



**WHO IS WHO?** President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, Nepal Army Chief Prabhuram Sharma, Chief Justice Chandra SJB Rana, House Speaker Agni Sapkota and Deputy Mayor of Kathmandu Hari Prabh Khadgi at Indra Jatra this week.

## Government in installments



AMIT MACHAMASI

More than two months after Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba took office to lead a five-party coalition, he has not even been able to form a complete Cabinet. He had amassed a lot of experience in coalition bargaining during his previous five tenures as prime minister, but that has not prepared him for this.

Now, he is having a difficult time untangling the knots within the governing alliance. First, he has had to divide up ministerial portfolios among his coalition partners which turned out to be a major hurdle.

After the government was formed in mid-July, Deuba's Nepali Congress (NC) and the Maoist Centre (MC) took the powerful finance, energy, home and law ministries for themselves.

He then appointed a loyalist to be state minister of health, and on Wednesday he hurriedly appointed Narayan Khadka as foreign minister to represent Nepal at the United Nations General Assembly.

Khadka was named, sworn in by the president, assumed office and departed for New York all within 12 hours.

The ministerial appointments had been stalled because Upendra Yadav of the Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP) had wanted the post, which he has held twice before. Deuba has finally got all four parties to agree on a quota: eight each for the NC and MC, and 6 each for the JSP and the UML (US) of Madhav Kumar Nepal.

However, this still leaves the question of which party gets which of the remaining ministries. Predictably, the JSP and the UML (US) want portfolios with the biggest budgets: education, agriculture, transport and physical infrastructure. Since this government will oversee the 2023 elections, the parties all want ministries with either power, or money, or both.

A Cabinet meeting on Tuesday decided abruptly to recall 12 ambassadors, including those to

the US, UK, India and China, all political appointees of K P Oli. Among the envoys being recalled is Deuba's own mother-in-law Pratibha Rana in Tokyo.

Analysts say one reason for this purge is to offer plum postings to mollify coalition partners not satisfied with their allocated ministerial portfolios. Deuba also has to contend with demands from within his own NC, especially his rival Ram Chandra Paudel, for ministerships.

There has been outrage and ridicule in social media and from commentators about Prime Minister Deuba adding ministers in installments.

The prime minister's job is not easy. He had to suspend Parliament in the middle of the budget session in July so that he could pass an ordinance amending the Constitution to allow parties to split if they commanded only 20% of the membership of their parliamentary party.

But that ordinance, which needs to be ratified by Parliament within 60 days, has now become an albatross around Deuba's neck.

Madhav Nepal of the UML (US) on whose behalf the ordinance had been introduced so he could legally break away from Oli's UML, is worried that if it is not ratified his party will not have legal standing.

Nepal is also nervous about a writ filed in the Supreme Court by Oli, and if its verdict makes his party unconstitutional.

Yadav of the JSP, meanwhile, wants the ordinance scrapped before Cabinet expansion so that disgruntled members of his own party who do not get their preferred ministerships do not break away.

Coalition members had said Cabinet expansion would happen on Wednesday, but negotiations appear to have stalled because of Madhav Nepal and Upendra Yadav wanting different things for their own partisan reasons.

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# Nepal needs to get its climate act together

The United Nations General Assembly is convening just six weeks ahead of the UN's COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, and follows a stark warning from the United Nations last week that the voluntary Nationally Determined Commitments (NDCs) by countries is not at all enough to stop cataclysmic climate collapse.

The UN collated the pledges by the world's 191 countries and projected that the earth's surface would be 2.7 Celsius hotter by 2100. This warning is even starker than the report to governments by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) last month that laid out a best-case scenario in which despite reduced greenhouse gas emissions, global average temperature was still set to exceed 1.5°C by the turn of the century.



UN

This means countries must not only have more ambitious targets in their NDCs, but richer nations must do more, and giants like India and China have to wean themselves away faster from fossil fuels.

Some of this is the subject of a meeting of 40 world leaders in New York this week co-chaired by UN Secretary General António Guterres and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Guterres told the General Assembly that the world needed to reduce carbon emissions by 45% by 2030 to stabilise the climate. On Wednesday, Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged that China would stop building more coal-fired power plants abroad, the US President Joe Biden promised \$11 billion to help developing countries adapt to the climate crisis.

Nepal, being one of the most vulnerable countries in world to a hotter world, the tenor of the discussion in New York this week will literally determine our future. Not only are our mountains melting in front of our eyes, but erratic weather means more floods, landslides and droughts that have dried up springs. Scientists have said that the Himalaya will get warm faster and by 1.8-2.2°C by 2050.

## The government has to stop saying one thing and doing the opposite in reducing emissions.

Adapting to a hotter Himalaya will need money for climate resilient agriculture, lowering flood risk of glacial lakes, and help to transition to renewable energy. But when Nepal's delegate at the General Assembly gets up to speak in New York next week to ask for more pledges for adaptation, it will carry very little moral authority if the government back home is backtracking on its own NDC commitments.

And that is what is happening. After taking one step forward with tax rebates on electric cars in this year's budget, the government of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has taken two steps back. This week, it slashed taxes on the import of 10 or more diesel buses by new luxury hotels to 1%. It cut by half the duty on petrol motorcycle assembly in Nepal.

The Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) is so bloated with cash that it gets from taxing petroleum that it is investing in high rise office blocks in Kathmandu, putting up more petroleum storage facilities and planning new pipelines. The government still has pipe dreams about building a mega-airport in Nijgad. They just don't get it.

What Nepal should have done is slash taxes not just on battery cars, but also on electric public transport. At the moment the tax for electric and diesel buses is the same. At this rate, there is no way Nepal is going to meet its commitment to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and net-zero by 2050.

In fact, the Ministry of Environment's submission to the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) last month revealed that Nepal's carbon footprint had doubled in the past 10 years to 28,166 gigagrams of carbon dioxide (Gg CO2) annually.

Ironically, at a time when the government seems to be actively promoting diesel buses to benefit a few of the richest hotel owners in the country, and has done nothing to reduce the tax on electric buses, its NDC pledges to strengthen public transport and turn 90% of all vehicles electric by 2030.

The NDC document says that Nepal will reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 28% by 2030 – that is laughably unlikely given the current policies in place.

All this is critical not just because Nepal needs to do its bit to reduce its carbon emissions and to slash its ballooning petroleum import bill, but also so that the country can secure funds from the UNFCCC for adaptation measures.

In fact, consistent delays in completing and submitting these reports to the UN has meant that much of the resources Nepal could have mobilised for climate action have lapsed.

## ONLINE PACKAGES



MELAMCHI

Two months after a massive debris flow on the Melamchi River knocked out Nepal's most expensive water project, geologists investigating the disaster say the danger will remain for decades to come. Rewatch this dramatic aerial footage shot after a devastating flood in July of the debris field in Bhemthang washed down by rains. Report: *pages 10-11*.

### GODS RETURN

We are aware of these claims and are addressing them carefully and seriously ('2 more Nepali antiquities traced to US museum', nepalitimes.com). The Rubin is committed to investigate thoroughly and in collaboration with the relevant authorities to determine the proper course of action. The museum has already engaged two scholars of Nepalese art and is in direct contact with the Consulate General of Nepal, New York, to further examine and research the known provenance of the pieces. Once we have more information on the assessment, we will determine appropriate steps, which could include restitution.

**The Rubin Museum of Art**

- Who will research how the Ullman family obtained the sculpture ('US returns another antiquity to Nepal', Alisha Sijapati, nepalitimes.com)? It is good that it is being returned. But it would be better also to announce who had stolen it and prosecute that person if still alive.

**Doug Hall**

- Hope this gets to the right place, rightfully secure and visible to the public.

**Rosan Adhikari**

### SCHOOL REOPENING

Better open after the festivals ('Two schools of thought', Editorial, #1079).

**Gauri Rimal**

- Going to classes in half-empty buses, fuller minibuses or closely-packed tempos with a dirty screen in between, not feeling safe at all.

**Amulya Ratna Tuladhar**

- The worst is that some developed countries are throwing away expired vaccinations rather than shipping them in time where they could be used ('To boost or not to boost', Buddha Basnyat, nepalitimes.com). Just unforgivable!

**Kalps Para**

### INDRA JATRA

This is a beautiful story, I sent it to my grandchildren so that they can relish and learn (Indra Jatra, the tale of two flowers, Walkabout with Anil Chitrakar, youtube.com).

**Deep Rana**

- The way Anil Chitrakar explains every detail is wonderful. I got to know why this festival is celebrated, thank you. Let's preserve our culture and these beautiful flower plants too.

**Sujan Bhandari**

- Wonderful storytelling. I showed this to my children. Thank you very much. Let's start planting these amazing flowers.

**Nirmala Sthapit**

- Great to see this eloquently narrated piece, should be very useful to instill the importance of our heritage to the new generation.

**Dinesh Shrestha**

- Thank you for such an eloquent explanation. So glad to know our cultures and beliefs are inherently attached to nature. Wish everyone a bountiful day and fortunes on this auspicious occasion of Indra Jatra.

**Em Thapa**

- Thank you for sharing such a valuable story and making us aware of the conservation of culturally important plants.

**Sachita Dangol**

### MCC

I am not sure whether Deuba led coalition can table and pass it through Parliament ('Missing links in Nepal's MCC debate', Jeevan R Sharma and David Seddon, nepalitimes.com). People and different groups have become more and more aggressive against the MCC. This is a very interesting article, the concerned officials, so-called intellectuals and groups should go through it.

**Biren Bangdel**

### FIRST DAY IN SCHOOL

Our children often spend more time with their teachers than at home ('Letter to my kindergarten daughter', TP Mishra, #1079). Treating teachers as second parents is an important part of the relationship. This is sage advice and something I wish all parents instilled in their children.

**Jeffrey Promnitz**

### WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

Thanks a lot for an in-depth research and for writing such a good story, especially depicting families most affected by tiger attacks ('Human-animal interface in Nepal wildlife corridor', Tufan Neupane, nepalitimes.com). Families affected need help.

**Anjani Pajiyar**

### MARIJUANA

This is a medicinal plant that grows everywhere in Nepal, and licensed cultivation could become a game-changer for people. Marijuana with THC, the psychosomatic component, is prescribed by doctors for people with cancer and other chronic diseases, it also seems to work for patients with Alzheimer's. The country that forced us to delegitimise this medicinal plant has legalised it now, why should we wait?

**Lal Bahadur**

**Nepal Times.com**

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Building back better (and stronger) with bamboo

by Tripti Mahaseh

Multi-use bamboo is 'green gold', Nepal's answer to sustainable and earthquake-resistant construction. Yet it is not taken as a mainstream construction material. Details in the report only at nepalitimes.com

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**

### 2 more Nepali antiquities traced to US museum

As the return by Western museums and private collectors of Nepal's stolen antiquities gathers pace, two more religious objects from Kathmandu Valley shrines have been located at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York. Read up on activism to bring them back home on our website.

**Most popular on Twitter**

### Two schools of thought

Editorial

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? Restart schools only after holidays, with full precautions in place. Read the editorial and join the discussion online.

**Most commented**



### Class struggle

by Sania Awale

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. Follow our social media platforms for the latest developments.

**Most visited online page**

## QUOTE TWEETS



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes

This week as Kathmandu celebrates Yanya, here is heritage conservationist Anil Chitrakar's retelling of Indrajatra through two of the flowers found in Kathmandu Valley and their importance in our festivals.



**K.C. Shreya** @KCSHreya1

How amazing is this! Anil Chitrakar beautifully explains the story of #Indrajatra. This depicts how ideally our cultures and beliefs are intrinsically attached with #nature, our own #livelihood and in a way that promotes fraternity among us. #Nepal



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes

Republic of Nepal's animal kingdom. @SonamTaC and JanamShrestha revisit eastern Nepal's mammalian hotspot on #InternationalRedPandaDay.



**Cameron Cosgrove** @CryptidCosgrove

Today is #InternationalRedPandaDay. This is a good article on the issues facing eastern Nepal's environment. @RedPandaNetwork is an outstanding organisation working to implement sustainable conservation action in the area.



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes

US returns another antiquity to #Nepal 50 years after it was stolen from a #Kathmandu temple, a Uma-Maheswar sculpture is handed back by the Denver Art Museum. @AlishaSijapati reports:



**N the Himalayas** @Night04812666

It was great the lost deity was finally managed to be traced to the museum in Denver. The hope of residents in Gahiti will be fulfilled at last when the historical artifact is restored onto the base they have been preserving for more than half a century.



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes

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, writes MeenaBohara.



**Kabi Raj** @kabiirajj

We often see the small plants of swami (Ficusbenjamina), raj sallo (Cupressustorulosa), silk tree mimosa (Albiziajulibrissin), willow (Salix babylonica) along the roads of Kathmandu but are they suitable choices? Read this awesome article written by my friend @BoharaMe

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Sex Education

*Sex was always a taboo subject, and it still is in Nepali society. Talking about it with elders is considered vulgar and it is not part of parenting, and embarrassed teachers skim over the subject in school.*

*What little or incomplete information young people come across is through peers, adult content on the Internet and now social media. This led to unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs), among others in the past.*

*The good news is that there is now an increased awareness about safe sex, largely due to relentless mass campaigns to educate people about sexual behaviour, which in one of Nepal's biggest public health successes resulted to a dramatic drop in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.*

*Excerpts from Ramyata Limbu's report on Nepali Times published 20 years ago this week in issue #61 21-27 September 2001:*

Sunita Chettri belongs to that generation of young Nepalis exposed to a rapidly changing urban lifestyle that often contradicts the social, moral and religious values their parents teach them. Unlike her mother's generation, when women married very young and were forced to move from childhood into adulthood in a trice, men and women are marrying later these days. As a result, there is a new group of people-generally young working people-that is exploring the diverse recreational options thrown up by a society that is loosening its grip on its youth. The problem



is there are no social rules yet about how to deal with such young people...

...This is heightened in the face of pressure, especially in urban areas, among teenagers and young adults to date, be "cool," and maintain a certain image. And so young Nepalis are often forced to lead a double life, claiming to have knowledge and experience with their friends, but pretending to know nothing in front of parents and other authority figures. They stay up late to watch adult channels long after their parents have gone to bed. Boys worry about "experience" and girls want to be slim and beautiful.

So far, what little sex education is available in schools isn't adequate. In a random survey taken among high school and college students in Kathmandu and Pokhara recently, more than 11% of students said they had had sex. The average age of first sexual intercourse was found to be 15.5 years. Knowledge about STDs and AIDS was relatively high, but the use of condoms, low.

The findings should perhaps not be so surprising, given the results of the first survey on Nepali sexuality conducted three years ago among an older age-group. The survey, conducted by Himalkhabarpatrika showed that 29% of the respondents had premarital sex and 10% had extra marital affairs. Roughly 60% males and 34% females said they considered themselves "liberal" about sex.

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

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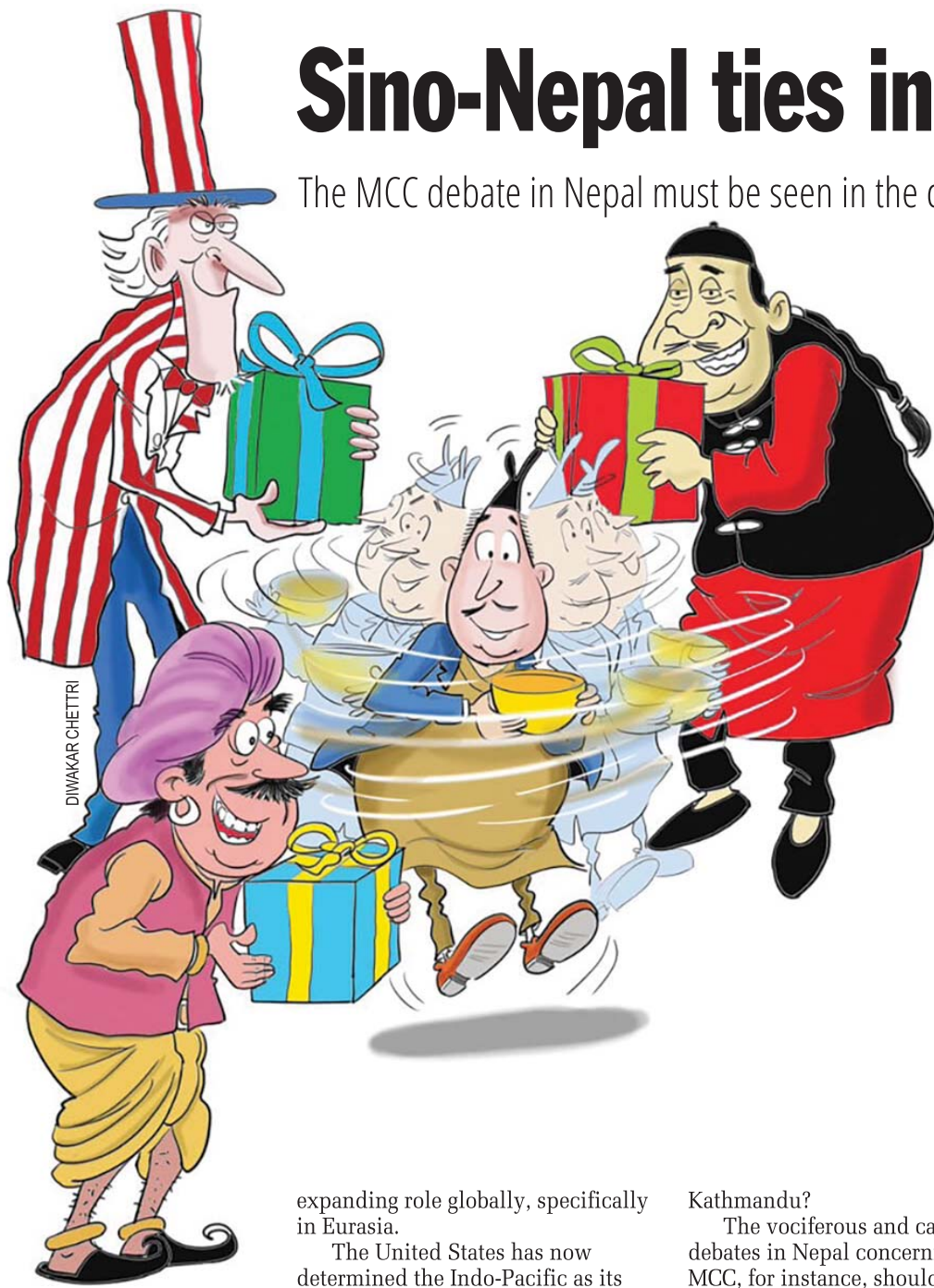
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# Sino-Nepal ties in the 'post-Afghan' era

The MCC debate in Nepal must be seen in the context of Asia's restructured geopolitics



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

The course of Sino-Nepal relations is likely to enter a new historical phase in the aftermath of the US exit from Afghanistan, and the signing of the 'Aukus' security pact this week between Australia, the UK and the US.



**WORLD WIDE**  
Bhaskar Koirala

The associated decline in the importance of global terrorism is a defining feature of international politics. But there is also a sharper emphasis on great power rivalry, primarily in the context of China's

expanding role globally, specifically in Eurasia.

The United States has now determined the Indo-Pacific as its core area of interest in this new period. How and to what extent the fundamentals of Sino-Nepal relations will be impacted by this structural change in geopolitics is yet to be determined.

Neither the lessons of the Cold War nor the period of globalisation that followed, will serve as an infallible basis upon which to extrapolate about the future contours of bilateral relations between Nepal and China.

What is now emerging as the principal fault line in international politics after the Global War on Terror is the question of hegemony in Asia. Is the US prepared to tolerate a potential peer competitor that gains increasing primacy in Asia, and steadily erodes its options and maneuverability in the region, including in capitals like

Kathmandu?

The vociferous and cacophonous debates in Nepal concerning the MCC, for instance, should be understood within this broader framework instead of deferring to an intellectually convenient position of arguing that bilateral relations (whether Sino-Nepal, Indo-Nepal or US-Nepal) exist in an airtight vacuum.

If there are any lessons to be learnt from the history of the Cold War or the period of globalisation that followed, it is that the bilateral relations between any two countries do not operate in a bubble.

However, history does serve as an indispensable point of departure for any analysis that seeks to prognosticate the nature of Sino-Nepal relations in the coming near future. Some five months prior to the 9/11 al-Qaeda attacks that prompted the US invasion of Afghanistan, tensions were rising between Washington and Beijing as

the George W Bush administration labelled China as a 'strategic competitor'.

That was, of course, in marked contrast to his predecessor Bill Clinton's policy of forging a strategic partnership with China, embodied most explicitly in the US Congress passing legislation to grant Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China and the US Senate's vote to give China permanent most-favoured-nation status, both in 2000. This paved the way for China's eventual accession to the WTO in 2001.

George W Bush was laser-focused on shifting attention away from what was perceived as Clinton's flawed and benign approach vis-à-vis Beijing, towards what was deemed as an emerging "near-peer" threat from China.

But after the twin towers in New York were brought down by al-Qaeda operatives, this radically, abruptly, and almost completely, shifted US attention to West Asia. Washington first attacked al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan to decimate the fulcrum of radical international terrorism. Events in Iraq, Libya and Syria would soon follow.

Some analysts have argued that had the 9/11 attacks not reoriented US attention, the likelihood of China's path towards great power status would have been considerably impaired, even curtailed. The logic is that the US would have shifted in its defence and economic posture towards China much earlier than when it actually did towards the end of the first term of the Obama presidency.

Obama's 'pivot to Asia' in 2012 and the 'Indo-Pacific Strategy', conceptualised by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, was advanced vigorously by the Trump administration, and is being given continuity by President Joe Biden.

In 2001 when the 'Global War on Terror' was launched, China had just been admitted to the WTO and was weakly linked to the world economy. Twenty years later, China has become the largest economy in the world measured in purchasing power parity terms, and is substantially interwoven within the global economy. It is now the largest export destination for 33 countries,

and the largest source of imports for 65 countries.

Did Washington's inordinate concentration on Afghanistan accelerate China's rise and significantly enhance its position in Asia today? The argument is counter-factual, and denies China, the Chinese people and the Communist Party of China, agency in chartering an adept grand strategy.

As a young student in 2006 on a visiting scholar program in Beijing, I witnessed amorphous discussions on 'China-SAARC relations'. Fast forward 15 years, and there has been a revolution in the landscape of China-South Asia ties encompassing every conceivable infrastructure program from oil pipelines to gas fields, seaports, highways, mega hydroelectric projects, ambitious railway proposals. Euphemisms such as 'string of pearls' have even entered the popular lexicon.

And it is precisely due to this Chinese strategy to consistently expand its relations over the last two decades with not just Nepal but virtually with all South Asian states, that has made alarm bells go off in Washington.

This has led the United States to double down on politico-economic (even the military QUAD) initiatives in the Indo-Pacific. It is no coincidence that US Vice President Kamala Harris visited several countries in Asia just a week before the 31 August 2021 deadline set by the Biden administration for US troop withdrawals from Afghanistan.

The purpose of her trip, according to senior White House officials, was to demonstrate that "America is back [and that] the administration is making clear that we have an enduring commitment to this region, that we are part of the Indo-Pacific and in this region to stay."

This new 'post-Afghanistan' era with the American 'Rebalance to Asia' and a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' is already having a considerable impact on the course of Sino-Nepal relations. 🇺🇸

**Bhaskar Koirala** is the Director of the Nepal Institute of International and Strategic Studies.

## prabhu BANK

### Budget approved

Amidst clamour from UML lawmakers, Parliament passed the budget for fiscal year 2021/22's via an Appropriation Bill this week. The previous ordinance introduced by Finance Minister Janardan Sharma lapsed on 15 August because of UML obstruction of House proceedings, after which government spending was paralysed. The Rs16.3 trillion budget is now passed by the National Assembly and ratified by the President.



### Samsung Dasain Offer

Samsung has launched 'Chhut ko Taranga, Dasain Tihar ma Umanga' festive offer with free installation and discounts of up to 35% on Samsung TVs, refrigerators and washing machines. The scheme is valid until 15 November.

### Buddha Everest flights

Buddha air has resumed its Mt Everest sightseeing flights from Kathmandu. The one hour flights operate on Saturdays and cost Rs9,999 for Nepali passengers who also get to take a companion for free on the aisle seat.

### City Express and Terrapay

TerraPay, a global payments infrastructure company, has partnered with the City Express Money Transfer, to strengthen its



network for inward remittances into Nepal. "TerraPay's interoperability engine and reach in 79 countries will enable individuals residing overseas to send payments on a scalable, secure, transparent, and efficient platform, and that too, in real time," says Chandra Tandan of City Express.

### Citroen in Nepal

Shangrila Motors, authorised distributors of Citroen cars in Nepal, has opened bookings for the Citroen C5 Aircross at Rs13.5 million. Citroen's C4 electric vehicle is also set to arrive in Nepal by mid-2022.



### Sanima-Samsung tieup

Sanima Bank is offering Zero % EMI via Sanima Credit Card in the purchase of recently launched Samsung Z Fold 3 and Z Flip 3. Customers can convert their purchase via Sanima Credit Card into Zero % EMI up to 12 months along with pre-booking gifts by Samsung.



### AEDs on Himalayan

Himalaya Airlines has this week introduced Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs), a portable device that automatically diagnoses and treats life-threatening sudden cardiac arrest, onboard all its fleet of three A320s and one A319. The Airlines also placed the devices at its head office and ground handling office at the airport. All cabin crew and ground personnel have been trained to use it.



### Cathay Pacific's 75 years

Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific is celebrating 75 years of its founding. "Cathay Pacific has seen exhilarating successes over the years. We have also experienced unprecedented challenges, such as the global pandemic, which we are all still overcoming," says CEO Augustus Tang.



### Global IME debenture

Global IME Bank has listed 3 million units of its '8.5% Debenture 2086/87' on the Nepal Stock Exchange (Nepse). The debentures have a 10-year time period within which 8.5% interest is awarded biannually.



# 2 more Nepali antiquities traced to US museum

Activists aim to have the sacred objects returned to shrines in Kathmandu from which they were stolen

As the return by Western museums and private collectors of Nepal’s stolen antiquities gathers pace, two more religious objects from Kathmandu Valley shrines have been located at The Rubin Museum of Art in New York.

The wooden artefacts between 400-700 years old were tracked down at The Rubin by the group Lost Arts of Nepal which has been investigating sacred objects so that they can be returned to the shrines from where they were stolen in Kathmandu.

One of the items is a 14th century carved wooden architectural element of a flying *gandharva* (divine singer) that was stolen from Itum Bahal in the 1980s. The other is a wooden *torana* (frieze) that is 500 years old and was wrenched out of a doorway in I Bahi in Patan.

Both objects are exquisite examples of Newa devotional art and photographs in art and architecture publications in the 1970s of the objects in situ in Kathmandu shrines prove their provenance. It is not known who stole them, and how they came to be in possession of The Rubin, which has now been withdrawn from view.

Announcement about the two objects was made at the official launch on Friday at the Patan Museum of The Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign by Lalitpur Mayor Chiribabu Maharjan. The Campaign aims to work for the return of sacred objects to the temples and monuments from where they were stolen, or to



THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

Nepali and international activists have begun the process of repatriating this 700-year-old wooden carving of a flying *gandharva* (divine singer) which was stolen from Itum Bahal in Kathmandu in the 1980s, and is now in the collection of The Rubin Museum of Art in New York.

of Patan Museum, lawyer Sanjay Adhikari, Rohit Ranjitkar of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, Roshan Mishra of Taragaon Museum and journalist Kanak Mani Dixit.

museums in Nepal.

The Campaign has informed the Nepal consulate in New York about the objects in possession of The Rubin, and says it will start working immediately to facilitate the restitution of these and other antiquities.

Lost Arts of Nepal is based in the US and has tracked down numerous other stolen Nepali antiquities, some of which have already been returned or handed over to Nepali authorities.

Just last week, a 10th century stone figure of Uma Maheswar, stolen from Gaa Hiti in Patan 50 years ago was handed over to the Nepal Embassy in Washington DC by the Denver Art Museum.

In the past year, six stolen stone and bronze sacred statuary have been handed back to Nepal. They include the 12th-century Laxmi-Narayan statue from Patko Tole in Patan returned by the Dallas Museum of Art, a 13th century

carved wooden Apsara from a temple eave, and a 700 year old Buddha.

A 15th century Ganesh was also recently returned by the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office, and a 13th century Shivalinga stolen from Kathmandu was returned to the Nepal Embassy in Washington by the Art Institute of Chicago.

These objects are temporarily stored at the Patan Museum or National Museum in Chhauni before being returned and consecrated at their original shrines.

“We are committed to restore the sacred statues that have been returned to the temples from which they were stolen,” Mayor Maharjan said at the launch of the Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign.

The Campaign’s patron is historian Satyamohan Joshi and is chaired by Riddhi Baba Pradhan, former Director General of the Department of Archaeology. Other members include Dilendra Shrestha

The anonymous investigator of the Lost Arts of Nepal is in the Advisory Council with other international art restitution activists, including Art Crime professor at the City University of New York Erin L Thompson.

After news broke of the *gandharva* and *torana* at The Rubin, Thompson tweeted on 17 September: ‘What do you say, Rubin Museum – will you join the Denver Art Museum and Dallas Museum of Fine Arts in repatriating stolen sacred artwork from Nepal?’

The Rubin Museum of Art was founded by Shelley and Donald Rubin who began collecting Himalayan ‘art’ in the 1970s, and has as its main mission, ‘inspiring personal connections to the ideas, cultures, and art of Himalayan regions’.

After the 2015 earthquake, The Rubin held a special exhibition of some of the Nepali antiquities in its collection, including a gilded Durga statue from the 13th century,

of which the museum says it is confident about its provenance. Last week on Ganesh Chaturthi, it highlighted a copper alloy Ganesha figure from Nepal in its collection.

An *Al Jazeera* investigation in 2018 of sacred antiquities stolen from Mustang titled ‘The Great Plunder’ led to police raids and probes of antique shops in Kathmandu and museums.

In a statement at the time, The Rubin said that it ‘vehemently opposes the trafficking of stolen or looted cultural items and does not acquire any material known or suspected to be stolen or looted’.

The Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign is chasing up 15 other stolen Nepali antiquities in the possession of collectors and museums in the US, UK, Australia, Germany, France and other countries. It has started work on investigating the provenance of the stolen objects to provide proof for their repatriation to Nepal.

The District Attorney Office in Manhattan has been involved in an investigation of a \$143 million antiquities smuggling ring that stole and sold artefacts from Nepal, India, Cambodia, Thailand and other countries. It seized some of them from the collection of art dealer Subhash Kapoor, who was arrested in 2012.

In July, the DA’s office arraigned 58-year-old British art restorer Neil Perry Smith after extraditing him from Britain. He is accused of preparing 22 stolen antiquities valued at \$32 million for sale to Kapoor’s clients at his gallery, Art of the Past. Some of those objects were from Nepal, the indictment says. 🇳🇵

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Issue #317 of *Nepali Times* from 29 September-5 October 2006 that carried the news and photograph of the handover ceremony of the KCA to the government in Taplejung the day before the helicopter crash killed all of those in the picture.



15 years after the Ghunsa tragedy, the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area is a nature protection model

● Ghana S Gurung

Tucked in the sacred Himalayan landscape of the northeastern corner of Nepal, the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) is home to the world's third highest mountain ecosystem. It is also Nepal's first conservation area managed by the local community.

It was declared as 'A Gift to the Earth' by the Nepal government in support of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Living Planet Campaign in April 1997, and has a long-standing history of perseverance, resilience, and of striking a balance between conservation gains for people and nature.

The KCA's 2,035 sq km area hosts a vast assortment of biological diversity, it is part of the Eastern Himalayan Global 200 cross-border eco-region, and millions of people downstream depend on it and its water towers.

Recognising the significance of the region, there have been integrated efforts to protect its biodiversity and improve livelihoods of local communities. WWF Nepal's engagement in the KCA dates back to 1995, when it first conducted a feasibility study followed by the inception of the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project (KCAP) in 1998.

It was rolled out in partnership



Community discussion about conservation in Ghunsa.

WWF NEPAL



Blue sheep sighted in the KCA.

WWF NEPAL



There has been a marked increase in the population of snow leopards in the KCA since 1997.

DNPWC/WWF NEPAL

with local communities under the leadership of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. After almost a decade, the government of Nepal undertook the historic step of handing over management responsibilities of KCA to local communities on 22 September 2006 -- making it the first protected area to be managed by the local

community in Nepal.

Community driven conservation hinged on the notion of increased community participation in decision-making and natural resource management, which has allowed the KCA to address key challenges such as forest degradation, human snow leopard conflict, and gender inequality.

These initiatives have been critical in promoting women's empowerment by enhancing their role in nature conservation and decision-making, particularly in natural resource management. Since its inception, KCAP has supported 35 Mothers' Groups and helped them secure a critical role in decision-making and management.

Starting off as a small network, the Mothers' Groups have expanded to include a wide spectrum of activities including support for non-formal education to the older generation, and education for girls. There are cleanliness and health-hygiene programs, childcare, and initiatives to promote financial independence of women through saving and credit schemes.

The Mothers' Groups are a

model for translating the rights of the women over natural resource management into action, and provide scholarships to girls from low income families through an endowment fund of Rs5 million in each group. It supports income

generation activities and provides scholarships for students, particularly girls from vulnerable households. So far, 206 girls have benefited from scholarships.

Community-based snow leopard conservation and prey monitoring has also begun in which citizen scientists have been trained to keep track of the endangered cats and their prey. This group uses a wide gamut of technologies from conventional sign surveys to camera traps, fecal DNA surveys and GPS collaring.

Already, the KCA's presence is seen in increased forest cover, from 51,500ha in 1999 to 54,800ha in 2015. As a result, from zero snow leopards in 1995, there were 293 of the animals moving between India, China and Nepal. The return of the Himalayan wolf is also encouraging, as is the increase in population of blue sheep from 1,167 in 2007 to 1,638 by 2015.

While encouraging, there are still challenges like human wildlife conflict, especially with the return of the wolves. Even







Khambachen campsite



GHANA GURUNG/WWF NEPAL

With thicked forests and more prey, the elusive Himalayan wolf is back.

WWF NEPAL

so there have been few retaliatory killings of wolves, with not a single case since the establishment in 2004 of Ghunsa Community Snow Leopard Insurance Scheme, supported by University of Zurich. There are four livestock insurance schemes with a revolving fund of Rs8.4 million, along with a Rs4.7 million crop damage relief fund. KCA has earned national and international recognition for its conservation success and takes forward the legacy of the conservation heroes who tragically lost their lives in a helicopter accident in Ghunsa on 23 September 2006, just a day after handing over the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area to the local community.

KCA has come a long way in the 15 years since. There are challenges ahead: representation and leadership of women in the Management Council of the KCA needs to increase. The role of local governments in the Council also has to be redefined.

There is also the possibility of developing the Kangchenjunga region as a Tri-National Peace Park

as a model of transboundary and regional cooperation for biodiversity conservation.

The community-based Livestock Insurance Schemes have proved to be a successful human wildlife conflict mitigation measure, but this activity needs to be scaled up and integrated with the government compensation mechanism.

Then there is the potential to promote nature-based eco-tourism and green enterprises as alternative livelihood options for the communities post-Covid.

Environment and wildlife friendly infrastructure have to be designed to maintain ecological connectivity in the region, particularly with the new roads and hydropower projects in the region. 🇳🇵



**Ghana S Gurung** is the Country Representative of WWF in Nepal and Snow Leopard Champion for the Global WWF Network.

# Remembering Harka Gurung

Tribute to a visionary Nepali on the 15th anniversary of his death in the Ghunsa crash

## ● Jit Gurung

Today marks the 15th anniversary of the tragic death of Dr Harka Gurung and 23 other environmentalists, diplomats, politicians and professionals in a helicopter crash in Ghunsa of Kangchenjunga. Among them were pioneering conservationists that day, including Chandra Gurung, Mingma Norbu Sherpa, Yeshe Lama, Tirthaman Maskey and many others.

Harka Gurung was born in Lamjung in January 1939 and was the fifth of six sons. Nicknamed ‘Hanuman’ by his parents, family members remember that from a young age he showed great promise, always curious about the world, and eager to learn new ideas.

He topped the Intermediate level at Tri-Chandra College in Kathmandu and in BA (Hons) at Patna College. He then dropped out of a military academy in Dehradun and went on to earn a PhD from the University of Edinburgh in 1965 -- the first person from the Gurung community to receive a doctorate.

Harka Gurung was a renowned scholar and wrote and published 15 books and over 700 research articles in various fields, covering geography, development, sociology, economy, anthropology, tourism and mountaineering.

After teaching briefly at SOAS of the University of London and Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, Harka Gurung served as a member of the National Planning Commission in 1968, later becoming its vice-chair until he was appointed state minister for tourism.

He was instrumental in promoting tourism and mountaineering in Nepal during his tenure in government, and was in the committee that gave names to many of Nepal's unnamed Himalayan peaks. After his death, the government named a 7,871m peak in Manang after him.

After leaving the government, he served as director of the Asia-Pacific Development Centre in Malaysia and returned to Nepal to continue his scholarly pursuits.

Besides becoming my in-law, Harka Gurung was a role model. He was my guiding light and mentor. He advised me in my academic life, my second career after 22 years of military service, and introduced me to his array of Nepali and international contacts.

Once, in Kenya he told me to go and see his old friend Ian Douglas-Hamilton who ran an elephant research centre there. But instead of me going to see him, Douglas-Hamilton came to collect me in his private plane, and took me on an aerial tour of his Samburu ranch where he owned over 900 elephants.



When I was an intern at the United Nations in New York, Dr Gurung introduced me to Assistant Secretary General Kul Chandra Gautam and Navin Rai, then working at the World Bank. In the UK in June 2005, he put me in touch with Prof Surya Subedi and Dr Ramesh Dhungel.

Through him, I got to know Dudley Spain, then 88, who had spent decades with the British Embassy in Kathmandu. When news came from Nepal of the helicopter crash, Dudley wept for his friend.

Back in Kathmandu Dr Gurung took me along to attend various academic events, which helped me expand my network. In fact, it was Dr Gurung who introduced me to Ganesh Gurung of the National Institute of Development Studies (NIDS) who helped with

research for my masters level dissertation at Coventry University.

My last meeting with Dr Gurung was in June 2005 during his visit to the UK, and I feel his absence deeply at a personal and professional level. Nepal has also lost a towering figure who spoke passionately about political inclusion, social justice and the need to protect the country's natural resources and biodiversity.

Long before Nepal's two elections to a Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution, Dr Gurung had openly voiced the need for such an assembly even during the restricted absolute monarchy period of the Panchayat. He was ahead of his time in many ways.

As a social demographer, Dr Gurung believed that Nepal had too many administrative areas, and wanted the size of zones and districts reduced so they would be more manageable and suggested a new map. He felt true devolution was more important to decentralise decision-making and to empower the disenfranchised.

Now, Nepal has a federal democratic system, yet it has not achieved good governance, and despite the Constitution the indigenous people's movement that Dr Gurung espoused still does not have adequate representation in the state machinery.

If he was alive today, Dr Gurung would continue to shape a new Nepal that he believed was possible to create. He would have answers to tackle internal and overseas migration, address the impact of the climate crisis, to make access to health and education more equitable.

The Mi-8 helicopter went missing on Saturday 23 September 2006 just after taking off from Ghunsa in poor visibility. The wreckage was located two days later on a steep mountainside. The crash dealt a heavy blow to Nepal's conservation movement, and in Harka Gurung the nation lost a visionary multi-disciplinary scholar.

**Jit Gurung** was born in Tang Ting of Kaski district, and is currently with the UN Mission in Mali.

# Last night in Taplejung

That night in Taplejung, we sang and danced to the tune of *Sorha Barse Umera Ma*. It was my conservation guru Chandra Gurung's favourite song, and one he sang during many occasions.

That song still brings back memories of the night 15 years ago as I sing it in every staff retreat to pay tribute to my mentor. The pain of loss is still palpable.

We celebrated, but it was short-lived. Little did I know that 24 hours later I would be hiking all night with Ang Phuri Sherpa and a rescue team to Ghunsa to find the crash site, after bad weather forced our search helicopter to drop us in Pholey.

It had been rainy in Ghunsa on 23 September 2006, as the Mi-8 helicopter took off and disappeared into the clouds. I was supposed to be on it, but had to make space for the dignitaries who had come for the handover ceremony of the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) to the community.

Twenty-four people died in that tragedy this week 15 years ago, among them Nepal's conservation heroes: Harka Gurung, veteran geographer and planner; Chandra Gurung who designed the model of using tourism income to pay for conservation; Mingma Norbu Sherpa, who helped establish the Annapurna Conservation Area; Tirthman Maskey, who paved the way for people and parks to coexist. Nepal also lost Forest Minister Gopal Rai, Secretary Damodar Parajuli, and Director Generals Sharad K Rai and Narayan P Paudel. Also on board was the first Chair of the KCA Management Committee, Dawa Tshering Sherpa.

The shock of the deaths posed a pressing question: were Nepal's achievements in conservation now in jeopardy? The model of participatory conservation pioneered in Nepal was an example to the world, but could the path-breaking work of these visionaries be sustained?

Fifteen years later, the answer is: yes. We have passed the torch to yet another generation to help preserve our natural heritage, just like our predecessors once did. Despite the tragedy, and many challenges since, Nepal has taken great strides in nature conservation.



Twenty of the 24 who perished on 23 September 2006 (left to right from top row): Dr Bijan Acharya, USAID; Margaret Alexander, USAID; Hemraj Bhandari, Nepal Television; Dr Chandra Gurung; Dr Harka Gurung; Jennifer Lynn Headley WWF UK; Yeshe Choden Lama, WWF Nepal; Dr Tirthaman Maskey; Pauli A Mustonen, Charge d'Affaires Finland Embassy, Kathmandu; Damodar Parajuli, Secretary Ministry of Forests; Mathew Preece, WWF USA; Narayan P Paudel, Director General of Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation; State Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation Gopal Rai; Meena Rai; Sharad K Rai, Director General Department of Forests; Dr Jillian D Schlaepfer, WWF UK; Mingma Norbu Sherpa WWF USA; Sunil P Singh, Nepal Television; Vijaya Shrestha, youth leader Taplejung; Dawa Tsering Sherpa KCA Management Council Chair.



## EVENTS

**Writing workshop**  
Sign up for KathaSatha’s writing workshop ‘On Fragments’ facilitated by writer Sharmini Aphrodite, who will guide participants to distill and compress written work. Register at <https://www.kathasatha.org.np/workshops/on-fragments> by 30 September.  
*2 October, 2pm onwards, Fee: Rs1500*

**Film festival**  
Watch films from across Europe and Nepal on environment and climate change at the Nepal European Union Film Festival (NEUFF) 2021. Go to <https://www.festivalscope.com/page/neuff/>.  
*Until 25 September*



**Photo Sindhuli**  
StoryCycle and Nepal Tourism Board call on aspiring photographers to participate in the online photo exhibition ‘Photo Sindhuli’. Find details and upload photos at <http://photo.ntb.gov.np/blog/photosindhuli>

**Sunday Sessions**  
In this session of Sunday Sessions, Prateebha Tuladhar will be joined by Prathama Raghavan, to discuss his journey as a mental health and disability support worker. Registration details on Book Bus Nepal’s Facebook page.  
*26 September, 6pm-7pm*

## DINING



**Koto**  
Indulge in authentic Japanese cuisine from Makonouchi bento and Katsudon to delicious Japanese rolls. Go online for a variety of other dishes to order.  
*(01) 5542936/(01) 4226025*

## MUSEUMS



**Virtual Museum Tours**  
Google Arts & Culture has teamed up with over 2,500 museums and galleries around the world to bring everyone virtual tours and online exhibits of some of the world’s most famous museums.

**Europeana**  
Discover cultural heritage from 3,000 museums, galleries, libraries and archives across Europe. Head to <https://www.europeana.eu/en> and read about historical places and watch exhibitions, photographs, ancient manuscripts and more.

**Global Nepali Museum**  
Global Nepali museum is the first database of its kind that features Nepali art and artefacts that are housed in museums around the world. Go to <https://globalnepalimuseum.com> and learn about sculptures, paintings, as well as contemporary art, and other cultural objects from Nepal.

**Comic Museums**  
Meet superheroes, villains and giant robots on a Google Earth virtual trip around ten of the most iconic global comic book spots, including the Brussels Comic Book Museum, the Cartoon Art Museum in California, and the Ghibli Museum in Japan.



**Photo Museum Nepal**  
Take a look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal’s history and learn the stories behind them at <https://photomuseumnepal.org>.

**Aalucha**  
How many ways can fries be made? Aalucha has got it all covered. Try the choila fries, the butter chicken poutine or go for the classic fries with Aalucha’s signature dips.  
*Basantapur, 9860108771*



**Bhumi**  
Experience authentic Newa flavours of bara, chatamari, samaya baji, momo cha and more at Bhumi. Find more options on the menu online.  
*Jhamsikhel, 9851213574*

## GETAWAY

**Bandipur Kaushi Inn**  
A small, rustic place to stay in the idyllic village of Bandipur, replete with cultural diversity and traditional architecture.  
*Bandipur, Tanahu, (065) 520083*



**Kasara Resort**  
With activities ranging from cycling to wildlife viewing, Kasara Resort, located in the heart of the lush greenery of Chitwan National Park, is a fantastic getaway for families.  
*Patihani, Chitwan National Park, 9801048824*

**Hotel Fireside**  
Hotel Fireside in Kalinchok, a quiet, picturesque village in Dolakha, makes for a comforting refuge. Enjoy the stunning Himalayan vista, beautiful gardens, comfortable rooms and soul-warming Nepali food.  
*Kuri Village, Kalinchok, 9841958696*



**The Pavilions**  
This is a luxury eco resort with boutique villas, swimming pool, organic farm, restaurant lounge and bar. Visit for refreshing morning walks, therapeutic and relaxing day-ins, authentic gastronomical experience and quiet nights.  
*Chisapani, Pokhara, 9856027997*

**Akama Hotel**  
Akama Hotel boasts a fusion of Local Newa and Himalayan cultures as well as luxury modern amenities. Relax by the infinity pool, take a dip in the jacuzzi and step into the sauna room for a day away from the Kathmandu hustle.  
*Dhumbarah (01) 4377298*



**Curilo**  
Get yourself some delicious pastas, pizza or sandwiches. Try Picante de Pollo, barbecue pork chops, and cap it off with some delicious apple crumble.  
*Lazimpat (01) 4005079*

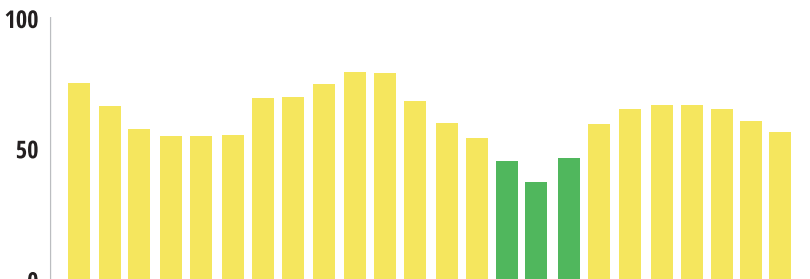
**French Bakery**  
Enjoy scrumptious breakfast from the French Bakery. Get the tummy-filling breakfast platter, or the bacon and egg sandwich. Also order from a variety of delicious cakes and muffins.  
*Chhetrapati (01) 4251998*



The monsoon has been relentless this season, and there is yet another low pressure pulse that has moved in from the Bay of Bengal that will bring Nepal into its sphere of influence. After being soaked this week by a previous pulse, we are expecting another weekend in Kathmandu Valley with sporadic showers. However most of it is likely to be localised with sometimes heavy afternoon showers as convection systems along the mountains condense the high moisture content in the air.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
28° 19°	27° 19°	27° 18°

## AIR QUALITY INDEX

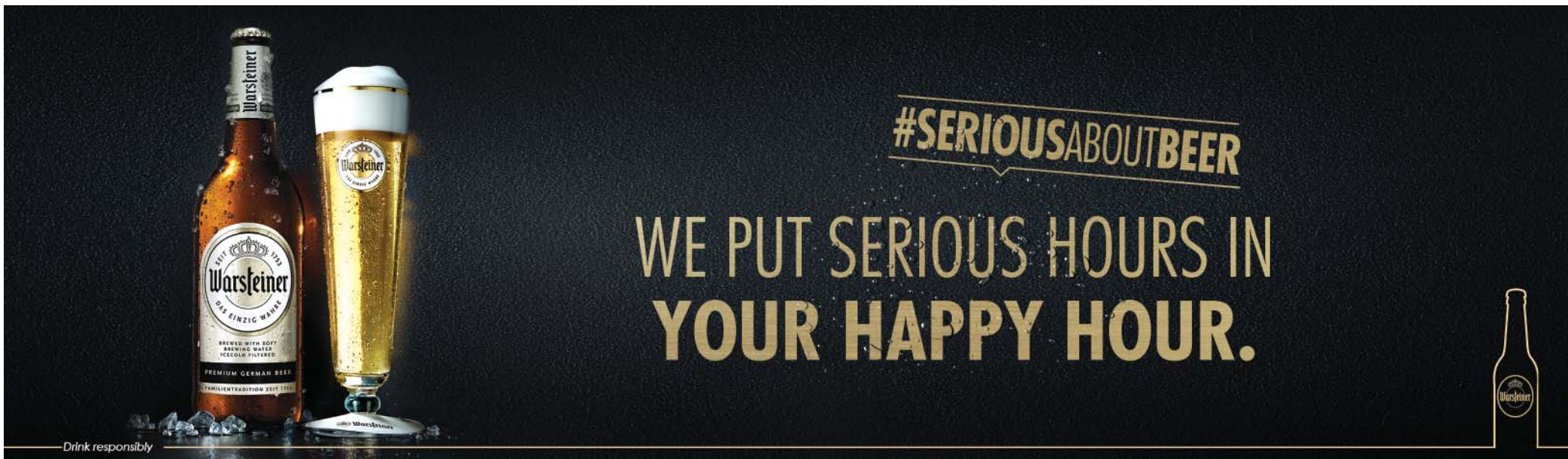


1PM 22 September to 12PM 23 September measured at US Embassy, Phora Darbar  
The lingering monsoon rains do have a bright side: it means that Kathmandu’s Air Quality Index (AQI) is still quite good. Since they seem to coincide with the evening rush hour, they tend to wash down the suspended particulates in the air from the exhaust of diesel vehicles. But the weekly average is creeping up to AQI 100, and as the Dasain traffic picks up, we can expect the air quality to get worse. So, don’t take those masks off.



## OUR PICK

A trio of demon-hunters with supernatural powers pose as workers in a noodle restaurant in this South Korean series *The Uncanny Counter* set in the fictional city of Jungin. When an encounter with a powerful evil spirit results in tragedy, high school student So Mun is chosen to join the trio. As demonic forces close in, So Mun must learn to use his newfound powers and work together with other hunters while uncovering a past incident that connects them all. Stars Jo Byung-gyu, Yoo Jun-sang, Kim Se-jeong, and Yeom Hye-ran.





# Toilet encounters

The tendency in men to use the toilet carelessly can be disturbing for others

Fr K was every girl’s heart-throb. Yes. Heart-throb. We used the word for guys who made our heart beat quicken. Sometimes for girls. So, Fr K Heart-throb.



SUBURBAN TALES  
Pratibha Tuladhar

We saw him once a year during the annual retreat. And girls waited all year with bated breath for the ‘retreat’. The retreat was calendared for that time of the year when all the students except one batch went on their holiday. So, it would mostly be a particular batch and Fr K, the only other person on the sprawling campus being *Chaukidar Daju*.

Every day of the three-day retreat, the girls made an effort to look nice. Do your hair a certain way, wear your best blouse, and make sure to get a seat in the first row. Although, Fr K always made sure to reshuffle the seats eventually into a circle, with him standing in the centre.

Leaning in his very dark navy blue contemporary habit, a hint of white popping out on the collar, he stood there for three full days of the retreat, talking, charming his listeners. What did he really do to work his charm? Not much.

But thrown into a classroom of 17-year-old girls, he did not have to do much. His competition were 60-year-old Mr Chaurdhary who taught Economics and *Chaukidar Daju*, who walked about with betel nut tucked between his teeth.

I suppose the only thing different Fr K did was smile. He smiled and laughed softly a lot between talking. And every time he did that, the scar from a sewn-up upper cleft lip showed itself off, adding something striking to his demeanour.

There were rumours about Fr K. They said that in his hill-town,

women fell for him every time they heard him speak during church. And there were other rumours that made the girls blush. But there he was, standing amidst us, talking about ethics and love for all living beings.

Just as the bell rang after lunch break, I shoved my bag into Rosy’s arms saying, “I need to use the loo”. I ran in as I always did and stopped suddenly at the main door of the lavatory.

The door to the cubicle in the centre was open, partly showing off the dark navy blue attire. Facing away from me was Fr K, relieving himself. When he heard the steps, he tilted his head, looked at me and said, “Oh, hello.” And continued at what he had been doing.

I felt like my face was on fire. Why was he in the students’ toilet instead of the GENTS in the staff room building? Had no one briefed him about the toilet rules in an all-girls’ institution? I walked away, the startling sound of shower softly hitting the toilet floor ringing in my ears.

Back in the classroom, Rosy asked me why I looked so flustered. I said it was nothing. I said, I was glad the retreat would be over in a few hours. She looked at me like she couldn’t believe her ears.

I make my way to the toilets, a short walk from the hall at the literature festival venue. The door to one of the toilets is open. A man stands inside, relieving himself. He is wearing loose clothing. His linen shirt collar is met at the nape by peppery curls. A cotton bag is slung on one shoulder. “Sorry,” he says.

When I go back to my seat, I see this man again. He is now seated on the stage alongside other speakers. The moderator introduces him as the writer of a book which is named after a certain exploding fruit. Later, I would try to read the book and never be able to finish it.

“I’m your fan,” I say to the politician, as he walks into



the studio, preparing for a live interview. As the studio producers help him with the lapel mic and framing, I make small talk.

“I disagree with your thoughts regarding federalism, but I have always been impressed by how clearly you make your argument on why we don’t need it.”

“That’s all right, *Nanu*,” he says. “In a democracy, we’re all allowed to disagree.”

The interview is over and it is my turn to go on the air, before which I always use the toilet. I walk towards the row of restrooms. The first one on the floor has its door flung open and our guest’s colourful Dhaka *topi* stands out in the semi-darkness of the cubicle.

“La!”

“Eh...” he says.

Past 6PM is always time for your last cup of tea. I’m standing by the lift, waiting, when he absentmindedly walks past me towards the toilet, muttering a casual hi. Given the short distance between the lift and the toilet, a strong smell would sometimes hover in the lobby.

“When are you going to turn your feature in?” he yells at me from the toilet.

“Sorry?” I turn my head towards his voice. The door to the Men’s is open.

As always, I hate having to use the toilet at Nepal Tourism Board. In there, I’ve always wondered how one was expected to use a space so small. I tend to get apprehensive even before I enter it.

I open the main door and standing before the mirror, is them, towering over the basin. They’re doing some last-minute fixing, standing taller than anyone I have met in my life, poised gracefully in a peach silk gown, with floral patterns. “I love your blog post about massage. I’ve often wondered what that kind of pain actually brings,” I say.

“Thanks,” they say and continue to get busy by the mirror. It was the first time I was speaking to someone who uses ‘they’ as a pronoun. I carry on into one of the cubicles, where it feels like the walls are about to crush me. I wonder how they might have used a space so tiny. I also think of how we had coexisted for a few minutes in a tight space and how, unlike similar encounters with men, I had not felt threatened.

*Suburban Tales* is a monthly column in Nepali Times based on real people (with some names changed) in Pratibha’s life.

AKIRA  
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# दर्शैको बेला हिरोको मेला

यसपालीको दर्शैमा आफूलाई मनपर्ने  
HERO स्वरिद गरि खुसीयाली मनाऔं ।  
पक्का डिस्काउन्ट सँगै  
थप नगद पुरस्कार पनि पाउँ ।

बम्पर  
रु. १००,०००

रु. ६,०००  
पक्का डिस्काउन्ट

१ लाख  
हरेक SCRATCH मा  
रु. १००,००० सम्म बचास

साथै, सबै HERO MOTORCYCLE र SCOOTER मा  
0% ब्याजमा ५०% फाइनान्स उपलब्ध छ ।  
यो योजना कम्पनीले तोकेको शुरुमहत्तमा मात्र लागू हुनेछ ।

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Kantipath 5325377, 5366517 • Kurnaripati 5408781 • Mitra Park 5241224, 5241033 • Ravibhawan 4670812  
Outside of Valley Attaria 551244 • Baglung 520174 • Bardaghat 580727 • Bardibas 550552 • Bharatpur 526697 • Bhairahawa 523930 • Bhairahawa 524290 • Birchowk 545227  
Biratnagar 463754 • Biratnagar 503095 • Birgunj 529667 • Birtamod 590195 • Butwal 542725 • Butwal 437909 • Chandranigahapur 540739 Damak 581463 • Damauli 560477 • Dang 563442  
Dhangadi 417115 • Dhanushadham 414063 • Dharan 526522 • Gaidakot 502399 • Gaur 521109 • Gausala, Mahottari 556186 • Golbazar 540327 • Gulariya 420099 • Gulmi 520142  
Hetauda 525386 • Inaruwa 566498 • Itahari 587580 • Jaleshwor 521095 • Janakpur 523644 • Janakpur 527426 • Kalaiya 551526 • Kapilbastu 550160 • Kawasoti 541001 • Kohalpur 540280  
Lahan 562202 • Lalbandi 501628 • Lamahi 540863 • Malangawa 521711 • Mahendranagar 520745 • Mirchaya 550803 • Narayanghat 532255 • Nepalgunj 551598 • Palpa 400639  
Parasi 520984 • Parsa 582862 • Parsa 561825 • Pokhara 589389 • Pokhara 522905 • Pyuthan 460464 • Rajbiraj 523542 • Simara 521520 • Siraha 520442 • Surkhet 525196  
Surunga 551010 • Taulihawa 561330 • Tikapur 560426 • Tulsipur 522050 • Uribari 540074 • Waling 440610



Two scientists are dwarfed by the thick loose sediment field brought down by the flood and deposited along the 2.5km long valley floor. The sediment field is crumbling, and constantly adds more debris into the Melamchi.

Nepal's most expensive project to supply water to Kathmandu will be at heightened risk for decades

● **Mukesh Pokhrel**

Two months after a massive debris flow on the Melamchi River knocked out Nepal's most expensive water supply project, geologists investigating the disaster say the danger will remain for decades to come.

Torrents of boulders and mud paste buried the headwork of the Melamchi Water Supply Project under 20m of debris on 15 and 30 July. Waves of debris washed away the highway and bridges connecting the site, submerged settlements, and killed at least 30 people.

The much-delayed \$800 million project had started test distribution of water from the Langtang National Park through a 26.5km tunnel to Kathmandu residents in April. Fortunately, the tunnel had been sealed for inspection a few hours before the flood hit, and was saved.

Geologists and experts are now trying to study the upper reaches of the Melamchi watershed to determine what caused the disastrous debris flow, and to see if anything can be done to mitigate future floods. What they found does not bode well.

Project engineers say that the two big floods in July caused damage worth more than Rs2 billion, including destroying the 22km link road, 6 bridges, warehouses and offices. Six project staff from Nepal, India and China were killed.

"Melamchi is now uncertain, we do not know when we can restart the project," says senior divisional engineer Rajendra Prasad Pant. "We need to make a much more extensive study of the watershed upstream to determine if we can control future floods, and if so, how long it will take."

Indeed, aerial inspection and satellite imagery of the Melamchi Valley upstream shows a massive sediment field that is constantly collapsing and being washed down by heavy monsoon downpours.

Engineers say they are trying to mobilise heavy earthmovers to clear the debris and send water into the tunnel through a temporary channel by the end of the year to resume the 170 million litres of water supply a day to Kathmandu. Just this part of the job will add another Rs1 billion to the cost of the project.

But there remains the enormous challenge of dealing with the 2.5km



# Still chasing the Melamchi mirage



The upper reaches of the Melamchi scoured by landslides and debris flow.

long crumbling sediment field upriver, which they say will pose a danger for decades to come. No one has an estimate of how much any mitigation measures will cost, or if it is even possible.

But besides immediate repairs at the headwork, the disaster has also put on hold the second and third phase of the project, which was to extend the tunnel to Yangri and Larke, two parallel valleys to the east to augment the tunnel capacity by another 340 million litres per day (*see map, overleaf*).

Although engineers had studied the upper reaches of the Melamchi to scope out any glacial lake or unstable slopes, they had never expected the sediment field to be so fragile and unstable.

"So far, we think the disaster was caused by record rainfall in the catchment area which had been destabilised by the 2015 earthquakes," explains Shiva Baskota of the Department of Mines and Geology, who recently flew over Bhemthang region, and said he saw extensive slope failure on the Melamchi and its tributary stream, the Pemdang.

Baskota estimates that some 150 cubic metres of fluvial, glacial or lacustrine deposits still sit on the river upstream at an elevation of 3,500m, and this is constantly being washed down by the river because of continuing heavy rains. On 11 July, a weather station in nearby Sermathang recorded 110mm of rain in 24 hours.

Some scientists blame the extreme weather events on





ALL PHOTOS: SHIVA BASKOTA

climate change, and say that heavy downpours are now falling on higher altitudes where there used to be snowfall. Other researchers believe that in addition to heavy rainfall, a glacial lake in Langtang National Park burst, adding material to the debris flow.

“It looks like there has not

been an adequate disaster risk assessment of the catchment area,” Baskota says. “This means we have to study the glaciers above Yangri and Larke before starting the next phase of the Melamchi water project.”

There is a way to reduce the danger from future flooding in the

Melamchi by building check dams along the river to slow the flow of the debris. But they admit it is a huge and expensive undertaking which has to start as soon as the monsoon ends to be prepared for next year’s rains.

Climate scientist Raju Pandit Chhetri says that the impact of



Aerial photo of the confluence of the Melamchi and Pemdang Rivers taken after the 30 July flood.



The 26.5 km tunnel that brought 170 million litres of water daily from Melamchi to Kathmandu for 3 months before its headwork was damaged by the floods on 15 and 30 July 2021 (above). Google Earth image of the Melamchi Valley taken in December 2017 (below) showing landslide scars and the location of the sediment field near the confluence of the Melamchi and Pemdang rivers.



Damage to sluice gates and channel diverting water from the Melamchi to the tunnel at the project headwork. The debris here is 20m deep.

global warming in the Himalaya is only going to increase, so current and future infrastructure along the mountains have to take the risk into account.

“Bridges, highways, water supply all have to be designed to withstand extreme events,” says Chhetri. “It may drive up the cost of the project, but they will prevent greater loss. Planning for a disaster like this would not have affected the Melamchi project as badly as it did.”

Some water experts say that an expensive project like Melamchi should never have been built in the first place, when cheaper alternatives to supply water to Kathmandu through reservoirs on the Valley rim to store monsoon water was possible.

“Even back then, some of us had warned that Melamchi was not suitable,” says water scientist Ajaya Dixit. “We had not foreseen a disaster like the one this year, but we knew that Sindhupalchok’s rugged terrain made it a risky place to invest in expensive infrastructure.”

Government officials, however, say that although the Norwegian consultants of the Melamchi project had assessed seismic and environmental risk and designed it for a lifespan of 100 years, nothing like the flood in July was ever expected.

“What was perhaps not factored in was the new risk added by accelerated global warming,” says Pant.

A British consultant had

conducted a study in 1988 of rivers in and around Kathmandu Valley to select the most suitable river for a project to augment the Valley’s water supply, but on the basis of flow, natural gradient and proximity Melamchi was chosen as the most appropriate.

The Melamchi project was thus launched, but there were delays due to political interference, local opposition, earthquakes, blockades, pandemic and other upheavals.

The project therefore took three times longer than it should have and was inaugurated on 4 April by President Bidya Devi Bhandari. Households and businesses in Kathmandu felt a great sense of relief that the water had finally arrived, but within three months the flood damaged the project and stopped the water supply.

In the Ministry of Water Supply, there is already talk of finding alternative sources of water for the Valley even if Melamchi is restored – because of the continued flood risk on the river, and the fact that the project will not be able to satisfy the thirst of an expanding capital.

At present the water utility for Kathmandu supplies between 90-170 million litres to consumers every day from existing reservoirs, streams and groundwater. Melamchi had doubled that supply, but it still did not meet demand. Pumping groundwater has also lowered Kathmandu’s water table, and that supply is dwindling. 🇳🇵





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