Sonia Awale

On Thursday morning, Nepal Times photographer Amit Machmali was greeted with a shocking sight when he drove up to Bagabdi 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 2022 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 2023.

“We have cleaner options like interlocking earth bricks, or we just need public pressure to make it an election issue,” says activist Bhutan Tuladhar.

A pre-pandemic research showed that 60% of suspended particulates in Kathmandu’s air was from brick kilns, 30% from vehicular emissions, and 10% 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).

“Vehicular pollution levels in winter have become the norm, yet the government is not doing much to control it,” says Shehpal 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 42,160 Nepalis, according to one research. Many more were indirectly affected. Vehicular emissions, 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 Shilpika Acharya: “Politicians are always 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

Curkus 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
Editorial
31 DECEMBER 2021 - 6 JANUARY 2022 • 41882

Keep the flag flying in 2022

Exactly one year ago, this newspaper celebrated its hundredth edition—100 months after going digital-only. The 1 January 2021 #0402 of Nepal 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. April and May saw the Delta variant overwhelming the country’s hospitals, and exhausting oxygen supply. Complicacy has set in again. But, let’s hope we have learned from our past mistakes.

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.

We wish you a better 2022. But things are not looking too rosy. Secessionism:

Economy

The year 2021 witnessed that true economic leap the pandemic was supposed to provide. With the country under a lockdown for half of the year, domestic trade and manufacturing saw a blip. The three-month lock-in saw exports drop by 25.9 percent in the April-June quarter as compared to the same period in 2020. The trade deficit increased to Rs 153 billion in October-November, while foreign remittances and remittances were much lower. The recent law of Rs 10.4 billion—enough only to last six months of crisis.

Tourism revenue has collapsed, and government spending is at a standstill. Tourism is facing a crisis of leadership, while the country’s tourism industry and associated sectors have been facing a similar crisis.

Journalists’ strike may have been a blunt guerrilla campaign, but it seems deliberate as Prime Minister — he has no clue about the economy. We hope the latter and the former goes through.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

A year of living indiscivly

The editor of the now defunct Nepali Times had in the year 2002, 20 years ago, described the country’s situation as one of the most serious of the time. Being diagnosed with viral hepatitis B, and not getting any proper treatment for it, I was told that I could die anytime. You may wonder, why I am sharing this story now? This year, 2022, has been a year of reflection and introspection for me. It has been a year of hope and despair, but mostly hope. The hope that things will get better.

Online packages

WHAT’S TRENDS

Looking back at the 1923 Nepal-Britain Treaty

By Sweta Adhikari

Nearly 100 years ago, the first treaty of Nepal signed a treaty with British India that resulted in the humiliation of the nation. This treaty is referred to in the British era and the Nepal-Britain Treaty is a symbol. The treaty was signed on 9 April 1923.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Secessionism and secessionist

By Sunita Shrestha

“Individual’s beliefs” and “abortion of identity” have been mentioned in the discussion of secessionist movements in Nepal. This article aims to explore the relationship between these two concepts and their implications for the future of Nepal.

Most popular on Twitter

Cars vs people in Kathmandu by Bhakti Shrestha

The city’s narrow lanes are crowded with cars, motorcycles, and buses, and the road becomes busy with traffic during rush hours. The situation has become more congested with the increase in the number of cars on the road.

Most commented

On nature and human nature

Karmacharya National Park is located in the central region of Nepal, with people from all over the world visiting it. The park is famous for its scenic beauty and diverse wildlife.

Most visited online page

QUOTE

TWEETS

A Royal Nepal News post had an important message to convey: “Nepal is a democratic country where everyone’s opinion matters.” The post aimed to encourage people to participate in the political process and make their voices heard.

NYAPE Times

Nepal Times

Nepal Times

Nepal Times

Nepal Times

Nepal Times

Nepal Times

Nepal Times

Nepal Times

Nepal Times

Nepal Times

Nepal Times
TIME TO MEET AGAIN
HAPPY NEW YEAR

TURKISH AIRLINES
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 to support its outreach to small, medium, and micro enterprises, and will help enhance the creditworthiness of the bank.

Buddha’s night flights

Buddha Air has increased the frequency of its flights to and from the Kathmandu Valley due to increased demand. The airline now has the highest number of flights at 11 per day. The company has increased its fleet size from 10 to 12, and is planning to add more aircraft in the near future.

Free health camp

Global Health Initiative, in coordination with the Nepal Family Planning Association, is conducting a week-long free health camp for women in seven provinces of Nepal. The camp, which started on 27 December, is aimed at providing medical care and counseling to women, with a focus on family planning.

SDGs in Mithila

The local government has initiated a new program to promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Mithila region. The program aims to raise awareness about the SDGs and encourage community action towards achieving them.

NCC and Hotel Sirajchuli

NCC Bank has launched a new service, mobile banking, which allows customers to access their bank accounts from anywhere. The service is especially useful in rural areas where traditional banking services may not be available.

Laxmi Bank AGM

Laxmi Bank AGM is held on 29th November. The AGM approved the proposal to distribute 8% bonus shares and 15% cash dividend to the shareholders.

Fonepay scheme

Fonepay, a mobile and digital payment service, has launched a new scheme to encourage people to use digital payments. The scheme offers incentives to users who switch to digital payments.

N.B. Ashish Dhakal

Ashish Dhakal is a well-known Nepalese artist known for his vibrant and colorful paintings. He is known for his depiction of everyday life in Nepal, particularly in rural areas.

Muses of the mountains

Artist Bharat Rai’s whimsical portraits of the beasts of burden that make trade possible
RAIZE
TO NEW BEGINNINGS

Move your world
Alpine style in the Himalaya

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

- Kunda Dietz
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 Himalayan climbers mount Everest... 13 Peaks: Nothing is Impossible stars Nepali climbers Nirmal (Nimsdai) Purja and his partners Mingma David Sherpa, Lakpa Denzor Sherpa, Gelsang Sherpa and German mountain guide 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 and Dhaulagiri'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 350 days, set by South Korean mountain climber Kim Chang-ho.

Purja is attempting this not just for himself, not just for Nepal, but "to show how normal beings can do it," he says. A point he makes over and over is that Nepal 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 for once and for all.

The former Gurkha commandos prove that there is no obstacle, either on vertical ice or in the bureaucracy that he cannot surmount. 13 Peaks is a story of teamwork, ambition, determination, perseverance and passion, but what 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 are ready to abandon their expeditions after three deadly avalanches. The Nepal lights the match, does not die. Reaham Firiz and Purja rallies everyone to give one more try, while his team roses to the top. Like Purja's book, the documentary is a must, and at times one wonders if he would tone it down a bit. The real star of the film is Purja's wife Ruthi, who is diagnosing when explaining his drive, her own words, which is as constant as Purja's. The movie shows the scenes with his allying mother.

The documentary attempts to address criticism Purja faced for using bottled oxygen, with many 'purists' saying that disqualifying it. Fortunately, 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 impossible in such a short time." (See profile, left)

While 14 Peaks profiles a climber attempting 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 meditation. It is based on Yanniguic's manga adaptation of Baki Yamamura's 1996 novel, and does not delve into the lure of climbing, focusing instead on the obsession.

Working as a photographer for a magazine, Nakajima Kokur (Bastien Boubliez) 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 tell him a secret that he says belonged to General Mally, the British climber who disappeared on Everest in 1924 (see page 2). The mystery of whether Mally and his climbing partner Andrew Irvine reached the top, almost three decades before Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norbee, 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, Purja thinks the camera is fake, but when he catches a glimpse of a man he believes to be Haku Juki (Yosuke Manuela), he suspects that it may be Mally's. Haku is a famous, but fictitious, Japanese climber who disappeared years previously.

Purja sets out to track down Haku. The film flashes back to Haku's childhood and his days in a climbing club, and his perilous previous climbs. Purja is as obsessed as his hero project, and when he finally gets to photograph Haku on Everest, both display powerful intensity to pull it off.

Director Patrick Imbert captures five volumes worth of action in just 94 minutes. The 3D animation departs from the textured layers of the original manga, and is reminiscent of Studio Ghibli works, with smooth, fluid movements and stylized photographic backgrounds.

It is the climbing scenes where the film truly shines. There is no dialogue, no music, just the wind, the breaths, the mist, the trembling tent ropes, and the roiling wind. These are the movements of hands, eyes and gestures in the dialogue scenes. This is a meditation of its immense beauty.

Imbert and his animation team depict the mountains in all their raw wild power, and the audience is left to experience the vertigo to scale them. Amine Bouab has the score complements the story and animates the adventure.

This is a French film about a Japanese mountain rescuer and an American cartoon techniques for a film set in Nepal, so it is surprising Netflix does not have a Netflix version with subtitles to give it greater audiences.

The Summit of the Gods is a not a happy movie, that much we can see. It does not shy away from the sacrifice and suffering to Adams and the adventures of the 1924 expedition, and the other 14 peaks. Both films show us what it is like to be a mountain climbing the super-human.

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 every arena of life. Just like Revol, Purja also has to deal with judgmental social media. His purity is questioned by using bottled oxygen and helicopters to base camp. But he has the courage to push the height high, both are above it all. Purja's unashamed masculinity, pages peppered with obituaries and gang on his accounts of alcohol and drugs, 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 crusade of character, an example of truthfulness.

Besides Nanga Parbat, Purja very nearly comes to grief on Kangchenjunga and the Gasherbruma, showing us why this kind of climbing is so dangerous. On Nanga Parbat summiting the first of his 14 peaks, he helps bring down a Malamur doctor who was deeply offended by being "knocked out". He rescues an Indian alpinist and two more Indian climbers on Kangchenjunga. They were too far gone to make it down, and Purja did not leave them to die - even though he nearly died himself. In the book and the film, Purja wonders if his international fame and stardom let him, if he had been a Westerner. As someone from a tiny mountainloving nation in Nepal for an international win story in the 1960s, I know it would have. But after this book and Netflix, Nirmal may have finally changed that.

"When I was 12 years old, I dreamt of fighting for life on the Killer Mountains. It tells the story of her own heroism: 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 partners. Nanga Parbat has been claiming climbers' lives for the past 160 years. The first two Nepali casualties in a Himalayan expedition were Gurkhas with British climber Albert Mummery in 1856. Six more Nepalis were among nine killed in a German expedition on the mountain in 1934, as well as Nepalis, were killed in an avalanche three years later - all on Nanga Parbat.

To Live is Elisabeth Revol's attempt to come to terms with Mackiewicz's death, and two years later, rationalizes for his own complicit in his climber's death. This is an extreme saga of survival against all odds, and adventure literature at its most spell-binding. This is not a spoiler, since the whole world knows the story: the rescuers arrive. Revol shares the terror of the day before of his friend's obliteration on Nanga Parbat, and with ends 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 accident would occur on Nanga Parbat, she tells, her brother, she decided to climb Everest. She negotiates the traffic jam in May 2019 to descend to the South Col, and re-climbs Lhotse. She describes the feeling: "The sunrise over Nepal and the Valley of Silence is magnificent. What luck! I indulge myself in my country, far away from the world, in my element, in solitude. The mountain welcomes me with kindness for the time being..."
New Year countdown
Food will be creamy and drinks will be flowing at Kathmandu’s New Year’s Eve party and countdown to 2023.
31 December, Khyre Ki Bar, Kapan, Kathmandu, 9860012337

Batuwa Comedy Show
Get ready for a laughter-filled New Year’s Eve with Maatruti Cine, Ashwini Dhakal and Anushka Malla at the Batuwa Comedy Show. Call for tickets.
31 December, Baneshwor HK Plc, Kapan, Kathmandu, 9860012337

TFN Fellowship 2022
Apply for the TFN Fellowship 2022, a leadership training program designed to tackle inequality in education while preparing young Nepalis to become effective leaders. Applications must be completed and submitted an online application at https://www.tfntop.org/ Deadline: 15 January.

Disco party
Put on your dancing shoes and say goodbye to 2022 with disco, disco and unlimited food.
31 December, Sring, Dashrath, Everest, Dashrath, Gokarna, 9803627215

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-12pm, Le Sherpa Mahalaya.

Kathmandu
OUR PICK
AIR QUALITY INDEX

Daytime to see and_weather_index_300_0_100_0_10_Low

周圍の空気の品質が_300_0_100_0_10_Low

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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-2023, 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 64m airspace that the new international airport will require for medium/heavy 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 Kama 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 how to proceed from here or given us any alternative,” complained Balram 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 Rai 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, Bhairapur, Simara, Biratnagar and Nepalgunj. More flights are planned to Janakpur and Blahapur 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 69 registered companies, collectively with an annual turnover of $6 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 operations 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 Pram 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.
Kathmandu’s worsening air pollution increases with vehicle numbers, so that is where the solution lies

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.

Yet cities can also harm. Air pollution, traffic congestion, overcrowding 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 unarguably 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 is on its exponential growth, must address these questions.

The city’s old narrow streets are crowded with motorbikes, cars, and pedestrians. The traffic jams and machine contest for space. Metro-wide paths have become narrow for motorbikes to try to avoid congestion. This allocation of public space to cars and motorbikes robs important opportunity 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. Citizen 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 Kantipath and Kathmandu by the municipality office, which is not just private companies but agencies of the state that are also trying to build up green spaces for commercial purposes.

Such spaces 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, faster city, with more pedestrian spaces, and one in which children can play safely in all its spaces 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 desolate, 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 Brandon 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 non-motorised 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 these highlighted here compete for policy attention alongside other equally important agendas. So it is crucial to communicate their implications on the economy and public health.

In a city like Kathmandu, however, where cyclists, pedestrians and electric trolley buses use the same road, 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.

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the Covid second wave in mid-2021. Nepal spent Rs4.29 billion in importing vehicles, transport equipment and spare parts in four months from mid-July to mid-October, against Rs957 billion and Rs414 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 fear," says Dhinba Thapa of the National Automotive Dealers Association.

Raju Chhetri, 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 100,000 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 bars," Chhetri 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 kilometer than buses and cars.

Two-wheelers also emit invisible toxic gases like carbon monoxide, benzene and nitrogen 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 petrol import bill.

"The priority has to be on electric public transport and supporting infrastructure," says Tika Shrestha, who is also the director of Indra Tashiyat 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 Lumchini Development Trust. Similar charging stations can be set up for public and private vehicles in existing bus parks across Nepal and along highways.

Shlilshila 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 bigger 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 Shlilshila Acharya: "Our policies on mobility and air pollution have to be people- and culture-centric, instead of focussing 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 criterion for candidates to win votes.

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1921 Rendezvous: Mallory, Pumori and Everest

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

- Kanak Mani Dixit

In July 1921, exploring the southern flanks of Mount Everest, the British mountaineer and climber George Leigh Mallory came up from Tibet on the West Rongbuk Glacier. Already dazzled by an array of peaks towered before them by Everest until, before his face at the head of the glacier loomed a beautiful pyramidal peak serrated with ice and rock.

He decided to name the mountain after his 6-year-old daughter, whom he named in memory of his deceased brother in arms in World War I, 1921, 1922, and 1924.

He wrote: ‘At night, before we turned into the moonlit zone was half-illuminated 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 been transfigured into Pumori. Mallory was on the glacier with a team of Sherpas besides his climbing companion Guy Bullock, Phambo or Shimpo (as he sometimes came to be known in the Himalayan dialects, and it refers to a peak in Tibet), and that he had been asked to adapt to ‘the daughter peak’.

An alternative possibility is suggested by Pekten Sherpa, researcher and writer at Kathmandu, who believes that Mallory may have first heard the name Pumori from his climbing team of Sherpas and adopted 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, and those of the articulates explorers’ wonder, are the first texts, we have, of Khumbu Nupse, the Western Dams, as well as the Khumbu Lhotse and Glaciers.

The climbing history of Everest started 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 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 15 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 to explore and describe Everest in this way. He described the adventures above the Rongbuk Glacier, the West Rongbuk Glacier, the eastern one, right up to the base of Khumbu, and finally identifying the route up the South Col, up from the East Rongbuk Glacier.
We can only imagine Mallory’s first-ever description of Everest with its three main areas converging towards the peak. We know that it was a rugged giant. It was not the smooth and symmetrical peak that we see today from Mount Everest. It was not the picturesque and white and sparsely glaciated flank. It is a rather rock mass, coated with snow, and covered with ice, which is blunter at its sides... it has no spine.

Dying at age 36, Mallory had packed a lot in his life besides climbing in the British Isles, the Alps and the Himalayas. He had served 16 months as an artillery officer on the trenches of the Western Front during World War I, which impinged 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 (1981) calls Mallory the ‘spiritual father of high-altitude mountaineering’. Mallory gave cultural and emotional weightage to mountaineering beyond a sport, 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 cunningly oxygen canisters, but rather 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 without supplemental oxygen. The glass太平 party has the better adventure. My intention is to carry as little as possible, snow fast and catch the summit by surprise.’

The discovery of Mallory’s body by climber Conrad Anker on 1 May 1999 on Everest’s westridge steep was one of the most poignant episodes of mountaineering ever. Having survived, stranded and face-down for 75 years on the hostile, wind-swept ridge of rock and ice on the North Face, his entire frozen upper torso frozen-dried and intact – the tweed and cotton clothing, the personalized tags and knuckle-knuckle, gloves, compass, bivy sack and broom rope. He was planning to be ready to get up from the fall and say, ‘Let’s get on with it.’

Mallory could be brusque and matter-of-fact, just as 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, hastily highlighted, shows that Mallory was more than a throwaway line: ‘Everest is the highest mountain in the world, and to man has reached its summit. Its existence is a challenge. The answer is indicative, and I suppose, of man’s desire to conquer the universe.’

Mallory had other ambitions beyond mountaineering. He hoped to portray 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 existing experience of war in the trenches, the horror of the bombs and poison gases, and after joining the faculty at Cambridge he had become interested in what he called ‘international politics’. Before the 1934 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: ‘Practically the game is not good enough. The risks of getting caught are too great; the margin of strength when men are at their best is too small. Perhaps it’s more 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 letter posted 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 ‘shikra’, it was, after all, the Sherpas who made all three expeditions possible, while referred to mostly as nameless ‘nepalese’. As they observed the Khumbu landscape from Tibet together with Mallory and Hillary, the Sherpas were looking down on 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 fast and saving the life of a porter who needs rescuing down the mountain. The Shikra, the bird supposed to be the Shikra or conish, or the conick. If we ask a man to carry our load up to the mountain we must care for his wellness and soundness.

In one of Mallory’s photographs we can see them sitting on top of a field around the middle, and one man is seen very closely looking through a periscope. While rock climbing at high altitudes, a photograph of Cho Oyu shows a shikra in the foreground, resting with his head wrapped in a muffler and wearing clothes that look like a military-issue overcoat.

Did the Sherpas of Khumbu and Tibetans from adjacent northern valleys have their own name for Pumori? It seems that there was such an important peak at the head of the Khumbu valley, and much more prominent than Everest itself, would not have had a name. Kangtse to Thamserku, Makalu, Chomolangma, Chomolungma, Chamlang, Gyachung Kang and Cho Oyu, all have traditional, or indigenous names. How was Pumori missed?

Two possibilities arise. One, that there was no traditional name for the beautiful pyramid-like shuttle of the Khumbu, which became Mallory’s Clare Peak, which was rechristened to ‘Pumori’. Two, that there was a traditional name for the mountain, but the Sherpas of the 1924 team did not know it. Some sort of a conick made it to Clare Peak with enthusiasm and converted it into their toponym. While remembering Mallory and his team a century after the Everest expedition of 1923, we may just find another traditional and authentic name for Pumori, if it is not Pumori.
Himalayan highs

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

I was initially preparing to run the 2021 Everest Trail Race following the 2019 Annapurna Marathon and another trip in 2018. The run 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 a few other trekkers on the otherwise overcrowded 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 superlative 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 boarded east to the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area on Nepal’s northeastern trip, and below the world’s third-highest mountain.

Lodging 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.

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, rivering tourism, and passed waterfalls, streams and other glacier-fed rivers. At Kamzokh, a wide-open view showed evidence of receding glaciers all around. Near Lhokum, a lake with icebergs marked the point where the Kangchenjunga Glacier was calving.

The glaciers flowing down from Kangchenjunga and Ph Nepal merge here, and it is an awe-inspiring place to be, with its primal, unpolished beauty. We were the only people there.

Next, the high pass 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 Laganchhina Gola was replacing a washed out bridge to reopen the route. They had four large wooden rafts to carry the goods and food, and the group walked along the river. This sure makes Nepal an adventure destination in the true sense of the word.

On 19 October we were politely by heavy post-monsoon snow in Laganchhina Gola, the snow was deep at higher elevations, so we added two porters with tents and kitchen for the Lumbu Sumba traverse. We camped on new snow at Pashupati Camp and then began a hard 15 hour push, breaking trail up to the pass.

As daylight faded, we dug a snow shaft of 5,119 metres and made camp. The next morning’s sunrise view of Kangchenjunga to the east and Mt Everest to the west was otherworldly. The trek team’s determination and confidence made the Lumbu 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 Thadum 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 mother clinging to your pants. You just have to keep on walking with the prospect of a cold beer at our Chomung lodge beckoning us.

The final challenge was crossing the Arun River, up to Sittang La to Makalu Base Camp. At Nuni, 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 Tshosang to Dobato. Nepali engineers build the best and safest trail steps. Both uphill and downhill I try to hold a quick pace. My heart is racing, and I literally yip and shout with joy at the challenge.

Pemba Rinkh Sherpa and Lakpa Kipa Sherpa own the Laganchhina 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 was more joy than I was photographing the Milky Way over Makalu, or noting a bright, crisp sunrise the next morning.

Nepal, I will keep coming back. Next year, it will be Manaslu and Trum Valley.

David Pokorny is a 25 year-old American writer. He travels the world, means post, and playing the expatriate or online.
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 gracious and cantankerous throughout Fiscal Year 2023-22. After all, what is there to be cheerful about?

It is also the time of year when we realize that we are all getting older and wider. As a Commentator (albeit, uncredited), I write this column for a newspaper of record and I have been instructed upon this scribble 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 resolutions are 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.
- Tom there is hair. Many folliculoclastically challenged senior Nepalis are successfully hiding their age with transplants mobilized 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 a slipped hair during a spotlight on the floor of the August House. If the fur comes off (Ahau! 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, belly button) and starts sprouting where it is not supposed to (inside nostril, in ear canal, on inner ear, 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 aches, I would advise all aspirants to switch to Old Smokey and get a life membership of the Nepal Bar in 2022.
- Those of you who used Physics in school will know that according to Newton’s Law of Universal Gravitation, any mass in the known universe exerts another as with a force that is equal to the square root of the acceleration of both bodies as governed by the following equations: F = G (M1M2)/R². This explains why my lower abdomen has a hank started moving in the general direction of the Centre of the Earth. We can defy gravity by getting castlevale support from concaved cunningbuns, and take it as a compliment when younger colleagues in the orbit whisper: “Geez, the guy’s got guts.”
- Have to watch your carbohydrate intake as you grow older, so reduce carbs in the new year by cutting the leftovers Christmas fruitcake into smaller slices before eating them.
- Smoking is hazardous to health. Quit immediately. Just breathe Kathmandu air in 2023.

The Ass

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