

State-sponsored crisis

On 8 April, Finance Minister Janardan Sharma suspended Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) Governor Maha Prasad Adhikari at a time when the country is struggling to cope with a serious economic crisis.

Minister Sharma has, without evidence, accused the governor of damaging the country's banking and financial system, being "dishonest" and "inefficient" at his post in the central bank. Adhikari was also accused of leaking confidential information to the media about a \$35 million transfer to a Nepali that the US Financial Crime Enforcement Network (FinCEN) had flagged.

The allegations against Adhikari are so vague that Minister Sharma does not even have to prove them. In fact, the chair of the three-member judicial committee set up to investigate the governor is a kin of Finance Minister Sharma himself.

Governor Adhikari was appointed by the preceding UML government, and had been at odds with Minister Sharma ever since Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's coalition government took over last year.



The Maoist minister's list of grievances against Adhikari are obviously a smokescreen for political vendetta, and a way to divert attention from incompetent handling of the economy.

Minister Sharma was put on the hot seat just as Nepal's economy began sliding, first due to the pandemic and then by the Ukraine War.

The minister met Deuba to try to oust the governor, and when that did not work, brought in his boss Pushpa Kamal Dahal to convince the prime minister that Adhikari was in cahoots with the UML.

Deuba, who is already accused of being in the sway of his Maoist coalition partners for giving away the Bharatpur mayorship to Dahal's daughter Renu, agreed to the governor's ouster.

The pandemic has affected remittance inflow, imports surged after the lockdown was lifted, and this has led to a serious depletion of foreign exchange reserves. This set off price rises and a liquidity crunch in

the banking sector due to unproductive loans, and surging petroleum imports.

The governor can be blamed for failing to curb lending to real estate and imports since last year, but it was the government which prioritised increased spending, ensuring revenue by taxing imports.

The Ministry of Finance is responsible for the economy, not the NRB, plain and simple. Instead, Minister Sharma has used the pandemic and the Ukraine War as an excuse, and made the central bank governor a scapegoat to absolve himself of blame.

The plot thickened a few months ago when Minister Sharma sought to implicate Governor Adhikari in a bribery allegation involving NRB board member Subodh Kumar Karna. He accused Adhikari of failing to take action against Karna, who was accused of demanding a \$30,000 bribe from a well-known businessman. Actually, the NRB Act 2001 does not give the governor any authority to take action against a board member, it is up to the council of ministers.

In a democracy, central banks are generally free from direct government intervention. Indeed Nepal's National Bank Act envisages the institution as an 'autonomous organisation with uninterrupted' succession. This is not to say that NRB has been free from

political interference in the past.

The previous K P Oli government, while selecting both NRB deputy governors had sidelined competent and capable candidates in favour of cronies from his home district. Even so, the NRB is relatively unaffected by political

wheeling-dealing, unlike other agencies of government.

This row could not have come at a worse time. The economy may not be in a crisis yet as Sri Lanka is, but it is headed for a free-fall. Governor Adhikari's suspension and Subodh Kumar Karna's absence have reduced the seven-member NRB board of directors to five. The terms of two other members are set to expire on 16 April.

The ruling coalition has created further instability by weaponising its authority, and running out the governor to create a vacuum that will aggravate the economic crisis. In this, Prime Minister Deuba is as much to blame as Finance Minister Sharma.

Ramesh Kumar

The real emergency in Nepal's economy is not the Ukraine War, but a self-serving government

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Feckless Pluralism

This week marks the 32nd anniversary of the 1990 People's Movement. Restoration of multi-party democracy following the moment instilled much hope for grassroots development, decentralisation and economic upliftment. And for the next few years, there were some exemplary works done even if the bureaucracy and politics were mired in irregularities and corruption.

But the Maoist War in 1996 put a stop to all, the good and the bad. It, in fact, worsened service delivery and political failure.

Twenty years down the line, things are not much better, and with local elections only a month away, this editorial published in 2002 is as relevant as it was before. Excerpts from the editorial from issue #89 12-18 April 2002:

In his Journal of Democracy piece, Thomas Carothers reserves special mention for Nepal as one of the countries afflicted with a syndrome he calls "feckless pluralism". These are states with political freedom and elections, but where democracy hasn't taken root, there is chronic instability, and little political participation beyond voting. Carothers cites countries like Argentina and Nepal as being examples of countries with feckless pluralism where "the political competition is between deeply entrenched parties that essentially operate on patronage



networks and seem never to renovate themselves."

Countries with feckless pluralism, writes Carothers, achieve their own "dysfunctional equilibrium" where rival elite groups compete for the spoils of power. And he cautions against having too high expectations of elections as generators of democratic change. Carothers goes on: "Nepal is a telling example. Since 1990 (it) has held many multiparty elections and experienced frequent alternation of power. Yet, the Nepalese public remains highly disaffected from the political system and there is little real sense of

democratic accountability"

Well put. But while many here would agree with Carothers' observation concerning national politics, he does overlook the genuine evolution of a culture of democracy in Nepal at the grassroots since 1990. One of the major accomplishments of the past 13 years has been the gradual devolution of decision-making to accountable locally-elected leaders. This has started to unleash a wave of development throughout the land: in community forestry, health care, and lately in education.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



BASKING IN BISKA

The annual week-long chariot festival of Bhaktapur has begun with the start of Nepali New Year this week. Bisket, or Biska, Jatra, famous for its tongue-piercing and chariot-pulling is celebrated for nine days and eight nights and is observed mainly in the Bhaktapur Darbar Square and Thimi. Watch video online.

VIEW-TOWERS

I am wondering if all the houses that were destroyed during the earthquake of 2015 have been rebuilt and the people involved compensated ('Nepal's short-sighted view-tower craze, Ramesh Kumar', www.nepalitimes.com).

Jean Kern

• When everything seems bleak for the politicians, they assume the role of populist leaders.

Ngawang Tenzin

• And these same people will get re-elected.

Kalps Para

• The national flag on top of the tower should be hoisted on a staff no less than 100 m tall so Xi and Modi can see clearly from Beijing and Delhi ('Still Rising Nepal', Ass, #1106).

Ajaybar Pradhan

• Mt Everest is already over-crowded. My dream is to come back to Nepal and do the Annapurna with just a guide. I have lost hope that there is any solitude to be found and the whole planet has become either a war zone or an amusement park! Thank goodness this article was satire, and I hope it stays that way.

Janis Randalls

• If only our kleptocratic leaders and their ever prostrating sycophants understood this.

Ram Chamling

• That awful tower on Poon hill is bad enough... no more towers please.

Darren Maynard

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Let us tighten our *patuka* ('The geopolitics of food', Sonia Awale, #1106). Let us consume our own products as far as possible.

Gauri Rimal

ARCHIVING

One of the reasons Nepalis are indifferent to their history could be because 'history' was a cruel dictatorship ('Adventures of a lone archivist', Alisha Sijapati, www.nepalitimes.com). Good article though.

Cyril Raj Satyal

• Archiving should be a state responsibility. Belonging to mountains and mountaineering culture, I feel empowered by this news. If we talk about Himalayan mountaineering, Nepal's involvement in mountaineering before Mallory is criminally undervalued. Who will carry on with the legacy of archiving Himalayan mountaineering chronicles after Lieut-Colonel Kenneth Mason, Dr. Harka Gurung, and Ms. Elizabeth Hawley? *Nepali Times* to an extent. Archiving is a tool to breathe life into history.

Anish Dahal

CLIMATE

Sadly, the general trend among leadership is always on sweet talk ('4 months after Glasgow, Nepals goals look iffy', Angel Li, www.nepalitimes.com) but minimum efforts to deliver results and impact. No wonder there are concerns in the delivery of COP26 promises; we can still catch up and must push to redouble efforts to deliver promises made.

Bishow Parajuli

• This is a great study and we need to make sure early warning system with better weather forecast should be implemented to reduce the damage in future ('Post-disaster lessons for Nepal', nepalitimes.com). In addition, further research on what causes this abnormal extreme would provide to improve forecast.

Binod Pokharel

ROAD FATALITIES

The horrible deaths that we hear about and see many time in our country, but do not talk about ('Nepal's other pandemic: road fatalities', www.nepalitimes.com).

Sajan Basnet

BORN BY ROADSIDE

This is one of the most heart rending stories which is common in rural Nepal ('Born by the roadside in Nepal', Prakash Singh, nepalitimes.com). Access to health services should be the top priority of Nepal government. Pregnancy and motherhood journey should be blissful, joyful with love and celebration, not filled with anxiety, fear and terror.

Kritika Dixit

UM HONG GIL

Well that's great, and I wish him all the best, but also I wish he didn't have to do what should have already been done ('Um Hong-Gil's Project Impossible', Sonia Awale, #1098).

Scott MacLennan

Times.com WHAT'S TRENDING



The Qatar Job Mirage

by *Nepali Times*

An aspiring Nepali migrant shares how he successfully applied for the Qatar Police in 2020 while dreaming of taking a selfie with his hero Lionel Messi at the next FIFA World Cup, only for his hopes to be dashed. Full story only on nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Growing appetite for school lunches

by *Marty Logan*

School meals currently managed by the World Food Programme (WFP) will be taken over by the government starting next year. But can the government that has rolled out meals for students in 71 districts meet expectations? Read the report from Bajhang and watch video on our YouTube channel.

Most popular on Twitter



Still rising Nepal

by *Ass*

Nothing is more symbolic of the Still Rising Nepal than the ongoing view tower construction spree. However, at this rate we may soon run out of peaks to put towers on, so we must strive for more creative new erections. Read them online and join the discussion.

Most commented

The salt of the earth

by *Jag Bahadur Budha*

The Nepal-Tibet salt economy strengthened ties not only between the people of Tibet and the Nepal Himalaya, but also fostered personal relationships between individuals of the two regions. But the end of the trans-Himalayan rock salt trade has led to the decline of Himalayan communities. Join the discussion online.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Instead of expanding health posts and hospitals, retrofitting school buildings to make them seismic resistant, or ensuring safe drinking water supply, elected people's representatives are squandering taxpayer money on useless structures.



Forester@kuenvmgt504

I hate these eyesores for stealing my taxpayers' money.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

The Geopolitics of Food
Far-reaching consequences of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict on child hunger in poor countries.
@SoniaAwale reports:



KYU Yeti @KyuYeti

Is our govt taking steps to ensure adequate food supply for the population? If not, shouldn't we?



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Instead of expanding health posts and hospitals, retrofitting school buildings to make them seismic resistant, or ensuring safe drinking water supply, elected people's representatives are racing to squander taxpayer money on useless structures.



Surendra Phuyal @surendraphuyal

We seem to love it all: view towers, big gates and grand statues - and all over Nepal - in a country renowned for hills and peaks. And worth billions. Huh. Does that prove we are - after all - Nepalis? Grand work by Ramesh Kumar.

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

MAY IT BE A MAGICAL YEAR
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ONES IN 2079. WE ARE WISHING
A HAPPY NEW YEAR
TO NEPAL.



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Returning to the cradle of democracy

Durga Thapa comes back to Khula Manch to remember the iconic photograph that came to symbolise Nepal's democratic struggle

Min Bajracharya was just 18 then. He was close to Nepali Congress democracy warrior Ganesh Man Singh, and was photographing the People's Movement of 1990 at the Khula Manch in Kathmandu, when he took with his Nikon F-2 and a 105mm lens what is now the famous photograph of the protest.

A young woman leaps above the mainly-male demonstrators sitting and waiting to hear the pro-democracy leaders at the open theatre. Her hands and fingers make V-signs above her head. Her face is defiant, fervent. Her cry of "Long live democracy" is audible over the noise, as the men look on.

Durga Thapa was a student, and was a fiery defender of democracy. But she did not know that Bajracharya had just taken a photograph that would make her famous. That came much later.

It was the morning of 9 April 1990, the month-long protests had climaxed with King Birendra restoring multi-party democracy. A new constitution a year later turned Nepal from an absolute into a constitutional monarchy.

There was a victory rally at the Khula Manch on what has come to be known as 'Chait 17'. Formerly underground leaders like Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Ganesh Man Singh and Man Mohan Adhikari were on stage. As Bhattarai gave a rousing speech, Bajracharya noticed the young student spring up from the crowd. He turned his camera away from the podium to her and took a couple of photographs.

Min Bajracharya stored Durga Thapa's images in his negative cabinet, and it was only two years later that it made it to the cover of the book, *Dawn of Democracy* published by the Human Rights Protection Forum. Since then the photo has been used in t-shirts, banners and even coffee mugs — most of it, Bajracharya rues, without permission or payment.

As a staff photographer for



PHOTOS: MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Himal Khabarpatrika and *Nepali Times* Min Bajracharya went on to document the war, the royal massacre of 2001 and King Gyanendra's coup. In 2006, when the Second People's Movement against Gyanendra gathered strength in the Kathmandu Spring, *Nepali Times* asked Bajracharya if he could track down Durga Thapa.

And there she was: back on the streets, still shouting "Long live democracy" outside Singha Darbar. Sixteen years after he took her picture, he took another photograph

of Durga Thapa, smeared in vermilion and leading a pro-democracy rally. Thapa was now 38, had a son, and was a civil servant.

This year, 30 years after the first photo was taken, Bajracharya was once more curious to see where Durga Thapa was. Now 53, she is the assistant Chief District Officer of Rasuwa. Her life has paralleled the trajectory of democracy in this country.

This week, Min Bajracharya brought Durga Thapa to the Khula Manch which has been mired



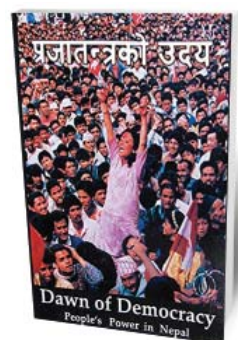
THE MARCH OF TIME: Durga Thapa, now 53, is the assistant Chief District Officer of Rasuwa.

She returned to Khula Manch in Kathmandu where 30 years ago this week (left) Min Bajracharya (right) had taken the iconic photograph of her that was on the cover of the book, *Dawn of Democracy*.

Durga Thapa was back back on the streets in April 2006 during the Second People's Movement (above).



NABIN BARAL



Dawn of Democracy by the University of Michigan FOPHUR 1990 128 pages

prabhu BANK

Top golfers

Mahendra Mainali and Kashmira Shah have won the Indian Ambassador's Invitational Golf Tournament organised this week. Other winners include Sadbhav Acharya (best gross award), Pradeep Kumar Shrestha (senior winner), Mahesh Bikram Karki (best front nine award), Wangchen Dhondup (best back nine award), Charlie Gurung (maximum pars), Vijay Shrestha Einhaus (most birdies), and Purna Bahadur Rai and Dawa Sherpa (longest drive award).

Sustainable Turkish

In 2021, Turkish Airlines saved enough fuel to equal 292,000 trees planted. In the same year, 54% of Turkish Technic's water usage was met with rain harvesting. The flag carrier's latest initiative is to use environmentally friendly fuel during its Istanbul-Paris flight on 2 February, with plans to increase the frequencies and destinations for flights that use this fuel.



"Protecting the future of these regions that possess unique beauty with their natural, historical, financial or cultural assets is a significant matter for Turkish Airlines," says Ahmet Bolat, Turkish Airlines Chairman of the Board and the Executive Committee.

Toyota upgrade

Uniter Trader's Syndicate, the authorised dealer for Toyota in Nepal, organised a vehicle upgrade event last week



where customers could bring any brand vehicle and have it exchanged with Toyota models like Rush, Hilux, Corolla Cross, Fortuner, RAV4 Hybrid, and Land Cruiser Prado.

Ncell New Year

Ncell has launched combo packs for 2079 so with every top-up of Rs50 customers get more social media data packs as bonus starting from 50 MB. They can subscribe to a 7-day combo for Rs96 and get 1GB data and 100 minute all net talk time. 5GB and 100 minute for Rs168 is also available. The 28-day pack gets 2.5GB data and 250 minute all net talk time for Rs298. Or, get 1GB data everyday, 50 minute of net talk time and 100 all-net SMS at Rs798. Those needing more data can get 2GB everyday, 100 minute of net talk time and 200 all-net SMS at Rs998 for 28 days. Offer is valid till 25 April.

Him-Doko

Him Electronics has signed an agreement with Doko recyclers to reduce electronic waste, the two will work together in the management of pre-owned electronic products.

DishHome Youth

DishHome fibernet was the internet partner for the recently organised Youth Conclave held in Pragya Bhawan, Kathmandu.

Jyoti Bikash Branch

Jyoti Bikash Bank has opened new branches at Ilam and Kanchanpur. The branches will provides all banking facilities and services to customers.

Daraz 2079

Daraz is offering 60% discount, vouchers up to Rs5000, discount on online pre-payment up to 15% as well as chance to win products and bumper prizes for Nepali New Year. Card holders of Sanima, Nepal Investment Bank, Mega Bank, NCC, Century, Jyoti Bikash, Muktinath, Shangri-la, Nepal Bank and Bank of Kathmandu can all enjoy discount up to 10% on debit prepayment and 15% on credit card prepayment. Offers valid until 15 April.



Kent 2079 Scheme

Kent has launched a new year consumer scheme under which customers buying Kent RO water purifier and Kent HEPA Air Purifier can get accidental insurance up to Rs300,000. The offer is valid for a limited period only.



Nissan Kicks

Pioneer Motors, has introduced discounts up to Rs350,000 in the purchase of every Nissan Kicks vehicles. Customers can also exchange old models with the new car. The New Year offer is valid until end-April.

NMB-Daraz tie-up

Under the new agreement, NMB Bank customer can now get up to 15% discount while purchasing goods online via Daraz.

Volkswagen Offer

Pooja International, authorised importer of Volkswagen in Nepal, has launched a New Year pocket scheme. Customers can buy a Taigun at Rs22,999 and Polo at Rs14,999 monthly EMI valid upto 30 April. The products come with two year warranty, on spot old car valuation, free road tax for one year, 4 years free servicing and free accessories.



For children, about children

The set of six new illustrated books for younger audience address their rights and expressions

● Ashish Dhakal

Rajib does not like school. His dreams are filled with snakes, pulling him into dark wells. He stares at his own reflection in the mirror, transformed by anxiety. The boy withdraws into himself, trudging against watercolour skies from one page to the next.

When Rajib's older brother arrives from Australia, he brings with him a gaming set. During one of the games, the boys enter a dark tunnel, and the brother asks: "Bhai, it's pretty dark in here, are you scared?"

Rajib responds: "No, I only get scared when I'm at school..."

But the tunnel takes a sinister turn when villains show up. The snakes from Rajib's nightmares shed their skins to reveal his classmates. He cries and finally shares with his brother the secret.

In गयल केटो (*Absent Boy*) by Bina Theeng and illustrators Dristi & Keepa Manandhar, Rajib is bullied and suffers from anxiety. It is one of six books produced by Srijanalaya in collaboration with The Asia Foundation.

The project brought together six authors and six illustrators to design books on topics like bullying, harassment, gender- and caste-based discrimination and juvenile justice.

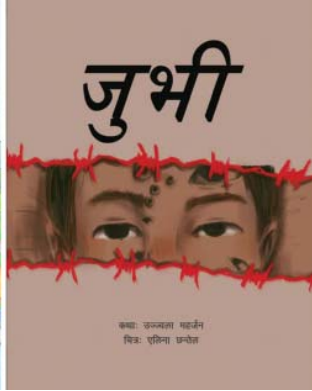
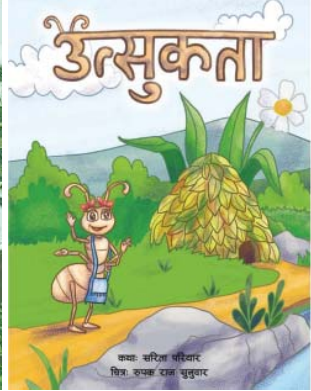
Books for young readers by authors writing in languages of Nepal are rare. Even rarer are books that deal with the torment and confusion of being a child, so much of which goes unnoticed and overlooked by adults. Often, there is no vocabulary to articulate difficult thoughts and feelings – and even adults do not know what to say.

छयाँबले (*Chhyanbale*) written by Tirtha Gurung and illustrated by Roseena Sakya is narrated by a mother swallow, Set in Sikles,

which is also called Chwiuli (barn swallow) locally, the book follows a young boy who cannot walk and is bullied by his peers.

Woven together are themes of loss and hope – literally a thing with feathers in the context of the book.

"The inspiration for the story came from my own childhood," says Tirtha Gurung who, like Chhyanbale, was unable to walk for a long time. "But all children grow at their own pace, and the book aims to give hope to parents as well, that it takes time and there is no reason to worry or feel bad."



The musical story unfolds in warm yellow and orange and fresh green through the pages as light slants and curves giving the impression of someone looking over without rest, aiming to protect.

The artwork is similar in सुनौलो सुँगुर (*The Golden Pig*) by Swapnil Smriti and illustrator Swornim Shakya. It is the story of Lingyok, a boy in Panchthar bullied by his classmates and teacher because of his family profession of rearing pigs. The rainy and thunderous palette mimics the unrest felt by Lingyok.

Illustrations by Sapana Sanjeevni and

Pallavi Payal for अम्बरको धुन (*Ambar's Tune*) by Pranika Koyu is inspired by vibrant Mithila art. The book is a day in the life of Ambar who is wheelchair-bound, and each line and shape, all larger-than-life, frame the lucid text to tell the story of boundless imagination.

"We wanted to reflect Ambar's voice and character as closely as possible," explains Sapana Sanjeevni. "Mithila art's two dimension helps express his simple and flowing language."

Sarita Pariyar's उत्सुकता (*Curiosity*) is illustrated by Rupak Raj Sunuwar, and takes a

hypocrisies. She wants to understand why she should come second to her male classmate who copied her answers in exam, or why Pantheni Bajai, who 'reeks of raw milk and cow dung' snaps at her to stay away.

Ujjwala Mahajan's जुभी (*Juvie*), is a much darker fable of children in juvenile homes, illustrated by Alina Chhantel in the many shades of red and black, with barbed wires running across the pages.

What is striking about this surreal and sensitive story is the multitude of eyes that grow on the children's skins, constantly watched and judged by the world outside.

"Books about children's rights are usually didactic, and we have an image of people punished for breaking the law as irredeemable and violent people, with *Juvie* we wanted to break that narrative," she says.

The book that may be too sombre for children, but both Maharjan and Chhantel wanted it to be representative of the people it was about. "Being honest to their story, reflecting the seriousness and discomfort, would help get the feeling across to readers, and encourage them to be more

empathetic and accountable," Maharjan says.

Pallavi Payal hopes the books will be able to encourage more writers and illustrators to create educational material for children in Nepal's languages that are easy to relate to. She says: "Children want to read books that make them feel they are not alone." 🇳🇵

The books are available online as PDFs in Nepali and English. To request a copy of जुभी (*Juvie*), reach Ritica Lacoul of The Asia Foundation at ritica.lacoul@asiafoundation.org, or Srijanalaya at srijanalaya@gmail.com

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Australia's writing diplomat

Australian Ambassador to Nepal Felicity Volk talks about mixing her job with her hobby

Felicity Volk is Australia's ambassador to Nepal, but many may not know that she is also a novelist.

Long before joining Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Volk had grown up with writer parents who sparked an interest for writing from her early years.

"They were the voices in my childhood ear that called my own words into being and initiated me into the infinite possibility of imagination," recalls Volk.

When she was seven, her parents spent a year travelling through Europe in a Bedford campervan with the family. They made stops at galleries, and in one Volk remembers seeing the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

The young girl was struck by the way one canvas could carry so many stories, and everywhere in a Bruegel frame was an unfolding world, interconnected, but also complete in itself, a visual novel of sorts.

"The stories I want to tell have a similar ambition," adds Volk, who went on to study English literature at the University of Queensland while continuing to write short stories and poetry.

Next, she set off to Canberra to begin her diplomatic career and before long, she was consumed with the demands of her new job that left little time for anything else.

It was only after postings in Bangladesh and Laos, and the birth of her daughters that Volk rediscovered writing. A screenplay led to short stories, to novellas, to two novels, *Lightning* (2013) and *Desire Lines* (2020).

"The juggle of my two professional lives is hard, but the compulsion to write is elemental," Volk explains. "I write, as American writer Joan Didion so eloquently described it, 'to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear'."

Extensive travel as a diplomat has allowed the author in Volk to explore what it is like to be an outsider in someone else's land and even a stranger in one's own life.



SOFILA VAIDYA

Grief, identity, alienation and connection are common themes in Volk's novels and so is the question whether we are responsible for our circumstances, or if fate is pre-determined. She often brings in her personal experience in her work, of loss, betrayal and pain, compassion, towards self and others.

As ambassador, Volk is so busy that the most she can manage to keep her writing muscle exercised is the occasional poem. This week, for example, she was in Lumbini to attend a cricket match paying tribute to legendary Australian bowler Shane Warne.

Volk was appointed ambassador to Nepal during the pandemic, which has largely shaped her tenure.

"Covid-19 made for a very stop-start experience of settling into my role as ambassador and getting to know Nepal,"

she says. "The opportunities that are now available, to travel to remote parts of the country, to connect, to discover what people look like unmasked, to explore Kathmandu, are even more precious as a result."

Australia itself has reopened its borders. Nepal has resumed sending its students down under and is expected to reach the pre-pandemic peak of 50,000 a year soon. Nepali students account for 8% of total international pupils in Australian universities. Over 200,000 Nepalis are settled in Australia.

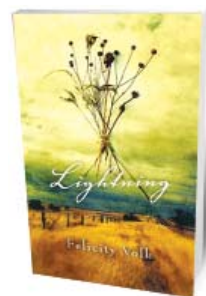
It has been 62 years since the two countries established diplomatic relations and during that time, Australia has supported Nepal through some of its best success stories, including its community forestry program credited for doubling the country's forest cover in just two decades.

In recent times, Australian aid and support have been primarily for subnational governance, gender equality including women's political participation, climate resilience and Covid recovery.

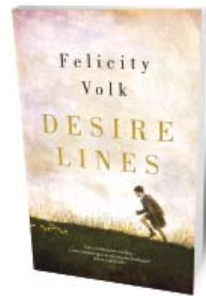
We ask Felicity Volk if her travels in Nepal have inspired her to write another novel. One is indeed underway, even though the manuscript is languishing. In the meantime, she is also gathering information for a story set in Nepal woven with its magic and mysticism.

At 56, Volk is in her 33rd year as a diplomat. Before coming to Nepal as an ambassador, she had been here several times as a tourist and last year, her daughters visited Nepal for the first time.

Says Volks: "I loved exploring Nepal with the girls, seeing the country through their first-time eyes, but most of all, I relished sitting by a fire in my residence with them, eating, drinking and playing cards. That was when my house in Kathmandu became a home." 🇳🇵



Lightning
by Felicity Volk
Picador: Pan Macmillan
Australia 2013
382 pages
\$9.99 (eBook)



Desire Lines
by Felicity Volk
Hachette Australia 2020
448 pages
\$32.99

The stone-breaker's daughter

New book about how a chance meeting between a 6-year-old Nepali girl and an American teenager changed both lives

● Ram Tamang

Six-year-old Hima Tamata used to look at her reflection in a pool on the banks of a river near Surkhet. The still water was clear as a mirror.

Her mother, Ganga, toiled nearby, crushing boulders with a hammer. Occasionally, she wiped sweat from her brow. The stones were used to pave new highways, and Hima sometimes joined her mother to break smaller stones with her tiny hands.

A single mother, Ganga had to work all day to feed Hima and her three brothers. Her husband had left the family and remarried. Hima sometimes rummaged in a nearby garbage pile to find things to sell.

It was 2006, and the Maoist conflict had just ended. Maggie Doyne, a 19-year-old American, was backpacking through western Nepal.

"I sensed someone watching us from a distance as I helped my mother break stones. And when our eyes met, she gave me a dazzling smile," recalls Hima. "I smiled back because her smile made me happy."

Maggie and Hima immediately bonded, and Hima was asked if she would like to go to school. The answer was a quiet "yes", and that was all it took. The chance meeting prompted Maggie Doyne to pay for Hima's enrollment in a primary school in Surkhet.



PHOTOS: BLINKNOW FOUNDATION

But soon, Doyne found out that there were hundreds of other children like Hima. So, she went on to help set up a home for children orphaned by conflict, using money her parents in the US wired her from saved up baby-sitting money.

By 2010, she had added a school where 400 of Nepal's neediest children now get free education. She co-founded the BlinkNow Foundation and established the Kopila Valley Children's Home and School in Surkhet. The two institutions also work in vocational training and to foster grassroots community development.

Her work has been championed by Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* columnist Nicholas

Kristof and the Dalai Lama, among others. The story of BlinkNow's beginnings has been featured on the Huffington Post, VH1, MTV, and DoSomething.org. Maggie was named *Glamour* magazine's Woman of the Year and was used as an example for her groundbreaking work at the Forbes 400 Summit on Philanthropy.

In 2015, she was named CNN Hero. Maggie's story carries a message of hope, love, and the possibility of how the smallest individual acts can spark big changes. She believes that poverty, hunger, and violence can be alleviated when children are provided with their most basic needs: a loving, happy childhood, nutrition, and a quality education. Maggie's resolve to educate



GROWING UP: Hima Tamata's photo by Maggie Doyne when she was 6 years old, helping her mother crush stones by the roadside in Surkhet (above).

Maggie and Hima 8 years later, at the same spot (left).

one child has now metamorphosed into a home for 50 children and Kopila Valley School, where over 400 students get free education. Among the students was Hima, who graduated two years ago, completed a chef internship and is enrolled in a hotel management diploma course.

Hima was inspired to be a chef by her mother, who left her stone-breaking job and now works in the kitchen of the Kopila Valley Women's Centre, cooking for 40 people daily.

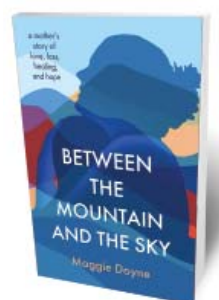
"I learned cooking as a little girl since my mother and brothers would be working outside all day," Hima says. "While studying at Kopila, I also baked and sold cookies at football tournaments. It helped me with pocket money, which further motivated me and

built my confidence."

Sixteen years later, Hima recently went back to the river bank where she gazed at her reflection, the pool is muddy and polluted. There is now a busy market on the roadside where her mother used to break stones.

Now 23, Hima wants to follow the example set by her mentor, Maggie, and help others like her. Maggie Doyne's work to nurture under-served Nepali children is detailed in her new book *Between the Mountain and the Sky: A Mother's Story of Hope and Love*.

"I feel proud to be a part of Maggie's journey, but I have to carve my own story too," says Hima. "Maggie would want that. So, I work hard towards my goal to be somebody of my own." 🇳🇵



Between the Mountain and the Sky: A Mother's Story of Love, Loss, Healing, and Hope
by Maggie Doyne
HarperCollins Focus, 2022
ISBN
0785240284, 9780785240280
272 pages, \$14.99 on Amazon

Manjushree Thapa’s novel now in Nepali

Nepal’s most noted international writer talks about her craft and the Nepali translation of her last novel

● Sambhavi Basnet

At Café Soma of Baluwatar on a recent morning, Manjushree Thapa is sitting by herself at a table and is recognisable even from a distance. She looks exactly like her pictures on Google Images.

There is much to learn about Manjushree Thapa from an Internet search. The columns she wrote for *Nepali Times* twenty years ago are fascinating profiles and translations of Nepali writers and poets and introduced the best of Nepal’s literature to the outside world.

Now, the Toronto-based writer is introducing her own English writing to Nepal. The translation of her 2016 book *All Of Us in Our Own Lives* by Ujjwal Prasai and published by Shangri-la Books was launched on 8 April in Lalitpur.

Manjushree considers herself to be a part of the post-1990 generation where everyone was involved in the process of learning about each other and the country.

“A lot of the communities, castes that had been somehow embarrassed about their past were asserting themselves. For me, this search of self-discovery and self-redefinition is very much central to what it means to be a Nepali,” she says.

Manjushree Thapa is eight novels old. She does not look her age, her skin glows in the morning sun and spurts of laughter resonate in the café’s corners. Yet, she confesses that no matter how much experience you have with it, writing does not get easier with time and



SHAMBHAVI BASNET

every book is a creative challenge.

There is something confessional and self-aware in Manjushree’s spoken words, similar to her books, and the way she talks about the ethical and aesthetic responsibilities of being a writer.

“As a Nepali writer, I can write about Nepalis. Or I could be writing about people who have lived experiences different from mine. I feel that becomes ethically challenging. Not that you should never do it. But if you’re going to do it, you need to really put in the amount of work it takes, to really understand someone else’s experiences,” she says.

Especially as a writer in the English language, she says, authors already tend to have more privilege because the audience

is more international. Perhaps for Manjushree Thapa, some part of the ethical and aesthetic consideration is also part of her decision to provide creative license for translating *All Of Us in Our Own Lives* into Nepali.

“When the novel first came out in English it did not get much response. Now, once it reaches its target audience, I want to see what the response is going to be,” says Manjushree about the novel that is set around the world of development assistance in Nepal.

“For many years, I’d wanted to write about the aid world in Nepal because it’s so omnipresent, so important,” she says. “I wanted it to be about how people who seem to have very separate lives can bump against each other and change each others’ lives. This idea of interdependence.”

Indeed, *All Of Us in Our Own Lives* starts with characters who seem far apart with considerable space and indents in between. Ava lives her fortified life away from Nepal, whereas Sapana and Chandra weave their dreams of stars and the moon, and also their futures in a rural Nepal.

Gyanu makes his living in the Gulf, and Indira is a working housewife. But as the story progresses and the lives of these characters collide, the gaps become smaller. Spaces remove themselves and the characters see how their lives affect other, and how we go on to live our own lives, severing the ties that we had with each other.

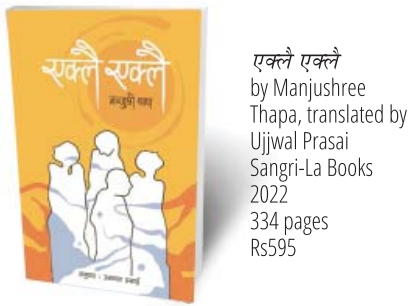
By the end of the novel, the world feels different again, disparate for some characters as they move away from each other, but stable for some who find solace in the company of others, more so in their own company. Yet, the trace that one person leaves on another is still there. The ripple of even the simplest interaction remains.

Reading Manjushree’s writing is like swimming in a clear, blue pond. Each page is dip into the waters that readers immerse themselves in as the characters introduce themselves. Every sentence has a purpose. Every scene is an imaginary stage that author creates in the reader’s mind.

But what of Ujjwal Prasai’s Nepali version of the novel? Is some of it lost in translation?

“A lot of the sections are actually stronger in Nepali than they were in the English,” she replies. “It’s like the story has been returned to the language it should have been written in originally. It suddenly comes to life. Ujjwal has put a lot of work into it.”

The Nepali translation of All Of Us in Our Own



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THE KING OF BEERS

10 years after the first
traverse, a German journalist
runs the Great Himalayan
Trail to document the
changes sweeping Nepal

● Kunda Dixit

German journalist Peter Hinze always had a fascination for the Himalaya, and later for trail-running. On one of his trips to Nepal, at Pilgrim’s Bookstore in Thamel, he came across Robin Boustead’s *Nepal Trekking and the Great Himalayan Trail*. On his flight back to Munich, he decided to one day do the trek himself. ‘My goal was not to break records. No, speed was not my motivation,’ Hinze writes in the prologue to his own book titled *The Great Himalaya Trail* and self-published in English in 2021. The German original won the International Tourismus Börse Book Award in Berlin in 2019.

The reason he made the three-month journey in 2017 was that he felt the Himalaya was at a great risk from climate change, ‘civilisation’, road construction and out-migration. It was to draw attention to this ‘existential danger’ to Nepal’s mountains that he wrote a book that does not just record his adventure, but highlight haphazard road-building, the erosion of culture, impact of climate damage, and also the hardiness and adaptability of the high Himalayans.

With its superb photography, the book is a guide to those who want to be among the less than 150 people who have completed the entire trail, or even just do a part of this epic traverse of the Nepal Himalaya.

There are two Great Himalaya Trails (GHT): one is the High Route that traverses the upper passes and uninhabited valleys, and the other is the Cultural Route which moves through villages and settlements. One has only mountains, and the other has mountains and people. Hinze’s book is as much about people as it is about terrain.

It is almost an anthropological documentation of the rapidly-changing landscape and culture of Nepal. As we flip through the pages, we know that many of these places will never be the same again.

Hinze’s team of porters and guides starts in Lhonak below Kangchenjunga and already the first signs of shrinking glaciers and retreating snowline are visible. Trying to cross from Khumbu into Rolwaling, the team



Change on a Himalayan

is forced to turn back from Tashi Laptsa Pass because of heavy snow and avalanche danger.

He does make it to Mt Everest Base Camp to recount the series of disasters that have hit it in 2014 and 2015. We can see with the pandemic how over-dependence on tourism can be disruptive to livelihoods.

Being a journalist, Hinze’s book is like a magazine longread. Instead of chapter breaks, we have sidebar interviews with people he meets along the way: the climate scientist

Fidel Devkota, tourism entrepreneur Yankila Sherpa, Raju Bista, the nephew of the King of Mustang, and Robin Boustead himself.

Hinze avoids polemics, trying to understand the need of Nepali villagers for better roads. He quotes Raju Bista: “Mustang is not a zoo for foreigners to come and ogle at us like we’re some sort of attraction. We are also entitled to progress, wealth and a better life, the road will bring us all of this.” But Hinze is deeply worried about

scars that the roads are leaving on Nepal’s nature and culture. The country’s bio- and human diversity is being erased by this accelerated rush to connect. Along the way, Hinze develops a special bond with Dolpo and its people. It is Nepal’s largest district still largely untouched, but the world is encroaching from its north and south.

Ten years after the first GHT traverse, Hinze gives us a glimpse through text and images of change on a Himalayan scale. We

A ray of hope for Nepal

Takashi Miyahara’s
memoir offers a
glimpse of the
Japanese-Nepali’s
vision for his
adopted country

Takashi Miyahara was a Japanese development worker who was first assigned to Nepal in the 1960s, when the powers he had ordained that the country’s future was possible through something called the ‘cottage industry’.

Miyahara soon realised that progress along that path would keep Nepal backward. Mesmerised by Nepal’s scenery and its culture, he was convinced tourism-led development was the only way ahead, and went on to build Nepal’s first world-class high-end hotel in Syangboche at 3,880m.

Together with Tiger Tops in Chitwan, Miyahara’s Hotel Everest View brought Nepal to the attention of the outside world in all its variety – from the highest mountains to tropical jungles teeming with wildlife.

Just how difficult it was logistically and bureaucratically to set up this iconic hotel is recounted in exquisite detail in Miyahara’s book, *A Ray of Light in the Himalayas: Building the Hotel Everest View*. First published in



EARLY REFLECTIONS: Miyahara (above) in 1970 with a Nepali co-worker during the construction of the Hotel Everest View.

Takashi Miyahara looks out of the window of the completed Hotel Everest View in Syangboche (right) with Ama Dablam and surrounding mountains reflected on the pane.





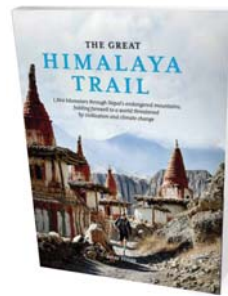
n scale

just hope that the book finds an international publisher so it is circulated widely. It has a useful appendix with the stages of the Trail and tips for those who want to do all 1,864 horizontal kilometres, 95,551 vertical metres, crossing 12 passes above 5,000m and 22 above 4,000m.

The highest point on the trail is 5,758m, and the lowest 303m. This book is vivid proof that there are six directions in Nepal: north, south, east, west, up and down. 🇳🇵



- 1 Excavator on the move at the edge of the Makalu Barun National Park in Num.
- 2 As the monsoon clouds dissipate, a view from Laurebina of (left to right) Himalchuli, Ngadi Peak and Manaslu in the morning sun.
- 3 Yak wool weavers below Ganesh Himal now have to use chemical dye because the plants they relied on have died out.
- 4 A miller in one of the last remaining water mills in the village of Sho in the Manaslu section of the Great Himalayan Trail.
- 5 Peter Hinze trail-running through Upper Mustang, where the road is rapidly changing the landscape and culture.



The Great Himalaya Trail
by Peter Hinze
English translation: Sylvia Goulding, Emily Plank, 2021
ISBN: 978-3-9801939-1-7
286 pages
info@greathimalayantrailrun.com
More photos and interview with Peter Hinze online:
www.nepalitimes.com

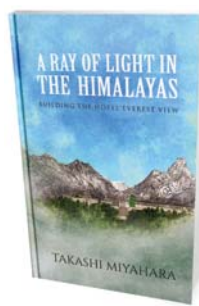


1982 in Japanese as ヒマラヤのドン・キホーテ, the English translation is published by FinePrint in Nepal. Page by page, we learn of the tenacity of a man who married in Nepal, and made this country his home. He renounced his Japanese citizenship to set up the Nepal National Development Party, and even contested (and lost) the 2008 Constituent Assembly elections. Many in Nepal did not help Miyahara, some put obstacles in his way (you know who you are), but he never gave up. Even in the most desperate moments when officials dilly-dallied on the hotel permit, or when Royal Nepal Airlines gave him the runaround, he persevered — not only setting up a hotel that put Nepal on the international map, but gave Khumbu its own airfield. It is not Miyahara's fault that governments did not exploit the visibility that Hotel Everest View gave Nepal globally to push for high value, low-volume tourism. The potential of Syangboche airfield was also never fully exploited because of vested interests. He went on to also get Japanese investors for the Himalaya Hotel in Patan, and was already bringing in 1,000 up-market Japanese tourists

to Nepal in the 1970s. His other dream project was the Annapurna View Hotel in Sarangkot. But we get a sense from his memoir that Miyahara had already realised that even developing a high yield tourism model was not enough to get Nepal to leapfrog development. The only way to change things was to infiltrate politics. He used to joke that he wanted to be a prime minister of Nepal to fast track the country's growth. Which is why he set up his own party. Much of his thinking on infrastructure-led growth, sustainable tourism development, the premium on protecting nature, formed the basis of his party's political platform, and are contained in the later chapters of his memoir. He told this newspaper in an interview before the 2008 elections: "Tourism will not only increase national income but also help Nepal become self-reliant. This means using Nepal's natural resources like rivers and forests, and moulding them for tourism purposes, and also harnessing their potential through hydropower generation and transportation." Miyahara died in 2019 at age

85, and was cremated near the hotel he built with his bare hands in Syangboche. His vision lives on at Hotel Everest View, and is spelt out in this memoir. For maximum impact, this book deserves to come out in translation in Nepali since it is Nepal's policy-makers and the public for whom the book should hold most value. Takashi Miyahara told *Nepali Times* in another interview in 2015: "The public must be aware of the political failure that led to [Nepal lagging behind]. Bureaucrats don't take decisions and just shift responsibility. There is greed, and society lacks a moral compass." 🇳🇵 **Kunda Dixit**

Go online to read excerpt of the book:
<https://www.nepalitimes.com/banner/a-himalayan-high/>



A Ray of Light in the Himalayas: Building the Hotel Everest View
by Takashi Miyahara
FinePrint Books,
Kathmandu 2022
224 pages Rs 998

EVENTS



Go organic

Support local organic produce businesses, attend the fifth edition of the Organic Agro Fair. 14-17 April 10am-5pm, Patan Darbar Square, Lalitpur

Impact Hub

Participate in the ‘What’s Hub?’ sessions on climate and environment, and hear guest speaker Shristi Singh Shrestha speak about climate action and opportunities. 13 April, 4pm-6pm, Impact Hub Kathmandu, Lalitpur

Food tasting

Attend the food tasting event and get a taste of West African, Vietnamese, Turkish, Caribbean and Norwegian cuisines. Book tickets now. 16 April, 10am-4pm, Tickets: Rs400, Academy of Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management, 9801969997

Peer Pressure workshop

Register for the workshop on peer pressure and personal values organised by CYC and UUON. 13 April, 1.30pm-3.30pm, Kimdol, Swayambhu, 9828567054



Manakamana Gorkha Hike

Hike this weekend from Manakamana to Gorkha and learn about places of historical and archeological importance to Nepal. Call for more details. 15-16 April, Rs5000, 9841729236

DINING



Dokdo Sarang

Enjoy a variety of widely popular Korean dishes including Tteok-bokki, Gimbap and Bibimbap, or even the full set. Head to Dokdo Sarang now. Kupondole Heights, 9803472187

MUSIC

Acoustic Night

Welcome the Nepali New Year 2079 with live instrumental music from Tricode Nepal, in the company of good food and drinks. 13 April, 6pm onwards, Pepsicola, Micheal Grills



Nanashi

Enjoy the jaazy performances from Nanashi and the after party with DJ AK at Moksh on New Years’ Eve. 13 April, 7.30pm onwards, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5428362

The Immortals

Also on New Years’ Eve, live music by The Immortals at Rumi’s Bistro. 13 April, 6pm onwards, Mandikatar, 9849537947



Rajesh Nepali

Join Rajesh Nepali’s live performance at Pauline’s Garden and enjoy New Year’s Eve with family and friends. 13 April, Pauline’s Garden, Aane marg, (01) 6924947

Newaz

Usher in 2079 BS with a performance from Newaz at Beers N’ Cheers. Call for details. 14 April, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5524860

GETAWAY

The Old Inn

The B&B is made up of two beautiful timber and brick tradition Newa townhouses overlooking a serene, traffic-free bazaar. Boasts the view of Central Himalaya from Annapurna in the west to Langtang and beyond in the east. Bandipur, Tanahu (065) 520110

Hotel Baha

Plan a short stay at Hotel Baha with its view of Bhaktapur Darbar Square and the Nyatapola Temple. Offers a homely meal of rice, lentils, vegetables, meat and pickles. Bonus: Biska jatra nearby has begun. Bhaktapur, (01) 6616810



Himalayan Front Hotel

Located atop Sarangkot, Hotel Himalayan Front has magnificent sunset views as well as one of the best restaurants in Pokhara, The Summit Restaurant. An ideal place to unwind this New Years’. Sarangkot, Pokhara, 9801166370

Club Himalaya

Escape to Clyb Himalaya for amazing mountain views and a refreshing weekend. Special packages available for Nepalis and expats. Nagarkot, (01) 4410432



Kasara Resort

Immerse yourself in the lush greenery at the heart of Chitwan National Park. The resort has something for everyone, from cycling to wildlife viewing. Patihani, Chitwan, (01)4437571

Casa Mexicana

For best Mexican in town, head to Casa Mexicana. It serves both vegetarian and meat options of tacos and quesadillas, as well as the sweetest tres leches for dessert. Gairidhara, 9840542082



Blenders

This milkshake bar offers the yummiest flavours in cute reusable glass bottles, leaving one wanting for more. City Centre, Kamal Pokhari, 9808080808

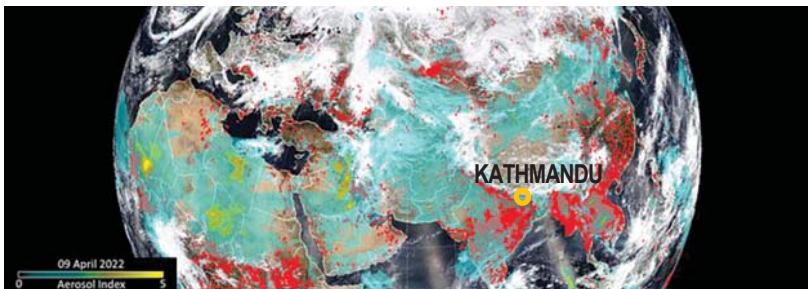
WEEKEND WEATHER



There is no let up from the haze that blankets northern India and Nepal, and this is filtering the sun, keeping the maximum temperature slightly below normal. But a shift in prevailing winds and a slight thinning of the smoke-sand-emission haze will mean that we are looking at temperature touching 30 Celsius in Kathmandu on Friday. Expect some afternoon cloud buildup and a 20% chance of rain in Central Nepal on Saturday accompanied by strong wind and thunder in places. This will lead to a slight let-up in the heat. Otherwise, there is no moisture injection from any westerly front on the horizon till next week. It is still early for the pre-monsoon showers. For that it has to get hotter still in the plains.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
30° 16°	29° 15°	29° 16°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



The current thick haze does not just cover Kathmandu Valley, although the Air Quality Index has been in the Red Unhealthy zone for the past two weeks. The suspended particles are from vehicular and brick kiln emission within the Valley, and wind-blown sand dust from as far as the Iranian desert where there have been severe sandstorms as seen in the green bits in this satellite image taken on Tuesday. In addition there have been quite a lot of wildfires in Uttarakhand, central India as well as the Nepal Tarai that has sent smoke blowing our way. No major precipitation event expected over the weekend, so the haze is likely to linger. Monitor live hour-by-hour AQI levels measured at Phora Darbar on www.nepalitimes.com

OUR PICK

High Score, the 2020 docuseries created by France Costrel, dives into the world of gaming, tracing the creation and development of video games in the 80s and the 90s. The six-part series includes pixel-art animation, and features interviews with video game developers and creators, from early arcade games and RPGs, to the evolution of multi-player games and 3D gaming. Watch creators chronicle how Nintendo games came to be, or Mortal Kombat, and more. Featuring narration by Charles Martinet, who voices Mario, Luigi, Wario and Waluigi in the Super Mario video game series.



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-१९ खोप

कायदा अख्तियार

स्वास्थ्य

नेपाल सरकार

Drink responsibly

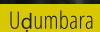
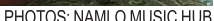
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Dhokaima Café to kick off 2079 with a week-long festival of Nepali music

Likening it to the variations in art, he adds that this will allow the artists an intimate platform to showcase the changing forms of expressions, which in turn reflect the changing times, societies and attitudes. 🇮🇳



7 Baisakh (20 April), Wednesday
Opening act by Bibhuti. More detail to be
revealed.
Entry: Rs500 (pre-sale)
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*Team Hero MotoSports won Stage 3 of Dakar 2022. This is the first-ever stage win at the Dakar – the toughest race in the world – by an Indian Team and an Indian manufacturer.

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Right at home with Nepalis

Their initial perception might shock you but most foreigners grow to love and learn about Nepal and its people

Nepalis abroad are often asked if they have climbed Mt Everest. It is the number one question a Nepali national is asked by a foreigner.

Following closely is the assumption that the country is all mountains and hence Nepalis should be used to winter.



LIFE TIME

Anjana Rajbhandary

To be sure, it is impressive that a relatively insignificant nation in Western eyes has made a mark on people all around the world. If the roles were reversed and I were asked about a faraway tiny country, my knowledge of its geography or culture might not be as accurate.

We are also often asked if we are Hindu or Buddhist, or if we grew up doing yoga and meditation in nature as a child. I did grow up watching my grandmother do yoga every day but I started only in March of 2020 when the pandemic had taken over all our lives.

I have lived away from Nepal for over 20 years and in all these years I have come across a wide range of perceptions and assumptions about Nepal and Nepalis, from how we look to how we speak.

When I first asked my partner what he knew about Nepal, he knew more than most people I have met. He was aware that Nepal had undergone a Maoist war and it was still affecting national politics.

He was well-informed about the Gurkhas due to his military background, and how Nepali history was influenced by British India. And of course, he knew about Mt Everest.



AMIT MACHAMASI

One thing is sure, Nepalis are bound to feel either proud, confused or shocked when hearing foreigners' take on Nepal and its people. Some are mindful of the words they use while others have no filter, coming across as ignorant, rude or condescending.

My friend Shailu, who lives in Canada, has always had a cheerful demeanour and can make friends easily, but even she was surprised when she was asked if people had fridges or have eaten pizza in Nepal.

Others asked her if she had to carry a large backpack up and down the mountains to get to school. She would say she didn't but many children in remote areas still do.

"But all in all they were fascinated by the

Himalaya and want to visit Nepal," she adds.

My friend Alina has encountered people who thought that Nepal was a part of India or China because, in their words, Nepalis "look like either Indians or Chinese".

Most people also assume that Nepalis cannot speak English because they come from a developing country. They are shocked to find that they can.

Admittedly, it is hard to know much about a foreign country when you have no personal attachment or have never visited.

"After meeting me, my foreign friends now want to visit Nepal and experience its rich and beautiful traditions for themselves," Alina says.

Another friend of mine didn't have the best experience. Milan lives in the southern United States and was shocked when his educated first-generation American coworkers asked him if Nepal was a part of India "like the Maldives".

One of them went a step further and asked him if he would come to work in a *salwar kameez* on Diwali.

Alisha is tired of people assuming that she is Indian, and it always ends up becoming a geography lesson. Other than that, people are surprised by her grasp of English, to which she has to explain that it is not the case for everyone in Nepal.

But she has had a generally positive experience with people telling her that Nepalis are friendly and get along with others. She says this perhaps has to do with the fact that an average Nepali grows up around people of various castes and ethnic groups, making them more accepting and open-minded about differences.

Such upbringing is especially helpful when you go abroad and meet people from diverse backgrounds.

The general consensus is that Nepalis are welcoming, they always have a place for you at their home and they treat "guests as gods".

Nepalis are indeed known to be excellent hosts, and while most of us at some point have had to struggle explaining to others about Nepal, we are a friendly bunch that gets along with people of all backgrounds.

Our welcoming nature has earned us a reputation as the folks who love inviting people over for momos. Perhaps the most important element of Nepal's international "brand" are Nepalis themselves. 🇳🇵

Some names have been changed.

Anjana Rajbhandary writes this fortnightly Nepali Times column *Life Time* about mental health, physical health and socio-cultural issues.



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Driverless in Carmandu

The world is making amazing progress in automotive technology, and this means Nepal will soon leapfrog rapidly from a country of drivers without cars, to one of driverless cars.

That is why the Ass would like to know what the higher up authoritarians are doing to prepare Kathmandu for self-driving cars. Lack of preparation could mean chaos on Kathmandu's presently smooth-flowing streets. Actually, self-driving cars would be the perfect antidote to all the hazards and obstacles to road trafficking in the Valley. Here is how:

1. Google Maps will have to train itself to geolocate your exact destination, since there are no street names and numbers in Kathmandu. Driverless cars should be able to instinctively detect their position using Virtual Reality so they know when to turn left at the uncollected garbage pile at Bag Bazar, and after 150m, drive up a pedestrian overhead bridge at Jamal, and then home to Ass-on.

2. Visual cues are not enough for driverless cars which will need olfactory sensors to navigate the Dungmati Corridor. Your vehicle just follows odour emanating from the Sewage Canal by literally smelling its way to the destination.

3. Natural intelligence of a human driver will be superseded by artificial intelligence of a driverless vehicle which can detect the large sinkhole in the middle of the street in Lazimpat by promptly falling into it.

4. The real revolution will happen when the Office of Transportation allows motorcycles to also be driverless. Self-driving two-wheelers will make both pillion

rider and driver obsolete.

5. Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya declared Kathmandu a 'smart city', and driverless cars will make it a Genius City. But first, we have to get the software rewritten so vehicles can drive on any side of the road and also follow Kathmandu's new smart traffic lights. Green: Go fast; Yellow: Go faster; Red: Step on it.

6. On Nepal's highways, when a tipper truck in front gives a right signal it doesn't mean he is turning right. It is trying to tell the self-driving car that it can safely overtake him. This feature has been retained also for driverless tipper trucks.

7. Self-driving minibuses must learn that in Nepal, we don't just over-take, we take-over the road. When God made cars, he equipped them with horns. Driverless micros should honk pointlessly just to prove that they exist, following the polite instruction on the backs of lorries.

8. The best thing about driverless cars is that we can drink and drive again.

9. Self-driving Teslas in Kathmandu must override their software to ignore zebras, especially if there are people on wheelchairs trying to cross.

10. Besides chicken crossing the road, driverless cars will also have to watch out for bulls, goats, ducks, monkeys and other street fauna. With machine learning, driverless cars can also handle dogs that insist on racing the vehicle in question, barking its head off.

Better to just put an ass behind the wheel.



The Ass

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Fate joins, then separates,

● Anil Shrestha

I left for the UAE six years ago. It was a struggle to adjust to the new environment, but the country gave someone like me who had arrived with no experience a platform to work hard, and make a decent living.

I started as a crew member at a restaurant, and by the end of six years, was working as an assistant manager making five times more than my starting salary.

I did not have any reason to leave the UAE given my job security and attractive benefits, but my younger brother, Ajay, who was based in Malta wanted me to join him there.

“Europe is Europe,” he used to say.

My only motivation to go there was to be with my brother. Why live in two separate places when there is opportunity to be together to support each other, to celebrate festivals together, and create some semblance of a ‘home’? My mother also loved the idea of her sons being together.

He helped me find a job in Malta, also in the restaurant line. The salary was not all that different from what I was making in the UAE.

When I joined my brother in Malta on 31 January this year, it had been three years since I had last seen him. We were thrilled. What I

did not know then was that it would be a reunion that would change the trajectory of our lives.

In addition to the excitement to see me, he was also looking forward to his trip back to Nepal on 1 March. He was already in holiday mode, excited to be back for the first time since he got here.

A cricket fanatic, he had set aside a ₹1,900 fund to organise a game back home through a cricket academy in Bardia that a common friend had set up.

A mother’s boy, he was trying to decide between different mobile sets to buy for her, and also for an uncle.

He worked as a bike delivery rider in Malta and in the morning of 16 February, he was scrolling through his phone when he got a delivery request and decided to take it up. Every extra euro would help, he said.

I was playing a game on my phone and barely paid attention as he left the apartment. He later called from below the apartment to ask me to pass his power bank that he had left. As a delivery boy, it was an essential he could not afford to leave behind.

He called again me to tell me to throw him his purse from the balcony. He caught it with a grin. Sloppy boy, I thought.

A while later, I got a call from a fellow Nepali. He told me to go to the hospital because Ajay had met with an accident, about three

kilometers from our apartment.

I could feel my soul leave my body when I heard the news as I rushed to the hospital. As soon as I arrived, I was told by the doctor that Ajay was no more.

The fact that he had come back twice to take his phone charger and wallet still haunts me. He had died on the spot when a truck hit him. Perhaps if he had not been delayed by those couple of minutes due to his absentmindedness, he would still be alive. The difference a few split seconds would have made.

Needless to say, I was shocked beyond belief. How could this have happened? My eyes hurt to see my brother as he lay there in the hospital, as if he was in peaceful sleep. He looked normal and was still warm.

My mother back in Nepal had to be rushed to hospital as she collapsed after hearing the news. This added to my grief and worry.

In that abyss, I felt numb, unable to process what was going on. It had been only 17 days since I had arrived in Malta. Everything was a blur.

Back in my brother’s apartment as I wept, I could not comprehend what was going on and what was next. I had to figure out how to take my brother’s body home. I did not know anyone there, or how the system worked.

Friends came to the apartment to pay their respects. They were all in tears, and hugged me, brought me food and made sure someone was always at my side. I have no idea who these people were, but



they were all Ajay’s friends and they were there for us, and to support me.

Growing up, I was always the quiet one, and Ajay the more outgoing sibling. I used to be known as ‘Ajay’s Dai’ rather than Anil. Even in his death, I was ‘Ajay’s Dai’, surrounded by his friends, in an unfamiliar country, among unfamiliar people.

It was also evident how much

goodwill Ajay had garnered in Malta. I had at least five Nepalis who came to me to repay money they had borrowed from Ajay. They didn’t have to but they did. They were in tears.

Many recounted memories of how he had helped them when they were struggling financially. In the following weeks, there were football games organised in his memory with moments of silence in

The women left behind

When Nepali men migrated as warriors or workers, the women they left behind helped empower the country

● Sonia Awale

Every new crisis heightens the importance of labour migration for Nepal’s economy. Remittance money has run this country for past centuries, right down to the present day.

A succession of rulers have not offered citizens even the bare minimum to survive, so Nepalis have voted with their feet – as workers or warriors overseas. Now, women have also started migrating, and about 10% of Nepali workers abroad are female.

Remittance accounts for more than a quarter of Nepal’s GDP, an ever-growing portion of which is from women workers abroad. Many are employed in India and in countries banned by the government, which means they are missing from official records.

The history of labour migration from Nepal has its roots in the Nepal-British India wars. Even before the formal defeat of the former Gurkhas were being recruited by Sikh king Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Lahore having seen their bravery at the battle of Kangra in 1815. The word *Lahure* लहुरे denotes soldiers and men working abroad and is derived from the British cantonnement in Lahore.

Migration of Nepali men for work and/or settlement is comparatively well documented, but women not so much. Even more neglected is the sacrifice and contribution of the women left behind in Nepal.

In his new book *Lahure Women: Two Centuries of Struggle, Service and Silent Fortitude*, Nepal scholar David Seddon looks at the role of the लहुरेनी, the daughters, wives, mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers of Gurkhas and latter-day migrants in the Gulf, Malaysia and other countries.

This is an attempt to bring women to the fore, and shed light on their changing role in Nepali society. The book has a brief history of Gurkhas in wars of the last 200 years, and the role of Lahure women.

Labour migration was also the beginning of women empowerment in Nepal. Women



PAUL JEFFREY

left behind had to take care of families and farms after the men left. The difference today is that the women are also leaving in greater numbers – to work as caregivers in Israel and as household help in the Gulf countries.

This is the driving force behind the increasing purchasing power of Nepali families, the dramatic fall in the poverty rate, and the spurt in grassroots development. Families in villages can now afford more nutritious food, healthcare and ‘boarding’ school education for their children – paid for by remittance money sent home.

Many women who initially faced increased burden in absence of men are now leaders of their communities. They head forestry users groups, are in school management committees, volunteer as community health workers, implement drinking water projects, and are adapting to climate change.

Seddon reminds us that not all women were left behind. Even during the Anglo-Nepal war, women and children followed the

Gorkhali garrisons and made up a significant portion of camp followers. Some were companions or concubines. Wives of Gorkhali soldiers even fought and died alongside their husbands in the battles of Kangra and Malaun.

During the 19th century, Nepalis migrated to India to avoid high taxation, or to escape debt. As tea plantations spread in Darjeeling, entire families moved out of eastern Nepal to be pickers. From there they went on to Bhutan and Burma to work in dairy farms.

It was in the late 19th century that Nepalis ventured beyond India, starting with Fiji and the West Indies, where they went as indentured labourers in British sugarcane plantations – many went with families.

Seddon traces what must be one of the first documented Nepali woman migrant workers. He writes: ‘In a fascinating discussion of Indian indentured labour, involving predominantly Indian women being shipped to the West Indies and elsewhere, by Gaiutra Bahadur, mention is made of a “Nipalese woman” named Morti.’

In the original document, Morti is described as refusing to acknowledge her husband and ‘if the couple had been married, it was perhaps a hastily struck depot or shipboard marriage as they were not from the same part of India, not remotely.’

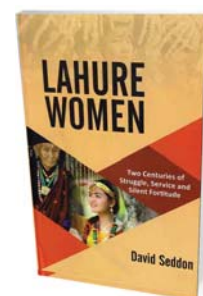
There were 200,000 Gurkhas deployed in the First World War, which accounted for one-fourth of the total male population in Nepal at the time. The Second World War also saw a similar number. Nearly 50,000 Nepali young men were killed in both wars, leaving us to consider what impact this loss might have had on the families in rural Nepal.

Others chose not to return and settled with their families in Hong Kong, Singapore, Burma and Malaya where they had served under the British Army. By 1952-54, just over 12% of all Nepalis abroad were women.

Seddon tries hard to find information on the roles Gurkhali women played, but it is scanty. The historical neglect by the state of Nepali women is reflected in the lack of documentation of their role, rendering their experience and sacrifices invisible.

The book relies on reportage, including some from the *Nepali Times*. (Wish the author had credited the feature on Nepalis in Thailand, though.)

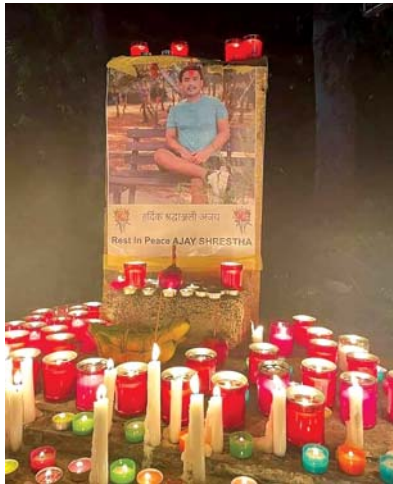
Seddon himself acknowledges the gaps and the need for more research. *Lahure Women* can be seen as the start of a process for further anthropological research into this important socio-economic aspect of Nepal’s migration. 🇳🇵



Lahure Women: Two Centuries of Struggle, Service and Silent Fortitude
by David Seddon
Adroit Publishers 2021
220 pages
Rs1,600

siblings

Nepali working in Malta recounts how destiny dealt his family a cruel blow



REMEMBERING WITH LIGHT:
Ajay Shrestha (left) with his favourite cricket jersey.
Tributes to Ajay from his Nepali and Maltese friends last month in Valletta (above).
The Banke district team (right) won the cricket tournament held in Ajay's memory this week.



SOURCE: ANIL SHRESTHA

his tribute. My brother, he had left a mark among many.
These stories of death in a foreign land are common. It is a familiar sight for us Nepalis to see coffins arrive at Kathmandu airport. Most of them are on flights from the Gulf, where I spent six years.
But this was the first fatality among Nepalis in Malta. Even the Prime Minister of Malta and the Mayor reached out to me and extended their condolences. The

Nepali community there was stunned. Nepalis and Maltese friends crowdfunded for his repatriation, to support our family, and raised nearly Rs2.8 million with which we could send the body to Nepal.
How do you describe the feeling of being on a plane with your brother in the cargo hold in a box? How can you talk about bringing a younger sibling's body home to your parents?

On the flight back home, I kept thinking about how my brother had brought me to Malta just weeks before he died. It was as if he had wanted his elder brother to take care of him, and bring him home.
Had I been in the UAE, there was no way I would have been able to go to Malta to do that. The longer the wait, the more difficult it would have been for my parents, since seeing my brother's body and completing the final rites at least

provided them a sense of closure.
Here in Bardia, the days are passing slowly. My priority is to take care of my parents who are distraught. My mother is almost unrecognisable with shock and loss of appetite. She has no more tears left to shed.
Things were just starting to look up for us. Three months ago, we bought our father a scooter so he could get around more easily than in his bicycle.

My brother and I had just moved in together in Malta, and this happened. Nothing makes sense. I now want to find ways to keep my brother's memories alive, and to fulfill his dreams.
We organised the cricket tournament in his memory, and the finals were on Monday. A team from Banke district won.
Both us brothers were very fond of cricket growing up, perhaps because India is right across the border. But back then we could not even afford the basic equipment.
We played with a tennis ball, and even that was expensive. We made our own bats. My brother had wanted to make sure that children of our home village would not have to suffer the same deprivation.
Just a month before his death, my brother had sent another Rs15,000 to the sports academy to organise the tournament.
On the opening day, I wore one of his favorite jerseys that said 'AJ' on the back. It is the little things that remind me of him, and make me suddenly burst into tears without warning. There are many memories of our childhood that make me feel simultaneously close to him, while reminding me of the cruel reality that he is not around anymore, and he will never be.
The jersey is among his possessions that I brought back with me from Malta, leaving nothing behind in his apartment that I gave up before returning.
I don't think we will ever learn to move on from this loss. But perhaps one day we will learn to live with it. 🇳🇵

Translated from Nepali.
Diaspora Diaries is a regular column providing a platform for Nepalis to share their experiences of living, working, studying abroad.
More photos online at www.nepalitimes.com



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