



# No vax? Ask for Mask.

Much has been said about 'vaccine apartheid' and how instead of levelling out rich and poor, it has widened inequities. Nepal today is living proof of this.

The government lurches rudderless from one failure to another — nowhere does SARS-CoV-2 have such fertile ground to spread as in Nepal.

The government declared a 'smart lockdown' after infection rates dropped, but with only 2.6% of the population vaccinated, the virus is lurking out there. In 2020, the first wave actually started only after the lockdown was eased and lifted. It can happen again.

The Delta variant is three times more virulent than the original virus, it rides unvaccinated hosts in crowded places, who do not wear masks, and do not have access to adequate healthcare.



MONIKA DEUPALA

Prime Minister K P Oli and four health ministers who have served under him in the past year have cried wolf with sweeping promises of "full vaccination in a few months".

We have also heard promises from the US President, G-7 and Team Europe of a billion of doses, but there is no sign of surplus vaccines being shipped out. The Danes, Norwegians and Czechs want to send Nepal unused Oxford AstraZeneca doses, but Brussels is forcing them to go through COVAX.

A laudable initiative, COVAX has been undermined by its own funders. Its Japan-hosted pledging summit in early June was proof of how quickly a global mechanism with an equity plan can fall apart when national narrow-mindedness prevails over enlightened self-interest. No country is safe from future mutants until everyone is vaccinated.

We will not even bring up moral and ethical considerations here. Commentators have been drawing attention to veterans from the Indian and British militaries who have died of Covid-19 complications in Nepal's second wave because India did not send vaccines that had been paid for, and Britain sent us loads of PPEs.

Please spare us more selfies by diplomats at Kathmandu airport posing with yet another

'relief' flight full of latex gloves. We know they know that what Nepal urgently needs right now is vaccines that they themselves promised, or are willing to buy.

Even if, by some miracle, 1.4 million elderly Nepalis get their second doses of Covishield, it looks impossible that we can procure the 40 million doses needed to inoculate 70% of our eligible population even by the end of 2022 at the earliest.

Our government has failed us, the international community has let us down. We better start looking after ourselves in a vaccine-less future.

As if the Covid-19 crisis was happening on a distant planet, the Supreme Court is consumed by hearings on the future of the government. It will decide by next week the fate of Parliament and there isn't much

of a choice: either the current prime minister will get to swear himself in once more, or we will get one who has been prime minister four times in the past 20 years already.

We cannot expect effective vaccine diplomacy, or needed policy interventions to contain the virus from this inept lot. The daily death toll when the lockdown was announced on 29 April was ten, this week we averaged 35 fatalities a day. Total active cases are higher as restrictions lifted, than two months ago.

And all this is happening even while public health experts warn of a third wave, as the virus mutates in an unvaccinated world. We also know that the official infection and death rates in India and Nepal are underestimated. Excess

mortality in the population caused by Covid-19 is said to be much higher than official figures.

Projections by the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle show that on 29 June, when the official fatality tally nationwide was 20, the real death toll from Covid-19 was probably closer to 95.

This week, the official count for the number of people who have died in the pandemic crossed 9,000 — overtaking the total death toll in the 2015 earthquake. But the models suggest that the actual fatalities could be more than 31,000.

At present only 72% of Nepalis wear masks, if that can be raised to 95% as the country opens up, the models show, nearly 1,500 additional deaths due to Covid-19 could be prevented by 1 September.

We have to plan as if there will be no vaccines, and behave as if we are still in isolation. The mantra is: mask up and avoid crowds.

**The lockdown may be relaxed, but we have to plan for a vaccine-less future by masking up and avoiding crowds.**

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Health revolution

20 years ago this week, Canadian journalist Daniel Lak writing in his column in Nepali Times called his doctor friend a revolutionary for advocating every citizen's right to be healthy.

Then, as now, for Nepal this means clean drinking water for all citizens, social reform on a grand scale to confront patriarchy for the well being of mothers and daughters, healthcare for all, even for those who cannot pay and to the remotest corners of the country. And not least, education about sanitation and hygiene at the local level to prevent disease transmission. This need has not changed much in the past two decades.

Excerpts from issue #49 29 June-5 July 2001:

A friend who advises a big multilateral organisation on public health puts it succinctly. "Health is a human right. A society that recognises that is advanced. One that doesn't is backward."

My friend is a revolutionary. He wants societies remodelled on the notion that everyone has the unfettered right to free and high quality health care, backed up with education. His revolution involves consent and hard work, not guns or peasant armies. His storm troopers would be public health workers and teachers infiltrating every last nook and cranny, administering enlightenment and responsibility in equal doses. What if my friend, or someone like him, could lead a peoples' movement that demanded good health as a fundamental right. And it



would not be a movement that tried to shake a cruel elite into dispensing this medicine, it would be a mass mobilisation of people prepared to work for their own salvation and good health. At least that's what he says. "No point in expecting bad governments to change and start doing the right thing," he insists, "That's what made people ill in the first place. They don't care and they never will. We need to do it ourselves."

What a wonderful thought, no riots, no confrontations with police, no marches on palaces or parliaments, just vast legions of people asserting their right to health by building dispensaries, setting up schools and getting on with it. My friend tells me that good things like DOTS programmes for TB and mass vaccinations against polio only work as grassroots efforts, supported by the people and run by them. Look to western Nepal and the way that communities are carrying out AIDS awareness, bucking local trends, spending hardly any money and shunning the bureaucratic, Pajero-loving culture of the expat-government nexus in the capital.

From archives material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

## ON THE WEB

### 2021 MONSOON

Ain't nothing but consequences when you mess with mother nature, floodplains are there for a reason, it's not for building houses.

**B B Shah**

• You claim the floodplain of the river to make houses. You mine the river clean of boulders and sand. This is all our doing and no one else is to blame. Manmade disasters.

**Rizal Sunit**

• This is heart wrenching. Yet we still want to dig and mine and wipe out forests.

**Sandipa Thapa**

• The government should not design or construct roads alongside rivers.

**Anil Ranjit**

### COVID CRISIS

2020 was supposed to boost our economy with #VisitNepal ('The real cost of Nepal's second wave', Anita Bhetwal, #1067) Really sad.

**Balivada Kiran**

• Feeling sad for such an amazing country.

**Glab Kali**

• History will show that ending independent travel was the biggest economic mistake made during the pandemic.

**Aksel Lydersen**

• This just shows how much they care for our special bond ('Anger grows in Nepal over vaccine delays', Alisha Sijapati, #1067). A friend in need is a friend indeed!

**Shyam Kumar Thakuri**

• Lesson in real politics for Nepal: there are no friends, just interests.

**Abs Pan**

• It's not in their interest to give vaccines to Nepal. They used our youth during their wars, we gave our lives for their cause but they don't care if we die.

**Pandey Kundan**

### AIRPORT DOG

Good for Angel ('Angel meets an angel', Sonia Awale, nepalitimes.com)! She will receive all the attention and love throughout the year in Canada, not just in KukurTihar.

**Tsering Sangpo Sherpa**

### HERNE KATHA

I watch 'Herne Katha' regularly and I find every episode special ('The extraordinary lives of ordinary Nepalis', Shristi Karki, nepalitimes.com). I even download them and show it to my students. One such episode is 'Jyaulika Juntara' about a 14 year-old girl from Western Nepal forced to quit school to earn money in Kathmandu's brick kiln. Since then my students have shown greater interest in their studies but they keep asking about the girl, if she got to go back home and if she could afford gifts for her family.

**Lamichhane Samm Gurung**

### POLITICS AND PANDEMIC

Prime Minister K P Oli has ruined democracy and destabilized Nepal ('Oli's gambit', Tufan Neupane, #1067). We need effective and stable government to fight Covid19 and other natural disasters, but that is clearly not the case.

**Neil Kantha**

### TRANS-HIMALAYAN TRAIN

The train coming up to Kerung is good enough for Nepal at the moment ('No light at end of trans-Himalayan train tunnel', nepalitimes.com). We can still use this facility for international trade given China has good railway network to their ports.

**Kin Bee**

• Instead of always hoping to get something for free, how about holding your government officials to account all the mismanagement and embezzlement that deprive Nepal of its future?

**Trinle Gyamtso G**

• Even if highly desirable for us from geopolitical angle, I do not think that it will ever get built.

**Ananta Armugam**

### RICE

Until a few decades ago, Nepal used to export rice to the outside world. It's the opposite now. Promises of 'agricultural revolution' has become a tale, when will the authorities work towards achieving it?

**Pradeep Rana**

### CASTE DISCRIMINATION

The reluctance of many human rights activists and persons of civil society organisations including political parties to get involved in the cases of caste discrimination is seriously questionable ('Nepal's caste struggle', Kunjani Pariyar and Binita Nepali, nepalitimes.com).

**Rajesh Nepali**

• Could the authors are Nepali Times also write about re Dalit children enrolment at the best private schools in the Valley, if they are offered seats and scholarships and how much.

**EmperorofficeCream**

• No new political system could superimpose ancient traditions, even the Soviet system was full of hierarchies. But education and communication can surpass superstitions.

**Chris Schul**

• I wholly agree with the article but there is one error here. It was not Saraswati Pradhan who first raised the issue of cast, rather Rupa Sunar herself. And it was Pradhan's elderly mother who had a problem with renting a room to Dalits.

**Birat Anupam**



### The real cost of Nepal's second wave

by Anita Bhetwal

At the tail end of the first wave in March, Himalmedia tv magazine Saglo Samaj interviewed Nepalis most affected by lockdowns. This week, the team revisited the same people to find out what has become of them. Read this report, watch video and join the online discussion.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**

**Most commented**



### Anger grows in Nepal over Covid vaccine delays

by Alisha Sijapati

Historic, diplomatic and military connections weren't enough for the UK to deliver life-saving Covid vaccines to Nepal in its hour of need. There is growing anger against India and Britain for not responding to the country's desperate pleas. Visit website for details and latest developments.

**Most popular on Twitter**

### Smartass Lockdown

The Ass

"One way to protect the city's smartness is to make sure the streets are permanently dug up. This is deliberate. There is no better way to make people street smart, keep them on their toes, alert, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, than to lay booby traps along public thoroughfares." The Ass' on nepalitimes.com

**Most visited online page**

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Running out of time for their second doses of the Covid-19 vaccine has added to the woes of Nepal's seniors.

**Stuart Reynolds @shaldonangler**  
Tragic story

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Portrait of a #photographer in rural #Nepal. She may not know how to read or write, but she makes a living taking pictures. @DeupalaMonika reports from Jumla.

**Bhawana Gurung @bhawanaNa**  
This is such a heart-warming story

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
#review For those who want to read the Mahabharata but are intimidated by the very thought, GurcharanDas' interpretation of the epic is well worth the time. @BasnyatBuddha reviews The Difficulty of Being Good:

**Bipin Adhikari @Bipin\_tropmed**  
I can see several epics in the book. An appealing synopsis by Dr. @BasnyatBuddha: "The self-effacing Yudhishtir, looking a bit puzzled, asks Indra's permission if they can also take in a stray dog who has been following him for a few days.....!"

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Back in March, at the tail end of the first wave, Himalmedia's tv magazine @SagloSamaj interviewed people most affected by the lockdowns. This week, the team revisited each of the same people to find out what had become of them.

**FREE PALESTINE• Black Lives Matter @AUpadhya\_**  
While the political elites continue to squabble over party politics...

**Robert I. Kabakoff @bigbrotheactor**  
Sleeping hungry.

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Pokhara's royal egret sanctuary. The former summer palace of Nepal's royal family has turned into a bird sanctuary.

**HimalayanEcho @HimalayanEcho**  
A good read! Excellent photographs too. Do not miss this out!



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.



TURKISH AIRLINES

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# Giving start-ups a head start

Despite obstacles, start-ups emerge as exciting new outliers of Nepal's economy

About 250 years ago when King Prithivi Narayan Shah made Kathmandu the capital of unified Nepal, he realised that the city had great potential as a business centre, complementing its role as a trading hub.



**COMMENT**

Siddhant Raj Pandey

He allowed in businessmen from Rajasthan in India to set up shop and allow entrepreneurship to ferment, a move expanded later by Prime Minister Chandra Shamshere Rana. One reason entrepreneurship did not have deep roots in Nepal was the concept of जगिर, a 10-5 salaried position with job security.

That is why the start-up culture took so long to start up and morph in Nepal. The proliferation of, and exposure to the Internet and the recent advent of international private equity firms, accelerators and incubators have paid a pivotal role in making this happen.

Since 2017, successive government budgets have mentioned start-ups and allocated money for their establishment, but without clarity and development. This year's budget was no different: it also set aside Rs1 billion towards building a start-up ecosystem, including concessional loans.

What the previous governments had missed out on, this one seems to have acknowledged: start with defining a start-up. A voluminous document is doing its rounds through the corridors of our bureaucracy for comments from experts. Until they come up with a definition, let us say a start-up is an innovative idea that uses technology to address unmet demand in the market.

In the United States, the start-



up sector is a \$3 trillion business. In South Asia, India leads the pack with over 20,000 Start-ups in operation, of which 100 are unicorns with a combined market cap of \$240 billion. Bangladesh, Pakistan and even Afghanistan have understood the importance of this sector to the economy.

Internationally, some 90% of start-ups fail to take off. Nepal has invested in 400 start-ups, all in Kathmandu, and the risk appetite for new investments is limited partly because of the absence of an enabling environment.

The cost factor for starting a tech business in Nepal is lower than anywhere else with a constant flow of eligible young graduates well versed in English who are relatively

computer literate. The bandwidth for connectivity is getting better. It is an untapped market, an imitation of international successes for local markets can be implemented, and the population is young, and growing.

There are challenges with the lack of legal and policy environment posing the greatest risk. Ideas are the premise of any start-up. Intellectual Property Right (IPR) is the most important legal recourse for safeguarding those ideas, which in Nepal remains a draft and has been in discussion for quite some time.

The current law was formulated in 1964, and does not address developments that have occurred worldwide since then. A lawyer

recently remarked that when he tried to register a trademark for poultry feed, the application was denied because a tobacco company had already registered it.

Thankfully, the Supreme Court gave a verdict on the Kansai Nerolac case a few years ago, which protected trademarks. Still, laws need to reflect international best practices for this sector to operate.

Financing start-ups is also a great hurdle. Banks are reluctant and risk averse to lend without collateral. If a loan is secured it is not nearly enough to meet the requirement and equity is difficult to come by. The ones who have demonstrated that they have the ability to serve a niche market and can show potential to scale up have

been successful to secure equity financing.

The start-up industry is evolving despite the lack of an enabling environment. The resilience shown by these entrepreneurs has steadily improved, and the appetite to invest in them is gaining traction. Examples are ride sharing apps that made the government change its policy, e-commerce platforms that have engaged with the government to facilitate the sector, and companies that realigned business plans to accommodate government policies.

A cloud service provider had to create a hybrid model because government officials could not comprehend what it was, and that data could be secure. They needed to see actual physical infrastructure.

But start-ups are resilient, and they will continue to compel the authorities to accommodate them as they continue to grow. They have adapted to the situation and have introduced internal safeguards to secure their ideas in a lax IPR environment.

Some are ensuring strict non-disclosure agreements, developing in-house products knowing that there will be disrupters in the market six months down the road and, focussing on networks as much as focussing on products.

The government's new regulations will hopefully put it in a facilitating role to create a platform for ideation to grow with the help of mentors from academia and the private sector. Nepal's start-ups are to stay, and with the right legal and regulatory framework in place, will thrive. One day there will be a Nepali unicorn in the making. 🇳🇵

**Siddhant Pandey** is Chairman and CEO of Business Oxygen Pvt Ltd (BO2).

## prabhu BANK



### World Bank loan

Nepal has signed an agreement for a concessional loan worth \$150 million with the World Bank for post-Covid recovery as well as to accelerate ongoing large-scale development projects, create jobs, mobilise markets and support green revival.

"This assistance will improve the tax and customs system, public investment management, environmental regulation and debt management to further strengthen Nepal and support green reconstruction," says Finance Secretary Shishir Kumar Dhungana.

### Top Turkish brand

Turkish Airlines, Turkey's national flag carrier, has once again been named the country's Most Valuable Brand for the fifth time in a row with a brand value of \$1.61 billion.

"We are proud to continue our success story of the previous years during the pandemic and being 'Turkey's Most Valuable Brand' once again," said Airlines CEO Ilker Ayci.



**TURKISH AIRLINES**

Meanwhile, the airline announced this week that passengers from countries including Bangladesh, Nepal, South Africa, Brazil would not be allowed to enter Turkey until further notice because of the spread of the Delta strain. However, Turkish Airlines passengers from Nepal can still transit Istanbul to their destinations elsewhere.

### Canadian Covid relief

A Canadian special flight brought over 16,000 units of PPE, 27 ventilators and other health equipment to Kathmandu on Sunday to help Nepal fight the pandemic. The Canadian government had previously funded C\$1.5 million to UNICEF to procure oxygen concentrators and medicines, C\$1 million to Nepal Red Cross Society and C\$50,00 to ASK Foundation to support its telemedicine services in the country.

"Canada is proud to send additional relief material to Nepal that will help save lives of those suffering from Covid-19," said Deirdre Kent, Canada's Acting Ambassador to Nepal.



### Upper Tamakosi completed

The construction of the Upper Tamakosi Hydropower project in Dolakha district has been completed, and will generate power from 5 July from the first unit. There are six units with 76 MW capacity each.

"If there is no technical problem, we will turn it on the next Monday morning and start generating electricity from the first unit," says NEA Executive Director Hitendra Dev Shakya. The power will be sent to the national grid through the Gongar-Khimti-Dhalkebar 220KV, which is also being tested.



### Tata Nexon EV

Tata Motors is soon opening bookings for its electric SUV, the Nexon EV in Nepal, scheduled to be launched in July. The Nexon EV launched in India in January 2020 has sold more than 4,500 units, capturing 65% of Indian EV market.

"The Nexon EV will not only promote Nepal government's vision of electrifying the auto industry, but also revolutionise the way we can embrace green technology," says Mayank Baldi of Tata Motors.

### Covid assistance

Renowned Nepali Bollywood actress Manisha Koirala, UK-based businessman Rabin Jung Lamichhane and BAPS UK delivered 33 portable 10-litre oxygen concentrators worth £25,000 to Nepal. Koirala herself will oversee distribution of the equipment to remote hospitals in need, in coordination with Nobel Compassionate Volunteers (NCV) Nepal.

### Remdesivir made in Nepal



The Department of Drug Administration has authorised National Healthcare Private Limited to begin domestic production of remdesivir, which is used by some physicians to treat Covid patients. Sold under the brand name "Remsivir", each vial of the US FDA-approved drug will cost Rs 3,500.

# Hope, hyperbole and hypocrisy of COVAX

The realpolitik of vaccine nationalism and how it impacts on countries like Nepal

As a previously unknown novel coronavirus struck in the winter of 2019-20, public health experts recommended universal mask wearing, physical distancing, lockdowns and travel restrictions, while awaiting the arrival of preventive vaccines and effective therapies.



**COMMENT**  
Kul Chandra Gautam

On two sides of the Atlantic, contrasting approaches emerged to tackle what came to be known as the Covid-19 pandemic. On the one hand, there was the erratic Donald Trump (seconded by his Brazilian buddy Jair Bolsonaro) who denied the seriousness of the pandemic or peddled miscellaneous magical cures.

Blaming China and WHO was Trump's fallback position to hide his own policy failures. But he also invested billions of dollars to bankroll several American pharmaceutical companies to speed up the production of Covid vaccines through his Operation Warp Speed.

Consistent with his 'America First' priority, the vaccines were meant primarily for Americans, and any leftovers could be sold or given away to friendly countries depending on the MAGA Leader's mood.

On the other side of the Atlantic, at the urging of the WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom, many European leaders took a seemingly more enlightened global approach. Recognising that "no one is safe until everyone is safe", European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and their fellow Nordic counterparts declared that they would eschew "vaccine nationalism" and embrace the concept of a Covid vaccine as a 'global public good' to be made available equitably to all countries.

Encouraged by this idealistic vision, WHO launched a clumsily worded but ambitious 'Access to Covid-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator' that would speed up the development, production, and equitable access to Covid-19 tests, treatment, and vaccines. The ACT Accelerator brought together a who's who of the global health partnership: governments, scientists, businesses, civil society, and philanthropists, including the Gates Foundation, GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, the Global Fund, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the World Bank, Unicef.

The most important pillar of the ACT Accelerator was the 'COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access', abbreviated as COVAX. It is hosted and administered by GAVI, and its main vaccine procurement and delivery partner is Unicef. A high-level COVAX Coordinating Mechanism with representation of a cross-section of its partners and multiple technical groups is responsible for ensuring equitable allocation and access to Covid-19 vaccines worldwide.

Participating in COVAX are two groups of countries: the fully self-financing high-income countries (HICs), and nearly 100 low and middle-income countries (LMICs) that generally rely on donor funding to receive some vaccines, but can also purchase some more with their own resources.



Then Health Minister Hridayesh Tripathi received the first batch of 348,000 doses of Covishield AstraZeneca vaccines from the UN Resident Coordinator in Nepal Sara Beysolow Nyanti in March. The remaining 1.92 million doses promised by COVAX never arrived.

A mechanism called the Advance Market Commitment (AMC) through which GAVI guarantees the purchase of a large quantity of vaccines to incentivise manufacturers to produce doses and sell them at an affordable price. Initially, the donors were expected to capitalise on the COVAX facility with a contribution of \$9 billion to purchase and distribute 2 billion doses of vaccines to meet the needs of some 20% of high-risk groups in participating countries, including frontline health workers and senior citizens.

COVAX was hailed as a futuristic model of enlightened international cooperation to ensure that vaccine development and delivery would progress at 'a speed, scale, and access never before seen in human history'.

While most poorer countries patiently waited for COVAX to be fully-functional, richer countries, particularly the G-7 and EU members, decided to jump the queue and cut bilateral deals for their own citizens. Not to be left behind in the competition for public relations and profits, China, India and Russia, the three major vaccine producers outside Western Europe and the US, engaged in carefully orchestrated 'vaccine diplomacy' to bolster their image of solidarity with LMICs.

COVAX remained under-funded and unable to compete with the HICs that quickly reserved huge quantities of vaccines directly from the manufacturers, often exceeding their actual requirements. By August 2020, the Trump administration had signed seven bilateral deals with six companies for more than 800 million doses, enough to vaccinate 140% of its population.

The Biden administration substantially increased this. The EU was not far behind in reserving half a billion doses secured through two deals. The UK signed five bilateral deals for 270 million doses, equivalent to 225% of its population. Canada was at the head of the class reserving four times more vaccines than the total requirement for its population.

These bilateral deals severely undercut COVAX's ambition of becoming the global coordinator of

vaccine procurement, allocation and distribution. By the time it managed to secure the \$8.3 billion it needed to procure and deliver the promised vaccines to 92 poorer countries in June 2021, manufacturers had no more vaccines to sell, as practically all their production was contractually committed to the HICs.

COVAX was caught in a Catch-22. Whereas initially it did not have enough money to buy the vaccines, now it has the money but there are no vaccines in the market. Besides HICs hoarding a huge cache of excess vaccines, two other problems are responsible for the global vaccine shortage.

The huge second wave of Covid infection in India in the Spring of 2021 led it to ban the export of the AstraZeneca Covishield vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII). This was a big shock for both COVAX and lower-income countries like Nepal.

But an even bigger and more systemic problem has been the unwillingness of a handful of Big Pharma multinationals to give up their exclusive patent rights to produce vaccines and medications. Although the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) provides for waiving patent rights in the case of life-saving medicines and vaccines, in public health emergencies like global pandemics, most HICs have refused to grant such waivers.

President Biden did express a willingness to consider waiving the intellectual property rights for Covid vaccines. But the same European leaders who loudly proclaimed Covid vaccines as 'global public goods', have stubbornly and hypocritically resisted waiving the IP rights of their pharmaceutical companies.

The hypocrisy is compounded because billions of dollars, euros and pounds of public funds were given to private Big Pharma companies to accelerate research and development of new vaccines for which they now claim exclusive patent rights to maximise profits for their private shareholders.

## The G-7 charade

There were high hopes that the G-7 Summit of the world's richest democratic countries in June would lead to a breakthrough in Covid response, revive COVAX and accelerate delivery of vaccines to developing countries.

The IMF had estimated that an investment of \$55 billion now would not only save the lives and protect the health of millions, but would help revive the world economy and yield a return of \$9 trillion by 2025. Sadly, the G-7 accounting for 60% of the world's economy did not pledge even 6% of the investment recommended by the IMF.

The G-7 commitment to donate less than one billion doses of the surplus vaccine they have hoarded, and that too over an extended period stretching well into mid-2022, was a disappointment in the face of a dramatic surge of newer and deadlier Covid variants ravaging countries like Nepal, much of South and Southeast Asia and Africa.

# COVAX

CEPI Gavi unicef World Health Organisation

COVAX estimates that it needs 2 billion doses in 2021 to reach the most vulnerable 20% of people in the developing world, and 11 billion doses to reach herd immunity by 2022. Alas, if current trends continue, if TRIPS patent waiver is not granted and technology transfer is not facilitated to vastly increase and diversify vaccine production in many more countries, it might take decades before people in LMICs can expect to reach herd immunity.

The People's Vaccine Alliance estimates that, at the current rate, low-income countries could take 57 years to fully vaccinate their populations, whereas G-7 countries are likely to reach that milestone in the next 6 months. Of the 2.1

billion Covid-19 vaccine doses administered worldwide so far, only 4% were provided to poorer countries by COVAX.

COVAX has been criticised harshly for making tall promises but failing to deliver. GAVI, which administers COVAX, made some early compromises on its egalitarian founding principles by agreeing to certain double standards applied to the HICs vs LMICs. For example, it allowed donor countries like the UK and Canada to pick and choose which vaccines they preferred to fund or purchase for themselves through COVAX rather than requiring their funding to be co-mingled as part of COVAX's funding pool for all countries and products.

UK and Canada managed to purchase through COVAX fairly large quantities of their chosen vaccines, despite the fact that they had already procured plenty of vaccines through direct bilateral contracts with several vaccine manufacturers, even as COVAX was struggling to deliver minimal quantities of vaccines for LMICs.

Canada managed to procure through COVAX 1.6 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine while Nepal (a country of similar population size) only received 348,000 doses. An added irony is that some of those AZ vaccines in Canada remain unused and are on the verge of expiry, whereas 1.4 million senior citizens in Nepal are desperately waiting for their second jab of the AZ vaccine.

Despite shortcomings, the UN, COVAX and other initiatives are important building blocks towards a fairer world of greater human solidarity. Imperfect as they are, humanity is better off with such organisations striving to harness the power of partnership than a dog-it-dog world driven solely by narrow national or other parochial interests.

Some of the weaknesses and hypocrisy seen in the early functioning of COVAX are not the result of its model being wrong, but because some of its key sponsors are not playing by agreed rules.

In a world of sovereign nation-states, leaders have a legitimate responsibility to protect their own populations first. Hence vaccine nationalism is understandable and should have been built into the design of initiatives like COVAX from the start -- although pursuing vaccine equity must be its ultimate objective.

Without putting all our eggs in the COVAX basket, and while exploring all other options to meet our urgent vaccine needs, it is in the interest of countries like Nepal to help build a more robust COVAX to help the world better cope with future pandemics. 🇳🇵

**Kul Chandra Gautam** is a former Deputy Executive Director of Unicef and Assistant Secretary-General of the UN. He is the author of *Global Citizen from Gulmi: My Journey from the Hills of Nepal to the Halls of the United Nations*. He was also a former board member of GAVI.

# Angel meets an angel

Angel, the dog that grew up greeting passengers at Kathmandu airport is herself flying to a new home in Canada



● **Sonia Awale**

Just before all flights were grounded during the Covid-19 lockdown last year, dog trainer Janak Kapali was at Kathmandu airport to see off a street dog being adopted by a family in Canada, when he was surrounded by a pack of hungry strays.

One of them stood out, a snow-white one that was calm, gentle and unlike the rest of the pack that lived in the pre-departure area. She sat quietly next to the red kennel with the rescued dog being sent off (photos, left).

Kapali noticed her at the airport whenever he came to arrange for the departure of one of the rescued dogs, and she always sat next to the pet carriers — as

if to say her own farewells to the dogs that were leaving.

“Every time I came to the airport, she was there, guarding the kennel while we waited for the dogs to be put on their flights,” says Kapali, 45, who shelters 14 rescued dogs in his Rambo Abbie Dog Training Centre (named after his own pets) in Kathmandu.

Kapali noticed that with flights mostly cancelled during the lockdown, the unowned dogs at the airport had become emaciated because there were no humans to feed them. So, he took to offering the white dog snacks every time he was at the airport.

The white dog now has a name, Angel. And she is at the KAT Centre which works for animal welfare in the Valley. Angel has already got her shots,

and her travel documents sorted out before departure.

Akash Dahal at KAT Centre was struck by Angel’s calm demeanour three months ago at the airport when he was seeing off another batch of rescued dogs.

“I have never before come across a street dog like Angel, she is just so well behaved and intelligent, as if she has been trained, she got along with the other dogs and she understood me,” says Dahal.

Lesley Mapstone, founder of Temple Dog Rescue in Canada, who supports animal welfare organisations in Nepal, also noticed Angel in airport photos taken by Kapali, and in videos posted by KAT Centre. It was she who named the dog ‘Angel of Tribhuvan’.

Mapstone has been a frequent visitor to Nepal and was always moved by street dogs huddled in

cardboard boxes at street-side garbage piles near Swayambhu.

One afternoon three years ago, she followed a puppy to its mother and siblings living on a sidewalk. She started feeding them daily, but the mother and litter were in bad shape. She took them for treatment at the KAT Centre, but the vets were only able to save a female puppy.

Mapstone named the pup Dawa, and adopted her. With Dawa by her side in Canada, Mapstone’s Temple Dog Rescue has been helping KAT Centre with fundraising to carry on with its work in feeding and sheltering Kathmandu’s community dogs, which have been going hungry during the long lockdown.

Temple Dog Rescue also helps place dogs up for adoption with new families, and has helped find

homes for dozens of strays from Nepal and Egypt. And it has found Angel a home.

The four-year-old is being adopted by an award-winning Canadian activist against domestic violence, and will soon have a large 20 hectare property to explore in Ontario. Through GoFundMe, Angel now also has a one-way ticket and is waiting for her own flight from Kathmandu airport, where she said goodbye to so many of her canine friends.

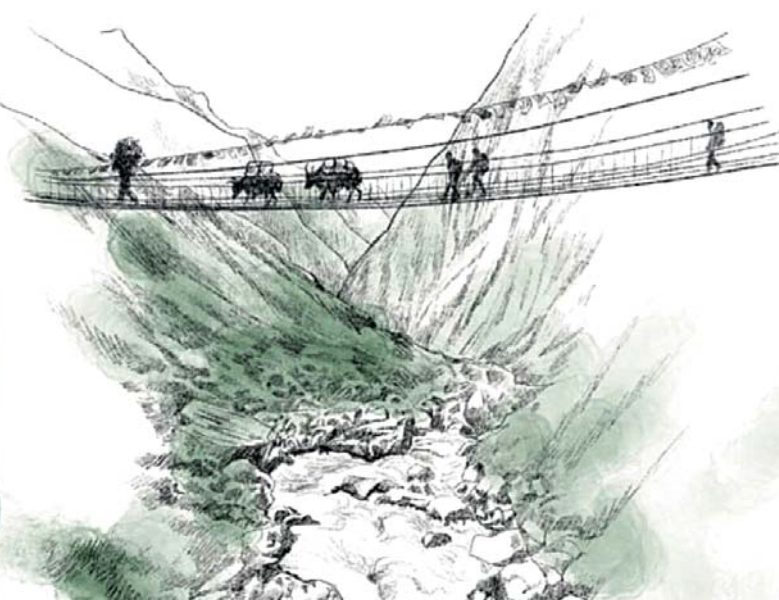
“Angel’s story about being an airport dog was so compelling that she was very popular during the fundraising, and soon she will have a loving home and lots of space to roam around and play,” Mapstone told *Nepali Times* by phone.

Meanwhile in Kathmandu, animal welfare activists are busier than ever caring for street animals



## Nepali conservationist among Rolex awardees

Rinzin Phunkjok Lama is among recipients of this year’s Rolex Awards for Enterprise



A new generation of Nepali environmental activists is filling the void left by the tragic 2006 Ghunsa crash that saw the loss of many pioneering conservationists including Harka Gurung and Chandra Gurung. Rinzin Phunkjok Lama, the first graduate in environmental science from Humla district, is one of them. In an announcement on Monday, Lama was named among five laureates of this year’s Rolex Awards for Enterprise for his role in promoting local initiatives for biodiversity conservation in Nepal’s trans-Himalayan region.

Born and raised in one of Nepal’s remotest regions, Lama was inspired and mentored by 1981 Rolex Laureate, wildlife biologist Rodney Jackson, who spent four decades of his life protecting the threatened snow leopard, and initiated the first-ever radio collar study on the big cats in western Nepal 40 years ago. But Lama has taken a step further making it his life’s mission to

protect not only the snow leopard, but other threatened high-altitude species like the Himalayan wolf, Himalayan black bear, wild yak, Tibetan argali, musk deer that live at altitudes from 3-5,000m.

“The trans-Himalayan ecosystem which includes most of Nepal’s highland is very fragile and increasing human activities are threatening it constantly. Thus, there is an urgent need for a conservation project which addresses an integrated approach to conservation and livelihood,” says Lama.

Humla district in Nepal’s northwestern corner bordering China and India has long suffered from state negligence, and is one of the least developed parts of the country. Only 1% of its land is suitable for farming, leading to one of the highest rates of food insecurity in Nepal. Economic opportunities are hard to come by.

Now, the climate crisis has added to the challenge. Lama’s long-term solution to overcome the threats to the biodiversity is to

engage local people from Humla, particularly young environment graduates and empower communities to become the stewards of the land. The young scientist plans to enhance and enlarge current conservation activities to promote local leadership in conservation. One of the priority areas is educating and training people in law enforcement to discourage illegal hunting, logging and forest fires. Lama’s other focus is developing livelihood for communities.

Lama is collaborating with a herbal and agricultural products company in Humla to develop a model for technical support to local residents who want to establish small businesses. He is also conducting a feasibility study of potential trekking trails to promote ecotourism and working with local women skilled in making the traditional attire to generate jobs.

Lama’s project is science-based and uses field surveys and camera trapping techniques to establish the baseline number of mammal

species, while supporting the development of new enterprises that will expand the possibilities for local people’s source of income. At the same time, Lama will combine science with traditional knowledge and indigenous Buddhist philosophy to educate the citizens of Humla in environmental conservation.

“I want to show that, if given opportunities, local people can lead exceptionally and are capable of managing large-scale conservation projects and community engagement as real stewards of the land,” he adds.

Since 2014, Lama has been actively involved in research and conservation of high altitude wildlife in Nepal. In 2015, he won a Wildlife Conservation Network scholarship and was the recipient of the WWF Nepal Conservation Award in 2020.

Lama obtained a master’s degree in International Nature Conservation from the University of Göttingen, Germany, and Lincoln University, New Zealand. Currently, he is a conservation biologist and Conservation Program Director at Third Pole Conservancy and an environmental adviser to Humla’s elected representative.

Other recipients of the Rolex Awards this year are American Felix Brooks-church, working on malnutrition in Tanzania, Chad’s Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, linking indigenous knowledge to prevent climate conflicts in the Sahel, Gina Moseley from the United Kingdom who is looking into climate change in the Arctic and Brazilian Luiz Rocha who is exploring mesophotic coral reefs and their biodiversity in the Indian Ocean.

The five laureates will receive funding for their projects, and a virtual event celebrating the awards will be held at the end of year.

The Rolex Awards were set up 45 years ago to mark the 50th anniversary of the world’s first waterproof wristwatch, the Oyster. It supports exceptional individuals with innovative projects that expand the knowledge of the world, protect the environment — helping to preserve habitats and species — and improve human well-being. 🇳🇵



JANAK KAPALI

during the lockdown. KAT Centre and Sneha’s Care have been feeding dogs, cows and even temple monkeys which have been deprived of their usual source of food. The empty roads also mean that there has been a horrendous rise in dogs and cows sitting on the asphalt being hit by speeding cars.

Sneha’s Care last week signed an MoU with Lalitpur Municipality to turn the city into an ‘animal friendly metro’, in the hope that it will be a model for other municipalities in Nepal to better care for street animals with anti-rabies vaccination campaigns, sterilisations, and control mistreatment.

Animal welfare organisations are often asked why they pay so much attention to dogs when people are also suffering during



## US suspends dog imports

The US Centre for Disease Control (CDC) has banned dogs being brought into the country from 100 countries for one year because of an increase in the number of dogs with fake anti-rabies vaccine certificates.

the pandemic. Sneha Shreshta of Sneha’s Care answer to them is: “Looking after suffering animals is also a part of what it means to be a human being.”

Not all street dogs in Kathmandu are abandoned, many are community dogs. But many of these neighbourhood animals are also going hungry because of the lockdown, and have to forage in garbage piles to survive.

Janak Kapali says he has noticed growing awareness in communities about the need to take care of dogs all year around, and not just worship them during Kukur Tihar. Nepal’s animal care organisations have increased their profile, and there is now better response when abandoned dogs are put up for adoption.

“Unlike in the past, we now get inquiries about street dogs for

The ban has been criticised by animal welfare agencies, and will affect dozens of dogs who have been delayed in joining families that have adopted them because of the lockdown.

The US has seen a sharp increase in pet adoptions from abroad during the pandemic as lonely families cooped up at home needed companionship. However, the CDC says that more than 450 dogs arriving at US airports were found to have fake rabies certificates in 2020.

This is a small proportion of the nearly 1 million dogs that are adopted and imported in the US every year, but the CDC says it is taking no chances. The ban on imports will go into effect from 14 July, and there is a rush to take dogs to the US where the authorities have become extra-strict in checking rabies papers.

Among the 100 countries from which dog imports are suspended are China, North Korea, Vietnam, Nepal, Brazil, Kenya, Uganda, Colombia, Russia and others. Most European countries are not on the list.

adoption, although many more still prefer popular dog breeds,” says Dahal of KAT Centre.

“Having people to volunteer with us is more important than donations because once people work closely with these animals, they have better empathy for them.”

It is difficult to find Nepali families wanting to adopt older, or disabled dogs and those that are not pure breeds. Which is where foreign adoptions have helped with finding homes for dogs that have been injured in acid attacks, or wounded in traffic accidents.

Adds Mapstone of the Temple Dog Rescue: “Street dogs can be just as gentle and loyal and as willing to please as any other breed, they just need a chance and that is what we are doing.” 🐾



## Pokhara’s royal egret sanctuary

The former summer palace of Nepal’s royal family has turned into a bird sanctuary

● **Krishnamani Baral** in Pokhara

After Nepal’s monarchy was abolished in 2008, most of the property of the royal family was nationalised, and some of them like the Ratna Mandir in Pokhara have reverted back to nature.

Located at the edge of Phewa Lake, the property has become a sanctuary for a large flock of cattle egrets which now nest on bamboo groves in the abandoned garden.

The compound is named after Queen Mother Ratna, King Mahendra’s wife, who is still alive and lives in a part of the former Naryanhiti Palace in Kathmandu.

Located at Pokhara’s Lakeside and opposite the thick forested slope of Raniban on the other side of the lake, the neighbourhood has seen a resurgence of birdlife.

Kings, queens and their entourage do not visit anymore,

the cattle egrets have made it their palace. And since the streets below leading to the boat hiring area are deserted now because of the lockdown, the egrets seem to find the location even more appealing.

Local birders say that although some egrets have always nested at Ratna Mandir, their numbers have risen dramatically in recent years because of urban expansion in Pokhara’s lakeside and the proximity to the lake where the egrets like to fish.

And as the monsoon rains arrive, the cattle egrets have put on their tan plumage for the breeding season. They nest by the hundreds, on the upper branches with adult birds flicking back and forth bringing insets and small fish for the hatchlings, or twigs and leaves to maintain the nests.

The cattle egrets are breeding undisturbed because the bamboo forest is next to a Nepal Army sentry post, which means the soldiers are also guarding the birds.

While some birds fish, others fly further afield to pick insects off grazing water buffaloes and plough oxen, often riding on their shoulders.

The egrets also face natural disasters like thunderstorms and hail which break their eggs and kill the chicks. The mother egrets do not leave their nests, guarding their young through wind rain, or hail. 🐾

# Kathmandu’s nightlife

The lockdown provides an opportunity to tick off nocturnal wildlife from the mammal list

● **Lisa Choegyal**

“Does it have a tail?”  
“I can’t see because it’s sitting on it.”  
“What about its eyes and coat?”  
“Bright and black eyes with spikey brown fur.”  
“Sounds like a greater bandicoot.”  
“Oh dear. Not again.”  
“The bamboo rat lives underground so he has tiny eyes. Stocky. Short tail. Reddish colour.”  
“I don’t think it’s him.”  
“Disappointing. Check its tail when you let it go.”  
“You mean when Laxman lets it go – at the bottom of the garden. It’s pouring with rain and I’m ready for bed.”  
“Tomorrow put the trap right up against the burrow below the bamboo clump.”  
“Ok. We’ll keep trying.”  
“At least it’s a big one tonight, not another Himalayan field rat or *Niviventer* like we had before.”  
“I really like these jungly outdoor chaps, especially the little ones with the mickey mouse ears, white tummies and pink feet.”  
“Careful. Don’t get attached.”  
“Ha!”  
“He’s historic, first described by Brian Houghton Hodgson in 1845.”



ALL ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRIAN HOUGHTON HODGSON

It is day six of our wildlife catching exercise, trying to entrap a lesser bamboo rat (also first recorded by Hodgson in Nepal in 1841) for Stuart Chapman — one of the few species he has never seen. A new big tick for his mammal list.

After a career in conservation, only 24 people in the world are in front of him. Stuart’s natural competitiveness is thwarted by the pandemic and rivals are creeping ahead – the unforgiving world of mammalogists.

“The Fawn-coloured mouse at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge was a big win. I need to bag some more new species.”

Our garden is not that big and suffers from a ruthless gardener and four energetic dogs but still has proven to be teeming with nocturnal wildlife.

“Three species identified are the bandicoot *Bandicota indica* and lesser Himalayan *Rattus nitidus* who seem to inhabit bamboo, and the *niviventer Niviventer niviventer* who are the fellows you see in the creeper around the terrace. I strongly suspect the bamboo rat is also there *Cannomys badius*. After these, I’m desperate to get onto the Tibetan plateau to find a pika (*Ochotona himalayana*).”

Not all after-dark critter activity in the garden is benign. The main suspect for killing the stately stand of bamboo are the bandicoots, turning the waxy yellow stems streaked with delicate green into a sickly flat ochre, the dead fronds a brittle rattle in the evening breeze. In the quiet of the night the chomping rats are sometimes audible, although the holes amongst the tangled roots are expanded by the dogs digging frantically into the sound.

Although there used to be mongoose and squirrels, we seldom see them because of the dogs. They also drive away the monkeys who visit when the trees are fruiting, and occasionally catch an unfortunate snake. Because of our proximity to Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park, wild night-time barking usually signals a passing civet, or even a leopard. I’ve seen both in

our vicinity.

One of our family legends is when a leopard got into the garden over the high wire fence entwined with climbers, probably jumping down from an overhanging tree. Dogs are known to be their favourite meal, and many Budhanilkantha neighbours have lost their pets. But in our case the leopard took fright, driven by our pack into the shelter of a big rocky cluster.

The story goes that the smallest dog Rusty, a feisty half terrier mixed with serious Kathmandu street variety, caught the end of the poor leopard’s tail and tried to pull him out backwards from his shelter beneath the stones. The Department of Wildlife had to be called, but it all ended happily when the leopard found its own way out over the fence and back into the forest, without eating any of them. Last month heavy rain after the long drought triggered swarms of winged termites. Rising in clouds out of holes in the ground, their fragile wings and frail lifespans filled the mauve sunset and caused a feeding frenzy of feasting toads, swooping swallows and darting fruit bats. (“Fulvous fruit bats *Rousettus leschenaultia*, at its maximum altitude range in your garden,” says Stuart.)

Brushing the flying *alates* out of our hair and eyes, we realise these rapacious insects have colonised the outside room, infested the foundations and are devouring the wooden floor. There is a limit to our termite tolerance — time to call the terminator to save the building.

Stuart, however, is committed to wilding. He is adamant that before being released from the trap, which is a metal box baited with a tasty carrot, the animal is not left too long to get too hot, too cold, too wet or too stressed.

Laxman has watched Stuart decant a rodent from his steel trap into a clear plastic bag for closer examination before being let go behind the garage, but that was the much smaller Himalayan rat — and at best it is a tricky manoeuvrer. One greater bandicoot during the same transition made a bid for safety, vaulting through Stuart’s experienced hands.

It is a dark raining June night, and Laxman helpfully thinks I should check its tail myself as he attempts to tip the rat into a ziplock bag on the front doorstep. The four dogs look on with interest, safely tied, and so does Hari the cook, Ram the gardener, Mohan the night guard and me in my pyjamas. The inevitable happens, and we all have an excellent view of his tail as the bandicoot’s escape route takes him straight past me into the house. The long tail trails him up the staircase before he can be turned back down, dislodged from behind furniture, pursued by brooms and dishcloths through the dining room, hall, bathroom and eventually out through the kitchen. I have climbed to safety on a chair with Stuart’s bearded face grinning with concern on my phone.

“Such a handsome looking animal!” 🐾

## EVENTS

**Learn French**  
Join Alliance Française Kathmandu's 6-week long online French language classes for all levels. Get details on Facebook.  
*Fee: Rs 9,900*

**Sooriya virtual studio**  
Join Sooriya Wellness and Yoga centre's virtual studio for yoga sessions available to everyone for self-practice at home. Sessions are available on prior appointment. Go to the Sooriya Wellness Facebook page for details.  
*9818481972*



**Le Sherpa Farmers Market**  
Shop for fresh and organic vegetables, fruit, cheese, bread, meat products, honey, and much more. Physical distancing guidelines apply.  
*Saturdays, 8am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa Maharajgunj*

**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](mailto:kathasatha@gmail.com).

**Photography contest**  
Send in up to 10 photographs for The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management (CIWEM), WaterBear, and Nikon's Environmental Photographer of the Year 2021. Eligible submissions: only photographs taken since 1 January 2018.  
*Deadline: 31 July*

## DINING AT HOME



**Hankook Sarang**  
Satisfy the hankering for Korean food during the lockdown and enjoy a variety of delectable dishes like Tteokbokki, Pork Je Yook Bokum, kimbab and more. Find the menu at Foodmandu.

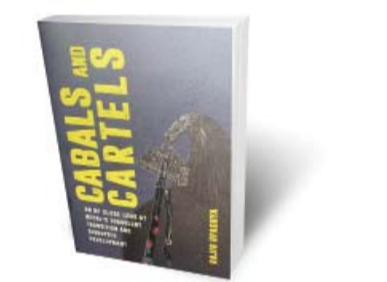
## ISOLATION READING

**Finding the Mother Tree**  
Ecologist Suzanne Simard's Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest is a deeply personal account of the secrets and knowledge that trees and other living beings in the forests hold.

**The Difficulty of Being Good**  
The Difficulty of Being Good by Indian author Gurcharan Das offers an interpretation of the Mahabharata, and explores how the Mahabharata differs from other sacred texts.

**Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982**  
In Cho Nam-Joo's Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 that aided the #MeToo movement in Korea, the titular Kim talks passionately of the injustices she and her sisters undergo each day as they navigate childhood, adolescence, marriage and childbirth.

**The Art of Freedom**  
In her book, The Art of Freedom, Bernadette McDonald writes about Poland's Voytek Kurtyka, a fierce critic of military-style expeditions to 'conquer' the big peaks, calling him the greatest alpinist of all time for the purity of his climbs.



**Cabals and Cartels**  
Former World Bank adviser Rajib Upadhyay's Cabals and Cartels: An Up Close Look at Nepal's Turbulent Transition and Disrupted Development is an insider look at how the powerful multilateral lender interacted with Nepal's officialdom.

**Achaar Ghar**  
Enjoy home-cooked meals along with various choices of pickles prepared using recipes passed down from generations. Order various thalis, or try the pickle-infused pizza. Look at the menu on Foodmandu.  
*(01) 5541952*

**Belgian Waffles**  
Get mouthwatering waffles from Belgian Waffles Nepal. Order the classic Belgian Chocolate Waffle, or try the Kiki and Cream Waffle, Maple Waffle and more. Delivery options on Facebook.  
*9849636013*

**Haadi Biryani**  
Enjoy slow-cooked biryani from Haadi, seasoned with a secret spice blend that enhances the dining experience. Head to Facebook for takeaway and delivery details.  
*(01) 4438444*

## LEARNING RESOURCES

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



**Crash Course**  
A channel started by authors/educators John and Hank Green, of Vogbrothers fame, Crash Course is a one stop destination for educational material. Watch tons of awesome courses in one channel, from organic chemistry to literature to mythology.

**Veritasium**  
A channel of science and engineering videos featuring experiments, expert interviews, cool demonstrations, and discussions with the public about everything science. Check out the playlist on YouTube and find what appeals.



**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.

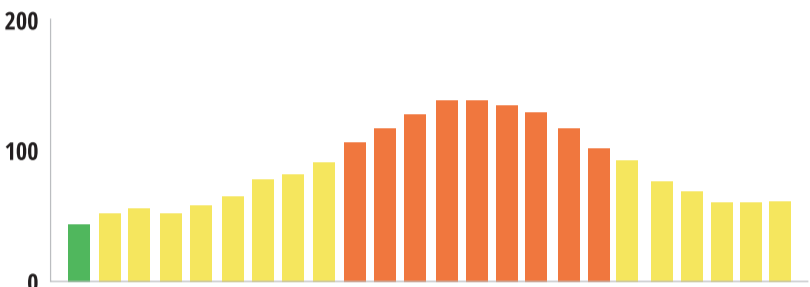
**Martin Chautari**  
Watch Martin Chautari discussion sessions on topics ranging from feminism to parenting to Nepali infrastructure. Sessions available on the Martin Chautari Facebook page. Or look for resources at <http://www.martinchautari.org.np>.



The rains this week washed off suspended particles in the air, even those harmful ones below 2.5 microns in diameter, just as fast as they were produced by the odd-even vehicles on the roads. The graph for AQI from 9AM 30 June to 9AM 1 July does not calculate gases like carbon monoxide given off mostly by motorcycles. But if it did, we would see that it is increasing because rain does not scrub them out.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
25° 19°	27° 19°	28° 19°

## AIR QUALITY INDEX



Just as forecast, monsoonal activity picked up again this week and June registered 25% above the rainfall average for the month. The squalls will continue into Friday, and after a brief slowdown on Saturday, pick up again on Sunday and into next week. This means we should be on high alert along streams and rivers, and saturated slopes could slide. The Tarai should brace itself for river erosion, and water impounded by embankments.



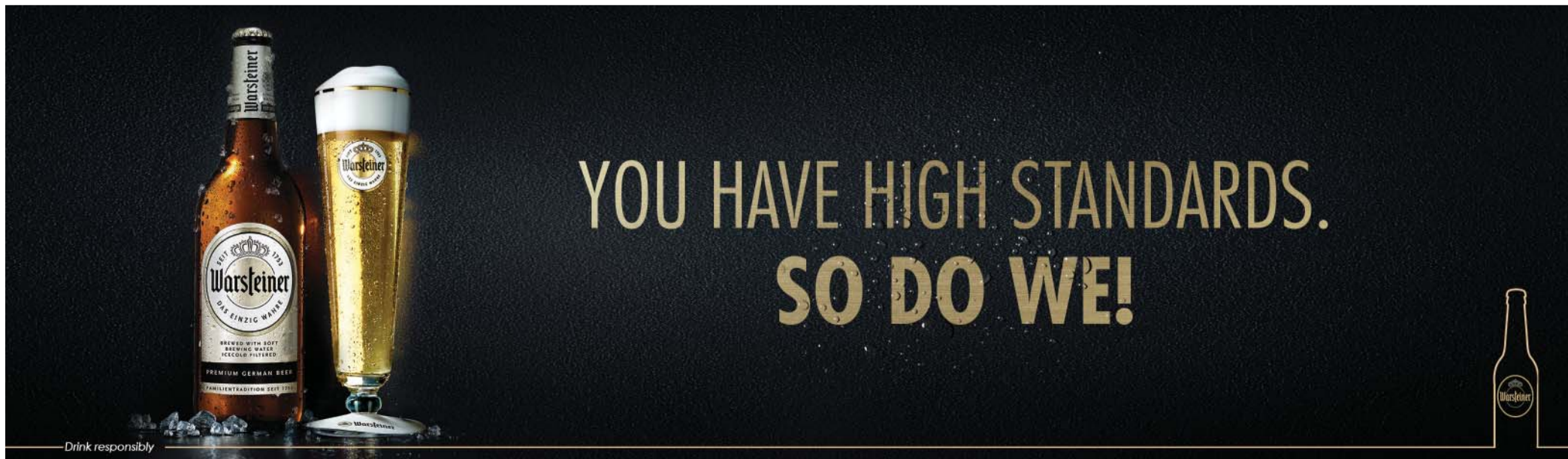
## OUR PICK

In this 2019 South Korean tv series *Vagabond*, struggling stuntman and aspiring martial arts director Cha Dal-gun's world crumbles after his Morocco-bound nephew dies in a plane crash. However, a chance encounter in Morocco, where a Dal-gun has travelled to grieve for his nephew, leads him to believe that the crash might not have been accidental after all. As enemies close in, Dal-gun must team up with covert operative Go Hae-ri and intelligence officer Gi Tae-ung to uncover the greed and corruption that led to the crash. Stars Lee Seung-gi, Bae Suzy, Shin Sung-rok, Moon Jeong-hee, and Lee Geung-young.

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 extraordinary lives of ordinary Nepalis

Journalists turned story-tellers bring out the tales of courage and fortitude

● **Shristi Karki**

The Euro 2020 matches are live on television, and many are watching the replays the next morning. But what is really going viral in Nepal these days is a short program of grandmothers playing a football match in the mountains of Lamjung district.

Two teams made up of members of the local Mother's Group of Siurung village face each other on a school football ground. The clip of the match is on social media accounts of the web series *Herne Katha*, and is accompanied by a running commentary, complete with slow motion replay of a free kick that is saved by goal-keeper Yoju Gurung.

"We saw the grandchildren playing, and I thought why shouldn't I also have a go at it before I die," says 67-year-old Gurung.

Posted on YouTube and broadcast on Kantipur Television every alternate Tuesday at 6:30pm, the web series *Herne Katha* has uplifting stories of struggle, survival and triumph — a message especially important at a time when Nepalis are suffering such hardships.

in 2003 when they took up a job at the same radio station. Kumar had come to Kathmandu after high school and enrolled in a journalism program, having, as he puts it, fallen into journalism. Chapagain had also always wanted to be a journalist. As their careers progressed, their paths would constantly cross.

"In those early days, our work almost exclusively involved going to the Reporters Club and waiting around for the politician of the day to give their speech," recalls Kumar. Chapagain nods, adding: "Or we would have to go to hotels to cover workshops and conferences."

They are seated, Chapagain on the floor and Kumar on a beanbag chair, and complete each other's sentences with the ease of two people who have been colleagues for a long time.

In locked-down Lalitpur, their office is quiet but for the sporadic rain outside and the occasional click of the mouse as the editor, Sandesh Pariyar, works in the other room on an upcoming project.

Kumar and Chapagain both worked for BBC Media Action's debate program *Sajha Sawal* as producers. Chapagain would eventually become the presenter of the popular show, a role that

content, says Kumar.

Editor Sandesh Pariyar joins in the conversation, and says it is the power of the story that is most important. And it has to be told with a minimalist approach in editing and camerawork, so that there are no distractions from the story being told.

Pariyar is a visual editor, and relatively new to the team. He says about his previous job, "I used to sit in the editing room and I could predict exactly what a politician would say and when even before I saw the clips. That is why I quit."

Three years on, things are changing, and the storytellers agree it is largely due to the increasing reach of YouTube, with 60% of Nepalis surveyed saying they use the platform. Almost 70% of the *Herne Katha* viewership is in the 18-35 age group and the program is very popular in the Nepali diaspora.

"Once, in a remote village in Achham, a young man asked if I was from Herne Katha," says Chapagain, who says the views on YouTube and being frequently on the trending list proves that their program is spreading a powerful positive message.

"Some of our best stories have come from the audiences themselves," Chapagain says. One



HERNE KATHA

Manjuliya Devi walks briskly through her village Morang district, going house to house to cut the hair and trim beards of residents. She has little time to waste, wedding guests are lining up. Her son wants his elderly mother to stop working, but Manjuliya Devi says she will not stop.

Near the Dang-Rolpa border, Yam Bahadur Gharti and his young son Purna Bahadur work in the districts' coal mines, deep in the belly of the scraggly hills. Father and son have taken a break for lunch, and talk about families back home who depend on their earnings.

In Surkhet, a clan of Raute nomads prepare to pack up their tents and move on to the next in Surkhet. Their timeless method of Swidden farming is now threatened by roads and monetised markets. In Marpha of Mustang district, elders are alone in the village below Dhaulagiri with their livestock and dogs. Everyone else has moved down to Kathmandu or Pokhara to escape the harsh winter.

These recent programs on *Herne Katha* unite Nepalis by showing us the lives of other Nepalis, providing hope and optimism at a time when most have little of both. The series that began airing in 2018 is created by ex-BBC journalists Bidhya Chapagain and Kamal Kumar who are constantly on the road to the remotest corners of Nepal to profile ordinary Nepalis living extraordinary lives.

Kumar and Chapagain met

propelled her to celebrityhood.

Yet even as their careers flourished, professional discontent had begun to creep in. The structure of the show, the Kathmandu-centred happenings, and interviewing politicians had become tiresome.

The two got along and worked well together, and at tea break would talk about doing something different, something more fulfilling. When they quit the BBC they were still not sure about the next stage in their careers, and the only thing they knew for sure was that they wanted to keep working on video.

Without equipment, they rented a small room as an office and started to brainstorm. Says Chapagain, "We got out of our comfort zone and took a risk. It was fearful and exciting at the same time." It was not until they were working on their documentary *Marisakeko Manchhe*, which won the Nepal Panorama Best Documentary at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival, that they realised what kind of stories they wanted to tell. *Herne Katha* was born and uploaded its first video three years ago about young female Muslim students in Kapilvastu.

"We had hoped for at least 20,000 views, but we got almost 50,000 in two days," Chapagain remembers. Getting out of a structured media environment allowed the two to be more flexible and experimental. It also made them accountable for their own

such program was *Mayako Katha*, about a family in Kupondole which takes care of 17 pets and other street dogs in its automobile workshop.

Chapagain and Kumar say they are not activists, they believe they are doing the kind of ethical journalism they learnt about in college, keeping true to their own personal values.

The program gets loads of feedback. Young people reach out to say the programs have made them understand their own country better. Teachers show *Herne Katha* videos to students in class.

"Most people in the cities who interact within their circle of people on the echo chamber that is Twitter have not seen the country. On the other hand, a larger part of the country is unconcerned with the discourse on those platforms. They have their own struggles," says Kumar, of the characters in their videos. Chapagain agrees that the mainstream media is also recognising the importance of grassroots storytelling, and that politics is not the only story.

"Stories do not need to be issues at all, it could just be people going about their daily lives," she says "And it is good to see evidence that the lives of ordinary Nepalis are worthy of being on the front pages." 📺

 [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

Go online to watch Herne Katha episodes



She may not know how to read or write, but she makes a living taking pictures



## Portrait of a

● **Monika Deupala**  
in Jumla

them can be quite demanding, but Nani Maya is patient and tries to meet their requests.

"I want *sindur* on my forehead," says one. "Make my skin look smooth and less dark," demands another, "can you get rid of the moles in my face?"

Nani Maya replies: "I will make you look like a heroine in a Bollywood movie." There are peals of laughter from the women.

Gothijyula village is a local hub in Sinja Valley with government offices, banks, and a rural market: residents of many surrounding villages travel there for official documents, to deposit money, and to do some shopping.

Nani Maya Buda has been running her small shop here selling electrical goods for ten years. The shelves are filled with mobile phones, batteries, watches, flash-lights, and other goods. Seeing the demand for mugshots for citizenship certificates, bank forms and school admissions, her husband started the small photo studio.

After he got a salaried job, he got his wife to take over the shop, and also trained her to take and edit pictures in a rudimentary studio, which is just a white cloth hanging on the wall outside the shop where there is more light. Customers sit on an empty oil drum, while Nani Maya tilts their





ALL PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

# photographer in rural Nepal

faces just right.

"I learned quickly, but made mistakes at first," Nani Maya recalls. "Once I accidentally formatted the entire drive and lost all data, and sometimes I waste too much paper while printing photographs."

Nani Maya's daughter died in an accident, and she now lives in a rented room with her husband and a younger son. The older son goes to school in Surkhet.

She is now well-known in the village, and the shop is usually crowded, especially at school

admission time when she is taking pictures back-to-back of young students. She is thrilled that they have a chance at education that she never did.

During festivals and religious functions, people in this region dance the *deuda*, holding hands.

Earlier, Nani Maya would have joined them, but these days she is too busy taking pictures and videos. Some of the dancers give her their phones to take pictures of them.

After a day at work in her shop studio when her husband come back from his job, Nani Maya

turns to her household chores: collecting firewood to cook dinner. "I am still learning to take better photos for my customers," she says, as she inspects a visitor's Canon EOS D7. "I want to save and buy a better camera like this someday." 📷

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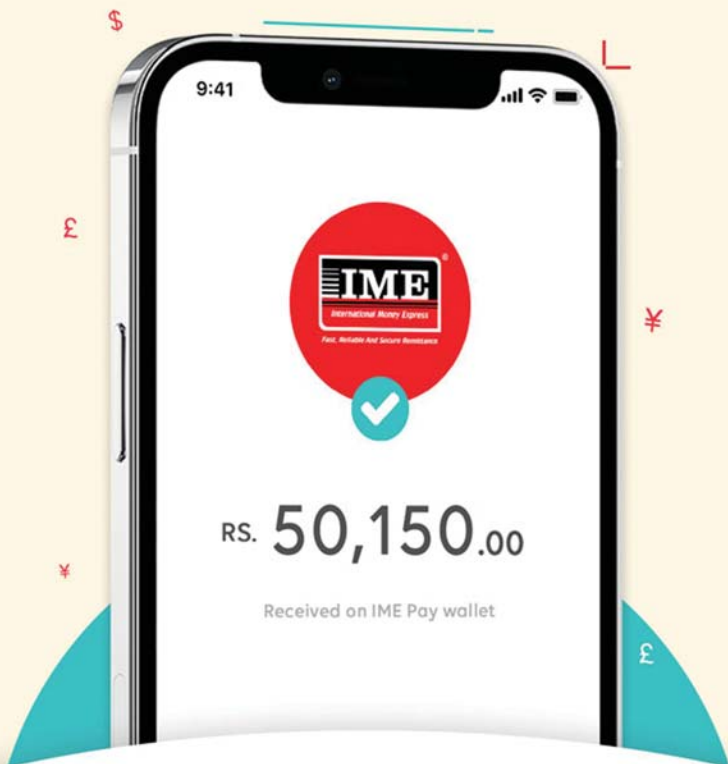
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# Overachiever govt

From time to time, as our nation state marches ahead to the drumbeat of history, we have to remind ourselves of the tremendous achievements of the Communist Party of Nepal (Un-unified Marxist-Lennonist) and its steadfast adherence to the dialectical materialism as espoused by Comrades Groucho Marx and John Lennon.

Because of space limitations, we cannot go into too much detail of its accomplishments here and now, but we will continue to list its overachievements in future instalments of this column.

1 The Ministry of Foreigner's Affairs has attended many virtual meetings with the international community for the procurement of vaccines, and has put donors on notice that Nepal will not take their promises lying down anymore — we will take it standing up with our hands outstretched. Beggars can't be choosers, but we have chosen to be beggars out of our own free will, and that choice should be universally respected.

2 The Ass has lost track of who is Nepal's Hon'ble Foreign Minister at this particular moment in our nation's history, but whoever it is, he seems to have put vaccine diplomacy into top gear. He has instructed Nepal's under-graduate ambassadors and SLC-pass plenipotentiaries to launch a diplomatic offensive, which means they have to be as offensive as possible as diplomats.

3 Many may not have noticed that GONE has put itself on a war-footing to access vaccines. This means we are ready to launch a pre-emptive strike to ensure supplies from rich countries that have overdosed themselves.

4 In a major breakthrough Nepal this week established diplomatic relations with Sierra Leone.

5 Many pooh-pooched the prime minister when he pledged to turn Nepal into Singapore within five years. He has accomplished his goal. All Nepalis have now attained the same annual per capita income as the village of Singhapur of Taplejung district. And prime minister-in-waiting Comrade Lotus Flower has clarified that when he once promised, during an unguarded moment, to make Nepal like Switzerland, he actually meant Swaziland. The error is regretted.

6 It is unfair that the Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City gets so much flak when he has been working tirelessly ever since the pandemic began to dismantle and disperse the charity organisation providing free lunches to daily wage earners. His message is clear: there is no such thing as a free lunch in the universe. And this breaking news: in another brave and audacious move a special hit squad of the KMC has risked life and limb to courageously erase a mural dedicated to Nepal's frontline health workers at the Dilli Bazar intersection.

7 Despite being busy with matters of state, it is commendable that three years after it came to power the grabberment has solved the most pressing need this country has ever faced: providing SUVs to members of the judiciary. Who said such feats could not be accomplished in our lifetime?

8 To reassure the start-up community, the Under-Financed Ministry is preparing an Economic White Paper. It is so called because it is completely blank.



The Ass

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