



● Sonia Awale

On Thursday morning, *Nepali Times* photographer Amit Machamasi was greeted with a shocking sight when he drove up to Nagarkot to take pictures of overnight snowfall. Below him, dozens of brick kilns were spewing out smoke and steam into the city's air (*photo*).

The rain had washed down suspended particles, but the brick kilns were pumping more smoke into the air we breathe. There have been attempts to relocate brick kilns away from the densely-populated capital, but political patronage means owners are still fouling the air.

After the 2015 earthquake damaged most of the Valley's brick factories, some adopted cleaner technology to reduce emissions. Public pressure and urban growth then pushed most brick factories to the city's fringes, and they are now concentrated around Bhaktapur – most of those in the photograph are traditional dirty chimneys.

After two years of forced

closure during the pandemic, the brick kilns are once more working overtime to fill a backlog of demand from builders. But with politicians bogged down in power struggles, local leaders are too distracted to address the pandemic and pollution crises – both of which affect the human respiratory system.

In a public opinion poll in this newspaper just before the 2017 elections, most respondents said air pollution topped their list of concerns. Pollution has got worse since then, but it is unlikely that dirty air will figure in election speeches in 2022.

"We have cleaner options like interlocking earth bricks, so we just need public pressure to make it an election issue," says activist Bhushan Tuladhar.

A pre-pandemic research showed that 40% of suspended particulates in Kathmandu's air was from brick kilns, 30% from vehicular emissions, and 20% from open burning of trash and biomass. With the exponential increase in cars and motorcycles, the concentration of vehicular pollution at street level is now 70% (*page 10-11*).

"Hazardous pollution levels in winter have become the norm, yet the government is not doing much to control it," says Shilshila

Acharya of the Himalayan Climate Initiative (HCI). "The public should demand action from our leaders."

Although public awareness about air pollution is at an all time high, it has not translated into action by municipalities or the federal government – even though in a democracy elections would be the way to force accountability from public officials.

Says Tuladhar: "Campaigning in 2022 for elections, particularly for local government, will give us a platform to build political will to reduce air pollution. People have to be outraged, and the good news is that we have some young and educated leaders taking the lead."

In 2019, air pollution resulted in the deaths of 42,100 Nepalis, according to one research. Many more were indirectly affected. Vehicular emission, garbage and agricultural residue burning and brick kilns were the main sources of toxic ambient air.

Besides shifting to cleaner and greener brick-making technology, controlling garbage burning, and a rapid transition to electric vehicles with government investment in electric mass transit, would be steps that would quickly improve air quality in Kathmandu.

Air pollution is leading to the premature death of Kathmandu's

citizens. It has huge impact on the economy. The solution is political, and elected officials need to respond to the crisis.

Adds Shilshila Acharya: "Politicians as always are big on promises but we demand that they first protect our health by cleaning up the air we breathe. It is a basic right guaranteed by the Constitution. Don't talk about more grandiose plans, just clean up our air first."

FULL STORY PAGE 10-11

## MOUNTAINS CALLING

Gurkhas and Sherpas no longer porters  
PAGE 6

2 Netflix films on mountains  
PAGE 7

3 books on Alpine style climbing  
PAGE 6-7

Pokhara's paragliders  
PAGE 9

George Mallory and Mt Pumori  
PAGE 12

Himalayan highs  
PAGE 13

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#1042 (1 - 7 JANUARY 2021)

#1056 (9 - 14 APRIL 2021)

#1058 (23 - 29 APRIL 2021)

#1070 (16 - 22 JULY 2021)

## Keep the flag flying in 2022

Exactly one year ago, this newspaper restarted its hardcopy edition 10 months after going digital-only. The 1 January 2021 #1042 of *Nepali Times* carried the bold banner: 'Print Is Back'.

There was optimism in the air. We thought the worst was over with Covid-19 pandemic, the economy was going to revive and the country would bounce back.

Little did we know what 2021 had in store: the second wave crashed onto Nepal's shores in April from India, the Delta variant overwhelming the country's hospitals, and exhausting oxygen supply. Complacency has set in again, but experts warn we have been caught with our pants down too often.

The WHO warned on Wednesday that the ominous Omicron variant is merging with Delta to create a Covid tsunami. Nepal has all the conditions (low vaccination rate, limited testing, crowding) for this highly transmissible strain to spread like wildfire again.

Wish we had better news for 2022. But things are not looking too rosy. Sectorwise:

### Economy

Overseas remittances that had held steady despite the pandemic went down by 7.6% in October-November to Rs312 billion. Meanwhile, imports rose to Rs82 billion so far this fiscal year, while exports is lagging at mere Rs6.5 billion. The trade deficit increased to Rs150 billion in October-November, while foreign currency reserves dipped by \$510 million to a near record low of \$10.47 billion — enough only to last six months of imports.

Tourism revenue has collapsed, and government spending is stagnant. Banks are suffering a liquidity crisis, although that seems to be due to increased borrowing.

Things are not looking good in agriculture: rice harvests went down by 20% due to post-monsoon floods, and there is a chronic fertiliser crisis.

Janardan Sharma may have been a brilliant guerrilla commander, but he seems clueless as Finance Minister — he has no sense of urgency about the emergency. He and his boss are prone to gaffes that spook the market even more. This economic crisis is a result of populism and neglect. 2022 being an election campaign year, it is not likely to be addressed.

### Covid

Learning from mistakes from the past two years, the Health Ministry must be prepared for an Omicron surge in 2022 with border testing and tracing, ICU beds, ventilators and oxygen generators. A mass vaccination and booster campaign with the 12 million stockpiled doses should have started last month. What are they waiting for?

### Climate

Nepal's delegation said the right things at the COP26 in Glasgow, but seems too distracted with immediate political crises to look at net-zero and forest cover targets it pledged. We cannot afford to wait for climate adaptation funds that may never come to start doing our bit at home to reduce petroleum consumption and switch to renewables.

### Elections

2022 will be dominated by campaigning. We have got a whiff of what it is going to be like from speeches at the recent party conventions. In the absence of result-delivery while in office, leaders are falling back on religion, monarchy, ethnic politics and rolling back federalism.

Given the political failure of the past four years (example: blatant fragmentation of ministries in Bagmati Province) those who want to scrap federalism and secularism are building mass support.

### Governance

Then there is governance, or the lack thereof. Service delivery and development are at a standstill. There is colossal misappropriation of state funds for personal and party gain.

National projects like the MCC are weaponised in a geopolitical proxy war. Tried-tested-failed figures of the past decades have been elected to senior party positions.

### Migration

Given all this, the wellbeing of Nepalis in coming years will continue to depend on remittances. We hope this year's dip is a blip. This important sector must be cleaned of corruption and abuse, new labour markets explored, and overseas Nepalis encouraged to return and invest.

Given the new party leadership, we do not expect much from this or post-2023 governments. But we have hope in Nimsdai Purja, Prabal Gurung, Santosh Shah and tens of thousands of other hard-working citizens across Nepal who keep the flag flying.



#1086 (19 - 25 NOVEMBER 2021)

#1088 (3 - 9 DECEMBER 2021)

#1089 (10 - 16 DECEMBER 2021)

#1091 (24 - 30 DECEMBER 2021)

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### A year of living indecisively



This editorial from 20 years ago this week in *Nepali Times* might as well have been written today. The year ended summarised a year of living dangerously that saw heightened Maoist insurgency, a royal massacre and a nation in an emergency.

This was a year of living indecisively. Throughout 2021, despite the ongoing pandemic, the politicians were embroiled in a power struggle and there was no time for governance. Leaders have already set their eyes on the 2023 polls having used their general conventions as a playing field ahead of the elections.

Excerpt from the editorial from #74 28 December 2001-3 January 2002:

We carry in this issue a capsule of 2001 from the pages of the *Nepali Times*. As journalists we should have been glad: bad news is good news for the news business. But for our country's sake we wish 2002 will be less newsy. We would like to have weeks in the coming year in which

we don't have to once more bemoan the state of the nation, remind everyone that the country is in a rut and we need to pull ourselves out...

...In the end, it all boils down to a crisis of leadership. Be it peace or war, a nation needs visionary leaders to steer it towards its chosen destiny. The year 2001 was full of challenges, but we failed to produce a single leader who could seize the opportunity inherent in every crisis. That is one way to look at the year gone by-a year not just of misfortune, but of our collective failures.

On a more positive note, most of Kathmandu's urbanisation woes are management problems. Given the political will and sound administration they can be solved overnight. Just look at how quickly an entire city block can be demolished, street lights fixed, or roads widened. The same goes for air pollution. All it took was the citizens of a Kathmandu suburb to rise up against illegal brick kilns, and the Bull Trenches have been hounded out. Now, after ignoring local activists and environmentalists for 25 years, the government has finally decided to close down the Chobhar cement factory. Moral of the story: where there is political will, there is a way.

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



REINHOLD MESSNER

At age 77, after having pushed the limits of what a human beings can physically achieve, Reinhold Messner looks back at a life lived at the edge of life and death, and turns philosophical about the art of mountaineering. The climbing legend in his latest Nepal visit also talks about the climate crisis and his support for Nirmal Purja. Watch interview with Messner on *Nepali Times* Studio. Profile: [page 6](#).



MALLORY, PUMORI, EVEREST

Kanak Mani Dixit delves into how Pumori peak (or Mt Clare as it was first called) came to be named exactly a century ago. More about George Mallory's climbing, early history of mountaineering and Everest on this YouTube video and text on [page 12](#).

### GREEN PRAYER FLAGS

What is the point in having biodegradable *lung ta* when the air and dust in Kathmandu can kill you or send you to the hospital with respiratory diseases?

Varvāra Hajisāwa

- Prayer flags were always made of 100% cotton which is biodegradable. You can still buy colourful cotton prayer flags in every flag shop. But customers want everything cheap so there is polyester prayer flag as an alternative. The price difference is just Rs100-200. This is a great way to bring attention to our own choices.

Rewati Gurung

- This is a great initiation. I always thought that Buddhist sites like Nagarjun, Pharping, etc full of colourful prayer flags hung in the trees was not right because the material used needs hundreds of years to decompose.

Nishan Pradhan

- Before, people didn't really have a choice but the younger generation is much more concerned. But how expensive the biodegradable flags are will also make a difference in their use.

Nyima Tsering Sherpa

### COVID

I am a regular reader of *Nepali Times*, I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the wonderful article by Sonia Awale ('Covid in 2022', Sonia Awale, #1091). She has put it all succinctly in this commendable work which is very informative, timely and valid. She has highlighted the preventive measures and also emphasised social distancing, mask mandate and vaccination. But the fact that our Health Ministry has not yet made any decisions about boosters when neighbouring countries have already acted is concerning.

Udaya Sharma

- We need to vaccinate many more if we want to avoid further worsening of the situation ('From scarce vaccines, to storage shortage in Nepal', Sonia Awale, [nepalitimes.com](#)).

Marjolaine Elisabeth

### PARAGLIDING IN POKHARA

There is no other place in Nepal better suited for paragliding ('Pokhara's paragliders must relocate, but where?', Masta K, [nepalitimes.com](#)). High hill Sarangkot and the Phewa Lake provides a microclimate with a soft thermal effect for commercial paragliding flights.

Natasha Shrestha

- Pokhara had an iconic place in the world paragliding map.

Pawel Maksymilian

- This is sad news indeed. I remember flying at Sarangkot Hill in 1994, I had the place to myself. I can't believe how busy it has become.

Ian Lloyd-Jones

### CAR VS PEOPLE

After residing in Nepal for many years, I left in 2006 because of worsening vehicular pollution ('Cars vs people in Kathmandu, Mark Perrin, [page 10](#)'). Kathmandu is no longer a liveable city and the great tragedy is that it was preventable.

Maggie Kerr

- Traffic flow will drastically improve if public vehicle 'STOPS' are managed and enforced. We should also construct underground passes and keep zebra crossing to a minimum with overhead bridges where necessary.

Bhumi Limbu

- The defect, perhaps, is also linked to our mindset about mobility and the association of four wheelers with prestige. Satellite cities development, pedestrianisation, metro with sufficient parking up to transits, biophilic earthquake engineered vertical development while conserving/respecting heritage sites are some of the challenges/opportunities for positively transforming the city which is progressing in a megalopolis phase.

Prabal Dahal

- Sadly it is true that Kathmandu is too built up for any planning to be done now. Yet, if we could have dedicated lanes and blocks for bicycles, we could hopefully make the most of what we have.

Shraddha Pant

## Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Looking back at the 1923 Nepal-Britain Treaty

by 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. Read story and comments on [nepalitimes.com](#)

[f](#) Most reached and shared on Facebook



### Secularism and sectarianism

by Indra Adhikari

"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." Read the full Editorial from last week's edition and the debate it generated online.

[t](#) Most popular on Twitter



### Cars vs people in Kathmandu

by Mark Perrin

The city's old narrow streets are crammed with cars, motorbikes, and people, as man and machine contest for space. Urban planning in Nepal must set aside public spaces to which all citizens have equal access. Join the online discussion and send in your own comments. More on [page 10](#).

[66](#) Most commented

### On nature and human nature

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche believes in the blending of traditional practices and philosophy with modern psychology. In this exclusive interview, he teaches us the art of understanding ourselves through wisdom, compassion and balance. Read the longread online.

[7](#) Most visited online page

## QUOTE TWEETS

- [Nepali Times](#) @NepaliTimes  
What Next for Reinhold Messner? In his Nepal visit, mountaineering legend ponders life after all the legendary climbs are done.
- [Chris Schul](#) @RaspaPLUSdevi  
So, climbing on the highest summits seems not to be the only goal for living; diving into our Unconscious universe, the most profound of our imagination, is as important as flying higher.
- [Nepali Times](#) @NepaliTimes  
Just as everyone was waiting for the business to go back to normal in 2022, countries have been hit with a highly contagious new variant, causing serious worries about the efficacy of #vaccines against #Omicron and who and when to boost. @SoniaAwale reports:
- [KYU\\_Yeti](#) @KyuYeti  
Highly contagious but less strong compared to the first strain and the delta variant.
- [Nepali Times](#) @NepaliTimes  
Despite having started exporting surplus #electricity to India last month, the #Nepal Electricity Authority is now scrambling to meet a spike in domestic demand. This year there has been a 26.5% increase in peak demand and 28.5% in units consumed.
- [Pigreen](#) @pigreen1  
Let's hope that this home-produced electricity is being used productively.



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# Muses of the mountains

Artist Bharat Rai's whimsical portraits of the beasts of burden that make tourism possible

● Ashish Dhakal

Bharat Rai's ongoing exhibition 'Whistle Blower' at Ekantakuna's Wind Horse Gallery is a quasi-surreal take on the world of tourism and mountaineering. His first solo show of about 35 paintings do not show Himalayan peaks but the often-overlooked state of tourism, modernism and consumerism.

You will find few mountains here. The white background in the canvases is the closest thing to snow and clouds. The real protagonists are the mules, donkeys and the burden on their backs. We can almost hear their rusty bells punctuating the silence of their unsung endurance.

One of the first paintings that comes into view as visitors climb the staircase to the vast gallery is called *Lale*: a brown mule leaping with its tail up in the air. Its dark, melancholic eyes gaze ahead as the blue sacks on its back weigh it down. A long rope attaches the mule to a sealed Coca Cola bottle with crystallised rocks inside (pictured right).

The artwork is striking, and whimsical — an animal mid-air, tied to the ground by an empty bottle of soda. The bells around the neck and shoulders in the colourful harness look harmless at first, and we instantly recognise that these are the beasts of burden that make trekking and mountaineering possible, allowing those selfies on Kala Patar and summit certificates.

But what of Lale, frozen as it tries to jump and break free, despite being held fast to the ground? A couple frames away, Dhurbe tries to hurdle off the back of a blue pick-up truck. Next to



Dhurbe, another looks dolefully at a miniature version of itself lying on its back with legs flailing upwards.

It may not be immediately noticeable, but the atmosphere of the paintings is indeed that of a false levity, draped in a foreboding silence of suffering.

Silence pervades Rai's art: silence not volunteered but forced, and silence caught in motion. Rai's muses are mules and donkeys — always in the act of moving, whether away, towards, or in circles. They are flying, rolling and dancing even. Their desired destination is up the trail, but they appear to be protesting through their contortions — and their silence.

Rai grew up around these equine heroes, spending over a decade in their company. His family profession was moving cargo on mule trains up and down the Solu Khumbu trail before motor cars and jeeps took over. He has shared his feelings and worries more with mules than humans, and this very empathy influences his art.

'Most visitors and strangers would tell me about the creatures,' writes Rai in his statement, 'saying that they would cry if they did not get heavy loads!' But, as evidenced by his paintings, the mules do not look happy to be carrying all those sacks and cylinders.

On the contrary, they are tired, beaten and eager to break

free of their tethers. The animals have names, distinct characters and personalities. In a way these downtrodden animals are symbolic of the silent disenfranchised citizens of our country. Abused, exploited, excluded, collectively derided.

The effect is twofold. While the animals are taken as symbols of simplicity and foolishness (and thus abused), by using them as metaphors Rai draws our attention also to the cruelty and micro-aggression directed towards people living on the margins.

Then there are some paintings that depict items scattered around mountaineering camps: steel plates, cylinders, rusty wheelbarrows, a yellow excavator, and a sewing



machine practically falling apart. One canvas has a rolled-up roti fastened by a safety pin, reminiscent of swaddling. There is, as one may find, a larger, cautionary statement here against the recklessness, entitlement and egotism of mountain visitors.

Despite these undercurrents, 'Whistle Blowers' is not a pessimistic show. It is more a call to action to be more mindful, more conscious. Our four-legged mountain friends are not indentured servants, but beings with dreams and hopes of their own.

We are conditioned to imagine nobility in horses and ridicule donkeys. Rai subverts these notions by inviting us to look into the eyes of mules as muses. 🇳🇵

*'Whistle Blowers' by Bharat Rai  
Wind Horse Gallery, Bhanimandal-Ekantakuna Road, Lalitpur  
10AM-6PM (closed on Mondays)  
Limited visitors in the hall. Masks mandatory.  
Till 17 January 2022.*

prabhu BANK

## NMB with SIFEM

NMB Bank Limited has secured a \$12 million debt investment deal with the Swiss Investment Fund for Emerging Markets (SIFEM) on 28 November, with the



Swiss Agency for Development and Corporation (SDC) extending credit enhancement on a risk sharing basis. This is the first-ever SIFEM investment in Nepal and will be utilised in lending to micro, small and medium enterprises and

help entrepreneurs to access finance, contribute to the development of the financial sector, preserve jobs, and boost the resilience of the local economy.

## Buddha's night flights

Buddha Air has increased the frequency of its flights including night flights due to increased domestic demand. Pokhara now has the most number of flights at 11 per day followed by Bharatpur and Bhairahawa at 10 each and Biratnagar and Simara have 9 and eight each respectively. Poor highway conditions, a post-lockdown economic



revival and affordable fares have contributed to increased demand. Buddha has the largest domestic fleet with 15 aircraft.

## Free health camp

Global IME Bank in coordination with Nepal Family Planning Association is conducting a week-long free health camp for women in all seven provinces of Nepal to mark its 15th



anniversary. From 27 December to 1 January, women can get free health check-ups, medicines and VIA tests to screen for cervical cancer and pre-cancers in

specific health posts and hospitals in their provinces.

IME has also announced a new scheme to celebrate New Year's. Customers sending money from Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar and UAE from 23 December to 4 February will be eligible to enter a lucky draw for a cash prize of Rs10,000. In addition, four will be selected for the bumper prize of Rs40,000.



## NCC and Hotel Siraichuli

NCC bank visa card holders, mobile banking clients and its staff can now avail 10% off on food and beverages and 25% on accommodation at Hotel Siraichuli in Bharatpur, Chitwan under the new agreement. For account holders without a card, the bank is providing an instant card for immediate use.

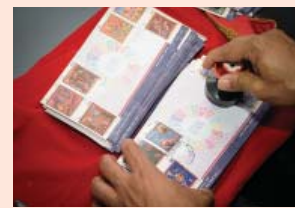


## Laundering training

IME Life Insurance Limited has trained its employees in the Lumbini, Karnali and Far West Provincial offices to prevent money laundering and financing of terrorism. The training included the definition of financial laundering, legal frameworks against it, and the role of the company in combating it, among others.

## SDGs in Mithila

The postal department has issued 17 new stamps portraying the UN's SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) in Mithila painting, created by local women artists of Janakpur. "The issuance of the SDGs postal stamps not only highlights the UN's effort to localise the SDGs in Nepal but symbolizes Nepal's commitment and readiness to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030," said Robert Kasca, UN Resident Coordinator in Nepal. However, the department has not yet fully restarted its international postal delivery.



## NLIC leads



Nepal Life Insurance

Company has taken the lead in collecting the first premium for November. The company has already collected Rs2.98 billion in the first five months of the current fiscal year.



## Laxmi Bank AGM

Laxmi Bank held its 21st Annual General Meeting (AGM) last week in Kathmandu. The AGM approved the proposal to distribute 8% bonus shares and 3.5% cash dividend on the current paid-up capital of the bank.

## Fonepay scheme

Under its 'Jhata transfer, chatta car' campaign that ran from 17 October to 28 December, Fonepay has provided 30 daily winners with an iPhone 13 each. People using

Fonepay Direct to transfer money were eligible for the scheme. Anyone can use Fonepay to transfer money to 60 financial institutions in its network at just Rs10.





# RAIZE

TO NEW BEGINNINGS



*Move your world*





At age 77, after having pushed the limits of what a human being can physically achieve, Reinhold Messner looks back at a life lived at the edge of life and death, and turns philosophical about the art of mountaineering.

Messner started climbing in the Dolomites when he was five. On his first Himalayan climb in 1970, he lost his brother and seven of his toes on Nanga Parbat. In 1986 he climbed the mountain again solo, and became the first person with Peter Habeler to summit Mt Everest without bottled oxygen. He went on to climb all of the world's fourteen 8,000m peaks. In 1980, he came back to Everest and solo-ed it too.

"We go to places we could die, but not die. Traditional mountaineering is the art of not dying," says Messner, speaking on Sunday, just after getting off a flight from Europe on yet another trip to Nepal that was delayed by the pandemic. "Mountains are infinite in comparison to our lives. Up on a mountain we are forced to contemplate eternity. Climbing is a useless activity, as absurd as life itself."

Messner has nothing but praise for Nirmal (Nims) Purja, the Nepali climber whose ascents of all 14 of the world's eight-thousanders in seven months was featured in a popular Netflix documentary (*next page*).

"I needed 16 years to climb all 14 peaks without oxygen," says Messner, repeating what he said in the Netflix film. "For this, I give Nirmal great respect, he did it in such a short time. And after this, he went back to K2 and became the first to climb it in winter. He is not just chatting, he is doing."

Messner worked with Purja to finish his latest book which is out in German, and defends the Nepali climber's use of helicopters and oxygen for his climbs saying technology had made it possible to fly from one base camp to the other. And Purja's team was also fixing ropes for others, carrying its own oxygen.

Messner is also glad that Nepalis are finally getting credit for helping western climbers attain the world's highest peaks – starting with Gurkha porters on Nanga Parbat in 1895, and later with Sherpa guides.

"Now, Sherpas and Gurkhas are no longer support staff, they organise expeditions around the world," says Messner. "I am very happy that after 100 years the Sherpa have the



AMIT MACHAMASI

economic possibility to organise their own expeditions."

Messner then turns to his pet peeve: how Alpinism has turned into tourism as hundreds of clients jumar up on fixed ropes to the top of Everest. And indoor climbing walls in gyms also do not cut it for him.

"Traditional mountaineering is the art of surviving where you can die, if you take away the possibility of danger, then it is not Alpinism," says Messner with messianic zeal during an interview in Kathmandu with *Nepali Times*. "Organising a safe infrastructure where someone takes you up and down a mountain is tourism."

Nepal's economy has now come to be dependent on these large expeditions, aside from the revenue that the country collects from hefty climbing royalty. A switch to only Alpine style climbing would mean fewer jobs for expedition support staff.

But Messner is a purist when it comes to mountaineering, and says that smaller, lighter teams would also be less damaging to the environment. He takes the message of pure Alpine style climbing around the

world now through lectures, setting up a string of museums, as well as making more films, including the latest semi-autobiographical *White Out*.

Messner faced criticism for abandoning his brother on Nanga Parbat in 1970, but has often defended himself, saying people at sea level should not be passing judgement about decisions of survival at 8,000m.

He has made 31 expeditions in his lifetime to eight-thousand metre peaks, 18 of them successful. He dabbled in politics, and was a Member of the European Parliament for five years before deciding that he did not want to be a professional politician.

During this visit to Nepal, Messner will inspect the new Sherpa Himal Museum that he helped build near Namche, adding to other mountain museums he has set up around the world. On Sunday, Messner and Karna Shakya inaugurated a new high-rise wing of the Kathmandu Guest House in Thamel, where he has always stayed since his first visit.

Regarding this year's controversy about climbers on the fore-summit of Manaslu, Messner says it is clear which the true peak is, and remembers bringing down a piton in 1972 from an earlier Japanese expedition to the 8,163m summit as proof. But it is less clear which the true peak is on long ridges like Annapurna I, he adds.

Messner is worried about the climate crisis, and how it is making climbing more dangerous, but not necessarily more difficult. Changing monsoon patterns and the jet stream show that the global environment is out of balance due to industrialisation, cars and fossil fuels, and consumerism, he adds.

Messner is now helping to give back to the people of the mountains around the world where he has climbed all his life, rebuilding hospitals and schools, and supporting students.

He says, "After climbing the mountains, I came later to also understand the people, and I am thankful that I can give back to this country with tourism promotion. I owe my climbing success to Nepal." 🇳🇵

**Kunda Dixit**

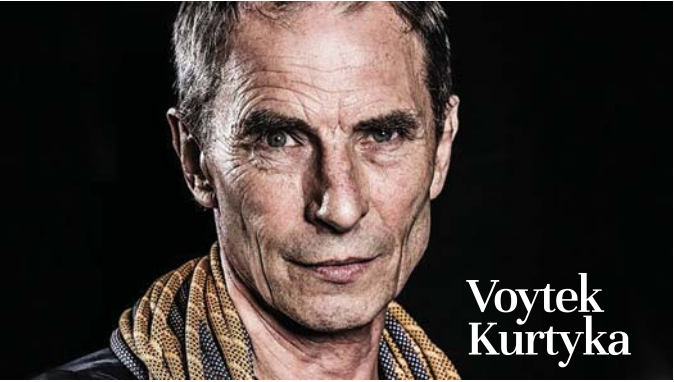


NIMS PURJA

# Alpine style in the Himalaya

Three books about triumph and tragedy among the world's highest mountains

● **Kunda Dixit**

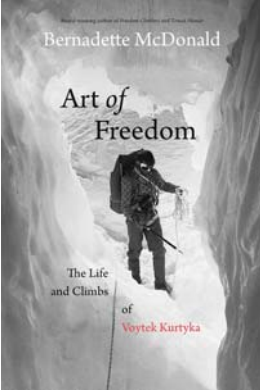


**Voytek Kurtyka**

There was the rattle of pans and the hiss of a kerosene stove from the kitchen tent. Poking my head out of the sleeping bag, the huge hulk of Makalu was silhouetted against the dawn sky. It had snowed all night, the moon and stars were out. There, in the semi-darkness, Voytek Kurtyka was hanging by one hand from a truck-sized boulder.

It was the spring climbing season in 1981, and we were camped out on a moraine by the Barun Glacier. Kurtyka was planning an Alpine style ascent of Makalu's unclimbed west face with Alex MacIntyre. The weather was bad and the face was impossible. The two returned in autumn, but they were defeated by a 500m rock overhang near the summit.

Canadian mountaineering writer Bernadette McDonald chronicles the Makalu expedition and other Kurtyka climbs in her book, *Art of Freedom*. Kurtyka is a driven man, completely consumed by his climbing, and an ardent opponent of militaristic expedition-style assaults of the Himalayan peaks. Attaining the summit is not so important for the reclusive Kurtyka:



*Art of Freedom  
The Life and Climbs of  
Voytek Kurtyka*  
by Bernadette McDonald  
Rocky Mountain Books, 2017  
326 pages  
Hardcover \$32

it is how a climber gets there. We read about the climber's dislike for mountaineers who write in a 'pretentious or self-aggrandizing style'. Kurtyka tells McDonald: 'I now see clearly that climbing is an Art. I also see that advertising is a poison, while self-advertising is the oldest disease in the human soul.'

After the assembly line jumar mass-conquest of Mt Everest in 2019 made international headlines, these words have special relevance. *Art of Freedom* takes us back to the purity of climbing that Kurtyka believed in like a religion – a style in which humans meet mountains one-on-one.

Kurtyka's approach to climbing is low-key, humble and Zen-like, a complete antithesis to the chest-thumping rat race that it has become, especially on Everest. Born in Communist Poland behind the Iron Curtain, Kurtyka is vehement about government over-regulation of mountaineering. He is proud of his many illegal climbs.

After returning to Kathmandu from Makalu in 1981, Voytek and Alex would go bar-hopping on Freak Street and come home after curfew. Because they did not want to wake us up, the two would climb up the drain pipes to the second floor 'alpine style', with our dogs howling at the intruders.

Kurtyka is one of the few who has lived to tell the tale of Alpine style climbing. Jerzy Kukuczka died on Lhotse, and Alex MacIntyre on Annapurna South Face. In the book, Kurtyka tells McDonald why he thinks he survived: a combination of luck, an instinctive alertness to danger signals, or even 'some idealistic notion of a reciprocal love between the mountain and him'.



# Peak performance

Two new Netflix movies take Nepal's Himalaya to a new high

● Sahina Shrestha

Two films that premiered on Netflix this month may provide some answers to the age-old question of why humans climb mountains 'just because they are there'.

*14 Peaks: Nothing is Impossible* stars Nepali climbers Nirmal (NimsDai) Purja and his partners Mingma David Sherpa, Lakpa Dendi Sherpa, Geljen Sherpa and Gesman Tamang. Directed by Torquil Jones, the documentary opens with Purja telling viewers to dream big.

"Doesn't matter where you come from, you can show the world nothing is impossible," he says as a drone camera films him on Ama Dablam's vertical rock face.

The documentary chronicles Purja and his team's attempt to summit the world's 14 peaks over 8,000m in just seven months. The previous world record was 7 years 310 days, set by South Korean mountaineer Kim Chang-Ho.

Purja is attempting this not just for himself, not just for Nepal, but "to show what human beings can do". A point he makes over and over is that Nepali guides and porters who helped Western expeditions in the past never got the credit they deserved. "They are ghosts," Purja says, and he is out to change that once and for all.

The former Gurkha commando proves that there is no obstacle either on vertical ice or in the bureaucracy that he cannot surmount. *14 Peaks* is a story of teamwork, ambition, determination, perseverance and patience, but what also stands out is the generosity of spirit.

More than once, Purja's team rescues climbers stranded high up



on the mountains, even when he almost succumbs to the altitude on Kangchenjunga.

"In military I have never left anyone behind, I wasn't gonna do that on the mountains," he says.

On K2, when the group reaches the base camp, climbers there are ready to abandon their expeditions after three deadly avalanches. The Nepalis lighten the mood, dance to *Resham Firiri* and Purja rallies everyone to give it one more try, while his team fixes rope to the top.

Like Purja's book, the documentary is macho, and at times one wishes he would tone it down a bit. The co-star of the film is Purja's wife Suchi, who is disarming when explaining his drive, her own fears, while offering him constant moral support. Purja's tender side shows in the scenes with his ailing mother.

The documentary attempts to

address criticism Purja faced for using bottled oxygen, with many 'purists' saying that disqualified his feat. Surprisingly, it is Reinhold Messner (who himself climbed the 14 peaks without oxygen but took 16 years to do it) who defends Purja: "He was doing it this way, otherwise it is not possible in such a short time." (*See profile, left*)

While *14 Peaks* profiles a climber attaining an impossible goal, claiming glory for himself and his country, the animated French film *The Summit of the Gods* (original title: *Le Sommet des Dieux*) is quietly meditative. It is based on Jiro Taniguchi's manga adaptation of Baku Yumemakura's 1998 novel, and does not delve into the heroics of climbing, focusing instead on the obsession.

Working as a photographer for a magazine, Fukamachi Makoto (Damien Boisseau) heads up to

Mt Everest to take pictures of a Japanese expedition which aborts the climb and is left without pictures for his story. In Kathmandu, a man tries to sell him a camera that he says belonged to George Mallory, the British climber who disappeared on Everest in 1924 (*see page 12*).

The mystery of whether Mallory and his climbing partner Andrew Irvine reached the top, almost three decades before Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, haunts the climbing world to this day. Many believe that the camera, a Vest Pocket Kodak, which is still missing, holds the answer.

Back to the film: Fukamachi thinks the camera is fake, but when he catches a glimpse of a man he believes to be Habu Joji (Eric Herson-Macarel), he suspects that it may be Mallory's. Habu is a famous, but fictitious, Japanese climber who

disappeared years previously.

Fukamachi sets to track down Habu. The film flashes back to Habu's childhood, his days in a climbing club, and his perilous previous climbs. Fukamachi is as obsessed as his subject, and when he finally gets to photograph Habu on Everest, both display powerful tenacity to push the limits.

Director Patrick Imbert captures five volumes worth of plot in just 94 minutes. The 2D animation departs from the textured layers of the original manga, and is reminiscent of Studio Ghibli works, with simple character animations and stylised photorealistic backgrounds.

It is the climbing scenes where the film truly shines. There is no dialogue, just the struggle to breathe, the missteps, the trembling taut ropes, and the roaring wind. There are the movement of hands, eyes and gestures in the dialogue scenes. This is animation at its immersive best.

Imbert and his animation team depict the mountains in all their raw wild power, and the audacity of those who dare try to scale them. Amine Bouhafa's score complements the story and animates the adventure.

This is a French film about a Japanese climber using Japanese cartoon techniques for a film set in Nepal, so it is surprising Netflix does not have a Japanese dub version with subtitles to give it more authenticity.

*The Summit of the Gods*, is not a happy movie, that much we can say. It does not gloss over the sacrifice and suffering to glamourise adventure. *14 Peaks*, on the other hand, glorifies climbing. But both films show us what it is like to be a human attempting the super-human. 🇳🇵



Élisabeth Revol and her climbing partner Tomasz Mackiewicz on Nanga Parbat.

## Élisabeth Revol

On 25 January 2018, Élisabeth Revol and Tomasz Mackiewicz reached the top of Nanga Parbat (8,126m), the world's ninth highest peak in the Karakoram. This was the second winter ascent of the mountain, and Revol was the first woman to do so. Reaching the summit after dark, Mackiewicz became snow-blind, and she left him in a crevasse for later

rescue.

Revol's book *To Live: Fighting for Life on the Killer Mountain* tells the story of her own heroic rescue from Nanga Parbat by two Polish climbers who were on K2 at the time, and the trauma of not just the harrowing descent, but also of having to abandon her partner.

Nanga Parbat has been claiming climbers' lives for the past 140 years. The first two Nepali casualties in a Himalayan expedition were Gurkhas with British climber Albert Mummery in 1895. Six more Nepalis were among nine killed in a German expedition on the mountain in 1934, then 16 others, including Nepali guides, were killed in an avalanche three years later -- all on Nanga Parbat.

*To Live* is Élisabeth Revol's attempt to come to terms with Mackiewicz's death, and two years later, rationalise for herself why she descended alone. This is an extreme saga of survival against all odds, and adventure literature at its most spellbinding.

This is not a spoiler, since the whole world knows the story: the rescuers arrive. Revol shares the terror of the descent, her friend's obsession with Nanga Parbat, and she ends with a letter to Tomasz Mackiewicz that is a farewell, and also a personal closure. As a child in France, Revol had a poster of Mt Everest on her bedroom wall. A year after the tragedy on Nanga Parbat, still wrestling her demons, she decides to climb Everest. She negotiates the traffic jam in May 2019 to descend to the South Col, and re-climb Lhotse. She describes the feeling:

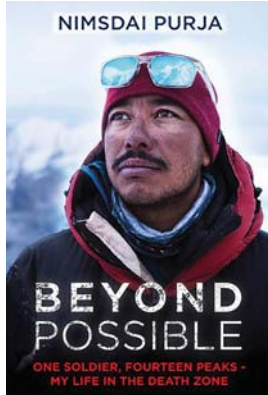
"The sunrise over Nepal and the Valley of Silence is magnificent. What luck! I indulge myself in my kingdom, far away from the world, in my element, in solitude. The mountain welcomes me with kindness for the time being ..."



## Nirmal (Nimsdai) Purja

It is also on Nanga Parbat that Nirmal (Nimsdai) Purja begins *Beyond Possible: One Soldier, Fourteen Peaks – My Life in the Death Zone*, and his near-death experience after slipping on ice at almost the same point where a year previously Élisabeth Revol had made her second night's bivouac on the Kinshofer Route. 'It was Purja's presence of mind and survival instinct that allowed him to arrest his fall. This scene is also shown in animation in the recent Netflix documentary *14 Peaks* (*see review, above*).

*Beyond Possible* is the story of the now-famous ex-Gurkha commando and his never-say-die ambition to climb the world's 14 highest mountains in seven months. He does the impossible in 6 months and 6 days. Labelling this kind of extreme mountain-hopping 'Alpine style' is not adequate, it demands stamina, mental focus and ambition that only someone like Purja commands.



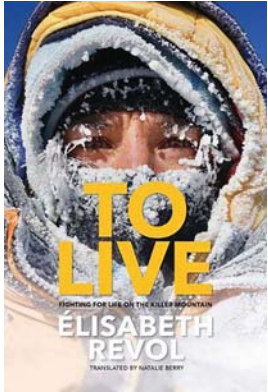
*Beyond Possible: One Soldier, Fourteen Peaks – My Life in the Death Zone*  
By Nimsdai Purja  
Hodder & Stroughton / SAFU, 2020  
293 pages  
Hardcover: £17.18  
Softcover Nepali Edition: Rs800

It almost seems like the summit is just symbolic, Purja's single-minded pursuit of his goal and never losing sight of his destination is an inspirational message for everyone in every arena of life. Just like Revol, Purja also has to deal with judgmental social media. His purity is questioned for using bottled oxygen and helicopters to base camp. But up there in the high thin air, both are above it all.

Purja's unabashed masculinity, pages peppered with obscenities and gung-ho accounts of alcohol and partying, can put readers off, but is an accurate reflection of his persona. What could be seen as self-promotion is also self-discipline – Purja's credo of leading by example, of trailblazing.

Besides Nanga Parbat, Purja very nearly comes to grief on Kangchenjunga and the Gasherbrums, showing us why this kind of climbing is so dangerous. On Annapurna, after submitting the first of his 14 peaks, he helps bring down a Malaysian climber despite being 'knackered' himself. He rescues an Indian woman on Everest, and two more Indian climbers on Kangchenjunga. They were too far gone to make it, but Nimsdai did not leave them to die -- even though he nearly died himself.

In the book and the film, Purja wonders if his international fame would have been greater if he had been a Westerner. As someone who covered mountaineering in Nepal for an international wire service in the 1980s, I know it would have. But after this book and Netflix, Nimsdai may have finally changed that.



*To Live: Fighting for Life on the Killer Mountain*  
by Élisabeth Revol  
Translated from the original French *Vivre* by Natalie Berry  
Vertebrate Publishing, 2020  
154 pages  
Kindle Edition: £8.54  
Hardcover £17.60



EVENTS



**New Year countdown**  
Food will be plenty and drinks will be flowing at Vivanta Kathmandu's New Year's Eve party and countdown to 2022.  
*31 December, Hotel Vivanta, Jhamsikhel*

**Batuwa Comedy Show**  
Get ready for a laughter-filled New Year's Eve with Maniraj Giri, Asheem Bhandari and Adarsha Mishra at the Batuwa Comedy Show. Call for tickets.  
*31 December, Bunker Hill Pub, Kupondole, 9804445337*



**TFN Fellowship 2022**  
Apply for the Teach for Nepal Fellowship 2022, a leadership training program designed to tackle inequality in education while preparing young Nepalis to become effective leaders. Applicants must complete and submit an online application at <https://www.teachfornepal.org>.  
*Deadline: 15 January*

**Disco party**  
Put on your dancing shoes and say goodbye to 2021 with disco, drinks and unlimited food.  
*31 December, 7pm onwards, Entry: Rs3,000, Pauline's Rooftop*



**Le Sherpa Market**  
Support small and local businesses. Shop for fresh and organic vegetables, fruit, cheese, bread, meat products, honey, and much more at Le Sherpa farmers market.  
*Saturdays, 7:30am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa Maharajganj*

DINING



**Raithaane**  
Take a gastronomic tour of Nepal at Raithaane, which has reopened at a new location. Every dish on the menu is connected to different communities of the country, made with locally sourced food.  
*Kupondole, 9801002971*

MUSIC

**Karaoke evening**  
Be your own entertainer this New Year's Eve and spend the evening singing with loved ones at The Latitude's Karaoke evening.  
*31 December, 3pm-8:30pm, The Latitude, Banasthali*



**NYE @ Dhokaima**  
Spend the New Year's Eve with live music from Ser o Dúo and Brazilian Duo at Dhokaima Café. Entry is free.  
*31 December, 6:30pm, Dhokaima Cafe, Patandhoka*



**Bipul Chhetri**  
Musician Bipul Chhetri & The Travelling Band, featuring Pahelo Batti Muni will deliver a musical afternoon this New Year's Day.  
*1 January, 1pm onwards, Chhaya Center, Thamel*

**Live music**  
The Apostles and Faithom will be live this Friday to liven up New Year's Eve with a musical evening at Blue Notes Café.  
*31 December, Blue Notes Café, Sanepa*



**The Elements**  
Celebrate New Year's Day with The Elements as they perform live music at Overeasy. Tickets at [dealkhana.com/events/new-year-with-the-elements](https://dealkhana.com/events/new-year-with-the-elements).  
*1 January, Overeasy BnB, Bansbari*

About Town

GETAWAY



**Charikot Panaroma Resort**  
Perched atop a hillock in Dolakha, the Charikot Panorama 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.  
*Dolakha (01) 5529463, 9802189822*

**Yak & Yeti**  
Yak & Yeti's annual New Year's Eve celebration will include live music, prizes and a gala dinner. Get details about the entry charges and the NYE accommodation package on Instagram.  
*Darbar Marg, 9851082805*



**Pataleban Vineyard Resort**  
Spend the New Year at Pataleban Vineyard Resort, an eco-resort with great views, jungle walks and picnics to rejuvenate from the stress of a tedious routine.  
*Chisapani, 9841679364*

**Mirabel Resort**  
Perfect for families, Mirabel Resort offers comfort, continental cuisines and views of Kathmandu Valley. Take a walk around Dhulikhel before tucking into a Nepali lunch. Get details on the Family Package on Facebook.  
*Dhulikhel (01) 490972*



**Ghale Gaun**  
There can be no better way to experience Nepali hospitality than at Ghale Gaun, where families have opened their homes to guests for more than two decades. Visit to experience the Gurung culture and way of life.  
*Ghale Gaun Tourism Management Committee, Rs1,100-1,200 per day (3 meals included)*



**Utpala Cafe**  
Enjoy vegetarian cuisine spanning 22 different flavours from Utpala's Executive Chef Deepankar Thapa Magar's New Year menu. Includes special beverages and live music.  
*31 December, 5:30pm, Boudha, 9810700763*

**Hyatt Place**  
Have a family brunch on New Year's Day at Hyatt Place Kathmandu's Zing. Celebrations include a magic show and kids' activities.  
*1 January, Tahachal (01) 5381234*



**Level 3**  
Head to Level 3's New Year's celebration, which will include a gala dinner buffet with live music, as well as an after party.  
*31 December, Labim (01) 5536513*

**Kairos Café**  
Known for its craft coffee, customisable breakfast, variety of juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine away from the hubbub of street noises, Kairos Café is a must for foodies.  
*Jawalakhel, 9813493902*

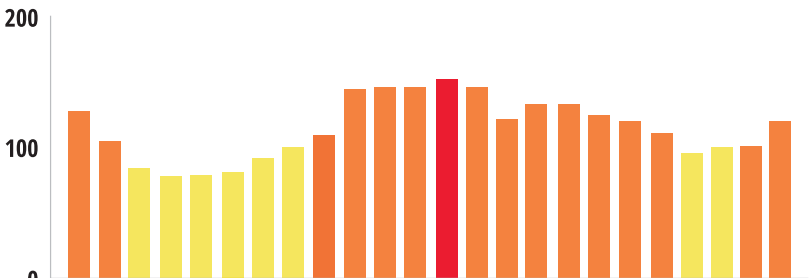
WEEKEND WEATHER



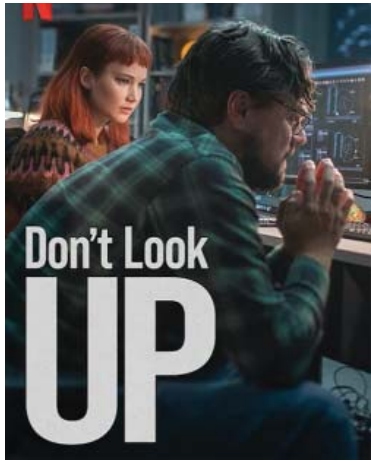
After the dousing midweek by that forceful Westerly that dumped 40-50mm of rain in Central Nepal and thick snow down to an elevation of 2,300m, the skies will clear up in the coming days, offering some stunning views of the Himalaya to welcome the new year. This was welcome rain for potato farmers in the mountains and those waiting to plant wheat in the Tarai. Kathmandu Valley will experience misty mornings into the weekend that will burn off when the sun comes up, while Saturday will see passing clouds without precipitation. The maximum temperature will climb, but stay below 20°C.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
16° 4°	17° 3°	19° 3°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



Down came the rain and washed off all the pollution – but just for a while. The Air Quality Index (AQI) that measures the concentration of dangerous suspended particles smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter dipped to 60-70 during the rainfall on Wednesday after topping 220 on the windless Tuesday. However, since vehicles will continue to spew emissions and people light outdoor fires to keep warm, the AQI climbed again – as seen in the above graph of measurements at the US Embassy in Phora Darbar from 8AM on Wednesday to 8AM on Thursday. Mornings in the coming days will have soot particles sticking to the moisture, creating a thick layer of smog in Kathmandu.



OUR PICK

Adam McKay's 2021 sci-fi satire *Don't Look Up* on Netflix follows two astronomers who must sound the alarm to the world about a comet approaching the Earth in six months. After their meeting with the US president Janie Orlean and her Chief of Staff is met with indifference, the two go on a media tour to warn mankind of the impending disaster. In the process, the two scientists are met with varying reactions from across the world. Stars Jennifer Lawrence, Leonardo DiCaprio, Meryl Streep, Jonah Hill, Mark Rylance, Cate Blanchett, Tyler Perry, Timothée Chalamet, and more.

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

संयुक्त संवैधानिक सरकारले जारी गरेको निर्देशनलाई सबैले पालना गर्नुपर्नेछ

नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

हिमाल खबरपत्रिका  
नपढी सुखै छैन !

हिमालमिडिया प्रा. लि.  
पाटनढोका, ललितपुर



# Pokhara’s paragliders must relocate, but where?

The city’s new airport will be displacing its aerial sports companies, but there are plenty of even more exciting options

● Masta KC

As Pokhara’s new international airport prepares to open by mid-2022, paragliding and ultralight companies that draw tens of thousands of visitors a year to the city will have to relocate. But given Central Nepal’s stunning terrain and scenery, there are plenty of even more exciting options.

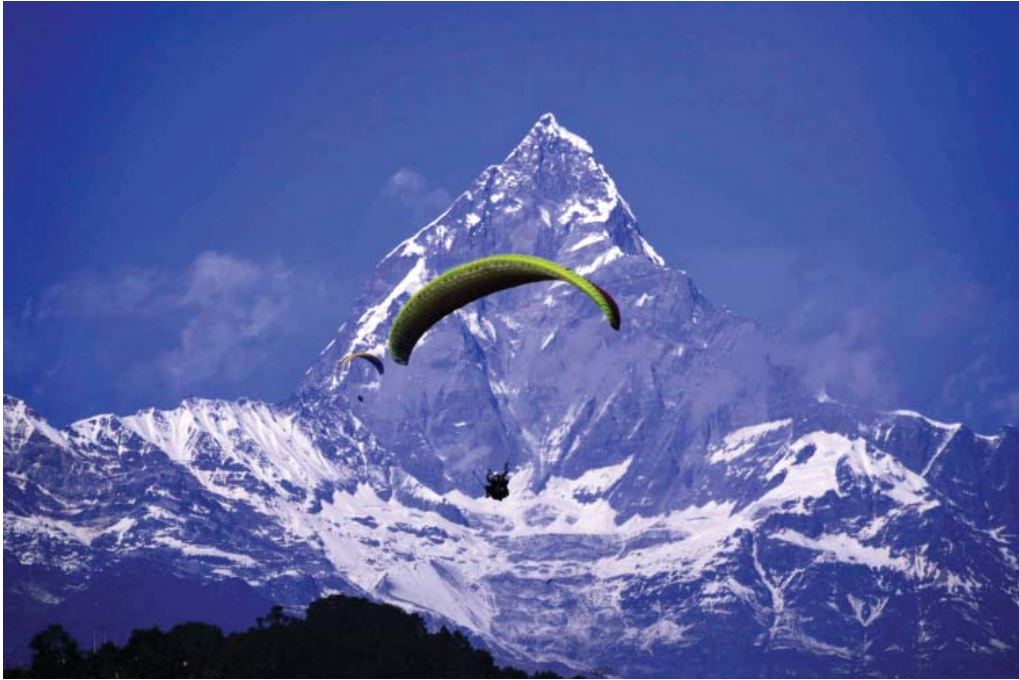
Pokhara’s Sarangkot Hill is a popular jump off point for paragliders but it falls within the 26 x 6km airspace that the new international airport will require for medium-haul twin jets that it will handle. The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) has now concluded that there is no alternative but to relocate them.

“Air safety rules prohibit recreational flights inside this airspace which is why we have to move paragliding and ultralight activities elsewhere,” explained Dev Chandra Lal Karna of CAAN, adding that tourism operators have been advised to take their business to adjoining Syangja, Parbat and Baglung districts.

It is not just the paragliders that will be affected, but also the ultralight companies that currently operate from the existing airport. They, too, must move because of the heavier and faster aircraft that will be landing and taking off in the new facility.

But local aerial sports operators have been reluctant to relocate, saying they can continue from Pokhara if proper safety guidelines are issued. They have purposed a flight curfew two hours a day either in the morning or in the afternoon to allocate that time for paragliding and ultralight flights.

“CAAN says we can’t run ultralight and paragliding here but they haven’t told us



RSS

how to proceed from here nor given us any alternatives,” complained Balam Acharya of the Nepal Air Sports Association who runs a paragliding company in Pokhara.

However, aviation experts say flight curfews do not make sense and there are plenty of alternatives for the aerial sports companies – including Syangja for paragliding and Baglung’s unused airfield for ultralights.

International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standards do not allow any aircraft to operate within the airspace of an international airport and neither is it safe to do so.

“It is technically impossible to fly

paragliders and ultralights near what is going to be a busy airport, it has to follow strict international safety guidelines,” says infrastructure expert Surya Raj Acharya. “There should be no other activities within its airspace.”

Indeed, Pokhara’s existing airport is already operating at maximum capacity with up to 40 domestic flights a day to Kathmandu, Jomsom, Bhairawa, Bharatpur, Simara, Biratnagar and Nepalganj. More flights are planned to Janakpur and Bhadrapur by private airlines.

In addition to catering to increased domestic flight frequency, the new airport will also handle international flights to

India, China, the Gulf and Malaysia. The current airport does not have night landing facilities, although the new one will.

Acharya is also of the opinion that airports should be built away from populated tourist destinations. “Today we face paragliding problem, tomorrow it will be noise pollution,” he adds. “A fast-track Butwal-Pokhara highway would have meant that flights would not be needed between the two cities.”

Commercial paragliding started in Pokhara in 2001 and now has over 69 registered companies, collectively with an annual turnover of Rs1 billion. There are three ultralight companies operating from the current airport, and one hot air balloon operator.

All companies had been hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and the collapse of tourism, and business has just started to pick up with mainly Nepali adventure-seekers. There are 1,200 people employed by aerial sports companies.

Paragliding operators are also reluctant to relocate because they think it will cause further losses, as they had already established Pokhara as the hub for adventure sports in Nepal.

Says Pom Narayan Shrestha of Pokhara Tourism Council: “Those interested in adventure tourism know Pokhara is the place to go but moving away means rebranding their products from scratch, and this would impact the entire tourism sector.”

Tourism planners say it is economically viable to move adventure sports activities from Pokhara to sites in nearby districts, but no more than one and a half hours away and have already come up with some suggestions. 📌



#SERIOUSABOUTBEER

WISHING YOU A **BEER-TIFUL** HAPPY NEW YEAR 2022.

Drink Responsibly





● Sonia Awale

It is that time of the year again when smog makes Kathmandu's air hazardous to health. Hospitals are swamped not with Covid, but COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease).

Once more, there is a flurry of media headlines about the dangerous concentration of suspended particles smaller than 2.5 microns from diesel exhaust.

Public awareness about air pollution is at an all-time high, the average life expectancy of Kathmandu's residents is reduced by at least four years. Yet, nothing happens. Why?

"The awareness and knowledge have not translated into corrective action," explains environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar. "We know about vehicle emission tests but we ignore it, open burning is bad but we don't stop, we have the opportunity to reduce air pollution with electric mass transport but we don't invest in it."

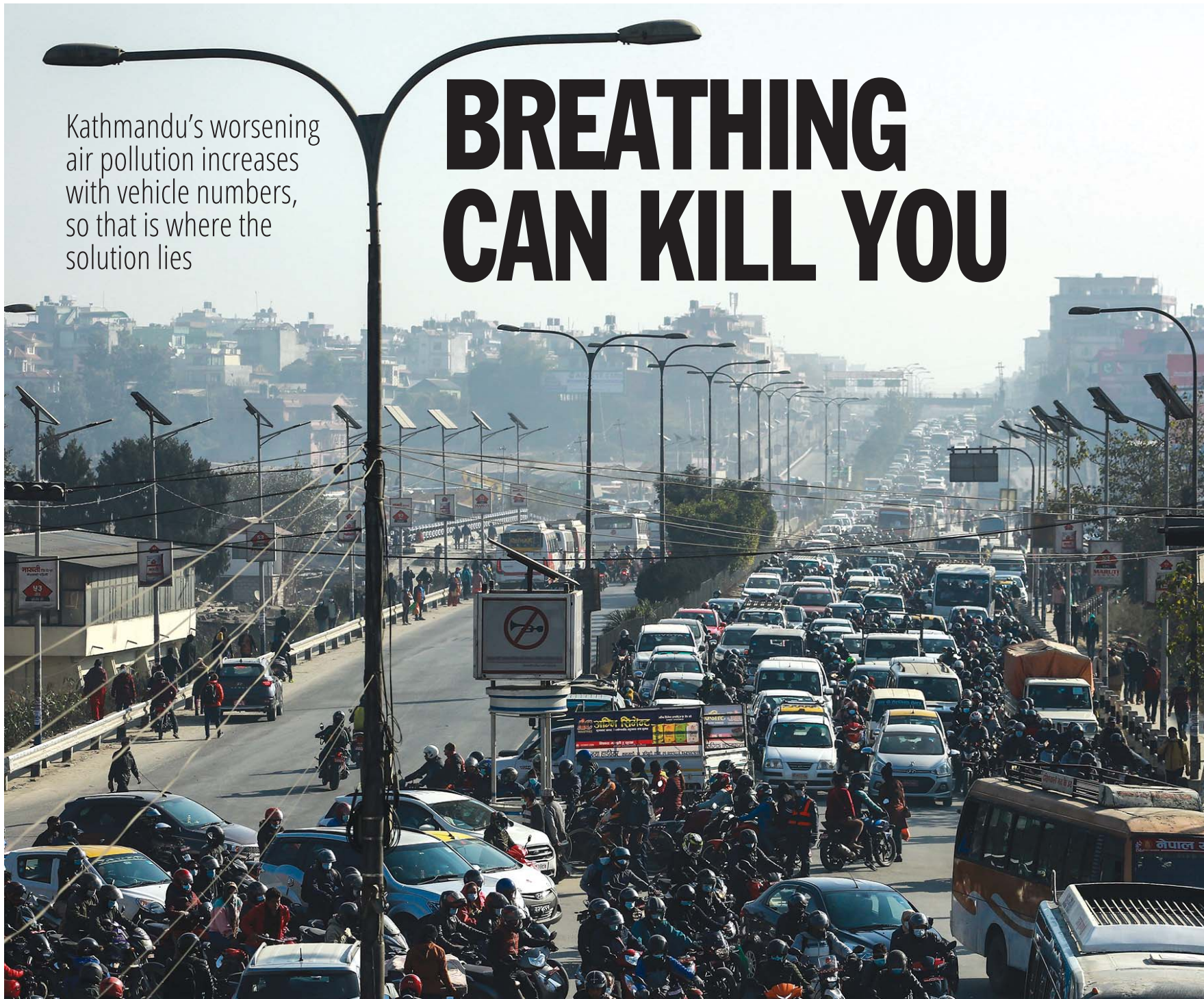
Air pollution was directly linked to at least 42,100 deaths in Nepal in 2019. Almost half of that was due to breathing in particles smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter which can cross the air blood barrier in the lung capillaries. Most of those particles come from vehicle emission.

From 1990 to 2015, the number of vehicles in Nepal grew by 1,995,404 — most of them in Kathmandu Valley. In five years, that figure doubled to 3,987,267.

This figure doesn't include the exploding demand for cars and motorcycles after the end of

Kathmandu's worsening air pollution increases with vehicle numbers, so that is where the solution lies

# BREATHING CAN KILL YOU



## Cars vs people in Kathmandu

City life and the many benefits it represents, including better healthcare, reliable transport and quality education, are the main pull factors for migration. The social networks of cities continue to be one of the principal drivers of economic productivity across the globe.



**COMMENT**  
Mark Perrin

Yet cities can also harm. Air pollution, traffic congestion, over-crowding and noise are some of the defining features of the lives of many city-dwellers across the world today — and not everyone is affected equally.

We often dismiss these negative 'externalities' as the unavoidable consequences of economic development, and of city life. But if we understand them well enough, both the good and bad aspects of city life can be disentangled and addressed.

One of the emerging areas of interest in cities is how much public space is allocated to motorised traffic. Who benefits? Who is impacted? How do motorised vehicles affect society?

Are there better ways to design urban transport systems and traffic flows? Kathmandu Valley, with its exponential growth, must address these questions.

The city's old narrow streets are crammed with cars, motorbikes and people, as man and machine contest for space. Metre-wide paths have become rat-runs for motorbikes to try to avoid congestion. This allocation of public space to cars and motorbikes raises important questions of what value authorities and inhabitants place on inclusivity and equality.

It is vitally important to understand how this plays out from the point of view of individual citizens. Consider, for instance, the perspective of a child playing on the street outside the house, or a senior citizen walking to the shop, or a woman carrying her baby while taking her first child to school.



We also know well that open community spaces, preferably incorporating nature, are vital components of any vibrant, just and social city system. Cities need places where people, regardless of social status, can mix, meet and connect. Yet in many cities, this is not factored sufficiently into the often-haphazard urban design.

In Kathmandu, while people do value open space and nature, that value has not yet been reflected in urban design. A case in point is the steady encroachment of Tundikhel and planned re-development of Rani Pokhari and Kamal Pokhari by the municipality office. It is not just private companies but agencies of the state that are also trying to build up green spaces for commercial purposes.

Such plans are detrimental especially to the people with the least resources. Recent research by UNOPS found that the 'lack of open space negatively affects the poor, who live in very crowded conditions, with no recreational areas, parks or open spaces nearby; while the lack of green space, the high amount of dust, and high pollution all impact the small amount of public space that does exist'.

Local leaders in some parts of the world are responding to these connected issues with innovative solutions. In Barcelona, the Superblock concept of urban design seeks to recover space for the community, improve biodiversity, and move towards sustainable mobility. It carves out 'islands' of traffic-free space by routing traffic around multi-block areas.

These 'superblocks' have better cycling and public transport links, to help replace car journeys. They also seek to create a more democratic, fairer city, with more participatory spaces, and one in which children can play safely in all its squares without risk from cars.

In Bogota, where development has historically occurred without planning just like in Kathmandu, inclusivity and empowerment of women through public spaces and urban mobility are now key objectives, supported by a clear plan. Municipal leaders are framing roads as manifestations of inequality, occupying a disproportionate amount of public space set against the number of people who use them. Accordingly, the city aims to redistribute road

space towards use by public transport and pedestrians.

Transitions to a more sustainable design are long-term processes. They are typically guided by inspiring visions of desirable, sustainable systems and deep engagement with communities.

In both Barcelona and Bogota, the creation of such a vision, informed by community perspectives, was a vital step. To get started, pilot projects by innovative and forward-looking municipalities can be used to act as seeds of transformation. If benefits and outcomes are shared and communicated, pilot projects that produce innovations can be expanded and aligned with future national policy interests.

Lalitpur is branding itself as the first cycle friendly municipality of Nepal. Chitwan is also taking a lead to make its streets people-centric. These examples can be models for other municipalities.

The central government, on the other hand, can develop policies to promote public transport and incentivise electric mass transit, which will clean up Kathmandu's air pollution, utilise Nepal's surplus hydroelectricity, and cut its petroleum import bills.

Cities are places of complexity, involving multiple actors, interests, interactions and processes. The meaning of sustainability is contested, especially in cities. Transport and public space-related issues such as those highlighted here compete for policy attention alongside other often equally important agenda. So it is crucial to communicate their implication on the economy and public health.

In a city like Kathmandu, however, where cyclists, pedestrians and electric trolley buses used to once roam, and where local shopping is the norm, a serious look at how to reduce the impact of vehicles and motorbikes on city dwellers would likely find fertile ground for beneficial change. 🇳🇵

**Mark Perrin** is a Senior Fellow at Nepal Economic Forum (NEF) and Technical Lead at Himalayan Circular Economy Forum (HICEF).





AMIT MACHAMASI

the Covid second wave in mid-2021. Nepal spent Rs543 billion in importing vehicles, transport equipment and spare parts in four months from mid-July to mid-October, against Rs357 billion and Rs418 billion for the same periods in 2020 and 2019.

“There has been an unexpectedly high demand for private vehicles in Nepal after the pandemic, especially two wheelers given the public’s hesitancy to use buses due to coronavirus fears,” says Dhruba Thapa of the National Automotive Dealers Association.

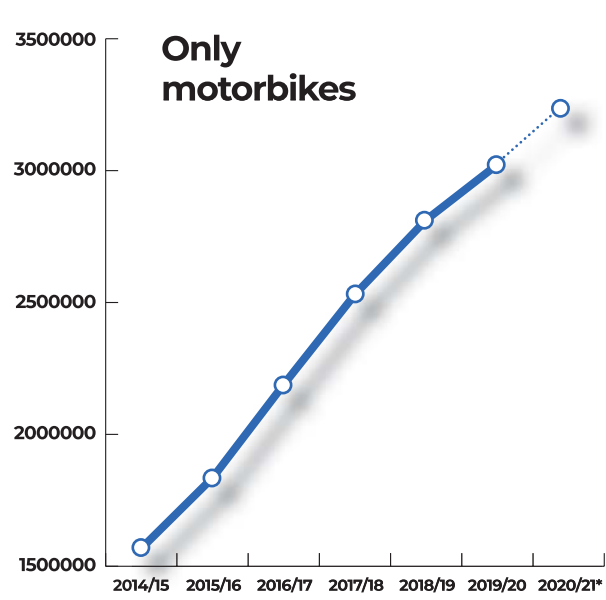
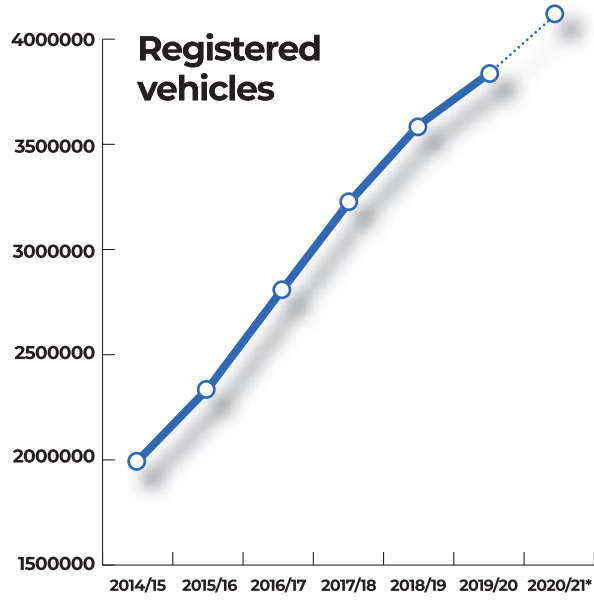
Raju Chettri, CEO of the MAW Enterprises that imports Yamaha bikes in Nepal has a similar observation. He saw a decline in the annual sales of two wheelers from about 250,000 units to 190,000 right after the pandemic. But this year, the sales went up to 350,000 units.

“There are two reasons behind this: pent-up demand and reduced use of public transport because of Covid fears,” Chettri says.

There are more than 3.1 million two-wheelers in Nepal, over one million of them in Kathmandu. They are adding to the capital’s foul air, as they are up to 10 times more polluting per passenger kilometre than buses and cars.

Two-wheelers also emit invisible toxic gases like carbon monoxide, benzene and nitrous oxides, and increase the concentration of street-level ozone. Motorcycle exhaust may not be as visible as diesel exhaust, but they are highly poisonous — especially when there are so many of them. Besides exacerbating respiratory diseases, the gases are carcinogenic, causing cardiovascular diseases and Alzheimer’s.

The solution is to shift rapidly to cleaner electric vehicles, not just for healthier air but also to meet Nepal’s net-zero pledge in Glasgow and to reduce the country’s burgeoning



SOURCE: DOTM \*PROJECTED

petroleum import bill.

“The priority has to be on electric public transport and supporting infrastructure,” says Tuladhar, who is also the director of Sajha Yatayat that is procuring 40 electric buses and trying to turn the former trolley bus terminal into a charging station.

He adds: “Electric buses are more expensive than diesel ones, so the government has to help with capital, and better manage Kathmandu’s public transport.”

This week, Nepal opened its first electric charging station powered by solar panels for the Lumbini Development Trust. Similar charging stations can be set up for public and private vehicles in existing bus parks across Nepal and along highways.

Shilshila Acharya of Himalayan Climate Initiative (HCI) agrees that the priority should be on electrifying public transport and encouraging bicycle lanes. She says, “Replacing cars with more

cars even if electric only promotes consumerism. We have to give people reliable alternatives.”

Kathmandu Valley Air Quality Management Action Plan held its first meeting this week, during which it finalised a USAID-funded project to control air pollution, and a forecasting system with technical support from ICIMOD.

“The problem of air pollution will take some time to be solved but we have started our homework,” says Indu Joshi of the Department of Environment. “At the moment, our biggest challenge is controlling open burning.”

Apart from transport, garbage burning and biomass fuel for household heating and cooking are also contributors to Kathmandu’s dirty air. The problem is made worse in winter due to the Valley’s topography that traps surface pollution in an inversion layer.

Improper solid waste management in Kathmandu means locals burn garbage by the

riverbanks near residential areas — while, as studies show, segregation of waste at homes can reduce the city’s garbage volume by up to 80%.

There is no other problem that is so directly linked with the health and economy of the country as urban air pollution. The Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 is proof that Kathmandu can be cleaned up, it just needs the right leadership and the political will to back it up.

Says Shilashila Acharya: “Our policies on mobility and air pollution have to be people- and culture-centric, instead of focusing only on technology. We must build public pressure to force the politicians into action.”

A public opinion poll in this paper just before the 2017 elections showed that a majority of Nepalis were concerned about the health impact of pollution. Since 2022 will be dominated by campaigning for the next election, this could be turned into the main criteria for candidates to win votes. 🇳🇵

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# Happy New Year

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# 1921 Rendezvous: Mallory, Pumori and Everest

Mountaineering was enriched by George Mallory, who was awed by Nepal's Himals that he saw over a high pass from Tibet

● Kanak Mani Dixit

In July 1921, exploring the northern flanks of Mount Everest, the teacher, essayist and climber George Leigh Mallory came up from Tibet on the West Rongbuk Glacier. Already dazzled by an array of peaks never before seen by Europeans, before him at the head of the glacier loomed a beautiful pyramidal peak serrated with ice and rock.

He decided to name the mountain after his 8-year-old daughter Clare back home in Surrey. On 18 July 1921, Mallory penned a letter to his wife Ruth, one of the many which make up a great written archive of his three forays to Everest in 1921, 1922 and 1924.

He wrote: ‘*At night, before we turned in, the moonlit scene was half-veiled in cloud; and in the early morning the moon was still up, and the peaks clearer. One mountain in particular, on the far side of the snow-covered glacier, was singularly lovely. I call it for the present, Mount Clare, and I hope the name will stick.*’

The name did stick, but it seems to have transmogrified into Pumori. Mallory was up on the glacier with a team of Sherpas besides his climbing companion Guy Bullock. *Phumo* or *Bhumo* means ‘daughter’ in the Himalayan dialects, and *ri* denotes a peak (རྩ་མོ་རི་). It is believed that the Sherpas decided to adapt it to ‘the daughter peak’.

An alternative possibility is suggested by Pasang Sherpa, researcher and writer of Khumjung/Gokyo, that Mallory may have first heard the name ‘Pumori’ from his climbing team of Sherpas and adapted it for his Western audience with his daughter’s name.

Mallory was able to look into Nepal, but was prevented by the terrain as well as the reality of the international border from descending into the Khumbu and exploring Everest’s western features. However, his writings, so full of the articulate explorer’s wonder, are the first texts we have on Lhotse, Nuptse, the Western Cwm as well as the Khumbu Icefall and Glacier.

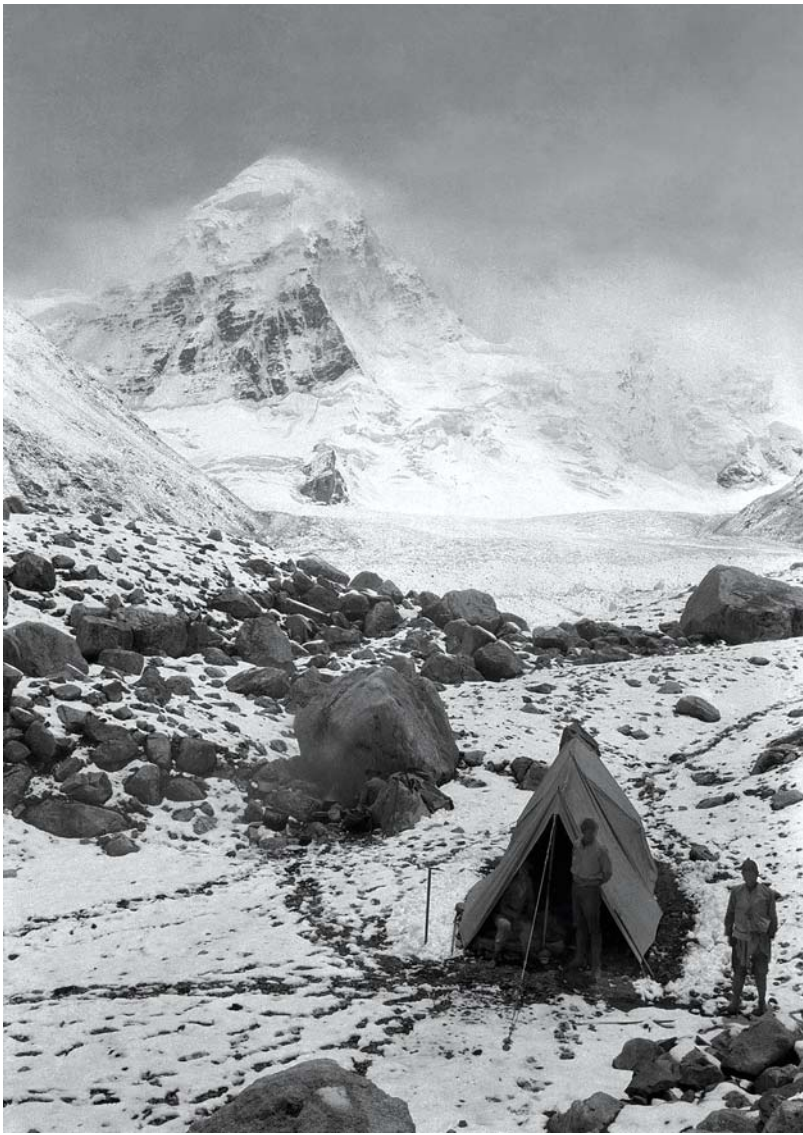
The climbing history of Everest swivelled completely after World War II, with Nepal opening its portals to climbers and explorers in 1949, including Maurice Herzog, Eric Shipton and A W Tilman.

The main route up Everest till today remains the one up the South Col, which Mallory would not have seen from his vantage point on the col. But he wrote on 19 July: ‘*We saw a lovely group of mountains away to the South in Nepal. I wonder what they are and whether anything is known about them.*’

It was world mountaineering’s good fortune that a writer of such expressiveness was the ‘first-explorer’ of Everest – in the way he described the adventures above the Rongbuk and West Rongbuk glaciers, eastward right up to the base of Makalu, and finally identifying the route via the North Col, up from the East Rongbuk finger.

We can only marvel at Mallory’s first-ever description of Everest with its three main arêtes converging towards the top: ‘*Everest is a rugged giant. It has not the smooth undulations of a snowy mountain with white cap and glaciated flanks. It is rather a rock mass, coated often with a layer of white powder which is blown about its sides ... it has no spire.*’

Dying at age 38, Mallory had packed in a lot in his life besides climbing in the British Isles, the Alps and the Himalaya. He had served 16 months as an artillery officer on the trenches of the Western Front during



World War I, which impacted his outlook on life and sparked his plans for public service.

Reinhold Messner, the reigning patriarch of world climbing and author of the book *The Second Death of George Mallory* (2001) calls Mallory ‘the spiritual father of high-altitude mountaineering’. Mallory gave cultural and emotional weightage to mountaineering beyond a sport, as a personal quest of the climber.

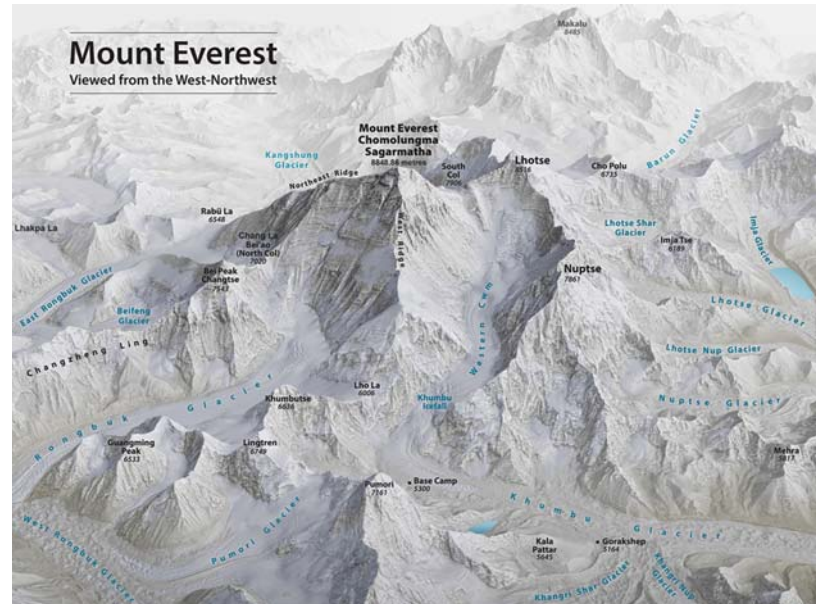
Like Messner, Mallory was at heart what would later be called an ‘Alpine style climber’, who sought to climb light and fast towards the summit, without supplemental oxygen.

The supply lines of the day required many porters, but Mallory’s way was always to lead rather than come up on belay. He was persuaded during the last 1924 expedition to use the ungainly oxygen canisters, but the rest of

Mallory’s explorations up and around Everest were always without supplemental oxygen.

He wrote: ‘*It has always been my pet plan to climb the mountain gasless ... The gasless party has the better adventure. My intention is to carry as little as possible, move fast and catch the summit by surprise.*’

The discovery of Mallory’s body by climber Conrad Anker on 1 May 1999 on Everest’s windswept upper strata was one of the most poignant episodes of mountaineering ever. Having survived, sprawled and face-down for 75 years on the hostile, windswept field of rock and ice on the North Face, his entire frozen upper torso freeze-dried and intact – the tweed and cotton clothing, the personalised tags and handkerchief, goggles, compass, hobnail boots and broken rope – you would think he is ready to get up from the fall and say, “Let’s get on with it.”



**DAUGHTER PEAK:** (clockwise from left) Pumori shrouded in cloud as seen by George Mallory from the West Rongbuk Glacier in Tibet in 1921.

Map of the Everest region that Mallory expored from 1921-24, and Mallory at Base Camp on his last expedition.

Thinly-clad Nepali porters climbing rock at high altitude.

Mallory could be brusque and matter-of-fact, as when in 1923, responding to a *New York Times* reporter about why he sought to climb Everest, he said: “Because it is there.” But the rest of his answer to the reporter, rarely highlighted, shows that to be more than a throwaway line: “Everest is the highest mountain in the world, and no man has reached its summit. Its existence is a challenge. The answer is instinctive, a part, I suppose, of man’s desire to conquer the universe.”

Mallory had other ambitions beyond mountaineering. He hoped to parlay his climbing fame not only for income for a comfortable life for his family through books and lectures, but also for a life in public affairs. There was already his searing experience of war in the trenches, the horror of the bombs and poison gas, and after joining the faculty at Cambridge he had become interested in what he called ‘international politics’. Before the 1924 expedition, Mallory had applied for a job in the League of Nations, the predecessor organisation to the United Nations.

During the second expedition the following year, Mallory survived an avalanche below the North Col, which took the lives of seven porters. Before the accident, he had written: ‘*Frankly the game is not good enough. The risks of getting caught are too great; the margin of strength when men are at great heights is too small. Perhaps it’s mere folly to go up again. But how can I be out of the hunt?*’

The death of the Sherpas must have also been part of what impelled Mallory towards the top in 1924, as a kind of redemption for the lives lost. His last posted letter before finally disappearing into the clouds on the North Face for was: ‘*I can write but one line. We are on the point of moving up again and the adventure appears more desperate than ever.*’

While the story of Everest exploration from the North is replete with reference to the ‘Sahibs’, it was, after all, the Sherpas who made

all three expeditions possible, while referred to mostly as nameless ‘coolies’. As they observed the Khumbu landscape from Tibet together with Mallory and Bullock, the Sherpas were looking down at their own homes and valleys.

Mallory was quite concerned about the safety and security of the supporting climbers, and believed that the summit must be abandoned if it is a choice between that and saving the life of a porter who needs escorting down the mountain. ‘*The obligation is the same whether he be Sahib or coolie. If we ask a man to carry our load up to the mountain we must care for his welfare and need.*’

In one of Mallory’s photographs we can see porters tying ropes around the midriff, and one is seen wearing the regular *daura-surwal* while rock-climbing at high-altitude. A photograph of Cho Oyu shows a Sherpa in the foreground, resting with his head wrapped in a muffler and wearing what looks like a military-issue overcoat.

Did the Sherpas of Khumbu and Tibetans from adjacent northern valleys have their own name for Pumori? It is unlikely that such an important peak at the head of the Khumbu valley, and much more prominent than Everest itself would not have had a name. Kangtega to Thamerku, Makalu, Chomolongma, Chomolonzog, Chamlang, Ghyachungtang and Cho Oyu, all have traditional, indigenous names. How was Pumori missed?

Two possibilities arise: One, that there was no traditional name for the beautiful pyramid astride the Khumbu Icefall, hence Mallory’s Clare Peak, which was relinquished to ‘Pumori’. Two, that there was a traditional name for the mountain, but the Sherpas of the 1921 team did not know it, hence they took to Clare Peak with enthusiasm and converted it into their tongue.

While remembering Mallory and his team a century after the Everest expedition of 1921, we may just find another traditional and authentic name for Pumori, if it is not Pumori. 🇳🇵



# Himalayan highs

● David Pokorny

I was initially preparing to run the 2021 Everest Trail Race following the 2019 Annapurna Marathon and another trip in 2016. The race was cancelled because of the pandemic, but when Nepal re-opened to vaccinated tourists I immediately grabbed the opportunity to trek, since there would be only few other travellers on the otherwise over-crowded trekking trails. I had to move fast to get all the shots, tests, visas and Covid forms to get to Nepal on 7 October.

I have been returning to Nepal, true to the country's former tourism slogan: 'Once Is Not Enough'. What draws me here is the hospitality and kindness of the people, the rich cultural heritage, and of course the superb scenery.

The glaciers and high mountain ecosystem are feeling the threat of global warming, but the isolation of being in Nepal's Himalayas is unparalleled. And it is even more isolated because of the slump in tourism internationally.

Trekking in Nepal, you get to challenge yourself on the best (and some of the hardest) hiking trails in the world. No wonder Nepal is repeatedly listed by the *Lonely Planet* as a top destination, as it did also for 2022.

This time around, I wanted to go solo, fast, high and far. I wanted to be where few other trekkers go. So, with the trek company that took care of me on my previous trips, we created a customised itinerary and on 11 October set forth with three guides and porters.

We headed east to the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area on Nepal's northeastern tip, and below the world's third-highest mountain.

Lodgings on the Kangchenjunga trail are more basic than those on the Annapurna Circuit, but it is more authentic. Rooms and food are simple, there are no printed menus.

This is the best time to go off the beaten trek, and explore eastern Nepal's mountain wilderness



DAVID POKORNY

The *dal-bhat* is the staple, with at least one meal a day. We ate by the warm kitchen fire, often sitting on the floor.

We trekked higher along a rumbling, roaring river and passed waterfalls, streams and other glacier-fed rivers. At Kambachen, a wide open view showed evidence of receding glaciers all around. Near Lhonak, a lake with icebergs marked the point where the Kangchenjunga Glacier was calving.

The glaciers flowing down from Kangchenjunga and Jhinsang merge here, and it is an awe-inspiring place to be in, with its primal, unspoiled beauty. We were the only

people there.

Next, the high passes of Nango La and Lumba Sumba were the hardest part of the trek. Very few people had used the Nango La trail in the recent past. At the Yangma River a crew from Olanchung Gola was replacing a washed out bridge to reopen the route. They tied four logs roughly together and then walked over the Yangma. This sure makes Nepal an adventure destination in the true sense of the word.

On 19 October we were pelted by heavy post-monsoon rain in Olanchung Gola, the snow was deep at higher elevations, so we

added two porters with tents and kitchen for the Lumba Sumba traverse. We camped on new snow at Pass Camp and then began a hard 10 hour push, breaking trail up to the pass.

As daylight faded, we dug a snow shelf at 5,159 meters and made camp. The next morning's sunrise view of Kangchenjunga to the east and Mt Everest to the west was other-worldly. The trek team's determination and confidence made the Lumba Sumba crossing possible.

It felt like a family dinner the next evening on the other side of the pass, when six of us snuggled into sleeping bags on the kitchen floor and benches of our Thudam home-stay.

Trekking has highs and lows, and the next day was the worst. It is impossible to enjoy a long day on a muddy slippery trail with leeches clinging to your pants. You just have to keep on walking with the prospect of a cold beer at our Chyamtang lodge beckoning us.

The final challenge was crossing the Arun River, up to Shipton La to Makalu Base Camp. At Num, I said thanks and goodbye to the porters and camping equipment. Only three of us would carry on. There were more trekkers on the Makalu Trail, and several were Nepali families who spoke English. More and more Nepalis are trekking now, and making up for the absence of international tourists.

There are two things about Makalu that were remarkable: the trail steps from Tashigaon to Dobato. Nepali engineers build the best and safest trail steps. Both uphill and down I try to hold a quick pace. My heart is racing, and I literally yip and shout with joy at the challenge.

Pemba Ringin Sherpa and Lakpa Kipa Sherpa own the Langmale Kharka and Base Camp lodges on Makalu. They kept the lodges open despite the deep snow just for us. Lakpa welcomed us with a warm stove, delicious *dal-bhat* and a can of Tuborg. Their kindness gave me more joy than photographing the Milky Way over Makalu, or seeing a bright, crisp sunrise the next morning.

Nepal, I will keep coming back. Next year, it will be Manaslu and Tsum Valley. 🇳🇵

**David Pokorny** is a 54-year-old American traveller. His nickname in Nepal, 'Poko', means 'pack'. More pictures of the expedition are online.

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# Older and wider in 2022

As Planet Earth completes another orbit around the Sun, it is that time of year during our trajectory through space to take stock of the past year, and prepare for the next one by making a firm resolution to be even more grouchy and cantankerous throughout Fiscal Year 2021-22. After all, what is there to be cheerful about?

It is also the time of year when we realise that we are all getting older and wider. As a Communist [Damn, autocorrect!]. As a Columnist for a newspaper of record it is incumbent upon this scribe in the public interest to also promote a few health tips for the benefit of those who in 2022 need a higher resolution:

- New Year's Eve is a timely reminder to some of us that we are getting long in the tooth. Not that we needed reminding. Take it from me: the older you get, the fewer teeth you have. Which is why senior officials of the main political parties are all toothless.
- Then there is hair. Many follicular-challenged senior Nepalis are successfully hiding their age with transplants modelled after Nepal's successful Community Forestry Program. A person may have a full head of hair, but it may not be attached to the scalp. The way to tell is to yank alleged hair during a fistfight on the floor of the August House. If the fur comes off (Aha!) the MP in question is wearing a wig, and is not a Young Turk. We should therefore accord him/her/them all respect and veneration traditionally bestowed by our society on five-time prime ministers.
- The other thing about hair is that as one gets on in years, it stops growing where it was originally designed to (head, chest, armpits, bellybutton) and starts sprouting where it is not supposed to (inside nostril, in ear canal, shower outlet, etc). There is also a gender difference: mustaches fall off as men age, whereas older women start growing them.
- Since too much tea drinking can cause ulcers, I would advise all seniors to switch to Old Smuggler and get a life membership of the Nepal Bar in 2022.
- Those of you who aced Physics in school will know that according to Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation, any mass in the known universe attracts another ass with a force that is equal to the square root of the acceleration of both bodies as governed by the following equation:  $F = G(m^1m^2)/R_2$ . This explains why my lower abdomen has of late started moving in the general direction of the Centre of the Earth. We can defy gravity by getting cantilever support from concealed cummerbunds, and take it as a compliment when younger colleagues in the orifice whisper: "Geez, the guy's got guts."
- Have to watch your carbohydrate intake as you get older, so reduce carbs in the new year by cutting the leftover Christmas fruitcake into smaller slices before eating them.
- Smoking is hazardous to health. Quit immediately. Just breathe Kathmandu air in 2022.



The Ass

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