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For more details,

Adventures of a post-Covid tourist in Kathmandu during Dasain.
by Subhas Rai (With apologies to Hergé)



Nepali Times and Himalmedia wish readers and partners a healthy and happy Dasain. Let us bring out the best in us as Nepalis to be kind, compassionate, and to help each other this festival season.

The *Nepali Times* editorial team is taking a Dasain break, so there will be no print edition on 15 October. The next hardcopy issue will come out on 22 October. Follow daily online coverage throughout the holidays on www.nepalitimes.com



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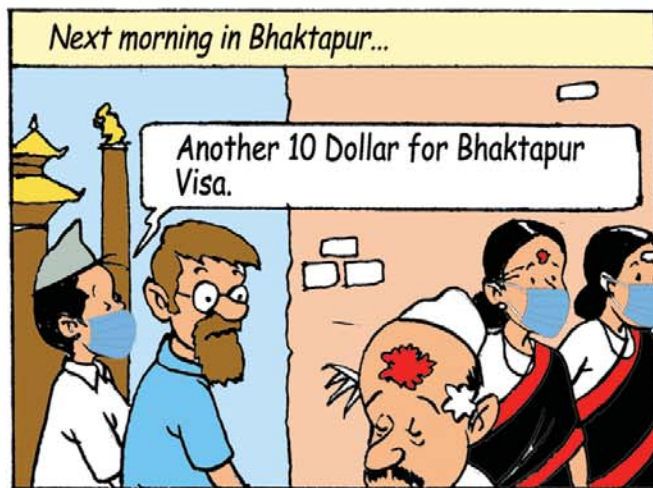
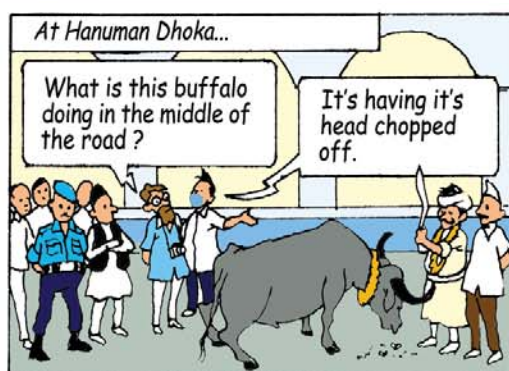


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Giving every Nepali a shot at the Covid vaccine

Nearly half of Kathmandu Valley's population is fully vaccinated against Covid-19, but the national average is only a little over 20%. In essence, this is a microcosm of vaccine inequity seen globally – but it also reflects Nepal's in-built socioeconomic inequalities.



GUEST EDITORIAL

Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa

In Asia and Africa, a majority of the population including health workers and the elderly are yet to receive even their first dose. But the US, France, Germany, and Israel are already providing booster shots to their vulnerable populations.



AMIT MACHAMASI

On one hand, this is a stark reminder that Nepal is not on the priority of wealthy nations. Just as it was not during the devastating second wave in May when, despite the prime minister and the president calling on foreign governments for vaccine shipments, the response was tepid.

On the other hand, the imbalance in vaccine distribution within Nepal is a reflection of long-standing inequities in healthcare services, education, drinking water, and food that predate Covid-19.

Despite a federal Constitution that has devolved decisions and delivery of basic services to local governments, it is still Kathmandu that holds the purse strings and power. Isolated and beyond the state's reach even at the best of times, Nepal's hinterland this year has been cut off by destructive floods blamed on the climate crisis.

A village in Kailali with 200 Tharu and Dalit families has been marooned by floods for the past month, where the submerged roads block access to even the rudimentary healthcare available.

It is not surprising, therefore, that very few in this village are inoculated. In fact, those who need to be vaccinated the most now face a triple whammy: historical state neglect, international apathy, and now climate-induced extreme weather.

This in turn has set off a vicious cycle,

and the poor are getting poorer. The official death toll from Covid-19 in Nepal is nearly 12,000, but the 'excess deaths' that were not counted in remote villages across the country is probably several times higher.

An estimated 1,200 children have become orphans because of the death of one or both parents due to Covid-19. Many of them do not have support for food, healthcare, and education – setting a stage for intergenerational inequity.

In Kathmandu and urban centres, on the other hand, there is complacency and false sense of security as the festive season approaches. Unvaccinated children have also started attending in-person schools. The Health Ministry's recent seroprevalence study has revealed that 67% of people have SARS-CoV-2 antibodies, and therefore have natural immunity against the virus. This, combined with half of the valley's targeted demography being vaccinated on paper, makes a case for a fully immune population.

But that is not the case. There is now growing proof that antibodies provided by vaccines wane over time, which means many of us who were vaccinated earlier this year have weaker protection than we think. Only those newly infected with the virus might have sufficient antibodies to fight off the next infection.

It is not as important to know what portion of the population has antibodies as to how much of it they have. Vaccinated individuals are less susceptible to hospitalisation, severe symptoms, and death, but they can still be contagious, especially as the more virulent Delta variant continues to

circulate in the region.

The Dasain shopping spree has started, and there are throngs of shoppers in Asan and other bazar streets. Many have stopped wearing masks, or use them inappropriately. The situation will be worse when Kathmandu residents travel to their hometowns this week. They will be visiting elderly parents and grandparents, exposing vulnerable elderly relatives with lower immunity to the virus.

The government is bringing in 100,000 doses of Pfizer vaccines after the festivals, with plans for 10 million more by March. But provincial and district hospitals must have deep refrigeration equipment in place, and make necessary collaboration with private hospitals.

To make sure that each Nepali child, even those in remote Karnali, gets a shot at the Covid-19 vaccine, our expansive network of community healthcare workers must be mobilised and, where required, administer vaccines at the household level.

Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa is an epidemiologist and a senior research monitoring and evaluation adviser at IPAS Nepal.

ONLINE PACKAGES



GET, SET, GO GREEN

Electric motorbikes and scooters have now become a part of life for people in Kathmandu, but there is a new electric mountain bicycle in the town. Join us on a test drive to see the difference from a regular bike or electric two-wheelers. Subscribe to our YouTube channel. Electric transport special on *pages 8-9*.



DASAIN AAYO

Bamboo swings used to be a Dasain essential before they were replaced with mobile phones, television entertainment and video games. There is also a belief that a spree on the swing allows one to leave the ground at least once during the great festival to obtain salvation. Watch a community come together to set up a swing on the *Nepali Times* YouTube channel.

NEPALI PASSPORT

Thank you for writing on this topic, very close to my experience too ('Having a Nepali passport is no fun', Anjana Rajbhandari, #1081). I question the concept of global citizenship because it does not apply to us -- as you have highlighted, the ordeal we have to go through to apply for a visa and our inability to make an impromptu foreign visit.

Swosti Rajbhandari Kayastha

• This is very sad and unfair, I feel so bad for all Nepali people. I am always anxious when I travel with them, starting from Tribhuvan airport. Seems that this can only change when the country improves its governance and raises its economic power. Unfortunately this is how the world works due to various vested valid interests.

Geraldo Fernando Heng

• True, the worst is being harassed by our own countrymen in our airport.

Tshering Sherpa

• Many countries require Americans and Europeans to get visas. But we're also not a developing country. Most countries assume Americans and Europeans will not remain in the country to work. Sadly many Nepalis who came on student visas to the US stayed on illegally and spoiled the opportunity for others.

Maggie Kerr

• Every visa application for Nepal involves hours of paperwork and anxiety. Every year the list of what is required appears to change and there is endless hassle at the airports. And let's not even get started on college applications (the TU equivalency certificate), trekking permits, which seem to give nothing to the communities, since 'foreigners' are just cash cows for GoN.

Shirin Barakzai

PANDORA PAPERS

Naming and shaming should have a direct effect but it didn't happen in 2019 after the Panama Papers and it won't happen now after these latest revelations either ('Nepal's richest man in the Pandora Papers', *nepalitimes.com*). Why? Because it's impossible to shame the morally bankrupt. The 'loopholes' aren't there by accident - but by design. Lawmakers are the primary law breakers.

Alex Ferguson

• Loopholes are purposely designed by politicians/lawmakers to fatten/pay back those so-called business leaders. Look at unpaid taxes, rents, bills etc by some institutions with political connections in Nepal. It is impossible to receive quick service from government offices without bribes. If you try to complain they will make your life difficult.

Bhumi Limbu

FEMALE FOETICIDE

Great story and you are an inspiration for other young girls and women ('Female foeticide to footballer', Srijana Singh Thakuri, #1081). Thank you for sharing!

Nancy Chin-Wagner

• More power to you. You are an inspiration to many girls (and boys) who can look to emulate you. Keep shining on!

Swadesh Subedi

• Such an amazing story of perseverance and courage, we are so proud of you. May good fortune and personal fulfillment follow you wherever your path leads!

Suzy Becker

THE GURKHA EXPANSION

In the 80's, I worked at Aap Pipal Hospital that sits on Lig Lig mountain, which I believe was a fort of the Gorkhali ('Beginning of the end for the Gorkha Empire', Alisha Sijapati, #1081). Interesting history.

Sigmund Stengel

DASAIN DESTINATIONS

Great collection promoting the high-value low-volume tourism concept for Nepal ('Top Fasain destinations', #1081).

The Britain-Nepal Society

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Beginning of the end for the Gorkha Empire

by Alisha Sijapati

Follow our reporter as she retraces the zenith of Gorkhali expansion more than 200 years ago in this new series. The first in this 5-part series looks at the bravery of Gorkhali troops under its legendary generals to defend the newly-conquered forts, but also the historical memory of an oppressive rule. Follow series on *nepalitimes.com*. Part 2 on *pages 14-15*.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook



Female foeticide to footballer

by Srijana Singh Thakuri

From an unwanted daughter to Nepal's national footballer, Srijana Singh Thakuri pens her personal journey, which is a testament to her determination in the face of patriarchy and discrimination. Visit our website for the full story.

t Most popular on Twitter

Having a Nepali passport is no fun

by Anjana Rajbhandari

Every visa in a Nepali's travel document has behind it hours of painstaking paperwork filled with anxiety and anticipation--Nepalis everywhere could relate and send in their comments. Read feedback and join the online discussion.

“ ” Most commented



Top Dasain destinations

The holiday season is here, and *Nepali Times* had handpicked six eclectic getaways for the discerning traveller this Dasain. Go online for details about special holiday packages for families.

🔴 Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepal's richest man, as well as other prominent businessmen in the country among those named in#PandoraPapers. Noted political and business figures said to be using tax havens for money laundering.@CJorg



Riya @Riya_Tiwari9929
Just when I was about to watch some reality shows tonight, Nepali Times keeping us informed and entertained.



ART @AmulyaSir
Why am I not surprised?



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepal's 'missing girls'
For every 106 boys born in Nepal, there are only 100 girls because of sex selective abortion.



Harish Acharya @mr_aachaaryah
The beginning of gender discrimination is through the foetus. This shows where we are and where we are going!



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Female foeticide to football: "Why was I not enough? Why were we#daughtersnot enough?" Srijana Singh Thakuri pens her personal journey from an unwanted daughter to#Nepal's national#footballer.



Rita Thapa @bheribas
#daughtersTHREE CHEERS to Brave Srijana Singh Thakuri

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Time travel

Looking back 20 years ago is like taking a walk down memory lane, not nostalgic, but nightmarish. It is like a time travel movie with the same ending.

In October 2001, second-time prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was tasked with his biggest job yet: find a negotiated solution to the Maoist insurgency as the government geared up for the third round of peace talks. But Deuba had yet to expand his council of ministers, and the delay was because he needed to split ministries equally among his supporters.

It is an identical scenario two decades later. Nearly three months after he became prime minister for the fifth time, Deuba still does not have a complete cabinet.

Deuba is said to be working out a plan to divide up the ministries so that the Nepali Congress and Maoist Centre get eight portfolios each and six each for the JSP and the UML (US) of Madhav Kumar Nepal. Nepalis might finally get a full cabinet before the Dasain holidays this week, not that it will probably matter much in terms of governance.

Excerpt from the page 1 report 20 years ago this week from issue #63, 28 September – 4 October 2001:



took to announce his government in July, Deuba may need some more time so his patronage is distributed evenly among supporters. "You are looking at next week, or even after Dasain," one senior minister told us. "He does not decide fast."

But why now? The main catalyst is the move by Deuba's arch rival within his party, Girija Prasad Koirala, to fill key positions in the Nepali Congress Central Committee with cronies and loyalists.

There is no love lost between the two, and Deuba must have seen this as a personal challenge. Koirala himself needn't have done it so blatantly. What it shows is that Congress factions are still at each other's throats, which was the reason that despite being a majority party in parliament it has not been able to govern properly.

A close Deuba aide said a decision on cabinet expansion was imminent, and there could be as many as 39 ministers. Deuba has a reputation for jumbo cabinets-during his last tenure 1995-97 he had a record 48 ministers. To accommodate supporters, Deuba is even said to be thinking of unbundling larger ministries like Industry, Commerce and Supplies into smaller units. There are a lot of impatient Congressites

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



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Editor Online: Sahina Shrestha

Executive Editor: Sonia Awale

Layout: Kiran Maharjan

Publisher: Kunda Dixit, 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

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The JABS and JABNOTS

Global vaccine inequity is reflected within Nepal, and what to do about it

● **Sonia Awale**

A post-graduate student of mechanical engineering Samita Rimal is completing her 14-day quarantine in a hotel in Montreal. Despite being fully vaccinated with VeroCell in Nepal, she now has to take one of the four jabs recognised in Canada.

"I wish I had taken J&J before coming here, I just wasted time and money, others like me should really try to find out the exact requirements before leaving Nepal," says 23-year-old Rimal.

Another student preparing to leave for Canada is in a dilemma: should she get a shot of the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine which is accepted in Canada, or face two weeks of quarantine and further restrictions because the Chinese vaccine VeroCell is not accepted by the Canadian government?

"People inoculated with vaccines other than those accepted there are treated as if they are not vaccinated and hence face additional restrictions. I probably won't be able to attend in-person classes there," says the 29-year-old.

Other students leaving Nepal are also confused because they

do not know whether it is safe to mix vaccines accepted in Europe or North America on top of a Covishield or VeroCell they have taken earlier this year.

A year after the first Covid-19 jabs were developed, there are at least 11 different vaccines in use worldwide, and many more are in different phases of trials. Never before has there been as much effort and investment in vaccine development.

But this breakthrough in science is not accompanied by a fair distribution of vaccines around the world, or within countries. It is usually those with access and reach who are fully vaccinated, and some are even getting booster shots already.

Nepal is currently using three different vaccines: AstraZeneca, VeroCell and J&J. While China is giving Nepal one million doses of its other Covid vaccine Sinovac, the government is set to receive 100,000 doses of Pfizer shots under WHO's COVAX facility, which requires ultra-cold refrigeration.

There are two new jabs under trial in Nepal: a Chinese messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine, and another developed by Sonafi, a partnership between a French company and

UK's GlaxoSmithKline.

Of these only AstraZeneca and J&J are widely accepted in Europe, the US, and the Gulf, which means Nepali students and migrant workers have to bear expensive hotel quarantine costs while missing out on university or work.

On the other hand, even as thousands of people get vaccinated each day, the vaccination drive has been concentrated in the urban centres. This is why it is not surprising that even as half of Kathmandu Valley residents is fully vaccinated, only 22% of Nepal's total population has been inoculated.

Nepalis in the hinterland were already least prioritised by the state, for health, education and basic needs, but extreme climate events due to global warming has added to the pre-existing challenges.

"This week in a village in Kailali we meet isolated pockets of Tharus and Dalits, most of them unvaccinated," says epidemiologist Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa. "Because of flash floods, they had no access to healthcare, market or schools, the streets were all flooded and the river had swelled."

Indeed, as Sherpa argues in her guest editorial (*page 2*), this monsoon rural Nepal was hit by triple disasters: historical state neglect, international apathy with rich countries stockpiling vaccines, and climate change. All of this has further magnified the coronavirus crisis in the region least equipped with healthcare infrastructure, and vaccine inequity.

Elsewhere in Kathmandu, there is a false sense of security among people who think they are immune against Covid-19 with increasing vaccine coverage. The declining number of daily news



cases and deaths have added to the complacency. However, many Kathmandu hospitals still report full ICUs -- mostly occupied but by referral patients from outside the Valley.

The misinterpretation of the recent sero-prevalence study conducted by WHO and the Health Ministry had added to the misconception. The sample survey found that 67% of Nepalis have natural immunity against the virus.

But virologists say the test used does not reveal the concentration of neutralising antibodies that fend off the virus in an individual. It does not detect memory T-cells either, which provide crucial immunity against foreign organisms in the body.

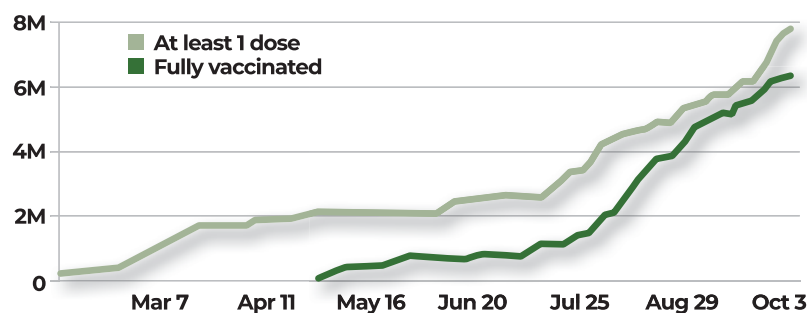
After six months of Nepal's vaccination drive, about half of

those who had been inoculated have started registering a decline in the level of antibodies. However, this does not always translate into individuals getting infected, as they might still have immunity afforded by memory T-cells.

"Given our vaccination coverage and natural immunity mostly against the Delta variant, we can say that there might not be an immediate large-scale surge unless there is a new strain," says pulmonary specialist at Kathmandu's HAMS hospital Raju Pangen. "But we also know that even those vaccinated are not fully protected against the Delta variant which transmits much faster in enclosed spaces."

With the Dasain festival starting this week, people are

Total Nepalis Vaccinated



prabhu BANK

Foreign exchange limit

Nepal Rastra Bank has introduced a new limit on foreign currency exchange for Nepalis travelling abroad owing to a steep decline in the country's foreign exchange reserves in the past year. Previously, individuals going to a foreign country had to carry at least \$500 but it has been halved now for those leaving for the Gulf, SAARC countries, Malaysia and Thailand on a tourist visa. Those visiting the US, EU nations, Japan and Korea can carry \$500.

According to the changes, foreign currency can be exchanged only from commercial banks and individuals have to mandatorily provide their source of income. Nepal Rastra Bank has also instructed financial institutions to tighten the exchange rate and not to exchange more than \$200 in cash.



Tata Lucky Draw

Dil Bahadur Thapa, Chaudhary Traders, RK Steel Furniture Industry and Shree Krishna Milk Collection and Distributor Firm were announced as winners of Tata's month-long weekly lucky draws. Under its festive scheme, customers who ordered Tata vehicles had the chance to win a 40-inch smart TV.

Divine Wines Premium



Shree Mahakali, manufacturers of Divine Wines, has introduced the new 'Divine Wines Premium' in the market. Divine Wines are made domestically with state-of-the-art technology.

Hard Rock Cafe in Nepal

The world-famous Hard Rock Cafe is set to open at Sherpa Mall, Kathmandu this month. The cafe will feature a US-inspired menu, cocktails, a culinary tribute to Kathmandu and memorabilia from renowned musicians.

Turkish Airlines with MONA

Turkish Airlines has partnered with the Museum of Arts Nepal (MONA) to launch a mega art festival to promote Nepal as an art destination and support children battling cancer.

Thirty-three Nepali artists will come together for a 'live art congregation' at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel to be showcased until 9 October. Visitors also stand a chance to win a trip to Europe via a lucky draw.

Kosi Corridor

A 106-km transmission line that will evacuate 2,000MW power from new hydropower projects on the Arun and Tamor basins in eastern Nepal was inaugurated on Tuesday in Hile. The 220kV line costing Rs10.4 billion was funded by the EXIM Bank of India and was handed over to the Nepal Electricity Authority.

Indian Embassy deputy chief of mission Namgya Khampa (pictured) said India was committed to work with Nepal to develop connectivity in Nepal in line with its 'Neighbourhood First'.



DishHome Fibernet

DishHome Fibernet has now reached Kalaiya, Lahan, Bhairahawa and Taudaha, with plans underway to expand the services to Nepalgunj, Dhangadhi and Narayanghat.

VW Taigun

Volkswagen with Pooja International has launched the Taigun compact 5-seater SUV at an introductory price of Rs5.09 million. The SUV comes with LED headlamps with integrated DRLs, 17-inch alloy wheels, an electric sunroof, functional roof rails, Infinity LED tail lamps, an integrated spoiler with a high-mounted stop lamp, and a shark-fin antenna. The Highline and Topline variants are available at Rs6.39 million and Rs6.99 million respectively.



Free accessories and cash offers for the first 100 buyers are available on a first-come-first-serve basis. Pooja International has also commenced the 'Volkfest Surprise' month-long carnival at 1 Durbar Mall, whereby customers have the chance to win BMW G310 GS motorbike, Suzuki Burgman Scooter, and Samsung Z Flip3 smartphones.

Ncell

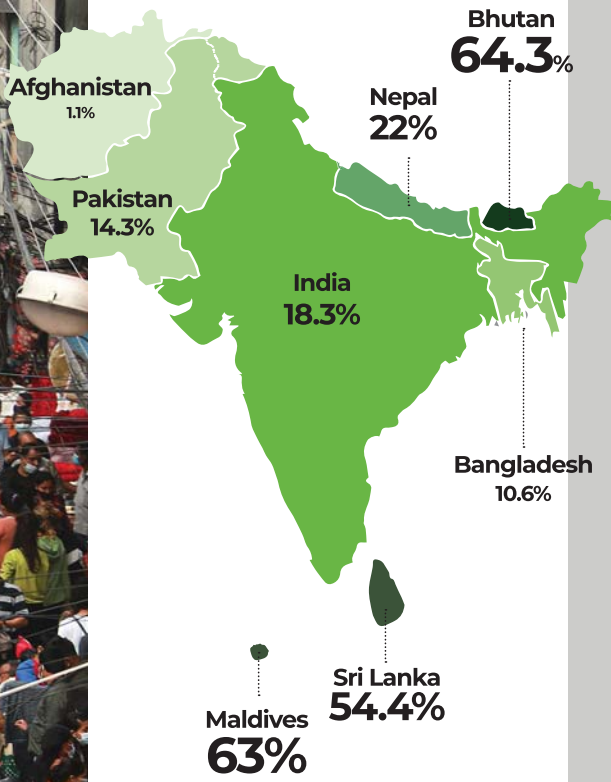
Ncell for senior citizens

Ncell has launched a free SIM scheme with bundled offers for senior citizens. Nepalis above 60 can subscribe to Ncell SIM for free and receive bonuses, such as 100MB data and 100MB on-net SMS, for up to six months in every recharge of Rs50 and more.



AMIT MACHAMASI

Vaccine coverage
in South Asia
(fully inoculated)



we are not careful we will be jeopardising the health of our children and parents,” says Sherpa, who works with IPAS Nepal.

Experts have now shifted their focus to the post Dasain-Tihar festival season, and upcoming winter months when coronaviruses thrive. Children, elderly, people with co-morbidities, and immune-compromised individuals are at the higher risk.

Says Raju Pangeni: “Our priority now must be to vaccinate children across Nepal after the holidays. At the same time, we must also promote influenza vaccines in order to avoid the double whammy of Covid and flu.”

QR coded vaccine
certificates in queue

Digital vaccine certificates were supposed to help control the pandemic if properly implemented with the vaccination drive gaining pace. But the government’s designated website for QR vaccine certificates crashed before it even took off.

Due to the high demand for the QR coded certificates, the system was overloaded this week, leading applicants confused about the next steps, especially as the cell phone number listed for further information has been unreachable indefinitely. The Covid-19 hotline operators were also unsure about who to reach out to.

The site seems to be fixed now, but its form is onerous and requires scanned citizenship certificate and vaccine card, even a finger-printed affidavit. If unable to apply online, applicants can visit the National Ayurveda Research and Training Centre in Kirtipur with necessary documents for in-person application.

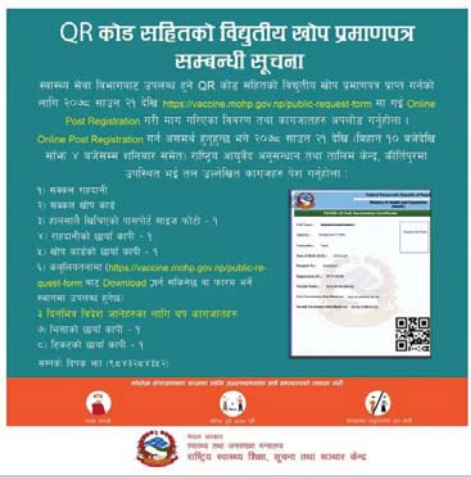
Required documents include original and a photocopy of passport, original and photocopy of vaccination card, a recent passport sized photo, and an application form available at the centre.

Vaccine coverage worldwide now averages at 34.5% for the fully inoculated, even as the uptake between rich and poor countries differs vastly. And digital vaccine certificates have become the new passports for international travel.

Nepal started issuing QR coded vaccine certification because migrant workers queued up all night and day back in July for just rubber-stamped papers to certify that they have been vaccinated. But the letter did not have a digitally-registered QR code, and hence risked being invalid in destination countries.

The Health Ministry then set up an online application with photo, ID, vaccination card and a self-declaration form for a scannable digital vaccine certificate accessible with encrypted link and QR code acceptable internationally.

WHO Nepal provided technical assistance including training, design and development of the ministry’s software system and IT equipment, and electronic vaccination registration system.



now leaving for their hometowns, and market places are crowded. Parties, meetings and seminars are being held in enclosed spaces, and unvaccinated students are packed into classes for lessons before the holidays begin.

During Dasain, children and the elderly are at the most risk of infection. While children are entirely unvaccinated,

senior citizens even if fully inoculated have weaker antibody responses. This means the mobile younger population that have been vaccinated and hence are asymptomatic even if infected pose severe risks to the vulnerable groups.

“We must perform our rituals this Dasain keeping in mind the consequences of our actions, if

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Nepal's singing nun is a hit in China



Ani Choying Drolma's popularity soars after Asian concerts

● Ashish Dhakal

After taking Nepal by storm with her popular songs and chants, Ani Choying Drolma is now a hit also in Tibet, the land of her ancestors.

Not just Tibet, but her melodious mantra are also loved by tens of millions in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and southeast Asia.

Following a concert in Lhasa before the pandemic, Ani Choying Drolma had just returned to her hotel room when she was visited by a group of monks who had become fans.

"They told me that they thought I was just a good singer, but after my concert they said they believed I was also a seeker," Ani Choying says in a recent article in *Himal Khabar* magazine.

Ani Choying Drolma is a household name in the Nepali-speaking world because of her breakthrough song "कुलको आँखामा" which has got over 2 million views on YouTube. Her soothing voice and uplifting lyrics have amassed a dedicated fan base in Nepal and abroad.

Her Buddhist mantra chants also have a wide crossborder fan base, especially in China

where there is a growing spiritual revival. A well known Chinese singer is quoted in the media as saying: "Before I listened to Ani, I used to think I was among the number-one singers in China."

There are many such stories, and each is as humbling for Ani Choying as it is inspiring. Tân Dùn, the Academy Award-winning composer of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, asked her to perform for him last year. Unfortunately, the concert could not be held because of the pandemic in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong holds a special place in her heart because she opened a concert marking the British handover of the territory to China at the Asia-World Arena in 1997. She sang the main Awalokiteswar mantra to an audience of 14,000.

"I have performed in Hong Kong many times, but it was that concert that made the biggest impact on my career," Ani Choying says.

Even when Chinese tourists visit Nepal, they sometimes visit her nunnery in Pharping, buy her CDs in Thamel, ask about her concerts, or sometimes recognise her on the streets and take selfies.

"Once I was in Baudha when I saw a person running towards me, and he asked to

take a picture," Ani Choying recalls. "The man said he was an actor back home and asked me if I knew that I was very famous in China."

They exchanged WeChat contacts, and she later found out that he was none other than Chen Kun, the famous Chinese actor from *The Knot and Love Story in Shanghai*.

Ani Choying credits this affection and admiration in China to her many guru. Fans flock to her after concerts to thank her for the courage and hope that her songs provide them. Once at the Jumeirah Himalayas Hotel in Shanghai, the owner of the hotel recounted how Ani Choying's songs helped her through labour pains during the birth of her first child. When she heard the music, she felt so relieved as though the pain had vanished by half.

Ani Choying's music has boundless reach, can hold many meanings to many people, but most of her devout followers say it calms their minds, soothes their souls.

A Taiwanese singer recently approached her manager asking for permission to rearrange and perform one of her Buddhist mantra. Her reply: "It is a holy chant, anyone can sing and get solace from it."

In Nepal, Germany, or China, compassion

has no borders, and that is the underlying message in all her songs which are delivered in concert halls where there is complete silence. These are mostly traditional Buddhist chants and mantra. But her Nepali songs mostly have lyrics by Durga Lal Shrestha and music by Nhyu Bajracharya, and have been consistently popular because they are based on Buddhist teachings.

Ani Choying's Tibetan roots means that she has to keep a low profile while performing in China, and she labels herself as a 'Himalayan Buddhist from Nepal' and renders her spiritual songs of compassion.

She thinks the reason for her popularity in China is that with the country's meteoric economic rise, more and more people there are yearning also for spiritual upliftment that her songs help provide.

She says: "Nepali artisans like Arniko are renowned in China for their craft, and I am just carrying on that tradition with my music." 🇳🇵

 nepalitimes.com

Watch Ani Choying Drolma perform Buddhist mantra chants in a concert in China on YouTube.



Nepal's Soft Power
Himal Khabarpatrika
Dasain Special on 8 October

हिमाल खबरपत्रिका

दर्शन साहित्य विशेष

साथमा
'नेपालको सौम्य शक्ति' संकथन



ग्राहक सेवा:
नारायण पोखरेल
९८४१४७६७२०

Nepal's 'missing girls'

For every 106 boys born in Nepal, there are only 100 girls because of sex-selective abortion

● Anita Bhetwal

The spread of ultrasound clinics to detect the sex of babies is leading to a slaughter of daughters in Nepal, sharply skewing the country's gender balance.

A recent survey has shown that 77% of expecting mothers undergo ultrasound scans, and 12% abort their babies after identifying their gender.

For every 106 boys born, there are only 100 girls, and 12 of Nepal's 77 districts are already reporting a widening gender gap. Nepal's national census next month is expected to reveal the true number of 'missing girls' in its total population.

The study conducted by the Center for Research on Environment, Health and Population Activities (CREHPA) shows that deep-rooted patriarchal values and preference for a boy over a girl child is entrenched in Nepali society. "Nepal easily tops the list of Asian countries that prefer a son to a daughter, and the crime of sex-selective abortion continues unabated," says Bandana Rana of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Despite prevailing laws, sex-selective abortion in Nepal is increasing, experts told a



KATE HOLT/IRIN

'Gender-Biased Sex Selection' workshop organised by the Sancharika Samuha media group in Kathmandu last week.

Sex-selective abortion is illegal in both Nepal and India, but the practice continues in both countries where sons inherit ancestral property and daughters are not considered worth the investment.

Even if there is no clear preference in the first pregnancy, 44% of women in the CREPHA survey said that they would want a son the second time they are pregnant, and only 28% said they

would like a daughter.

Their reasons included persecution and hostility from husbands and in-laws for giving birth to a daughter, lack of control over their body, the economic dependence on their husband's family, respect for having a son, among others.

The practice is more prevalent in Hindu families, Muslims in Nepal's Tarai, and among the groups practicing dowry. It is less common among Nepal's indigenous groups, where the preference for boys is less pronounced.

Many pregnant mothers are taken by in-laws to private clinics in the cities or across the border in India seeking ultrasound scans to find out the gender of their babies. Many then abort the baby if it is a girl, risking their health.

Anyone identifying the gender of a baby with an intention of committing sex-selective abortion can face three to six months in jail. Those involved in sex-selective abortion can be served with up to additional 12 months of imprisonment.

But the culprits are often not

identified or prosecuted, claims advocate Sonali Regmi, adding that society's denial of women's independent identity is the main reason for the abortions. Indeed, it is often not the mother that wants the abortion, but her husband or in-laws.

"A woman still doesn't have an identity apart from being someone's mother, wife, daughter, and sister. The biggest reflection of this is the fact that citizenship is still not issued in the name of mother," says Regmi.

Abortion was legalised in Nepal in 2002 and, as per the law, is legal up to 12 weeks of gestation, up to 18 weeks in case of rape or incest, and at any stage of the pregnancy if it poses danger to the physical or mental health of the expecting woman, or if the foetus suffers from a severe physical deformity.

Prior to this, Nepal had a strict anti-abortion law, and women seeking the service were imprisoned. The practice of relatives accusing young daughters-in-law of abortion just to put them behind bars was prevalent.

While legalisation of abortion gave an avenue for women to pursue safe services, it has also led to the proliferation of ultrasound clinics across the country allowing parents to terminate pregnancies if they are girls.

Activists estimate the number of 'missing girls' every year as high as 50,000, babies aborted after parents find out through ultrasound scans that they are girls. This did not include abortions carried out without parents knowing the gender of their babies.

Speaking at the workshop, Sancharika Group's Nitu Pandit said the media had a role in spreading the message: "We need to continue raising awareness about sex-selective abortion, and push the state for corrective measures to reduce it." 🇳🇵

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Tax breaks, the festive season, and an end to C



A combination of tax rebates, the Dasain-Tihar season, and a public fed up with being cooped for nearly two years due to Covid restrictions is driving a spurt in sales of private electric vehicles in Nepal.

Electric car importers are scrambling to meet the surge in post-pandemic and pre-festival demand, but are being held back by global supply chain disruptions due to shortages of microchips, lithium batteries, and maritime cargo capacity.

The KP Oli government in May scrapped taxes imposed last year by his own previous finance minister Yubraj Khatriwada. The coalition government of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has retained the tax breaks.

Under the new tax forumla, the excise duty on battery powered cars was withdrawn, and the customs duty was restored to the 10% that had been in place for the past five years. The tax cuts in 2016 had made electric cars more affordable, and led to a spike in demand. Electric car imports fell to nearly zero after the taxes were reimposed by Khatriwada in May 2020.

The Dasain-Tihar festive season is when Nepalis usually splurge on consumer items, and there is usually a rise in purchases of vehicles as well. This year, the tax rebate has made electric compacts, SUVs, and two-wheelers more competitive compared to fossil fuel vehicles.

Improvement in technology has increased the range and performance of eVs, and the fall in price for batteries has made them more affordable. Till five years ago, battery-powered cars in Nepal had less than 100km range. Today the new models can go up to 500km – enough for a Kathmandu-Pokhara roundtrip on a single charge.

Electric car importers also report a rise in customer demand, a surge in queries from people who are tired of being locked down for nearly two years, and want to be out and about – and that means being able to drive to Biratnagar or Bhairawa and beyond on the new e-SUVs without stopping to recharge.

Brands that have a head start with battery power in

Nepal are Hyundai, Kia, Mahindra, MG, TATA, and a plethora of Chinese brands like BYD, Great Wall Motors, Dahe, and Derry.

Besides range, potential buyers in Nepal will be looking at ruggedness, interior space, and ground clearance. While some of the fancier SUVs are attractive to look at and have a rocket-like takeoff, it may be more important in Nepal to see that the cars have more



Electric bicycles in Nepal terrain

A new range of electric bicycles are here. And they are suited for Nepal's ups and downs.

● Shristi Karki

Even as importers try to meet increased demand for electric cars following the reinstated tax rebates on battery-operated vehicles, electric two-wheelers remain relatively on the sidelines.

Now, here come electric bicycles which purists have problems with, but are catching on despite the steep price tag.

In 2018, Nepal's oldest bicycle shop Pancha Asta Narayan Cycle (Panc) began to roll out Electric Conversion Kits (ECKs) that turn regular bicycles into e-bikes. Now the shop is also importing battery powered bicycles.

This year, Kuzu Nepal, the distributor of the Chinese electric vehicle company Yadea's two-wheelers, introduced four of its all-terrain electric mountain bicycles in Nepal: the Yadea SS1000, SS800, YS500, and YT500.



AMIT MACHAMASI

Yadea Nepal's customer base has grown steadily since then. It has sold 30 electric bicycles in recent months. Interestingly, the higher-end SS1000 and SS800 are bestsellers, says Ritesh Shrestha of Yadea Nepal. Most customers are avid Kathmandu-based long-distance cyclists, doctors, and expats.

However, the company recognises that the reach of e-bikes is limited and that they may not be for everyday Nepali users.

"Our customer base is largely people who know their bicycles, and people over age 35 who want a less taxing mode of a healthier lifestyle," says Shrestha.

He recalls some recent feedback from a young client who purchased an e-bike recently, but his father has been using it to commute to and from work:

"The Dad told us that despite not being in top form, the rides are not stressful or tiresome, and his commute is helping him to exercise."

The primary objective of an electric bicycle is to enable a healthy way of travelling and enhance one's performance. Cyclists need not exert nearly as much energy pedalling, and can ride further without taxing their bodies.

Among the four all-terrain e-bikes, the Yadea SS1000 and SS800 mountain bikes are for Nepal's off-roads, while the YS500 and YT500 models are more suited to urban and city roads. The high-end Yadea SS1000 is the most expensive at Rs430,000, while the two city bikes are priced at Rs250,000 each.

Yadea e-bikes use a Samsung lithium-ion battery attached to the down tube of the bicycle frame, which takes four-and-a-half hours to fully charge for the SS1000 and SS800 bicycles, while the YS500 and YT500 models take six-and-a-half hours to charge fully.

The bicycles are equipped with the company's independently developed 350W Fusion mid-motor located near the bicycle's bottom bracket, which

provides a maximum torque of 85NM.

The controls of the bike, which allow the rider to manage the motor input according to levels, are on the left handlebar, with a display monitor at the front. The bikes have 11 gears that can be changed using a tab along the right handlebar.

Nearly 80% of all registered vehicles in Nepal are privately owned two-wheelers, most of them polluting fossil fuel guzzlers, and contribute 8% to total emissions from transportation.

And while battery-powered electric scooters and motorcycles significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, some point to the "redundancy" of e-bikes, as bicycles require no fossil fuel to begin with.

"Electric bicycles, and electric two-wheelers in general, haven't made an impact in Nepal like electric four-wheelers," says Lokesh Oli of Olizstore, who has tested and reviewed several electric vehicles, including Yadea's SS1000 e-bike, and posted videos on YouTube.

The expensive price tag is a drag. Many viewers commented on Oli's review of the Yadea SS1000 that they would rather buy new motorcycles than spend so much on electric bicycles.

Other companies that promote e-bikes in Nepal agree with the public consensus and sell the bicycles without much exposure or promotion.

"Considering the costs as well as exposure,

BYD

BYD e6

5,750,000

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Nexon EV

3,599,000

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Partner Tepee

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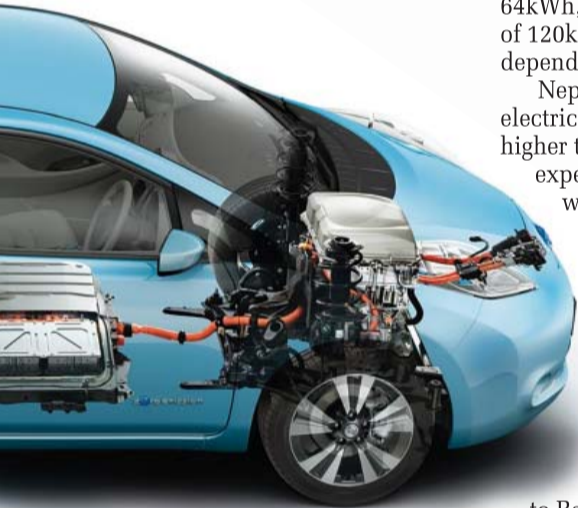
and ready to go

Covid restrictions lift sales of electric vehicles

than 180mm ground clearance – otherwise you will be scraping your expensive bottom on road craters. Much more critical than a formidable acceleration of 0-60km in 4.6 seconds is also charging time and battery life. Most lithium-ion batteries have an 8-year warranty these days, and need 1 hour to recharge 80% with DC fast charge. Charging at home with a 15amp wall plug should not take more

than 8 hours. Despite everything, the electric car’s main attraction with the tax rebate is the money you save on fuel. An average diesel SUV needs Rs5,500 to fill its 40l fuel tank, but an electric version of the same vehicle will cost less than Rs500 for a complete charge for a 350km range. Multiply this by the volume of diesel you burn in an average month, and the savings add up. The electric vehicles in the market now come with battery packs ranging from 20kWh to 64kWh, giving them ranges of 120km to nearly 500km – depending, of course, on AC use. Nepalis did not take on to electric cars till now because higher taxes made them more expensive than a diesel vehicle with similar specs, but now there is no excuse. The upfront cost of electric and diesel vehicles are about the same, and energy savings make eVs more competitive. The other reason eVs had become popular was that owners paid zero in road tax, saving up to Rs35,000 a year. However,

this year’s budget has retained the road tax announced by Khatiwada last year: Rs15,000 per year for battery cars in the 50-125kW range, Rs20,000 for e-vehicles of 126-225kW, and Rs30,000 for cars in the 226-and above range. Fair enough, private vehicles are a luxury in this country. However, after taking one step forward on electric cars in this year’s budget, Finance Minister Janardan Sharma has taken two steps back. Despite the pledge to switch to renewable energy for transport, last month he slashed taxes on the import of 10 or more diesel buses by new luxury hotels to 1%. That move appears to be designed specifically to suit certain business interests. Then it cut by half the duty on petrol motorcycle assembly in Nepal, completely contradicting its policy on pushing electric transport. Nepal has announced it will stop selling fossil fuel cars by 2031. And this sounds like a bold move, until you realise that India and China (from where most of our cars and two-wheelers are imported) will be switching fully to battery or hydrogen powered vehicles by 2030, anyway. 🇳🇵



e-2 wheelers

e-bikes in Nepal, whether they be for the daily commute or more long-distance off-road travel, are currently for hobbyists,” he adds. However, Oli, who grew up cycling to and from school and around his village, as well as for a few years after he relocated to Kathmandu, is optimistic about the future of battery-operated bicycles. “This is true specially as bicycles remain the primary mode of transport for much of Nepal’s population outside the Valley,” he adds. People across Nepal own bicycles for travel and business, and access to e-bikes would reduce their effort as well as make them more efficient. 🇳🇵



Electric motorbikes and scooters have now become a part of life for people in Kathmandu, but there is a new electric mountain bicycle in the town. Join us on a test drive to see the difference from a regular bike or electric two-wheelers. Subscribe to our YouTube channel.

There are 1 million two-wheelers in Kathmandu Valley, and they make up 79% of Nepal’s total vehicle fleet. Of the total two wheelers operating across the country, only 6,000 are electric. In addition, there are nearly 15,000 motorcycle taxis (essentially three-wheelers) operating in the Tarai. Although the contribution of motorcycles and scooters to overall greenhouse gas missions from the transport sector is only 8%, two-wheelers are a public health hazard because of their emissions of deadly carbon monoxide and other toxic gases. If Nepal is to clean up its air and reduce petroleum imports, the lowest hanging fruit is the electrification of two-wheelers. China has already stopped producing petrol two-wheelers, and India is expected to follow suit. Nepal is going against its own Nationally Determined Commitment (NDC) to lower carbon emission by allowing a new assembly plant for two-wheelers and giving it a tax break (*see main story, above*). Battery powered 2-wheelers till now lacked suitable models, and the affordability of existing petrol scooters. “Most Nepalis own two-wheelers, and use them for long distances with heavy loads on Nepal’s dangerous roads,” says Lokesh Oli, who reviews electric vehicles on his YouTube channel. “The limited range and cost of electric two wheelers and the lack of charging stations made them less suitable.”



Pure EV India’s e-scooter brand Pure EV partnered with White Lotus distributors in 2020 to launch its EPluto7G and ETrance NEO battery operated two-wheelers in Nepal. Both the models have a 2.5kWh lithium-ion battery that will be fully charged in 4 hours, following which the scooters will run for 90-120km. The 2.5kWh batteries come with a five-year warranty. The e-scooters are priced between Rs229,000-Rs249,000.

Yatri Project 1 In 2019, the Nepali company Yatri headed by Ashim Pandey introduced its high-end Project Zero battery-powered motorbike, the first of its kind designed and assembled in Nepal. This April, Yatri launched its second electric motorcycle Project One. It has a lithium ion-manganese oxide battery which fully charges in 3 hours and then will run for 110km. The batteries have a capacity of 3.0 kW. Project One, priced at Rs500,000, is more affordable than Project Zero.



NIU Chinese company NIU was the first to introduce e-scooters in Nepal. Its latest GOVA G3 is equipped with a 2,700W BOSCH Motor and a 48V lithium-ion battery that fully charges in 5 hours to give it a range of up to 90km. The GOVA G3 is priced at Rs255,000. Other NIU e-scooters available in Nepal include the NQi, MQi, and the UQim series.

EVENTS

Art Festival

Museum of Nepali Art has partnered with Turkish Airlines for a mega art festival where thirty-three Nepali artists will come together for a day-long “live art congregation” to promote Nepal as an art destination and support children battling cancer.

7-9 October, Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel

Dasain Bazaar

Support local artisans this summer and shop beautiful handmade crafts at the Dasain Bazaar organised by Mithila House.

9 October, 12pm-5pm, Oskar Bar and Grill

Fulpati

On Fulpati, dedicated to Kalratri, the seventh form of Goddess Durga, holy kalash, banana stalks, jamara, and sugar cane are brought to Hanuman Dhoka from Gorkha.

12 October, Tundikhel

Maha Ashtami

Animals including buffaloes, goats, roosters, and ducks are sacrificed to appease Goddess Kali on the eighth day of Dasain. Newa communities also celebrate ‘Khadga Puja’ on this day to worship their weapons.

13 October, Basantapur Darbar Square



Maha Nawami

On the ninth day, people worship Vishwakarma, the God of creation. An offering of animal and fowl blood is made to vehicles, tools, and equipment for safety and well-being. Official military ritual sacrifices take place under gunfire salute at the Kot courtyard.

14 October, Taleju Mandir, Hanuman Dhoka

Dashami

From the tenth day until the purnima, families receive tika, jamara and blessings from elders in celebration of Goddess Durga’s victory over the Demon Mahisasur, and Lord Ram’s victory over the Demon Ravan.

15 October

MUSIC



Sugam Pokharel Live

Catch performances by musician Sugam Pokharel and The Baja Gaja Band at the London Pub. Call for bookings.

8 October (01) 4220256

Voodoo U Live

Voodoo U will perform live as part of Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory and Moksh’s live music sessions that will feature some of KJC’s Higher Diploma graduates.

Fridays, Moksh, Jhamsikhel (01) 5428362

Dasain Music Week

Join Nepali musicians for a music-filled week this Dasain at Beers N’ Cheers. Check out their Facebook to get details about tickets.

Until 10 October, Beers N’ Cheers, (01) 5524860

Music Workshop

Take vocal classes, as well as workshops in piano, classical guitar, and violin at Sushila Arts Academy. Go on to Facebook for details, or call to register.

Sushila Arts Academy, 9860588626



Rohit John Chhetri

Don’t miss an evening with Rohit John Chhetri and Abhishek Bhadra as they perform during this week’s ‘Feel Good Fridays’ at Three by Four Cafe.

8 October, 7pm, Three by Four, Sanepa, 9803158145

GETAWAY

Hotel Annapurna View

Situated at 1,600m atop Sarangkot, this boutique hotel offers breathtaking views of the snow-capped mountains and Phewa Lake. Look up the Family Holiday Package for this Dasain.

Sarangkot (01) 506000



The Terraces Lakhuri

Perched on a high ridge below Pulchoki at 2,200m and located just an hour’s drive from Kathmandu airport, the Terraces fuses international sensibilities with the best of what Nepal has to offer: a sprawling vista of the Central Himalaya with the Valley below.

Lakhuri Bhanjyang, 9813252888

The Old Inn

The bed and breakfast place offers a cozy getaway with a scenic view of Annapurna, Langtang and beyond. With its traditional Newa architecture, the timber and brick design is reminiscent of old Newa houses.

Bandipur, (01) 4422617



Everest View Hotel

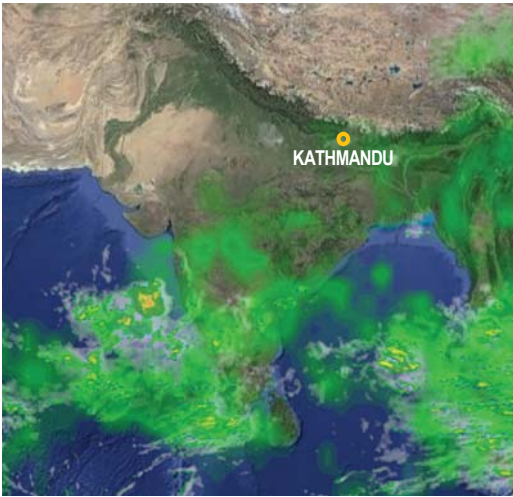
Rooms in this historic hotel offer a 360-degree view of Mt Everest, Lhotse, Ama Dablam, Thamserku, Kongde and Khumbila. Get more information online about the ‘Get Close To Everest’ 4 nights/5 days package and the ‘Everest Wanderlust’ 4 days/3 nights package this Dasain.

Syangboche (01) 5412142

Lake View

Escape to the cosy wooden huts of Lake View Resort, one of Lakeside’s oldest establishments. The resort features traditional, rustic designs with modern accents.

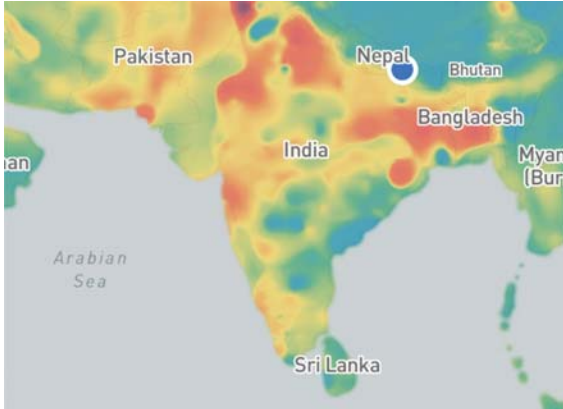
Lake Side, Pokhara (061) 461477



The monsoon is now technically over, and the wind is blowing again from the west, as it will till next June. However, because there is still so much transpiration moisture and residual water vapour is being lifted up the mountains, these will keep sending down brief, sharp showers towards evening and night into Friday and the weekend. Eastern Nepal may see heavier downpours with snow coming down to 4,000m. Kathmandu Valley will see misty mornings leading to partly sunny days with cloud buildup towards afternoon. Minimum temperature is down to 16 degrees.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 17°	27° 16°	27° 17°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



As this Air Quality Index map of South Asia on Thursday morning shows, the air is getting dirty again right across the Indo-Gangetic plains. Economic activity is picking up after the lockdowns, there is more traffic and industrial pollution. Some farmers on both sides of Punjab are also starting to burn their paddy and maize harvest residue to prepare fields for winter wheat. Bad news for us in Nepal is that the westerlies will waft this pollution in our direction.

OUR PICK



Set on the Italian Riviera, Enrico Casarosa’s debut feature-length 2021 animated film *Luca* centers on the eponymous Luca Paguro, a young sea monster with the ability to assume human form while on land. Luca longs to visit the surface but is forbidden for fears that humans might hunt him. But one summer, Luca meets Alberto Scorfano, a free-spirited young sea monster. Quickly best friends, the two explore the Italian town of Portorosso, experiencing a life-changing adventure. Stars Jacob Tremblay, Jack Dylan Grazer and Emma Berman, with Maya Rudolph, Jim Gaffigan, and more.

DINING



Achaar Ghar

Enjoy home-cooked meals along with various choices of pickles prepared using recipes passed down from generations. Try the lunch box or the khaja set.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5541952

The Workshop Eatery

Choose from The Workshop Eatery’s selection of yummy doughnuts and bagels. Try the burrito bowl and Workshop BBQ chicken sandwich, or get the assorted box of doughnuts this Dasain.

Kupondole, 9860431504



Marriott Hamper

Send carefully crafted Dashain hampers from Kathmandu Marriott Hotel as gifts to family this Dasain. Call for details.

Kathmandu Marriott Hotel, 9801971643



OR2K

Dive in and lap up the refreshing Matbucha or roll along with the falafel grenade from this exquisite Turkish restaurant. The beaten copper bowls at OR2K will take every visitor’s palate on a flight to the middle-east.

Thamel (01) 4422097

Cafe de Tukche

Make Dasain lunches special, and get authentic Thakali food delivered from Cafe de Tukche. Order the Thakali Khana set, or take a break from rice and try the Thakali Dhedo set instead.

Lazimpat, 9828937500

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त्यसैले कोरोना लाग्ने नदिन

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Restoring a piece of Patan's history

Destroyed in the 1934 earthquake, the Bhaidega Temple in Patan was being rebuilt when the 2015 disaster struck

● Sahina Shrestha

When an 8.3 magnitude earthquake hit Kathmandu in 1934, a three-storey temple in Patan collapsed. Eighty-two years later, just as work had officially started to rebuild it, the 2015 earthquake hit central Nepal.

The Bhaidega temple dedicated to Lord Shiva was built more than 350 years ago, but after it was destroyed in 1934, it was rebuilt with a much smaller Moghul style stucco dome. Two months after work began in February 2015 to rebuild it in the original style, the earthquake destroyed much of Patan Darbar Square.

The 2015 quake killed nearly 10,000 people, and many of the temple, monuments, and homes of Kathmandu Valley's historic towns were destroyed. For the following two years, as priorities shifted, the reconstruction of Bhaidega was suspended so that the other temples could be restored first.

"When the earthquake struck, the focus and priorities changed. There was an urgent need to rebuild the temples and monuments brought down by the earthquake," recalls Rohit Ranjitkar of Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT), which was leading the restoration of the temple. "So, Bhaidega took a back seat."

Six years after the 2015 quake, while the temples around it have come out of their scaffolding, the work on the Bhaidega is stalled because money has run out.

The timeline for the reconstruction of Bhaidega is proof that restoration of quake-damaged monuments take a long time in Nepal and tend to overlap each other.

But earthquakes in Nepal also provide an opportunity to rediscover traditional seismic resistant construction methods, so they can be built back better, and revive ancient craftsmanship.

What sets Bhaidega apart is that unlike the other temples of the Patan Darbar which were built by the Malla kings, it was put up by a commoner, Bharo Bhagirath Bhaiya in 1678. Historians believe Bhagirath Bhaiya was probably the first person in the Subcontinent to dedicate a temple to Vishweshwar after the desecration of the original shrine in Banaras nine years earlier.

The Kashi Vishwanath temple in Banaras was destroyed on orders of Moghul emperor Aurangzeb in 1669. Ironically, after the 1934 earthquake, Bhaidega was rebuilt in the Moghul stucco dome architectural style that the rulers of Nepal copied.

"In the past, people did not really have a concept of conservation. The priority was to have a roof over the idol of the deity," says Ranjitkar. "So, they rebuilt it anyhow, but it was important to rebuild in the original form."

Restoration work actually had begun as early as 2011 when well-wishers, conservation architects, historians, and community activists started to collect photos of Bhaidega taken eighty years before and traced to the collection of Felix Brandt in Germany. The photos show only partial facets of the original Bhaidega but was vital in estimating the size and outline of the temple.

Detailed watercolour of the woodwork of the first-floor struts, cornices, and pillars made by Henry Ambrose Oldfield in 1853



HERITAGE
LIVE!



The three-storey Bhaidega shrine (in scaffolding) is now being reconstructed in the original design.

AMIT MACHAMASI



Photograph of the old Patan courthouse with the pre-1934 Bhaidega.



The same view with Bhaidega rebuilt in the Moghul stucco dome style in the 1990s.



Restoration work on Bhaidega in 2021.

AMIT MACHAMASI

were discovered in the British Museum. More importantly, carved wooden struts 4m tall, subsidiary struts, and pillars of the temple were discovered in the Patan Museum storeroom.

All these provided clues for the reconstruction and designs for the missing wood carvings. With additional research, architects could then draw up sketches of what the restored temple would look like.

"When you look at the photos that are available, you can see that the carvings in Bhaidega are one of the best in the city, if not the country," says Indra Prasad Shilpakar, one of the master carvers working on the temple. "It showed us that we were on the right track, and it makes us proud that we are helping revive a part of Nepali art and history that was almost forgotten."

Rebuilding slowed after the 2015 earthquake because other temples

were also destroyed or damaged, but the interruption was also an opportunity to build back better.

"The earthquake gave us a chance to look at the foundation of Bhaidega which would not have happened if the earthquake had not hit," says Ranjitkar.

The plan was to rebuild on the original plinth, but upon inspection the team found that the foundation of the temple was weaker than what they had anticipated. Not only was it shallower but some of the stones used were round.

"Rounded uncarved stones move around easily and are not structurally safe. This meant that we had to spend a lot of time and money to reinforce the foundation and make it stronger," explains Ranjitkar.

After 2015, funds and expertise were diverted to other monuments in the Valley as the country went into an emergency response mode. On the heritage front, Nepal faced a crisis of skilled artisans to rebuild and restore collapsed and damaged



The Bhaidega temple is being rebuilt in this original pre-1934 design (above).

It had been rebuilt after 1934 (below) in this inappropriate Moghul style with a stucco dome.



Who was Bhagirath Bhaiya?

Bhagirath Bhaiya was a commoner who served as prime minister of the kingdom of Patan for 16 years during the reign of King Srinivas Malla. Known for his philanthropy, he was a reputed military commander and fought in battles in Makwanpur and elsewhere.

He donated much land, upgraded the town's facilities, and repaired temples in Patan and Pharping. In 1678, he built the Bhaidega temple replicating a Shiva lingam at the Kashi Vishwanath in Banaras which was destroyed nine years earlier.

For the inauguration of the temple, he also built the pavilion of Lampati that still stands today across the street south of Bhaidega. It was from here that invited Kings and nobility watched the consecration of the temple. The guests included the royalty of Patan, King Jitmitra of Bhaktapur and his brother Ugra Malla, King Nripendra Malla of Kathmandu and his brothers Mahipatindra and Parthivendra. Even the king of Tanahu, Bhaiya Rudra Sen was invited.

King Srinivas held Bhagirath Bhaiya in great esteem, and this is evident in an inscription dating 1674 at Matsyendranath Temple, where he asks the public 'to make no distinction between him and me'.

But the elevation of Bhagirath Bhaiya did not sit well with some members of the nobility, especially Yoganarendra Malla who was envious of the former. Having consolidated power in the court, they stripped him of his position in 1685. There are written records that Bhagirath Bhaiya was 'dragged all the way from his residence (to the palace)'.

A year later, King Yoganarendra Malla usurped power from his father, and had Bhagirath Bhaiya killed.

and monuments destroyed in 2015, Bhaidega was not a priority for donors and the government.

"We approached the government for timber at the official rate, but the Forest Ministry did not even grant us that," says Prithvi Pande, who is the chair of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Group, a citizen's group. "The government talks about importance of heritage and tourism but can't even provide wood to rebuild our temples."

A big part of the rebuilding cost has been borne by Pande and his colleagues. Before the earthquake, the Norwegian Embassy contributed to the shortfall in the initial cost estimate. After the earthquake, other private citizens and the Lalitpur Municipality also supported the cause. But funds have now dried up, while prices have skyrocketed.

Ranjitkar of KVPT says the work on restoration has slowed, and there is a budget shortfall of more than Rs30 million.

To ensure that the restoration makes up for lost time, the KVPT team worked through the pandemic, following safety protocols. Only the first floor has so far been completed and work is ongoing on the second tier.

Most of the wood carving work for the doors, windows, columns, including the lower cornices have been completed.

Says Ranjitkar, "If we get the required amount, we can finish rebuilding in 10-12 months. But it is going to get more expensive the longer it takes." 🇳🇵

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I.M.A.G.I.N.A.T.I.O.N by Uttam Nepali

“I am not who you think I am, I am not who I think I am, I am who I think you think I am.”
– Charles Horton Cooley

In a society where we spiritualise the tangible through our imagination and creativity, we also turn into tangible art forms our spiritual experiences.

Traditional devotional art uses various imaginative forms to represent a thought or emotion: compassion, impermanence,



FOR ART'S SAKE
Rajan Sakya

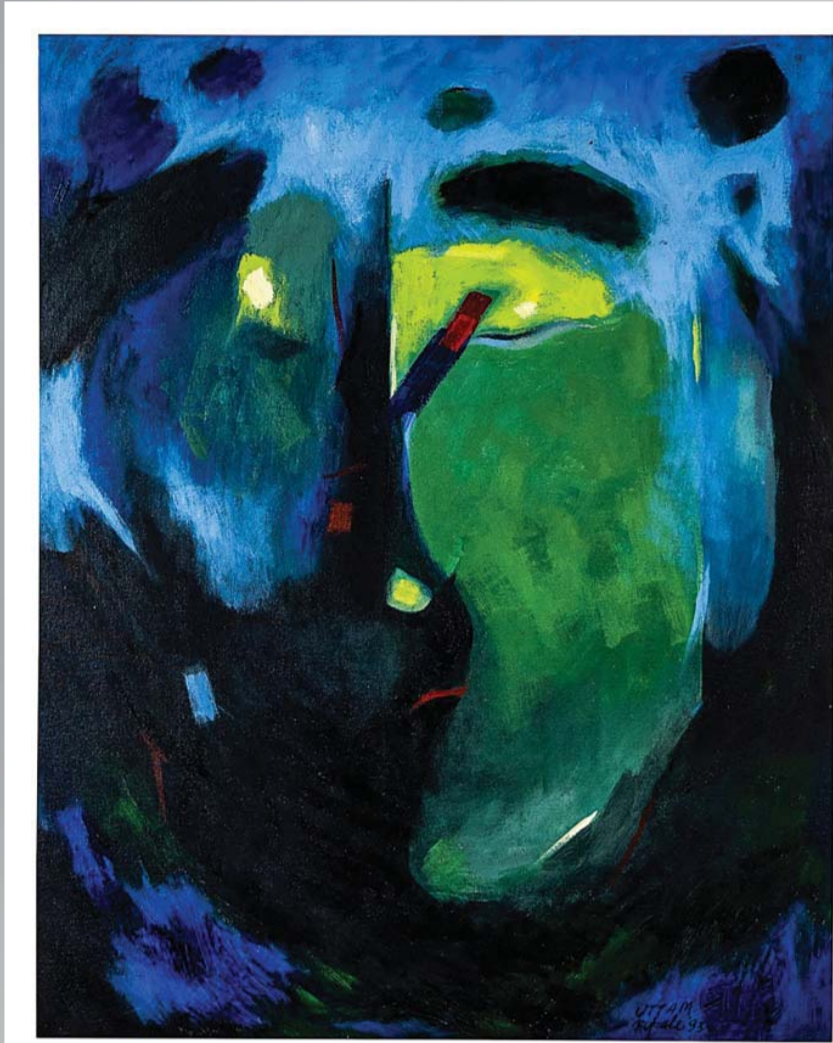
detachment. To this day we echo the artists who thousands of years ago translated mudra, objects, and nature into iconography.

The very form of everyday devotion and ritual in our culture and religion is an abstraction of our imagination for practical, tangible, and visual purposes – most vividly in stones and rocks.

For example, an oval rock, when powdered with red *tika*, turns into a Ganesh. An oblong stone becomes a Shiva linga just by having milk sprinkled on it. Any roadside rock when smeared with vermilion and covered in flowers is revered as a deity. We dare not pass these totems without bowing our heads as a manifestation of unshakeable faith.

This is because in those objects we see what is *not* there, and interpret it according to what we want, imagine, and believe.

Abstract art, on the other hand, is a purposeful collision of an artist's conscious and subconscious minds to give instinctual expression. The subconscious mind is best understood as a recollection of actions and experiences, which the contemporary abstract artist piques when crafting and contemplating a masterpiece.



Such is the case of Uttam Nepali's I.M.A.G.I.N.A.T.I.O.N. which brings out untainted, unbiased, and unsolicited inquisitiveness in all of us. Staring in-depth into this painting screams out the purity of childlike innocence. The conscious and the subconscious instincts are unleashed, evoking a time when right and wrong were not determined by rigid rules, but through love and affection.

Uttam Nepali merged art and poetry into a kind of original expressionism not seen before in Nepal. The artist died on 21 July 2021 in a Kathmandu hospital aged 84, and as a tribute the Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA) in Thamel

organised an individual and group viewing of his painting I.M.A.G.I.N.A.T.I.O.N.

This is what we saw and what we felt, how this work by Uttam Nepali moved, and moved us. We were very lucky to have met and interviewed the artist about this particular work before he passed away.

The acquisition of I.M.A.G.I.N.A.T.I.O.N. came out of a necessity. I did not even look at the painting and I did not ask for its price. I had been looking to acquire one of Uttam Nepali's pieces for a long time.

The only thing I knew was that I wanted his work in MoNA because a museum dedicated to Nepali artists would not be complete without Uttam Nepali in it.

The painting hung in my office wall for at least six months, and it was amazing to observe how a painting of this calibre speaks differently from different perspectives and temperaments. After all, moods and emotions dictate the emergence of different shapes and colours as a form of artistic expression.

Some days the red seemed prominent, other days it was the blue that provoked, and strokes of white suddenly made sense. When I am alone, I see something but when looking at the painting in a group, something else emerges. It feels like a different painting every time you look at it. What an investment!

Eventually, the painting becomes a part of the viewer's personality, and adds to it. How you explain this artwork to others hints at your own depth of understanding and place in the world.

I met Uttam Nepali only a month before he passed away, and at that time I.M.A.G.I.N.A.T.I.O.N. communicated with me in an entirely new way. Here was a man who had devoted his entire life to art and Nepal's art community. His studio stacks over 300 of his paintings. Some of the artwork is as personal as his representation of his grandchildren in the womb.

Uttam Nepali rarely sold his art. Instead, he presented them to people he met and who showed interest in his work. I was trying to persuade his family to allow us to hold a solo exhibition at MoNA of his incomparable contribution to the contemporary art of Nepal.

We had only given a day's notice before visiting Uttam Nepali at his home. As we sat

down, his son Udhya told us how his father had become rather forgetful after a surgery five years ago. He was on oxygen support most of the time, and his memory was deteriorating day by day.

But when we showed him his painting that we were acquiring, there was a sudden sparkle in his eyes. He sat up and spoke nonstop for 20 minutes about when he made it, why he made it, and what feeling he had at the time. This is what he said:

“When everyone comes to a state of quietness and calm, every person shares a similar kind of impression and expression. However, they have different façades. The temptations on their faces are different. Their attitudes differ as well. Nevertheless, the emotions that they portray may be the same ... in the sense that everyone looking at the same painting will be observing the same feelings. The closeness of the visitor's expression and emotions with what is depicted in the painting will be unavoidable after a certain time.”

He added, “Abstract art depicts something that is expressed without saying a word. It shows what is hidden. It is simultaneously easy and hard to understand. Hence, the power of impression and expression is like walking upon a dark alley without the light and discovering its rare and unique idiosyncrasy. It will have the verity of essence.”

MoNA manager Jenisha Maharjan is also moved by what the painting depicts, and the emotions it evokes in her. “At first glance, one can see half a face with its eyes closed,” she says. “They express serenity and tranquillity as the subject is in a deep state of meditation. Then upon deeper reflection, the face looks like the meditating Buddha.”

“The other half of the face has a darker coat. We also see brush strokes in the middle of the canvas with a red rectangular shape towards the edges, resembling a thumb with the nail painted red, maybe a woman's hand. Could this be a modern depiction of Buddha Maar?”

Maharjan says the grip looks very powerful, yet, surprisingly, the face remains calm, peaceful, and unbothered. “A little too dramatic and explosive use of colours,” she says, “yet amazing how even closed eyes can be so expressive.”

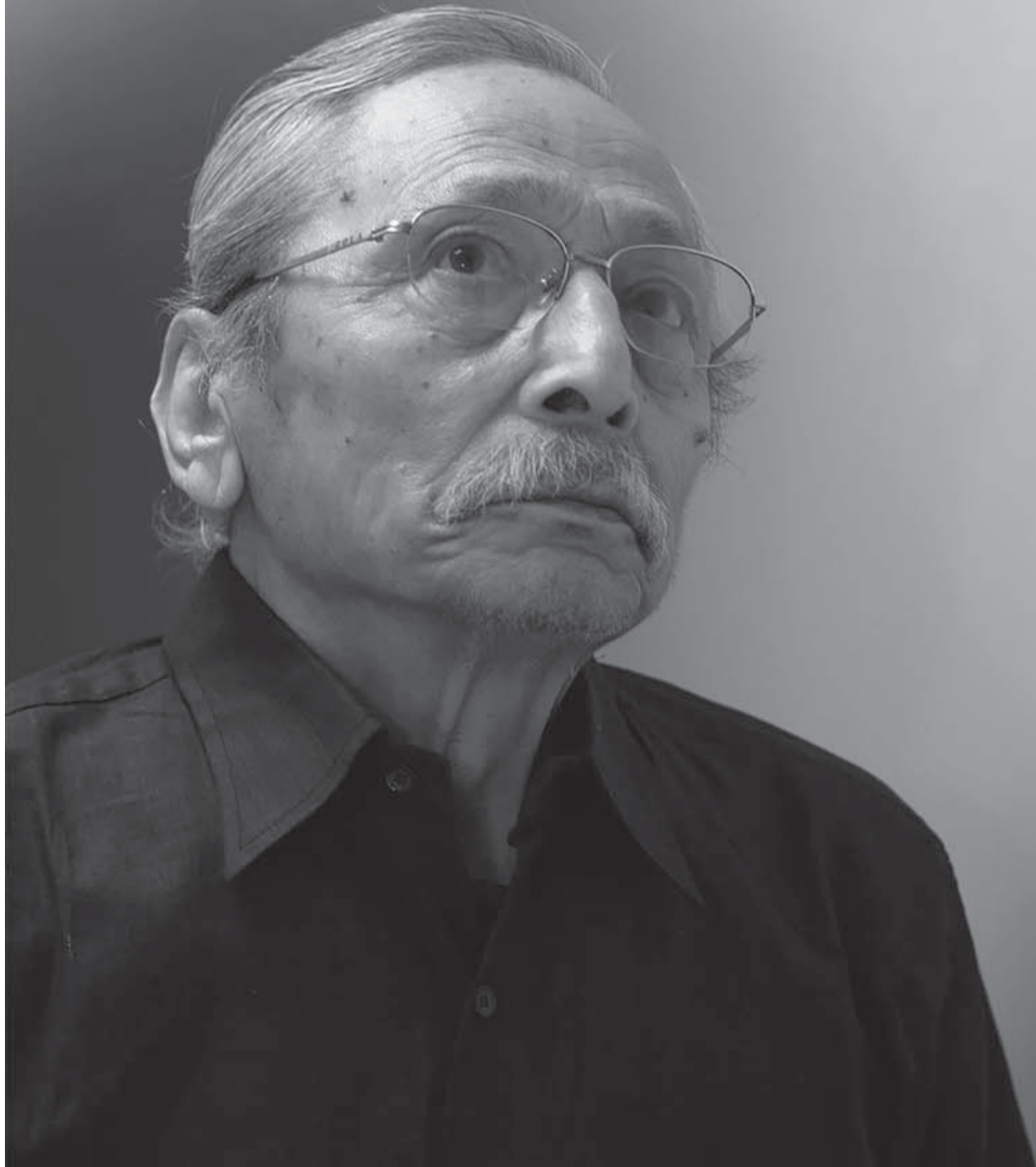
Ursula Manandhar is head of research at MoNA and says I.M.A.G.I.N.A.T.I.O.N. may actually represent what concentration, or trying to concentrate, may look like. It feels as if a person is struggling, or fighting their inner demons with brighter and more positive thoughts.

“The power of our mind and its capacity for imagination is so vast that it could be a joyous journey across, or overwhelming. Sometimes darkness overshadows the mind and at other times a bright light dispels the darkness,” Ursula Manandhar says. “The curiosity for abstract art starts in us before we even know how to speak or write. As toddlers we looked into the sky and interpreted the formation of clouds as we wanted and felt.”

But as we grow older our unique creativity is eclipsed by other people's perceptions, and what is brought in front of us. Individual creativity has been blighted by the transient mass-market visualisations and the decadence of modern-day superficiality. 🇳🇵

Rajan Sakya is the founder of the Museum of Nepali Art at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel and contributes this monthly column For Art's Sake in Nepali Times.

Turkish Airlines has partnered with Museum of Arts Nepal (MoNA) to bring 33 Nepali artists together for a day-long live art congregation at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel from 7-9 October. Visitors also have the chance to win a trip to Europe via lucky draw.



Wine and women during Yenya

Indra Jatra is improvised to allow women-only events and made way for changes in society

Here is what the image shows: her face turned towards the sky, her mouth open, catching a fountain of *thwon* (rice wine), flowing down *Hatu Dyaa's* mouth, straight into hers.



SUBURBAN TALES
Pratibha Tuladhar

Her eyes are shut, like they were caging inside them a perfect moment of desire. It is an image from a day at the Indra Jatra week, now, popularly known as a women-only night at the festival.

“How was it?” I ask her.

“It was exhilarating!” she texts back. In 2017, the *Yenya* or Indra Jatra committee set aside a day for women to drink from *Hatu Dyaa* (Swet Bhairab), an activity which in the past had not been segregated by gender, and was therefore accessible mostly to men.

“It gets quite rowdy,” my friend says. And explains she had gone prepared with a “quick dry tee and shoes and all”. She says she would love to do it again and I assure her I would join her.

Growing up in Naradevi Tole, tucked away in old Kathmandu, *Yenya* was the focal point of the year for me. In the evenings, the family would set out for a walk through the festivities.

One time, my काका raised me through a crowd of men, taking me all the way to where the wine was trickling down the mouth of Swet Bhairav. I carry a faint memory of



Women-only night at Indra Jatra festival where participants take in rice wine from Swet Bhairav's mouth as a blessing.

being scooped up from the ground and being flung under the massive face of the deity as some wine spray hit me.

As a grown-up, however, I have only experienced the ceremony from a distance. I got on a call this week with some girlfriends who had attended the event in 2019, and felt an excitement rise in my belly, looking at images of them jostling to get under the wine tap.

“I definitely want to do it again,” Anbika Giri laughed. “It was hard to push others and go all the way to the wine pipe, but I still managed. It splashed over my face, body, mouth, my hair. But I also came away with a sense of achievement.”

Bhawana Gurung, who was alongside Anbika that evening, did not exactly get to drink, but was definitely showered on as she got

shoved around in the crowd: “I came home smelling like *thwon*.”

Anbika recalls how everyone around her looked overwhelmed by the experience, despite clothes and hair that had become soaked in wine. She calls the experience a way of exercising your will, a symbol.

“I saw it as a way of choosing. To push your way through the crowd and then to compete to drink — not everyone gets to do it. But the thing is, you’re not being hindered. You’re making a choice to experience it,” says Anbika. “Fun events for Nepali women are limited. We’re told that enjoyment is not right. We internalise it. So this activity is a symbol to reverse that. Even if it was water instead of wine, people would still go. It is about claiming space.”

Coming from a Janjati community, Bhawana has

experienced more “freedom” than her friends from other communities. “I think it’s a privilege that we don’t have to observe seclusion when we’re on our periods. I’ve also had freedom of mobility. But my mother would still bar me from drinking alcohol, which means that even within our community, my freedom is inferior to that of a man. So, the event for me was not so much about drinking, as much as it was about participating at free will.”

Bhawana’s main take away: “We have festivals where women aren’t allowed to go to temples or attend certain festivals. If this festival can be inclusive, so can the others.”

Festivals, in different cultures, are known to restrict women’s freedom as they are mostly confined to kitchen duties, while men revel. Then, there is also the sunset curfew for women. The liberty for women to drink from a deity, has also been seen as a mark of how women have the right to be outside their homes at night, participating in celebrations alongside their male relatives and friends.

Ever since drinking from the Swet Bhairav spout opened to women five years ago, women clamouring before *Hatu Dyaa*, have been some of the most viewed photos on social media. While a lot of these images clearly come from the male gaze, there is also the photo-opportunity side to it, the two strands representing two very different things.

Anbika says media has glamorised the event like it has always done with events where women and drinks come together.

There is certainly the risk of over glamorisation of an event eclipsing its meaning, she argues.

Some images of women drinking at Indra Jatra, however, have come to represent the other side of the gaze. They depict women as aspirants to be seen as equals in a society where the festive nightlights and the right of participating in a fun activity are male entitlement.

Asha Thapa, who has been quietly listening to our banter interrupts: “I will surely attend the festival in a pandemic-free world for the experience. I come from a community where even as someone in my late 20s, I’ve never had alcohol with my parents and to give women an opportunity to drink publicly seems to me like a way of saying that the culture is making space for women to be who they want. Whether to drink or not, is also a choice women should get to make, don’t you think?”

For over a decade now, I have sauntered around Basantapur alone during *Yenya*, observing its many eccentricities and critiquing its ways that are beyond my comprehension and sense of agreement. But I have also thought that if a festival can keep improvising to make way for changes in society, it also means there is hope that the culture will keep up with its people.

I have learned that sometimes it takes a moment in our memory to set us free. 🇳🇵

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

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The Gorkhali defeat at

FROM NALAPANI
TO KALAPANI

Part 2

Nepali Times reporter Alisha Sijapati spent a month retracing the Gorkha expansion beyond the Mahakali River more than 200 years ago. The Gorkha Empire was on a warpath, and the British East India Company saw it as a threat to its own expansionist ambitions.

This five-part series looks at the bravery of the Gorkhali troops under its legendary generals to defend the newly-conquered territory, but also the historical memory of an oppressive rule.

The first part appeared on 25 September, and the third instalment will be published in this space on 22 October.

● Alisha Sijapati

The fortress at Kangra looks majestic in the rain. The monsoon clouds drift across its stone ramparts like lace curtains, and the lush green mountains appear fresh, as though newly painted.

Spread across 190 hectares on a ridge overlooking the Kangra Valley and a sweeping view of the Beas-Sutlej Rivers, there has been a fort here for more than 1,000 years because of its strategic location.

The fort had been invaded and defended many times before the Gorkhali army arrived in the early 19th century. The sprawling fortress is still impressive because of its sheer scale, and must have felt impregnable to those who occupied it at various times, and impossible to take over for those attacking it from below.

“Kangra Fort was built in such a way that any enemy force would have been easily spotted, and its approaches were so steep and the walls so formidable that it was almost impossible to scale,” explains Sandeep Badoni, a historian based in Dehradun.

Walking towards the huge main gate, visitors are still awestruck not just by the walls towering above them but also by what warriors must have felt more than 200 years ago as they went into the many battles that were fought here.

Over various periods in history, Kangra had been occupied by the Katoch kingdom, housed a Mughal garrison, was held briefly by the Gorkhalis and then the Sikhs, followed by the British.

This was also the place where the Gorkhali general Kaji Nain Singh Thapa was shot by the defenders in 1809, eventually bringing to a halt Gorkha expansion westwards, and changing the course of Nepal’s history. The Gorkhalis retreated to its territories to the east, only to be attacked by the East India Company five years later.

Built by the Katoch, one of the 14 medieval ruling clans of present day Himachal Pradesh and Jammu regions of India, the fort was damaged in the 1905 earthquake.



The ramparts of Kangra Fort were so formidable it was impossible for enemy troops to scale. A siege was the only way to try to defeat the forces inside.



THE KHUKRI BRAVES

A painting from the period depicting the fierce hand-to-hand combat between the Gorkhali forces and the defending Katoch Army in 1808. The Gorkhalis were able to capture the fort, and held it briefly before being ousted by Ranjit Singh of Punjab in the battle of Ganesh Ghati.

Nain Singh Thapa, brother of Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa, was killed at this main gate of Kangra Fort in 1809.



Even though what remains standing now is only one-third of the original complex, it is still one of best preserved archaeological sites in the region.

The descendants of the Katoch rulers today maintain a small museum at the fort dedicated to their king, Sansar Chand II of Kangra, who in 1786 fought a war with the Mughal emperors to reclaim his family’s heritage.

For 115 years the Kangra Fort had been occupied by the

Moghuls before Sansar Chand finally retrieved the historic fort in exchange for two other sites nearby.

The Katoch king restored the glory of his ancestors after much bloodshed, but peace was still elusive because he was also looking to expand his territory. There was friction between rival clans in these rugged mountains and that spilled over into open hostilities — even as word came of the rapid advance of the Gorkhalis from the east.

A series of attacks and

annexations followed, and a ruthless Sansar Chand took over the states of Chamba, Mandi, Kutlehar, and others surrendered. The remaining smaller principalities formed a federation to have a common defence, and invited the Gorkhalis, who by then had already occupied Garhwal and Kumaon, to subdue what they considered Sansar Chand’s “terror”.

Tales of Gorkhali valour and martial prowess had preceded them, and the smaller kingdoms

found it expedient to lean on what they thought was a stronger invading force from Kathmandu as a bulwark against a ruthless and ambitious neighbouring king.

Nepali historian Dinesh Raj Panta says that the Gurkha Empire’s Kangra war against Sansar Chand and Punjab’s Ranjit Singh marked the bitter end of its expansion and conquest because in those two kings the Gorkhalis finally met their match in terms of fighting spirit and cunning.

Kangra



PHOTOS: ALISHA SIJAPATI



Inside Kangra Fort to which Amar Singh Thapa laid a four-year siege until the final battle in 1809.



The Gurkha Empire at its peak in 1815. Coloured area is present-day Nepal, the grey areas were ceded to British India after the Sugauli Treaty of 1816.

“The Gorkhalis were already well known for their bravery and shrewdness, but Sansar Chand’s trickery and Ranjit Singh’s military strategy proved superior to the capacity of the fractious courtiers in faraway Kathmandu to plan an effective military campaign to retain the territory they conquered,” Pantu says.

The first battle in 1808 between the forces of Sansar Chand and the Gorkha army en route to Kangra Fort was fought 50km away at Mahal Morian, which the Gorkhalis won. Sansar Chand fled to his palace at nearby Tira Sujampur. Led by Bhakti Thapa, the Gorkhalis were in hot pursuit, and Sansar Chand fled again: this time to Nadaun, 28km away.

Nadaun did not have the fortifications to withstand a Gorkhali assault, so Sansar Chand fled further west to Kangra to make a last stand against the invaders. Kangra was so unassailable, and a frontal attack would be so costly, that the Gorkhalis had to lay a siege that lasted four years.

Sansar Chand used the time to ease the Gorkhali stranglehold. He tried to entice General Amar Singh Thapa with a bribe, and even offered his daughter’s hand in marriage to the young king Girvan Yuddha Shah in Kathmandu.

Amar Singh Thapa and Kathmandu shunned these offers, making it plain to Sansar

Chand that they were not there to negotiate. But even as the Gorkha siege of Kangra dragged on, Amar Singh Thapa refused to order a fusillade of cannon fire at the ramparts in preparation for an assault — even though he had a good vantage point from an adjoining hill.

Being a devout Hindu, the Gorkhali general did not want to provoke the ire of Goddess Ambika, whose shrine was located inside the fort. Instead, he built another temple at his own base to the Goddess Jayanti, and waited for Sansar Chand to surrender. This temple stands to this day on a bluff two hours uphill from the fortress at Kangra, and has become a pilgrimage site for Indian tourists.

The siege dragged on for four years, and impatience was boiling over among the hill fiefdoms who started to think the Gorkhalis were not as invincible as they were made out to be.

The Gorkhali rank and file was getting war weary, and back in Kathmandu 1,500km away, Bhimsen Thapa, the *Mukhtiyar General* (Prime Minister) of Nepal, was also getting increasingly irritated by the delay in taking over Kangra Fort.

He desperately needed a victory to strengthen his own position in the intrigue and conspiracy-ridden Kathmandu court against rival clans, and he decided to send his

brother Kaji Nain Singh Thapa to Kangra to oversee a swift end to the stalemate.

When Nain Singh Thapa arrived on the Gorkha frontlines in Kangra, he wanted to attack the fort right away, but Amar Singh Thapa cautioned him to wait and strategise first. Nain Singh was a man in a hurry and led his troops to the gate of the fort, where he was shot.

Historian Dinesh Raj Pantu says, “Bhimsen Thapa had two sides to him: arrogant before the Anglo-Nepal war and deflated after the Kangra defeat. Grief and anger over his brother’s death consumed him.”

“Bhimsen Thapa blamed Amar Singh Thapa for his brother being killed in action in Kangra, but also blamed himself,” Pantu explains. As it turned out, the Gorkha defeat in the 1816 war also led to the downfall and eventual suicide in detention of Bhimsen Thapa in 1839.

Amar Singh Thapa eventually gained control of the gate at the fort. The Gorkhali troops stormed inside, and started climbing up the steep slope to the upper levels, their *khukri* drawn.

The Katoch king put up a fierce resistance. When asked to surrender, he made a request to let the women, children, and the elderly safely evacuate Kangra, after which he promised to surrender the fort to the Gorkhalis.

He convinced Amar Singh

Thapa to give him a week to complete the evacuation of civilians. This turned out to be just a ploy to buy time to negotiate with his long-time rival, Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab, even though the two did not see eye to eye.

Disguised as a woman, Sansar Chand fled the fort to rendezvous with Ranjit Singh, and offered him Kangra in return for repelling the invaders from the east.

This was a shocking turnaround for the Gorkhalis. Not to be outdone, Amar Singh Thapa also offered Ranjit Singh riches in return for spurning an alliance with Sansar Chand, but the king of Punjab already had his eyes on a bigger prize: territory east of the Sutlej.

Having heard of the capabilities of the Gorkhali war machine, Ranjit Singh knew he would one day have to fight them himself. And that day soon came in September 1809.

Ranjit Singh’s Sikh troops that had come to the aid of Sansar Chand confronted the Gorkha army at Ganesh Ghati, a few kilometres south of Kangra Fort. This is still remembered more than 200 years later as one of the fiercest battles ever fought in the entire campaign.

“The Kangra war was so ruthless that even today, there is competition between Indians of

Back in Kathmandu

As war raged on 1,500km away to the west, the infant king Girvan Yuddha Bikram Shah in Kathmandu presided over rival Thapa, Basnyat, and Pande clans who were constantly vying for power.

The war on the western front was to figure prominently in this competition between the families, with one blaming the other for defeat, some taking all the credit for conquests, and all of them waiting to exact revenge on the others.

In 1799, when he was only one-and-half years old, Girvan Yuddha’s father, Rana Bahadur Shah, was forced to abdicate the throne in his favour to become an ascetic.

But in 1804, egged on by the British, he returned to the court and became regent for Girvan Yuddha. After his reinstatement, Rana Bahadur began to exact revenge on those who had tried to keep him in exile.

On 25 April 1806, he was beheaded by his half-brother Sher Bahadur Thapa. Dowager Queen Lalit Tripura Sundari took over the regency, while her uncle Bhimsen Thapa became the *Mukhtiyar General* (Prime Minister). He remained the de facto ruler of Nepal till 1837.

Lalit Tripura Sundari was the daughter of Nain Singh Thapa, hailed a martyr after his death at the Kangra Fort. The temple she built in Kathmandu was damaged in the 2015 earthquake and has been renovated.

Girvan Yuddha was a teenage king when the Anglo-Nepal War took place in 1814-16, and he died soon after, aged 19. Bhimsen Thapa himself started falling from grace after the Sugauli Treaty, was imprisoned, and died by suicide in detention in 1839.

Khalsa and Gorkha origin regarding who between them are better warriors,” explains Major Vijay Singh Mankotia, a former Indian Army officer commanding a Gorkha regiment. “The answer is that they are both the best warriors in the world.”

Ranjit Singh had brought a 12,000 horse-borne cavalry to the battle of Ganesh Ghati and had amassed 72,000 soldiers against a much smaller Gorkhali force.


The Gorkhalis were sick, hungry, war weary and far from home, but they still put up a stiff resistance. But, vastly outnumbered, it was a swift, but bloody battle, and 200 among the Gorkhali forces who had retreated to the Ganesh Temple at the battlefield were attacked and burnt alive.

Ranjit Singh then allowed Amar Singh Thapa to surrender with arms, regarded as the highest honour from the Sikh king. Even today, Amar Singh Thapa and his bravery in this battle is mentioned on plaques at Kangra. “The Sikhs were going for the kill, but the Gorkhas put up such a brave fight that Ranjit Singh was thoroughly impressed,” writes Jyoti Thapa Mani in her book *The Khukri Braves* that recounts the battles.

Thapa Mani is herself a descendant of a warrior in the original Gorkha army in 1790. She adds: ‘In the Gorkhalis he saw great fighters — brave and sincere. He wanted them and ended the battle diplomatically.’

Ranjit Singh took over Kangra Fort after ousting the Gorkhalis, but did not really defend it against the next invading force, which was the British East India Company.

Kangra represented the westernmost reach of the Gorkha empire, and the Gorkhalis retreated from this point back across the Sutlej River to Arki in Garhwal. Five years later, the Anglo-Nepal War started in 1814 and Amar Singh Thapa lived to fight another day against the East Indian Company.

The next chapters in the history of this region was the valiant, but ultimately futile, Gorkhali defence of their forts in Malaun, Nalapani and Jaithak, which will be the subject of the next three episodes in this series. 



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Judging a car by its looks

Many alert readers will have noticed that cars — like dogs — resemble their owners. In fact, there is a striking facial similarity between a certain neighbour in Bhaishepati and the new MG GS that he recently bought. Especially around the nostrils.

A colleague at work is the spitting image of a Hyundai Venue that he drives, both have the same toothy grin. And a CFO I know has an identical stiff upper lip as the Mahindra Thar in his garage.

This subject deserves serious anthropological study: why are cars designed with grills that look like the vehicle is grinning from ear to ear? Some even have chrome fangs sticking out of their turbo intakes, like a bulldog with an underbite.

And have you noticed those new SUVs with double chins? Or swept back aerodynamic sedans that look like they may be airborne any second, but are sitting for half an hour at the Bagmati traffic jam?

We shouldn't be judging cars by their looks (it is what is under the fibreglass-reinforced polyurethane instrument panel that is more important) but, sad to say, there are some automobiles that are downright ugly.

Take the Nissan Magnite, the front end of which seems to take inspiration from someone's Y-front. No wonder Carlos Ghosn had to go into hiding.

Fact is, looks matter. Cars need tapered headlight lenses patterned after Aishwarya Rai's eyes.

Designers also pay a lot of attention to a car's butt which, in hindsight, must be why hatchbacks have derrieres that could win hands down in the swimsuit round of the Miss Universe contest.

You might also not have

helped noticing that some of the new crossover utility vehicles on our roads have of late developed ample bosoms.

Aside from anthropomorphic automobile design, I am glad to report, cars have also become a lot smarter. SUVs greet you when you open the door, will not start unless they recognise your voice, and will make idle chit-chat on long drives.

There are even hybrids that throw tantrums, sulk and go all passive aggressive on you, unless you tickle their lithium-ion batteries from time to time.

In fact, modern motorcars are so human they even have sex. No, they don't fornicate in the parking lot. (Not that I am aware of, anyway.) I mean cars these days are actually gender differentiated. There are cars that are unquestionably of the male persuasion, there are cars that are definitely female, and there are cars that are neither, and/or both.

Take the Jeep Wrangler, its protuberant proboscis makes it an unmistakably masculine machine that oozes testosterone from every pore. Or the Mahindra Bolero, which is all muscle, and no brains.

Then there is the BMW 7 Series with its sleek fenders and curvaceous chassis that exudes quiet intelligence and a self-assured demeanour that would make any other male car on the road today look like a dork.

Now that the internal combustion engine has been replaced with electric motors it is only appropriate for us to start referring to cars neither as he or she, but as they/ them.



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