



Nepal's uncivil servants

While I was working in the National Planning Commission, I was assigned a branch officer to assist me professionally. I found after we began working together that my assistant neither knew how to access emails or set up my daily schedule.



GUEST EDITORIAL

Bimala Rai Paudyal

All my assistant would do was pore over books to pass exams in order to get promoted. The promotion would go through, not as a result of my subordinate's professional abilities, but on the basis of a three-hour exam filled with pages of rote-learning.

This is one of many examples of the procedural inconsistencies that I have encountered upon a close analysis of Nepal's bureaucratic mechanism—both as someone in government and out of it.

The primary responsibility of a civil servant is to implement the law, and above all, serve the people to the best of their ability. These responsibilities, however, seem to be contrary to the attitude of many Nepali government employees.

Indeed, I have often noticed that they have an air of superiority over ordinary citizens — as if the public they are supposed to serve as being beneath them and the positions they occupy.

This is not to say that there are not capable, diligent public officials serving the people. But they are heavily outnumbered by the unqualified, under-motivated and incompetent. They get to their posts through these perfunctory tests, personal connection, or political affiliation.

Much prestige is assigned to the fact that somebody has passed Nepal's public service exam. It guarantees one financial and job security for the next two decades. But as much importance is given to the tests, there is little way through which the exam can evaluate if potential government staff can handle the responsibility of their work.

And once one passes the exams and enters public service, there is no practice of evaluating whether employees are up-to-date with the technology required to fulfil their jobs, nor is there any mechanism to evaluate them on the basis of their work.

Access to public service in Nepal depends largely upon the leverage that one has.

Indeed, if I were to go into any government office without my government identification, it would be difficult to access any service.

While my MP badge greases the wheels

of bureaucracy these days, those who are not in my position need to instead grease palms to get things done. And others who know people in the right places might make back channel 'arrangements' to get what they need.

The onus of streamlining our deteriorating bureaucracy lies in both civil servants and political leadership who seek votes through promises of 'change'. Once they get elected, the success or failure of the political leadership depends on how their subordinates translate their vision into action.

In Nepal, the effect of changing governments extends to the bureaucracy. There have been instances where public service workers have thwarted the plans of politicians by citing their agenda as not being in line with the law.

Conversely, politicians have often unnecessarily intervened to transfer employees who are not aligned with their party interests, or refuse to carry out unethical actions.

As a result, public service workers use precious time to question whether they should fulfil their professional responsibilities or play nice with their new bosses by not rocking the boat.

Government officers have a duty to be objective and transparent about the work they are doing. They need to be well informed about the legal and political red tape in the bureaucracy since they are the ones who draft bills that are tabled in Parliament.

The bills therefore serve the interest and preferences of a few individuals working in civil service. The role of a parliamentarian is limited to voting either for or against the bill.

We must now focus on if — or how much — discretionary power we should give to civil servants. Nepal's Parliament is discussing this matter at present, along with other

reforms to the work culture of public service officers.

Indeed, the entire bureaucratic system needs a complete overhaul and things will only improve when employees are transferred, promoted, rewarded and punished on the basis of the outcome of their work.

The nature of public service means that civil servants are permanently a part of government. They have many facilities at their disposal: from separate hospitals, financial security during crises, and opportunities to travel abroad. All of this is paid for with Nepali taxpayers' money.

Nepal's public service workers must be made to understand that bureaucratic problems within our system of government must under no circumstances interfere with the services that Nepali taxpayers are entitled to.

Bimala Rai Paudyal, PhD, is a member of the National Assembly.



Making the bureaucracy more efficient faces bureaucratic hurdles

ONLINE PACKAGES



The Russian invasion of Ukraine has potential to overshadow the climate crisis but also highlights the urgent need to transition to cleaner energy sources. Increasing fossil fuel consumption among others is melting the mountains. Join us on an aerial survey of the Khumbu in this video.



With Nepal's biggest art festival Kathmandu Triennale 2077 in progress, watch this video of Manjula Thakur and other Mithila artists who had prepared a mural for the event. Thakur didn't know how to read or write, but like generations of Maithili women before, her mother had taught her how to make traditional clay murals and paint the walls of their home.

SAFA TEMPO WOMEN

Hats off to women Safa Tempo electric three-wheeler drivers and entrepreneurs who have been driving Kathmandu's clean air movement over the past 20 plus years while empowering themselves and inspiring others ('Women in the driving seat', Shristi Karki, #1101)

Bhushan Tuladhar

● The thing about a Safa Tempo is that it has a low floor, so elderly people, women with kids and heavy shopping bags, and people with mobility issues can climb up with little difficulty.

Sushma Joshi

WASTE MANAGEMENT

I see fires all the time, but worse is all the trash in the rivers here ('No smoke without fire in Nepal', Tom Robertson, www.nepalitimes.com.)

Ron

KHUMBU DOGS

A few years ago, we were also joined by one of these Tibetan Mastiffs on a short walk of several days to Ghandruk ('Khumbu dogs go wild after tourism decline', Abhyu Ghimire, page 5). The dog was so nice and patient, walking with us when we were walking and resting when we rested. These dogs going wild again is very sad news. Because these are really big dogs, they can be seriously dangerous if they lose their friendly demeanour.

Jennifer van der Helm

● The multiple lacerations on the back of a girl may be horrifying, but with the amount of food available for the canines in Khumbu tapering off due to another side effect of Covid-19, they may fall back on their ancestral wolf instincts.

N the Himalayas

NEPALI HOSPITALITY

One of the weirdest questions I got asked was if I belonged to the Royal family, because this foreigner thought that only royals could afford to go abroad. I was outraged by that question. The other question that really shocked me was which caste I belonged to. Even Nepalis are sensitive about asking one another's caste—a foreigner asking was a real shocker.

Eemā Budhā

● My friend was offended when he was asked in the 90s if Nepalis had television. So, when they asked him about Mt. Everest he told them that it is just behind his house and even climbed it a bit, although he'd never been to the top!

Diwakar Chettri

CONSERVATION AWARD

After spending a week with many guides searching for a glimpse of the Red Panda near Ilam, we gave up ('Nepali activist shortlisted for nature award', www.nepalitimes.com). Glad to see the protection and conservation of these beautiful animals.

Alan Roadnight

JOURNALISM AWARD

Good news ('Nepalis win two investigative journalism awards', #1101). Congratulations and best wishes for their further success.

Charan Prasai

● Congratulations to both the journalists. May the stories, and subsequent changes continue to happen.

Pratik K

HITI

This inclusion and recognition by WMF in a world stage is definitely good for highlighting the plight of thousands of years old heritage ('Saving Nepal's Hiti heritage', www.nepalitimes.com).

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Planet of the pangolins

by Maheshwar Acharya
Meet researcher and conservationist Tulsi Laxmi Suwal and read up on her decade-long campaign to save Nepal's endangered pangolins, the world's most trafficked mammal. Visit nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Nepalis win two investigative journalism awards

by Nepali Times
Namrata Sharma was awarded for her investigation into human trafficking of Nepali workers by Nepalis in Luxembourg. Bhrikuti Rai's exposé of illegal sand mining in Nepal won her Excellence in Environmental Reporting. Both were carried in *Nepali Times* in 2021.

Most popular on Twitter



Right at home with Nepalis

by Anjana Rajbhandary
Nepalis are bound to feel either proud, confused or shocked when hearing a foreigner's take on Nepal and its people. But their welcoming and accepting nature means most foreigners grow to love and learn about Nepal. Join the discussion online.

Most commented



Nepalis flee Ukraine as Russians advance

by Priti Thapa
Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, more than 200 Nepalis have arrived in Warsaw, while there are another 100 who have crossed into Slovakia, Romania and Hungary. Nepalis narrate their own arduous trek to the border, long wait, and now an uncertain future. Details on our website.

Most visited online page

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

War and Peace



Nepal survived a decade-long bloody Maoist War but more than 17,000 Nepalis did not. More importantly, a question that lingers is, what did the war even achieve, especially when the promise of a just society remains unfulfilled. Most wars and revolutions in human history throw up this question.

The following paragraphs from an editorial published in

2002 in Nepali Times stands true once more as the Russians invade Ukraine. Excerpts from the issue #84 8-14 March 2002 20 years ago this week:

Peace is breaking out all over the region. A shaky calm has returned to Afghanistan after 30 years, the deaths of 500,000 people, and the displacement of an entire generation of five million Afghans. Out in Sri Lanka, 20 years and 65,000 lives later, there is an indefinite ceasefire and hopes of peace at last.

This may be a good time to ask what the wars in Sri Lanka

and Afghanistan actually achieved. What was the sense in all that carnage? Did the freedom fighters achieve what they set out to? Whatever the cause, can mass misery on such a scale for such a long time ever be justified? What is an acceptable price to pay for freedom and self-determination? Who really benefited besides the arms merchants?

It is so much easier to wallow in cynicism and despair, and to look erudite while taking on a hopeless pose. It is hard to sound confident and harder still to be credible standing amid the carnage to say: all is not lost, we must pull ourselves together. To take an existentialist perspective amidst all this, we remind ourselves that in the end there is no choice but to assert our humanity amid so much inhumanity.

What is worrisome is the desperation of those who will benefit from the coming anarchy. And there is a danger of society becoming irreversibly brutalised, our instinctive humanity smothered by blind anger and bad blood.

There is a sense that we are collectively dragging each other down, and we will all end up in the muck of violence, corruption and greed. Every day, good people are being affected by the audacity and sheer persistence of those who benefit from a system that has lost morality and purpose.

From archives material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com



TURKISH AIRLINES

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New Daraz MD seeks to make an impact in Nepal

Aanchal Kunwar left Amazon to come home and join Nepal's growing e-commerce sector

● Shristi Karki

Aanchal Kunwar sits in her office that has an overview of employees of Daraz busy at their desks. A meeting is in progress in a conference room next door.

In January, Kunwar became one of few women in leadership in Nepal's corporate sector, heading the operations of Daraz, the company now owned by China's Alibaba.

Kunwar was working for Amazon in Seattle when a recruiter reached out to her via LinkedIn to let her know that the Managing Director position was open at Daraz in Nepal.

"I felt like coming back to Nepal after gaining all the experience would be more impactful than whatever else I could be doing right now in the US," she says.

Kunwar was born and raised in Kathmandu and spent her early childhood moving around the country because of her father's job. She left for the US after high-school, graduated in maths and economics, and began to work for Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) while doing her MBA.

She then worked for Amazon for five and a half years, managing the company's mass cosmetics business, working in global expansion — helping launch the platform in countries like Sweden, Poland, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.



"Four years into that job is where I was starting to think: what do I want to do next in my life?" Kunwar recalls.

There was a clear path in terms of just moving up the ladder in the corporate world. "But something in me was telling me that wasn't enough, and that I needed not something more, but probably something different, something that I believed would be more fulfilling," she says.

Kunwar had been considering going into the non-profit sector when Covid hit. "With the pandemic, I thought I'll just hold my thoughts for a little while because there were a lot of other things to handle."

When the Daraz opening in Nepal came up, she remembers thinking: "That would be cool."

Daraz would be a perfect fit: she was Nepali, had similar approaches to running a business in terms of being socially and environmentally responsible and customer-focused.

Kunwar's entry into Daraz coincides with a dramatic growth in e-commerce in Nepal as Nepalis locked up at home during the pandemic began to explore online purchases.

"The pandemic has definitely helped push people towards e-commerce more," Kunwar notes. "Prior to the pandemic it was probably just the younger generation but during the pandemic, even the older demographics understood the convenience and started buying things online."

Kunwar is convinced the Nepali market is quick to adopt new technologies, and gives the example of the growth in e-payments. Even till last year, only 10% of Daraz business was through e-payments, now it is half.

Kunwar's experience at Amazon has given her insight into how global markets operate, and the unique set of challenges that markets across the world present with legal restrictions, logistics and tools.

Nepal's challenges include lack of experience in e-commerce, which means sellers need the right kind of training and education to be able to answer questions, so buyers have the information they need to make a judgement call, she says.

Another challenge is that Nepal does not have a proper GPS mapping system, and deliveries still have to call people to figure out where exactly they are located.

"An unstable government adds to the challenges with *banda* announcements," Kunwar says. "And during Covid, if there is a lockdown or odd-even rules, we have to navigate that and ensure proper delivery. These challenges are unique to Nepal, you wouldn't see them in the US."

She adds, "The companies I worked for in the US are very mature businesses, where processes are defined. Here in Nepal we still have a start-up culture. But we will probably be where Amazon is now in a few years."

Daraz currently operates in 47 cities across Nepal, and plans to expand to 80 this year. But Kunwar wants to take one step at a time, and have the logistics in place for growth.

"In the last two years, we have had to run before we could walk, but in order to keep growing, we just need to have processes in place," she says. "We need our key account managers to focus more on strategy and then have execution be more on a lower level."

This is dependent on improvements in connectivity, people being able to shop online, road infrastructure, and mapping systems.

As Daraz Nepal's managing director, Kunwar joins a growing number of Nepali women taking the lead in the corporate world.

"My family raised me no differently than my brother," she says. "So I've always questioned the status quo. I don't take 'This is just how things are' as an answer."

She admits that there have been instances since she joined Daraz where men in power have shut her down halfway through her introduction.

"It is something that I wish were different, but it's not," she admits. "But I don't necessarily let that get to me as long as it is not preventing me from doing what I want to do for the business, and for the country."

Kunwar says her driving force is putting in the hard work, and making her presence felt. Outside Daraz, Kunwar is passionate about education for under-served Nepalis, and sponsors young students.

She wants to focus on mentorship because even when students have funding for education, they cannot dream bigger because they are stuck in their social milieu.

"I came back to make an impact for Nepal, it is broader than just Daraz," says Kunwar. "Five years from now, I'm hoping to make some impact here, in addition to taking Daraz to new heights with the team." 🇳🇵

DARAZ

Istanbul stopover offer

Turkish Airlines has resumed its Istanbul stopover offer for passengers from Nepal and other countries who have lengthy transfer times. Halted during the pandemic, the carrier is re-starting the service with 1-night stay in a 4-Star hotel for Economy Class and 2-nights stay in a 5-Star hotel for Business Class. Passengers also have the option of staying at partner hotels at as low as \$49 per night.

Turkish Airlines General Manager Bilal Eksi says: "Passengers can also increase the length of their initial free of charge accommodations at contracted hotels and discover even more of Istanbul."



Turkish Airlines also is collaborating with the organisation Glocal for an on-site art competition under its Skill Fest event of Skill Week 2022 on the theme 'Flying with Turkish Airlines: My Dream Destination'. The competition will be held on 26 March at The Ace Institute of Management in Kathmandu. The art competition aims to highlight artistic talents of students and enhance their creativity as well as promote reflective and critical thinking. The winner will be awarded a cash prize of Rs5,000 and a round trip ticket on Turkish Airlines to their dream destination.

prabhu BANK

Rs150/l petrol

The government has increased the price of petroleum products by Rs5 per litre. At Rs150 per litre, the price of petrol is now at an all time high. A litre of kerosene now costs Rs233. This is a reflection of the international crude oil price reaching \$127 per barrel due to the Ukraine crisis.

Tata Motors

Sipradi Trading is launching the Tata Dhamaka scheme from 27 March which includes cash discounts, AMC provision, exchange offers, discounts on three EMI's, and a discount of up to Rs300,000. The Tata Nexon also registered its highest sales in India in February with 12,259 units, with Hyundai coming second with 11,224 units.

Nepal-China transmission

The feasibility study for a 400KV transmission line from Gyirong (Kerung) in China to Rasuwagadi in Nepal has been completed. The 70km line will have 214 towers and is expected to be completed in six years. A 'load flow test' has already been carried out.

Dolma financing

The US government's International Development Finance Corporation has joined existing investors to bring the Dolma Impact Fund II to over \$50 million. The fund has \$13 million of available capacity before reaching its hard cap of \$75 million. Dolma made its first investment in Upaya City Cargo, a third-party logistics platform, and is finalising deals with a restaurant aggregator food delivery platform and a 100-bed, multi-specialty hospital in Nepal.

Gold quota

Nepal Rastra Bank has decreased the quota for gold imports by half to only 10kgs, given the country's depleting foreign reserves. In the past six months, Nepal imported gold worth Rs23.36 billion. The price of 10 grams (1 tola) of gold has increased to Rs101,000.

Ncell Voice Pack

Ncell has launched the 'All Nepal Voice Pack' offer that allows customers to make calls at 51 paisa per minute. The six various voice packs under this offer came into effect from 7 March.



Toyota Contest

United Traders Syndicate held an award ceremony this week for three winners in each category of its Toyota Dream Car Art Contest, in which 300 participants took part.

Daraz IME offer

Daraz and IME have launched a weekly Sunday offer where customers can get a discount up to 10% by paying through the IME Pay wallet. Customers can also collect IME Pay wallet or Visa card vouchers.

RA to Riyadh

Nepal Airlines has received permits to connect Kathmandu with Saudi Arabia's Riyadh, Dammam and Jeddah. The flights will be operated three days a week. The Saudi government had previously permitted Nepal Airlines to fly to the cities in 2002 and 2020, but the carrier could not operate the flights because of the lack of planes and mismanagement.

IWD at Buddha Air

Buddha Air, Nepal's biggest domestic airline with a fleet of 15 aircrafts, marked International Women's Day (IWD) on 8 March with an all-women crew on its morning flight from Kathmandu to Dhangadi and back.



Sprite and Samsung

Sprite has started a promotional campaign where nine customers will have a chance to win a Samsung smartphone and a smartwatch. To participate, customers have to scan the QR code on the promotional label, enter the serial number on the Sprite website or SMS the serial number to 34949.



PHOTOS: ABHYU GHIMIRE

Khumbu dogs go wild after tourism decline

When Nepal's trekking income dropped due to the pandemic, hungry dogs behaved like the wolves they evolved from

● **Abhyu Ghimire** in Khumbu

Scientists have found genetic evidence that dogs were first domesticated by early humans on the Tibetan Plateau, and interbreeding with the Himalayan grey wolf gave them the ability to adapt to high altitude living. So, it is no wonder that dogs feel so much at home in the mountains.

When a team did the first traverse of the Great Himalayan Trail in 2017, a mastiff they named Setuk joined the group for 300km from Khumbu to Helambu, even climbing over to the 5,700m high Tashi Labtsa pass. Setuk once accompanied mountaineers up the Khumbu Icefall to Camp 2.

Another Tibetan mastiff named

Tashi once walked back from a village in Ramechhap to Kathmandu after his Japanese owner, at the end of his job in Nepal, took him back to the place where he adopted the puppy.

Dogs often trail trekkers in Nepal, they bond with them acting as guides and camp watchdogs in return for food and adventure. Some of these dogs stay on in the mountains and are feral, hunting in packs like their evolutionary ancestors. Wild dogs have been known to attack yaks in high pastures in Khumbu.

A community dog from Dingboche once accompanied us on the climb up to Nangarshang peak. He was a perfect gentleman (a gentledog, if you will), and carried himself with much dignity. Not

obtrusive or greedy, he was just there all the time, walking ahead of us on the trail.

Tibetan mastiffs look intimidating at first glance, but they seldom quarrel among themselves when resources are plentiful. They, however, can be loyal and fiercely protective of the yaks, sheep or humans that they watch over, and do not hesitate to attack "outsiders".

There is a difference between domestic dogs confined to households, and community canines that watch over the whole village they belong to. As an example, this particular tourist dog was attacked by local dogs at Namche Bazaar. As my patient wouldn't let me suture the lacerations, wounds were cleaned and repaired using staples.

Lately, however, I have noticed that with the drop in tourism following the pandemic in the past two years, previously friendly community mastiffs in the Khumbu have become more aggressive.

As a doctor here, I have had to treat an increasing number of dog bite cases. Not only have the incidents of dog-attack increased, but the injuries are also more serious. No longer are they casual fang marks and scratches, but deep wounds as if the predator had the intention of killing and eating its prey. Some people have stopped walking alone along village trails, and children are warned by parents not to go out alone. I had to treat a child who was attacked by a group of dogs in Pangboche and had deep life-threatening injuries on her back. She was lucky, as neighbours chased away the dog pack in the nick of time.

There used to be a puppy in

Dingboche that used to play with a yak calf which was about his size. He was being raised by the community to be a watchdog to protect the yak herd from wolves and snow leopards.

Recently, the pup was killed and eaten — not by a snow leopard, but by other feral dogs. There have been other instances of dog-eat-dog, a phenomenon locals here had never heard of before.

The people of the Khumbu rely heavily on trekkers for income, and the collapse of tourism has had a domino effect on families here. The fall in income has also meant that the dogs now do not get enough to eat.

Community dogs that used to be well-fed and sleep all day in the sun, are now showing more aggressiveness. Triggered by hunger, they have fallen back on their primitive lupine instincts.

They hunt in packs, and there are frequent territorial wars between rival gangs. Dog fights have become more common, and dogs do not hesitate to eat their own kind if one is killed in a fight.

Khumbu's langur monkeys, which were wary only of snow leopards and wolves, are now being attacked and eaten by dogs. In Dingboche, one unfortunate monkey met such a fate and was left half-eaten by dogs.

It is an indication of how much locals are worried about dog attacks that the deeply religious people here, who usually do not harm animals, have started requesting the authorities to poison rampant dogs. This is against what doctors believe in and practice, and hence was denied.

Luckily, with the Covid-19 pandemic tapering off, there is a trickle of trekkers. With more food available, the number of dog bite cases at the health posts in the Khumbu is going down noticeably.

This behavioural change in Khumbu's dogs should be studied in more detail but what we witnessed first-hand was thousands of years of domestication fading away in a matter of months, as a result of food deprivation — an interesting side effect of the whole Covid-19 pandemic. 🇳🇵

Abhyu Ghimire is a Medical Officer at The Mountain Medical Institute at Namche Bazar and Dingboche in Solu Khumbu.



Microchipping Pokhara dogs

A pilot project to register canines in Pokhara aims to curb dogs and humans harming each other

● **Aria Parasai**

Nepal was declared an open defecation free zone for humans in 2019, but in Pokhara it is the dogs that are creating nuisance.

Public complaints about street strays using sidewalks as lavatories in this picturesque city have prompted Pokhara's municipality to make dog registration and licensing compulsory for the first time in Nepal.

If successful, the pilot project will be replicated in Kathmandu and other cities, microchipping and tagging the stray and community canines to keep their population in check, and help control rabies.

"Registering in Kathmandu would be more challenging given the sheer number of dogs in the Valley," says Khageshwaar Sharma of Himalayan Animal Rescue Trust (HART) in Pokhara. "We will need a separate body for monitoring and proper documentation with microchipping."

Kathmandu municipality's livestock division already has three years of experience registering street bovines by embedding microchips in them.

It has now received Rs5 million from the Prime Minister Employment Program to bulk microchip dogs and cats this year. Officials will soon conduct door-to-door visits to do a canine census, and estimate the total



microchips needed.

"The census will also give us a more accurate figure for the total number of dog owners, pet shops and clinics, which in turn will allow for mass vaccination against rabies, spaying and neutering of the dogs and formulation of necessary regulations," says Awadesh Jha, livestock division chief with Kathmandu municipality.

Ideally, registration and microchipping of dogs should be done by breeders but in Nepal, the government does not even have a record of

the total number of breeders and kennel clubs. In fact, there is no law stipulating that breeders have to be registered, adding to the risk of animal abuse.

Laws preventing animal abuse are relatively new in Nepal. The Ministry of Livestock Department developed the Animal Welfare Directive only in 2016 and even that has no provision to punish offenders.

While animal abuse is criminalised under the Criminal Code of Nepal, specific laws are still missing such as the specificity of animal hospitals and clinics, breeding and shops. This has proliferated the so-called 'animal hospitals' that

lack basic veterinary equipment and mostly function as breeders or pet shops.

A video clip of the torture and killing of a dog named Khairey in Banepa last year provoked outrage and street protests. There have been frequent mass poisonings of street dogs. In 2019, a contractor supposed to transport street cows to a shelter pushed hundreds of them off a cliff in Surkhet.

Activists say that the central government needs to draw up uniform laws so that offenders, be they pet owners, locals, shops or

breeders, can be held accountable.

This is also important for rabies control. Nepal needs to achieve the World Health Organisation (WHO) 'Zero by 30' global strategic plan to prevent human deaths by dog-mediated rabies by 2030.

Rabies is a completely preventable disease but has the highest documented case-fatality rate, at close to 100%. Globally, it is responsible for nearly 60,000 deaths a year, 40% of which are of children under 15.

Rabies is endemic in South Asia and Africa. India alone accounts for 40% of all global annual rabies deaths in the world. Nepal on the other hand has an average of 125 cases a year, which experts say is a gross underestimation. Most cases in rural areas never make it to healthcare facilities.

Preventive measures, including vaccinating and controlling the canine population, are the most cost-effective approach, and dog registration with microchipping can be the first step in ensuring this.

For now, Pokhara is leading the way. Says Awadesh Jha: "With registration, owners can find lost pets, animals can be protected from diseases and the government can form plans to control the canine population and take action against irresponsible ownership, breeding or selling. We should microchip every animal so that neither dogs nor humans misbehave." 🇳🇵

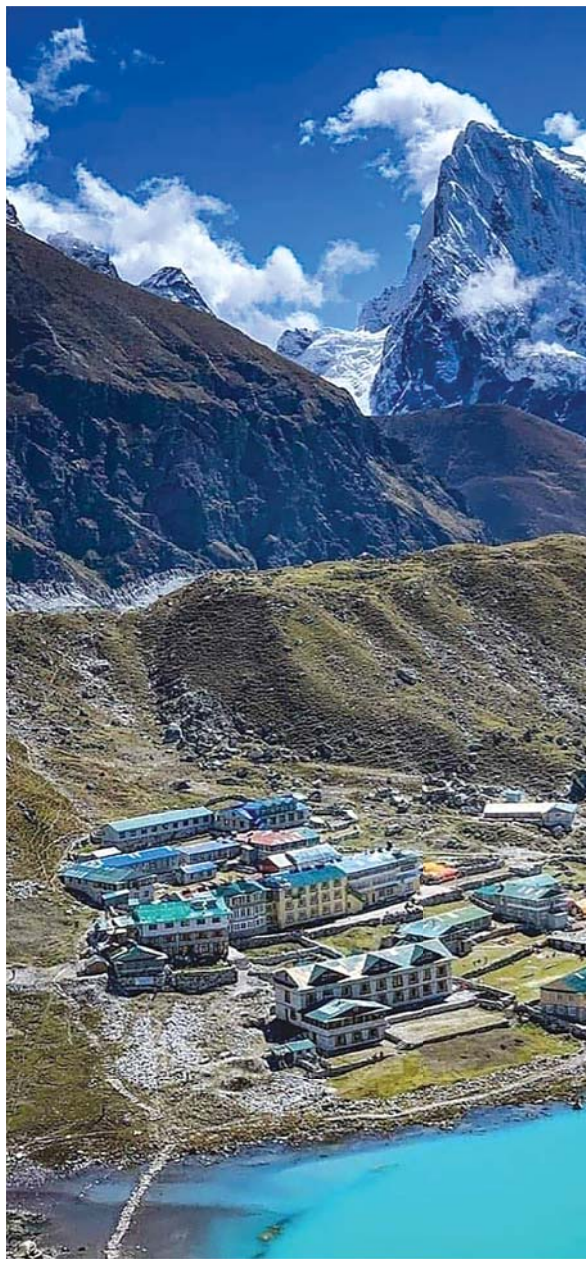
Saving Gokyo from itself

How tourism and climate change are transforming Nepal's most fragile and scenic places

● Ang Rita Sherpa



Gokyo from Gokyo Ri in 1985 with yak herder huts, and Ngozumba Glacier.



Gokyo today with Mt Cholatse in the background.

I was born in the ancient mountain ecosystem of Solukhumbu in Nepal. For me, not to be among mountains is like being without parents who look after their children and prepare them for their future.

The mountain landscape is not just the icy peaks that tower above us, but also a natural habitat in which highland people like myself live, inheriting the rich natural and cultural resources. We have borrowed it from our ancestors to live in and admire in this life, before we pass it on to future generations.

From a purely material point of view, mountains are rich in natural resources that include water, timber, minerals and rare biodiversity. They call them 'ecosystem services'. However, equally important is the healthy, natural lifestyle and rich cultural heritage of mountain peoples.

Mountains also offer a place of rest from the troubles of the world, and are desirable destinations for tourists, migrants, pilgrims, or just urban refugees who seek solitude, adventure, recreation, and scenic and spiritual beauty.

For centuries, the relative remoteness and isolation of

mountains protected them from human impact, and even if people used the natural resources they did so more sustainably than in many lowlands.

But with better connectivity, the combined advances in extractive resource technology and increased leisure time, both the negative and positive impacts of human activity in mountainous regions have increased significantly.

As the mountains become more accessible, and as we learn to exploit their ecosystems for material development and benefits, it brings about a degradation of the natural environment. These delicate systems are being negatively impacted by an increase in local populations, as well as the large-scale annual migration of tourists and adventurers.

Once secluded areas are now open to exploitation by industry and tourism. We should consider the lessons and history of Nepal's own national development and our tourism industry.

The COVID-19 pandemic gives the mountains of Nepal a breathing space and it buys us time to chart a new course so that our development model does not come at the cost of irreversible natural degradation.

As previously remote and pristine areas are opened to human exploitation and activity, there is an increasingly urgent need to act to protect and nurture nature in the same manner that it has nurtured our people.

Growing up as a Sherpa boy in the then remote mountains of Solukhumbu, I have experienced the changes in these mountainous regions first-hand. Like the rest of the mountainous regions of Nepal, Gokyo Valley of Khumbu Pasanglhamu Rural Municipality #4, is being transformed by development.

Thirty years ago, Gokyo valley along the Ngozumba Glacier, Nepal's longest, was uninhabited except for the summer grazing of livestock. Gokyo also has a religious significance, and has remained a sacred pilgrimage site for centuries.

The holy Gokyo Lakes at 4,750m-5,000m are popular pilgrimage destinations for both Hindus and Buddhists. During the Janai Purnima Festival in mid-August, thousands of Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims flock to the holy site to bathe and renew themselves.

The spectacular blue lake was internationally designated

as a Ramsar wetland preservation site in 2007. Gokyo is not only a destination for grazing yaks and spiritual pilgrimage, it is the home of many unique and rare species. The alpine biomes of the lakes support endangered and unique flora and fauna.

Endemic medicinal and aromatic plants species such as the flowering *Kobresia fissiglumis* or the medicinal *kutki* plant are resources for local populations. While the ecosystem is delicate, it is able to support large mammals such as the Himalayan Tahr and the Snow Leopard.

The lakes are also an important stopover for birds on their trans-Himalayan migrations twice a year. Flocks of migratory ducks briefly join local birds such as the wood snipe on their way to and from the Tibetan Plateau and beyond.

However, during the last two decades, Gokyo Valley has become the second most popular remote destination among trekkers seeking adventure, challenges and solitude. The main attractions are the mountains all around from Cho Oyu that rises up at the head of the valley, to Mt Everest and Makalu to the east, and Thamserku and Kangtega to the south.

Many trekkers started making Gokyo their destination to avoid the crowds on the Everest Trail, and also because the view from Gokyo Ri is more spectacular. The Sagarmatha National Park received more than 60,000 tourists in 2019, and a third of them visited Gokyo.

When asked, trekkers cite several reasons for why they come to Gokyo. Many believe that the panorama from Kala Patar above Everest Base Camp is actually much more constricted by high mountains, and there are no human settlements in the upper Khumbu Glacier to give the human touch.

The other attractions of Gokyo were:

- Better perspective on Mt Everest by means of a shorter and more easily accomplished route
- More professional excursions to the lake and surrounding viewpoints
- Sherpa ancestral culture, traditional mountain villages and friendly homestays
- An overwhelming, inspiring and incredible landscape all along the trail as well as from Gokyo Ri

Himalayans on the frontlines

The people of the Himalaya face the double whammy of climate breakdown and Covid-19

● Ang Tshering Sherpa

The double-barrel crisis of climate and Covid has hit Nepal's Himalayan communities hard with its impact on livelihoods and the natural environment.

I myself have witnessed first-hand the vast changes in the lives of our people in the mountains for over six decades. As a mountaineer, trekker, environmental activist, and someone in the mountaineering, trekking and tourism sector, I have seen the impact of the twin crises.

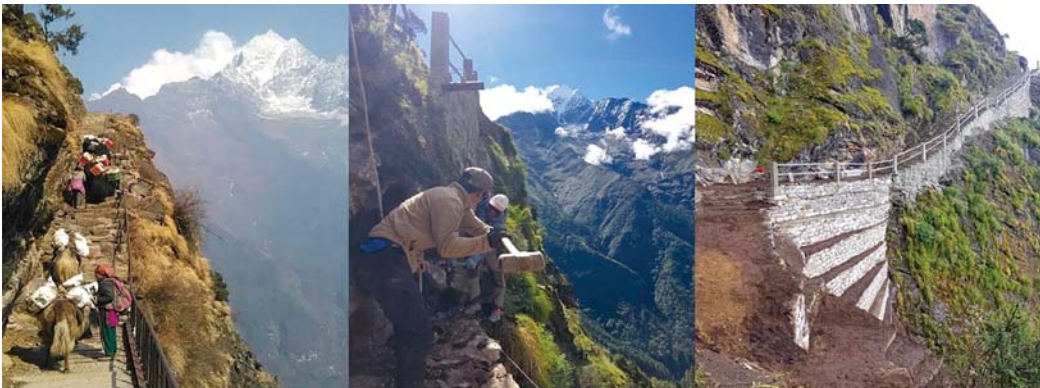
Although we share the Himalaya with Bhutan, India, China and Pakistan, it is Nepal that hosts most of the highest peaks. Both the Buddhists and the Hindus who live here consider the Himalaya sacred.

Much of our socio-cultural practices of diverse ethnicities



KUNDA DIXIT

Imja Glacier has turned into a lake 3km long and 1km wide in the last 30 years due to global warming.



ANG RITA SHERPA

Locals used the pandemic lockdown to repair and spruce up the trekking trail to Everest Base Camp.

from the mountains to the plains evolved amidst the great lakes and rivers emanating from the Himalaya. Protecting the precious natural beauty of the mountains is important not just for Nepal, but also for the planet.

Much of Himalayan region is poor, many remote areas

still do not have electricity, health facilities are dismal, children are deprived of quality schooling, and educated youth migrate because there are no jobs.

Nepal is known for its mountains, but it is the spontaneous warmth and natural friendliness of its people

that impresses visitors. This multi-ethnic society living in harmony for centuries has weaved a rich cultural tapestry.

The Himalaya, and more specifically the Khumbu region represents the opportunities and challenges of Nepal in a microcosm. I grew up there taking my family's yaks to graze,



ALL PHOTOS: ANG RITA SHERPA

- Challenging walks and healthy activity
- Delicious, healthy and appetising local dishes and meals in Sherpa family lodgings
- The camaraderie and storytelling around the fire or stove
- Stunning sunsets

While the number of visitors to the Gokyo Valley is small compared to those visiting the Everest Base Camp, their impact is nevertheless significant, and growing. Tourism in the Gokyo Valley has, without a doubt, provided a range of positive opportunities to the local people in the form of employment and income.

Gokyo Lake now faces the impact of livestock and pilgrims. These can be locally resolved and mitigated, but the increased volume of tourism and the higher material demands and consumption of tourists and adventurers is a threat to Gokyo’s fragile ecosystem.

The following quote from a local yak herder interviewed in 2013 explains the dilemma:
“My family has been coming to Gokyo for over four to five decades. In my father’s time, one *goth* had

as many as 100 yaks and naks, but now no one has more than 1 or 2. People can’t keep as many as they used to. There isn’t enough grass. The main reason is that the area has become a tourist hub. The *goth* has turned into teashops and lodges, thereby increasing the number of teashops and lodges significantly within last two to three decades.”

Despite obvious problems caused by human activity, there continues to be a steady increase of herders, pilgrims and tourists in these areas. The delicate environment is struggling to cope, and the once productive pastures of the Gokyo Valley are degrading into scrubland.

As a result of this degradation of the ecosystem, the area is further compromised by deforestation and overgrazing. At these high altitudes, the loss of the delicate flora results in landslides and erosion, which adds to the rapid deterioration of the fragile mountain ecology.

Human waste is the other issue in Gokyo. As the number of tourists expands, so does the support staff needed to take care of them. The tourists all expect western-style bathrooms with flush toilets, showers and other facilities. The traditional pit latrines that used to provide manure for the fields have now been replaced with septic tanks, where the overflow feeds directly into the sacred lakes.

The traditional pit compost toilet is environmentally friendly and is a reasonable local solution. We have abandoned sustainable ancestral methods to modern sanitation facilities under the assumption that they are more acceptable and guests prefer them.

The primary reason for this situation is the family scale economic opportunity provided by tourism. Locals derive economic security from tourism, attracting yak herders and potato farmers to abandon their traditional lifestyle and expand into delicate wilderness areas to build more lodges.

Increase in tourism also means there is greater demand for energy. Cooking is mostly done with LPG cylinders that are brought up on yaks and mules from Phaplu. But the demand for firewood has meant that dwarf junipers growing along the Ngozumba moraine and shrubs on the slopes are being used up for cooking and heating.

As long as firewood demand was local and not very high, nature had a chance to grow back. But at higher altitudes, plant growth is much slower and the greater demand for firewood means the alpine vegetation does not have time to regenerate – resulting in the destruction of many years’ worth of growth in order to provide tourists with a hot shower or tea.

Unlike most of the high altitude wetlands and sacred lakes of Nepal, which have no nearby villages and are largely uninhabited, local seasonal herders and



Cho Oyu reflected on Gokyo lake at sunrise.

tourists trekking use Gokyo’s lake intensively.

Based upon my observations made in the Gokyo Valley, these are the environmental problems that the region is facing:

- Encroachment of the lakefront by lodges, walls and other construction
- Increased number of lodges surrounding lakes
- Removal of cushion plants and rhododendron shrubs, thereby increasing siltation of the lake bed
- Plastic packaging and non-compostable garbage is being carried into the sacred lake by wind and rain
- Flush toilets using large amounts of water mixed with human waste eventually draining directly into the sacred lake
- Lack of management and few environmentally mitigating rules or instruction for pilgrims
- Erosion due to loss of vegetation cover on the moraine and slopes, and an increase in danger of landslides
- Geologically fragile mountain structure
- Continued retreat of the glaciers is resulting in the formation of new lakes

Indeed, aside from the short-term pressure from increased tourist traffic, the entire Khumbu region is feeling the direct impact of climate change. The Gokyo lakes are expanding. Supraglacial lakes and melt pools on the debris-covered Ngozumba Glacier are expanding, as the glacier itself retreats and shrinks.

The ice is melting because the mountains are thawing at a rate faster than the global average. At present rates of warming, one-third of the remaining ice in the Himalaya is expected to melt by 2050. But aside from global temperature rise, the ice-fields

higher up are also melting because of soot deposition from pollution and forest fires. This has accelerated the glacial retreat, and the trend can be seen all around Gokyo in the dirty ice.

All of these varied human activities are rapidly degrading, depleting and altering the natural conditions of the regions’ resources. The extraction of these mountain resources has increased, yet there is little or no reinvestment into either the local ecology or local communities.

Investing in stabilising and improving the ecosystem as well as providing security to the local population are both equally necessary, and have to happen side by side.

Those resources, which are extracted or utilised, should be managed in a manner that sustains the unique mountain environment and cultures, thereby preserving its many valuable potentials. In order to protect our precious resources, this threat of destruction by our own people and international visitors can and should be avoided.

This can be accomplished in part by the careful and considerate planning and implementation of local or national development projects. In order to achieve long-term management, Sagarmatha National Park must not forget to involve the local people from the very beginning of any program or project that is to be considered.

It is now obvious that nature conservation is not possible with just local participation. This has been demonstrated clearly in the many failed conservation projects and programs in Nepal, and worldwide.

We must use the time we have been given by the coronavirus lockdown to think of a new way to manage tourism in Nepal in general, and Solukhumbu

in particular – and especially in the fragile Gokyo area if we are to protect this unique natural landscape for posterity.

It is not wise, sustainable or recommended to construct hotels and lodges in one of the world’s finest unspoiled natural areas, without regard to their architectural suitability.

Local lodges along the main destinations are undergoing expansion and refurbishment without proper planning and minimal codes of conduct. To avoid further deterioration, there is an urgent need for a building code and the introduction of a permit system for new establishments.

Local participation in the planning and management of protected areas is desirable: a community-based approach to tourism is essential to boost the local economy, and ensures a more equitable distribution of benefits. Local participation also greatly increases the community’s investment and cooperation with program or project goals.

There should be a regular monitoring system for tourist lodges and facilities, and this system must be standardised as per Himalayan National Parks Rules and Regulations. All lodge operators should be given sufficient training in lodge management and related issues.

Establishing a Lodge Management Committee could provide more democratic and effective control of this local economic activity. Likewise, committees can play a key role in promoting fuel-efficient technologies, proper waste management, fixing and improving menus based on geographical pricing systems, standardising lodges, promoting improved sanitation and hygiene conditions, as well as in the building and maintaining of community trails. 🇳🇵

Ang Rita Sherpa is Chair of The Partners Nepal.

climbed for a living to support my family, and awakened to my life’s mission. The mountains are literally melting before my eyes. Hundreds of glacial lakes have swelled up dangerously in recent decades. Imja is now one of the biggest, and I have seen it grow enormously since my childhood. As children, we used to cross the Imja Glacier with our yaks. Then ponds started to appear, and grow. The lake is now 3km long and 1km wide, and in danger of bursting. The Khumbu Glacier in the adjacent valley may not have a big lake, but the firm ice we used to walk on is all gone, replaced by boulders and debris.

The Himalaya is already one of the most seismically active areas of the world. Future earthquakes can bring down avalanches into these lakes, causing them to top over the fragile moraine dams, sending vertical tsunamis rushing down the narrow valleys.

In my lifetime, I have seen two of these glacial lake outburst floods with my own eyes: in 1977 below Ama Dablam in Pangboche, and in 1985 after the Dig Tso burst in Thame. Both caused death and destruction downstream, washing away trails and bridges, drinking water systems, a hydropower plant and decades of development.

We in Nepal’s mountains did not cause the global climate breakdown, yet we are paying the price. This is why I formed the Climate Alliance of Himalayan Communities (CAHC) to bring the impact of climate change in the Himalaya to world attention, and work on risk reduction through traditional knowledge and native experience.

Trekking and mountaineering had also fouled the mountains, giving Mt Everest a bad reputation for being overcrowded and garbage-laden. But in recent years, through initiatives like the annual Eco Everest Expeditions and the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee, the routes are much cleaner. The ‘Cash for Trash’ started by Asian Trekking has brought down 24 tonnes of garbage from Mt Everest in the past 14 years. Seven bodies of climbers have also been retrieved for dignified funerals.

Cleaning Himalaya is not as easy as picking garbage in the streets of Kathmandu. Some of the frozen bodies were brought down from Balcony at 8,400m, below the summit of Mt Everest. The Sherpas risked their own lives to dig out the bodies entombed in ice.

Tourism has played a pivotal role in the economic transformation of the Khumbu. But it has suffered many crises. The deadly avalanche at Everest Base Camp in 2014, the earthquake the next year, and in the past two years the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as more recent conflicts and instability.

Nepal needs a post-Covid strategy to revive its tourism industry. The Khumbu, Annapurna, Langtang and Manaslu areas have been hit particularly hard because trekking provided 80% of the income for families.

What has made the situation worse has been winter drought, extreme monsoon weather in the last two years. This has meant poor harvests, wildfires and other disasters that

have made it difficult for people to cope.

The pandemic hit just as Nepal was preparing to welcome the Visit Nepal Year 2020 campaign. The tourism sector had invested a lot of resources through bank loans to promote Nepal and upgrade facilities. But when tourism collapsed, the loans added to the burden for businesses.

A post-Covid resurgence of tourism in Nepal could be adopted with the following strategies and policies:

- Banks should reschedule repayment of loans, demand only interest payments now and the principal a year after tourism revives and the cash flow is better. This would lessen some financial burden of the already floundering industry.
- As tourism recovery seems uncertain, there is a need for state support for those dependent on trekking and mountaineering.
- Covid vaccination should be prioritised for frontline tourism workers. More PCR test centres should be opened at airports for hassle-free entry for tourists without quarantine. Health protocols should be followed but without making a Nepal trip unpleasant for travellers.
- Introduce and promote more tourism destinations and products, such as sky diving, winter skiing, high altitude ice hockey competitions, mountain biking, agro tourism, etc.
- Tourism infrastructure should be rebuilt using an eco-design approach to optimise the use of locally-available



Ang Tshering Sherpa is a mountaineer and tourism entrepreneur and has served with the Nepal Mountaineering Association.

EVENTS



Children Lit Fest
Akshara School's children literature festival has workshops and other literary activities to stimulate young minds. Register online to attend.
14 March, 10am-3pm, Akshara School

Nepal Bike Expo
Mountain biker or cycling enthusiast? Visit Nepal Bike Expo and check out the latest models of bikes, gears, clothing and accessories.
12 March, 11am-6pm, Chhaya Center, Thamel

Wilderness First Aid
This workshop will prepare you for any situation out in the wild. Call for more information.
13 March, 9am onwards, Rs9040, 9861082985

Tech Brunch
All Tech people, gather at Entrance cafe and meet like-minded individuals over coffee and food.
12 March, 9am onwards, Entrance Cafe, Chakupat



Suryabinayak Hike
Make the most of your weekend with this six-hour hike accompanied by women from Suryabinayak to Dhungeni. Call for more information.
12 March, 7.30am onwards, 9860488309

DINING



Casa Mexicana
Head to Casa Mexicana for the best Mexican in town. It has both vegetarian and meat versions of tacos, quesadillas, and the sweetest tres leches for dessert.
12pm-8pm (Except Monday), Gairidhara, 9840542082


ONLINE ARCHIVES

Boju Bajai
Listen to Itisha Giri and Bhrikuti Rai as they talk from across two continents about politics, media and feminism in South Asia.



Night in the woods
Explore frozen forests, gather round the campfire, and trace the constellations in Lost Constellation and Longest Night, two games within the world the Night in the Woods series by Infinite Fall.

The Story
Each episode of The Story is a mini-historical biography that explores unknown backstories of some of the most influential and successful historical figures. Find it on Stitcher and Apple podcast.



Crash Course
From authors/educators John and Hank Green, of Vogbrothers fame, Crash Course is a one stop destination for educational material from organic chemistry to Egyptian civilisation.

The world at home
Travel may be limited these days, but discovering incredible experiences from across the globe does not have to be. Get your Guide's The world at home initiative brings some of their top tours, activities, and attractions online. Find everything on their YouTube channel.

Anatolia
Anatolia's Indian and Turkish dishes are packed with spices and an unforgettable assortment of flavours. From the Mutton Kofta Curry to the Baklava, the dishes will keep you wanting more.
10am-10pm, Thamel (01) 4258757

Embassy
Enjoy a hearty meal in this centrally located restaurant known for its lively ambience. The Duck Breast, served on a bed of mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables in a rich peppery steak sauce is a must-have.
Opposite to Japanese Embassy, Lazimpat, 9802024040

Evoke Café & Bistro
Evoke has great food with perfect working space. Try the pita bread, baguette and multigrain bread sandwich.
Jhamsikhel, 9851111051

GETAWAY



Hotel Annapurna View
Located at an altitude of 1600m, the hotel offers the picturesque scene of the Annapurnas and the Phewa Lake.
Sarangkot, Pokhara (061) 506000

Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur
Explore Newa art and food at this boutique hotel at the heart of old town of Bhaktapur.
Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur (01) 6611628

Pataleban Vineyard Resort
A healing weekend getaway surrounded by the green hills and vineyard. Go for a hike and in the evening, relax with a glass of wine made from the vineyards.
Chisapani (01) 4316377

Meghauri Serai
Book a stay at this luxurious safari lodge at the heart of Chitwan National Park and immerse yourself in the local culture and art.
Chitwan National Park, 9851218500




The Old Inn
A modest establishment in Bandipur that offers a panoramic view of the Himalayas right from its rooms styled in Newa architecture.
Bandipur (065) 520110









Blenders
This milkshake bar offers the yummiest flavors in its cute reusable glass bottles. Perfect hangout spot as the temperature picks up.
9.30am-9.30pm, City Centre, Kamal Pokhari, 9808080808

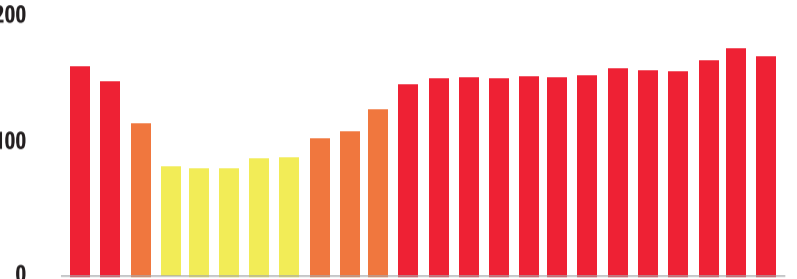
WEEKEND WEATHER



We are looking at a largely cloud-free and hot Friday and weekend as a high pressure makes its presence felt over northern India. The maximum temperature is expected to climb as high as 28° Celsius on Sunday and the minimum also rises to 13 degrees. There will be a lot of wind about in the afternoons, and the chances of some convection cloud over the higher valleys. No perceivable moisture-bearing westerly front on the horizon.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 27°  12°	 27°  12°	 28°  13°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



Kathmandu AQI from 11AM 9 March - 10AM 10 March measured at US Embassy Phora Darbar
The Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu may have improved with summer-like temperatures, but there is no rain to wash down particulates. Also, let us not forget the toxic gases mainly from vehicular emissions – carbon monoxide as well as surface ozone. The main culprits for this are motorcycles of which there are now 1.1 million in Kathmandu Valley. High winds are also fanning some wildfires, and this will add smoke haze.

OUR PICK



This acclaimed British spy thriller is back for its fourth and final season. Follow Eve Polastri, the British intelligence investigator tasked with capturing the elaborate psychopathic assassin Villanelle as they develop, confront and recover from a mutual obsession that threatens more than their own lives and forces each other to face their own darkest impulses. Led by a different female showrunner each season – largely unheard of in television – the writing is sharp and depicts a well-balanced confluence of comedy, violence, sexuality and attraction in a wickedly funny and unprecedented light. This is not your usual spy thriller, and Villanelle almost definitely does not just want to have dinner with you. Inclusive, daring and especially stylish, *Killing Eve* is kind of a big deal in the industry. Stars Sandra Oh, Jodie Comer, Fiona Shaw, Kim Bodnia and Camille Cottin.

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 त्रुकिछिपी बेच्न राखिएका खोपहरु नक्कली हुन सक्छन् ।




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BACKSIDE

The Virtual Keynote

At the outset of today's Zoom webinar, allow me to first thank the organisers of this 6-day Conference on Sustainable Development of Community-based Organisations by Empowerment of Local Stakeholders through a Paradigm Shift in Their Agenda-Setting Role in the Context of Economic Globalisation and Climate Change organised by GONE in corporation with FEDUP, UNDO, USURP, DEFEAT and FINIDO, and partnership with local non-governmental organisations FECKOFUN, HERPES, INSECT and NASTY.

So, without further ado, let me invite our virtual Chief Guest to cut the digital ribbon and deliver his virtual keynote.

“Madam Chair, ladies, gentlemen and others. Thank you for nominating me Brand Ambassador for Poverty Alleviation. Nepal is a landlocked Himalayan nation sandwiched between India and China, and is 56,700 sq m in area. [DUE TO SPACE CONSTRAINTS WE HAVE HAD TO CUT THE NEXT 15 PARAGRAPHS. -ED.]

We need clear short-, mid-, and long-term goals and a steering committee that prioritises a bottoms-up approach so the totality of the changing paradigms can be internalised and allowed to trickle down. We have to learn from best practices, and put non-priority sectors in the back burner for a deep dive at a later date.

We cannot measure the impact of awareness-raising in dollars and cents, but the gender narrative will inform our pilot project to upscale deliverables and replicate them nationwide so admin costs can profit our non-profit. This pandemic is a wakeup call to rouse us from deep slumber and up-skill staff to an asynchronous work style to fulfill the groundbreaking agenda-setting that will be added in track changes during breakout sessions.

This will provide agency to other development actors and actresses to achieve expected outcomes. Here, the HR Lead will not just pay lip service in this mid-term review to the complex dynamics of underdevelopment, she will be taking a holistic, strategic macro-economic perspective, in attaining end-degree refinement, a multi-sectoral institutionalisation of all trilateral and bilateral monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the process of re-intermediarisation of sequenced interventions for sustained resource mobilisation in an era of economic globalisation, so that a selective allocation of these resources can be fine-tuned for optimum utilisation and disbursed inclusively to all beneficiaries.

To this end, the requirement of a supportive environment cannot be overemphasised and under-stressed. Self-correcting mechanisms for proper TORs to meet the CCMC's governance goals, self-fulfilling STCRDP/RSP, and participatory LSGDA are going to create an enabling environment in Phase II of the DSRSL Framework to empower the downtrodden through earthquake-resistant capacity buildings.

We must revisit mis-directed civil society priorities for policy advocacy, proactive social mobilisation, action research, and experience-sharing to bring about a win-win situation for all beneficiaries and target groups.

We have to doubly redouble our efforts to rectify wrongs and address the structural policy-polity dichotomy that stymied past efforts to uplift excluded and marginalised vulnerable communities, so these initiatives will ultimately trickle down to the grassroots.

Thank you, you may now wake up for a 15 minute break.”



The Ass

● Ashish Dhakal

There is a widely circulated image of King Gyanendra taken at his post-royal massacre coronation in 2001. The golden throne is visibly aged, chipping at the base. Gyanendra is sombre as he looks ahead under the crown, his hands clasped, his left leg resting upon the red velvet hassock.

A rendition of the same image looms large in the gallery at Yala Maya Kendra in Patan, where an exhibition of traditional and contemporary art titled Kholo 2^o is underway.

But this one is a starkly different image. Artist Kailash K Shrestha's enormous acrylic on canvas shows a king sitting on the coronation throne, but sans face, sans hands.

The famous crown of the Shah kings of Nepal hangs in the air, heavy, unsure. Who will grab it next?

The painting is also aptly titled *Occurrence before Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal (pictured right)* – words that once were so full of promise, now reduced to being the punchline of a disillusioned joke, a mere vanishing act.

Faces and names have been pared off to reveal an institution of glittering crowns and thrones – a statement on the nature of power and the meaning of monarchy itself.

Curated by Ujen Norbu Gurung, Kholo 2^o brings 22 artists working in Nepal to address the shifting tides, perception and faith in Nepali society and politics.

The exhibition is named after the *Mani-kholo*, prayer wheels in Buddhist shrines, to symbolise cycles of time, thought, experience and growth, and to expand the dictionary of creativity and expression.

The exhibition showcases 14 young and rising Nepali artists alongside eight established and senior ones, highlighting the significance of helping launch younger artists in the current climate of Nepali art.

Kishor Jyoti's *Clash of the class* is a semi-mythical painting that looks like a panel from the *Mahabharat*, if not for the leopard-headed naked torso attached to another robotic body.

It is a fitting companion to Kailash Shrestha's work, showing the battle between the elite and the working-class, as the middle-class tries to referee, or even join in.

An andromorphic jackal (wolf?) snarls from a golden chariot, brandishing a whip over its head. There is a dog in the middle, also barking at the leopard. It is a ferocious work, tense, loud and violent.

Moreover, on the opposite wall is the true horror: a real clash of arms and ideologies, suffered by the Nepali people whose loss and grief continues to be unaccounted for.

Photographs from the 2007 book *A People War* curated by Kunda Dixit taken during the Maoist insurgency show people hugging the bodies of their dead husbands, children hurt, a woman washing blood off the front of her shop, several men moving the dead remains.

“Most discourse on the war is only in terms of the numbers,” says curator Gurung. “But the meaning behind those numbers is being forgotten, erased. What was the price the people were really made to pay?”

All this reminds us of the violent reality of the world outside — Ukraine, Yemen, Syria and the

The wheel of time and thought

Exhibition of contemporary and traditional art looks at Nepal's changing history and attitudes through multi-layered lenses



MONIKA DEUPALA



SAHINA SHRESTHA



ASHISH DHAKAL

never-ending brutality in world history.

The politics of being is central here. From the meditations of memory – Teesha Shrestha's mixed-media works depicting the deities and Newa heritage (in gold) being swallowed by the dark clouds of ash and thoughtless urbanisation – to masked shapes, faces, ideals and cages, the art is linked by the questions of body, freedom, history and responsibilities.

Above on the first floor, however, the atmosphere is the exact opposite. Following the traditional *paubha* paintings of deities on various kholo around the room call for introspection and

compassion.

The two floors are not so separate as may seem. The harsher reality downstairs and the calmer, philosophic upstairs encourage the viewer to ask: what is धर्म (Dharma)?

But, as one stands before Saru Prajapati's *Padmapani Lokeshvara* or Udaya Charan Shrestha's *Mahalaxmi (pictured, above)*, under the warm, lulling lighting, there indeed arrives a deep sense of love and awe.

Reality is often overwhelming and disturbing, and we look for a recourse to help us heal and deal with it. Religion, gods, philosophy is one way: perhaps, art is another. Gurung recalls an artist friend

of his jokingly asking him once: “When shall we pick rocks and take to the streets?”

He believes that we are all contributing one way or another, whether subtly from our homes or on the road tackling expired tear-gas shells.

“As artists,” he says, “our craft, their voice and expression are just as loud and forceful as sticks and stones.” 🇳🇵

Kholo 2^o
32 Cycles of Life
Dhokaima Café, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan
Contemporary section: Till 15 March 2022
Traditional section: Till 29 March 2022
Closed on Mondays

VACANCY

Women LEAD Nepal is seeking two passionate and qualified individual to join the communications team as full- time staff.

Communications Coordinator

The Communications Coordinator will lead the development and creation of creative content for Women LEAD's digital communication efforts, including graphics, videos, photos, and other multimedia projects.

Communications Officer

The Communications Officer will work with the Communications Coordinator to coceptualize, plan and execute the organization's communications plan.

Apply by March 25, 2022.

Learn more about these vacancies at women-lead.org/announcements

Direct inquiries to apply@women-lead.org

womenLEAD
NEPAL

Female migrant workers hold

Migration offers Nepali women a chance to become financially independent, yet the government tried to restrict it

● Sahina Shrestha

Sharada Rai was a single mother who found it difficult to support her family from what she earned as a teacher at a primary school in Morang district. She tried giving private tuition to students, but it was still not enough.

Then, out of sheer desperation, she found a recruiter who could find her a job in Kuwait for a fee. Women were not allowed to migrate for work at that time, so she had to travel overland to India and then fly from there to Kuwait City.

That was 18 years ago. Sharada was naïve and did not know what her job entailed. But she was lucky to find employers who were kind to her, and the job was what she had been promised.

“The working conditions were good, but I missed the freedom to move around. I could not go out on my own, and I wasn’t allowed to call home when I wanted,” recalls Rai. So, after a few years she returned home.

Back in Nepal Rai once again struggled to pay for her son and her younger sister’s education. She decided to leave for a second time and went to Saudi Arabia where she

worked as a house help for three and a half years. After that she went to Dubai on a tourist visa, and worked as a domestic help this time, returning to Nepal in 2017.

Over the years, the money she sent home helped to run the household, and paid for her son’s education. The exposure familiarised her with the use of the Internet, household appliances and other technology.

“Foreign employment allowed me to be financially independent. It made me capable and changed the way society viewed me,” she says. “In the past, as a single woman people would often try to look down on me, but that is not the case anymore.”

The media is replete with stories of Nepali women as victims of abuse abroad where they work as domestic help. While there is indeed exploitation and ill-treatment, there are many more who have gained financial stability and confidence. With limited opportunities at home, migration has provided Nepali women access to income and new skills.

Their experience abroad instills in women new self-esteem and assertiveness when they return, leading to a positive change in their gender roles within the household and the community.

“I do not have a hefty amount saved in the bank, but the exposure gave me self-confidence. I did not have to rely on anyone else to raise my child either and so I am at peace mentally,” adds Rai, who now works as a psycho-social counsellor in Morang’s Letang Municipality and is also a social activist.

Bijaya Rai Shrestha of AMKAS Nepal, an organisation that supports returnee female migrants says that empowerment begins from



Sharmila Lama, returnee from Kuwait now runs a shop in Maharajganj.

MONIKA DEUPALA

the moment a female migrant worker steps out of her house. They travel to a new place and are exposed to a different culture, but soon learn to adapt.

“They take the first steps to economic independence, many open bank accounts for the first time when they apply for work. Once they come back to Nepal, they can handle their own financial affairs,” says Shrestha, who herself is a returnee.

Many women migrant workers who have returned to Nepal have also been active in social work, small businesses, and even joined politics.

Sharmila Lama’s husband did not work, and her mother-in-law was battling cancer. The rent they earned from the house augmented her salary, but Lama wanted to send her two daughters to a better school and pay for her mother-in-law’s treatment.

The loneliness of a long-distance driver

As a truck driver in Saudi Arabia, I am always on the move. That’s how it has been since 2011.

Jeddah is almost 1,500km from Jubail, where I live. Places en route like Riyadh only allow trucks at certain hours of the day, so we take stops in between and wait. Including sleeping breaks, it takes us almost 36 hours one way to reach our destination.

The road goes on and on and on. You feel like you have been driving forever, only to realise there is still 1,000km of asphalt left.

It tests your patience. Fortunately, there are other Nepali drivers on the road. The dreary driving is mutual so we keep each other company on the phone throughout our journey. When my phone is quiet for a bit, I get a call from a fellow long hauler who

reminds me to stay awake. Then he tells me a joke.

This is the camaraderie I share with my fellow gurus. Yes, just like back home in Nepal, we call drivers ‘guru’ here in the desert, too.

In Nepal, trucks have funny or inspirational messages painted on their back. It is not allowed here. But some of us have managed to just write ‘Nepal’ on our trucks.

During food stops, we pool our resources and cook together in our tiny makeshift kitchen in the truck. It is more fun and easier that way, but also saves us money. Of course, we always opt for *dal, bhat* and chicken curry.

After doing this for 10 years, I have never got tired of the magical way the sand dunes on either side of the

highway change their colours and textures. These are shades of reds and browns that I have never seen before.

We get to the point from where there is another 600km more to go, and that is when I start feeling more upbeat. As we get closer to our destination, our mood starts to shift. By the time we have less than 50km left, we start honking at each other in celebration and there is a huge sense of relief and accomplishment even though we may have done the route many times.

My first few trips were exciting. I had places to be, things to deliver. But it soon started feeling monotonous. Day turns into night, and into day again, and you are driving along in that

endless ribbon of road.

Of late, I have started opting for shorter routes which are quicker and also better for my health. Now that I have worked in the company for many years, I have a say on my route preferences.

It is easy to get lost in thought on the road here in the Saudi desert. I ran away from my home at age 11 to India to be a domestic worker, taking care of my employer’s children who were older than me. Life has not been easy.

Before driving these humongous trucks, I worked as an auto-rickshaw driver and then a personal driver in India for a pittance. My license in India was fake, since I was only 15. I shaved my chin so that my facial hair would grow, but it did not. When I was questioned about my youthful looks, I blamed



my Nepali genes. The *sahu* employer bought it. Or maybe they just wanted someone *sojho* he could trust to work for cheap.

The first time I came to Saudi Arabia after paying Rs70,000 to a manpower company, I landed a terrible employer and returned to



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Sharada Rai spent over a decade working as domestic help abroad and is now working as psycho-social counsellor in Morang.

"It wasn't an easy decision leaving my daughters behind, but I had to do it for all our futures," recalls Lama who boarded a plane for the first time in 2014 to go to work as a hypermarket cashier.

She says working abroad taught her how to deal with people, be more confident so she can face any challenge. She is now back and runs a store in Maharajganj selling ladies footwear, clothes, and an assortment of

knickknacks.

Returning female workers are also harnessing their experience in negotiating their role in families and communities as well as to challenge the societal taboos and stigma associated with a woman's mobility.

When Shova Baniya's husband went missing 18 years ago, her in-laws accused her of being irresponsible. Unable to bear the mental torture and determined to raise her three children, she went abroad to work first as a domestic help in Lebanon and then in a company in Malaysia.

"I sent money home regularly. When my in-laws passed away, it was I who performed and paid for the final rites despite the way they had treated me," recalls Baniya, who returned to Nepal four years ago.

To be sure, many Nepali women are abused and assaulted by their employers, cases of wage theft are rampant. Women, especially those who return without proper earnings, often encounter a hostile society that questions them and their morality. Many also cannot find jobs when they return.

When Sharada Rai came back from Kuwait, she had lost a lot of weight. Soon rumours circulated in the village that she had AIDS. "It wasn't true, so I kept going about my business," says Rai.

Sharmila Lama's husband also accused her of having relationships with foreigners when she was in Qatar, but the rest of the family supported her fully. "I went there legally and worked to the best of my ability. I even won the Best Cashier award, there was no reason for me to bow down to anyone's accusations," she says.

Shova Baniya has been looking for a job since she came back, but to no avail. Not the one to give up, she recently completed a 30-day JCB excavator operator training from CTEVT in Kailali and passed her written test. She is now waiting for the trial examinations so that she can start driving.

"No one thinks that a woman is capable no matter what we do, I will prove them wrong," says Baniya. "I am no longer the same person who silently listened to others taking down on me, now I can fight and fend for myself."

Also tied to women's migration and remittance are certain human costs such as gender discrimination at all levels imposed by family, community and even the State. Even today Nepali society is steeped in patriarchy and an archaic protectionist approach towards women.

Returnees and activists say that the government is quick to call for a blanket ban on female migrant workers, but does nothing to provide jobs at home.

"More Nepali male migrant workers die abroad than women, so why doesn't the government impose a ban on men going abroad to work? Why is it just the women?" asks Bijaya Rai Shrestha of AMKAS.

By not granting labour permits or approvals for household work abroad, women cross the open border to India, use back channels or visit visas since that is their only way out. This not only makes them more vulnerable but also invisible.

The government's knee-jerk reaction to this is to ban women from migrating for domestic work, or announce a proposal to put absurd conditions on visit visa.

Because women use these informal channels to go abroad, it opens up the possibility of abuse, and in turn, Nepal's embassies are unable to reach them. They also cannot get welfare and compensation on return since they are undocumented.

"A ban on women going abroad to work is not a sustainable solution, the government needs to move from welfare to a right-based approach, and from protection to empowerment," says Saru Joshi of the international think-tank, Nepal Policy Institute.

For years, women migrant workers have also been undercounted so, in more ways than one, they are invisible to policymakers. But looking at only the bad is doing the workers injustice, say activists.

"There is a huge grey area in migration that the government has not been able to see, and therefore, has never thought of a long-term approach," explains Joshi. "They just rely on ad-hoc discriminatory decisions but what we need is, to come up with and implement policy that ensures safe migration."

Recruiters reach the doorsteps of people, but the government has failed to do so. What prospective migrant workers need to make most of their time overseas is knowledge and training so they are prepared before they leave.

"One of the biggest lessons from working over a decade overseas is that we need to understand our responsibility and match the expectations of the employers," says Sharada Rai. "That is only possible if women receive training and are aware about what the employment entails."

Mobilising returnees is another solution, as they understand the migrant problems best, have exposure, and know how to be independent. This could also ensure employment to the returnees.

Says Joshi, "A comprehensive story of migration needs to be told and the government as a whole should work for migrants' rights. Each level should be aware of its responsibilities and collaborate rather than pushing migrant issues to another department or ministry." 🇳🇵



Nepal prematurely after getting sick. But I knew I had to go overseas again — what other option did I have?

With my second child on the way, I was so desperate when I came to Saudi Arabia the second time that I thought to myself: "Even

if things do not go any better and I die there, it will still be better for my family because they will at least get around 15 lakhs from the Foreign Employment Board and insurance as compensation."

This time, though, I landed a good employer and have not looked back since. This coincided with my daughter's birth — and as they say, with her arrival so did Laxmi enter our house.

Even with a good job, I again started feeling ill in Saudi Arabia just like I had the first time. I was always drowsy and weak, and it was difficult to muster the strength to even get through the day driving the truck.

One of my Indian colleagues noticed this, told me, "For the next two weeks, drink four to six liters of water a day." I did that and immediately started feeling better. It was a miracle, and something as simple as drinking lots of water. I did not know that I was severely dehydrated.

My life could have taken a completely different turn had it not been for this small piece of advice from a colleague. I remember him

with gratitude.

I share my room with three other Nepalis. But even in the cramped space, we have managed to create our own individual corners. Our work and sleep schedules do not always match. But even when we are in the same room, we are all glued to our phones most of the time speaking to family, or reading news from Nepal.

Even though I have lived in Saudi Arabia for over a decade now, I have barely had any interaction with local people other than people at the airport. Just like in India, my supervisors in Saudi Arabia have all been Indians. My colleagues are either Nepalis or *ajjabi* foreigners. I speak mostly Hindi and Nepali, although I have picked up some basic Arabic.

I think domestic workers here are the ones who learn to speak Arabic fastest since they live with locals families and deal directly with them on a daily basis.

Unlike many Nepalis, my colleagues and I were lucky during Covid-19, as we had work. We continued to deliver goods from the port to nearby markets. Everything

was shut down and the no-entry rules during certain hours in cities meant the roads were empty. We drove like kings.

But soon, I tested positive. Again, unlike many Nepalis who even lost their lives in Saudi Arabia during the pandemic, I was well taken care of. But when I was in isolation, my mother passed away in Nepal to a non-Covid related cause.

I was trapped as I was Covid positive, but also because of the travel bans that had shut out the world. I mourned the loss of my mother in isolation. It was also painful that neither my brother nor me, both of us migrants in the Gulf, could be there for her final rites.

We had made enough money to take care of her long-term illness that may have even extended her life by a few years. But we had failed to be there with her in the last moments. An uncle performed the funeral on our behalf.

Perhaps it is that experience or because I recently turned 36 that during my dreary journeys on the road, that I have started longing for home more intensely. I want to

spend time with my family now, it has been too long and my children are all grown up.

How many more times must I call my wife to confirm that I have sent her money for that month's expenses, and that she should spend it wisely? Hemanta Rana captured it very well when he sang "चलिस काटो रमाउँला". I am now nearing age 40 that he sings about, when we can start taking things easy after years of toil.

My friends tell me there are better opportunities in places like Portugal for drivers like me, and I am tempted. But just for a moment. But I quickly decide against it. I want to be back home in Nepal soon, and make up for the time I have lost to be close to my family.

Till then, म खाडीमै छु, म गाडी मै छु. Here I am still in the Gulf, still in my truck. 🇳🇵

Translated from a conversation with a Nepali driver in Saudi Arabia. Diaspora Diaries is a regular column in Nepali Times providing a platform for Nepalis to share their experiences of living, working, studying abroad. Authentic and original entries can be sent to editors@nepalitimes.com with 'Diaspora Diaries' in the subject line.

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