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October 2018



October 2020

HIMALAYAN MELTDOWN: Mt Saipal in far western Nepal is one of the most vivid examples of how fast the ice is receding in the Himalaya. The outcome of the COP26 Summit in Glasgow on Friday will determine if this trend can be slowed.

PHOTOS: BASANT PRATAP SINGH / WANDA VIVEKUN

COPOUT at COP26

● **Sonia Awale**

The COP26 climate jamboree ends in Glasgow on Friday, and already it looks like the best world governments are prepared to offer in emission cuts is not enough to stave off a global environmental catastrophe.

There were a slew of national, international and multinational pledges for net-zero, but activists fear that the targets are a vague and over-ambitious greenwash that nations cannot meet.

The result could be global average temperatures soaring to up to 3° above pre-industrial levels, with catastrophic results. The Himalaya will warm even faster, and scientists say it could lose up to two-thirds of its remaining ice during this century.

On Tuesday in Glasgow, Nepal unveiled three ambitious targets, and without waiting for others to say it, boasted that it was the 'highest climate ambition country'.

In its three-point pledge, Nepal said it would:

- Start reducing emission from 2022 and be carbon negative after 2045
- Halt deforestation and increase forest cover to 45% by 2030

- Ensure all vulnerable people are protected from climate change by 2030

In Kathmandu, environmental activist Bhushan Tuladhar welcomed the new targets, saying they were "ambitious but doable", but ones which will require a serious review of our normal development pathway.

"We can't look at commitments as just reduction of carbon emission, but as an investment in our economy and health. Now let's walk the talk and get to work," Tuladhar said.

A good start would be for the government to order that all official vehicles purchased from now on will be battery powered, encourage public transport operators to electrify their bus fleets, reduce taxes, and set up charging stations, he added.

The pledges have been criticised as being too vague about 'protecting all vulnerable people by 2030', and the annual reduction of emissions till net-zero by 2045 will hinge on implementation, on which Nepal has always been weak. But the forestry target is seen to be achievable.

The targets are also conditional upon financial support, and Nepal will require \$46 billion to implement them from 2022-2030, which is 24% of national GDP, and the government can fund only about 2% of this.

Amrit Nakarmi, an adviser at the Energy Development Council, prepared the long-term strategy report, and says Nepal is unlikely to meet the targets without funding.

"We contribute only 0.5% of total global carbon emissions and even within that only 30% is anthropogenic, 20% is natural and the remaining 50% is transboundary, so us reducing our carbon footprint will not make much of a difference to the global climate," explains Nakarmi.

"But we can replace fossil fuel imports with clean hydroelectricity and cut our import bill," he adds. "Electrification of the economy is urgent, and policies should be in line with our targets and the public sector should be involved."

Climate finance and payments for Nepal's carbon sink from expanded forest cover will take time to materialise. Experts say we should not wait for the money, but start low-cost effective mitigation measures right away.

Cooking via electricity has now become much cheaper than LPG, and many urban families have transitioned to induction stoves. But 90% of households across Nepal are hooked to only 5amp current which is only enough for lighting. If the grid is upgraded,

Nepal could save at least Rs33 billion a year by replacing cooking gas imports with electricity.

What Nepalis have paid as 'pollution tax' for every litre of petrol or diesel at gas stations in the last decade now totals Rs10 billion. This money could be used to buy electric public buses, and increasing the petroleum excise duty could fund conversion to renewables.

Nepal would save Rs21 billion a year by reducing its petroleum import bill by 10% if it converted public buses to battery-operated vehicles. This would also increase domestic consumption of clean electricity and improve air quality. If the transport sector is electrified, experts believe net-zero by 2045 is possible.

Water expert Madhukar Upadhyaya says Nepal can meet its forest cover target of 45% by 2030 (from current 37%) by expanding community forests and controlling encroachment.

But Upadhyaya is puzzled by the third target on protecting vulnerable people. "We just don't have the infrastructure, knowledge or expertise to achieve climate resilience for vulnerable people by 2030," he asserts.

"Nepal experienced extreme

weather this year, droughts and floods destroyed crops, lack of water is creating climate refugees, wildfires have become nationwide," Upadhyaya adds. "The question is what are we doing to address these challenges?"

After overdosing on climate news for two weeks just to be side-lined until the next COP, we might want to recall another one of our targets, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Half of the 17 goals in SDGs will be directly affected by climate change, and yet these initiatives are working in isolation when in fact they should be coordinated for the same goal: sustainable and just future.

Says Tuladhar: "There are things to do right after Glasgow: explain the nitty-gritty of the commitments we made and immediately

implement short-, mid- and long-term strategies to achieve them. Start with the low hanging fruit, what we can immediately do, and there are plenty of them."

Climate crisis is adding to child marriage

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For a longer version of this story and a commentary

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 **HYUNDAI**

Urgency about Nepal's economic emergency

Nepal Rastra Bank's report last month was badly timed. It was a bad idea to sound a warning that Nepal is going belly up, just as the country was grinding to a halt for the Dasain-Tihar-Chhat festivals.

The indicators were ominous: Nepal's foreign currency reserves fell to \$11.1 billion in September, much below the figure for last year, and only enough to pay for 8 months of imports. There has been a 76% increase in the import bill to a record Rs352 billion last fiscal year, despite a pandemic slowdown.

In the first two months of this fiscal year, overseas remittances that had held steady despite the pandemic went down by 6.3% to Rs155 billion.

One of the holy days of Tihar last week was dedicated to Goddess Laxmi, and many prayed for individual wealth and prosperity. We should have prayed for Nepal's economic survival.

Just the two figures for falling remittances and rising imports should have been enough to sound the emergency alarm. But fatalism is so steeped in Nepal's governance culture that we hope things will sort themselves out.

After all, if things go really wrong, we believe Pashupatinath will come to the rescue. But the Lord Protector of Nepal must be shaking his head at the disarray of the state.

We have come to expect lack of accountability in self-dealing politicians and elected officials, but at least the judiciary used to be relatively untainted and independent.

The violation of the principle of separation of powers by Chief Justice Cholendra SJB Rana and the gathering mutiny in the Supreme Court has dragged the judiciary also into dysfunction.

With the court system paralysed, Rana is said to be looking for a 'graceful exit', and apparently proposed a leave of absence until his term expires. The top leadership of the main parties have been silent about the fate of Chief Justice Rana, who after all was instrumental in overturning K P Oli's dissolution of the Lower House which put Deuba in office on 14 July.

They also have all kinds of pending cases in the Supreme Court, and do not want to antagonise a Chief Justice in case he survives this crisis. Rana has reportedly used the holidays for intense political lobbying through emissaries. That would likely entail a quid pro quo over not starting an

impeachment process in Parliament in return for future favours.

It was the failure of politicians to sort out their power struggles in Parliament that allowed the judiciary to have such a magnified role in who gets to be in government and who doesn't.

And now the governing coalition has set up an extra-constitutional 'high-level political coordination committee' at the behest of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who has always wanted to exert covert control over government. Given its composition, the last thing this 'super-sarkar' will be doing is to rescue the failing economy. It is just another layer of political interference in everything.

After all, the real emergency Nepal

faces is not who succeeds Rana or if the coalition remains intact till elections, but the fate of the economy. Removing Chief Justice Rana will not stem the rot. Remittances pay for imports, and inflows are down, imports are up. Hard currency reserves to finance

Nepal's imports, mainly of petroleum, food and other items are falling. Exports did go up, but the trade deficit rose to Rs270 billion in the past two months.

Besides, Nepal's main item of export is processed palm and soya oil that depend on massive imports

of raw material. A growing asymmetry between imports and exports means the balance of payments is now Rs83.4 billion — double what it was in July.

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba pledged at COP26 to reduce Nepal's carbon footprint, and Energy Minister Pampha Bhusal is pushing for a transition to electric transport. They seem to have finally realised that having a petroleum import bill more than all exports combined is not sustainable.

Destructive post-monsoon rains will reduce rice harvests by 20%, which will increase food imports. What will we use our remaining foreign exchange reserves for: to buy food or fuel? It might be an either/or.

There does not seem to be a sense of urgency about this emergency in the Finance Ministry. It must act immediately to increase taxes on luxury items, encourage local agriculture production and invest heavily in infrastructure to create local jobs.

The economic crisis is a result of political neglect and disarray. Trouble is: we cannot wait for the politics to sort itself out to fix the economy this time.



The real uncertainty Nepal faces today is not about who succeeds Chief Justice Rana, but the fate of the economy

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

History on a Loop

It is not amusing anymore how in this space week after week we are recounting the political horrors of the past two decades only to realise that history is repeating itself as a farce.

Oftentimes, it's the same actors, the same alliances and the same bargains. 20 years ago this week the page 1 story by Binod Bhattarai titled 'Deuba's gamble' might as well have been written today.

The then second-time prime minister had completed his first 100 days in office, but was far from making peace with the Maoists as he had promised. After a delayed jumbo cabinet formation

that was an excuse to hand out rewards for his supporters, his government failed to perform once again, and to silence his critics, Deuba was gearing up to announce local elections.

The circumstances could not have been more similar to today. Before the Chief Justice controversy was brought to the forefront, Deuba was once again looking to announce early polls to divert attention away from his own incompetence, and the growing discontent within his Nepali Congress about party leadership. Sound familiar?

Excerpts from the report from issue #67 9-15 November 2001:

When Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba took office four months ago, he told everyone he had one goal and one goal only: to make peace with the Maoists. And sure enough, he struck a truce with the rebels and went



about systematically trying to lure them out in the open.

Deuba was, and is still, gambling on a negotiated settlement so that he can bank on the political glory of being a peacemaker. For a while, it looked like he had a strong hand, but lately he has started frittering it all away. To shore up support within his party, Deuba doled out ministerial portfolios to just about everyone. The cronies were happy, but the 41-member cabinet was an unpopular move.

It was the combined support of Koirala-bashers in the Left and the Right that helped Deuba oust Girija in July. Now that the honeymoon is over, the main left UML is getting impatient. It brought together an everyone-except-

Congress meeting on Tuesday, and the message was: "We can't expect much from Deuba anymore on talks with the Maoists, we'll forge a unity of all non-Congress forces."

Deuba now wants to announce local elections immediately after Tihar to stave off moves to unseat him. Koirala controls the party's organisation and its vote banks, he would like to use elections to get Deuba out. Chakra Bastola is another Congress MP who is disillusioned with Deuba. "The government is wasting time," he told us. "It has nothing to show, it's just bragging about the Maoists not having killed policemen after the peace process began."

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



CLIMATE AND CHILD MARRIAGE

As harvests fail due to drought and floods, girls from marginalised families are forced to marry earlier to escape poverty in the remote mountains of Bajura district in Nepal's far-western region. Watch what young brides and climate experts have to say in this video. Field report: *pages 6-7*.



MP'S APPLE GROVE

While Nepal's MPs are squabbling among themselves chasing contracts and lobbying for ministerships in Kathmandu, Polden Chopang Gurung is busy tending to his apple orchard in Manang district, and arranging relief for flash flood survivors in the region. Get up and close with this model MP. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for videos. Story: *page 4*.

BAD AIR

I went out for an evening stroll yesterday and all I could smell was smoke from stubble burning, it literally hurt my chest. Not doing that again until summer.

Priyanka

- Kathmandu smog is not beautiful. It is ugly and endangers the health of your citizens. I lived in Nepal from 1985-2006 and Kathmandu I once knew is long gone. I have seen your beautiful city ruined by rampant unregulated overdevelopment and pollution, it has been reduced to traffic ridden concrete jungle. The tragedy is it could have been avoided yet no one cared.

Maggie Kerr

PRO-FORESTS

If cash is the motivation then you have lost ('Will Nepal ever be paid for saving trees?', Mukesh Pokhrel, nepalitimes.com). If the aim is to protect watersheds and thus water supplies, as well as reduce soil erosion and mitigate landslides, then maybe Nepal is onto something.

Shirin Barakzai

- If there are legal promises from GOP rich countries to help financially tree-planting endeavour, it's clearly an obligation for Nepal to use it. Since the two approaches, free will NGO and aided NGOs, can coexist without problems, why not this? But even aided actions should be watched carefully. Or Nepal could find itself easily covered by one-species only forests which is cheaper and a possibility where corruption is rampant.

Etienne Loyon

NIELS GUTSCHOW

Quite an invaluable contribution, yet the man is so humble and ever helpful ('Niels Gutschow leaves home', Ashish Dhakal, #1084).

Shobhit Shakya

- It is very sad that we could not address these scholars, nor the local government while they were still here.

Ramprasad Suwal

CYCLING

I would love to see more cycling lanes in Kathmandu ('Cycle to fight climate change', Bhushan Tuladhar, nepalitimes.com). It would be awesome to get around the city by bicycle. I am sure it would make it a better place to live in as well as a more attractive destination to visit.

Martin Max Aart de Jong

WATER CRISIS

True, sound bites and proclamations from fancy foreign locations will do nothing ('Women and water', Editorial, #1084). The Nepal government will have to dedicate specific resources at the local level to help with lack of or too much water but, unfortunately, not likely to happen. Basic needs on site at the local level, not grand programs whose funds are siphoned off in any case.

Roger Ray

STREET DOGS

When we did the Manaslu trek we were adopted by a street dog which walked with us for three days ('Adventures of a Kathmandu street dog', *Nepali Times*, #1084). Interestingly when we came to bridges over streams running into the main river, it took the original path up the stream and joined us further on. He preceded us into villages and kept the local dogs at bay for us to pass.

Richard Tyler

GORKHAS

Thank you for sharing this piece of history ('Where Nepal's banner once waved', Alisha Sijapati, #1084). Hopefully, we will get a chance to know the real heroisms of our forefathers and the true history, not a one-sided made up story.

Shobh Raj Ghotane Gurung

TRADITIONAL SWEETS

Hands down the best and good quality sweet store in Kathmandu ('Hitting the sweet spot this Tihar', Sonia Awale, #1084). Despite being a Kathmanduite, I discovered this place late in my life. My husband, who belongs to the Newa ethnicity, introduced me to Nanda sweets. Have been a fan ever since. Nimki, laddu, lakhmari and barfi are favorites.

moonstruckjewel

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Niels Gutschow leaves home

by Ashish Dhakal

After 50 years documenting the culture and architecture of Nepal, noted scholar returns to Germany, leaving behind an extensive bibliography on the architectural anthropology of Kathmandu Valley. A profile of Niels Gutschow and his work at nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Adventures of a Kathmandu street dog

Street animals bring out the best (and sometimes the worst) in human beings. Based on a true story, Sathi, a new bilingual book is an uplifting tale of suffering and survival of an abandoned dog. Read this review online.

Most popular on Twitter



Will Nepal ever be paid for saving trees?

by Mukesh Pokhrel

When Nepal signed a Rs36 billion carbon trading agreement last week, there was widespread expectation that we would finally be compensated for doubling our forest cover in the past 40 years. But it's not that simple. Read this analysis by Mukesh Pokhrel in Glasgow.

Most commented

Where Nepal's banner once waved

by Alisha Sijapati

The forth in the series From Nalapani to Kalapani is on the battle at Malaun, which was one of the bloodiest months of the Anglo-Gorkha war. It was Amar Singh Thapa's last stand, and with its surrender reversed the Gorkhali westward advance as well. Now read the fifth and episode in the series, on pages 10-11.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
How the #climatecrisis adds to child marriage in #Nepal

As harvests fail due to drought and floods, girls from marginalised families are forced to marry earlier to escape poverty. Sonam Lama reports:



Nepal Now @now_nepal
This is devastating to girls' lives, and one of the most extreme impacts of #climatechange on girls and women Down pointing backhand index #COP26



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The #climate crisis is a #water crisis. This is how local #women in Kavre are reviving a traditional network of ponds to recharge groundwater. #ClimateAction right here in #Nepal. Read full story:



Pigreen @pigreen1
excellent development - the revival of 'traditional' water retention and storage systems is to be recommended...both in the hills and in the plains



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
When #Nepal signed a Rs36 billion #CarbonTrading agreement last week, there was widespread expectation that we would finally be compensated for doubling our #forest cover in the past 40 years. But it's not that simple, writes @mukeshjee from #GlasgowCOP26.



Phuntsho Namgyel @pnarmgyel
Bhutan & Nepal remain trapped in the old model of forest protection. We fail to leverage forestry for ecology, climate & economy. A good forestry job will mean no need for hand-out.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Cycle to fight #climate change
On the 10th death anniversary of Pralad Yonzan and the start of #COP26, let us dedicate more bicycle lanes in #Kathmandu, writes @BhushanTuladhar.



Timothy Aryal @txaryal
Moving tribute & sober views from @BhushanTuladhar. Pedal in peace, Mr Yonzan.

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A parliamentarian's apple grove

MP Polden Gurung turns away from a political career to look after his constituents and tend his orchard in Manang

● **Mukesh Pokhrel** in Manang

While Nepal's Members of Parliament are squabbling among themselves chasing contracts and lobbying for ministerships in Kathmandu, Polden Chopang Gurung is busy tending to his apple orchard in Ngisyang village of Manang district, and arranging relief for flash flood survivors in the region.

Gurung is the chairperson of the Manang chapter of the UML and was elected to the House of Representatives after he broke into the district's Congress stronghold during the 2017 elections.

"I am a representative of the people of Ngisyang, so there is no reason I have to be in Kathmandu in order for me to do my job," says Gurung with a shrug, "I can serve my constituents from right here."

Gurung's home district of Manang has been plagued by disasters of late, with the region seeing a seven-month winter drought last year, followed by wildfires in the spring that burnt entire mountainsides near Chame for three months. Then the monsoon hit the semi-arid district in the Himalayan rain shadow with 300% above average precipitation resulting in devastating floods and landslides in mid-June.

In the wake of the disaster, Gurung has been actively involved in helicopter rescues of his constituents trapped by



the landslides, as well as in the rebuilding of Manang's disrupted road infrastructure.

But even during more normal times, when Parliament is not in session in Kathmandu, Gurung can be found tending to his apple orchard at his home in Ngisyang. "I use whatever free time I have to take care of my apples," he says.

Gurung credits his father for inspiring him to come back to Manang despite having the opportunity and reason to stay in the capital. Like him, his father Pema Chhiring Gurung was an MP and an Assistant Minister for Local Development during the Panchayat era.

But Pema Chhiring was first

and foremost a farmer, and had started an apple orchard in Manang 45 years ago. "My father always told us that he had tried his best to raise us and to be of help in his community," recalls Gurung. "He asked that we continue to do the same for our village that he had devoted his entire life to."

Pema Chhiring had built his apple orchard out of land collectively owned by seven Manang villages. Residents of the villages worked in the orchard and distributed the profit amongst themselves.

Eventually, the work ceased to yield any profit, and the land was rented out.

Now, his son's apple orchard is

spread over 37 hectares of land in Manang. Gurung obtained the plot when his Manang Agro Company won an open competition six years ago that allowed him to lease the land by paying a yearly sum of Rs5.8 million.

Gurung's orchard is crammed with apple trees, saplings of which were brought from Italy and Serbia. And the yield is plentiful, with 600,000kgs of apples expected to be harvested this year. Over the next three years, Gurung's target is to produce 1.7 million kgs of apples annually.

Nepal spent Rs243 billion in food imports in the fiscal year 2019/20, an increase of Rs19 billion from the previous fiscal year.

Two-thirds of Nepalis depend on agriculture, but Nepal's annual food imports are increasing exponentially due to a growing population and rising income.

Of total food imports, Nepal spends upwards of Rs13 billion annually on apple imports. Which is why Gurung believes that there is a huge domestic market for Manang's apples, provided supply can meet demand and there is access to markets. If the fruits themselves do not sell, there is significant demand for products like apple juice, wine and candy.

In fact, the demand for apple seedlings from other mountain districts of Jumla, Humla and Mugu has gone up ever since Gurung began buying better quality saplings that resulted in higher yields.

Gurung tells us that he would rather be recognised as an apple farmer from Manang than an MP in Nepal's political arena.

He adds: "My father told us not to forget our roots, and that individual wealth and happiness hold little meaning in the grand scheme of things. So I decided to return home, and build on his legacy." 🇳🇵



MP'S APPLE GROVE

While Nepal's MPs are squabbling among themselves chasing contracts and lobbying for ministerships in Kathmandu, Polden Chopang Gurung is busy tending to his apple orchard in Manang district, and arranging relief for flash flood survivors in the region. Get up and close with this model MP. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for videos.

prabhu BANK



KTM Hard Rock

International chain of restaurants based in London, the Hard Rock Cafe opened its first branch in Nepal in Darbarmarg. Says vice president for Asia-Pacific at Hard Rock Cafe International Malcolm Chao: "Nepal is perfect for international brands because people here want to try new things and yearn for exciting life experiences. We have taken a very big step to encourage other big brands to come here as well."

Turkish raffle winner

Turkish Airlines Kathmandu and Roadhouse Group have announced the winner of a raffle prize of a free roundtrip ticket to a European destination via Istanbul. The lucky winner is Sonam Gurung. Roadhouse's Chandan Kayestha and Abdullah Tuncer Kecici of Turkish Airlines were present at the lucky draw at Mezza Cafe in Darbar Marg on Saturday (pictured, above).



Turkish 'Best in Business'

Turkish Airlines has received the 'Best Airline Corporate Program' award with its Corporate Club program in 'Best in Business Travel' awards by Business Traveler. "It comes as a no surprise to be named among the top travel providers in the world by the Business Traveler's reader survey. We will continue to be among the best in aviation in the world with its strong flight network and peerless service," says Turkish Airlines Chair of the Board Ilker Ayçi. Turkish Airlines Corporate Club offers various advantages with its loyalty program with extended flexibility options while purchasing tickets, entry to special passenger lounges in Istanbul Airport and extra baggage allowance.



Tata's new milestone

Tata Motors has logged 44% year-on-year and 32% month-on-month growth in its total sales. The company registered 33,926 units in passenger vehicle sales in 2021 as compared to 23,600 units last year. With this, Tata has closed down the gap with Hyundai commanding a 13.7% market share.



Chandragiri record

The UK-based World Book of Records has awarded General Manager of Chandragiri Hills Pvt Ltd Abhishek Bikram Shah for his contribution in tourism and hospitality.



Vice President of Nepal Nanda Bahadur Pun handed over the award amidst a program on Sunday.

KTM-Mustang ride

Nepal General Marketing, the authorised distributor of Hero Motorcycles in Nepal kicked off the Kathmandu-Lo Manthang Hero XPulse Motorcycle Ride event this week to domestic tourism. More than 30 participants will be traveling around 900km from Kathmandu Lo Manthang via Pokhara, Lete, Jomsom and Muktinath.

11.11 sale

Daraz kicked off its one-day 11.11 sale at midnight 10 November. This year's event offered customers discounts up to Rs50 million on 1.1 million products brands such as Samsung, Philips, New Balance, Lenovo. Pre-paying customers, and credit and debit card holders of major banks also got up to 15% discount on their purchase. The campaign also featured the launch of the new Realme GT Neo 2 5G mobile phone.



Xiaomi Pad 5

Xiaomi Nepal has launched the Xiaomi Pad 5 in Nepal. The 6GB + 128 GB variant is priced at Rs44,999 and the 6GB + 256 GB at Rs49,999. Powered by Snapdragon 860 processor, the Xiaomi Pad 5 features a large 11-inch LCD screen with a WQHD+ resolution (2560x1600), a 8720mAh battery, a refresh rate of 120Hz, PPI of up to 275, and a contrast ratio of 1500:1. It has a 13MP rear camera and a 8MP front camera.



Happy connections

Dish Home has announced the winners of its 'Happy parvako happy connection' campaign. Dhurba Karki of Kathmandu and Anisha Rai of Sindhuli received two-way tickets to Spain, a four-night hotel stay and a chance to watch a La Liga game live. Customers who had purchased new connections of DishHome, DishHome Fibernet Combo Package, prabhu TV, SIM TV as well as La Liga season tickets from 27 September were eligible to participate in the event.



The mustard fields of Chobhar have been turned into an amusement park.



ALL PHOTOS: SCOTT FAIA



Maya Shahi in her fruit shop in Bhaktapur in 1992, 2009, and 2018.



Kathmandu's passage of time in photos

Photographer tracks the transformation of Kathmandu Valley and its people with his camera

● Ashish Dhakal

Nepal is known the world over for its majestic mountains and historic monuments, but for American development worker Scott Faiia there are two more reasons why Nepal is irresistible: “The people are very amiable, and they smile a lot.”

Turn to any page in his picture book *Changing Kathmandu* and this is evident: children and the elderly are captured in a state of sincere bliss without affectations. What is more, Faiia follows the same people in the same places over the decades, as a visual record of the passage of time.

In a neighbourhood in Bhaktapur, Maya Shahi sits in her fruit shop in her black-and-red *haku patasi* garb. The year is 1992, and she is turning a cotton wick in between her fingers. Faiia returns to the shop in 2009 and 2018 – besides fruits she now also sells clothing and other merchandise. Despite the intervening 26 years, the shopkeeper still looks directly at the camera with the same spontaneous smile.

Change is the central theme of Faiia's meticulous repeat photography. Ever since 1988, the former Nepal country director of Oxfam has seen the Valley transformed. Neighbourhoods have become unrecognisable, neighbours



The Ganesh Mandir in Kathmandu in 1991, and 2009.



have moved on.

The undulating mustard fields of Chobhar have been turned into an amusement park. The crisp view of the Boudhanath stupa as seen from Gjeswori is now obstructed by a concrete jungle, and a layer of smog.

“Life and places are not static,” Faiia says. “But the problem with Kathmandu Valley is that the changes are unmanaged and out of order.”

This is evident from the pictures of Asan road photographed in 1988, 2009 and 2018. The changes are dramatic, with the fronts of the houses dangling with mannequins, people peep out of the windows with a sense of loss.

Still, many things remain the

same in this eternal city. The people Faiia follows have grown older, frailer in some cases, but still flash that happy smile. Concrete high rises have come up, but the city cores of Bhaktapur and Patan have been built back better after the 2015 earthquake.

Faiia is not against development, his work documents progress as well.

The enamel on a carved *torana* of a Ganesh temple in Patan has been removed to reveal the original texture of the wood. The Akash Bhairab temple in Indra Chok has been restored. And in the midst of it all there are always people, devotees, shoppers, children returning from school, witnesses to

the transformation — all smiling.

Meme is a resident of Bouddha, and when Faiia first photographed him looking out of his window in 1988, he was 47. The photographer went back to take pictures of him again and again in 2008, 2017 and 2018.

“When I went to see him again in 2017, he opened the door, asked me to wait, went inside and brought the picture I had taken of him in 1988,” Faiia recalls.

Each of the added years brings out in Meme a deep sense of contentment with life. His eyes have seen everything, but they are not tired. In fact, they look beyond to the future, anticipating further transformations.

Faiia did not receive any formal photography training, and it is a personal hobby he took up as a way “to keep balance in life”. During his time in Ethiopia in the 1980s, the country was going through the horrors of a civil war and famine. He was managing food distribution for millions of internally displaced people, and Faiia lost several of his own staff.

“It was very grim. Photography was a way for me to get away from the violence,” he says, “not to connect the dots in a war but to turn my attention to something else.” It was his Nikon that helped him find beauty and meaning in the world's other troubled spots where he has served: Somalia, Sudan, Haiti.

Faiia first came up with the idea to do a picture series of the same people and places of Kathmandu Valley when he was going rummaging through some old boxes of prints in 2008. “I found many old photos that I had taken in the past and the idea was born,” he says.

But life goes on, and for Faiia the project is not over. He is in Kathmandu taking more pictures of the same places and people from decades ago. It is a work in progress, as much as it is *on* progress. 🇳🇵



A row of houses and shopfronts in the Asan market photographed by Scott Faiia in 1988, 2009 and 2018.





Locals gather in Mukhtikot, where at least one member of each family is working in India.



● Sonam Lama in Bajura

“*Mulai kyai thaa bhayaanai,*” murmurs Birjaman, pain and fatigue etched on his wizened face. He has just made a steep 3-hour climb from his village of Mukhtikot to a pharmacy carrying his semi-conscious daughter-in-law, Reti.

She has post-partum haemorrhage, and has not stopped bleeding. The clinic managed to save her life, but the young mother lost her three-month foetus. Reti was married off at 16, and at 22 already has two children.

The midwife says the miscarriage was due to weakness and heavy workload during pregnancy. Reti’s husband is working in India, and she has to do all the household work, raise the children, take care of the livestock, and fetch water herself.

At the pharmacy, Gopal Singh says he sees cases like this often. This is the nearest medical stop for the predominantly Dalit village of Mukhtikot. He says, “This is nothing new around here, we get miscarriages like this daily. Many do not make it. Young mothers are not physically mature for childbearing and couples do not use contraceptives.”

Marriage before age 20 is punishable by law in Nepal but it is still common. Low female literacy, poverty, discrimination and cultural norms play a role, but child marriage has become more prevalent as of late, as subsistence farmers cope with a succession of droughts and floods that have destroyed harvests.

Last winter, western Nepal suffered a six-month drought that was followed by wildfires that raged for months. Then, two weeks ago the region was hit by a freak post-monsoon storm that destroyed standing crops. Farmers had been hopeful for a good harvest because of plentiful rain this monsoon, but the unseasonal downpour on 18-19 October unleashed landslides and floods, and dashed their hopes.

Scientists say global warming has added to the moisture content in the atmosphere, triggering extreme weather with erratic monsoons, frequent droughts and cloudbursts. Families in food-deficit western Nepal, already in a precarious situation, have been pushed over the edge.

Already stricken by poverty and caste discrimination, the climate crisis means that more parents now marry off their young daughters, who in turn end up risking their lives due to early pregnancy and poor diet.

“My father remarried after my mother died, and he married me off at 16 saying I would have a good life after marriage,” recalls Reti.

Subi, 16, is also from the same village. She lost her newborn baby two days after home delivery three months ago. She had not had a single pre-natal check-up, was too undernourished to breastfeed properly, and her baby eventually died of hunger.

Subi herself bled for more than two weeks after the birth, and even though there were no men to carry her to the health post, she survived. She is still weak and anemic. Subi’s friend Suna is also 16 and expecting her first baby. Afraid that she may have the same complication, she walked five hours to a pharmacy to get iron tablets.

Suna’s mother Rauthi married her to a neighbour’s son because the family’s harvest failed after a long drought. She has seven children, all of whom have dropped out of school either to work in India, or to get married and raise their own children. The husbands of both Rauthi and Subi are also away in India, working to augment family income.

Most families here have at least one member working in India, and the income they send home was what helped them survive when crops failed. But many Nepali workers lost their jobs during the pandemic, so even this fallback option was not there for the past two years.

“Life here is tough, and getting tougher. Early marriage is the norm, since it is easier to get our daughters married, so we do not have to feed them,” says Rauthi, two of whose seven children are handicapped and cannot go to school, or work.

Nearly 40% of girls in Nepal marry before they are 18, while some 14% give birth to their first child before their 19th birthday. Moreover, children of Dalit communities are at higher risk of being married young because of poverty, discrimination and limited access to resources.

Although child marriage is less common than it used to be, it is still prevalent despite laws banning it. Now, the economic crisis due to the pandemic and the climate emergency has exacerbated the situation.

This is evident in Bajura, a district in Nepal with one of the worst development indicators with more than 70% of people living below the poverty line, while the



Young mothers with children in Mukhtikot, where child marriage has become more prevalent as subsistence farmers cope with chronic drought and floods that destroyed harvests.

How the climate crisis is adding to child marriage

As harvests fail due to drought and floods, girls from marginalised communities are being married off at a young age.

country’s national average is 26%.

Frequent droughts and crop failures in recent years have further impoverished Bajura’s subsistence farmers. As it is, only 9% of the land in the mountainous district is arable, with a mere 1.42% with irrigation facility. Crop yields of barley, wheat, maize and millet harvests have dropped sharply in the past 10 years.

Every year the district faces a shortage of 11,000 tonnes food grain, and a World Food Programme (WFP) bulletin classified 85% of the population being food insecure. Mukhtikot is one of the villages classified as very vulnerable to deficient nutrition.

Even in years with normal harvest, food grown here is enough only to feed families for three months in a year. The result is out-migration for work, malnutrition, forced child marriage, high maternal and infant mortality.

With farmers so dependent on rain-fed agriculture, their fragile existence is even more precarious because of climate-related extreme weather. A 30-year precipitation data at the nearby Martadi met station shows that total annual rainfall has fallen, there is little winter snow, and even that tends to come with destructive storms.

“Rainfall has always been unpredictable in these parts, but these days there is very

little winter snow that we need for the spring *marsi* paddy and buckwheat,” says 65-year-old farmer Brij Bahadur Bam. “And when it does rain, it is so heavy that it washes away the crops.”

This all adds up to lower groundwater tables, which means even perennial springs have gone dry. Indira Kandel of the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology says that the rain and snow is then not enough to replenish the aquifers.

The link between drought and child marriage has been proven by research in India. Reetika Revathy Subramanian, a PhD student at the University of Cambridge, has studied how drought-induced migration in the caste-ridden Marathwada region of India has increased underage marriage.

“The decision for a girl to marry gets shaped by a web of intersecting factors, including poverty, access to education, social pressure and norms, harassment and intimidation, which is further exacerbated by disaster,” she explains.

In Nepal’s Bajura district, too, the Dalit community is more vulnerable to the impact of the climate crisis on agriculture than more privileged groups. “Child marriage is rampant here but it is more likely in families hit hard by food crises and with many children,” says



ALL PHOTOS: SONAM LAMA



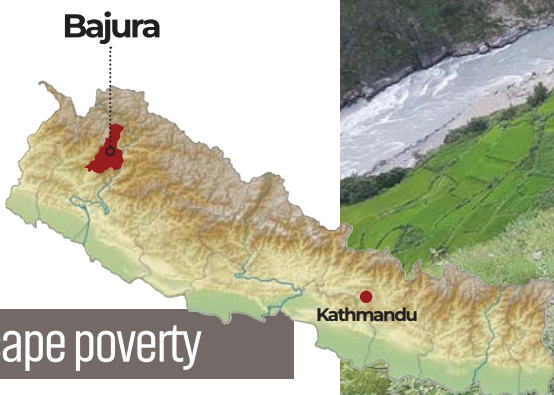
A 17-year-old mother and her baby in Bajura. Nearly 40% of girls in Nepal marry before they are 18, while 14% give birth to their first child before they are 19.



The rudimentary pharmacy and clinic in Bajura which tries to treat many married teenagers suffering miscarriages.

Climate crisis is child marriage

Analised families are forced to marry earlier to escape poverty



Children in Muktikot have to walk across steep terrain for three hours roundtrip everyday to go to school.



Birban BK of the Nepal Climate Change Support Program (NCCSP).

The answer lies in making irrigation available to farmers so they are not affected by erratic rainfall, which is why the NCCSP prioritised building irrigation canals and flood-prevention gabion walls in Bajura.

Muktikot got its name from Maoists guerillas during the insurgency who wanted to show that the Dalit village had been liberated from caste discrimination. The war has been over for 16 years, but life is, if anything, worse for the Dalits here.

Village officials and locals believe that the relocation of the entire community is the only way out. Plans are afoot for the rehabilitation of villagers to settlements up the mountains to an altitude of 2,500-3,000m where rainfall is more regular. They can grow cash crops like walnut and apple, but will be needing help accessing the market.

“These practices could be diversification of livelihoods and income sources through adopting climate-resilient cash crops, connecting farmers to the markets, promoting agro-forestry and use of bioengineering for infrastructure development,” says Monika Upadhyay of WFP Nepal.

Even among Dalits, it is the women from

the community who are even more affected by the climate crisis. The shortage of water adds to their daily drudgery, because they have to walk longer to reach springs that are still functioning.

Says Radha Wagle of the Climate Change Management Division at the Ministry of Environment: “In Bajura and other districts, we need climate-resilient and gender-responsive plans because women are more adversely affected by socio-economic, geographical and climatic vulnerability.”

Nepal aims to implement these measures at local levels by 2030, the same year the government has set to end child marriage. But given that the practice is still rampant, it is still an ambitious target.

Says Subramanian: “It is important to strengthen child marriage prevention groups, village-level committees to work closely with vulnerable families including women and girls in particular.”

At nearby Radhamata Secondary School, only 13 of the 113 students in Grade 10 are unmarried. Manshova Buddha, 17, is one of them. She says: “With so many of my friends already married off by their parents, I also feel the pressure. But I am not going to give up on my dreams.”

Some names have been changed.

EVENTS

Artist’s Library

The fourth session of Mobile Library Nepal’s talk series ‘What’s in the artist’s library?’ will feature a conversation between Nepali artists Narendra Malla and Shreejan Rajbhandari. Send a DM or email at mobilelibrarynepal@gmail.com for the zoom meeting link.
14 November, 4pm-5pm

TFN Fellowship 2022

Apply for the Teach for Nepal Fellowship 2022. The intensive leadership training program is designed to tackle pressing issues like inequality in education and quality of instruction in Nepal while preparing young people to become effective leaders. Applicants must complete and submit an online application at <https://www.teachfornepal.org>.



Art Exhibition

Siddhartha Art Gallery’s latest exhibition ‘Tale Of A City’ features works by eight Nepali artists in mediums like pen and ink, rice straw art, analog as well as digital prints as they pay homage to their experiences with the Kathmandu Valley.
Until 29 November, Baber Mahal Revisited

Sooriya yoga studio

Join Sooriya Wellness and Yoga centre’s studio for yoga sessions, or for virtual studio sessions for self-practice at home. Sessions are available on prior appointments. Go to the Sooriya Wellness Facebook page for details.
9818481972

Labim Bazaar

From fresh produce to crafts by local businesses, there’s something for everyone at the weekly market at Labim. Safety guidelines apply.
Saturdays, 9 am, Labim Mall

DINING



Taza

Bring some Middle Eastern flair to the dining experience. Taza offers Shawarma, falafel, hummus, baklava and more and everything is fresh. Bhojdeals will deliver.
Pulchowk, 9860960177

VIRTUAL TOURS



Underwater tour

Take Google’s Life in the Ocean Deep underwater tour and discover the mysteries of the sea with Sir David Attenborough. Watch videos and underwater maps, and learn about the unique creatures that inhabit the world’s oceans.

NHDP Tour

Visit Patan’s monuments right from home through the Nepal Heritage Documentation Project, and learn about the historic heritage site in the process. Visit the website for details.

Street art

Google Arts Project: Street Art showcases the world’s greatest graffiti works and tells the stories behind them, including those of Nepal. Viewers can take virtual walking tours, view online exhibitions and learn about the artists.

Botanical garden tour

Google Earth’s Stop and Smell the Flowers is a journey through eleven of the most breathtaking botanical gardens and arboretums around the world from countries like Russia, Sweden, and Canada, to the Netherlands.



World tour

Travel may be limited these days, but discovering incredible experiences from across the globe doesn’t have to be. Get your Guide’s The world at home initiative brings some of their top tours, activities, and attractions to you online. Find everything on YouTube.

Cafe de Tukche

Tired of trying to figure out what to cook for lunch day after day? Get authentic Thakali food from Cafe de Tukche. Order the Thakali Khana set, or take a break from rice and try the Thakali Dhedo set instead. Check out the menu online.
Lazimpat, (01) 4436990



Casa Mexicana

Experience the best of Mexican food. Try the Carnitas burrito, Tinga quesadilla and the traditional Tres Leches cake. Head to Foodmandu to browse for more.
Gairidhara, 9848591486

GETAWAY

Himalayan Deurali

Just 10km of aerial distance from the majestic Machhapuchhre Himal, visitors can get a magnificent view of the iconic mountain from Himalayan Deurali. The expansive property offers everything from a relaxing spa to continental food.
Nagdada, Kaski (061) 696730



Shangri-La Village

Get away for a couple days this winter and head to the idyllic Shangri-La Village Resort. Meditate in the outdoor Yoga Pergola, indulge in a massage in Phewa Spa and soak up the sun in the Sanctuary Garden.
Gharipatan, Pokhara (061) 462222

Bandipur Kaushi Inn

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



Dwarika’s Resort

Dwarika’s Resort not only boasts luxury accommodations, an attentive staff and fantastic amenities, but also award winning dishes from around the world.
Dhulikhel (01) 4479488

Jagatpur Lodge

Jagatpur Lodge’s 5-star tents and rooms with private viewing decks offer two special experiences. While the former brings visitors closer to nature, the latter provides breathtaking views to relish.
Jagatpur, Chitwan (056) 411085



Chez Caroline

Chez Caroline is the go-to for authentic French and continental cuisine in Nepal. The restaurant offers catering and takeaway services too. Try the Profiteroles au Chocolat and Choux pastry filled with vanilla ice cream and hot chocolate sauce.
Baber Mahal Revisited (01) 4263070

Pho99

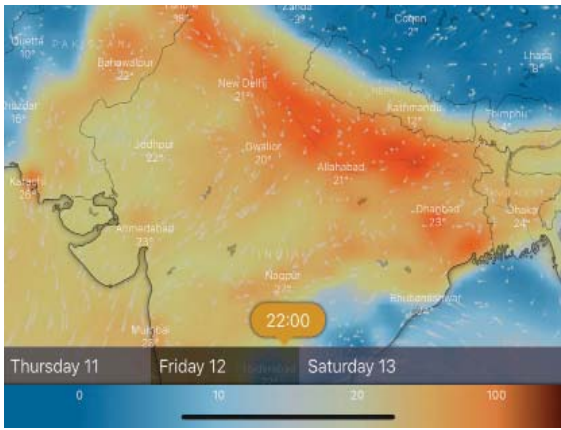
Enjoy mouthwatering Vietnamese food including fresh Banh Mi sandwiches, Vietnamese salads and curries, along with Vietnam’s national staple, the delicious Pho. Check out the menu on Foodmandu.
Boudhanath, 9802043330



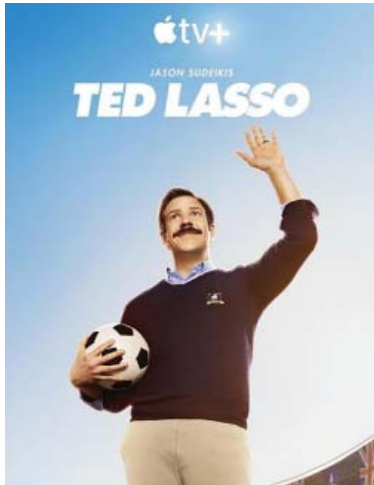
An expansive high pressure area over northern India has Nepal in its spell, which means bright sunny days with a hint of winter in the mornings as the temperature goes down to the single digits for the first time. During the day the maximum temperature will climb to a balmy 22. There will be some cloud buildup along the mountains with a stiff breeze, but not threatening any precipitation. Afternoons will also see some of the Indo-Gangetic haze being pulled up the foothills in western Nepal.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
22° 9°	22° 10°	21° 9°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



The major air pollution threat across the northern Subcontinent remains the combination of smoke from crop residue burning in India and Pakistan together with industrial pollution as seen in this image for concentration of particles less than 2.5 microns. The Air Quality Index was off the charts at 999 in New Delhi on Monday, and some of these suspended particles were transported into Central Nepal by prevailing winds. A northwesterly shift in wind direction will keep this pollution away from Kathmandu for now (*left*).



OUR PICK

Ted Lasso, the acclaimed Emmy-winning American sports comedy-drama, follows the eponymous American college football coach as he moves to the UK after being recruited to manage AFC Richmond, an English Premier League football team. Once he arrives in London, Lasso along with his friend and colleague, Coach Beard, must learn to navigate the unfamiliar world of football while attempting to elevate the performance of a divided team and manage expectations from a fanbase that is not immediately welcoming. Stars Jason Sudeikis, Hannah Waddingham, Brett Goldstein, Brendan Hunt, Nick Mohammed, Phil Dunster and Juno Temple.



Bigger fish to fry

Many of us are suffering from post-Dasai Tihar withdrawal symptoms. This is a recognised psychological syndrome wherein an individual is forced to come to terms with the reality of everyday life after all the escapist wining and dining. Now, we are just whining, as we chew the cud.

After putting all the country's problem in the back burner for a month, we have been forced once again to deal with garbage piling up on the streets, the polluted air, smelly rivers, a CJ who wants to stick around, and (as if the Nepali nation state did not have enough on its plate) a huge sinkhole has opened up on the road outside the Parliament Complex. Good thing the House has been suspended, otherwise the Hon'ble Speaker and his SUV could have been sucked into the netherworld and come out at The Hague.

On the slightly brighter side, Nepal is governed by the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, which means it is full of surprises. So don't be taken aback if things get even worse from now on. The ruling collision may call for early elections, that means there is a possibility we will elect more contractors as mayors, and serial killers as representatives to the Federal Parliament.

If all this is making you anxious, try reducing your caffeine intake, go on a 2-week Vipassana meditation, schedule an acupuncture session on your cerebral cortex, or dart yourself with a handy tranquiliser gun meant to knock out an Asiatic One-horn Rhinoceros.

The other way to take your mind off mundane day-to-day worries about politics, pollution

and potholes would be to fret about much more frightening things. See, if you consider impending global catastrophes, all the uncertainty about the Nepali Congress General Convention will seem far away.

Here is a list of much more scary stuff to agonise about:

The Climate Crisis:
Kathmandu's unbreathable air will pale into insignificance if you can get yourself worked up about melting polar ice caps, Iceland turning into Greenland, the Maldives becoming the first Underwater Republic, Khumbu Icefall melting into Khumbu Waterfall.

Asteroid Hit:
There are a couple of million near-Earth asteroids out there just waiting for the opportune moment to drop in on us. Brood twice a day (preferably while attending to a call of Nature) over the likelihood of Planet Earth being hit by a large haemorrhoid. Nepali politics will never spook you again.

Is There a Parallel Universe?
Are we alone in our Milky Way Galaxy? Are there intelligent lifeforms on other planets that are smarter than some of the Asses we have here on Earth? Would some of these aliens be hostile? Are there parallel universes, and if so, how many? Clearly, we have bigger fish to fry than whether the MCC is ratified or not.

Nuclear Winter:
The Doomsday Clock was readjusted to four-to-midnight as China tested its hypersonic missile last month. A full scale nuclear exchange would fry the Earth not just once, but many times over. Think about that, and relax. That way, not even climate change will ever worry you again.



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SIPRADI

From Nalapani to Kalapani

● Alisha Sijapati

This is the last of a 5-part series on the rise and fall of the Gorkha Empire more than two centuries ago

***Nepali Times* reporter Alisha Sijapati spent a month earlier this year retracing the Gorkhali expansion and defeat beyond the Mahakali River.**

The Gorkha Empire was on a warpath, and the British East India Company saw it as a threat to its own expansionist ambitions in the Subcontinent.

This series looks back at the bravery of the Gorkhali troops under its legendary generals to defend the newly-conquered territory at Nalapani and other fortresses.

Also, how the historical memory of that occupation continues to colour Nepal-India relations, and the current border dispute over Kalapani.



The forest around Khalanga fort in Nalapani, the site of the first major battle that pitted the Gorkhali troops against the East India Company in 1815.

ALL PHOTOS ALISHA SIJAPATI

Malaun was certainly the fiercest battle fought in the Anglo-Gorkha War in which the defenders suffered heavy casualties, and the death of legendary general Bhakti Thapa.

The Gorkhals were forced to cede all territory west of the Mahakali River to the British East India Company. Then on 2 December 1815, Nepal signed the Treaty of Sugauli, which effectively ended the war, but that did not mean an end to distrust between Calcutta and Kathmandu.

And to this day, the defeat and loss of so much territory continues to affect Nepal's relations with independent India, as well as a territorial dispute over the Kalapani region on Nepal's north-western tip.

Even before the war ended, British officers were in awe of the bravery in battle of their enemy. In fact, some of the troops in the Gorkhali army switched sides and joined the British forces even before the treaty was signed to end the war.

The tradition of recruiting Nepal's 'martial races' into the British Army, and later also the Indian Army that started then continues to this day. Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, former Chief of Indian Army, once famously said: "If a man says he is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or a Gorkha soldier."

This fierce reputation can in fact be traced back to the first major battle fought between the Gorkhali and the East India forces in Khalanga outpost of Nalapani near Dehradun in present-day Uttarakhand state in India.

It was in Nalapani that the defenders under command of Capt Balbhadra Kunwar, the Gorkhali commander of Garhwal, despite a siege, held out for a month against the British at the start of the war in 1814.

To the west of Nalapani, the Gorkhals had already fought and lost the fort at Kangra to Sansar Chand and Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1809, but Khalanga was the first major battle that pitted them against the East India Company.

The siege of Khalanga hill lasted from 31 October to 30 November 1814 around a small base walled with bamboo stockades. Today the road up the hill is an easy drive, but 200 years ago there were thick forests on the steep slopes, and the



The memorial to Capt Balbhadra Kunwar at Khalanga. Kunwar abandoned Nalapani to the British and joined King Ranjit Singh's Army, only to die in battle in 1823 during the Punjab-Afghan war in what is now Pakistan.

Gorkhali base seemed impregnable.

Like the Gurkha forts of Jaithak, Subathu and Malaun, here too the leaves whisper in the wind as if the place is still haunted by the ghosts of hundreds of Gorkhali soldiers their women and children who perished. The wind rustling in the trees sounds to visitors like their cries for water "*Pani, pani*".

As the siege dragged on, the British had cut off the water supply to the fort, and unable to take the hunger and thirst anymore, the defenders made a dash for it, and were cut down.

A place of such great sacrifice and tragedy now lies forlorn and abandoned. There is a tall column that rises above the overgrown ruins of the fort that is the memorial to Capt Balbhadra Kunwar, with trash littering its base.

The fort is now a popular selfie-spot for picnickers, who drive up to admire the view of Dehradun below. But the young Indians are oblivious of the history witnessed by these weathered stone slabs. It seems to hold symbolic significance only to the occasional Nepali visitor.

Not a drop to drink

Capt Balbhadra Kunwar was a proud commander of the Gorkhali forces here but was only 25 at the time of the battle of Khalanga. His father Chandrabir Kunwar was also once appointed the governor of Garhwal and Doti.

of 1,300 infantry, 300 horses and five light guns. On the 24th, Col Mawby's men tried to breach the fort with cannon fire from two 6-pounders but failed.

Then on the 26th, he was joined also by Maj-Gen Sir Hugh Robert Rollo Gillespie who, annoyed at Mawby's failure, arrived with two brass 12-pounders, two 6-pounders, howitzers and mortars, and more men.

On 31 October, Gillespie led the second assault. Amidst a fusillade of cannon fire and clash of swords, Gillespie then tried to follow the Gorkhals back into the fort with a dismounted party of the 8th Dragoons.

When that failed, he renewed the attack with companies of the 53rd Foot, shouting as he charged: "One shot more for the honour of Down." A Gorkhali sharpshooter then put a bullet through his heart, and he was instantly killed. The next senior officer had no choice but to call a retreat.

Gillespie's death eased the pressure on the fort, and was a feather in Balbhadra's cap. But the Gorkhals knew that it was only a question of time before the British would return, and the worst was yet to come.

On 27 November, the British, under the command of Col Mawby, located the hidden water supply to the fort and cut it off. Nalapani was now completely surrounded, and the Gorkhals did not have a drop to drink. There were women and children inside the fort since it was the custom then for the Gorkhali soldiers to bring their families along.

The number of the wounded and dead inside the fort rose with each passing day, but Balbhadra and his forces decided to hold their ground and fight till death with *khukris* in their hands

The British were getting impatient with the stubbornness of the defenders. So, they intensified the bombardment with cannons and the condition inside the fort became even more dire for the Gorkhals and their families. The children cried for water, and morale was dwindling.

Balbhadra and the Gorkhals knew that the reinforcements would not arrive in time and were determined to fight on. But hope was dwindling. And so, with heavy

hearts, Balbhadra and the remaining troops decided to leave behind the dead and the injured, retreat and live to fight another day.

Historians say that when Capt Balbhadra rode out of Nalapani in the cover of night, he shouted to the British, pledging to come back and fight them: "Go capture the fort that you could not win by war, we have left it of our own free will."

When the British finally entered the destroyed fort, they found only death and suffering. They had lanterns, and from the darkness of the ruins came faint whispers calling for water, and the stench of corpses was unbearable.

While the biggest and most ruthless battles in the war were fought further west in Malaun, the first big blow to Gorkhali morale was in Nalapani.

Jyoti Thapa Mani, the author of *The Khukri Braves*, describes in her book the deadly scene at Khalanga forest of Nalapani where, as the Company fired cannon rounds at the weak ramparts of the fort, many Gorkhali soldiers, children and families died of thirst and their corpses lay all over the hilltop.

Later, Col Mawby ordered the Khalanga fort to be razed to the ground, leaving no trace, and that is how the ruins have remained to this day. Only 70 Gorkhals and their commander survived the battle for Khalanga fort in Nalapani by abandoning the fort.

Balbhadra Kunwar and about 300 Gorkhals joined the army of King Ranjit Singh of Punjab, and the famous captain was killed in action during the Afghan-Punjab War in 1823 in what is now Pakistan.

Harsh Dev Joshi: the missing link?

The Kumaon region that the Gorkhals had conquered, and is now a part of India's Uttarakhand state, was ruled by the Katyuri (Chand) dynasty since the 11th century. By the late 1700s, the dynasty's power had diminished as two political factions – the Phartyals and the Joshis – were engaged in a power struggle for the throne. Lal Singh Phartyal sidelined the Joshis and placed his son, Mohan Singh, renaming him as Mohan Chand, as the King of Kumaon.

Things turned ugly when Diwan Sib Dev Joshi lost his life, which led to his entire family being imprisoned. Diwan Sib Dev Joshi's son Harsh Dev Joshi, bitter about his father's death and imprisonment, spent all his life conspiring to gain power to exact revenge on the Phartyals. Harsh Dev's personal tragedy cost Gorkhals the most in the two decades that would follow.

Joshi devoted his life to oust the Phartyals from Kumaon. He plotted to kill Mohan Chand in 1789, only to be disappointed that Mohan Chand's nephew Mahendra was placed on the throne. Well aware of the growing power of the advancing Gorkhals, Joshi sought their help in 1789. He had a much larger plan to also annex Garhwal for himself.

On the insistence of Harsh Dev Joshi, 'Sano Kaji' Amar Singh Thapa (father of Bhimsen Thapa, not the Amar Singh Thapa who commanded the Gorkhali force in Malaun), crossed the Mahakali River with Gorkhali soldiers in 1790 to Kumaon to capture its capital, Almora.

King Mahendra Chand was then killed and Kumaon was annexed. After Harsh Dev successfully managed to overthrow the Phartyals, he wanted to be ceremoniously appointed governor of Kumaon by the Gorkhals,

but this had to be cancelled as war broke out on another front after China had come to Tibet’s aid against Nepal. The Gorkha forces had to return from Kumaon to defend Kathmandu from the Chinese.

Harsh Dev Joshi then tried to forge an alliance with various principalities in Garhwal, Kumaon and further west, against the Gorkhali occupation and regain political power in the Himalayan foothills under the guardianship of the East India Company.

While Nepal’s history books speak volumes of the loyalty and valour of the Gorkhalis in the conquered territories, the collective memory of the people of Kumaon and Garhwal is different to this day. The Gorkhali occupation is remembered as being cruel, even barbaric. The people of Garhwal, Kumaon and Himachal Pradesh have historical memory of Gorkhali brutality and plunder.

When a trader in Dehradun found out that this reporter was from Nepal, he was not diplomatic. “You Nepalīs gave a lot of pain to our ancestors, we will never forget that,” he said in an even voice.

Ironically, the streets of Almora and Dehradun are full of Nepali porters and menial daily wage earners who say they are from Doti, Achham and Bajhang districts in Nepal. It is a great reversal of history that the descendants of the former conquerors are migrant workers at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder here.

The dejected Harsh Dev Joshi felt double-crossed by the Gorkhalis and was embittered with them right till the end of the Anglo-Gorkha war. Joshi was in fact the mastermind behind the alliance with the East India Company against the Gorkhali invaders, a fact that has been largely brushed off in the history of the period.

In fact, the consensus among Nepali historians is that the Gorkhali expansion in the west was a result of Bahadur Shah’s ambition to continue his father, King Prithvi Narayan Shah’s legacy of annexation. On the other hand, historians in India claim that it was Harsh Dev Joshi who had a great role in sparking off the Anglo-Gorkha War.

“Harsh Dev Joshi does not figure prominently in Nepal’s history books, but it would be safe to say that it was he who initially brought the Gorkhalis to the west of the Mahakali River, and eventually it was also he who sent the Gorkhalis back,” historian Dinesh Raj Panta told *Nepali Times* in Kathmandu.

Joshi’s ego was bruised by the Gorkhalis, and he found the perfect opportunity when they signed a diplomatic treaty with Pradyumna Shah, the King of Garhwal.

In her book, Jyoti Thapa Mani explains that Harsh Dev Joshi was already ill disposed towards the Garhwalīs for turning their back against him to fight a war against the Phartyals. So, he began to actively sow hatred against the Gorkhalis in the region.

Kumaoni writer Shekhar Pathak, however, does not agree with this interpretation of history. “The Anglo-Gorkha war and the loss of Kumaon and Garhwal were monumental setbacks for the Gorkhalis,” he told *Nepali Times* in a recent interview in Nainital. “However, it wasn’t just at Harsh Dev Joshi’s instigation and alliance with the Company, it was due to the ruthlessness of the Gorkhali rulers. Their heavy-handed rule had cost them public support, and the Gorkhali cruelty is a part of Garhwalī and Kumaoni folklore to this day.”

While Kumaonis already disliked the Gorkhali governors, the tipping point for the Garhwalīs came with the great 1803 earthquake. In the aftermath, Pradyumna Shah could not pay his

annual revenue to the conquerors, so Gorkhalis attacked Garhwal in what is known today as the brutal Battle of Khurbura.

“The attack happened during the most vulnerable time for Garhwalīs as many had lost their lives, families and their homes in the earthquake, it wasn’t the right time to wage a war,” says Pathak.

After the war, the histories of the rise and fall of the Gorkhali territories have been written differently in Nepal, in Britain, and later India. In Nepal, it is all about bravery, patriotism, and sacrifice. In India, to this day, it is about the ruthlessness, greed, and corruption of the Gorkhali governors.

Nepali historian Mahesh Regmi often cites in his research paper the Garhwalī historian and writer Shiv Dabrawal who has written about the history of Uttarakhand in his series, *Gorkhayani*. In it, he depicts the behaviour of Gorkhali rulers as being the reason why the people harboured such resentment against the invaders, and preferred their own Chand dynasty which had been ruling the region since the 11th century.

The Gorkhali governors (*Subbas* and *Jagirdars*) were transferred every year as per the system followed in Kathmandu, but the governors in these regions were brothers and often close relatives. There were many small military camps in Kumaon which were in charge of collecting taxes from villagers.

Among the governors was Nara Shah, notorious for his oppressive ways, who led the massacre of the Nagarkotis and an unnecessary coup, resulting in more animosity against the Gorkhalis among the people of Kumaon-Garhwal.

Dabrawal suggests in his book that Gorkhali administrators took full advantage of the power and exercised judicial authority since the royal court in Kathmandu was too far away. They were known not just for imposing hefty fines but also for inflicting harsh, corporal punishment – all of which have been burned into the memory of the descendants of Kumaon and Garhwal today.

There was no standard penal code, these governors and military officials could inflict any arbitrary punishment. Says Shekhar Pathak: “If there was a theft, a person’s innocence was tested by candle fire. If the hands of the accused were unburnt, they were innocent, otherwise they were sentenced to death.”

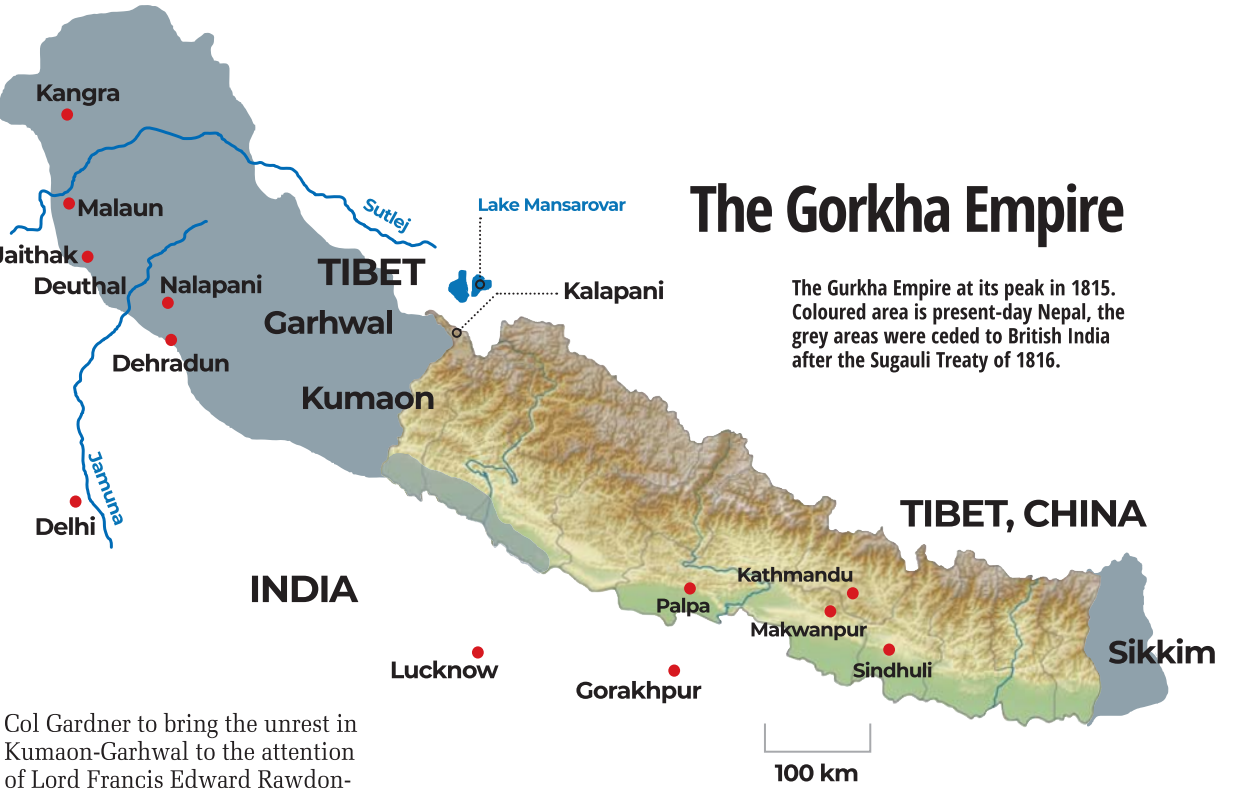
The royal court and nobility in Kathmandu were too embroiled in their own intrigue and infighting to care much about what was happening in the western front, so the Gorkhali governors did pretty much what they pleased, including forcing local villagers into slavery, and trading them like livestock.

While historians have mentioned Gen Amar Singh Thapa’s loyalty to the throne in Kathmandu, his spirituality, and his respect for women and children, Shiv Dabrawal has a different take on the man.

In *Gorkhayani*, Dabrawal writes that Amar Singh’s rule in Kumaon and Garhwal along with the governors and the military administrators was in fact cruel, tyrannical, and ignored local sentiments.

Shekhar Pathak also mentions that in the region, the ‘Kaji’ governors were brutal whereas the Gorkhali ‘Chautariya’ administrators behaved better. “People talk about the bravery of the Gorkhalis, but history should also acknowledge their brutish ways. Nepal’s history books should also mention this side of the story,” Pathak adds.

Also unpopular for his harsh rule was Bam Shah, the Gorkhali governor of Kumaon. It was he who prompted Harsh Dev Joshi to get Lt



Col Gardner to bring the unrest in Kumaon-Garhwal to the attention of Lord Francis Edward Rawdon-Hastings in Calcutta.

When the British forces attacked in 1815, Bam Shah had only 750 Gorkhali troops and 750 Kumaonis to defend himself. Meanwhile, Harsh Dev also influenced many Kumaonis to desert the Gorkhali army, and over 300 from the Gorkhali army joined the British side to fight against their former side when the East India Company marched in.

The Company had now brought the Gorkha expansion to a grinding halt, just as Gen Ochterlony was engaged against Gen Amar Singh Thapa in Malaun. When Malaun fell, Hastings took the chance to humiliate Amar Singh further by playing up Bam Shah and asked the latter to mediate between the Company and Amar Singh Thapa.

Hastings sent a draft of a treaty following the battle of Malaun to Bam Shah, who was then to communicate it to Bhimsen Thapa in Kathmandu with the news that Kumaon had been lost, and that it was better for Nepal to surrender and agree to the Treaty.

The supply and communication lines with Kathmandu 1,500kms away was so long that messages were often intercepted. The Company gathered vital information through letters sent to Kathmandu from the western front. The British therefore had prior knowledge of Gorkhali strategy and battle plans.

Swords clashed with wits in this war, and the Gorkhalis were outnumbered on both counts. It is a testament to their loyalty and courage that despite this they continued to fight until they ran out of men, weapons and supplies.

When the war ended the Gorkhali rule in Kumaon and Garhwal, the people there were in general happier to be protected by the East India Company.

Meanwhile, in Kathmandu
The death of Prithvi Narayan Shah was followed by continuous squabbling in the royal court among the regent rulers and the courtiers. Immediately after the death of Pratap Singh Shah, Prithvi Narayan’s son and successor, Bahadur Shah and the regent queen, Rajendra Rajya Lakshmi Devi, mother of Rana Bahadur, were embroiled in a bitter power struggle.

At this time, the powerful Thapas, Pandes and Basnyats courtier families were also at loggerheads with each other, and the Shahs. The annexation of Kumaon, Garhwal and regions to the west may have begun in the 1790s but it was also a result of the political infighting, conspiracies and betrayals in the Court.

In fact, one of the reasons Gen Amar Singh Thapa and his loyal troops were sent so far to the west as the governors was also so the ambitious military men would not pose a threat in Kathmandu.

More fuel was added to the fire when Rana Bahadur Shah, who

had previously abdicated in favour of his infant son Girvan Yuddha, returned once more to Kathmandu from exile in Banaras, and took up regency. His murder in 1806 by his stepbrother Sher Bahadur Shah paved way for Bhimsen Thapa to take full control of the administrative powers and become the *Mukhtiyar General* (Prime Minister) and the *de facto* ruler of Nepal.

As historian Dinesh Raj Panta suggests, Bhimsen Thapa was an accomplished man. He had a very strong personality but was also exceedingly arrogant. Equally ambitious, he married off his young niece Lalita Tripura Sundari (daughter of Nain Singh Thapa who was killed in Kangra Fort) to King Rana Bahadur Shah. When Rana Bahadur died, she became the regent to the infant king Girvan Yuddha, and Bhimsen Thapa successfully centralised the power in his own family.

Panta also says that while many believe that fighting a war against the British was the best decision Bhimsen could have taken, he was also short-sighted. After losing the Anglo-Gorkha War in 1816, the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816, and ceding ⅓ of the country’s territory to the Company, there was a sudden shift in Bhimsen Thapa’s personality. After all, he was held responsible for the death of thousands of Gorkhali soldiers, widows and orphans by many in the court.

King Girvan Yuddha died in 1816, succeeded by his son Rajendra. Bhimsen Thapa and King Rajendra did not get along, as Rajendra was distrustful of the Thapa clan and its ambitions. Eventually, The Pandes were able to sway royal favour away from Bhimsen Thapa onto themselves, leading to Bhimsen Thapa’s downfall and attempted suicide in custody on 28 July 1839.

His blood-soaked, unconscious body was taken from his jail cell to be dumped on the banks of the Bishnumati River in Kathmandu where he died nine days later. Bhimsen Thapa’s ignominious end happened on the very spot where three decades previously he had himself thrown 45 corpses of people he had killed in the Bhandarkhal massacre to rise to power.

Historian Dinesh Raj Panta says Bhimsen Thapa had both good and bad qualities, adding: “There was definitely the guilt of the dead, guilt of almost losing the country to the East India Company and losing respect. But it was because of him that Nepal did not wholly submit itself to the Company after the war.”

The Treaty of Sugauli
On 2 December 1815, the Treaty of Sugauli was signed between the East India Company and Raj Guru Gajaraj Mishra with Chandra

Shekhar Upadhyaya on behalf of Nepal. It was then ratified by 4 March 1816, but not before the British had to send another expeditionary force to threaten Makwanpur Fort 30km to the south of Kathmandu to convince Nepal’s rulers to sign the treaty.

Under the Sugauli Treaty, Nepal ceded all its territory west of the Mahakali to the British, and the river formed the boundary between British India and Nepal.

The original copy of the treaty is now lost, but the dispute over Kalapani on the border between Garhwal and Nepal continues to affect Nepal’s relations with India to this day. Although the people of the east bank of the Mahakali in Kalapani and Limpiyadhura paid land taxes to Nepal, and took part in national censuses and the 1980 referendum, India is now occupying this strategic valley that offers access to the Tibetan region of China.

Nepal and India share a 1,800km long open border, which is managed under the bilateral Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signed in 1950 (the original of which is also missing). This border had been agreed upon in the Treaty of Sugauli, which states in Article 5 that the King of Nepal ‘renounces for himself, his heirs, and successors, all claim to or connection with the countries lying to the west of the River Kali’.

In June 2020, Nepal’s Prime Minister K P Oli to stave off a mutiny within his own Nepal Communist Party, unveiled a new map which included the Limpiyadhura region. A month previously, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had virtually inaugurated an 80km road to the Chinese border along the east bank of the Mahakali.

Nepali geographers Mangal Siddhi Manandhar and Hriday Lal Koirala in their work, *Nepal-India Boundary Issue: River Kali as International Boundary*, claim that all maps produced by British cartographers up until the year 1857 suggest that the origins of the Kali river lies in the Limpiyadhura pass.

“But in the period between 1857 and 1881, a subtle but deliberate attempt to misname the river Kali took place,” write Manandhar and Koirala.

The Nepal government first raised its concern over the actual main flow of the Mahakali, and consequently of Kalapani, only in 1998. On the other hand, Indian officials claim that revenue records show that Kalapani area has traditionally been administered as part of the Pithoragarh district of Garhwal in India, dating as far back as the 1830s.

The issue of Kalapani continues to cloud Kathmandu’s relations with New Delhi. 🇳🇵



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

