to join. Not because it would mean distance from her family, but because of respiratory problems caused by severe air pollution in the capital.

"I have asthma," says Thapa. "Dailekh may not have modern health facilities, but at least the air there is fresh."

Ram Bahadur Shahi, 65, is also an asthma patient, and can breathe without problems in his home village in Kavre. But as soon as he comes to Kathmandu, the dust and the smog make him wheeze and he has difficulty breathing.

We cannot measure the impact of air pollution directly, as we can with blood pressure or glucose level. Nonetheless, it kills as many people as does chronic diseases, if not more. One study showed that in 2019 alone, 42,100 Nepalis died directly due to dirty air, and the average lifespan of a resident of Kathmandu is cut by nearly 4 years.

"Air pollution affects all parts of the human body and even unborn babies. It is carcinogenic and about 43% of asthma deaths are cases that are aggravated by dirty air," says cardiologist, Bhagwan Koirala.

But for something as lethal as that, what is surprising is the lack of public outrage. Clean air activist Bhusan Tuladhar attributes it to the lack of a direct causal link. "When a patient dies of respiratory problems, the hospital's death certificate does not mention 'air pollution' as the cause of death," Tuladhar said in a



Saglo Samaj interview (see below).

Air quality in Kathmandu is now so bad that there are now 'pollution refugees' who have decided to emigrate to other parts of the country, if not abroad, for health reasons. "Parents visiting their children in Australia need no medication there but as soon as they return to Kathmandu, they have to be admitted to hospitals," says pulmonary specialist, Raju Pangeni.

Two weeks ago, the Air quality index (AQI) in the capital hit record high levels. A Nepali Times monitoring team on 6 January morning, recorded AQI at 450 at Bagmati Bridge and above 300 in

most parts of the city. And that was on a good day.

Diesel vehicles are among the worst polluters in Kathmandu, and the number of buses and trucks are increasing exponentially. Ten years ago, Nepal's annual diesel import from India was only about 500,000 kilolitres. Today, it is nearly 1,500,000 kilolitres. The number of vehicles in Kathmandu Valley is increasing every year by at least 22%.

Green stickers can be bought under the counter, and there are no emission checks on the streets. There is a lack of political will to relocate brick kilns, among the major sources of suspended particulate matter.

Municipalities have done little to nothing to control open garbage burning.

Correct government policy interventions were allowed to lapse. Cargo ropeways to Hetauda used to transport up to 25 tons of cargo a day. The Kathmandu-Bhaktapur trolley bus system was allowed to rot away after serving commuters for over 30 years.

But there were examples of citizen action that forced politicians to reduce air pollution. Battery-operated Safa three-wheelers replaced diesel Vikram tempos, and brick kilns were regulated. But there has been no follow-up to encourage

electric public transport, and the kilns are back. And after announcing two years ago that 20% of vehicles in Nepal would be battery-powered by 2020, Prime Minister Oli's government re-imposed taxes on electric cars last year.

The biggest impediment to clean air is the lack of political will. After all, if Kathmandu could so effectively curb drinking and driving with breathalyser tests, why is it so difficult to conduct effective emission checks? There is now Rs7 billion accumulated from pollution tax, that could be invested in clean public transport and charging infrastructure. 🇳🇵

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"Air pollution is not just an environmental problem"

In an interview on the Saglo Samaj tv magazine program, urban planner and clean air activist, Bhushan Tuladhar explains the challenges of achieving better air quality. Excerpt:

Saglo Samaj: Which parts of Kathmandu Valley are at more risk of air pollution?

Bhushan Tuladhar: Everyone who breathes in Kathmandu is at risk. Some places are more polluted than others, but even the least polluted areas have pollution levels much higher than that recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). But neighbourhoods near traffic, brick kilns and firewood burning are most exposed.

Recently our team went out across the town with air pollution monitoring devices. Bagmati Bridge had the worst air quality.

That is because Bagmati Bridge has constant flow of vehicles and traffic jams throughout the day. And most of these are from motorcycles, which make up 80% of vehicles in Kathmandu. They emit invisible poisonous gases.

What are the main sources of air pollution in Kathmandu?

The main source of pollution is transport, followed by brick kilns, garbage burning and firewood for cooking. But during winter, an inversion layer traps smoke and dust in this bowl-shaped Valley with no outlet. And we keep adding to it until it suffocates us, which is what happened two weeks ago.

What is the solution?

Use of firewood for cooking is decreasing and brick kilns have also adopted

cleaner technology. But people still burn their garbage in many places, including Kathmandu. So, local representatives can be mobilised to discourage garbage burning. We need an efficient and reliable mass transit system. The per capita emission of public transport is much lower. Only 27% of the rides in Kathmandu are on buses, we need to double it. And if we can convert to electric buses, it will be even cleaner.

If air pollution is so hazardous, why are people not outraged?

Air pollution is a silent killer. When a patient dies of respiratory problems, the hospital's death certificate does not mention 'air pollution' as the cause of death. So, people do not see the linkages between dirty air and dangerous diseases.

Is there hope that elected local governments now have decision-making power?

Municipalities have to take the lead now. The federal government should just backstop the measures and provide guidance. Air pollution is not just an environmental problem. It is a public health and economic issue and we have to treat it as such.

This interview is based on the fourth episode of Saglo Samaj, a tv magazine program produced by Himalmedia which is broadcast every Monday, at 8:30PM on Dish Home Channel 130. Go online to watch a trailer of the program.



PRATIBHA TULADHAR

Snatches from an asthmatic’s childhood in Kathmandu

● Pratibha Tuladhar

My aunt would lie on her side on raised pillows, wheezing. She would speak between coughing and wheeze some more. Then she would pull out—what I considered a toy as a child—an inhaler, clamp it in her mouth and press, then suck in for a while before repeating. She would fall asleep when the wheezing eased.

I would soon learn her toy was actually an asthalin inhaler for asthma patients. And in the years that followed, I would soon be using them myself.

As a school girl, my bag had a pile of books like most children going to mediocre private schools in Kathmandu do. Nestled

between them, always, was the inhaler with ‘Salbutamol’ on its label. I was likely to forget my lunch box some days, but never my inhaler.

My memory of how I first experienced an asthma attack is feeble. But I remember hearing the same wheezing sounds my aunt used to make, from inside me and thinking: okay, so this is what it was. My chest would feel tight, as though it was contracting to squeeze the breath out of me. And I would feel like my nose had stopped taking in air.

A puff, and I would slowly relax and go to sleep— incomplete homework giving me nightmares.

During Games classes, I would stand under the trees watching other children

play. Running around left me quickly out of breath. But not being a participant in the sports my friends played, also made me feel left out. It gradually shaped my personality as a ‘loner’, pushing me into a place of introversion.

As a teenager, the attacks suddenly stopped when I was studying in Darjeeling. It felt like a miracle, but mostly like my lungs had finally been set free. I would walk up and down the hills with classmates, or alone, breathing in the pine trees, and the moist air that carried nothing of the hydrangeas, azaleas or orchids, but pure rain. I lived.

But the one time we went down to Calcutta for a mock-parliament event, my lungs were clogged again. I felt a heaviness I

had not missed. Only, it was worse than the feeling I had experienced in Kathmandu. I longed for the Darjeeling sky.

My trajectory as an asthmatic child was shared by my sister. But as someone who has mostly lived in Kathmandu, she graduated from asthalin to rotohalers and occasional nebulizers. As a working woman who rides around on her scooter through Kathmandu smog most days now, she is constantly coughing and wheezing. They have become a part of her countenance. What has it done to her lungs? I dread I will have to find out.

I read somewhere that our lungs grow to their best extent when we are children and much of our adult life depends on how much they expand in the first few years of development. At five, my nephew is already experiencing breathing difficulties. I cringe when I think of the possibility of him having to live a childhood that is shackled by breathlessness, as the Air Quality Index constantly hovers at 200.

Every time I read the AQI, I think of my late grandmother, another asthmatic in the family. She would climb up the stairs slowly to get to the kitchen on the fourth floor and collapse at the landing every single time, sitting there for a long while to catch her breath before saying a word.

In the last years of her life, she needed a constant supply of oxygen, blown into her nostrils through a thin pipe that she wore like a halter around her face. It left a permanent dent on her cheeks.

I recall her sitting still on her bed, moving as little as possible, because movement would leave her out of breath. When she passed away exactly twelve years ago, Kathmandu air was still not as terrible as it has now become. There were still mornings when we would wake up to the mountains. Now, we wake up to haze almost all of our days.

My aunt, who goes on morning kora around Boudha Stupa every morning tells me there is always a layer of thick black particles on her jacket when she comes back from the perambulation. It has become the new normal.

She tells me, “Maa would not have survived the dust bowl that Kathmandu has become. It’s a good thing she didn’t live to see what we have come to.” 🇳🇵

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Why wear a mask?

This listicle is brought to you in the public interest by the Department of Pandemics that falls under the Ministry of Pandemonium of GONe.

Masks have now become as essential an item of clothing as one's undies, and like them, should not be shared. Here is why we should wear them (masks, not undies) at all times:

1. If, perchance, you happen to pass a bank in Pulchok and you are suddenly overcome by an urge to rob it, you can instantaneously pull off a heist then and there, by walking right in through the front door without having to spend time looking for a mask, since you will be wearing one already.
2. Are you concerned about privacy, and do ubiquitous CCTV cameras connected to the national face recognition database spook you? Is it bothersome to you that the authoritarians can track your whereabouts anywhere in Nepal at any given time, even as you attend to the call of nature on the perimeter wall of the Lower House? Fret not. A device called 'The Mask' can trick the face detection software, thereby ensuring that our semi-intelligence agencies cannot tell you apart from 30 million other Nepalis.
3. If you are you an introvert by nature who does not like to make small talk, and feels obligated to smile a lot in the company of socially-distant relatives until your cheeks hurt, salvation is at hand. Whip out the mask automatically from your inner jacket pocket, pull it towards you, cover your nose and mouth, and breathe normally. The rest of the boring wedding reception will

- be a breeze, because people won't be able to tell that you are a grumpy uncle. After all, what is there to smile about in these trying times?
4. Do your spectacles fog over when you wear a mask? A resourceful optician in Teku has come up with an ingenious solution to remove condensation from your eyewear for a small fee. He will detach the lens from the spectacle frame, and voila, he's fixed the foggin' problem.

5. Many of you have faced awkward situations while dining at a fancy outdoor restaurant, and when the wine arrives you have to risk your life to sip it because you have to take your mask off. Well, a marvellous new invention now makes it much safer to partake of beverages without being a superspreader.

The masks come with factory pre-installed straws with in-built tiny reusable plugs at one end. When the drink arrives, all you have to do is remove the plug, dip the straw into the drink, take a swig, and replace said plug. For the hors d'oeuvre, switch masks to the one that comes with a zipper and trap door.

6. Masks may also save you from losing your job since the boss can't tell which one of you called him an ***_****.



OK, which one of you called me an ***_****?



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