Dance of democracy
Two parties in ruling coalition block holding local elections on schedule

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba’s Nepali Congress and Janata Samajwadi Party on the other hand want the election as scheduled on 27 April.

At an all-party meeting at the Election Commission on 14 January, the MC and US came up with a legal argument that there were different provisions in the Constitution and the Act regarding the tenure of local representatives. They even used the pandemic, high cost of separate polls, and ‘election fatigue’ as pretexts to postpone the polls.

“All of us are for local elections to be held immediately and we said as much, except for the Manastha and the United Socialists,” revealed Jhunjhun Prakash of the rightwing Rastriya Pranami Party (RPP). “Periodic elections are a prerequisite in a democracy, they should be held as scheduled in April.” Indeed, 13 leaders out of 15 parties at the meeting said elections should be held on time. MC and US were the only ones demanding postponement.

And it is clear why. Dahal wants elections to all three levels held simultaneously and that provincial and federal elections be held before local elections because he fears his party will be trounced in local polls. Dahal is aware that his party has stagnated and suffered defections since the last elections in 2017, and has seen an erosion of its mass base. One MC leader confirmed that the party was finding it difficult even to find candidates in some municipalities and wards, let alone win them. Dahal is also worried that the MC’s defeat in local elections will undermine his chances in provincial and federal assembly polls. The Nepali Congress has said it is fighting elections on its own and will not join an electoral alliance with the Manastha.

Dahal is now using the argument that federal elections are needed first to break the deadlock in Parliament, which has not met for six months because of obstructions by the UML. Which is why Dahal is even thinking of one more forging an alliance with arch-enemy K P Oli’s UML. If that happens, Nepali politics will have come a full circle to pre-2017 days.

“We have two advantages in joining with the UML, we win more seats than aligning with other parties and it will also stop the defection of Manastha cadres to the UML,” says a close Dahal confidante. “If an electoral pact with either UML or NC is arranged, we will agree to local elections in April.”
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Editorial

Polls in the time of pandemic

A

fter hammering and hawking about holding local elections, top members of the five-party alliance that met on Tuesday finally made some headway.

In good news it is said they were committed to holding the local polls "on time." The bad news is that the parties were even thinking of postponing polls to suit their electoral prospects, even though that would be contrary to the Constitution whichever way it suits them.

However, elections, mechanism, members are not united. Prime MinisterSher Bahadar Dashti's Nepal Congress wants to hold local polls as scheduled on 27 April, and this puts him closer to the opposition UML's stance. The JSP also wants the local polls in April, but the Pushpa Kami Dalal of the Maoist Centre and Mahat Kumar Nepal of the Unified Socialistis being from fragments of larger parties, want more time to prepare for elections. And the pandemic has been the perfect pretext to argue for postponing it.

So the argument they are using is that elections are not possible due to the pandemic, and that there are all three elections in November?

There are differing provisions for local elections in Nepal's Constitution and local election laws. While Article 233 of the Constitution stipulates that local elections will be held within six months after the terms of the current leaders expire, the Local Level Election Act 2017 states that elections will be held two months before the terms of the current representatives end.

Coalition leaders said to be exploring the possibility of passing an ordinance to amend the local election law so that they can hold local elections when they see fit — which means later in the year.

The power for elections is inconsistent, subject to amendments at the convenience of coalition leaders, and that the Election Commission is unable to make an independent decision in the matter of a full-fledged election.

It shows just how centralised Nepal's power is, with coalition parties using the terrain to rapidly shift political influence in Constituency bodies like the Election Commission has become.

The differing provisions within the governing coalition on proposed local election data have further exposed the volatile dynamics within the five-party coalition.

As it is, the ruling coalition is already thin on ice due to differences over the US-supported MCC project, as well as over the Nepal Congress being dissolved by an electoral alliance with coalition partners. Differences over MCC ratification by Parliament, already threatened to split the coalition when some members are said to be unhinged by the CC commission.

But there are other more pressing matters. Parliament has not been able to sit and pending bills due to the UML not letting it function because of K.P.O. Oli's aggression against Speaker of the House, Dr. Fenishwar Sharma. Sharma had rejected his request to expel former party members including Mahat Kumar Nepal.

The five-year terms of Nepal's locally elected representatives, which began on 20 May 2017 are set to end on 19 May. Not holding these elections on time will undermine local government because wards and municipalities will be left leaderless, disempowering the country’s still fragile federal system.

Some of the smaller parties are already campaigning against federalism, and a few small ideological groups could bolster their argument that the system is not constitutional and not suitable for Nepal.

As the highly transmissible Delta variant gains ground in the country and overwhelms Nepal's limited healthcare infrastructure, villages and rural communities will need steady leadership more than ever.

The third wave has hit Nepal as the country enters the third year of the pandemic. During this time, power struggles at the top have largely perplexed the federal government's response to the crisis.

However, at the local level many elected representatives have been leading from the frontlines to help communities. This newspaper reported on mayors and ward chiefs in Nawalpur and Khokana districts driving the sick to hospitals during the second wave. They set up local quarantine and isolation centres, and did not wait for Kathmandu to respond.

One of Nepal's development success stories in the past 40 years was that local elections have ensured accountability and services delivery. Its local elections, the first in 20 years, and not having elected local leaders could be the country two decades in lost development.

National leaders treating local elections as if it is just another political play will be misjudged against the Nepal people.

Shruti Karri

Playing politics with local elections will undermine Nepal's democracy and grassroots development

Online packages

WHAT'S TRENDING

Creation to destruction, then revival

New Guide explores the present and future of 'Makara sankranti' and 'Sangrakshita' with Amalesh Makarkar. Nepal has long debated whether to repatriate Makara Sankranti and other festivals that relate to the solar lunar cycle.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Nepali artist's butterfly effect

Nepali artist Mani Rai has come a long way since his project to find winter butterflies in the forest. He has now been invited into one of our Karthik's paintings.

Most popular on Twitter

Lessons still not learnt

Seven years after the earthquake, Kathmandu is becoming more densely populated, and the remains of collapsed buildings piled up in streets. Awareness about earthquakes has not yet taken root in the society

Most commented

Mini forests to make Nepal more liveable

A new initiative by woman led community group is growing tiny plots of urban forest like karutis in Kathmandu, as an initiative to make urban jungles less hot.

Most visited online page

QUOTE + TWEETS

Nepali Times (@NepalITimes)

Nepal artist Mani Rai transformed Makara Sankranti into a new festival called ‘Karshni Sankranti’.

Nepal Times (@NepalITimes)

Nepali artist Mani Rai has been using saffron to explore the connection between nature and culture.

Nepal Times (@NepalITimes)

Nepal Times (@NepalITimes)

Nepali Times (@NepalITimes)

Nepal Times (@NepalITimes)

Nepal Times (@NepalITimes)

Nepal Times (@NepalITimes)

Nepal Times (@NepalITimes)

Sudhakar Tripathi (@SudhakarTripathi)

Nepal Times (@NepalITimes)

Sudhakar Tripathi (@SudhakarTripathi)
FLY SAFE
FEEL SECURE

Have a healthy journey with all precautions taken to the finest detail for your in-flight safety.
3rd Covid wave infects Nepal’s frontliners

The Delta wave resulted in a shortage of oxygen, Omicron so far is causing a shortage of health workers in Nepal’s hospitals

**Sonika Awale**

During the devastating second wave last year, many of people were dying every day. Hospitals had run out of ICU beds and oxygen cylinders.

This time, hospitals are running out of medical staff.

As elsewhere, the third wave in Nepal is infecting healthcare workers, endangering not only patients with Covid pneumonia, but also those suffering from pre-existing conditions like kidney failure, diabetes, cancers or cardiovascular diseases.

This acute shortage in medical staff across Nepal is due to the rapid spread of Omicron which has prompted the Ministry of Health to consider shutting down the tertiary hospitals to stop the spread to doctors, nurses and paramedics to five days. The US and India have already done so.

On Tuesday, there were 11,352 new cases out of 27,409 tested, bringing the positivity rate up to 41.6%. This is the highest ever daily new cases and positivity for Nepal.

Hundreds of health workers are testing positive daily in hospitals all over the country, turning health facilities themselves into a battlefield of the virus. "Omicron is spreading like wildfire through all hospitals, in our absence, we have 35 staff testing positive," says Sandik Ritik of Tilganga Eye Hospital in Kathmandu.

One of the biggest facilities in Kathmandu, EAMS Hospital, has 14 of its clinical staff in isolation after testing positive. On Thursday, 32 staff of the Pratap Chandra Trust Centre Hospital tested positive in one day, affecting emergency services in the hospital.

"Health workers in every ward we are exhausted. Covid has new spread from the emergency to the general ward, the blood bank, physiotherapy, ICU and even the administration," director of the Pratap Chandra Pratam Joshi told Nepal Today.

The third wave has now even affected hospitals outside Kathmandu, which are struggling to cope due to a shortage of staff. Hudabinda Hospital in remote Achham district has cut down some services like C-sections because of staff shortage. Charikot hospital in Dolakha district is running for an increasing number of coronavirus patients but with fewer staffs.

Some of us have mild but manageable symptoms but we are still working, we have a shortage of healthcare workers even before this third wave," said Buddh Pradhan of Charikot Hospital.

"We have fewer people than we had during the second wave, we have equipment but no trained staff. We are not as prepared as we were before."

The only reprieve during the third wave is that the new strain is much milder. Because Omicron’s impact is largely confined to the upper respiratory tract, physicians say that their patients do not need as much oxygen or ventilator support as was the case with the Delta variant which primarily affected the lungs. Most doctors in and outside Kathmandu say they expect infected staff to be back at work in a week after another test.

Even so, given Nepal’s largely unprepared and limited healthcare infrastructure which works on a shift basis, medical staff having to isolate just a few days can seriously disrupt medical care, especially in rural areas where hospitals and doctors were always few and far between.

Indeed, this latest crisis reflects a pre-Covid-19 chronic shortage of doctors, nurses and trained medical staff, wrote Wickham in her book on the Government's Covid-19 Pandemic Challenges and Collision Disease Hospital in Pokhara.

"What we are experiencing now is both an acute and chronic shortage of health workers, and this carries a lesson for our government, to strengthen and prepare its medical resources for future pandemics," he added.

However, there are concerns that nurses are being asked to work in close contact with possibly infected patients.

But vaccination centres themselves risk being breeding grounds for infection. This time the queues are not just of the unvaccinated getting their first shot, but also those waiting for boosters. Even if vaccinated, doctors say masks and physical distancing are mandatory.

"They warn the public not to be complacent. They’ve been vaccinated and that Omicron is milder.

Bhudd Pradhan of Charikot Hospital says: "More people are treating Omicron as a normal cold but it is very important we monitor the progress of the disease in the next few weeks, and prepare adequate critical care.""

At Tiku Hospital, virologist Sharab Chaudhary said the shortage of healthcare workers will not persist, and the isolation period can be reduced to five days.

"I believe that the most infectious stage of Omicron passed, and it will be easier to keep a close watch on people who are isolating."

Pradhan adds: "We must also investigate which strain is causing Covid’s impact. Nepal’s death rate with Omicron has indeed declined, but we cannot say it was before the third wave."

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**India-Nepal power trade**

India and Nepal have agreed to increase the bilateral power trade of 1,500 MW to 3,000 MW, according to an agreement signed in New Delhi.

Anchal Kunwar at Daraz

Together with its expanding, Nepal-based telecommunication business, Daraz has been expanding its business in the United States, recruiting 600 people in the last year.

**Inflation on the rise**

Nepal is experiencing its highest inflation in six years with the consumer price index (CPI) increasing in recent months. The annual point to point consumer price inflation rose to 7.19% in November-December 2021. This is the highest since May 2015, when inflation was 5.6%.

The rise in inflation can be attributed to the sharp rise in fuel prices, which has led to a rise in input costs for various goods and services. The government has also increased its budgetary spending on subsidies for key commodities, which has contributed to higher inflation.

However, the government has also taken steps to address inflation, such as increasing the interest rate, imposing import duties, and implementing price controls.

The central bank has raised the policy rate to 3.5%, which is the highest since December 2014. This has helped to抑制通货膨胀, but it is likely that inflation will remain high in the short term.

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**Tourism down**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the global tourism industry. In Nepal, the tourism industry has been hit hard, with many hotels and restaurants closing due to lack of tourists. The situation has improved slightly in recent months, with some tourists returning to the country.

Caregivers to Israel

The number of caregivers from Nepal in Israel has increased in recent years. The caregivers are primarily women, and they are paid to take care of elderly people in Israel. The caregivers typically stay in the country for a period of six months or longer.

The caregivers work long hours and are often paid very low wages. The work can be physically demanding, and many caregivers experience stress and burnout.

The government of Nepal has recently taken steps to improve the conditions of these caregivers, including increasing their wages and providing better training and support.

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**Tigor EV in Nepal**

FonePay record

FonePay, a mobile payment service in Nepal, has launched a new kind of mobile phone that pays for calls and other services using a smartphone. The smartphone, called the "Tigor EV," is designed to be used for making calls and paying for internet and other services.

FonePay is working with the government of Nepal to promote the use of mobile phones and mobile payments in the country.

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**Khuksi Spiced Rum**

Khuksi is a traditional Nepalese drink made from rice and jaggery, and it is an alcoholic drink. The drink is enjoyed in various cultures and is a popular drink in the Himalayan region.

DishHome Shorts

DishHome is a mobile app that provides information on events and activities in Nepal. The app includes information on movies, concerts, and other events, and it is available in the app store.
Two siblings who survived a Maoist attack in 2002 speak of their long struggle and hopes for the future

Sahina Shrestha

I was exactly 20 years ago that Rabina Regmi and her sister Anjali are walking along with their parents when their bus was attacked with petrol bombs by Maoists along the East-West Highway in Suratoli. As the fire spread, the driver lost control and the bus toppled over into a ditch. Rabina, aged 5 and Anjali, 3, and their mother, Anjali, were the last to be rescued. All three suffered severe burns and a video taken at the time shows the two children huddled around their mother, crying and in shock. Anjali died after two weeks of pain and agony in a hospital in Kathmandu. Rabina had burns all over her face, her hands and stomach. Rabina had burns on his face, a gash on his head, deep cut on his leg and his left hand was broken. Two other passengers also lost their lives in the attack.

A Nepali Times reporter Nazim Nawaz’s story appeared in this newspaper in 2002, the tragedy came to represent the face of a meaningless war, and there was an outpouring of support from readers. Gunjana Kirat Memorial Hospital offered reconstructive surgery to the children, and Bright Horizon Children’s Home and School took responsibility for their education till college.

“Telling their story was important because there wasn’t enough coverage on how the war was affecting children,” says Nazim Nawaz. “The Maoists were attacking public spaces without regard to who may be affected from their actions; this story showed the victim’s side of story.”

Nawaz followed up with the family numerous times and is grateful for the positive impact it had on the family. The last time he met them, the siblings were happily settled in at the school. The Regmi family’s tragedy and ordeal was depicted in A People War, a photo book trilogy curated by Krishna Dutt and featured in Koshang Tsten and From BK’s documentary Frames of War. Now aged 24 and 18, Rabina and Anjali still bear scars from the tragedy, but are determined to not let their past hold them back. Rabina is a final year BBA student at Global College of Management and wants to get into banking. Rabina is doing his BSc in Agriculture from Chitwan University. After the campus closed last year due to the pandemic, he is in Kathmandu attending online classes.

Their father Bhakta Bahadur Regmi is a forest ranger stationed in Hotani, the same job he had 20 years ago. He is grateful for all the help his children have got over the years from the school, hospital, and others, but says it has been two decades of struggle without their mother. There has been no help from the state. “Everywhere we go, they ask for identification cards proving that we are conflict victims. But we don’t have any papers to prove that,” he says. Even today, he carries a folder of newspaper cuttings and old medical records of his children.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was mandated to provide identification cards to conflict survivors, and inform them about investigations into war crimes. But without political connections, and no time to scour many government offices, Bhakta Bahadur and his family have been left to fend for themselves. That the attackers were never identified and did not have to answer for their crimes.

For the past 20 years, Rabina and Anjali have needed numerous operations to heal their wounds, including reconstructive and orthopedic surgery, laser treatment, even hair transplant. “The fees for surgeries were waived or subsidised, but the cost of travel, medicines and hospital stay add up.” In 2013, when Sahina was getting another of her laser treatments for burn scars, the Indian blockade led to a shortage of medicines. “They doctors had to perform the procedure without

Tsering Sumjok shines bright

Badly injured as a baby, Dolpo native never gave up and is now helping her community

Laat November, in the waiting room of a hospital in Baudha in Mustang, Tsering Sumjok Guniyau caught glimpses of a familiar face. The tall man with grey hair and moustache was wearing a white coat over a yellow jumper. It was none other than plastic surgeon Andik Birshe who had treated her horrific childhood burn injury at the Sushma Koirala Memorial Hospital in Kathmandu ten years previously.

“It was an emotional reunion for both of us,” Tsering, now 23, remembers. “He was very friendly and wanted to see how my injuries had healed.”

Tsering was 18 months old that summer when her family made the annual migration, up to high pastures to graze their yaks. One day, while her mother was tending the livestock, Tsering fell off her crèche into the fireplace. She was badly burnt on her back and right arm. There were no doctors in her village of Bhjher, so she was treated for the next four years by the local amchi bosal. This kept her alive, but the skin on her right arm was fused with the tissue. All her childhood, Tsering was carried around in a deboh bamboo basket.

“Burns are common in Dolpo because home life revolves around the kitchen fire,” says Tsering. “I was lucky.”

Despite being painful to move around, Tsering started going to school in Siliver and excelled in studies. In Grade 2, a group of wealthy Americans and Swiss trekkers visited the school that they had supported. They noticed Tsering, examined her injuries, and helped bring her to Kil in Upper Dolpo for surgery and treatment. Over the years, the two families have also funded a hospital and a cheese factory in the village.

Tsering used to wear her classmates in Kathmandu run and play, or dance in school programs, but could not participate because of her injury. She eventually admitted to the Sushma Koirala Hospital, which is supported by INTERPLAST-Germany, where Andik Birshe and his team performed five major operations with reconstructive surgery. Every week, she had to take a painful bus ride from her dorm in Baudha to the hospital in Sankhu for physiotherapy and follow-ups.

She missed many classes, but she made up for it by reading books which inspired her to become a doctor, so she could serve higher education, in 2017 she started working as a hospital ward as a school in Ghose. That is when she met German journalist Peter Hinze who was researching his first book on The Great Himalayan Trail, and Tsering later travelled with him to Upper Dolpo to make a film with herself as the lead character.

Tsering was back in Bhjher for the first time in ten years, and her family and neighbours were surprised how much she had grown and changed. Her injuries were not visible anymore, and no one could believe that a little girl who had such terrible injuries would be so transformed.

“I met the right people who helped me get treatment, otherwise my life would have been different,” Tsering says. “Even now, there are many children in my neighbouring villages who are not as fortunate.”

The film project was cancelled because of the pandemic, but Hinze converted the research into the book 10000 Schritte zum Glück about Dolpo, and invited Tsering to Germany for the unveiling in November. The book made it to number 4 on Amazon’s
anesthesia and it was very painful,” recalls Bhakta Bahadur. Later, her wounds got infected and she had to get it treated again. Robin has not had laser surgery due to financial constraints.

At Bright Horizon, the siblings aced their studies. Robin passed her SEE with a GPA of 3.85, the highest from his batch. Robin was also a good student, and the school is still helping them with college fees, while their father struggles to cover other costs.

The first year Robin was at the boarding school, she ran away. “I did not know anywhere and I missed home,” she says. “But later, it became our home. Both of us made life long friends there.”

Bhakta Bahadur describes Robin as the calm one. Robin on the other hand was a mischiefvous little boy. He says, “Both of them felt at home at Bright Horizon, when we went to pick them up during holidays, they’d refuse to come home saying their mother wasn’t there.”

At school, Robin made it a point to look out for her brother. Every time Robin got into fights with his friends, his older sister would come to his rescue. Today, the two share their hopes and dreams, supporting each other and hope to take care of their father who has sacrificed all to raise them.

Worry of the country’s current situation, Robin now wants to go abroad for her MBA. Robin wants to complete his MSc and then try for the civil exams. “The two of us came to the conclusion that one of us should go abroad and the other should stay back,” says Robin. “We have seen how much difference having a family member abroad makes for the economic wellbeing of families.”

Having brought up the children on his own, Bhakta Bahadur still worries about their future. But he is happy the two have become responsible young adults ready to take charge of their own lives.

Robin says with determination, “We have had to depend on our father for so long. Now, we want to look after him, and our family.”

bestseller list in Germany. And he had a surprise in store- a meeting with the surgeon who had treated her in Kathmandu all those years ago. It was an emotional and joyful reunion.

“This was one of the best days in my 26-year career, when I could see the wonderful result of our charity work,” said André Borosche.

Teering was equally happy: “I made it from my family home but in Bhuj to the hospital in Germany to meet the surgeon who changed my life.”

In the hospital, Borosche examined her burn scars and was satisfied with how well her back had healed. He suggested one more operation, but Teering refused any more treatment.

“I am over medical procedures for now,” Teering told Nepal Times on her return from Germany. “After all those surgeries, I am put off by the sight of blood. I don’t want to think about the pain afterwards. For now I think I am ok.”

These days, when Teering is not busy with her full-time work at the Chobar school, she helps Hinsae with Project Dolpo, a private initiative to support those who need assistance in their home district. She gets frequent calls from families in Dolpo who are in distress.

Says Hinsae: “I think this is a motivating story about a girl who never gave up, and who trusted herself. It shows how when help gets to the right people, the underprivileged and the almost forgotten, it can make a big difference to their lives.”

This past week in Kathmandu, Teering has been busy taking a seven-year-old boy from Dolpo who was also badly burnt with boiling water, and was brought to Kathmandu for treatment. Teering has been taking the patient to the burns hospital in Kirtipur for medical attention.

“It happened to me, and now to this boy. These accidents occur so frequently and Upper Dolpo just does not have the facilities to treat burn injuries,” says Teering.

For now, she wants to complete her education and ultimately return to Dolpo. “I feel it is my responsibility to give back to my community. The only way my village is going to develop is when young people like me get educated, and head back to help others like us. There is so much to do.”

Saheja Shrestha
![Dance classes](sign up to take Bharatnatyam, ballet, hip-hop, freestyle, and contemporary dance lessons from Sushma Arts Academy. Call the academy for details.)

**Bhindhunga Day Hike**
Participate in the seven-hour hike organised by Hike for Nepal from Bhindhunga to Indradhobhi this week.
22 January, 0600. 3800777687

**Health Camp**
Get full body check-ups and learn more about healthy living in its health camp organised by Medcure Pharma. Call for more details.
22 January. 9100 onwards. 9854747785

![Yoga training](Register to learn yoga from an academically certified Instructor at Sambhava Yoga. 20 January. 300 onwards. 9817626887)

**Le Sherpa market**
Support local businesses. Stop for fresh fruit and vegetables, cheese, meat products, honey, and much more. Physical distancing measures apply.
Saturdays, 8am-22.30pm. Le Sherpa, Mukhumargu

**Virtual street art**
Google Arts Project Street Art showcases the world’s greatest graffiti works and tells the stories behind them, including those of Nepal. Viewers can take virtual walking tours, view online exhibitions and learn about the artists themselves.

**The world at home**
Travel may be limited these days, but discovering incredible experiences from across the globe doesn’t have to be. CuriousGuts’ ‘The World at Home Initiative’ brings some of their top tours, activities, and attractors to you online. Find everything on their YouTube channel.

**Herne Katha**
The web series depicts untold stories of ordinary people from across the country. Head to their YouTube channel to take a tour of Nepal through the experiences of ordinary people.

**Europeanana**
Discover cultural heritage from 3,000 museums, galleries, libraries and archives across Europe. Go online to read about historical places, cultural exhibitions, photographs, ancient manuscripts and more.

**Underwater tour**
Take Google’s life in the Ocean Deep underwater tour and discover the mysteries of the sea with Sir David Attenborough. Watch videos and underwater maps, and learn about the unique creatures that inhabit the world’s oceans.

**Dwarka Resort**
Dwarka Resort is the perfect getaway from the bustling city life to the re-energising spa experience, Ayurvedic and crystal therapy during the visit.
Dwarka (71) 49661

**Bandipur Safari Lodge**
Explore the rich cultural heritage and wildlife Bandipur has with the Bandipur Safari Lodge.
Bandipur, 9845996800

**Hotel Baha**
Spend a few days at this traditionally built hotel at the heart of Bandipur. The hotel offers a peaceful ambiance, delicious food, and the historic vibe of the old town.
Bandipur (71) 851070

**Lake View Resort**
Lake View, with its cozy huts featuring handcrafted wooden furniture, local art pieces, and spectacular views guarantees a perfect weekend getaway.
Lake Side (81) 64147

**Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge**
Get up and close with the local Tharu culture at the Tiger Tops, located four kilometers away from Chewa National Park.
Kawsuwa, Nawalparasi (3161) 600121

**Kyubi’s Kitchen**
Kyubi’s offers not only a space for anime lovers, but noodles, dumplings and meals as scrumptious as seen in any Japanese cartoon.

**Chez Caroline**
Tucked away from the main street, this quiet corner is a must for authentic French and continental cuisine. Try the Pepperoni au Cheddar and Oven poached fillet with vanilla ice cream and honey chutney sauce.
Bijesh Motel (975) 4467030

**Kunga**
Head to Kunga Hotel for some of the best Chinese cuisine. Don’t miss out on the hoppers, prawn chicken and shredded peppers.
Buddha (975) 8191117

**Le Mirch**
Enjoy the spicy and savory Indian cuisine subtly influenced by French fine dining at Le Mirch. The restaurant also offers gluten free options.
(adham Mall (972) 527407)

**Builingal**
With a variety of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian options, Builingal has something for everyone. Cute the vegetarian restaurant at a try.
Maldevi (91) 4321193

**A special weather front is approaching Nepal and will result in heavy downpour across Nepal’s western mountains during the Friday morning. The low pressure wave will weaken as it travels across Nepal, but is expected to bring isolated showers in the high mountains until existing showers in the high valleys and plains. The high amount of cloud and precipitation in the high valleys will result in some localised flooding in the high valleys and plains. The high amount of cloud and precipitation in the high valleys will result in some localised flooding in the high valleys and plains.

**KATHMANDU**
KATHMANDU

**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

**WEATHER PERFORMANCE**

**OUR PICK**
An ex-British soldier and a night hunter of a lucky fox, Jack and his devoted companion set out to solve the inner mystery of a secret armadillo. This 2018 miniseries is based on a novel of the same name. Highly acclaimed British show The Night Manager has six episodes, starring Hugh Laurie, Tom Hollander, David Harbour and Elizabeth Debicki.
Thamel’s new Art Street

A backstreet in Kathmandu’s tourist centre becomes a new hub for Nepal’s contemporary art scene

Ashish Dakal

Under a canopy of prayer flags and electrical wires, a quiet backstreet of Thamel is reinventing itself to be the new epicentre for Nepali art.

Away from the bustling main roads of this tourist quarter of Kathmandu, along a narrow winding alley is Kathmandu Art House, a four-storey block with large lower-case letters on the facade: ‘art st’.

Art Street is not an immediately obvious facet of Thamel, the building has been around for years. Nevertheless, it aims to provide Nepali artists with a platform to work and showcase their creativity in a one-stop shop.

It is perhaps fitting that Art Street is adjacent to Kathmandu Art House which became a catalyst in the 1970s for the evolution of Thamel as a backpacker destination, replacing Boudha which was known in the Hippie era as ‘ Freak Street’.

Thamel got branded as a place for budget travellers, and with the renovated Kathmandu Art House and Art ST rebranding itself to be more upmarket.

"This side of Thamel lacked identity, which is why I came up with this idea," explains Rajan Saky; Kathmandu Art House who also established the nearby Museum of Nepali Art (MoN) and turned the courtyard of Kathmandu Art House into a permanent exhibitions space for sculptures.

Showing a visitor around, Saky says, “We have plenty of malls in Kathmandu but we lack an avenue for intellectual entertainment. Art is such a part of our identity as mountaineering and trekking, which is why I wanted to create an environment rich with artistic expression.”

Each room at the Kathmandu Art House is rented out at up to Rs25,000, a dozen prominent Nepali artists like Eritka Tamrakar, Sujan Dangol, SC Suman, Rohan Dangol, Raj Prakash Man Tulshidar have set up shop here. The names of the artists are embossed on the street-side facade next to the ‘art’ sign.

The artists all have their very own private artisan where visitors can browse through their works, talk to them about their craft, and even purchase their favourite pieces.

Artists in Nepal often complain that not many people buy Nepali art, yet alone go to exhibitions and view paintings on show. “This is not indicative of a low volume of output, as it is of a smaller market,” says Saky. “To say Nepali art is not appreciated enough is directly related to how few galleries and platforms there are in Nepal at present.”

Raj Prakash Man Tulshidar, a traditionally trained painter of paubha, completes only 2-3 paintings each year, given the meticulous detail that goes into creating them, and yet he does not have space at home to display them.

"Thanks to the art house, I have a studio that is also my exhibition space," Tulshidar says, gesturing to walls lined with vibrant paubha depicting fierce and benevolent deities. “Earlier, I could only tell people about progress in paintings, now they get to see me at work, and my entire collection in one place. This allows me to develop a closer connection with art lovers.”

This is a feeling shared by Rohan Dangol, another artist in residence at Kathmandu Art House. “I was first introduced to this place by fellow artist Samendra Man Singh Shrestha, and it was a great move,” he says.

Two windows in his studio frame trees and buildings outside in a canvas of their own, letting in ample sunlight and birdsong. An easel stands in the middle of the room with a work-in-progress spread.

"There is a creative environment here," Dangol says, “I find the greenery outside and engagement with other artists encouraging and inspiring.”

Dangol, 30, was recently commissioned by mountain explorer Reinhold Messner during his recent visit to create two artworks for the Messner Mountain Museum in Italy. Dangol credits his exposure to Kathmandu Art House; “I probably would not have found the same level of national and international recognition otherwise.”

Earlier, Dangol’s charcoal drawings would often be rolled-up or stacked in his home studio, gathering dust. Here, many have found room on the walls, all framed as an exhibition.

"When people come to look at my art,” he adds, "I no longer have to try and explain them with words. Here, I can show my different styles and experiments, and my paintings are right in front of them to view in one space.” Thamel was chosen for this new initiative primarily because of the large footfall of tourists, both domestic and international, that it receives annually, making it a prime location for people to be acquainted with the artists and their works.

"We cannot work for the government to come along and declare this spot as an art zone," says Rajan Shukla. "We have to take the initiative ourselves and help reach Nepali art new heights and gain widespread recognition.”

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Rohit

Rohit is from Bihar and drives an auto-rickshaw in Mumbai. Life has been a struggle ever since he lost his parents in a car crash. Like many young men from Bihar in this big city, he migrated here to make a living.

Then came the pandemic in 2020, and the lockdown meant that Rohit had no income at all. He and his family had to rely on the municipality’s two free meals a day.

“Mumbai belongs to the rich, except during elections,” says the 23-year-old as he negotiates the city’s heavy traffic, recalling how his wife and young son were evicted from their room for unpaid rent.

But one day a miracle happened. A Nepali caregiver named Manjeela, whom Rohit knew, came to the rescue and along with her two daughters offered his family shelter and food for a few weeks.

Rohit says he and his wife struggled to comprehend Manjeela’s generosity. Why was she going out of her way to help a poor family when their own family in Bihar had refused to help them?

“I am so used to people turning their back on me that I just did not understand Manjeela’s kindness. It felt uncomfortable to accept such a genuine gesture,” he says.

Manjeela then found out from the media that the popular Bollywood actor Sona Sood was helping migrant workers like Rohit with transportation to their homes. She coordinated with Sood’s team and registered Rohit and his family so they could travel back to Bihar.

“The trip was not easy. The car was full, even to shake his hands,” smiles Rohit.

Had it not been for Manjeela and Sona Sood, Rohit knows he would have been one of the hundreds of thousands of displaced workers walking home to their villages along train tracks, backwaters and pavements — an iconic image from India’s first lockdown in early 2020. “What other option did we have? Even thinking about the possibility of walking back brings tears to my eyes,” says Rohit.

Adds Rohit: “For tens of thousands like me, Sona was a real-life hero. But for my family specifically, Manjeela was an angel. I will never be able to forget what they did for me and my family.”

Dhana

Dhana is from Galmi district in Nepal, and is finally flying home from Dubai after the pandemic hit two years ago.

“Nepal is so close, yet I have not seen my family for two and half years,” he says.

For many Nepalis, a work stint in India is a stepping stone to go to Malaysia or the Gulf. They can save enough in India to afford to pay recruiters for the overseas jobs.

But Dhana’s work history is unique. He has been to India before, then to Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, UAE and has come right back to India after his boss in the UAE transferred him to look after his home in India.

Older Nepali migrant workers find the culture and familiarity of India more appealing, even though the earnings may not be as much as elsewhere. Many others are here for seasonal work as drivers or security guards because they cannot afford to pay recruiters for jobs in the Gulf. Younger Nepalis, however, do not find India as appealing.

Despite being one of the largest destination countries for Nepali workers, India seldom gets the attention it deserves and is treated akin to internal migration. There is no precise count of Nepali workers in India because of the open border and no requirement for permits. But this migrant workforce suddenly became visible during India’s Covid lockdown as Nepalis stranded back in the hundreds of thousands.

Dhana himself works at an Indian household, so was spared during Covid-19. But he knows of many Nepalis who suffered. Poor of his acquaintances who lived close by lost their lives during the 2021 Delta peak.

Desire of Nepali workers in India also go largely unnoticed — with or without Covid-19. “There is no count, no compensation to families of the deceased, and no government help with repatriation as happened from the Gulf or Malaysia.”

“The only consolation is that here you can expect that full procedures will be followed during funerals according to Hindu rituals which you probably cannot expect elsewhere,” says Dhana. “The Nepali government should compensate families of the deceased as they are from the poorest families.”

But he is quick to note the privileges of being a migrant in India versus other countries where he has lived and worked.

“You don’t become undocumented in India. You are not obliged to stay with the same employer,” he says.

Dhana should know: he had spent months hiding in the jungle of border hills in Malaysia with 15 other Nepalis to avoid raids when he became undocumented because his employer went bankrupt.

He quit his job in Saudi Arabia after three months despite having paid $2,500 to be a recruiter. In both cases, he felt trapped as he wasn’t able to exit the countries without incurring fees, and was mentally stressed.

After making a full circle back to India where he had spent over a decade in his early twenties before venturing to Malaysia and the Gulf, he values the freedom for Nepali workers like him there.

Amit

A quiet man with a wide smile, 45-year-old Amit spent a decade in Saudi Arabia taking care of a family of seven, alongside three other South Asian migrants including a Nepali housemaid.

He had come home to India for his nephew’s wedding when Covid-19 hit, and he was stuck because of a Saudi ban on flights because of the Delta outbreak. Two years later, it finally looks like he can rejoin his employment, but only by making a convoluted journey through Kathmandu for a flight to Riyadh.

India has finally been lifted off the Saudi red list, but direct flights from Mumbai are unaffordable for Amit. That is why he is flying from Delhi to Kathmandu along with three other stranded Indian migrant workers. This is a less expensive option — at least that is what his agent told him.

Agents are skilled at finding loopholes around flight bans and restrictions, and presenting options for desperate workers like Amit. But the Kathmandu option is also expensive for him; he had to pay the agent $6,500, including costs for a two-week quarantine in Nepal.

It was not an ideal arrangement, given pre-Covid flights were a fraction of what he is paying now, but Amit says at least he will start earning again soon. The uncertainties brought by Omicron might trap him for extended periods once again, but he cannot afford to take any more chances.

“From now, the priority is my daughter’s wedding,” says Amit who will have to pay the groom up to $400,000 ($640,000) in dowry. This is over 15 months of his wages, even if he were to save every paisa. There are other regular costs to take care of back home — for food, medicine, fees for the ticcer and his children’s education, making it difficult to save even a small portion of his earnings.

Amit looks out of the plane’s window at Himalayan peaks as the plane begins its descent over Kathmandu. He says, “The work in Saudi is not easy. What work is easy? But it pays, and that’s what matters. I can save $25,000 a month, and that’s more than double of what I can earn in India.”
New election symbols

Besides defending its 9th as the most corrupted country in South Asia, Nepal has lately also been recognized in the Guinness Book of having the highest per capita number of Communist parties this side of the Sewage Canal. However, the 50 shades of red parties has the unintended side-effect that there isn’t an electronic voter machine that has been invented yet that has enough buttons to be of any use here in local, provincial and federal elections this year. Additionally, since every party worth its salt needs a symbol, the Election Commission has run out of them.

Popular symbols like sun, moon, two, hammers and sickles have all been taken on a first-come-first-served basis. Which means we will have to fall back on the diversity of Nepal’s flora and fauna. The cow and goat are already reserved, so we can offer scorpion, vulture, porcupine, and the Donkey is pleased to announce a jack ass to parties that do not yet have symbols.

At the rate parties are splitting, even this will not suffice. We need symbols that more accurately reflect the ethos of the parties in question. For instance, a band gazebo is an apt symbol for squawkingilaas who want voters to remember the terror. Voters would also make an immediate connection between certain parties and the handcuff symbol.

Some of these symbols will be so coveted that the Election Commission may have to auction them off, have a lottery, or simply do an underhand deal.

The Family Party could be given the condom as an election symbol to set it apart from others, and also simultaneously spread awareness among the electorate about contraception.

Now that Nepal has declared itself open-defecation free, the forthcoming election could be the perfect opportunity to de-stigmatise the equal latrine and assist in the government’s campaign of Flush Toilets for All by 2025.

The real problem about elections is that no one gives a Rat’s Ass (in a manner of speaking) about them. The question on everyone’s mind is what happens if local elections can’t be held in April? Luckily, the High and Mighty Political Mechanism already has a cunning plan. But it’s top secret.
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