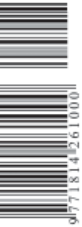




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Because of the holidays there will be no print edition of the paper on Friday 5 November. The next hard copy issue of *Nepali Times* will be on 12 November, 2021. Visit [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com) for daily updates and original multimedia content.



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## Let there be light

The Festival of Light this year coincides with the countdown to the COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow. Interestingly, it was in this Scottish city where in 1763, James Watt built the first steam engine. In the 258 years since, the world has not looked back as internal combustion engines powered by fossil fuels came into use globally.

Humanity has come back a full circle to Glasgow for a make-or-break conference next week, where world leaders will have to commit to reducing carbon emissions to below 45% of 2010 levels in the next nine years if average global temperatures are to kept within 1.5-2°C to avert a climate catastrophe. However, the

latest UN assessment shows that the voluntary cuts by countries will only reduce carbon emissions by 1% in that time.

This Special Climate Issue of *Nepali Times* looks at how the climate crisis is already impacting Nepal and the Himalaya.

Climate activist Raju Pandit Chhetri (page 7) draws links between Glasgow meet and his village destroyed by the Melamchi flood this year, and reminds us to think globally and act locally.

Sonam Choekyo Lama profiles a farmer in Dolpo (page 8-9) whose buckwheat farm was swept away by two devastating glacial floods in the past eight years. Her fallback income source of yarsagumba has also been hit by erratic weather

due to climate change. She thinks it is divine retribution for angering the mountain gods.

Mukesh Pokhrel travels to Manang (page 8-9) to see how the trans-Himalayan district is coping with this year's freak floods that followed prolonged drought and wildfires that raged for months.

Alton Byers (page 10-11) shows how interviews with local people are almost as important as satellite mapping to find out about glacial lake outburst floods in the Kangchenjunga region.

In this week's Editorial (page 3), Sonia Awale looks at the disproportionate impact of the climate emergency on Nepal's women. Water scarcity and gender inequity predate the climate crisis, but global warming has added to the drudgery of women as springs go dry due to droughts.

Nepal's rural women are harvesting rainwater, reviving traditional ponds to recharge

ground water, or planting cash crops like sugarcane on flood control embankments. These local initiatives need to be scaled up to the national level.

Nepal's delegation to COP26 is led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Instead of flying Glasgow, maybe he should have headed out to his home constituency of Dadeldhura to see for himself how subsistence farmers are coping with this year's drought, wildfires and floods.



Special Climate Coverage  
PAGES 4, 7, 8-9, 10-11

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# Women and water

The climate crisis is a water crisis – either too much of it, or too little. Droughts have dried up springs, and when it does rain, it comes down to unleash deadly flashfloods.

If there was an effective farm irrigation network, reliable and safe drinking water in every village, Nepalis would find it much easier to cope with the impact of the climate emergency. Historical state failure has provided neither, and blaming climate change now is just a convenient excuse to cover up for past neglect.

There have always been droughts in Nepal. For millennia, Himalayan rivers have unleashed catastrophic floods. The climate crisis has just made them worse, as poorly designed infrastructure and settlements lead to more destructive disasters.



SONAM CHOEKYI LAMA

Melting icecaps get all the media attention as the world deals with climate change, but it is the state of our streams, rivers, and ground water that affect more people immediately.

With outmigration of men from rural areas, it is mostly women who are left to farm, raise livestock, fetch water, and care for the household. Even before the climate crisis hit, the work of Nepali women was demanding and undervalued. Global warming has just made their drudgery much worse.

In Kavre district, women who had to walk a few minutes to fetch water now have to make one hour roundtrips because springs have dried up. With the men-folk gone, women like Namdak Sangmo (*pictured*) in our special report from Dolpo (*page 8-9*) struggle to survive after their farms were swept away by a glacial flood.

You do not need to be a gender activist to see how women bear a disproportionate burden from the climate crisis. Across the Himalayan foothills, farm terraces lie dry and fallow. Women are not just heading households now, they also have to make decisions about planting, irrigation, harvesting, grazing, foraging, cooking, and taking care of children.

While remittance money has helped raise the standard of living, extreme events like the deadly floods and landslides this monsoon

season add to the misery. Three-fourths of Nepal's farmers are dependent on rain-fed agriculture, and the combined impact of weather extremes and the pandemic have added to food insecurity.

Increased work for women in the household means many daughters drop out of school to help with household chores. Most of these problems predate climate change, but global warming has added to the challenges women face every day.

The most low-hanging fruit for climate adaptation in Nepal is to provide women with enough water, or protect their families from too much of it. And that is exactly where most of Nepal's success stories are happening.

Faced with dry springs, Mother's Groups and Forestry User Groups in Kavre have joined forces to harvest monsoon water for household use in the dry season. They have revived traditional network of ponds for groundwater recharge, and nurtured indigenous plant species in community forests.

In Kailali district in the western plains, farmers who used to suffer from chronic floods are using botanical buffers. Bamboo and napier grass on embankments and sugarcane on riverbanks block floods, while providing cash income. In Kanchanpur district, villagers also grow banana, watermelon, pumpkin, squash and gourd after the floods recede, taking advantage of nutrient-rich soil deposit.

While developmental partners, aid agencies and non-governmental organisations have played a crucial role in introducing climate-specific interventions, theirs is a piecemeal approach. In fact, it often lets the government off the hook. We need to scale up these successful pilot projects nationwide.

With or without the climate crisis, it is the state's responsibility to ensure access to water for households and irrigation. After all, droughts and floods are nothing new here.

Nepal's delegation to the COP26 Climate Summit next week will be led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. But instead of going to Glasgow, Deuba should head out to his home constituency of Dadeldhura-1 to see for himself how the most marginalised women have coped with this year's triple whammy – drought, wildfires and floods.

In Glasgow, the focus is on emissions reduction and compensating countries like Nepal for loss and damage. Nepal's delegation has little right to hold out the begging bowl when it is doing so little for its own people back home. Climate justice and historical emissions sound good in speeches, but it does not deliver food security today.

Women and their added vulnerability to the climate emergency should not be limited to sound bites at international fora, but goad real action that prioritise them.

Sonia Awale

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Times of Nepal

*It is tragic that while most of the things including the state of healthcare, education, development and politics in Nepal have remained more or less the same for the last 20 years, the few things that have changed have been for the worse.*

*In the early 2000s, following the restoration of democracy in 1990 and at the height of the Maoist insurgency, the mainstream media was at the vanguard. All shades of opinion were allowed to be aired in public, and an underground party committed to a violent overthrow of the state openly published newspapers.*

*Two decades later, media now includes social networking sites and yet its space is more constricted than ever before. The state has been trying to gag the press and introduced a slew of bills in Parliament to criminalise and jail journalists. This has prompted a culture of self-censorship in the media and cyberspace.*

*On the other hand, there is a growing trend of politicians and businessmen owning media companies, which has undermined press freedom and fostered the rise of populist opinion and agenda pre-setting.*

*Excerpts from the editorial published 20 years ago this week from issue #66 2-8 November 2001:*

After the restoration of democracy in 1990, we have seen in Nepal an explosion of expression. In fact, if there is a single pillar of democracy



that we can say is relatively robust, it is the media. The Panchayat-era taboos are gone, there are a very few holy cows left, and the freedom to publish and broadcast a wide spectrum of political opinion has bestowed on our adolescent democracy a remarkable resilience.

Freedom is a safety valve that makes our polity less brittle, society itself more malleable. Outwardly, it is easy to mistake this freedom for a free-for-all, and the powerful who are in the media glare would prefer to get on with dealing in the shadows. But those who have personally profited from democracy and have in the process given the system a bad name must realise that it is, paradoxically, this same freedom that protects their interests...

...A vibrant media has reinforced the public sphere, it has made the citizenry more alert, it has fostered awareness and cemented Nepali society with a collective consciousness. Production quality, values, content, and the sheer range of public opinion makes the Nepali media today unrecognisable from what it was pre-1990. The deregulation and corporatisation of the Nepali media in the past 12 years have been driven by a simple fact: professionalism and credibility sell better than bias and gossip.

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



THE MOUNTAINS ARE ANGRY

October is buckwheat harvest time in the highlands of Dolpo. But 68-year-old Namdak Sangmo doesn't have any land anymore, her riverside terraces have been washed away. Follow our reporter to Nepal's remotest district where floods, a declining yarsagumba crop and collapse of trekking have impoverished farmers. Report: *pages 8-9*.



THE SWEET HERITAGE

The Nanda Mithai Bhandar, a 150-year-old traditional sweet shop in Patan Darbar Square has survived earthquakes, upheavals and epidemics. Meet the fourth-generation Rajkarnikars to hear about continuing their culinary heritage. Watch everyone's favourite jeri being prepared, one step at a time. Profile: *page 14*.



MHA PUJA

Tihar is a festival of lights and dedicated to animals. But in Newa communities, it is also that time of the year when people purify and worship themselves. Much have been said and written about this unique custom. Take a look yourself. Watch it our YouTube channel and subscribe for original videos.

### CLIMATE CRISIS

What could be more pertinent than drawing attention to the nexus between climate change and growing natural disasters ('Think globally in Glasgow, and act locally', Raju Pandit Chettri, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com))? We should not leave out migration caused by such disasters in its aftermath. Also, it is very sad that we are not prepared for this kind of disasters ('Post-monsoon rain ruins Nepal's crops', [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)). Our lack of concern towards climate change is concerning. We need sustainable agriculture and climate change awareness from grassroots. But we also need to address it at policy level.

Sharma Prashamsha

● We still aren't prepared for any kind of disaster and hence the consequences are here.

Sagar Bikram Pande

### 'WOE TOURISM'

Thanks for this report ('Nepal's war tourism is a scam', Mahesh Neupane, #1083). The insurgency was never really about the uplift of the poor. It was about who gets the biggest share of the loot. And so it continues. Nepal's 'woe tourism' more like.

Mark Pickett

● Unfortunately political power is widely used or influenced for private gain in Nepal. Utterly frustrating.

Tarka Jung Gurung

### BONDED LABOUR

This is a great story ('From slave to entrepreneur', Prem Biswokarma, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)). Simple entrepreneurship like this is the key to attaining wealth and independence. Don't wait for the government or NGOs or foreign aid to bail you out.

Sigmund Stengel

### AIR TRAVEL

With the daily horrendous accidents in buses, and washed out roads and bridges, air travel begins to look much better ('Now, everyone can fly', Birendra B Basnet, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)).

Roger Ray

### HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

When it comes to money or power, few if any will uphold their belief and principle, this is true for all humans universally ('Feel angry? Read this.', Anjana Rajbhandary, #1083). So keep faith and belief to oneself and not impose it on others or claim it to be a superior.

Desh Ratna

### ROBERT POWELL

I so wish I could see this exhibition and if I hadn't had to cancel this year's climbing trip I would have ('Remembering Robert Powell', Ashish Dhakal, *page 5*). I have a couple of Robert Powell's prints on my wall at home. Transcendent hyperrealism says it all.

Ed Douglas

● Robert Powell's drawings of Mustang are just beautiful.

Bradley Meyhew

## Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Feel angry? Read this.

by Anjana Rajbhandary

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. Read this column for tips on how to temper your temper.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

### Climate change is a disaster in the Nepal Himalaya

by Sonam Choekyi Lama

In the arid trans-Himalayan region of Dolpo, people are falling back on a sense of community and traditional belief systems to cope with the impacts of the climate crisis. Read this special report on *pages 8-9*.

Most popular on Twitter



### We are what we eat

by Aruna Uprety

Misleading commercials in Nepal have convinced families to replace nutritious local diets with processed food. Visit [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com) for details and join the online discussion.

Most commented

### The start of the Anglo-Gorkha war

by Alisha Sijapati

The expansionist Gorkha Empire was headed for a headlong clash with equally belligerent East India Company. It would culminate in one of the bloodiest encounters of the war at Jaithak Fort in 1814 in present day Himachal Pradesh of India. Read the fourth episode in the series, on *pages 18-19*.

Most visited online page

## QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

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.



Rita Thapa@bheribas

The harmful effects of Junk Food& Drinks are pervasive from child malnutrition to NCDs-the largest killers in Nepal.Beside Public Health, deterring consumption of Junk food- drinks must be every sector's responsibility, especially that of MEDIA of all kinds.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"I lost close relatives and neighbours. My own house and farmland were destroyed. The hopes of my hard-working community have also been dashed." A climate activist, whose home was destroyed by Melamchi #floods, makes an urgent plea to #COP26 delegates.



BhimAdhikari@bhimadhi

Very sorry to hear this sad news.My greatest sympathy. Totally agree, this is a make or break COP.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

BP dedicated his life to uplifting living standard of Nepalis through genuine #democracy, but he feared that he wouldn't live to see his life's work completed. It's worth pondering what he would've thought of #Nepal today, nearly 40 years after his death.



Jiwanji@Jiwanji5

Admirable story of BP Koirala! A good man!



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Deadly Dasain on #Nepal's highways.Nearly 50 people have been killed in the last two days in road traffic #accidents. Most these could have been prevented by just maintaining the roads and avoiding reckless driving. #RTA #RoadSafety



NaranKlyphree@NaranKlyphree

Government must crack down on unsafe vehicles and take them off the roads.





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# What is happening to Nepal's Supreme Court?

Politicians who interfered with judicial appointments are irked with a Chief Justice who interfered with ministerial appointments

● **Santa Gaha Magar**

Even though Nepal's executive, legislative and bureaucratic arms suffer from over-politicisation, the judiciary and military have been relatively less affected. The current crisis in the Supreme Court has politicised the justice system and also dragged it into dysfunction.

The Supreme Court has not held scheduled hearings, and courts across the country have been shut for three days after justices of the Supreme Court and the Nepal Bar Association called for boycotts demanding the resignation of Chief Justice Cholendra SJB Rana.

Rana has more than a year left in his tenure, but has been embroiled in controversy after he allegedly lobbied for ministerial posts for a relative and crony in the coalition Cabinet of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba.

It was the Supreme Court's verdict overturning the dissolution of the Lower House by previous prime minister K P Oli that put Deuba in office on 14 July, heading a five-party coalition. Deuba himself is also implicated in the scandal after he agreed to make Rana's brother-in-law Gajendra Hamal a minister earlier this month. Hamal resigned three days later.

Even though party leaders have in the past two decades often bent Nepal's Supreme Court to suit their interests, by pressuring the prime minister to accept his own relative as minister, Rana is seen to have crossed the red line and violated the doctrine of the separation of powers.

Rana summoned other justices and lawyers on Tuesday and said that under no circumstances was he going to step down, and that he would rather face an impeachment motion in the House.

However, there has been an intriguing silence from the top leadership of the main parties about the fate of Chief Justice Rana. They seem to wish the problem will just go away, or Rana voluntarily



resigns, so they do not have to take a stand.

They do not want to annoy Chief Justice Rana because of the need to bargain over their own pending cases in the Supreme Court, but there is now intense pressure from the legal fraternity and the public to impeach him.

Prime Minister Deuba of the Nepali Congress (NC) has not spoken in favour of impeachment, but is under pressure to do so from a rival faction within his own party. And even though it was Rana's Supreme Court verdict that removed him from power in June, the UML's K P Oli is against impeachment — saying that if Rana were to step down, five other justices who ruled against him should also resign.

Others like Madhav Kumar Nepal of the United Socialists and Baburam Bhattarai of the Janata Samajbadi Party have cases pending in the Supreme Court in a real estate scam, and the Maoist Centre (MC) parliament speaker Agni Sapkota also has a war crime

case against him.

However, some have argued that the real issue here is separation of powers and stopping political interference in the judiciary, and the Supreme Court having to step in to resolve political deadlocks in the executive and legislative branches.

By taking their disputes to the Supreme Court as arbiter of last resort, Nepal's leaders have handed over crucial political decisions to the Chief Justice and his benches. So much so that the apex court has been deciding who forms a government and who doesn't — an issue that should be resolved by party strength in Parliament.

The only way to remove Rana would be if he is forced to resign, or if 25% of the House move an impeachment motion against him, although it will take a two-thirds majority to actually indict him.

With so much politics, corruption and vested interested tied up with the political appointment of justices, there are

some who question whether just removing Chief Justice Rana will solve the problem, because the rot goes much deeper.

Even if Rana is forced to resign or is impeached, he will be replaced by Dipak Kumar Karki. Those who would benefit from Karki's elevation to Chief Justice can be seen to be pulling strings from behind the scenes, and suspicions have fallen on the MC's Pushpa Kamal Dahal who is said to be close to Karki. Dahal appears to be trying to do with Karki what he tried to do with appointing Kul Bahadur Khadka as army chief in 2009.

The irony is that the same NC, MC, and dissident UML members that praised Chief Justice Rana for saving democracy twice this year by his constitutional bench verdicts to restore the dissolved House, are now labelling Rana a villain. Oli's UML criticised the Supreme Court heavily for that.

The Maoists also vehemently opposed a Supreme Court decision in February to nullify the unity of the UML and Maoists to form the NCP, that Oli had welcomed.

What all this shows is that politicians and their parties are wont to praise to high heavens justices when there is a decision in their favour, but berate the Supreme Court when it goes against their interest.

The only difference this time is that the anti-Rana forces in the judiciary, Bar and the government feel he went too far by allegedly lobbying for relatives and cronies to be included in the Cabinet. Even if he did talk the prime minister into agreeing to make his brother-in-law a minister, Deuba should have rejected it outright as interference.

Instead, Deuba and Dahal both clarified that Hamal had been made minister from the NC quota and did not say anything about pressure from the chief justice. Why were Deuba and his coalition partners so eager to make Hamal a minister? Was it because they wanted to keep Chief Justice Rana in the good books to extract their

pounds of flesh in future verdicts in cases involving them?

Cholendra SJB Rana is Nepal's 29th chief justice, but not the first to be embroiled in controversy. Even Sushila Karki, known for her firebrand independence, faced an impeachment motion by a NC-Maoist coalition government in 2017 because she did not agree to pass verdicts that favoured them on the appointment of a police chief.

In fact it was Rana who trashed that impeachment motion against Karki, saying it went against the spirit of the Constitution to file a motion against the chief justice on such partisan grounds.

There is a lot of politics tied up with whether Rana remains chief justice or is forced to step down. On 1 November, the Supreme Court is due to hear a case against Madhav Kumar Nepal and Baburam Bhattarai on the Baluwatar real estate scandal. Some see the magnified criticism of Rana as a way to put pressure on him to rule in their favour.

It is clear that Rana's departure will not be enough to herald a golden age of justice in Nepal. The same forces in the executive and judiciary that were scratching each others' backs will still be up to their old tricks. Rana is not coming out of this smelling like roses, but neither are many of the other justices who want him to resign, nor the politicians who benefited from their appointments.

It is now important that the political parties and justices who are at the root of this crisis vow not to violate the constitutionally-enshrined separation of powers. This should not be about using Chief Justice Rana as a bargaining chip, but an opportunity to conduct far-reaching reforms within the judiciary.

Says ex-justice Prakash Wasti: "The ball is in the court of the Nepal's politicians, whether to make the courts a place where justice is served, or where they serve themselves." 🇳🇵

**prabhu BANK**



## In the red

Nepal's foreign currency reserves have fallen by 6.6% compared to this time last year, reaching \$11.1 billion, which is enough to pay for only 8 months of total imports. The main reason for this downturn is shrinking remittances, which is also down to Rs155 billion, 6.3% below the year before. The government, in response, has reduced the amount of money Nepalis can officially exchange before traveling abroad from \$1,500 to \$200-500 and has banned the purchase of vehicles for official use. The negative trend of the indicators has been exacerbated by the recent unseasonal rains, which have killed more than 110 people and destroyed one-third of the country's ready-to-harvest crops.

## Interest rates soar

Commercial banks and financial institutions have increased the interest rate on credits up from 9.5% in July to 11.67%. Prior to this, banks had increased interest rates on fixed deposits for extra funds before Nepal Rastra Bank put a stop to it and directed financial institutions to limit it to 10%.

## Nepali film wins award

The Nepali film, A Scarecrow, has won the UNICEF Iris 75 award at the Innocenti Film Festival 2021 (UIFF) in Florence. The film written and directed by self-taught Nepali filmmaker, Rajesh Prasad Khatri, depicts what it means to be a girl child in Nepal today and shows the cultural barriers that prevent young girls from gaining an education.



## Art for a cause

Thirty-three of Nepal's most prominent artists from all genres took part in a live painting performance at the Museum of Nepali Art in Thamel this month. Part of the proceeds from the sale of the artworks went to the oncology ward of the Kanti Children's Hospital.

## Jawa ride

Jawa Motorcycles with Agni Moto organised Nepal's first-of-its-kind invitational motorcycle ride last week from Kathmandu to Nagarkot. Jawa Motorcycles, originally a Czech company, has 15 dealerships all over Nepal.



## Jyoti's smart saving

Jyoti Bikash Bank has launched Smart Savings account, which offers a 5.75% interest rate to customers who also get free



demat service, MeroShare registration, mobile banking service, internet banking service and debit card. Women applicants get 50% off on locker services.

## Honda bonanza winner

Honda distributor Syakar Trading has announced the first fortnightly lucky draw winner of its festive bonanza to receive Rs350,000 cash prize, Butwal's Sanjay Nepal. Under the offer, on every purchase of a car, customers can get discounts of up to Rs200,000, free insurance for up to a year, free road tax also for a year, free servicing for three years and 7% discount on spare parts, also for three years.

## Maestro Edge 110

Hero Motor has launched a new scooter with a fully digital speedometer and bluetooth connectivity to alert users about calls. The Maestro Edge 110 is



powered by a 110cc BS-IV compliant engine that delivers a power output of 8 BHP @ 7500 RPM with a peak torque output of 8.7 NM @ 5500 RPM. The scooter comes in two colors, matte red and blue.

## Viber's cricket fiesta

Viber has launched 'Cricket Fiesta' with a chatbot feature that allows users to predict match scores for a chance to win prizes, get regular updates, and access cricket communities. The popular messaging app will also incorporate AR-powered Viber lenses to simulate a stadium environment and let users talk to cricketers in real-time.







(Left to right) Chanaute in the Melamchi Valley, before the flood in 2017. The village after the 2021 flood on the Melamchi River.



PHOTOS: RAJU PANDIT CHHETRI

# Think globally in Glasgow, and act locally

Climate activist, whose home in Nepal was destroyed by floods, makes an urgent plea to COP26 delegates

● **Raju Pandit Chhetri**

On 15 June, the Melamchi River north of Kathmandu saw a massive flash flood, killing 25 people and sweeping away 200 houses and 360 hectares of farmlands.

Another debris flow on the river on 31 July added to the destruction and misery. The disaster was unprecedented in the Melamchi Valley, and caught residents, trout farms, shops along the banks by surprise. Before the communities got a chance to fully rise from the massive double-earthquake in 2015, the region was hit yet again with another disaster.

As a resident of the Chanaute, I lost close relatives and neighbours to the flood. My own house and farmland were destroyed. The river sliced through the bazar town, and its 56 houses are now ruined and abandoned. The hopes of my hard-working community have also been dashed.

Local entrepreneurs, small shop owners and farmers whose arable land have turned into a boulder-strewn wasteland are shattered. Damage to roads and bridges has cut the valley's connection to the outside world. Nepal's most expensive water supply project has been damaged.

Any individual extreme weather event is difficult to directly attribute to the climate crisis. But the intensity and unpredictability of this year's monsoon has been unprecedented. Manang and Mustang were hit by flash floods at the same time as Melamchi – even before the monsoon

officially started. And even after the rainy season was formally over last week, parts of the country were hit by record-breaking rainfall. For the past decade, my career has taken me to numerous international climate summits where we have discussed strong national and international advocacy to address the impact of the climate crisis – especially on developing countries like Nepal.

At international climate negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), I have observed climate-vulnerable countries make urgent pleas for ambitious action in tackling the climate crisis. Small, low-lying island states like the Vanuatu, Tuvalu and the Maldives have tried to show the urgency of it all – rising ocean levels will soon submerge their countries.

The Philippines and Bangladesh continue to raise concern about the increasing intensity and frequency of typhoons and cyclones. Fragile mountain regions of the world are trying to get their concerns on the agenda.

Next week, heads of state from around the world will start arriving in Glasgow for the 26th annual climate summit of the UNFCCC (called COP26). Recent impacts of extreme weather events around the world (wildfires in Siberia and the western US, heat waves in Canada, floods in Europe, landslides and floods in Japan, India, China) are likely to focus everyone's mind on the climate emergency, and the message that we are all in



this together.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate impacts to avert and minimise some of the loss and damage will be at the forefront of the negotiations. However, as the incoming president of COP26, the United Kingdom and the leaders of the industrialised world will have to face a new reality – to address the destruction unleashed by the climate crisis with rehabilitation, migration and financing.

Industrialised countries have long brushed aside these issues, diluted their commitments to merely focusing on the weaker goal of reducing greenhouse gas

emission, and providing token climate financing to allow low-income countries to adapt.

In fact, addressing the loss and damage from disasters like the one that hit Melamchi and parts of the Himalaya will be one of the main pillars of the COP26 in Glasgow. Nepal's delegation will be led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, and he is expected to speak about this year's climate-induced disasters starting with winter drought, nationwide wildfires, and floods.

Nepal will have strong moral grounds to persuade world leaders that low capacity vulnerable countries need help to deal with a crisis that is not of our making. Himalayan glaciers are shrinking and receding fast, extreme weather trends are more pronounced, and this is impacting on infrastructure projects and threatens to undermine decades of progress in achieving

the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. A 2020 study by ICIMOD and UNDP has shown that 47 glacial lakes in the Kosi, Gandaki and Karnali basins are in danger of bursting. Although 21 of these lakes are in Nepal, the others also drain into tributaries of rivers flowing into Nepal. These are ticking time bombs.

Glacial lake outburst floods have been hitting Nepal's Himalayan valleys with increasing frequency. In 2012, an avalanche on Annapurna unleashed a catastrophic flood on the Seti River that killed at least 70 people. In 2014, a deadly post-monsoon blizzard spawned by Cyclone Hudhud swept through the mountains catching many trekkers unawares. The Tarai has seen increasingly destructive floods in the past five years, and Bara district was hit by a rare tornado in 2019 that killed dozens.

In Glasgow, Nepal will have to make a compelling case for loss and damage compensation for disasters like these. COP26 will be a make-or-break summit for reducing global carbon emissions by 45% by 2030. Nepal will also need to do its bit to achieve its updated Nationally Determined Contribution target to reduce emissions by 2030 by switching to renewable energy, and attain net zero by 2050.

Glasgow will be an opportunity to link global targets to local impact, and to find ways to address the disproportionate destruction caused by climate crisis on the poorer parts of the poorest countries. 🇳🇵

*Raju Pandit Chhetri is a resident of Chanaute in Nepal's Melamchi Valley and works on climate change issues.*

## Nepalis e-shop for Tihar and beyond

Online shopping did not take off in Nepal for the longest time. It took the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns that restricted movement for the Nepalis to start buying goods over the Internet.

Many retailers also closed down physical shops following the Covid-19 crisis and limited their sales digitally via social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, which further promoted the culture of online payment in the urban centres.

The growth of e-commerce in Nepal is still hindered by the central bank's regulation on cross border payments and lack of essential infrastructure but proliferation of digital wallets and bank card has increased the access of ordinary Nepalis to online shopping.

Daraz, a subsidiary of China's Alibaba, has been trying to boost digital shopping with events like annual 11.11 sales that was launched in 2009 and in 2018 in Nepal, and has since become the largest online shopping extravaganza.

The pandemic iteration of the 11.11 shopping festival timed for Tihar last year was its most successful edition yet. Despite the Covid-19 induced economic crisis, over 520,000 consumers from 27 cities across Nepal bought products worth Rs20.5 million from 7,000 retailers in the just first hour of the sale, up from 60% the previous year.

The shopping event saw significantly higher numbers in online pre-payment via wallet and bank

**Thronging to Daraz for online shopping, many Nepalis waiting for the 11 November sale event**



card taking up 45% of the total sales. Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) who went online during the pandemic like Masala Beads, Juas, Mantra, Goldstar, Vans, and more generated 23% of the total sales.

"Sellers are at the heart of our strategy and we can only thrive together. The domestic economy has been hit hard due to the pandemic, therefore, it is fundamental for us to help bring the economy back on track," says Lino Ahlering, managing director of Daraz Nepal.

He adds: "E-commerce and particularly Daraz as the leading marketplace in the country is growing extremely fast. 11.11 - the world's biggest sale day is now only a few days away and is not only a unique opportunity for our customers across the country but also for our 12,000+ sellers to keep growing in these times."

This year's sale is expected to break more records with over 1.1 million items with heavy discounts on display and delivery services extended to 47 cities. More than 12,000 retailers with leading domestic and international brands are joining the bandwagon this Tihar. Daraz has also been supporting SMEs waiving off their marketplace fee for three months under the Sahayatri Campaign

"With Daraz's mega campaigns driving sales for sellers, more consumers



and brands are going online," claims the company. "Brands and payment partners today are more aware of the impact of Daraz's sale campaigns and ecommerce as a whole, thus, it isn't uncommon to find many popular national and international brands promoting and offering lucrative deals on Daraz."

Daraz says its over 12,000 retailers are now undergoing necessary preparations for smooth delivery of goods keeping up with the increased consumer demand ahead of the big sale day on 11 November. Currently, Daraz has around 15 delivery hubs located throughout the country from where customer's products are shipped to and from.

Lack of proper road network connecting major cities and street addresses adds to the challenges in delivering goods and services. As such, the company also runs Daraz Express to deliver the goods, and has hired delivery riders familiar with a particular locality in any given part of the country.

Ever since its acquisition by Alibaba in 2018, Daraz's key focus has been to build a countrywide logistic infrastructure which it hopes will allow the company to increase its footprint but would also aid in creating a better ecommerce ecosystem in the country, according to the company. Says Daraz Nepal: "The company expects their biggest one day sale will enable further growth for sellers, and also help further develop an ecommerce ecosystem where logistic companies, payment partners, and everyone involved benefit greatly."





# Climate change is a disaster in

## Floods, a declining yarsagumba crop and collapse of trekking combine to impoverish farmers in Nepal's remotest district

● **Sonam Choekyi Lama**  
in Dolpo

October is buckwheat harvest time in the distant highlands of Dolpo. In the village of Tso, Namdak Sangmo (*pictured*) watches other women from her village fling their sickles, stoop over to sling the sheaves on their shoulders, and bring the crop in.

Sangmo, 68, does not have her own crop to harvest because she does not have land anymore. Her riverside terraces were washed away by a flash flood in 2012, and another one in 2019 destroyed what was left, leaving a barren boulder-strewn slope.

"It was a raging torrent, and it came down suddenly and swept everything in its path, I do not have any land left to farm," says Sangmo. She is not the only one, almost half the villagers in Tso lost their standing crop and fields when a wall of mud and boulders raced down from the 6,883m high Mt Kanjiroba that towers over the district.

Scientists have not yet drawn a direct correlation between the climate crisis and extreme weather, but they say there is more and more evidence that droughts, record downpours and erratic monsoons are a result of a hotter atmosphere. This year's monsoon saw freak downpours and unprecedented rainfall in the trans-Himalayan regions of Nepal.

Sangmo remembers well that September day two years ago. "It had rained non-stop for two days, and suddenly we heard a big roar from up the mountain, my brother-in-law told us to run," she recalls.

There was unusually heavy rain where snow used to fall, and the fragile moraine ridges below Kanjiroba just dissolved, sending the debris flow racing down to the villages below (*pictured, far right*).

"There is more and more evidence that extreme rainfall events are caused by climate change, and these trigger sudden floods that destroy farms and settlements downstream," says Arun Shrestha, a climate specialist with the River Basins and Cryosphere division at the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

There has not been enough study to determine if the Dolpo flood was caused by a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF), or just extra-heavy rainfall on sediment deposits in high mountain valleys, but the result was just as devastating.

While communities in Nepal have historically learnt to reduce risk from these floods by not settling along riverbanks, new roads, settlement and infrastructure are vulnerable to these climate induced disasters.

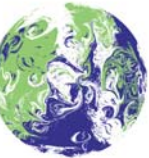
While GLOFs can happen at some point in the future, weather extremes caused by the climate crisis have already unleashed a creeping disaster in Himalayan villages like Tso. This year, a seven-month winter drought led to wildfires and floods in Dolpo, displacing farmers and forcing them to migrate.

As Dolpo is connected by road, most men have left rural areas for work in the cities or abroad to supplement their income, and it is the women who stay behind who bear the brunt of the impact of climate change — the drudgery of having to walk farther for water, or suffer from failed harvests.



"Climate change adds to the extra load of women in rural areas because of unpredictable rain, floods, droughts and springs going dry," says Abid Hussain, of the Mountain Agriculture and Livelihood division of ICIMOD. Most of Nepal's subsistence farmers are dependent on rain-fed agriculture, and 83% of women are fulltime farmers.

Namdak Sangmo's husband died 15 years ago, and her children are married. Without her fields, she finds it difficult to take care of her family. Nepal's central or local governments should be helping families like hers, but there has been



## Usually arid, Manang district was hit this year by never-seen wildfires and floods

● **Mukesh Pokhrel**  
in Manang

Nepal's trans-Himalayan district of Manang is located in the rain-shadow, and is a high altitude desert. Its average annual rainfall is barely 300mm, but it got nearly double that rain in just one week this June.

The region had seen a seven-month winter drought, and was ravaged by wildfires this spring that burnt for three months. Then came the monsoon: dumping 300% more rain than the average for June-July.

The steep slopes scorched by wildfire could not absorb the heavy rain, and a wall of water, mud, boulders and logs flushed down the Marsyangdi River, washing away highway, bridges, settlements and other infrastructure.

Three and half months later, the scars of that devastation are still seen everywhere in the towns of Chame and Taal. Residents are still waiting for help from the government, while charities and activists have provided relief material.

Scientists are reluctant to blame a



# Himalayan floods a sign of

single weather event on the climate crisis, but there is a growing consensus that a hotter Himalaya is leading to more erratic monsoons, droughts, floods and wildfires. The 2021 monsoon was proof of that.

Minrasi Gurung and his family in Naso village of Manang used to have their hands full all year round growing vegetables in a large patch by the river. Income from selling potatoes, chillies and tomatoes to trekking lodges supported the entire household.

But the flood on the Marsyangdi River on 15 June swept away the family's farm, and the river is now flowing through a boulder-strewn debris field where the farm used to be.

"We have been tilling this land since the time of my great grandfather, never before has

there been such a disaster," he says.

Minrasi has now moved with his wife Masini to Myagdi River on the border of Lamjung and Manang districts to open a tea shop. "The floods and landslides displaced us," they say.

The scenic town of Taal used to be a popular stopover for trekkers on the Annapurna Circuit, and there were many lodges on a ledge overlooking the Marsyangdi. The water rose so high on 15 June that it washed away the lodges, and only seven of the 57 houses in the village are still liveable. None of the hotels survived however, one would be hard-pressed to even locate their ruins.

Keshav Gurung of Taal spent much of

his life in the tourism business, and he ploughed his earnings to upgrade his hotel, never thinking of investing elsewhere because trekking brought good income.

But the flood swept away his Rs40 million hotel, and he is now living in a tent in a plot owned by his neighbours. He used to make Rs1.6 million a year in profit from the 21-room hotel.

Golamaya Gurung in Sirantal had a 10-room hotel, a house and half a hectare of land. All of this is now gone, she barely managed to save her own life as the floodwaters rose.

A helicopter rescued Golmaya and her neighbours two days after the disaster from a cave they had fled to. Since then, she has not been able to return to what used to be her



# the Nepal Himalaya



ALL PHOTOS: SONAM CHOEKYI LAMA

no compensation for the loss and damage. Without her fields, with no income from trekking tourism due to the pandemic, and a decline in the yarsagumba crop, Sangmo is worried.

Left to fend for themselves, she has fallen back on her faith in the Tibetan animist belief system that has deep reverence for the mountains as divine creations that have their serene and destructive sides that need to be appeased through prayer and good deeds.

“We may have angered the gods of Kanjiroba with our deeds,” says Sangmo. “We made the river impure and many outsiders came



and polluted the lake.” To prevent future calamities the monk at the local monastery, Khenpo Lama, performed a ritual to appeal to Mt Kanjiroba with a *shebchu* and a small stupa with offerings of buckwheat and barley. Sangmo believes it worked, because “everything has been quiet on the mountain after that”.

From his monastery, Khenpo Nyima himself has noticed the change in weather, and the snow retreating higher and higher up Kanjiroba (*pictured, above*). Although he does not connect this to the global climate crisis, he is convinced outsiders are to blame. “We have seen the mountains changing, and that is because there are more and more outsiders coming here and they are desecrating nature,” he says, looking up at the icy tongue of a glacier below Kanjiroba, the top of which is veiled in monsoon clouds.

He says the modern world has also changed the traditional ways in Dolpo. Local people no longer rely on *dorima* that determines the

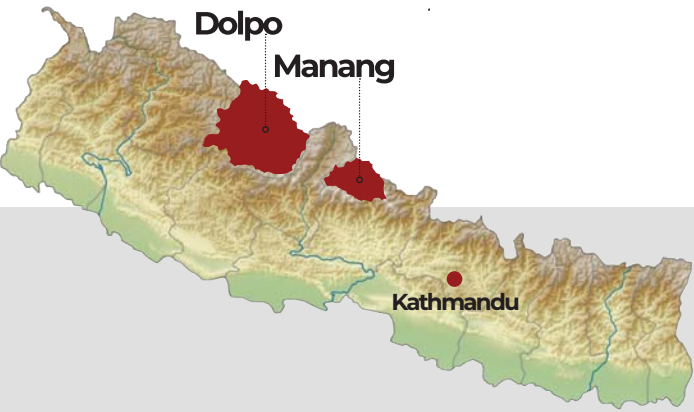
schedule for planting, harvesting, and the timings for taking yaks and goats up to high pasture. “They also do not put up prayer flags in the *yulsa* every year, and this has displeased the gods,” Khenpo Nyima adds. However, the local government and the Shey Phoksundo National Park are not relying on prayers to protect citizens here. They built an embankment along the river after the 2012 flood to shield Tso’s village and farms, but it was washed away in the second flood in 2019.

“We may need a bigger budget to build a proper wall that will save the village the next time there is a big flood, I am trying to convince the municipality authorities, but we need more help,” says Nima Lama, the ward chair.

Anthropologist Ben Orlove of Columbia University’s Earth Institute surveyed people in mountain regions, including the Andes, and found that villagers were aware of the changes, but they adapted to them without necessarily linking it to climate change.

Orlove proposes framing the ‘climate change’ narrative as a need for ‘community change’ so the focus is on how villagers can benefit from the measures they take to adapt to lack of rain, water shortages, or flood-prevention embankments.

That appears to be already happening here in Dolpo, an arid trans-Himalayan region of Nepal where people are falling back on a sense of community and traditional belief systems to cope with the impacts of the climate crisis. 🇳🇵



ALL PHOTOS: MUKESH POKHREL

## worse to come

home. “There is no way I can get there at the moment. From a distance, I can see the river flowing where my house once stood, I can identify the general location of my house because of a tree that is still standing,” says Golmaya. The floods on the Marsyangdi River and its tributary, Thada Khola, caused the most damage in Taal and Dharapani municipalities. The district headquarter at Chame is still cut off because the road was washed away by the flood and numerous landslides. Kamarkali Gurung owned Hotel Heaven in Dharapani, popular with trekkers. There is no sign of it now. She put in all her savings and spent Rs20.5 million on the hotel, and had

been running it for eight years. “I invested everything in that hotel, what happened is so unexpected, so shocking, I still cannot believe that I have lost it all,” she says. Bhuturam Gurung of Chame had also been running a hotel for 15 years, but both his house and hotel were washed away by the Marsyangdi that fateful day. “I had never seen an angry river like that in my life,” he recalled. Bhuturam’s family and three others are now living in Manang’s district prison, which has been converted into a shelter. There is no exact estimate of the damage wrought by the 15 June flood yet. But according to Chief District Officer Bishnu Prasad Lamichhane, the disaster cost at least

Rs1.1 billion. A municipality investigation showed a much higher number. “The government observation doesn’t match the ground situation, we estimate over Rs4 billion in damage,” says Palden Chopang Gurung, MP from Manang district. “Chame and Naso alone suffered over Rs3 billion in damaged private buildings, schools, electricity lines and roads. But that is just two municipalities, more bridges and roads have been affected.” A recently completed track from Manang to Bhartang is badly damaged with a 2km-long stretch washed away by the floods. While a new route is under construction, the terrain poses a challenge and the progress has been slow. The landslide-damaged road between Dharapani and Chame also poses risks for travellers. “It’s impossible to resume smooth transport anytime soon, we have settled for a temporary road for now,” says Chairman of Chame Village Municipality Lokendra Ghale. Following the floods, the chief minister of Gandaki Province Krishna Chandra Pokhrel has visited the disaster site three times in a helicopter, he also announced Rs200,000 in relief for each family. But three and a half months later, locals are yet to receive any help. Earlier this year, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba’s government declared Manang as a high-risk district, following which Home Minister Bal Krishna Khand

and Energy Minister Pampha Bhusal also choppered in to make more promises that have not been kept. “We haven’t received any help from the central government, the only relief has been from Manang people living in Kathmandu or abroad,” adds Ghale. “All these experts in Kathmandu who have linked the disaster to climate change are also all talk and no action.” Located in the Himalayan rainshadow, Manang gets only about 300mm of rain a year. But on 15 June, it got 212mm of rain in just 24 hours. The average rainfall for March-June in Manang is about 40 mm, but this year it got 135 mm in that period. “The soil in high mountains can be easily washed away by the rain as they are not as firm,” says geography professor Subodh Dhakal at Tribhuvan University. To make matters worse, Manang saw fires burn continuously for three months last winter. Monsoon cloudbursts then hit slopes where the soil’s absorptive capacity had been reduced by previous wildfires. The runoff disgorged itself into the Marsyangdi River. “Due to the rise in average global temperature, there is more moisture in the monsoon system, and these have managed to find their way to the other side of the mountains, this is a clear link to global warming,” says climate scientist Ngamindra Dahal. The average increase in temperature in Manang is also higher than other districts at lower elevations, and is 0.09 Celsius higher than elsewhere, according to the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology. This is in line with the finding that the Himalaya is getting 0.3-0.7 Celsius warmer than the global average, and is a warning for a much hotter Subcontinent and more frequent disasters in the coming days. 🇳🇵

### ‘Himalayan viagra’ and Climate

As the climate crisis impacts on the pastoral lifestyle of the people of Dolpo, the women who remain in the remote villages have started relying more and more on yarsagumba, the caterpillar fungus that is prized in Chinese medicine for its supposed aphrodisiac properties. These days, it is mainly women who climb up to the high slopes where the fungus pokes out of the ground after snow melts in spring. They harvest the yarsagumba and sell it to middlemen who in turn sell it to wholesalers at the Chinese border, 4 days walk to the north. However, a combination of unseasonal snowfall, long periods of drought and warmer weather is affecting the yarsagumba, too. Schools in Dolpo close at yarsa harvest time so students can accompany parents to pick the fungus, but this year they have returned empty-handed.

“We went up in April, but the yarsa was not fully mature and it was soggy, there was nothing to pick,” says one student, Sangmo Lama. While over-harvesting in the past has been one of the reasons for the decline in the yarsa crop, it should have revived in the past two years when the pandemic reduced the numbers of pickers. That lends support to the theory that a warmer Himalaya is also affecting growth of the valuable fungus, contributing to the end of the gold rush. Local people who relied on tourism and livestock for income had earnings from the fungus as a fall back. Now, that option is also gone. Yarsa made up more than half of the annual income of an average Dolpo household. While the fungus is sold for only Rs5,000 per kg to the Chinese traders at the border, it can fetch as much as \$75,000 per kg in Shanghai. After she lost her fields to the glacial floods, Namdak Sangmo of Tso village used to rely solely on yarsa income. She used to collect at least 100 pieces of fungus in the past, two years ago she found only six pieces, and this spring none at all. “Without yarsa what do we eat? How do we survive? The mountain was angry and took away my fields, there is nothing to do but pray,” says Sangmo, as she sharpens her sickle to help the other women in their buckwheat fields.



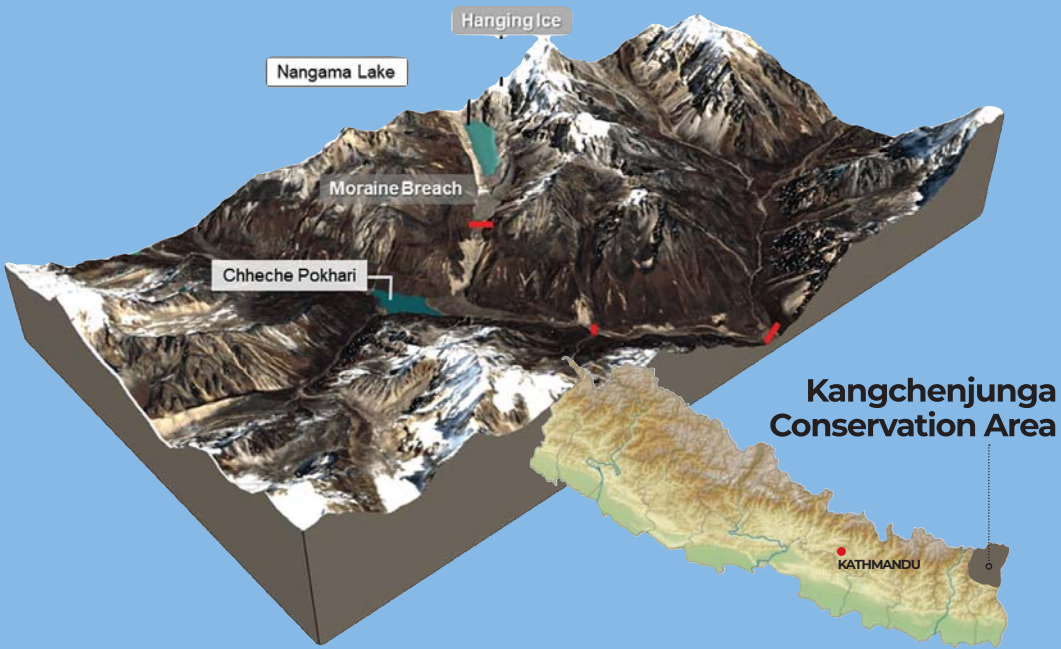
# Tracing past glacial floods in Nepal

Satellite imagery is useful, but involving local people in research can often help fill gaps in research of glacial floods

● **Alton C Byers**

Glacial lake outburst floods are highly destructive events, usually caused when stored lake water is suddenly released by a triggering event that can include moraine dam failure, snow and debris avalanches, as well as heavy rainfall. There have been at least 26 major glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) events in Nepal that we know of, most having occurred since the 1960s, and onset of global warming trends, receding glaciers, and new glacial lake formation. Perhaps most famous is the Langmoche ‘flash flood’ of 1985 in the Thame Valley in Khumbu which killed at least five people, destroyed a nearly completed hydropower facility, and took out bridges for nearly 100km downstream. However, it would be 20 more years before the acronym GLOF became a household word, at least in Nepal, as well as a major scientific discipline. The renowned Japanese geographer Teiji Watanabe wrote a scientific paper about a 1980 GLOF in the Kanchenjunga region in eastern Nepal. The only documentation of the flood that Watanabe could find was a short piece in the *The Rising Nepal* of 28 June 1980 reporting that a flood had occurred in the Tamor Valley a week or so before. Damage included ‘...all the houses in Olangchung Gola village’, bridges, and downstream settlements, with at least 10 deaths. Using maps and aerial photographs from 1978 and 1992, Watanabe was able to determine that the source of the flood was the Nangama glacial lake, about 8km south of the border with China. Oblique aerial photos taken in 1978 and 1992 clearly showed the breached terminal moraine and deposits that not only a GLOF from Nangama had occurred in 1980, but that its debris had blocked a small river to the south, creating a new lake named Chheche by the local people. For the next 40 years, no GLOFs were reported in the Kanchenjunga region. This was odd, since during the same period Nepal had experienced dozens of GLOFs — twice from the Zhangzango Lake in Tibet (1964 and 1981), the Tama Pokhari due east of the Mt Everest region (1998), and the

Langmale flood in the Barun valley (2017). There had also been dozens more smaller glacier floods which originate from within the glacier itself and consist of stored water from surficial ponds and ice caves. But nothing from Kanchenjunga. And so we set out from Bhadrapur by jeep in April 2019 to see if we could update the status of GLOFs and climate change impacts in what had now become the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA). It was an eight-hour drive to Taplejung from the Tarai plains up through the beautiful tea plantations of Ilam. The next day a three-hour drive to Tapletok, at that time the end of the ever-lengthening and expanding road. We spent the next six weeks on foot in the KCA. Kanchenjunga is the world’s third highest mountain at 8,586m, located on the border of Nepal and Sikkim in India. It was first summited in 1955 by a British expedition which stopped short of the sacred summit, as per the request of the king of Sikkim. The region’s location at the intersection of three floristic provinces — the Indo-Malayan, Palearctic, and Sino-Japanese — creates one of the most biologically rich landscapes of the eastern Himalayas. The entire Kanchenjunga Landscape region in Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet encompasses 22 ‘Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas’, 19 protected areas, one UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one Ramsar wetland site. There are 5,198 species of plants that have been recorded in the region since botanical investigations first began in the 1840s and continue to this day. Even before the pandemic, tourism was limited in the KCA compared to other protected areas of Nepal, perhaps owing to its remoteness and lack of publicity. The vast majority of trekkers visit the Kanchenjunga Base Camp situated north of the Kanchenjunga Glacier. Five rustic lodges have been built in recent years in Lhonak Kharka for 200 trekkers each spring, and 500 in autumn. After arriving in the KCA last year, we were faced with the fundamental question of how to go about reconstructing the history of GLOFs in a region with absolutely no written, media, or scientific documentation. To start, we interviewed local people. This is something still somewhat unusual in the physical sciences in general, and in research related to glaciers in particular, for reasons that are not entirely clear. Glaciologists like to take field measurements, drill ice cores, analyse satellite imagery, and recreate peak flows and flood volumes through the use of sophisticated flood modeling, but for some reason the insights and experience of local



people has been strangely lacking in scientific studies of GLOFs. The original plan was to trek from Tapletok due north to Yangma, and then west to Nangama glacial lake, so that we could see firsthand, and for the first time by scientists, what this place looked like. But by interviewing local people along the way, primarily those over 75, a new story started to take shape — one that totally changed the original itinerary of visiting Nangama glacial lake only. It all started when we were told that an older person who was knowledgeable in the region’s history lived in the upper part of Tapletok, about a 20-minute walk away. We left immediately, walking through the rice fields and up a steep incline to a beautiful house overlooking the Tamor River below, the home of Barachan Limbu, 81. Limbu had spent 21 years in the Indian Army, and was now enjoying his days at home under the care of one of his daughters, a registered nurse. He was also a storehouse of local knowledge, and over the next hour described how instead of only one GLOF in the region since the 1980s from Nangama, there had been five major floods that local people still remembered and could describe, including one that happened nearly 100 years ago in 1921. Five floods were identified by Barachan Limbu. The most recent was in 1986, presumably from the Yalung Glacier and within the Shimbuwa River that joins with the Tamor from the east. The 1980 Nangama flood we knew about,

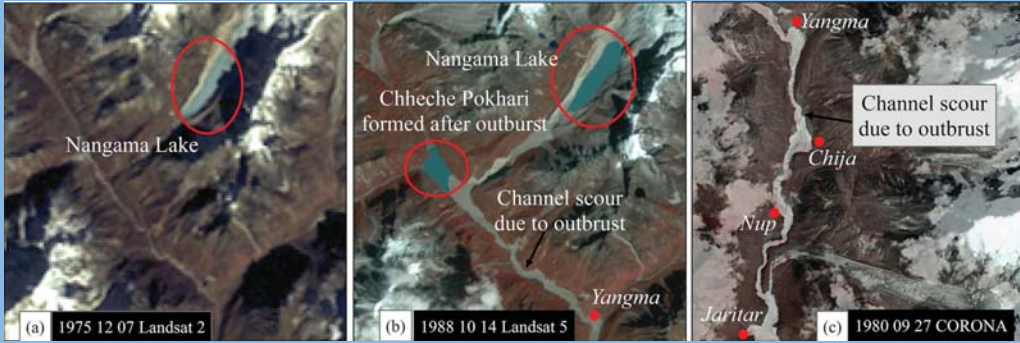
but two floods had occurred in the upper branch of the Tamor River, one in 1963 and one in 1968, were a complete mystery. And for people to still remember a GLOF from the upper Ghunsa valley that occurred in 1921, nearly one hundred years ago, meant that it must have been one very large flood indeed. Armed with this new and unexpected information, we decided to alter our journey by branching off to the west and following the Tamor River to the the village of Olangchun Gola, also located on the Great Himalayan Trail route, to try and get the story on the 1963 and 1968 floods. Once there, we were directed to Kushophula Lama Ukyap, 72, caretaker of the Deki Chholing Gompa built 450 years ago. Ukyap informed us that as opposed to the 1980 Nangama flood destroying the lower part of the village (a physical impossibility, since the Yangma Khola runs to the east of the Tamor River), it was in fact the 1963 Olangchun Gola 1 flood that caused the damage to the village. Flood waters originated in the Tiptola glacial lake to the northwest, which was the source of a second and smaller GLOF in 1968. Approximately 45 houses were destroyed by the 1963 flood, either by undercutting of the river bank below or by a lake that formed when debris blocked the flood downstream for a while. Most of the people who lost their homes and property moved to Kathmandu. The cause of both the 1963 and 1968 floods was thought to be a result of massive ice avalanches from the Chhochenphu Himal (6,269m) to the north of the lake.



Chheche Pokhari, formed when debris from the 1980 Nangama GLOF blocked the Pabuk Khola at its confluence with the Nangama Khola to the left, in May 2019.



# in Kangchenjunga



We then trekked for two days to Tiptola glacial lake, for the most part following a newly constructed road from Olangchun Gola to the Tiptala Pass (5,095m) to Tibet. Along the way we meet a group of KCA employees from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, scouting out a new site for a checkpoint location.

Wildlife poaching and sales to China were major problems in the region prior to the pandemic, and the checkpoint was designed to try and curb the illegal trade. The group was also holding community consultations in an effort to promote the development of home stays as well as more nature-based economic development in the region. Once they had checked our research permits, they expressed a strong support for our work and wished us the best of luck.

Returning to Olangchun Gola several days later, we next set out for the village of Yaphu to the north. Along the way on the Yaphu River we saw two bears, a possible red panda, a variety of resplendent sun birds, and old growth stands of junipers, hemlocks and fir trees with diameters of 1 metre+.

A road was being built on an upper ridge to the west to Yaphu, but the path along the river and old growth forests also contained painted boulders with surveyor’s markings that suggested a road might be built along the river as well. A number of people that we interviewed felt that such a road was not needed, would result in the destruction of the old growth forests, and as a result have negative impacts on the adventure tourism trade.

As tourism will definitely return to the region at some point in time, officials and local communities might do well to heed these words of warning, or lose a valuable source of income as well as incentives for biodiversity conservation.

At Yangma, we met Tahwa Lama, 71, an eyewitness to the 1980 Nangama flood who remembered grazing his yaks in what had been three distinct pasture areas covering approximately 4.5km below the terminal moraine when the GLOF occurred. He heard a deafening noise and a large dust cloud

descending from the lake area, followed by a wave that rose above the high-water mark, “like a fountain,” and accompanied by “strange sounds” (some GLOFs in Nepal have been described as creating deep, deafening moaning sounds as they slosh down the river).

Water then began to slowly emerge from the terminal moraine, growing larger and larger by the minute in terms of discharge. The flood that followed was “big, muddy, with stones clashing against each other” (sparks created by rocks may cause the gunpowder smell often reported during a GLOF, and have even been linked to local forest fires).

Floodwaters rose and lowered at intervals, indicating the pulse-like nature reported for GLOFs elsewhere in Nepal. Lama said that Chheche Pokhari, located at the foot of the Nangama valley, was formed from the blockage of the Pabuk Khola by flood sediments and debris.

Another interpretation of the flood, as reported by Damling Lama Sherpa, 62, also of Yangma, is that the lake had been inhabited by a local deity or spirit (Khangba), similar in appearance to a giant turtle, who became angry with the local people and caused the GLOFs as a consequence. Just before the flood he could hear “strange sounds” which presumably came from the Khangba.

The turtle then floated down the valley in the flood waters until it reached the bridge at Yangma village. Refusing to go under the bridge, the turtle’s body blocked the flood water, resulting in a temporary lake upstream that damaged hillslopes and grazing land, but which drained when it decided to continue downriver.

The flood was also linked by religious leaders to the fact that “modern people have become wicked, so bad things happen”, a frequently heard lament and correlation in highland Nepal that links greed, the erosion of traditional practices, and lack of respect for gods, deities, and spirits with negative consequences, both physical (earthquakes, floods) and social (death, suffering).

Our final visit of a GLOF site was to the

Lhonak Glacier, en route to the Kanchenjunga base camp north. This was the source of the 1921 Lhonak GLOF which is of particular interest because, nearly 100 years after its occurrence, it was still referred to by people throughout the Tamor watershed.

Lakpa Chhetan Sherpa, 88, of Ghunsa said that his ancestors had come from Tibet and settled at Khangpachen, a *goth* (yak pasture) downstream of the Lhonak Glacier, some 500 years ago, where they farmed and herded yak.

When the flood destroyed all of their fields in 1921 his grandfather, whose wife was among the fatalities of the flood, moved to Ghunsa, where the family has lived ever since. Lakpa Chhetan Sherpa also reported that another small flood of the Ghunsa River had occurred in “either August or September” of 2011, the approximate time that a deadly earthquake (6.9 magnitude) centered in the Kanchenjunga region occurred that killed an estimated 111 people, which brought out total number of new, unreported floods from the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area up to a remarkable six, in addition to the 1980 Nangama GLOF.

The massive breach in the terminal moraine of Lhonak, and deposits of debris at the foot of the moraine, are testimony to the power that the flood must have possessed. In fact, most people probably walk by such features and ignore them for the beautiful snow and ice peaks jutting above, never realising that they are walking in the middle of a catastrophic event that changed people’s lives, livelihoods, and view of the world nearly 100 years ago. We certainly wouldn’t have known anything about the glacial lakes and moraines that we visited if we had not consulted with local people along the way.

Back in the US, it was March of 2020 before I was finally able to start transcribing the recorded interviews and designing a framework for a scientific research paper. While rumours of a strange global virus were circulating, I contacted Mohan Bahadur Chand, a recently-minted PhD student at Hokkaido University and, coincidentally, one of Teiji Watanabe’s students.

Mohan’s 2020 PhD thesis was, in fact, about the development of glacial lakes in the Kanchenjunga region, and he was rapidly able to document the occurrence of five of the six GLOFs reported by local informants using before and after remote sensing images, mostly through the presence of flood scars, breached terminal moraines, and deposits.

He also located two additional smaller GLOFs that had not been mentioned, probably because they were smaller and located in remote regions near glaciers. Mohan had been aware of these events through his own research work, but he had been unable to assign approximate dates to their actual occurrence until provided with the results of the project’s oral history component.

Jonathan Lala, graduate student in engineering at the University of Wisconsin Madison, developed a numerical simulation model of the Nangama GLOF that strongly suggested that it was triggered by an ice/debris avalanche of some 800,000m<sup>3</sup> of

material, just like local people had thought, causing a surge wave that breached the terminal moraine and released an estimated 11 million cubic metres of water, with debris from the flood damming the Pabuk Khola river 2km below to form what is today known as Chheche Pokhari — just like the local people had said.

Milan Shrestha, an anthropologist at Arizona State University, provided the methodological framework for oral history as a tool in recounting past GLOF events. He also provided essential information about mountain cultures and religious beliefs that helped immensely with our understanding and interpretations of many of the interviews conducted.

Plant ecologist Elizabeth Byers, when not photographing wild flowers for her new Himalayan wildflower app, was responsible for taking many of the field measurements of the Nangama glacial lake (*pictured below*) and terminal moraine that Jonathan Lala considered to be essential to his numeric modeling.

And Teiji Watanabe, whose article from over 20 years ago about the Nangama GLOF sparked the launch of our 2019 expedition, shared his vast expertise and more recent thoughts about the continued dangers of glacial lakes in the Kanchenjunga region.

Together, the different contributions resulted in our scientific paper published July 2020 in the journal *Sustainability*, ‘Reconstructing the history of glacial lake outburst floods in the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area, east Nepal: an interdisciplinary approach’.

In summary, the experience demonstrated the benefits and utility of using interdisciplinary research approaches to the better understanding of past and poorly documented GLOF events in Nepal and elsewhere, especially in remote, data-scarce high mountain environments rarely visited by scientists.

Modern technologies and tools such as Geographical Information Systems, satellite imagery, and flood modeling are becoming increasingly sophisticated and valuable to our understanding of our changing world, but they have their own temporal and analytical limitations as well.

Involving local people in research can often help to fill these gaps in surprising ways. The research also demonstrates that while development agencies are busy writing up guidelines for mountain people to adapt to climate change and hazard risk impacts, these same people have been doing so for decades, if not for centuries.

Each flood mentioned killed many people and destroyed millions in infrastructure, but they find ways to adapt (move to Ghunsa, graze the cattle higher), and they press on. Their resilience in the face of a history of unexpected GLOFs could provide some valuable lessons for us all, as we face the shock and completely unanticipated challenges imposed by COVID-19 and the global pandemic. 🇳🇵

**Alton C Byers**, PhD is a Senior Research Associate and Faculty at the Institute for Arctic and Alpine Research (INSTAAR), University of Colorado at Boulder. A scientific version of this article was published in Sustainability.





EVENTS

Tihar Haat Bazaar

Get Tihar shopping done while enjoying live music and good food at the Tihar Haat Bazaar this weekend.  
30 October, 2pm, Foodpark Avenue, Boudha

Kag/Kukur Tihar

On the first day of Tihar, crows are worshipped as the vehicle for Yama Raj, the god of death. Dogs are also revered on the day as Yama Raj’s gatekeepers, who ensure the soul’s journey to judgement.



Laxmi Puja

On Laxmi Puja, houses are decorated with lights, diyos, and rangoli to welcome Goddess Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and good fortune.  
4 November

Govardhan/Mha Puja

Nepalis observe Govardhan Puja by making a reproduction of the Govardhan mountain, which Lord Krishna is said to have lifted to save people from a flood. The Newa community celebrates Mha puja (worship of the self) on this day.  
5 November

Bhaitika

The last day of Tihar celebrates the bond between brothers and sisters. On this day, brothers and sisters mark each other’s foreheads with saptarangi Tika, and sisters pray to Yamaraj, the God of death, for the long life of their brothers.  
6 November

Art Exhibition

Stop by the Windhorse Gallery, where ‘Inverse’, a collection of artist Tulku Jamyang’s recent artwork, is on display.  
Until 15 November, Windhorse Gallery, Bhanimandal

DINING



Deepawali with Marriott

Gift loved ones this Tihar with specially-curated boxes of mithai from Marriott, which include Silver Cashew, Rosette de Leche, Gur Mewa, Le Pistache and more.  
Kathmandu Marriott Hotel, 9801971643

DOCUMENTARIES



Netflix on YouTube

Netflix has released some of its documentaries for free on YouTube for educational purposes in light of the global coronavirus pandemic. Watch the award-winning documentary Our Planet from Sir David Attenborough to start.

Herne Katha

The web series depicts untold stories of ordinary people in the form of short documentaries. Head on to their YouTube channel to start.

Journeyman Pictures

Watch groundbreaking award-winning films on some of the most burning issues across the globe including politics, the environment, and the current pandemic. Find Journeyman pictures on YouTube.

VICE

Watch documentaries about anything and everything from all over the world on the VICE YouTube channel. Start from documentaries about Nepal’s honey harvesters, The Nepalese Honey That Makes People Hallucinate, as well as the most recent documentary on human trafficking in Nepal.



Real Stories

Go to the Real Stories YouTube channel to watch compelling award-winning documentaries from all over the world. Watch factual films about war, crime, mental health, technology and more.

Bungalow Bar and Kitchen

At Bungalow Bar and Kitchen, you can have authentic Thai dishes like Som Tam Essan, Pad Kra Pao and Red Curry, or Asian - fusion dishes like the Pork Bamboo Shoot, Buff Lemon Grass and Fried Calamari, all with a side of refreshing cocktails.  
Naxal, 9801068630



Saturday Brunch

Spend a relaxing day poolside at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu and try a variety of cuisines from a carefully-crafted brunch spread.  
12-4pm, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 9802050429

GETAWAY

Maruni Sanctuary Lodge

Chitwan National Park is home to a wide range of flora and fauna. From the comfort of the cabins and cottages of this lodge, you can peek at the wandering wildlife and nature of the park.  
Sauraha 9865381010



Tiger Mountain

Tiger Mountain Resort is an example of homegrown high-value eco-tourism that uses local products and showcases the best of Nepal’s scenery, nature and culture. Get details on Tihar offers online.  
Kandani Danda, Pokhara (01) 4720580

Godavari Village Resort

Spread over 14 lush green acres, traditionally-styled cottages and buildings overlooking rice fields offer mountain views.  
Godavari (01) 5560675



Pataleban Vineyard Resort

Pataleban Vineyard Resort is an eco-resort with great views, jungle walks, and picnics to rejuvenate from the stress of a tedious routine.  
Chisapani, 9841679364

Mirabel Resort

Perfect for families, Mirabel Resort offers comfort, continental cuisines and views of Kathmandu Valley. Take a walk around Dhulikhel before tucking into a Nepali lunch. Get details on the Monsoon offer on Facebook.  
Dhulikhel (01) 490972

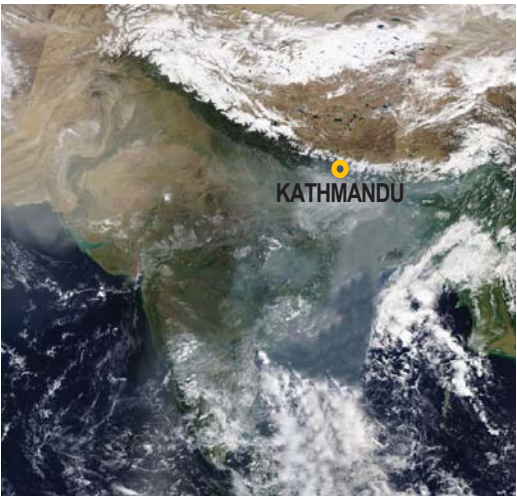


Kairos Cafe

Known for its craft coffee, customisable breakfast, variety of juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine away from the hubbub of street noises, Kairos Cafe is a must for foodies.  
Jawalakhel, 9813493902

Jatra Cafe

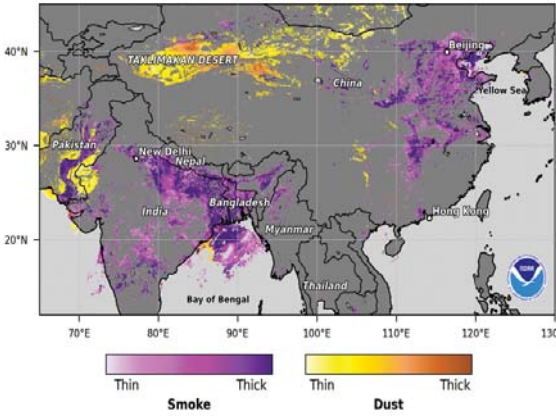
Jatra Cafe & Bar has an extensive menu of authentic Newa cuisine. But the Samaya Baji Newa khaja set is one of the best out there and as authentic as it can get.  
Thamel (01) 4256622



A large high pressure area dominates northern India, and will bring more fine post-monsoonal weather for the next week. The maximum and minimum temperatures will drop down to 24 and 10 Celsius. The cloudless sky does not mean it will be clear this weekend. Stubble burning on both sides of Punjab is picking up, sending clouds of smoke our way. High winds in the Af-Pak desert are also kicking up a lot of dust. These will filter the sun over Nepal also, suppressing daytime temperature.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
24° 10°	24° 11°	23° 11°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



As this NOAA satellite aerosol image taken on Tuesday shows, there is a mass of smoke from crop-residue burning in northern India and Pakistan moving across parts of Nepal (pink). There is also desert dust being whipped up by high winds in the Thar desert (yellow) that is blowing in. Combined with an increase in vehicular pollution, the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu Valley has been hovering in the orange ‘Hazardous’ zone at 150 all week. This is likely to continue into the weekend.



OUR PICK

Denis Villeneuve’s *Dune*, the 2021 film adapted from Frank Herbert’s 1965 novel, set far into the future follows Paul Atreides, the gifted son of a noble family from the ocean planet of Caladan. When Paul’s father is assigned to rule the harsh desert planet of Arrakis, Paul and his family find themselves entrusted with the protection of Arrakis’ supply of ‘spice’-- a priceless asset that throws the forces of the galaxy into conflict. Stars Timothée Chalamet, Zendaya, Rebecca Ferguson, Oscar Isaac, Josh Brolin, and more.

कोरोना लागेपछि न धुँदा जाने, न रुँदा जाने त्यसैले कोरोना लाग्नै नदिन मीडमाडमा नजाने

कोरोना संक्रमणबाट बच्न मासि, आउरोकोकोरुमरुम र आउरोकोको रोगबाट बच्न

मासि, आउरोकोकोरुमरुम र आउरोकोको रोगबाट बच्न

मासि, आउरोकोकोरुमरुम र आउरोकोको रोगबाट बच्न

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# Adventures of a Kathmandu street dog

New bilingual book is an uplifting tale of suffering and survival of an abandoned dog

Nepal is a land of despair and hope. Despite enormous hardships, Nepalis have learnt to survive, and indeed surmount them. There is injustice and exclusion, but also youthful activism. The present may look hopeless, but we still hold out hope for a better tomorrow.

We treat our animals badly, yet we worship them as manifestations of our gods. This contrast between cruelty and kindness is most pronounced in the lives of street fauna, creatures with whom we share our urban space.

Dogs are mistreated, but there are also many families which have adopted dozens of street dogs to feed and care for them despite not having spare income. They may not be rich, but they display a richness of compassion for fellow beings.

On Kukur Tihar on 3 November this year, we will worship our pets and community dogs, garlanding and feeding them treats. But in the evening, many of the same families will light firecrackers to frighten the living daylights out of their dogs.

Like in previous Tihars, pets will get lost – desperately fleeing the explosions, until they have run too far to find their way back home.

It is to draw attention to how street animals bring out the best (and sometimes the worst) in human beings that this Kukur Tihar will see the launch of another book



ILLUSTRATIONS: JENNY CAMPBELL



about a Nepali she-dog named Sathi who finds a new life thanks to kind humans.

*Sathi* is an exquisitely illustrated bilingual book that tells a fairy tale story of an abandoned dog, who is scalded on Kukur Tihar by a city shopkeeper angry that the dog is

messing up her shop.

She throws boiling water on the hapless dog. Sathi is miserable and in pain as she licks her wounds at a garbage pile, until she finds a benefactor who takes her to the real-life animal shelter called KAT Centre in Kathmandu.

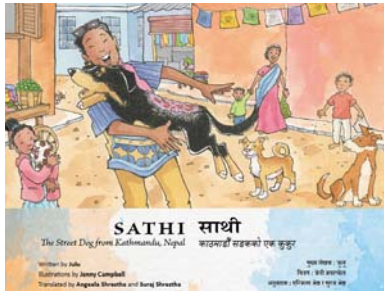


Sathi is cared for at the dog home, and the burns on her back heal slowly. She makes friends with other dogs at the shelter who have also been attacked, abandoned, or hit by cars. There is Moti, Momo, Karma, Tashi – all with heart-rending stories from the streets.

“You know, dogs are often not treated very well here in Kathmandu,” a dog named Karma who lost one eye to a knife-wielding attacker tells Sathi. “Not all people like dogs and they only honor us one day a year, on Kukur Tihar. The rest of the time, they don’t really care about us.”

Like most fairy tales, *Sathi* has a happy ending. Julu is the pseudonym of the author who was prompted to write the book after learning of a dog like Sathi.

This true story on which the book is based is explained in the Epilogue that also contains a list of animal shelters in Kathmandu. Proceeds of the book will go to support some of these shelters.



*Sathi*  
The Street Dog from Kathmandu, Nepal  
साथी  
काठमाडौँ सडकको एक कुकुर  
by Julu illustrations by Jenny Campbell  
Nepali translations by Angeela Shrestha and Suraj Shrestha  
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● Sonia Awale

The narrow stone-paved alley behind Patan’s Krishna Mandir is unusually packed these days with people in the new cafes, bars and homestays. But nestled among them is a 150-year-old sweet shop that has survived earthquakes, upheavals and epidemics.

It is called Mamadu Galli, but over the decades it has become synonymous with the *mari pasa* confectionary shop housed in a building that survived the 1934 and 2015 earthquakes. One morning this week, it was crowded with customers, many of them who had just finished worshipping in nearby shrines.

Nanda Mithai Bhandar is famous not just in Patan. Customers come from Kathmandu and further afield to buy the freshly cooked *jeri-swari*, *barfi*, and other sinfully sweet ghee-dipped delicacies. Some are so impatient, they do not even wait to get home and are savouring the piping hot treats right there on the sidewalk.

It is just past 8AM, but the proprietor Radha Krishna Rajkarnikar has been busy since 6, as he is every day. “This is how it is 365 days a year, seven days a week, we rarely close,” says Rajkarnikar, whose family has been running the shop now for over four generations.

“The recipes have been handed down from the time of our great-grandparents, passed down from one generation to the next,” adds Rajkarnikar, who grew up as a boy to watch his parents mix the



## Hitting the sweet spot this Tihar

The Rajkarnikar family has been running its confectionary shop in Patan for four generations



PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

ingredients, heat the sugar syrup in a great vat, before dipping the freshly-fried delicacies every morning.

“I used to help my father with sales, I was told to sell one piece of *jeri* for 25 paisa,” recalls Radha Krishna, now 45. “I also learned to make simple breakfast staples like *halwa*, *malpa* and *sel*. Back then we used to buy stacks of firewood from local traders, we didn’t have kerosene or gas stoves.”

Everything flies off the shelf as soon as it is cooked, and is fresh, few items are left over for the next day. The best-sellers are everyone’s favourite *jeri-swari*, of which about 1,000 pieces are made every day. Other favourites are *lakhamari*, *barfi* and *balbara*.

Its eight workers work nearly non-stop until 9PM every day, especially during the wedding and

festival seasons, on Mothers and Fathers Days.

“More and more we are also getting customers who have been living abroad for years, and have childhood memories of visiting our shop when they were young,” says Srijana Shilpakar Rajkarnikar who runs the shop together with her husband Radha Krishna.

The pandemic had significantly reduced business, but things returned to near-normal this Dasain season. Now, sales are shooting up again ahead of Tihar.

Increasingly, traditional *mithai* are being replaced with well-packaged pastries, cakes and other baked goods. It is only during the festivals and rituals that people buy the more traditional delicacies. In time, family-run *halwai* businesses like these may also lose out to the modern bakeries and cake shops that have sprung up nearby. The younger generation is also moving away to pursue better-paying jobs or migrate abroad.

Srijana herself became active in the shop only a couple of years ago but having been raised in a family of traditional wood carvers in Lalitpur, and growing up helping her parents at their showroom, she says it is important to continue the culinary heritage and keep traditions alive.

“Both my young sons help out when things get busy, especially during festivals. We have taught them about raw materials and recipes,” adds Srijana. “It is my hope they carry on with our tradition in some capacity.”

The Nanda Mithai Bhandar is named after Radha Krishna’s grandfather and has been in the same rented space for nearly a century. Says Srijana: “We cannot let our heritage fade away, we need to transfer our skills and knowledge to continue our ancestral profession, and encourage the coming generation.” 🇳🇵

● Ashish Dhakal

The first thing that strikes us about Makkusé wrappings is the tasteful copper-and-black design. The second thing is just how tasty the contents are.

Anushka Shrestha, former-Miss Nepal and founder of the country’s newest food brand, says the colours are conscious deviations from the ubiquitous gold. And the treats inside revive traditional Newa condiments to a more global clientele.

“With the Makkusé design, we wanted to evoke a more traditional experience of the Newa community where copper features more predominantly than gold,” Shrestha explains. “We want our products to remind people of the taste of the old Kathmandu. But at the same time, also be unique, modern, and sustainable.”

While gold may be considered the more obvious choice, the team felt that copper captures the Nepaliness more accurately. Indeed, ‘Authentic Nepali Luxury’ constitutes the brand vision and narrative of Makkusé, and the colours, with the handcrafted boxes made with *lokta* bark handmade paper, give the products a truly authentic and unique look.

Next comes what the boxes hold. Unwind the string, and with each turn the anticipation rises. Open the lid. Inside, two glass jars of *gundpak* sit snugly. This is a creamy fudge-like dessert popular in Nepal, traditionally made with



Authentic Nepali sweets get a tasteful new makeover with the new Makkusé brand

thickened milk and sugar, but with Makkusé, there is an added twist: its *gundpak* is infused with rosewater and pistachio, or mocha.

Other products include *pustakari* made from molasses cooked with ghee, milk, and often topped with nuts. To this, Makkusé adds chocolate *gundpak* fudge cookies, and oats *gundpak* pumpkin seed cookies – all of which carry their very own special taste.

For Anushka Shrestha, the line of products reflects the brand’s dedication to both tradition and innovation. With immense love and faith in Nepal, she always



knew she wanted to work in the country, but found the field of possibilities and platforms a bit overwhelming at first.

“There is so much one can do here,” she says, “and that I think brings a sort of fear in youths today of not knowing what to do, it definitely did in me.”

But her passion for development, project management and the Nepali culture eventually helped her narrow her options down, and Makkusé was launched in November 2020 when she was bedridden with Covid.

To say people were a bit skeptical would be an understatement, but there was

urgency for something comforting during the pandemic when fear, dread and tragedy were abound.

Further, the break in the supply chain during the lockdown led to an overwhelming amount of waste. All this inspired Anushka to mitigate that gap via locally sourced resources and deliver little packets of delights in which people might find some recourse.

The initial reaction is still fresh in Anushka’s mind. “There was a huge collective exclamation: “आँ !” she says. After the initial reaction, people were pleased with the products, and slowly, sales picked up. Customers returned time and again, with positive things to say.

“And two months after the first sale, it began to feel like a step in the right direction and something all Nepalis could be proud of,” Shrestha adds.

Makkusé’s *pustakari* and *gundpak* makers have years of culinary experience, and some of the families have been working in the field for generations. The milk comes from Kavre where the elevation is said to add to the unique taste, and the recipes adhere to the long-established tradition of sweet-making in the Newa community of the Valley not taught in culinary schools.

The skill to make these sweets are mostly handed down from parents to children, or from makers to apprentices. But far fewer people today are willing to learn or train and keep the culture afloat.

With Tihar around the corner, Makkusé offers a delightful new way to greet family and friends in the festival of lights. There is no exact translation to मक्कुसे, but perhaps the brand tagline ‘simply scrumptious’ comes close to the original Newa word.

Who knows, “Makkusé” could just become a new form of Tihar greeting. 🇳🇵



# Ass Tihar

You might have noticed that the Festival of Lights is called Tihar in Nepal. This is unfortunate, because that is also the name of the notoriously famous prison in Delhi from which The Serpent broke out after knocking his guards unconscious with sleeping pills.

Be that as it may, and whatever, Nepal is also the land of Pashupatinath, the Lord of Animals. And unlike Dasain when we decapitate animals and eat them, in Tihar we worship our furry and feathered friends.

Dogs are gods and crows are divine on 4 November, cows are holy all year round, and all sisters are living goddesses on 6 Nov. And there is even a day set aside for people to worship themselves, if they feel so inclined.

Nepal would not be the same without its diverse flora and fauna. I don't want to name names here, but there are quite a few skunks and hyenas loose in Singha Darbar which give this country its unique character and aroma. Snakes are loose in the Supremo Court, and there are creepy crawlies in both the Upper and Lower Chambers of the August House.

Moving on to the Class Aves, we notice that there is now a severe shortage of doves in the city. So many of them have been symbolically released on the International Day of Peace, that politicians have been forced to switch to releasing chickens which have symbolically refused to fly off, and have had to be turned into drumsticks.

But if there is one animal that deserves to be called the Nepalis' best friend, it is the mutt. This year, Dog Day coincides with the

Annual Mating Season, which is why dogs and bitches can be seen staging public interactions at Baneswore intersection, with people milling around to provide moral support and to cheer them on.

Speaking on the occasion, a Sitting Member of the Standing Committee of the United-Marxist-Leninists said: "What our amorous canine comrades are doing today sets a fine example for the rest of us in our party to stand back-to-back, stick to each other, and wait for speedy disengagement."

What all this shagging means, of course, is that in the next three months the torch will be passed on to another generation of puppies which we will have to worship next Kukur Tihar. We must thank these canine security guards who ensure safety in these uncertain times by howling all night at the world in general, and no one in particular.

No commemoration of Tihar will be complete without a passing reference to the city's cattle population. After being venerated, cows and bulls out of a sense of duty will be back on the nation's highways, chewing the cud and serving as traffic islands.

In conclusion, I would like to once more thank the livestock, poultry and canine sectors for their contribution to making this festival so much fun. But lest we be accused of being speciest, next year we also want an Ass Tihar so we can also wear and eat our own marigold garlands.



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# Niels Gutschow leaves

After 50 years documenting the culture and architecture of Nepal, noted scholar returns to Germany

● Ashish Dhakal

“Welcome to my playground,” calls Niels Gutschow from the brick-laid front yard of his home in Bhaktapur. At the centre stands the single-storey house, with a narrow door in the middle of the vast brick façade, bracketed by two lattice windows. The house originally had three floors, but the 2015 earthquake brought much of the structure down.

Cool breezes rush in from all sides, filling the air with a polyphonic rustle of leaves. Here is a world unto itself, far from the hustle and bustle of this historic city. The sky is blue, the landscape is crisp, absent of dust, and butterflies flutter about. The nearest road is a 7-minute walk away, whatever trace of the mechanical city life beyond is filtered by the willow trees that line the narrow trail leading up to the house.

Gutschow’s wife Wau sits on the plinth next to the door, knitting. “A sweater for Niels,” she says, holding it up. “I knitted a red one before, did I not?”

Gutschow nods. It is a white sweater this time.

Every year for the last 30 years (although, Nepal has been his home for nearly 50 years now), Niels and Wau would leave Nepal for Germany in November where they live near Heidelberg amidst landscape much like their Tahaja Hill home in Bhaktapur, secluded and peaceful.

But this November, the Gutschows are making the trip back for the last time, leaving behind an extensive bibliography on the architectural anthropology of Nepal, an invaluable contribution to the conservation of the country’s tangible and intangible heritage. And they leave behind their home.

A striking example of Gutschow’s work is in the *chaitya*-studded lobby of the Hyatt Regency in Kathmandu. These are the exact replica of shrines built between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries around Kathmandu Valley.

Even as the Valley’s cityscape turns to cement and steel, spreading like a malignancy across towns of historical and cultural significance, visiting the stone archive in Hyatt lobby presents some consolation and even a chance to return to our architectural roots.

Gutschow was born in 1941 in Hamburg. His father was an architect, to whom he credits his entry into the visual 3-D world of design. He studied Latin and Greek in school, and in 1958 attended Buddhist Sunday classes. Educated not just in the Western classical canon but also Buddhist philosophy, he first came to Nepal in 1962 en route to Burma.

In May of the same year, he witnessed the Machindranath Jatra in Lalitpur which had a profound impact on him, and made him decide this was something he would like to study. An architectural anthropologist by profession, he returned to Nepal in 1970, sponsored by the German Research Council to study the villages of Marpha and Tukche in lower Mustang.

It was around this time that he met a German diplomat who wanted Gutschow involved in a project to restore the historic Pujari Math priestly residence in Bhaktapur. He prepared a plan for



ALL PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

its restoration after surveying the badly ruined building complex with the help of Krishna Shrestha, the director of the National Art Gallery at the time.

The project was a precursor to what was to follow: an ambitious bilateral initiative between Nepal and Germany for the conservation of the architectural heritage of Bhaktapur. He returned to Nepal in August 1971 to organise the site visit, and took up residence at Bhaktapur in the ‘Rana House’ – now a homeopathic clinic – near Nag Pokhari.

Walking around Bhaktapur even today is like stepping back in time. Its unique charm is preserved intact in its historic buildings and monuments – still largely untouched by the haphazard westernisation that has destroyed other towns in the Valley.

Back in the 1970s, Bhaktapur was dilapidated, but its historic

urbanscape was even more pristine. The Arniko Highway was just being built, and there were only a couple of buses a day to and from Kathmandu.

Gutschow fully immerse himself in the life and happenings of this little city. He witnessed Indra Jatra and Dasain, and experienced communities get together during the Bisket Jatra and during the procession of the Navadurga.

“It was fascinating to see Newars use their space as a stage,” he recalls.

Gutschow returned in 1974 with a scholarship to study Bhaktapur, which was also the year the German-supported Bhaktapur Development Project (BDP) got a start. Although many consider that Gutschow himself was part of the BDP, he says it is a misunderstanding.

“I only wrote the first paper to initiate the project,” he adds. “The

project went through a tender and we were young people then, we did not compete.”

That paper is only a small part of Gutschow’s vast scholarship on Nepal. One of the many people who have introduced Nepal to Nepal, he conducted architectural surveys of Gorkha and Nuwakot, Kag and Khyinga (in Mustang) from 1980 to 1988 and from 1990 to 1995. He also studied in greater detail the 19<sup>th</sup> century temples of Patan, Kathmandu and Deopatan, and Buddhist *chaitya* to develop a chronology based on stylistic evidence.

Further, his documentation and analysis of the urban space and rituals of Bhaktapur, his mapping of the city’s religious and social topography, and his architectural and anthropological research are unparalleled in their significance and impact.

He has written three detailed

volumes on death rituals (*Handling Death*, 2005), initiation ceremonies (*Growing Up*, 2008) and marriage customs (*Getting Married*, 2012) of Newars, with special focus on Bhaktapur. The 3-volume encyclopædic opus *Architecture of the Newars*, spans the early, Malla and modern times. Another book, *The Sky Face* studies Kirtimukha – a recurrent iconography of a fierce monster face with huge fangs and gaping mouth – and related creatures in Nepal, South and Southeast Asian art and architecture.

In the 50 years that he has spent in Nepal, Gutschow has witnessed the steady change, and decline of the Valley’s pristine landscape into an ugly concrete jungle, which he also documented in his 2012 book, *The Kathmandu Valley*.

Also a meticulous chronicler of change, Gutschow held a deliberately dispassionate tone in



# home

the book – subdued and impartial, despite the sadness, telling *Nepali Times*: “The curiosity I feel about this ongoing development has nothing denunciatory about it. The documentation of the construction sites does reveal a certain crudity, not to say brutality. Its aim is to achieve a largely unemotional presentation of one aspect of reality.”

Gutschow’s passion and dedication to documentation can also be seen in his house in Bhaktapur – an integral part of his œuvre, a historical record of three decades in bricks and beams, where his research, scholarship and life spent among the people, the rituals, and the festivals of the Newa communities of Bhaktapur culminate, and which he is leaving behind when he returns to Germany.

The house stands atop Tajaha Hill (literally ‘a net of serpents’) where snakes are indeed a common feature to this day. Gutschow remembers several large snakes basking in the sun, and some smaller ones in the lotus pond, especially in the monsoon or winter afternoons.

Unlike most mythologies in the West, snakes represent strength and rebirth in Buddhism and Hinduism. This feels like an apt analogy, adding to the serene, mythical quality of the house, which itself was rebuilt and reconfigured in 1989 and lived in for 30 years.

Narrow bricked steps lead the visitor away from the trail and

towards the house, flanked on both sides by a small forest of monkey grass, *isicha*, willow trees, mugwort and persimmon among others. A small round lotus pool on the right and a *kuwa*, or a wellspring, on the left are near the entrance.

In the courtyard a long arcade has been reconfigured after the earthquake. The columns and capital-brackets on top Gutschow bought for the price of firewood. “No one wanted these,” he says, shaking his head. The carvings depict buffalo eyes, lotus leaves, snake virgins under serpent hoods, and the mythical *makara* aquatic beings.

Behind the house stands the Kadam Chörten, a *chaitya* completed in 2002 to commemorate the passing of the Buddha, and further up is the tall guest house, its roof peeking from behind the fan palm and *lapsi*. Two giant vermilion circles look ahead from under the roof like eyes keeping watch over the hill, the neighbouring houses and fields.

“The earthquake affected this building too, the base twisted,” Gutschow says, demonstrating the jerk and twist with his own body. The door had to be removed and replaced with a wall upon which another giant red circle was plastered with a smaller yellow circle painted inside. When asked about its meaning, Gutschow smiles slyly: “I cannot tell you that, *you* should come up with your own interpretation.”

From the guest house, one can see another tower up ahead which looks as though it is simply a decorative piece. The bricks are of singular styles not seen elsewhere in the house, which were designed by students from Frankfurt.

“It was an experiment,” Gutschow says, moving his hand across the jagged motif. The traditional Newa bricks are



arranged at the bottom, with a layer of modern rough bricks above, followed by a single line of traditional bricks, above which the Frankfurt-designed ones sit, and the pattern continues.

Three columns stand here – two on one side and one inside a narrow opening opposite. These are unique structures which came from Pondicherry in India, wide at the base, and tapered rather sharply at the top. The lonely column on the other side is painted red, as is the top of the wall inside. This colour is a recurring motif with Gutschow.

“Red is an important colour, almost like my trademark. It is the colour of blood, and especially associated with life and death,” he adds.

Red also has ritualistic significance in Hinduism and Buddhism, and is the colour of the sun in mornings and evenings. Gutschow would not reveal the mystery of the coloured circles in the guest house, but perhaps they too represent the same sense of duality: of life and death, of dawn and dusk, of Nepal and Germany.

However, Gutschow is cautious with hasty interpretations, since in art they can often allude to a notion of functionality, and an object is reduced simply to its utility. “But form does not need to follow function,” he says as we walk away from the tower towards the house.

“The lonely pillar stands in the space as an aesthetic choice, an object to be appreciated as itself,” he says.

It is the same with the anthropomorphic façade of his study tower, where two window panels that function as eyes are separated in the middle by a wooden arch which is the nose. Above the eyes, the cornice serves as eyebrows and there in the central axis sits a small block carved into a third eye. This is a prime example of the “impulse to adorn” which features heavily in the architectural practice of Bhaktapur, where decorations serve a pure aesthetic purpose.

After the tour, sitting inside the arcade, Gutschow recounts the Navadurga ritual, which he has been attending for the past 50 years not as a tourist but as an inhabitant of Bhaktapur, belonging to the community.

Even then, despite his work, projects and involvement all these years, Gutschow has been coming to Nepal on a tourist visa which covers about five months at a time, and he still has to buy a \$15 entry ticket every time he visits Bhaktapur Darbar Square.

But, he shrugs: “Now it does not matter anymore.”

Gutschow laughs when asked about how he balanced being in Nepal and Germany for half-a-century.

He adds, “I enjoyed being in two worlds, and being able to work and write in Germany as well as in Nepal meant that when I returned to one of the places, I always returned with new questions.”



## Remembering Robert Powell

Taragaon Museum exhibits the late artist’s evocative paintings of Himalayan landscape and architecture

Robert Powell’s drawing of the courtyard façade of Kuthu Math in Bhaktapur is a prime example of his singular style: light enters from the left and the contrast between surface and shadow accentuate the depth of the carvings, guiding the viewer’s eyes.

The windows are the many eyes on the wall, some open and some closed, some watchful and some resting. The blackness behind the openings contours the face and enhances the intricate latticework. There is a stillness to the painting, but wait: is that a flying pigeon frozen in time under the second-floor window?

The retrospective exhibition at Taragaon Museum is a tribute to Robert Powell who died in Thailand on 16 December 2020. It is also a celebration of talent that sheds light on the artist’s unique visual range, subtle playfulness and an austere dedication to detail.

There are 30 of Powell’s works on exhibit, including the museum’s recent acquisition: the artist’s rendition of the 17th century Licchavichaitya at Vambaha in Patan. Individual pieces of the original *chaitya* date to the 7th century and was only later assembled.

This is an intricate drawing of an exquisite sculpture, and Powell’s brush strokes add to the superior craftsmanship of its unnamed master. Directly beneath the dome sits a Buddha flanked by two ferocious lions looking

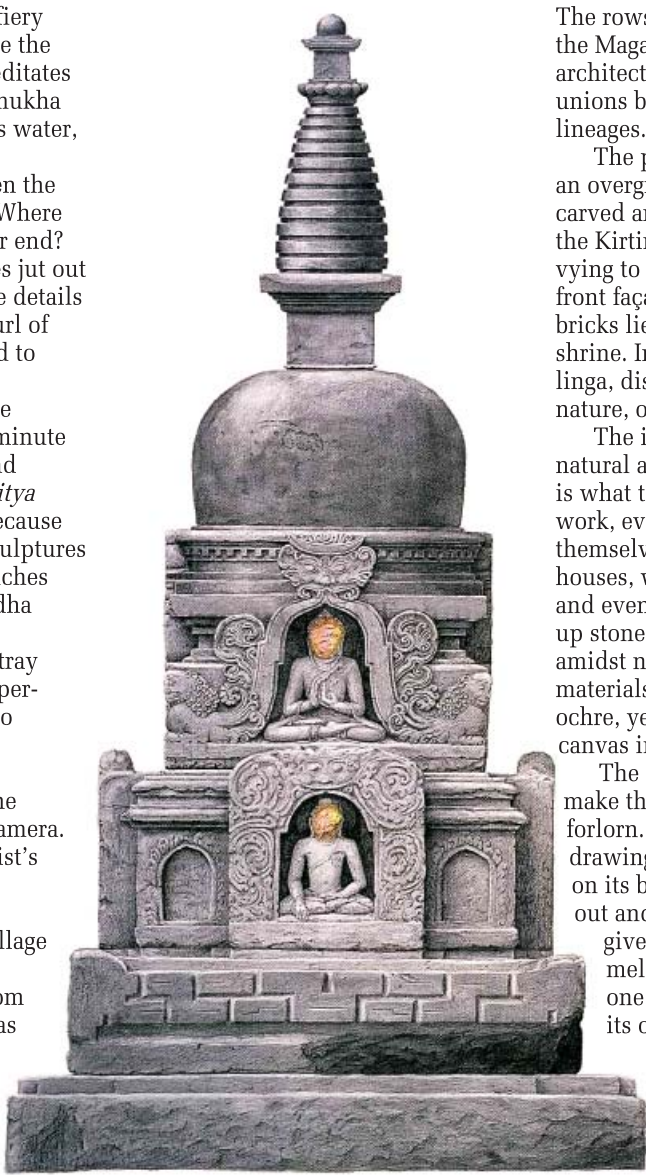
in opposite directions. The fiery tails of the lions rise to frame the niche where the Buddha meditates and are swallowed by Kirtimukha above, who then regurgitates water, signifying rain.

Where is the line between the opposites – fire and water? Where does one begin and the other end? Meanwhile wide lotus leaves jut out of the tails on each side. The details are immaculate, and each curl of the tails and manes rendered to perfection.

The drawing captures the essence of the sculpture in minute scale, carefully measured and rendered on paper. The *chaitya* itself is of special interest because unlike other Licchavi era sculptures in Kathmandu, where the niches are empty, this has the Buddha meditating in it.

Powell does not just portray what is literal. These are hyper-realistic impressions taken to another realm by his artistic genius. There is an added dimension inaccessible to the human eye, or even to the camera. Reality mingles with the artist’s own impression.

Take, for example, his drawing of Taka, a Magar village in Rolpa, which depicts a 3-storeyed structure seen from above. The surface appears as if in motion, and the viewer is almost hovering overhead with the hat-like granaries on the flat roof leap out of the page.



The rows of houses represent the Magar marriage system in architectural form: matrilineal unions between cousins across 3 lineages.

The painting of a temple with an overgrown *pipal* shows the carved arch interlocked between the Kirtimukha and the trunk, both vying to devour it. Much of the front façade has crumbled and the bricks lie about as the tree lifts the shrine. Inside is a solitary shiva linga, displaced or at home among nature, one cannot say.

The interaction between natural and human structures is what ties together Robert’s work, even though the paintings themselves are not peopled. The houses, windows, lonely temples, and even *thowo* (row of piled up stones) – all are either placed amidst nature or built of natural materials. Earthy pigments of ochre, yellow, white, colour the canvas in thin effervescent layers.

The lack of people could make the structures appear forlorn. A house in one of the drawings has visible cracks on its brick wall, looks worn out and abandoned, ready to give up. There is a sense of melancholy, but an aesthetic one. The landscape revels in its objective existence, seen as themselves. Robert is careful not to overlay his own influence onto the canvas, his point of view is reflected solely

by what he selects to draw.

This is architectural documentation at its best. Historians and conservationists draw lines with sharp pencil or ink, without using a T-square, aiming to depict an objective reproduction of the artefact without manipulating it, or completing missing details. Powell famously counted the bricks in the courtyard of Kuthu Math in Bhaktapur and meticulously painted each of their colour, texture and size.

Such exactitude adds a layer of poetry to Powell’s art which aims not to influence but to uncover what was previously unseen or unnoticed, giving a more holistic image of the structure with surgical precision and mythic elevation.

The Taragaon exhibition showcases Robert Powell’s powerful narrative quality that augments an archival contribution to architecture and ethnography, full of aesthetic and historical significance. The eyes on the windows watch us as we pass, and their doors open to remind us of the cities of the old from where we have come. These drawings are vessels for memory, since only the material world is transient.

Ashish Dhakal

Robert Powell Exhibition  
The Taragaon Museum  
Till 3 November  
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# Where Nepal's banner

FROM NALAPANI TO KALAPANI **Part 4**

● Alisha Sijapati

**Nepali Times** reporter Alisha Sijapati spent a month earlier this year 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 is the fourth in a five-part series that looks back at the bravery of the Gorkhali troops under its legendary generals to defend the newly-conquered territory, but also the historical memory among the local people of an oppressive rule.

The first, second and third episodes in this series are in the *Nepali Times* archives. The fifth part will appear on 12 November in this space.

The Anglo-Gorkha War officially began in November 1814 and came to a resounding close in March 1816 with the Treaty of Sugauli, the echoes of which are still heard across Nepal, India and Britain today.

In April 1815, the Gorkhali forces clashed with the East India Company army in what was to be the most brutal and decisive siege of the war, the Battle of Malaun, with its far-reaching consequences for the rest of the conflict and much later on the history of Britain-India-Nepal relations.

The Malaun Fort stands forlorn in what is now India's Himachal Pradesh, upon craggy ridges overlooking the vast, green, tiered landscape below. Today, its long stone ramparts are narrow, jagged remains that crane towards the sky. Behind the walls, a red triangular flag (that predates Nepal's national flag) flutters like a lonely feather caught in the billowing wind.

It is a ghostly ambience that greets visitors as they walk up the narrow and steep stone path to the fort. One can almost hear the battle drums from more than two centuries ago, the war cries of the attacking forces, and screams of the wounded. Although there is a small settlement in the village, for more than a century after the famous battle here the fort had been overtaken by vegetation with trees growing out of the ramparts.

Today, the vines from the tall kiara trees sway as the wind carries monsoon mist through them. Wild roses (called *kunja* by the locals) flash red, white and yellow from the bushes. Goats frolic upon the charcoal-grey rocks, while the distant tinkle of mule convoys carry up the ridge.

But through the hazy folds of this serene landscape one can almost hear the reports of cannon balls that once shook the slopes in April 1815, mingled with the furious battle cries of 17,000 Gorkhali fighters who clashed, khukris raised, against the deadly

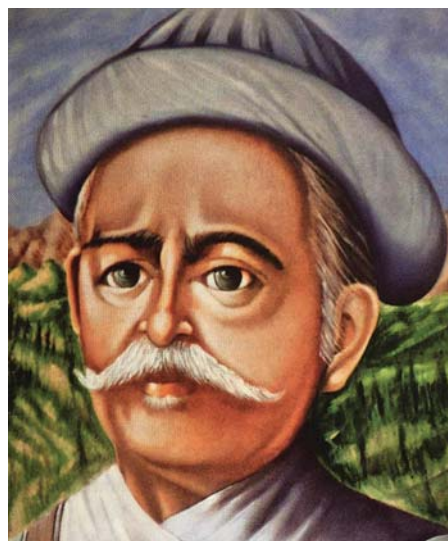


The Malaun Fort stands forlorn in what is now India's Himachal Pradesh.

ALISHA SIJAPATI



The Malaun Devi Temple.



A portrait of Bhakti Thapa by Anthony Lawrence.

cannon fire of the invading East India Company force that was almost thrice as large.

The battle at Malaun lasted from 14 April to 15 May 1815 and was one of the bloodiest months of the Anglo-Gorkha war. The fort, as Jyoti Thapa Mani (herself the descendant of the original Gorkhali troops) writes in her book *The Khukri Braves*, was Amar Singh Thapa's last stand, and with its surrender reversed the Gorkhali westward advance as well.

#### Face-to-face with the enemy

On 4 November 1814, Amar Singh Thapa moved to Ramshehar Fort from Arki (near Shimla) with 3,000 of his troops and a supplementary forces from Bilaspur. General David Ochterlony, who was promoted to Major-Gen and the overall commander of the Anglo-Gorkha war following the death of Major-Gen Robert Rollo Gillespie in Khalanga, Dehradun, had expected Amar Singh to put up maximum resistance at Nalagarh or Sirmour, but the Gorkhali commander was now coming to meet him head-on. Nalagarh fell on 5 November

and three weeks later, the British troops moved to Ramshehar Pass to break Amar Singh's supply lines to and from Arki. The army engineer Lt Peter Lawtie spent a week surveying the fort and concluded that the walls were impenetrable, and any attack would be futile except from a small settlement towards the rear of the fort called Nauri.

Lawtie, a highland Scotsman only 24 at the time, was an eager engineer who led the previously impossible task of carving roads on mountain-sides at Nalagarh and Ramshehar. It was through his roads that the Company troops were able to climb the perilous slopes, and bring their heavy mountain cannons within range of the Gorkhali forts.

On 19 November, coolies and elephants pulled the British heavy artillery up the mountains to the Nauri plateau. In response, Amar Singh Thapa sent his troops to defend the approach with stockade and bulwark. The British guns could only get to 150m below the fort, which was too far and too low from the Gorkhali base, and were soon pulled back.

Then on 24 December, the

Gorkhalis and the British began a fierce assault at Mangu, North-east of Nauri. Three hours later the Gorkhalis retreated up the ridge with 150 of their soldiers dead and 250 wounded.

Ochterlony wanted to push Amar Singh Thapa back further North to Bilaspur, a principality that was a strong Gorkha ally. Then in January, Amar Singh's son Ramdas Thapa and the Gorkhali families at Ramshehar covertly relocated to Malaun Fort.

Tracing the march of the Gorkhalis, Jyoti Thapa remarks that they were now again returning via the route they had taken when they first came from Arki to Ramshehar. Malaun, which lies between the two places and closer to Bilaspur, was meant to be a refuge from the battle which Amar Singh wanted to contain in the Ramshehar, Taragarh and Chamba forts across the River Gambar, and prevent the British from encroaching into Gorkhali territory any further.

But Gen Ochterlony had other plans. With spies planted along Amar Singh's routes of communication, a letter was

intercepted. Gen Ochterlony discovered the Gorkhali tactics and ordered Lt Lawtie to begin building roads to the fort, while he would send reinforcements to Bilaspur. He expected Amar Singh to soon leave for Malaun or Bilaspur and was not taking any chances.

Malaun Fort was not supposed to be a battlefield. Ever the devout and a loyal family man, he promptly hurried towards the fort from Mangu, leaving about 100 men to guard Ramshehar, which ultimately proved insufficient when the British took the fort on 16 February.

By this time, Ochterlony's emissary to Bilaspur, Colonel Arnold, had forced Bilaspur to give up supporting the Gorkhalis. This new and unprecedented development was a severe blow to Amar Singh Thapa. On top of that, Ramshehar Fort had now fallen and the troops he had left there to defend it came to Malaun.

Amar Singh Thapa was furious, writes Jyoti Thapa Mani, about the campaign in her book. He compared the situation with Khalanga, where the other Gorkhali general Balbhadra Kunwar, despite three assaults, no water, no resource and the fort practically reduced to rubble, had not surrendered.

The royal court in Kathmandu, torn by family feuds and clan infighting, was not helpful either. It had already in December 1814 agreed to sign a treaty with the Company, news that had greatly demoralised the Gorkhali soldiers on the western front.

The British were spreading propaganda of their own that the war was over, to try to stop Amar Singh Thapa's soldiers from continuing to fight. And it was working: soldiers were gradually defecting to the British side, especially the non-Nepali 'Gorkhali sena' recruited locally from Garhwal and Kumaon.



# once waved



Guns of Malaun, 14GTC, Subathu. Photo: THE KHURKI BRAVES

On 2 March 1815, Amar Singh wrote to King Girvan Yuddha Bikram Shah asking the court not to surrender, but the letter never reached Kathmandu. By 16 March, the forts at Taragarh and Chamba also fell. The British closed in, and now Ochterlony looked to exploit the cornered Amar Singh Thapa's dedication to his family and civilians at Malaun.

It was ruthlessness like this that has made Gen Ochterlony a celebrated warrior in British history books, but not in the eyes of Nepali historian Dinesh Raj Panta who says the colonial accounts of the battle airbrushed his brutality.

"Malaun was a refuge for children and women, not a place to wage war," Panta told *Nepali Times* in Kathmandu. "Amar Singh Thapa was a spiritual man, very devout, and Ochterlony exploited this and his need to protect civilians inside Malaun Fort to his advantage. It was actually a sign of the British general's poor leadership."

Poor leadership or not, this was the same tactic that had previously been used by Sansar Chand II to ultimately defeat the Gorkhalis and lead to the loss of Kangra Fort. (*See second part of this series.*)

### Iron Indignation

Malaun Fort sits atop the northern end of the narrow parabolic range, described Jyoti Thapa Mani in *The Khukri Braves*. The long fort hides behind the front wall, which is on a different level than the rest of the structure, when seen from below. There is a watch tower on the eastern side while the north face looms over steep cliffs. The main entry is from the south which opens to a wide courtyard. There is also a temple of Malaun Devi in the fort, facing West.

Surajgarh Fort is the nearest fort on the Malaun Range, about 7km away, where the 74 year-old Bhakti Thapa made his base. In between the two forts stands the Raila Peak, with Deothal Peak with its sharp crags near Malaun Fort. The British had to occupy Raila and Deothal to isolate Malaun from Surajgarh.

On 14 April, Lt Flemming and Lt Lawtie reached Raila Peak with 1,100 men and 300 Nusseerees, made up of recent defectors from the Gorkhali Army. They were joined by Major Innes who led the Grenadier Battalion with two 6-pounder cannons. Major Laurie led 400 Hinduris and Patiala Sikhs to Deothal where he was joined by Colonel Thompson with 1,300 regular, 300 supplementary troops and more 6-pounders.

At first, the Gorkhalis were able to hold their defences and keep the British from climbing up the ridge. Between the khukris and the bayonets, it was a landscape still largely unfamiliar to the British and they were no match for the

lithe Gorkhalis, who were most at-home with the hills, the cliffs and the elevation, instinctively creating paths in those uncharted terrain with only their hands and feet.

But soon, under Lt Lawtie, the British began carving makeshift roads, bringing with them elephants and the power to blast the ramparts with cannon balls. Amar Singh Thapa was worried. The Gorkhalis' familiarity with the terrain did not mean much once the terrain was changed to the linking of the British.

Before, their guns were too far below to do any real damage, but now they were within range and had started finding their mark. The fate of the fort hung in the balance unless the relentless British cannon fire was knocked out of Deothal.

In the meantime, Bhakti Thapa decided it was time for him to abandon Surajgarh Fort and head to Malaun. Born in 1741 in Lamjung he had fought alongside Amar Singh Thapa almost 50 years ago under King Prithvi Narayan Shah in the battles for the unification of Nepal. More recently, during the 1804-1809 battle at Kangra, he had chased Raja Sansar Chand II from Mahal Morian all the way to Kangra Fort.

Amar Singh Thapa and Bhakti Thapa were trusted friends, who had deep respect and admiration for each other. When he arrived at Malaun Fort, they sat in Malaun Devi Temple and discussed for hours what their next step should be.

Bhakti Thapa felt leaving Malaun and taking the battle elsewhere would be a better option, but Amar Singh Thapa did not think that would be feasible or wise. In the end, it was decided that Bhakti Thapa would lead 2,000 of his best warriors to Deothal and dispose of the British 6-pounders which were firing at the fort even at night. There was no other option.

And so, on 15 April 1815, the septuagenarian Bhakti Thapa led the Gorkhalis to what was to be the Anglo-Gorkha war's bloodiest hand-to-hand combat.

### Fight to the last gasp

Author Jyoti Thapa Mani gives a vivid image of the Gorkhali's preparation for battle on the night of 15 April. 'Bhakti Thapa and his men took an oath invoking Goddess Kali as their witness, and tied vermilion coloured cloths around their waist,' she writes: Then Bhakti Thapa placed his minor son in Amar Singh's arms and told his two wives to prepare for *sati* and sacrifice themselves on his funeral pyre should he fall.

They crept out of the fort and moved towards Deothal where they hid behind rocks and trees before leaping out. The darkness was quickly overrun by the shrill cries

of "*Jai Mahakali, Ayo Gorkhali*" amidst trumpeting from the fort as the Gorkhalis headed straight for the 6-pounder cannons to disable them. Many were instantaneously blown to bits. The night was drowned in the cacophony of gunfire and the acrid smell of exploding powder, as the fierce Gorkhalis kept up the attack.

Perhaps one of the earliest accounts of the ferocity of this battle at Deothal comes from a letter Lt Ross wrote to Captain Birch (who was later to be Gen Ochterlony's assistant) dated 20 April 1815:

*'... [the battle] lasted nearly two hours, and during which they sustained the hardest fire of grape and musquetry I have ever heard. They returned there several times to the charge with most unparalleled intrepidity and endeavoured sword in hand to cut in upon our guns, during which attempt as fast as one set of men were knocked down others springing up from behind rocks rushed forward to supply their places.'*

As dawn silhouetted the eastern hills, the Gorkhalis stopped fighting but were soon chased away by the Hinduris who massacred many of them. Similar to Jaithak, even today a passer-by may stumble upon a 200 year-old archaeological remnants of rusted knives and shrapnel on the slopes.

By daybreak it was clear that although the Gorkhalis had fought bravely to destroy the cannons, the battle was lost. Among the mangled remains on the slopes was the body of Bhakti Thapa, bearing deep gashes. Local legend has it that when he was disembowelled during the battle, Bhakti Thapa tucked his guts back into this abdomen, tied a turban tightly around his midriff, and proceeded to decapitate many enemy soldiers before he fell under the canopy of pine trees. And when he died, so did any hopes of Amar Singh Thapa to save Malaun Fort.

Although he was their adversary, the British were so impressed by Bhakti Thapa's bravery that they wrapped his body in a fine shawl and with full military honours, returned it to the Gorkhali side. The Gorkhalis suffered 300 casualties that fateful night, and the British lost only 2 officers and 59 men, with 5 officers and 289 men wounded.

### An Empire Falls back

Immediately following the battle at Deothal Peak, Gen Ochterlony brought in more artillery and surrounded Malaun. The Gorkhalis

were tired, their food supply was running low, and Bhakti Thapa's death demoralised their sagging spirit.

Meanwhile, in Jaithak 92km away, Amar Singh Thapa's son Ranjore Singh was holding back another relentless British assault with dwindling resources. Amar Singh Thapa was now increasingly under pressure from other battles raging nearby to surrender.

On 27 April 1815, Bam Shah, the Gorkhali Governor of Kumaon handed over the region to Lt Colonel William Linnaeus Gardner, and also wrote to Amar Singh Thapa from Almora advising surrender. The British, on the other hand, were circulating rumours that Amar Singh Thapa had already given up, and had signed a treaty.

But Amar Singh Thapa did not want to give up so quickly. He hoped the coming monsoon would affect the mobility of the British, especially to bring their deadly cannons up the mountains. But Gen Ochterlony brought more elephants and several 12- and 18-pounder guns, and began to fire at the fort. The hills thundered with the sound of explosions as the ramparts were blasted. Amar Singh Thapa was finally forced to concede that the British just had more firepower.

In an excerpt from the *Gurkhas (Handbooks for the Indian Army)*, compiled by Lt Colonel Eden Vansittart, Gen Ochterlony is said to have been so impressed by the gallant defence of the fort by the Gorkhalis that he allowed Amar Singh Thapa and his troops to march out with their arms accoutrements, colours, two guns and all their personal property.

The same honourable terms were also granted to his son, Ranjore Singh in the unconquered Jaithak where he had managed to hold defence against General Martindell for five months.

Amar Singh Thapa and Gen Ochterlony were on opposite sides in the war, but they admired each other as soldiers. Both wanted to end the bloodshed and work out a General Peace Treaty between Nepal and the Company. And so it happened: on 15 May 1815, the treaty was signed -- not between the King of Nepal and the British Governor-General, but between two frenemies. The Gorkha territory west of the Mahakali River was ceded to the British and all forts surrendered.

Perhaps the most pertinent article in the treaty between Amar Singh and Ochterlony was Article 5, which stated: 'All the troops in the service of Nepal, with the exception

of those granted to the personal honour of the Kajis Amar Singh and Ranjore Singh, will be at liberty to enter into the service of the British Government, if it is agreeable to themselves and the British Government choose to accept their services, and those who are not employed will be maintained on a specific allowance by the British Government till peace is concluded between the two States.'

Thus began the two-century history of the recruitment of Nepalis into the British (and eventually Indian) Army that continues to this day. Ochterlony started enlisting Gorkhali soldiers from Nepal in the British Indian Army's Nusseeree Battalion, the first-ever Gorkha Rifles. The negotiations were done professionally by two military men, and that Gorkha soldiers joining Ochterlony's forces would be granted full freedom to adhere and maintain their own Gorkhali culture, heritage and traditions.

As for Gen Amar Singh Thapa, he left with his sons and troops on the month-long journey back to Kathmandu, 1,500 km away across high mountains and deep valleys. It was a humiliation for the brave general, who was returning to Kathmandu's brutal court politics and the eventual signing of the Treaty of Sugauli (2 December 1815) and its ratification in 1816.

Some of the guns still remain in Malaun and its surroundings, 200 years later. In 1995, two battle-scarred guns weighing 4.2 tonnes each were removed from the battlefield for safekeeping at a museum in the Subathu Regimental Centre.

"The guns had been abandoned and rusting on the ridge and the villagers did not know of their historical significance," recalls Maj Vijay Singh Mankotia, who himself was an officer in the Indian Army's Gorkha regiments.

Some villagers in Malaun want the guns back because they were a tourist attraction. Yet the fort today is in ruins, visited only by history buffs and picnickers. It will slowly crumble away unless the governments of Nepal and India do something to preserve a part of the shared history of the two countries.

Local resident Arvind Bisht looks at the fort framed by the Raila and Deothal peaks from his home, and says he is lucky to live in such a sacred historical place because of his father's connection to the Gorkha regiment. Although now settled in Dharamshala, Bisht returns to Malaun every once in a while. Chatting outside his home, with the fort in the distance, Arvind Bisht tells a visitor from Nepal: "We know my ancestors were Gorkhalis, but not much more than that. We just know that our language and culture is close to Nepalis." 🇳🇵







## CRAFTED WITH PASSION

Exquisitely rich in color and refreshing aroma, "Gorkha Craft" is moderately hoppy with balanced bitterness and full flavor of toasted Ruby malt.

