





# Dying to get vaccinated

The unprecedented speed at which Covid-19 vaccines have been discovered is truly inspiring. The problem with acceptance and distribution of those vaccines, however, is another story.

The speed with which medical science has come up with effective Covid-19 vaccines has been a game-changer. If this is followed by treatment protocols, it will be even more spectacular.



**GUEST EDITORIAL**  
Buddha Basnyat

The best example to showcase efficacious treatment has been the Oxford University-lead Recovery (Randomised Evaluation of Covid-19 Therapy) trial in which Nepal was the first actively participating site outside the UK.

In June 2020, the results of this trial showed that an inexpensive and widely-available drug, dexamethasone (a corticosteroid) substantially reduced deaths in hospitalised patients requiring oxygen. The drug has saved millions of lives.

The trajectory of the pandemic has led to revelations. Herd immunity acquired with previous infections seems to be an unreliable and less robust way to seek protection from the virus. This was illustrated with the spread of the Delta variant in India where

many people, including doctors, thought they had enough antibody protection. The most dramatic observation during this pandemic has been in human behaviour and psychology. Literate people (many in high income countries) refusing to wear masks or be vaccinated despite overwhelming scientific evidence, is bewildering.

So, while vaccine stockpiles are nearing their expiry dates in the United States and parts of Europe, people in Africa and Asia are literally dying to be vaccinated. An excess of human hubris is also clearly in evidence during this pandemic. Leaders of countries who boasted that they were saviours of the world by promising vaccines were brought to their knees with the spread of the Delta variant. Those who extolled their superior public health facilities have had to eat their words.

Hypocrisy is also in full display. Early grandiose talk of vaccine equity in high-income countries even before the discovery of the vaccine was soon forgotten as countries stockpiled up to four times what was needed to vaccinate their eligible populations with two doses.

One thing is for sure, all this shall also pass. But we have to learn lessons to be better prepared for the next pandemic.

Many countries did not put their money where their mouths were, espousing vaccine nationalism. The concept of vaccine distribution equity is now like talk of motherhood and apple pie.

The virus clearly showed us that the world needs not only universal health care and universal basic income, but just as much universal behavioural therapy. Even in their enlightened self-interest, high income countries should ensure universal vaccination because science has shown that the more people remain unvaccinated, the more the danger of variants mutating.

Here on, since 70% vaccine coverage will take time, Nepal's need to continue to mask up, wash hands and avoid crowds – preferably all three. Avoiding crowds is easier said than done, but we must try or face another debilitating lockdown.

Those who are vaccinated must remember that it does not always protect them from infection, just severe symptoms, and they can be carriers to spread it to others. Vaccines only reduce mortality and morbidity and hospitalisations. Same with masks. Wearing a mask and going into crowded places defeats the purpose. Those following proper guidelines have noted that they are also

less sick than usual with respiratory and gastrointestinal ailments if they mask up and wash hands frequently.

The important thing is not to miss the opportunity to get vaccinated with whatever doses are

available, whenever. All the available vaccines are safe and have very few, if any, contraindications even in pregnancy.

We have to psychologically prepare ourselves for the likelihood that the pandemic will continue for many more

months, if not years, unless the vast majority of us in the world are promptly vaccinated.

Amazingly, no world leader has gone beyond rhetoric to actually start delivering vaccines to the rest of the world. As the pandemic plays out, the best-case scenario is that Covid-19 antibodies will be present even years after vaccination or post-infection, and provide protection for years to come. If that does not happen, another booster shot will be needed. Or perhaps Covid-19 will peter out and become like the influenza virus requiring a jab every winter. Variants may continue to be a problem, and we are still learning. But in all likelihood, vaccines will continue to be effective even against variants.

One thing is for sure, all this shall also pass. But we have to learn lessons to be better prepared for the next pandemic.

*Buddha Basnyat is a physician and clinical researcher at Patan Academy of Health Sciences and writes on health for Nepali Times.*



AMIT MACHAMASI

## Scientists can invent vaccines, but political scientists cannot find answers to vaccine denial

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### It's all in the mind

*We have come a long way in how we manage patients with psychological disorders. It might shock many to know that two decades ago mentally ill people could legally be jailed in Nepal.*

*We now have better treatment facilities, awareness and investment but increasingly more people are suffering from psychological disorders, particularly in urban centres during the pandemic. There were 7,141 reported deaths due to suicides nationwide in the past 12 months, up from 6,252 the year before. There is a direct correlation between lockdowns and a spike in mental health problems. Psychiatrists have also reported increased cases of anxiety, depression, PTSD, hypochondria, obsessive disorders and psychotic symptoms, and recent studies have found that as high as one-third of Nepal's population have some form of psychological disorders.*

*Experts from the report 20 years ago this week from issue #56 17-23 August 2001:*

Instead of ensuring the human rights of the ill and their right to treatment, existing laws legitimate inhuman treatment. Local administration laws grant chief district officers (CDO) the right to put mentally ill people into jail for their own safety or for the safety of the community upon the recommendation of a doctor. But CDOs are not given a concomitant responsibility to protect the rights of disturbed people. And there is no legal provision to reverse this "mentally sick" certification, even if the person's condition improves.

A person's mental health is mainly determined by genetics, environment (like family and work atmosphere), and individual factors



like susceptibility to tension or depression. Everyone has their own breaking point, and when this point is reached, a person develops a mental disturbance.

There is no official study on prevalence, but researchers estimate that about 12 percent of Nepalis suffer from some form or degree of mental illness at any given time, and at least two percent suffer from severe but treatable mental illness. Even the presence of four million suffering people has failed to instil a sense of urgency among policymakers

and public health officials. Though a National Mental Health Policy was announced in 1997, the issue is still treated as separate from other human development endeavours. Only 0.14 percent of the national health budget was allocated to mental health programmes in fiscal 2000.

The general perception about mental sickness is perhaps reflected in the policies. Here too, the issue remains a taboo subject, and the ailment, one that only affects 'the poor, uneducated, underprivileged and downtrodden.' But researchers the world over have been saying for some time now that the prevalence rate for mental illness is similar everywhere in developed and under-developed countries, in cities and in villages. The difference lies on the types of disorders, which often depends on the environment the patients work and live in.

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



TIKAPUR TRAGEDY

On 24 August 2015, this week seven years ago, armed protestors affiliated with the Tharuhat Struggle Committee in Kailali carried out a massacre that killed eight policemen and a six-month-old toddler. Follow our reporters to Tikapur to listen to falsely imprisoned Tharus who recall torture at the hands of police and their wait for justice. Report: *page 10-11*.

### SUMMIT HOTEL

Human greed, pride and modernisation like this led to global warming and environmental degradation ('The Summit is more than a hotel', Anne Goldie, #1074).

**Surand Rana**

● Really sad to read this, what had come to be one of the finest garden properties in Kathmandu.

**Surjoy Das**

● It's OK to come up with new ideas but we must also preserve the old and the existing. Green should have been the heart of the project, there is so much that can be done by building with nature.

**Sushmita Ranjit Shrestha**

● I never thought that a construction of a 15-floor building in Kathmandu would be possible.

**Eliane Castro Smith**

● I really appreciated this article from the perspective of an expat who first arrived in 1979. It is my observation that some people won't rest until this once-pristine Valley is paved from one side to the other.

**Dale Lee Nafziger**

● To tear down the Summit Hotel is to destroy past memories and future prospects all in one.

**Donald Curtis**

● Is this even allowed or is it just another example of bribing your way up to get a building clearance? And you can't believe it's safe to build towers on the edge of a cliff. And most of all, who would want to stay in an 11 storey building in a country with high seismic risk?

**Cily Keizer**

● Please save the hotel for future generations. Maybe someone will come to its rescue.

**June Davies**

● It only shows that businessmen have no sympathy, empathy and concerns for culture, tradition, heritage and nature. The government can stop it by not issuing licences for projects that hurt nature, culture and heritage.

**Manoj Manandhar**

● Wisdom destroyed by short-sighted greed, once again.

**Reinier Lindeman**

● So you ask your former porters and waiters to defend your romance of the expat good life? Guilt free in the non-commonwealth? I lament the demolition of Studio 54 in New York City but I have moved on. The long and short of it is, private developers are not in the business of safekeeping people's happy memories. Not in Nepal. Not in the US. Nowhere.

**Rajib Upadhyay**

### CLEAN ENERGY

The situation is dire, and while the wealthy countries are the highest polluters, Nepal must play its part in its own backyard by reducing black carbon and similar pollutants that are melting snow at a faster than normal rate ('Mountainous regions face catastrophic impacts without urgent climate action', Manjeet Dhakal, nepalitimes.com).

**Jamie McGuinness**

● Climate change is here ('UN climate report declares planetary emergency Sonia Awale', Sonia Awale, #1074). It is permanent. And we have caused it.

**Bryan Hitan**

● In the long run, solar power is the key ('The roof is the limit', Ural Kafle and Sunil Prasad Lohani, nepalitimes.com). In the short term, government support for the development of this sector is crucial.

**David Seddon**

● Government is aware of this fact but not willing to bring any program to replace IC engines with EV ('The road to electric transportation in Nepal', Diya Rijal, nepalitimes.com). The high import tax is the reason.

**Makalu Rai**

● Tourists won't be coming back any time soon and Pokhara airport's opening has been delayed yet again ('Pokhara paragliders to relocate', Krishnamani Baral, *page 5*). So plenty of time to sort things out.

**Alex Ferguson**

### NEPALIS IN AFGHANISTAN

Sitting in America, what is happening in Afghanistan may just be another news story. Sitting in Kathmandu, Kabul is just 1,062 miles ("Bring us home", says Nepali in Kabul', nepalitimes.com). Don't worry... that does not mean we are in danger, but many migrant workers from Nepal are in harm's way.

**Candace Kolb**

● One flight of NAC to Kabul next week may not be enough to bring home hundreds or thousands of Nepalis stuck in Afghanistan. Nepalis are always in a sorry state in times of crisis.

**Rai Rohit**

## Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Spike in suicides during pandemic

by *Sonia Awale*

Death by suicide has soared in Nepal during the pandemic, but treatment of mental health disorders can save lives. Visit [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com) for detailed breakdown of increased suicides in the country, preventive measures and successful recoveries.

**f Most reached and shared on Facebook**

### Who will rescue Nepalis from Afghanistan?

Nepali repatriation from Kabul has started but there are thousands of others waiting to get out as the Taliban takes over Afghanistan. Rescue efforts will require multinational cooperation, but Nepal does not even have a Foreign Minister. Follow us on social media. More updates *page 6-7*.

**t Most popular on Twitter**

### Losing the Summit is not just the loss of a hotel

by *Anne Goldie*

The decision to replace a hotel like the Summit with another high-rise has been met with fury among Nepali Times readers, Nepalis and foreigners alike. Read the impassioned plea of a non-Nepali and voice your opinion on our website.

**“” Most commented**



### Delta variant's wake-up call for Nepal

by *Sushil Koirala and Ben Ayers*

The Delta variant is more virulent, more transmissible and more lethal than other strains of Covid-19. Masks are not enough protection and vaccines are not a passport to resume normal life, avoiding crowds is a must. Read the full report online.

**🔥 Most visited online page**

## QUOTE TWEETS



**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Rajkumar Shakya, 1967-2021. Anil Chitrakar pays homage to Rajkumar Shakya, the artist who inspired a whole new generation to preserve #Nepal's #heritage.



**Utsav Shakya @utsavshakya**  
On the passing of a Nepali master at the junction of traditional art and modern technology, and what his life teaches us about adapting to change, sharing what you know and the importance of building a community.



**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
#Karnali's Covid blues. The pandemic and the drought have pushed #Nepal's most neglected region further into poverty and hunger.



**Bishow Parajuli @BishowParajuli**  
This needs urgent attention: Govt should prioritise the underdeveloped part of the country & put measures to eliminate regional disparities, with increased budget & incentives for new investments.



**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
How #Nepal must prepare for 3rd Covid wave. It has to be a collective effort to learn from the 2nd wave to avoid another pandemic pandemonium, write the Nepal-Johns Hopkins University Covid-19 Vaccine Advocacy Group.



**Tseten Norkyel @norkyel**  
Amazing article that government should use as guidelines made by young professionals!



**Ananda Poudel @AnandaPoudel18**  
Really prescribes many practical suggestions and a pedagogical one. If responsive all we can cope third phase of pandemic.



**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
UN climate report declares planetary emergency. Dire forecasts of warming and extreme weather will directly impact the #Himalaya and #Nepal. @IPCC\_CH @UNFCCC #IPCCreport #ClimateAction



**ART @AmulyaSir**  
The environmentalists are forced into a doomsday prediction mode which is ignored until the symptoms hit the common man and the politicians hard and then human coping responses increase exponentially to catch up and overshoot in trajectory momentum to alleviate and tackle it



**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Scientists can invent vaccines faster than ever, but political scientists cannot find answers to the problems of #vaccinedenial and inequity, writes Buddha Basnyat.



**Kritika Dixit @\_KritikaDixit**  
Global leaders should be vigilant about how to improve access to and availability of the Covid-19 vaccines in LMICs while continuing educating people about the importance of vaccinations and adopting safer hygiene behaviour.



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# Photojournalism looking for solutions

On World Photography Day 19 August, a look at the past, present, future of visual journalism

● Min Ratna Bajracharya

In the four decades that I have been a photojournalist, the technology has changed so much and made photographs so easy to take and disseminate that everyone with a phone is now a photographer.

Just a few decades ago, the film rolls in which I took photographs with my analogue camera had to be processed, the negatives turned into positive, and scanned into zinc blocs to be printed in smudgy newsprint on letter presses.

We are in the age of citizen photojournalism. Online platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok and others have levelled the playing field, offering anyone and everyone the opportunity to post pictures and videos online. The mainstream media is no longer the sole purveyor of photography.

There has been a tendency to strive for hits and likes, manipulation and deep fake imagery, but the technology has also aroused public interest in photojournalism. Enrolment in media schools and training institutes in Nepal have jumped, as many want to graduate to learn more about the techniques of professional digital photography. There is even a retro trend of re-discovering film processing in dark rooms.

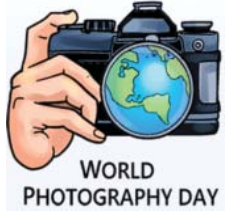
With all this technological advancement, it is easy to forget about the purpose of photography. What is it all for? Does photography have a higher calling to spur reform and promote social justice? Or is our job just to visually capture what is out there, and let the chips fall where they may?

In my career, I have learnt that photojournalism can be a powerful catalyst of change — usually for the better. One photograph I took during the 1990 People's Movement, by clambering up an electricity pole for a higher perspective of student activist DurgaThapa leaping out of the crowd with a victory sign, became an iconic image of the pro-democracy struggle. I would like to think that it helped raise awareness in the public about democracy.

Photographs of flash flood



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA



The iconic photograph of DurgaThapa, 22, as she leapt up during a victory rally on 9 April 1990 to shout "Long live democracy!"

survivors have done more to show the public the impact of climate change than thousands of thousand-word articles. Photographs have warned us about the seriousness of the pandemic, and also spread public awareness of the need to protect ourselves with vaccination and masks.

Pictures by citizen journalists from Kabul airport this week, posted live on social media, brought home the desperation and fear of the Afghan people, and will be seared in the public memory for decades to come.

We are also reminded that photojournalists are by definition on the frontlines of events, no matter how dangerous. This is why there is such a high mortality rate among us, with the death of AFP's Danish Siddiqui in Kandahar on 16 July being just the latest tragic example. There is also increased

risk now from state control even in supposedly democratic states, from police, and from having to risk getting infected with Covid-19 while covering the pandemic.

We also have to accept that photojournalists do not have a very good image in the public. Paparazzis are seen as nosey parkers, they have been called 'vultures', or 'wolves' who hunt in packs. We are accused of being invasive, aggressive, and not respecting the privacy of people who have just suffered tragedy.

As in all other forms of media, photojournalism also suffers from a 'negative bias'. It comes from the very definition of news: that it has to be something out of ordinary, absurd, or sensational to be newsworthy. This makes some of us focus on disasters, zoom in on suffering, and portray the worst human qualities, cropping everything else out.

In some ways, that is the nature of the beast. The news business is built on negative bias. But in these cynical times, does it hinder or help? Does it just reconfirm our worst fears about a nightmarish future, underline the futility of tackling climate change or working for peace, and paralyse us individually and as communities from taking action?

Fortunately there is now a trend among media educators and editors to promote 'solutions journalism'. Not to whitewash society's problems and misery, but to present it in a new light that restores hope in the future, builds solidarity, and encourages constructive action.

The World Press Photo Foundation is also helping to promote a Solutions Visual Journalism Initiative so that photographers do not just dwell on difficult issues and dire situations,

but use in-depth field reporting to photograph them taking action to solve those problems.

Many Nepali journalists are already doing this, and we must continue to push this kind of photography at a time when disasters, instability and societal breakdown are becoming self-fulfilling prophecies because of an exclusive focus on how bad things are. There is a better way.

On World Photography Day on 19 August, I wish my colleagues in the profession personal fulfilment and self-satisfaction in their work. 🇳🇵



**Min Ratna Bajracharya** was a staff photographer for Nepali Times and HimalKhabarpatrika and past president of the Nepal Forum of Photo Journalists (NFPJ).

prabhu BANK

## Seasonal metering



In its bid to increase electricity consumption and reduce wastage, the government is planning to implement power tariffs for different types of consumers as well as separate rates for monsoon and the rest of the year.

NEA's new boss Kulman Ghising says its consumer base has increased by 7.37% this year and 90% population now has access to the national grid. NEA's hydropower plants collectively generated 2.81 billion units of electricity, whereas electricity leakage had increased again. NEA's profit also decreased considerably, down to Rs3.51 billion from 11.68 billion after Ghising left last year.

## NEA Chief goes to court

Following Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's reappointment of Kulman Ghising to head Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), the incumbent Hitendra Dev Shakya has filed a writ in the Supreme Court demanding the appointment be scrapped. Shakya had been restaffed as an expert in the Energy Commission, but he maintains that he has not accepted the new position and that he still held office while Ghising was sworn into his place. "I have neither resigned from NEA, nor have I been lawfully discharged of my duties. The Cabinet's actions deprive me of my constitutionally-guaranteed employment rights," he says.

## Student fares on Turkish

Turkish Airlines has introduced special fares and extra baggage allowance to students travelling from Kathmandu to cities in Europe and the US. The package includes special student class fares up to 34 years



of age, 40 kg baggage allowance (or 2x23 kg where piece concept applies). The carrier currently operates three flights a week from Kathmandu via Istanbul and is the only European carrier that connects Nepal directly with Europe.

## New budget in limbo

With the abrupt halt in the Parliament session, the implementation of the 2021/2022 budget has been thrown into doubt. The budget was presented just before the downfall of the Oli government via ordinance on 29 May because the House was dissolved.

Current Maoist Finance Minister Janardan Sharma reintroduced the budget to a Parliament reinstated by the Supreme Court, but the session ended with no discussion. According to prevailing laws, an ordinance must be passed by the House within 60 days. Lawmakers now have a month to ratify the budget before it is scrapped, after which the legal procedure is unclear. The government could be prevented from spending.

## Muktinath savings

Muktinath Bikas Bank has brought into operation its 'Sambriddhi Savings Account' which provides the highest interest rate, clients can open their account with a minimum balance of Rs100. Customers can also open their account as well as apply for loan and deposit remittance online.

## Samsung AI



Samsung has launched three models of washing machines in Nepal with inbuilt Artificial Intelligence that analyses consumer patterns and offers washing options accordingly. All three models are frontload washing machines with Ecobubble technology and store washing patterns in their memory to better understand consumer preferences.



## DishHome La Liga

DishHome has become the first Nepali company to earn broadcasting rights for Spanish top-flight football league La Liga. The company has secured rights for Pay TV as well as special digital broadcasts of the league. Matches will be shown on Action Sports HD 2, which customers can watch by purchasing a season-long ticket for Rs2,000, which will soon be available across platforms such as Sim TV and Prabhu TV.

## Food Dept vs DDC

The Department of Food Technology and Quality Control (DFTQC) has filed a case against the government-owned Dairy Development Corporation (DDC) for selling substandard milk products. The Food Department's inspection in October had found that the DDC was selling nearly 200,000kg of substandard butter, most of it past expiry dates.





NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

# Pokhara paragliders to relocate

New international airport will force Pokhara's aerial sports companies to find new jump-off points

● **Krishnamani Baral** in Pokhara

Hundreds of thousands of international tourists used to visit Nepal every year, drawn by adventure sports options available in scenic Pokhara. Besides climbing, rafting bungee and zipline, the most popular was paragliding from Sarangkot.

Before Covid-19, there would be hundreds of paragliders soaring above Phewa Lake all day amidst the stunning backdrop of the Annapurnas, Machapuchre, Manaslu and Dhaulagiri. Pokhara had also become the venue for international sporting events such as the Paragliding World Cup Asian Tour.

However, Pokhara's days as an aerial sports hub is numbered with the much-delayed airport coming into operation next year. Most companies offering paragliding and ultralight flights will have to relocate.

Aerial sports and sightseeing companies were badly hit by the collapse of tourism, but had started to pick up with Nepali tourists replacing internationals.

"Even as tourism was down and out following the first lockdown, there were 1,000 Nepali tourists paragliding every day in the skies above Pokhara, in part due to heavy discounts," says Krishna Bhandari of Nepal Air-sports Association. "Pokhara residents and domestic travellers from Kathmandu, Chitwan and Nepalganj kept the business running."

But following the second lockdown in May-June this year, paragliding services have remained shut. The pandemic also delayed the completion of the new airport, and the new opening date is July 2022.

Pokhara International Airport, which began construction in November 2017, was supposed to be completed by 10 July 2021. If not for the pandemic, the first test flight would have happened this month, followed by regular international and domestic flights.

The 2500m long 45m wide runway is aligned east-west, and departures would fly right above the city and Sarangkot, making it impossible for paragliders to be there.

The delays are due to the fact that construction material from China could



Pokhara's new international airport is nearly complete.

KRISHNA MANI BARAL

not be imported, Chinese technicians were also not able to travel. However, the airport terminal and ancillary buildings are nearly complete with runway lights and navigation equipment being installed.

"We have extended the deadline by a year also because of the new surges in Covid cases after the lockdown as well as the possibility of the third wave, but I'm certain that we will have conducted a test flight by mid-April 2022," says head of the airport project Binesh Munankarmi.

Local paragliding businesses are already looking for alternative jump-off points in Syangja, Parbat and Baglung, away from the flight path of commercial flights. They also want the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) to issue NOTAMs with designated areas for paragliding as is the practice in Europe.

Such an arrangement is a possibility also in the northern areas of Pokhara Valley, concluded a Paragliding Operation and Management Study which was undertaken two years ago.

Commercial paragliding started in Pokhara in 2001, it now has over 69 registered companies, collectively worth Rs1 billion.

There are 356 para-pilots, 342 of them Nepalis. 350 people can take a flight at a time from Sarangkot.

In addition, there are five ultra-light companies offering sightseeing flights to the Annapurnas from the current Pokhara airport. They were also hit by the tourism collapse, and it is not yet certain whether they will be allowed to operate from Pokhara international Airport. If not, they may have to move to the unused airport in Baglung or even Manang.

"Paragliding directly or indirectly supports over a thousand people with employment, and even as we speak there are 25 Nepalis currently undergoing training to become commercial para-pilots," says Balram Acharya, also of the Nepal Air-sports Association.

Some say the new airport is also an opportunity to diversify paragliding and ultralight flights across Nepal and boost other local economies post-pandemic. Safety has also become a concern with overcrowding on Sarangkot, and there have been several fatal crashes in the past three years.

The terrain in Syangja, south of Pokhara, is deemed the most ideal for paragliding, and even holds international cross-country



There is an alternative paragliding hub in Syangja district.

paragliding competitions and a thriving training school run by Mt Everest summiteer and adventurer Sano Babu Sunuwar.

Meanwhile, Pokhara's new airport still has to address issues like relocating landfill sites in a 3km radius from the airport that are a bird-hit hazard for aircraft. Pokhara Municipality's Mahesh Baral says the work of relocating landfills will gather pace once the new sites are identified.

"The municipality doesn't have the budget to fast-track a new landfill site. If the government had also allocated money for adjoining works involved in national pride projects, we wouldn't have had unnecessary delays," he adds.

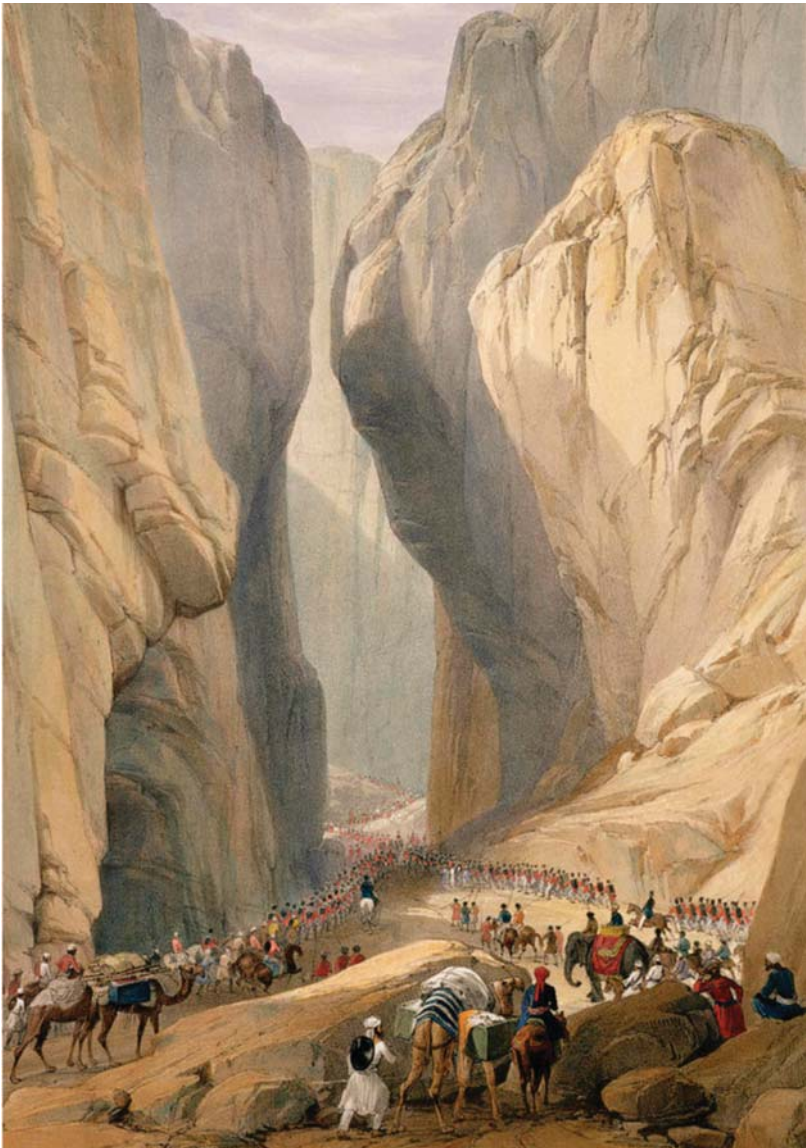
Meanwhile, the forested Rittheponi Hill on the eastern approach to the runway at Pokhara's new airport needs 40m to be shaved off to allow safe landings and takeoffs.

Despite the government's approval to do so back in March, it continues to be the last hurdle for the completion for the airport that can handle direct international flights, bringing tourists directly to Pokhara, bypassing Kathmandu. 🇳🇵





Kathmandu and Kabul are far apart, but the two countries share some difficult history



British forces together with Nepali soldiers of the 'Army of the Indus' entering the Bolan Pass en route from Quetta to Afghanistan in 1839. The campaign ended in a bloody disaster. Engraved by Louis and Charles Haghe.

● Kanak Mani Dixit

Even though Nepal and Afghanistan are separated geographically, Nepali and Pashtun warriors have met face-to-face over more than 200 years. While the Pashtun were in their home territory, the Nepalis were fronting for others, and now with the Taliban's second-time total victory in Afghanistan, new dynamics will have to evolve.

The history of Afghan-Nepal relations goes back two centuries, with what the British colonisers called the 'First Afghan War' and continued through the 'Third Afghan War' against the Pashtun in 1919. These were Britain's wars in Afghanistan, and the Nepalis who joined at various times were parts of the British Gurkhas, and even the national Nepali army. Most recently, British Gurkhas were fielded as part of the ISAF/NATO force, or were recruited by western military contractors to guard Western bases and embassies.

**The Army of the Indus**  
Nepal is situated in the mid-Himalaya, while Afghanistan sits

astride the Pamir and Hindu Kush, 2,000km away. Even at its height, the expansionist Gorkha Empire could not go beyond the Sutlej River. But these are the only two countries in South Asia that fought off colonialism. Afghans are known for their fierce resistance to foreign hegemony, as were Nepalis, but Afghanistan has nevertheless been serving continuously as a 'fighting field' for outsiders, while at best Nepal has been a 'playing field'.

Historically, there were indirect links between the central Himalaya and the Hindukush/Pamir: from the ancient Aryans down to the Moghuls, it was through the Khyber Pass and other northwestern passages that migrations and conquests of the Indus-Ganges plains occurred.

It was the colonial British that separated the Pashtun people with a new boundary called the 'Durand Line'. This forced demarcation has relevance today because, while Afghanistan is ethnically diverse with Kyrgyz, Baloch, Hazara, Uzbek and other communities, the Taliban leadership and rank-and-file are dominated by Pashtuns.

Even though Afghanistan and Nepal were spared colonial rule, Afghanistan suffered much more foreign interference than Nepal. Located between Czarist Russia, Central Asia and the British Empire and with Persia to the west, Afghanistan was (and remains) a strategic prize. Nepal, on the other hand, was protected by malarial jungles to the south and the world's highest mountains to the north, and neighbouring powers found it more advantageous to maintain it as a buffer state.

When the Gorkha Empire felt threatened by the East India Company in the mid-1700s, it sent feelers for help to the Maratha and Sikh kings. Though probable, we do not have historical evidence to indicate that Kathmandu also appealed to the rulers in Kabul.

Meanwhile, even before the end of the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-1816, some Nepali soldiers had already gone over to the British side, marking the beginnings of the 'Gurkha' brigades. After the bloody defeat at Nalapani, the Gorkhali general Bal Bhadra Kunwar escaped to join the forces of Sikh king Ranjit Singh in Lahore. The Nepali word



The 2nd Battalion 5th Gurkha Rifles at Ahnai Tangi in Waziristan on 14 January 1920 as part of Britain's 'Third Afghan War'. Painting by

# Nepal and th

लाहुरे for soldiers and workers who go abroad is derived from the name of this city.

We do not know what happened to the other Gorkhali troops who went with him, but Bal Bhadra himself was killed in battle when the Sikhs were fighting the Pashtuns in Naushera, which was then Afghan territory.

Nepalis and Pashtuns came into more direct contact during the East India Company's Afghan Campaign of 1839-42 when an 'Army of the Indus' was assembled to invade Afghanistan. This was part of the Great Game, when British India felt it had to contain the expansion of Czarist Russia. Thousands of troops from the early 'Gurkha' units were deployed on the Afghan front, and as was the practice in those days, the soldiers were accompanied by camp followers which included their wives and children.

The 'Army of the Indus' was routed, and legend has it that only one British officer straggled out to Peshawar, though there would have been a few more. There is no count of how many Nepalis were cut down with swords in Herat, Ghazni and Kabul, or those who

froze to death in the dreadful Afghan winter. Many women and children would have been enslaved by Afghan warlords.

North of Kabul in Charikar Fort, hundreds of Gorkhali fighters were under siege for months, with the water source blocked. When the Gorkhals tried to break out, most were killed, except a sipahi named Motiram who managed a dangerous and arduous trek down to his cantonment in the Punjab plains to tell the tale.



# Afghans and Afghanistan are us

● Aunohita Mojumdar

“We are not Americans,” the young Afghan man told me angrily, and, I thought, patronisingly. It was 2004 in Kabul and we were in the middle of a fierce debate on independence of media and women's rights, the two issues which have come to the fore in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover of Kabul.

The young man, R, was insistent that all this talk of rights was an American imposed program, alien to the culture of Afghanistan. “Nor am I American,” I answered, emphasising that my footprint was firmly in the region.

My shift to a regional paradigm changed the tone of the conversation that day, and we were able to have a discussion based on substance rather than on stereotypes. I was to find this again and again as I navigated through the complex space of a country emerging from years of isolation, one, which seemed, then, to be on the brink of a more hopeful future.

To me it seemed as though the complexities of the country and the opportunities, its strengths and its problems mirrored ours, different certainly in scale and acuteness but



ANNEFEENSTRA

Aunohita Mojumdar on right talking to farmers in a field in the village of Haibat Khel in Parwan province in 2008.



AUNOHITAMOJUMDAR

Voting in elections 2009.





Painting by Fred Roe at the National Army Museum.



A British Gurkha soldier of NATO's ISAF mission in Helmand Province following the 9/11 attacks. Nearly 200 years earlier, the forefathers of these Nepalis had also fought for the British in Helmand.

# The Taliban's second coming

## Najibullah to Ghani

Throughout the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, Nepalis kept going back to Afghanistan – to fight. Gurkha soldiers assigned to the Durand Line engaged in frequent skirmishes with Pashtun fighters. And in 1919, while other Nepali soldiers were returning home from Belgium, France and Gallipoli, soldiers of the Nepal Army were sent to Afghanistan to help the British counter a rebellion in Waziristan. Those troops for the ‘Third Afghan War’ were led by Gen Babar Sumshere Rana.

In the modern era, the people of Afghanistan suffered as super-powers muscled their way in. In 1974, Afghan king Zahir Shah was overthrown, and at the end of the Mujahideen war that followed against Soviet occupation, President Najibullah was dragged out of the UN compound where he had sought refuge, tortured and hung at the gates of Kabul in 1996 by the Taliban.

Unable to face the resistance of Afghan guerrillas, the Soviet Union withdrew in 1989 and cast off Najibullah in 1991, just as the American abandoned Ashraf Ghani in 2021. During this whole time,

Afghan polity was decimated as a result of interference by the Soviets, the Americans after 9/11, NATO forces, Pakistanis and Saudis, who together spent trillions of dollars.

While all that money landed up at the hands of the Afghan elite and warlords, ordinary Afghans died and suffered. Millions became refugees in Iran and Pakistan, and more refugees are streaming out as this is written – the desperation seen in Afghan men trying to attach themselves to C-17s on the runway at Kabul Airport this week.

The irony of it all was that some of the descendants of the Gorkhali troops who fought in Helmand and Kabul nearly 200 years ago were back as part of the Gurkha units in the British deployment in the same places as a part of NATO's ISAF mission. The blood and sweat they sacrificed seems to have been in vain, as President Ashraf Ghani flew out of Kabul on 15 August. Ghani said he wished to prevent bloodshed, and would doubtless have also feared meeting the same fate as Najibullah. But all this seems to have been part of a larger withdrawal deal worked out between the Americans and the Taliban in talks in Doha.

One of the consultants that the World Bank brought to Nepal in 2006 to advise leaders here about post-conflict rehabilitation was Ashraf Ghani, himself. The author of the book *Why States Fail*, Ghani wrote in one of his columns for *Nepali Times* then: ‘Surely the people of Nepal deserve leadership from their politicians to ensure that Nepal embarks upon a path towards a new future. A new future is no longer a dream, it has become possible.’

Nepal has not been brutalised and ravaged by a series of proxy wars like Afghanistan has for the past four decades. It did suffer the violent 10-year internal conflict, but the peace process took hold, and the country held two elections to a Constituent Assembly that wrote the new Constitution. Afghanistan's violence, the killing of innocents and religion-laced extremism, has been at a whole different level.

If it was soldiers that Nepal used to send to Afghanistan in the past two centuries, in the last two decades it has been Nepali development experts, gender and media consultants and governance advisers who went to Kabul on behalf of the UN or other partners.

And then there are the estimated 15,000 security guards protecting various embassies, hotels, bases and installations in Kabul -- attracted to dangerous work because it pays better.

While some Nepalis are starting to return on repatriation flights this week, there are many stranded in Kabul. The Nepal government must establish contact with the new regime in Afghanistan to ensure the safety of its citizens there. It is also hoped that the soft language emanating from the Taliban victors, about allowing safe passage to all who seek to exit, reflects a genuine commitment.

Nepal is currently chair of SAARC, and it could use its tenure to bring Afghanistan back into the South Asian fold. Kathmandu must strive to establish bilateral relations, while remaining outside the sphere of Indian, Chinese, Pakistani, Saudi or Western interests there.

China and Russia have already made their overtures to the Taliban government. New Delhi has been stung by Ashraf Ghani's downfall, while there seems to be some rejoicing in Islamabad. If Nepal takes a proactive diplomatic

approach (in a manner that would be wholly new to it) Kathmandu could use its bilateral relations to usher in a new era of peace in the region.

Meanwhile, Nepali civil society members must reach out to their counterparts in Afghanistan and offer safe haven should it be required. While the Taliban spokesman has said all are safe, there is no saying when Afghan journalists, gender and human rights activists may need support and refuge. The Taliban has been using Sharia law to justify its extreme form of patriarchy to prevent women and girls from equal rights, agency and education.

It has also been violently suppressing minorities like the Shi'a and Hazara. The group that blew up the historical statue of the Buddha in Bamiyan in 2001 is now ruling Afghanistan, and there are genuine fears that the Taliban will return to its old ways.

The fact that the Taliban is in control in Kabul is a fait accompli. Nepal must accept this and, while working to extricate its citizens from Afghanistan, must help Kabul rejoin the South Asian sphere. 🇳🇵

## Long before the Americans abandoned Afghanistan, we in the region had abandoned our claims to a shared kinship with Afghans

nonetheless familiar and tractable.

The problems facing Afghan women had not disappeared with the removal of the Taliban. Some areas experienced much greater freedom, and some faced more problems. The most brutal interpretation of Sharia was gone, but it still took presidential diktat to save an Afghan from execution for perceived blasphemy.

Over the eight years that I lived there, I also saw a growing erosion of support for women's rights. An Afghan woman activist was denied appointment as a minister by the parliament because her work for safe houses for women was considered immoral. Women were still being incarcerated in Pul-e-Charkhi prison outside Kabul for the crime of running away from abusive homes.

They were guilty since, as possessions of the family they were considered to have committed a theft against their family by running away. Women ran radio stations and became TV anchors. In some places they were also forced to leave the radio stations they had joined as their voices on air was considered unbecoming by their families.

The space which had opened up after the removal of the Taliban was full of

possibilities. It was also full of struggle. It also felt familiar, the way it did in many parts of India where many women like me had many more rights than others did. It felt familiar the way it did in the villages of Haryana where I had reported from homes where Hindu women observed deep purdah as many Afghan women continued to do.

In Kabul I wore the same head covering I had worn in many villages in India on my reporting trips and received some lectures from western women journalists on how I was supposed to show the way to Afghan women by discarding it. When some of the women's rights started being eroded under the growing clout of the ultra-conservative militia leaders they had put in power, western diplomats started to talk about cultural relativity. I found myself asserting that I came from a similar culture but that the rights to life, liberty and safety were neither relative nor negotiable.

The reigning narrative of the Taliban was one of oppression of religious minorities. Except that in the popular narrative it was oppression of non-Muslim minorities - the Hindus and Sikhs. What I found in Afghanistan was different. One of the first de rigueur interviews as an Indian journalist was

with the leaders of the Sikh community in Kabul's Karte Parwan area.

The Sikh leader complained about the deterioration of security after the departure of the Taliban. They said their religious rights had not been impinged upon by the Taliban whose focus was on making Muslims observant of all the religious practices.

I thought about that today when I heard the Indian government had decided to discriminate on religious grounds, and offered help only to the Hindus and Sikhs of Afghanistan. I thought about the outcry over independent media in Afghanistan today when I read about journalists in Srinagar being thrashed while reporting on the *muharram* procession.

I knew about the outrage of the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan. When I travelled to Bamiyan valley I also saw the areas where communities of Hazaras had been massacred around the same time, with much less international comment.

I had gone to live in Afghanistan in 2003. In 2002 I had marched in the streets of Delhi and organised meetings after the state-assisted massacres of Muslims in Gujarat. I would not have been working in Afghanistan had

the Taliban still been there and I could see the young Afghans I worked with and met amazed at the opportunities.

They would show me their ID cards from the Taliban times, long bearded and morose, laughing at how much older they had looked then – but it also felt familiar, like the struggles of much of our region against femicide and infanticide, against horrific dowry deaths and religious discrimination, against the use of state power to brutal ends. It didn't feel like another planet the way it seemed to do to some westerners.

The truth is that long before the Americans abandoned Afghanistan, we in the region, had relinquished our claims to a shared kinship based on geography, history and culture, looking at the country as a mutation of our worst fears, and one can draw a line, perhaps not straight, but jagged, from there to what we see today.

But now, perhaps, it is time. It is time we in the region not leave it to our governments, and to claim Afghanistan and Afghans as one of us. 🇳🇵

*Aunohita Mojumdar is a South Asian journalist. She lived and worked in Kabul for 8 years.*



## EVENTS

### Heritage tour

This instalment of the Virtual Heritage Tour series designed by Story Cycle will take viewers on a journey to a historic and culturally significant stretch of the Bagmati River, from Thapathali to Teku. Make reservations on a Google form at Story Cycle's Facebook page.  
*27 August, 4pm-5pm*

### Art workshops

Art students are invited to participate in Mobile Library Nepal's series of online workshops from artists Pramesh Baskota, Kripa Shakya and Yugesh Ghimire on children's book illustrations, photograph reading, and Tharu wall paintings respectively. Details on Facebook.  
*Until 5 September*



### Sooriya yoga 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*

### Labim Bazaar

From fresh produce to crafts by local businesses, there's something for everyone at the weekly market at Labim. Safety guidelines apply.  
*Saturdays, 9am, Labim Mall*

### Photowalk

Join aspiring photographers for walks across the valley and take pictures that inspire. Follow distancing protocols. Get details about photowalk schedules on PhotoWalk Nepal's website.

## DINING



### Vino Bistro

Touted as the hub of French cheeses and imported wines in Nepal, Vino offers delivery for cheese platters, charcuterie, pastas and some of the best bruschetta, all paired with the perfect wine.  
*9849480432/9818953251*

## PODCASTS



### King Falls AM

A bimonthly podcast, King Falls AM centres on a lonely little mountain town's late-night AM talk radio show and its paranormal, peculiar happenings and inhabitants. Find on Stitcher and Apple podcasts.

### Feast Meets West

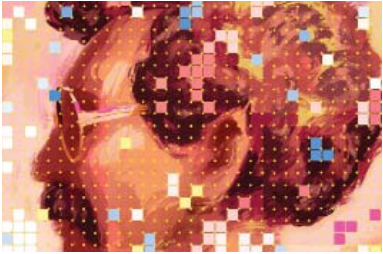
In Feast Meets West, hosts Lynda Liu in NYC and Iris Van Kerckhove in Hong Kong trace the origin and journeys of Asian food and food trends to the west. Listen to episode #39 where the hosts interview New York-based Fulpa Jangbu, who owns and operates Momo Delight, a food cart in NYC.

### Binge Mode

Episodes of this pop-culture podcast produced by The Ringer give detailed recaps of much-loved television shows, films, or other pieces of media. Find Binge Mode on Stitcher and Apple podcasts.

### Revisionist History

In Revisionist History, The New Yorker's Malcolm Gladwell re-examines overlooked and misunderstood elements from events, people, ideas, and even songs of the past. Find the podcast on Stitcher and Apple Podcast.



### Invisibilia

A study of human behaviour, Invisibilia fuses narrative storytelling about the unseeable forces that shape our ideas, beliefs, and assumptions with science that will make you view your life differently. Find the podcast on Stitcher.

### The Village Cafe

Get Fresh, Delicious, home-made food from The Village Cafe delivered at home. Order sel roti mix, frozen momo and khuwa. Call the cafe for deliveries, or order through Kathmandu Organics.  
*(01) 5540712*

### Bota Momo

Thinking about making momo at home and enjoying them on rainy afternoons? Save time and get frozen momo from Bota. Bota's open momo and Guccha momo are also available to order.  
*9801116402*

### Haadi Biryani

Craving a quick and easy Biryani? Haadi is the place to go to or order from. Enjoy slow-cooked biryanis seasoned with a secret spice blend which come in clay pots that enhances the dining experience.  
*(01) 4538444*

## GETAWAY

### Club Himalaya

Escape to this cosy mountain resort with breathtaking views away from the bustle of the city for the weekend.  
*Nagarkot, 9801321201, 9801321203*



### 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*

### Pataleban Vineyard Resort

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



### Aloft

Located near the heart of Thamel, Aloft, a global chain of hotels offers some of the best modern luxuries and architecture in Kathmandu. From beauty salons and spas to restaurants and shops, Aloft is a place for visitors to indulge.  
*Thamel (01) 5252000*

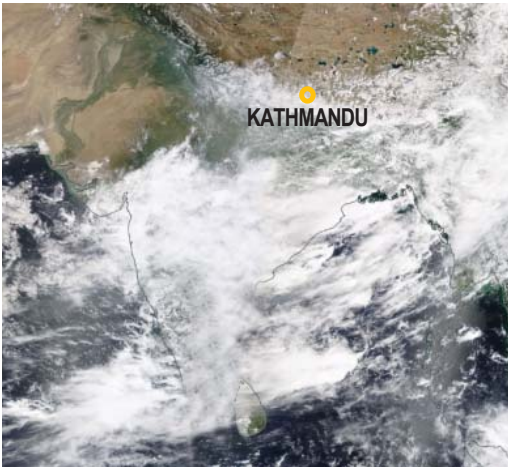
### Grand Norling

Take a trip to the outskirts of Kathmandu to the scenic nature of Gokarna, and enjoy sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer herds, and the garden. Get details about the resort's monsoon package on Facebook  
*Gokarna (01) 4910196*



### Hankook Sarang

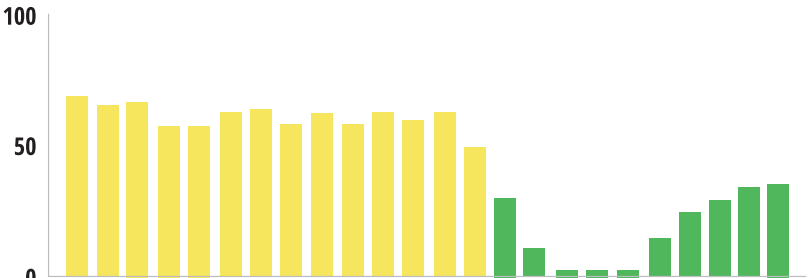
Satisfy the hankering for Korean food and enjoy a variety of mouthwatering dishes like Tteokbokki, Samgyeopsal, Jeyuk Bokkeum and more. Call for additional details.  
*(01) 4256675*



This satellite weather map at noon on Thursday shows the relentless march of the monsoon across the Subcontinent, coming in from the Arabian Sea, joining up with the moist air from the Bay of Bengal, curving westwards over Assam and then approaching Nepal from the southeast. There is a low pressure circulation that is bringing more rain to Kathmandu over the weekend, with the sun peeking through occasionally.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 19°	27° 18°	27° 18°

## AIR QUALITY INDEX



11AM 18 August to 10AM 19 August measured at US Embassy, Phora Darbar

The Air Quality Index (AQI) measured at the US Embassy Phora Darbar station is available hour-by-hour on [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com). In this, we see a continued pattern of better AQI after rains wash down particulates from the air, with an immediate spike at rush hours when traffic builds up. This pattern will continue till the end of the monsoon next month, after which AQI will deteriorate again. So breathe the relatively clean air until it lasts.

## OUR PICK



*Confession*, a 2019 South Korean legal drama, follows Choi Do-hyun, a young man with a heart condition who become a lawyer for his father, who he believes has been wrongly accused and imprisoned for murder. When the investigation takes a new direction, he must team up with a former police detective, his new assistant, and a journalist, all of whom have connections to the case, to catch the real perpetrator. Stars Lee Jun-ho, Shin Hyun-bin, Yoo Jae-myung, and Nam Gi-ae.

कोमिड-१९ विरुद्धको खोप सरकारले निःशुल्क लगाइरहेको छ ।

अबैध रुपमा खोप बेच्ने र किनेर लगाउने दुवैलाई प्रचलित कानुन बमोजिम कडा कारवाही हुनेछ ।

कोरोना विरुद्धको खोप बेचबिखन भएको थाहा पाउने जो कोहीले स्थानीय प्रशासन, प्रहरी कार्यालय, पालिका वा स्वास्थ्य कार्यालयमा यथार्थ जानकारी गराउनु हुन अनुरोध छ ।

बजारमा लुकिछिपी बेच्न राखिएका खोपहरु नक्कली हुन सक्छन् ।

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# Big message for small businesses

Multimedia messaging can be a stepping stone for stores going digital during the pandemic

For over 16 months during the pandemic, businesses have been going through transformative change with a steep learning curve. They have had little time to prepare for how the Covid-19 crisis has irrevocably altered customer behaviour.



**TECH AWAY**  
Saniaa Shah

Many people are unwilling to make visits deemed inessential, which has impacted older small businesses that have always relied on footfall and traditional retail presence to make sales. As the pandemic stretched from weeks to months to years, emergency funds have worn thin. Many businesses have shut shops, unable to handle the overheads, staff salary, among others.

Without government help for digital literacy, local businesses are having to take matters into their own hands and use social media and online platforms to maintain their presence, as more people seek services from the safety of their homes.

Businesses with family members of the younger digital-savvy generation can cope with the change better, with children helping them set up or managing their online presence. But most businesses used to the traditional sale methods are grappling with somewhat outdated establishments that would have done just fine, if not for multiple lockdowns.

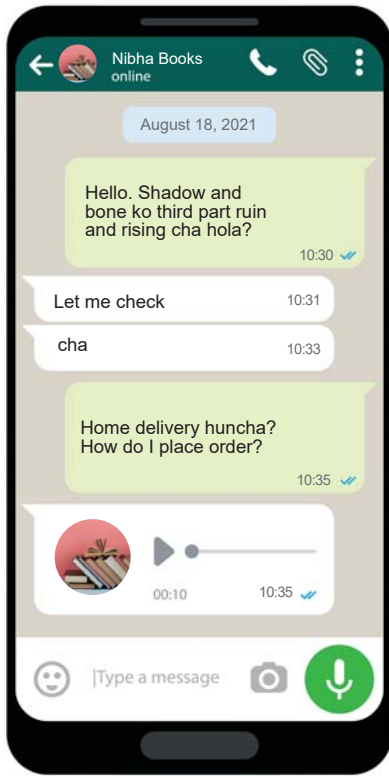
Businesses that spent years sticking to hand-written bills and paying vendors by cheque have now been forced to switch to digital substitutes and online payment systems like mobile wallets (eSewa or Khalti), Connect IPS and banking apps.

Facebook and Instagram stories are now daily staples for posting updated menus of services, products and business timings that tend to change as the government issues new Covid-19 safety policies, in response to the evolving health crisis. If there is a sudden lockdown, some businesses find ways to cater to their customers, but many are forced to go on hold until further notice.

Small businesses now are seeing up to 25% of revenue generated directly from their Facebook and Instagram pages. Many of them are active on Messenger and use DMs to answer customer queries, confirm orders and coordinate delivery, using casual yet highly effective language styles (most commonly, typing in Roman Nepali) coupled with genuine pictures and videos to clinch sales.

With thousands of Nepalis engaged on WhatsApp and Viber every day for both personal and professional purposes, small businesses are also able to use these communication platforms to stay in touch with repeat customers. Most do not even use the WhatsApp Business app because regular WhatsApp does the job without having to upgrade to the proper channel WhatsApp has launched for business inquiries, complete with fancy features such as an automated chatbot and a product catalogue.

Technology is already at our fingertips, but user behaviour and audience willingness to adopt new methods of sales and marketing communication stand in the way of digitalisation of traditional businesses. The audience may



already be comfortable with e-commerce websites and apps, but business owners often are not, because they are not familiar with the technology and its possibilities.

Not to forget, that setting up a website alone requires a team of people to handle online orders, and with that comes logistics to sort out the entire sales process.

Moreover, low literacy levels mean that many small business owners do not feel confident handling customer care online by typing words on a virtual keyboard. WhatsApp, Viber and Messenger are ideal training wheels for such small business owners because, besides text messaging exchanges, they also offer audio-visual data (voice notes, phone calls, image and video sharing) for free.

Let us take a look at some traditional businesses that could do with a beginner level digital transformation:

**Pharmacies:** Drug stores are important during the pandemic, yet these small family-owned shops struggle when Viber could very well be their virtual shop counter. While some shops have switched, many have yet to start selling medicine via messaging apps, sending photos of tablet strips without having to type out complicated names, as well as having delivery to residents within a 3km radius.

**Flower/Plant Sellers:** Gardening was a booming hobby during the first few months of the pandemic, during which nurseries saw new customers interested in setting up rooftop gardens to grow their own vegetables. Restrictions on gatherings also meant that flower sales saw a sharp decline with no weddings, or events. Online flower businesses could help with important family events being held at home as well as those looking to gift fancy bouquets without visiting a flower shop. Product photos can be easily sent over, and video calls can help make colour and wrapping choices. Even better, a flower vendor in Kathmandu can cater to a wedding at home in another district, provided they tie-up with an inter-city delivery partner.

**Book and Stationery Shops:** The publishing industry was already suffering before the coronavirus crisis. But now many people would rather download an e-book or watch a movie. But books, unlike clothes or shoes, are a product category that enjoy low chances of getting returned, with customers usually receiving exactly what they saw on the WhatsApp image.

The same goes for stationery items like notebooks, pens, staplers, geometry sets, etc. These business owners need to get going by collecting contact numbers of regular customers and asking Facebook page visitors to message them with the title or category of the book they are searching for. This is only the stepping-stone towards e-commerce websites, which some Nepali online booksellers like booksmandala.com and laibary.np already have. Nepal could someday have its own staples.com, an online store of a global retail chain that houses stationery and office supplies.

**Paper Products:** Thanks to e-commerce, plastic packaging is contributing to mounting piles of garbage. Nepali paper, recycled paper or lokta are a part of our cultural aesthetic, and an industry that needs revival – especially due to the sharp dip in tourists buying creative paper goods made in Nepal. If paper goods manufacturers used multimedia messaging to take orders, the market may see an upward trend in affordable paper lampshades,

pretty gift packaging and photo frames.

**Festive Decor:** With Raksha Bandhan, Krishna Asthami and Tij around the corner, as well as major festivals like Dasain and Tihar coming soon, festive decor, puja items and related paraphernalia will force people to visit crowded markets in Asan and Patan for affordable deals, further spreading the virus. But what if small businesses chose to pre-book orders via WhatsApp and Viber, bundling both decor and puja goods for customers to shop efficiently without wasting time and risking their health? pujaservice.com is your one-stop-shop for religious ceremony requirements, but festive shopping is a massive, rich territory that is yet to be properly tapped.

**Hair, Skin and Beauty Services:**

Neighbourhood barber shops, kiosk-based mehendi artists and local beauty parlours have all seen a drastic decline in customers because they need physical proximity. Home visits and doorstep services might be the way forward for them. After all, smaller businesses thrive on

their efficiency, not their brand experience. These businesses can benefit greatly from booking appointments using messaging apps, and carrying a kit to their customer's home, while also charging extra for personalised at-home services. With innovative platforms like UrbanClap and HouseJoy seeing tremendous success in the Indian market, Nepal could also get started. But for now, getting a haircut on the home driveway, thanks to a simple Viber message to a trusted barber, is a solid beginning.

If you want to help your local small businesses take a step towards post-Covid Nepal, volunteer to help set up their phone, teach them to create a Facebook post or show them the magic of in-stream video and voice messages, and see where it takes them.

Who knows, this could be a 'one tiny phone tap for a Nepali shopkeeper, one giant leap for Nepal'.

**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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GIGfiber

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FOR SMS BOOKING: Type Your Name<Space> Location and send SMS to 9801116552



# Tikapur's protracted

Six years after the massacre of policemen, Tharu wrongly jailed for it await justice

● **Tufan Neupane** in Kailali

On 25 August 2015, Ram Prasad Chaudhary was in a meeting with the principal of the school he taught at in Joshipur when plainclothes policemen rushed in. He was handcuffed and blindfolded without being told of the charges against him.

The beatings began in the police van. "From Tikapur to Dhangadi, they tortured me. I had no hope of coming out of there alive," recalls Ram Prasad, who floated in and out of consciousness until they reached Dhangadi. More torture and humiliation would follow in prison.

The previous day, Tharu activists demanding greater autonomy for their indigenous group in the new Constitution had confronted Akhanda Sudur Paschim supporters, and the police intervened as the clashes became violent.

As things escalated, eight policemen were butchered in Tikapur, and a two-year-old toddler was shot dead by Tharu activists. In the following weeks, as the masterminds of the violence and those known to have whipped up the agitation slipped away, police took revenge on innocent Tharus.



Ram Prasad Chaudhary

Ram Prasad finally found out in jail that he had been arrested for the killings of the policemen in Tikapur on 24 August. He had been a constituency-level leader of the then Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Democratic), and had participated in the protest but was not involved in the killings.

Sick in hospital, the court ordered that Ram Prasad receive treatment for his injuries. Doctors found that he had suffered blunt force trauma to the head, arms, and chest from incessant beatings. Six years later, Ram Prasad is still on medication for his injuries.

This week ahead of the anniversary of the tragedy, Tharuhat Central Coordination Committee has started a sit-in in Kathmandu demanding the cases filed after the massacre to be withdrawn and the report of the government's investigation into the incident to be made public.

The Tikapur protest was not a sudden implosion, but the apotheosis of the Tharu movement, similar to movements by other ethnic communities across the country. The Tharuhat Struggle Committee (TSC) had rejected the seven-province federalism model that placed Kailali and Kanchanpur in Far-western Province, and had been agitating for a separate Tharuhat Province.

Madhav Chaudhary, Kailali

coordinator of the TSC, says that the situation deteriorated after proponents of the Akhanda Sudur Paschim movement staged a motorcycle rally from Dhangadi to Tikapur on 20 August to celebrate the passing of the new Constitution.

Disgruntled Tharuhat cadre tried to stop the rally in retaliation for the disruption of a TSC meeting in Dhangadi. Akhanda Sudur Paschim activists then vandalised the Tharu Welfare Assembly office and other Tharu-owned buildings in Tikapur.

The local administration imposed a lockdown in Tikapur, but TSC members gathered thousands of Tharus in Tikapur to replace 'Nepal Government' in signboards with 'Autonomous Tharuhat Province'.

The police was overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of protesters. By the end of the day, SSP Laxman Neupane, Inspectors Balram Bista and Keshav Bohara, Constable Shyam Bahadur Khadka, Police Constable Lokendra Bahadur Chand, Senior Constable Lalit Saud, Assistant Constable Ram Bihari Chaudhary, Constable Janak Negi, and the two-year-old son of one of the policemen, Tek Bahadur Saud, had been killed by protesters.

Police filed cases against 58 suspects in the Kailali District Court, out of which two were Muslims, and the rest Tharu. Of them, only 27 suspects were arrested, and 31 are still on the run. Of the 27 arrested, 17 have since been released. All of them spoke to us of being tortured while in police custody.

Five days after the Tikapur incident, police tried to restore communal harmony, but by then most TSC leaders had fled. That night, police went house-to-house arresting any TSC member they could find.

Santa Kumar Chaudhary, who ran a liquor shop in Bhajani, was one of them. His wife Yamuna Devi Rasaili remembers the police buying alcohol, getting drunk and beating both husband and wife.

The inebriated policemen led by Inspector Bharat Shah then kicked down the door to the home of Brijmohan Chaudhary, who lived nearby. He told us: "Around 12 drunk policemen broke in at 1AM and began beating me and took me to jail."

Kisan Lal Chaudhary remembers the torture in custody. "They used sticks and even their gun butts to beat us senseless," says Kisan Lal, who still needs treatment. Vegetable vendor Rajesh Chaudhary was also arrested that night, and severely tortured. Santaram Chaudhary, a teacher from Bhajani, had to be taken to hospital after the torture shattered his right eardrum.

Even before the 24 August 2015 killings, Rajkumar Kathariya and Sundarlal Kathariya of Janaki village were shot in police firing and had been hospitalised.

But the police picked them anyway, accusing them of being involved in the killing of policemen. Rajkumar's brother-in-law Ram Kumar Kathariya went to the hospital with clothes and money, and stayed there overnight. On 25 August, Rajkumar, Sundarlal and Ram Kumar were arrested at the hospital.

"They asked us if we had gone to the protests and killed

Rajkumar Kathariya was arrested from the hospital where he was receiving treatment after being shot in police firing. His wife Sita gave birth to their son while he was seven months into custody.



Tikapur

Kathmandu

those policemen," Rajkumar recalls. "I told them that was impossible because I had been shot by the police before the killings, and was in hospital. But they beat me up anyway."

Seven months into custody, Rajkumar's wife Sita gave birth to their son. Sita would visit Rajkumar in prison with their infant son. Even as he was filled with joy, the first sight of his child, whom he couldn't hold or even touch, broke his heart. "I wish I had been with Sita when she was pregnant," says Rajkumar, holding his son at his doorstep last week, six years after that horror-filled day. "I suffered thinking about her going through it alone." The Kailali

District Court ruled that Rajkumar would serve a life sentence for the Tikapur killings. However, in December 2019, the Dipayal High Court reduced Rajkumar's sentence to five years. By that time, however, he had

already spent six months more than his term. Rajkumar's brother-in-law Ram Kumar was initially sentenced to three years in prison, even though he had already spent three-and-a-half years in jail by that time.

Sundarlal Chaudhary suffered multiple tragedies during his five year incarceration. He lost his daughter to jaundice, and his son has been paralysed after an accident. "Had I not been in prison, I would have been able to get my children the treatment they needed," says Sundarlal. "My family was destroyed."

Others, like Lahuram Chaudhary, spent six months more than his three-year sentence, while Rajesh Chaudhary and Brijmohan Chaudhary spent four more months than their five-year terms.

Nepal's National Criminal Code stipulates that no one shall be subjected to torture, and those perpetrating it face stiff fines and



Sundarlal Kathariya

jail terms. The code further states, 'Any person who commits such an offence shall not be allowed to claim that they have committed the offence under orders from a superior officer, nor shall they be exempt from punishment.'

But although the torture of the Tharus of Tikapur while in custody was recorded in court, there was no subsequent investigation by law enforcement. And no compensation.

Ram Naresh Chaudhary lived





# trauma



ALL PHOTOS: AMIT MACHAMASI



and worked as a mathematics teacher near his rented flat in Bardia, some 23 km from Tikapur. He was teaching his Grade 10 class on 25 August when two plainclothes policemen showed up and asked him to confirm his identity. He was then put on the back of a motorcycle and taken to Dhangadi. Ram Naresh was accused of involvement in the killings even though he had not been anywhere near Tikapur the previous day. He asked police to check his phone's geolocation, but they put him behind

bars anyway.

Birbal Chaudhary, the principal of the school Ram Naresh taught at, went to the police station in Dhangadi with his colleague's attendance record to prove his innocence. Birbal offered to pay bail, but was denied. "If you talk too much you will suffer the same fate," the police told him.

In 2020, after he had spent three and a half years in prison for the Tikapur killings, the district and high courts ruled that Ram Naresh was not involved. "I spent three-and-a-half years in prison despite my innocence," says Ram Naresh. "I lost my job, my family is in disarray. Where is justice?"

Tikapur farmer Bishram Kusmi ran an agro-vet and nursery shop in Tikapur and had taken out a loan to rent a plot. His store had been vandalised and looted the day after the deadly protests, but police still came after him seven months later to arrest him. "Months after my store was vandalised, I was jailed," Kusmi says, "my business was finished, and my debt kept stacking up. I lost everything."

Kusmi had not been named in any of the complaints following the Tikapur incident, and his phone's location proved he had been



nowhere near the protest site. But the government prosecutors still sought life imprisonment. On 6 March, after spending 3 years in prison, Kusmi was acquitted, but by that time the bank had started the process of auctioning his property.

Although Nepal's Supreme Court ordered that those who were falsely imprisoned be compensated, they have not received any amount from the state. Police haven't had to answer for their arbitrary arrests and torture. The courts have not



Shiva Narayan's electrical goods store was looted and burned to the ground. Shops owned by Tharus in Tikapur in the aftermath of the killings were robbed, vandalised and torched.

been held to account for wrong prosecutions.

Santa Kumar Chaudhary is serving a life sentence for the Tikapur killings in Jhumka Prison, 500km away in Sunsari. But it appears he was mistaken for someone else with the same name.

Wrongful imprisonment was not the only consequence that Tharus of Kailali faced after the Tikapur killings of police. There were revenge attacks on Tharu-owned houses and businesses in Tikapur, many were vandalised, looted, and set on fire. Nirmala Chaudhary, owner of Niru Traders, had brought her pregnant sister to Tikapur to care for her. Her shop was set on fire by Akhanda Sudur Paschim protestors. She and her sister escaped the fire from the third floor window.

"My sister gave birth to her daughter that very night. Every year on that day, I struggle with joy and sorrow," says Nirmala. "Should I celebrate my niece's birthday, or mourn the loss of my house and shop?"

Shiva Narayan Chaudhary sold electrical goods at Niru Traders with his wife Nirmala. It was looted and burned to the ground despite the curfew imposed after the Tikapur violence.

"Everything that was stocked up for the Dasain festival was looted and they had police protection," says Shiva Narayan, who did receive some compensation. Indeed, while shops owned by Tharus were looted and torched, those owned by hill settlers were not. Businesses run by Tharu families in buildings owned by non-Tharu were vandalised, but not set on fire. "We filed a petition demanding action and sent it to the police," Shiva Narayan says, "However, there has been no investigation into the vandalism and arson of our homes and shops." Laxman Tharu, the national coordinator of the Tharuhat/Tharuwan Struggle Committee, says that the Tikapur violence set back the movement for Tharu autonomy.

"Since the Tharuhat movement was gaining traction, the Tikapur incident was planned to disenfranchise us, as a result of which the movement has suffered great loss," he says.

There was dissatisfaction among many ethnic groups across the country seeking autonomy in the new Constitution. Although the demands of other ethnic groups were partially met, TSC coordinator Ram Prasad Chaudhary says: "The Tharu have been the only people who haven't had any of their concerns addressed. The state has continued its historical oppression." 🚩

## Righting historical wrongs

In his book *Madhes: Problems and Possibilities*, researcher Arjun Guneratne writes about the Tharu and the Nepali state, tracing the historical discrimination and land-grabbing by settlers of the forests and farms of the Tarai where the Tharu lived.

It all started with the practice of gifting birta land to soldiers and military officials to feed the Gorkha conquests of the 18-19th century. This process accelerated after malaria was eradicated in the 1960s, and the forests cleared to allow a state-sponsored transmigration of hill people to the Tarai.

The impact of such migration, Guneratne writes, was widespread in the Far West and Inner Tarai valleys like Chitwan and Dang. After losing their land, many Tharus of western Nepal joined the ranks of *kamaiya* indentured labourers.



The anti-*kamaiya* movement in the 1990s for the first time made the Tharus politically aware. This is why the Maoists were able to recruit Tharus into their militia during the insurgency by promising them liberation with an autonomous Tharu state.

According to a report on Nepal's conflict by the Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), it was the Tharu who suffered the most casualties and enforced disappearances in proportion to their population base.

Fifteen years after the conflict, the Maoists are in power and have forgotten about their promises to the Tharu, and have still not been allowed into decision-making positions either in provincial or the federal government.





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# CPN (Asinine)

It doesn't look like anyone is about to give Prime Minister Brave Lion a honeymoon period. The same folks who were baying for Oli's blood are now sinking their fangs into the lion's jugular. And it's not even 100 days yet.

That is very unfair, give the man some time. He has been a prime monster five times before. He knows what he's doing. He is in no hurry to expand the cabinet because the country seems to run just fine with only four ministers. The longer he can delay adding ministers, the less headaches he has, and the more money the country saves.

The Ass just did some back of the envelope calculations, and it seems Nepal's exchequer has saved 1 Kharab 5 Arabs 31 Corrodes and 47.5 Lacks just in the past 6 weeks by not having to pay for a jumbo prawn size cabinet. We have salvaged on honorariums for all those new honorary ministers, salaries for their brothers-in-law to serve as PAs, on allowances for a Armed Police Farce platoon for every minister, SUVs, smartphones, Dasain bonuses.

These savings will add up to so much that they will wipe out Nepal's burgeoning budget deficit. This is Prime Minister Dubya's masterstroke to save the economy from collapse. It looks like we do not really need a budget debate in this prorogued parliament after all because we have no balance of payment deficit anymore for the opposition to bash the government about.

A skeleton cabinet also means there is less corruption. Imagine all the kickbacks not partaken of, the bribes uncollected, the commissions not handed over under the table. This means the treasury has healthy

cash flow so we can send ex-prime ministers for health checkups to Delhi.

But now that the Unified Marxist-Leninists are not unified anymore, Brave Lion will have more mouths to feed in the new cabinet. That can easily be resolved, what is more worrying is what we are going to call all these new communist parties — they are splitting like amoebas in heat.

It used to be pretty straight forward in the old days, there was just one Communist Party of Nepal (CPN). But then there came the CPN (Mashal) and CPN (Masal) — yes, they were different parties. After that, there were the CPN (Marxist-Leninist) and CPN (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) which merged with the others to form what we now know as the CPN (Unified Marxist-Leninist). The CPN (Maoists) got so sick of it all that they preferred to go underground and shoot everyone.

But now with Makunay registering the CPN (UML-Socialist) he has opened a pandora's box. Does this mean that the other CPNs are not socialist? If so, what does this mean for dialectic materialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat?

And since the comrades seem to be suffering from ideological promiscuity, we have to make space for more communist parties in the days to come:

UML (Socialite)  
CPN (Marxism-Leninism-Hinduism)  
CPN (Maoist-Monarchist)  
NCP (Big Plop)  
CPN (Revolutionary)  
CPN (Revolting)  
CPN (Asinine)



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