

We are what we eat

Earlier this year, as the second wave was subsiding in Nepal's far-western mountains, a one-year-old baby was brought into Achham district's Bayalpata Hospital. She weighed barely 5kg. She was being breastfed by a mother who was herself undernourished.

The family has cows and a patch of land where they grow vegetables. There is enough lentil and flour at home. So why was the child not eating a healthier diet?



GUEST EDITORIAL

Aruna Uprety

"Noodles have all the nutrition to give her strength but my baby is still losing weight which is why I have brought her to the hospital," the young mother tells the doctor.

The traditional practice of growing and consuming locally grown lentils, soybean, millet and buckwheat is being replaced even in the remotest parts of Nepal by junk food in throwaway plastic wrappings.

Locals here have been misled by tv commercials that have glamourised noodles, biscuits and cheese balls, convincing many parents that they contain vitamins and micronutrients for healthy babies. The instant food in plastic packs are also convenient for parents who are usually busy all day in the fields.

Child specialist Ramesh Kant Adhikari says that, on the other hand, most urban children who grow up on junk food tend to be obese and malnourished, and certain parents are proud that they are raising well-fed children.

"Parents don't understand that such foods are harmful to the health of their children, they don't believe me even when I try to explain," Adhikari says.

Even in the food-deficit regions in the remotest corners of Accham and Doti districts where families cannot even get basic medicines, packaged junk foods are now easily available. This is evidence enough of the state's misplaced priorities.

Children of subsistence farmers, already undernourished, are consuming low-nutrition junk foods. The children then suffer health consequences, which means expensive consultations with doctors who then prescribe costly bottled vitamins, further impoverishing the family, and thus completing the vicious cycle.

"There is absolutely no evidence that supplemental vitamins are good for growing children," adds Adhikari. "All they need is a proper, balanced diet found in traditional

home foods."

But parents are so swayed by unethical commercials that public health experts are fighting a losing battle to convince them of the dangers of junk foods. Indeed, some health care workers share part of the blame: they prescribe vitamin supplements to young children instead of counselling parents on the nutrition available in the traditional Nepali diet.

The Ministry of Agriculture has for decades been publishing booklets and posters to promote local produce such as buckwheat, millet, potato, lentils, latte, tarul and beans. But lack of coordination between the health and agriculture ministries means that information rarely gets out into the hinterland.

The junk food epidemic in Nepal is only widening the country's food gap – between those with too much and too little nutrition. It has also exposed the appalling wastage of food in more prosperous sections of society where there is plenty. (See page 4-5)

The UN's Global Hunger

Index 2021 this week ranks Nepal 76th among 116 countries – better than India (101) and Pakistan (92). However, thousands of Nepali families are struggling to feed themselves due to income loss caused by the pandemic, as their budgets are further squeezed by children clamouring to buy junk food they see on commercials. Children everywhere are easily swayed by these ads, and parents often comply because it is also a status symbol.

Junk food commercials can be countered by attractive infomercials about a healthy diet. Following the pandemic, some television and radio stations started to broadcast programs on nutrition, but their reach is limited.

There is also resistance to change because the Health

Ministry in Kathmandu is not serious about promoting local food products aggressively enough. For example, sesame seeds have good fat, calcium, and mineral content, and can be given to children and pregnant mothers. Flax seeds contain omega-3 fatty acids and fibre.

We do not advertise these locally available superfoods, or use them in fighting malnutrition. Instead doctors prescribe imported capsules packaged by multinationals that contain the very same ingredients.

Federal Ministries, especially Agriculture and Health, must coordinate with their provincial and municipal counterparts to fight malnutrition. It is not an exaggeration to say that the epidemic of junk food in Nepal is now emerging as a public health crisis.

Aruna Uprety is a public health specialist and author of the 2017 book on nutrition, खाना खनुभयो?



Misleading commercials make families replace nutritious local diets with processed food

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

In search of peace

The ruinous Maoist insurgency was a result of long-standing inequities in Nepali society. Ordinary farmers and their children were convinced to take up arms and lead a militant life with a promise of a just society where everyone has equal access to healthcare, education and development.

But over 15 years after the end of the war and more than 17,000 lives lost, social inequities have in fact grown, the gap between the rich and poor is now wider, genuine democracy and devolution have been lost in the corridors of Singha Darbar.

When millions of Nepalis in the remote mountains and the Tarai are experiencing food and landslide disasters remain out of reach of the most basic needs, one cannot help but question the point of the war. And ponder, what is to prevent an even more desperate insurgency in the future, if the inequality persists and impunity continues to prevail.

Excerpt from our editorial 20 years ago this week from issue #64 12-18 October 2001:

Despite the havoc Maoists have created, the revolt has exposed the hollowness of Nepal's political leaders who have discredited and squandered our hard-won democracy. It has also shown the depth of



frustration of a neglected people whose basic needs have been ignored for too long. More than a decade after the promulgation of a constitution that made the people sovereign, rural Nepal is still waiting to see what it actually means to be the true rulers of this country. Call them ignorant or illiterate, but they have yet to see and feel the supposed advantages of democracy. And, mark this, they know exactly who the crooks are. The Maoists had felt the pulse of the people and they knew the anger, frustration and hopelessness in the hinterland. They let the people down by fighting a futile, wasteful war in their name, that is another matter. They lived with the people-in many cases they were the people. Like Mao said, they were like fish in water. After the rebels lay down their guns, that is the kind of intimacy that political parties and their activists should be aiming for. Much of this is happening in many parts of Nepal as local self-governance takes root. Such successful examples of grassroots democracy in action must be replicated nationwide if we are to prevent an even more desperate insurgency replacing the present one.

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

ON THE WEB

POST OFFICE

Until the street address system improves, the postal service cannot do much ('It's in the mail', Anita Bhetwal www.nepalitimes.com).

Santsh Aryal

- Nepal's post office has not resumed its foreign mail service to the USA and to other foreign countries for the last two years. It had a deal with Thai airways, and hasn't made new contracts with other airlines to move mail.

Deep Rana

- Nepal Post should be better or at least equal to courier companies in speed and reliability for their services to be relevant.

Avi Stha

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Wonderful to have native innovation promoted, but do advocate for electrified public transport, cycling infrastructure, and pedestrian protected walkways for a less congested urban landscape('e-2 wheelers', #1082).

Adhish Gurung

- Why only two wheelers? Could they not have upgraded the makers of the Safa Tempo into small electric family cars? It is very easy to mould strong fiberglass bodies and assemble them.

Lal Bahadur

- Electric bikes are costly, there are no charging stations. How much distance will they cover, and how do we repair them? We should only proceed with them once we fulfill all these requirements.

Jagat Ranabhat

I am yet to be persuaded by electric bicycles from a climate perspective ('Electric bicycles in Nepal terrain', Shristi Karki, #1082). From a green point of view, unless one is switching from a motorbike to an electric bicycle you are just consuming more electricity, which adds to our carbon footprint. Then you have the problems of battery disposal and the ecological impact. They could do more harm than good.

Rastraraj Bhandari

WAR TOURISM

Disgusting waste of money where people are suffering every day (Nepal's war tourism is a scam, Mahesh Neupane, *page 6-7*). This must stop, and those who are guilty of stealing the people's money must be punished.

Naran Klyphree

- This shouldn't be a surprise, they are just copying what the Government of Nepal does.

Shirin Barakzai

- Communism was to help the common people. Who would have thought they only helped themselves?

Stewie McLean

BP KOIRALA

BP was a far-sighted leader, he had a greater insight into the depth of the psyche of the Nepali people ('Last days with BP Koirala', AshishDhakal, www.nepalitimes.com).

Kaushik Dutta

- As BP implies, free and fair elections (and referendum) are essential, and in my view, are one of the main pillars for reducing corruption.

Jamie McGuinness

MANANG FLOODS

Unfortunately, the devastating impacts of climate change seems similar in all continents, including the poles ('Himalayan floods a sign of worse to come', MukeshPokhrel, www.nepalitimes.com).

Pierre Fasseaux

- I hope rebuilding efforts get funded by the government.

David Ellenberg

- This is global warming in high gear.

Gyurme Dondup

KING MAHENDRA

Why would he have to pay for hunting in Alaska? ('King Mahendra didn't pay hunting bill in US', www.nepalitimes.com)? You've been given WIP treatment, granted a hunting licence, driven around in limousines with Nepali flags flown alongside American flags—all done in honour of the King, and you expect him to pay his expenses?

Hari Sapkota

- The Royal couple must have thought 'if they don't ask, we don't need to pay'. Nor did they pay taxes in their own country, until the People's Movement II that sidelined king Gyangendra Shah.

Suraj Hazare Dhakal

ROAD TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS

That's one sad and deplorable side of life ('Deadly Dasain on Nepal's highways', nepalitimes.com). When something tragic becomes too common, one doesn't react that strongly anymore - paradoxically maybe some kind of survival mechanism in our psyche.

Anna Paulina Eklöf

PANDORA PAPERS

Nepal is probably one of the best places from where this sort of laundering can happen ('Nepal's richest man in the Pandora Papers', nepalitimes.com). Everyone knows it's happening, but no one does a thing, the nexus works well to fuel it. Will this round of expose yield any result in terms of bringing the perpetrators to book? I think not. Nepal will still be poor partly because the riches are channeled away, by its own citizens.

Raj Gyawali

- Well, if we make that kind of money, guess we would want to save it. I have not reached that level yet so shall avoid judging them. Hehe.

Sanjiv Stanly Soreng

- Just allow them to bring the money as FDI because *the* Nepal government cannot do anything else.

Saroj Powdel

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Deadly Dasain on Nepal's highways

Nearly 50 people died within two days in three different accidents on Nepal's highways during Dasain, mainly due to overloading, negligence of drivers, mechanical failure, and poor road conditions. Read the detailed report about the epidemic of road accidents in Nepal at nepalitimes.com



Most reached and shared on Facebook



King Mahendra didn't pay hunting bill in US

In November 1967, King Mahendra and Queen Ratna went on a hunting trip in Alaska after their state visit to Washington DC. But the entourage skipped town without settling \$60,000 in expenses, an Alaskan guide now says.



Most commented

Nepal's 'war tourism' is a scam

by Mahesh Neupane
Rolpa's 'war tourism' was meant to honour the sacrifices of those lost to the insurgency, generate income from trekking, and create local jobs. But money for the proposed 'Guerrilla Trek Trail' is being doled out to local Maoist cadre. Read this expose on our website for details. In this issue on *page 6-7*.



Most popular on Twitter

Nepal's singing nun is a hit in China

by Ashish Dhakal
Widely known in Nepal as the singing nun, Ani Choying Drolma's Buddhist mantra chants have now reached tens of millions across Southeast Asia. Read about Drolma's success story on our website.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Last Days with BP Koirala: a nephew has fond memories of his famous uncle and his vision for #Nepal's future. Don't miss this detailed account of a visionary #leader in his last moments. #politics #history



Pradeep Dixit@pradeepdixit7
Good article, yes he was gone too soon.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#Nepal's 'war tourism' is a scam. Money for the proposed 'Guerrilla Trek Trail' is being doled out to local Maoist cadre in Rolpa. #wartourism #war An expose by Mahesh Neupane for @cjnepal.



Ashok Pokharel @BigBlackYak
And, who in their right mind expected the money to go to where it was designed to go? Pashupatinath, help us!



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
We are what we eat
Misleading commercials in #Nepal make families replace nutritious local diets with processed food, writes public health specialist and author Aruna Uprety.



Sujeev Shakya@sujeevshakya
#MustreadThis is global phenomenon, in highly educated rich countries commercials can be super misleading.



WildYak@WildYak11
Dr Aruna is a legend. And I totally agree. The traditional Nepali diet is actually pretty great (eg daalbaat). It's sad that people think western things like coca cola and noodles are a good idea.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#GuestEditorialGiving all Nepalis a shot at the Covid #vaccine
State neglect, international apathy, and the climate crisis magnify vaccine inequity in #Nepal, writes epidemiologist @Lhamo_Y.



EmperoroficeCream@IceEmperorof
Excellent! Thank-you, Lhamo. Important reminders. Inequality among states & inequality within the state. The latter is often forgotten by the powers that be.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The district hospital in Sandhikharka of Arghakhanchi bought a #ventilator six months ago, it has never been turned on even though there were critically-ill #COVID19 patients who needed respiratory support.



Joe Niemczura@ccnepal2013
This is not a surprise.



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TURKISH AIRLINES

ENGLAND

Nepal's glaring food gap

Dasain exposes waste, and the country's dilemma of too much and too little food

● Aryan Sitaula

Although the undernutrition rate in Nepal has dropped dramatically in the past two decades, a quarter of its children still go to bed hungry every night.

Yet, food waste makes up 66% of garbage in Kathmandu. The gap between poverty and plenty is even more glaring during Dasain-Tihar, when bingeing on *masu-bhat* is the norm.

This week's Global Hunger Index 2021 by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) ranks Nepal 76th among 116 countries – better than India (101) and Pakistan (92). However, this is no comfort for thousands of Nepali families who are struggling to feed themselves due to income loss caused by the pandemic.

On the other hand, with rising living standards, Nepalis are also over-splurging, leading to an increase in food waste. Much of this is processed and packaged food, which adds to the plastic in urban garbage.

The problem has gotten so bad that cooking oil brand Siddha Baba took it upon itself to communicate the seriousness of food waste in Nepal ahead of the festivals via tv and social advertisements with comedy duo Madan Krishna Shrestha and Hari Bansa Acharya.

Doko Recyclers that manages



AMIT MACHAMASI

and upcycles dry waste in Kathmandu, has seen a significant increase in consumption and wastage during the festival season.

To be sure, the problem of food waste in Nepal is not specific to festival time. Nearly 4.6 million people are categorised as 'food insecure' in Nepal, and 40% of children under five are stunted. Childhood malnutrition has been made worse by pandemic-induced economic fallout.

The pandemic has also disrupted the market with tons of vegetables and fruits left to rot without proper transport during the lockdowns. Which is why, despite a favourable monsoon this year, many were discouraged from planting

maize and paddy, fearing more wastage.

In a recent panel examining the food crisis in Nepal, environmental scientist Uttam Babu Shrestha said that up to 40% of vegetables are wasted daily during their transport and handling.

"Although there is plenty of anecdotal evidence pointing to a large degree of food waste in transit and households, there has been no comprehensive study done in Nepal examining food waste post-harvest," added Shrestha.

A study in January of 2014 surveyed wholesalers and retailers to determine the primary cause of food waste in shops. Many of the respondents said it was because

they did not have refrigeration facilities to extend the shelf life of farm produce. Others said poor handling and packaging contributed to food waste.

Food is generally to be packed in polythene bags which are significantly cheaper than crates, the expensive alternative that is the industry standard for protecting produce. The use of polythene bags, paired with tightly packed produce with minimal airflow in a vehicle on uneven roads, leads to a significant waste of produce even before it reaches market.

Food waste at home can easily be minimised, but the extent of the problem is much larger in hotels and restaurants. Nabin Bikash

Maharjan of the company Blue Waste to Value has been working with clients like Hotel Yak and Yeti and Hyatt Regency, and has seen first-hand the amount of food waste such establishments generate.

"Before the pandemic, we used to get some 1.5 tons of waste from one single 5-star hotel in a day, 60% of which would be food. In large part, this waste is from banquets and events they host," says Maharjan.

Blue Waste to Value turns the food waste into animal feed, and the rest for organic composting. Most larger hotels and restaurants in Kathmandu now have similar tie-ups with pig farms.

Actually, an average Nepali household produces much less food waste. Blue Waste to Value found that only about 20% of the waste generated in private homes is food. Even so, a study by the Solid Waste Management Technical Support Centre (SWMTSC) estimated that in Nepal, 65% of household waste is organic which means it can be turned into compost instead of being dumped in landfill sites.

Food waste is adding to Kathmandu's growing problem of solid waste management. The capital's only landfill in Nuwakot's Sisdole has already reached its maximum capacity, and every monsoon the rains damage the access road to the site obstructing the movement of garbage trucks.

Some 1,000 tons of solid waste is dumped at Sisdole every day, 60% of which is organic. Almost all of the waste remains unsegregated and adds to the pollution, further worsening the health of the people.

Says Pankaj Panjiyar of Doko: "Food waste at home can be largely reduced if all of us practice in-house waste segregation and composting, this in time will help with our overflowing landfill." 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK

Post-monsoon rains

Still reeling from a disastrous monsoon season, Nepal has been hit with unseasonal downpours that dumped nearly 500mm of rain in 24 hours in some places. At least 95 people have died in floods and landslides and 23 are missing following the rains. Rice fields ready for



harvest were affected across the country, and the 2021 paddy crop is most likely to be below target. Last year, the country produced over 5 million tonnes of paddy, but still imported about Rs51 billion worth of rice to meet growing demand.

Hundreds of flights were cancelled on Monday and Tuesday, and highways were blocked by landslides as Nepalis travelled after the Dasain break. Over 900,000 people had left Kathmandu Valley during the festival.



Turkish best again

Turkish Airlines has been named among the top three in the 'Best Global Airlines' list by the Readers Choice awards 2021 of the lifestyle and travel magazine *Condé Nast Traveller*. Currently, Turkish Airlines operates four weekly flights between Kathmandu and Istanbul and is the only carrier that connects Nepal directly to Europe, and with a global onward connections from Istanbul.

NEXON new avatar

Tata Motors has unveiled the new avatar of its Nexon Diesel BS6 car with a thinner bumper, the interior decorated with new colours except for dual-tone black and silver and the dashboard modified to make it more user-friendly. The car priced at Rs4.9 million is powered by a 1.2 litre Revotom turbo petrol unit and a 1.5 litre Revotorq diesel unit, which churns out 120 PS of speed. The engine can drive in Eco, City and Sports modes.



NRB limits interest rate

Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) has directed banks and financial institutions to reduce interest rates on deposits that they had increased on 18 October to 11%. The hike was blamed for the plummeting stock market. The central bank says banks can now provide only 10% interest.

Huaxin Cement complete

Chinese-backed Huaxin Cement has nearly completed construction of its 3,000 tonne per day cement plant in Dhading with plans to commence production immediately after the Tihar festival, according to its Nepali partner Suraj Baidya.



The \$220 million plant already has access to the electricity with the switching station at Siddhalek Gaonpalika-6 under the Marsyangdi-Suchatar 132 KV transmission line coming into operation last week.

Global IME Ncell tie-up

Global IME Bank and Ncell will jointly provide a free SIM card and free data pack worth 250MB for mobile banking to new Global Sahayatri Remittance Account holders intended towards migrant workers and their families. The SIM holder will get Rs20 main balance, 20 min on-net voice, 20 on-net SMS and 200MB data. On recharge of Rs100 and above within 2 days of SIM activation, the customer will get 100 min on-net voice pack and 100MB data. There is also a 10% bonus balance for every recharge till one year and discounted call rate in India, Malaysia and Middle East countries.



27 years of Everest

Everest Bank marked its 27th anniversary this week with a blood donation and free health checkup camp with a special focus on post-Covid complications



at its head office in Lazimpat. The bank also signed MoU with Lalitpur Metropolitan City in the presence of mayor Chiri Babu Maharjan to build an electrical crematorium at Sankhamul Ghat.

City Express winners

City Express Money Transfer has announced the name of its lucky winners under its Dasain-Tihar-Chaat scheme wherein 10 individuals will receive Rs100,000 for two months. The winners of the first



month are Anju Ghale who transferred money from Japan, Yamlal Bhusal from Saudi Arabia, Min Kumar Shrestha and Januka Chaulagai from Kuwait and Ramesh Yadav from Dubai. All customers sending money home are eligible for the scheme which also has daily winners receiving Rs10,000 for 61 days.



MONIKA DEUPALA

100 DAYS

The report card for Nepal’s 5-party coalition government gives it failing grades in most subjects

● Ramesh Kumar

Wednesday, 20 October marked 100 days since Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba assumed office, for the fifth time in his political career, and head of a 5-party coalition. Soon after his appointment in July, now Defence Minister Minendra Rijal of the Nepali Congress (NC) was scathing in his criticism of the preceding K P Oli government. He told a House session: “The Nepali people will now finally see for themselves how a government is actually supposed to function.”

Nepalis have certainly seen firsthand how the coalition government has functioned, although not in a way Rijal meant it. Rather, this ‘honeymoon period’ has been characterised by failures and incompetence.

It took Deuba a full 88 days to even fill Cabinet positions, as he attempted to reach a power-sharing agreement and divide ministerial portfolios within his political alliance. To be sure, not all the blame lies at Deuba’s doorstep. Coalition partners haggled with each other, and factions within the governing parties competed for quotas and plum ministerial berths.

In order to keep his coalition intact, the prime minister’s first order of business was to prorogue Parliament in the midst of a budget debate so that he could issue an ordinance that would allow his ally Madhav Kumar Nepal to form a new party and join his coalition.

Earlier this year, Deuba had been fiercely critical when K P Oli also dissolved Parliament in an unsuccessful attempt to pass a similar ordinance, and instigate early elections. Deuba came out looking hypocritical at best.

“This government chose to repeat the mistakes of its predecessor, the very ones that it deemed unconstitutional and undemocratic,” notes economist Keshav Acharya.

The farce did not end there: Deuba then repealed the ordinance after it became an albatross around his neck as Nepal and the other coalition partner, the Janata Samajbadi Party, feared it would lead to further splits.

The Cabinet expansion, when it did happen, ignited criticism from media, legal, and political spheres when news emerged that Chief

Justice Cholendra SJB Rana wanted two of his nominees to be awarded ministries. Deuba appointed the Chief Justice’s brother-in-law Gajendra Hamal, an unelected NC member, as the Industry, Commerce and Supplies Minister.

If Deuba’s precious misdemeanours were tolerated, Hamal’s appointment was seen by many as crossing the line on the separation of powers and led to a public outcry and outrage on media. Hamal resigned three days later.

“The fact that the leadership was unable to form a full Cabinet in time just confirmed to the public their worst perception towards the leadership,” adds Acharya.

Contrary to its commitment to transparency, the government has continued to grant public appointments to party-affiliated candidates, some of whom are under investigation for professional discrepancies. Twelve of Nepal’s ambassadors were abruptly recalled in September, even those who had been relatively successful.

The disarray in the coalition has brought important policy decisions as well as economic activities to a complete standstill. Dozens of important bills are stuck in Parliament. The federal civil service bill, which was supposed to be passed three years ago, has been withdrawn, and the Milennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) ratification is stuck.

“None of the promises made before and during the formation of the government has been fulfilled yet,” says former Finance Secretary Rameshore Khanal, “it looks very much as though the government is yet to find its feet.”

Indeed, the prime minister has not even been able to appoint members to his own secretariat, and remains without economic, political, and foreign affairs advisers. Appointed ministers have failed to disclose their financial assets, as required by law.

Even the decisions the government has finally taken have proven to be controversial – like the amendment to the budget that make it easier for money laundering by not requiring source of income for investors.

Moreover, the failure to reach a consensus within the parties on issues of national importance, such as the budget, led to a government shutdown for the first time in the 71-year history of Nepal’s budget.

According to the Office of the

Comptroller and Auditor General, only 3.42% of the government’s development-targeted capital expenditure has been used during the first three months of the current fiscal year, down from 4.28% during the last fiscal year. Nepal’s ‘national pride projects’ are affected even as infrastructure damaged by this monsoon’s devastating floods need to be urgently repaired.

“The government has no roadmap for how to function,” says Kishor Thapa of Bibeksheel Sajha Party, “and bureaucracy cannot function in a leadership vacuum.”

Prime Minister Deuba, in an interview in state-run *Gorkhapatra* said that the United States was ready to amend the MCC agreement to upgrade Nepal’s electricity transmission lines and highways. However, the project has become a victim of political infighting and geopolitics, and even threatens the coalition.

Foreign policy has been another disaster. There have been no active attempts to address Nepal’s border disputes with India, and no investigation into the disappearance of a young Nepali man on the Mahakali border river. Instead, Deuba unnecessarily angered Beijing by setting up a committee to look into a long-settled border issue with China.

With the 2022/23 elections a little over a year away, Deuba needs to improve performance if his NC is to get more votes this time. In fact, Deuba seems to be so nervous about this that he is battling for early elections (*see report above*).

“This opportunity to form a government was pure luck,” a close Deuba aide admitted candidly, “so no clear goals or directions had been set at the time of government formation, there was and has been only confusion.”

One of Deuba’s only success stories so far has been the Covid vaccination drive -- 30% of the eligible population has been fully vaccinated so far, while 39% have received the first dose. China has promised a further 2 million vaccine doses.

Former government secretary Krishna Gyawali sums up the first 100 days: “The leadership has been unable to make bold political decisions and reforms. While this government does not seem to have made things worse than the previous one, it certainly hasn’t done anything to make things better either.” 🇳🇵

Who wants early elections, and why?

● Santa Gaha Magar

Even as he completes his ‘honeymoon period’ in office, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is sending signals that he would like to call early elections.

Already under fire for non-performance and incompetence, his five-party coalition is in disarray, and some in his own Nepali Congress (NC) want elections before the party’s popularity plummets further.

Deuba led his five-party coalition into office on 13 July after the Supreme Court reinstated the Lower House that was dissolved by his predecessor K P Oli. But Deuba and some of his colleagues appear reluctant to allow Parliament to complete its full five-year term.

The next elections are due in December-January 2022, and Parliament’s term is valid till April 2023. Besides his party’s election prospects, Deuba also wants early polls to defuse increasing dissent within his party from those dissatisfied with his leadership. This is the fifth time Deuba has been Nepal’s prime minister in the last 23 years.

Those supporting Deuba’s push for early polls include leaders from all parties who lost in the 2017 polls, as well as coalition leaders who did not get ministerial portfolios in Deuba’s belated Cabinet expansion on 8 October. The opposition UML led by K P Oli has always batted for mid-term polls.

Electoral calculations now even determine relations between the coalition partners and the NC itself. The Maoist Centre (MC), for instance, appears not too unhappy to place all blame for the government’s failures on the prime minister’s lap. In fact, Deuba has become the lightning rod, while none of the criticism seems to rub off on the MC’s Pushpa Kamal Dahal and the party’s ministers in government.

“Voters are disillusioned, so the government must announce some bold initiatives in the public interest,” says the MC’s Giriraj Mani Pokhrel, who has served as education and health minister in previous governments. “The coalition must keep its unity intact till elections.”

When Oli dissolved the House for the first time on 23 December 2020 after facing a mutiny within his Nepal Communist Party from Madhav Kumar Nepal and Dahal, Deuba who was then the leader of the main opposition

party, had supported his call for a fresh electoral mandate. The NCP then split into the MC and UML, and Nepal himself broke away from the UML to form the Unified Socialists (US). It would be advantageous for the NC to call for early elections, since it would benefit from the split in the NCP and UML, as well as the Janata Samajbadi Party led by Upendra Yadav, which is also in the coalition.

However, some NC insiders say that the real reason Deuba wants early polls is because of the party’s general convention, which Deuba wants to postpone to blunt rising criticism from party stalwarts like Ram Chandra Paudel, Shekhar Koirala and others who want the convention to go ahead.

The case for early polls and postponing the party convention is legally fraught, and Deuba will have to jump through some constitutional hoops if he is to announce it. “If the NC is going to postpone its general convention once again, the Election Commission could de-register its party name and election tree symbol,” says Punranjan Acharya, a political analyst.

Meanwhile, Dahal’s MC is holding its own convention in December, and the party does not appear to be ready yet for early elections. The MC was formed after the Supreme Court refused to accept the unity of the Maoists and the UML to form the NCP in 2018.

Dahal and the MC are already eying the NC as their prospective election rivals, and allowing Deuba to take the heat for the government’s many failures in the past 100 days. The Maoists see Deuba’s insistence on keeping the powerful Home, Defence and Foreign Ministries with the NC as a part of his elections strategy.


Constitutional expert Bipin Adhikari says that elections are deemed to have been held on schedule only if they are held after Parliament completed four and half years. He also says local elections should be held first, followed by federal polls. This would mean that Deuba’s early polls, if held, would be very close to normal elections anyway.

Party conventions used to be boisterous affairs, but except for the NC there does not seem to be much discussion about the MC, US and UML conventions. The reason could be that while the party leadership is being challenged in the NC by various factions, Dahal, Nepal and Oli seem to be firmly in control of their own parties. 🇳🇵

आफ्नो भ्रजेको आफ्नै हुन्छ




बडा दशैं, शुभ दिपावली २०७८, नेपाल सम्वत् ११४२ तथा छठ पर्वको हार्दिक मंगलमय शुभकामना।



बडा दशैं, शुभ दिपावली २०७८, नेपाल सम्वत् ११४२ तथा छठ पर्वको उपलक्ष्यमा देश तथा विदेशमा रहनु भएका सम्पूर्ण नेपालीहरूको सुख, शान्ति, समृद्धि र उत्तरोत्तर प्रगतिको कामना गर्दछौं।

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A functionless cement welcome gate erected at enormous cost in 2016 in Thawang.

ALL PHOTOS: MAHESH NEUPANE



A cement shed built at a cost of Rs1.66 million to commemorate 44 guerrillas killed in a battle in 2001 lies abandoned.

● **Mahesh Neupane** in Rolpa

After the decade-long Maoist conflict ended in 2006, ex-guerrilla commanders and local governments here in the cradle of the Maoist insurgency saw great potential for ‘war tourism’.

The Maoists launched their armed struggle in February 1996 among these craggy and remote mountains of mid-western Nepal. Once obscure villages like Holeri, Khara and Gam became household words because of the famous battles that were waged there.

More than 15 years after the war ended, former guerrilla commanders have been in and out of government many times, setting aside budgets every year to take the region ‘from Maoism to tourism’.

Historical memory of the conflict would be used to honour the sacrifices of those who were killed, generate income from tourism, and create local jobs.

In the past 15 years, the central government alone has spent more than Rs500 million to promote ‘war tourism’. But the money has mostly been doled out to the cadre of the Maoist Centre party, which is once again a member of the coalition government in Kathmandu now.

But Rolpa today is as neglected as ever, and the former Maoists in government have not done much to improve health and education, or lift the living standards of the people in whose name they fought a war.

A safe house in Rolpa in which Maoist Supreme Commander Prachanda (Pushpa Kamal Dahal) once sought shelter in 2001 during the conflict is an example of the waste of money.

In 2019, the local government spent Rs10 million to renovate this house ostensibly to turn it into a museum. The mud and thatch two-storey house (*pictured below*)

belongs to the brother of Maoist leader Jayapuri Gharti, and another of her brothers headed the project. The money was used to purchase the house and build a metal roof to shelter the shelter from the elements.

“All that money was spent for nothing,” says Anil KC, a Maoist from the Biplav faction. “They brought some journalists here and took some pictures. I don’t think any tourists have come this way.”

Of the 17,000 people who were killed in the conflict, nearly 1,000 were from Rolpa. And 35 of the 1,380 people still listed as missing are also from the district in which the Maoists launched their armed struggle on 13 February 1996 with an attack on the Holeri police post.

After the conflict ended, the Ministry of Peace allocated Rs1.1 million to build a ‘martyrs’ gate’ in Holeri to commemorate the first Maoist attack. There is no sign of the gate today.

“There was a gate here, but since so much of the money was embezzled during its construction, those involved demolished the evidence, saying they needed to widen a road,” says the mayor of Runtogadi, Balaram Buda.

In 2011, the district administration allocated Rs17 million for nine projects to develop trekking infrastructure in Rolpa. After the 2017 election, municipal, provincial and federal governments have paid out more money to build rest houses, repair trails, and construct view towers along the paths that the guerrillas used.

The Peace Ministry in Kathmandu doled out Rs1.86 million seven years ago to construct a memorial to Maoist commander Khim Thapa in Sulichaur. It was never built. “I remember before I was elected, some bulldozers were levelling the site, but I have no idea why they abandoned it,” says ward chair Ganj Chhetri.

In April 2001, 44 Maoists were killed in a fierce battle in Pategumchal of Rolpa. Seven years ago, the Ministry of Peace allocated Rs1.55 million to build a memorial column at the site of the battle.

A cement shed and latrine were built, but they are not usable. After pressure from local people, a committee headed by Nar Bahadur Pun finally built a makeshift gate.

The village of Gam made national headlines in 2002 after a fierce battle that killed 35 Maoists and left 106 police and civil servants dead. There is a ‘martyrs’ pillar’ to commemorate the battle, but it looks abandoned.

“They stole money meant for those who died, and just built this to show they did something,” says local resident Deu Gharti Magar.

The municipality got another Rs3.2 million to build a ‘martyrs’ memorial peace park’ under the chairmanship of Maoist Centre leader Ramesh Buda. It was also never built. He is uncomfortable when asked about where all the money went.

Another Rs3.2 million was given to a committee to build a martyrs’ memorial park in Jankot. Some of it was used to buy the land, but the park was not built, and the rest of the money has vanished.

Despite questions about how building martyrs’ gates will help promote ‘war tourism’, budget outlays have continued to local committees for projects that lack any utility. And even the money set aside to build those memorials is misused, or simply stolen.

In Dubi Danda of Rolpa, Rs2.5 million was given between 2011-2015 to build a park, but all that was done was construct a makeshift shed and level the site to make a helipad. It is the same story in Gangadev municipality – Rs3.2 million given to a local committee was spent on hiring a bulldozer to clear the slope, and that was that.

NEPAL 'WAR TO IS A S

Money for the proposed
being doled out to lo

In 1999, the police captured 11 members of a Maoist cultural troupe in Bhawang, executed them, and burnt their bodies. The Peace Ministry allocated Rs2.5 million to build a memorial for them, but today there is just a shed ringed with barbed wire at the site where the bodies of the warriors were set alight.

Across Rolpa and Rukum, except for a memorial in Thawang and a Gurung Museum homestay, there is not much to show for the budget doled out.

“They have exploited our grief and bereavement to enrich themselves,” says Dev Bahadur Oli, whose brother Sundar was killed by the security forces in 2002. “The money is just a handout to the party cadre to rent dozers, it is not transparent at all.”

Rolpa ranks 67th out of Nepal’s 77 districts in the Human Development Index (HDI). The district needs better schools and more hospitals, roads and bridges need to be upgraded, and people who lost their jobs during the



Rolpa ranks 67th among Nepal 77 districts in human development. Its roads need repairs, instead of war memorials that have no impact on lifting livelihoods, locals say.



Rolpa’s school children need bridges to cross dangerous rivers, not trails that go nowhere, say residents.



A safe house used by Maoist leader Prachanda has a roof over its



The Martyrs' Memorial at Thawang, a stronghold in Rolpa of the Maoists during the conflict.



This 'memorial park' in Iribang commemorates Maoist guerrilla Kim Bahadur Thapa, and was built at a cost of Rs3.5 million.

ROLPA'S TOURISM' SCAM

sed 'Guerrilla Trek Trail' is
o local Maoist cadre

pandemic need help.

Yet, all three levels of government keep wasting money on physical monuments that have no public service function – even if they are ever built.

Khem Buda Magar, who headed the now-defunct District Peace Committee, says it is not just the misuse of state resources to build the so-called parks and memorials, but such projects have failed to honour those who died or were disappeared, and their relatives feel they are also forgotten.

Rolpa's elected representatives see much potential in trekking as tourism rebounds after the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, all local governments have put trekking tourism top on the list of priorities.

In the 2018-19 fiscal year, Madi, Paribartan and Thawang municipalities spent altogether Rs4.5 million for the so-called 'tourism development'. In addition, Lumbini Province in this year's budget allocated Rs20 million for tourism infrastructure in Thawang. Even the Ministry of Tourism

and Civil Aviation under the federal government has granted Rs7.5 million for the 'Guerrilla Trekking Trail' along the Jaljala mountain. Of this, only a 1.8km path has been built by a local committee in Jelbang.

Rs4 million was also given to Thawang for a 'Yarsa Trekking Trail' that follows the paths used by yarsagumba pickers. The municipality only built a 2.5km trail with the money, but it is not used much, says Thawang resident Sri Kumari Roka.

"It is a trail to nowhere, why should anyone walk on it?" she asks.

Six of Rolpa's local governments set aside Rs7.4 million last fiscal year for 'war tourism', and Lumbini Province allocated Rs5 million for the purpose.

The whole town of Jelbang was supposed to be turned into a 'model village' to honour the 73 Maoists who were killed there in 2001, by helping their relatives. The Peace Ministry even granted Rs2.8 million, but it was all spent on road

repairs, and the ward chair says that was a joint decision.

"The money that came to build model villages ended up giving some Maoist leaders and cadre a model lifestyle," local resident Bharat Roka says mockingly.

A former Maoist camp supervised by the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) in Triveni of Rolpa is being turned into a Rs9 million museum. The project is headed by local Maoist leader, Amar Dang, who himself is related to Lumbini Province Chief Minister Kul Prasad KC.

Another building in Thawang for a 'martyr foundation' was allocated Rs6.5 million, but was abandoned until it was converted last year into an isolation centre for Covid-19 patients.

Much of the rest of the money allocated for 'war tourism' is now being spent on building functionless and wasteful concrete view towers on mountain tops.

One such mountain is the 2,055m high Chuche Peak, on top of which the municipality is building

a 10-floor, 115m high view tower at a cost of Rs48 million (*pictured, below*). Another view tower is sprouting near Holeri, the cradle of the Maoist revolution.

All this construction is happening in a district where there are 200 government schools with nearly 70,000 students, but very few teachers. At Sunchahari municipality there are 5,000 students, the school buildings are rudimentary, and there is not a single secondary school teacher.

The doctor-patient ratio in Rolpa is 1:25,000, and families have to walk for days just to reach a health post even for simple medical procedures.

Yet, all this does not seem to concern the three levels of government that have spent Rs30 million just on building 90 temples in the district.

One of the more useful projects has been the establishment of ethnic museums, with ones for Gurung, Magar and Dalit peoples. The Gurung Museum has exhibits and a homestay (*pictured*).

Erstwhile Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun, who was once a guerrilla commander, inaugurated an 'Information Centre' and an 'indigenous museum' for the war tourism project near Libang. No one is using the building, and it is falling apart.

The war tourism initiative was launched without any study or business plan. It has not been promoted adequately, and has just been an excuse to distribute money to Maoist cadre, says Amar Singh Pun, a former minister from Rolpa.

He adds: "This has been a colossal waste of money, a pretext for cash handouts to party loyalists." 🇳🇵

This report was prepared by Mahesh Neupane for the Centre for Investigative Journalism Nepal. A longer Nepali version of this piece is on <https://cijnepal.org.np/>

Rolpa District



ver its roof that cost Rs10 million.



A dog lounges at the construction site of the 115m high concrete view tower that is going up on top of the 2,055m Chuche Peak in Rolpa. It will cost at least Rs48 million.



A Gurung Museum and homestay in Rolpa is part of the 'war tourism' effort to attract trekkers on the Guerrilla Trail.

EVENTS



Dance classes

Sign up to take Bharatnatyam, Ballet, Hip Hop, Freestyle, and contemporary dance lessons from Sushila Arts Academy. Call the for details. 9860588626

Art Exhibition

Siddhartha Art Gallery will exhibit paintings and handcrafted artwork by entrepreneurs Shivani Singh Shah, Sunita Vaidya and Nidhi Todi. 22-26 October, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

Leadership programme

The British Embassy is inviting young Nepali women to apply for a year-long mentoring programme run by a group of embassies and development agencies led by women. More at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/participate-in-a-womens-leadership-mentoring-programme-in-nepal> Deadline: 16 November

Photowalk

Join aspiring photographers for walks across the valley and take pictures that inspire. Follow distancing protocols. Get details about Photowalk schedules on PhotoWalk Nepal's website.



Boudha market

Buy fresh and organic fruits, vegetables, baked goods and other delicious goodies. Support local products and businesses, and follow physical distancing guidelines. Saturdays, Utpala Cafe, Boudha

DINING



Pho99

Enjoy mouthwatering Vietnamese food including fresh Banh Mi Sandwiches, salads and curries, along with Vietnam's staple, the delicious Pho. Check out the menu on Foodmandu. Jhamsikhel, 9803203119

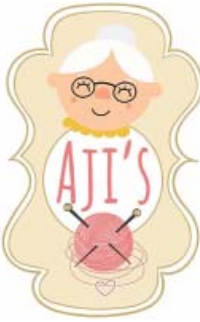
PODCASTS

Feast Meets West

In Feast Meets West, hosts Lynda Liu in NYC and Iris Van Kerckhove in Hong Kong trace the origin and journeys of Asian food and food trends to the west. Listen to episode #39 where the hosts interview New York-based Fulpa Jangbu, who owns and operates Momo Delight, a food cart in NYC.

Aji's Podcast

Listen to inspiring and extraordinary life stories from Nepal's elderly community. Find Aji's Podcasts on YouTube, Apple Podcasts, or Stitcher.



Bookclub

A group of readers talk to acclaimed authors about their best-known novels in this podcast from BBC Radio 4. Find Bookclub on Stitcher.



Forest 404

Forest 404 is a nine-part environmental thriller podcast set 200 years into the future where forests do not exist anymore. Find on Apple podcasts, Spotify, and Google podcasts.

Ridiculous History

History is beautiful, brutal and, often, ridiculous. Episodes of Ridiculous History dive into some of the weirdest stories from across the span of human civilisation. Find on Stitcher.

French Bakery

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



Embassy Restaurant

Enjoy a hearty meal in this centrally located restaurant known for its lively ambience and assorted menu. Try the Duck Breast, served on a bed of mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables in a rich peppery steak sauce. Lazimpat, (01) 4424040

GETAWAY



Jal Mahal

Hotel Jal Mahal lives up to its name with three large swimming pools in its sprawling property. Even if it is not an overnight stay, take a dip in one of the pools before the winter sets in. Gharipatan, Pokhara, 9856087030

Peacock Guest House

Housed in a World Heritage Site, 3-storied Newa-style building provides splendid views of the Dattatreya Square and the Bhimsenthana temple. Bhaktapur (01) 6611829

Mystic Mountain

Situated amid the forest of Nagarkot, the resort is exquisitely built using ultra modern designs and world-class comfort. Nagarkot, 9851277701

Balthali Village

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



Evergreen Eco-Lodge

Evergreen Eco-Lodge is a rustic stay in Chitwan. Unwind in one of the wooden tree-house cabins with thatched straw roofs and enjoy the tranquillity of the dense forest. Sauraha, 9827284448



Haadi Biryani

Craving a quick and easy Biryani? Haadi is the place to go to or order from. Enjoy slow-cooked biryanis seasoned with a secret spice blend which come in clay pots that enhances the dining experience. Dilli Bazaar (01) 4538444

Gangnam Galbi Barbeque

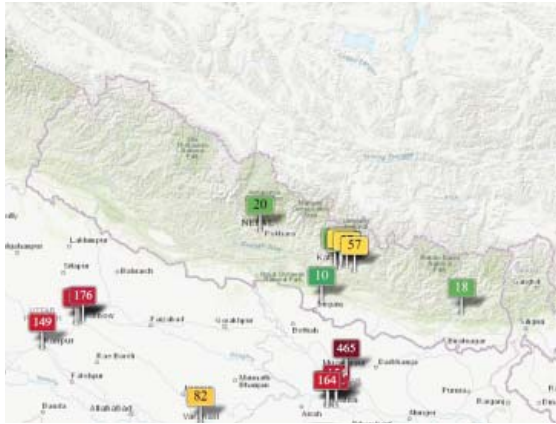
Tantalise the taste buds with the best of Korean barbecue, grill, and stick food. Try the Suntofu stew and duck roast grill. Find the menu online. Naxal, (01) 4434780



Just as we predicted last week, the confluence of two sky rivers from the Bay of Bengal and the post-monsoon westerly dumped destructive record-breaking rainfall, mainly over western Nepal and India's Uttarakhand. Some parts of Nepal saw a shocking 500mm of rain in 24 hours. That system has now been pushed out of the way by the westerlies, however there is plenty of moisture still in its wake and these will rise along the Himalayan foothills into Friday and the weekend, unleashing thunderstorms. Unseasonably warm temperature will also drive local convection for afternoon and evening cloud buildup.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
25° 16°	23° 15°	24° 13°

AIR QUALITY INDEX

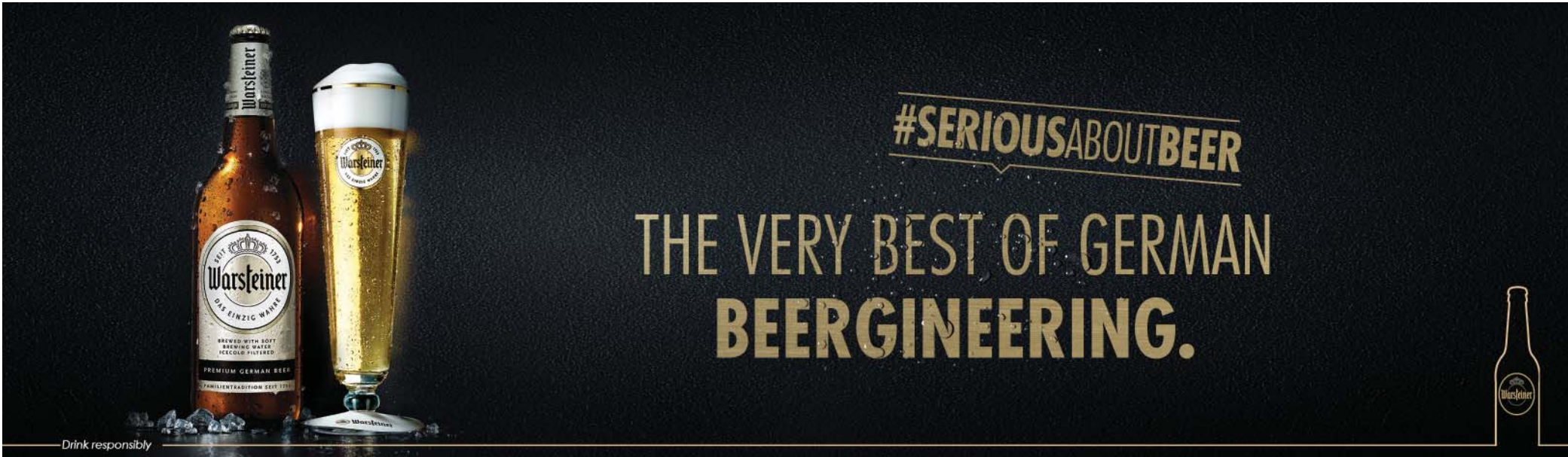


The combination of heavy unseasonal rainfall and the lack of traffic over the holidays this week meant that Kathmandu Valley's air was clean, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) staying in the green 'Healthy' zone. But this will not last. Although residual showers will still scrub the air clean, the increase in vehicular pollution post-holidays will raise the AQI to more dangerous levels again. In addition, we are also seeing a resumption of crop residue burning in Pakistan and northern India that will blow smoke our way.



OUR PICK

Creator Molly Smith Metzler's 2021 American miniseries *Maid*, inspired by Stephanie Land's memoir *Maid: Hard Work, Low Pay, and a Mother's Will to Survive*, follows Alex, a young mother who along with her daughter escapes an abusive relationship with her ex-boyfriend. Alex turns to housekeeping, and gets a job working as a maid in order to make a life for herself and her young daughter Maddy. Stars Margaret Qualley, Nick Robinson, Anika Noni Rose, Billy Burke, and Andie MacDowell.



Feel angry? Read this.

Archaic patriarchal beliefs will persist for years but you can't let negative emotions consume you

If you are a woman, it is easy to get angry. If you are a Nepali woman, it is even easier to get mad at cultural norms and societal pressures that have become an unnecessary constant in your life.



LIFE TIME

Anjana Rajbhandary

Despite our progress, women are made to feel like they are there to serve the men, many of whom speak of gender, class or ethnic equality but rarely apply it to their lives.

For example, it is pointless trying to convince a man that it is not an insult to his manhood to prepare a cup of tea for you. Alternatively, when was the last time your older brother or husband brought you a cup of tea when you came home tired from work?

I have held on to years of frustration and anger within me, and talking to other women, I realised that they do as well. It is terrible to constantly feel negative emotions because it affects our physical health and our overall well-being.

When I was younger, I vented out my anger a lot but over the years, it has adversely affected my relationships with other people. My inability to let go has affected my life quality and the time spent with my loved ones.

Early on in life, I learned that it is better to speak up about the issues bothering you than holding



MONIKA DEUPALA

them in. But I misinterpreted it so that I started to express my frustration over minor problems instead of thinking about them critically.

When I asked others for help, they told me not to get angry, which made me angrier because I already knew that. I didn't want to be angry, but I needed to learn how not to be.

I once met this wise person who told me that there is nothing wrong with anger, that it is normal — but it is how we express the anger that makes a difference.

Having been angry for years, he told me that I would not stop at will, but it was possible to change.

He told me to think about a few things when I get angry, which can be challenging in the heat of the moment, so I decided to write them down to look at when I get mad.

“Ask if it is worth it.”
 “How is this anger benefitting me now?”
 “Do not react, no matter how mad you feel — hold it in and be patient.”
 “Put your phone away.”

We have all become more impulsive about the need to express our anger. In this digital

world, it means expressing it via instant messages or social media, angry Tweets that you cannot take back.

I thought holding things in was a sign of weakness, but sometimes it is a sign of intelligence.

Often, I have regretted the things I said and texted when I was angry. So, practicing patience is one of the best pieces of advice for anger management. It allows me to feel anger but not react until I have cooled down. Generally, things don't seem as awful after you give them some time.

This is not me saying to hold things in, but it is always best not

to react in the heat of the moment when things usually come out wrong. It is also not about letting all your anger go, but analysing it to see why it bothers you so much.

Anger is oftentimes hidden sadness, and as such, I thought of it as my strength. But I have hurt too many people in the process, so I am trying to rid myself of this habit.

So now, whenever I get angry, I look at my notes and wait. It is difficult, but I do it because it is the best way to approach anger. I take it one day at a time, and it works.

I am still working on not reacting unnecessarily to people but giving myself time to see if what caused the anger is worth it. And the truth is: it never is. In the past, I used to realise it too late, but not anymore.

It will take a long time for our society and its patriarchal ways to change. In the meantime, we cannot afford to lose more of ourselves and our ability to reason by giving into negative emotions. Change comes from within and from a mind at peace. That is why the first step is to channel the energy productively. We need to be mature about this and know which emotions to express and which ones to hold in.

When I feel myself boiling inside, I wait, breathe, and pray for the strength to let go of the anger that benefits no one. I am working on controlling my anger rather than letting it control me. It is the best present I can give myself this Festive season. 🍅

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

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The start of the Anglo-

FROM NALAPANI
TO KALAPANI

Part 3

● Alisha Sijapati

***Nepali Times* reporter Alisha Sijapati spent a month retracing the Gorkha expansion beyond the Mahakali River in Kumaon and Garhwal 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 is the third in a 5-part series that looks at the bravery of the Gorkhali troops under its legendary generals to defend the newly-conquered territory, but also the history of a brief but oppressive rule.

The first and second episodes are in *Nepali Times* online. The fourth part will appear on 29 October in this space.

The road from Subathu to Jaithak in Himachal Pradesh of India will remind any Nepali of the highway from Bharatpur to Mugling. In the monsoon, there are frequent rockfalls and landslides.

This year's monsoon saw heavier than unusual rainfall across the Himalaya, and especially here in these rugged mountains where more than 200 years ago the invading Gorkhali army was facing an imminent threat from the East India Company.

The expansionist Gorkha Empire was headed for a headlong clash with the equally belligerent British who were extending their influence across India.

The deep valleys are lush and green this time of year, as the rain sweeps in on the monsoon winds from the east. It was also from the east that the Gorkhalis came in the early 1800s, sweeping across 1,500km of the Himalayan foothills in a blitzkrieg.

It was among these mountains that the sound of cannons must have echoed, along with the battle cries, and the rivers ran red with the blood of the dead and wounded. One of the bloodiest encounters of this offensive occurred at Christmas in 1814 at Jaithak Fort, as the British launched an offensive all along the western front, the centre and east of what was then not yet Nepal.

Unlike other forts, the Gorkhalis held on to Jaithak for five months, which was unconquered, until they had to give it up because of the loss of the nearby fort at Malaun.

The Empires Strike

The Anglo-Gorkha war began in October 1814 when the British troops proceeded to take over Nalagarh, the present-day gateway to Himachal Pradesh. Within the next four months, the Gorkhalis had already lost Khalanga, Nalagarh, and Ramsheher passes.

The Gorkhali general Amar Singh Thapa, devastated after the defeat by the Sikhs at Kangra and



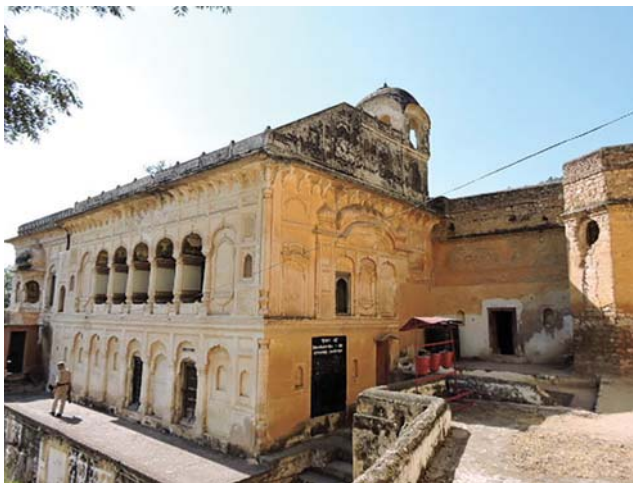
View of the Gorkhali fort at Subathu.

the treaty with Maharaja Ranjit Singh, had moved to Arki Fort, while many Gorkhalis went on to join the Khalsa army at the Lahore camp, giving rise to the term Lahurey — which even today denotes anyone migrating abroad for work.

Amar Singh Thapa knew about the strength of the British and their mighty cannons, and he did not want to engage with the East India Company, advising restraint against any provocation. However, back in Kathmandu, the Mukhtiyar General (prime minister) Bhimsen Thapa had ambitious plans to preserve the influence he had hitherto contrived for his family and preferred assertive action against the British.

On the other hand, the East India Company, with expansionist ambitions of its own, was swiftly moving across India and took the Gorkhali advance in the north as a threat. There was another reason at play as well: cotton export from India was dwindling because of the burgeoning textile industry back in England and the Company needed a trade route across the Himalaya to Tibet to access the valuable shatoosh wool (pashmina) which was prized in England.

Historians say that if the British had had enough time to instigate their troops for taking over the Gorkha, they would have done it quickly and easily, considering their numerical superiority and modern weapons.



Gorkhali general Amar Singh Thapa moved to Arki Fort after the defeat at Kangra.

But the rivalry between the Gorkhalis and the East India Company actually began much earlier. The Malla kings of Kathmandu Valley in 1767, facing an imminent Gorkha invasion, sent an SOS to Calcutta for help. The British sent an expeditionary force led by Captain Kinloch which was met by the Gorkhali defenders at Sindhuli Garhi fort. Battling malaria, wild animals and the fierce Gorkhali defence, the British and their Indian fighters retreated.

In 1795 there was another dispute over the Tarai frontier lands. The British wanted to define the borders in Morang and Purnea districts but were deterred by thieves and fugitives in the area.

In 1804 Sano Kaji Amar Singh

Thapa (not the same general in Kangra) conquered Palpa and expected to receive rents from Butwal and Gorakhpur. However, he did not know then that the Nawab of Oudh had already ceded Gorakhpur to the Company. The negotiations around the territory took a turn for the worse when the Company flatly refused it to Kathmandu.

That bitterness was festering when in 1813, Major Paris Bradshaw, who joined the East India Company as Chief Commissioner, produced land documents as evidence to back the Company's claim on the villages in the Makawanpur border and Butwal. Historians say that Bradshaw's 'haughty' manners did



not sit well with the Gorkhalis, and this escalated the matter further.

The Gorkhalis were given until 22 April 1814 to surrender Butwal and Siuraj. On the day, the Magistrate of Gorakhpur sent 17 Companies to take possession of the land. The Gorkhalis had withdrawn since it was the malaria season. A month later, however, they returned to attack the police posts in Butwal resulting in the death of one policeman.

Meanwhile, Francis Rawdon Hastings joined the East India Company in Calcutta as the new Governor-General. Hastings was a sensible man and did not want to start a full-scale war with the Gorkha Empire for a small piece of land that merely got the Company

-Gorkha war



ALISHA SIJAPATI



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But war was inevitable. A precursor to the Kumaon-Garhwal-Himachal war was that Bradshaw had occupied 22 villages in Saran and captured a Gorkha police post. Following this, when Chandra Shekhar Upadhaya, an agent from Kathmandu was sent for diplomatic negotiations, the Company announced it did not want any more talk.

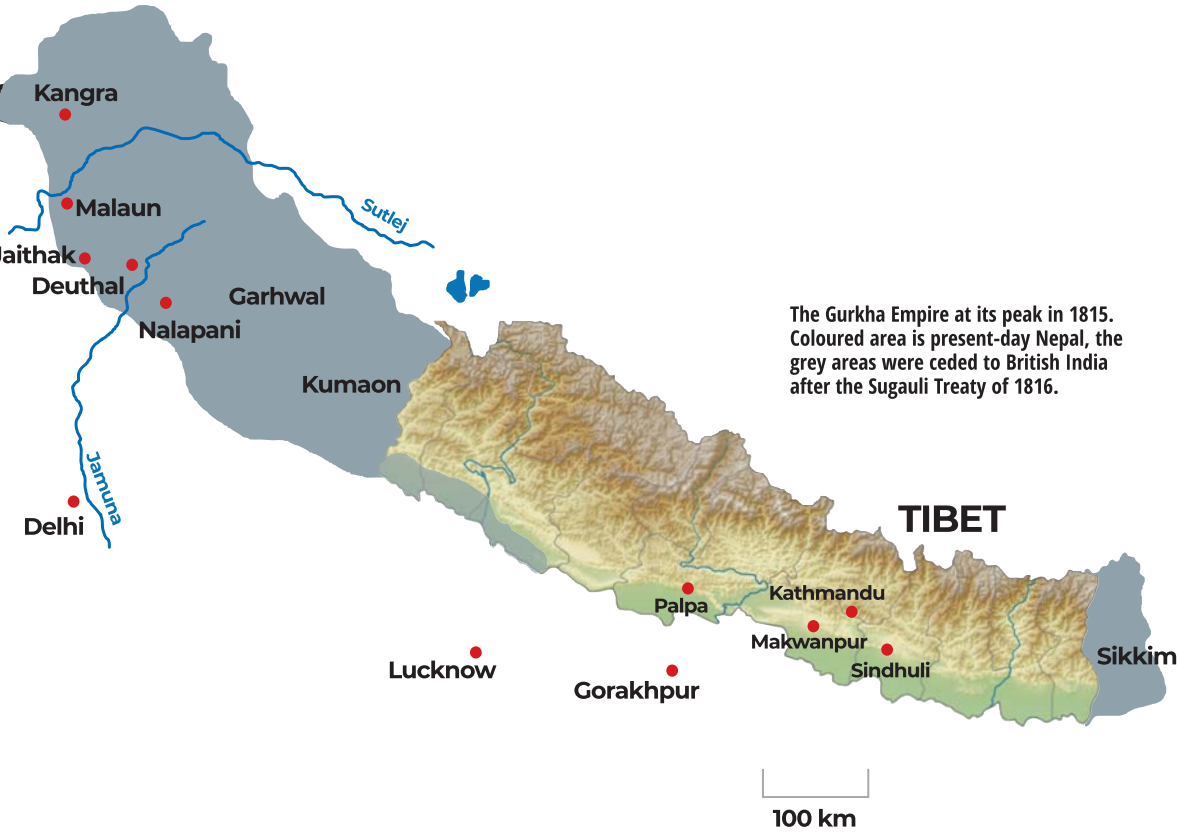
Meanwhile, in the territory newly conquered by the Gorkhals in Garhwal, General Amar Singh Thapa claimed Sirmaur and Hindur. British General David Ochterlony, who was then based in Ludhiana countered the claim. Thapa wrote to Kathmandu and was eventually successful in

invalidating Ochterlony’s claims. The failure to secure Sirhind for the Empire and the Company greatly embittered Ochterlony towards Amar Singh Thapa.

According to Jyoti Thapa Mani, the author of the book *The Khukri Braves*, Ochterlony and Amar Singh Thapa were rather frenemies. To keep an eye on each other, these two opposing generals even made their sons *mit* friends.

“Both Ochterlony and Thapa understood each other’s expansionist ambitions and loyalties to their respective countries,” Thapa Mani says.

Despite his reluctance to go to war with the British, Amar Singh Thapa knew that the war with the East India Company was



inescapable. The Gorkhali’s ties with the Khalsa army of Punjab was weakening after the Sikhs were subdued with the Treaty of Perpetual Friendship with the Company. Amar Singh Thapa knew that a war would come at a hefty price for the over-extended Gorkhals.

Thapa tried to send word to Lord Hastings in Calcutta but failed. He even tried to get support from Qing rulers of China and the Sikhs, but in vain. The Peshwas of Maratha, who were also fighting the British, were also approached.

In a letter to General Ochterlony, Amar Singh Thapa wrote: ‘Otherwise by favour of Gods, the troops of the Gorkhas, resembling the waves of the ocean ... will make necessary preparations to prevent the usurpation of any one place which has been in their possession for years past, and the flame of agitation will daily increase.’

On 1 November 1814 Lord Hastings formally declared war on the Gorkha kingdom, but he permitted the army to strike as they saw fit as soon as the monsoon ended. He had to his favour also the intensified infighting in the royal court in Kathmandu, and the tension between Bhimsen Thapa and Amar Singh Thapa was already at a tipping point.

The East India Company was looking to redeem itself as the bravest warriors in the region since Captain Kinloch’s defeat at Sindhuli, and the second time around, on top of more advanced artillery, Hastings was also more prepared.

By February 1815, the East India Company had already placed four points of attack on the Gorkhas — Khalanga, Saran, Jitgarh, and Malaun Fort.

By the end of the first month of the war, the Gorkhali had already surrendered Nalagarh Fort to the East India Company, and by the end of November Khalanga in Dehradun too was lost. The British had overwhelming numbers and mountain cannons that could blast the Gorkhali forts.

The forts did not just have the warriors in them, but the Gorkhali troops had brought along their wives and children as well who would rain boulders down from the ramparts at the British. These families bore the brunt of the Company’s siege of the forts and the battles to conquer them.

In November Amar Singh Thapa moved to Ramshehar Fort. Then in January he again moved his base to Malaun, where winding roads isolated the fort. He then advised his son, Ranajor Singh Thapa to move his base from Nahan to Jaithak, 92km north-west of Malaun.

The Assault at Jaithak

Jaithak Fort sits atop a steep hill and even today, with one wrong

move on the narrow trail, a visitor can fall into the ravine below. Historians remark at how only the nimble-footed Gorkhals knew their way around the terrain and to imagine the British troops trying to scale this perilous hillside is truly astounding.

The British had no option but to try and build roads to reach from the nearby mountain peaks. Due to its geographical advantage, Ranjor Singh Thapa held on to the fort even after five months of the British siege. The fort had earlier served as a garrison for ammunition and a lookout post, and Amar Singh Thapa had seen strategic advantage in Jaithak Fort, since he was well aware that the topography would make it difficult for the British troops.

Gen Ochterlony, on the other hand, was seeking every vulnerable aspect of the Gorkhals to strike. He called Major-General Gabriel Martindell from Kanpur to attack the Jaithak troops with all the might of his force. Martindell soon arrived and set his camp close to Nahan and was joined by Captain Ludlow who had just won a war in Khalanga.

The battle for Jaithak Fort took place in December during a bitter Himalayan winter. It rained, it snowed, and the Gorkha soldiers were already weak from hunger and thirst. The soldiers also had to protect and care for their families inside the fort. The campaign was fierce, and eventually there were only 500 Gorkhali soldiers against thousands of British troops. Even then, the Company could not take over the fort.

Nevertheless, while Ranjore Singh Thapa still held on to Jaithak, the Gorkhals had already lost Malaun where Ochterlony and Amar Singh Thapa signed a treaty on 15 May 1815. As per the agreement, the Jaithak Fort was surrendered to the Company – even though it had not actually been conquered.

Jaithak today

Two centuries later, these scenic mountains of Himachal Pradesh are serene — there is little to remind us of the blood that was shed here in the clash of empires. Even though the tales of bravery from the battles survive in lore, folk songs and history textbooks in present-day Nepal, few of the descendants of the Gorkhals who remain here in India remember that history.

One person trying to change that is a descendant of the rulers of Sirmaur, Ajay Bahadur Singh, who along with his son, has bought a section of the Jaithak Fort. He takes pride in his connection to the Gorkhals, some of whom had joined the British even before the war ended in 1816.

There is a sign outside the

Fort that says: ‘Jaithak Fort is a private property of Kunwar Ajay Bahadur Singh and outsiders needed permission to trespass the property.’ Ajay Bahadur Singh is a descendant of the former royal clan of Sirmaur in Himachal Pradesh and takes immense pride in being a part of the Gorkha heritage.

Sitting comfortably in his centuries-old palace in Nahan, Ajay Bahadur Singh tells us proudly that the site is called Ranjore Palace — named after the Gorkhali commander Ranjore Singh Thapa, son of Gen Amar Singh Thapa. Ajay Bahadur Singh has even named his son Balbhadra, after the great Gorkhali warrior Balbhadra Kunwar, who after the Khalanga battle, came to Jaithak. He also fought the British in Nalapani.

Balbhadra Kunwar later joined the army of Punjab’s king Ranjit Singh and was killed in a battle against the Afghan in 1823, in present-day Pakistan.

Although not a Gorkhali by lineage, Ajay Bahadur Singh has always been a fan of the brave fighters from the east, whose valour and loyalty have stood the test of time. Every now and then, locals dig up 200-year-old skeletons and skulls from below the ground, and some of them even have rusted khukris next to them.

Ajay Bahadur Singh is a former legislator from the Himachal Pradesh assembly, and with his son Balbhadra has also set up a guest house in a section of the Jaithak Fort. The rest of the fort is in ruins and overgrown with trees.

“Neither the government of India nor Nepal has taken any heed or consideration in the restitution of these buildings,” says Ajay Bahadur Singh. “If forts in Rajasthan can be turned into resorts, and even Kangra Fort is preserved by the Archeological Survey of India, why are the other Gorkhali forts in such a dilapidated state?”

The former Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Vir Bhadra Singh, who was from Rampur Busher, had started to restore the old Gorkha forts, but he died this year. Even more than Jaithak, the Malaun Fort six hours drive away held a greater strategic significance during the Anglo-Gorkha War. That is the fort where Amar Singh Thapa was fighting the most crucial battle against the Company while his son Ranjore was holding out in Jaithak in the winter of 1814.

In the next episode in this series, I will travel on to Malaun, the Gorkhali fort that saw one of the bloodiest and fiercest sieges by the Company. The fall of Malaun was decisive and led to the eventual signing of the Sugauli Treaty, under which the Gorkha Empire had to cede all territory to the west of the Mahakali River and east of the Mechi River. 🇳🇵



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Brand new products

Now that Nepal has been ranked 76th out of 116 countries in the UN's World Hunger Index, and we seem to be more fed-up than India and Pakistan (yay!) this is a long-overdue recognition of the rapid strides this country has taken to ensure junk food for all by 2025.

That is the year when Nepal attains Middle Kingdom Status, and the average person's consumption of cracker curls, chips, cookies, and chau-chau will propel the Nepalis' economic growth, if not girth.

The other indicator that Nepal's economy has taken off like a rocket is the growth of the advertising industry. Commercial Break: this week's Backside Column has been made possible because of generous support from Crackpot Cheeseballs ("Do you have the balls?") and with the sponsorship of Virgin Gin ("Forget the tonic!"). At this juncture the Ass would like to pay tribute to the junk food industry without whose valuable support we journalists would not be able to peddle this junk. If the fast snack folks did not fill these pages with ads, we would not be able to ram our opinions down your throats.

Nepal's fast-moving consumer products are now moving so fast that there is no time to loaf around. (This last sentence was sponsored by Sagarmatha Loaf: 'You Got the Dough? We Got the Bread.') And that is why this week's Backside column gives a whole new meaning to the notion of 'native advertising' by listing the hottest food items with zero nutritional value (yum!) that are on supermarket shelves:



E-coli Bottled Water
'Bottled at source from the Bagmati at Teku and fortified with micro-organic nutrients. Quench your thirst, and simultaneously loose weight from loose motion.'



Housewife Cooking Oil
The cooking oil that all Nepali housewives swear by. (Actual housewife quote: "@#\$%&*?!") Move from the fire into the frying pan with Housewife. Good for the Heart, Bad for Everything Else.'



Poodle Instant Noodle
'No, Nepal has definitely not run out of instant noodle brands. Here comes Poodle Noodle, which despite its name has nothing to do with a pooch (it just rhymes), but is the country's first noodle with permitted colours and flavours of uncastrated goats.'



Computer Chips
'Enjoy Nepal's first onion-and-cheese flavoured semiconductor chips prepared especially for computer programmers, medical transcription inputters, back office staff, and call centre workers to munch during their midnight snack break.'



Sloth Beer
'Drink all you can to be the lucky winner of a weekend stay for two at Sauraha, and help in the conservation Nepal's laziest endangered bears.'



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