



AMIT MACHAMASI

## Hoang Chu

Intense international pressure for and against the \$500 million project has intensified, even as Nepal's main political players try to work out a compromise formula ahead of the 28 February deadline for ratification by Parliament.

This being Nepal, lawmakers may go late into the night on Monday, 28 February. And to buy time, they may even say that there is another 12 hours before it is midnight in Washington DC.

Whatever happens, by playing political ping-pong with the MCC Nepal's leaders have damaged the country's international reputation, coming across to both the Americans and the Chinese as being untrustworthy.

All agree that Nepal needs better highways and more transmission lines.

But the MCC became a pawn in a chess game within the Nepal Communist Party. Rivals of former prime minister K P Oli used his support for the MCC to bring him down. Oli is now in the opposition

UML and itching to use the MCC to break a shaky governing coalition.

Prime Minister Deuba of the Nepali Congress (NC) has been a vocal supporter of the MCC, while his two Communist partners are not. The opposition UML's stance will be key to having the MCC passed, although the NC and smaller parties will have the numbers if the two Communist partners stay away.

China is a geopolitical influencer in Kathmandu, and has always been wary of Western support for Tibetan nationalism. Beijing wants Nepal's Communist parties to remain united and reject the MCC.

China has been the largest source of foreign investment in Nepal for six consecutive years, it has provided large loans for Pokhara airport, and is negotiating an even bigger one for the Budi Gandaki dam. It sees the MCC as a challenge to its own Belt and Road Initiative of which Nepal is a signatory.

But many have warned that Nepal might fall into a 'Chinese

debt trap' similar to the one that has now bankrupted Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, Mongolia successfully negotiated its own \$350 million MCC for a water supply project in Ulaanbaatar despite being squeezed between Washington, Beijing and Moscow.

Anti-MCC parties contend that the compact is anti-national. They have mobilised the social media to spread fear of American imperialist ambitions to counter China (see *Editorial, page 2*). Because of America's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and its past misadventures in the Gulf, many Nepalis believe the country may be pushed to war.

If the MCC is not ratified by the deadline, it could impact not just US-Nepal relations, but also undermine the country's international credibility, dependence on multilateral agencies, and even Nepal's peacekeeping operations paid for by the Americans. And it will mean more cost and delays if transmission lines have to be built with Chinese loans.

**The medium  
is the message  
EDITORIAL  
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The elephant in the room in all this is India, which has kept out of the debate so far. But it must be watching Nepal's prevarication warily for signs of Chinese inroads into Nepal if the MCC is rejected.

On the other hand, if the MCC goes ahead it risks China's ire. On 23 February, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said Beijing opposes "coercive diplomacy" by the United States in Nepal.

Hua added: "How can a gift be sent by an ultimatum? Is it a gift or a Pandora's Box?"

In MCC-related posts on the Sina Weibo platform's comments call the MCC a 'US trap' and 'a form of occupation'. Some comments go even further, calling the US a 'colonist power'. Another post said: 'Nepal is close to China, that's why the US wants to come here.'

Whichever way it goes, the MCC will be a tipping point in Nepal's delicate geopolitical balancing act, and will have a direct impact on three levels of elections this year. 🇳🇵

*Hoang Chu is a student at Pitzer in Nepal in Claremont, the United States.*

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# The message is the medium

Historians have pointed out that the reason for Nepal's political dysfunction is that although it is South Asia's oldest nation state, it is also the newest to open up to the world.

Another upheaval of similar magnitude is now buffeting Nepal with the rapid spread of information technology. This revolution is happening at lightning speed, much faster than changes since 1950.

And once again, Nepalis are having to adapt to a hyper-real world of social media platforms, viral videos, disinformation and an alternate universe of premeditated fakery.

At the beginning of the pandemic, there were about 8 million Nepalis with Facebook accounts. Today, the figure is said to be close to 12 million. There are millions more posting videos on TikTok. Thousands of YouTube channels with sensational graphics vie for audience and AdSense revenue. Twitter trails, but has a following among opinion-makers and shakers. It is the preferred medium for political influencers and the media, and this amplifies its impact.

The content on these platforms rides the spread of mobile telephony. Nearly all Nepali households now own at least one handheld device, and 60% of them now are smart-phones. The number of mobile cellular subscribers is now 43 million – more than the country's total population.

As Internet speed increases and cellular towers bring more parts of the country under at least 3G coverage, we can expect to see an even greater consumption of social media platforms – especially video-based content like YouTube and TikTok.

The fact that 15% of Nepalis work, study or live abroad means that connectivity has allowed them to stay in close touch – a fact that was of vital importance during the pandemic.

Most online content can be classified as 'entertainment', but it is also 'politics as entertainment' as Nepal's parties jostle for power.

This migration of eyeballs from the 'mainstream' to digital media is having a profound impact on how Nepalis connect with each other. The influence of the legacy media in agenda-setting is now replaced by non-journalistic content providers.

This has transformed how Nepalis access information, in how they communicate with each other, how society functions, and ultimately in how Nepal is governed.

These media trends are not unique to Nepal. The reach of Big Tech globally has

transformed the relationship between rulers and the ruled. Journalism has gone from vertical to horizontal. But it has also warped the democratic process as disinformation and the propagators of 'alternative truths' manipulate the medium to stoke populism and intolerance.

We have seen increasing evidence of what this means for news consumption. The filtering function of journalism is bypassed so that raw, unverified, deliberate disinformation sways public opinion. Algorithms allow biases to be reinforced in echo chambers with increasingly radical content.

It is not all negative. Internet activism has been a powerful medium to mobilise support for caste- and gender-based violence, citizenship issues, and for making national heroes out of high achievers like Kulman Ghising, Sanduk Ruit or Mahavir Pun.

But, as the organised disinformation campaign against the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) shows, it can also be an effective way to interfere in the political process, whip up populist hyper-nationalism, stifle rational voices and undermine economic progress.

The preponderance of fake news about the Americans planning to build military bases in Nepal has polarised politics and society, even dividing families, friends and colleagues.

With elections around the corner, this phenomenon of demonising political opponents through abuse of social media will have far-reaching consequences for our democracy. If open societies like India and the US can buckle so easily, we in Nepal need to be vigilant against such threats to our own hard-won freedoms.

Umesh Shrestha, editor of *Nepal Fact Check* tells us: "Media literacy has not kept pace with the spread of the Internet. People think the falsehoods on YouTube and TikTok videos are legitimate news, and it forms public opinion."

Shrestha adds, "This increases responsibility for journalists. Just like when experts and the mass media helped quash rumours about Covid-19."

Disillusionment against Nepal's established parties and distrust of politicians is at an all time high. They deserve it, but we cannot let that translate into disenchantment with the democratic process itself.

Nepalis value democracy and harmony. We have pulled back from the brink many times before. It is time for the silent majority to speak up and drown out the fake and phoney in cybersphere.

his district. But no one listened. He could not deliver, and he also lost his party ticket to contest the 1998 elections.

Dahal then got together a group of local businessmen, took a loan from a consortium of banks in Kathmandu and invested in the Puluwa Khola hydropower plant near Chainpur that will start providing 3MW of power to the national grid by April.

Taking advantage of a landmark policy approved by then deputy prime minister Shailaja Acharya in 1995 which set out a formula for the Nepal Electricity Authority's buy-back rate from private power suppliers, and stipulated an annual 6% increase for power from small hydro projects, Dahal had no problem convincing bankers that it was a sound return on investment. The buy-back rate was set at Rs 4 per kW-hour for peak power and Rs 2.75 non-peak. So, the Arun Valley Hydro Power Development Company Pvt Ltd was set up. Dahal's partners put in 30% of the Rs 280 million for Puluwa, and the banks put in 70%. Private hydropower development in Nepal has now become so lucrative Dahal is surprised more businesses in Kathmandu aren't jumping onto the bandwagon.

"In very few ventures do you have both the raw material and the market guaranteed," he says. "With hydropower the raw material is water, and the market is the NEA."

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



KHUMBU DOGS

Dogs often trail trekkers in Nepal, they bond with them acting as guides and camp watchdogs in return for food and adventure. But the drop in tourism in the past two years has made previously friendly community mastiffs in the Khumbu more aggressive. Read this account by a local doctor online and watch video on our YouTube channel.

### AIR POLLUTION

Pollution is why I left in 2006 after 25 years working in Kathmandu ('Things are up in the air in Nepal', Sonia Awale, #1099). I have been back several times since, and the pollution just gets worse and worse. This was a preventable disaster.

Margaret Kerr

• I first came to Nepal in 1977 and remember the incredibly clear vistas and clean air. I left in 1982. I later retired and started coming at least every other year for 6 months at a time. Pollution has increased exponentially.

Roger Ray

• A well-researched report in *Nepali Times* on air pollution dynamics.

Namindra Dahal

### MIGRANT WORKERS

What a heart-rending, yet life-affirming story about Hom Nath Giri working in Kuwait, including how he deals with his struggles by writing a moving poem ('Diaspora Diaries 2', #1099). Journalism at its best. Looking forward to reading more stuff.

Buddha Basnyat

### ELECTRIC BUSES

Without significant natural energy resources, Nepal will remain dependent on importing, and a victim to inflation ('Nepal goes electric, but conditions apply', Ramesh Kumar, #1099). Turning to electric vehicles will help to clear the air some, but that electricity has to come from somewhere. Can Nepal build enough dams to provide for itself?

Sigmund Stengel

• With the dangerous pollution levels in Kathmandu Valley, all public transport, government or private, needs to be turned into electric. Next we have to ban polluting brick kilns. Finally, plant trees. Well done Sajha for leading the way with electric buses.

Narendra K Gurung

### KARNALI BLUES

Glad to know that there is an English edition of Buddhisingar book out now so that it can reach a wider audience ('The Karnali Man', Shambhavi Basnet, pages 6-7). I read the Nepali version a few years ago and I found the protagonist to be a very well-drawn out character, like someone I have met and was listening to his story throughout the novel. A memorable read.

Manjima Sharma

• It was such an inspiring privilege to have Michael Hutt as a teacher at SOAS ('Taking Nepali Literature to the world', Ashish Dhakal, pages 6-7). I was not a good student of Nepali, but I did become an ethnographer of Nepal, and I still treasure my experience.

Piers Locke

### CHINA NEPAL MAOISM

I remember once when Prachanda was received by relatively low protocol by an official in a t-shirt ('What the Chinese think about Nepal's Maoists', Aneka Rajbhandari, #1099). Your argument is quite valid and relatable.

Ashish Adhikari

### FOETICIDE TO FOOTBALL

Such an inspirational story, may god bless you ('Female foeticide to football', Srijana Singh Thakuri, #1081).

Sophia Merry

### MINI FORESTS

How about we stop widening the Ring Road to create more parking lanes and not cut down all the beautiful old trees ('Mini forests to make Kathmandu more liveable', Sonia Awale, #1094)?

Shirini Barakzai

### WAR CRIMES

Ten years of conflict brought terrible suffering and has left huge scars ('The scars of war', Sahina Shrestha, #1095). It is important for the government to make honest efforts to heal and deliver promises of the republic.

Bishow Parajuli

### NEPALI WATER IN QATAR

How much CO<sub>2</sub> is produced to get a bottle of water from the Himalaya to Qatar ('Nepal's Water in Qatar', Ramesh Kumar, page 13)? What happens to the empties? Does anyone care?

Mark Pickett

• The world is overwhelmed with plastic pollution. Now some Nepali businesses want to make money off creating more plastic waste? This is irresponsible. We should try to set a positive example to the world. This is not the way.

Aashish Joshi

Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Nepal goes electric, but conditions apply

by Ramesh Kumar

While private EV sales boom, battery-operated buses fail to gain traction because of high taxes. In fact, electric buses cost five times more than diesel buses of the same size in Nepal. Details in this report only on nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

### What the Chinese think about Nepal's Maoists

by Aneka Rajbhandari

China seems to tolerate Puspha Kamal Dahal despite his perceived incompetence because of the attachment of Mao's name to his party. Dahal's present predicament with the MCC could either further improve or completely ruin his stature in China. Join the discussion online.

Most popular on Twitter



### Things are up in the air in Nepal

by Sonia Awale

International researchers have used a technology, originally developed by the US military to locate Soviet atomic tests, to pinpoint sources of the worsening air pollution in Kathmandu Valley. Read full story in our website.

Most commented

### To be or not to be on the MCC

by Anil Shah

The banking industry has invested at least Rs215 billion in energy projects across the country, which represents deposits of ordinary Nepali citizens. All of this will be wasted without transmission lines, to be supported by the MCC. Nepal's leaders need foresight to make the correct decision for the future. It is a choice between darkness and light.

Most visited online page

## QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

The populist #nationalism around the #MCC is not only tarnishing the image of the parties and their leaders, but also #Nepal's image as a nation. The consequences will be borne by the people, writes @rabinigiri.



Shreya Soni @shreyasoni

Why do we discourage development? Our own leaders have, as evidenced through years of corrupt lazy governance, been incapable of fostering growth and change in the country but will fiercely prevent any prospects that will fuel the socio-economic standing. #mcc #Nepal



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

#comment After 2006, Beijing muted criticism of Prachanda because his party is 'Maoist'. What the Chinese think about Nepal's Maoists | @\_rajbhandari



Raunab Singh Khatri 孔仁星 @SinghRaunab

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) used Maoism as a suffix instead of its main guiding principle. In fact, Mao Zedong himself was firmly opposed to using 'Maoism' as a political label for his ideology. Brilliant piece by @\_rajbhandari



Amish Mulmi @amish973

Excellent piece by @\_rajbhandari



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

#replug Made in Nepal Peanut Butter in Japan A Japanese social entrepreneur brings skills and income to Khotang's peanut farmers by finding export market.



N the Himalayas @Night04812666

The story behind the natural peanut butter makes me feel like eating it. The rich flavor of organic peanuts and creamy texture will certainly tempt even the most jaded palate.

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Power to the people



**Hari, the hydro-entrepreneur**  
An early dream to build a dam under state patronage, Hari Bairagi Dahal understood this 20 years ago and on his own initiative set out to supply power to his constituency in Eastern Nepal and with the profit, run a college in the district.

Two decades later, as the debate on the ratification of \$500 million Millennium Challenge Corporation project that will primarily upgrade Nepal's transmission lines polarises the country, it may be time to rethink our national priorities.

Excerpts from a report published 20 years ago this week in #82 22-28 February 2002:

When Hari Bairagi Dahal was the UML MP from Sankhuwasabha district five years ago, the one thing people in his constituency always asked for was electricity. He went around the government ministries in Kathmandu, he even staged a sit-in outside Singha Darbar to increase allocation for infrastructure development for



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# Decrypting Nepal's ban on crypto

Is the central bank preventing fraud or domesticating digital technologies to allow political-criminal nexus to continue?

The recent uproar over the use of cryptocurrencies in Nepal has given those of us interested in digital transformation and innovation much to chew on. A few weeks ago the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) issued a directive banning all Nepali nationals from buying or investing in cryptocurrencies. This was not a surprise given previous NRB declarations.



**MAKESHIFT**  
Sakar Pudasaini

But the circular went a step further by also forbidding non-nationals living in Nepal from transacting in cryptocurrencies. This was followed by a series of news stories, quite obviously fed to the media by authorities, focusing on the use of crypto to defraud people looking to migrate for work as well for furthering capital flight.

I suggest we step back from the noise surrounding the recent circular to explore how novel technologies interact with extant systems via three ideas – affordances, disruption and domestication. This zoomed out exploration provides us some ways of thinking about why the NRB might be so worried about cryptocurrencies and how we might think about digital currencies more generally.

Let us start by accepting that migrant labour fraud, using *hundi* networks to underpay custom duty or even pandora/panama papers style capital flight are not new for Nepal. They seem to occur with a sufficient degree of frequency within the existing financial regime. So we cannot argue that cryptocurrencies are responsible for causing such fraud and flight. But cryptocurrencies might facilitate increases in the volume and/or frequency of such illegal actions. Let's suppose this to be true, what about cryptocurrency could be enabling this increase?



## Affordances

Cryptocurrencies have been the preferred medium of exchange for the internet darknet markets. They become the preferred means of digital extortion schemes such as ransomware attacks, but more unexpectedly, they are also what off-line IRL kidnappers across multiple countries prefer. There are, in fact, some things (affordances) that are inherent in the design of cryptocurrencies that make criminals choose them. For one, their pseudonymous nature offers a particular kind of anonymity as compared to traditional financial institutions.

While traditional bank transactions are not visible to the public, the ownership of the account can be tracked fairly easily to a specific real world person. In the earlier, and still most popular, cryptocurrencies all transactions are visible in public. But it is difficult to know who actually owns the account. Even this relative lack of transactional privacy is being addressed by newer designs.

Those skirting the law also appreciate that law enforcement cannot easily freeze accounts because there is no central regulator or even physical asset. So, it is certainly possible that the Nepali

officialdom is reacting to an increase in illegal activity facilitated by the affordances of cryptocurrencies. But there are other possibilities too.

## Disruption

But the volume of unlawful activities in Nepal may not have increased because of cryptocurrencies. The NRB might instead be concerned that the power to conduct such activities has shifted from one set of actors to another. In other words, a new technology has caused a disruption. Why would such a shift worry the NRB so immensely? To answer that question, let us take a brief detour into the connotations of the word “setting” in Nepali.

A setting is a network of relationships utilised to ensure that a specific action, almost always involving getting the State to do something, can be carried out. Settings often do involve the exchange of money, but not always. They can be about forging new relationships, or providing mutual friends or in-group acquaintances with favours. A setting can range from the mundane, ensuring that a land transaction is carried out with minimal hassle, to much more significant.

One imagines that the extant

networks involved in black or gray currency transactions have carefully calibrated settings encompassing political protection, the trading houses that invariably need their services, and even regulators. The emergence of cryptocurrencies may have, in a very real sense, disrupted these arrangements.

One plausible disruption is that financial regulators and political patrons have been cut out of the setting. Nepal now has a generation of digital natives with the skills to manipulate novel technologies. But that alone would not be enough to disrupt the setting without their access to the resources of the youth diaspora now working and earning in the West. Such a network is unlikely to have existing contacts with political forces nor with the officialdom, and thus unlikely to feel the need to involve them in any transaction.

Another plausible disruption is that cryptocurrencies, with their enforcement challenges and lower cost of transaction, have democratised certain illegal actions. In other words, regulators could be worried because you no longer have to be a powerful player with large sums of money and know how to hire expensive lawyers in the British Virgin islands to engage

in capital flight. Any moderately wealthy Nepali family that knows a few kids who are good with tech now has access to the same gray market financial services that only the very powerful previously had. Such a case would worry regulators because while only a few people are in the former category lots are in the latter.

## Domestication

We should also be cautious not to read the above with unbridled cynicism. There are reasons for good-faith regulators, cognisant of the realities of corruption and political-criminal nexus in their milieu to worry about the disruption of familiar black and gray market “settings”. The familiarity of the “settings” allows regulations to monitor such transactions and the informal powers of approval allow them to exercise some control over them.

If the disruptions brought on by cryptocurrencies allow for the setting to be dispensed with, the ability of regulators to influence these activities decreases. Assuming that black and gray market transactions cannot be fully prevented, there is a justifiable case to be made for trying to domesticate them by monitoring the key players, as well as influencing the volume and timing of these activities.

Informal influence through collusion is, however, not the only tool regulators and law enforcement have to domesticate emergent digital technologies. The next part of this piece will take a brief tour through how governments and regulators around the world are attempting domestication. These explorations might also shed light on how Nepal might prepare for the transformative disruption that the arrival of digital currencies will herald. 🇳🇵

*This is first in two part series on cryptocurrencies. The second part will be published in March.*

**Sakar Pudasaini**, Founder at Karkhana, explores innovation, technology, education and their social consequences in *Makeshift*, a new monthly column in the *Nepali Times*.

## prabhu BANK

### Indian Army Day

The Indian Embassy marked 74th Indian Army Day at a function in Kathmandu on 20 February. Gen Prabhu Ram Sharma, Nepal Army Chief, who is also an honorary general in the Indian Army was the Chief Guest. Also in attendance were Indian Ambassador Vinay Mohan Kwatra and former Nepal Army chiefs. Kwatra thanked Gorkha soldiers in the Indian Army for their selfless service and sacrifice.

### Air Safety First

Turkish Airlines has successfully completed the Safety Assessment of Foreign Aircraft (SAFA) program implemented by the European Union Aviation Safety



Agency in 2021. The carrier underwent 74 assessments by 38 civil aviation authorities in 57 airports in Europe to become one of the best airlines scoring a near zero rating at 0.054.

### Tata Banepa

Tata Motors has increased its total outlets in Nepal to 19 with the latest inaugurated this week in Banepa. The location was picked by Sipradi Trading, sole authorised distributor for Tata vehicles in Nepal.



### Casino arrears

As of 20 February, the Nepal government has collected revenue worth Rs810 million from casinos with additional Rs1.1 billion in arrears. Tourism Minister Prem Bahadur Ale Magar warned casinos with arrears that they would have their licenses revoked, and set an example with Hotel Yak & Yeti.

### Petroleum price hike

The price of petroleum products has reached all-time high in Nepal with the Nepal Oil Corporation once again increasing the cost of petrol at the pump to Rs145. Diesel and kerosene cost Rs128. Aviation fuel and LPG prices stay the same.



### NMB Hydro

NMB Bank with Remit Hydro is to finance Ghunsa Khola hydropower project in Taplejung, a part of the government's ‘Citizen's Hydropower Program’ at a cost of Rs18.25 billion.

### Yeti Blonde

Yeti Brewery is introducing Yeti Blonde craft beer with the tagline ‘Spirit of the Mountains’. The beer made from malted barley, yeast, hops and Himalayan water comes in 350ml and 650ml bottles and contains 5.2% alcohol.



### Anti-cancer drugs

Tizig Pharma has become the first company to manufacture anti-cancer drugs in Nepal. According to the company, three ‘molecules’ have already been approved for distribution within Nepal and one for export.

### Genese-BO2

Genese Solution has secured a second investment of \$1 million from Business Oxygen to be used to upgrade its services and expand skills of homegrown developers on par with the global IT sector.

### Machhapuchre CEOs

Sarju Thapa and Bishwanbhar Neupane with more than 20 years of experience in the banking sector have been promoted to Deputy CEO at Machhapuchre Bank.

### Nabil with Sowa

Nabil Bank has tied up with Sowa Healthcare Centre to provide treatment to its prepaid/debit/credit card holders and its staff at discounted rates.

### SalesBerry is 8

SalesBerry marked its eighth anniversary this week with the Triple Eight campaign from 13-20 February. Under the special offer, eight lucky customers were able to shop free of cost for 60 seconds.

### New insurance plan

People between 18-60 years can now apply for Nepal Life Insurance's scheme worth Rs100,000 to 10 million, to be matured between 5-25 years. Payment can be made monthly, yearly or quarterly and benefits include payment for accidents. The lump sum can be taken after the plan or at the death of the insured.

### Samsung S22 launch



Samsung has launched the Galaxy S22 series, Galaxy S22 Ultra, Galaxy S22+ and Galaxy S22, in Nepal. The Galaxy S22 Ultra combines features of the Galaxy Note series and the SPen, and the S22 and S22+ come with high-grade AI camera features. Some of the phone's parts sport an eco-conscious design made from recycled fishing nets, plastic and paper.



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# The lost Nepali translation of

● Ashish Dhakal

With 1,084,170 words, 198 chapters, seven books, one play and a billion-dollar franchise, the Harry Potter series revived the reading habit of millennials everywhere. Twenty-five years after the first book came out, it is still the bestselling book series in history, translated into 80 languages – including Nepali.

Few know that in 2008 Sunbird Publishing House in Kathmandu secured the copyright from J K Rowling to officially translate *Philosopher's Stone* into Nepali. This was part of Sunbird's aim to publish more books in Nepali for rural children at a time when the Maoist insurgency had destroyed schools, disrupting education.

The book was released as *ह्यारी पोटर् (Harry Potter ra Parasmani)* translated by Shlesha Thapaliya and Bijaya Adhikari, and edited by Kedar Sharma.

Having grown up reading Harry Potter books, Thapaliya remembers being thrilled when Helen Sherpa of Sunbird reached out to ask if she would be interested in translating it.

"Helen asked if I could translate the first chapter as a sample, and they were happy with my work," she recalls. It took Thapaliya a year to complete the draft, during which time Bijaya Adhikari also joined.

Adhikari first read the books in 1998 when *Chamber of Secrets* had just come out, and only the British Council Library had copies. He was also familiar with Nepali Unicode, which came in handy during the translation process.

It was also the time of loadshedding in Nepal. "I used to sit with the book and translate by the candlelight," Adhikari remembers.

Power cuts were only part of the challenge. The real Forbidden Forest, so to speak, was to correctly translate many specific terminologies, such as *muggles* or *quidditch*.

"We weren't sure at first how Nepali children reading it, especially in the rural areas, without exposure to the British context would relate to the story," says Thapaliya.

Spells, Adhikari adds, posed a particular challenge. Rowling uses a modified version of Latin to create incantations in the original series, often a play on their desired effect: *levicorpus*, for example, to hoist the victim by their ankles, has roots in *levare* 'to lift' and *corpus* 'body'.

The same reasoning and effects were difficult to contextualise for Nepali audience. Even the words 'witch' and 'wizard' had to be reconsidered, as *बोक्सी (boksi)* and *बो*

*क्सी (boksa)*, which carry a negative connotation in Nepali society. So, the translators used *जादूगर्नी (jadugarni)* and *जादूगर (jadugar)* which more closely mean 'magician'.

Proper names had diphthongs with no Nepali equivalent (for instance the vowel sound in 'Harry' – not quite the strong *ह्यार*, nor the long *ह्यार*). Food items were uniquely European, as were the festivals and holidays.

"We decided that we couldn't obviously change the context of the book by Nepalifying everything," Thapaliya says, "as reading is supposed to strike one's imagination and teach new things."

So, instead of a literal, direct translation, Adhikari came up with the formula to rather try and translate the meaning and the feelings. The editing process was equally rigorous, as he sat with his cousin, Aditi Adhikari, and her father Kedar Sharma to go through the text from cover to cover.



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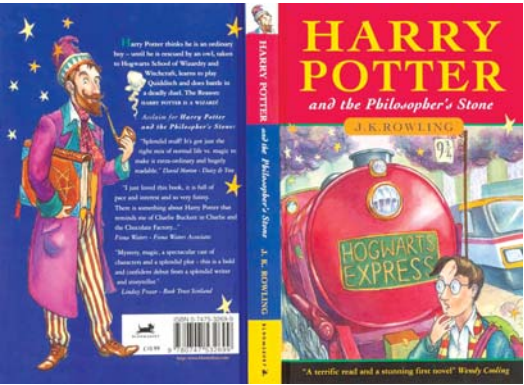
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# n of Harry Potter



“As the cultures of Nepal and the UK do not align exactly, we would often end up adding two or three words to explain the terms that were confusing or unfamiliar,” he says, “We were constantly asking ourselves if the translation was making sense to the children in Ilam or Rukum who are not familiar with western folklore.”

The translation did not get much hype upon release, even as Helen Sherpa wanted to take the book to different parts of the country and share with children there, and its distribution was limited among a handful of Potterheads.

Adhikari adds, “The cultural relevance of Harry Potter is significant to people who have been exposed to Western media and literature.” Consequently, the planned translation of the second book did not pan out. Even ह्यारी पोटर् र पारसमणि is now difficult to find.

Its rarity is comparable to the first edition of *Philosopher’s Stone* of which only 500 copies were printed (pictured above). One was sold for a smashing \$471,000 in the United States on 9 December, setting the record price for a 20<sup>th</sup> century work of fiction.

The global cultural impact of Harry Potter is a result of its universal themes of love, friendship and discovering oneself, while combatting the dangers of authoritarianism and propaganda. And J K Rowling managed to make school fun and thrilling, where one can expect adventure and room for growth in every corridor, instead of only homework and punishment.

But will the series sustain its relevance as attitudes change owing to Rowling’s controversial politics? Many

fans, organisations, and even the cast of the film adaptations have distanced themselves from Rowling because of her trans-exclusionary feminism.

“We should have seen it coming,” adds Soph Levinas, a 22-year-old non binary Nepali: “Growing up, we never saw the problematic aspects of the books because we didn’t have the context for it. Now, it is difficult for me to gloss over the stereotypical portrayals of many characters.”

*Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* first came out in 1997 at a time when Nepali children would be playing cricket, tag or hide-and-seek in the streets. The internet and mobile phones were a novelty. Whatever time remained, children did homework or read the *Nagraj* comics. Harry Potter took his sweet time aboard the Hogwarts Express to find his way to Nepal. It was not until the mid-2000s that Pottermania finally caught on, and even then it was a such a different world and culture that it did not have much of a readership.

English folklore, tales of vampires, werewolves and dragons were not so familiar to Nepali youngsters. But at a time when there were not enough books either in Nepali or English targeted especially for young adults, Harry Potter appealed to a niche readership.

Anjan Shrestha of Educational Book House in Jamal, one of the first bookstores in Kathmandu to introduce the series, recalls that Harry Potter was slow to pick up momentum here. “We brought the books in 2001, but it took another two years before there was a decent fanbase,” he says.

But by the time *Half-Blood Prince*, the sixth in the seven-book series, was published in 2005, self-proclaimed Potterheads were sharing the bulky hardbacks among friends, discussing plot lines and theories, turning twigs into wands, and re-reading while they waited for the next book.

In subsequent years, the appetite for the wizarding world only grew. It is a different world today, of course, and whether Harry Potter remains popular among children born today is a question to ask in another 25 years – half a century after *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* was published. 🇳🇵

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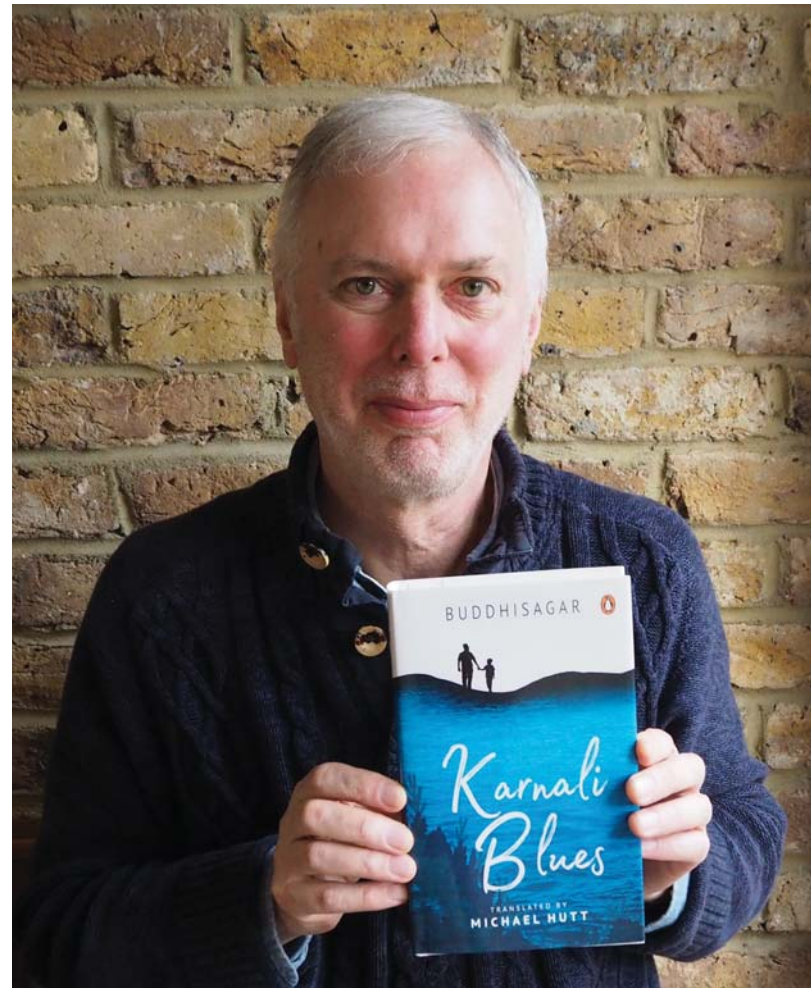
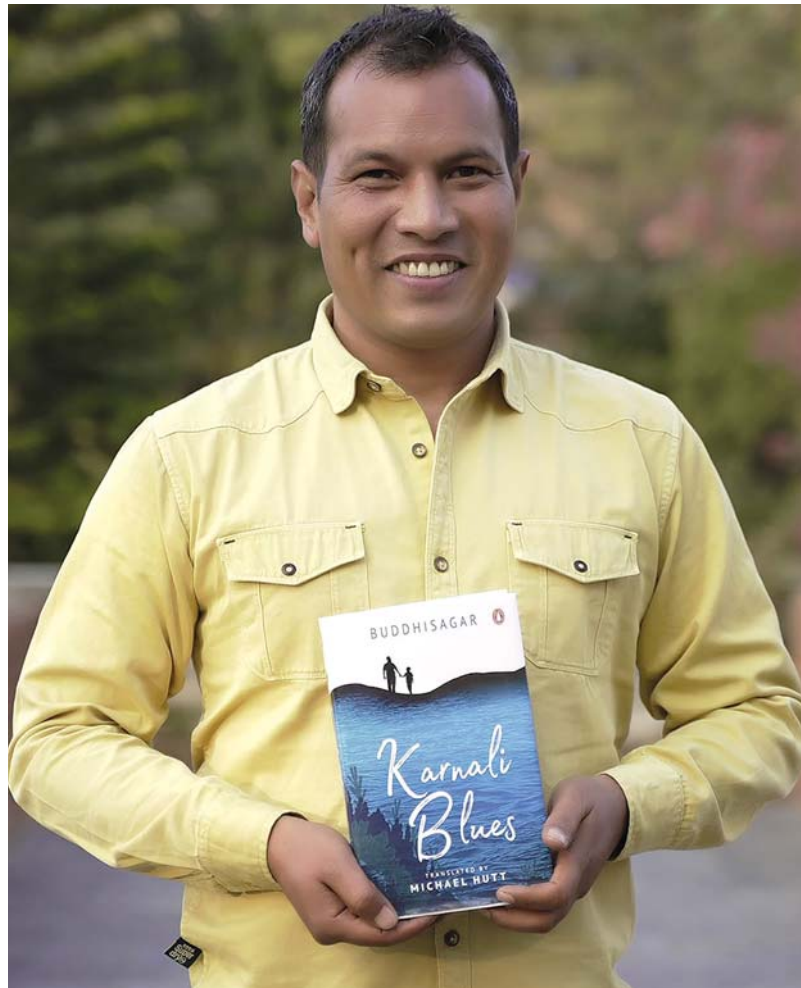
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# TAKING NEPALI LITERATURE TO THE WORLD

English translations of Nepali books open international avenues, but there are miles to go still

● Ashish Dhakal



BUDDHISAGAR/FACEBOOK

**WRITERS DUO:** Buddhisagar with a copy of his book *Karnali Blues* that was translated by SOAS professor, Michael Hutt (right).

A character in Buddhisagar's bestselling 2010 novel कर्नाली ब्लुज (*Karnali Blues*) has the habit of adding “हजुरको” (‘hajurko’) at the end of all his sentences. Eventually he runs a teashop which takes its name after the same idiolect: हजुरको चियापसल (‘Hajurko Chiyapasal’).

To the reader of Nepali, the nuance clicks immediately – a phrase is used so often that it takes on a character itself. But how does one transpose the same effect into the English medium when translating?

Michael Hutt, whose translation of *Karnali Blues* was published in December by Penguin India to rave reviews, agonised over how to render हजुरको into Nepali, trying to find the perfect turn of phrase without misrepresenting it.

“For you, sir teashop’ just doesn’t work,” says Hutt, a professor of Nepali and Himalayan studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. “At first mention, I say something like ‘for you, sir’, so that the semantics will be apparent to an English-language reader, but keep the ‘hajurko’ in the later instances.”

Hutt’s other translations of Nepali works include Laxmi Prasad Devkota’s मुनामदन (*Muna Madan*) in 1996 and Lil Bahadur Chhetri’s बसाई *Basain* (titled *Mountains Painted with Turmeric*) in 2008.

Even then, Hutt adds, ‘for you, sir’ may not be the perfect choice, as another reader of Nepali literature may immediately, upon coming across the phrase in the book, quip, “I would have translated that differently.”

Nevertheless, Hutt believes that as a translator, he has a serious responsibility to the author and the original text to not distort the intended impact and meaning.

For author Buddhisagar, translation is a joint effort. He says, “The Nepali was mine, but the translation is Michael’s too.”

There are no perfect translations of books, and Hutt believes “a sense of compromise must be reached between the original text and

the translation”.

When translating from the Nepali language into English, says Hutt, there is a character embedded in the Nepali language that speaks to a Nepali speaker or reader but not to English. Levels of politeness and deference between speaker and interlocutor in conversation, for example, is difficult to take from Nepali and replicate in English because there are not exact counterparts.

But taking liberties in the name of ‘capturing the spirit of the text’ is an act of violence, says Hutt. “If certain aspects of the original language do not come elegantly in translation, one has to accept it, the original must not be changed beyond recognition.”

One classic challenge was to choose how much Nepali to put into the translation, especially in the cases of nouns for family roles such as father, mother, sister, uncle.

Set in far west Nepal, the narrative of *Karnali Blues* is informed by its society and dialect, and the use of *ba*, *ama*, *didi* and *kaka* or *mama* are ubiquitous. This is true for most Nepali writings. Characters often have different words for different family members depending on whether they are from the father’s side or the mother’s.

These words do not automatically denote kinship. Many characters are called *ama* or *kaka* because they fall in the general category by their age. The effects of these nouns in a text are often impossible to translate into another language, and the meaning may be lost on the reader if they lack a certain familiarity with the culture and society.

Quoting Derrida, English language author from Nepal Manjushree Thapa wrote in a paper in *Studies in Nepali History and Society* (SINHAS) published in 1999: ‘A translation never succeeds.’

Besides the differences in dialects and syntax, difficulties when translating are often posed by the intangible aspects particular to languages, such as the tone, cadence, humour and poetic images. A slight mistranslation can

unravel and flatten the entire narrative.

Thapa adds, ‘[T]here is, in each translator, a persistent desire for such successes, a desire often realised, albeit erratically, unpredictably’. She says this often leads the translator to ‘achieve a certain logic and rhetoric during translation’.

In case of Hutt’s translation of कर्नाली ब्लुज, this may refer, among other choices, to the use of the English ‘sister’, ‘mother’ and ‘father’ in the narration. But their Nepali equivalents are used when the characters refer to each other in quote marks.

“Sometimes you have to make these rules for yourself as you go,” he says.

Even 22 years ago, Thapa wrote that there can be ‘traces of a desire to show an English-reading audience some uniquely Nepali aspect of the original text,’ as the ‘translator acts as a guide into literary Nepal.’

Hutt’s aim is to show there is a vast body of creative, literary voices in Nepal, beyond the exotic image of a trekking paradise.

“Nepal is spoken for and about by others so much,” he says. “One thing that has always frustrated me since I started reading Nepali is that many foreigners engage with Nepal but never read Nepali or are aware that there are nuanced and complex voices here, which can enhance their understanding of the world and humanity beyond measure.”

He is curious to see what the reviewers say of his translation of कर्नाली ब्लुज. Will they pick up on the universal themes of filial love in a landscape undergoing radical socio-cultural and political changes, or see it as a book translated from a foreign language as-of-yet underrepresented in the global literary scene?

Another case in point is Ajit Baral’s English translation of फातसुङ (*Phatsung*) by Chuden Kabimo. Titled *Song of the Soil*, the translation was published in October 2021 by the UK-based Balestier Press which specialises in contemporary world literature.

“The story of फातसुङ is incredibly

poignant,” says Baral, who is with FinePrint publishers and brought out the Nepali original. “The novel was acclaimed and loved by readers of Nepali, and I felt that it had to be translated into English.”

The plot line of *Phatsung* focuses on the Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling, which Baral felt resonates with Nepal’s armed struggle. In addition, Baral’s idea was not to translate and publish the book in Nepal only.

“Many in Nepal who read Nepali always have the option to read the book in its original language,” he says. “My idea was to bring the book to foreign readers as well.”

There is increasing focus on translation today, as publishers put out more translated works, as seen by the popularity of authors like Haruki Murakami, Elena Ferrante, Olga Tokarczuk, Han Kang and Mieko Kawakami.

## Speaking in Tongues

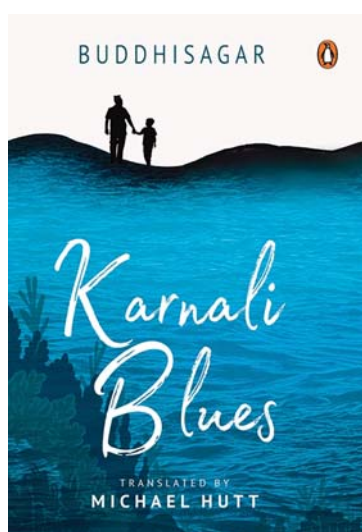
But translation itself is not a new craft. The word ‘translate’ comes from Latin *translatus* ‘carried over, bear across’ and translators have been integral to cultural and intellectual exchanges since *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was translated four thousand years ago from Sumerian into Akkadian.

Many works of Greek philosophers and mathematicians survived in large part due to their Arabic translations. Even in Nepal, Bhanubhakta Acharya’s रामायण (*Ramayan*), which is considered the first Nepali epic, was itself translated from Sanskrit.

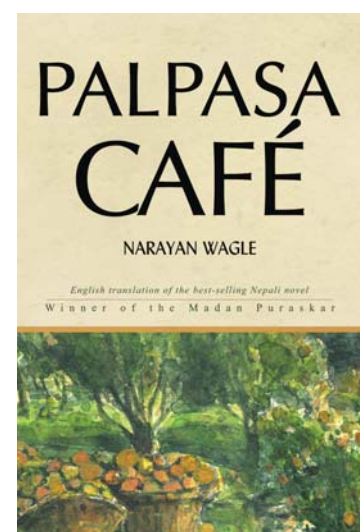
Nepali literature is relatively young, but there are writers who are pioneers in social realism, psychological fiction and experimental writing, and have a unique understanding of the human condition.

Michael Hutt says a section of readership, for example in the UK, is now used to reading books translated from different languages. In addition to Russian, French and Italian, writings from Czech, Korean and Japanese are also gaining readership.

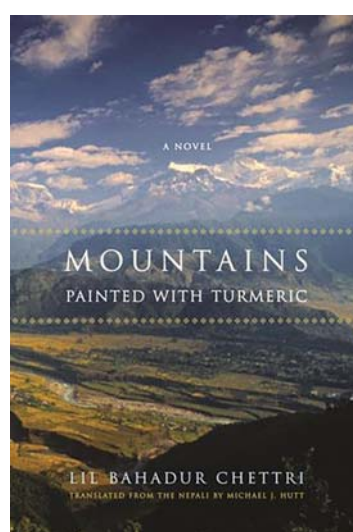
“There is an entire range of different



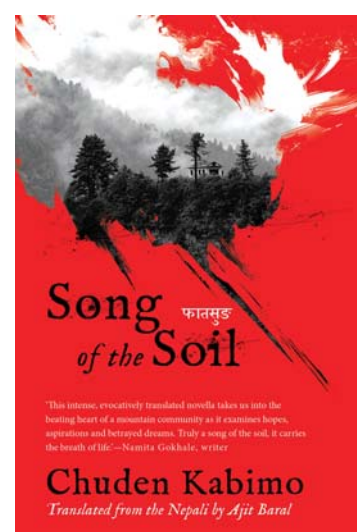
*Karnali Blues*  
Penguin India  
2021  
422 pages  
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*Palpasa Cafe*  
Nepalaya  
Fourth edition  
2008  
278 pages  
Rs450



*Mountains Painted with Turmeric*,  
Columbia University  
Press 2007  
152 pages  
\$32 (Hardcover)



*Song of the Soil*  
Balestier Press  
2021  
200 pages  
Rs475



languages, and people are engaging with those books as literature,” he says, “And they are being evaluated as literature that strikes our imagination and our emotions.”

Nepali stories being translated into English and published internationally in this scene provides readers with a unique geographical flavour.

Says Baral: “This increases the probability of more authentic and local stories from Nepal being published abroad as readers there will be able to find something new in them.”

Chuden Kabimo, author of फातसुङ, also sees the English translation of his book as a positive addition to literature and emphasises the role of translations as bridges. He says, “In translation, it’s not just the book that is being transmitted, but identities, cultures and history as well. This helps mediate the apparent separation between communities and peoples of different nationalities, and help us understand each other better.”

It is like borders coming down, he explains, as the story travels from one person to the next, one country to the next. And since its translation, *Song of the Soil* has now also been added to the BA English curriculum at the SRM University in Sikkim where, Kabimo believes, the story and culture will now also be passed from one generation to the next.

But there is still a long way to go, as linguistic limitations are compounded by systemic challenges. Whether a translation is good or not depends on numerous factors that include the quality of the original text, the translator’s command of both languages and the skills of an editor. All of these are largely dependent upon the state of literature and the studies and practice of translation, which are currently lacking in Nepal.

“Language is the first barrier. Our command of English is not perfect,” remarks Baral, “and in many cases the flair that should come from an English-language text has been lacking in our translations.”

Sometimes the text reads too much like Nepali, and is jarring. The English translation of Narayan Wagle’s award-winning 2005 novel पल्पसा क्याफे (*Palpasa Café*), for example, was not as well-received as the Nepali book.

Knowing both languages is not enough either. Buddhisagar, whose pen name translates as ‘Ocean of Wisdom’ says: “Even Google can translate. Translators should also be writers themselves, they should have a sense of poetry and creativity. They must be up to date with their society and the world.”

Additionally, translation is not a one-time thing. Citing Milan Kundera’s *The Joke*, Buddhisagar remarks how it has been translated five different times into English. “Translations need periodic polishing,” he says, “But there is not enough conversation on translating in Nepal at present. Even literature has not been taken that seriously.”

There is also a gap between the theoretical approach to translating and the actual practice. “Theory is important for background, surely,” explains Baral, “but we need more hands-on experience on how to translate, and what the different options of translation are. Workshops could be conducted so that writers and translators can meet and work together.”

One way to address the limitations is to have a good editor equally accomplished in the languages. “A sentence can be translated in many ways,” Baral says, “but to have an editor who can pick out the right one from the mix makes all the difference.”

Anurag Basnet, who was previously an editor with Rupa Publications and Penguin Books India in New Delhi, agrees. Himself a translator of Nepali and Hindi books into English, he describes his editorial process as going line-by-line with the translator.

“That is where the most fights happen,” he laughs. After that, the editor has to ensure that the text stands independently in English.

Basnet believes that literary translation is even more important now, especially in South Asia, where despite having shared languages and history, we do not talk to each other.

“There is a lot of writing happening in the languages,” he adds, “but there is not as much communication between the languages.”

Translating is therefore the best recommendation one can give for a book. As a translator you are trying to convey as precisely as possible the emotion you felt when you read the book, Basnet says, but a big challenge is that translating is not yet financially rewarding.

“There are almost no supporting mechanisms, either from the government or other sources. This needs to be addressed urgently,” he adds: “It cannot always be a labour of love.” 🇳🇵



BUDDHISAGAR/FACEBOOK

## 12 years after his bestseller came out Buddhisagar reflects on its central theme of life and death

● Shambhavi Basnet

Buddhisagar’s novel कर्नाली ब्लुज starts with a father, who says after seeing his newborn son for the first time, “He has a mole on the sole of his foot, so he will have to walk a lot but he won’t go off anywhere and leave us.”

His mother then asks the baby, “Will you go off and leave us when you’re big?”

A statement from one parent, a question from the other.

In a Thamel restaurant on a sunny winter afternoon, Buddhisagar walks in wearing a brick-orange jumper and black pants, looking as if he just returned from a track meet-and-greet. He apologises for being late. “I walk everywhere,” he offers as an explanation.

He does not look like any of the pictures on the Internet, those that make him out to be larger-than-life celebrated Nepali author. Maybe it is because he is not expecting to be photographed.

This is the real Buddhisagar, in his most natural state. Perhaps this is how he looks writing in his own company, while sipping tea from a local vendor and building stories out of childhood nostalgia.

Like Brisha Bahadur in कर्नाली ब्लुज, Buddhisagar was also born in Matera, and brought up in Katasé and Kalikot. Like the main character of his novel, he was not academically gifted. But unlike his fictional counterpart, he was rather shy, Buddhisagar confesses. So the prolific author most likely

# The Karnali Man

did not go around looking for mischief or drawing moustaches on pictures he found around the house.

Many call कर्नाली ब्लुज an autobiographical fiction. “Some parts of the beginning of the novel are real,” the author admits.

The inspiration for the novel came in a hospital, a place of both birth and death. “My father was sick and like in the novel, he was in Kohalpur. He died later, from brain haemorrhage as well,” he says.

But Buddhisagar says he is not the real protagonist: “A writer is never one character. We are in the minds of young and old, of men and women. We are everywhere in fragments. There are some parts of me in Brisha Bahadur. There are some parts of my mother and father in him as well. He is not all me.”

After a pause, he adds, “Just look at the poems he writes. If he was me, he perhaps could have written them better.”

There is also the juxtaposition in the book between the two Harsha Bahadurs — one is the breadwinner of the family and the other lies paralysed in a hospital bed.

Then, there are the two Brisha Bahadurs: the child who looks up to his father, and the youth who still does so even as the father lies on his deathbed.

Father and son oscillate between having to give and receive care to one another. There is also the pacing of the past and the present in the chapters. The present moves

in a numbingly slow pace as the human mind goes through moments rejecting death, and yet accepting the hopelessness enveloping it whereas the past rushes up to the narrator like a deadly current in a moody river that catches up to those who do not want to be caught.

“What matters the most to me is authenticity,” Buddhisagar says, sipping on a single-shot Americano. “Regardless of whether a story is autobiographical or not, the readers must think that the events in the story can actually happen in reality.”

कर्नाली ब्लुज tells us about people and places that age through immaculately detailed visuals of the great river’s tributaries weaving themselves into the story.

Villages and towns also have characters and stories to tell. A tea shop by the river turns into a small market. The river becomes a dumping site to accommodate modernisation. The cattle get sick. A new bridge opens up a nearby town, and its population migrates, hoping for a better future.

The village dries up, but the rivers stay polluted. There is death and abandonment, but even if one life ends, the other has to move forward. The title is apt, there is no

other place to feel blue and desolate than in the Karnali River.

“The back-and-forth style of storytelling in *Karnali Blues* came from those hospital nights with my father,” Buddhisagar says, this time holding a freshly-lit cigarette between his fingers. “You start by reading about an unknown person, sick and on his deathbed, and slowly, you walk along the story with him. Eventually, the readers get to know him and so when the end comes, it creates an emotional response.”

Because we spend 400 pages with Harsha Bahadur, we know that he is a constantly caring patriarch whose love for blue waistcoats is immeasurable. We also know that Brisha Bahadur’s nameless mother is constantly forgiving. Despite being a troublemaker, we still adore Brisha Bahadur’s predilection for an expensive bicycle, or a leather jacket. His love for tea makes him the most relatable Nepali on earth. And thus we come to care for all of them.

“Since I spent many years writing the novel, it opened a whole new world for me,” Buddhisagar says, blowing out blue smoke through his nostrils.

It has been 12 years since the book came out, and readers have come to love the world he created as well. It has now found new visitors with Michael Hutt’s English translation (*see overleaf*).

Language bridges distance, and so when asked whether he wishes to change the way he had written कर्नाली ब्लुज, especially now that he has become a father himself, he shakes his head.

“I don’t have any regrets about my past work. Whatever I had felt while writing the book has dissipated. If I read it now, I will do it as a reader,” says Buddhisagar. “We are fathers of a different era. I don’t feel the need to change the way I have written about fatherhood in this novel.”

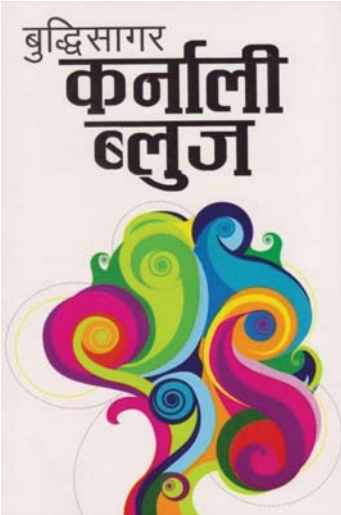
Perhaps it is not Buddhisagar we should be looking for in our narrator, rather it is us readers that find ourselves in his characters. The way we were

as children, the kind of parents we want to become.

Maybe Buddhisagar has expertly hidden himself somewhere within lines like these in Hutt’s translation: “Once Father set out, he never looked back. He used to say, ‘If you turn to look back, your attachments will trap you and you won’t be able to go.’”

Buddhisagar is working on his third novel. 🇳🇵

*Karnali Blues* translated by Michael Hutt is available in Kathmandu bookshops.





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# Erika and King Tribhuvan

Looking back 70 years to the role of a German physiotherapist and her friendship with King Tribhuvan in Nepal's transition

● Alisha Sijapati

When Erika read the story to the King, he cried out, "But that is I, Erika! And that is you!" The King asked if he might keep the story, and Erika said, "It was written for you, but I promise you, one day the whole world will know."

The king is King Tribhuvan. Erika is Erika Leuchtag, a German physiotherapist. The story is the book *With a King in the Clouds* which came out in 1958, and a later edition titled *Erika and the King* published by Coward-McCann Inc.

The book is an intimate history of King Tribhuvan during Nepal's political transition, his queens Kanti and Ishwari, and the princesses Nalini, Vijaya and Bharati, who were not allowed to leave the Narayanhiti Palace by Nepal's Rana rulers.

The 270-page memoir begins on Christmas Eve in 1948 when Erika receives a letter from a European doctor, asking if she would be prepared to be a masseuse for the Senior Queen of Nepal, who was then staying in the household of the royal family of Patiala in India.

Despite her family and friends advising her against venturing out to what was then a forbidden Himalayan kingdom, Erika entered Nepal in February 1949 and walked up across Chandragiri pass to Kathmandu with her helper Gorkhi Ram and her spaniel, Peepchen.

Erika did not have a clue about the dynamics of Nepal's two royal families, the Shah and the Rana, until she sensed something was 'off' when she visited Singha Darbar — 'a prototype of the Palace of Versailles' — to meet the last Rana Prime Minister Mohan Shamsher and the Director-General of Foreign Affairs, Bijaya Shamsher.

The British had left India, and an Anglophile Rana dynasty's days were numbered. There were new rulers in Delhi, and many members of Nepal's royal families and India's princely states were married to each other. Palace intrigue, royal rivalries, and geopolitics were churning, and Erika changed from what the Ranas saw as a ditzzy European to an insider playing an integral part in helping Tribhuvan's escape to India and the eventual end of the Rana rule.

Her daily visits to the 'Naran Hity Durbar' was ostensibly to serve Senior Queen Kanti Rajya Lakshmi, but she ended up befriending the entire family, particularly King Tribhuvan. She was not just a physiotherapist for them, but a teacher, a Western dance instructor and a German language tutor.

She nicknamed the two queens Kanti and Ishwari 'Birdy' and 'Dreamy' for their beauty and personalities, but one gets hints of growing intimacy with Tribhuvan. Erika Leuchtag herself left Germany before World War II because of the rise of Adolf Hitler, and she makes no secret of the fact that the Ranas reminded her of the Nazis, and the Shahs therefore were allies.

Historian Dinesh Raj Panta remembers reading a smuggled copy of the first edition of Leuchtag's book in secrecy because it was banned, ironically, after the Shahs came to power. As a historian, Panta was intrigued by the German's relationship with Tribhuvan, his escape to the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, his departure to Delhi, and the events that followed.

"Was she in love with Tribhuvan? Or was it just loyal devotion? Maybe the book was banned because people might think that the king's [Mahendra] father had a romantic alliance with a

European woman and that would taint the history of the restoration of the Shah dynasty," Panta speculates.

Rajni Chand, the granddaughter of King Tribhuvan and daughter of Princess Nalini, was brought up in Happy Cottage inside Narayanhiti since she was two by both her grandmothers — Queens Kanti and Ishwari. Now 65 and living in Chhauni, she remembers her grannies talk about Erika and how everything changed after she arrived in Kathmandu.

It was not just Erika who was devoted to the family. Chand remembers being told the royal family was also extremely fond of her. They even named the room where she taught them to waltz the Erika Dance Hall in her honour. As a child, Chand remembers sneaking into the hall every chance she got to admire the colourful walls, the decoration and cute animal toys.

"My grandparents, mother and aunts were prisoners in the palace, and Erika was like a ray of sunshine in their lives, someone who they never imagined would help them recover from their miseries, and

even in that short time, Erika managed to leave long-lasting memories for each one of them," Chand told us in an interview.

Unlike many history books about Nepal's longest reigning king, Erika gives us an insider's personal perspective on the man, describing vividly his melancholy and frustration at being a mere pawn at the hands of five Rana prime ministers: Chandra Shamsher, Bhim Shamsher, Juddha Shamsher, Padma Shamsher and Mohan Shamsher.

Perhaps it is because of Erika's influence that Tribhuvan confides that he wished to become a constitutional monarch like King George V of England — which happened briefly during the transition in the 1950s, until his son King Mahendra took back absolute powers in 1961.

King Tribhuvan worked alongside Dharma Bhakta Mathema and other Nepali democracy activists and politicians, but the book's more revealing parts are about the softer side of the man who loved and respected his wives and daughters, and was

reciprocated the affections.

The King and his family lived in Happy Cottage, which was later known as Tribhuvan Sadan inside Narayanhiti Palace. As a royal prisoner, the king's life was like that of a bird in a gilded cage. He was intrigued by Europe, and often pored over mail-catalogues for clothes, furniture and cars to order for the palace. The book describes Tribhuvan as a man of sophistication who yearned to visit the outside world.

Tribhuvan was childlike, and according to Erika he never liked alcohol — mainly because he did not want to be a puppet king spoilt by wine and women like his father and grandfather. He was fond of cigars, dressed well, and once smuggled two trunks full of books from India through Boris Lissanevitch, the White Russian émigré who managed the Royal Hotel.

The book is a time capsule and through Erika's keen sense of observation, we get descriptions of Narayanhiti's majestic gardens and detailed portrayals of people she came across. The book is



Erika Leuchtag

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Erika Leuchtag with King Tribhuvan, 'Birdy' and 'Dreamy' (*Senior Queen Kanti and Junior Queen Ishwan*) along with Princess Vijaya in Calcutta in 1951 at Princess Bharati's wedding.

King Tribhuvan with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, B P Koirala and other democratic leaders in New Delhi in 1951 before the signing of the Delhi Accord to form a tri-partite interim government.

tions her grandmothers, her uncles and aunts in loving terms. But the other unique part of the book — very few historical novels in Nepal ever mention women behind the scenes, and here they do the female protagonists are often portrayed as powerful and ruthless.

The book concludes with Tribhuvan's death in a hospital in Zurich, and as Dinesh Pantana notes, leaves open an interpretation about why Erika died much for a country that would never recognise her efforts.

Given 64 years after its first publication, *Erika and the King* is a fascinating insider account of the royal family through the eyes of a foreigner. It also reduces us to Erika Leuchtag, who seems to have played an important role in the escape of the emperor and his family in 1950 from the Indian Embassy and, four years later, to Delhi.

The rest, of course, is history, the tri-partite Delhi Agreement paved the way for an interim government and move towards democratic Nepal. We won't

give away any spoilers, but we learn about Erika's role in getting Tribhuvan to meet the Indian ambassadors and carry a letter from Nehru.

This is all stuff that could be turned into a gripping historical tv series like *The Crown* for which Erika Leuchtag has already written the script.

**Excerpts:**  
King Tribhuvan was curious about Senior Queen's physiotherapy treatment and wanted the same treatment for himself too. Here, Erika describes King Tribhuvan's physique in intimate details:

*He took off the dressing gown. Beneath it, he wore black and white bathing trunks, and his body was as superbly muscled and as graceful as that of the dancing deity Nata Raja. About his hips, and dipping down toward his loins, was a broad belt of thin golden mesh, fastened in the centre by a clip mouthed with a great emerald. Around the biceps of his right arm he writhed a golden snake, its head a milky moonstone. From his throat, hung amulets strung to threads of gold and emeralds.*

From neck to ankle he was tattooed, twisting, cunning convolutions of blue lace of his pale skin. The intricate patterns combined on his chest, thighs and shoulders to form ferns, flowers and the outstretched beauty of peacock's feathers.

A letter from King Tribhuvan to Erika Leuchtag where he has given due credit to Erika's effort through coded words:

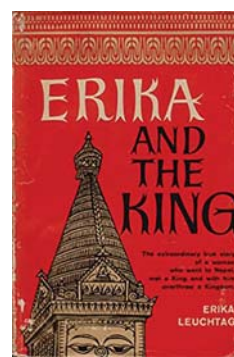
*'Dear Miss Lakshmi — I thank you for your advice — be still more grave. I will try very much to be grave. The photo of Lakshmi is in my portico, the reflection is in my heart. Do not forget us.'*

*The bird came to my garden  
and gave me the Doctor's flower,  
but you are the person who sowed  
the seed and took care of the plant.  
The flower is very sweet and  
beautiful. What more? Not only  
I, but all my party offer you our  
heartfelt thanks for the trouble you  
have taken to plant and make it  
free from pest.'*

In a conversation with Indian Ambassador CPN Singh during a picnic trip to Budhanilkantha, Erika Leuchtag writes about a conversation with his predecessor:

*I told him that Surjit had met the King, and that he had promised to help, even by flying the King out of Nepal to asylum in India, but this had come to nothing with Surjit's recall.*

Chandreshwar Prasad Narain Singh: "I should meet your King, also, although I cannot promise to fly him out of the country. But first tell me what it is he wants from India. I shall be going to India soon. Perhaps I could talk to Pandit-ji (Jawaharlal Nehru) and perhaps bring a letter back for your King." 🇮🇳



*Erika and the King*  
(With a King in the Clouds)  
by Erika Leuchtag  
Coward-McCann; First Edition (January 1, 1958)  
Hardcover, 255 pages, \$12.48 on Amazon

necessarily dated and in places turgid when she is describing the sights and sounds of Kathmandu, but one has to understand that this was one of the first books that introduced Nepal to the outside world.

There are hints that Erika was more than a royal physiotherapist, she mentions walking hand-in-hand with Tribhuvan around the palace garden. It is clear that she and Tribhuvan were working together to overthrow the Ranas, and in this she became the go-between to coordinate logistics with Indian ambassadors Surjit Singh Majithia (1947-49) and CPN Singh (1949-52).

She and Tribhuvan developed elaborate code words in their communications to keep their plans a secret. Here were some of them:

*Serpent – A Rana*  
*Big Snake – Prime Minister Mohan*  
*Shamsher*  
*Bird – Ambassador*  
*Moor – The King*  
*Flower – Letter*  
*Kite – Airplane*  
*Storm – Evacuation*  
*Erika – Lakshmi*



*Erika and the King*, is now available as an e-book in English is a timeless historical read. This is a fairy-tale account of that period, but it is accurate and does not exaggerate her own influence.

Rajni Chand (*pictured above*) notes that Erika's account and the oral history that she grew up with in the Shah royal family do match quite a bit. Chand admits she admired and respected Erika, probably also because the book

A large red Tata H5 SUV is shown from a front-three-quarter view, parked on a city rooftop. The background features a skyline of skyscrapers under a clear blue sky. In the top left corner, the Tata Motors logo and slogan "Connecting Aspirations" are displayed. A dark blue banner across the upper middle section contains the text "LIVE MORE WITH H5". Below this banner, two callouts highlight key features: one showing the interior panoramic sunroof looking up at fireworks, labeled "PANORAMIC SUNROOF", and another showing the vehicle's chassis, labeled "BASED ON LAND ROVER'S LEGENDARY D8 PLATFORM". In the bottom right corner, there is a QR code for online booking, the word "SIPRADI" in red, and small text indicating the car is available for rent from ₹10,000 per day.



EVENTS



**Bal Sahitya Mahotsav**  
Nepal's largest children's lit festival by Rato Bangala Foundation returns with its 7th edition. The theme is 'Social-Emotional Skills through Literature' and guests include authors, educators and illustrators such as Vivian Vande Velde, Julie Palais, Harihar Timilsina, Jenny Campbell and Kalpana Parajuli, among others.  
*Register now at <https://bit.ly/3rgSEMh> 25-27 February*

**Barpak Hike**  
Trek through the remote villages of Barpak, Laprak and Nimche Pokhari, and experience an authentic Nepal. Call for details.  
*3-6 March, Rs12,500, Buddha Mall, Machapokhari, 9841729236*

**Nepal-India Expo**  
Participate in the Nepal-India franchise and investment expo and meet local investors, dealers and entrepreneurs. Book tickets now.  
*26-27 February, The Everest Hotel*

**EAT GREEN**  
Join healthcare specialists and influencers as they discuss replacing animal-based diet with a plant-based option in Nepal in this Facebook live. Visit [ordernow.com.np](https://www.ordernow.com.np) for event details.  
*28 February, 8-10pm*

**KTM RUN 2022**  
Get your sneakers ready to participate in Kathmandu's biggest marathon event organised by KTM CTY. Register now.  
*26 February, 7am onwards, Darbar Marg*

**Nepal Agritech**  
Join the fourth Nepal Agritech exhibition and learn about the latest dairy, poultry, livestock and farm machinery and technologies. Also participate in the FoodTech expo on processed food and beverages.  
*25-27 February, Chitwan Expo Center, Bharatpur*

DINING



**DanRan**  
Enjoy authentic Japanese meal at DanRan restaurant. Don't miss out on the soft tofu, pork cutlets and don varieties offered.  
*Jhamsikhel Road, (01) 5521027*

ONLINE ARCHIVES

**Storytime from space**  
Watch astronauts on space station read children's literature and demonstrate scientific experiments. Find the playlist online and watch with children.

**Poetry Foundation**  
Discover collections of classical and contemporary poems through the 100-year archive of Poetry Magazine. Go to their website to start.



**Roblox**  
Roblox is a global video game platform that hosts user-created games of multiple genres. Join the immersive 3D world and enjoy games created by players for players.

**Botanical garden tour**  
Google Earth's Stop and Smell the Flowers is a journey through eleven of the most breathtaking botanical gardens and arboreturns around the world. No two visits are the same!



**Forest 404**  
A nine-part environmental thriller podcast set 200 years into the future where forests do not exist anymore. Each episode is followed by an expert discussing the theme of the episode. Find on Apple podcasts, Spotify and Google podcasts.

**Jimbu Thakali**  
Enjoy a traditional Thakali Khana Set that tastes like home at one of the two Jimbu Thakali outlets near you.  
*01-5544011*

**Marriott brings Paella**  
Marriott has brought the traditional Spanish dish Paella to the kitchen of its Mediterranean restaurant, Tahina Terrace. The rice dish, originated in the Valencia region, is offered with seafood, lobster and other varieties.  
*Until 13 March, (01)5970300*



GETAWAY



**Dwarika's Resort**  
From appetising multi-cuisine food to energising spa experience, Dwarika's has it all. Try Crystal salt therapy during the visit.  
*Dhulikhel, (11) 490612*

**Peacock Guest House**  
Housed in a 700-year old UNESCO heritage site, visitors can enjoy true Newa architecture at the heart of the old city of Bhaktapur.  
*Dattatreya Square, Bhaktapur, (01) 6611829*

**Tiger Mountain Lodge**  
1,000 feet above the Pokhara valley, Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge has everything for a rejuvenating stay: spectacular views, tranquil atmosphere and eco-friendly local products.  
*Kandani Danda, Pokhara, (01) 4720580*



**Barahi Jungle Lodge**  
Opt for either individual or two-in-one private villas, or guest room in this eco-jungle lodge offers, and revel in the beauty of the surrounding Chitwan National Park.  
*Megauli, Chitwan (01) 4429820*

**Balthali Village Resort**  
This cozy retreat with picturesque views of green terrace fields, rural houses and the Himalayan peaks is perfect for mountain bikers, hikers and writers.  
*Balthali Panauti Village, Panauti, (011) 416022*



**Roadhouse**  
Roadhouse specialises in wood fired pizza. But if you are not feeling pizza, then opt for their pasta varieties which are a must eat.  
*9863029293*

**Dalle Momo**  
Tantalise taste buds with the delicious Darjeeling-styled momos that Dalle offers. Order or go to any branch.  
*(01) 4411302*

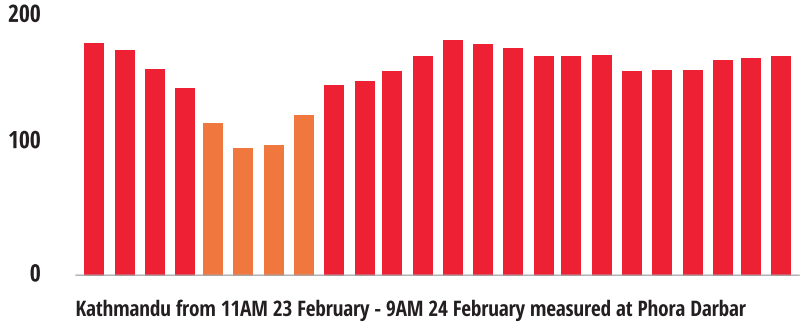
WEEKEND WEATHER



Just when we thought spring was here and the temperature climbed to 21 Celsius midweek in Kathmandu, there is another moisture-bearing westerly front headed our way. The Met Department is forecasting more snow, rain and even hail (as happened in Pokhara) for Friday-Saturday. The showers may be moderate intensity in places and will be accompanied by strong winds at higher elevations. The cloud cover means that the temperature will dip once more. By Sunday and early next week, the sun will be playing hide-and-seek among the clouds, and the temperature will climb again. If we are lucky by late next week the minimum temperature in Kathmandu will be in the double digits for the first time this year.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
21° 9°	18° 7°	18° 7°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



The general rule with Kathmandu Valley's Air Quality Index (AQI) this time of year is that if the temperature plummets, it means the wind is from the west or northwest, and the air quality improves. If it is warmer, the wind is from the south or southwest, and this blows in suspended particles from industrial and vehicular emissions from across the border. Of course, there is also Kathmandu's own worsening AQI, but that usually gets blown away after the afternoon breeze or rain. If the AQI remains poor in the afternoon, one can be sure it is imported soot. This weekend, it will also be sand whipped up from the Thar desert that is moving across northern India.

OUR PICK

The American fantasy sitcom *The Good Place* is a warm, funny and original take on the afterlife where humans are sent to "the Good Place" or "the Bad Place" after death, based on the numerical score they accumulate during their lifetime determined by the morality of their conduct. The show centres on the amoral Eleanor Shellstrop who is welcomed into the Good Place, but she is there by mistake and potentially causing havoc. She must now hide her selfish past and questionable moral choices while trying to become a better and ethical person to continue 'living' in the Good Place. The four seasons tackle everyday concerns to profound philosophical conundrums, asking and attempting to answer the most basic of all questions – what is the meaning of life and how to live it? – with a unique blend of humour and creative exploration of ethics and philosophy. Stars Kristen Bell, William Jackson Harper, Jameela Jamil, D'Arcy Carden, Manny Jacinto and Ted Danson.



कोभिड-१९ विरुद्धको खोप सरकारले निःशुल्क लगाइरहेको छ ।

अबैध रुपमा खोप बेच्ने र किनेर लगाउने दुवैलाई प्रचलित कानुन बमोजिम कडा कारवाही हुनेछ ।

कोरोना विरुद्धको खोप बेचबिखन भएको थाहा पाउने जो कोहीले स्थानीय प्रशासन, प्रहरी कार्यालय, पालिका वा स्वास्थ्य कार्यालयमा यथार्थ जानकारी गराउनु हुन अनुरोध छ ।

बजारमा लुकिछिपी बेच्न राखिएका खोपहरु नक्कली हुन सक्छन् ।

कोभिड लाग्नबाट बच्नका लागि

खोप खानी

कोभिड पुगे बच्न नदी

कोभिडमा लाग्नेको छान्न नदी

नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड



# Nepal’s water in Qatar

From the Himalaya to the desert, a Nepali company is exporting bottled spring water

● Ramesh Kumar

After Nepali migrant workers, it is water sourced from Himalayan springs that have found a market 3,500km away in the desert nation of Qatar.

The export project was derailed for two years by the pandemic, but Rudra Ganga Natural Water has started shipping Rasuwa: Super Premium Himalaya’s Natural Spring Water to Doha. Eight tonnes of water was recently air-freighted to Doha in the first phase.

The water samples were tested and certified by Qatari authorities, where the 330 ml and 500 ml Rasuwa bottled water are available at 3.50 riyals (\$1) and 4 riyals (\$1.4) respectively in supermarkets. The company is planning to export additional 16 tonnes soon, and has got orders for another 50 tonnes to Dubai by March.

“Those countries became rich by selling oil to the world and now we have started selling our water to them where drinking water is more expensive than petroleum,” says Bibi Kharel of New Langtang Himalaya Trading and Contracting in the Gulf.

The Gulf region has little water and spend billions every year desalinating sea water as well as in importing bottled water brands from Europe.

Rasuwa is trying to tap into this market with the Himalayan and Nepal brands. The exporters say Nepalis in Qatar and other



NEW LANGTANG HIMALAYA TRADING AND CONTRACTING

Gulf countries are well regarded, many work in supermarkets and restaurants, and can be good brand ambassadors.

Many Nepalis work in the hospitality sector and hotels are among the biggest consumers of bottled water, so the company is promoting high-quality chemical-free Himalayan natural spring water from springs near Dhunche in Rasuwa at an elevation of 2,000m.

Rudra Ganga Natural Water, which has a water treatment plant in Dhunche started production

two and a half years ago with the goal of exporting water. While the pandemic delayed its initial plans, it is now researching markets including China, Australia and Saudi Arabia for export.

“China has big potential, and we have spent a huge amount of money for the promotion of Rasuwa Water in Chinese cities,” says Ganesh Bahadur Bhandari of Rudra Ganga.

In recent years, businesses have been looking at the possibility of exporting Nepal’s water overseas and experts believe that Nepal can

tap foreign markets if it properly utilised the good reputation of Himalayan spring water globally.

Rudra Ganga is in fact not the first company to attempt water export in Nepal. About 15 years ago, Himalayan Spring Water, also in Dhunche, had started exporting water to Korea. But it was unable to continue when its Korean investors pulled out.

The company, which is now owned by businessman Ajay Raj Sumargi, produces water under the Himalayan On Top brand which is also exported to Saudi Arabia and Dubai in limited quantity.

Bhandari of Rudra Ganga says that high air freight cost from Kathmandu is the biggest hurdle for expansion, adding that it costs them about 60 cents (Rs72) to export 500ml of bottled water to Qatar.

“For us, shipping costs are higher than production. Only by reducing it can we reach our potential,” he says.

Distributor Kharel agrees. It costs the company Rs55 per kg while shipping bottled water to Qatar, which he says should be reduced to Rs35 per kg to make Nepal’s water competitive. Air cargo charges could be subsidised for exporting water through Nepal Airlines.

“If cargo cost is reduced by half, it

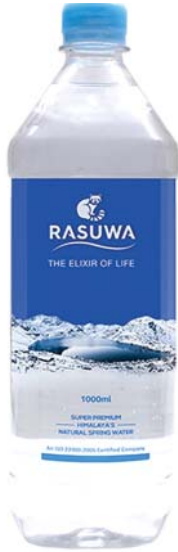
will help in the export of other homegrown products too, and in destination countries we need support from Nepali missions abroad to market our products,” he adds.

There is a cheaper alternative. Businesses can export bottled water through Indian sea ports at Rs10 per kg but it takes at least 45 days for it to reach Qatar via Kolkata, and a month through Visakhapatnam port. Using Mumbai would be faster.

Nepali workers have played an important role in the transformation of West Asian countries which have been built on the blood, sweat and tears of labour migrants. On the other hand, remittances from these workers have kept Nepal’s economy afloat despite the pandemic.

Migration experts say that bilateral agreements between Qatar and Nepal could explore mutually beneficial projects like this that could help Nepal’s economy, and not just with income from remittances.

Says Bibi Kharel: “We should now think beyond just exporting human resources to exporting our products too. And this will be crucial in generating reliable foreign exchange earnings and expanding enterprises.” 🇳🇵



Toyota Hybrid System

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Starting off

The electric motor is used primarily. Power stored in the battery is used to turn the motor.

Full acceleration

Power is provided by the petrol engine in addition to the electric motor. Output is maximised for acceleration.

Braking and deceleration

The electric motor functions as a generator to recharge the battery by itself. No fuel is used, so there are minimal CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Normal driving

A mix of petrol and electric is used for best economy, depending on the conditions. The battery is recharged where possible.

At rest

With the car brought to a stop, the petrol engine cuts off. The system automatically avoids idling to conserve fuel and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

## KEY BENEFITS OF HYBRID ELECTRIC VEHICLES

With no compromise on vehicle responsiveness, the quieter and calmer experience in a Toyota Hybrid Electric Vehicle has proven to give one of the most pleasant and delightful drives on the road. It's why millions of hybrid drivers choose to never go back to gasoline-only engines.	You don't have to plug in a Toyota Hybrid Electric Vehicle – the battery charges as you drive, using the engine or energy captured when decelerating or braking. So you can be confident a Toyota Hybrid Electric Vehicle (HEV) will take you further for less.	Toyota’s Hybrid System offers the reliability and quality you can always expect from Toyota. Tested and trusted for 23 years – so no matter where you go, you’ll have peace of mind in every drive.	In a Toyota Hybrid Electric Vehicle, you'll have an uncompromising driving experience with responsive, dynamic performance. Off-the-line torque is remarkable, allowing you to move quickly and smoothly every time.





AMIT MACHAMASI



NEURO HOSPITAL

# New cure for stroke, but prevention is key

As younger Nepalis are afflicted by stroke, state-of-the-art treatment is now available in Kathmandu

## ● Sonia Awale

■ A 32-year-old female patient was suddenly unable to move one side of her body. She was rushed to Upendra Devkota Memorial National Institute of Neurological and Allied Sciences (Neuro Hospital) where doctors used a new non-invasive treatment to remove a clot that was obstructing the artery supplying blood to her brain. The patient's mobility was immediately restored and she walked out of the hospital in a few days.

■ A man in his mid-fifties arrived at Neuro Hospital five hours after suffering a stroke. He underwent the 15-minute procedure after which he could move all of his limbs freely.

The strokes could have been fatal for both patients if they had not got to the hospital immediately, and if its new state-of-the-art mechanical thrombectomy procedure was not available.

The prevalence of strokes in Nepal has increased 40% in the past decade, and more and more younger people are suffering the condition that could paralyse or kill them.

Strokes are the third leading cause of premature deaths in Nepal, and ranks first for disabilities. A person somewhere in Nepal suffers a stroke every 20 seconds.

Doctors say a changing lifestyle and dietary habits, including heavier drinking and smoking, have led to an increase in hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol — all precursors to strokes.

Recent studies have also reported that people infected with Covid-19 have an elevated risk of ischemic stroke, adding to the burden of disease. Other risk factors include aging, congenital heart diseases, hormonal changes and pregnancy. Women are comparatively more prone to strokes than men.

Ischemic strokes account for 85% of all cases, where an artery supplying blood to the brain is blocked damaging it. Haemorrhagic stroke, on the other hand, occurs when blood from a ruptured artery collects in the brain.

"A stroke is a medical emergency,



KUNDA DIXIT

**GOLD STANDARD IN STROKE CARE:** Subash Phuyal (*top, left*) is Nepal's first interventional neuro-radiologist at the Neuro Hospital in Kathmandu. The cath lab at the hospital uses technology that was developed only six years ago.

Madhu Devkota (*above*), co-founder of the hospital says awareness about strokes and immediate medical care are essential to saving lives from an affliction that is Nepal's third leading cause of death.

especially ischemic stroke which can lead to permanent disabilities and even death if it is not treated immediately," says Subash Phuyal, Nepal's first interventional neuro-radiologist at the Neuro Hospital in Bansbari.

In fact, speed is of the essence to save the life of a patient or prevent life-long paralysis. But many Nepalis are not aware of the symptoms and reach hospitals too late, and even then the right treatment may not be available.

Unlike a heart attack, stroke patients do not feel any pain, making it difficult to identify it. Which is why doctors have come up with the acronym BE FAST (Balance, Eyes, Face drooping, Arm weakness, Slurred speech, and Time) to identify signs of stroke in time.

Patients usually experience a sudden problem with their sense of balance, have blurred vision, double vision or loss of sight in one or both eyes. There could be facial drooping, weakness or paralysis on one side of the body, and slurred speech.

If patients get to hospital within four hours of a stroke, they are given medicine to

dissolve the clot, restoring blood flow to the brain. This treatment is effective in only 10% of patients.

However, with mechanical thrombectomy, 90% of patients who get to hospital in time can be cured. A small incision is made in the thigh and catheters are inserted using an imaging machine in the cath lab.

The catheter travels along the major arteries until it retrieves the clot to allow the blood to flow again. In the case of haemorrhagic stroke, surgery to clip the blood vessel is now replaced with a method called endovascular coiling in which the catheter inserts platinum coils to block the aneurysm.

This non-invasive mechanical thrombectomy was first devised in 2015, and it was already available at the Neuro Hospital in Kathmandu four years later. Its biplane cath lab has been treating up to 25 patients a month.

The hospital's founder Upendra Devkota (*see box, above*) was determined to introduce the newly-developed endovascular treatment technology in Nepal, but did not live to see it save lives. He died of cancer in 2018.

## Visionary doctor

A young and talented doctor at Bir Hospital, Upendra Devkota (*pictured*), was sent on a scholarship to the Glasgow Neuroscience Institute in 1983 to train in neurosurgery. Under the guidance of the renowned Professor Graham Teasdale, Devkota proved himself among the best neurosurgeons in the world and had a bright career ahead of him in the UK.



But the Gorkha-native left all that behind to return to Nepal in 1989 to set up the country's first Neurological Trauma Unit at Bir Hospital. He worked day and night, while also training young neurosurgeons with limited resources.

Devkota briefly served as the Health Minister under King Gyanendra in 2005, and a year later started setting up the National Institute of Neurological and Allied Sciences.

"Many tried to dissuade us, but despite challenges we were determined to set up an institution dedicated to preventing paralysis and disabilities in Nepal," says Madhu Devkota. "My husband had foreseen the need for an advanced neurological centre in Nepal. So we thought, if not us, who would? So, we ran with it."

His wife Madhu Devkota completed the dream, and set up an interdisciplinary team for stroke patients. Neuro Hospital is also building a rehabilitation centre for recovering patients who often need physiotherapy.

But despite having the most advanced stroke treatment in Nepal, most people are unaware of the danger signs of a stroke. They also do not know that such non-surgical treatment is available in Kathmandu. It is also not widely known that such care is available in the country, and up to half the stroke patients at Neuro Hospital are brought in too late for treatment.

Nepal's topography adds to the problem of getting patients to hospitals in time. Madhu Devkota suggests the government could provide an air ambulance facility, as it does for complicated maternity cases.

Says Subhash Phuyal: "People must know that strokes are preventable, and that advanced treatment is available right here in Nepal. But the most important thing is to get the patient to hospital as quickly as possible." 🇳🇵



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## Bird-counting made easy

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A new app to crowdsource the counting of Nepal's vast diversity of birdlife

● Maheshwar Acharya

Nepal has more than 889 species of birds and counting them accurately is a difficult process. Now, a new app will help crowdsource the annual bird census.

Launched this week, the छिमेकी चरा (*Chhimeki Chara*, Neighbourhood Birds) app is designed by the nature group Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN)

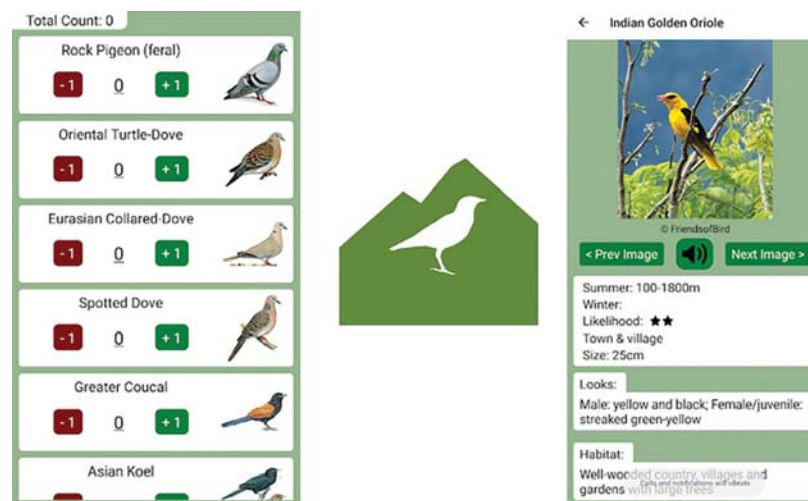
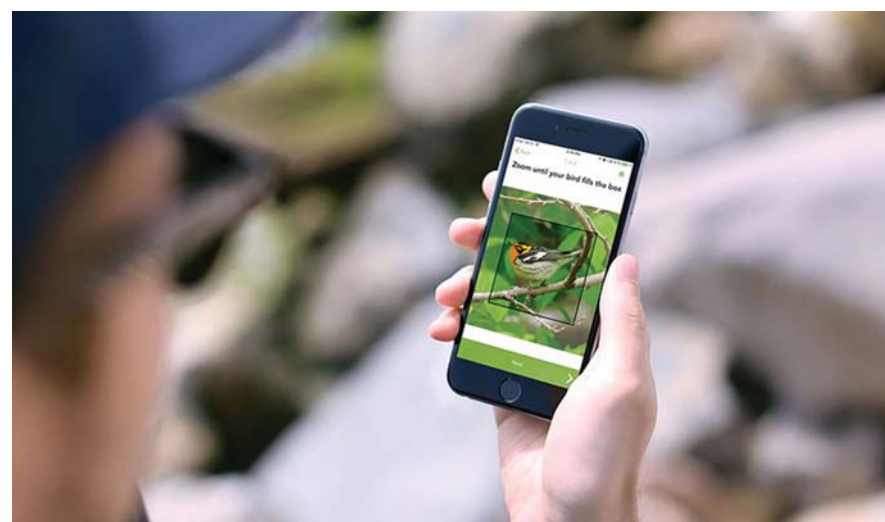
to involve the public in its annual avian census which was previously done only by professional ornithologists during the winter migration season.

The census would also be restricted to wetland areas and protected forests. But with the app, birds in villages and urban areas can now also be included.

"Nearly 1,000 volunteers and

partners from 64 districts across Nepal have already downloaded the app," says Aarati Nepali, the project's program co-ordinator. "For half-an-hour on Saturday, they used the app to identify the birds in their vicinity and record their numbers and species."

Nepali says the app is designed to accurately count birds that live and fly near human settlements,



A screenshot of the छिमेकी चरा app.

## ... and a new app to identify wildflowers

The first-ever phone app puts identification of mountain flowers literally in the palm of your hands

Nepal is famous for its spectacular scenery and rich cultural heritage. But no less wondrous is its flora.

We are now approaching the spring flowering season, and some of us lucky to be up in the mountains will wonder what that gorgeous cluster of large red flowers is called. Or what is the story behind that delicate carnivorous plant with leaves like the hands of the Buddha? How about the medicinal uses of the lovely blue gentian?

Now, the answers are all literally in the palm of your hand, and it does not add a single ounce to your backpack.

The Flora of Nepal Project and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation partnered with vegetation ecologist Elizabeth Byers and High Country Apps to produce *Wildflowers of Mount Everest* in 2020, the first-ever wildflower identification app for Nepal.

Nepal's flora is unique in the world, being especially adapted to survive at high elevations, through cold winters and wet summer monsoons. In spring, luxuriant displays of rhododendrons and primroses cover whole mountainsides with colour.

Summer brings beautiful and sometimes bizarre blossoms, such as *Hippolytia gossypina* with its white-haired pillars topped by clusters of golden flowers. The autumn trekking season is painted with the blue of gentians and the bright red and yellow autumn foliage.

The app *Wildflowers of Mount Everest* offers easy-to-use graphical keys, botanical help, detailed descriptions, and plant lore to identify and explore Nepal's remarkable flora. The app does not require a cellular or internet connection to run, it can be used anywhere. Users can create a list of the plants they see each day and email it to themselves or their friends.

"The app is suitable for students, educators, scientists, guides and visitors interested in the beautiful wildflowers of Nepal's Mount Everest region. It will be



### Tourism down? Use the pause to learn about flowers

Tourists and trekkers will be flocking back to Nepal before long. For guides, now is the time to learn new skills and increase their confidence and knowledge, so that when business picks up again, clients will rave about their experience in Nepal.

A fun skill-building activity is offered by the *Wildflowers of Mount Everest* app, the first plant identification app written specifically for Nepal. This is an enjoyable way to learn the flora of eastern Nepal's upper elevations. It is designed for beginners and experts alike, with easy picture-based keys, information about local lore, and plant facts. The richly illustrated app includes 557 species of wildflowers, shrubs and trees.

### Flora of Nepal Project

The Flora of Nepal Project is an international partnership tackling a knowledge gap identified in Nepal's National Biodiversity Action Plan.

The project is coordinated by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in partnership with the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology, the Government of Nepal's Department of Plant Resources, Tribhuvan University's Central Department of Botany and the University of Tokyo, and draws on their taxonomic expertise.

The Flora of Nepal Project is supported by High Country Apps dedicated to developing applications that deliver high quality natural history information with an intuitive, easy-to-use interface.

It partners with expert botanists and photographers to provide information of the highest quality in its mobile field guides.

High Country Apps will donate a portion of the proceeds of Flora of Nepal to support field cost of Nepali students, buy equipment for botanical studies.

The Android version of the app is a full version and will not expire.

a useful tool for park rangers and scouts as they work to conserve the park's floral diversity," says Gopal Prakash Bhattarai, Director General of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation.

Designed for people who are beginners as well as experienced botanists, *Wildflowers of Mount Everest* will appeal to anyone who wants to identify or learn about plants.

Byers has spent much of the last 40 years identifying, photographing, and cataloging sub-alpine and alpine flora of eastern Nepal.

"Two things make this field guide special," she says. "First, the Sherpa elders who have graciously shared plant lore and stories to give us a glimpse of the cultural importance of each species. Second, the botanical experts from all over the world who have volunteered their knowledge to help us understand the unique and especially-adapted plants of Mount Everest."

The *Wildflowers of Mount Everest* app is available from Apple App Store and Google PlayStore for \$7.99. Authors update the app to include new species and other content, at no additional charge to users. 📱

**Elizabeth A Byers** is a vegetation ecologist studying rare plant species and climate change vulnerability of plants. She has been studying and photographing the flora of Nepal for nearly 40 years.





BIRD CONSERVATION NEPAL

Australian Ambassador Felicity Volk with छिमेकी चरा app.



Egyptian Vulture



Spotted Owllet

HEM SAGAR BARAL

and could include the common sparrow, pigeon, barn swallow (गोथली), dove (दुकुर), ruddy shelduck (चखेवा), magpie, crow and owl.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology developed the 'Great Backyard Bird Count' project in 1998 which was the first online bird-counting program. It was later expanded world-wide into an effective method to collect information about bird sightings.

In Nepal, counting bird species and their numbers began in 1987, simultaneously with other parts of Asia, under the initiative of Wetlands International. In 2012 and 2013, BCN organised bird count outings and included amateur ornithologists as well.

"Bird-watching is a small

community," explains Niraj Dahal of BCN. "The छिमेकी चरा app will expand that. We already spend a lot of time online and on-screen, and through the app we can bring together conservation helpers and 'citizen scientists' who can help in bird counting."

Nepal, ranks 25<sup>th</sup> in the world and 11<sup>th</sup> in Asia in terms of avian biodiversity. It has nearly as many bird species as the continental United States in a much smaller area — and makes up 8% of the world's total bird species. Most of these species are found in the Kosi Tappu Nature Reserve, Chitwan, Bardia and in wetland areas of the Tarai.

Of the species found, 389 are indigenous birds, and 45 seasonally migrate to Nepal. Another 300 or more are migratory species that

transit through Nepal in their east-west or north-south migrations from Siberia to Africa, Sri Lanka and Indonesia in the northern hemisphere winter.

The reasons for this diversity are three-fold. Nepal has a great altitude variation and is in the boundary between the eco-biological domains of the Paleo-arctic realm to the north (Tibet, Siberia) and the Indo-Malayan realm to the south (India, South-East Asia).

The country also lies smack along an east-west Himalayan divide of which the Kali Gandaki Valley forms a distinct avian boundary. Climate diversity and altitude variation from the wetlands of Kosi Tappu, barely 90 metres above sea level, to Himalayan peaks above 8,000 metres make the rich

birdlife possible.

Bird Life International has identified 37 Important Bird Areas in Nepal, and although nearly 27% of Nepal's land area is protected, a high proportion for a developing country, only 17 bird conservation areas have effective protection activities.

Among the species found in Nepal, 168 are on the endangered list while eight have been declared extinct. This year's census across Nepal's wetlands and national parks showed a decline in the number and species count for water birds, a trend in recent years, although a few rarely sighted migratory species were seen.

BCN's Dahal says the bird app was launched in February to track the return of migratory species.

There will be another census in six months to include summer migrants as well.

A tutorial has been uploaded to YouTube. Volunteers can record information in their devices even without the internet and add species not seen on the list as new species.

The record is then processed and BCN will publish a map showing the areas where certain bird species are prevalent. So far, the app is compatible only in android phones, but a version for the iOS is also being developed.

Says Arend van Riessen of the छिमेकी चरा project: "In the Netherlands, birds are counted based on their street numbers. We cannot do the same here, but in the future we can reach that level." 🇳🇵

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## Paul Farmer on my mind

Tribute from a Nepali doctor to a visionary who served the poorest people in the poorest countries

• Bibhav Acharya

When we were in 11th grade, my friends and I wanted to bring healthcare services to an impoverished village near Pokhara, my hometown. The best solution we could imagine was what is colloquially called a 'health camp': show up in a village with a doctor and some medications, go through hundreds of patients in a few hours, and leave.

We believed that since doctors and medications were expensive, and the poor could not pay, a health camp was the best we could do.

In college, my anthropology professor introduced me to the work and writings of the physician and medical anthropologist Paul Farmer, who described relegating the poor to such meager services as, quite simply, a 'failure of imagination'.

His influence transformed my thinking regarding the most vexing problems in global health: the poor are not to blame for their economic condition and its attendant health challenges. Rather, the blame falls on our collective lack of imagination, which is rooted in, to borrow another phrase from Paul, 'the idea that some lives matter less'. And that is how Paul began to live in my mind, as he did for thousands of others interested in healthcare.

Paul provided the requisite vocabulary to make sense of deep inequities, and he inspired with his actions. He and his team at the non-profit, Partners in Health, have brought life-saving healthcare services to indigent populations by supporting 230 healthcare facilities in 12 countries.

His work inspired me to go to medical school and co-found the non-profit organisation Possible with other like-minded medical students, all of us committed to expanding high quality healthcare in rural Nepal. We had no track record, credibility, or adequate funding but Paul supported us. Graciously, he joined our Board, advised and mentored us, helped make connections, and let us leverage his credibility to raise funds. On the Partners in Health website, he included Possible as an organisation expanding the mission for high quality care for the poor.

He shared his expansive platform by including Possible's work alongside his. His generosity could have cut into his own fundraising efforts, but he always rejected the belief that the pie is small, and we should fight over it. He inspired us to fight for a bigger pie, and he willed that world into existence.

Back in Nepal, we began with a small clinic in Achham, where 250,000 people had no access to even a single doctor. We faced many detractors, and sometimes we doubted ourselves. But his words, spoken clearly and earnestly, helped us form our moral compass and inspired a determination that would not countenance failure.

Because more funding was available for HIV programs, many advised us to open an HIV clinic, but we knew that Achham needed comprehensive services beyond strictly HIV care. Well-meaning supporters lamented, sounding much as my friends and I had in high school, that the best we could do was a series of health camps. Surely, they fretted, there was no money for anything long-term.

People seemed to have an unspoken collective agreement that when it comes to serving the poor, there are not enough resources. Paul had a phrase to describe

this social myth: 'socialisation for scarcity'. The reality is, he taught, there are enough resources in the world to provide high-quality health services to every poor person, but we fail to make this a reality. We back away from this challenge, simply because we assume it is not possible.

A well-wisher suggested that we build something in Kathmandu rather than in rural Nepal because people in Kathmandu can pay for services. This time, we thought of another phrase that Paul popularised as a reminder that the system needs to be built to serve those with the greatest needs. He called this 'a preferential option for the poor'.

In 2009, we established Nyaya Health Nepal, a Nepal-based sister organisation to Possible, and collaborated with the Nepal government to expand to Bayalpata Hospital. In 2012, Paul visited Bayalpata (pictured above), rounding on patients with the local clinicians, teaching and inspiring with his intellect and humor. He expressed genuine admiration towards the healthcare workers living and serving in rural Nepal.

He somehow managed to express more gratitude than he received, in a way most people would not expect from someone with his level of accomplishment. After the 2015 earthquake, our team expanded to Dolakha, and at its peak, was overseeing three permanent hospitals with 350 staff: a long way from sporadic health camps.

A few years ago, I was in a small global health conference and we were waiting for Paul Farmer to speak. As most busy speakers do, we expected him to sweep in, give a talk, and jet off to the next event. I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was Paul. I was surprised to see him with the audience. We hugged. He asked me how I was doing and wanted to know how he could help with our work in Nepal. I thanked him for having highlighted the importance of mental health in high-profile global health meetings.

He thanked me for working in mental health, a persistently ignored area. He then walked around the room, surprising and personally checking in with several people who were working in different parts of the world. Later, the organisers told me that Paul had asked for the list of attendees so he could check in with the people he knew were doing similar work in global health.

He did not need to do any of this. He had a way of being present with you, listening, inspiring, and building solidarity for his commitment to the most vulnerable.

On 21 February, 2022, Paul passed away in his sleep in Rwanda, where he had been teaching and seeing patients at the University of Global Health Equity, a world-class university that he helped to establish. He was 62. He left behind three children and his wife, Didi Bertrand Farmer, a medical anthropologist from Haiti.

As Bill Gates wrote recently, the void Paul left cannot be filled by anyone. But I know that although he is gone, his work will continue through how he influenced us, through his incisive writing and inspiring legacy. He will continue to live in my mind, urging us not to succumb to failures of imagination, and instead to fight against socialisation for scarcity to boldly build a preferential option for the poor. 🇳🇵

**Bibhav Acharya**, MD is a psychiatrist, an Associate Professor at University of California San Francisco, and co-founder of Possible, a nonprofit organisation that has been working to improve health care in Nepal since 2007. @BibhavAcharya



## Do You Have Guts?

We are all excited here in the newsroom about a news item that a Chinese firm is making sports bras for overweight men. Most men of voting age are mammary-challenged, but there is a growing number that need support during vigorous exercising in the gym. (We'll be right back after this message from this week's sponsor, **Ze-Bra**: 'Sag No More! Be a Man! Defy Gravity! No Pills. No Surgery. No Injections. No Side-effects.') There are already hundreds of satisfied middle-aged men using **Ze-Bra**, and we recently interviewed one of them. "I was always self-conscious on the treadmill with my melons swaying wildly," he said. "Now they are nicely tucked in, and I'm proud of my bosoms." Encouraged by the success, the beauty industry is now literally aiming below the belt with anti-cellulite jabs. (Advertorial: "Inject

Botox onto your buttocks and get rid of ugly wrinkles fast.") With elections looming, all this is good news for septuagenarian leaders in need of political face-saving with a nip and tuck to restore their youthful exuberance. There is a whole range of plastic surgery options now available for Nepal's indecisive decision-makers so they can have a total remake of their physical infrastructure: \* **Do You Have Guts?** Buy yourself intestinal fortitude tested on lab rats. Experimental rodents exhibiting signs of spinelessness were forced to ingest quick drying cement which solidified in their lower digestive tract, thus giving them battle-hardened bowels. \* **Keep Up with the Arms Race.** If you need more than two hands to rake the loot in, grow two extra limbs in your thorax region. The coalition might collapse this

weekend, so time is of the essence. Extra fingers and greasy palms optional. \* **Tummy Augmentation.** Having ample girth is a sign that you have made it in Nepali politics. Skinny politicians no longer need to feel inadequate and be mistaken for someone who is honest and upright. Add bulk and fullness to your frame with a special XXXL Silicon Tyre Implant in your upper abdomen. Be the envy of your peers in Parliament, let your belly spill out of your belt. Limited Offer: Buyers get free moustache transplant. \* **Give Teeth to Politics.** With inflation, it is important for servants of the people to protect the value of their ill-gotten wealth. Investing in real estate is too visible. Now, the friendly neighbourhood dentist can replace molars with 24-carat gold teeth. The Maoists may be against bringing back the monarchy, but the

RPP desperately wants its crown back. \* **Brain Enlargement.** With advanced laser surgery it is now possible to completely reboot the human brain by expanding the volume of the cranium and grafting brain tissue implants from donors with a proclivity for purloining state funds. \* **Get Gonads.** Because the grumblement has waffled so much on the MCC, many in the intercontinental community have started passing snide slurs that Nepal's 'lack balls'. As a matter of public record, ministers and legislators should first present visual proof that they are indeed in possession of both their nuts, and then proceed to demonstrate that the family jewels are intact and of adequate durability to withstand blunt force trauma. The nation's credibility is at stake.



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