



RE-SCHOOLING: High school students sit for exams in Adarsha Azad College in Bhaktapur on Wednesday. Schools in Kathmandu Valley are all set to restart in-person classes from next week.

AMIT MACHAMASI

Class struggle

● Sonia Awale

On 5 September, for the first time in nearly five months, there were less than a thousand daily new Covid-19 cases in Nepal. And it has mostly stayed that way since.

The rate of infection is also dropping below 9%, and schools in Kathmandu which have been closed for nearly two years are scheduled to reopen from next week. Cinema halls, bars and clubs are already up and running.

In fact, most Nepalis seem to think the pandemic is over. But it is not. The infection rate is still several times higher than most parts of the world, and with the festival season around the corner, there is a danger of a repeat of last year.

About this time in 2020, the government had also loosened the lockdown. Millions returned from India or travelled from Kathmandu to hometowns ahead of Dasain-Tihar, spreading the virus that

set off the first wave. The only difference this time is that we have vaccines. "Given the vaccination drive and natural immunity in the population, there might not be another big spike in near future, which also means fewer hospitalisations," says virologist at Teku hospital Sher Bahadur Pun. "But the virus will continue to spread and break through."

Studies have shown that even vaccinated people can be infected with the Delta variant and spread it. Jabs do not prevent transmission, they just reduce the seriousness of symptoms. And there could be new variants in future that do not respond to current vaccines.

The Health Ministry's recent sero-prevalence study has revealed that nearly 69% of people in a sample had SARS-CoV-2 antibodies. This means quite a large section of the population has been infected in the past, and have developed resistance to the virus.

But experts caution that this information could cause people

to disregard proven preventive measures, including masking and vaccination. Sero-prevalence surveys were designed to detect antibodies to measure the spread of the virus in the community, but the Delta strain has made terms like 'herd immunity' and 'breakthrough infections' obsolete.

"The key is to vaccinate as many people as possible," adds Pun, and Nepal is making up for lost time with inoculations. Close to 20% of Nepal's 30 million people have now been fully vaccinated, and this figure will likely reach 40% by December.

Despite this, experts warn that it is not a time to let our guards down. "It is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared," says physician Buddha Basnyat at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences. "We must continue wearing masks and practise safety measures. Only when 80-90% of people have been vaccinated will we be out of the woods."

Recent studies have shown just how effective masks can be in saving lives. In the largest study of mask-wearing yet, researchers conducted a trial in 600 villages in Bangladesh earlier this year and found that mask-wearing tripled in the community and people started distancing. Mask-wearing reduced symptomatic infections in individuals above 60 by one-third.

With Dasain around the corner, experts say the government should step up its public awareness campaign so that people limit unnecessary travel and mingling, and ensure mask-wearing even indoors for family gatherings if they cannot be avoided.

It is the elderly and unvaccinated children who will be most at risk, especially with schools reopening just weeks before the holidays and teachers only recently getting their first doses.

Says epidemiologist Lhamu Yangchen Sherpa: "We know Covid-19 is airborne, so we should be especially mindful about enclosed spaces during Dasain, something as simple as moving to the terrace rather than crowding a living room can spare the grandparents and children."

Two schools of thought
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

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Two schools of thought

After nearly two years of disruptions, Nepalis are itching to get back to normal lives. But there are signs society is returning to an old normal.

As soon as the daily caseload and infection rate started falling, the lockdown was lifted even while more than 10% of those tested are still Covid-positive, there are still nearly 500 people in ICU and ventilators in hospitals, and the Delta variant is infecting even those vaccinated.

And now schools are set to open next week. While we understand that there has been a tremendous social cost to students not attending in-person schools for nearly two years, why was there a need to reopen just for a few weeks before the holidays?

Some teachers, not all, have only just got their first vaccine doses, and unvaccinated children will now be in crowded classrooms, and then going home for family and festival gatherings for Dasain-Tihar-Chhat.

As our *page 1* report warns, we have been at this point before. Last year this time, the government relaxed the lockdown and millions

did not protect children from being infected with Covid-19 if family members were not careful about mingling and mask-wearing.

Research also shows that the risk of infection in the classroom is low if students wear masks properly at all times, and are physically separated in well-ventilated classrooms.

Experts predict that there will be a slight increase in Covid-19 cases among students, teachers and family members at home when schools resume in-person classes. But as vaccination rates rise, and in areas with high sero-prevalence, it may not lead to another spike, or even a third wave.

What no one can tell us is how 'slight' this 'increase' in Covid-19 cases will be in Nepal – especially since the vaccination rate is still low and most classrooms, school buses, playgrounds are crowded, and children will be excited to see each other after so many months away from friends.

So, while the benefits of resuming physical classes may outweigh the risks, the government has been ill-advised to restart in-person lessons just a few weeks before schools close again for the holidays.

Instead, it should have used the coming weeks to launch a saturation awareness campaign with strict criteria for school opening, citing mask-wearing at all times, spacing and limited mingling.

Parents, teachers and students must be convinced that the risk has been minimised, and the cost of denying children education now exceeds the risks to them from Covid.

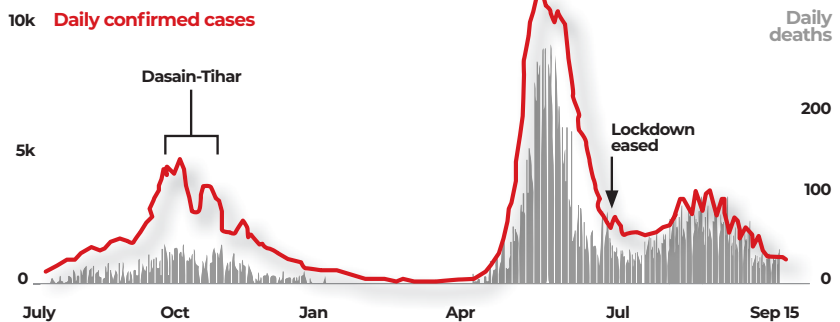
Across South Asia, school closures and limited digital learning have deprived

children for a prolonged period from education, widening socio-economic inequalities. In Nepal, the digital divide has created an education divide with most of the 80% of students who attend government schools deprived of learning since March 2020.

Most students have missed at least 70 weeks of school since the pandemic. Of the 29% of children in a recent survey who said they had access to distance learning via radio, television or online, only half were actually using it – mostly in cities and private schools. The pandemic has wrecked Nepal's gains in school enrolment, especially among girl children.

While keeping schools closed does not prevent the Delta variant from spreading, they should not reopen without precautions in place – and only after the festivities. Public awareness campaigns are needed before in-person classes resume, and compliance must be monitored. Last but not least, expedite full vaccination of teachers and school staff nationwide.

Covid-19 trend in Nepal



travelled to their hometowns. Cases soared as the first wave peaked during the holidays (*see graph*).

Experts have told us that a third wave is not likely, given that 20% of the population are now vaccinated (probably rising to 30% by Dasain), as well as the presence of natural antibodies detected in nearly 70% of the population in a recent sample sero-prevalence survey.

However, we cannot let our guard down. Delta is a sly virus, just waiting for an opportunity to pounce, and exploiting every weakness in human behaviour.

Experience from Nepal and other countries have shown that fully vaccinated people can be infected, and spread the virus to others, including elderly and unvaccinated children at home. Because of Delta's high transmissibility, experts warn that labels like 'herd immunity' and 'breakthrough cases' do not make sense anymore.

By the time Nepal reaches 40% vaccinated population by December, it will also be time for the third booster shots. We also do not know how long the natural immunity will last in the 70% of the population with antibodies.

Studies in India and elsewhere have shown that lockdowns and a high seropositivity rate

Reopen in-person schools only after holidays, with full precautions in place.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Hard labour

Nepal is bankrupt, the only thing keeping the economy afloat is remittances. Defying all projections, overseas contract workers sent home \$8 billion last fiscal year, reaffirming their significance.

Nepal's remittance-to-GDP equivalence is highest in Asia at 28% but migrant workers leaving for destination countries are cheated every step of the way, by moneylenders, agents and even the government, instead of being facilitated in their journey.

Only recently, outgoing workers were forced to wait for up to 28 hours at Teku Hospital just for a rubber-stamped piece of paper to certify they have been vaccinated. The letter didn't even have a QR code.

Neglect of the migrant workers is nothing new, it was the same two decades ago. In fact, this report from *Nepali Times* 20 years ago this week is a tragic reminder that the most essential needs of the people have been ignored all along: food, health care, education, irrigation and employment, to name a few.

Excerpts from issue #60 14-20 September 2001:

Nepal earns a huge amount in the form of remittances from citizens working abroad, but there are also thousands of Nepalis cheated of their inheritance and land-holdings, lured by the prospect of employment overseas. An investigation by *Himal Khabarpatrika* last year estimated that remittances from abroad earn Nepal about Rs75 billion annually-



more than tourism, foreign aid and exports put together.

People seeking foreign employment can be cheated twice-within the country and when they reach their destination. The deception begins as soon as a person indicates his interest in foreign employment. The village moneylender is often the first to benefit, as employment agencies require applicants to pay the entire amount involved in seeking and securing a job in one go, before the process is started. Applicants want the money desperately, and moneylenders in the informal sector will give it to them-often at 60% per annum. And, since the supply of workers is contracted and sub-contracted in so many layers, from overseas agencies to Nepali agency to smaller agencies to individual brokers in the countryside, a worker could end up paying double the actual cost of the process. At every layer, the agencies add on a comfortable margin for themselves.

The other trap-the bigger one-for workers abroad is the difference between what the employment agencies promise and the actual work conditions they are faced with. Worried and depressed by the prospect of losing their investment and the loss of face, these youths often work in inhuman conditions, just to be able to return having at least broken even. Perhaps because of this, the death rate among the Nepali workers in the Gulf is shockingly high.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



BAMBOO SUPREMACY

Increasingly more designers are using bamboo to build some of the prime properties around the world including resorts, hotels, schools and art galleries. This multi-use perennial plant is also Nepal's answer to sustainable and earthquake-resistant construction. Watch people in eastern Tarai construct bamboo structures and explain why they make for better homes. Report: *page 10-11*.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

One reason Nepal is food insecure, millions of young people have been working abroad for decades leaving arable land uncultivated ('Nepalis less and less able to feed themselves', Ramesh Kumar, #1078).

Puspa Raj Pant

And we are a so-called agricultural country. **Indra Bahadur Thapa**

Lack of modernisation in agriculture is another reason for increasing imports and decreasing food self-sufficiency. **Rk Pradhan**

It is more expensive to grow rice than to buy it. As with tourism, the scope for a productive and financially beneficial outcome rests in the hands of those who don't care. **Ian Wall**

THE MCC DEBATE

Building back better through inclusive economic growth is crucial post Covid, MCC grant will help Nepal to do just that ('MCC ball in Nepal's court', Namrata Sharma, nepalitimes.com). Political leaders need to dispel the misinformation and build consensus around it for the sake of 30 million Nepalis that will benefit.

Bandana Rana

It is unbelievable and sad how people are spreading misconception on these huge grants, which can be so beneficial for the country. **Bishow Parajuli**

Misconception can galvanise public opinion to such an extent that people refuse to see the truth. **Prabhakar Bagchand**

AFGHANISTAN

So longed for, so very, very close on multiple occasions, and yet I never made it across borders into AFG ('A short walk up the Panjshir', Lisa Choegyal, #1078). Very pleased your friends made it out. Alas many others have been left behind. **Terry Termite**

Lisa seems a prolific writer. Just as Panjshir is in the news, she immediately writes such an informative article with pictures for readers to enjoy. **Ganesh Gurung**

So beautifully written, she truly paints a vivid picture of an indescribably beautiful place. **Sara Lailee**

Many Nepalis faced the similar problem during the Maoist insurgency, ironically in their own country ('Afghans in Nepal await resettlement', Mukesh Pokhrel, #1078). **Desh Ratna**

PANDEMIC EDUCATION

I hope that the policy makers will start thinking about strategies to address the issues of children having limited access to learning environment and these efforts of lessons though local radio will help set the milestone ('Schools of the Air', Felicity Volk, #1078).

Sujit Wasti

ROADSIDE TREES

This is a great article and shows how we have the local knowledge to make better decisions for sustainable and long-term environmental and infrastructural benefits ('Right trees for right seasons in Kathmandu', Meena Bohora, *page 10-11*).

Stephanie Suhowsky

Good arguments here. The criteria for roadside tree selection make sense. I wish there were more than one recommendation for the appropriate species though. **Abhi Parajuli**

Jacaranda is a serious road hazard. A considerable patch below any Jacaranda tree is a slippery goopy mess. Glad that someone finally addressed this. **Vibek Manandhar**

Are there any trees still left in Kathmandu? Every time I return, more have been cut down. **Margaret Kerr**

INDIA-NEPAL TRANSMISSION

Yet another significant development strengthening the bond and bilateral ties between the two countries, and beneficial for the progress of both Nepal and India ('India, Nepal sign power exchange deal', nepalitimes.com).

Pradeep Subedi

This will prove to be a lifeline for energy trade, as it will have more than double the capacity of the currently operational 400kW Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur transmission line. **Soujan Bohara**

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Afghans in Nepal await resettlement

by Mukesh Pokhrel

With the Taliban back in power, the doors have all but closed on the chances of Afghans in Nepal ever returning home. But life in Nepal, while certainly safer, has not been easy at all, especially with the pandemic. Visit nepalitimes.com for the report.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Tamang history, memory and identity

Printmaking artist Subas Tamang's exhibition 'History, Memory, Identity', is a tribute to the struggle and resistance against oppression of Nepal's Tamang community. Explore this powerful, award-winning exhibit in this review on our website.

t Most popular on Twitter



Nepal less and less able to feed itself

by Ramesh Kumar

Growing population, rising disposable income and stagnant domestic production mean more dependence on food imports to meet increasing demand. Details in the story online.

cc Most commented

(Geo)political football

MCC or not, Nepal needs to build the transmission lines for power to be distributed within Nepal, and also for export surplus monsoon power to India. But the geopolitics and domestic politics threaten much-needed US-supported infrastructure. Join the debate online and follow us for latest developments.

t Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Printmaking artist Subas Tamang's exhibition 'History, Memory, Identity', is a tribute to the struggle and resistance against oppression of #Nepal's #Tamang community.



Tamang 大鵬 @van_blon

Damphu, Mercedes (porters), Doko (Pipa), Rakam (unpaid labor) & Lokta (paper) are the historical symbols of #Tamangstruggle and resistance against state oppression #identity #history @EmperorofIceCream Maybe overdue for more honest subaltern history in #Nepal's school curriculum.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Right trees for right seasons in #Kathmandu. Besides beautifying the city, selecting correct species has ecological benefits and reduces road hazard. Meena Bohara writes:



ART@AmulyaSir

More than right or wrong trees for Kathmandu. Moratorium on all arborescent trees cutting from public places. Plant more trees in public places every year.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"It should not come as a surprise to anyone if the ruling coalition collapses because of the #MCC." MCC row rocks #Nepal's ruling coalition:



Sanju Gurung @sanigurung

Foreign aid dependent Nepal is now being thrown into a larger geopolitical rivalry beyond the immediate issues of security, and it appears that political parties have pretty much aligned their support for the US or China sponsored aid/loan largely based on their party politics.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Indian spiritual figure Sadhguru visited Kathmandu Darbar Square on Monday during the final leg of his pilgrimage tour of Nepal. Sadhguru has been on a tour to view Mansarovar Lake and Mt Kailash in Tibet from a vantage point in the Nepal-China border at Lapcha, Humla district.



Sam Eli @sambingang

Never a dull moment with him.

Times

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Publisher and Editor: Kunda Dixit
Audience Engagement: Sahina Shrestha, Associate Editor: Sonia Awale, Layout: Kiran Maharjan
Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518
Printed at: United Multi Printers Pvt. Ltd. Hattiban, Lalitpur Tel: 01-5950517/01-5950518



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Step by step for rural health care

Local philanthropy and volunteerism combine to make Ek Ek Paila a model for health care in rural Nepal

● Aryan Sitaula

It is the aftermath of disasters that bring out the best among Nepalis. And so it was after the 2015 earthquake, volunteer groups sprang up spontaneously and organised relief through social media.

Among them was a loosely structured group of like-minded Nepalis who used their medical expertise to provide emergency help to areas destroyed by the earthquakes. But while many such groups faded away, the volunteers continued to expand their work — calling themselves Ek Ek Paila (one step at a time).

“After seeing the devastation in 2015, I thought it’d be best to use my expertise to provide medical help and do more rather than just provide relief,” says Suman Thapa, an ophthalmologist who helped set up Ek Ek Paila.

Now, with the pandemic, Ek Ek Paila has been trying to bring health services to parts of Nepal which have rudimentary medical care even at the best of times. “After hearing about infected people having virtually no access to Covid-19 treatment in rural areas where we had previously held health camps, we created a Covid Health Package and took it to them,” Thapa adds.

The package consists of medication, relevant information, and a direct hotline to volunteer doctors to answer any questions they might have about symptoms, tests and vaccines. The demand for the packages has now snowballed, with local governments in more districts approaching for help.

Ek Ek Paila raised Rs7 million for the distribution of the Covid Health Packages — all from local donations. In fact, that is what makes the non-profit different from most other charities in Nepal, it relies almost completely on donations from Nepalis.

“If foreigners and international organisations want to donate to Ek Ek Paila, we do not say no,” Thapa explains. “But 99% of the funding for Ek Ek Paila comes from local donors.”

The fact that Thapa is also an accomplished musician, and a lead guitarist in the band ‘The Blue Fret’ helps with fund-raising concerts. “I had always wanted to be a musician,



Suman Thapa conducting an eye examination on a patient at Chaurjhari Hospital in Rukum, where Ek Ek Paila is working with the local government.

EK EK PAILA



Suman Thapa is also an accomplished musician and organises fund-raising concerts for the non-profit he co-founded.

and being a doctor was actually the next best thing for me,” admits Thapa, grinning through his mask during a recent interview at Ek Ek Paila’s new Community Health Centre in Kathmandu.

Ek Ek Paila had a humble

start after the earthquake six years ago. Thapa contacted some friends and found fellow doctors who committed to spending one weekend a month for a year to provide medical care to survivors in remote villages badly hit by the

earthquakes. In the first year alone, Ek Ek Paila organised 12 health camps in Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, and other districts.

Nepal’s mountainous terrain has posed a significant challenge in health care delivery, made worse by government neglect and poor governance, and exacerbated during crises like the earthquake and pandemic.

All medical professionals who volunteered at health camps paid for their own trips, equipment, and even for the medicine that they prescribed. But after the 12 health camps, the regular volunteers decided to officially register Ek Ek Paila, creating a Nepali-driven and funded organisation to expand its services.

Today, volunteer doctors and medical personnel also perform surgeries, including complex eye operations, in rural health camps and carry more equipment with them, increasing diagnostic accuracy. Ek Ek Paila’s camps have become mobile primary health care centres.

“What has made our work easier

despite the political paralysis in Kathmandu is that with federalism, local governments are empowered and collaborate in holding health camps,” says Thapa, who has experience with rural health camps organised by Sanduk Ruit of the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology.

Local governments top up the donations from the Ek Ek Paila members themselves and other local funding to run the camps. They provide Ek Ek Paila teams of 30 or so people with accommodation and two meals a day. They also help organise the space in which the health program is conducted and help disseminate information.

Ek Ek Paila also collaborates with other non-profits like Sparsha Nepal and the ear-nose-throat surgery specialists, Impact Nepal.

Ek Ek Paila’s new non-profit Community Health Centre in Thapathali provides affordable health care to those who cannot afford hospital fees. With the flow of patients increasing, and the challenge of making the centre sustainable, a tier system for small consultation fees subsidises free treatment for those who cannot afford it.

The Community Health Centre was funded through private donations, including the building itself which belongs to one of the founding members. Overhead costs are low because medical personnel all volunteer their services.

Besides the vital service it provides, Ek Ek Paila has also led by example to foster volunteerism and philanthropy among Nepali individuals and companies.

Foreseeing the third wave, Ek Ek Paila is expanding its Covid Health Packages to reach more people in hard-to-reach places. The non-profit also is in talks to manage primary health centres in Jajarkot and Sindhupalchok districts.

Says Thapa: “Ek Ek Paila has brought Nepalis together from all walks of life, it has helped people in need of affordable health care and given donors and volunteers a sense of satisfaction for having contributed. As for me, this is the most fulfilling thing I have done in my life.”

To donate to Ek Ek Paila:
<https://www.ekekpaila.org/page/5/donate>

prabhu BANK

\$50 million from WB

The World Bank this week signed two agreements worth \$50 million each to support Nepal’s flagship School Sector Development Program and public management reforms in the health sector. The agreements were signed by Finance Secretary Madhu Marasini and World Bank Country Director Faris Hadad-Zervos.

“Strengthening Nepal’s education and health systems is an essential element of building back better from the pandemic,” said Marasini, Finance Secretary.

Hyundai Dasain

Laxmi International has launched the ‘Hyundai Festival Delight 2078’ scheme offering Hyundai i20 cars through lucky draw as a bumper prize along with cash discount upto Rs300,000, additional cash discounts to Rs100,000 through scratch card and free one-year comprehensive insurance and road tax. In addition, six years free service and three years warranties are also on offer.



HYUNDAI



LaLiga on DishHome

Dish Media Network Limited has obtained exclusive broadcasting rights in Nepal for LaLiga season 2021-22, with the Spanish league set to be shown on Action Sports HD2. Customers can watch the league via a ‘Season Ticket’, which will be available on DishHome DTH and OTT platforms. SIM TV, Prabhu T2 and OTT will also host the league.

DFSK Dasain Offer



Kuzu Nepal, authorised dealer of Indonesian brand DFSK, has announced a series of festive offers on the purchase of Glory i-Auto SUVs such as Rs1.5 million down payment, Rs350,000 cashback, Rs50,000 exchange bonus and one year

of tax exemption. Glory 560 SUV is also available for Rs1 million down payment, as are Yadea brand’s C1S and G5 electric two-wheelers.

India-Nepal transmission

Nepal Electricity Authority Managing Director Kulman Ghising this week signed a joint investment agreement with Power Corporation of India for the construction of a 120-km, 400kW electrical transmission line between Butwal and Gorakhpur – 20km of it in Nepal. Estimated to cost Rs6 billion, the project is a prerequisite for the implementation of the Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC).

Toyota Exchange Fest

United Traders Syndicate is organising a ‘It’s Time to Upgrade’ exchange carnival under which customers can exchange cars of any brand for Toyota vehicles such as Corolla Cross, RAV4, Land Cruiser Prado and Fortuner among others.



Viber Lens

Viber has collaborated with Snap Inc to bring Viber Lens to the Nepali market, integrating Snap Inc’s Camera Kit, Creative Kit and customisable Bitmoji in the Viber app. At least 20 different Viber lenses, with local lenses from singer Swoopna Suman and Coca Cola, will also arrive shortly. Users can make interactive conversations through Augmented Reality (AR)-powered photo and video messaging.

Nissan LEAF

Nissan has launched its zero-emission LEAF EV in Nepal at a special introductory price of Rs5.99 million for the first 50 customers. The EV can be fully powered up at home in

15-18 hours using a dedicated wall outlet and universal charging cable. “The introduction of the zero-emission Nissan LEAF in South Asian

markets reflects our commitment to support the efforts of these governments, as they work toward achieving their clean-energy goals,” says Sinan Ozkok of Nissan India.



Letter to my kindergarten daughter

Former Bhutanese refugee resettled in America writes to his daughter on her first day of school

● T P Mishra

Dear छोरी,

Congratulations on starting a long and exciting journey by beginning kindergarten today. It was lovely to see you so excited when we dropped you off at school this morning.

My own excitement is a bit subdued due to my concern about the Covid-19 pandemic surge in America. I know you will feel uncomfortable wearing that mask all day, but it is necessary to help reduce the risk for yourself and those around you.

The environment and circumstances of my school days back in Bhutan were so different from your first day at school today. I was only six in 1990 when I and one of my six siblings were enrolled in the Dokap Primary School near our remote village of Indrachok in Bhutan.

My eldest brother, who never had the chance to go to school himself, carried me on his shoulders during the monsoon when the trails were slippery — 30 minutes downhill and 45 minutes uphill.

I would hold on tight with my hands wrapped around his head as he pushed his way through shrubs and bushes. I would arrive in class bleeding with leeches on my head. I had to pluck them off by sprinkling salt on them. During the monsoon, we always carried pouches of salt in our school backpacks.

At home, we did not have a table, and sat on the floor to eat. I was the youngest, and my job was to feed the family dog, ཅཱིེ.

Thankfully, you have an air-conditioned school bus that pulls up outside our home, ready to take



T P MISHRA

you to your school, which is within easy walking distance here in North Carolina where we are now settled.

In elementary school, some of the Bhutanese teachers treated me harshly. They used to beat me with sticks because I struggled to learn Dzongkha, the national language. Sometimes they made me stand on one foot with the other foot crossed over the knee.

Classmates were encouraged to laugh at me. I am glad you will be studying in a supportive environment without any such childhood trauma.

In 1991, when the Bhutanese regime evicted the Lhotshampa, my family along with thousands of others were taken by trucks across India and forced into Nepal.

Our refugee camp was on the banks of the holy Kankai River in Jhapa where we spent the next 20 years. Many Bhutanese refugees lost their lives over the years to malaria and other diseases. Two members of our own family died, and I will

tell you about them when you grow older.

Later, we were moved to the Beldangi-II refugee camp and we could attend school again. The classes were out in the open, in the shade of a large tree. Once, during a storm, a branch fell on my head and I had to rush to the health post for treatment.

Corporal punishment was a part of everyday life in the classroom. The intention of the teachers towards students was not bad, it was just the way schools functioned in those days in Bhutan and in the refugee camp in Nepal.

Our large family lived in a bamboo hut, the roof leaked, and we did not have electricity in the refugee camp. We did our homework on the floor next to kerosene lamps.

We used to have lots of homework. We had to memorise long paragraphs at home and then recite them when we were in the classroom the following day.

As a refugee child, I did not have

shoes. My parents could not afford them, so I wore flip-flops to school. Always remember that it is not what you wear on your feet that allows you to take steps in life, it is your inner determination.

As a new American, you have a place to call home. You should always be grateful to this country where you were born. The United States gave your parents a chance to build new lives so that you, too, can enjoy the freedom and citizenship that was denied to us, and to many other peoples around the world today.

Freedom does not mean that you are free from obligations and responsibilities. Never take your freedom for granted. Unlike your parents when they were your age, you will have a roof over your head, you will always have enough food, health care and a sense of belonging.

There may be classmates who may be having a hard time, who cannot afford lunch, or who are from refugee families trying to heal from the trauma of war.

Your compassion and love will help them as they struggle to make a life in a new place. Share what you have, but do not humiliate others with pity.

Now that you are outside the home, you will probably see things from a different perspective. That is completely normal. I hope you will soon learn to take a stand if you or your friends face bullies. Be kind and generous to others.

Never discriminate against those around you because of the colour of their skin, ethnicity, creed, or any physical difference that sets them apart.

You are starting school even as the people of Afghanistan,

especially women there, fear for their lives and are under threat of losing their fundamental rights. I hope you will grow up learning to become the voice of those who cannot speak up for themselves.

Culturally, we in Bhutan treat teachers as our second parents. I hope you will carry on that tradition here in the US. We will continue to abide by the language rule: Nepali at home and English at school.

As you grow older, I hope the situation will change in our motherland Bhutan, so we can go back to trace our ancestral history in the forested mountains of Dagana.

When we fled, I hid a plastic bag with my school supplies inside our house because my mother promised we would return home soon. Thirty years have passed, and while we were in the refugee camp in Nepal we learnt that the regime had burnt down our home in Bhutan. That plastic bag with my books must have turned into ashes.

I am sharing these stories from our past for one reason alone — I want you to know where you come from, so that you will make the best of the opportunity that has come your way.

“I will be fine,” you assured us right before we dropped you off at your school today. Keep rolling, girl. We cannot wait for you to come home and tell us all about your first day at school.

With unconditional love,
Your बाबा



T P Mishra is the Executive Editor at the Bhutan News Service and is one of the 90,000 Bhutanese refugees resettled in the United States. This article first appeared in Let's Rethink This, and is excerpted with permission.

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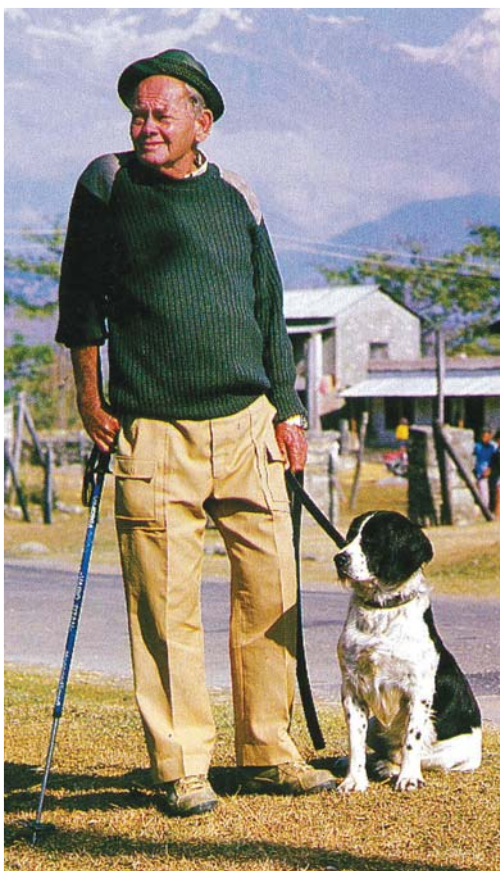
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A Himalayan odyssey

Lt Col J O M Roberts (1916–1997) was a decorated British Army officer who joined the military in India so he could climb mountains. He lived in Nepal from 1958 till his death in 1997. He is considered a pioneer of trekking tourism in Nepal, and maintained an aviary in Pokhara, a place he chose to live in because no other place on earth has a mountain view like it. As the pandemic dismantled Nepal's trekking industry, and at the start of another season which should have been fully booked, *Nepali Times* brings you an abridged version of a blog titled 'The Himalayan Odyssey' that Roberts wrote just before he died in 1997 in Pokhara.



MEL GOLDMAN

A Royal Nepal Airlines DC-3 in Pokhara Airfield, 1967.

● Jimmy Roberts

I have grown up (I refuse absolutely to write "grown old") with modern Himalayan mountaineering and I have watched and pioneered mountaineering and trekking in Nepal literally from the beginning.

I came out to India and joined the old British Indian Army at the end of 1936 partly because I was unqualified for a more intellectual employment, but mainly because I wanted to climb in the Himalaya. It worked.

At that time the whole of the Himalaya Karakoram lay open: either permits were not needed, or could be obtained easily enough. The peak height record stood at 25,600ft (Nanda Devi), not a single mountain over 26,000ft had been climbed. Entry into Tibet needed more formality, and Bhutan was the same. But for a mountaineer it was Nepal that the lure was far more potent.

Closed off Nepal

Until about 1948, visits to Kathmandu were by invitation only, either from the Rana rulers or the British Embassy. The rest of the Kingdom was firmly closed to foreigners, an exception being made in the case of glaciers west and south of Kangchenjunga, to which access was permitted in special circumstances by way of a high pass in north Sikkim.

Pokhara exerted a greater fascination than Lhasa, and was certainly less known. Fourteen years were to pass before I set foot in Nepal myself and this long wait must account for the fact that I have never quite lost my own sense of wonder and privilege of being allowed inside Nepal at all.

In the Indian Army we were allowed two or three months local leave each year, and nine months leave every three years. Annual leave was a privilege, not a right, and could be withheld or reduced by one's commanding officer. It depended on what one intended to do.

My mountain scheming had extended beyond the mere Indian

Army and I had managed to insinuate myself into a Gurkha Regiment with headquarters at 6,000ft on the flanks of the Pir Panjal range in what is now Himachal Pradesh. So in 1937 I was able to climb for a total of about three weeks among the granite peaks of the Dhauladhar, in 1938 I joined an expedition attempting Masherbrum in the Karakoram.

There were five of us in the party, plus four Sherpas and we needed 60 porters to carry all our loads. That year there was also another British attempt on Everest from the north, a German expedition led by Paul Bauer to Nanga Parbat, and an American expedition to K2. There was some friendly rivalry with the Americans with whom we shared part of the trail, but never actually met.

For a 20-year-old, Masherbrum was a rather shattering experience. I acclimatised very slowly, was frostbitten, could not sleep, and it never seemed to stop snowing. Finally two of our friends were very severely frostbitten in a summit attempt and I watched their toes wither and blacken and fingers drop off, literally as I helped the doctor with their dressings.

However, by the time I reached Srinagar I had perked up a little reading a newspaper report that they had failed on Everest, but might return in the autumn. I wrote to Tilman, the leader, giving him the welcome news that I would be available to join them in their second attempt. Sometime later I received a terse reply, written from the Planters Club, Darjeeling. There was to be no autumn attempt, and in any case I would not have been wanted.

A new expedition to climb Everest from Tibet was being organised for the fall of 1940, and I was asked to join. Mostly it was a new team to replace those who had spent the last six years trudging to and from Darjeeling and the Rongbuk Glacier.

A Captain Hunt was another of the members. It was an alluring prospect: just the right age and, first, home leave and three months getting fit in the Alps. I do not regret the war but wish they could

have put it off for a couple of years.

The war gave me experience of parachuting and command of the first operational drop of the war in South East Asia. Dispirited after failures in the mountains, I still sometimes return to uncertain glow of that small and not very dangerous parachute operation into North Burma in 1942.

The boredom, the sheer and utter misery of war and the few moments of truth which make it sometimes seem worthwhile compare very closely with high altitude climbing. I feel great admiration for the young men who voluntarily, without any clarion call from king and Country, endure similar miseries on high and steep mountain faces. Maybe it is not quite as dangerous as war, and maybe television provides the call, but never mind, I admire them.

Finally, Nepal

In 1949, the Himalayan Committee of the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club applied to the Nepal government for Everest. This was refused, but Tilman and Peter Lloyd were permitted

to visit Langtang Valley, north of Kathmandu. Once again, I wrote to Bill Tilman. Same result as in 1938. But in 1950 the Committee received permission to send an expedition to Annapurna, and at the same time the French were permitted to attempt Dhaulagiri. Now, it was Tilman's turn to write to me.

There were four of us climbers in addition to our leader who was 20 years older and by far the strongest and fittest. It was an ill-organised and badly led expedition, which made its Base Camp above the Manang Valley the day the monsoon began and then failed to reach even the summit of lowly Annapurna IV. Personally I was relieved when superficially frostbitten feet put an end to my own climbing and I was able to spend the rest of the monsoon exploring the Manangbhot and Bhimtakothi valleys and collecting birds for the British Museum.

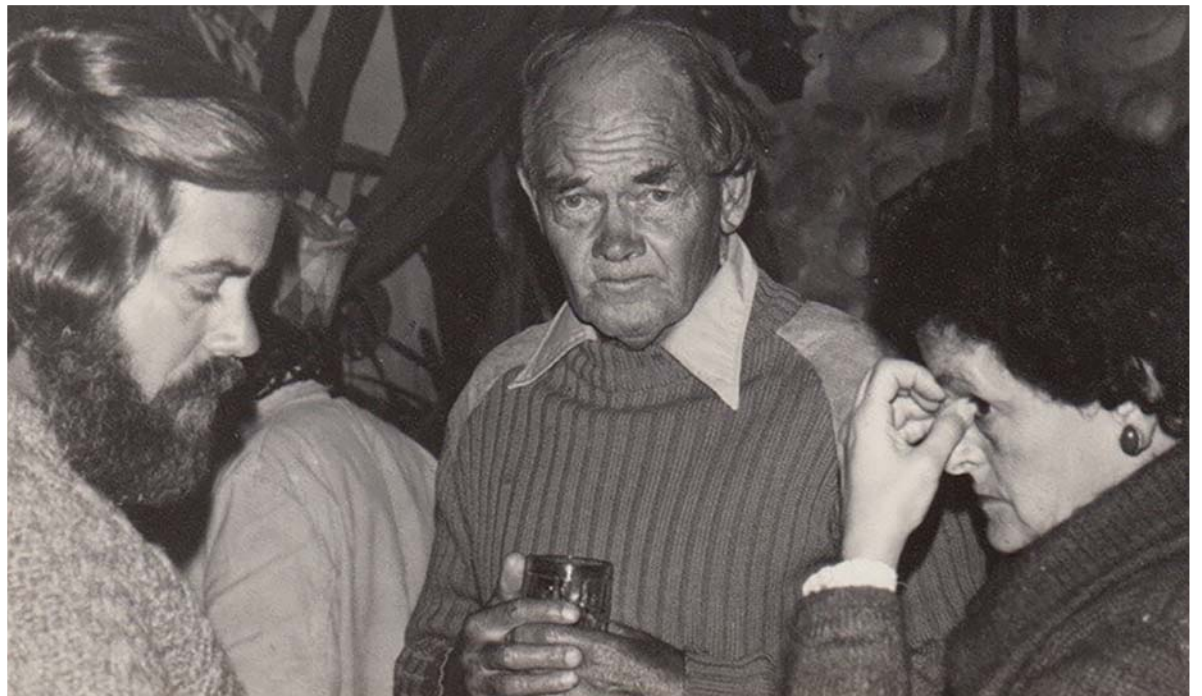
At the end, too, came a special reward when I walked across with one Sherpa to Pokhara. Poor Pokhara has taken a bit of hammering in the 43 years which have passed, but I have not changed

the opinion I formed then, there is no other mountain view in the world to equal Machapuchare and Annapurna hanging there in the sky above the green Pokhara plain.

Meanwhile Herzog and the French had failed on Dhaulagiri but climbed 'our' Annapurna. It was the first 8,000m peak to be climbed and the subsequent flag waving and publicity were a curtain-raiser to even greater events in 1953 and the even more vigorous waving of flags.

I went to Everest that year myself, only as a purveyor of oxygen loads. Dumping my oxygen loads at Base Camp I went off to prove myself, made the first exploration of the Lumding, Inuku and Hongu valleys, the first ascent of Mera and a south-to-north crossing of Amphu Lapcha pass in basketball boots – two firsts in one.

Hastening back to my Regiment in Malaya, one hot night in June I heard the news that Everest had been climbed from Indian policemen who were searching my rucksack in Jainagar on the Nepal border. And I rejoiced with the rest of the world.



Col Jimmy Roberts with Al Read and Elizabeth Hawley during New Year's at Tiger Tops in 1978.

Nepal mountaineering

Nepal had begun to open the doors of her mountains to foreigners, but those in other parts of the Himalaya began to close. Tibet became the first to be difficult to access, and soon impossible. Relations between India and China became strained, and finally reached the breaking point of war in 1962.

India and Pakistan fought in Kashmir. During those years, which continued in effect until the early 1970s Pakistan sometimes permitted the entry of a few expeditions to such mountains as Nanga Parbat. But apart from Nepal, the remainder of the Himalayan Range from Bhutan to Kashmir, remained firmly closed to foreign expeditions. Nepal closed her own mountain for three years from 1966 to 1968.

The golden age of climbing and exploration in Nepal was from 1950-65. Permits were of course required, but there were no restrictions. Most of the highest peaks were climbed during these years but yet there were never too many expeditions in the field at one time.

After 1953 I continued to return to Nepal from army services in Malaya almost yearly, to the detriment of my military career. In 1954 I climbed Putha Hiunchuli (23,800 feet) with one Sherpa and this remains my humble personal height record.

Machapuchare followed in 1957, Noyce and Cox reaching a point about 50 meters below the north summit. In 1960 Annapurna II was the last 26,000 footer to fall, Grant, Bonington and Ang Nima being the summit trio. In 1962 and 1965 I scraped around the flanks of Dhaulagiri VI, mistaking it for Dhaulagiri IV. Like Machapuchare, ‘D4’ was an old ambition but proved even more difficult to grasp than the proverbial Fish Tail itself.

Towards the end of 1958 I was appointed to the newly created post of Military Attaché at the British Embassy in Kathmandu, and I have lived in Nepal ever since. In those days the Embassy staff was very small and so, at first, it was paradoxically more difficult to get away than it had been before.

However from now on I was at the centre of the Nepalese mountain scene, and the 1960 expedition to Annapurna II was fitted into this period. The appointment was for three years and I managed to have this extended by another two.

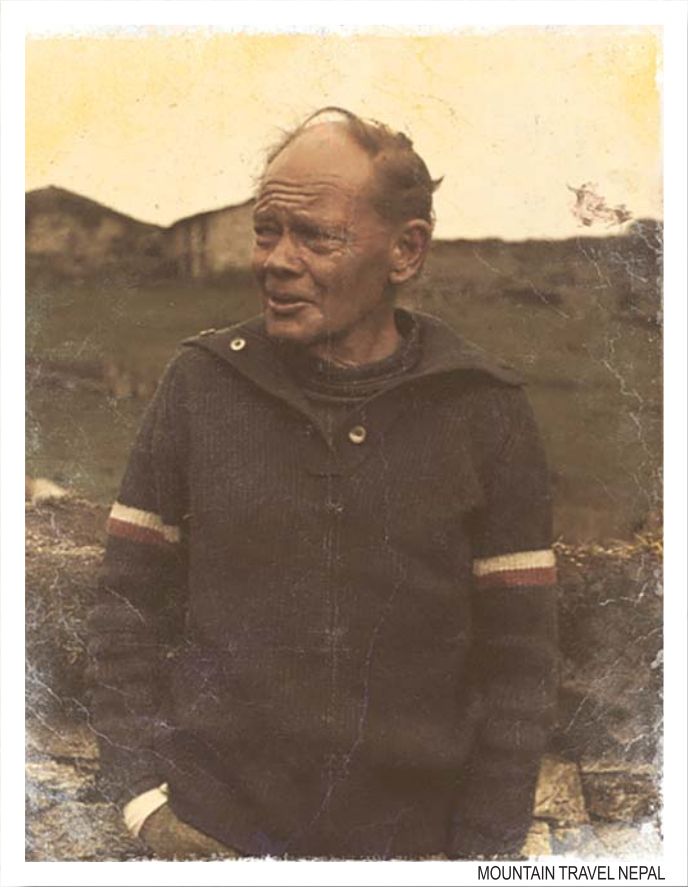
Now I was merely opting for another two years of security and good army pay. But again fate intervened and this time dealt me a joker in the shape of an Army Brigadier (we don’t call them Generals in the British Army) who turned up in Kathmandu on leave.

Unfortunately (fortunately) I took a dislike to his face and was unwise (wise) enough to tell him so rather late one night in the Yak & Yeti bar in the Royal Hotel. Rather unfairly – for he had no official standing in Nepal – he later reported me for “insulting” him. No, I was not court–martialled or sacked, but the two-year Embassy extension was cancelled and I took the hint and retired voluntarily.

At the same time I wrote to Norman Dyhrenfurth and volunteered my service for the American Mount Everest Expedition planned for 1963. It gave me both immediate objectives to work for and, afterwards, a sense of partnership in probably the most outstanding feat yet performed on Everest barring the first ascent.

I refer, of course, to the Unsoeld/Hornbein climb of the West Ridge and subsequent traverse of the mountain, although I would accord almost equal honour to Junko Tabei, the first woman to reach the summit with a single Sherpa companion in 1975.

In 1971 and 1972, I returned to Everest in a more exalted capacity than the ‘transportation officer’ of



Col Jimmy Roberts demanded only the highest standards on treks. Here he is training Mountain Travel guides in cooking hygiene and food presentation.

1963. However, a disability now prevented me from going beyond base camp, and that is no place for a leader or his deputy to remain.

The International Expedition of 1971 is probably remembered mainly for the walkout of the four so-called ‘Latins’. I protest against concentrating all our efforts on a South West face climb. In fact, the seeds of failure had already been sown when a spell of appalling weather followed the quite unnecessary death of a well-loved Indian member.

Despite all this, we did not do too badly and my main regret was the loss of a childish and innocent personal belief that mountaineers of a certain calibre and reputation must also be gentlemen (to use an outmoded expression).

Trekking in Nepal

After 1963, I decided to remain in Nepal and create my own means of employment there. The field of ‘mountains’ obviously suggested itself – indeed I had few other qualifications. But within that field my credentials were good – long standing knowledge of the country, the people and their language, and more recently some familiarity with official circles in the capital.

I thought back to earlier days in Kashmir, and agents who used to help organise the forays of my

sheep hunting friends, providing all camp gear, staff, porters, and food for an agreed daily rate. However, their methods and equipment were heavy and old fashioned – army tents, sheets and blankets, camp cots and camp furniture, and china cups and plates. There was also the consideration that these agents catered mostly for seasoned travellers who spoke the local language and who remained in full control of their caravans.

The terms trek and trekking, are now very commonly used and understood, but were novel to some in 1964. The derivation is form an old Boer word but the terms were so often used in Himalayan literature in connection with mountain camping and travel and so on that I never had any doubt that the beast forming in my mind would be called a Trekking Agency. It would be based on what I had already seen in Kashmir, but streamlined and modified by lessons learnt in expeditionary mountaineering. And as the clients or trekkers would not be experienced in Nepal conditions, we would have to maintain a greater degree of control, which would necessitate a high standard of trekking staff and their training.

Beginnings were modest. I remember sketching out a plan to provide for no less than 8 trekkers in the field at any one

time. I would have 8 pads, 8 this and 8 that. I wrote down 8 tents, scratched out the 8 and wrote 4. “Let ’em share,” I said to myself. I placed a small but expensive advertisement in Holiday magazine which produced five replies, two obviously from curious children.

By the end of 1964 Mountain Travel was however registered with the government as the first trekking agency in Nepal, and it was to remain the only one for the next four years. My first clients came to do an Everest trek in the early spring of 1965. There was a story in circulation a year or two later that these were ‘three American grandmothers’, and a more sporting trio of enthusiastic and appreciative ladies I have never since handled.

Even by 1966 the days of the 8 sets of equipment were long past and I soon had to begin considering the problem of ‘how big’? In order to preserve the exclusive quality of the mountain experience I wondered if I should not turn people away. But the demand grew and grew, and now there were other agents coming into the field.

Turning people away would not reduce the numbers coming to trek, so it seemed better to expand and at least try and ensure that the good name created for trekking in Nepal did not suffer. With expansion there was the danger of losing the personal touch which is vital in an operation of this sort. However, by selection, by training, by example and influence, and the delegation of responsibility, it may become possible for a special spirit to permeate an organisation, down to the humblest ‘Kitchen Boy’.

There was, too, the question of approach, of what we were trying to achieve, to aim behind the way a trek was conducted. Stated simply, I would say we are trying to show you the mountains of Nepal, its valleys and villages and people, under the best possible conditions, but without shielding you from reality. One hears criticism of groups who trek through Nepal isolated from the people and country by their own entourage and disinterest. That is not, I hope, our way of running a trek. Rather we try to give you all the ingredients of enjoyment, with guides who look after you but do not intrude. The final, total experience remains yours to create, and to enjoy to full without organisational worries or distractions.

We have all heard that the Sherpas are splendid fellows. And we have heard that they have been ‘spoilt’ (by expeditions, trekking, tourism or education – take your choice). Probably the truth lies somewhere in between. As in any community, there are ‘bad’ ones, and the wages and other rewards now become customary for mountaineering and trekking work are high by Nepal standards. However, the good ones – there are many – are very good indeed and reply to their wages many times over with willing work, loyalty and comradeship.

On an expedition or a trek, they served superbly but without any trace of servility. Sherpas give trekking agents in Nepal a most unfair advantage over their counterparts in other parts of the Himalaya. I cannot hide the truth – I love them. And at times they drive me stark, raving mad.

The year 1966, when Mountain Travel was beginning to give a fair amount of employment to Sherpas, also marked the end of mountaineering expedition activity for three years. Khumbu was already suffering from the economic effects of the near closure of the once profitable trade with Tibet, and this new source of employment, then and swelling steadily in coming years, was a godsend to Sherpa people.

Now it is all taken for granted

and tends to rate less honourably than the aid (hospitals, schools and bridges) given to the Sherpa community by an outside source. However, someone had to start it all – and what trekking gave the earlier years has not been forgotten in the villages at the foot of Mt Everest.

The growth of wilderness travel in Nepal during the past years has been phenomenal. The foreign exchange earnings from trekking have been considerable and more important, converted into rupees these earnings – in the form of pay, food purchases and so on – have reached people in remote mountain areas, not just a few pockets in Kathmandu. The facilities which have been developed in Nepal have enabled people, who never dreamt that it would be possible, to enjoy an expeditionary type holiday in the Himalayas.

On the debit side, in Nepal we hear of dirty campsites and trails littered with rubbish and crowds of hikers invading the peace of the mountain. The now widespread realisation that the first problem does really exist, amounts at least to a partial solution.

Postscript

The text above was written up to 1987, when about 40,000 trekking permits were issued. Five years later, the latest figures available, being for 1992, 71,439 were issued. That is about 20% of the visitors total for that year, but trekkers spend considerably longer in Nepal than normal visitors, so the income from trekking and mountaineering probably accounts for at least half of the grand yearly total of foreign exchange by tourism.

The years since 1965 have been something of a success story for this aspect of tourism in Nepal, which has spread to the rest of the world. Nepal did not invent hotels or aeroplanes but it did invent trekking tourism as we know it today. Even in its now somewhat degraded form it has brought benefits to many sections of the community and to the national economy, and it has enabled thousands of foreign visitors to explore the more inaccessible parts of this beautiful Kingdom.

But despite the statistics, the industry is not all that healthy – for much longer than these last five years we have been engaged in strangling the goose, golden eggs and all.

In 1992, of then total 71,439 trekkers, 40,808 made their own private arrangements not employing one of the official trekking agencies. This implies they lived comparatively cheaply in shanty-like ‘tea houses’, which are often unsanitary and allowed to spring up, unchecked, on former beauty spots. And so the trails grow overcrowded and dirty and even properly organised groups say “Nepal is finished”.

This situation is especially acute on the more popular routes of the Annapurna region which played host to 60% of the overall trekking total in 1992, the majority being do-it-yourself trekkers. One cannot blame the latter for doing what they wish to do, but the trouble is that they are spoiling the experience, and the country, for others and contributing comparatively little to the national economy.

There are now over 200 trekking agents officially authorised in Nepal and it is doubtful more than 100 of these make a proper living from their agencies. Small wonder that some agencies may try and balance their accounts by petty dishonesties such as underpaying their load carrying porters.

4 August 1997

© Colonel JOM Roberts, Mountain Travel Nepal

EVENTS

Short Film Contest
Entries are open for ‘Green Growth: Green Recovery,’ a short film competition by Kimff and the EU that will explore diverse perspectives, issues, opportunities and challenges of how the environment and climate change has impacted Nepal and Nepalis. Go to <https://kimff.org> for application requirements.
Application deadline: 12 November

Reading Circles
This month, Mobile Library Nepal’s Reading Circles will focus on how artists use photographs and videos as mediums for creative expression and documentation. Send an email at mobilelibrarynepal@gmail.com for reading materials and more information.
22 September



Girls in Tech podcast
The Girls in Tech Podcast, hosted by award-winning filmmaker and producer Zuzy Martin-Aly, will explore the evolution of tech as listeners hear from scholars, executives and creatives developing solutions to the world’s biggest challenges. Learn more at the Girls in Tech- Nepal Facebook page.

Education Exchange webinar
Educators are invited to join the British Council Schools Education Exchange webinar and get tips from a global teacher panel on how to inspire learners to tackle climate change through languages.
22 September, 8:45pm

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

DINING



Little Tibet
Indulge in piping hot bowls of noodles, *da-pao* and mouth-watering Tibetan, Bhutanese and Nepali food. Get the *Lowa Khatso*, Mustang *Aloo*, *Sha Phale* and more. Find the menu online.
(01) 5342656

LIBRARIES



Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya
Browse through the collection of Nepali archived content, including manuscripts, newsletters, sketches and photographs on the Madan Puraskar Pustakalya database.

American Literature Library
The American Literature Library has a collection of 160 of the greatest classic short stories, and also thousands of classic novels free for readers to enjoy.

MyLoft
Find fiction, plays, non-fiction and self-development books at The British Council’s MyLoft App and gain free access to educational and recreational resources. Register for the Digital Library at bit.ly/2XB7Vbl.

Children’s Digital Library
Looking for ways to keep children occupied? The International Children’s Digital Library has children’s books from all over the world, including *Adventures of a Nepali Frog* by Kanak Mani Dixit from Nepal.



Amazing Libraries
Take a virtual trip to 11 historic and beautiful libraries around the world through the Amazing Libraries Google Earth tour, including the New York Public Library, Klementinum in the Czech Republic, and Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt.

GETAWAY

Hotel Shambala
Located in the bustling city of Kathmandu, Hotel Shambala is a fusion of cultural heritage and modern luxury. Enjoy Tibetan-themed rooms and a refreshing dip in the infinity pool overlooking the city.
Bansbari (01) 4650251



Aloft
Aloft, a global chain of hotels located near the heart of Thamel, 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

Chandragiri Hills
Chandragiri Resort sits atop lush green hills overlooking Kathmandu Valley. Catch glimpses of the Himalayas, marvel at stunning sunsets, and take a dip in the infinity pool to beat the heat.
Thankot (01) 4314400



The Famous Farm
The three-storey boutique hotel west of Kathmandu is Nuwakot’s best-kept secret. This little traditional house has a lot of rich cultural heritage to share.
Kuwapani, Nuwakot (01) 4522617

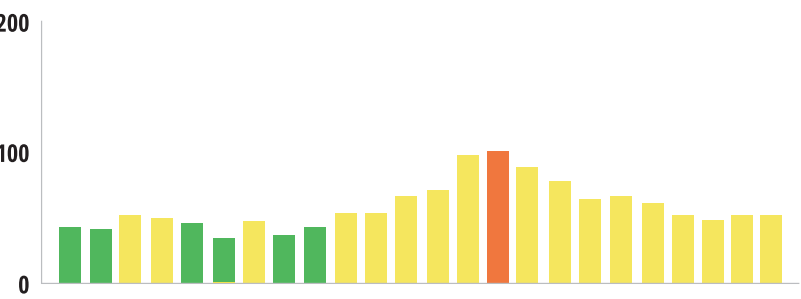
Traditional Comfort
Blending traditional Newa designs and the comfort of modern amenities, Traditional Comfort’s angled ankhi-jhyaal windows and the hand-painted scenes of local life on the walls give guests a glimpse into the past.
Kamalpokhari (01) 4410009



FRIDAY	26° 19°
SATURDAY	27° 19°
SUNDAY	28° 19°

Clouds are massing up again in the Bay of Bengal in a huge depression that has moved into Central India. This is the monsoon making its presence felt one last time before retreating, and although it has brought significant precipitation in the plains, its periphery will graze the mountains and bring sharp localised showers, some of it in heavy bursts in the afternoon and evening.

AIR QUALITY INDEX



With the monsoon rains tapering off, the lockdown lifted and the holiday season increasing traffic on the streets, Kathmandu’s Air Quality Index (AQI) is inching up, and will possibly climb above 100 at peak hours in the coming week. This means a higher concentration of harmful suspended particulates 2.5 microns and smaller in the air, so it is well advised to keep masks on while out and about.



OUR PICK

Renuka Shahane’s 2021 directorial debut *Tribhanga* follows the complicated history of three generations of women of a family in Mumbai. When her estranged mother Nayanara—an accomplished novelist—falls into a coma following a stroke, Anuradha Apte grapples with the dynamics of their strained relationship. The story gives way to Anuradha’s fraught relationship with her own daughter Masha as the film explores how each of the three women’s decisions has deeply impacted the lives of the other. Stars Kajol, Tanvi Azmi and Mithila Palkar.

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

कोरोना लागेपछि: कसले माथि: माथिल्लोपट्टोमा रहेको कसले कसले माथि

माथिल्लोपट्टोमा रहेको

माथिल्लोपट्टोमा रहेको

माथिल्लोपट्टोमा रहेको

नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

#SERIOUSABOUTBEER

WE PUT SERIOUS HOURS IN
YOUR HAPPY HOUR.

Drink responsibly

Staying mum about sexual assault

We should encourage people to speak up about abuse, but only when they are ready

When I was in high school, I went out for a walk one day and saw one of the students sitting by the water. We were not friends, but I knew her because we had a class together. At first, I wanted to sit with her, but I felt it would infringe on her privacy.



LIFE TIME

Anjana Rajbhandary

She waved when she saw me, so I walked over. She had always been nice to me but we had never really had a chance to talk before. Many boys had a crush on her. She was smart and beautiful, and she always made it so easy to talk to her, so I understood why everyone was drawn to her.

We were from different countries and had different sets of friends, so we never really hung out. It was one of the first times we had a conversation.

"I love the water, but I also hate it because of all the memories I have of it. I was so young, and when he took advantage of me, I stayed silent because I didn't want to make him mad," she said. "I don't talk to people about it because when I do, I change in their eyes."

In an instant, she changed in my eyes. It was the most silent I had been when sitting with someone. I tried to understand why she did not tell others about the incident.



It is easy for us to say that one needs to open up and bring attention to sexual assault, but the truth leaves people vulnerable to repercussions. Quite often society blames the victim, that it was the way she was acting or what she was wearing, when the only reason someone gets assaulted is because the perpetrator chose to do so.

She and I did not talk much for the rest of the year, but when the school year ended, she asked me if I wanted to take a walk and sit by the water again. She told me her best friends did not know, and she was

not ready to tell people.

I never quite understood why she chose to open up to me, but maybe she just needed someone who did not know her too well to listen and not tell her what she should do.

We hear the horror stories of sexual assault every day. When someone comes forward, there are always people who question if it is true or made up. It takes immense strength to stand up to all those opinions and voices.

She told me she went to hospital and had to repeat details of the

assault four times because they kept sending a different nurse. I cannot imagine being in such a vulnerable position, having to repeat and relive the incident over and over again. She said repeating her experience made her doubt her own credibility.

I understand the importance of coming forward and speaking up. It is necessary to bring light to the prevalence of such crimes, but some people find comfort in silence because they are processing it themselves.

It is unfair to ask those who

have suffered to share their story to heal themselves. We think we know best, and tend to have opinions on everyone else's life. But how do we know what is good for someone when their situations are different?

She told me she was aware that she should talk to a therapist and felt guilty for staying silent, but it is her life and her choice. It would be unfair for anyone to ask her to do something she was not ready for. But when she is, she will do everything in her power to do what she is *supposed* to do, she told me.

I felt helpless because there was nothing I could do to make her feel better. And it was not my place to tell her what to do, the most I could do was be there to listen and support her.

People have different coping methods to deal with trauma, and we have no right to tell them what is best for them. Some people need more time to heal than others. Some have a less difficult time speaking up, while others keep the truth buried in their hearts for a long time.

I still remember that evening looking at the water with her. We were holding hands, not knowing what her next step in life would be.

We lost touch over the years, and I still wonder how she is doing now. I know she will talk when she is ready. I know she will speak up when it is her time. 🇳🇵

Anjana Rajbhandary writes this fortnightly Nepali Times column Life Time about mental health, physical health and socio-cultural issues.

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Right trees for right seasons in Kathmandu

Besides beautifying the city, selecting correct species has ecological benefits and reduces road hazard

● Meena Bohara

Every spring Kathmandu turns into a city of flowers blooming with jacaranda and bougainvillea. People wait year-round to escape the otherwise dull and dusty concrete landscape with vibrant streets of purple, red and green.

But very few people know that these beautiful roadside trees and their colourful seasonal flowers are ill-advised for our climate, and can increase road hazard.

Trees shelter us from sudden downpours, and during hot summer days, we seek their refreshing shade. In fact, they reduce the temperature of the asphalt surfaces beneath them by as much as 15° Celsius.

Trees purify the air by sequestering carbon dioxide and giving off oxygen, they remove harmful gases and particulate matter. They improve the soil by assisting in nutrient cycling and help regulate surface and subsurface water. And they provide food and shelter to insects, birds, animals, and plants.

However, not all trees are suitable for urban streets. We need to select them based on more than aesthetics and convenience. Ecological value and road hazards

are equally if not more important considerations when choosing a species.

Unfortunately, past strategies and the recent National Urban Development Strategy 2017 and Nepal Urban Road Standard 2076 have failed to provide clear guidelines for tree selection, leading to haphazard planting along Kathmandu's roads. Concerns raised by ecologists, conservationists and locals over the years have gone unheard.

History of street trees

Early records of roadside trees date back to the 14th century when Jayasthiti Malla (1380-1395) ordered plantations alongside streets and public wells. Later, Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana brought back exotic species like Eucalyptus, bottlebrush (*Callistemon*), and *Kaiyo ful* (*Grevillea robusta*) from his Europe visit (1850-51) to decorate palaces and roadsides.

More systematic efforts started in the early 20th century. Prime Minister Chandra Shumshere Rana (1901-1929) expanded Kathmandu's road network and planted trees, introducing new species like Monkey puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*). Juddha Shumsher Rana (1932-1945) continued planting trees to beautify the roads like

Putali Sadak, particularly after the devastation of the 1934 earthquake.

Modern urban environmental planning began during the Panchayat in the 1960s and 1970s. The government renovated roads, mandating the planting of either a single line or double line of roadside trees. Part of the newly constructed Arniko Highway (Kathmandu to Kodari) and the Ring Road encircling the capital, had rows of trees on either side.

In the 1980s, urban planners suggested three lines of green belt alongside the roads instead of previously mandated one-line roadside trees. As a result, more than a hundred thousand fast-growing trees were planted around the Ring Road.

Rana and Panchayat planners were wrong to pick roadside trees such as poplars and eucalyptus based primarily on aesthetics and their fast-growing nature. In recent decades, Nepal has been steadily expanding its road network while integrating green belts, but planners have neglected the inclusion of criteria on species selection.

Over time, attempts have been made to suggest a more scientific species selection. Researchers have recommended over 300 potential species for urban forestry in Kathmandu, including a comprehensive list of suitable



species that could be planted alongside roads. The list includes native and exotic trees and ornamental plants. These suggestions have been largely ignored.

Mitra Pathak, research officer at the National Botanical Garden in Godavari says, "It is unscientific, we are planting whatever saplings are easily available."

Ecologically, the majority of trees planted around Kathmandu are misfits. Swami (*Ficus benjamina*) for instance is a

weed, whilst *Grevillea robusta*, a deciduous branchy species, and Raj Sallo (*Cupressus torulosa*), are climatically unsuitable for the city.

Urban environment expert Ramji Bogati also laments the lack of ecological criteria. "We should take into account factors like location, soil, and nature of the species in selecting roadside trees," he says.

The Tinkune-Maitighar Road, for example, is one of Kathmandu's better-maintained green belt stretches. But despite having

Building back better (and stronger)

Multi-use bamboo is 'green gold', Nepal's answer to sustainable and earthquake-resistant construction

● Tripti Mahaseth

Bamboo, the perennial and plentiful plant, is the next big thing in sustainable construction.

For centuries, bamboo has been used for traditional ceremonies and as the primary material for building homes in local communities, especially in Eastern Nepal.

So, why has bamboo not been taken more seriously as a mainstream construction material? Public perception and awareness have a part to play.

It starts with the perception that bamboo is the 'poor man's timber'. This means not many people are aware that bamboo is one of the most robust materials for construction if the right species is used together with the appropriate techniques.

According to a 2019 report by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, treated bamboo wall panels can last up to 20 years. Bamboo treatment ranges from traditional practices such as river washing and smoking to using chemical preservatives made with boron salts or Solignum.



Apart from high tensile and compressive strength, bamboo is known for its shrinkage, resistibility, elasticity, and is low weight, making it suitable building material for seismically active zones like Nepal.

When the earthquake struck Nepal in 2015, nearly ten thousand Nepalis lost their lives and many more were injured, trapped under collapsed homes. Some 600,000 buildings were partially or completely damaged by the tremors.

While other factors played a part, construction and structural deficiencies caused much damage to unreinforced masonry, stone and adobe buildings in central

and eastern Nepal.

In addition to being a superior construction material, bamboo is also ecologically sound. The fast-growing bamboo generates 35% more oxygen than trees. As bamboo products used to build a house can be recycled, hazardous construction waste can also be reduced.

The Global Status Report by the United Nations in 2019 stated that buildings and construction account for nearly 40% of energy-related carbon dioxide emissions worldwide. The shift to environment-friendly building technology to reduce carbon footprints is another bonus of bamboo.



For some time, groups such as India's National Bamboo Mission and the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan based in China's Beijing have promoted the sustainable use of bamboo.

World Bamboo Day falls on Saturday, 18 September and has been used to highlight the ecological and economic benefits of this versatile plant.

Here in Nepal, we are not ignorant of bamboo's enormous potential. At construction firms like Adobe and Bamboo Research Institute (ABARI) and non-profit Habitat for Humanity Nepal, bamboo is promoted as a sustainable building material. Besides



AMIT MACHAMASI

high species diversity, proper tree species selection has been disregarded. Planners mainly opted for exotic species that grow fast, with minimum care, and with a high survival rate instead of evergreen and local species.

The 3.2km road with four rows of plants consists mostly of non-native ornamental trees: fast-growing deciduous poplars, eucalyptus which lowers the groundwater table due to fast moisture absorption, and *Jacaranda mimosifolia*, an invasive species.

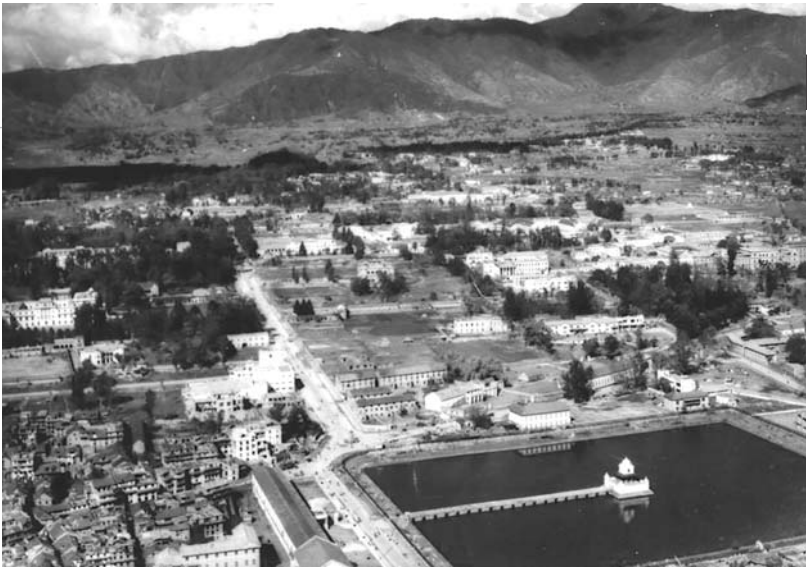
Poplar and eucalyptus can damage foundations and develop cracks in pavements because their roots grow close to the soil surface.

Some native species planted, such as birch (*Betula alnoides*) and silk tree mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*), both deciduous and fast-growing, were poor choices owing to their open crown and drooping branches that are potential road hazards. Willow (*Salix babylonica*), native to central Asia, on the other hand, is a better choice because it is elegant, robust

and tolerant to air pollution and injuries.

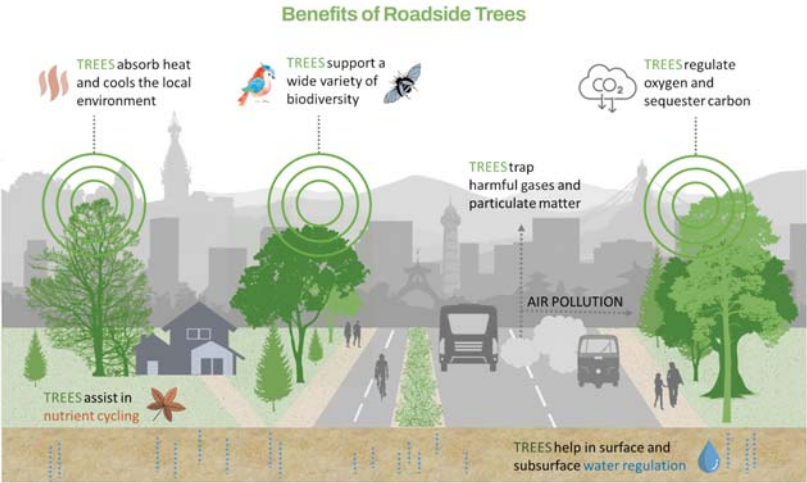
Guides to roadside tree selection

Nepal Road Standard 2070 has three guidelines for roadside plantations: ensure good visibility by planting trees on sides and shrubs on the median, avoid wide-crowned trees, and ensure tree crowns do not cross the pavement's edge. Yet, even this fails to address important aspects of species selection. In particular, we need criteria to evaluate ecological, economic, and aesthetic values.



Kathmandu in the 1950s.

RANA PALACES OF NEPAL/WIKIWAND



1. Functional Criteria: Block noise, clean the air, control wind and provide safety and shade to vehicles and pedestrians, and habitat for urban wildlife.
2. Ecological Criteria: Fitting for the soil and climate of the city, resistant to wind, pests, diseases and air pollution.
3. Socio-Economic Criteria: Cost, care, longevity, and reflection of urban identity.
4. Structural Criteria: Fast development, pruning-ability, strong root system, tree shadow, flowering and fruiting, future size, and diameter.
5. Visual Criteria: Colour of leaves, flowers, deciduous vs. evergreen, tree dimension, road width, and planting arrays. Selecting appropriate tree species is often complex but if we engage urban planners, ecologists, and specialists of the field, we

can create sustainable roadside plantation guidelines. Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) is an effective tool to aid decision-makers to set priorities and decide the most suitable trees for particular roadsides ecologically and aesthetically.

We have to be cautious with the types of trees to plant along our roads, beauty can often be misleading. Carefully selected roadside trees can help reduce negative environmental and social impacts of urbanisation, making Kathmandu more resilient in the face of changing climate and overexploitation of nature.



Meena Bohara, PhD, is a researcher of ecology and environment. She is the President of Nature Conservation and Study Centre.

with bamboo

construction, the versatile bamboo has diversified uses, ranging from bridges and scaffolding to its application in furniture, handicrafts and even bicycles.

But promoting bamboo as a sustainable resource is a collective effort, not an individual mission. Therefore, the proponents of bamboo need to have a unified voice, actively coordinating and engaging with myriad actors to achieve scalable partnerships.

Although there is no lack of research papers on the harvesting, types, and uses of bamboo, studies typically don't delve into factors such as market demand, supply chains, and opportunities for scaled impact.

When it comes to the use of bamboo in home construction, we also need to address people's perception that it is an inferior material. We can tap into strong advocates that have demonstrated innovative ways of building with bamboo. Madan Puraskar Library in Patan Dhoka (*pictured left*) is one that was rebuilt after the earthquake with bamboo and rammed-earth.

Would we rather build a bamboo home that lasts longer or a concrete block that might not survive the next big earthquake? The choice should be obvious. 🇳🇵



Tripti Mahaseth is an architect and urban planner who leads the bamboo housing project at Habitat for Humanity Nepal providing safe, durable, and affordable treated bamboo solutions in the Eastern Tarai.



Sustainable and spectacular

Bamboo is no longer a poor man's construction material, architects have used the versatile plant to design some prime properties around the world ranging from quaint and beautiful resorts, hotels and restaurants to green schools, art galleries and residential apartment buildings.



Some prime examples are: Bangkok Tree House Resort, Naman Retreat (*top picture*) and Kontum Indochine Café in Vietnam, architect Edouard François' 10-storey residential Flower Tower in Paris (*above*) and IBUKU

designed forest getaway, Sharma Springs (*right*), in Bali. Bamboo is making waves and is very much in demand, in particular for its environment-friendly features.



The Arc at Green School Bali

It is only fitting that The Arc in Bali has a bamboo building that employs the latest construction technologies. It is the newest structure on campus and is a community wellness space and gymnasium for the school. The Arc, a collaboration between Jorg Stamm and Atelier One, is built from a series of intersecting 14m bamboo arches spanning 19m, interconnected by anticlastic gridshells that derive their strength from curving in two opposite directions.

The highlight of the new building is that it creates large spaces with minimal structure, for which it draws its inspiration from a human ribcage. At the Arc, arches working in compression are held in place by tensioned anticlastic gridshells. These appear to drape across the spaces between impossibly thin arches soaring overhead, giving an intimacy and beauty to the space. Although the gridshells appear to hang from the arches, they actually hold them up.

This project has been longlisted in the Sustainable Building Category of Dezeen Awards 2021.



Bocas Treehouse, Bocas Del Toro, Panamá

On the remote Frangipani Island in Bocas Del Toro, Panama lies a self-sustaining eco-resort, 100% off the grid, soon growing to incorporate IBUKU-designed tree houses for a customised experience of luxury nature for locals and tourists alike, with the spectacular views of the ocean through the canopy on the mangrove island.



The resort will feature a fusion of local bamboo and greenheart timber, with an interior from Bamboo Pure Workshop in Bali. IBUKU is in the schematic design phase of this project, collaborating with Mar Azul, Summer House, and Jose Agustín Almaria.

IBUKU

IBUKU is a team of designers, architects and engineers based in Bali, pioneering in building bamboo-based structures. It was founded by Canadian designer Elora Hardy, who is known for designing a community of bamboo homes near Denpasar in Bali.

In April, John Hardy partnered with Elora Hardy and Arief Rabik to further the efforts of bamboo reforestation through their continued *Wear Bamboo, Plant Bamboo* program.

Elora's father John Hardy has planted over 1.3 million bamboo in Indonesia since 2007 in partnership with the Environmental Bamboo Foundation. For every handcrafted bamboo piece sold, bamboo seedlings are planted in Indonesia under the foundation's *Bamboo Village Initiative*.



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