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DEUBA.5



At 75, Sher Bahadur Deuba is Nepal's prime minister for the fifth time in 26 years -- joining the ranks of other serial prime ministers Surya Bahadur Thapa and Girija Prasad Koirala.

That fact alone shows that the structural defects in Nepali politics remain intact, so politicians can keep returning to power without learning from, and atoning to, past mistakes.

Deuba first became prime minister of a coalition government under similar circumstances in 1995 after the Supreme Court overturned the decision to dissolve Parliament by Manmohan Adhikari, who was leading a minority UML government.

Since then, Deuba has led the country through key moments in Nepal's history: during King Birendra's reign, after King Gyanendra's coup, in interim governments after the peace accord in 2006, and during the first federal elections in 2017 under the new Constitution.

But Deuba's long political career is replete with mis-steps and controversy. He must have had a sense of déjà vu as he challenged K P Oli's leadership, since he himself dissolved Parliament during his second term in 2002, after which King Gyanendra sacked him for being 'incompetent'.

Deuba was then dismissed by his Nepali Congress (NC), which led him to found a breakaway faction. The same kind of power struggle that brought down the UML also plagued his party: first with GP Koirala and currently with Ram Chandra Paudel as the

NC prepares for its convention.

Deuba was in power when he waged war on the Maoists, who had placed a bounty, dead or alive, on his head. The fact that he now shares power with Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoist Centre proves the adage that there are no permanent enemies in politics.

In 2005, after his third tenure, Deuba was arrested and sentenced to two years in prison for corruption, but was released after the court dismissed the case.

After the 2017 election, Deuba handed over prime ministership to K P Oli. But even while Oli fought off the leadership challenge from the Dahal-Nepal combine, Deuba did not join them till earlier this year. It must have been Deuba's destiny to bookend Oli's term as Prime Minister and succeed him.

Deuba's fifth term is already off to a shaky start, and the choice of Pampha Bhushal and Janardan Sharma from the Maoist Centre in powerful ministries shows the kind compromises he has made with Dahal.

Deuba also has a month to face a floor test in the House. If he can get 136 votes out of 271 seats, he can govern till elections in 2023. If he cannot, then Nepal has to go for early elections in six months.

In May, the anti-Oli alliance under Deuba's leadership had the support of 149 lawmakers — 61 from his own NC, 49 from the MC, 23 members of the UML Nepal faction, and 12 from the Yadav-Bhattarai faction of the JSP.

**From the
fire into the
frying pan
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2**

The 23 votes of the Nepal faction will be crucial for Deuba, and some Nepal loyalists know that the UML will split if they vote

for Deuba. But party insiders say there is now too much bad blood for Oli to offer Nepal the olive branch.

Most Nepalis, while glad that the uncertainty in the UML has ended, are dismayed that the parties could find no one more promising than Deuba to lead the country.

Deuba's first task is to bring his disparate Cabinet members to make up for time that the Oli government squandered in dealing with the Covid-19 health and economic emergency, obtain vaccines to prevent a third wave, and deal with a disastrous monsoon season.

They do not have high hopes. **Shristi Karki**

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From the fire into the frying pan

So, this is the price Nepalis had to pay for two leaders of the ruling party not being able to sort out their personal differences. This is the toll the UML has also had to bear for the intractable ego-clash between its two headstrong leaders.

If any entity wanted to shatter Nepal's communist parties into smithereens, they could not have done a better job than K P Oli. First, he decoupled the NCP from the UML, and then went on to split the UML itself. Along the way, he also detached the ex-Maoist members of the JSP from the main party.



Those who blame this on an outside anti-Communist force are deluding themselves. The Nepal Communist Party, the Maoist Centre or the United Marxists-Leninists are only euphemistically 'communist', and they have disintegrated because of the tunnel vision and contradictions of their own comrades.

It may be an indication of just how far off-script K P Oli had drifted while trying to stave off multiple mutinies that he brought two personalities as disparate as Sher Bahadur Deuba and Pushpa Kamal Dahal together.

To be sure, Deuba and Dahal have shared power before. But this time, the two sworn enemies who tried to physically annihilate each other till 2006 have joined hands to 'protect democracy'.

Seeing many of the venomous comments on social media, most Nepalis see through this. They are glad the prolonged paralysis of government is over, but aghast that politicians with such chequered pasts have become guardians and defenders of democracy and constitutionalism.

Each of the members of the anti-Oli alliance are now demanding their pound of flesh from Deuba, and the first ministerial appointments are already an indication of the division of the spoils.

Deuba has another 28 days to win a confidence test in the House, and he has kept key portfolios as carrots for the JSP faction, and perhaps even UML dissidents.

Licking wounds in his Balkot lair, Oli will

also be trying to retain as many of the Nepal faction as possible in the UML, even though he probably will not mind untethering Nepal once and for all.

Oli and Nepal have inflicted too many unkind cuts on each other, and are seething so much with vengeance that even mediators have given up. Oli is banking on enough of Nepal's supporters valuing party unity for the next elections over their loyalty to Nepal.

While Deuba grapples with trying to appease members of his own NC, Dahal's MC and the Bhattarai-Yadav JSP, Oli's sights are already on the next elections.

Governing Nepal is difficult at the best of times, but try grappling with the multiple crises the country faces during the pandemic. Knowing Deuba's past track record, and the near impossible task of reconciling the ambitions of the Maoists in government in the run-up to elections, Oli must sense that the next vote will be anti-incumbent.

As soon as he became prime minister, Deuba already faced strong pressure from Dahal to give the Maoists the powerful Home Ministry portfolio. Deuba appointed trusted supporter Bal Krishna Khand as Home Minister, but in return had to hand over the finance portfolio to the Dahal-appointed Janardan Sharma.

Dahal himself has to balance expectations and ambitions among his own comrades, and has superseded

other aspirants to appoint Sharma to the Finance Ministry which controls budget allocations and money flows — crucial at election time.

The other Maoist in Deuba's cabinet is Pampha Bhusal with the energy and water resource portfolio, another ministry with access to purse strings.

However much many disliked Oli, most Nepalis are asking if the only alternative was to bring a four-time prime minister back for the fifth time. And Deuba's first ministerial appointments portend it is politics as usual: a predictable lack of transparency, woeful failure of governance and service delivery.

That is exactly what the UML is hoping for, so that the failure of the past three years will be blamed on the incumbent rather than on Oli.

Deuba could launder his legacy by proving everyone wrong by launching an effective social safety net campaign to help Nepalis whose livelihoods are impacted by the pandemic, and to confront the pandemic by vaccinating 70% of the population by end-2021.

Only that will convince Nepalis that this Deuba avatar is different.

Prime Minister Deuba has his work cut out, but can he deliver where he has failed so many times before?

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Clean transport

In 2001, not long after highly polluting Vikram diesel tempos were taken off the streets, the annual budget was expected to come down strongly on gas-run vehicles, previously thought to be a cleaner alternative.

The then Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat addressed the issue in the budget by removing gas-run vehicles, but not those that use petrol or diesel, from the list of imports eligible for the 99% customs and 100% VAT exemption.

The report published in issue #51 13-19 July 2001 20 years ago this week pointed to the need to increase emission ceilings for cleaner vehicles or not subsidise the polluting ones in the first place.

20 years down the line, with the worsening impact of the climate crisis and air pollution, there is more pressure to switch to clean energy, albeit not without resistance. State revenue often takes precedence over the environment and public health as our planners have proven time and again.

This year's budget repealed the excise duty on battery-operated cars, while cutting customs duty down to 10%, which was revoked only the year before. But there is little to no work or investment to show for promoting electric mass transit.

The government has yet to ensure Valley residents with safe, reliable and clean public transport, as was the case two decades ago. Excerpts:

The ideal gas to run public transport on would be CNG, but it would have to be imported, the economics would not work out if it were brought in



from anywhere else. LPG use in transport reduces pollution, but does not eliminate it, as Nepal's zero-emission labels misleadingly suggests. Vehicles running on cleaner fossil fuels are categorised as either low-, ultra-low or and super ultra-low emission vehicles in many countries, including India.

The truly ironic part is that while all attention is being lavished on gas-run autos, the real zero-emission mobiles, electric vehicles (the battery-operated Safa tempos), get no similar concessions. They are required to pay VAT and only get a one percent exemption from the 15 percent

import duty on batteries.

If we are serious about having the cleanest possible vehicles on our roads, the government should be concentrating on producing EVs. «But it is not interested, and we cannot mass produce electric vehicles cheaply without government support,» said one electric vehicle producer who did not wish to be named. Industry experts tell us that batteries, their disposal and recycling facilities are not as big a problem as the drain on government revenue due to mis-targeted subsidies and increased pollution.

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

ON THE WEB

NEPAL AND SIKKIM

As long as the Nepali Rupee is chained to its Indian counterpart any notion of genuine Independence or Sovereignty is an illusion ('Letting go of Sikkim's ghost', Ajay Pradhan, #1069).

Alex Ferguson

• For those of us born in the early nineties this article provides a thorough but succinct description and analysis of most of our present preoccupations in politics and highlights the need for Nepal and Nepalis to look ahead to the future instead of fretting about the past. Thank you so much.

Nep Hygge

• Ajayaji, many thanks for your expository article featuring Nepal, India and China. Nepal has owned durable peace through hard and soft diplomacy over the period of 50 years in the past.

Gokul Pokhrel

• There is very little that you could disagree with in this very succinctly written piece. I don't think India will ever annex Nepal, it is getting out of Nepal what it needs, without having to pay for its upkeep. Also, there are millions of Nepalis in India. Do they figure in the whole India/Nepal dynamic at all?

Krishna Joshi

MIGRATING WOMEN

What kind of senseless ban is this ('Nepal town to ban mothers migrating', Upasana Khadka, #1069)? No mother willingly leaves behind her child to seek financial security abroad. With this ban is the local authority providing an alternative or a good paying job to these women?

Sarala Nepal

• Raising a child is the responsibility of both a father and a mother, a woman is not just a caregiver. People with power, as with others, need to be sensitised on gender issues. When will patriarchy, religion and cultures be challenged and more equitable policies are implemented?

Bandana Shrestha

NEPAL'S EDUCATION

Maybe western governments, including the U.S. could enlist the help of retirees from around the world who are familiar with remote learning platforms such as Zoom ('Lessons not learned from the pandemic', Dhurba Basnet, #1069). Perhaps the government of Nepal could also enlist the help of Jeff Bezos who could help get the Internet to remote areas of the country with Project Kuiper.

Julie Palais

• Because of the pandemic, Nepal's digital divide is creating an education divide. While we are hustling and bustling to attend our virtual classes, the students of the government schools are left hanging without proper resources.

Shikshya Shahi

COVID VACCINES

Tax and revenues are used up on salary, vehicles and medical treatment of leaders ('Nepal-Bhutan vaccine appeal to European Commission', nepalitimes.com). Institutional corruption and bad governance is at an all time high and people are burdened with foreign loans.

Janak Sapkota

• I hope all the front-liners and old folks get it first ('Johnson and Johnson in Nepal', nepalitimes.com).

Zwon Raz

• Fairness is a concept which is unfathomable in Nepal, although a wishful and hopeful thought ('Once Nepal gets vaccines, they need to be fairly distributed', page 10-11).

Sugat S

• There are only two solutions to the current pandemic problem ('Vaccines too little, too late for Nepal?', Sonia Awale, #1069). Either leave it to destiny (those who will die, will die and those who will live, will live) or get vaccines. Vaccine supply is where the government effort should be concentrated in instead of the never-ending power struggle.

Suresh Pun

POLITICS AND PANDEMIC

Only multi-parties are visible, we are waiting for democracy to appear so that an informed judgement can be passed ('Parliamentary whiplash', Editorial, #1069).

Kyu Yeti

MONSOON

We need professional drones that have longer range and flight time. The NDRMA should deploy those with Lidar ('Drones to the rescue in Melamchi', #1069).

GeoHub Nepal

• We are seeing radical changes in monsoon and the negative impact of landslides and flooding because of haphazard construction and climate change ('Monsoon submerges Kathmandu environs', nepalitimes.com).

Ngawang Tenzin

• Kathmandu had less than half million residents back in 1980s. Today, there are more than 5 million people here. It is overcrowded, there are not enough passages for rainwater to flow. Flooding will continue unless we take measures to care for nature. Gyurme Dondup

MITHILA ART

Art helping women find their financial independence ('Vibrant Mithila art thrives in Nepal', Anita Bhetwal, nepalitimes.com). This is such an inspiring story.

Nistha Nakarmi

• Mithila paintings are very popular worldwide but it isn't just art. It's a bond between people, the paintings have themes of religion, love and fertility.

Bishnu Vimal

• Cultural art forms like Mithila art needs to be integrated into the school curriculum. But instant changes into the curriculum could be messy, so crash/seasonal courses during vacations could be a way to start it off.

Apeksha Chhetri

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



The Kosi's Sorrow, and Scope

by Kanak Mani Dixit

The topography of this mighty river has shaped Nepal's history and culture, and can also determine its future, but only if we respect its geology, hydrology and basin climate. Read up on the Kosi Barrage and plans for a high dam. Watch the field video on our website.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

No Direction

by Pratibha Tuladhar

The author recalls a harrowing experience with a male teacher, still fresh on her mind 17 years later. Find out how she dealt with it in the aftermath and how she overcame the feelings of guilt, only on nepalitimes.com

Most popular on Twitter

Lessons not learned from the pandemic

by Dhurba Basnet

There was a class divide in Nepal's education even before Covid-19. The pandemic just widened the gap between urban-rural, private-government, and rich-poor. Go online for details, watch a video and join the discussion.

Most commented



Letting go of Sikkim's ghost

by Ajay Pradhan

Nepal must live its policy of peaceful coexistence, be a peace-keeper in areas of conflict, and move forward as a confident nation, once and for all shedding its fear of Sikkim's ghost. Don't miss this longread.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The lack of physical classes and face-to-face learning have meant that even students who are attending online classes have suffered. But a majority of students, especially in government schools, have not had any classes at all. Dhurba Basnet reports.



Sakar Pudasaini @yeti140
Prioritise vaccinating for 12-18 year olds + teachers and get them back to school. It's about time to restart classes.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The devastating floods in#Melamchion the night of 16 June provided a test case of how#drones can be deployed in future#disasterresponse in#Nepalto assess damage, rush relief and to quash rumours.



Nimesh Dhungana @NimeshDhungana
Interesting article on how newer actors and technologies (in this case drones) are altering the landscape of humanitarian/disaster governance. The socio-political consequences of their deployment, effectiveness, scalability, sustainability are questions worth investigating.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Prolonged winter drought caused nationwide wildfires in#Nepal, and this was followed by destructive floods at the start of the monsoon. The impact of the#climatecrisis on melting ice and extreme weather will intensify in the coming decades.



Farsis-shimajiro @FShimajiro
If the Himalaya lost a third of its snow by the end of this century, the impact on the ecosystems would be unimaginable. I would like to look at every facet of my lifestyle to emit less carbon dioxide.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepal town to ban mothers migrating. Even though Sri Lankan experience shows restricting women migrant workers with babies does not work. Upasana Khadka reports.



Susan Guest @SusanGuest
Sounds like another way people have of controlling women's bodies.



Exploited Cactus @in_the_desert
This country is obsessed with oppressing women.



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No light at end of trans-Himalayan train tunnel

Engineering, financial and geopolitical challenges remain for Kerung-Kathmandu railway line

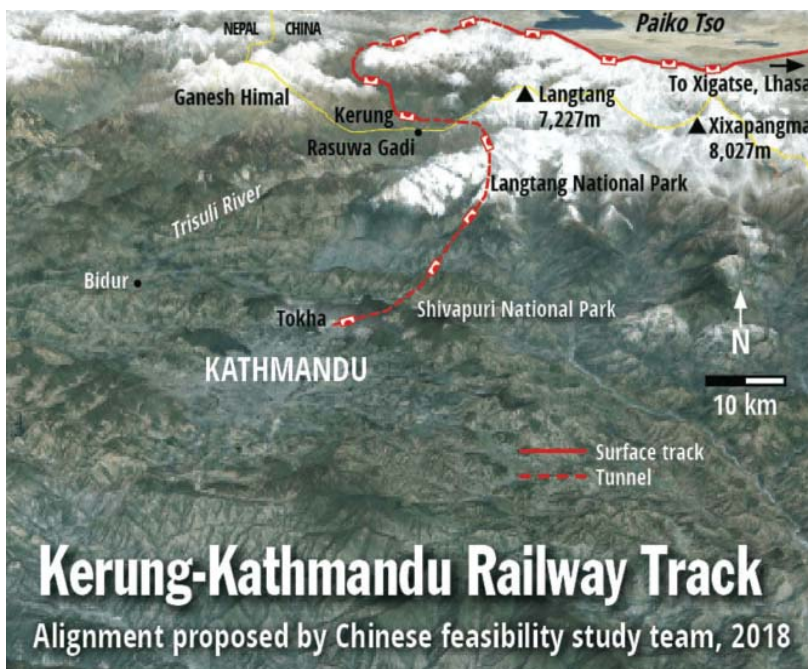
The prospect of a trans-Himalayan connectivity has historically been a sensitive geopolitical issue since it concerns the region's main rivals: China and India.

Even back in 1961, when Nepal and China signed an agreement to build a highway linking Kathmandu to Lhasa there were misgivings about Beijing's strategic motive. India and China were about to go to war along the Himalaya, and the Cold War was at its height. King Mahendra allayed those fears by famously saying: "Communism does not travel by taxi."

Sixty years later, similar suspicions have surfaced as China moves full steam ahead to connect its Tibetan Autonomous Region with new bullet train links that could ultimately be extended to the Nepal border, and even Kathmandu as a part of its Belt Road Initiative (BRI).

On 25 June, China made a high-profile inauguration of a 435km section of the Lhasa-Nyingchi Electrified High-speed Rail that will be a part of the new Sichuan-Tibet Railway. When connected to Kerung via Lhasa and Xigatse, the train could put Lhasa within six hours distance and Chengdu within 19 hours from the Nepal border.

While China makes rapid progress on rail connectivity, on the Nepal side of the border talk of a trans-Himalayan railway is only political tokenism. Successive governments in Kathmandu have not even been able to maintain existing highways to Kodari and Rasuwagadi to international standards.



But even the Chinese seem to be daunted by the cost, estimated at \$5.5 billion and sheer magnitude of a trans-Himalayan railway, especially its engineering challenge. Nepali Times had revealed in 2019 the content of a Chinese pre-feasibility study that proposed 170km alignment from Kerung to Kathmandu through a series of tunnels below the Himalaya.

A report in Railway Standard Design last week confirmed that the proposed alignment would include 30km of tunnels beneath Langtang National Park.

Liang Dong, a lead engineer with the China Railway First Survey and Design Institute Group will be presenting his report to the Chinese and Nepal governments.

He said the Himalayan Tunnel route from Kerung (Gyirong)

to Kathmandu would be more challenging and costly, but other routes were rejected either because the gradients were too steep, went through protected areas, or were geologically unstable and exposed to glacial lake outburst floods due to climate change.

The possibility of trans-Himalayan connectivity was first mooted as far back as 1973 by Mao Zedong in a meeting with King Birendra in Beijing. Since then, China built the Qinghai-Tibet Railway connecting Lhasa to Xining, and is now working on the Sichuan-Tibet Railway to Chengdu and Kunming.

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway was extended from Lhasa to Xigatse in 2014, and in three years those tracks will reach Kerung on the Nepal border, only 70km in a straight line north of Kathmandu.

Even though it is just a secondary route in China's ambitious BRI, Nepal could gain valuable access to Chinese seaports and trade centres, especially as relations with long-time trade partner India blow hot and cold.

China had committed to financing Detailed Project Reports (DPR) for a 72-km rail line between Kathmandu and Rasuwagadi during President Xi Jinping's visit in October 2019, but since then, government planners have blamed the pandemic for delays in taking plans forward.

Nepal has lost valuable time twiddling thumbs and waiting for China's support, even while China aims to finish its Sichuan-Lhasa rail line by 2030.

A Kathmandu-China connection will prove to be costly and difficult. Nepal has no railway infrastructure to speak of, and in any case would be unable to bear the financial cost of building a difficult and expensive tunnel across the Himalaya. 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK



Greenlight for Lower Arun

Indian state-owned SJVN Limited has begun initial planning on the Lower Arun Hydropower Project after obtaining survey permission. The 679MW project based on the peaking run of river system will cost Rs134 billion.

SJVN, selected during the Nepal Investment Summit in 2019 is responsible for the development, ownership, operation and transfer structures of the project, and has to present a detailed project report to the Investment Board within two years of signing the MoU.



Unilever Covid support

Unilever Nepal has donated a consignment of oxygen concentrators, N-95 masks and PPEs to the Health Ministry, Birendra Military Hospital, Federation of Nepal Chambers of Commerce and Hetauda Government Hospital. It also contributed funds to set up an oxygen plant in Makwanpur.

Petroleum price hike

Nepal Oil Corporation has once again hiked the price of petroleum products, only two weeks after the last increment. Petrol now costs Rs129 per litre while diesel and kerosene cost Rs112. LPG prices have gone to Rs1,425 per cylinder. Aviation fuel for domestic flights is now valued at Rs84 per litre while for international flights it will cost \$754 per kilolitre.



MV Superveloce in Nepal

Sykar Trading's SJ MOTO bike gallery has unveiled the limited



edition MV Agusta Superveloce Serie Oro. The bike comes with features including the in-line three-cylinder engine and a very compact body structure, designed for both racing and regular riding. There are only 300 units globally.

Nissan LEAF EV

Bookings for zero-emission Nissan LEAF EV have opened with an introductory price of \$502,900. The car comes with an eight-year battery warranty for the first 160,000kms and gives a maximum output of 110kW and 320 Nm of instant torque.

"Not only are we delivering the right technology with the best performance and zero-emission, but we're also providing confidence through smart driving," says Sandeep Kumar Sharda of Pioneer Moto Corp, the sole distributor of Nissan and Datsun in Nepal.

No to privatisation

The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation has refuted claims that the Nepal Airlines Corporation (NAC) is up for



privatisation. NAC staffers earlier this week padlocked its offices after a Board of Directors meeting on June 27 decided to forward a draft management letter and privatisation proposal to the Ministry.

Mobile crackdown



Authority's Mobile Device Management System comes into operation. Visitors to Nepal will be allowed to bring only one mobile set with the purchase bill.

Mobile phones imported illegally without paying customs duty or bought without a bill will become non-functional from 16 July onwards as Nepal Telecommunications



ADB new country director

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has appointed Arnaud Cauchois as the new Country Director for Nepal. Cauchois, a French national, has over three decades of experience in the development sector, including over 15 years with the ADB.

Says Cauchois: "My immediate priority will be to support the Government of Nepal as it addresses both the immediate and longer-term health, economic, and social impacts of the Covid-19 crisis."

Esewa Remittance Payment

Esewa Money Transfer and Georgian remittance giant IntelExpress have signed an agreement that will make the transfer for Nepalis in Italy, Greece, the UK, Cyprus and Georgia smoother. Remittance sent from IntelExpress can be collected from more than 8,000 Esewa agents.

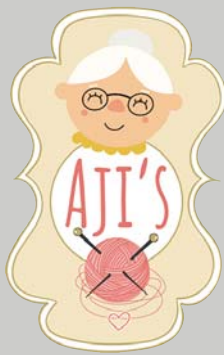


Now we are talking

Excess screen time during the pandemic is turning people to podcasts and the value of voice

Get started

A shortlist of five popular Nepali podcasters with content ranging from development and environment, climate, politics to feminism, society, technology and innovation, music and entertainment.



What do rapper Snoop Dogg, actor Alec Baldwin, comedian Bill Burr, health guru Jillian Michaels, entrepreneur and influencer Gary Vee, startup investor Tim Ferris, relationship therapist Esther Perel, talk show host Oprah and the Obamas have in common? Podcasts.



TECH AWAY
Saniaa Shah

Podcasts are perfect for those who like to listen to experts talk about topics they are interested in, or passionate about. They are a terrific way to entertain yourself without staring at the screen, while doing household chores. In fact, podcasts are a hit with multitaskers who love to listen to something stimulating while they are driving, cooking or folding laundry.

Some people even listen to podcasts while they are on the treadmill. Step aside, Justin Bieber. Joe Rogan is the new joggers' jam. Additionally, bedtime reading has been swiftly replaced by bedtime listening, especially with adults who prefer to close their eyes and fall asleep to a pleasant, confident voice that they have grown rather fond of.

Information, entertainment, or education: the purpose of a podcast does not matter, as much as the quality of content. Podcasts tend to be of all kinds: in-depth conversations on fascinating subject matters, comedy and silly banter to destress and smile with, business and financial advice from industry experts, insights and experience exchanges on parenting and child care, marketing tips and tricks, guided meditations, post-match sports talk, movie breakdowns, TV series discussions, literary interviews and reviews, or cultural commentary. Podcasts are popular because they are easily accessible, just a few taps away, either on the browser or inside an app, and usually free.

What makes podcasting different is its ability to establish intimacy between strangers. Much like radio, it helps the listener form a relationship or connection with the voice they listen to, which is why podcasters enjoy impressive levels of loyalty. After a few hours of relevant and valuable content, audiences keep returning to the same creators for more episodes.

Another unique selling point of podcasts is that they are highly engaging, with astonishingly low drop-off rates, which means that they are ripe territory for advertisers to disrupt and catch ears at. Host-read advertisements also mean that listeners trust the product more, so radio ad-like commercials do not need

to interrupt an episode mid-conversation.

There is something real and human about listening to other people talk on a podcast that is radically different from TV, film and YouTube entertainment. We could say that podcasts are a regular staple in digital media culture and consumption, and not just a passing trend. Podcast culture is interesting and diverse, like human society itself, because there are podcast newbies, podcast junkies and everybody else in between – there is no such thing as sameness when it comes to understanding listeners, and the only way to get to know anything is to test and learn.

We are not talking about cutting edge technology or a recent discovery of this type of audio media, and yet, podcasts reached peak popularity in 2020, especially since the pandemic. People had time, and needed free entertainment. TV show hosts and actors needed an outlet that did not require entering a set or using complicated equipment.

What is more, Zoom fatigue and excess screen time has meant people need to give their eyes a break, and keep hands free. Timing wise, podcasts are perfect for today's app-savvy audiences, but the funny thing is, they got published before the Internet age.

Back in the eighties, podcasts were called 'audio blogging' -- a way of recording thoughts and feelings, like written blogs, but did not quite take off because they lacked ease of distribution. In 2003, when the iPod was a prevalent personal device through which audio blogs could be downloaded, the term 'podcasting' ('pod' from 'iPod') came into being.

By 2005, it went mainstream once Apple added podcasting as a feature on iTunes. By 2018, with most carrying smartphones with mobile data on them, podcasts saw another huge spike, and in 2020, when celebrities turned to podcasting as a means of making content, and subsequently, earning big bucks, podcasts were finally seen as a simple, friendly and convenient medium for people everywhere to make entire careers out of.

Those new to the world of podcasts can start by exploring a few apps that help find the channels that resonate with them, and even inspire them to start their own podcast. Apple Podcasts, an early leader offers millions of unique podcasts that are well curated, and is available to iPhone users.

iPhone users can check out quality podcasts on the app from all over the world. However, the next best podcast platform, Google Podcasts, is both Apple and Android-friendly. Google Podcasts has some cool content, and can provide personal recommendations and manage listening activity.

Spotify, known for its music collection, offers 2.2 million podcasts. Audible, an Amazon product, is known for audiobooks but also hosts 100,000 podcasts. TuneIn Radio, which streams more than 100,000 radio stations, boasts a rather large collection of 5.7 million podcasts.

Castbox, a popular player, scrubs podcasts from all over the web, including iTunes. It is totally free, comes without ads, and is especially great for those interested in language learning

through listening.

Those who want to launch their own unique podcast can try Podbean, an Android podcast app where they can also create their own podcast, not just stream and download content, straight from the phone. Podbean offers a few handy features like adding sound effects such as applause, drum rolls or laughs, and placing music clips in your episode to give it a personality as well as create smooth transitions.

And saving the best for last, there is Anchor, a professional yet

beginner-friendly app that helps users record their own podcast and publish them online across listening platforms. Anchor is the right choice if you want to regularly publish episodes and grow your audience organically. It offers unlimited hosting, and makes money off your content, but also serves up ways to monetise your podcast. How about it? Now we are talking. 🇳🇵

Saniaa Shah runs Studio Aakar, a film production studio. Her marketing career helped her develop a keen interest in tech and digital culture.

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His artistic legacy lives on

Two decades after he died, family, friends and students say Nepal ought to value its foremost artist more



Lain Singh Bangdel paints a portrait of Balkrishna Sama in 1975.



MONA

and eventually became its vice-chancellor. He later went on to become the founding general-secretary of Nepal Art Council and the New Art Circle, where he taught 15 talented new artists for free.

Bangdel also wrote three Nepali-language novels between 1948 to 1951, *Muluk Bahira*, *Maitighar* and *Langada Ko Sathi*. They were tales of struggle and hardship of families in the mountains. Bangdel's eyes saw the world: he lived through wars and revolutions, he saw pain, angst and misery all around him, and he transferred them to canvas and text.

In later years, Bangdel went on to become an art historian and was an activist lobbying for the return of Nepal's stolen religious objects. He wrote *Early Sculptures of Nepal* (1982), *2500 years of Nepali Art* (1987), and *Inventory of Stone Sculptures of the Kathmandu Valley* (1995). However, his most important book, and one that is still as relevant today as when it was written in 1989, is *Stolen Images of Nepal* which documented 300 missing religious objects from Kathmandu. Most of them are still missing.

Bangdel built the home in Sanepa with his wife Manu Kumari Thapa, a nurse, who figures prominently in his biography, *Against the Current: The Life of Lain Singh Bangdel*. In the book, Bangdel narrates his beautiful love story with Manu and her undying support for all his work. She went on to become a matron in Prasuti Griha, and is now in her mid-90s, still living in the home she built with her husband in Sanepa.

Dina was the sunshine of Lain Singh and Manu's life. An only child, she was her father's confidante in the later part of career as an art historian, and shared the same passion for Nepal's heritage and their preservation.

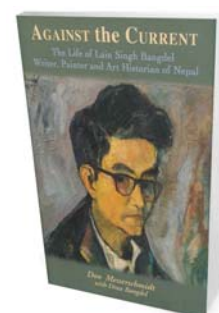
Dina Bangdel and Bandana Thapa were childhood friends, and they used to walk school from home together during which Dina would share extraordinary stories of her adventures with her father, of going to various heritage sites and taking pictures.

"I remember Dina's excitement when she narrated her father's work to document stolen idols and we could all feel her passion even when young," Bandana Thapa recalls.

Dina's death left a lot of her work to preserve her father's legacy incomplete. But Lain Singh Bangdel lives on through the brush strokes of his students, some of whom have now become accomplished artists themselves.

Abstract painter Jeevan Rajopadhyay studied under Bangdel till the year he died, and has only fond memories of a gentle and patient teacher. "If it wasn't for Bangdel Sir, maybe I would never have been an artist in the first place," he said.

Rajopadhyay was also shocked by how little his teacher's painting fetched in an European auction. He said: "Even in the nineties, Bangdel's paintings were selling for at least Rs500,000 in Japan's Fukushima Museum. He is the father of Nepal's modern art. We need to value his work more." 🇳🇵



Against the Current: The Life of Lain Singh Bangdel, Writer, Painter and Art Historian of Nepal by Don Messerschmidt with Dina Bangdel
Orchid Press, 21 July 2006
258 pages

● Alisha Sijapati

On 15 September, a UK-based art promotion site MutualArt sent an auction notification to its over 500,000 members. For sale was a rare 1955 watercolour painting of a woman, and it bore the signature of Nepal's foremost artist, Lain Singh Bangdel.

Within two days of the announcement, the painting was bought for £100, and that price understandably left Nepal's artist community, connoisseurs of Nepali art and Bangdel's own family members disappointed.

"The 100 pound auction price is extremely low for someone of Bangdel's stature," stated Sangeeta Thapa, art curator and director of Siddhartha Art Gallery. "Nepali artists and their artwork are finally getting the momentum they deserve, but this is dismal."

Thapa is a lifelong admirer of Bangdel's work, and says she owes a lot to "Lainji" to launch her own career in art. She worked with Bangdel's daughter, Dina, in promoting Nepali art in the international arena. Dina's sudden death left a deep void in the country's art scene, Thapa says, and Nepal will probably never have a better father-daughter duo than of the Bangdels.

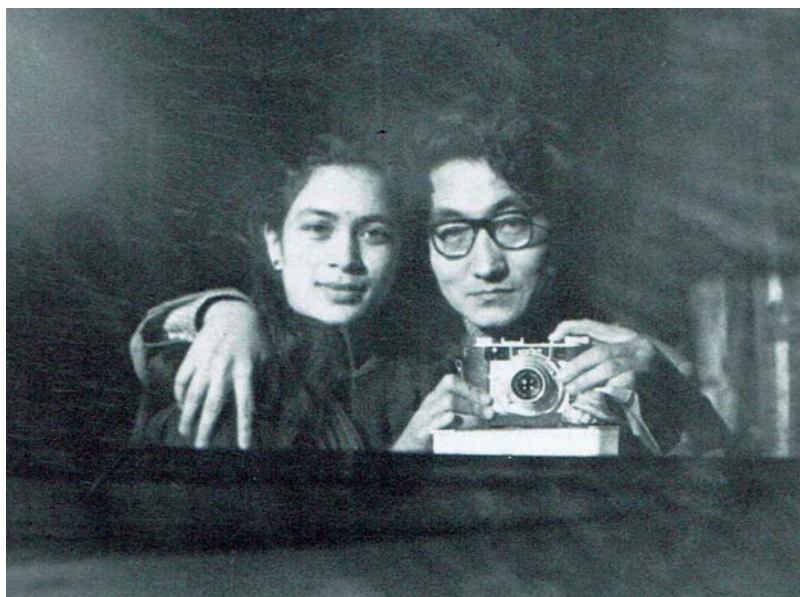
The auction in September was organised by the UK-based Burstow & Hewett via The Abbey Auction Gallery, and the watercolour portrait was under the lot #1063. But this is not the only Bangdel painting that has been sold abroad at such a low price: three other abstracts were sold via a Canadian auction house, Westbridge Fine Art Auction House, in 2016 and 2017, each at less than 700 Canadian dollars.

"In places like Canada, we can assume people haven't heard enough about Bangdel and that could be what determined the price," says art crime professor Erin L Thompson at the City University of New York.

Dina's husband Bibhakar Shakya is also saddened to see the latest auction price: "Most of the paintings are in our collection at home, and my father-in-law never really sold paintings, he mostly gifted them in the later years of his life."

Shakya has been keeping Lain Singh Bangdel's legacy alive with their son Deven, cataloguing the collection of 300 to 350 of his father-in-law's paintings at their home in Sanepa. He also plans to publish the English translation of Bangdel's book *Langada Ko Sathi*, and find a permanent gallery for the paintings.

"It was Dina's dream to carry on in her



Lain Singh Bangdel and Manu Kumari Thapa in a mirror 'selfie' after their Paris wedding.

father's footsteps, it is my responsibility to pick things up from where she left," says Shakya, who says Bangdel could write as beautifully as he painted.

Lain Singh Bangdel was born to Ranglal Rai in 1919 near Darjeeling. As a child, he would paint everywhere, even on the walls of his home and street with images of gods and goddesses. Ranglal worked at a tea estate, and one day came home with a small collection of postcards given to him by his British employer. Bangdel was only eight then, but the images of various Impressionists and post-Impressionist artists, Corot, Millet, Monet, Manet and Turner were etched in his young mind. More than the others, Bangdel said later it was the French painter Corot whose work 'captured his soul' and inspired him to pursue his passion.

It was only in high school that Bangdel came to realise that he wanted to be an artist. In 1939, he joined Calcutta Arts College. Calcutta was where that he met Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray, and the two became lifelong friends.

In 1952, Bangdel enrolled at the French National Art School in Paris. Part of the cost was defrayed in a strange way. Bangdel had painted a portrait of Balkrishna Sama and it impressed General Keshar Shumsher Rana so much that he sent over Rs5,000, quite a hefty sum in those days.

In Paris, Bangdel was introduced to the works of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, and he was deeply influenced by their style. But he felt the tug of home, and was taken by Laxmi Prasad Devkota's *Muna Madan* which

impacted on his paintings and writings. Bangdel later used the epic as a theme for his most famous impressionistic works.

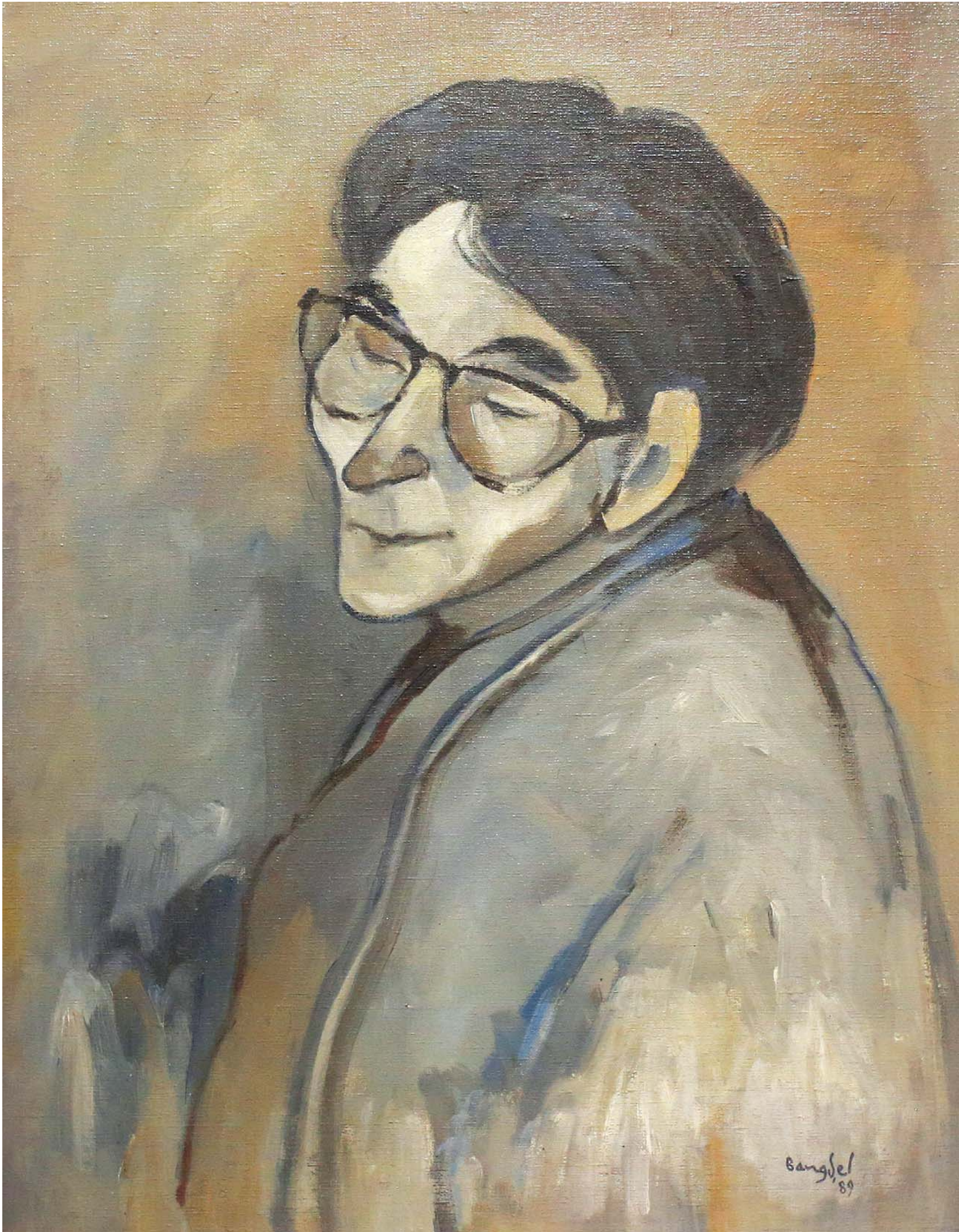
In later years, Bangdel went on to receive many national and international awards, including the French Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, the Order of the Crown of Italy (Commendatore) for his contribution to the study of Nepal's early history and art. In 1987, Bangdel was awarded the honorary Knight Commander of the Victorian Order by Queen Elizabeth II.

Bangdel died in October 2002 in Lalitpur at age 83. Two decades have passed, and many young Nepalis have never heard of him. His son-in-law Shakya wants to change this. "It is due to Lain Singh Bangdel that Nepal's modern and contemporary art started being noticed internationally, and we have to keep his works alive," he says.

Lain Singh Bangdel was not just a painter, he was also an established writer, art historian and to a select few, a passionate art teacher. His daughter Dina Bangdel carried forward his legacy until her own untimely death in 2017.

After Paris, Bangdel travelled to London in 1957 where he received a letter from his friend B P Koirala to return to Nepal. Koirala went on to become Nepal's first democratically elected prime minister, but within a year was removed in a coup by King Mahendra in 1960. It was then Mahendra who convinced Bangdel and his wife Manu to return from Europe to Nepal.

In 1961 after moving to Kathmandu, Bangdel got a job at the Royal Nepal Academy



Lain Singh Bangdel 1919-2002

Lain Singh Bangdel was born in 1919 near Darjeeling, and grew up drawing images of gods and goddesses all over the walls of his home. He was impressed from an early age with the paintings he saw in the house of his tree planter father's British employer.

It was inevitable that Bangdel should join Calcutta Arts College in 1939. It was there that he met Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray, and the two became lifelong friends.

In 1952, Bangdel enrolled at the French National Art School in Paris where he was influenced by the works of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. He was so attached to Laxmi Prasad Devkota's *Muna Madan* that he used the epic as a theme for many of his impressionistic works.

Bangdel died in October 2002 in Lalitpur at age 83. Lain Singh Bangdel was not just a painter, he was also an established writer, art historian and a passionate art teacher. His daughter Dina Bangdel carried forward his legacy until her own untimely death in 2017.

generations about the lived life of an artist.

Everyone's life is filled with expectations, successes, failures, joys and sorrows. When we learn and understand from each other, we develop empathy. In a life tethered to obligations and responsibilities, it seems impossible to break away from every day struggles.

However, there are a few who have had transcendent experiences, and it is through such stories that we can better ourselves, and understand ourselves better.

Bangdel painted his self-portrait 31 years ago at a time when he felt freedom, responsibilities had been released from his shoulders with his retirement. He was finally liberated from relentless guidance, the bureaucracy, and he felt overwhelming gratitude to the monarch who had invited him to Nepal.

Bangdel always lived life on his own terms, whether struggling as an artist in Paris, or as a brave pioneer of a new genre of art in a conservative Nepal of the 1960s.

His biography *Against the Current* by Don Messerschmidt and his daughter, Dina, cites a conversation between Bangdel and King Mahendra: 'Bangdel, upon being asked to settle in Nepal and lead the Royal Nepal Academy, replies with utmost modesty, "Nepal is an agricultural country, an artist like me does not have much to do".'

Bangdel headed the Royal Nepal Academy from 1972 to 1989, creating and curating many artworks and writing many historically significant books. He made this self-portrait the year he retired, and reveals his sigh of relief from all the burden and responsibilities. This particular self-portrait Bangdel is on display at MoNA.

Looking at Bangdel's paintings, one sees a distinct boundary before and after 1989, and we can assume that the artist could finally live life for himself, and for his art. 🇳🇵

Rajan Sakya is the founder and director of MoNA (Museum of Nepali Art) and also the CEO of KGH Group. This column, *For Art's Sake*, will appear in *Nepali Times* every month.

Lain Singh Bangdel's 'Sigh'

Why is there is a look of quiet contentment in Bangdel's visage in the artist's self-portrait?



FOR ART'S SAKE
Rajan Shakya

With this contribution, I am beginning a monthly column in *Nepali Times* and *Himal Khabar* in which I will select one piece of contemporary Nepali art from the collection of MoNA (Museum of Nepali Art), and try to explain the technique and medium used, the message being communicated, as well as the significance it holds in the country's cultural history.

There are rare moments in the lives of great artists, when they create something for themselves and no one else. In those works of art they give us a glimpse of their soul, a secret sentiment not to be shared. An exposé of inner romanticism.

Self-portraits can be made during important milestones in an artist's life, an illustration of an obstacle overcome, a portrayal of a life-altering occurrence, an interpretation of a discrete romantic escapade, a visual representation of a magical encounter.

Lain Singh Bangdel's self-portrait from 1989 represents such a work. It is a 'sigh' that evokes a sense of fulfilled bliss in the artist's life.

Bangdel deserves this attention, recognition of his struggle and successful life, which resonated with inspiration and motivation long after his death in 2002.

Bangdel was the founder of modern and contemporary Nepali art. His authoritative and exemplary books explored the realisation and preservation of Nepali culture, introducing it to the international art arena. His contemporary and abstract works are now revered across the world, and depict nature and creation in one way or another.

But this particular self-portrait stands apart. In it, Bangdel paints himself with contended closed eyes, an inconspicuous smile, a rough and incomplete brush stroke where his ear should be, a face expressing satiated relief about something, an

assertive yet deferential posture, an unpretentious shoulder with a shawl of honour draped around it. The painting is finished with confident last strokes.

And a frame, an ordinary frame that he painted for himself as a laurel as if to encase his accomplished self. The self-portrait speaks of something beyond that which the eyes can see. It may be Bangdel's reflection of himself at his best.

Self-portraits by famous international artists capture a moment of rapture, a reminder of an emotion, of a particular sensation, never to be forgotten or revealed, but an aide-mémoire to the self.

A self-portrait is a maze of discoveries. The viewer has to unravel the artists' secrets layer by layer, see, feel and understand. It is a message from the past, by a person who has departed, containing clues for future

EVENTS

Education Exchange webinar

Join the British Council Schools Education Exchange webinar on ways teachers can inspire pupils to take positive action against climate change in the classroom. Sign up here: <https://bit.ly/3APyY53>
16 July

Baithak sessions

Join Tomas Carrasco and Moa Edmunds live on Saturdays for the Baithak Sessions, where the musicians will play songs from their upcoming album, jam to other songs and improvise. Catch the live show on Ser o Dúo's Facebook, Instagram and Youtube accounts.
Saturdays, 8:45pm



Boudha market

Buy fresh and organic fruits and vegetables, baked goods, and other delicious goodies. Support local products and businesses, and follow physical distancing guidelines.
Saturdays, Utpala Cafe, Boudha

Photography contest

Take photos during the On The Moon Again event depicting the interaction between people and the Moon, and share them with the caption #OnTheMoonAgain21 over social media. Winners will be awarded. Fill the participation form at <https://www.onthemoonagain.org/contest>
16-18 July



Kora Cycling

Participate in the eleventh edition of the Kora Cycling Challenge, #kora21, taking place all over Nepal. Register at <http://mykorachallenge.com/registration> as a rider, runner, or both.
17 July

DINING



Bhumi

Experience authentic Newa flavours of bara, chatamari, samaya baji, momo cha and more. Head on to Facebook to browse Bhumi's menu.
9863328781

DOCUMENTARIES



Herne Katha

The web series tells untold stories of ordinary Nepali people via short documentaries. Head on to their YouTube channel to binge.

VICE

Watch documentaries about anything and everything from all over the world on the VICE YouTube channel. Start from documentaries about Nepal's honey harvesters, The Nepalese Honey That Makes People Hallucinate, as well as the most recent one on human trafficking in Nepal.

Journeyman Pictures

Watch groundbreaking award-winning factual films about some of the most debated issues across the globe including politics, the environment, and the current pandemic. Find Journeyman pictures on YouTube.



Real Stories

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

Netflix on YouTube

Netflix has released some of its documentaries for free on YouTube for educational purposes in light of the global coronavirus pandemic. Don't miss the award-winning documentary Our Planet from Sir David Attenborough.

GETAWAY

Mirabel Resort

Perfect for families, Mirabel Resort offers comfort, continental cuisines and scenic views of Kathmandu Valley. Take a walk around Dhulikhel before tucking into a Nepali lunch. Get details of the Monsoon offer on their Facebook page.
Dhulikhel (01)490972



Hotel Country Villa

A relaxing retreat for those wishing to escape the pandemonium of the city, the hotel provides spectacular views of greenery, sunrise and sunset from top of the Nagarkot hill.
(01)6680127

Pataleban Vineyard Resort

Pataleban Vineyard Resort is an eco-resort with spectacular views, jungle walks, and picnics to rejuvenate from the stress of a tedious routine.
Chisapani, 9841679364

Green Valley Resort

Located 5.5km away from Budhanilkantha Temple, the resort is a lovely getaway for the weekend. Take a stroll around the Tamang Valley nearby as the first ray of sun warms up the day.
Shivapuri National Park (01) 5248091



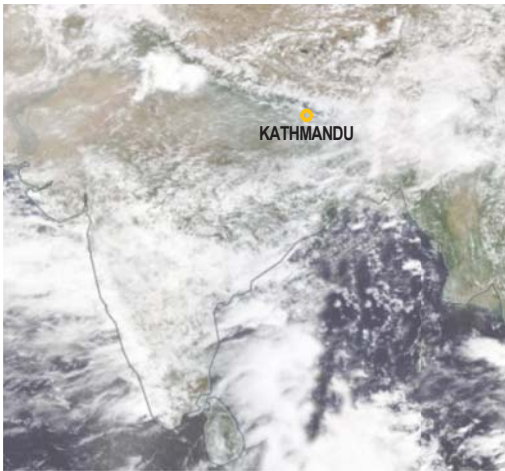
Godavari Village Resort

Spread over 14 lush green acres, the resort offers mountain views and traditionally-styled cottages and buildings overlooking rice fields.
Godavari (01) 5560675



Curilo

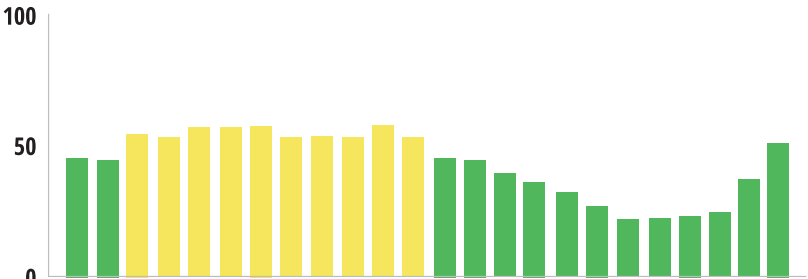
Try delicious pastas, pizza and sandwiches. Order the signature La Curilo Pizza, also freshly baked multigrain bread from Curilo. Find the menu at Fooddole.
(01) 4005079



The monsoon from the Bay of Bengal is now moving vigorously across north India, and joining up with its Arabian Sea arm. This has added heft to the rains, however, for the past few days it has stayed mainly in the plains. That is about to change as another monsoonal pulse is approaching from the southeast which will bring some more vigorous rain into Friday and weekend. Some of the squalls will be heavy, and the precipitation may be concentrated towards evening and night.

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

AIR QUALITY INDEX



The only thing holding Kathmandu's Air Quality Index (AQI) from deteriorating following easing of the lockdown and subsequent vehicular emission is heavy and constant showers in the afternoon. The rains wash away pollutants but they build up again quickly as seen in this hourly AQI measured at US Embassy Phora Darbar from 9AM 14 July to 9AM 15 July. Mask up outdoors mandatorily to protect yourself from both harmful particulate matters and Covid-19.



OUR PICK

Chris Chibnall's critically praised British crime drama *Broadchurch*, that ran over three series from 2013 to 2017, follows detectives Alec Hardy and Ellie Miller in the fictional English town of Broadchurch as they investigate the murder of 11-year-old Daniel Latimer and the consequent grief of and impact on the family and the townspeople as the killer is brought to justice. The third series looks into the rape of town resident Trish Winterman. Stars David Tennant, Olivia Coleman, Julie Hesmondhalgh, Jodie Whittaker, and more.

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



Job-seekers now also jab-seekers

Mandatory vaccine requirement for migrant workers throws international migration into uncertainty

● Upasana Khadka

In February 2020, Nepali migrant worker Min from Sindhupalchok was excited to visit Nepal after completing two years working in Kuwait. More than a year later, he is still here, due to a Covid-19 travel ban by Kuwait.

He could have returned by taking an indirect route via the UAE since there were no direct flights from Nepal. But since quarantining in the UAE was too costly, he decided to wait for travel restrictions in Kuwait to be lifted.

“Now it looks like new rules regarding mandatory vaccination in Kuwait will further delay my return,” says Min.

Another worker in Kuwait is Lila from Chitwan. He had spent 15 years there, but has been stuck ever since he came home for a break. Lila’s employer in Kuwait is getting impatient.

Stories of stranded migrants are common, but with new vaccination requirements by destination countries, the situation has only become even more uncertain.

“From 1 August, Kuwait will allow entry of non-citizens only if they are fully vaccinated by one of the four vaccines: Pfizer BioNTech, Oxford/AstraZeneca, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson,” says Nepal’s ambassador to Kuwait, Durga Bhandari.

Of these only Johnson & Johnson is available in Nepal with the United States flying in 1.5 million doses under the global COVAX initiative this week. But the migrants have not been prioritised for the single-shot vaccine.

Saudi Arabia is also set to impose similar vaccination requirements from 1 August. Until then, those who are not vaccinated have to undergo quarantine for a week.

While Qatar is allowing Nepali passengers with mandatory institutional quarantine, there has been no announcement regarding vaccines yet. Nepal is currently banned by the UAE and Bahrain for public health reasons.

The UAE has approved Sinopharm, Pfizer, Sputnik V and Oxford-AstraZeneca, and has imposed double vaccination mandate to South Africa, Nigeria and India, which will likely be applied to Nepalis as well once the ban is lifted, according to UAE-based travel entrepreneur Krishna Bhusal.

As the Gulf countries ramp up their vaccination drives and set ambitious targets for universal vaccination, they have started to require proof of full vaccination for all activities including workplace visits, public events, restaurants and malls.

Nepal, on the other hand, is bearing the brunt of the global vaccine inequality with a dismal vaccination rate of 2.6%. It is uncertain when outgoing migrants will get their turn, and as they wait, how many will lose lucrative opportunities or have visas or contracts expire.

“Even without these flight bans and the new vaccination requirements, it has been difficult for workers with expensive quarantine and testing costs,” says labour recruiter Saroj Pokharel.

It can cost from \$800-\$2,000 for institutional quarantine in Qatar depending on the standard



PHOTOS: RAM BAHADUR BASNET

Migrant workers, including Nepalis, in Kuwait after being vaccinated (*left*). A Nepali worker gets his jab (*far left*).

of facilities, and many employers are reluctant to cover these expenses which get passed down to workers.

“The only way out is widespread vaccination, but at the rate we are progressing, I do not see the foreign employment sector recovering anytime soon,” Pokharel says.

Quarantine costs are about \$1,000 in Saudi Arabia as well. “Employers are required to foot the bill and have to commit in writing in the job demand approval letter that they will bear the costs of quarantine. The Saudi authorities will also notify employers regarding this rule,” says Nepali Labour Attaché Prem Upadhaya at the Consulate in Jeddah.

However, given that workers are desperate it is likely that they will pay for it covertly, no matter how high the cost, or how inconvenient.

The rules on quarantine and

vaccines do not just involve Nepali workers, and other countries face the same problem.

In response, the Philippines has put its overseas contract workers in the ‘essential’ category alongside health staff which moves them up in the vaccination priority list.

Bangladesh will prioritise workers heading to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for the Pfizer vaccines that it received as part of the global COVAX initiative. It is set to receive 2 million doses of the Moderna vaccine from the United States through COVAX. The country also has a scheme to reimburse quarantine costs of workers to Saudi Arabia.

In Pakistan, Saudi-bound expats broke into a vaccination centre in Islamabad after fears that the AstraZeneca vaccines would run out. Prime Minister Imran Khan has asked Saudi Arabia and other countries to accept the WHO-

approved Chinese vaccine with which Pakistan is inoculating its population.

Sri Lanka has also announced free vaccines for those with confirmed overseas jobs, but is also dependent on the Sinopharm Chinese vaccine, which is not accepted by key destination countries.

In India, many migrant workers are stranded because their vaccine certificates refer to Covishield, and not Oxford AstraZeneca. However, Saudi Arabia finally recognised Covishield as equivalent to AstraZeneca after diplomatic dialogue. Vaccination camps have been set up for outgoing students and workers, although demand far outweighs supply.

In Nepal, however, there is growing frustration with the lack of progress in sourcing vaccines. Says Sujit Shrestha

of Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA): “We need a way out because there is demand in these countries for Nepali workers. The government should get vaccines and prioritise outgoing workers, or coordinate with destination countries to provide quarantine and vaccines for workers. For many Nepali families, foreign employment is the only source of income.”

After a few months of slow and uneven recovery of emigration, the second wave impacted both new and current Nepali workers. But even with cases falling and limited flights allowed, there is uncertainty because of the vaccines.

It is not just about whether Nepal can inoculate outgoing workers soon, but also whether the vaccination provided is accepted by the destination country.

Saudi Arabia has a demand for 40,000 Nepali workers that are waiting to be filled. In Kuwait, employers are struggling with labour shortages. This is in addition to thousands stranded in Nepal while on holiday like Min and Lila, who are at risk of losing their jobs overseas.

Says Kuwait-based Nepali Ram Bahadur Basnet: “If flights normalise and the issue of vaccinations gets sorted out, Nepalis will be able to find attractive opportunities here.”

Some names have been changed. Additional reporting by Hom Nath Giri.

Vaccine doses need to

Nepal-Johns Hopkins University COVID-19 Vaccine Advocacy Group is made up of:

Swetha Manohar,
Johns Hopkins University (JHU)
Binita Adhikari,
JHU and Health Foundation Nepal
Tsering Pema Lama, JHU
Bijay Acharya,
America Nepal Medical Foundation
and Harvard Medical School
Smriti Mathema,
Department of Paediatrics,
Kathmandu University, Nepal
Paediatric Society
Angela KC, JHU, Acumen
Dinesh Neupane, JHU
Santosh Dhakal, JHU

Global inequities in the distribution of the Covid-19 vaccine have revealed themselves during the past six months. Based on the most up-to-date data today, more than half of the population in Bahrain, the United States and the United Kingdom have been fully vaccinated.

In Nepal, this number is 2.6%. During times of public health crises, a convergence of social and economic inequalities sharpen disparities in access to health, food, and financial security. Moreover, in countries like Nepal with a pronounced urban-rural and regional divide in infrastructure, education, and health access, these divisions intersect with wealth and social inequities during a pandemic creating tremendous stress on an already tenuous local health system.

This results in worse health outcomes for underserved populations. With low vaccine coverage against the Covid-19 virus in Nepal, and the slow trickle of vaccines into the country it is imperative to question how vaccines will equitably be distributed across the country.

The Nepal-Johns Hopkins University Covid-19 Vaccine Advocacy Group weighs in on dose prioritisation

Biological risk factors like age tend to be used to assess risk of infection of any virus. But what about social disadvantage or inequities? Can such identification of population strata that have a high risk for transmissions will help inform the formation of the next tier?

Typically, when planning for vaccine rollout, the most common approach is identifying risk factors that are highly correlated with the virus and, thus, most vulnerable to infection risk. With Covid-19, risk factors to prioritise target groups have been those correlated with mortality (age) and those that can aid in preventing mortality (healthcare workers).

Thus, age and being a health worker have almost universally informed Tier 1 (or first recipients) of the vaccine. But what about the next Tier? From an epidemiological perspective, vaccination efforts aim to reach the highest or tipping point of coverage that allows some level of herd immunity or reduction of transmission.

So, who is most at risk of transmitting the virus, and when positive for the virus, what non-biological factors put groups at a higher risk of having the worse health outcomes?

Historical learnings from Nepal have taught us systemic inequities persist along the lines of wealth, region, and caste to ensure and



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protect access to adequate and quality health care. There have been impressive gains in public health in recent decades: maternal mortality has dropped 73% since 1990, young child mortality has decreased from 47 to 30 deaths per 1,000 live births since 2010 and routine childhood immunisation coverage has increased 21% since 2001.

But inequities persist in health

and nutrition outcomes. For example, households with lower wealth, no maternal education, and residence in Province 2 have significantly lower immunisation rates amongst infants.

Further, Dalit and Tarai caste groups (including Muslims) have a lower likelihood to have their children fully immunised compared to Brahmins and Chhetris. Similarly, socioeconomic

disparities have been noted in stunting reduction, with the poorest experiencing a lower rate of decline than those who were wealthier.

Taken together during this unprecedented time of a global pandemic, the question is why is it essential to achieve equitable distribution of the vaccines prioritising not just medically vulnerable, but also historically

Vaccines start trickling into Nepal

But Nepal is still a long way from vaccinating 70% of its population

● **Ramu Sapkota**

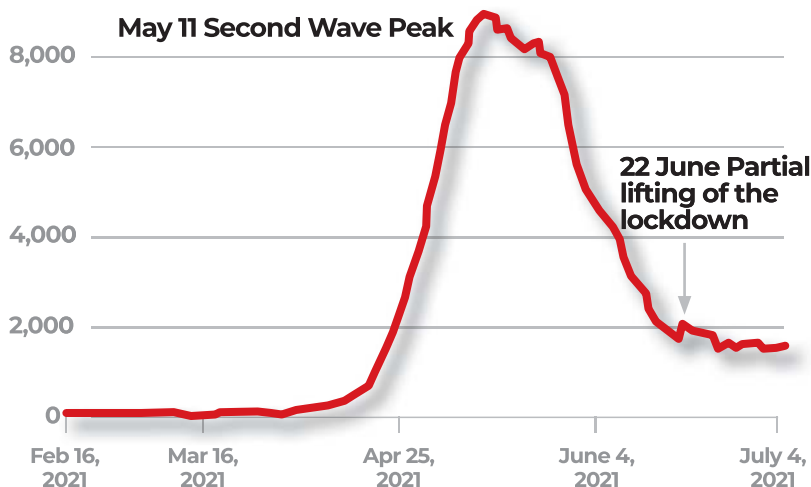
Much-delayed vaccine supplies to Nepal appear to be picking up with the United States flying in 1.5 million doses of Johnson & Johnson shots on Monday and 4 million doses of Chinese Sinopharm vaccines starting to arrive in Kathmandu. The country is expected to get additional doses through the COVAX facility in the coming weeks.

In a government-to-government deal, Nepal ordered 4 million doses of Sinopharm's VeroCell vaccines, which will be enough to inoculate an additional 2 million Nepalis. The first shipment of 800,000 doses was flown in by Nepal Airlines from Beijing on 9 July.

The British Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth, Lord Tariq Ahmad in a written response to House of Commons MP Sir John Hayes on 30 June said that Britain would be sending more vaccines through COVAX by next month.

'COVAX has allocated 2,000,000 vaccine doses to Nepal, of which 348,000 have already been delivered and we understand another tranche will arrive by August,' Lord Ahmad's letter, which was made available to *Nepali Times*, states.

The Japanese announcement on Tuesday to provide 1.6 million



7-day rolling average of daily confirmed Covid-19 cases in Nepal.

doses of AstraZeneca vaccine to Nepal comes as a respite for 1.4 million Nepalis above 65 years who are desperately waiting for their second doses.

The elderly were inoculated their first dose more than 12 weeks ago with Covishield AstraZeneca manufactured by Serum Institute India of which Nepal got 1 million doses as initial grant from India and then purchased another 2 million of which only 1 million were delivered before New Delhi banned vaccine exports.

Less than 3% of Nepalis have so far received both doses of Covishield or VeroCell, and another 2.6 million have got both shots. Nepal needs to inoculate at least 22

million of its eligible population. COVAX had originally promised 13 million doses of Covishield to inoculate 20% of Nepal's population.

The American 1.5 million J&J doses are a part of the 7 million pledged by President Joe Biden to South Asian countries last month, of the 1 billion doses from the G-7 promised at a summit in the UK last month.

'The majority of the doses will go through COVAX,' Lord Ahmad says in his letter. 'In addition, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (both partially UK-funded) have made available significant funding to enable the Government of Nepal to

purchase vaccines. This financing together with COVAX supplies can vaccinate 70% of the population of Nepal.'

Indeed, the World Bank has provided Nepal with a \$100 million loan, and an additional \$160 million from the ADB for vaccine procurement. World Bank former country director Faris Hadad-Zervos told reporters in Kathmandu on 8 July that Nepal may have to wait a long time to get vaccines as grants through COVAX, and it might be a better idea to buy them.

The EU had negotiated with vaccine manufacturers to provide 1.2 billion vaccines to low income countries through COVAX. It has exported 340 million doses of vaccines, half its production, to countries around the world.

Head of the EU Delegation to Nepal Nona Deprez says the EU is not sitting on a big stockpile of vaccines at the moment, and has not been blocking individual member states from having direct vaccine deals with countries like Nepal.

A group of European, Nepali and Bhutanese personalities had written an open letter to the European Commission president last week demanding that countries be allowed to send surplus vaccines directly to countries without having to go through Brussels and COVAX.

'Nepal is very much on our radar, and direct vaccine supply depends very much on individual

member states who are owners of the vaccines,' Deprez told *Nepali Times*. 'In fact, we have received requests from 20 countries, including Nepal, and have tried to facilitate the bilateral donations.'

The UN's COVAX facility is mainly funded by the UK and EU, but its reliance on India's Covishield as well as legally-binding shipments of doses to donor countries has set back its programs in Africa and Asia.

Pressure has been building in the UK from Gurkha veterans, MPs, and activists for Britain to provide AstraZeneca vaccines at least for the second doses. At least 63 Gurkha veterans have died in Nepal from Covid-19 during the second wave.

Nepal's second wave has crested, but public health officials have warned of a second peak because of what they say is a premature relaxation of lockdown rules when not enough people have been vaccinated.

On Wednesday, there were 19 more deaths from Covid-19, and the number of infected people, while much lower than at the peak last month, has been higher than the total recovered patients for the last 10 days, with 2,905 on 14 July. The number of active cases in Nepal has risen slightly again to 26,968, after dropping from 120,000.

However, many experts have pointed out that the daily death and infections are severely undercounted. 🇳🇵

be fairly distributed

socially excluded groups? Which are these groups? And how do we address the issue?

WHY?

As of mid-July nearly 1,800 people were testing positive daily for Covid-19 and a total of 9,382 deaths have occurred since May 2020. These numbers are most likely grossly underestimated, given a lack of mass testing. Only 11% of the population have been tested to-date and with 85% of the population residing in rural areas, access to testing centers can be challenging.

In a country with a dominant youth population – nearly 41% is between the ages of 16-40, having age alone decide vaccine prioritisation tiers seems ill-informed. Further, reports of differential age cut-offs between Kathmandu, and those residing outside the capital municipality could well be short-sighted and discriminatory.

Another issue in pandemic management has been a lack of widespread contact tracing to identify transmission patterns. Returning migrant workers since March 2020 have not been tested and quarantined properly.

Why should the focus of the vaccination campaign rollout for Tier 2 centre on underserved populations?

The WHO states there are three C's that affect transmissibility of Covid-19: Crowded places, Close-contact settings, Confined and enclosed spaces. In many areas across Nepal, poorer households tend to be in densely clustered areas where conditions are ripe for

the spread of the virus.

Social isolation is a privilege enjoyed by those of higher socioeconomic status. Close living spaces mean higher transmission rates among these communities.

The intersection of social exclusion has fueled health disparities in Nepal despite successes. Ultimately, there are health, social and economic consequences at stake if we fail to take an equitable approach to vaccine allocation.

As with economic inequities, we see evidence globally with Covid-19 hitting hardest ethnic and racial minorities. Lower socioeconomic groups are typically employed in jobs that make up the backbone of the country's economy, providing essential services such as growing and selling food, waste management, and public transportation.

If we do not prioritise these communities, we will not only have no chance of controlling the pandemic but also no prospect of allowing our economy to survive.

WHO?

Who do we need to prioritise beyond those of age 65 and above, and healthcare professionals? The groups most vulnerable include frontline workers: food production and food service workers drivers, custodial staff, security personnel, transportation workers, caretakers of people who are immunocompromised residing at home, adults in a shared living facility such as prisons, nursing homes, or close-quarter communities such as the *sukumbasi*.

Among these groups, targeting historically underserved minority groups would be crucial step. This would help prevent further widespread health disparities and achieve broader population immunity once vaccines arrive in Nepal and immunisation efforts are scaled up.

We cannot overlook the intersectionality here: those who experience economic disadvantages, regional and social exclusion overlap in significant numbers. The time has come for public health targeting to be guided by something beyond health metrics, and carefully consider economic inequity and social disadvantage.

HOW?

How can the health sector prioritise reducing health disparities, and promote equity? We recommend the following strategies:

#1 Utilise equity as a priority for vaccine distribution: After vaccination of those that belong to the Tier 1 group (the elderly, immunocompromised, and healthcare workers), prioritise Tier 2 by identifying socially and economically underserved communities. Other professional groups that clearly need to be prioritised include teachers, transportation, and custodial staff. The ultimate goal will be not to sort individuals at the point of vaccination.

Instead, target groups that geographically cluster to get as close to herd immunity as is possible by prioritising those among the most vulnerable in

the ‘herd’ to economic and health disparities.

#2 Broaden and tailor behaviour change communication on Covid-19 vaccinations: Conduct clear and cohesive mass vaccination campaigns that include consistent messaging on the Covid-19 vaccines availability and their efficacy and safety. With 139 mobile telephone subscriptions per 100 people, appointment management through text messages to avoid overcrowded lines should be considered.

Further, continue the mass communication push through trusted social media, local tv channels, and radio in languages beyond Nepali or English.

#3 Facilitate equitable access to the vaccine: Leverage trusted members of prioritised communities such as community leaders, female community health volunteers, and others, our suggestion is to set up vaccination drives as close as possible to these communities to overcome barriers of physical access and to sensitise communities to the intervention. Those misusing power to strong-arm their way into vaccine access should be penalised.

#4 Build trust: While vaccine hesitancy was high during the first wave, this has shifted during this second wave. Initially, the older people were afraid to get vaccinated and needed much encouragement. But now people are eagerly waiting for their turn to get the vaccine, according to Rekha Chaudhari, a Female Community Health Volunteer in Sarlahi District.


However, confidence in public institutions is not equal across the population. And, in

some communities, trust is low given patterns of being politically, economically, and socially disenfranchised.

#5 Leverage science: Data and its use cannot be underscored enough for evidence-based action against Covid-19. As noted above, the use of available population data and routine monitoring data is imperative to guide intervention.

Additionally, given the likelihood that a substantial proportion of the population will probably be administered a combination of vaccine (say Covishield AstraZeneca to begin with and Sinopharm VeroCell as a second dose) due to the staggered and varied release of vaccines to Nepal, there is the opportunity to plan and implement studies that examine the effects of such mixing of vaccines especially amongst high-risk groups on related health outcomes.

#6 Clear and justly enforced reopening guidelines: Clear and consistent messaging on the phased, cautious reopening of the country via multiple communication channels is essential. The government's implementation of a responsible phased reopening approach that balances economic slowdowns, people's livelihoods with health is imperative.

Advancing equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines in Nepal, once adequate vaccine procurement occurs, is a clear opportunity for addressing existing health inequities in the country that have been further deepened by what indeed has been a global pandemic with a discriminating path. 

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Nepal’s Olympic dreams

Now the Euro Cup fever is over (“Forza Italia!”) and we have all caught up with much-needed sleep, let us gear up for the Tokyo Virtual Olympics 2021.

This year, the Olympics organisers have made sure that it is first games in the modern era to be conducted in a city that is under an emergency. But I must play the donkey’s advocate here and argue that the Olympics has always been constrained by sports that date back to Ancient Greece.

If the discus throw can be a track and field sport, then we should also include marathon discussions in parliamentary committees as a category in Nepal’s National Games. We have some sure fire gold medalists in that sport.

And javelin throw? How is that relevant in this day and age? Imagine if domestic terrorists get hold of such weapons. Even more absurd is the shot put, which harks back to the age of lugging around cannon balls in the heat of battle. Modern warfare has moved on – today we incinerate the enemy with lasers.

The International Ass of Athletic Federations would do well to change some of the categories to reflect more modern methods of biological warfare like the Kathmandu Runs, which Nepalis would win hands-down since all of us have so much practice.

Nepalis have broken all records in breaking records, and the Tokyo Olympics is a god-send opportunity for us to claim even more entries into the Guinness Book like the Nepali tv news anchor who conducted a continuous 62-hour talk show, the world’s most frequent prime minister, the most rightwing Communist Party, the fastest clock in the world, and of all the donkey species in the world, Nepal has the biggest asses.

One sport that Nepalis have increasingly excelled in is rubber-band *chungu*. It will be too late to include it in the Tokyo Olympics, but we should definitely have it among the categories for the next games and start grooming our top notch *chungu* champs with a supplementary diet of performance-enhancing yarsagumba. It will be a proud moment for Nepal’s gold medalist in Rome in 2026 when the double triangle is raised to the tune of the national anathema.

Another Nepali sport that was popular in Nepal before the invention of the ball is *dandi biu*. We have to tweak it a bit and call it *dandi charge* so that contestants from the Police Club, who have been practicing it at recent street rallies, can reap medals at future international championships.

We are glad to see that mountain biking is finally an Olympic sport, but it has always been a bit unfair that mountaineering has been kept out of the world games because it is one sport in which Nepal could sweep the medals tally.

After all, if scantily attired women whose noses are clipped with clothespins can take part in an Olympic event called synchronised swimming, I personally see no reason why our Icefall Doctors should not.

If it is problem, we can have Nepali participants in the mountaineering category climb Mt Fuji with their noses clipped with clothespins.



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