

Who gets what?

● Santa Gaha Magar

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba took office nearly two months ago, but aside from five ministers he has not been able to set up a full Cabinet.

It is not for the lack of trying; he needs to balance disparate demands of coalition partners who want their rewards for backing him. The second Covid wave may be waning, and Kathmandu Valley lifted its three-month lockdown on Wednesday, but the economy and development are at a standstill.

But that seems to be of little concern to personalities in the parlours of power whose eyes are set on grabbing important portfolios

ahead of the 2023 elections so they can build up war chests, as well as command the government and security apparatus.

Staking their claims to Cabinet positions are Madhav Kumar Nepal who launched his own party, the CPN (United Socialist) on 25 August, and whose defection in July led to the collapse of the K P Oli government, and paved the way for Deuba to become prime minister for the fifth time.

Deuba also needs to pacify other members of the five-party alliance, including his own Nepali Congress (NC), where rival factions need to be placated ahead of his party's general convention in November so that he can counter rivals for presidency.

Deuba has to decide whether it is more important to pacify dissidents like Ram Chandra Poudel, or dangle carrots in front of members supporting Bimalendra Nidhi's candidature for president of the NC.

The Maoist Centre (MC) is also demanding its share, and not just a pound of flesh. The MC's Pushpa Kamal Dahal complained publicly that he was under "tremendous stress" because of demands from many of the party's 49 members for ministerships. "I wish I could make all 49 MPs ministers, but there are only 7 slots," an exasperated Dahal told a gathering last month.

Then there is the Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP) which, besides its own ministerial

candidates, is also putting pressure on Deuba to retract the ordinance he used to allow Madhav Nepal to split off from the UML.

That ordinance allowed the Mahanta Thakur faction to also break away from the JSP because it lowered the constitutional threshold of parliamentary party membership for a formal split. The JSP now fears more dissidents may leave the party.

Two lengthy meetings of coalition leaders this week in Baluwatar failed to agree on the ministerial lineup. The NC and MC have divided up the most important ministries between themselves. Deuba already has his loyalists in the home affairs and law ministries, and the state minister for health. The Maoists have finance and energy. The two also want to keep foreign affairs, defence, and information.

The JSP and United Socialists will have to make do with remaining ministries, and are haggling over the more lucrative ones. Deuba's problem is that the Constitution only allows 25 ministries in government, and his aides say the partners are working on a compromise but a deal "may take a few more days".

There are also demands from within coalition members. Dahal has to placate comrades from the conflict days. Even the JSP has not been able to finalise its list in order to strike a Mountain-Madhes balance. The remaining member of the alliance, Rastriya Janamorchha has only one MP and has said it does not want to be a part of the government.

Deuba is working on a quota of 5-7 portfolios for Madhav Nepal's United Socialists, five more ministries for the Maoists and the JSP, and five more for his own NC. And with that he will have hit the limit for Cabinet size. Negotiations within the coalition are expected to drag on.

Blood, sweat, tears
EDITORIAL
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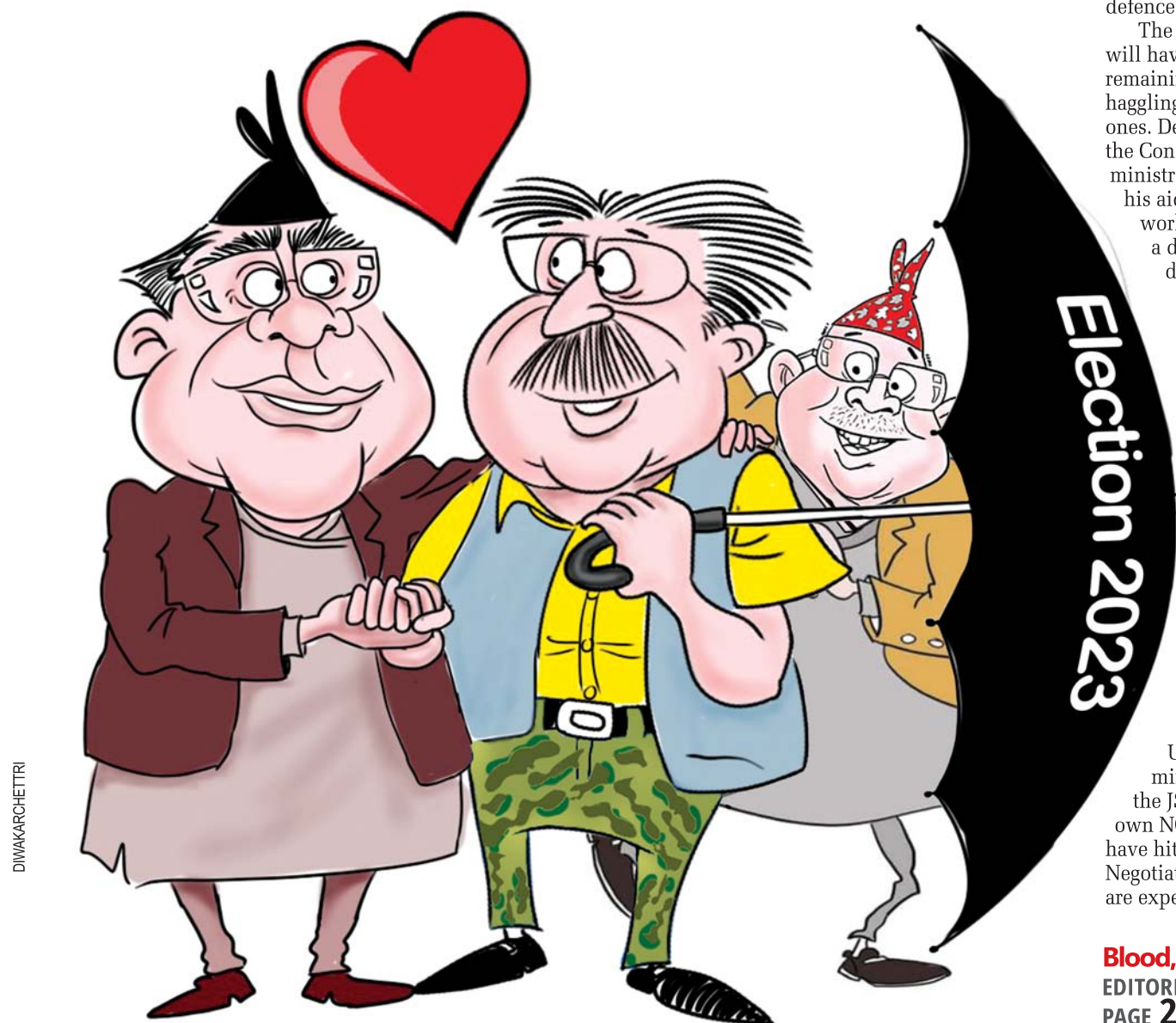
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Blood, sweat, tears

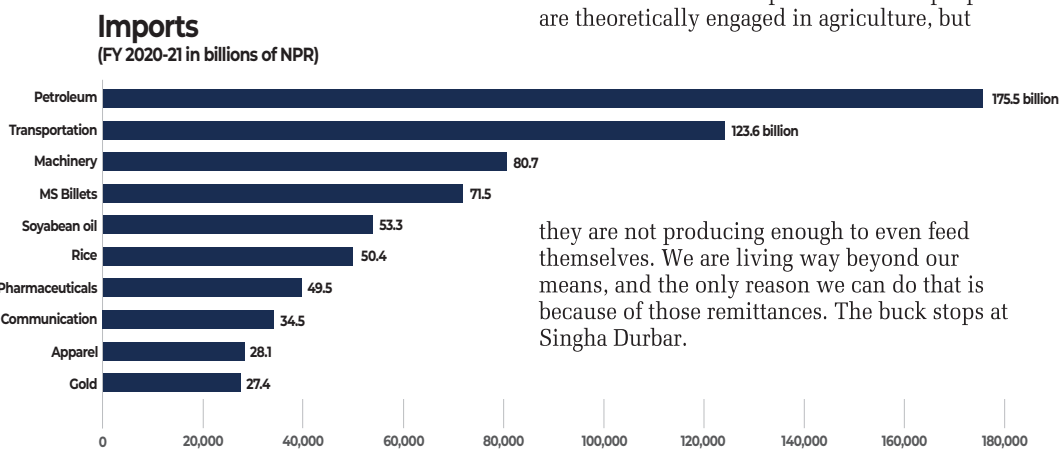
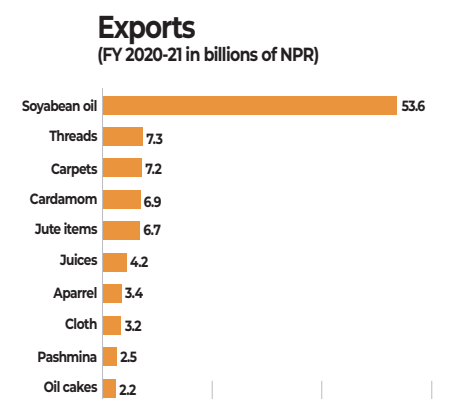
Nepal's economy has hit the iceberg, but you wouldn't know it from the politicians fighting it out on the deck.

A serial prime minister cannot form a functioning coalition government even after 6 weeks of assuming office, his coalition partners are too faction-ridden to be a countervailing force, and the main opposition has just split.

All this is nothing new, of course. It has been the way things have been ever since the 1990 changes when democracy was supposed to unleash prosperity. Three decades of political infighting, neglect, conflict, a rent-seeking state and governance failure have left the economy in tatters. And now we have the pandemic to contend with.

If the political battles being played out in the parlours of power were inter-generational or about ideology, something good might have come of it. But such personality driven one-upmanship means that the current crop of ageing politicians has neither the time nor competence to deal with the emergency at hand.

The malaise runs deep. Despite gains in literacy, the poor quality of education drives young Nepalis to seek salaried jobs. The yield from agriculture is so low it does not make sense to farm. Government investment and market support for agriculture are ineffective. Every year, 700,000 youth join the labour market but there are jobs in Nepal for only 15% of them. The rest seek their fortunes abroad by selling ancestral property, fallow farms, lower food production, increasing poverty, and completing the vicious cycle.



20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The land of gods and goddesses

This week Kathmandu celebrates Indra Jatra, the chariot festival presided over by none other than the Living Goddess Kumari. Locally known as *Jenyā*, the festival commemorates the descent from heaven of the rain god, Indra, dressed in peacock clothes and bent on a very human pursuit: stealing flowers.

The week-long Indra Jatra is Nepal's most colourful celebration, complete with feasts, singing and masked ritual dances, marked with much enthusiasm and devotion by Hindus and Buddhists alike.

For the first time in living memory, Kathmandu's great festival was cancelled to coronavirus last year. As the pandemic continues to ravage parts of the world with the emergence of the delta variant, we must avoid crowds and unnecessary gatherings while celebrating even if we are fully vaccinated, rather mask up and maintain distance to prevent the next surge.

Excerpts from *Nepali Times* report 'A day in the life of a Living Goddess' by Salil Subedi from issue #58 20 years ago this week 31 August-6 September 2001:

The Kumari will be dressed in resplendent red and gold, bedecked in a golden tiara and Sesh Naag around her neck as she rides her rath for the very first time. On her forehead is painted a vermilion third eye



on a black backdrop of mustard oil and soot-this is the mythical divine eye which sees everything. She can see through every individual's mind, and fathom the dimensions beyond a common being's understanding.

When she rides the main chariot, she will be followed by two of her friendly deities-Bhairab and Ganesh, who are also chosen and made god the same way as the Kumari herself. But these incarnates have it slightly easier, they can stay in their parent's house. They can go out, and play, but the Kumari can't. On Saturday, the three will tour the city in their chariots and the streets come alive with the mask lakhe dance, music, and feasting.

This is the annual festival dedicated to Indra, the god of rain. But it is also dedicated to Taleju Bhawani, the powerful goddess and protector of Kathmandu who will manifest herself in the Kumari to empower the king and his citizens with divine power. Interestingly, Taleju is supposed to be the family deity of Ravana, the demon king of mythic Lanka, and the Taleju of Kathmandu is said to have been brought from India in ancient times.

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

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ONLINE PACKAGES



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Follow Himalmedia's *Saglo Samaj* tv magazine crew to Dhanusha and Mahottari districts in Nepal's Tarai where children in most families suffer from chronic malnutrition. Watch what the locals have to say and what do the experts recommend for this chronic national problem. Read the latest on Nepal's status on malnutrition on *pages 10-11*.

NEPALIS EXPLOIT NEPALIS

Not just in Luxembourg, such practice is rampant in Nepali restaurants in many other EU nations ('Nepalis abused by Nepalis in Luxembourg', Namrata Sharma, #1076). We had similar news in Finland two years ago.

Krishna Sharma

- It happens in other parts of Europe, too. I've had Nepali friends here in the UK share experiences very similar to the ones narrated here in the report. They suffer from mental stress and never get paid on time. The worker pays all taxes. If they have all necessary documents, owners fear losing the worker and having to increase their salary.

Pawan Khadka

- Leaders of the Nepali society in Luxembourg are themselves restaurant owners and NRNA officials. Respect and loyalty is a two way street.

Haris Shrestha

- Organisations and agents that send Nepalis overseas should provide workshops to migrant workers about their rights, responsibilities and cultural differences.

Tashi Dolma

- The sad part is Nepali Society here has been just a mute spectator, leaving victims all alone in this case.

Rana Jenesh

- Great investigative piece by *Nepali Times*, Nepalis abusing fellow Nepalis. Thanks for bringing it to light.

Xabhie

- Sadly widespread in Nepal: 'Slave' children working in homes, restaurants, hotels, trekking porters, brick workers, sex-trade, street cleaning... Their poverty creates a source, fed on by greed and general acceptance. Nepali contact man arranges short-term low paid jobs, the worker is moved from one restaurant to another, so owners don't pay all taxes, holiday money etc. The workers have poor and expensive accommodations and their resident permit can be easily revoked as unstable/non tax paying immigrant. They end up trapped, in debt, illegal.

David Durkan

CLIMATE CRISIS

We invited this catastrophe. We built the Bagmati corridor by turning the river into a channel so narrow it cannot hold monsoon rains ('Kathmandu's 'flash floods' are 4 decades in the making', Tom Robertson, #1073). On the other hand, we drive our cars on those corridors lined with concrete, where any recharging of the groundwater is impossible. In fact all of our urban settlements are paved with concrete, replacing earlier bricks and stones which allowed for natural seepage. We even erased rivulets like Banganga in Baneswor and built a road over it.

Lal Bahadur

- Nepal needs information on weather, but more than that it needs serious action to implement systematic mitigating action, on the part of all, including the government ('Nepal needs weather stations in the Himalaya', Rijan BhaktaKayastha, #1076).

David Seddon

CHEATING

Thank you such an amazing article, may your friend be happy and all women of this world be treated as respectfully as any human being deserves ('Nepal's unequal marriages', Anjana Rajbhandary, #1076).

Glab Kali

- "But this is not how a god would behave." You are right. Thanks for the article and all the best wishes for your friend.

Scott MacLennan

- This "Yestai ho" culture needs to be revisited. Not just our rituals and way of life.

Sameer Rana

- This is terrible, don't put up with it, women

Sue Everall

THARU

What hasn't helped matters is that the Tharu people are some of the least conscious group about their political rights, which has further marginalised them ('Tikapur's protracted trauma', Tufan Neupane, #1075). Furthermore, we still have people who believe that the country belongs to them solely because their forefathers built it. It's tragic that this kind of mentality still persists.

Anjani Pajiyar

MIGRANT WORKERS

Unsaid and perhaps not understood when discussing opening up to international tourism is the elephant in the room, Nepal's millions of migrant workers who are sort of equivalent to tourists and are increasingly vaccinated ('Livelihoods matter, restart trekking in Nepal', Michael Henry, *page 4*).

Jamie McGuinness

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Behind the masks

by Sonia Awale

You might be fully vaccinated but you are not immune to the delta variant. So get a jab, but continue to mask up, keep distance to prevent transmission and the next surge. Also read up on 'NORMalising Mask Project' in Nepal. Follow up on Nepali Times social media for latest Covid-19 developments.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Nepalis abused by Nepalis in Luxembourg

by Namrata Sharma

It is ironic and distressing that Nepalis migrants are suffering mistreatment and exploitation by their own relatives and friends in the heart of Europe. Exclusive investigative report on nepalitimes.com

t Most popular on Twitter



Nepal's unequal marriages

by Anjana Rajbhandary

Men cheat and get away with it, while women are blamed for shaming the family in Nepali society with its deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs. A strong society must be founded on equality and trust. Read feedback and join the online discussion on this column.

“ ” Most commented



Afghanistan abandoned

by Aunohita Majumdar

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, writes a Southasian journalist who lived and worked in Kabul for eight years.

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QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepalis abused by Nepalis in #Luxembourg
In the heart of #Europe, Nepali #migrants are victims of mistreatment and exploitation by their own relatives and friends.

@GuyAirline
I've noticed this unfortunate aspect about our Nepali culture; we'll bow & scrape to those (socially, economically, administratively) above us and greatly resent it but at the same time abuse those below us with no second thought. #BadCulture

Deepak Adhikari @DeepakAdk
Important investigation into the abuse and exploitation of Nepali migrants in Luxembourg.
By @NamrataSharmaP & @LucCaregari with support from @FinUncovered & @journalismfund. Read it @ NepaliTimes

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Long before the Americans abandoned #Afghanistan, we in the region had abandoned our claims to a shared kinship with Afghans, writes Aunohita Majumdar.

Kalpna Sharma @kalpana1947
Important perspective on Afghanistan by AunohitaMajumdar who has spent 8 years in that country. @NepaliTimes

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Livelihoods matter, restart #trekking in #Nepal
The government should re-open trekking in September with vaccine proof and other precautions, writes Michael Henry.

World Citizen @WorldCitizenLA
The thought of "throngs of trekkers on the trails" yikes. I trekked Annapurna South 25+ yrs ago: my porters, cook, kitchen assistant, Sherpa, a friend & myself. Saw no trekkers in between occasional small villages we'd encounter. Ever. Those were the days.

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TURKISH AIRLINES

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Livelihoods matter, restart trekking in Nepal

The government should re-open trekking in September with vaccine proof and other precautions

● Michael Henry

On the morning of 20 May this year, we dragged ourselves up to Gokyo Ri, the famous viewpoint in the Khumbu. Four of the world's six highest mountains sliced the crystal-clear air in a spellbinding scene that had inspired us to visit Nepal.

The only problem was that we were alone. In normal times, a May morning with perfect weather would have meant throngs of trekkers on the trails. The solitude was lucky for us, but a telltale sign of the grave risk that Nepal's tourism-dependent regions now face.

My girlfriend Mallika, our guide Kedar, and I were among the last trekkers in the Khumbu in Spring 2021. For 16 days, we had the trails, hotels, and even whole villages to ourselves. We spoke with many locals whose livelihoods rely on trekking, including guides, hotel owners, cooks, and shopkeepers.

They painted a complex picture of great personal resilience, seriously depleted finances, and increasing worry about the impacts of Covid-19.

The Nepal government should make clear policy decisions to support the Khumbu and other regions that focus on tourism. Policies can succeed by balancing income generation with Covid-19 risk. Speed is key: the trekking season begins in mid-September, and foreign tourists need to book their travel plans soon.

The problem is that there have been three missed seasons of trekking income, with a fourth looming. Trekking drives Nepal's tourism economy, especially in the Khumbu. It provides two distinct seasons of cash flow annually: March-May, and September-November. The lack of substantial off-season tourism makes each season a crucial financial opportunity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has now blocked this opportunity for three straight seasons. The impacts were serious for everyone we met this year in Nepal's tourism sector. Trekking guides normally work 10 treks per year, but many have not worked since 2019. We were Kedar's first clients since February 2020. One French-speaking guide in Kathmandu, who usually gets



The famous view at Gokyo Ri draws tourists from around the world. It was abandoned in May 2021.

PHOTOS: MICHAEL HENRY



The empty dining hall of the newly built Good Luck Hotel in Milingo, on the trail to Everest Base Camp

reliable business from French trekkers, is now running a small grocery. Porters and lower-paid support staff were even worse off, with many leaving Kathmandu to avoid rents.

Business owners are facing the risk of massive debts. They had envisioned recouping 2020's losses in the Spring of 2021, but had no real chance to do so. The owner of a new hotel told us he had raced to finish construction for the season, but had few guests.

Since he had to finance porters, mules and helicopters to bring the construction materials into roadless Khumbu, he was now far behind financially. In Lukla, a shopkeeper said she had moved from Kathmandu in late 2020 with her family to open her business. She had invested in having all her goods ready by March, but almost no one

showed up to buy them.

Despite these challenges, we saw the deep resilience of Khumbu locals. In the high mountains, people had shifted their focus from tourists to yaks. We managed lodging in shut-down villages with people who stayed to care for their animals. In the lower valleys, age-old agricultural rhythms were kicking into gear again.

Mixed feelings about tourism during the pandemic were also evident. While we were vaccinated and wore masks around others, most people were wary of foreigners spreading Covid-19. The owner of our Namche hotel even gave us a bag of masks to hand out along the trail.

It was clear overall that a lack of trekkers next season would be a big problem, further pushing an already stressed economy.

A proposed solution can be

to open trekking in September, but require vaccine proof. The Nepal government can support the mountain tourist regions, while also protecting their health and honouring their fortitude by implementing a balanced policy that allows trekking for fully vaccinated tourists.

September is the right time to open up. The low trekking season during the monsoon was a natural buffer for the Covid-19 situation to improve both in Nepal and abroad. Now, with the lockdown having stabilised the case load somewhat, the improving conditions can also enable economic recovery.

In the meantime, potential trekkers have been getting vaccinated. In 2019 trekkers mainly came to Nepal from the UK, USA, China, Australia, Germany, France, India, and several other European countries. Global Covid-19 vaccination data shows that European countries and the United States have vaccinated a large proportion of their populations. India and Australia lag behind, but have active vaccination drives.

Clear communication from the government would be essential for this to work. Foreigners need to know the exact rules about vaccine proof, tests and quarantines before they decide to travel, and locals need to know that trekkers will not be allowed to come in and spread disease. Implementing vaccine proof travel may be easier than we might think. Vaccine passports may be difficult to require for Nepal tourist

visas, as previously discussed in *Nepali Times*. Countries have been slow to roll out formal passports, and barring entry to Nepal for all unvaccinated people could exclude individuals with medical conditions from necessary visits.

Enforcing vaccine proof when granting trekking permits would be much simpler. Vaccine cards already issued by every country, rather than formal vaccine passports, would be good enough for this purpose. The requirement would not exclude anyone from necessary travel since trekking is purely a pleasure activity.

Furthermore, Nepal's trekking regions already require special permits and there are many checkpoints along the way to verify them. The policy could be as simple as requiring the vaccine proof when giving the trekking permit. The Government would not need to invest in new infrastructure.

Nor would a vaccine passport requirement stop trekkers from coming to Nepal. Trekkers tend to be wealthy, health-conscious people with both the means and the motivation to get vaccinated. Ultimately, Nepal's mountainous landscapes and outstanding people are an irresistible draw for foreigners. They will surely come, and will not endanger the people of Nepal, if the government lets them. 🇳🇵

Michael Henry is a Canadian who has worked in the social sector in Zambia, Senegal, Nigeria, and India, and has written about trekking, mountains, and livelihoods for Red Bull, India Development Review, Mountain Life Media, and others.

prabhu BANK

Inflation 20-year low

Last fiscal year's inflation rate of 3.6% is the lowest since 2001/02, according to Nepal Rastra Bank. Average annual inflation rates have stood at 6.7% over the last decade, but the pandemic and ensuing loss of demand in goods and service sectors have knocked numbers down. Nepal recorded a trade deficit of Rs13.98 trillion, spending Rs15.4 trillion on imports while recouping only Rs1.41 trillion on exports (see Editorial, page 2). While the current account is Rs3.33 trillion in deficit, the overall balance of payments has a surplus of Rs2.82 trillion.



Turkish to Luanda

Turkish Airlines has added Luanda, Angola to its African network with two weekly flights as of 27 October, making it the carrier's 327th destination worldwide.



Kathmandu-Colombo

Sri Lankan Airlines started twice-weekly direct flights between Colombo to Kathmandu from 31 August on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Flights arrive in Kathmandu at 0940 and depart at 1040.

World Bank review

The joint portfolio review of the Nepal Government and the World Bank covering 27 on-going Bank-financed projects with a net commitment of \$3.27 billion concluded on 27 August. The annual stocktaking exercise reviews the performance and implementation of projects. "The pandemic has also provided an opportunity to recalibrate our approach to improve project implementation and capital spending," said Faris Hadad-Zervos, World Bank Country Director for Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

Ncell's Rs1 SIM

Ncell has launched 'Pahilo SIM' offer for students who had appeared for SEE (Secondary Education Examination) this year. Under the scheme, students can buy a SIM at Rs1 and receive free MyFive service, a bonus on recharge and bonus data.



HBL Hospital Aid

Himalayan Bank Limited has provided Bansbari-based Shahid Gangalal National Heart Rs692,962 in assistance to maintain its wards and improve service delivery. The reconstructed wards have been handed over to the hospital.



Tata Safari

Tata launched its flagship SUV Safari in Nepal on 26 August, with a starting price of Rs8.2 million for the 7-seater. "We are delighted to bring our best products to customers in Nepal before the festive season," says Rajesh Prasad Giri of Siprati Trading.

Sanima scholarship

Sanima Bank has opened applications for its scholarship program for 2021/22 targeting



underprivileged students from outside Kathmandu pursuing grades 11 and 12 in the capital.

Three-time Everest summiteer and climate activist Dawa Steven Sherpa has forged a new route up Africa's highest mountain to help Tanzania with an innovative eco-tourism project.

Sherpa helped explore the new Kidia Route and reached the summit of Uhuru Peak (5,895m) on 22 August along with rangers from the Kilimanjaro National Park. The Tanzanians want to promote it as a 'VIP Route' by pricing it higher for those who want to avoid the crowds on the Mweka or Machame routes.

"The summit is at about the height of Everest Base Camp, so it was not particularly difficult," Sherpa said on return to Kathmandu this week. "But we had to explore a new route and see if it was feasible and safe for a low-volume, high-value trail that can help raise local incomes and make tourism itself more sustainable."

Before Covid-19, there used to be 50,000 visitors a year to Kilimanjaro National Park with up to 200 climbers a day on the busier trails which had been nicknamed 'Coca Cola Route' or the 'Fanta Route' and where tourism income does not really trickle down to local communities. With the pandemic the numbers are down to 30%, affecting the park's revenue for conservation.

The plan now is to limit trekkers on the Kidia route to only 20 a day, employ more porters, depend more on local produce, and charge tourists higher fees — a bit like an 'executive class' on Kilimanjaro, and similar to the Nepal government's practice in Mustang and Dolpo.

Besides being the highest in Africa, the dormant volcano is also one of the tallest free-standing mountains in the world, rising 4,000m from its base. Uhuru is the highest point, and situated on the Kibo cone.

Even though the Kilimanjaro climb ends at an elevation where the ascent of Everest begins, Dawa Sherpa found a lot of similarities between the two mountains — the terrain on the higher reaches, friendly people, porters singing as they carry loads, and the Tanzanian camp staff preparing chapati and samosa for breakfast.

When posing for group photos in Nepal, porters often ask trekkers and climbers to smile and say "Yak Cheese". On reaching the summit of Kilimanjaro, their porter instructed Sherpa's team: "Say Chapati."

"Africa gets a lot of bad press, but what I found were super friendly people, and like Nepalis they are very relaxed and polite," says Sherpa. "Tanzanians are very conscious about the environment, there is very little garbage."

The new 7-day route starts in Kidia village on the southern side of the mountain, the 25km trail first passing through pastoral land, thick forests of the national park, then the moors higher up



Dawa Sherpa (extreme right) on the summit of Kilimanjaro (5,895m) on 22 August after blazing a new trail to the top.



Nepali pioneers new route on Kilimanjaro

Everest summiteer helps Tanzania with a eco-tourism trail up Africa's highest peak



En route to the summit of Kilimanjaro along the Kidia trail earlier this month.

leading to an alpine desert terrain similar to Mustang. Back home, besides running his family's tourism and climbing business, Dawa Steven Sherpa supports the clean up of the garbage from the base camps of eight of the world's highest mountains in Nepal.

The Tanzania National Parks Authority

has included the Kidia route project into its strategic plans not just as a new marketing tool but also to use tourism income to directly help local communities at the base of the mountains.

"Both in Nepal, Tanzania and in other fragile parts of the world, you have to look

after the people so they will look after the natural areas they live in," explains Sherpa. "Eco-tourism can make local communities the custodians of the ecosystem, so they are an integral part of conservation."

Sherpa's team had to break a new trail around dangerous scree slopes on Kilimanjaro, and avoid cliffs, recording the path with GPS devices. After they reached Stella Point on the crater rim, Sherpa let the Tanzanian rangers go ahead to Uhuru so they could be the first to climb the new route to the summit.

Sherpa has been involved in raising awareness about the impact of climate change in the Himalaya, and what he saw on the summit of Kilimanjaro shocked him.

"In fact, climbing Kilimanjaro is possible mainly because the glaciers and snow slopes are gone," he says. "Every year, more snow is melting, and this year there were huge wildfires at the base of the volcano due to a drought, just like we had in Nepal."

Indeed, Kilimanjaro, which is situated at the equator, has lost 90% of its ice in the past century, and at the present rate experts say all the ice will have vanished by 2040.

Back in Nepal, Sherpa is getting ready to continue where he left off before the monsoon to clean up the garbage at the base camps of Manaslu, Annapurna and Dhaulagiri. 🇳🇵



Medicine goes back to its roots

The Covid-19 pandemic prompts many Nepalis to rediscover natural Ayurveda treatments

● Sonia Awale

Nearly two years after the global Covid-19 pandemic began, there has been a revival of traditional Ayurveda medicines that boost the human immune system. While some dismiss herbal treatments as quackery, even allopathic doctors are now prescribing Ayurvedic formulations.

During the pandemic, treatment protocols have shifted from treating the immediate symptoms to preventing multiple infections and better management of post-recovery complications.

Seriously sick patients do need hospitalisation, oxygen or even ventilators, and modern medicine is good at saving lives. However, it is in boosting immunity, preventing infections and whole-body healing that natural herbal medicines serve an important function.

"I do not treat Covid-19, but I do get a lot of patients who have recovered from the disease but continue to experience long-term symptoms," says Piyush Bajracharya who runs an Ayurveda clinic in Patan. "And there are a lot of people who want to boost their immune system to protect themselves from the virus."

Ayurveda has evolved over 3,000-years-old in the Subcontinent, and was recognised by the World Health Organisation at its Alma Ata conference in 1978. The Himalaya, and especially Nepal, is considered a rich repository of medicinal plants – a belief enshrined in the Ramayana where Hanuman rips out an entire mountain when he could not find the exact herb to treat his master, Laxman, who was wounded in battle.

"Modern medicine has its roots in our ancestral knowledge of plants and herbs, passed from one generation to another," says noted physician Sundar Mani Dixit, adding that the most modern drugs in cardiology and painkillers are derived from the herbs with the Himalaya being the treasure trove of medicinal plants.

Expensive hospital bills and costly medicines with serious side effects in addition to the rise of new infections and lifestyle diseases have meant that patients and doctors are increasingly turning to natural plant-based treatment systems.

There is now a growing body of research that proves the efficacy of various medicinal herbs, the ingredients of Ayurveda, in the treatment of influenza, dengue, arthritis, herpes, inflammatory bowel diseases and coronaviruses. Many more plants and their

formulations are proven immune enhancers.

"Over the millennia our ancestors led a population oriented natural research in the laboratory of the world, but now scientific methods have polished and refined the development of these treatments," adds Dixit.

Despite being a seasoned allopathic practitioner, Dixit himself prescribes to his patients herbal formulations to modulate immune responses. They include *Terminalia chebula* (Harro), *Moringa oleifera*, (Nim, Tulsii), *Piper longum* (Pipli), *Picrorhiza kurroa*, (Kalmegha), black pepper, turmeric, *Chirayita*, Black elder, (*Ashwagandha*), *Tinospora cordifolia* (Gurjo) and Liquorice root (*Jethimadhu*).

To be sure, Ayurveda has its limitations. It cannot cure specific conditions quickly as modern drugs do, and is more effective against primary diseases of the respiratory system and digestive tract such as cold and cough, flu, gastritis, indigestion, as well as allergies.

It can also treat initial stages of blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol, triglyceride and liver diseases, as well as cancers specific to an organ not belonging to a system such as uterus or breast.

There is also a common misconception that there are no side effects to Ayurveda medicines, but this is not true -- only multi-vitamins or supplements can be taken without consultation.

"If you self-medicate without referring to the doctors on dosage and duration, chances are high that they will harm you, even if they are common kitchen spices, which has often been the case during this pandemic," explains Piyush Bajracharya.

This week at Singha Durbar Vaidyakhana, the state-run Ayurveda outlet, the sales counter had run out of some of the more popular immune boosters like *Chawanpras* and *Triphala* because of an increase in demand for them since the pandemic.

"It is a matter of further research whether traditional medicine directly inhibit Covid-19 infections, but they do increase one's overall immunity and in case of an infection, people have less severe symptoms," says Sabari Sah, head of the Singha Durbar Vaidyakhana.

"After all, Ayurveda is a science of healthy living," he adds. "If people follow the basic rules of a healthy diet, exercises and positive thinking, then more often than not you won't fall sick." 🇳🇵



Your friendly neighbourhood

Yogendra Shrestha Baidya is the 23rd generation of traditional healers in his family. His training began at 10, when he started learning to find, grind and mix various herbs and spices in his ancestral home in Patan's Sundhara neighbourhood.

"We've continued the Baidya tradition for centuries, but I can't see my children following in my footsteps," says the 59-year-old, whose surname denotes his profession. "The times are changing even as the demand for

our medicines has increased."

Ayurveda seems to be moving from the hands of traditional healers like the Baidya who passed their knowledge from one generation to the next, to trained Ayurveda professionals. It is not restricted to a particular clan anymore.

During the course of an hour-long conversation at his small shop stocked with his own herbal mixtures, and with the rich aroma of many herbs, Baidya got a call on his mobile from a father worried about his child's dysentery. Next, a

pharmaceutical agent dropped by for 20 bottles of digestive tablets.

Three masked patients with various medical conditions waited on a bench for their Ayurveda mixtures to be prepared. One of them was a 66-years-old patient who had bicycled for one hour from Hatiban to get medicines for his digestive disorder. He also wanted a consultation for his wife who has high blood pressure and diabetes.

"She is tired of taking so many tablets, I thought we could switch to Nepali medicine," he said. But



84-years-old Nirtha Kumari Shakya is among the most respected female Baidyas in Patan.

SONIAAWALE



CREATIVE COMMONS

Baidya

Yogendra Shrestha Baidya advises him to have his wife continue using allopathic drugs. “Since you have already started on those medicines, it is not advisable to discontinue that.” The new proliferation of herbal treatments and Ayurveda has also meant malpractice, people with fake credentials claiming to have a cure for chronic diseases have taken to social media to propagate them.

The Nepal government now allows only certified professionals to operate Ayurveda clinics, but

this also risks discouraging the Baidya clans where knowledge has been passed down through many generations of traditional healers.

“We need policies to regulate the malpractices but I can’t go back to medical school now,” says Baidya, who is a botanist by education. “Genuine traditional healers should get to practice, I have the practical knowledge and I should be allowed to treat my community.” 🇳🇵

Sonia Awale



The good doctor

Tribute to Nepal’s most celebrated Ayurvedic doctor Rishi Ram Koirala who died last month at age 63

● **Lisa Choegyal**

I had an appointment with Rishi Ram Koirala the day before he suffered his fatal heart attack. Last week Nepal has lost one of its most celebrated ayurvedic practitioners, the founder and medical director of the renowned Ayurveda Health Home.

It was a fortuitous blessing that I was able to see him one last time, taking a friend for a consultation. Whilst we sipped glasses of tulsi tea in the clinic’s waiting area heavy with the scent of oil and powder, I struggled to find any bone fide complaints to waste his precious time.

Dr Rishi’s kind brown eyes seemed to sparkle with health. “It’s been years,” he greeted me. Wearing a voluminous green gown, blue hair net, surgical gloves, double masks and a face shield, the eyes were all I could see of his slight, sprightly figure. But enthusiasm and gentle wisdom shone through the clear plastic sheet.

“You are lucky to be so healthy at your age.” I muttered something about preferring to lose some weight and could feel his dismissive hidden humour: “It must be your inner nature. How are Tenzin and the boys?” We caught up with family news and updates on his practice. I wish now the I had thought to ask him how he was.

Dr Rishi took my pulse in his little office across the courtyard of the Dhapasi clinic, flanked by two of his junior doctors similarly adorned in full PPE, learning skills from the master. On the walls were colourful renditions of the naked body showing ancient pressure points, chakras and energy channels. Stacked on shelves were rows of red-topped glass jars containing mysterious medicines of essential natural ingredients, herbs, tablets and dried plants.

“I’ve been busy, still lecturing all over the world via Zoom, and I’ve just submitted a paper on ayurvedic policy for the National Planning Commission and Ministry of Health.” His eyes sparkled.

“And we are now producing our own medicines from home-grown herbs and plants on our land beyond Nagarjun. We are expanding our factory to process these, taking advantage of the government restrictions on importing pharmaceuticals and trying to break the stranglehold of the cartels exporting all Nepal’s best medicinal plants to India.”

Dr Rishi’s reputation as a skilled and compassionate doctor, ayurvedic master and yogic



The newly developed ayurvedic ‘centre of excellence’ is nestled beneath the forests of Nagarjun, just half an hour from Kathmandu. The centre is a legacy of ayurvedic doctor Rishi Ram Koirala who passed away last week.

“Foreigners of 122 nations have taken our services, including high-ranking officials from Russia and the Middle East,” he said.

In anticipation of the return of this loyal international following, the Ayurvedic Health Resort is being developed as an ‘ayurvedic centre of excellence’ on a forested slope behind Nagarjun. Bordering on the national park and community forest, this sylvan retreat consists of a hotel of 28 rooms with wholesome vegetarian food and dedicated space for treatments, teachings, meditation and yoga.

Nurseries and flower beds cultivate the finest quality herbal plants, and a production unit processes oils, potions and remedies according to the most efficacious medical tradition.

Huge picture windows at the comfortable new Nagarjun centre overlook the dense green cradle of forest that reverberates with life, birds call during the day and insects by night. An unseen river gurgles below the steep drop off below my balcony, and the occasional aircraft passes overhead.

During our monsoon visit mists threaded the valleys, tendrils of clouds draped the hilltops and rain hammered the roof. Badri explains the building reflects the principles of vastu shastras, and it exudes peace and serenity from the moment we arrive.

The weekend prescription plan of curative activities includes abhyanga massages, body scrubs, steam chambers, the oil flow of shirodhara and Himalayan singing bowl therapy.

Kathmandu Valley is a spiritual melting pot of great healers. From all points of the compass the ancient therapeutic traditions converge in the shadow of the Himalaya – Ayurveda from India, Tibetan and Chinese. Some practitioners are a well-kept secret, revealing themselves only when necessary and only to those in need.

Rishi Ram Koirala was a quiet modest man, but his healing skills, diagnostic expertise and extraordinary knowledge were widely respected throughout the world. His legacy will live on with the Ayurvedic Health Resort enterprise, but he himself will be sorely missed by many. 🇳🇵

EVENTS



Sundarijal Hike

Spend the Saturday with nature by hiking along the trails of Sundarijal, Kavresthali, and Manichud. Find payment details on Hike for Nepal's Facebook page.
4 September, 6:40am from Bhrikutimandap

Film grant

Aspiring filmmakers 18 and under are invited to submit a pitch for British Council Nepal's 30 Days Challenge: Films on Climate Action Grant. Details at British Council Nepal's Facebook page.
Deadline: 10 September

Writing contest

Submit a work of non-fiction about a fun, funny or serious event, moment, or experience of your life for a chance to win a cash prize and get published. Learn more at writermag.com/contests.
Deadline: 11 September

Art show

Visit Gallery MCUBE's 'Nude Art Show 2021' curated by Kapil Mani Dixit and Manish Lal Shrestha, with 21 participating and two guest artists. Follow safety guidelines.
3-16 September, 11am-7pm, Gallery MCUBE



Art exhibition

Siddhartha Gallery's upcoming exhibition Kaiten: History, Memory, Identity will feature artwork by Himalayan Light Award recipient Subas Tamang.
10-28 September, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

DINING



Taza

Bring some Middle Eastern flair to the dining experience. Taza offers Shawarma, falafel, hummus, baklava and more. And everything is fresh. Bhojdeals will deliver.
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VIRTUAL TOURS

Botanical garden tour

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



World Heritage tour

Go on a virtual adventure and explore world heritage sites through Google's International heritage virtual tour.

NHDP Virtual Tour

Visit Patan's monuments right from home through the Nepal Heritage Documentation Project, and learn about the historic heritage site in the process. Visit the website for details.



Access Mars

Take a virtual trip to Mars through a tour of a 3D replica of the surface of Mars recorded by NASA's Curiosity rover.

Global flea markets

Experience 9 of the world's most iconic flea markets including France's Les Puces de Saint-Ouen, India's Anjuna Flea Market, and London's Portobello Market through a Google Earth virtual tour.

Flat Iron Grill

From a variety of sandwiches to cheesecakes and eclairs, Flat Iron Grill offers a balance of sweet and savoury American food. Go to www.flatirongrill.com to get freshly baked goods, ham, sausages, and dairy products delivered.
9808200961



Attic

Enjoy Attic's signature Royal Aloo, Attic chicken chop, bacon potato roll, or get some chicken barbecue. Go to Attic's Facebook page for more information.
(01) 4417843

GETAWAY



Dwarika's Resort

Dwarika's Resort boasts luxury accommodations, an attentive staff, fantastic amenities, and award-winning dishes from around the world.
Dhulikhel (01) 4479488

Shivapuri Heights

Enjoy home-cooked meals, meandering walks, and get pampered at the outdoor spa at the Shivapuri Heights cottages. Go to Facebook or <http://www.shivapuricottage.com/> for more information about the weekend package.
Shivapuri Hills, Budhanilkantha, 9851088928

Club Himalaya

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

Balthali Village

A small, cosy retreat just beyond Kathmandu Valley with a bird's eye view of green terrace fields dotted with ochre painted houses.
Panauti, Kavre, 9851087772



Riverside Springs Resort

Riverside Springs Resort, away from the bustle of the city, offers a vast swimming pool, exciting activities like horseback riding and rafting, cosy rooms and attentive service.
Kurintar, 9801801336



Mamagoto Nepal

Get a fill of some delicious Pan-Asian food from Mamagoto, a restaurant that serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes. Order Spring Rolls, Soups, Dumplings, Ramen and more from Foodmandu.
9802320960

Blenders Milkshake

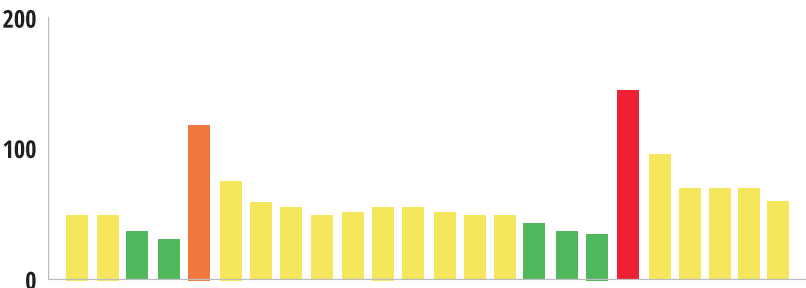
Beat back the dreary monsoon afternoons with fresh cold milkshakes out of reusable bottles. Find flavours to suit at Bhojdeals, Foodmandu, and other delivery platforms or call to order.
9808080808



After those heavier than usual showers this week, there will be a slight let-up in the precipitation, but there will still be lots of clouds about, and the weekend will see passing showers over Kathmandu Valley and central Nepal. But these will be more localised. The main monsoon trough has now moved to western Nepal. Parts of Nepal received up to 450mm of rain in three days this week, and have already exceeded the annual precipitation by 30% even though the monsoon still has one month to go.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
26° 20°	27° 20°	28° 20°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



11AM 1 September to 10AM 2 September measured at US Embassy, Phora Darbar

The continuous heavy rains this week brought the Air Quality Index (AQI) to its cleanest level yet -- below 20. That is almost unheard of these days. AQI measures the concentration of tiny suspended particles in the air below 2.5 microns in diameter. These are particularly harmful since they lodge deep inside the lungs and can also cross the blood barrier. Follow live hour-by-hour AQI readings for Kathmandu at www.nepalitimes.com

OUR PICK



The Rain, a Danish Netflix drama series, follows siblings Simone and Rasmus, who have taken shelter underground after a virus spread through rain infects and destroys most of the Scandinavian population. Emerging from their bunker after six years of isolation, brother and sister set out to search for their scientist father and other survivors of the apocalypse, hoping to find a cure for the virus. Stars Alba August, Lucas Lynggaard Tønnesen, Mikkel Følsgaard, Lukas Løkken, Sonny Lindberg, and more.

कोरोना लागेपछि
न धुँदा जाने, न रुँदा जाने
त्यसैले कोरोना लाग्नै नदिन
मीडभाडमा नजाने

कोरोना लागेपछि: कसले मर्ने? यस्ता कसैलाई पनि हत्याकाण्डमा लाग्न नदिने

कोरोना लागेपछि: कसले मर्ने? यस्ता कसैलाई पनि हत्याकाण्डमा लाग्न नदिने

कोरोना लागेपछि: कसले मर्ने? यस्ता कसैलाई पनि हत्याकाण्डमा लाग्न नदिने

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The house of Kalapremi

A family of artists showcases its repertoire of ceramic art at the Siddhartha Art Gallery

● Shristi Karki

In the centre of the room of the ground floor at Siddhartha Art Gallery, tattooed ceramic female figures stretch languidly astride grazing horses.

The 12 blue and white raku ware pieces are part of a collection of ceramic artwork by noted sculptors Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha, Yamuna Shrestha, and Shushank Shrestha. Gopal and Yamuna are husband and wife, and Shushank is their son.

Much of Kalapremi's artwork included in the exhibition is an attempt to explore gender dynamics in post-modern Nepali society.

One of his more notable collections titled *gaali* features a series of anthropomorphised female figures with their arms outstretched in a peace sign. The animals (monkey, dog, sheep, donkey) are a physical manifestation of some derogatory terms women are addressed by like *bandarni*, *kukurni*, and *gadhai*.

In another collection of intricate blue and white raku sculptures titled *Basti basti bata uthne haru*, Kalapremi has reimagined the sacrificial pawns in a chess piece as women with purpose. Anthropomorphised mares dressed in *bukhu*, *lehenga* and other traditional dresses represent various professions including a doctor, performers, and sportswomen.

Some of his other collections



ALL PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

include a series of 15 ceramic paintings titled *Silent Scream II*, which feature fragmented human forms meant to depict the angst and pain of recent crises in the country.

"The element of fantasy, playfulness, the very tongue-in-cheek way of expressing things is what is most striking about Gopal's work," says Sangeeta Thapa of the Siddhartha Gallery about Kalapremi's artwork.

Meanwhile, Yamuna Shrestha

had also found her own medium in origami work. But eventually, she too forayed into ceramic artwork, where she began infusing Mithila motifs in her clay earthenware. Colourful flowers, birds, and other nature motifs adorn her ceramic plates, bowls, and cups on display at the gallery.

Upstairs, Shushank Shrestha's artworks offer a marked tonal shift from deliberate, commentary-infused artwork displayed on the

floor below, and are as vividly imaginative as they are nostalgic.

His 39-piece *Jutta* series of ceramic shoes traces his imagined evolution of his grandfather's old footwear, which he took inspiration from. The shoes hung in the wall begin from muted, masked, three-eyed beings — emblematic of the times we are living in.

The shoes move on to become richly patterned, grinning faces and creatures with their lips peeled

back in grotesque laughter, a homage to the fictional monoliths of popular culture.

They also take a living, breathing form on canvas and in sculptures, as the grinning, three-eyed shoe gods sit cross-legged, adorned with the golden headgear of our culture's mythic heroes and gods, melding tradition with the absurd.

Another one of his collections pays homage to his family's dog, reimagining it as a three-eyed, lion-dog creature. Shushank has captured the animal's playfulness and love in the tilted heads and the wide grins of the creature, imbuing the works with enough personality that one would almost expect the creatures to come to life and wag their tails if they were to reach out and touch them.

"This is a very painstaking process," Thapa says of ceramic artwork, "It's simultaneously cost-intensive and work-intensive."

Indeed, it would take one LPG cylinder on average to cast one of the artwork on display at the exhibition. Each piece needs to go through four processes, getting cast in fire, painted, then cast in fire again before the glaze is finally applied.

But the time and effort that the family has poured into their craft shine in each of the artwork, Thapa notes about the three artists' four-year process, saying: "They have managed to create such a diverse body of work."

'Where the wild things are' will run until 3 September at Siddhartha Art Gallery.

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A TALL ORDER

After initial success in reducing childhood malnutrition, progress has stalled. Find out why.

● **Marty Logan**

A white-coated nurse holding a blue and white, half-litre bag of milk stands in front of a small group of mothers seated near the entrance of the Nutrition Rehabilitation Home in Kathmandu.

She is explaining the importance of feeding milk to their children, who are lolling on their mothers' laps. On a table behind the nurse are containers of pulses and legumes and leaning against the wall, charts displaying leafy vegetables.

But later, listening to the women's stories, it is apparent that solving their children's problems will require more than a healthy diet. Through tears, Chandra, 24, says she brought her son Raju, 21 months, to the Home after a routine hospital check-up found that he was malnourished.

His father, who Chandra was forced to marry, bought barely enough food for them to survive, says the woman. That deprivation, plus physical beatings and "mental torture" caused Chandra to flee their village home for Kathmandu.

Mother and son arrived in January at the 24-bed facility perched on a hill on the outskirts of the city, where housing colonies sprout on former farm fields. In

the month since then, Raju has gained 1kg in weight and is much stronger.

The boy will stay at the Home for a few more weeks, says Sunita Rimal, coordinator of the Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Program at the Nepal Youth Foundation, which runs the Home. By then she hopes to have found some work in Kathmandu for Chandra via her informal channels, so that the mother-son pair don't have to go back.

Epidemic of hunger

Nina Parajuli, 45, brought her daughter Anushka, 7, to the Home weeks later on the advice of staff at a local non-governmental organisation. Nina had gone there for skills training after losing her house-cleaning job in Kathmandu.

She was forced to find work unexpectedly after Anushka was born, when her husband deserted them. The family that hired her ate their first meal of the day only in the afternoon, which meant the girl left for school in the morning having eaten only snacks, while her mother worked. Eventually, Anushka grew dangerously thin and was considered severely malnourished when she arrived.

Nina "was too concerned with her own problems to notice," Rimal explains. Like her husband, she is HIV positive. She also has a

heart condition and is on a waiting list for a uterus operation.

Though unique, the stories of Nina and Chandra share a common thread — the causes of their children's malnutrition are multifaceted. Rimal says that is the norm: "Most of the people who come here have other socioeconomic problems."

Past achievements

Nepal is celebrated globally for its success in fighting malnutrition from the 1990s until recent years. Most notably, rates of stunting (low height for age) fell from the world's highest, 68% in 1995, to 36% in 2016.

New research has teased out exactly which development

efforts had what impact on stunting. Indirect (also known as 'nutrition-sensitive') approaches were surprisingly effective. For example, better educated parents accounted for 25% of the improvement, environmental factors like building more toilets contributed 12% and economic growth made up 9%.





HIMALMEDIA

Direct (‘nutrition-specific’) efforts included: improved nutrition of mothers (accounting for 19% of the gain), and maternal and newborn health care (12%), according to the research, published on the website Exemplars in Global Health.

“The exemplars that we picked were countries that did (development) much faster than others. Nepal is not necessarily the best example but it is an important example,” says Zulfiqar A Bhutta of the Centre for Global Child Health at The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, one of the leaders of the research.

“One thing is very clear, no one country has done it alone by only investing in health and nutrition sectors,” explained Bhutta via Zoom from Toronto. “And no one country has done it alone by only investing in poverty alleviation strategies. So the truth is that you have to do both in combination.”

Nepal has continued that broad approach, investing in health both directly and indirectly, yet the progress has plateaued. While stunting continues to fall, the 36% rate is greater than the developing country average of 25% and the Asia average of 21.8%. In fact, the country is on target to hit only one of its nutrition goals for 2025 set by the World Health Assembly — for underweight children under 5 — says the Global Nutrition Report 2020.

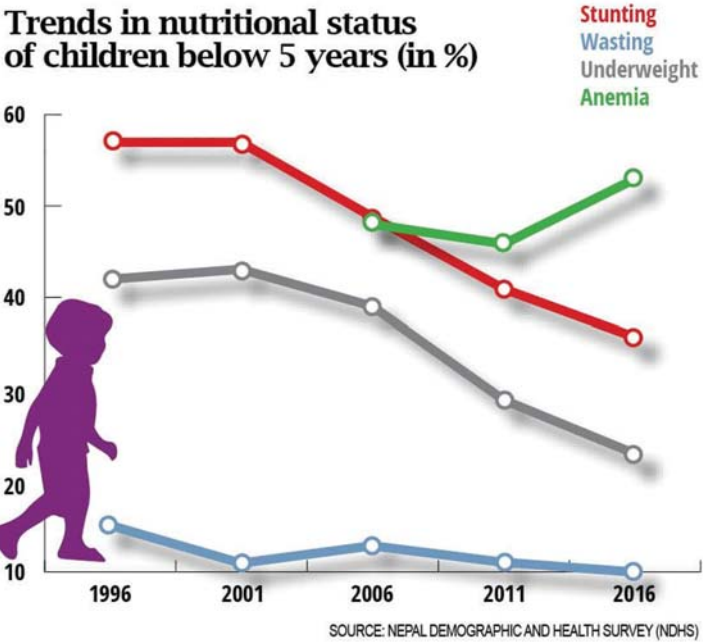
So what happened?

“The one thing that I was surprised by is that inequity has increased,” says Bhutta, “and I have a feeling some of that may have had to do with the urban poor or rural to urban migration.”

Nepal, he adds, should work to pinpoint the who’s and why’s of poverty, but otherwise, it should maintain its balanced approach.



HIMALMEDIA



Investment on nutrition

A recent analysis from UNICEF found, however, that spending on indirect approaches to fight malnutrition was rising while declining for direct interventions. This goes against the direction given in the government’s Multi-sector Nutrition Plan (MSNP), the blueprint for tackling malnutrition.

The first phase of the MSNP ran from 2013 to 2017, and the current plan ends next year. The analysis in UNICEF’s Nutrition Sector Budget Brief also pointed out that the cost of programs in phase two (Rs48.9 billion) of the multisector plan is just 54% of phase one (Rs88.5 billion). In addition, the gap between budget numbers and actual spending has been growing.

Kiran Rupakhetee of the Good Governance and Social Development Division at the National Planning Commission secretariat, helped shape MSNP-II. In an online interview he suggests that rather than the current plan’s budget being too low, the budget for MSNP-I might have been “over calculated at the time”.

As to the growing gap between allocations and real spending

— it results from many factors, including “rigidities and structural barriers” in the system, he explains.

Another major challenge for MSNP-II is federalism, which introduced three levels of government after elections in 2017. “It’s a Herculean task... because at the moment it’s not only one government—we have 761 governments... There are some difficulties in ensuring coordination among them,” adds Rupakhetee.

The pandemic challenge

The Covid-19 pandemic has added to the challenge. “It definitely has hampered our activities,” says Rupakhetee, “but we tried our level best to keep the programme going.”

For example, parents were trained to measure the arm circumference of infants to detect signs of malnutrition, a task usually done by female community health volunteers, who have been unable to do so due to frequent lockdowns.

Nepal’s school feeding programme was also modified because of the

pandemic, with food rerouted to students’ homes, says World Food Programme (WFP) Country Director Jane Pearce, in an online interview.

“Whereas most of the world stopped all of their school meals programmes, Nepal has continued, which has meant that we’re maintaining the nutrition that we’re providing through our locally-managed school meals programmes by giving households take-home rations,” she said.

WFP has also teamed up with UNICEF and other UN agencies to press the government to expand its malnutrition treatment to include not only children who are severely wasted (low weight for age) but moderately wasted, says WFP’s Head of Nutrition Anteneh Girma.

“With the impact of Covid and others, if they’re not treated they will become severely malnourished, then chronically malnourished, or stunted,” he adds.

In June this paper reported on how severe malnutrition was killing children in the poorest communities in Nepal’s eastern plains. It told the story of Raju Devi Sada, whose first daughter died at 3, after being malnourished. A second daughter died soon after birth, a year later.

A third daughter is underweight and local health workers have recommended feeding her nutritious food. But Raju Devi cannot afford vegetables, eggs, milk and meat, and what she earns as a daily wage labourer is barely enough to feed the rest of the family.

“We have found that up to 70% of children who die every year in Province 2 do so due to malnutrition, and the main reason for that is extreme poverty,” said Kedar Parajuli at Nepal’s Family Welfare Division. “Without alleviating poverty, we can’t solve malnutrition.”

WFP is doing mapping, using mobile data, to create what it calls a vulnerability index. It documents people’s access to water and sanitation services, health and other factors, in addition to nutrition, says Girma.

He adds, “Our nutrition response, food security response, is informed by that index... it indicates those who are vulnerable for not having access on time, for being exposed to various inequalities.”

Nepal. To date, 10 companies, all working in the food industry, have become members.

Ending malnutrition and other food-related diseases “will happen only if the private sector is responsible for what they are producing, and producing something safe ... so their engagement, bringing them to the table, is very important,” says Girma.

Leading collaboration with the private sector on the ground is Baliyo Nepal, a non-profit company that generated headlines when it launched in 2019. The initiative was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation through the Chaudhary Foundation, the charity arm of the Chaudhary Group, makers of Wai Wai instant noodles, which are widely considered junk food.

Today Baliyo Nepal is set to expand a pilot project that has been running in Lumbini Province since 2020 — raising awareness about nutritious food among school children, including via a cricket program, and educating shopkeepers to sell the nutritious foods in the first phase of its ‘Baliyo Basket’: eggs and a single-portion Rs10 sachet of fortified porridge for infants.

“Seventy percent of the sachets in the market were sold, according to the sales report,” says Baliyo Nepal CEO Atul Upadhyay, a nutritionist, in an interview in his Kathmandu office. “The feedback we’re getting from mothers is ‘Now we want it in a bigger package. We can’t go to the shop every day and buy the Rs10 package’.”

Upadhyay says manufacturers will start making the larger packs by year end. That is just one of many plans he is cooking up — besides expanding pilot activities to Bagmati and Gandaki provinces, the company will soon be adding to its Baliyo Basket a fortified drink for pregnant and lactating women and fortified porridge for 2-5-year-olds, once they are approved by the government.

Upadhyay notes that both the government and private sector are gradually embracing his innovative approach but stresses that new ways to fight malnutrition, like this public-private partnership model, are essential if Nepal is to reach its nutrition targets.

“It’s not important who works for nutrition. It’s important that someone works for nutrition, whether it be WFP, Baliyo Nepal, company A, company C — I don’t mind,” he adds.

Target Stunting

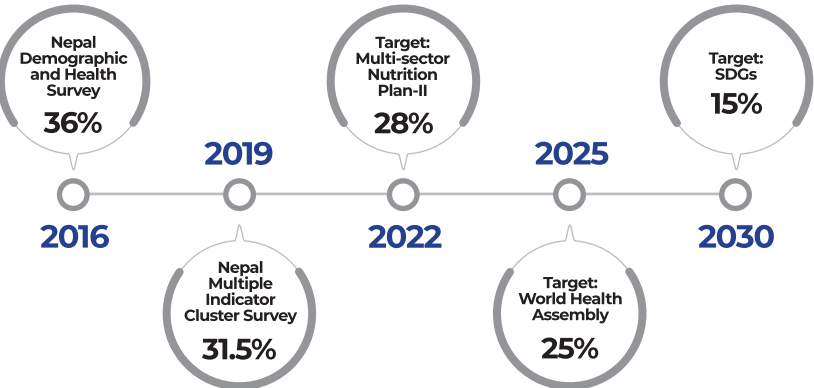
Stunting, low height for age, is a sign of chronic undernutrition. It can hinder brain development resulting in reduced mental ability and learning capacity, poor school performance in childhood and lower earnings and higher risks of nutrition-related chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity, in adulthood.

Nepal cut its stunting rate dramatically in recent decades, and it is one form of malnutrition that the country might be on track to reduce in line with coming targets: MSNP-II (2022), World Health Assembly (2025) and SDGs (2030).

The UNICEF Nutrition Sector Budget Brief says that the average yearly rate of stunting reduction since 2001 (3.25%) must increase to 3.8% to meet the MSNP-II and WHA targets, and rise to 6.5% to meet the SDG target.

According to Kiran Rupakhetee at the National Planning Commission: “The Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey has brought some encouraging results, but it may still be difficult to make the WHA target... but since the SDGs deadline is quite far away I’m very much optimistic and hopeful that we can meet it.”

Stunting rates and targets



The private sector

Girma points out that WFP, both in Nepal and globally, supports the multisector approach. In that vein, the UN agency is working closely with the government to establish the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Business Network in



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