

# COVID in 2022

- **Sonia Awale**

It has been two years since the coronavirus turned the world (and Nepal) upside down. Masks have become the norm, physical distancing is a must, vaccines are mandated, and parts of the world are going back to lockdowns.

Just as everyone was waiting for business to go back to normal in 2022, countries have been hit with a highly contagious Omicron variant with worries that existing vaccines will not stop its infection.

Lab tests have shown that the AstraZeneca and VeroCell vaccines most used in Nepal may not be as effective against Omicron, with m-RNA vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna proving more effective.

*Nepali Times* spoke with national and international health experts to clarify these initial findings and how they will impact Nepal.

"The coronavirus is here to stay and it will remain with us for decades to come. To do this it will find ways to continue to infect people in communities even if they are vaccinated," said Andrew Pollard, who helped develop the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine.

“The important role of the vaccines is to prevent severe disease and the evidence so far, even with Omicron, does appear to indicate that vaccines are still holding up in preventing most of the severe outcomes,” Pollard told *Nepali Times* from Oxford.

Anup Subedee, an infectious

diseases specialist at HAMS hospital in Kathmandu, agrees: “It is true that mRNA vaccines are more effective against the new variant, but all jabs still significantly reduce severity and mortality. So our priority must be to vaccinate as many people as soon as possible and give boosters to the immune-compromised and frontliners.”

Researchers recommend using mRNA vaccines as booster for the vulnerable populations. Last week, Nepal received nearly 2 million doses of Moderna shots from Germany via the COVAX facility, which is sufficient to provide booster doses for the elderly.

Minister of Health Birodh Khatiwada announced on Wednesday that booster shots would be given from mid-January 2022 provided WHO allows it. But WHO has prioritised first and second doses, and recommended boosters only after 40% of the population is fully vaccinated.

“WHO might have its guidelines but we must also stick to our national priorities, we must provide boosters for frontliners so that Omicron does not shut down our health care system,” adds Subedee. “We must not miss immune-compromised and the elderly, it is more important for now to provide boosters for 80+ people than administer a single dose to 12-18 year olds.”

An Imperial College London Covid-19 response team estimates that the risk of re-infection with the Omicron variant is 5.4 times greater than that of Delta.

“There is some evidence that natural immunity from past infection and or vaccine-induced immunity from prior inoculation may not be sufficient to prevent Omicron infection,”

warns regional health expert Sushil Koirala from Bangkok.

Preliminary findings suggest that Omicron may be milder than previous variants, but its increased transmissibility could still result in many more people with severe disease particularly among vulnerable and unvaccinated groups, overwhelming ICU capacity.

“The real question is not how many people Omicron is likely to kill but given its higher transmissibility, how Nepal’s limited health infrastructure will deal with a surge,” says Dibesh Karmacharya of the Centre for Molecular Dynamics Nepal.

The general consensus is to launch mass immunisation and administer booster shots for the vulnerable people high risk groups side by side. Nepal's vaccine stockpile is now so large that there is a danger of some of it having to be destroyed because of the lack of refrigerated storage, and there are millions more doses in the pipeline in 2022.

“We now need to get jabs into arms as soon as possible, by inoculating those who haven’t yet been vaccinated while simultaneously also administering boosters, given the decreasing antibody levels and the rise of new variants,” says Buddha Basnyat, a physician at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences.

Given relatively lower vaccination coverage, lack of booster doses, unknown efficacy of Chinese jabs, and insufficient safety measures, Nepal is at high risk of another wave. Says Basnyat: “We have to prepare for a new surge, we have been caught too many times with our pants down.”

The way to do that, Koirala says, is to increase surveillance on the Indian border, and accelerate vaccination drive. He adds as a grim warning for 2022: "It is of utmost importance that Nepal prepare critical care for a large-scale Omicron outbreak."

## NEW YEAR BOOKS

**Kumar Nagarkoti**  
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**Amitav Ghosh**  
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# Secularism and sectarianism

The word 'secularism' is mis-translated into the Sanskritised Nepali as 'धर्मनिरपेक्ष', and has been taken by many to mean anti- or non-religion. This has created a misunderstanding about the concept among Nepal's deeply religious people.



**GUEST EDITORIAL**  
Indra Adhikari

All secularism means is separation of state and religion, and in practical terms it connotes freedom of religion. An individual's belief, faith or lack thereof are inherently personal. It is when a dominant religion is mixed with politics that divisions between 'us' and 'them' come up.

As scholars have pointed out, the Sanskrit word 'धर्म' also does not have an exact translation in English. When the British were in Bengal they loosely translated 'dharma' to mean 'religion', whereas institutionalised religion has other Sanskrit synonyms like 'पन्थ' or 'मार्ग'. Hinduism, as Gauri N Rimal points

made it easier to govern. Perpetuating the caste system, and confining each group in its place and profession, made it easier to divide and rule.

Even though the concept of 'Sanatan Dharma' denotes ordained collection of practices and duties regardless of caste, sect or class, in actual practice most festivals and rituals in Nepal today are derived from Hinduism. They have continued in Nepal's so-called 'secular' state where the traditional caste and sect divisions are perpetuated in the name of tradition and heritage.

This means that although Nepal is now supposed to be a secular republic, decisions of the state including the observance of religious holidays of dominant groups, participation of politicians in rituals, and the fall-back on populism are anything but secular.

Religion is a matter between an individual and their god, but rulers use it as a strategy to come to power and retain it. Marx called it 'the opium of the masses'. The big historical wars of the Subcontinent were usually about territorial conquest, not based on religion. The colonial period used divide-and-rule tactics, and thereby laid the seeds of communal violence.

Some of these same methods are being used by India's rulers today. After partition, the religious extremism in the Subcontinent within India, between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, and the AfPak-Iran region, now also have geo-strategic ramifications.

It is because religion is so personal that it should not be mixed with politics. We see where this can lead to in India today, where people have been killed because of disputes over what is deemed sacred by some. Nepal should learn lessons from this, since

certain ethnic groups eat animals that others regard as holy, while some do not eat other animals.

The way to peacefully resolve these issues is by not allowing one religion or dominant group to direct what is lawful and what is not. One indicator of a truly democratic state is how well it protects the rights of its minorities. When a country's leader is seen as the protector of only the majority group or faith, it can invite conflict. Leaders who create divisions based on religion among citizens, and incite them to violence against each other, may call themselves 'nationalists' but they are anti-national.

When Nepal became secular, we thought it would finally liberate women from entrenched patriarchy. Most of the burden of rituals and festivals still fall on the shoulders of women, and many are still treated as non-citizens.

Nepal is not yet secular. We still have a long way to go.

*Indra Adhikari is a political analyst specialising in international relations and security issues. This opinion is extracted from a Himal Sambad discussion on 16 December.*



out in *Himal*, is a 'dharma', not just a religion.

World history is replete with wars fought in the name of one god or another, where propagation of religion has driven conquests, and faith-based fissures have plunged countries into internecine conflict.

The concept of 'secularism' was imported into Nepal from the post-independence Indian constitution after communal pogroms of partition in the Subcontinent cost millions of lives. India inherited secularism from its colonial ruler, Britain, which itself had a long history of mixing church and state, and of sectarian violence between Catholics and Protestants.

In a country with such a diversity of *dharma* as Nepal, it is strange for one religion to be dominant. In fact, B P Koirala mentioned in 1980: 'Nepal is not a Hindu state, it was never a Hindu state, and it will never be a Hindu state.' Much before in 1962, he stated that 'declearing Nepal as a Hindu State is a fraud.'

Even when Prithvi Narayan Shah and his progeny unified the country that would later be called Nepal, it spread far beyond just his hilltop principality of Gorkha and its patron deities. Nepal's later rulers found it advantageous to define the new country as a Hindu state because top-down hierarchy

## Nepal is not yet secular. We still have a long way to go.

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Our Rivers



*Even outside of political crises, some of our biggest urban problems have remained the same all these years. Take Kathmandu's garbage for example. The root of the problem then, as now, lay in the lack of governance.*

*Nepal is an open defecation free zone but we still dump our trash on riverbanks and release untreated toilet water in the water bodies. There is open garbage burning, including plastic, further worsening air quality and reducing life expectancy in the process.*

*The problem is so chronic that sometimes satire is the most effective way to deliver the message. Excerpts from 'Under My Hat' from issue #73 21-27 December 2001:*

The Bagmati on a recent morning had a brut non-vintage redolence. The light-golden straw-colour with its effervescent bubbles was very soft on the nose, rich and well-structured. The powerful aroma

is a combination of digestive biscuits and radish gundruk.

Over at the Bishnumati, the water is deep green and has an attractive nose with intense notes of semi-digested momos in spice. It is supple on the palate, round, velvety but well-balanced, and very reminiscent of a 1997 Riesling Cuvee Sainte Catherine.

By afternoon, the anaerobic fermentation of the sludge along the bed of the Tukucha near the western wall of the Rastriya Samachar Samiti is releasing a lively elegance conveyed by citrus aromas, with a hint of roasted almonds and a bouquet of buffalo innards. This is a strong sample, and not for the faint-hearted.

Among the reds, the Hanumante is a deep crimson since it is situated downstream from a carpet dyeing unit. Against the light, the water looks full-blooded and is imbued with a racy nose with a hint of liconice, a touch of gameyness, and the plethora of unidentified floating objects giving it a robust fruitiness and a rounded finish.

But for the premium brand among reds, there is nothing to beat the Bagmati at Chobhar which has a strong purply-red hue with a tangy floral aroma of over-ripe grapefruit. There is slight froth due to incomplete enzyme activity, but the finish is rich and persistent.

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche combines the practical and philosophical dimensions of Tibetan Buddhism with modern psychology. The author of four books including *The New York Times* bestseller *The Joy of Living*, Mingyur Rinpoche sat with surgeon Saroj Dhital for an in-depth conversation on philosophy, meditation and healthy living.

### HUNTIN DIPLOMACY

Great piece of writing, very much recommended ('Centennial of hunting diplomacy in Nepal', Tom Robertson, #1090)! A historical anecdote on how Ranas established friendship with the then British regime and advocated for Nepal's sovereignty. It also unveils the cruel killings of wildlife in the past. The fact that they needed 800 elephants just to hunt a tiger is like straight out of the movies and beyond one's imagination today.

**Dinesh Karki**

• *Nepali Times* is Nepal's *The New York Times*, great archive.  
**Chun Gurung**

• A superb read, utterly fascinating!

**Madhav Acharya**

• How times change, now there are lectures on conservation from the great grandchildren of these very folks. Entitlement is the 300-year stint in telling others they are not up to snuff.

**Samphe Lhalungpa**

### GREEN PRAYER FLAGS

Every little step counts to protect the environment, whether it is coming from an individual or an organisation ('Let's only buy bio-degradable prayer flags', Ashish Dhakal, #1090). So those who are hurt or finding this switch to biodegradable flags problematic can go to sleep.

**Kunga Tsewang**

• The flags are iconic to the culture. It's not right changing the colours to white on the stupa. Each colour represents the five elements. It is rather easy to obtain handmade cotton prayer flags. She could have hand dyed with natural pigments just for Boudhanath.

**Karen Yeom**

• The origin of the *lung ta* was plain natural paper and charcoal ink and until a few years ago it stayed that way. To respect the representation of five colours, these biodegradable *lung ta* do have all the mantras printed in five colours. It is possible to use natural dye but not everyone can afford it and coloured clothes can be highly toxic.

**Ang Dolma Sherpa**

• We can easily sustain our green nature by using such biodegradable things.

**Devendra Shakten Rai**

• Let us stop buying synthetic prayer flags and help preserve both our heritage and the environment.

**Sundar Sherpa**

### COVID VACCINES

Thank you for this excellent article ('To vax or not to vax', Anjana Rajbhandary, #1089). Being an anti-vaxxer is indeed a self-centred privilege. People in Europe (where I live) and the U.S. need to hear the point of view of those less privileged and why the selfish decisions of the privileged impacts negatively on them. We will not beat this virus and put an end to its breeding ground for mutations until the vast majority in the world is fully vaccinated. We are One World with no borders - viruses don't need visas.

**Joy Stephens**

### TRI-CHANDRA

This appears to be a beautiful building with a wonderful history ('Tri-Chandra's run down state is a microcosm of Nepal', Sahina Shrestha, nepalitimes.com). In many cities around the world, people regret that more wasn't done to save similar buildings. I request Nepal's to examine the possibilities of forming a group to save this building before it is too late.

**Alan Roadnight**

• Tri Chandra reflects present day Nepal and contemporary politics. No one cares about it, but only wants to benefit from it.

**Gyurme Dondup**

• This is a part of our heritage. I hope all efforts will be made to restore it to its original glory soon.

**Bishow Parajuli**

### CAR VS PEOPLE

Kathmandu is possibly one of the most unplanned capitals in the world, a city where you build your house, or carry out major external modifications, and then get the approval ('Cars vs people in Kathmandu, Mark Perrin, nepalitimes.com'). Kathmandu is too built up for any planning to be done now. The best way ahead is to discourage people from moving here.

**Krishna Joshi**

• In Western countries cars own the road and pedestrians give way to cars. In Nepal people own the road and cars give way to pedestrians. That's the difference.

**Robert Vermont**

• Without any footpath, pedestrians in Nepal spill over on the roads.

**Lal Bahadur**

• After residing in Nepal for many years, I left in 2006 because of worsening vehicular pollution. Kathmandu is no longer a liveable city and the great tragedy is that it was preventable.

**Maggie Kerr**

## Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Let's only buy bio-degradable prayer flags

by *Ashish Dhakal*

Buddhist prayers for virtuousness and compassion are getting a green makeover in Nepal with eco-friendly *lung ta* and *khada*. Meet Ang Dolma Sherpa who is behind the initiative that aims to reduce garbage, and pollution. Watch video, too.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**



### Rights referees blow whistle on World Cup fouls

by *Kunda Dixit*

For Nepal's, the 2022 World Cup is personal. The eight stadiums in Qatar where the games will be held are built on the blood, sweat and tears of tens of thousands of migrant workers, including from Nepal. Read full story on [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

**Most popular on Twitter**

### Centennial of hunting diplomacy in Nepal

by *Tom Robertson*

Exactly 100 years ago on 14 December 1921, Nepal's Rana ruler hosted British royalty on a hunting expedition in Chitwan. Get a detailed account of this lavish hunt on our website and send in your own comments.

**Most commented**

### Pokhara's paragliders must relocate, but where?

by *Masta KC*

The city's new airport will be displacing its aerial sports companies, but there are plenty of even more exciting options. Find out what they are in this report online.

**Most visited online page**

## QUOTE TWEETS



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes Since the 2015 #earthquake, Tri-Chandra College has silently awaited restoration, even as schools around #Nepal were rebuilt. Six years after the #disaster, the century-old buildings are crumbling, with trees growing out of the walls.



**Krishna Kumar Limboo** @KrishnaKumarLi9 Leaders of all parties are well aware of how one of the country's oldest college buildings is. In fact, they are just waiting for its collapse and to sell the land.



**Tulasi shiwakoti** @tulashiwakoti Our oldest #educational institution, our home, eagerly awaiting the renovation. Concerned authorities should pay attention to this matter.



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes With the introduction of synthetic materials fewer khadas and lung ta are made of cloth and silk today. Now activists are launching a campaign to replace them with more #ecofriendly alternatives.



**WildYak** @WildYak11 Yes, even 20 years ago in Kathmandu, we could only find one person/ shop who used non plastic type material, and natural inks etc. Burning plastic materials and chemical dyes creates toxic chemicals and gases.



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes 'Died in his sleep' (सुत्ता सुत्दै मर्यो) has become a colloquial Nepali term with deaths attributed to "natural causes". But there is nothing natural about the migrant deaths. #InternationalMigrantsDay. @kundadixit reports:



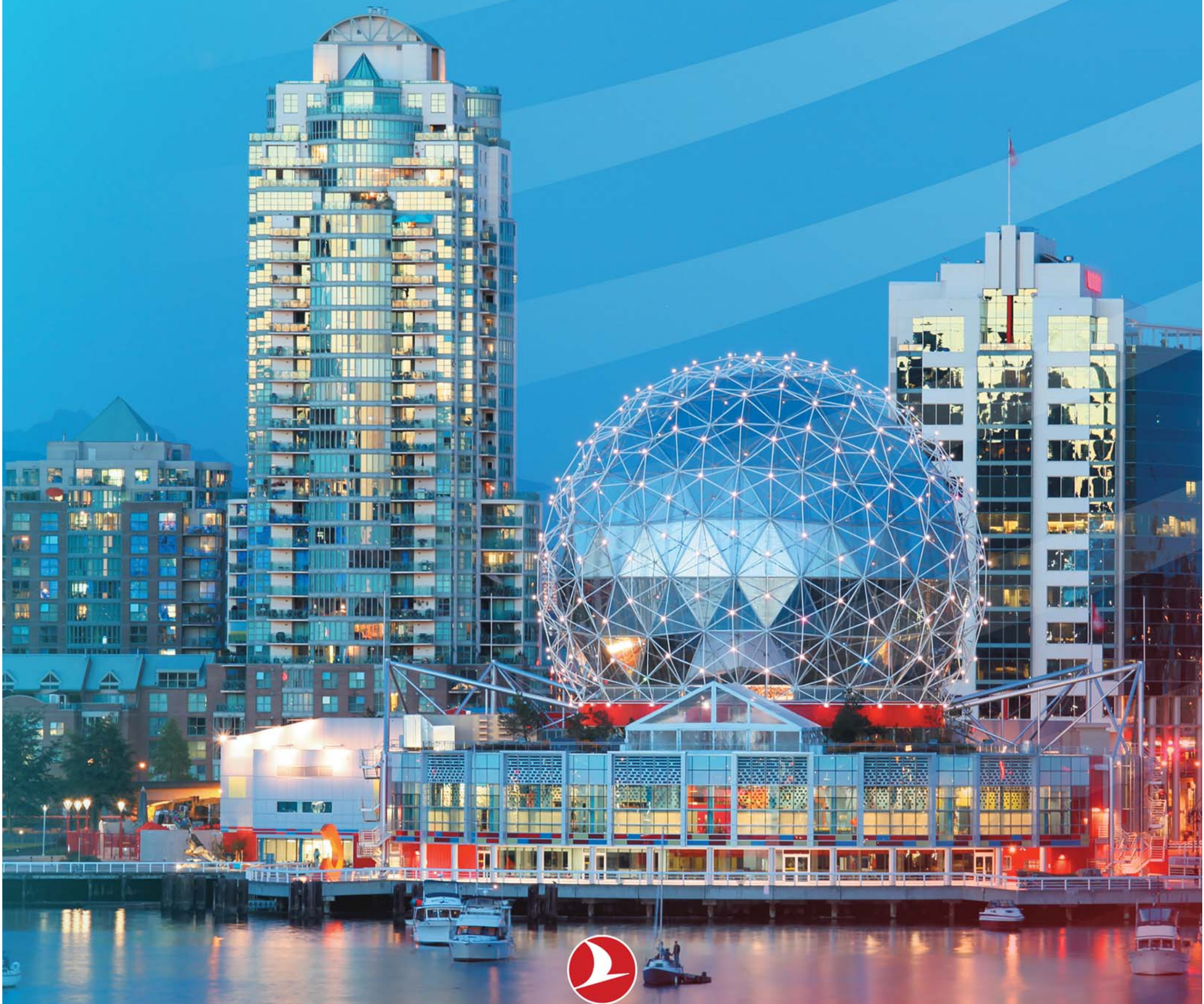
**Big Ben** @BigBen56383875 Qatar needs to look at their working conditions, but one thing it is not responsible for is the recruitment "fees" being charged in Nepal and other places. This is their own nationals abusing them, what is the Nepal government doing to stop this?



A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

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# China lobbying against MCC

The holdup in ratifying the MCC is not because of Nepal's domestic politics, but geopolitics

● Ramesh Kumar

A \$500 million American grant to upgrade Nepal's infrastructure appears at first glance to be delayed because of domestic politics. But the real reason appears to be Beijing's opposition to the project, and its pressure on politicians not to implement it.

Sources say the Chinese government has been showing unusual interest in the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) project as Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba prepares to present it for approval by the winter session of Parliament, despite opposition from coalition partners.

On 22 December, Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi made a hasty trip to the Balkot residence of former prime minister K P Oli who leads the opposition UML. Oli and Deuba back the American project, and some see this meeting of minds on the MCC as possibly triggering a breakup of the governing coalition.

On 13 December, Vice Minister Chen Zhou of the International Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held a video conference with the new UML General Secretary Shankar Pokharel.

Pokharel is said to have assured Zhou that his party would not allow activities that could damage Sino-Nepal relations. The UML's Bishnu Rijal confirmed that Zhou's call was about the MCC, but added ambiguously: "He must have had queries about projects in a neighbouring country."

Zhou also called Madhav Kumar Nepal of the Unified Socialists who also reiterated his support for China's concerns. Nepal has said he will reject the MCC if it affects ties with neighbouring countries.

CPC officials also held virtual meetings with Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoist Centre, who has not hidden his opposition to the MCC.

A government official said off

the record: "China does not want the MCC to go ahead, it has already conveyed as much to the top political leadership."

Speaker Agni Prasad Sapkota of the Maoist Centre, who is close to Beijing, has said the MCC would not move forward under his watch. His predecessor Krishna Bahadur Mahara has said he stopped MCC because it was anti-Chinese.

"China has already sent the message that it will not sit idly if the development activities in Nepal undermine its interests here," Nepal's former ambassador in Beijing Mahendra Bahadur Pandey told *Nepali Times*. "China was always concerned about the MCC,

and views it with suspicion."

China's objection to the project is most noticeable through op-eds. Wang Yiwei, a professor of international relations at the Renmin University, in one interview with *nepalkhabar.com* last October called the MCC 'an American ploy'.

Analyst Geja Sharma Wagle says Nepal must balance the interests of its neighbours India and China with that of the US: "It is in Nepal's interest to implement both the MCC and BRI projects based on our national needs."

MCC is seen as America's response to Beijing's Belt-Road Initiative (BRI) which promotes

connectivity and infrastructure in order to benefit China's influence and trade in the region.

Apart from the Maoist Centre and Unified Socialists, coalition members Janata Samajbadi Party and Rastriya Janamorchha are also against the American grant. Even the Hindu-Right Rastriya Prajatantra Party is not on board.

Deuba called an all-party meeting this week to discuss the MCC, but Oli did not show up. Representatives of other parties reiterated their opposition to the compact in its present form. Jhala Nath Khanal of Unified Socialists was named to yet another committee to study the MCC agreement.



## prabhu BANK

### Costlier cars

As rising imports have reduced foreign exchange reserves, with a fall in remittances and a widening trade deficit, Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) is set to increase the prices of four- and two-wheelers. Automobile importers now have to maintain a 50% cash margin when opening letters of credit (LC) in banks. Previously the margin was only 1%. If not in cash, the margin amount can also be



deposited by spending current, savings and call deposit accounts, but no interest can be paid on the amount. No loans can be disbursed even in domestic currency for purpose of depositing margin amounts and advanced payment will not be available for import. Electric vehicle imports, cars for government use, diplomatic missions and hospitals are exempt from this provision.

### New hydropower

NMB Bank Limited has executed financial closure of the 13.5MW Super Kabeli Khola A Hydropower Project and the 12MW Super Kabeli Khola Cascade Hydropower Project in Taplejung. Agreements for both projects were signed with lead financing from NMB Bank and Rastriya Banijya Bank. Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has also signed Power Purchase Agreements (PPA) with both companies. Super Kabeli Khola A and Super Kabeli Khola Cascade will be financed with Rs1.89 billion and Rs1.67 billion loans respectively.



### Nabil SmartPOS

Nabil Bank has signed a tripartite agreement with Daraz and imark to introduce Nabil SmartPOS, an Android portable payment solution. Customers shopping at Daraz will now be able to make payments through the features available within the SmartPOS.

### ICT Awards

The sixth edition of ICT Awards honored winners in 12 categories during an event held in Kathmandu on Friday. Kalika Secondary School, Butwal won the Digital Education ICT Award (government) and the Digital Education ICT Award (private) went to Rato Bangla School, Lalitpur. The Digital



Services government and private went to the Department of Land Management and Records, and Nepal Clearing House Limited respectively. Dipesh Pradhan was honored with the Entrepreneur ICT Award, Manohar Kumar Bhattarai won the Pioneer ICT Award, and the NCell Woman Icon ICT Award went to Guna Keshari Pradhan.

### Enterprise India

Chargés d'Affaires of the Embassy of India Namgya C Khampa inaugurated the Enterprise India Exhibition in Bhrikuti Mandap this week. Organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) with the support of Indian Ministry of



Commerce & Industry to promote Brand India, the show hopes to enhance bilateral trade and investment between India and Nepal. More than 50 Indian companies are participating.



### Christmas lighting

Radisson Hotel Kathmandu held the official Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony to welcome the holiday season. Dignitaries from various embassies, corporate houses and media houses were present during the event.



### Excellence Award

IME Life Insurance Company held the first annual Business Excellence Awards last week at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 200 award claimants, eight best agency managers and 32 MDRT (Million Dollar Round Table) agents were honored during the ceremony.



### Khukri musical tour

Khukri Rum in collaboration with Arbitrary Group is organising a musical campaign across Nepal. Music lovers can enjoy different genres of music during the event which is being held to promote rising Nepali performers.



# Looking back at the 1923 Nepal-Britain Treaty

● Santa Gaha Magar

Nearly 100 years ago, the Rana ruler of Nepal signed a treaty with British India that redressed some of the humiliation that the Gorkha Empire suffered after its defeat in war and the Sugauli Treaty of 1816.

To celebrate the new treaty on 21 December 1923, Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher Rana decreed two days of national holiday, freed prisoners from jails, and temporarily lifted the ban on gambling.

“The signing of the 1923 treaty with British India was a national festival with public buildings illuminated and joy on the streets,” Nepali diplomat Bhim Bahadur Pande writes in his memoir ‘त्यस बखतको नेपाल’. ‘Nepal had finally managed to erase the disgrace suffered 107 years ago with the Sugauli Treaty.’

Historian Pramod Shamsher Rana agrees in his own book ‘राणाशासनको वृत्तान्त’ that the 1923 treaty went a long way in ‘healing the wounds of 1816’. Indeed, the Sugauli Treaty forced the Gorkha Empire to cede two-thirds of the territory it had conquered to British India.

However, the treaty did not happen overnight. It took much skilful diplomacy and lobbying by Chandra Shamsher, who worked hard to prove to the British that Nepal was worthy of being declared an independent country. Drafts of the treaty went back and forth between Calcutta, London and Kathmandu for two years before being finalised.

Part of the reason the British agreed to sign a treaty so favourable to Nepal was because Nepal paid for it with their own blood. The Ranas sent 200,000 troops to defend the British during World War I. There were 24,000 casualties in Gallipoli and in the trenches of Belgium and France.

Pande writes that Nepal also helped British India in its dealings with Afghanistan at a time when the October Revolution rocked



**IN BLOOD AND INK:** British envoy to Nepal William O'Connor and Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher after signing the Treaty of Friendship with Nepal on 21 December 1923 at Singha Darbar (*left*). Mohan Shamsher Rana and Indian Ambassador to Nepal Chandeshwar Prasad Narayan Singh signing the 1950 treaty between Nepal and the newly-independent India also in Singha Darbar (*right*).

the Russia, and assisted the Younghusband expeditionary force to enter Tibet.

Besides, there was also symbolism to ingratiate the British to Nepal. The British envoy in Kathmandu, for example got a 20-horse escort and a 31-cannon royal salute when he travelled from Lainchour to Singha Darbar to sign the treaty. By treating the British ambassador as a king, Chandra Shamsher was buttering him up.

“The 1923 Peace and Friendship Treaty helped Nepal to be recognised internationally as an independent country and not just another Indian princely state,” explains former ambassador Dinesh Bhattarai. “It opened a new era for Nepal on the world stage.”

The Sugauli Treaty had allowed the East India Company to appoint a resident in Kathmandu, and after the 1923 the envoy was

re-designated as ‘ambassador’.

Although the 1923 treaty is regarded as the main foreign policy achievement of Chandra Shamsher’s rule, historians say Kathmandu did not capitalise fully on its provisions, and Nepal’s ruler also went on to misuse the treaty to suppress dissent in India.

For example, Nepal should have taken a reciprocal move to also establish an embassy in London on the same day that the British mission in Kathmandu became an embassy. Nor did Nepal apply for membership of the League of Nations established in 1918 after the end of the war in which so many Nepalis were killed.

The 1923 treaty had seven articles: the first deals with the establishment of friendly ties and guaranteeing each others’ sovereignty, the second said the Sugauli Treaty would

remain in effect, the third required both to inform the other if there were problems with neighbours, the fourth disallowed the use of the territory of one country against another, the fifth allowed Nepal to import weapons for its security, seventh removed customs duty for Nepal’s imports and exports.

A copy of the Treaty is preserved in Singha Darbar and bears the signatures of British Resident William O’Connor and Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher.

Chandra Shamsher used this article to ask the British to suppress Nepali pro-democracy activists in India at the time, and the British did stop publication in 1922 of the Gorkhali newspaper from India that opposed Gorkha recruitment.

Nepal’s lobbying for the treaty started three years after the war ended in 1918, and Chandra Shamsher hosted the British Crown Prince Edward on a lavish hunting expedition in Chitwan during his India tour in 1921. This ‘hunting diplomacy’ served its purpose.

“During the 1921 hunting expedition in Chitwan, Nepali and British officials reached a new understanding about Nepali independence,” wrote historian Tom Robertson in an article in *Nepali Times* last week. “They formalised things two years later in the Treaty of Friendship. Nepal would get weapons and a formal acknowledgment of its independence.”

Despite its importance for Nepal, the 1923 treaty does not get as much attention in Nepal, in Britain or in India. Researcher Tika Dhakal thinks this is because it is squeezed between two other treaties, the 1816 Sugauli treaty and the 1950 Treaty of Friendship between Nepal’s last Rana rulers and newly independent India.

Indeed, there has been criticism about the 1923 treaty, even from the very day it was signed. They came from those who opposed the Rana oligarchy in Nepal, or those against Gorkha recruitment by the British, and later from officials who maintained that the 1950 treaty superseded 1923.

However, former ambassador Bhekh Bahadur Thapa says: “Of course there are questions about the 1923 Treaty, but that does not diminish its importance and relevance for Nepal.” 🇳🇵

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# NEW YEAR NEW PLACES

*Nepali Times* picks 5 eclectic getaways to welcome 2022



## Soaltee Westend Premier, Nepalganj



Equipped with infrastructure that is both eco-friendly and luxurious, Soaltee Westend Premier is the ideal hangout in Nepalganj for the eco-conscious traveller. It is the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified Silver Category hotel in Nepal with a ground water recharge system, rainwater harvesting, recycling of toilet effluent and measures to save energy. Visitors can sleep soundly at night, not worrying about their carbon footprint.

The hotel is just 10 minutes away from the airport, making it a good choice for those looking for a comfortable stay after treks. It was designed to cater to an influx of Indian pilgrims headed to Mt Kailash, although the pandemic ruined that idea. Still, travellers can

relax at the spa and sauna, enjoy snacks in the in-house café, or head down to the Sunset bar.

For those looking for adventure, Bardia National Park is only a few hours away. Pay a visit to the grasscutter's lane to taste the tradition and life in rural Nepal. At the city centre, indulge in some local delicacies and barbecue street food. Sweat it all out in the in-house gym at the hotel or take a leisurely swim in the first-floor swimming pool.

Single: Rs6,500++ (breakfast included)  
Double: Rs7,500++ (breakfast included)  
<https://www.soalteewestend.com/>  
081 - 551145/48/86/87



## Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, Pokhara

People don't come to Tiger Mountain to see tigers, although tigers have started being sighted higher along the Himalaya lately. An occasional leopard does stroll by at night. But most visitors come here for the mountains after seeing tigers in the hotel's sister properties in Bardia or Chitwan. The surrounding forest is alive with birds, and a 30 minute stroll yields sightings of at least 40 different species. The trees and thick undergrowth of the community forests are a favourite for birds, with 332 of Nepal's 867 species found here. Two new sightings were recorded last year: White-fronted Goose and Short-eared Owl. There are 350 species of butterflies and dragonflies.

Nestled at 1,200m on a ridge, Tiger Mountain commands an unparalleled vista

from Gurja Himal in the west, along a jagged horizon of the Annapurnas, Machapuchre's skyscraping pyramid, Lamjung Himal, right up to Manaslu and Himalchuli to the east. The place is ideal for those looking for a calm pre- or post-trek stay, for nature lovers, and for exploring local communities in rural setting.

While most will come for the mountain views, Pokhara has a lot more to offer than Machapuchre. The ridge where Tiger Mountain is situated was first located by trekking pioneer Jimmy Roberts while trying to find prominent hilltops to erect radio masts for the 1960 elections. It then became a camping spot for Prince Charles' trek to Nepal in 1979, and the 'Royal Trek' that it popularised: more relaxed scenic day hikes around Pokhara.

Nepalis \$140 per night/person (+tax)  
Foreigners \$195 per night/person (+tax)  
Includes accommodation in double or twin sharing basis, all meals, non-bar hot drinks throughout the day, arrival and departure transfers and local guides.  
<https://tigermountainpokhara.com/>  
01 472 0580, 98611 17717



### Inside Valley

Durbar Marg: 014226287 | Bouddha: 014475666 | Thimi: 016634838 |  
LABIM, Pulchowk: 015542942 | Maharajgunj: 014016148 | Kalanki: 9802311802 |  
Naxal: 9802337143 | Baneshwor: 9801114802

### Outside

Pokhara  
Itahari  
Hetauda





## The Old Inn, Bandipur

Most people driving from Kathmandu to Pokhara do not realise that 30 minutes off the highway and up a mountain side is the jewel of Central Nepal: Bandipur. The old Newa trading town with its pedestrianised cobblestone main street is a model of how heritage tourism should be done in Nepal.

At the centre of Bandipur bazar is The Old Inn: a restored four-storey Newa townhouse of timber and warm red bricks. The carved beams and staircases add to the charm of this centuries-old structure true to Kathmandu Valley's traditional architecture.

The rooms have low ceilings and doors, and the ambience more than makes up for the absence of the usual accoutrements of a modern hotel room. They are comfortable and decorated with Buddhist and Newa art, and locally made furniture. Food is delicious and prepared entirely from locally-sourced organic ingredients.

Those spending the day here can take a leisurely hike to Ramkot, a Magar village two hours away, and learn first-hand about age-old farming methods. If you like more adventure, you can hike to Siddha Cave (4 hours down and up) and even do a bit of spelunking.

Situated on a ridge at 1,030m elevation, Bandipur is sunny all winter when the Marsyangdi Valley below and Pokhara to the west are shrouded in fog. As the sky clears up, a vast mountain vista opens up, revealing the stunning Annapurnas, Himalchuli and Ganesh Himal.

A Magar kingdom before Prithvi Narayan Shah took over nearly 300 years ago, Bandipur was settled by Newa traders from Kathmandu Valley in later centuries, bringing with them art, culture and architecture that have been preserved intact – even as they slowly disappear in Kathmandu itself.

Easily accessible from Kathmandu (4

hours), Pokhara (2 hours) and Chitwan (1.5 hours), Bandipur will soon be connected to the highway by a scenic cable car. Visitors can opt for lunch on arrival at The Old Inn and take a guided tour of the town, and then savour authentic Nepali cuisine for dinner.

At the end of the day, The Old Inn provides a soothingly tranquil environment to wind down over sundowners on the terrace, making it a place perfect for families and groups of friends for a festival holiday.

For Nepalis (all prices include service charge and VAT)  
Single room with bed and breakfast: Rs5,000  
Single room with either lunch or dinner and breakfast: Rs6,000  
Single room with breakfast, lunch, and dinner: Rs7,000  
info@rural-heritage.com  
+977 1 4522617, 4522618, 9808882270



## Charikot Panorama Resort, Dolakha

Designed in collaboration with a Swiss architect and built in the late 90s, Charikot Panorama Resort provides a comfortable stay with a friendly and homely atmosphere.

Perched atop a hillock in Dolakha, the resort is a perfect weekend getaway. The resort offers a full package of accommodation, and can organise trips to Rolwaling, Jiri or Kalinchok, now linked with cable car.

Rolwaling Himal, including majestic Gauri Shankar (7,134m) and Melungtse (7,181m) are directly to the north. The hotel offers traditional Swiss (think fondue) and Nepali cuisine prepared by trained chefs.

You can also take a stroll down the old trading town of Dolakha Bazar with its old mint house and the Bhimsen Tower. Bring your binoculars to the four-storey high Charikot View Tower to take in the breathtaking view of the surrounding landscape.

The vegetables served are homegrown organically in the hotel's garden. Don't miss out on the homemade bread and plum jam during breakfast and opt for dinner by the bonfire during the chilly evenings.

The resort also features a small library and is pet friendly. Rooms are heated, which is welcome during the chilly nights.

Standard Half board (includes set dinner and breakfast)  
Single: Rs4,400  
Double: Rs7,500  
Triple: Rs9,900  
Room-only starts at: Rs3,800  
All rates inclusive of VAT and Service charge.  
www.charikotresort.net  
01-5529463, 9802189822



Outside Valley  
Pokhara: 61457464 | Bharatpur (CG Landmark): 056596344 |  
Tahari: 9801199234, 025-584927 | Nepalgunj: 9801199123 |  
Metauda: 9801969048

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our Viber channel!



## Ghale Gaun Homestay, Lamjung

There can be no better way to experience the famed Nepali hospitality from a pre-trekking era than at Ghale Gaun.

This historic village in Lamjung is where for more than two decades Gurung families have opened their homes to guests.

Located 4 hour drive northwest of Kathmandu at an altitude of 2,100m, Ghale Gaun was first developed as a model SAARC village in 2008. Today, it draws trekkers and tourists to the Gurung Heritage Trail, which starts at Besisahar and ends in Thumsikot. The route includes several other villages within the Annapurna Conservation Area, including Ghanpokhara, Bhujung and Pasaun, which also offer homestay services.

“Out of 120 households in Ghale Gaun, 40 homes currently provide homestay

services,” says Dirgha Ghale of the Ghale Gaun Tourism Management Committee.

“Homestay operators reopened their doors to tourists in mid-August following a crippling months-long Covid-induced shutdown.”

Visitors can either ride up to Besisahar and make a 6-hour trek to the village, or drive straight up for a relaxed family trip.

Ghale Gaun offers an authentic experience of the Gurung culture and way of life. Stay in Gurung ‘ghumaune’ round-houses, savour local cuisine and beverages, and enjoy the breathtaking view of Manaslu in the east, Lamjung and Annapurna II to the north. Visitors can meander through the bazar, visit the famed Uttarkanya Temple, bird-watch at the Talangyo Lake, or walk through the expansive tea garden. You can also sit in the sun overlooking terraced farmlands and listen to former Gorkhas recount stories of battles in far away lands in days gone by.

Ghale Gaun Tourism Management Committee  
Price: Rs1,100-1,200 per day (3 meals included)



EVENTS



Sanepa Market

Check out food, accessories, thrift finds, and more at the weekly Sanepa Market. Get the Christmas hampers as gifts during this week's Christmas themed market.  
*Saturdays, 9am-2pm, Kyampa, Sanepa*

Christmas Mela

Shop for products this Christmas season at up to 50% discounts at Kalpamart's Christmas ko Mela.  
*24-26 December, Perisdada, Koteshtwar (01) 4600796*

Mallory and Pumori: 1921 Rendezvous

An event to commemorate how the Pumori peak came to be named a century ago will be presented by Kanak Mani Dixit.  
*28 December, 3-4:30pm, Dwarika's Hotel, Battisputali. (Limited, distanced seating)*

Pame Film Festival

The fifth Pame Film and Music Festival in Pokhara will include 16 Nepali films, 36 short films and 20 international films.  
*27-31 December, Pokhara*

Art Exhibition

Windhorse Gallery's latest exhibition 'Whistle Blowers' will be Nepali artist Bharat Rai's first solo showcase.  
*Until 17 January, 10am-6pm, Windhorse Gallery*



Theatre Lab

Applications are open for the ninth edition of Theatre Lab, a short term theatre qualification program for novice theatre learners, which will be conducted by and hosted at Mandala Theatre in January.  
*Application deadline: 31 December*

MUSIC

Raaz Babu Nepal

Raaz Babu Nepal will be live this Friday to liven up Christmas Eve with a musical evening at Parpala Bistro & Cafe.  
*24 December, 3pm, Parpala Bistro & Cafe, Sankhamul*



Jazz evening

Celebrate this Christmas eve at Dhokaima with Jazz Duo Naresh and Maria. Spice up the evening with mulled wine and hot rum punch.  
*24 December, 6:30pm, Dhokaima Cafe, Patandhoka*

Pokhara Street Festival

The 23rd iteration of Nepal's biggest street festival in the tourist city will feature live performance from Bipul Chettri and the Travelling Band. Enjoy the fine amalgamation of food, music and culture.  
*31 December, Lakeside, Pokhara*

Gauley Bhai

Enjoy live Nepali folk rock music this Christmas Eve with the band Gauley Bhai, who are back in Kathmandu after a year.  
*24 December, 6pm, Over Easy BnB, Bansbari*



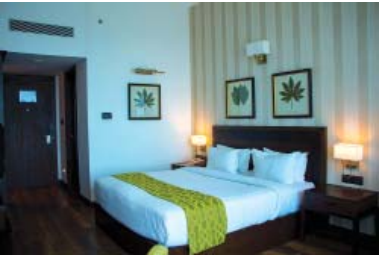
Weekend at BNC

This weekend at Beers n' Cheers will be jam-packed with performances by bands Project 901 and Realized Beings on Christmas Eve as well as Ai Faak, Strangle420 and Pahlenlo Batti Muni through Christmas Day and into evening.  
*24-25 December, Beers n' Cheers, Jhamsikhe*

Los KTM Gatos

Enjoy a musical Christmas this Saturday with the band Los KTM Gatos, who will be performing their final show of 2021 at Vidroh.  
*25 December, Vidroh, Saat Ghunti Marg*

GETAWAY



Soaltee Westend Premier

Celebrate a candle-lit Christmas with live music from Gham Pani at Soaltee Westend Premier, the expansive energy-efficient getaway located in the green plains of Nepalganj. Enjoy festive-season discounts on food and beverages. Read more about it on page 6-7.  
*Nepalganj, (081) 551145*

Fish Tail Lodge

Spend this holiday season at Fish Tail Lodge located on the quieter side of Phewa Lake with its innovative architectural design and breathtaking panoramic views of mountains. Go to [www.fishtail-lodge.com](http://www.fishtail-lodge.com) for details about Christmas and New Year gala dinners, as well as room packages.  
*Phewa Lake, Pokhara (61) 465071*

Jagatpur Lodge

Spend the New Year at Jagatpur Lodge, nestled in the jungle grassland, with special tents which are no less than 5 star rooms consisting of a private viewing deck to relish the breathtaking beauty of Chitwan. Get details of the New Year's Eve Gala Dinner and the one night accommodation package at [www.jagatpurlodge.com](http://www.jagatpurlodge.com)  
*Cost: Rs13,000 (single occupancy)/Rs19,500 (double occupancy), Jagatpur, Chitwan, (01)4221711*

Ultralight flight

Gift a loved one with an Ultralight flight over the breathtaking Annapurna region this Christmas. Send an email to [info@aviacubnepal.com](mailto:info@aviacubnepal.com) to enquire about the Gift Voucher, or call for details.  
*Avia Club Nepal, 9840898679*



Park Village

Have a four-course Christmas lunch with family at Park Village, spread across five acres of tranquil, wooded gardens north of Kathmandu.  
*Budhanilkantha, (01) 4370286*

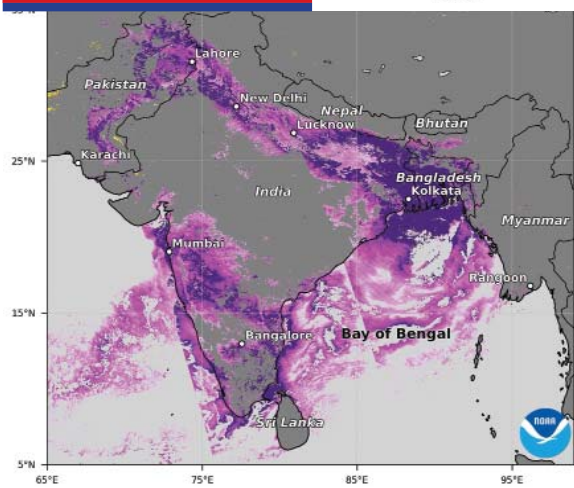
WEEKEND WEATHER



The frigid conditions will continue in Kathmandu Valley with the mercury dropping to its lowest so far this winter to 16C on Saturday. The minimum will hover in the 2-4C range. However, outside the city's heat bubble there will be morning frost. The inversion layer will be more pronounced, although in the absence of water vapour, it will be mainly smoggy. The Trisuli and Narayani river valleys will be fogbound till mid-morning, so careful on the highways. There aren't any substantial weather systems about, although the long-term forecast is of a wet post-Christmas and New Year period.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
19° 3°	19° 3°	17° 3°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



With winter setting in, the Valley's night-time inversion will persist till mid-morning, trapping suspended particles. The PM2.5 AQI levels will be edging towards 200 – which is the Hazardous Red Zone. We would advise staying home as much as possible in the mornings, and especially not engage in any strenuous outdoor exercise. Buying an air purifier for the bedroom is also a good idea. This NOAA satellite image on Monday (left) shows smoke engulfing the Indo-Gangetic plain, also affecting parts of Nepal.

OUR PICK



In director Jon Watts' *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, high school student Peter Parker's life turns upside down in a day when his identity as the web-slinging superhero Spider-Man is revealed to the world. Desperate to find a way to clear his name of a crime he did not commit and to protect his identity once again, Peter turns to Doctor Strange, the Sorcerer Supreme. But when Doctor Strange's spell intended to help Peter goes wrong, dangerous foes from other worlds begin to appear, forcing the young hero to confront enemies from across the multiverse. Stars Tom Holland, Benedict Cumberbatch, Zendaya, Jacob Batalon, Marissa Tomei and more.

DINING



Embassy Restaurant

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

Le Sherpa

Enjoy a special dinner of herb-roasted turkey, black rice risotto, and grilled trout and more, accompanied by exquisite piano and violin performances at Le Sherpa. Call for reservations.  
*24-25 December, Maharajganj (01) 4428604*

Christmas at Radisson

Book a table for family and friends and enjoy a delectable Christmas Eve's Dinner with live music at the Terrace Garden, or have Christmas Day lunch at The Coffee Shop. Or call The Coffee Shop for Christmas desserts.  
*24-25 December, Radisson Hotel, (01) 4411818*



Haadi Biryani

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



BBQ Party

Enjoy the evening with some Christmas Eve barbecue and mocktails, along with live music.  
*24 December, Rs1999, Genesis Cafe (01) 4002788*

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

नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

अब मासिक हिमाल १ पुसदेखि बजारमा ।

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# The story of books in Nepal

Writers and publishers experimented with bold new formats in 2021, building on a long tradition

● Ashish Dhakal

The sheer size of Kumar Nagarkoti's 'कल्प-ग्रन्थ' (*Kalpa-Grantha*) is staggering: 777 pages and weighing 1.5kg. This is a boulder of a book.

Packaged as a ready-made gift in a sleek bag, the royal-sized book fits snugly inside a box (*pictured, below*), accompanied by a postcard and a bookmark. More than a novel marketing strategy, this packaging marks Nagarkoti's 10th anniversary as a writer, and also his 10th book.

"The book is a celebration of my journey as an author. So, it had to be special," said Nagarkoti, sporting his distinctive grey goatee, neck and wrists looped in beads (*photo, right*).

Brought out by Book Hill Publications in March, *Kalpa-Grantha* is an ergodic rarity in the Nepali literary sphere, and marked a radical departure from the standard book designs. There are 68 surreal stories across

genres and typographies, even postcards, as Nagarkoti experiments with format, style and structure.

The book was available only by pre-order and delivered directly to readers, another first in Nepali publishing, but the print-run for this edition has now been discontinued. "It was to be a one-time special edition," explains publisher Bhupendra Khadka at Book Hill.

Another 2021 book that experiments with language and form to find novel ways of storytelling is Jason Kunwar's 'रमिते' (*Ramite*) published by Red Panda Books. Set in a fictional landscape, it is the first in a planned cycle of four closely related multimedia projects, which include music, live performance, art installation and film.

Kunwar's polyphonic novel is composed of text, drawings, songs and poetry reflecting his experience as a multi-instrumentalist and ethnomusicologist. Soon to be translated into English, it is a story of civilisation and human instinct, set in an imagined world resembling Nepal's mountains, valleys, rivers. But what sets it apart is not the treatment of social realism, but the unconventional layout used to enhance content, and impact on readers.

Unconventionality is largely dictated by what the norm is. When the majority of published work follows an established format, books like *Kalpa-Grantha* and *Ramite* use shock value to stand out.

This was most likely also the case 119 years ago when hand copied manuscripts of Girish Ballabh Joshi's *Bir Charitra* used to be passed around among eager



readers. This was the earliest Nepali novel, and in 1903 was far ahead of its time with elements of fantasy, even foretelling the genre-bending contemporary fiction of today. "In early Nepali publishing history

there are books that stand out, they tend to be religious ones with elaborate designs, colourful texts, woodblock prints, photographs and reproductions of paintings," says archivist Deepak Aryal at Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya.

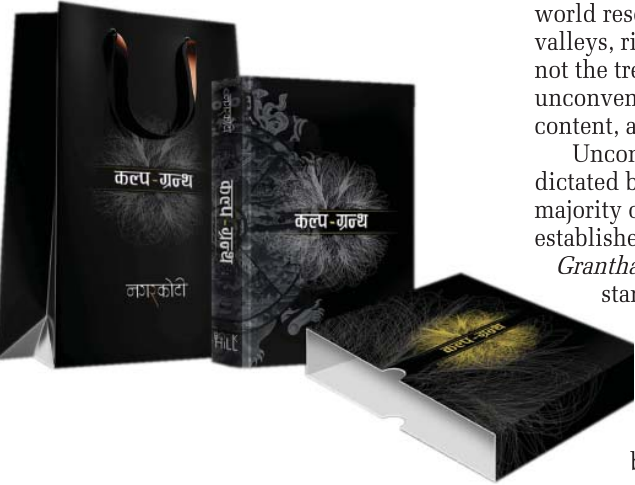
The earliest printed Nepali book is actually a translation in Darjeeling of the Bible in 1821. Later, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were printed with pictures of deities and depictions of key scenes, and they brought the reader's imagination to life.

Some early prints of Bhanubhakta Acharya's *Ramayana* did not have line breaks and space between words because these were part of the oral tradition, and were meant to be read aloud.

Diverse typography, illustrations and design elements have always been used in Nepali literature to tell a story, and make books more engaging to readers. Nagarkoti's use of hand-written comments by the editors on the margins of text in *Kalpa-Grantha* therefore follows a long tradition of innovation, coupled with the advances in publishing.

Such 'conceptual stories' are not trying to confuse us with gimmicks, but get readers to visualise the two sides of writing – the author's and the editor's – and imagine a collaborative process without being diegetic. Sindhiya Shrestha, a Nagarkoti fan, describes the process as trying to connect with the author. "It's a touch of newness," she says.

As Nagarkoti pointed out in an interview, stories are not limited to the written word. "Reading is like dreaming, fuelled by imagination, and comes in many different forms," he said. "The book is a composition, and reading is an experience." 🇳🇵



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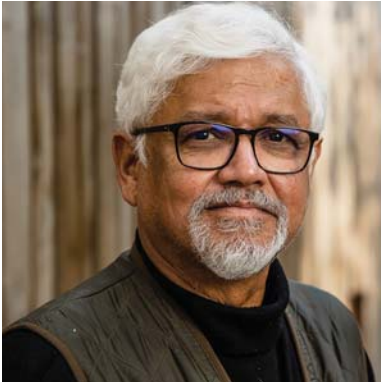


# Must-read climate trilogy for

Amitav Ghosh's three fiction and non-fiction books deal with the history of colonial greed that lie at the root of the climate emergency

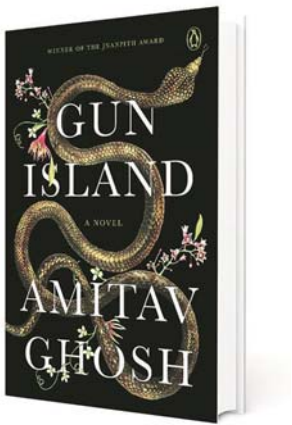
● Marilyn Lubetkin

Born in Calcutta, and now a New York-based writer, Amitav Ghosh approaches the subject of the global environmental crisis through two literary genres: fiction and non-fiction. As a celebrated novelist, Ghosh is known for his meticulously researched works of fiction that take complex transnational historical events, and weave characters into them, so that readers get a close idea of what it was like to live through those times. *The Calcutta Chromosome*, for instance, is a tale woven around the malaria scourge that has lessons for the current pandemic. In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh takes us back to colonial Burma, Malaya and Bengal, and the story of a family caught up in upheavals. *The Hungry Tide* recounts the story of a young Indian scientist in the ecologically fragile mangroves of the Sundarban in the Ganges delta. And *Sea of Poppies* is about fictional characters caught up in the very real Opium Wars.



While Ghosh specialises in historical novels that blend fact and fiction, he has also written powerful non-fiction books, including the ethnographic *In an Antique Land*, and *Countdown* which is about regional radioactive fallout of a future India-Pakistan nuclear war. *The Great Derangement* in 2016 looked at the reluctance of politicians, novelists, artists and movie-makers to grasp and respond to the climate emergency (*see review, overleaf*). Ghosh's pre-pandemic novel *Gun Island* could be seen as a response to the questions he himself raised in *The Great Derangement* about the paucity of novels dealing with climate change. In this fictional work, we are taken in typical Amitav fashion on the journey of a 50-something Bengali American, as he finds his view of reality shifting. Dinanath Datta, more commonly known by his American name Deen, is a dealer of rare books with a natural affinity for the ancient and

poetic. While on an annual visit to his hometown of Kolkata, he is persuaded into taking a last minute boat escapade into the Sundarbans, the same mangrove archipelago that is the setting for the earlier novel *The Hungry Tide*. Deen heads to a riverbank with a shrine in honour of the protagonist of an old Bengali legend. Upon learning more about the details of this mysterious folk tale, Deen begins to recognise that this narrative may be based on a real life experience of an individual living during climatic changes of the 'Little Ice Age' 500 year ago, when a cold period swept the planet. Needless to say, there are many parallels to the climate crisis we are experiencing today. Deen, a secular realist, realises that the greatest barrier to humanity dealing with a global emergency is greed. He thinks (and obviously the author does, too, through his character) that the religious concept of demons is a metaphor for greed. 'According to Hindu mythology, when demons take over is when the world ends,' Ghosh writes on behalf of his character. Humans are inherently greedy and this nuanced take is the theological summary of the anthropocene. While demons have not actually taken over the earth, demonic ideation has. Later in the novel, Deen's close confidant, Cinta, states that when she looks at this world 'with the diagnostic tools of an Inquisitor, it becomes [apparent] that the world of today presents all of the symptoms of demonic possession'.



*Gun Island*  
Penguin Random House India  
Paperback, 320 pages  
Available at Patan Book Shop

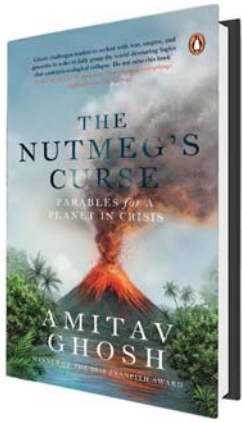
Cinta sums up our current climate crisis in a most particular, yet insightful fashion: 'Everybody knows what must be done if the world is to continue to be a liveable place ... and yet we are powerless, even the most powerful among us. We go about our daily business through habit, as though we were in the grip of forces that have overwhelmed our will; we see shocking and monstrous things happening all around us and we avert our eyes; we surrender ourselves willingly to whatever it is that has us in its power.' This is a striking and eloquent explanation of a world held in the spell of a capitalist consumer culture that has numbed us to its consequences on nature and life. The phenomenon of greed has "possessed" us in that way.

*Gun Island* is a bit of a slow burn, but once the action begins the pages turn easily. Ghosh weaves references to contemporary events and issues, while incorporating them into human history. He is able to illustrate the importance of maintaining a relationship with the unknown and mystical, as well as how that can actually strengthen one's relationship with reality. The author leaves his reader wanting to show strength in stepping out of the demonic chokehold of greed and extravagance that society is currently in, and stand up for Mother Earth. To ram the point home, Amitav Ghosh then used the pandemic lockdown to write a non-fiction corollary to his novel, *The Nutmeg's Curse*, released last month. In it, Ghosh speaks as himself, and not through one of his characters, about the history of cruelty and plunder behind the 'discovery' of the New World, and the European colonialism elsewhere in the world. By recalling gory details of extermination of nature and genocides of indigenous people, Ghosh reminds us that the planetary emergency we face today is just an extension of the holocaust that local people suffered in past centuries at the hands of the conquistadors. In fact, it presages the current crisis. The reader is shown how the 'conjoined processes of violence, physical and intellectual, were all necessary for the emergence of a new economy based on extracting resources from a desacralized,

VORTEX<sup>824</sup>



# 2022



*The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables of a Planet in Crisis*  
Penguin Random House India  
Paperback, 352 pages  
Available at Patan Book Shop

inanimate Earth'.

Ghosh is referring to the spiritual relationship indigenous communities have always maintained with Mother Earth. But modern industrialised societies look at the planet only through the lens of what she can offer us, paying no heed to the fact that we destroy nature at our own peril – as the Climate-Covid co-crises remind us.

*The Nutmeg's Curse* first takes us to 1621, when the Dutch colonial military wipes out the entire population of the Banda Islands in present day Indonesia to control the trade in the invaluable native nutmeg tree. Nutmegs were one of the most desired items of luxury and wealth in Europe at the time, driving the spice trade.

The value of this fruit drove

the Dutch East India Company to compete with the British to control the islands, and to do so they had to exterminate the local inhabitants. As with the entire European colonial project in South and Southeast Asia, Africa and the Americas, anything that stood in the way of resource extraction (nature, non-white humans and non-human animals) were expendable.

The curse of the nutmeg for Ghosh is an allegory for the more modern resource curse of fossil fuels behind the current climate crisis. Replace nutmeg with petroleum, and you can see how colonialism laid the foundations for the present planetary emergency.

Ghosh shows how the colonial process treated indigenous people as subhuman, and their knowledge of and sustainable co-existence with nature as 'primitive'.

The book gives us a long litany of horrors of European colonisation perpetrated on people around the world, systematically muting them, replacing forests with plantations, native cultures with slavery, and obliterating the natural world.

In a way, this is an alternative take on the history of the world, diametrically different from the history text books in schools that are dominated by laudatory retellings of politics and conquests that mined resources to fuel industrial 'civilisation'.

*The Nutmeg's Curse* also underlines the connectivity between our colonial history right down to the Black Lives Matter movement and the global pandemic. Ghosh tells us how he sat down to write the book during the pandemic lockdown in Brooklyn in 2020, as sirens blared outside and bodies had to be kept in refrigerated trucks because hospital morgues had filled up.

The reader is able to understand that in order to even begin to fight against social and environmental injustices, we must make changes in the way we live and govern ourselves.

Ghosh writes: 'much, if not most, of humanity today lives as colonialists once did — viewing the Earth as though it were an inert entity that exists primarily to be exploited and profited from'.

If we can somehow backtrack and learn to co-live with Gaia in the compassionate way that native folks once did, then there will be hope. We must speak up, and unlearn accepted practices, the deeply-rooted greed and over-consumption that dominate our lives.

*The Nutmeg's Curse* is an eye-opener. Ghosh is not preaching to the converted here, he provides even skeptics and deniers with a holistic history of global capitalism and its model of perpetual growth that underpins the current climate emergency.

Full of rich and meaningful history, these accounts of genocides and plunder illuminate the implications of Western colonialism in so many of our current sources of distress.

Readers of the novel, *Gun Island*, and the non-fiction, *The Nutmeg's Curse*, will have to decide for themselves which form of literature is more effective in communicating the urgency of the climate crisis.

These two books should be read together, they reinforce one another, and the impact is greater than the sum of their parts. 🇮🇳

*Marilyn Lubetkin is a first-year student at Pitzer College in California. As a Houston, Texas, native, Marilyn experienced first hand the impact of climate change when she lost her childhood home to the disastrous flooding induced by Hurricane Harvey in 2017.*

## Deranged climate

Amitav Ghosh published *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* before Donald Trump and his merry bunch of climate refuseniks assumed power in 2016. Yet, the key message of his book about the nature of empire in an age of globalisation that is driven by populism and climate denial is eerily prophetic.

Global disparities have widened in the post-colonial world. But for true climate justice, countries would need to cut emissions by 80-90%, something that is politically untenable for petroleum addicts.

Since he was so accurate in predicting how climate denialism in America could lead to someone-like-Trump, we have to believe Ghosh when he draws a parallel between the carbon economy and militarism.

The irony is that while Trump backpedaled on the environment, the American military saw increased instability around the world due to global warming. It is addressing the new challenge of 'green security' through greater surveillance of environmental activists and an 'armed lifeboat' mentality.

'Corporations and energy billionaires' are funding research to sow confusion about anthropomorphic climate change to get the corporate media to underplay the dangers of global warming by trying to be 'balanced'. Such false equivalence was seen in the way the US media covered Trump during his election campaigns.

Ghosh wrote the following lines at a time when a Trump victory was not even a remote possibility: 'The denial and disputing of scientific findings has become a major factor in the climate politics of the Anglosphere.'

Ghosh sees laissez-faire individualism that underpins Anglo-Saxon cultures as central to the climate crisis: 'The rate of climate denial tends to be unusually high' in the US, UK and Australia.

It is the Anglosphere that is driving the global carbon economy of the anthropocene to protect the western 'way of life'.

Ghosh acknowledges that official denialism in these countries exist in direct contradiction to a growing citizens' movement and global environmental activism.

The grip of fossil barons on the new US administration is so strong that it has failed to see the potential to make money from renewable resources, even after Trump's departure and the advent of the Biden administration. Under public opinion pressure, the Nordics are weaning themselves off petroleum: new car sales in Norway will be 100% zero emission by 2025, and one breezy day last July, Denmark produced 140% of its electricity from wind farms and exported the surplus to neighbours.

China has discovered that 'green' is not just synonymous with environment but also with 'greenbacks', and is the world's largest exporter of wind turbines, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaics. America is playing catch-up in the global race for green energy. India, for its part, will soon be the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases and in Glasgow it watered down coal 'phase-out' to 'phase-down'.

The author forces us to think about industrial agriculture that is burning hydrocarbon energy to provide carbohydrate energy for seven billion humans: 'The climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination, intimately linked with the wider histories of imperialism and capitalism.'

In 1998, after India's first underground atomic test, Ghosh wrote *Countdown* on how fallout from a full nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan would contaminate the Himalayan icecap, turning rivers that irrigate half of Asia radioactive.

That danger persists, but the accelerated deposition of soot from coal and diesel burning in the Subcontinent is also hastening the melting of Himalayan glaciers in Asia's water tower. 🇮🇳

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# Domestic frights

Although Nepal’s airlines have weathered the pandemic and remained airworthy, there are concerns about whether Covid has removed forever the magic and the romance of flight. It is hard to believe that it was only a century ago that the first heavier-than-air humans defied gravity and took to the skies.

And just look at how far we have come since then. Modern airliners offer the epitome of luxury and comfort: seats equipped with Shiatsu backside massage, high speed internet, and futsal on the upper deck. Meanwhile in Economy, eco-friendly airlines now offer free fully-biodegradable family-size barf bags.

Modern aviation is governed by the Vienna Convention as well as by Newton’s Second Law of Thermodynamics which states that the most garrulous gentleman from the Subcontinent, with odoriferous socks and a sneezing fit, must occupy the seat next to you on the 16-hour flight to Chicago.

On a red-eye to Europe, the bulkhead bassinet will invariably have a baby who wails non-stop right across the air space of all five ex-Soviet Central Asian republics.

In these troubled times, we have to find ways to re-inject awe and wonder to the experience of flying, which is why we are chuffed to hear that Nepal’s brand new Minister of Vermiculture, Marxism and Space Cadets has tried to ensure just that with some bold decisions.

One of the first things he announced after swearing himself in was that once-Royal Nepal Airlines has been granted an ICAO license to carry dangerous goods. (If you don’t believe me, google him.) I am not sure a national flag carrier should necessarily be proud that its aircraft now carry hazardous cargo. But, hey, it also shows that we are not a nation of cowards. Nims Dai Was Born In Nepal.

The resumption of free beer service on the Delhi shuttle is another proud accomplishment that will restore RA to the glory days of the Dakota, when passengers were allowed to board with one goat each as carry-on luggage on flights from Bharatpur to Palungtar provided it did not exceed the dimensions of the overhead rack.

In the Covid era, there are other steps the Civil Aviation Authoritarians of Nepal (CAAN’T) have taken to revive the sheer thrill of flying. Passengers are not allowed to use toilets even if the 14 minute fright from Simara has to circle for one hour to land in Kathmandu due to air traffic congestion. Imagine the sheer suspense and excitement!

It has also introduced monkeys into the domestic terminal to remind passengers about the primates we are all descended from.

By allowing wild boars and jackals to cross the runway at Nepalganj, airport management has added another magical dimension of mystique to the miracle of flight.

And we have just heard that pilots are also doing their bit to re-introduce a sense of amazement and surprise to domestic aviation. Recently, they transported unsuspecting Janakpur-bound passengers to Pokhara instead.



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