

YUNMI SEO

Tangled politics

Nepal's governance is once more grinding to a halt as the two major parties, the Nepali Congress (NC) that leads the ruling coalition, and the opposition UML gear up for their general conventions.

Such is the relentless focus on the heated contest for influential posts within these parties that even the mutiny within the Supreme Court against the Chief Justice has dropped off the headlines.

The conventions, during which Deuba and Oli will once again vie for top leadership positions within their respective parties, will take place even as the three branches of government are all tangled up. The UML conclave is being held in Chitwan this weekend, and the NC is holding its convention in mid-December in Kathmandu.

Chief Justice Chandra Rana has refused to step down, saying he would rather face an impeachment motion in the House, knowing fully well that the politicians do not have the stomach for it because of their own pending cases. A compromise of sorts was reached this week under which cases in the Supreme Court will be decided by a tamper-proof lottery-based cause list.

Now, as the two major parties hold their general conventions as required by law, there are doubts about whether they serve any purpose when power is so centralised at the top leadership of parties, even with federal devolution.

"The Nepali Congress and the UML were revolutionary political parties formed after the democratic movement 30 years ago, they were expected to bring about a socio-economic transformation," says political science professor Krishna Khanal.

Khanal notes that the greatest challenges for Nepal's political parties are not constitutional

matters or public opinion and discourse, but conflicting ambitions within individual parties that could make them implode, as parties have done in the past.

"There is no internal democracy within Nepal's political parties," laments Radheshyam Adhikari, himself an NC MP.

"The Constitution stipulates that political parties must hold internal elections every five years, which Nepal's major parties have failed to do. They have therefore lost their public legitimacy."

The current political climate also brings into question the leadership of Nepal's ageing political figures, and the need for a younger generation to step up to the stage.

"The parties have become stagnant swamps, not fast-flowing streams. The same leaders from three decades ago are still holding and vying for power," Khanal says.

Meanwhile, Nepalis are now so disillusioned with the current state of politics that they do not just blame politicians, but the Constitution itself, and even the very concept of a secular multi-party federal state – leading to a rise of the Hindu-monarchist right.

However, former law minister and ambassador to India Nilamber Acharya says the current state of affairs is not due to flaws in the Constitution, but the flagrant violation of its principles.

“The current political disarray is not due to republicanism or federalism, but because of the inability of elected leaders to bring those concepts into practice,” Acharya says. “The only answer to democratic decays is more democracy. The multi-party system is not responsible for the current problems, it is the deep rifts within the parties, and the inability of leaders to work together for the national interest.”

Shristi Karki

**Toothless
Commissions**
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

NEPAL'S FIRST EFFICIENT GAS OVEN

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A graphic for the Jobejee app. It features a blue and orange background. At the top is the Jobejee logo, which consists of the word "jobejee" in a sans-serif font, with a speech bubble icon around the "o". Below the logo is a large QR code. Underneath the QR code is the text "Scan to download" in white. At the bottom, there is a white rounded rectangle containing the text "That makes your job search just that eje!" in blue. Below this rectangle, the text "Now available on App Store" is written in white. To the right of this text is the Apple App Store logo, which includes the Apple logo and the text "Download on the App Store".

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A white BMW X1 SUV is shown from a front-three-quarter view, parked on a dark surface. The car's headlights are on, and its license plate reads 'M SY 5227'. In the background, a city skyline is visible at night, with several buildings illuminated. The sky is dark blue. The overall scene conveys a sense of urban sophistication and readiness for any situation.

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Toothless Commissions

The headlines for the past month have all been about the Supreme Court, and whether or not Chief Justice Chandra SJB Rana should be impeached, or resign, over past naughtiness.

The controversy goes to the heart of Nepal's governance failure and the erosion of the rule of law. Politicians have appointed justices who return the favour.

But there was a larger lapse of justice that went virtually unnoticed this week. It has been exactly 15 years after the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) was signed on 21 November 2006 between the Maoist commander Prachanda and Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala of the Nepali Congress.

As per the provisions of the CPA, two commissions to investigate the disappeared and for truth and reconciliation were to be set up and given two years to do their job. This being Nepal, it took a full ten years for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission on the Investigation of Enforced Disappearances (CIED) to even start their work.

The United Nations, Nepal's Western partners and international human rights watchdog groups were the driving force behind the transitional justice process, and if it was not for them it would have been unlikely that the country's 14 prime ministers since 2006 would have made any moves to rake up wartime excesses.

The rationale behind transitional justice is that unless families of victims and survivors find truth and justice, there will be no closure, residual revenge will poison societal relations, and there will be a danger of the country slipping back into violent conflict.

It would also promote impunity in other arenas of national politics, as we see today. The memory of the untold death and suffering of the war years need to be kept alive. Nepalis have to be reminded not to forget.

Yet, memories fade, time moves on, people drift into everyday routines and get on with their lives. Transitional justice would have helped heal families, provided them with closure, and perpetrators of war crimes would have a chance for atonement.

But, as with all other spheres of national life, the transitional justice mechanisms have been politicised from the word go. The leadership of the Maoist, NC and to a lesser degree the UML, all colluded to appoint yes men to the TRC and the CIED, extending their mandates over and over again with no hearings, trials or verdicts against those involved in heinous crimes.

The toothless commissions collected tens of thousands of testimonies from

families of victims and survivors, but the files are mothballed in steel cabinets. The two commissions have actually been used by politicians to prevent cases from moving through the regular courts.

In fact, on the 15th anniversary of the CPA, Prachanda (who has gone back to his peacetime name of Pushpa Kamal Dahal) vowed to complete the transitional justice process. In a statement on 21 November and an English op-ed in *The Kathmandu Post*, he termed Nepal's peace process a 'successful homegrown model' for post-conflict countries.

'Although the conflict was brought to an end, the task of investigating events that occurred during the war and to provide victims with transitional justice remains,' Dahal said in his statement. 'We are proud of what the revolution achieved, but we will probe wartime excesses.'

The fact that most other political leaders did not even bother to acknowledge the CPA anniversary showed that Dahal knows the sword of justice hangs over his head. With Western backing for the transitional process not as vigorous as it once was, he knows he just has to keep on saying the right things.

The CPA pledged to 'investigate human rights violations and those involved in crimes against humanity'. With every year that goes by, it looks less likely that will happen. There are still more than 2,000 people listed as missing, and some of their families have waited two decades to know whether they are alive, or what happened to them.

Many families of the disappeared interviewed by this newspaper have said finding out the truth is more important than justice. They do not expect the state to persecute perpetrators, so they do not even ask for justice. But their anguish is heightened when they see murderers and torturers in senior leadership positions, who never had to answer for their crimes.

As Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement issued jointly with Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists and TRIAL International on 21 November: 'State officials' reluctance to investigate and prosecute such serious crimes has exacerbated the suffering of victims, undermined the rule of law in post-conflict Nepal, and increased the risk of such violations in the future.'

She went on to warn: 'If justice is continually denied in Nepal, perpetrators of these international crimes committed during the conflict will be prosecuted abroad under international jurisdiction.'



SAGAR SHRESTHA

Former enemies are now in the same governing coalition, neither want to rake up war crimes.

ONLINE PACKAGES



Get an overview of Nepal's political crisis in the excerpts of the interviews with Nepali Congress leader and member of the parliament Radheshyam Adhikari, Nepal's former Ambassador to India Nilamber Acharya and political analyst Krishna Khanal. Report: *page 1*.



Join Nepal's kicking nuns at the Druk Amitabha monastery near Kathmandu as they practice their kung fu routine. Listen to them explain how they came to take up martial arts and how it has helped them. Watch the video. Read profile: *pages 6-7*.



The answer to addressing climate impact is to regenerate the most important ecosystem of all: the soil. Watch how farms in eastern Nepal have implemented this approach of agroecology with permaculture training at Almost Heaven Farms. Story: *pages 10-11*.

POKHARA'S EXTRA AIRPORT

How about turning the existing Pokhara airport into a nice open park with trees on the periphery ('What to do with Pokhara's 'extra' airport?', Masta KC, *page 4*)?

Gauri Rimal

- An open park with a convention centre as a resort town should always be able to cater to national and international conferences and seminars.

Rajendra Dhakal

- The nearly-completed airport will be the international gateway, while the old one could stay as a domestic one.

Loojaw Manandhar

- Given how the greed drives government in Nepal these days, do not be surprised if the provincial government, municipality and Nepal's main parties make tons of money in kickbacks to turn the place into an over-built urban ghetto. What Pokhara needs now are new lungs.

Jay Gurung

BAD AIR

Schools in Delhi are closed because of air pollution. Air quality is getting dirtier also in Nepal and in the next 1-2 months the pollution will certainly reach hazardous levels. There are several things that the government could do immediately to mitigate it: start a campaign to stop garbage burning, implement strict vehicular emission tests and ban big polluters, create awareness about air pollution, its impacts and methods to prevent it. The Ministry of Forest and Environment has to implement the air quality management action plan and get to real action.

Bhushan Tuladhar

- Air pollution is increasing by the day in such a way that the air is too dangerous to breathe.

Siddi Shrestha

ELECTRICITY GOING WASTE

Meanwhile the major cities of Nepal have very few street lights ('Electricity going waste', Anita Bhetwal, #1086). What a shame.

Dip Neupane

- When a surplus of your product is a risk for investors, your management is dysfunctional.

Alex Ferguson

POST COP26

I agree, we need robust plans made by all the countries and need to start implementing them ('Post-COP26, Nepal's real work now begins', Raju Pandit Chhetri, nepalitimes.com).

Radhika Iyengar

CHILDLESS BY CHOICE

What a read, wow ('Childless by choice', Anjana Rajbhandary, nepalitimes.com)!

Yonhyaku Nijuu Moyase

AGROECOLOGICAL

Well-articulated article ('Agroecology, Nepal's answer to climate change', Zachary Barton, *page 10-11*).

Madan Poudel

PUBLIC TOILETS

Management and maintenance are the key. (Toilet trained in Nepal, #1086). Let's just see after five years how well these public latrines with award-winning designs fare.

Bhumi Limbu

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Toilet-trained in Nepal

Nepal's progress in sanitation is an international success but very few public toilets in Kathmandu are well maintained or even operational. Now, the municipalities in the Valley are out to change that with the new award-winning model toilets. Details in this story online.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



Electricity going waste

Nepal's precious electricity is going to waste. The absence of transmission lines means expensive hydropower is being 'spilled', increasing the risk for investors. Read full report on www.nepalitimes.com

Most popular on Twitter

What to do with Pokhara's 'extra' airport?

Forty years after it was first proposed, Pokhara's new airport is finally nearing completion to connect the scenic tourism hub to regional capitals by July 2022. However, there are now questions about the current airport, with officials undecided about what to do with the prime real estate. Story on *page 4*.

Most commented

Multipronged response to Nepal's multi-hazards

Hazards in the Himalayas occur together and, when they do, their cumulative effect is greater than the sum of their parts. Then why do we approach them individually? The coincidence of multiple hazards necessitates a multi-hazard approach to disaster risk reduction.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Attending international conferences and raising mountain issues will not protect local communities from the worsening impacts of #climatecrisis. These summits provide guidance, but most of our work has to be done here at home, writes Raju Pandit Chhetri.



Matthew A. Witenstein @mattwitenstein
Important piece on #ClimateCrisis #Nepal & #Conference-going. So important to consider how to (re)tool conferences to offer meaningful applied supports in concert with the author's important point.



'Gaijin' Ram @MuniramSharma
Completely agree with the writer. @GretaThunberg said this too! #actionspeaks



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#satire: Since men and women are from different planets in the Solar System, there are things that start as minor irritants in conjugal life that can blow up into World War III. The Ass has some advice for newly-weds about how to survive a marriage.



Osh @NepoleonRai
As always, The Ass delivers. @NepaliTimes



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Agroecology, Nepal's answer to climate change. The answer to addressing climate impact is to regenerate the most important #ecosystem of all: the soil. Agroecology, Nepal's answer to #climatechange | Zachary Barton



Madhukar Upadhyay @madhukaru
A must read piece!

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepal's far-sighted eye care

Let's take a break from politics and news of war, mayhem and general chaos that dominated the country two decades ago, it is not much better today with the perpetrators of those crimes walking free and without guilt.

But despite a war, political instability and state neglect, there are plenty of home-grown success stories including community forestry, wildlife conservation, and dramatic strides in reducing malnutrition and maternal mortality rate.

But it is in eye care that the achievement has been most impressive. Nepal is an international leader in the field, and much of this has to be credited to our own world-renowned eye surgeon Sanduk Ruit. His revolutionary cost-effective cataract surgery has largely contributed in reducing the prevalence of blindness from 0.8% to 0.3% in Nepal.

Such is the care of Dr Ruit that people from across the border and the world over come to Kathmandu for the treatment, and this hasn't changed over the decades. Excerpts of the report from 20 years ago this week from #69 23-29 November 2001:

Twenty years ago, if Nepalis developed cataracts most either went blind or went to India for treatment. Today, the scene is reversed: thousands of Indian patients with cataracts and other eye disease come to specialised centres in Nepal for treatment.

It is one of those little-known success stories of Nepal's

development in the past 20 years that the country is now a regional leader in eye care.

Sanduk Ruit, Medical Director of the Nepal Eye Program (synonymous with Tilganga Eye Centre) pioneered the modern cataract surgery: removing only the clouded lens and implanting an intraocular lens into the natural capsule.

"With this method the sight of an eye can be restored near to the normal level," says Ruit whose team proved that modern cataract surgery can be done safely and hygienically in developing countries like Nepal, Eritrea, Vietnam, China and Myanmar with results equal to those obtained in Australia and throughout the world. Ruit is driven by a dream to have a self-sustaining eye care program throughout Nepal. TEC stresses a strict pricing tier, cross subsidies and high quality care. "A barefoot patient coming from Sindhupalchowk and

a member of Parliament get the same treatment," says Ruit who as a general medical doctor attending an eye camp in western Nepal was intrigued by the problem of blindness.

"Ophthalmology is a high tech branch of medicine, advancing very quickly. At the Centre, we try to adapt the latest technology but still keep our feet on the ground, keeping Nepali conditions in mind."

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



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TURKISH AIRLINES

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What to do with Pokhara's 'extra' airport?

As the new international airport nears completion, the fate of the old one is up in the air

● Masta KC

Forty years after it was first proposed, Pokhara's new airport is finally nearing completion to connect the scenic tourism hub to regional capitals by July 2022.

With an investment of Rs22 billion, China's CAMC Engineering has now finished the runway, apron, taxiway and terminal work and all that remains to be done is to slice off the top of a hill on the eastern approach to the airport.

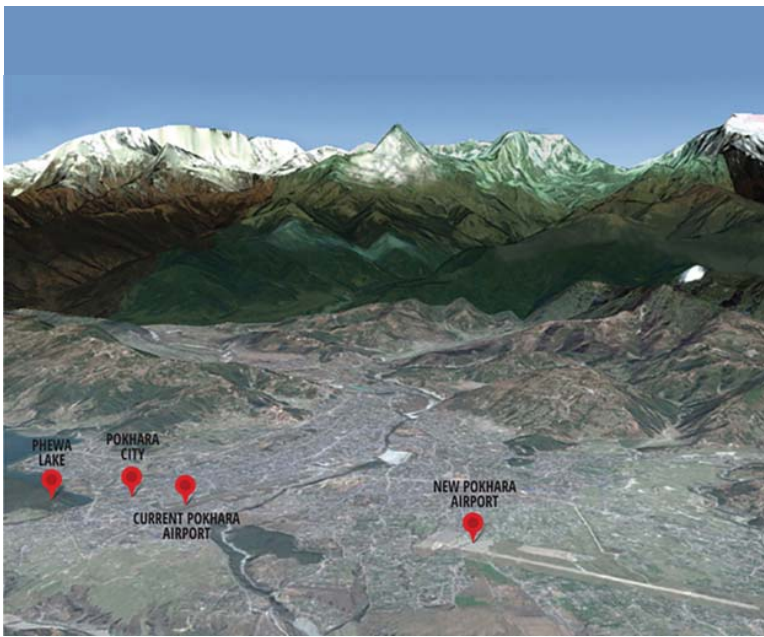
Nepal's third international airport after Kathmandu and Lumbini, the project was delayed by decades of turf battles, bureaucratic hurdles, local opposition, corruption in high places, and finally the pandemic last year. The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) is planning a soft opening in mid-2022 for domestic flights and then allow international flights from China, India, Malaysia and the Gulf countries.

However, there are now questions about current airport, with the Pokhara Airport Office, CAAN and the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation undecided about what to do with the prime real estate.

The chief of Pokhara Airport, Bikram Raj Gautam, who is also coordinating the task force to prepare for the transfer of operations, says there are no firm decisions yet.

"We have sent appropriate suggestions to the higher authorities," he said evasively, "ultimately, we follow what they decide. It could continue to be used for other aviation-related work."

Pokhara airport is the second busiest airport in the country after Kathmandu, with an average of 31 flights a day connecting Jomsom, Bhairawa, Simara, Bharatpur, Nepalganj and Kathmandu.



Out of 54 airports across the country 19 are currently inoperative, and locals have turned a majority of these into grazing areas for livestock. In addition, CAAN is not up to speed on the utilities, land, and infrastructure that remain in those airfields. This raises doubts about whether it can handle the vested interests that have eyes on the present airport's valuable real estate.

"The necessary infrastructure and staff of the closed airports have all been shifted and repurposed to the nearest open airport," says CAAN's Raj Kumar Chhetri, who adds that it is necessary to prevent encroachment and pressure from the land mafia.

"Such expensive property in the middle of the city cannot go to waste," he says. "If pressure on the

new international airport were to drastically increase, the old airport could be brought back into service for domestic flights and sports aviation," he says.

Unfortunately, the delay in decision-making means the airport may be subject to the same misuse seen in other government properties. Examples like the Baluwatar land scandal in Kathmandu show that politicians and legislators often have their eyes on cashing in on national property.

Pokhara's civil society wants to keep the airport as an open space in a city that is urbanising fast and losing its greenery. Indeed, municipalities across Nepal are fond of erecting concrete monuments, build shopping centres and view towers, or just haphazardly selling the land piecemeal.

Chhetri says Pokhara's current airport will not be abandoned like other closed airfields across the country.

"After appropriate research, the airport can be used in the public's interest," he says. However, these matters are yet to be discussed with local representatives and Pokhara's businesses. Pokhara's deputy mayor Manju Devi Gurung is adamant about preventing unnecessary development at the site. She says: "It should be preserved as an open space. Even if it is the property of the national government, it should be used for the benefit of the locals of Pokhara."

Local stakeholders agree that the airport should be converted into a green area with a public park. Infrastructure expert, Suryaraj Acharya sees this as an opportunity to enhance the beauty of the city, and says: "Open spaces are integral for families and communities. There is no need to even think about adding more concrete to the area." ■

prabhu BANK



Nepal-India travel

The health ministries of Nepal and India this week signed an MoU for the reciprocal recognition of Covid-19 vaccination certificates. Minister of Health and Population Birodh Khatriwada said the agreement will significantly ease the travel between the two countries.



Euro green grant

Paola Pampaloni, the visiting Deputy Managing Director of Asia and the Pacific Department at European Union, signed an agreement for a €240 million grant support to Nepal for its green growth and recovery till 2024. Pampaloni also took part in the Nepal-EU Joint Commission, and met Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba with EU Ambassador Nona Deprez (pictured) and discussed cooperation, the continued restrictions on Nepal's airlines in Europe, and climate adaptation.

e-Health

Midas Technology of the IME group has started an online appointment service through a mobile app in Bir and Civil Service Hospital allowing patients long-term treatment and consultations. For Midas' services, patients can opt to use the respective hospital's mobile app or 'MeroDoctor' mobile app/website.



More flights to the US

Turkish Airlines is increasing the frequency of its flights to five American cities next summer. Five routes will see double-daily service, including flights from Istanbul to Chicago, Los Angeles and Miami, starting in late March, and San Francisco and Washington Dulles, starting in late May. Four of these routes are to United Airlines hubs, where Turkish Airlines passengers can connect to other destinations within their codeshare partner's network.

Ncell awarded

Ncell Axiata Ltd has been awarded WITSA Global ICT Excellence Awards 2021 and ASOCIO Awards 2021 for its



telemedicine and health informatics project implemented in association with Dhulikhel Hospital to serve remote and underserved communities.

Sell your old phones

Sabko Phone, specialising in phone repairs and refurbishment, has now made it easier for people to sell their old mobiles. Customers can check the value of their old phones on its website and arrange for a convenient doorstep pickup.



The Class of 2021

The British College on 22 November held its virtual cum physical graduation ceremony for 491 undergrad and grad students from its affiliated universities, Leeds Beckett University and the University of the West of England. Rajen Kandel, CEO and Founder of the College, flew over from the UK to attend the event.

Jyoti Smart

Jyoti Bikash Bank has launched Jyoti Smart, an upgrade on its existing app. Features include information on services available, detailed account information, online payment services, scheduled fund transfers, account linking and registration for new users.

NRN \$ accounts

Nepalis resident overseas will soon be allowed to open hard currency accounts in Nepal, according to a directive by the Ministry of Finance which could be approved as early as next week. The move comes as Nepal's foreign currency reserves fall to pay for only 8 months of imports due to a drop in overseas remittances and burgeoning imports.

EN VOGUE season 8

EN VOGUE, an annual fashion contest organised by House of Fashion Nepal is scheduled for the first



week of January 2022. IME Pay is voting partner, and auditions with judges were Oshima Banu, Meilian Lama, Sophie Sunuwar, Evana Manandhar and Asmi Shrestha were completed this week.

Priority counter

Sanima Bank has opened a priority counter service at its branch in Kumaripati, previously available only in its head office in Naxal. The counter will serve priority customers who will also have access to an exclusive lounge and a dedicated relationship manager.

DO NEPALIS NEED COVID

BOOSTER SHOTS?

With only a third of the population fully inoculated, experts say: Vaccinate all the unvaccinated first

PHOTOS: AMIT MACHAMASI

● **Sonia Awale**

Not long ago, to boost or not to boost was the dilemma of rich countries even as developing nations were struggling to vaccinate their frontline workers and elderly with the first dose.

The argument has now reached our part of the world, with health experts even in Nepal recommending booster shots for the immunocompromised and frontline workers. In fact, the government's Teaching Hospital and few others in Kathmandu this week administered a third booster shot to some patients suffering other chronic diseases.

The recommendation has been met with some conflicting opinion at a time when only a little over 30% of Nepal's target population has been fully inoculated against Covid-19. While over half the people in densely populated urban centres like Kathmandu have been vaccinated, parts of rural Nepal are still largely unable to access jabs.

"Our first and foremost priority must be to vaccinate everyone, and if we have plenty more vaccines, which we are more than likely to have, the next step is to provide booster shots to people with co-morbidities and the elderly," says Buddha Basnyat, a physician at Patan Academy of Health Sciences.

Infectious disease specialist at HAMS hospital Anup Subedi agrees: "If the question is what is more advantageous in terms of controlling the pandemic, vaccinating the unvaccinated or offering booster shots, the answer is to vaccinate everyone first."

Having said that, Subedi in his observations has found the efficacy of VeroCell to be lower than that of other vaccines, with several people who had inoculated with the Chinese jab having been admitted to the ICU with Covid-19.

To counter this, Subedi adds that Nepal should provide the third dose of VeroCell for higher efficacy, as recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Others, however, suggest not jumping on

any conclusions until there is a concrete finding.

The concern about boosters is mainly because antibody levels decline significantly after 6-9 months of being inoculated, as proven by studies around the world. And as one of the first countries in South Asia to start its Covid-19 vaccination drive, it has been six months since frontline workers were given jabs.

Some experts, however, say that the human body provides protection also from so-called 'memory cells' so that even if vaccine immunity drops, the T and P cells produce antibodies when a pathogen attacks. There is no exact estimate of how long the memory cells provide protection, but it is most likely long-term, which means the general population may not need booster shots just yet.

Those who recover from Covid-19 are even better placed

to ward off the infection and its complications, with natural immunity being more effective than that gained by vaccination. And according to the recent seroprevalence survey, over two-third of Nepalis have SARS-CoV-2 antibodies that provide them natural immunity.

"Given that 68% of people in Nepal have some form of protection and a significant chunk of the population is fully vaccinated, we don't have to worry about boosters yet. Our infection rate, hospitalisations and morbidities have all largely declined," says Sameer Dixit of the Centre for Molecular Dynamics Nepal, which conducted the seroprevalence survey.

The new surge in Europe has been associated with the Delta variant, which has already swept through every corner of Nepal and India, which means a majority of the

people here have developed some immunity against it.

"So, we don't have to panic about another major surge as of now," Dixit adds.

This is not to say Nepal is out of the woods yet. With a declining number of daily cases and fatalities, schools have reopened, there are wedding parties, crowded marketplaces and indoor seminars are happening all over the country.

Safety measures must be maintained despite higher vaccination rates and declining hospitalisations. This means, continuing to mask up, avoiding crowds and maintaining distance — especially with the onset of winter and the seasonal risk of coronavirus, influenza and pneumonia infections. There are already reports of students, parents and teachers in Kathmandu schools testing positive for Covid-19.

The government had set aside Pfizer vaccines for the immunocompromised, but a lack of uptake meant that students aged 12 and above are now being offered the US-made vaccine that has been certified for children.

Shyam Raj Upreti, Nepal's focal person for the Covid-19 vaccine maintains that the government will start administering booster shots only after nearly 100% of the targeted population has received its first dose, the figure currently stands at about 40%.

Nepal has so far received 25 million doses of vaccines in donations or purchase, 30 million more are in the pipeline. "We now have more than enough vaccines for our targeted population, and we are now starting with students," says Upreti. "The new challenge is to increase vaccine acceptance among those who have so far refused to take it."

Although surveys have shown that 97% of Nepalis trust vaccines, many pregnant women and those with co-morbidities are refusing to get shots, fearing side-effects.

Experts caution that Nepal's response to the pandemic needs to extend beyond vaccinations. The country has to be prepared for a possible surge, and this means contact tracing including the testing of the children, stringent quarantine and isolation, well-equipped health infrastructure and trained medical staff to operate them.

"Another surge might not be a major one but it could still be on a scale sufficient to significantly impact our economy and lives," adds Anup Subedi. "So we have to be prepared. But a lot of it boils down to political will, and an efficient bureaucracy that is focused on controlling the pandemic."

Indeed, Covid-19 is here to stay which means continued vigilance and precautions like masking and physical distancing. Warns physician Buddha Basnyat: "Covid-19 is a wily virus, and it is still a formidable foe. We can't let down our guards yet." 🇳🇵



After falling uptake of vaccines among those with pre-existing chronic conditions, the government this week offered Pfizer BioNtech jabs to students above 12 years.



● Shristi Karki

“My name is Jigme Konchok Lhamo, and I am a Kung Fu nun.” During summer nights, on grounds illuminated by solar-powered lights, Lhamo and her sisters practice kung fu at the Druk Amitabha Nunnery near Kathmandu, wielding swords, sticks and paper fans.

The forested hills surrounding the nunnery echo with shouts as they kick, punch and lunge. The kung fu nuns work and live at the nunnery, better known as Seto Gumba, and belong to the centuries-old Drukpa lineage of Himalayan Buddhism.

On this morning, Lhamo and Jigme Migyur Palmo sit side by side, clad in maroon robes and red hats, as they Zoom with *Nepali Times*. The nunnery remains shut off to visitors because of Covid-19 risks to the nuns who live and work at close quarters.

On the wall above hangs a portrait of a smiling Jigme Pema Wangchen, the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa and the leader of the order that bears his name. Lhamo smiles as she talks about her family – she was born and raised in Lahaul-Spiti in India’s Himachal Pradesh and attended Catholic school until she saw the Gyalwang Drukpa one day when she was 12.

The course of her life changed forever after she heard him speak.

“I was so inspired by what he said about the need for equality in society, I decided then that this was the path I wanted to take,” she says.

But back at home, Lhamo’s parents were against her decision. It took three days of “shouting and crying” for her parents to finally, and reluctantly, allow their daughter to go become a nun so far away in Nepal.

“My parents would rather I became a doctor or a lawyer,” she explains. That was 15 years ago, and Lhamo has been based in Kathmandu ever since.

For Palmo, however, becoming a nun was the natural course. She was born and raised in a devout Buddhist family, all of whom were disciples of the Gyalwang Drukpa.

“My parents had always wanted one of their children to become either a nun or a monk,” she says. “And it was something I wanted as well.” So Palmo came to Nepal when she was 13, and has been at the nunnery for 17 years.

But even though she had been ready and willing to spend her life as a nun, the initial days after coming to Kathmandu were difficult. “The first thing I had to learn was to wake up early in the morning,” Palmo recalls.

Indeed, the nuns begin the day at 3AM with a two-hour meditation, after which they convene at the main temple for morning *puja* and prayers. After a frugal breakfast, they attend various lessons, including English, Tibetan, music,

painting, photography and drama.

Those who do not have classes scheduled are scattered around the monastery doing chores. The nuns are adept at gardening, electrical work, construction, and general upkeep around the monastery.

“We have electrician nuns, construction nuns, nuns who cook, solar panel nuns, you name it,” says Palmo, smiling.

On summer evenings, the nuns gather in the open for their daily kung fu practice. And as the days get cooler and shorter, they shift practice to mornings.

Gyalwang Drukpa encouraged the nuns to take leadership roles as well as learn skills that allowed them to be self-sufficient in running of the nunnery. But their involvement in such tasks, largely seen as jobs for men, did not go down well in conservative pockets in the Himalaya. Some nuns even got threats of physical harm for challenging gender norms.

That is when the Gyalwang Drukpa realised that the nuns also needed self-defence training. As luck would have it, some nuns from Vietnam who were visiting the institution at the time knew kung fu. The nuns saw them practicing daily, and joined the visitors.

“It was fascinating to see our Vietnamese sisters practice kung fu,” recalls Palmo. “They had been here for a while, and we had become friends. So it was not difficult to ask them to show us some moves.”

KINSHIP, AND KÚ

Nuns from a centuries
redefine what it mea





KARMA, KUNG FU

ies-old Buddhist order
eans to be of service



Self-defence workshop in Ladakh.

More nuns became interested, and in 2013 the Gyalwang Drukpa hired a professional to teach the martial art form to the 500 nuns from ages six to sixty from across Nepal, India, Bhutan and Tibet.

Among them is Jigme Yangchen Ghamo, who joined the nunnery when she was ten years old. As a child, Ghamo and her family made frequent trips to the nunnery for prayers and celebrations. She was born in Ramechhap and raised with her two siblings in Kathmandu.

"I remember coming to the nunnery with my family," says Ghamo, who has now been there for 12 years. "The nuns were so hard working and dedicated that I immediately thought that this was the path I should take."

Her parents were not too happy, but Ghamo persisted. "Who would want to send their child away? But I refused to go to school, and the possibility of me growing up without an education finally convinced my parents to let me go," she adds.

The first few days were difficult with just two others who were the same age in the nunnery. But a few weeks later, Ghamo began her kung fu training and she says it has helped her keep physically and mentally fit.

"When I was ten years old, kung fu was just a part of my daily routine, it was something I had to do," notes Ghamo. "But over the years, I have realised how valuable it has been to me."

And as they worked to master the craft, the nuns decided to use their knowledge to help other young girls and women protect themselves.

"While we learned, we thought about the women and girls out there who are being bullied, harassed or suffering abuse at the hands of family," explains Palmo. "We thought that we should also share our learning with them."

Their self-defence workshops have taken the nuns across the Himalaya from Ladakh to Kathmandu and Delhi to train not just other nuns, but young students as well. In addition, these interactions have also allowed the nuns to learn much about the world outside the nunnery.

As nuns, they did not face harassment to the same degree, so they had no idea what a girl's life was like in Mumbai, Chandigarh, or Kathmandu. Lhamo says she learnt from her kung fu students about how unsafe they felt in public buses and trains. "Those conversations were eye-opening for us," says Lhamo.

Many of the young girls who were trained by the nuns went on to join karate and other self-defence classes, and they often share their progress with the nuns who taught them.

"Even if we have made a difference in one person's life," adds Migyur, "it makes a big difference in ours."

And while their kung fu and

humanitarian work have earned them recognition and acclaim across the world, there is also prejudice, criticism and people passing judgment.

"There was criticism over our cycling uniforms when we went on our cycle yatra," Ghamo says. "How could we be expected to ride in our robes? But if we worried about the backlash we wouldn't have gotten anywhere."

People would question why the nuns, who follow a religion that stands for peace, were practicing a martial art form. "We are first and foremost Buddhist practitioners," says Lhamo firmly. "We have never intended to fight."

Ghamo agrees: "Martial arts is not about maiming, killing and violence, it is a discipline. Maybe people have been watching too many kung fu m-o-vies." 🇳🇵



KUNG FU NUNS

Join Nepal's kicking nuns at the Druk Amitabha monastery near Kathmandu as they practice their kung fu routine. Listen to them explain how they came to take up martial arts and how it has helped them. Watch the video.



The Kung fu nuns on a padyatra across the Himalayas.

EVENTS



Art Exhibition
Gallery Mcube's show *Metaphors about Islands* curated by Sandy Hisu-chih Lo includes video installations by five artists from Nepal and Taiwan.
Until 28 November, 11am-8pm, Gallery Mcube

Godavari Hike
Spend this Saturday with nature by hiking through Godamchaur, Bishankhunarayan and Chhapakharkau to Godavari. Go to Hike for Nepal's Facebook page for details.
27 November, 6:45am from Bhrikutimandap, Fee: Rs600



Sunday Sessions
In this Sunday Sessions, Prateebha Tuladhar will be joined by musician AMAZUMI to discuss her inspiration, Nepali roots and life as an artist during lockdown. Details on Book Bus Nepal's Facebook page.
28 November, 6pm-7pm

Film festival
Nepal Culture and Film Center's 3rd Nepal Cultural International Film Festival will feature 107 films from more than 50 countries, as well as master classes, interactions and discussion sessions with filmmakers. *More at <http://ncfc.org.np/> 1-3 December*



Saturday Market
Support small and local businesses. Shop for fresh and organic vegetables, fruit, cheese, bread, meat products, honey and much more at Le Sherpa farmers market.
Saturdays, 8am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa Maharajgunj

DINING



Everfresh
Perfect for brunch and breakfast lovers, Everfresh offers the best elevated avocado toast, fluffy pancakes, brioche French toast and buckwheat crêpes.
Lazimpat, 9803700736

Pangra Express
Experience the best of street food and fast food from Pangra Express. Get the Classic Chicken Momo, Hero Sausage and Shaphale Chicken, or go for the flavourful spicy ramen bowl.
Naxal, 9818453455

ON STAGE

Los KTM Gatos
Enjoy a musical winter evening this Friday with the band Los KTM Gatos and a glass of mulled wine at Beers n' Cheers.
26 November, Beers n' Cheers, Jhamsikhel



Raithane music
Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory's Raithane Music concert will feature artists Jhuma Limbu, Ser o Duo and others, who will play native instruments in a presentation of indigenous Nepali music fused with modern elements.
4 December, 6pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1000, Moksh

Shades of Sound
This edition of Shades of Sound by Electric Pagoda will feature Bobin Bajracharya and Sudan live. Swing by for some good music and good food.
28 December, 7pm-10pm, Electric Pagoda Bar/Cafe



Animal Farm
See Katha Ghera's Nepali adaptation of George Orwell's ever-relevant *Animal Farm*. Ticket booking from 28 November.
30 November-18 December, Tickets: Rs500, Kausi Theatre, Teku



Stop Kiss
One World Theatre's production of Diana Son's *Stop Kiss*, set in 1990s' New York City, tells the story of two women Callie and Sara, and the tragic consequences of their first kiss.
Until 4 December, Shilpee Theatre, Battisputali

GETAWAY



Kasara Resort
With activities from cycling to wildlife viewing, Kasara Resort, located in the heart of the lush greenery of Chitwan National Park, is a fantastic getaway for families.
Patihani, Chitwan National Park, 9801048824

Akama Hotel
Akama Hotel boasts a fusion of Local Newa and Himalayan cultures as well as luxury modern amenities. Relax by the infinity pool, take a dip in the jacuzzi and step into the sauna room for a day away from the Kathmandu hustle.
Dhumbarahi (01) 4377298



Hotel Fireside
Hotel Fireside in Kalinchok, a quiet, picturesque village in Dolakha, makes for a comforting refuge. Enjoy the stunning Himalayan vista, beautiful gardens, comfortable rooms and soul-warming Nepali food.
Kuri Village, Kalinchok, 9841958696

Buddha Maya Gardens
Wake up to the sounds of birds in the mornings at the Buddha Maya Gardens Resort, then take a stroll along Lumbini World Heritage Garden in the morning while listening to the spiritual hymns of nearby prayers.
Lumbini, 9801033114



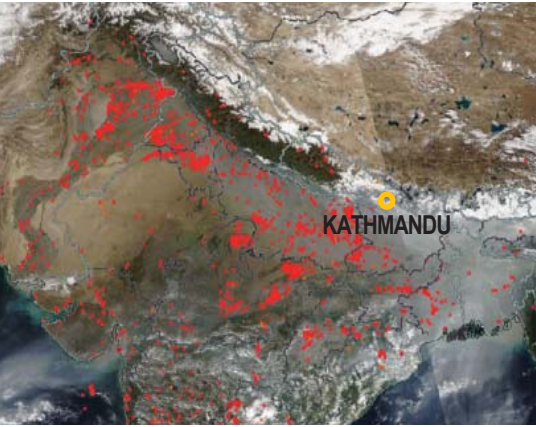
The Little House
A quaint stay in the middle of green rice fields, The Little House is a place where you can enjoy beautiful views, relaxing walks and scrumptious food.
Khokana, 9841370022



A low pressure trough is arriving over Nepal, and will bring some precipitation in the mountains and higher trans-Himalayan valleys on Friday. Kathmandu Valley may get scattered light wintry rain. Partly cloudy skies will mean delayed dissipation of the inversion layer in Kathmandu, trapping pollutants at ground level overnight, and the rain (if any) will not be enough to wash down suspended particles.
The weather system is expected to be blown off by the westerlies and we should have clearer weather from Sunday onwards. But since the wind is from the southwest, we could be getting a lot more of the crossborder haze from the Indo-Gangetic plains.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
19° 9°	20° 8°	21° 7°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



As this NASA satellite thermal/visual composite on Wednesday at noon shows, the fires keep burning in India. There is less stubble smoke from the two sides of Punjab, but there are extensive crop residue burning hotspots in eastern Uttar Pradesh. The wind has shifted to blow from the southwest, which means visibility and air quality index (AQI) will worsen across the Tarai, the Arun Valley and Kathmandu. The smoke being blown into Sikkim, Bhutan and Bangladesh and as far as Assam is clearly visible in this image. Kathmandu Valley's AQI will be hitting the 'Very Unhealthy' range at above 200 due to vehicular emission and trash burning in the coming days. So, mask up, and do not exercise in the mornings and evenings.

OUR PICK



The hit sitcom *Derry Girls* follows Erin, Orla, Clare, Michelle and James as they navigate their frenetic teen years during the end of the Troubles in Derry, where they all attend a Catholic girls' secondary school. Set against the backdrop of the ethno-nationalist, sectarian conflicts in Northern Ireland that began in the late 1960s and lasted till 1998, the show is particularly acclaimed for the way it balances humour and political undertones to earnestly depict how life was like for teens and what families had to endure during the irregular war. Stars Saoirse-Monica Jackson, Louisa Harland, Nicola Coughlan, Jamie-Lee O'Donnell, Dylan Llewellyn, Siobhán McSweeney and Ian McElhinney.



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Akari & Koko
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Jhamsikhel (01) 5525002

Cafe Soma
Pick from Cafe Soma's breakfast sandwiches, burgers served with potato wedges and coleslaw, and desserts. Or get the Beetroot & Walnut salad as a healthier option.
*Jawalakhel (01) 5528732/
Baluwatar (01) 4415792*



Anatolia
Anatolia's Indian and Turkish dishes are packed with spices and an unforgettable assortment of flavours. From the Mutton Kofta Curry to the Baklava, the dishes will keep customers wanting more. All the food is halal.
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Agroecology, Nepal's answer to



ALL PHOTOS: ZACHARY BARTON

Adapting to climate impact by regenerating the most important ecosystem of all: the soil

● Zachary Barton in Ilam

As a farmer and educator living in Nepal, I was not part of the dialogue at the UN climate summit (COP26) that just concluded in Glasgow. None of us here were.

And as world leaders, climate scientists, and corporate lobbyists return to their respective countries from Glasgow, here in the mountains of eastern Nepal I myself wonder what, if anything, they have accomplished in terms of real change. And what the implications will be for 'the rest of us'.

I wonder if these state bureaucrats and business representatives are the right people to look to for guidance and innovation to address the climate catastrophe. Which voices are clearly represented at the table? And which are conspicuously absent?

The Nepali delegation has already returned home setting itself ambitious targets and timebound pledges to achieve them. Nepalis have to cope with the impact of climate change, for which farmers here were not responsible. Yet, we



are asked to implement solutions that, similarly, come from afar.

This is not to say reforestation, net-zero carbon emissions, and providing some level of protection and support for vulnerable populations are not important. In fact, they are precisely what Nepal (and all other countries) should be working towards to minimise the impact of climate change. The real questions are: How? Who should get it done? And on what scale?

Solutions at conferences such as COP26 invariably tend to lean

towards high-tech possibilities, international policy agreements, and large-scale restructuring. There is, however, another approach: small-scale, local and grassroots agriculture.

While local regenerative agriculture is rarely discussed at the high table, such an approach may prove to be much more in line with Nepali culture and economy — a home-grown solution that returns political agency and innovation to local people on the ground.

Agriculture has become something of a dirty word for climate activists, and with some justification. It is estimated that agriculture accounts for roughly 23% of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. That makes it comparable to big industry, transportation and electricity production, which means it significantly contributes to climate change.

But not all 'agriculture' is equal. Regenerative agriculture has the potential to sequester carbon from the atmosphere and redistribute it to soils where it could have various positive impacts. Unlike many other industries, agriculture has the potential to transition from being a Big Problem to a Big Solution.

How we relate to land today is our most egregious lapse in judgement. Whether it is razing jungles for timber, draining precious wetlands, overfishing sacred waters, or converting grasslands to large-scale, chemical-based agro-farms, we seem to have forgotten the most basic natural law: reciprocity. We cannot extract and drill and harvest and mine with no thought of giving back.

Fortunately, there is a way to approach agriculture that maintains a reciprocal relationship with the local ecosystem.

Agroecology, to put it simply, is a farming technique that incorporates the principles of ecology so that agriculture becomes a means of giving back.

A local jungle is a source of natural foods, medicines, fibres

climate change



and energy sources, but instead of automatically clearing and putting it to the plough, we must recognise that it also cleans and conserves water, soils, regulates temperature and provides a habitat for other living beings. And, to circle back to climate concerns, importantly, that jungles capture carbon.

Managing land, under the auspices of agroecology, entails revitalising a different kind of relationship with the soil. It starts with understanding the principles of ecology and how nature works: diversity, recycling, systems thinking, interconnectivity, and that the sun is the ultimate source

of energy are just the few first steps.

What does that look like on a farm? A diversity of plants being grown together in what is known as a polyculture, and animals moving across the landscape as happens in nature.

Let's start with the soil. We put

a man on the moon 62 years ago, but we still know nothing about the world below our feet, the soil from which comes all life. Through over ploughing, mono-cropping and the use of chemical fertilisers we have effectively killed the life in the soil, from beneficial microbes to worms, and all other which preside and

flourish there.

In killing the soil, we released massive amounts of carbon into the atmosphere and compromised its ability to capture the carbon back. And in this dead soil, we grow plants that are chronically sick and unable to ward off pests and disease, completely dependent on chemicals for their survival. We then eat these sick plants which give us little nutrition, and we become sick ourselves.

So, while others look to the sky for solutions, let us take a glance down at the most important ecosystem of all: the soil where we stand. If farmers in Nepal can step up and lead the change, the politicians will come stumbling after. 🇳🇵

Zachary Barton is a permaculture designer, activist and teacher who has been living in Nepal since 2003. He established Almost Heaven Farm in 2013, where he researches, demonstrates and trains local farmers and international visitors in permaculture design, earth-based building and ecological restoration.



The answer to addressing climate impact is to regenerate the most important ecosystem of all: the soil. Watch how farms in eastern Nepal have implemented this approach of agroecology with permaculture training at Almost Heaven Farms.

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Defending Nepal

As some of you more alert readers may have surmised by now, we live in perilous times. Besides an impending climate catastrophe and more pandemics, there is also the threat of the National Census enumerators arriving at our doorstep this week to ask us embarrassing questions like whether we have a throne or squat loo, how many times a day we go, and whether we wash our hands with soap and water after.

There is limit to how much the grabberment can pry on our private parts. We need to censor the census. Why are we being asked to divulge such sensitive information at a time when this nation's very survival is at stake?

King Prithvi Naryan Shah the Great warned us about being wary of our two Big Brothers having us by our gonads. Indeed, the two big boulders are busy squeezing our yam. One Brother has occupied 363sq km of our turf, and the other Bro is up to some border hanky-panky in Humla.

As South Asia's oldest nation state and youngest republic, we can never be too careful about our national security. Defending Nepal's sovereignty and territorial integrity will be of paramount importance as we attain Middle Income Status, and get rich.

Luckily, we have terrain that protects us from the North. But the high mountains are not as impenetrable as they used to be. We must therefore get the tectonic forces that have been relentlessly pushing the Subcontinent against the Tibetan Plateau for the past 50 million years to work to our advantage, so that our border pillars surreptitiously move north at a velocity of 1cm/year.

Nepal's southern border, on the other hand, was protected from invasions by our glorious mozzie army, which slayed aggressors by injecting them with the deadly malaria parasite. But since we foolishly eradicated malaria, that deterrent does not exist anymore.

Nepal's military strategists therefore have to fall back on our second line of defence: the 1,500km East-West Moat. All we need to do is ask the Indians to construct more road embankments on their side to submerge the Tarai.

Future invading armies could use our highways, strategic bridges and other infrastructure to advance rapidly on Kathmandu. To thwart this, we are keeping our highways blocked by landslides, building such weak bridges that they collapse in the afternoon breeze, and ensuring the Nagdhunga incline and Daunne corridor are permanently gridlocked, to stop enemy tanks in their tracks.

But we cannot be complacent. The Mugling-Naryangad road and the Pokhara-Kusma highway have been unwisely widened to 6 lanes, allowing potential invaders rapid mobility.

If we are serious about defending Nepal, we need more roads like the one to Godavari which have such enormous craters that they will swallow whole armoured personnel carriers of our foes.

However, by far the greatest deterrent against any foreign invasion is our political leadership. Who in their right mind would ever want to conquer such an ungovernable country?



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