



Vacillating on vaccines

The flood of social media posts of donated medical supplies being unloaded at Kathmandu airport every day, gives the impression that the outside world cares more about the humanitarian emergency in Nepal than the country's own leaders.

This week proved that the Nepali politicians still do not get it. Except for the chatting classes locked up at home, not many Nepalis follow, or care, about a dissolved Parliament, elections in November, or writs at the Supreme Court. They are preoccupied with trying to prevent relatives from breathing their last.



AMIT MACHAMASI

Prime Minister K P Oli has proven that he is not just a shrewd manipulator, but also has elastic ethics. In the past year, he has shown that he will stop at nothing: split the NCP that he himself united, dismantle his own UML, dissolve a Parliament in which he had a two-thirds majority. All is fair, it seems, in love and politics.

Nepalis might have followed the political games in Kathmandu more closely if the alternatives to Oli inspired more confidence. But they are all tried, tested and failed ex-prime ministers themselves. The main contender Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress lined himself up to be PM for the fifth time, and has still not given up.

The crises due to the pandemic would have been the opportunity to form a national unity government, and work together to fight the virus. This would be the time for all the parties to skip a generation and bring up some young do-ers. That is what they may have done if this was a war. But this is a war.

The needs are great: ensuring adequate oxygen supply, rushing relief for the millions who have lost their income during the lockdowns, ensuring that ICU care is available and affordable to the general public, and negotiating a reliable vaccine pipeline. Preoccupied with politicking, the leaders had little time for any of this.

Most of Nepal's politically-appointed ambassadors overseas are more beholden to their patrons back home than to the people. With the exceptions of our female envoys

in Oman and Spain, other missions have not stepped up to the task of conveying the emergency like we did after the 2015 earthquake.

The oxygen cylinders and medical equipment that have arrived are mostly through donations from the Nepali diaspora, citizens groups that have mobilised through social media, and friends of Nepal.

No wonder the rest of the world does not take us seriously. When a state does not demonstrate accountability towards its own citizens, there is little trust even from governments that genuinely want to help, to provide urgently needed material.

And there is not much the outside world can do when the malaise is inside. Nepal has to resolve its own governance crisis that has messed up its Covid-19 response.

Having said that, the international community could show more concern for the urgent need for vaccines. There are many flights bearing

ventilators, concentrators, PPEs and test kits, but much vacillation on vaccines.

After a phone conversation between President Bidya Devi Bhandari and Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday, China agreed to donate 1 million doses of its Sinopharm VeroCell vaccines, in addition to the 800,000 already supplied in April. Talks are on to purchase

another 3 million. With an ex-general of the Nepal Army Balananda Sharma now leading the Covid-19 Control and Management Committee, there will hopefully be more traction so we can make up for lost time on saving lives.

There has been an unpardonable delay in Nepal's vaccine diplomacy, but it is also India, Britain, Canada, the US, the WHO that have let us down in this hour of need. We get it that vaccines are now a geo-strategic item, and countries are stockpiling it for the third wave. But some countries have enough doses to vaccinate their populations several times over, at a time when their own citizens are refusing to take AZ because of the panic over clots.

Across France, AZ vaccines are being dumped because they are nearing expiry, the United States has a cache of 80 million Covid-19 vaccines, and nearly half its population refuses to be vaccinated. Ship the shots to people who want and need the vaccines.

We would like to see fewer Tweets of donated items that Nepal can afford to buy, and more timetables for vaccine deliveries.

Let's see fewer Tweets of donated items that Nepal can afford to buy, and more timetables for vaccine deliveries.

ONLINE PACKAGES



TENZING INTERVIEW

On the 67th anniversary of the ascent of Mt Everest, listen to the voice of Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, speaking in Tibetan in a rare recording of a radio interview over All India Radio Kurseong in 1985, a year before he died. Read the interview on [page 6-7](#).

RACE TO PREMIERSHIP

Same thing over and over, musical chairs for leadership of Nepal as proven failures again and again vie for PM ('2 ex-PMs vie to be Nepal PM', [nepalitimes.com](#)). More of the same, nothing, except more corruption and riches for the powerful and little to no help for the people. I shake my head in disbelief, and wonder why the Nepali people do not rise up in outrage.

Roger Ray

- At a time when leaders should be putting their differences aside and show their solidarity towards the people and help fight the pandemic, here they are once again demonstrating their petty greed ('Nepal sets elections in middle of pandemic', [nepalitimes.com](#)).

Alex Shrestha

- It was elections that lead to the sharp spike in new cases in India, and we are going to make the same mistake. Nice, keep it up.

Santosh Shrestha

- It is ill-conceived to hold rallies, conventions, and elections amidst a pandemic.

Ashoke Dasgupta

COVID EMERGENCY

This article is the best current synthesis of the various threads of the Nepal pandemic problem that I have seen over the past couple of weeks ('It's an emergency', Sonia Awale, #1062). It illustrates how O2 concentrators fit into the O2 supply chain. I have also read that there are 20 oxygen plants in Nepal but I have yet to find any reporting on the geographic distribution of these companies. Are they all in the Kathmandu Valley? What are the provincial or regional level O2 supply capacities and immediate priorities?

Sean Edwards

- Also needed are Contact tracing and testing.

Vijayendra Baral

The Ministry of Tourism needs to cancel Everest Expedition 2021, Covid-19 cases are increasing in the basecamp ('Two Nepal in the death zone', Lesley D Junlakan). Return the permit fees and call it off. Imagine how many lifesaving oxygen cylinders are stocked up there for 2000 climbers. Too much fanfare and celebrations up there while we are under house arrest.

Vairochana Sherpa

- Since the vaccine availability across the globe is limited and there is a supply bottleneck, our government must move quickly reach out to the vaccine manufacturers, not just foreign ambassadors. To vaccinate entire population, government needs approximately \$450 million. This amount of money can be managed by cutting some of the development budget.

Sarad Thapa

- Strange to say, just reading this article has made me feel relieved to great extent even though I haven't yet incorporated any of methods the author tells us ('Locked up', Anjana Rajbhandary, #1062).

Himalaya Night

- This looks like an example of sustainable transformation and the 'building back better' post Covid-19 that we're always hearing about ('Empowering Nepalis during Covid-19 crisis', Kautubh Dhital, #1061). Should be an inspiration for others, large and small.

Nepal Now

- A good piece on Sputnik v, but let's not bring politics into it ('Vaccine geo-politics and Sputnik-V', Valentine Lares, [nepalitimes.com](#)). People are dying and life as we know it has come to a standstill. What's important is if the vaccine works and if it is affordable, which Sputnik v seems to be. Self interest, profit and politics should be put aside when people's lives are at stake.

Kat Mdo

- Thanks to public figures for their appeal ('Leading Public Figures Call on UK Government for Oxygen for Nepal', [nepalitimes.com](#)). But by the time the UK government formulates and put into action their plan, the second wave might already be over. So they should instead return Nepal's stolen religious objects housed in British museums and treat the Gurkha regiment on par with their own army.

Rk Pradhan

BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

The whole world follows Buddha's teachings, but us Nepalis, we just sit and claim that Buddha was born in Nepal ('Buddha's birthday in his birthplace', #1062). We must learn to value Buddhist philosophy and learn from his teachings.

Ashesh Shakya

- We need to develop this place into a grand city by preserving the historical artefacts and monuments.

Saman Shrestha

- Locals have a different story to tell, they say people in power and involved in its preservation have instead robbed the ancient city of its Buddhist artefacts ('Where Siddhartha Gautam walked', Robin Coningham, #1062).

Ratan Anand Karna

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Once upon a bandh

Back in 2001, we had more strikes, infamously known as bandhs, than public holidays. And that is saying something given Nepal has more national holidays than most countries in the world.

Frequent bandhs meant that businesses collapsed, healthcare was paralysed, students couldn't attend schools and daily wage workers had to forego income. At first glance, it sounds very much like the pandemic-induced lockdown down Nepal is experiencing now. A state-imposed bandh.

Nepal's politics is also as unstable as ever, 20 years later. Political leaders troop to the Supreme Court, hold indoor meetings and mass rallies during the coronavirus crisis. The same UML politicians who were calling bandhs then are today engaged in a power struggle.

This editorial from 20 years ago this week depicts the national culture of punishing the people to score political brownie points, regardless of its impact on our economy, development, health or education. Excerpts from issue #44 25-31 May 2001:

Nepalis can't seem to be able to improve on anything without first wrecking what exists. We want to fix things even if it ain't broke, or break everything while trying to fix things. To reform our school system, we first want to shut them all. We want to bring down a ruling party through street protests, and nearly end up bringing down the country. Few countries, it seems, can match our talent for self-destruction.



Newly-reunited leftist factions under the main opposition UML now will stop at nothing to bring this country to its knees while trying to bring Girija Koirala to his knees. Not satisfied with a one-day strike, they have now decided to close down the half of next week.

Fact: Of the 40 forced bandhs in the past seven years, in not even one has the main demand of those calling it been fulfilled.

Fact: A one-day nationwide involuntary strike costs the country upwards of Rs 80 million, a three day shutdown will cost Rs 240 million. (Can we send the bill to the UML?)

Fact: This time, even hospitals (except emergency wards) will be forced to shut.

Fact: The rich are not affected by bandhs. (They get some much-needed exercise.) Those who suffer the most are daily-wage earners, petty shopkeepers, taxi drivers.

Given the universal negative public opinion about these forced strikes, one wonders what the organisers have in mind. There is only one thing we can think of: the soft left wants to take the wind out of the sails of the hard left by punishing the centre right party in power. But will punishing ordinary people get them to that goal?

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



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Buddha's birthday in his birthplace

Even as the pandemic ravages Nepal, archaeologists unearth new secrets of Prince Siddhartha's kingdom and reveal that Gautam Buddha, besides being the divine entity he is today, was also a historical figure. Trace the Buddha's steps on his birthday week in [nepalitimes.com](#)



Most reached and shared on Facebook



It's an Emergency

by Sonia Awale

The second wave has now infiltrated the remotest villages and has brought the country to its breaking point. Only adequate supply of oxygen and vaccines can save lives and avert a major humanitarian crisis. Follow our social media platform for latest developments.



Most popular on Twitter

Elections in the middle of a pandemic

Amidst raging pandemic, Nepal's political fiasco continues with President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolving Parliament and calling for snap elections. Go online to read feedback and send in your own thoughts on this controversial decision.



Most commented

Two Nepals in the Death Zone

by Lesley D Junlakan

Climbers on Mt Everest and Covid-19 patients are both dependent on bottled oxygen for their survival. But while one group is gasping for life under severe shortages, the other makes leisurely ascents with potentially life-saving supplemental oxygen. Read full story on our website.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
As ambassadorial aspirants outnumber nations in the world, one way to fit everyone is to appoint ambassadors to all the 195 countries. If that is not enough, we can designate Chargé d'affaires ad Interim to the Moon, Mars and Venus.



martylogan @martydlogan
The only political news that makes sense



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
It's an Emergency. #Nepal's most immediate needs: #oxygen and #vaccines. @SoniaAwale reports.



Ozil Simkhada @Ozil Simkhada
This is the biggest evidence of failure of Oli government, who in spite of knowing about the second wave and its repercussions, ignored the pressing issue and concentrated on political rifts.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Archaeologists in #Kapilvastu are unearthing secrets of the kingdom that Prince Siddhartha Gautam left to seek enlightenment more than two-and-a-half millennia ago.



pigreen @pigreen1
new archaeological techniques allow us to re-discover ancient sites without excavation..



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepalis can protect themselves against the worst of #Covid19. Here's how.



Tsering @maya_42
Big yes to massive drive of distribution of free masks & public education in 'proper usage'.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
To save lives, #Nepal needs two things immediately: #oxygen and #vaccines.



Mad Town Mom @Susan95699696
If you climbed #Everest, you must donate to Nepal. You were supported by the people of Nepal. Now you need to support them! #NepalNeedsOxygen #NepalNeedsVaccine And please ban sale of valved masks.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Political ball now in Nepal's Supreme Court. Opposition coalition files writ to claim prime ministership for NC's Sher Bahadur Deuba.



Bikash Agrawal @bikashag02
Nepali politics is giving enough content for one season of 'House of Cards'

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER



HIGHEST HONORS COME WITH HIGHEST STANDARDS

We have been awarded the Diamond Status by APEX Health Safety independent audit powered by SimpliFlying for our efforts in ensuring the highest standards of hygiene and safety for our passengers.



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“I’m sad vaccines are delayed in Nepal”

Oxford scientist involved in AstraZeneca research says vaccines must go to those at highest risk

The Covid-19 pandemic has already claimed the lives of 3.5 million people, worldwide, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), although Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) puts the figure at an horrific 7.5 million -- projecting 9 million global deaths by September 2021.



COMMENT

Andrew J Pollard

Waves of Covid-19 infections across the world have severely challenged health systems in the richest countries, but have been catastrophic for nations with more limited health infrastructure. It is predominantly older adults and those with other health conditions who are most seriously affected by the virus, but the impact on health services indirectly affects those seeking help for other health problems, and the pandemic has further affected economic resilience of nations and families. Quite simply, we are all affected by the pandemic.

Against this backdrop, the wave of infections across South Asia this month is a cause for huge concern, with the reality of the pandemic being felt today so acutely by the people of Nepal. It is a pain I have shared, having worked very closely for the past 16 years with a talented team of doctors and researchers at Patan Hospital, Lalitpur, (led by Dr Shrijana Shrestha and Dr Buddha Basnyat) researching infectious diseases and vaccines in children.

Today, I feel so far away, more than 4,500 miles from Kathmandu, and rather helpless as the media vividly brings the news of Nepali political debates, lockdowns, individual suffering, oxygen shortages and the selfless dedication of the hospital staff into my living room.

In early 2020, I started work with other academics in Oxford on the development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca/Covishield vaccine. My role was leading clinical trials of the vaccine, starting on 23 April 2020, and eventually enrolling 24,000 volunteers in the UK, Brazil and South Africa during the course of the year.



AMIT MACHAMASI

In the trials, half of the volunteers were given the Oxford vaccine and the other half received a ‘control’ vaccination which wasn’t designed to protect against coronavirus. We then compared the number of people who developed infection in the two groups and found that disease was reduced by around 70% in those who received the vaccine.

Importantly, the vaccine prevented all hospitalisations and deaths. These amazing findings were recently confirmed in a trial of the vaccine in the United States. Our vaccine is remarkably effective. The trials also taught us that the vaccine had the potential to reduce the risk of transmission of the coronavirus by blocking infection and reducing the amount of virus in the throat of those who did catch it.

Since 4 January 2021, the Oxford vaccine has been used in the UK, and the national rollout has shown how powerfully effective vaccines are in ‘real world’ use, with a recent analysis by Public Health England indicating that around 12,000 deaths, and 33,000 hospital admissions from Covid-19

have been averted by the vaccines in just a few months here in the UK.

Our aim at Oxford University was to develop a vaccine that could be distributed equitably, and we hoped to achieve that through our partnership with AstraZeneca, who stepped up to help and have supported more than 20 vaccine manufacturing sites around the world (including Serum Institute of India, who make Covishield).

They are working flat out to scale up manufacturing even more, and it is through their efforts that over 450 million doses have already been produced this year, and how the vaccine is being distributed to over 160 countries. This incredible progress in such a short period of time will save hundreds of thousands of lives. But making vaccines is hard, takes time, and there are still not enough doses for the world, even with many other developers producing vaccines too.

Covishield, made at the Serum Institute of India, was the version of the Oxford vaccine destined for Nepal, but the urgent need in India has delayed supply. The supply

shortage has resulted in major concerns for countries with limited numbers of doses to decide what to do.

Starting vaccinations programmes will have the greatest impact, with the first priority being getting a first dose to older adults, those with other health conditions that make them more at risk of severe Covid-19, and health workers, as soon as possible.

The WHO have issued guidance about each of the vaccines which have been reviewed by them, to help with policy decisions, and for the Oxford-AstraZeneca/Covishield vaccine we know that there is good protection for at least three months after the first dose, with no sign of protection fading over that period.

The immune system ‘remembers’ the first dose so that protection is boosted when the second dose is given. Where there are shortages of vaccine, longer delays will not compromise the booster response to the second dose. The main reason for giving a second dose is to increase the immune response, which might improve protection against variants, and will also extend the duration of

protection.

At this moment we do not have much information about mixed schedules where different vaccines are used for the first and second dose, although this is something that my colleagues here in Oxford are investigating. However, since all of the available vaccines use the coronavirus spike protein to stimulate the immune system, it is expected that there will be a response to a different vaccine for the second dose. Whilst we do need more data to confirm the best combinations, in the meantime, getting a first dose to those most at-risk people should be the absolute priority.

While the vaccine roll out in high income countries is a remarkable success story measured in doses given, cases prevented, lives saved, and the green shoots of economic recovery, giving us hope for the future, it also reveals a serious concern when looked at in the context of global equity.

Some countries have vaccinated a high proportion of their citizens, while the pandemic continues to rage elsewhere. Many Nepalis have written to me asking why this situation is allowed to continue and asking what I am doing about it. Like you, I feel powerless.

Since supply remains constrained, to save lives in the next few months, vaccine doses have to be redistributed to those at greatest risk, wherever they live. This can only be achieved if governments work together to prioritise their supplies in a global objective to protect lives, taking an international view rather than a domestic perspective.

This year is the 30th anniversary of my first visit to Nepal, on that occasion as a mountaineer. With such a long connection to the country I felt so proud when I saw the first doses of the Oxford vaccine being administered in Kathmandu, and the hope that it brought to Nepalis, but I am now saddened to hear that further supply is delayed.

Whilst the pandemic has brought us closer together in a shared suffering, it has also shown how far apart we are when it comes to sharing health. 🇳🇵

Professor **Andrew J Pollard** is Director of the Oxford Vaccine Group, University of Oxford, UK.

prabhu BANK



Lockdown extended

One month after it was first imposed on 29 April, the Chief District Officers in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur have extended the ongoing lockdown in the Valley until 3 June with further restrictions. Mom-and-pop shops and department stores will not be allowed to operate, and there are stricter criteria about who can be on the roads. Even mornings walks are not allowed. All construction work is now prohibited as well as transport of raw materials. Daily essentials such as water, fruits, meat, milk and LPG stores to be open only until 9AM.

Covid spending

Health Minister Hridayesh Tripathi has revealed that Rs14 billion have been secured for vaccination, diagnosis and treatment of Covid as per the rapid action plan. Of the Rs5 billion spent so far on pandemic response, Rs2.54 yet to be paid for vaccination and High Dependency Units (HDU). Rs450 million was spent on the treatment of patients in April. Currently, 155 hospitals have been designated as Covid hospitals, with 45 private institutions offering free treatment. Free testing are currently available in 55 state-run labs.



Ncell Covid aid

Ncell Axiata Limited has handed over the first batch of 150 oxygen concentrators to the Health Ministry. Ncell is also operating a Covid-19 hotline in collaboration with Dhulikhel Hospital, providing free-of-cost teleconsultation for those in home isolation. Ncell has also launched a new version of its website which allows customers to buy voice, data packs, recharge digitally.



Limited banking

Nepal Rastra Bank has directed commercial banks to operate only six branches in Kathmandu Valley because of the pandemic, three in Kathmandu, two in Lalitpur and one in Bhaktapur districts. Similarly, development bank can run only four branches, two in Kathmandu and one each in Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. Finance companies can operate one branch each in all three districts.

Free Oxygen

Upaya City Cargo pick-up-and-drop service has teamed up with Sipradi Trading to offer free oxygen cylinder delivery across Kathmandu, Pokhara, Butwal and Bhairawa. The service is available 24/7



Sharda group

Sharda Group is providing free oxygen, medication and food to occupants of the 30-bed isolation centre and 15-ICU bed hospital at Duhabi Municipality. The company has also announced free oxygen and Rs400,000 in funds to the 51-bed isolation centre in Gaushala run by the Marwari Service Committee. Meanwhile, sister company Hongshi Shivam Cement has supplied the Health Ministry with 200 oxygen concentrator units.

New budget

After President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved Parliament and called snap elections, the new budget slated for 29 May will be passed via an ordinance. Despite the political changes, budget preparation and implementation will not be affected, says Finance Secretary Shishir Dhungana. Revenue collection and expenditure models will be outlined in the ordinance until representatives are elected to bring any new changes. If it happens, an early election presents additional costs of up to Rs 2 billion.

and can be reached at 9881098830 and 9881098880. “As of May 23 we have delivered 512 oxygen cylinders through 20 Tata vehicle owners in our network who are following the strictest safety protocols,” says Amigo Khadka of Upaya City Cargo.



Baburam Bhattarai and Hisila Yami soon after their court marriage in Delhi in 1981.

A photograph of Baburam Bhattarai, Hisila Yami, Ram Bahadur Thapa and Prachanda that was retrieved by the Nepal Army during the conflict.



BABURAM BHATTARAI/FACEBOOK

A PEOPLE WAR

Nepal's Maoist revolution from the inside

Hisila Yami's new book gives us an intimate peek into events that shaped Nepal's recent history

● Sahina Shrestha

A lot of people know Hisila Yami only as the wife of former Maoist ideologue and ex-prime minister Baburam Bhattarai. Her critics, of which she has many, have portrayed her as being Bhattarai's domineering better-half, or worse.

As Bhattarai's partner before the Maoist conflict, through the insurgency from 1996-2006, and after, Yami was an insider in the internal dynamics of the Maoist party. But she has always been in Bhattarai's shadows, and we have not heard much about her own role in shaping recent Nepali history. Till now.

In her new book *Hisila: from Revolutionary to First Lady* that was launched this week on Amazon, Yami chronicles her many roles as a daughter in an elite Newa family in Kathmandu, a college student in India, meeting and marrying Bhattarai, becoming an underground revolutionary, a three-time minister, the wife of a prime minister, as well as a mother and a feminist.

In *Hisila*, she combines this personal journey with revelations about the revolution that shaped Nepal for the past three decades. Because of her husband, and her own role in the party, what we have is an intimate account from someone who was in the thick of it. It is understandable that Baburam Bhattarai (BRB) looms large in the book.

Because of this, *Hisila* is not just about Hisila Yami — it offers unique insight into Bhattarai's personality and his role in planning and executing the revolution. The book details his love-hate relationship with Prachanda during the conflict, his role in the constitution-drafting process, rise to prime ministership, and finally his departure from the Maoist party.

What makes this perspective unique is Yami's position within the Maoist party as an outsider on the inside. Her background was different from most other comrades: she was urban, highly educated, and an outspoken woman.

"It may read like an autobiography, but it is a political



Hisila Yami during a press conference as Tourism Minister in Patna in 2008.

KUNDA DIXIT

history of the movement, and a documentation of what happened from inside it. I know many Communists and non-Communists will not like some parts, but I have given a truthful personal account of our experience," Yami told us about her book this week.

Divided into three sections, *Hisila* begins with young Yami in Delhi where Bhattarai becomes her mentor and political guide. The middle section goes into details about the insurgent years, most of which were spent in India, and then the post-conflict period.

She writes: 'Before I met BRB in Delhi, my concern for my country was social, not political. On the IIT campus, I used to see Nepali maids working in professors' houses and feel uncomfortable when invited to their houses for dinner. In most hostels, the cooks and helpers were from Nepal ... Seeing the plight

of some of the Nepali workers in India, I had a social awakening, which was to be transformed into a political awakening.' Her account of the internal dynamics, especially between BRB and PKD (Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Prachanda) provide a rare and first-ever glimpse into what was going on inside the party during the historical milestones of the launch of the 'Peoples War' in February 1996, the various Maoist central committee meetings in Indian cities, the Phuntiwang, Luwang and Chunwang gatherings, the November 2005 conclave in Delhi with the Seven-Party Alliance, the ceasefire, and two Constituent Assembly elections in 2008 and 2013.

It is a widely known fact that PKD and BRB did not get along. But Yami tries to be objective in analysing their relationship, portraying Prachanda as a 'pragmatist' and Baburam as an 'idealist'. But there is no doubt where her sympathies lie: she details how it is BRB's antipathy to PKD's Stalinist personality cult that brings about a rift between them. PKD is portrayed as a 'conspirator' who believes in 'conspiracies'.

There were also differences between PKD's nationalist, revolutionary anti-India line and BRB's support for a '21st century democracy'. After senior Maoist leaders were arrested in India, BRB comes under suspicion, and both husband and wife are disciplined and detained for six months in Rolpa in 2005.

She presents the other leaders

as she knows them, Prachanda's personality she says does not match his name. ('Politically he may look fierce, being the leader of a Maoist movement, but in person he is flexible.') She says his real name Pushpa Kamal which translates to lotus flower suited him better, as he is soft and charismatic.

Mohan Vaidya is 'devoid of colour and is too serious'. Ram Bahadur Thapa is 'philosophical when he describes contradiction, dialectic and relativity, but when it comes to inner party struggle, he often fails to firmly assert his political stance'.

Like Thapa and Prachanda, many of the other characters in *Hisila* are still major players on Nepal's political stage during the current crisis: Sher Bahadur Deuba, Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jhala Nath Khanal, K P Oli. The book is therefore an important backgrounder that sets present-day politics in historical context.

Her description of Pushpa Kamal Dahal is especially apt: 'Prachanda always needed to create two opposing sides to make himself invincible.' The book details what was going on in the corridors of power during the CA elections, and Yami analyses the reasons why the Maoists won the first one and how it was relegated to third position in the second.

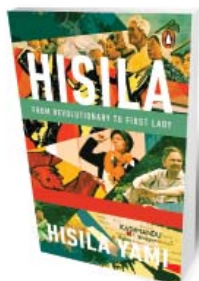
One wishes in places that Yami

gave us more information, for example about the role of UNMIN in the peace process, and BRB's controversial op-ed after the 2001 royal massacre. While the book mentions that many women joined the revolution because they were oppressed and the Royal Nepal Army had used rape as a weapon of war, it fails to address the same crimes from the Maoist side.

Despite the rough edges and a few important omissions, Yami has tried to be as honest as possible, and has not shied away from knotty issues like the 'war within the war' between PKD and BRB, the Maoists' India connection, as well as allegations of corruption against herself when she was in government (which she blames on PKD's smear campaign).

Throughout the book, Yami talks about her feminist bent: how she became socially aware about the issues around women when she was in IIT Kanpur, her work with women trafficked in India, the surveys she ran among the female combatants.

The book doesn't necessarily follow a chronological order, and there is some confusion with unnecessary repetition which could have easily been avoided with finer editing. We turn the pages waiting for some acknowledgement of the grief and suffering that the conflict caused to Nepalis, but it never comes. 🇳🇵



Hisila: From Revolutionary to First Lady
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Available at Amazon

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

Was Tenzing a Tibetan? It does not matter

On the 67th anniversary of the ascent of Mt Everest, a rare



ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

● Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa

We do not know the exact details of Tenzing Norgay's early life, since the records are poor. Despite this, the stories of his struggles as a youth and adult are incredibly touching.

He was born in a very humble family, and endured much hardship, moving across

South Asia just to make a living. However, through his own hard work and personal initiative, Tenzing managed to lift himself out of poverty, misery and injustice, becoming one of the 100 most well-known personalities of 2020.

When a person becomes famous, whether it is Tenzing Sherpa or Gautam Buddha, we have a tendency to crave for their ownership, instead of sharing their qualities with the rest of the world.

As in the case of the Buddha, the birthplace, nationalities and identities of Tenzing are often debated and contested. Where was he born? Was Tenzing a Tibetan, a Nepali, or an Indian?

We can find the correct answer only from his perspective, and the geopolitical situation of the time. When Tenzing was born and growing up, present day physical boundaries did not exist between Tibet, Nepal or India. Passports and national identity cards were not needed to cross over.

People could move freely throughout the Subcontinent in search of livelihood and spiritualism. They settled anywhere conditions were right. And that is what Tenzing did, becoming a true South Asian.

Therefore, whether he was Tibetan, Nepali or Indian was a question he probably dreaded the most because he was connected to all three places. In these complex matters, the choice should be left to the individual. Our job is to listen to them, honour their decision and celebrate their achievements.

Tenzing's Tibetan language interview by Tshultrim Chopel (*below*) was aired on All India Radio Kurseong on 3 July, 1985, a year before he passed away. The audio provides us an opportunity to listen to Tenzing in his own voice, and words. The interview is transcribed and published to celebrate the 67th Anniversary of the climbing of Jomolangma/Sagarmatha/Mt Everest on 29 May.

Tshultrim Chopel: We like to thank you for this great opportunity to have you speak on Radio Kurseong. I would like to begin by asking you about your childhood before mountaineering and also how you received the inspiration to climb mountains?

Tenzing Norgay: Sure. I am Tibetan by descent because my parents came from Tibet. They lived in Khumbu in Nepal, and I was born there. In the old days our Sherpa people from Khumbu went to Darjeeling quite a lot. On returning, they used to talk about mountain climbing a lot, including Jomolangma.

I was a young boy but used to listen to them intently. Besides, they also talked about Darjeeling. I thought mountaineering is some kind of respectable and holy activity, and so I too ran away from Nepal to Darjeeling. I may have been 13 or 14 then. I knew nobody in Darjeeling, no relatives and not even a Sherpa acquaintance. I came alone, and took three weeks to reach Darjeeling from Khumbu. It was quite hard because I did not speak the lowland languages well. I spoke only Sherpa and Tibetan.

In 1935, a well-known British mountaineer, Eric Shipton, arrived here (Darjeeling) and wanted to recruit 20-25 Sherpas for an Everest expedition from Tibet. He found most of them very strong and experienced men with good reference letters. I was young and had no references. I was there just for fun and had no expectation of



being recruited. I was 18 or 19 ... but the British recruiter selected me. In those days Nepal was not open for foreigners, especially white men. We had to travel via Sikkim to reach Everest.

I got hired for Everest expeditions continuously for three consecutive years in 1935, 1936 and 1937.

Why are Sherpas always happy?

Did Western ideas about Sherpas actually shape their interactions with outsiders?

● Tom Robertson

For decades, foreigners have noted and celebrated the good-natured cheerfulness of Nepal's Sherpas.

One western climber, in a preface to Tenzing Norgay's autobiography, noted that Norgay epitomised 'the tolerance and good humour ... for which they [the Sherpa] are renowned ... they are indeed a happy people, as anyone who has travelled with them will know, tolerant and good-humoured to a high degree, finding enjoyment in almost anything they do, interested in everything and with a strong sense of fun'.

As with any cross-cultural generalisation, this seemingly simple statement is actually far more complicated than it seems. Were the Sherpas really so cheerful, more so than any other group of people? Did the foreigners who repeatedly commented about Sherpa cheerfulness have a wide and deep enough view to make such a broad generalisation?

Did they really understand the Sherpas? And was this a note of praise, as it seems, or actually a variety of backhanded compliment -- something that seemed positive but actually hid a more negative judgement, in this case of Sherpa as childlike? If Sherpas really were more cheerful than other groups, why was this so?

In the late 1990s, a fascinating and



ALWAYS SMILING: Tenzing Norgay with Edmund Hillary after their first ascent of Mt Everest in 1953.

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

important debate broke out among anthropologists about Sherpa culture and western perceptions of Sherpas. Their cheerfulness became a key topic of conversation.

In a book *Tigers of the Snow* (2010) Vincanne Adams outlined her view of 'virtual' Sherpas, and Sherpa culture as a complex reflection of Western ideas about Sherpas. Westerners had so much economic, political, and cultural power that their

thinking about Sherpas -- based on their own hopes and dreams -- shaped actual Sherpa interactions with outsiders.

'Sherpas are produced both by a Western gaze and by Sherpas who are the object of that gaze,' she wrote (p. 228).

Over the years working in expeditions, dating back to the early decades of the 20th century, the argument goes, Sherpas had learned what the foreign climbers valued and rewarded, what the climbers wanted to see --

loyalty, camaraderie, and cheerfulness -- and gave it to them.

Sherpa culture involved a kind of performance, half deliberate but also unconscious, ultimately driven by a script written by outsiders. It was a kind of Sherpa play about Sherpas for the western climbers.

Life and Death on Mt. Everest (2001), anthropologist Sherry Ortner took a different view. She did not deny the power gap between western climbers and Sherpas, noting that Sherpas would not have carried loads and risked their lives for outsiders if they had more economic power.

But she felt that, despite these real power differentials, other factors -- particularly strong cultural and economic forces that spring from within an ever changing Sherpa society -- better explained Sherpa behaviour and meaning-making more than Western ideas about them.

One of the chief examples she gave was Sherpa cheerfulness. In the early years of climbing, western climbers noted again and again that Sherpa male climbers were friendly and liked to joke around. Even after a hard day's work carrying loads on steep, dangerous mountainsides, they smiled and cheerfully attacked challenging tasks.

Sahibs often commented, Ortner notes, on 'a certain good-humoured or good-natured style of Sherpa 'character' or 'temperament,' including a tendency to smile or laugh easily, a willingness to enter into joking and teasing, and a generally affable manner that often made interacting with Sherpas pleasant and enjoyable'. (p. 58).

According to Vincanne Adams's framework, Sherpa cheerfulness should be understood as a kind of 'virtual' reflection of

an, Nepali, or Indian? ot matter.

are radio interview in Tibetan with Tenzing Norgay Sherpa



In 1937, we reached the highest point of 27,108ft. We did not have good oxygen, clothing or boots but made it there somehow. Earlier (in 1924) two English climbers, Irvine and Mallory, climbed Everest but got lost and never came down. So, our English team members were quite pleased that we reached quite high, and managed to come

down. During the World War, mountaineering activity stopped. I went to Chitral (now in Pakistan) helping train local Muslim soldiers. After the war mountaineers began to return slowly.

In 1952, King Tribhuvan opened Nepal to foreigners including mountaineers. The Swiss received permission to climb Mt. Everest

that year and I joined them. This expedition was quite tough but food supplies were very inexpensive along the trail compared to now.

Kathmandu did not have many motor vehicles and airplanes. It looked very rural. Our achievement in that year was quite remarkable. We reached an elevation of 28,215 ft without oxygen. We only had one set of clothing and a small tent. The Swiss French climber Raymond Lambert and I shared a tent. It was extremely cold. We tried to keep each other warm by rubbing hands and bodies. He was so big and fat that my hands hardly covered anything. He spoke no English and I had no French. So, we used gestures of the hands, eyes, and mouth to communicate, and managed.

He said let's go down in French. So, we descended. I felt really bad for my friend because he would not get another chance. I was not worried about myself so much because I was booked to return the following year with the British. I was sad for him (Raymond) because we worked so hard.

In comparison, I faced no difficulty with the 1953 British expedition the following year. I knew the route, the people and food and drink were plentiful along the way.

When you made it to the summit of Jomolangma, what went through your mind?

In the 1953 expedition, we had 14 people in the team including two medical doctors. The expedition took approximately four months. If

we did not finish climbing by the end of May, it would have been too difficult because of melting and collapsing ice that would make it hard to find paths. So, we were under a bit of pressure. On 14 or 15 of May, we made a firm plan for the attempt. A decision was made to send two British climbers to the top first. The rest of the British climbers decided not to try but play a supporting role. That left Hillary who was a New Zealander and me, a Nepali. So, I said, "I support the selection of the two British climbers to lead. Those of you who decided not to try, the decision is yours. But I can't afford not to climb this time. I tried six times and turned back six times before. This is my 7th attempt and I must somehow make it to the top. I welcome anyone who wants to join me." Hillary spoke up, and said he would join me. This is how the two of us came to climb together.

How big was the summit? What was the view like towards Tibet and Nepal?

At the top, there was space for 8-9 people. The top was not like a needle. It was a gentle slope. I saw quite a bit of Tibet, the areas that I have been to before. Tibet is very dry, very little greenery, but still pretty. The Nepal side looked very green and pleasant.

We did not stay too long at the top, maybe 15 minutes. He (Hillary) took my picture and also of the sweeping view. I could see Kangchenjunga looking very small. The weather that day was very clear. It was fantastic. The wind was also not too strong. The sky was sunny and clear blue...

Tell us about unfurling the flags on top?

It was like this. We had camped in a vacant part of Kathmandu airport to repack the baggage. I saw a number of British flags in their luggage. Their small day packs also had English flags on them. I thought that there must be some good reason. One day, when we were in the Kathmandu market, I bought an Indian and a Nepali flag.

When Hillary and I were making the final preparation for our ascent, expedition leader John Hunt handed

us a British flag. Charles Evens produced a UN flag, not sure how he got it. I produced the Nepali and Indian flags.... John Hunt asked me to take all the flags and unfurl them when we reached the summit.

After returning from the mountain, you became world famous and received many gifts and honors. Tell us about that.

Now, Nepal went out of its way to honor me. They gave me one of the highest-ranking medals, Nepal Tara. In addition, the Queen of England awarded me the George Medal. There were also many honors and awards from different countries. But, after the climb, I had to find some kind of work. I did not have much of an opportunity to think it through. But Pandit Nehru and Dr V C Roy already had a plan to open a mountaineering school in Darjeeling and for me to work there as a trainer.

So, after climbing you worked as an instructor at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute?

Yes, Pandit Nehru once said to me "Tenzing, you have to become a trainer and send at least 100 Tenzings to the top of Everest". I was unsure about the 100 people but I said, "I will become an instructor and do my best". So, I tried my best and so far 15 of our trainees have summited Everest, including a female climber, Ms Bachendri Pal. We started with only 15 students and nowadays it has increased to 75-80 people.

Mountains remain the same. In our days we lacked good equipment, shoes and oxygen to climb. Nowadays, the technical aspects have improved greatly. I think the future of mountaineering is good. It is not so much about generating income but good for physical fitness and mental wellbeing. Also, you will get to know people. It is good and must be encouraged.



TENZING INTERVIEW

Listen to the voice of Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, speaking in Tibetan in a rare recording of a radio interview over All India Radio Kurseong in 1985, a year before he died.

happy?



HAPPY FEET MOUNTAINEERS

International mountain guide Lhakpa Rangdu Sherpa of Happy Feet Mountaineers agency.

western hopes for what they wanted Sherpas to be. Western climbers liked to believe that in the Himalaya they had broken free from the corrupting influence of modern life, and found 'real' nature and 'real' people -- Sherpas who were as pure and untouched as the mountains of the westerners' Romantic imagination.

Certainly this Romanticism reflects a powerful current in western thought. There is a long history of outsiders creating an image of supposedly premodern or traditional 'others' who are happy, tough, and true. These depictions usually reveal less in fact about the 'noble savages' and rural non-western places they presume to describe, and more about the desires and obsessions of Western society that created them.

And certainly many Sherpas experienced in dealing with Westerners have picked up on these Romantic fantasies and know how to play to, and play with them. If anything, in recent decades, Nepali knowledge about Western Romantic fantasies about non-western people and places has grown more widespread, as tourism has spread deeper into Nepali culture.

And ironically, Nepal's urban middle class, in their new excitement for rural tourism, has begun its own chase-your-tail search for the 'authentic' pre-modern that very much resembles what western climbers have searched for. Adams helps us understand these complicated cross-cultural dynamics.

In *Life and Death*, Ortner agrees that Sherpa cheerfulness did in fact often match the illusions -- the fantasies -- that Westerner 'sahibs' liked to tell about non-European others. 'The sahibs' intense romanticism, their desire to experience mountaineering as an escape from modernity,' she writes, 'link up with the view of the Sherpas (like the mountains) as untouched, innocent, unspoiled.' (p. 45) Cheerfulness was an outward sign of innocence.

The Sherpas smiled and joked, Ortner insists, not because of Western desires for premodern Asian 'others' to be happy but for their own reasons. In fact, she says they were actually happy. Not because Sherpas are essentially happy by nature, but because, in the early decades of the twentieth century, various historical factors had aligned to make the Sherpas, particularly the men who went into expedition work, genuinely happy.

Ortner walks us through these historical factors. One was their Buddhist faith, which celebrated peacefulness and a non-attachment to material desires, as anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf noted. Another was a tradition of trade, which had fostered an easy way with outsiders, as anthropologist Mike Thompson says.

But other historical factors played a big role as well, Ortner argues. Many porters came from poor Sherpa families, for whom life was extremely hard and, as Rana-era taxes grew steeper, growing harder. Porterage was a good job, even though it involved strenuous physical labour, and good work was appreciated. And even if it was wage labour, it was better than what other early mountaineering groups faced.

In addition, Ortner notes how in the 1930s and 1940s, Sherpas had successfully pushed their Western bosses to improve wages and working conditions. These Sherpas could look back and see how their work situations had improved in part because of their own striving. It was hard not to feel good about that.

But to say Sherpas carried packs for the money, that they were cheerful because they were making good cash, was not to say they had been corrupted. Many Westerners thought of mountain climbing as idealistic ventures in pursuit of a higher vision, and liked to think that their Sherpas did it out of loyalty or because they subscribed to similar high-minded motivations. Some even went so far as to describe Sherpas who showed a perfectly natural desire for money as somehow 'un-Sherpa' or corrupted.

Instead, Ortner emphasises that Sherpa porters usually wanted money so they could pursue traditional Sherpa activities. Money to Sherpa climbers meant many many things, Ortner says: 'It may mean simply making a financial profit; it may also mean supporting kin or sending kids to private schools in Darjeeling, or traveling or sponsoring religious rituals, or contributing to the financing of a monastery.' (p. 67)

The point was that, Ortner says, even though wealthy idealistic westerners may see climbing for money as an impure corruption, for Sherpas, money earned from climbing actually led to 'something we may think of as an 'authentic' Sherpa

cultural universe, a framework within which they articulate their own desires in something like their own terms'.

Climbing money was 'authentic' because although real and deeply felt, these meanings were not fixed and unchanging but rather the result of shifting historical patterns.

I like thinking about the happiness of Sherpa expedition porters in the early twentieth century because it helps us understand the complicated dynamics shaping the increasingly numerous encounters between Europeans and Asians during the twentieth century.

The story of Sherpa climbing culture shows the very real but shifting power dynamics at work in these encounters, but also the real but shifting forces within Nepali (and other Asian) cultures that shaped how individual Nepal's gave their own meanings to the encounters.

Ortner provides a model for thinking about history, culture, power, meaning-making, and agency that is very useful. It is a model that I have used in my own writings to understand how different Nepal's -- from Kathmandu-based planners to field based program implementers to Tharu men and women of different ages -- gave their own meanings to the international development programs that transformed places like Chitwan in the 1950s and 1960s.

The debates about Sherpa happiness also helps broaden our idea of history. So often in Nepal people think of history as merely political intrigues within Kathmandu. Those intrigues are, of course, important, but so are the difficult and dangerous work that mountain porters did carrying loads in remote areas and the rich, and fascinating meanings they gave to that work. 🇳🇵



Tom Robertson is an environmental historian. His article 'DDT and the Cold War Jungle: American Environmental and Social Engineering in the Rapti Valley of Nepal' appeared in the March 2018 issue of the *Journal of American History*.

ONLINE EVENTS

Pride with Kaalo.101
Kaalo.101's QUEER - A celebration of LGBTQIA+ arts and activism will include 30 days of workshops, screenings, discussions highlighting creativity, identities and collaborations with queer communities from across Nepal.
Throughout June



Dance classes
Sign up to take Bharatnatyam, Ballet, Hip Hop, Freestyle, and contemporary dance lessons from Sushila Arts Academy. Call the academy for details.
9860588626

Writing Wednesday
Keep an eye out for KathaSatha to put up a prompt for #WritingWednesday@, designed for 5 minutes of specific but low-stakes writing. KathaSatha will put up the prompt on Facebook. Share stories in the comments on KathaSatha's Facebook page. To share anonymously, send the story in KathaSatha's DMs or at kathasatha@gmail.com.

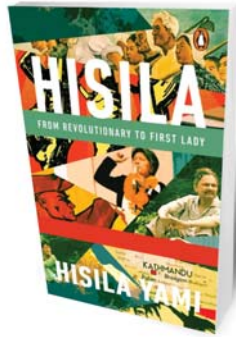
Language Exchange
Learn languages from across the world while making friends with native speakers online through BlaBla's Kathmandu Language exchange. Get access to a host and plan your lesson plans, text chat rooms and more.
30 May

ONLINE GAMES



Night in the woods
Explore frozen forests, gather round the campfire, and trace the constellations in Lost Constellation and Longest Night, two games within the world of the Night In The Woods game series by Infinite Fall.

ISOLATION READING



Hisila: from Revolutionary to First Lady
Hisila Yami's new book provides an intimate peek into events that shaped Nepal's recent history, and chronicles her many roles as an underground revolutionary, a three-time minister, the wife of a prime minister, as well as a mother and a feminist. Read review on [page 5](#).

This Changes Everything
Canadian author, activist, and filmmaker Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* delves into climate change in the era of the neoliberal market.

Home Fire
Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, a retelling of the Greek tragedy *Antigone* among British muslims, is very much a novel of the times, of families torn apart in meaningless exchanges of fidelity, identity, and faith.



The Color Purple
Considered among the most influential novels in history, this Pulitzer- winning novel by Alice Walker explores racism, sexism, sexuality, and poverty in 1900s Georgia.

VIRTUAL TOURS



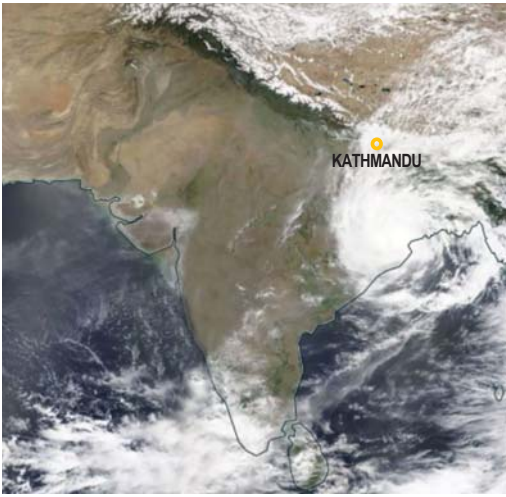
Europeana
Discover cultural heritage from 3,000 museums, galleries, libraries and archives across Europe. Head online to read about historical places and watch exhibitions, photographs, ancient manuscripts and more.

Buddhist Art
Check out Chhauni Museum's virtual tour of the Buddhist Art Gallery that boasts a spectacular display of rare Buddhist exhibits of archaeological and iconographical importance. Divided into Tarai, Kathmandu Valley, Northern Himalayan and Mandala sections.



Botanical garden tour
Google Earth's Stop and Smell the Flowers is a journey through eleven of the most breathtaking botanical gardens and arboretums around the world from countries like Russia, Sweden, and Canada, to the Netherlands.

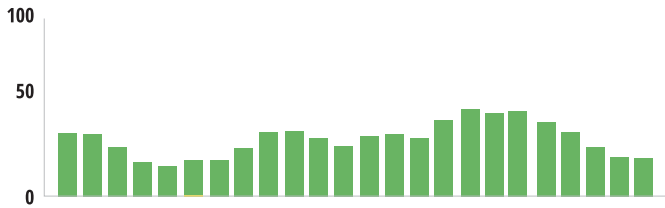
Access Mars
Take a virtual trip to Mars. NASA has partnered with Google to offer a tour of a 3D replica of the surface of Mars recorded by NASA's Curiosity rover.



Central and eastern Nepal will continue to see the after-effects of Cyclone Yaas, which pushed northwards into our airspace colliding with the westerly jetstream before being blown away. But there is now enough water vapour in the air to keep the Himalayan convection systems pumped up for weeks. There is more rain forecast for Friday-Sunday, and the maximum temperature will fall to the low 20s on Friday before climbing again over the weekend.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
22° 18°	25° 18°	26° 18°

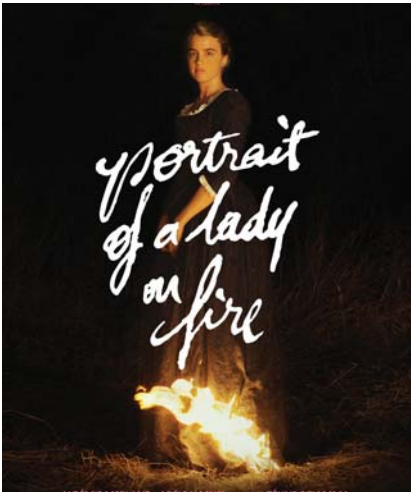
AIR QUALITY INDEX



9AM Wednesday, 26 May - 9AM Thursday, 27 May measured at US Embassy Phora Darbar.

What a delight it is to see those green bars measuring Kathmandu Air Quality Index (AQI) from 9AM on 26 May to 9AM on 27 May. The reason is not hard to discern: the absence of vehicles on the roads, and the heavy overnight rain that continued into mid-morning on Thursday. The effect of Cyclone Yaas is expected to persist into the weekend, and with the pre-monsoon showers, we are going into a season of relatively clean air, with or without the lockdown.

OUR PICK



Céline Sciamma's award-winning 2019 French historical romantic drama *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* tells the love story of Héloïse, an aristocrat and Marianne, the painter commissioned to paint Héloïse's portrait. Héloïse, who is to be unwillingly married off to a nobleman, has refused to sit for portraits for artists before, so Marianne acts as Héloïse's hired companion in order to paint her in secret. Stars Noémie Merlant, Adèle Haenel, Luana Bajrami, and Valeria Golino.

CAREER IN MEDIA

You are looking to make a career in media.

You have first language spoken and written English.

Style and clarity in writing are your forte.

You are also proficient in Nepali.

A good visual and design sense.

Eager to learn and explore new ideas.

You have video skills, or can learn fast.

You believe journalism is not just a job.

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Stay safe during lockdown with Netflix

Tv movie viewing has changed forever, now in Nepal as well

Ever since the first lockdown, cinemas have remained mostly shut. Enter Netflix: our quarantine companion, late-night friend and biggest supporter of procrastination, with its ‘next episode’ auto-plays and daily notifications of the movie or new season.



TECH-AWAY
Saniaa Shah

After getting disenchanted by regular cable tv and learning about how entertainment has moved to OTT (over-the-top) media platforms that thrive on a strong Internet connection, we started asking our friends and relatives living abroad to share their Netflix account with us.

But now, with the new \$500 allowance per credit card per year from a Nepali bank, you can independently purchase your own memberships to multiple streaming platforms, offering endless entertainment with remote controls that now come with bright red built-in ‘Netflix’ buttons. This button is proof that tv viewing has changed forever.

Users pay from \$8.99 (single screen streaming) to \$15.99 (up to 4 screens per account at a time) per month for curated feeds that are designed to intuitively offer content that are suited to your personal taste, based on your viewing history.

Netflix used to be exclusively

for watching movies, but lately it strategically shifted its focus to tv and web series, investing billions of dollars in original content. There are also award-winning documentaries like *My Octopus Teacher* and one-hour comedy specials like *Hannah Gadsby: Nanette*.

Besides Netflix, there are a few others worth spending on, but in Nepal we may require a VPN to view some of these. Amazon is at a similar price point, and trying

to beat Netflix’s movie collection with its own. Amazon charges \$8.99 per month for a Prime Video membership without any additional Amazon shopping perks. Prime also offers select content in 4K Ultra HD quality, making investing in a 55-inch LED Smart TV totally worth it.

While Amazon Prime is popular in South Asia, Hulu ranks second-best in the USA. Hulu’s most basic plan costs \$5.99 a month, but without ads it is double. For those with deeper pockets, there’s

also Hulu Live TV, a premium service with 60 channels that offer sports, news and entertainment, along with standard content for streaming. The one downside is that Hulu only allows two streams from the same account at the same time, making it difficult for an entire family to share.

The ultimate family-friendly streaming platform is probably Disney Plus, with movies only up to PG-13 ratings, further emphasising that its focus is on

kids’ entertainment. If you are a Marvel movie fan, *Star Wars* nerd or animated movie enthusiast, this OTT platform is perfect for you. All this for just \$7.99 a month, with full access to its library and no ads.

Another platform that is clearly aiming for family audiences is Apple TV Plus, with a very small content library of over 30 Apple Originals, a variety of content across genres. Apple TV Plus has a fairly generous family sharing plan, allowing up to six family members to use the same account. Even better, they can use their own logins, so you can quietly keep your embarrassing password to yourself.

Apple hasn’t yet convinced audiences with mind-blowing content yet, but cross-product sales offers do help increase its subscriber base; within 3 months of purchasing a new iPhone, you can avail the offer of a one-year free Apple TV Plus membership.

There is one tiny inconvenience: besides Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, which can be accessed from Nepal, the rest of streaming platforms listed above can only be accessed via VPN, so before subscribing to them, you might want to consider spending \$5 per month on average on a high-performance VPN (Virtual Private Network).

VPN connects you to a proxy server, becoming an intermediary between your device and the Internet and successfully hiding your IP address so that you can view content that is not accessible to Nepal or the region. 🇳🇵



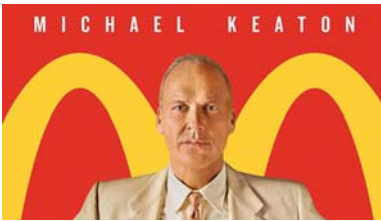
Uncut Gems, an Oscar-worthy performance by Adam Sandler that makes you sweat, stress and worry as much as the rich, shady characters of the diamond district of New York, shown in the movie.



The Mitchells vs. the Machines, a Sony Pictures production with its lovable wannabe filmmaker teenager Katie.



The Meyerowitz Stories, directed by Noah Baumbach of *Marriage Story* fame. Watch Dustin Hoffman play the father’s role with panache.



America: The Founder, starring Michael Keaton as a conniving business fox, based on a true story.



I Am Not an Easy Man, an out-and-out French comedy led by a shameless chauvinist who has a tough time navigating his life when he wakes up to a world where women and men have reversed gender roles.



Ludo, Bollywood film featuring Abhishek Bachchan, Aditya Roy Kapur, Rajkumar Rao, Pankaj Tripathi that intertwines four totally different stories bound by fate, chance and crime.

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Protecting those who protect



NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

Frontline healthcare providers across the country battle pandemic even as they fall sick and despite staff shortage

● **Sonia Awale**

On 20 May, the Health Ministry released a condolence message for doctors including Ishwor Lal Acharya, Mukesh Chaudhary and Pujya Shree Karki who lost their lives to Covid-19.

Nepal doesn't yet have an exact figure on the total number of medical staff infected by the SARS-CoV-2 but the Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) is currently conducting a study to find out.

"Majority of our frontline health

care providers have been fully vaccinated, so even if they are being infected, they are only mild to moderately sick," says cardiologist and chair of the Nepal Medical Council (NMC) Bhagawan Koirala. "This combined with a better understanding of Covid-19, they are now more confident and have a better sense of responsibility this time around."

At the National Trauma Centre in Kathmandu, nursing staff Suman Chaudhary is back to work after recovering from the coronavirus

herself and draws motivation from health workers who are battling the pandemic in major hotspots like Birganj.

"This is our chance to make a real contribution and having been infected myself has given me a new perspective on how patients feel," says Chaudhary who was pursuing Masters in Nursing at Bir Hospital during the first wave. "It is difficult to work in a PPE all day without water or bathroom breaks. I still feel weak and have shortness of breath, but watching people recover keeps us going."

Both Koirala and Chaudhary, however, agree that there is a chronic shortage of medical staff across the country. Hospitals outside Kathmandu and even Covid dedicated institutions are overstretched, and now doctors and nurses are themselves falling sick. In some hospitals, since patients and staff are all positive, nurses and doctors with mild symptoms have just kept working, since there is no one else to take care of the sick.

Last week, more than 47 of Dhading District Hospital's emergency and ward staff were infected with Covid-19, with many of them in isolation and some requiring ICU treatment even as the facility was finding it difficult to source enough oxygen for existing patients.

"We are a hospital of only 8 doctors, 5 paramedics and 23 nurses and with no backup, we were very close to collapsing," says Medical Superintendent at Dhading District Hospital Tribhuvan Jha, adding that everyone had to be called back to work after 10 days of isolation. "We are in this position due to a lack of preparedness, shortage of staff and limited infrastructure."

At Charikot Hospital in Dolakha, which is also a Covid-dedicated hospital, the majority of coronavirus patients are critical and there is at least one fatality every day. The 17 nurses work three shifts a day, and are unable to handle patient inflow, so the hospital has brought in community nurses from outlying villages. The hospital is consistently reporting a 45% test positivity rate among those tested.

"If a majority of our health workers get infected and are in isolation, we have no Plan B and this is especially worrying because we are the sole care provider for Covid here," says Binod Dhangal of Charikot Hospital. "Medical staff are all overworked, and they do not have any insurance or allowances."

As dire as the situation is in big cities and district hospitals, the pandemic has now infiltrated rural Nepal where there is just one doctor for every 15,000 people. Kathmandu's doctor-to-patient ratio is 1:850.

In her village of Phediguth of Okhaldhunga district, Rita Khatri is the only skilled birth attendant. Despite the growing risk of the second wave, she is still performing deliveries and ante-natal check-ups wearing a mask and her single PPE suit. There are no tests of health workers and the public.

"We are working despite fears of transmission, I wish we had more PPEs, masks and gloves so that we could conduct more regular check-ups and make home visits," adds Khatri. "At the moment many people in the community have high fever and are staying at home, but there is no

Aid pours into Nepal, but

International community rushes oxygen and PPEs, but Nepal is not even getting the vaccines it paid for

The United States, the EU, Australia, China, Singapore are all flying in emergency supplies to help Nepal battle a fierce Covid-19 second wave, but noticeably lacking are much needed vaccines.

It has to be said that the outside world seems to care more about Nepal than the country's own leaders, who have been squabbling for power for the past year, and their minds now diverted to controversial early elections in November. The government's vaccine diplomacy has so far failed to convince India, the US or Europe to rush jabs.

After an hour-long conversation between President Bidya Devi Bhandari and Chinese President Xi Jinping on 26 May, China agreed to donate 1 million doses of its Sinopharm VeroCell vaccine on top of the 800,000 it delivered in March. The government is negotiating with China on the purchase of another 3 million doses. Bhandari reportedly told Xi that Nepal could henceforth source all its vaccine needs from China.

Activists and public health experts say even though Nepal's friends abroad have been generous with relief, the country is not getting



Swiss Ambassador Elisabeth von Capeller (centre) handing over a consignment of medical aid to Health Minister Hridayesh Tripathi on 22 May at Kathmandu airport. SDC head Silvana Hogg at left.

AMIT MACHAMASI

the urgent help it needs to vaccinate 1.3 million people with their second dose, and then the remaining population.

Nepalis took to cybersphere to thank the United States and Europe for announcing help with oxygen concentrators and PPEs this week, but said what Nepal really needs is

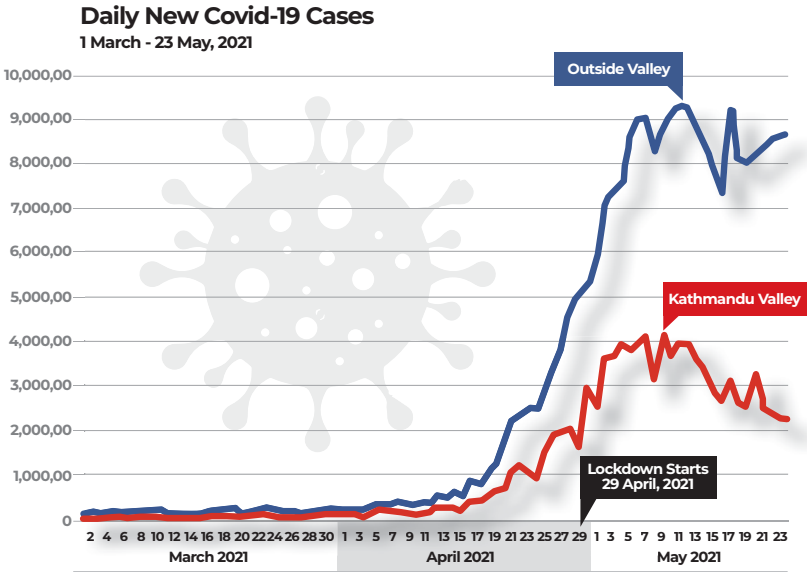
vaccines after India banned the export of its AstraZeneca Covishield vaccines.

Responding to a USAID post about emergency medical supplies to Nepal, dental surgeon Neil Pande who has been trying to mobilise help, tweeted: "Thank you for your generosity. What we need the most is

vaccines. It will save many from suffering. Please help. 1.3 million 65+ are waiting for the second dose of AstraZeneca."

Another user Prabhat Shrestha wrote, 'Please help with vaccine. Only vaccines can save us from this disaster. Thank you.' Ra Vee Shah commented, 'Hope this aid contains

us from Covid



way to test them.”

This time last year while in the grip of the first wave of a new pandemic, there was stigma associated with Covid-19 and people who were infected were ostracised in the community. There were many instances where healthcare providers were mistreated.

Doctors and nurses interviewed for this report say that is still the case, but there is also more praise for frontline medical workers risking their own health to save lives. However, there is growing concern about the worry and over-work affecting the mental health of healthcare providers.

“Among other things we need psychological support and counselling. I have seniors who have children infected with the new variant, and they are having

a hard time coping,” says Suman Chaudhary, nursing staff at the Trauma Centre in Kathmandu.

As most of Nepal enters the fourth week of lockdown, nationwide daily Covid-19 infections, positivity rate as well as fatalities are going down slightly. The number of recoveries have also risen to nearly equal new confirmed cases on some days.

Bayalpata Hospital in remote Achham District had to turn its Emergency Room into a Covid-19 ward last month to cope with a flood of patients. It had 33 patients, 18 of them needing high flow oxygen support. On Wednesday, it had only 12 Covid-19 patients with only two on oxygen. Four of those infected are medical staff.

“The situation is easing somewhat here, in Mangalsen, Doti and Dadeldhura. There are beds

available, and oxygen is coming in. But we are desperately short of medical staff,” says Mandeep Pathak, a physician at Bayalpata which is also caring for trauma and maternity patients from surrounding districts.

However, the cases and the test positivity rate have not gone down as expected and fatalities nationwide have stayed above 160 for nearly two weeks now as the highly contagious and more lethal B.1.617.2 variant spreads rapidly through communities.

Health Minister Hridayesh Tripathi sounded optimistic at a virtual press meet on Monday, predicting that there would be a decline in the infection rate in the next four weeks.

As Nepal receives large shipments of oxygen cylinders, liquid oxygen, test kits, PPEs and masks, doctors say the emphasis now needs to shift to more testing, mass vaccination, and replenishing exhausted and over-stretched medical staff at hospitals, both in the cities and the districts.

A non-profit One Heart Worldwide that works primarily in maternal care in Nepal’s 21 districts has been helping district hospitals by mobilising oxygen cylinders and medical kits it procured from China.

Executive director Surya Bhatta gives three reasons why despite the lockdown the infection rate is still high. “There is virtually no contact tracing, people are still not following health protocols and patients isolating at homes are not doing it right, resulting in a gross underestimation of total cases and fatalities.” 🇳🇵



Weddings into hotspots

● Gopal Dahal in Dhankuta

On 30 April, when a young man in Okhre village in Dhankuta district got married, the whole community was invited for the feast.

But a few days later, the groom suddenly fell sick. When he showed coronavirus symptoms, a test at the primary health care centre confirmed he was Covid-19 positive.

Now, every household in Okhre village has members showing similar symptoms. Most of them had attended the wedding. Of the 51 people tested, 25 tested positive.

“This is a crisis, the pandemic has spread to the whole village now,” says Ward Chair Palak Basnet.

One of the guests at the wedding was a man who had returned recently from the Tarai with mild symptoms. He was hired to wash dishes at the wedding, and had died a few days after the feast. No one tried to find the cause of death, and there was no PCR test done.

Dhankuta MP Jitendra Rumdali Rai says there are probably many more cases than the ones who have tested positive so far. “The pandemic is spreading out of control here because

the municipality wasn’t able to manage it on time,” he adds.

Okhre village (*top*) has now been sealed off till 8 June. Some of those infected are in critical condition, and six who were more serious were taken to hospital in Dharan. It is difficult for the others because the municipality does not have an ambulance, and some who had taken sick relatives to Dharan returned because there were no beds, or it was too expensive.

“Initially they were charging Rs10,000 per day for the bed and we paid Rs4,000 daily for the doctor. But then they hiked it to Rs14,700 and I couldn’t pay it any more,” says one patient’s family who returned recently from Dharan’s Bijayapur Hospital.

Another coronavirus patient says ambulances are also expensive, making it hard to get patients to hospitals. Buses refuse to take passengers who are sick.

The municipality called an emergency all-party meeting and decided to set up a 10-bed isolation centre with two staff nurses, and a doctor. Talks are underway to get at least a pickup from Dhankuta Red Cross to use as an ambulance.

where be vaccines?

enough vaccines to continue vaccination drive.’

Nepal should have fully inoculated 700,000 of its 30 million population following the conclusion of Chinese VeroCell vaccination drive this week. But there are no more jabs left for 1.3 million people waiting for their second dose of AstraZeneca Covishield.

Nepal ran out of its stock after India banned vaccine exports, and the COVAX Facility could not supply its remaining 1.8 million vaccines because of the global supply bottleneck.

There had been a lengthy debate in the UK House of Lords about supplying the vaccines to Nepal given the severity in the country but there has been no announcement as of yet.

Activists and pressure groups have been urging the Biden administration to immediately rush some of its 80 million AstraZeneca doses to Nepal. Yuba Raj Khatiwada, Nepal’s ambassador in Washington said last week that efforts were underway to send 3-5 million AstraZeneca vaccines from the US stockpile to Nepal.

The Foreign Affairs Minister Pradeep Gyawali also held a telephone conversation with Wendy Sherman, the Deputy Secretary of State of the United States of America on Monday to accord due priority to Nepal in distribution of surplus vaccines among the developing nations.

On 20 May, the USAID announced emergency assistance to Nepal with the first of three flights arriving in Kathmandu on 22 May carrying surgical masks, face shields, and gloves for frontline health workers.

The USAID maintains that it has provided more than \$15 million to help Nepal government scale-up testing, contact tracing, treatment, and infection prevention and more than \$50 million in the past 15 months to

combat the pandemic.

Also on 22 May, the Embassy of Switzerland in Nepal flew in 30 tons of medical supplies from Zurich that included 40 ventilators, oxygen concentrators, 1.1 million rapid antigen test kits and PPEs worth \$8 million.

“Switzerland stands in solidarity with Nepal and the Nepali people in the fight against Covid-19, these essential medical supplies will help save lives and provide support to the government of Nepal to contain and control the pandemic,” said Swiss Ambassador Elisabeth von Capeller while handing over the consignment to Health Minister Hridayesh Tripathi at Kathmandu airport.

Later in the same day, the Singapore-based Temasek Foundation, together with the MiRXES Private Limited and Lotus Life Foundation sent 15 tons of diagnostic and medical supplies on a Nepal Airlines flight. The consignment includes 36 ventilators, 4,000 pulse oximeters, 50 B-PAPs, 123,000 PCR test kits and RNA extraction kits.

On 21 May, the United Nations launched the Nepal Covid-19 Response Plan calling for \$83.7 million in emergency relief over the next three months to assist 750,000 of the most vulnerable people affected by the pandemic.

“The current outbreak is having a devastating impact not just on health but across all sectors, hitting the poorest and most marginalised people in Nepali society the hardest,” said UN Resident Coordinator Sara Beysolow Nyanti. “The Response Plan calls for swift action and international solidarity that is desperately needed to save lives and prevent unnecessary suffering today, tomorrow, and in the difficult weeks to come. We have no time to lose.”

However, even in the UN’s help list, there

is no mention of vaccines. The WHO had promised vaccines for 20% of Nepal’s eligible population throughout the COVAX Facility. However, 1.8 million of the 2.4 million Covishield vaccines never came, and its Indian manufacturer said this week it would not be able to export vaccines till end-2021.

On 20 May, an Iberia Airbus 330 landed in Kathmandu with 50 oxygen cylinders, 10 oxygen concentrators and 15 ventilators, among other medical kits donated by organisations in Spain. The shipment facilitated through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism is the first of several to follow from the EU Member States in the coming days.

Finland, France, Germany, Spain and Belgium are donating a combined total of 50 oxygen cylinders, 20 concentrators, 77 ventilators, 14 respirators, 164,000 antigen tests, 3.4 million masks, 42,500 gloves, 30,000 isolation gowns and 20,000 oxygen cannulas.

“The Covid-19 surge in Nepal is claiming more lives every minute as it spreads across the country. We stand in full solidarity with Nepal in its fight against the pandemic,” said Janez Lenarčič, Commissioner for Crisis Management. “We are also quickly mobilising emergency support with an initial €2 million. We stand ready to provide further assistance.”

Also on 20 May, the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China sent overland 200 cryogenic cylinders holding 150 litres of liquid oxygen, 10 oxygen concentrators, 5 ventilators, 200 ICU beds and 15,000 antigen kits to strengthen Nepal’s response to the pandemic.

About half of the 20,000 empty oxygen cylinders China donated to Nepal has been flown in by Nepal Airlines from Beijing.

Meanwhile, Australia has also announced AUD7 million (Rs635 million) in funding to

Nepal to procure essential equipment and health supplies, such as oxygen for provincial hospitals and personal protective equipment for health workers.

This is part of Australia’s aid package to support Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, to strengthen the resilience of the South Asian region during the pandemic.

New Zealand has also committed \$1 million to support Nepal’s Covid-19 response. The fund will go to UNICEF to help with emerging health needs and community resilience, wrote New Zealand’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Nanaia Mahuta on her twitter.

Another US-based group, Direct Relief, chartered an aircraft to rush oxygen concentrators and Covid-19-specific medical supplies on 25 May.

“People in Nepal are facing the worst Covid crisis in the world today based on per-capita confirmed cases, and they need urgent help, we will do whatever we possibly can to help,” said Thomas Tighe of Direct Relief in a statement.

International relief for Nepal is picking up but its most immediate needs are oxygen and vaccines, especially as the pandemic has now infiltrated the remotest villages in the country where there is no hospital care, medical equipment or doctors. In Rolpa and Humla districts in Nepal’s mountains, as high as 90% of PCR tests are coming back positive.

Even in cities, major hospitals have stopped admitting patients due to the shortage in oxygen supply and people are now dying because of low oxygen saturation in their blood.

Nepal needs 50,000 cylinders a day, 30,000 of them in Kathmandu’s hospitals, but presently there are only 19,000 cylinders available across the country. 🇳🇵

Sonia Awale



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The joys of being a Nepali citizen

It is a sign of the true statesman that LPM Odi is, that he has ensured Nepal is so politically stable that nothing moves in this country. He has left no stone overturned, he has moved heaven and earth (not to mention mountains), pulled out all stops and stopped at nothing to not just become top dog, but only dog.

And if anyone has any problem with that, please raise your hand. Guards! To the gallows with the gentleman at the back in the Bon Jovi t-shirt.

There will always be hecklers in a democracy.

Anyway, to get back to the main point on the agenda this week, it is heartening to note that to seek revenge on Nepal, Nepal is changing rules on who can be Nepali.

Since the country's birth rate is falling and people are out-migrating, the Patriarchal Demographic Republic of Nepal has taken the bold move by ordinance to boost the country's population. This will mean that only really committed people who want to risk becoming citizens of this country with heretofore onwards be permitted to be bonafide hot-blooded Nepalis.

Our rulers have now decided that babies born wholly within Nepal's territorial boundaries to Nepali mothers can now be Nepalis by descent. This is earth-shaking in its magnanimity and foresight.

We have to be careful, however. One can't be too careful about preserving the purity of our nationhood when millions of men are queuing up at no-man's land to cross over and marry our women in droves.

That is why, till now, we have preferred to offer citizenship to non-resident Nepalis than to non-Nepali residents. But even while we throw our doors wide open to farang

brothers-in-law from the immediate neighbourhood, we have to be careful. Everyone on the Planet is just dying to become a citizen of Nepal to enjoy the world class quality of life that we have here.

All you brand new Nepalis should be grateful that we have granted you the privilege of citizenship. Below is a list (by no means exhaustive) of some of the advantages of being Nepali:

1. Nepal was never colonised, and is the oldest nation state in South Asia. Just saying.
2. Nepal can generate 73,000 megawatts of potential energy. And we have surplus static electricity.
3. The world's highest mountain was born in Nepal, and is Nepali by ascent.
4. Because we believe in reincarnation, the higher-up authoritarians have made sure that your Nepali citizenship will also be valid in your afterlife, but only if your mother did not marry an alien in her previous birth.
5. There is firm proof that Lord Buddha was a Nepali by descent because both his father and mother had Nepali citizenship papers rubber stamped in triplicate by the Tilaurakot Ward 3 Chair.
6. Arniko's father and mother were both Nepalis. Even if he had to renounce his citizenship at the court of Kublai Khan. Once a Nepali man always a Nepali.
7. Bhrikuti married a Tibetan king, and we promptly denied her offspring Nepali citizenship, and then we invaded Lhasa to exact revenge.
8. Tenzing Norgay became an Indian, and that's all I have to say about that.
9. Become a Nepali citizen and develop chronic gastroenteritis, Nepal's national disease, and the world's most proven weight-loss program.
10. Experience the joys of living in a former monarchy, and present anarchy.
11. Look at the bright side: no one will chop off your hand for stealing in Nepal.
12. ... or execute you for corruption.
13. Nepal is a land of infinite possibilities. Need a Covishield second dose? Psst, call me.



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