**COPOUT at COP26**

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 avert 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 fact could be global average temperatures soaring to up to 3°C above pre-industrial levels, with catastrophic results. The Himalayas will warm even faster, and scientists say it could lead up to two-thirds of the 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’. Its three-point pledge, Nepal said: it would -

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

But in Kathmandu, environmental activist Bhuwan 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 go at commitments as just reduction of carbon emission, but as an investment in our economy and health. Now it’s 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 criticized 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.

Amit Narkami, 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 50% is anthropogenic, 20% is natural and the remaining 30% is transboundary, so our reducing our carbon footprint will not make much of a difference to the global climate,” explains Narkami.

“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 reforested forest cover will take time to materialize. 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 kerosene lamps which is only enough for lighting. If the grid is upgraded, Nepal could save at least Rs3 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 petrol 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 70% 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 Upadhyay says Nepal can meet its forest cover target of 45% by 2030 (from current 17%) by expanding community forests and controlling encroachment.

But Upadhyay is pained 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,” Upadhyay adds. “The question is what are we doing to address these challenges?”

After overrunning 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 utility 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.”

nepalitimes.com

For a longer version of this story and a commentary.
Urgency about Nepal's economic emergency

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.

While Nepal's MPs are squabbling among themselves chasing contracts and lobbying for ministerial positions in Kathmandu's latest round of nepotism, 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.

Will Nepal ever be paid for saving trees?

After 17 years of waiting, Nepal has still not been paid for saving trees under the UN's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) program. While most countries have received their due compensation, Nepal's case has been repeatedly delayed due to bureaucratic hurdles.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

"The revolving door of government is not a solution for the revolving door of treasure."

-- Mahatma Gandhi

"The government is just a instrument to implement the will of the people.

-- Abraham Lincoln

"It's the government's responsibility to provide a sustainable future for the next generation.

-- Jesse Jackson
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While Nepal’s Members of Parliament are squabbling among themselves chasing contracts and lobbying for ministerial positions in Kathmandu, Polden Chopin Gurung is busy tending to his apple orchard in 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 Ngayang, so there is no reason for me 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 mountain sides 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 rescue of his constituents trapped by the landslides, as well as in the rebuilding of Manang’s disrupted road infrastructure. But even during normal times, when Parliament is not in session in Kathmandu, Gurung can be found tending to his apple orchard at his home in Ngayang. “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 reasons to stay in the capital. Like him, his father Pema Chhitzing Gurung was an MP and an Assistant Minister for Local Development during the Panchayat era.

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

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

Eventually, the orchard produced high-quality apples and the land was rented out. Now, his son’s apple orchard is spread over 87 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 Rs.8.5 million.

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

Nepal spent Rs243 billion in food imports in the fiscal year 2019/20, an increase of Rs64 billion from the previous fiscal year.

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

Total food imports, Nepal spends upwards of Rs818 billion annually on food 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 no export to other countries. 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 juices and other products from other mountainous districts of Jumla, Humla and Mustang has gone up even since Gurung began buying quality apples 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 holds little meaning in the grand scheme of things. So I decided to return home, and build on his legacy.”

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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

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Turkish Airlines has received the ‘Best Airline Corporate Program’ award with its Corporate Club program in the ‘Best Business Travel Awards’ by Business Traveler. It warns as no surprise to be named among the top travel providers in the world by the Business Traveler’s master survey. We will continue to provide the best service as an economical and convenient flight network and personalized service,” says Turkish Airlines Chair of the Board Ilker Ayci, Turkish Airlines Corporate Club offers various advantages with its loyalty program with extensive travel options while partnering with the major airlines, easy to spend passenger lounges in Istanbul Airport and extra luggage allowance.

Turkish Airlines Kammath and Rastad House Group have announced the winner of a raffle prize of a free roundtrip flight to a European destination via Istanbul. The lucky winner is Emran Gurung, head of UNHRC Nepal and member of the Turkish Airlines. The lucky winner is present at the draw at the UNHRC namespace in Kathmandu.

Happy connections

Turkish Airlines announced the winner of its ‘Happy connections happy connection campaign’. A lady from Kathmandu and a lady from India received a free flight to Spain and a night stay, and a chance to watch a La Liga game live. Listeners who had purchased new connections between Kathmandu, Istanbul, Karachi and Colombo received a surprise flight to Spain and a night stay.

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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 Fails, 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, Fails 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 Shakti sits in her fruit shop in her black and red sari patani ghar. The year is 1992, and she is turning a cotton wick in between her fingers. Fails 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 Fails’s meticulous repeat photography. Ever since 1988, the former Nepal country director of Oxfam has seen the Valley transformed. Neighbourhoods have become unrecognisable, neighbours 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 Gujwarwori is now obstructed by a concrete jungle, and a layer of smog. “Life and places are not static.” Fails says, “but the problems with Kathmandu Valley is that the changes are unmanaged and out of order.”

This is evident from the pictures of Asian road photographed in 1988, 2009 and 2018. The changes are dramatic, with the fronts of the houses changing with manure, people pop out of the windows with a sense of less.

Still, many things remain the same in this eternal city. The people Fails follows have grown older, softer 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.

Fails is not against development, his work documents progress as well. The enamel on a curved torso of a Ganesh temple in Patan has been removed to reveal the original texture of the wood. The Aksh 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, witness to the transformation — all smiling.

Mona is a resident of Boudhanath, and when Fails 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.” Fails recalls.

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

Fails 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 Fails 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.

Fails 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 Fails 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.
Sonam Lama in Bajara

M urali Kalyan Bhamyarani, mrunala Birmaman, pain and fatigue etched on his wizened face. He has not made a steady 3-hour climb from his village of Mukhikot in 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-old. 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. Rati’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 Mukhikot. 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 fierce 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 flood-deficit western Nepal, already in a precarious situation, have been pushed over the edge.

Already stung by poverty and caste discrimination, the climate crisis means that more parents now marry off their young daughters, who end up renting rooms and their lives due to early pregnancy and poverty. ‘My father remarried after my mother died, and he married me off at 16. I was happy to have a good life after marriage,’ recalls Rati.

Suhail, 16, is also from the same village. She lost her newborn baby two days after home delivery three months ago. While she had not had a single pre-natal check-up, it was too expensive to have delivered properly, and her baby eventually died of hunger. Suhail 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. Suhail’s Brand Sam 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.

Sana’s mother Rathi 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 Rathi and Suhail are also away in India, working to augment family incomes.

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 need to feed them, says Rathi, two of whose seven children are handicapped and cannot go to school, or work.

Nearly 46% of girls in Nepal marry before they are 18, while some 14% give birth to their first child before their 16th 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 Bajara, a district in Nepal with one of the worst development indicators with more than 70% of people living below the poverty line, while the country’s national average is 26%.

Frequent droughts and crop failures in recent years have further impoverished Bajara’s subsistence farmers. As it is, only 9% of the land in the mountainous district is arable, with a mere 1.42% with irrigation facilities. Crop yields of barley, wheat, maize and millet harvests have dropped sharply in the past 15 years.

Every year the district faces a shortage of 11,000 tonnes of food grain, and a World Food Programme (WFP) bulletin classified 85% of the population being food insecure. Mekikot is one of the villages classified at 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 meteor station shows that total annual rainfall has fallen. There is little winter snow, and even that tends to come with destructive storms.

“Rains fail has always been unpredictable in these parts, but these days there is very little winter snow that we need for the spring mustard and buckwheat,” says 60-year-old farmer Lepa Bahadur Sum. “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. Ruchika Shagya Subramanian, a PhD student at the University of Cambridge, has studied how drought-induced migration to the caste-ridden Madhavpur 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 pressures and norms, harassment and intimidation, which is further exacerbated by disaster,” she explains.

In Nepal’s Bajara 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
Climate crisis is hild marriage

Kathmandu

Rhian BEK 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 gullies in Bajura.

Maklikot got its name from Maoists guerrillas during the insurgency who wanted to show that the Dalti 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 acrossing the market.

"These practices could be diversified to livelihoods and income sources through adopting climate-resilient cash crops, connecting farmers to the markets, promoting agro-forestry and use of bioenergy 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 Subramaniam: "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 Radhakuti Secondary School, only 53 of the 173 students in Grade 10 are unmarried. Manisha Budhia, 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."
EVENTS

Artists’ Library
The fourth session of Mobile Library Nepal’s talk series ‘What’s in the artist’s inbox?’ will feature a conversation between Nepali artists Nirmada Mishra and Shreemaya Subbarathy. Send a DM or email at moblibrariansyp@gmail.com for the zoom meeting link.
16 November, 4pm

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

VIRTUAL TOURS

Underwater Tour
Take a dive into the life in the Ocean Deep underwater tour and discover the mysteries of the sea with Sir Paul Attenborough. Watch mesmerizing underwater movies and learn about the unique creatures that inhabit the world’s oceans.

NHS Project Tour
Visit the properties and objects from home. These are home to the Nepali Heritage Preservation and Conservation Project, and learn about the site’s heritage and the process for viewing. Visit the websites 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 Nepalis who have virtual walking tours, online exhibitions, and 360-degree tours.

Botanical Garden Tour
Explore the botanical garden tour and understand the flora and fauna across Asia. The garden offers various tours and workshops, including guided tours and workshops.

World Tour
Travel through a journey of cultures, exploring the world’s diverse landscapes and cultures through stories and experiences.

GETAWAY

Himalayan Deurali
Just 10km from the airport, Deurali is a traditional Nepali home. Take a stroll in the garden, enjoy a cup of tea, and relax in the peaceful surroundings.

Shangri-La Village
Get away from the city and head to Shangri-La Village Resort. Situated in the scenic river valley, surrounded by lush greenery, and overlooking the Himalayas.

Bandipur Kausali Inn
A small, peaceful retreat in the hills of Bandipur, Kausali Inn offers a quiet escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Enjoy the serene environment and the stunning views.

Dwarika’s Resort
Dwarika’s Resort is known for its luxurious accommodations, spa treatments, and exquisite dining. Experience the perfect blend of tradition and modernity.

Jagatpur Lodge
Jagatpur Lodge offers comfortable rooms and a beautiful view of the surrounding landscape. Enjoy the tranquility and peace.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

Kathmandu
The air quality index for Kathmandu is.

Our Pick
Ted Lasso: The beloved Emmy-winning American sports comedy series, filmed in the beautiful English landscape.

Dining

Taste
Bring home a taste of Italy with this traditional Italian dish. Enjoy the classic Italian cuisine with a modern twist.

Casa Mexicana
Experience the taste of Mexican food. Try the Carne Asada, Tacos, Enchiladas, and more.

Pho99
Enjoy authentic Vietnamese food in the heart of Nepal. Try the famous Pho, Bún, and more.

The Very Best of German Beer Engineering
Many of us are suffering from post-COVID withdrawal symptoms. This is a recognized psychological syndrome wherein an individual is forced to come to terms with the reality of everyday life after all the escape and drinking. Now, we are just whining, as we chew the cud.

After putting all the country’s problems 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 C's 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 too shook up if things get even worse from now on. The ruling collaterals 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 duff yourself with a hasty trainee gun man to knock out an Asiatic One-horned Rhinoceros.

The other way to take your mind off mundane day-to-day worries about politics, pollution, and petrol price would be to fret about much more frightening things. Now, if you consider impending global catastrophes, all the uncertainty about the Nepali Congress General Convention will seem far away.

[Ad: Here is a list of much more scary stuff to agonize about:]

The Climate Crisis: Astronomically, unbreakable air will cave into insignificance if you can get yourself worried about making petrol or gas.

Asteroid Hit: There are a couple of million near-Earth asteroids out there just waiting for the opportune moment to drop in on us. Read The Day (probably while standing in a car full of bullets) over the likelihood of Planet Earth being hit by a large fireball.

Nuclear Winter: The Commonwealth Club was rudely awoken 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. Your next climate change will never worry you again.

[Ad: The Ass...]

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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. The former timer Alisha Sijapati spent a month earlier this year retracing the Gorkha 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 expansion ambitions in the Kathmandu Valley.

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

As we read the historical memory of that occupation continues to colour Nepal-India relations and the border dispute over Kalapani.

Mulan was certainly the first battle fought in the Anglo-Gorkha War in which the defenders suffered heavy casualties, and the death of legendary general Bihari Thapa. The Gorkhas were forced to cede all territory west of the Mahakali River to the British East India Company. Then on 8 December 1815, Nepal signed the Treaty of Sagarmatha, which effectively ended the war, but that did not mean an end to distrust between Calcutta and Kathmandu.

And in 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 with its southern neighbor region of Nepal’s south-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 Gorkha army switched sides and joined the British forces even before the treaty was signed to end the war.

The tradition of recruiting Nepali men into the British Army, and later also into the Indian Army, 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 he is a Gorkha soldier.”

This force reputation can in fact be traced back to the first major battle fought between the Gorkha and the East India forces in Khalanga, some 60 kilometers north of Kathmandu, on 21st November 1814.

It was in Nalapani that the defences under command of Capt. Balbhadra Kunwar, the Gorkha commander of Gorkha, stopped a large British force from reaching the British at the start of the war in 1814.

To the west of Nalapani, the Gorkhas had already fought and lost two major battles against the British. Chand and Maharanji Rangh Singh in 1809, and Kholot in 1813, two major battles that pitted them against the East India Company.

The siege of Kholota began lasted from October to November 1813, and was a small base walled with thick 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 Gorkha base seemed impregnable.

Like the Gorkha fort of Jalalpur, Sabahara and Maharanji, how the leaves whisper in the wind as if “the place is still haunted by the ghosts of hundreds of Gorkha soldiers, their women and children who perished. The wind rustling in the leaves somehow evokes to visitors their cries for water “Water, water.”

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 forgotten and abandoned. This 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 self-spot for piknickers, who drive up to admire the view of Dhaulabhir. But the young foliages are oblivious of the history witnessed by these weathered stone slabs. It seems to hold symbolic significance only to the occasional Nepal visitor.

Not a drop to drink
Capt Balbhadra Kunwar was a proud commander of the Gorkha forces here but was only 25 at the time of the battle of Kholota. His father Chandrahari Kunwar was also once appointed the governor of Garwhal and Doti.

Capt Balbhadra was related to Gen Amar Singh Thapa and his descendant was his nephews Kunwar, who would later become the first Rana prime minister of Nepal after the Kot coup in 1951.

Capt Balbhadra Kunwar planned on taking a defensive position against the British to prolong the battle, awaiting reinforcements from Kathmandu. The Gorkhalis defenders primarily consisted of 300 archers, sword and khukri fighters along with their families. They were heavily outnumbered and outgunned by the Company forces which had 5,000 troops and light artillery.

The source of water in Khalanga of Nalapani was a 15-minute walk below the outpost, and the Gorkhalis also had limited food supply. The fortifications were not strong enough, and Capt Balbhadra’s strategy depended largely on his shrewdly selected Gorkha-wielding troops to take the fight to the British lines, in receipt of hit-and-run attacks in the forest.

On 18th November 1814, Colonel Selwin Mawly, who had arrived at Dhaulabhir with 1,500 men from the King’s 33rd and 43rd cavalry, wrote to Capt Balbhadra Kunwar at midnight, asking him to surrender. Balbhadra Kunwar took the letter and sent a message back saying he did not receive communications so late at night.

Col Mawly then decided to wait for Lt Col Carpenter who joined him two days later with his troops of 3,000 infantry, 300 horses and five light guns. On the 24th, Col Mawly’s men tried to breach the fort with cannon fire from two 6-pounders but failed.

Then on the 25th, he was joined also by Mal Gen Sir Hugh Robert Rolle Gillies, who, annoyed at Mawly’s failures, arrived with two 12-pounders, two 6-pounders, howitzers and mortars, and more men.

On 30 October, Gillespie led the second assault. Amidst a fusillade of cannon fire and clash of swords, Gillespie then tried to follow the Gorkha back into the fort with a dismantled party of the 8th Dragoons.

When that failed, he renewed the attack with companies of the 5th Foot, shouting as he charged, “Our shot more for the honour of Down.” A Gorkha 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 raised the patriotic spirits of the Gorkha army as it was a feather in a cup. The Gorkha know it was not 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 Mawly, located the hidden water supply to the fort and cut it off. Nalapani was now completely surrounded, and the Gorkhali soldiers did not have a drop to drink. There were women and children inside the fort since it was the custom for the Gorkha 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 Gorkhas and their families.

The children cried for water, and morale was dwindling. Balbhadra and the Gorkhas 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, retread and live to fight another day.

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

When the British finally entered the deserted fort, they found only death and suffering. They had factories, and the smell of the rats gave a faint whispering calling for water, and the stench of corpses lay all over the hilltop.

Later, Col Mawly wrote that he had seen the Khalanga fort be razed to the ground, leaving no trace of what is now the ruins have remained to this day. Only 70 Gorkhals and their commander survived the battle for Kalapani in Nalapani by abandoning their fortress.

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 War in 1839 in what is now Pakistan.

Harish Dev Joshi: the missing link
The Kumaoni region, historically known for its supremacy, Gorkha had conquered, and is now a part of India’s Uttarakhand state, was ruled by the Kunwar (Chandy) dynasty since the 11th century. By the late 19th century, power had diminished through two political factions – the Thapa and the Chandy. It was in 1922 that Joshi was engaged in a power struggle for the throne. Lal Singh Thapar, the Chandy, was supported by his son, Mohan Singh, while Joshi, returning him as Mahatma Chandy, was supported by the Kunwas.

Things turned ugly when Dhurba Singh Joshi lost his life, which led to his entire family being exterminated. Dhurba Dev Joshi’s son Harish Dev Joshi, bitter about his father’s death and imprisoned, spent his life conspiring to gain power to exact revenge on the Kunwas and Chandy. Harish Dev’s personal tragedy cost Gorkhals the most in the two decades that followed.

Joshi devoted his life to oust the Kunwas from Kumaon. He plotted to kill Mohan Chandy in 1799, only to be disappointed that Mohan Chandy’s nephew Vishwanath was placed on the throne. Well aware of the power of the Kunwa lineage, leading Gorkha, Joshi sought their help in 1789. He had a much larger plan to also overthrow the Chandy lineage.

On the insistence of Harish Dev Joshi, the British army led by Gen Sir Humphrey Thapa (father of Shimsher Thapa, not the Amar Singh Thapa who command the Thapa forces and led them to victory in Mcaroon), crossed the Mahakali River on the British soldiers in 1799 to Kumeon to seize its capital, Almora.

King Chandrashekhar Chandra Chetri was then killed and Kunwa was annexed. After Harish Dev Joshi’s death, the Thapar’s were encouraged to overthrow the Thapars. they were to be consecutively appointed governor of Kumaon by the Gorkhalis.
but this had to be cancelled as war broke out in Europe and the war after China had come to Tibet's aid. The Nepalese force had to retreat from Khamtum to defend Kathmandu from the Chinese.

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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.