Giving every Nepali a shot at the Covid vaccine

Nearly half of Kathmandu Valley’s population is fully vaccinated against Covid-19, but only a little over 20% of Nepal’s population is vaccinated, which is only a little over 20%. In essence, this is a microcosm of vaccine inequity seen globally — but it also reflects Nepal’s six-big socio-economic 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.

State neglect, international apathy, and the climate crisis magnify vaccine inequity in Nepal

On this note, I would like to applaud the government of Nepal for its decision to revamp the COVID-19 vaccine delivery system. The government has taken a brave step in the right direction, and I hope this will encourage other countries to follow suit.

Top Dasani destinations

- Time Travel

Looking back 20 years ago, the Internet was a white elephant, and searching for the news meant going to a local newspaper or magazine stand. Today, the Internet is a daily companion, and searching for news is just a click away with the same old search engine.

- Online Packages

GUEST EDITORIAL

Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa

Most reached and shared on Facebook

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Nejlie Al-Ahmad

Most commented

In the age of the Internet, information is readily accessible, and people have more control over their own knowledge. However, this also means that misinformation can spread quickly and easily. Therefore, it is essential to be critical when consuming information and to verify its source.

Online Packages

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- NEPALI PASSPORT

- DISASY

- PANDORA NEWS

- TIME TRAVEL

- FEMALE FOOTCARE

- THE GURUWA EXPANSION

- DASANI DESTINATIONS

- Bhumil Limbu

- Mary Chin-Wagner

- Soapy Becker

- Suzy Becker

- Sharmilla Stagoni

- Daouda Suleman

- Bhumil Limbu

- Mary Chin-Wagner

- Soapy Becker

- Sharmilla Stagoni

- Daouda Suleman

- Bhumil Limbu

- Mary Chin-Wagner

- Soapy Becker

- Sharmilla Stagoni

- Daouda Suleman

- Bhumil Limbu

- Mary Chin-Wagner

- Soapy Becker

- Sharmilla Stagoni

- Daouda Suleman
TIME TO MEET AGAIN: LONDON

Have a healthy journey with all precautions taken down to the smallest detail for your in-flight safety.
Global vaccine inequity is reflected within Nepal, and what to do about it

• Sonia Anwala

A postgraduate student of mechanical engineering who is in Kuala Lumpur completing her 14-day quarantine in a hotel in Montreal. Despite being fully vaccinated with VeruCell in Nepal, she now has to take one of the four jabs recognised in Canada.

“I wish I had taken [4] before coming here, I just wanted 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 (K) vaccine which is accepted in Canada, or face two weeks of quarantine and further restrictions because the Chinese vaccine VeruCell is not accepted by the Canadian government?

“People inoculated with vaccines other than those accepted are treated as if they are not vaccinated and hence face additional restrictions. I probably won’t be able to attend in person classes then,” says the 21-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 VeruCell 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 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, VeruCell and [8]. 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 BioNTech, a partnership between a French company and UK’s GlaxoSmithKline.

Of those only AstraZeneca and Pfizer 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 areas. This is why it is not surprising that even as half of Kathmandu Valley residents are fully vaccinated, only 22% of Nepal’s total population has been inoculated.

Nepalis in the hinterland were already less 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 met isolated pockets of Tharu 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 overflown.”

Indeed, as Shepa argues in her guest editorial (page 20), this monsoon rural Nepal was hit by triple disasters: historical state neglect, international inequality with rich countries enjoyinganguard vaccines, and climate change. All of this has further magnified the vaccine 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 will report full ICU’s – mostly occupied by referral patients from outside the Valley.

The misinterpretation of the recent zero-prevalence study conducted by WHO and the Health Ministry had added to the misconception. The sample survey found that 67% of Nepal’s population has natural immunity against the virus. But virologists say the test used does not reveal the concentration of neutralizing 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 JAMH hospital Raju Pangeni.

“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 Dussehra festivities starting this week, people are

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**Total Nepalis Vaccinated**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40M</td>
<td>At least 1 dose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30M</td>
<td>Fully vaccinated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Foreign exchange limit**

Nepal Rastra Bank has introduced a new rule on foreign currency transactions. It has been reduced to a hefty degree in the country’s foreign exchange reserves. In the past year, individuals going to a foreign country have to carry at most $500 but it has been hiked now for those leaving for the Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and other countries. These visits on the 15th, 30th, and Japan can carry $1,000.

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

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**Divine Wines Premium**

Shree Mahakali, manufacturers of Divine Wines, has introduced the new Divine Wines Premium in the market. Divine Wines are made differently from the others.

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**Hard Rock Cafe in Nepal**

The world famous Hard Rock Cafe is set to open in Thap Mal, Kathmandu this month. The cafe will feature a 45-minutes menu, music, and help Hard Rock in Kathmandu and memorabilia from renowned musicians.

---

**Kostorroir**

A 14-hour transmission that will include $100,000 power from new hydro power projects on the Kali and Teri nullahs in eastern Nepal was inaugurated on Tuesday in the Jhapa line, said the Nepal Electricity Authority.

Indian ambassado de chief of mission Durga Tapas (second) said India was committed to work with Nepal to develop interconnected in Nepal line with to ‘Lighthouse’ Power.

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**DishHome Fibernet**

DishHome Fibernet has now reached Bahundanda, Lahaul, Lamjung, and Mustang, where plans are underway to expand the services to Dhangadhi and Ramechhap.

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**VW Taigun**

Volkswagen with Polo International has launched the Taigun compact SUV at an introductory price of 13.59 million. The SUV comes with 13-inch alloy wheels, an electric sunroof, leather and red cloth, 6-airbags, a 1-inch touchscreen, a keyless entry system, and an automatic parking system.

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**Ncell for senior citizens**

Ncell has launched a特殊优惠 plan with special offers for senior citizens. Ncell offers 15% discount to those over 60 who enjoy unrestricted talk, SMS, and internet services.

---

**Free accessories and cash offers**

For the first 100 buyers are available on a first-come-first-serve basis. Pepsi International has also announced the ‘Voluntary Sales’ month-long campaign at its 3,000 outlets, offering customers the chance to win BMW 318i (D3.57 million), Nissan Sunny, and Suzuki TVS 125.
Vaccine coverage in South Asia (fully inoculated)

- Afghanistan 15%
- Pakistan 16.3%
- India 18.3%
- Nepal 22%
- Bhutan 64.3%
- Bangladesh 10.6%
- Maldives 63%
- Sri Lanka 54.4%

We are not careful, we will be jeopardizing the health of our children and parents,” says Sharpa, who works with TPAS Nepal.

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

Says Raja Pasang: “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.”

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

During Dasain, children and the elderly are at the most risk of infection. While children are silently vaccinated,

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

“We must perform our rituals this Dasain keeping in mind the consequences of our actions. If

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 cited 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 messy and requires scanned citizenship certificate and vaccine card, even a foreigner's affiliate. If unable to apply online, applicants can visit the National Academy Research and Training Centre in Kathmandu with necessary documents for in-person application.

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

Vaccine coverage worldwide now averages at 34.3% 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 at night and day back in July for just rubber-stamped pieces to verify that they have been vaccinated. But the latter did not have a digitally-registered QR code, and hence risks being voided 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.
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 chants 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 seer,” 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 break-through song “Guru bhe” 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 cross-border 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. Tan Dun, 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 Awashiktewa 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 monastery in Pharping, buy her CDs in Ta-mel, ask about her concerts, or sometimes recognize her on the streets and take selfies.

“Once I was in Buddha 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 know that I was very famous in China.”

They exchanged WeChat contacts, and she later found out that he was none other than Guis Xun, 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 Himalayan 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 mantras. 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 mantras. But her Nepali songs mostly have lyrics by Bipo Losel and music by Nyuo 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 singers like Arishko are renowned in China for their craft, and I am just carrying on that tradition with my music.”

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

Himal Khabarpatrika
दशै का साहित्य विख्याति
दशै का साहित्य विख्याति

नेपाल लोको चित्र शास्त्री

योग्य भेटा: वाल्मिक सोपुलेलार

9841304650
Nepal’s ‘missing girls’

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

Anita Bhetwal

The equal 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 Centre for Research on Environment, Health and Population Activities (CRESHPA) 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 ‘Gender Biased Sex Selection’ workshop organized by the Sanchakra Samaluka 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, 64% of women in the CRESHPA 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 1962 and, as per the law, is legal up to 12 weeks of pregnancy, 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, Sanchakra Group’s Nitin 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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Shrishri Karki

Electric bicycles in Nepal terrain

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Hyundai Kona 39kWh
Limited availability

Hyundai Ioniq 64kWh
5,100,000

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

Electric car imports are scrambling to meet the surge in post-pandemic and post-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 its own previous finance minister Yubaraj Khatiwada. The coalition government of Prima Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has retained the tax breaks.

Under the new tax formula, the excise duty on battery-powered cars was withdrawn, and the customs duty was restated to the 15% 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 Khatiwada in May 2020.

The Dasu-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 rebates have made electric compact cars, SUVs, and two-wheelers more competitive compared to fossil fuel vehicles.

Government in technology has increased the range and performance of EVs, and the full 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 400km – enough for a Kathmandu-Pokhara round trip 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 Bikeshwar 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, FOT, and, to a lesser extent, Chinese brands like BYD, Great Wall Motors, Dabu, and Dery. Besides ranges, 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-ship-like takeoff, it may be more important in Nepal to see that the cars have more

Vidyas Nepal’s customer base has grown steadily since then. It has sold 30 electric bikes in recent months. Interestingly, the highest end S5100 and S5800 are bestsellers, says Arish Shrestha of Vidyas Nepal. Most customers are add 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 Nepal users.

“Our customer base is largely people who know their bicycles, and people near me 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 had been using it to commute to and from work.

“Her dad told us that despite not being in tax form, the ride was stress-free or treacherous, and his commute is helping him to exercise.”

The primary objective of an electric bicycle is to enable a healthy way of travelling and reduce one’s carbon footprint. Cyclists need not exert nearly as much energy pedaling, and can ride further without using their bodies.

Among the four all-terrain e-bikes, the Yamaha S5500 and S5800 mountain bikes are far Nepal’s all-roads, while the V5500 and V7100 models are more suited to urban and city roads.

The high-end V7100 is the most expensive at Rs43,000, while the two city bikes are priced at Rs26,000 each.

Vidyas e-bikes use a Samsung lithium-ion battery attached to the down tube of the bike frame, which takes four and a half hours to fully charge for the S5100 and S5800, while the V5500 and V7100 models take six and a half hours to charge fully.

The bicycle is equipped with the company’s independently developed 30W Fusi on-motor located near the bicycle’s bottom bracket, which provides a maximum torque of 35NM.

The controls of the bike, which allow the rider to manage the motor output according to needs, are on the handlebar, with a display monitor at the front.

The bikes have 117km that can be changed using a tap along the right handrail.

Nearly 40% of all registered vehicles in Nepal are privately owned two-wheelers, most of them pulsating fossil fuel engines, and contribute 9% to total emissions from transportation.

As electric powered-motor 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 Dawn, S.M. Ghale, who has tested and reviewed several electric vehicles, including Yamaha’s S5100 e-bike, and posted videos on YouTube.

The expensive price tag is a drag. Many viewers commented on a 52:06 review of the Vidyas S5100 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 promotion or expansion.

“Considering the costs as well as exposure.

Tax breaks, the festive season, and an end to the
Electric motorbikes and scooters have now become a part of the daily commute or long-distance off-road travel, as they are currently for big cities, he adds. However, on the other hand, the two-wheeler market is witnessing a steady growth, with the introduction of new electric vehicles in the market. One of the most popular brands in the market is BYD, which has launched its all-electric T100 electric car.

BYD’s T100 is priced at INR 3.99 lakh and comes with a range of up to 300 km on a single charge, making it ideal for long-distance travel. It also comes with a battery warranty of 8 years or 1 lakh km, whichever comes first. The car is available in both standard and luxury variants.

Another popular brand in the market is Tata Motors, which has launched its Nexon EV at a price of INR 13.19 lakh (ex-showroom). The car comes with a range of up to 500 km on a single charge and has a battery warranty of 4 years or 50,000 km, whichever comes first. It also comes with a host of features, including a 10.4-inch touchscreen infotainment system, automatic climate control, and a 360-degree camera.

Nissan India has also launched its Leaf e+ electric car in the market, priced at INR 12.50 lakh (ex-showroom). The car comes with a range of up to 350 km on a single charge and has a battery warranty of 8 years or 1 lakh km, whichever comes first. It also comes with a host of features, including a 7-inch touchscreen infotainment system, automatic climate control, and a 360-degree camera.

In conclusion, the electric two-wheeler market is witnessing a steady growth in India, with new players entering the market and existing brands expanding their offerings. With increasing government incentives and a focus on sustainability, the future looks promising for the electric two-wheeler market in India.
OUTLOOK ON TOWN

Art Festival
Museum of Nepali Art has partnered with Turkish Air Lines for a mega art festival where thirty-three Nepali artists will come together for a day-long ‘art congregation’ to promote Nepali art as an art destination and support children battling cancer.
3-9 October, Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel

Dasain Bazaar
Support local artists this summer and shop beautiful handmade products at the Dashain Bazaar organized by Mithila House, 3/2/2, Opal, Under the Bell.

Fulpati
On Fulpati, dedicated to Kali, the seventh form of Goddess Durga, holy kolaai, banana stalks, jasmine, and sugarcane are brought to Hanuman Dhoka from Golchha.
17 October, Tundikhel

Maha Ashtami
Animals including buffaloes, goats, rams, and ducks are sacrificed to appease Goddess Kali on the eighth day of Dashain. News communities also celebrate ‘Krishna Puja’ on this day to worship their weapons.
19 October, Basantapur Durbar Square

Maha Navami
On the ninth day, people worship Vishwakarma, the God of creation. An offering of rice and meat is made to vehicles, tools, and equipment for safety and well-being. Offering ritualistic sweets make them place upon grutesque statues at the courtyard. 14 October, Taleju Mandir, Hanuman Dhoka

Dashami
From the 10th day until the purimba, families receive baia, banana and blessings from elders in the honor of Goddess Durga being very near the Dharahara, and mark Ram’s victory over the Demon Ravanas.
15 October

EVENTS

MUSIC

Cynthia Relationship Live
Catch the performances by famous singer Cynthia Relationship at the Kantipur Club on 24 October.

Sugam Polchare Live
Catch the performances by veteran singer Sugam Polchare at the Tour and Travels’ Sun Club on 25 October.

Voodoo U Live
Voodoo U will perform live as part of Kathmandu Jazz Entertainment and Moksh’s live music sessions which will feature some of Nepal’s highest DJs and producers.

Music Workshop
Take vocal classes, as well as workshops in piano, classical guitar, and violin at Susho Arts Academy. Go on to facebook for details, or call to register.
Susho Arts Academy, Narayani

GETAWAY

Hotel Annapurna View
Studied at 1,600 meter above sea level, this hotel offers stunning views of the snow-capped mountain and Muktinath Lake. Look out from the Holiday Package for this hotel.
Sarangkot (977) 500009

The Terraces Laldauri
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Everest View Hotel
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AIR QUALITY INDEX

As the Air Quality Index rises, make sure to cook dinner at home. Use air purifiers and industrial cleaners. There are so many things that we can do as an individual to save our environment. Going green is a great start.

OUR PICK

Set on the Balls Ukan, Enrico Cocozza’s debut flavourɁtory 2017. An intrepid Tim Local comes on the op unnamed Luke Figaro, a young woman with the red hair. She can’t find her hair from the inside and Luke ageless. To make sure she lives, she finds the beauty of her hair. That humans might know her. But one another, Luke meets Alberto Scaroni, a strong spirited young man. Quick-witted Friends, the two escape the Italian town of Firenze, experiencing a life-changing adventure. Stars Jacob Tremblay, Jack Dylan Grazer and Finn Wolfhard, with Maya Rudolph, Jim Gaffigan, and more.

KOLOSKA LANGAPASI

#SERIOUSABOUTBEER

WE PUT SERIOUS HOURS IN YOUR HAPPY HOUR.
Restoring a piece of Patan's history

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

Who was Bhagirath Bhaiya?

Bhati (Bhagirath Bhaiya) was a conservative businessman who devoted his life to the maintenance of Patan's historical heritage. He was a lifelong member of the Royal family and a respected figure in the city. Bhaiya's dedication to the preservation of Patan's heritage earned him several awards and recognitions.

The three-storied Bhairdeva temple in Patan (inset photograph) is the original (left) and as rebuilt (right).

A major contribution to the city’s heritage, Bhati worked tirelessly to ensure that Patan’s cultural treasures were preserved for future generations. His efforts were recognized by the government, and he was awarded several titles and honours for his contributions to the preservation of Patan’s heritage.

By the time of his death, Bhati was a national icon and a symbol of Patan’s commitment to cultural preservation.

Heritage Live!

Sahina Shrestha

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

The Bhairdeva temple dedicated to Lord Shiva was built more than 350 years ago, but after it was destroyed in 1934, it was rebuilt with much smaller, Gothic-style stucco domes. Two months after work began in February 2015 to rebuild it in the original style, the earthquake destroyed much of Patan Durbar 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 Bhairdeva was suspended so that other temples could be restored first.

“Bhairdeva temple struck, the focus and priorities changed. There was an urgent need to rebuild the temples and monuments brought down by the earthquake,” recalls Rohit Rankaji of Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT), which was heading the restoration of the temple. “So, Bhairdeva 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 Bhairdeva is stalled because money has run out.

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

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

What sets Bhairdeva apart is that unlike the other temples of the Patan Durbar which were built by the Malla kings, it was put up by a commoner, Bhati Bhagirath Bhaiya in 1767. Historian believe Bhagirath Bhaiya was probably the first person in the Subcontinent to dedicate a temple to Bhairab Narayan, after the devastation of the earthquake in Banaras nine years earlier.

The Kali Vitthala temple in Banaras was destroyed on orders of Moghul emperor Aurangzeb in 1669. Ironically, after the 1934 earthquake, Bhairdeva was rebuilt in the Moghul stucco dome architectural style that the rulers of Nepal copied back in the 19th century.

“Until the people did not really have a concept of conservation, we thought that we had to have a roof over the concepts of the city,” says Rankaji. “So, they may rebuild, but it was important to rebuild in the original form.

Restoration work actually had begun as early as 2011 when well-wishers, tourists, historians, and community activities donated. In fact, photos of Bhairdeva takes eight years before and traced the collection of Palm Brandy Germany. The photos show the original Carl Theodor of the original Bhairdeva but was vital in estimating the size and outline of the temple.

Detailed watercolour of the woodwork of the first floor stouts, cornice, and pillars made by Henry Ambrose Oldfield in 1833 were discovered in the British Museum. More importantly, carved wooden eaves, tall subsidiary, and pillars of the temple were discovered in the Patan Museum storehouse.

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 Bhairdeva are one of the best in the city, if not in the country,” says Indra Prasad Shiplakar, 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 Bhairdeva which would not have happened if the earthquake had not hit,” says Rankaji.

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

“Rounder uncarved stones move around easily and are not structurally safe.” This means that we had to spend a lot of time and money to reinforce the foundation and make it stronger,” explains Rankaji.

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 monuments. This led to an increase in the cost of workers' wages, timber, bricks, and other building materials.

In 2012, the preliminary cost estimate for the Bhairdeva restoration was about Rs 650 million. Within seven years, it had more than doubled to Rs 1.4 billion.

Another temple in the Patan Durbar Square, the Harishankar shrine, similar in status to the original Bhairdeva did not cost as much to restore because 80% of its carved wooden columns, staves, arches were retrieved after the temple collapsed.

In the case of Bhairdeva, much of the wood carvings need to be replicated and built anew, which takes up the bulk of the expense, and time. Additionally, Bhairdeva also needs extensive bricklaying, roof tiles, terracing, and repairs and gilding of the original pinnacle.

Because of the overwhelming need to rebuild other temples and monuments destroyed in 2015, Bhairdeva was not a priority for donors and the government.

“We approached the government for funds on the official route, but the Forest Ministry did not even grant us that,” says Prithvi Poudel, who heads the Nepal Centre of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Group, a citizens’ 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 Bhati and his colleagues. Before the earthquake, the Norbridge family, who contributed to the shortfall in the initial wave of donations after the earthquake, other private citizens and the Lalitpur Municipality also supported the cause. But funds have now dried up, while prices have skyrocketed.

Rankaji of KVPT says the work on Bhairdeva has slowed, and there is a budget shortfall of more than Rs 400 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 floor.

Most of the wood carving work is done directly on-site, excluding the lower cornices that have been completed.

Says Rankaji, “If we get the required amount, we can finish rebuilding in 10-12 months, but now it is getting more expensive the longer it takes.”

To Donate:
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“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

FOR ART’S SAKE
Rajan Saluja

detachment. To this day we echo the artists who thousands of years ago translated masters, objects, and natures 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 ochre, turns into a Ganesh. An old stone becomes a Shiva lingam just by having milk spilt on it. Any roadside rock when smeared with vermilion and covered in flowers is revered as a deity. We dare not pass those totems without bowing our heads as a manifestation of unacknowledged 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 intellectual 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 unainted, unbiased, and unadulterated inquisitiveness in all of us. Staring in-depth into the painting streams out the purity ofchildlike innocence. The connotations and 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 to the Museum of Nepal Art (MoNA) in Thamel organized 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 hinders 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 stocks 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 Udayam 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 eye. 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, everyone shares a similar kind of impression and expression. However, they are different. The connections on their faces are different. Their attitudes differ as well. Nevertheless, the emotions that they portray may be the same... in the sense that they themselves will look at the same painting and be observing the same feelings. The closeness of the relationship of expressions and emotions with what is depicted in the painting will be unavoidable after a certain time.”

He ended, “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 iconography. It will have the variety of essence.”

MoNA director Jumila 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 a complex emotional state 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 and a blue shape towards the edges, resembling a thumb with the nail painted red. It is a woman’s hand. Could this be a modern depiction of Buddha?”

Maharjan says the grip looks very powerful, yet, surprisingly, the face remains calm, peaceful and unmoved. “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 blinded by the transient mass-market visualizations and the decadence of modern-day superficiality.

Rajan Saluja is the founder of the Museum of Nepal Art, which exhibit and curate the most useful art for Nepal’s future.

Uttam Nepali has partnered with MoNA for this Nepal Edition. In 2017 with Nepali artists, he has started the first ever art symposium at Kathmandu Guest House. March 1st 2018. This was also the chance to be a part in a unique art show.
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 her, her mouth open, catching a fountain of wine (rice wine). Bowing down, Hitu Dyasa’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 exclaims back. In 2017, the Yenya or Indra Jatra committee set aside a day for women to drink from a wine (Sweat Bhairav), an activity which in the past had not been segregated by gender, and was therefore accessible mostly to men.

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

Growing up in Narayari Tole, two years ago, 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 mother 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 being scooped up from the ground and being lifted under the massive face of the deity as some wine spray bit me.

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

“I definitely want to do it again,” Anibika 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 feet, body, mouth, my hair. It also came away with a sense of achievement.”

Bhawana Gurung, who was alongside Anibika that evening, did not exactly get to drink, but was definitely showered on as she got shaved around in the crowd. “I came home smelling like wine.”

Anibika 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 Anibika. “For events in Nepal, 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 janajati 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.”

In different cultures, are known to restrict women’s freedom as they are mostly confined to kitchen duties, while men revel. There, 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.

Even since drinking from the Sweet Bhairav spout opened to women five years ago, women chromosomes before Hiti Dyasa, 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 stand symbols representing two very different things.

Anibika 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 festivity highlights and the right of participating in a fun activity are male entitlement.

Anita 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 registered around Basantapur alone during Yenya, observing its many secrecy and critiquing its ways that are beyond my comprehension and sense of agreement. But I have also thought that if a festival can keep improving 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 series in Nepali Times, about an event with year-round changed in Pratibha’s life.
The Gorkhali defeat at

FROM NALAPANI TO KALAPANI

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

Spurred across 190 hectares on a ridge overlooking the Kangra Valley and a sweeping view of the Bas-Suhiy River, there has been a fort here for more than 2,000 years because of its strategic location.

The fort had been invaded and defended many times before the Gorkhali army arrived in the early 18th 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 Bedanti, a historian based in Dehradun.

Walking towards the huge main gate, visitors are still somewhat 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 Gorkhals and then the Sikhs, followed by the British.

This was also the place where the Gorkha general Kali Nain Singh Thapa was shot by the delirious Katoch emperor, bringing to a halt Gorkha expansion westwards, and changing the course of Nepal’s history. The Gorkhals 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 34 medieval ruling class of present-day Himachal Pradesh and Jammu regions of India, the fort was damaged in the 1905 earthquake.

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

The descendents of the Katoch rulers today maintain a small museum at the fort dedicated to their king, Sena Chaudh Raja Kangra, who in 1785 fought a war with the Mughal emperor to reclaim his family’s heritages.

For 15 years the Kangra Fort had been occupied by the Mughals before Sena Chaudh 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 Gorkhals from the east.

A series of attacks and annexations followed, and a ruthless Sena Chaudh took over the states of Chambe, Mandi, Kuftehar, and others surrendered. The remaining smaller principalities formed a federation to have a common defence, and invited the Gorkhals, who by then had already occupied Garhwal and Kumaon, to subdue what they considered Sena Chaudh’s “unfair.”

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.

Nepal historian Dinesh Rai Panta says that the Gorkha Empire’s Kangra war against Sena Chaudh and Punjab’s Ranjit Singh marked the bitter end of its expansion and conquest because in these two kings the Gorkhals finally met their match in terms of fighting spirit and cunning.
**Back in Kathmandu**

A war waged on 1,500 km away went to war, the infant king of the Gorkha State in Kathmandu gathered his forces and waited for the Anglo-Nepal War to begin. In 1815, the two armies faced each other near Tumlingtar in the Kirtipur Valley. The Gorkha forces led by General Thapa started moving towards Kathmandu.

Kangra

The Gurkhas were already well known for their bravery and shrewdness, but Sansar Chand’s treachery and Ranjit Singh’s military strategy proved superior to the capacity of the cautious courtiers in faraway Kathmandu to plan an effective military campaign to retain the territory they conquered.

"The Gurkhas were already well known for their bravery and shrewdness, but Sansar Chand’s treachery and Ranjit Singh’s military strategy proved superior to the capacity of the cautious courtiers in faraway Kathmandu to plan an effective military campaign to retain the territory they conquered," Patna says.

The first battle in 1815 between the forces of Sansar Chand and the Gurkha army on route to Kangra Fort was fought at 50 km away at Mahal Morien, which the Gurkhas won. Sansar Chand fled to his palace at nearby Tika Pauw in 1815. Led by Bakti Thapa, the Gurkhas were in hot pursuit, and Sansar Chand fled again this time to Nadiham. 28 km away. Nadiham did not have the fortifications to withstand a Gurkha assault, so Sansar Chand fled further west to Kangra to make a last stand against the invaders. Kangra was an unscalable fortress, and a frontal assault would be so costly, that the Gurkhas had to lay a siege that lasted four years.

Sansar Chand used the time to raise the Gurkha garrison. He tried to entice General Amar Singh Thapa with a tribute, and even offered his daughter’s hand in marriage to the young king Girvan Yuddha Shah in Kathmandu. Amar Singh Thapa and Kathmandu humored 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 Gorkha general did not want to provoke the ire of Goddess Ambika, whose shrine was located inside the fort. Instead, he built another temple on his own base to the Goddess Jagannath, 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 soldiers who started to think the Gurkhas were not as invincible as they had been made out to be. The Gorkha rank and file was getting war weary, and back in Kathmandu 1,500 km away, Bhimsen Thapa, the Maharajah General (Prime Minister) of Nepal, was also getting increasingly irritated by the delay in taking 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 Kaj 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 strategize first. Nain Singh was a man in a hurry and led his troops to the gates of the fort, where he was shot. Historian Dinesh Raj Panta 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," Patna 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 Gorkha troops stormed inside, and started climbing up the steep slope to the upper levels, their Kadis drawn.

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

He convinced Amar Singh Thapa to give him a week to complete the evacuation of civilians. This turned out to be just the time he needed to negotiate with his long-time rival, Maharanji Ranjit Singh of Punjab, even though the two did not see eye to eye.

Disguised as a woman, Sansar Chand feigned the desire to surrender to readies with Amar Singh Thapa, and offered him Kangra in return for repelling the invaders from the east.

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

Having heard of the expediency of the Gurkha 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 Gurkha army of Gobind Singh, a few kilometres south of Kangra Fort. This was still remembered more than 200 years later as one of the fiercest battles ever fought in the eastern campaign.

"The Kangra war was so ruthless that even today, there is competition between Edol of Kisku and Gorkha origin regarding who between them are better warriors," explains Major Vijay Singh Makwana, a former Indian Army officer commanding a Gorkha regiment. "The answer is that they are both the best warriors in the world."

Ranjit Singh then allowed Amar Singh Thapa to surrenders to his own army, and accorded the highest honour from the Sikh king. Even today, Amar Singh Thapa’s bravery in this battle is mentioned on plaques at Kangra. The Sikhs were going for the kill, but the Gurkhas put up such a fierce battle that Ranjit Singh was thereby impressed," writes Jyoti Thapa Majhi in her book _The Kuki Brave_.

Thapa Majhi is herefore described as a warrior in the original Gorkha army in 1796. She adds: "In the Gorkha he saw great fights — brave and valiant, and wanted them and ended the battle diplomatically."

Ranjit Singh took over Kangra Fort after mustering the Gurkhas, but did not really defeat him, it was the next invading force, which was the British East India Company.

Kangra represented the westernmost reach of the Gorkha empire, and the Gurkhas retreated from this point back across the Sutlej through the Kumaon. 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 chapter in the history of this region was the British occupation, with the last Gorkha death. Kangra defense of their forts in Malwa, Nicobars, and Jaithab, which will be the subject of the next three episodes in this series.
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 Bhaktapur 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 COP I know has an identical stub 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 building with an underbite.

And have you noticed those new SUVs with double chiff? Or overseen aerodynamic panels 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 (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.

Fac is, looks matter. Cars need tapered headlight lenses patterned after Alfa Romeo’s P’s eyes.

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

You might not have helped noticing that some of the new crossover utility vehicles on our roads have lately 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 you recognize 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 motorists are as human as they ever have been. No, they don’t ferment 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 proboscis protrusion 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 lines and curved features that exude quiet intelligence and a self-assured demeanor that would make any other male car on the road today look like a dink.

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.