COVID in 2022

Sonia Awale

It has been two years since the coronavirus turned the world upside down. Masks have become the norm, physical distancing is a must, vaccines are mandatory, and parts of the world are struggling to go back to normal. Just as everyone was waiting for business to go back to normal in 2022, countries have been hit with highly contagious Omicron variants with worries that existing vaccines will not stop its infection.

Lab tests have shown that the AstaZeneca and VeroCell vaccines used in Nepal may not be as effective against Omicron, with mRNA vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna proving more effective. Nepal Times spoke with 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 AstaZeneca vaccine.

“The important role of the vaccine 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 Nepal Times from Oxford.

Anup Subedi, an infectious disease specialist at HAMS hospital in Kathmandu, agrees: “It is true that mRNA vaccines are more effective against the new variant, but all jobs 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 vaccine as booster for the vulnerable populations. Last week, Nepal received nearly 2 million doses of Moderna shots from Germany via the OVAX facility, which is sufficient to provide booster doses for the elderly.

Minister of Health Bidhya Khatri announced on Wednesday that booster shots will 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 Subedi. “We must not miss immunity compromised and the elderly, it is more important for now to provide boosters for 80% people than administer a single dose to 12-15 year olds.”

Amp COVID 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 Nishil Koizala from Nepal.

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 Dilshad Khargharya 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 aside 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 jobs 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 Rudh Shrestha, a physician at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences.

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

The way to do that, Koizala 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

Amrit Chosh
Secularism and sectarianism

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

GUEST EDITORIAL
India Adhikari

All secularism means is separation of state and religion, and in practical terms it compro- mises freedom of religion. An individual’s belief, faith or lack thereof is inherently personal. It is when a dominant religion is mixed with politics that this distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ come up. As scholars have pointed out, the Sanskrit word धर्मसंसार also does not have an exact translation in English. When the British were in Bhaktapur they loosely translated ‘dharma’ to mean ‘religion’, whereas institutionalised religions have other Sanskrit synonyms like धर्म or धर्मन, as Green Nabil points out in his column.

In a country of such diversity - both religious and cultural - there are a lot of tensions. Sectarianism is on the rise, and if we do not act, there will be a backlash.

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

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Tomb dancers around the world are decentralised, diverse and a mix of modern and traditional. They are an important part of the cultural heritage of the countries and communities they represent.

Our Rivers

Nepal is an officially declared forest and river rich country. The country has a high concentration of biodiversity, including a wide range of flora and fauna. The country is home to many rivers and streams, which are an important source of water for agriculture, industry, and human consumption.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepal is a landlocked country and most of the rivers flow through the country from east to west. The country has a diverse range of rivers, including the Karnali, Mahakali, and Trishuli rivers. These rivers are important for irrigation, hydroelectric power, and recreation.

In conclusion, the future of Nepal's rivers is uncertain due to climate change and human activities. It is important to protect and conserve these resources for future generations. The government and society need to work together to ensure the sustainability of these water bodies.

guest editorial
India Adhikari

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TIME TO MEET AGAIN: VANCOUVER

Have a healthy journey with all precautions taken down to the smallest detail for your in-flight safety.
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 the pressure on politicians to implement it.

Recently 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 hearty trip to the basket residence of former prime minister K P Oli who heads the opposition UML. Oli and Deuba back the American project, and some see this meeting of minds on the MCC as possibly triggering a breakthrough of the governing coalition.

On 13 December, Vice Minister Chen Zhi 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 Rimal confirmed that Zhou’s call was about the MCC, but added analogically: “It must have had questions about projects in a neighbouring country.”

Zhou also called Mahendra Kusum, Nepal of the Unified Socialists who also reiterated his support for China’s concerns. Nepal has said he will not approve the MCC in effect ties with neighbouring countries.

CPC officials also held virtual meetings with Paneshya Kamal Dasai of the Manchist 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.”

Spokesperson Prasad Supakta of the Manchist Centre, who is close to Beijing, has said the MCC would not move forward under his watch. His predecessor Krishna Baburah Lahans 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 Pande held Nepali Times. “China was always concerned about the MCC, and views it with suspicion.”

China’s objection to the project is most noticeable through-up. Wang Yiwei, a professor of international relations at the Beijing University, in one interview with nepalatan.com last October called the MCC “an American plot.”

Analyst Gajendra Jha of Aaina magazine says China 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 Manchist Centre and Unified Socialists, coalition members Janak Samadhali Party and Rastriya Janamarcha 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. Bada Nath Kusum of Unified Socialists was named to another committee to study the MCC agreement.

Dahal and Nepal used K P Oli’s support for the MCC against him in a bitter power struggle last year that did not just split the Nepal Communist Party, but also the UML. They were so successful in generating public opinion against the MCC, saying it was part of American military strategy against China, that they had to back off now with elections a year away. Dahal also has his general convention to worry about.

At the height of political impasse, Chinese Ambassador Hou Yanqi lobbied unsuccessfully to keep Nepal’s communists united. Now K P Oli is in the opposition, he is not as openly pro-MCC, but uses it as a weapon to get back at Deuba and Dahal by splitting their coalition.

Nepal signed the MCC deal in Washington in 2017 when Deuba led a previous NC-Maust coalition. The US has insisted the project is a grant that Nepal qualified for, and has no strings attached.

MCC Vice President Fatema Suman and US Deputy Secretary of State Donald Lu visited Nepal recently, and reportedly gave Deuba an ultimatum to ratify the project by the end of this year.

Experts say the MCC is important to expand Nepal’s power grid with 400kVA transmission lines, and can export surplus electricity to India.

Nepal will be generating 4,500MW of hydroelectricity in the next three years, and over 12,000MW by 2030, and much of it risks being wasted if it cannot be smoothed down.

In monetary terms, Nepal’s power producers could lose at least Rs174 billion annually, which is why experts say Nepal must work immediately on transmission lines even if the MCC does not go ahead.

Although the project is for upgrading transmission lines, it will also improve highways in central Nepal to boost economic growth.

Costlier cars

As rising imports have reduced foreign exchange reserves, a US-Indian firm has increased prices of certain car models by up to 15%. Maruti Suzuki (MS) is set to increase the price of its Liva and Alto K10 this month. Automobile imports now have to maintain a 10% margin when opening letters of credit (LOC) in banks. Previously the margin was only 7%. For now, the margin amount can also be

deposited by spending carriers, saving, and call deposit amounts, but no interest can be paid on the amount. No loans can be disbursed even in domestic currency for purpose of depositing margins and secured amount will not be available for import. While private importers can, for government use, duty free Luxor’s and neps are more irreplaceable government.

New hydropower

NMB Bank Limited is renamed financial closure of the 13.5MW Super Kabeli Khola A Hydropower Project and the 11.8MW 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 Purchasing Agreements (PPAs) with both companies. Super Kabeli Khola A and Super Kabeli Khola Cascade Biscet enter into Force with Rs1.87 billion and Rs0.67 billion loans respectively.

ICT Awards

The sixth edition of ICT Award ceremony won by 12 categories during an event held in Kathmandu on February 28. Kathmandu Secondary School, Basantuli won the Digital Education ICT Award (primary) while the Digital Education ICT Award (primary) went to Rama Bajrangi Sahas, Lalitpur. The Digital Education ICT Award (primary) went to Ganga Kishor Pradhan.

Enterprise India

Charges of Bribery of the Embassy of India in Kathmandu inaugurated the Enterprise India Exhibition in Sukh Bhawan 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.

The show has been supported by the Embassy of India in Kathmandu, the Indian Embassy in Nepal and the Indian Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

Excellence Award

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

Khuwri musical tour

Khuwri Rami in collaboration with Abhirup Group is organizing a musical campaign across Nepal. Music lovers can enjoy different genres of music during the event which will be held to promote rising Nepali performers.
Looking back at the 1923 Nepal-Britain Treaty

It was 98 years ago this week that Nepal signed a treaty with British India that firmly established its independent status.

The signing of the 1923 treaty with British India was a national festival with public buildings illuminated and joy on the streets. Nepali diplomat Bhusan Pandey writes in his memoir ‘Nepal, the White Lion’ that Nepal had finally managed to erase the disgrace suffered 137 years ago with the Sugauli Treaty.

Historian Pranesh Shambhur Rana argues in his book ‘विलक्षिण योजना’ 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 skillful diplomacy and lobbying by Chandra Shambhur, who worked hard to prove to the British that Nepal was worthy of being declared an independent country. Trails 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 it for with its own blood. The Rana sent 200,000 troops to define the British during World War I. These troops had 24,000 casualties in Gallipoli and in the trenches of Belgium and France.

Pandey writes that Nepal also helped British India in its dealings with Afghanistan at a time when the October Revolution rocked the Russia and assisted the Youngblood expeditionary force to enter Tibet.

Although the British envoy to Nepal, William O’Connor and Prime Minister Chandra Shambhur, historians say that the language of the treaty also resonated with the British delegate, who was also a royal prince of a small European country.

The Sugauli Treaty had allowed the East India Company to appoint a resident in Kathmandu, but after the 1921 the envoy was redeployed as an ambassador.

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 overshadowed by the 1816 Sugauli treaty, and the 1865 Treaty of Friendship between Nepal and the Rana rulers that went largely unnoticed in India.

Indeed, there has been criticism of 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 the 1923 treaty.
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 haven 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, micro water 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 travel. 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 greenwater’s lane to taste the tradition and life in rural Nepal. At the city centre, indulge in some local delicacies and barbecue street food. Swim it all off in the in-house gym at the hotel or take a leisurely swim in the first-floor swimming pool.

Single: Rs6,900++ (breakfast included)
Double: Rs7,500++ (breakfast included)
https://www.soalteewestend.com/
081 – 551448/86/87

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, Pokhara

People don’t come to Tiger Mountain to see tigers, although tigers have started being sighted higher along the Himalayas 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 tree and thick undergrowth of the community forests are a favourite for birds, with 332 of Nepal’s 867 species recorded here. Two new sightings were recorded last year. White-Spotted Goss and Short-tailed Owls. There are 350 species of butterflies and dragonflies.

 Nested at 1,200m on a ridge, Tiger Mountain commands an unparalleled vista from Gunja Himal in the west, along a jagged horizon of the Annapurnes, Machapuchare’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 Machapuchare. 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 1978, and the ‘Royal Trek’ that it popularised: more relaxed, scenic day hikes around Pokhara.

Nepalis $140 per night/person (2%)
*conting $150 per night/person (20%)
Includes accommodation in double or twin sharing basis, all meals, non-bar hat drinks throughout the trip, arrival and departure transfers and city guides.
https://tigermountain pokhara.com/
(07) 427 0755, 9961 1771

Inside Valley
Durbar Marg: 044236588 | Boudha: 044727578 | Thimi: 016624532 |
LABM, Pokhara: 016623643 | Maharajgunj: 04476346 | Kalanki: 1902311872 |
Naxal: 9807233713 | Baneshwor: 9809114812

Outs
Pokhara
Hetauda
M ost 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 Newars trading town with its postcard-perfect cobblestone main street is a model of how heritage tourism should be done in Nepal.

At the centre of Bandipur is The Old Inn: a restored four-storey Newar 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 that makes up for the absence of the usual accoutrements of a modern hotel room. They are comfortable and decorated with bhuddist and Newar 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 1,300m elevation, Bandipur is sunny all year when the Marayangthi Valley below and Pokhara to the west are shrouded in fog. At the sky clears up, a vast mountain vista opens up, revealing the stunning Annapurnas, Himaladhuli and Ganes Himal.

A Magar kingdom before Prithvi Nayan Shah took over nearly 300 years ago, Bandipur was settled by Newar 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 hour), Pokhara (2 hour) and Chitwan (1.5 hour). 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, Nepal cuisine for dinner.

At the end of the day, The Old Inn provides a soothingly tranquil escape to wind down over sunterraces 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

Charikut Panorama Resort, Dolakha

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

Perched atop a hillside in Dolakha, the resort is a perfect weekend getaway. The resort offers a full package of accommodation, and can organise trips to Rolwaling, Jimi or Kullu/Kangra, now linked with cable car. Rolwaling Himal, including majestic Gauri Shankar (7,564m) and Malungtang (7,184m) are directly to the north. The hotel offers traditional Swiss-think fendue 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 Ibhornas Tower. Bring your binoculars to the four-storey high, Checkpoint View Tower to take in the breathtaking view of the surrounding landscape.

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.charikutresort.net
+977 1 5529463, 9802189822

Charikut Panorama Resort
Dolakha

Ghale Gaun Homestay, Lamjung

There can be no better way to experience the famed Nepali hospitality from a pre-trekking era than at Gaun. This historic village in Lamjung is where for more than two decades Gurung families have opened their homes to guests.

Located 4 hours drive northwest of Kathmandu at an altitude of 2,500m, 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 Besishahar and ends in Thumtikot. The route includes several other villages within the Annapurna Conservation Area, including Ghagkathi, Bhijang and Pongram, which also offer homestay services.

“Out of 120 households in Ghale Gaun, 40 homes currently provide homestay services,” says Dhirga 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 Besishahar 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 ‘ghumaisam’ 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 then move through the village, visit the famous Ullatainda Temple, bird-watching at the Talangar Lake, or walk through the expansive tea garden. You can also sit in the sun overlooking terraced farmlands and listen to former Gurkhas recount stories of battles in far away lands in days gone by.

Ghale Gaun Tourism Management Committee
Price: Rs.1,000 per day (1 room included)
ART EXHIBITION
Windhorse Gallery’s latest exhibition ‘Whistle Blow!’, will be held in the capital’s first solo showcase. Until 13 January, 10am-7pm, Windhorse Gallery.

THEATRE LAB
Applications are open for the eighth edition of Theatre Lab, a short-form theatre qualification programme for novice theatre writers, which will be conducted by and hosted at Kathmandu Theatre in January. Application deadline: 31 December

MUSIC
Razaa Bubai Nepal Razaa Bubai Nepal will be live this Friday to wrap up Christmas Eve with a musical evening at Polo Club Bar & Dine. 24 December, 7pm, Polo Club Bar & Dine, St. Regis

Jazz evening
Celebrate this Christmas eve with Srikanth with just Deep Narsh and Marwa. Spin up the evening with muddled wine and hot rum punch. 23 December, 6:30pm, Dickooka Caffe, Paschimadevi

Pokhara Street Festival The 23rd celebration of Nepal’s biggest street festival in the tourist city will feature live music and the local village. Find out the programme on food, music and culture. 31 December, Lakeside, Pokhara

Gauley Bhai Enjoy Nepal folk rock music this Christmas Eve with the band Gauley Bhai, who are back in Kathmandu after a year. 24 December, 7pm, Over Your Life, Lamosangwa

Weekend at BNC The weekend at BNC is the weekend. It will be jam-packed with performances by Under the Project 301 and Real Live Design on Christmas Eve as well as A Fox, Sacred420 and Pherallo Buti Muii through Christmas Day and into evening. 24-26 December, Bees n’ Cheesers, Bhaktapur

Los KTM Gatos Enjoy a musical Christmas this Saturday in the band KTM Gatos, who will be performing their final show of 2017 at Rising Star. 25 December, Rising Star, Gokul Chowk

GETAWAY
Soaltee Westend Premier Celebrate a special Christmas with fine food and drinks at Soaltee Westend Premier. The exquisite energy-efficient getaway is hosted in the green laps of Kathmandu. Enjoy festive season discounts on food and beverages. Read more on page 6-7. Neville, (01) 517145

Fish Tail Lodge Spend this holiday season at Fish Tail lodge located on the quiter side of Phewa Lake with its innovative architectural design and breathtaking panoramic views of mountains. Go to www.fishtailodge.com for details about Christmas and New Year getaways, as well as room packages. Pokhara Lake, (01) 450701

Jagatpur Lodge Spend the New Year at Jagatpur Lodge, nestled in the jungle, surrounded by temples and natural beauty. The lodge provides a beautiful view of the surrounding landscape. 2-31 December, Jagatpur Lodge, (01) 4522377

Ultrasound flight Get a tweet one with an Ultrasound flight over the breathtaking Annapurna region this Christmas. Send an email to Asia Club Nepal at info@ascana.com.np to ensure by the GIFT VOUCHER, or call for details. Asia Club Nepal, (01) 4886679

DINING
Embassy Restaurant Enjoy a hearty meal in this centrally located restaurant for its handy ambience and assorted menu. Try the Duck breast, served on a bed of roasted potatoes and roasted vegetables in a rosemary pepper sauce. Lomput, (01) 444040

Le Sherpa Experience a dinner of her-roasted turkeys, black rice, risotto and grilled trout and more, accompanied by exquisite piano and violin performances at Le Sherpa. Call for reservations. 24-25 December, Hotel Le Sherpa, (01) 4450104

Dining at Radisson Book a table for family and friends, and enjoy a delectable Christmas Eve Dinner with live music at the Terrace Garden or have Christmas Day lunch at The Coffee Shop. Or call the Coffee Shop for Christmas dinner. 24-25 December, Radisson Hotel, (01) 4411831

Hazdi Biryani Creating a quick and easy Biryani! Hazdi is the place to go. Enjoy slow-cooked biryani seasoned with a secret spice blend which comes in only in langot that ensure the dining experience. 24-25 December, St. Regis, (01) 4534844

BBQ Party Enjoy the most amazing Christmas BBQ dinner and mocktails, along with live music 24-25 December, 7pm, The Coffee Shop. (01) 4457598

WEATHER
The festive conditions will continue in Kathmandu Valley with the temperature dropping to between 10°C to 12°C on Saturday. The minimum will drop in the western hills on Friday. However, the day is likely to turn pleasant and the temperature will be on the rise, according to the Met Office. There will be extremely light winds from the easterly direction, and expect to get a clear sky.

Christmas Mela
Shop for products at this Christmas season at up to 50% discounts at Kathmandu’s Christmas Mela. 24-26 December, Anandidwara, Kirtipur, (01) 4806796

Malory and Pumori’s 1921 Revolution
An event to commemorate how the Punjabi peak came to be a national symbol on January 15. President Dr. Ram Baran Yadav will be the chief guest. 23 December, 6.30pm, Shangri-La’s Hotel, Batatalkot, Lumbini, (limited, advanced booking)

Film Festival
The Fifth Farm Film and Music Festival in Pashupati will include 16 films, 36 short films, and 20 international films. 27-31 December, Pashupati

AIR QUALITY INDEX
KATHMANDU
The air quality index level in Kathmandu today is 130 – which is the unsuitable zone. We would advise staying home as much as possible in the mornings, and especially not to engage in any strenuous outdoor exercise. Though any air purifier for the interiors is a good investment, the NPM 2.5 is still high.

OUR PICK
In closing Jim Wolk’s Spider-Man, No Way Home, high school student Peter Parker’s life turns upside down in a day when he discovers he is the Web-Slinging Superhero Spider-Man is revealed to the world. Hopeful to find a way to keep his identity a secret, he decides to stop his identity once again, and turns to Doctor Strange, the Sorcerer Supreme, to help. But when Doctor Strange’s spell needed to help Peter get away, dangerous threats from other worlds begin to appear, leaving the young hero to orchestrate events across the multiverse as Starks begin their life again, the Breakfast Club returns to the Big Bang, and the Beatles to the Ed Sullivan Show, with a return of Marissa Torres and more.
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 "BHERUKA" (Kalpa-Graantha) is staggering: 777 pages and weighing 1.85kg. This is a herald of a book. Published as a ready-made gift in a sleek box, the royal-sized book fits snugly inside a box (photo, right), accompanied by a postcard and a bookmark. More than a novel marketing strategy, this packaging marks Nagarkoti’s 100th anniversary as a writer, and also his 13th book.

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

Brought out by Book Hill Publications in March, Kalpa-Graantha is an epicodic parody in the Nepali literary sphere, and marks a radical departure from the standard book designs. There are 68 sacred stories across genres and typographies, even postcards, as Nagarkoti experiments with format, style and structures.

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 too a one-time special edition," says publisher Shumendra Khadka at Book Hill.

Another 2021 book that experiments with language and form to find new ways of storytelling is Jansen Kunwar’s "Ram" (Ramlit) 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 identity, set in an imagined world reimagining Nepal’s mountains, valleys, rivers. But what sets it apart is not the treatment of social realism, but the unconventional layout used to enhance context, and impact on readers.

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

This was most likely also the case 119 years ago when hand copied manuscripts of Girish Balbhad Joshi’s 'Aat Chandra' 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 foreshadowing 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 Medan Prakashal Pvt. Ltd.

The earliest printed Nepali book is actually a translation in Darujeling 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 those 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-writen comments by the editors on the margins of text in Kalpa-Graantha therefore follows a long tradition of innovation, coupled with the advances in publishing.

Such "conceptual stories" are not trying to confound as 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 didactic. Sindhiya Shrestha, a Nagarkoti fan, describes the process as "trying to connect with the author. "It’s a touch of nosiness," she says.

As Nagarkoti penned 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."
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

B ein 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 international 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, Malay 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 Sundarbans in the Bengal 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 Antipodean Land, and Countdowns which is about regional radiocative fallout of a future India-Pakistan nuclear war. The Great Derangement in 2016 looked at the reliance of politicians, novelists, artists and movie-makers to grasp and respond to the climate-emergency brave new world.

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 Amritav fashion on the journey of a 50-something Bengali American, as he finds his view of reality shifting. Dinawit 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 Sunderburhs, the same mangrove archipelago that is the setting for the earlier novel The Hungry Tide.

Deen heads to a riverbank with a shawl in honour of the protagonist of an old Bengali legend. Upon learning more about the details of this mysterious folk tale, Deen begins to recognize that this narrative may be based on a real life experience of an individual living during climatic changes of the ‘Little Ice Age’ 500 years ago, when a cold period swept the planet.

Nowhere to say, there are many parallels to the climate crisis we are experiencing today. Deen, a secular realist, realizes 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 mindset takes us in the theological summary of the anthropopes. While demons have not actually take over the earth, demonic ideation has. Later in the novel, Deen’s close companion, Cinta, states that when she looks at this world ‘with the diagnostic tools of an epiphenomenologist, it becomes (apparent) that the world of today presents all of the symptoms of demonic possession’.

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 livable 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 the 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 mystified, as well as how that can actually strengthen one’s relationship with reality.

The author leaves his reader wanting to show strength in stopping 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 New York Times, released last month. In it, Ghosh speaks as himself, and not through one of his characters, about the history of cruelty and planter behind the ‘discovery’ of the New World, and the European colonialism elsewhere in the world.

By recalling gory details of extermination of nature and genocide 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 crises.

The reader is shown how the ’conspiring processes of violence, physical and intellectual, were all necessary for the emergence of a new economy based on extracting resources from a desacralized.'
Deranged climate

As the world struggles with the impact of climate change, the Indian Ocean has become a hotbed of activity. The recent increase in extreme weather events has left many scientists concerned about the future of the region.

The Indian Ocean is one of the world’s most important bodies of water, hosting a vast array of marine life and supporting a significant portion of the world’s fisheries. However, as the climate changes, so does the ecosystem of the Indian Ocean.

Recent studies have shown a significant increase in sea-surface temperature, which has led to more intense and frequent storms. These storms are not only affecting the marine life but also the local communities who rely on the ocean for their livelihoods.

The Indian Ocean is also facing challenges related to temperature and salinity. As the climate changes, the ocean’s temperature is rising, which is affecting the distribution of marine species. At the same time, the salinity of the ocean is changing, which is affecting the movement of water and the distribution of nutrients.

These changes are not only affecting the marine life but also the local communities who rely on the ocean for their livelihoods. The Indian Ocean is currently home to some of the world’s most densely populated regions, and these communities are facing increasing water stress and food insecurity.

The Indian Ocean is not alone in facing these challenges. The entire world is facing the consequences of climate change, and it is up to us to take action now to mitigate the effects of this global crisis.