



AMIT MACHAMASI

GEN NEXT

- **Sarala Gautam**

The swearing-in ceremony on 30 May of the youthful new leadership of Kathmandu Metropolitan City was a sight to behold.

Out in front were Mayor Balen Shah, 32, and Deputy Mayor Sunita Dangol, 29 (*pictured*). The smug men from mainstream parties were standing behind the two. This is the Gen Next of Nepali politics, a symbolic handover of power from the past to the future.

As promised, Mayor Shah broadcast live to the public the first meeting of his city council. Chair Nabaraj Parajuli of Ward 32 told the mayor in a patronising and contemptuous tone: “Be careful what you say, you are all by yourself here.”

Introducing himself, Harilal Tandukar of Ward 11 did not like the meeting being live online, and said so derisively. Mukunda Rijal of Ward 16 yelled as if he was

addressing a street rally.

It is natural that these endangered species of Nepali politics feel threatened by the youthful new leaders. If they use such disparaging language against a newly-elected mayor, how will they treat their electorate? All cities and municipalities should beam their council meetings live, so citizens know what the candidates they voted for are really like.

There were some ward chairs like Bhuvan Lama of #6 who were appreciative, and offered Shah and Dangol useful suggestions. And over in Lalitpur, re-elected mayor Chair Babu Maharjan was full of praise for the youthful new leadership of the city's wards.

Having these transparent meetings has been welcomed by most, but it is understandable that elected candidates from traditional parties who have nothing to show for the past five years but mismanagement and malfeasance do not like it. They are used to murky backroom deals.

Transparency is the beauty of democracy. By beaming live the first meeting, the new mayor showed citizens who is who.

Local leaders from tainted parties which have dominated Nepali politics thus far and have profited from it are waiting for the new mayor to fail, or conspiring to put obstacles along his way. Mayor Shah is already facing roadblocks in his effort to resolve Kathmandu's garbage management problem.

This is not new, the established parties always let the trash pile up to blame it on each other. This time, they are colluding to blame a new independent mayor. It was because the meeting was live that Kathmandu's residents got to know what the problem at the landfill site is: a waste management crisis that took three decades of misrule by the main parties cannot be removed overnight.

"We have nothing to hide, we have to work together for the welfare of our citizens," Mayor

Balen told the open meeting.

This election proved that Nepal's voters are changing their mindset. They are abandoning old vote bank politics to reward candidates who show promise, who are not tainted by their parties' past. They are watching carefully to see if the parties they once supported will allow independent candidates to perform.

Social media platforms now amplify the voice of voters to warn the old guard not to obstruct those who want to get things done. And going by the reaction on Facebook and TikTok, there is overwhelming support for giving Balen and Sunita the chance to deliver on their election promises.

It is an indication of a rising alarm among the tried, tested and failed politicians that they are accusing Balen Shah of supporting a partyless system, or the king. Some veteran journalists are even more virulent than politicians in their dismissal of the 'Balen phenomenon'.

Let the rise of the independents be a lesson to the main parties to clean up their act before federal and provincial elections in November. 🇨🇦

Rise of the independents
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



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An advertisement for Hazella hazelnut spread. The word "Hazella" is written in large, stylized red letters with a white outline. Below it, there's a jar of the spread with a white lid, surrounded by hazelnuts and a splash of chocolate. A circular seal on the bottom right says "EXCELLENCE IN QUALITY". At the very bottom, the text "SalesBerry" is displayed in white on a green background.

A wide banner advertisement for the BMW X1. On the left is the BMW logo. To its right, the text "READY FOR ANYTHING." is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters, with "THE BMW X1." in smaller capital letters below it. The background is a night scene of a city with illuminated buildings and a bridge. On the right side of the banner, a white BMW X1 SUV is shown from a front-three-quarter view, parked on a road. The car's license plate reads "M SY 5227".

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Rise of the independents

Harka Sampang was a migrant worker in the arid mountains of Afghanistan. He dreamt of returning to Dharan's lush forests to uplift his hometown. The main parties did not give him the time of day, the media ignored him.

He persevered, showing he meant business. He was always there, draped in Nepal's national flag to remove garbage, manage bus schedules, and improve water supply to neighbourhoods. Citizens took notice, his dedication and integrity went viral on social media, and he was elected mayor.

Now, the national media cannot have enough of Mayor Sampang. Together with new independent candidates in Kathmandu, Nepalganj and other municipalities across the land, their message is clear — you do not need a ticket from a political party anymore to be elected.

Still, the future is a challenge. The multiple crises these cities face took a long time to accumulate. It is the result of structural failures in governance over decades.

Problems like solid waste management, air pollution, toxic rivers, lack of water, decrepit roads cannot be solved overnight. But the public's expectation of these mayors is high, and the main parties are waiting to prove them failures.

The wins of Harka Sampang in Dharan, Balen Shah in Kathmandu and Gopal Hamal in Nepalganj were natural, almost predictable. Public disenchantment with the established parties was so great that many defied the traditional vote blocks they commanded.

Ever since the Panchayat and the constitutional monarchy days, Kathmandu is used to expressing its disapproval of the status quo by casting 'protest votes' for unlikely or upstart candidates. By electing Balen Shah and Harka Sampang, voters were also rejecting the other choices, ignoring party loyalty or ethnicity as ballot criteria.

The local election campaign and reaction to results showed two types of disillusionment: political leaders within parties like the NC being convinced that their leaders took the wrong turn and undermined their party, and candidates not affiliated to any party cashing in on the non-performance of established parties.

What the independents have shown is that a candidate no longer needs a party ticket to contest and win elections — at least for local governments.

Balen Shah has got all the media spotlight, but there are many other municipalities across the country where independents have won because they convinced voters that they can deliver better services.

Public opinion surveys in the past have repeatedly shown that at the urban or municipal level, most voters do not care which party a candidate is from as long as they show a capacity to tackle every-day problems of city life.

How these three independents as well as other municipal chairs and deputies handle the mountains of mess they have inherited from predecessors will be evident in the months ahead, especially as mainstream parties lock horns again in the run-up to federal and provincial elections in November.

Already, there is talk within the Nepali Congress (NC) that the party paid a price for supporting Maoist-Centre and CPN Unified Socialist candidates. A rough calculation shows that the NC might have actually won more than 400 of the 753 municipal posts if it had fielded its own candidates instead of backing those from coalition partners.

Maoist and Unified Socialist wins in cities like Bahartpur, Pokhara and Hetauda put those two parties in a strong position for national polls in November. Now, there is talk of the Communist parties forging another electoral alliance for federal and provincial elections to undercut the Congress.

Despite the relatively good job she has done in Bharatpur, it is questionable if Renu Dahal would have been re-elected without

Congress votes. Despite coming second in the municipal counts, the opposition UML did so despite having to run against five parties.

What Balen Shah, Harka Sampang, Gopal Hamal and others are selling Nepalis everywhere is the hope for better governance. Most candidates from the big parties have nothing to show for themselves.

The mayors who got re-elected in Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, were rewarded for their performance over the past five years. In the end, that is what democracy is all about, and we need to scale that up to a national level.

Looking at November, the Congress can benefit from the split in the Communist vote, but only if the coalition is intact and the left does not unite. If they do not learn from the rise of the independents, they could suffer a collective setback.



Mayors Balen Shah and Harka Sampang prove how Nepal's democracy should function.

ONLINE PACKAGES



LEMON COUNTRY

The mountains of Palpa in central Nepal are famous for *dhaka* weaves. Besides the colourful handcrafted fabric, Palpa is now also the centre of lemon cultivation in the country, thanks to an enterprising couple. Join us on a trip to the rugged hills of western Nepal and meet Goma and Hum Nath Bhandari, and listen in their own words the story of their entrepreneurial journey. Watch the video on our YouTube channel and read the story on [page 9](#).



TAKING THE HIGH LINE

Highlining is an extreme adventure sport new to Nepal. Perfect for adrenaline junkies, it is akin to slacklining, which is essentially walking on a tightrope between two anchor points. Get up and close with Roadies-winner Saman Shrestha who is soon launching highlining in Nepal. Read the story and watch the video online. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.

GREEN ISSUE

I hope they do that ('Nijgad's green runway', Kashish Das Shrestha, #1114). It will be a big blow to Nijgad Airport Syndicate, Minister Ale, and his associates. It will serve as a lesson to not mess with biodiversity and the Supreme Court's decision!

Salman Gurung

- We need to have a very careful comparison and assessment between development needs and environmental protection ('Nijgad's aborted runway,' Editorial, #1114). Every mega project would have environmental implications, and what is required is to take adequate mitigation measures. So, what would have been fruitful is to have a discussion on the adequacy of such mitigation measures, and what can be done about them. Can we think of an alternative to Nijgad with zero or very much minimal environmental implications?

Bhuban Bajracharya

- Horrifying to see what's being done to this beautiful landscape ('More bullshit, Sonia Awale,' #1114). I recommend early education we got as children in the 1960s in the US: littering is a crime against all.

Robert I. Kabakoff

- The uncomfortable truth is that Himalayan glaciers are melting ('Nepal's mountains are melting,' Alton C Byers, #1114). Governments have known this for 50 years. ICIMOD and others keep studying and reporting — it's time to wake up and stop the yearly Hyatt workshops. Action is needed. Asia and India's groundwater is fast disappearing — time is ticking.

David Durkan

- This is insane. Everest Base Camp is now 50m lower than in 1953. The glacier melted and moved 50m in 69 years.

NH Manandhar

- I often walk past this Café and wonder if the café is running well, perhaps time to try it out ('Toilet café,' Aria Shree Parasai, #1114)!

Kalps Para

- Bottled water should be banned from meetings and functions of all government and corporate offices immediately ('Refuse, recycle, reuse, repurpose plastic,' Aria Shree Parasai, #1114).

Ajaybar Pradhan

NEPAL ECONOMY

Schools should focus more on creating a diversity of minds ('How Nepal can avert an economic crunch,' Kalpana Khanal, [www.nepalitimes.com](#)!) This will bring innovators.

Marieke van Meel

EMBOSSED PLATES

Thank you *Nepali Times* for exposing this ('Embossed plate company involved in scam,' Ramesh Kumar, [www.nepalitimes.com](#)). Though, I will bet my bottom dollar anything will change because of this since the "swamp" is too deep.

Ram Chamling

- It's all a game of corruption and commission.

Art DS

INDEPENDENT MAYORS

Until elected mayors keep their election promises, there is no proof of anything having changed ('Rise of the independents,' Editorial, #1115).

Aleksandr Verkovsyn

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Flying in Nepal

Last week a Tara Air DHC-6 aircraft with 22 people on board hit a mountain on a flight from Pokhara to Jomsom. Many were immediately reminded of another aircraft that went missing exactly 20 years ago, and was never found.

The Asian Airlines Mi-17 helicopter carrying eight mountaineering guides and two crew members including a Russian pilot from Makalu Base Camp to Lukla was lost on 31 May 2002. Even after weeks of aerial and ground search in rugged terrain during the monsoon, the aircraft could not be found, and the hunt was finally abandoned.

Excerpts from the report about the crash from issue #97 7-13 June, 20 years ago this week:



the Caucasuses and the Himalaya, and was familiar with the terrain.

Search and rescue flights have been hampered by cloud cover, and only able to fly from dawn until 9AM, by when clouds move in. By now it is certain that the helicopter crashed into one of the mountains, and that even if some of the six passengers and four crew survived the initial impact, they are unlikely to still be alive.

The accident came as we were preparing this survey of helicopter transport in Nepal, and once more underlined the dangers of flying in Himalayan terrain in bad weather. Aside from Maoist sabotage and mechanical problems, helicopter aviation in Nepal

faces the chronic hazards of what aviation experts call controlled flight into terrain (CFIT) — the possibility of pilots misjudging altitude or position and flying into a mountain in poor visibility. But the same dangerous vertical terrain is also what makes helicopters so indispensable in the Himalaya.

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



Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Toilet Café

by *Aria Shree Parasai*

The last place anyone would like to locate a new café would be next to a public latrine. But this is exactly what the Independent Sanitation Workers Cooperative has done at its facility in Patan, with the kitchen running on biogas from an underground digester using the waste. Visit [nepalitimes.com](#) for the full story.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook



Aborted landing in Nijgad

Editorial

The Supreme Court has ordered the government to scrap all decisions it has taken so far to build a new international airport in Nijgad. The project is a white elephant, a gigantic logging concession masquerading as an airport. It is a lethal mixture of kleptomania and megalomania. Read the Editorial, and join the online discussion.

t Most popular on Twitter



More bullshit

by *Sonia Awale*

Nepal is a pioneer in household biogas, and now the focus has shifted to industrial-scale plants for densely populated urban centres to replace LPG and chemical fertiliser. But the transition is not without challenges. Part of last week's *Nepali Times* 'Green Issue' on 5 June World Environment Day.

💬 Most commented

Embossed plate company involved in scam

by *Ramesh Kumar*

After the Department of Land Transportation issued a deadline for vehicle owners to replace current license plates with embossed ones, it has emerged that the company contracted for the job was blacklisted by the World Bank with *Nepali Times* obtaining the official documents. Follow us for the latest developments and read the story on [page 4](#).

🔍 Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
 #editorial Nijgad is a colossal white elephant. It is a gigantic logging concession masquerading as an airport project. It is a lethal mixture of kleptomania and megalomania.



Ed Douglas @calmandfearless
 This editorial from @NepaliTimes on the proposed Nijgad airport in Nepal is spot on. An environmental catastrophe.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
 Nijgad's Green Runway
 The path is open to declare a national park in the native forest where the airport would have been, writes Kashish Das Shrestha (@kashishds).



Nepal Now @now_nepal
 @nepalitimes lays out a roadmap for sustainably developing the site of what was to be Nijgad Airport [https://nepalitimes.com/banner/nijgads-green-runway/](#)



Biraj Shrestha @Biraj_Srestha
 Food for thought.

MORE SUSTAINABLE AIR TRAVEL

Turkish Airlines has been using Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) on its Istanbul-Paris route* once a week since 2/2/22 as part of its effort to provide more eco-friendly and climate-conscious air travel.



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*There are already plans to expand its use to more routes.

Embossed plate company involved in scam

Bangladeshi firm making embossed license plates in Nepal was blacklisted for fraud by the World Bank



MANISH PAUDEL/HIMAL ARCHIVE




IT and its French partner had committed fraud to win the bid.

Interestingly, Tiger IT has been involved in a slew of other projects in Nepal for the past decade. In 2013 it provided voter registration system software services to the Election Commission with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The project, however, did not go ahead for unspecified reasons, but that is not mentioned on the company's homepage.

In 2010 it was involved in the conversion to machine-readable passports in Nepal in collaboration with France's Oberthur Technologies.

Experts find it fishy that a blacklisted foreign company has such insider access to successive governments in Nepal that it wins one controversial contract after another. The passport project was also mired in allegations of kickbacks in high places.

The embossed number plate project has also been criticised because the letters and digits are in English and not Nepali when many countries in the region, including Bangladesh itself, have number plates with scripts of the country's national language.

The DoTM deadline requires all vehicles in Gandaki and Bagmati provinces to switch to embossed plates or face a fine. There is an elaborate online process to fill the forms in English, and the process is said to be cumbersome, opening the possibility of further corruption and payoff to middlemen at DoTM offices. But following the public outcry, the government has removed the 16 July deadline to implement embossed plates for now. 

● Ramesh Kumar

After the Department of Land Transportation (DoTM) issued a 16 July deadline for vehicle owners in Nepal to replace current license plates with embossed ones, it has emerged that the company contracted to do so was blacklisted by the World Bank.

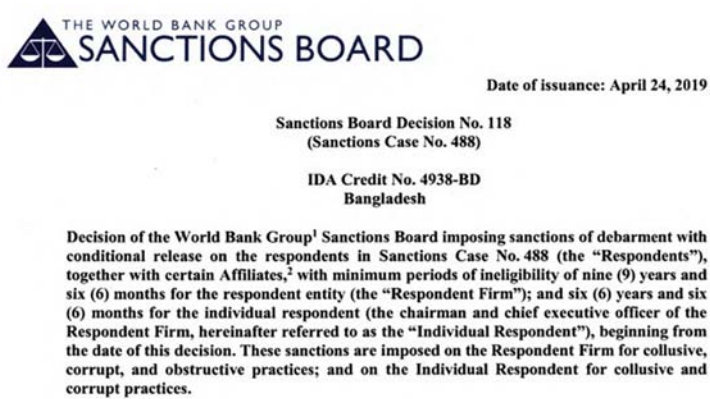
The Nepal government repeatedly extended the \$44 million contract it granted to a subsidiary of Tiger IT Bangladesh to install the computerised car plates which have camera-readable English digits, and an embedded chip that allows GPS tracking.

Nepali Times has obtained official documents that show that on 24 April 2019, Tiger IT Bangladesh

and its CEO Ziaur Rahman were blacklisted by the World Bank's Sanctions Board for 'collusive, corrupt and disruptive' practices on a bid for one of its projects in Bangladesh.

The case was heard on 5 March 2019 at the World Bank's headquarters in Washington DC in presence of its vice-chair where it concluded: 'The defendants were found to have colluded in barring open competition.'

Tiger IT is said to have bribed top government officials, did not provide required details and documents to the World Bank, and 'deliberately acted to materially impede the Bank's investigation into the misconduct'. The company is barred from participating in any other World



Bank projects for nine and a half years, and its CEO Rahman for six and a half years.

Decatur-Tiger IT, a joint venture of Tiger IT Bangladesh and US company Decatur, was first awarded the contract on 30 May 2016 to install embossed number plates on vehicles in Nepal in a deal worth \$43.787 million (Rs4.68 billion).

The initial agreement was to install number plates in 2.5 million vehicles in five years by mid-September of 2021. But after

delays, the government renewed the contract for another two-and-half years despite knowing that the company had been sanctioned the previous year by the World Bank in its home country.

In 2014, Tiger IT had won a World Bank contract for the 'Identification System for Enhancing Access to Service Project' to establish a secure and reliable national identity system in Bangladesh. But the Bank's investigation found that Tiger

prabhu BANK

Turkish Internet system

Turkish Airlines has strengthened its on-air Internet service with a Gate to Gate system. The airlines will use the service once the aircraft is above 10,000 feet and it is uninterrupted until the flight reaches its destination. Says chair of the



board Ahmet Bolat, "We are happy to extend our internet coverage area as the airline that flies to more countries than any other and provides the greatest coverage of international connections. We will continue to work on new technologies to provide the best of the virtual world just like we do with the real one."

Incessant Rain

Paras Chitrakar, tech entrepreneur and co-founder of banking app Dave.com listed on the NASDAQ has joined Incessant Rain Academy to train young people and provide them with career opportunities.

Khukri Zero Waste

The manufacturer of Khukri Rum, The Nepal Distilleries has committed to zero waste during its production and to reusing bottles. The company plans to implement 100% sustainable packaging by 2032 and has been working to clean up the mountains.

Laxmi Green Savings

Laxmi Bank has launched an online account opening service that provides an 8.03% interest rate, free mobile money and iBankXP. Customers can also redeem reward points for waiver on annual renewal fees for green banking packages such as Mobile Money, iBank XP.

Tata sets record

Tata Motors has set a new sales record last May with 43,341 units sold in India, surpassing the figure of Hyundai Motors. Of the total vehicles sold, 3,454 were electric including Nexon and Tigor.

Financial solutions

Standard Chartered Bank will provide supply chain financing solutions to dealers of Unilever Nepal with



which the latter can use trade financing solutions of the bank to ensure financial sustainability, especially during liquidity, pandemic or inflationary crisis. The setup can also help large corporations with sustainable and strengthened supply chains.



Dishhome fibernet

Dishhome has opened new Fibernet showrooms in Kanchanpur and Mahendranagar this week. The showrooms will run with support from Nawa Durga Livestock and Agricultural Farm.

IME in Chitwan

Global IME Bank laid the foundation stone for its new well-equipped regional corporate office in Chitwan's Bharatpur. The bank also organised a rally in the town with 500 participants on financial literacy.

AI washing machines

Samsung has launched a range of AI-enabled and connected EcoBubble washing machines for 2022 including larger capacity models up to 9kg. The AI Eco-Bubble is Nepal's first washing machine to learn user behaviour and suggest a preferred wash cycle. Other features include EcoBubble which saves energy and gives 45% extra fabric care and hygiene steam that removes dirt and bacteria. The price starts at Rs117,990.

Colour Next

Asian Paints Nepal has launched Colour Next 2022 with prominent architects and interior designers to study global socio-cultural and environmental trends to arrive



at design directions. The company also introduced the Mood Board Contest for architects and interior designers where the top 5 winners will get awards.



Sipradi for sports

Director of Sipradi Trading Shambhu Prasad Dahal on International Everest Day completed the Tenzing Hillary Everest Marathon in 9 hours 29 minutes and 14 seconds. The 42.195km marathon started from Gorakshesh and ended in Namche Bazaar. Sipradi has consistently supported many sports activities, even fully funding football training.

Everest's natural heritage on canvas

On the 50th Anniversary of the World Heritage Sites, Sacha Jafri connects Mt Everest with nature and culture

● Ashish Dhakal in Khumbu

A painting of Mt Everest could have only been unveiled on Everest Day 29 May at the iconic Hotel Everest View in Syangboche.

The triptych (pictured, right) by British visual artist Sacha Jafri shows the panorama of a discoloured mountain range, the black of the rocks seeping into the snow, against a sky progressively deeper the higher it goes.

Below are reddish-brown hills gathered for a conference of sorts, their heads ever so slightly bent as if they are listening and thinking. At the centre lies a pool of water so blue it seems to be collecting the whole sky above.

The painting appears as an almost abstract expression of the mountain rather than its reflection. It is Jafri's subconscious journey to the Himalaya, and there can be found immediately something childlike, innocent without pretense – a theme found in his other artworks as well.

The Everest painting is one of 50 Jafri is creating for the Art Maze project in partnership with UNESCO, and commemorates the 50th anniversary of World Heritage Sites around the globe.

"This comes at a time in the world, with climate change, the pandemic, the geopolitical flux, to reflect on the next 50 years and ask ourselves what we truly value as individuals, societies and countries, and what should be passed down to the



ASHISH DHAKAL



ART MAZE

these World Heritage sites in an art maze we could reconnect humanity to our natural and cultural heritage, to our ancestral past, to the custodians of our cultures, and we could start communicating again on a deeper level," Jafri (pictured, right) says.

The Maze and the Next 50 campaign also comes at a time when Nepal is changing rapidly, trying to balance development with nature. Everest itself continues to be affected by the climate crisis and mass mountaineering.

At the unveiling, Bishnu Rokaya of the Sagarmatha National Park said: "While Mt Everest and the park are already well-known, the painting will help us reach even more people, share our stories, and promote tourism and conservation efforts."

Raza Beig, adviser to ArtFi Global, has bought the Everest painting and plans to house its three panels in a museum and share it with the world. The profits from the sale of Jafri's paintings will help communities living in the Heritage Sites they represent.

Beig's daughter Aly wrote to *Nepali Times*: "We feel Mt Everest and Sagarmatha National Park to be one of the most spiritual places on our planet, and now we get to look at it every day and share it with the world." 🇳🇵

future generations," says UNESCO Representative to Nepal Michael Croft.

As such, UNESCO's The Next 50 campaign forms the foundation for Art Maze, and 34 of the paintings of World Heritage Sites, including the Acropolis in Greece, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, the Hyrcanian Forests in Iran, the Saint-Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, the Pyramids of Egypt, and Lumbini in Nepal, have been completed.

The paintings are characterised by their unique assortment of colours, which is reminiscent of lively crayons from childhood. Textbook realism has no place in these canvases as the paintings are stripped to their essence.

"We over-analyse, become pompous and over-intellectualise art," Jafri explains. "But all art, at the end of the day, is rubbish and superb."

There is a sublime simplicity to Jafri's method and work, enabling viewers to be more conscious in their world, their lives, and be open to love and compassion.

The Art Maze, curated by Marcus Schaefer, is a 12mx12m steel labyrinth gallery with Jafri's paintings, giving visitors the opportunity to choose which path to take and create an experience where "the journey is the destination".

For over 25 years, Jafri's work has been about reconnecting with the soul of the earth. His *Journey*

of Humanity (2020) is dubbed the world's largest and took him a year to create during the pandemic.

The idea behind the painting was re-connectivity, which then expanded into the Art Maze. When Schaefer approached him with the concept, Jafri found it resonated with his own. Jafri then thought perhaps the project would be even more poignant if it was about the World Heritage Sites.

The Maze was then launched on 23 March at the Burj Al Arab Jumeirah Helipad in Dubai with 30 works, and will be travelling around the world with plans for a Nepal stopover next year.

"I thought if I represent

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*17118# #PossibleChaSabai



The first view inside the British Cemetery at Kathmandu as it looks today - the caretakers Prem and Durga Devi might ask you to sign their visitors' book.



Views of the nineteenth century memorial in the British cemetery taken in 1977.

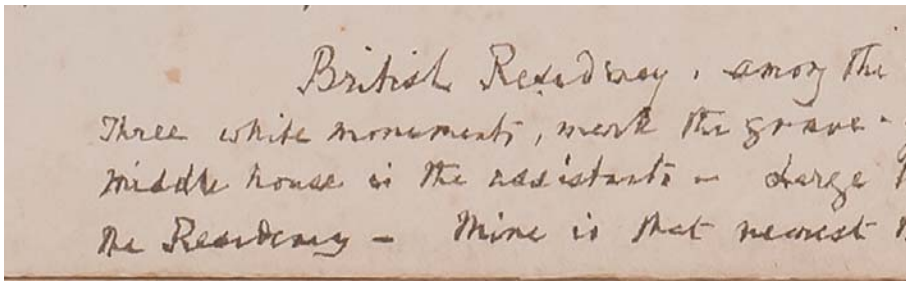
MICHAEL STOKES



The unfenced British Cemetery photographed at the turn of the century in 1901 within the tall chir pine trees (*Pinus roxburghii*).



ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY



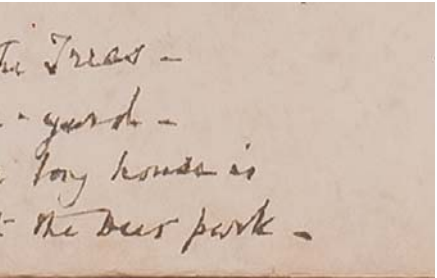
Details of a panoramic sketch by Residency surgeon, HA Oldfield in 1854 annotated 'British Residency, among the Trees ...' showing Shivapuri as the highest hill behind the Residency. The first three graves in the cemetery can just be made out as white pinnacles.



MARK F WATSON



BRITISH LIBRARY



BURIED in HISTORY

New book on the British cemetery reminds us of expatriates who lived and died in Nepal over the past two centuries

● Lisa Choegyal

The British cemetery at Kathmandu is little known but not hard to find. Keep the imposing white sweep of the British Embassy gate on your left, and then walk past the well-guarded Indian Embassy entrance to your right. The lane shrinks dramatically between their towering walls and, if you are lucky, no passing vehicle pins you against the brickwork.

Persevering on down the hill a little further than you think and avoiding a constant stream of bikes, the graveyard looms suddenly on your right. A mound of exotic trees, cultivated flowers and manicured lawns comprise this ‘corner of a foreign field’ that shelters a tantalising assortment of headstones and memorials dating back over 200 years.

Once through the gate with a helpful sign beneath a friendly arch, you might encounter the conscientious caretakers Prem and Durga Devi. Linger among the meticulously tended graves, the shades of people buried here begin to manifest at the edge of consciousness. ‘The laughter learnt of friends; and gentleness, in hearts at peace.’

The atmosphere vibrates with the ghosts of times remembered, whilst the mind crowds with apparitions of historic figures, funerals and friends, long-stay residents and short-term visitors, whosoever fate decreed would never leave the valley of Kathmandu.

This haven of tidiness was not always so. As we learn from this important new book, the fate of the British cemetery has ebbed and flowed with the tide of centuries at the whim of its diplomatic custodians. Sometimes neglected and overgrown, sometimes nurtured and cared for, it has always been at the heart of the history of foreigners in Nepal – ‘A pulse in the eternal mind’.

For the first time, the facts about the British cemetery and its glamorous array of inhabitants are gathered together in this comprehensive volume. The first grave dates from 1820, and I attended the most recent funeral in 2014.

Elegantly written and highly readable, Andrew Hall, anthropologist and former British Ambassador to Nepal, and Mark F Watson, keen historian and Himalayan botanist at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, have collaborated with Vajra Books. Initially conceived as a modest booklet to resolve the incomplete listings and jumbled records of the historic graveyard, it later expanded to include the wider context of Nepal’s complex relationship with the outside world.

As might be expected, such

a formidable combination of scholarship has done a very thorough job. The evolving changes to the physical site are documented with maps, drawings, paintings and letters dredged from London collections, and identities clarified that have been disrupted by earthquakes, fallen branches and general dereliction that damaged the marker stones, rendering some unreadable.

Every grave in the British cemetery in Kathmandu is catalogued, but there are others further afield. The Gurkhas had burial sites in Paklihawa and Dharan, the Jesuits at Godavari, two memorial parks mark the terrible 1992 air disasters in Kakani and Lele, each facing the direction of the catastrophe, and there is even a solitary grave in the grounds of the British bungalow in Kakani.

We find exhaustive descriptions of the British cemetery graves, headstones, location maps, names, dates, images, stories and anecdotes, and even details of trees and shrubs that grow there; a glossary, bibliography, sources, endnotes and index; and a list of the British heads of mission assigned to Nepal, responsible for this patch of ground ‘that is for ever England ... A body of England’s, breathing English air’.

But not really. Of the 100 or so people laid to rest here only about 40% are British, the remaining represent at least 16 nationalities and several religions other than Christian. Their causes of death are an eye-opener into the Nepal of their lifetimes.

Although the British were first to put down roots after the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli, the truth is that over the centuries this remote Himalayan country received a wide variety of visitors from all corners of the globe and the cemetery’s eclectic occupants reflect this – missionaries, mountaineers, military, traders, adventurers, eccentrics and dreamers.

The earliest grave belongs to Robert Stuart, the Assistant Resident who died suddenly one spring evening in 1820 of ‘a violent cold’. His superior, Hon Edward Gardner was devastated but had no choice but to inter him beneath the nearby hillock that the British were hastily given to bury their dead.

Hardly ‘that rich earth, a richer dust concealed’ of Rupert Brooke’s iconic First World War poem *The Soldier*, but a sandy wasteland unsuitable for cultivation, situated not far from the uninviting piece of land on the then-distant outskirts of Kathmandu that had been grudgingly granted for the British residency – now given over to the Indian mission after Independence.

By 1857 the cemetery contained only three graves. The grandest monument commemorates Brian Hodgson’s deputy, Ensign Hastings Young, aged only 20, and the first child burial, seven-year-old William



LISA CHOEGYAL

Boris Lissanevitch's well attended funeral in October 1985 during Dasain had to be arranged with the help of Mountain Travel Sherpas to dig the grave. The service was conducted by Jesuit Fathers Eugene Watrin and Tom Downing.



ROGER HYAM

Joint author Mark F Watson contemplates the oldest monument in the graveyard, that of Roger Stuart who died on 14 March 1820.

Nott Nicholetts. The only official Commonwealth War Grave in Nepal, belonging to Gilbert Deatker who died in 1942, ensures a funding commitment which proved crucial to the garden’s maintenance during the leaner years of British government support. The grave diggers’ busiest period was the tourism times from the 1970s to 1990s, before mortuary freezers enabled repatriation and local cremations became more generally accepted.

Some incumbents remain more mysterious than others, but the authors’ investigations have culminated in this highly readable account that spans not only the history of the British and other early foreigners in Nepal, but also the curious, sad and sometimes extraordinary stories of how they met their end.

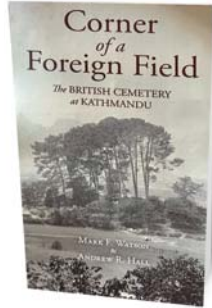
Some of these tales are tragic and extreme. Particularly heart-breaking are the babies and children, including the infant son of Henry Ambrose Oldfield, the Residency surgeon and artist, dated 1861. In addition to the occupational hazard of illness, as might be expected in harsh mountain terrain, fatalities feature mountaineering, rock falls, drownings and air accidents. On the back wall, a plaque remembers the New Zealand pilot of the flight that killed Sir Edmund Hillary’s wife and youngest daughter in 1975.

This peaceful garden is the last resting place of a roll call of Nepal’s early tourism, conservation and development pioneers. Familiar and colourful characters who left their mark include Boris Lissanevitch (plus his mother, mother-in-law, wife and son), Desmond Doig, AV Jim Edwards, Mike Cheney, Freddie Bowles, Robert and Cecille Reiffel, Peter and Margaret Ross and many more. Unearthing some buried recollections of my own having

known them all (full disclosure), I helped the ever-erudite Doctors Andrew and Mark with research, editing and proof-reading.

A collaborative and diligent research effort, many have contributed to this slim volume packed with information. Dedicated to the late great Charles Allen with a foreword by current British Ambassador Nicola Pollitt, both the Nepal Britain and Britain Nepal Societies supported its publishing, along with the British Association for War Graves in South Asia (BACSA), Bon Travel and Tours, Vajra Books and the personal generosity of Pratima and Prithivi Pande.

My only niggle is the misleading title. This useful book reaches far beyond the confines of the British cemetery enclosure, now a hidden and forgotten island in an ocean of concrete urbanisation down that narrow Lainchaur lane – which perhaps you will be inspired to discover. By using the graveyard and the circumstances of its existence, the chapters expand to encompass the entire early history of Nepal’s convoluted interaction and engagement with outsiders and the international world. 🇳🇵



Corner of a Foreign Field: The BRITISH CEMETERY at KATHMANDU by Mark F Watson and Andrew R Hall Vajra Books 2022 Rs2,500 168 pages

EVENTS



Pride Parade

The fourth annual Nepal Pride Parade this Saturday will see members of LGBTQ+ communities and allies come together to celebrate and support.

11 June, 10.30am onwards, Maitighar Mandala

Rooftop Gardening

Want to put to use the green fingers? Participate in the rooftop gardening workshop and learn to grow your own food. Don't forget to bring gloves.

11 June, 10am onwards, Mid City Café, (01) 5901460

Cycle Rally

A cycle rally that aims to raise awareness about blood donation and its significance. Join and support their cause.

11 June, 7am onwards, Ropeway Sadak (01) 4249158

Law Festival

National Law College's Lex Fiesta will host debates, drama, slam poetry and other events and stalls. Take your pick.

11 June, 9.30am-5pm, Sanepa, Lalitpur



Trade Fair

From handmade products and agro-food to live artisan demonstration, children crafts activity corner and food stalls, Trade Fair organised by Fair Trade Group has something for everyone.

11 June, 10.30am-6pm, Yak Palace, Pulchowk

DINING

Achaar Ghar

Hankering for some home-cooked meal? Look no further than Achhar Ghar, which comes with a variety of pickles prepared using recipies passed down through generations.

Jhamsikhel, Pulchok, (01) 5541952



MUSIC

Live Music

Enjoy your Friday night with a live performance by Dechen Phinasa, musician and song writer from Sikkim.

10 June, 6pm onwards, Thee Bar Bar Black Sip, Thamel, 9803859320



Ser O Jooni

Catch the last performance of Ser O Jooni and their newly released song 'Iglesia Abandonada' before their short hiatus.

11 June, 7pm onwards, Beers N' Cheers (01) 5524860

Nabin K Bhattarai

Chill out with friends to the beats of Nabin K Bhattarai and Attripta with an opening act from Karma Sherpa at Attic.

10 June, Gyaneshwor, Attic, (01) 4417843



Nanashi

Nanashi is here with modern jazz music and old Nepali Adhunik music blends. Tune in this weekend.

12 June, Beers N' Cheers, (01) 5524860

The Reckoning

Book the date for the Reckoning with performances by Screaming Marionette, Strangle and many more bands.

9 July, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel (01) 5910126



Sanchyan Ramen

This Japanese restaurant in the heart of Old Patan offers bento box, teriyaki chicken, tonkotsu ramen, gomaе spinach and more. Deserves a visit or two, if not more.

Swatha, Patan, 9840128425

Bricks Café

This multi cuisine restaurant claims to have the best wood fired pizza in town. And we suggest you also try their Lasagna. An all time favourite.

Kupondole, (01) 5521756

GETAWAY



Meghauli Serai

Take a break from city life and stay at this luxurious safari lodge at the heart of Chitwan National Park. Overlooking the Rapti River, Meghauli Serai offers scenic views as well as accommodation that integrates local culture with art.

Chitwan National Park, 9851218500

Raniban Retreat

Located on a hillock of Raniban forest, this environmentally-friendly boutique hotel has some of the best views of the snow-capped mountains.

Pokhara, (01) 5185435

Hattiban Resort

Grab breakfast from the hotel's buffet, lounge by the sunny courtyard overlooking the mountains, get a massage at the spa and take a tour of nearby Pharping, Champadevi Temple and Khokana Village, all at Hattiban Resort.

Hattiban, (01) 6916140

Mila Guesthouse

For those who prefer the quiet and admire a mix of the old and the new, Milla might just be the perfect getaway. Not too far, yet it is like you have stepped into a whole new world.

Bhaktapur, 9851024137



Namo Buddha Resort

Constructed in the traditional Newa style and surrounded by lush greenery, the resort is an oasis of peace and tranquility, offering spectacular views of the Himalayas on clear days.

Namo Buddha, Phulbari, 9851106802

Hass ko chhoila

Not for the faint of heart, this signature duck meat dish at Shyam dai's is only for those who can handle their spice. You have been warned.

Dhobighat, (01) 4280273

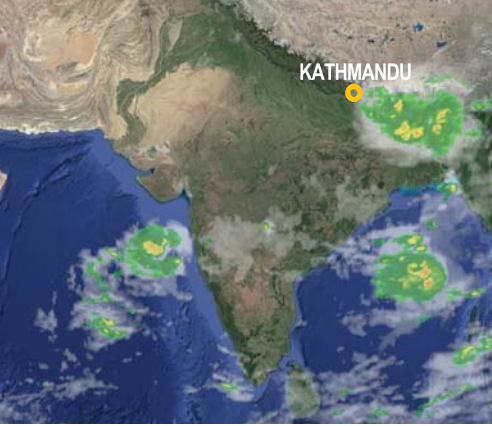


Kyubi's Kitchen




For customisable bowls of noodles, platters filled to the brim with dumplings, spicy noodles, kimbap, corn dogs, da-pow and more, visit Kyubi's Kitchen where each room pays homage to popular animes including Tokyo Ghoul.

Jhamsikhel, 9810298050

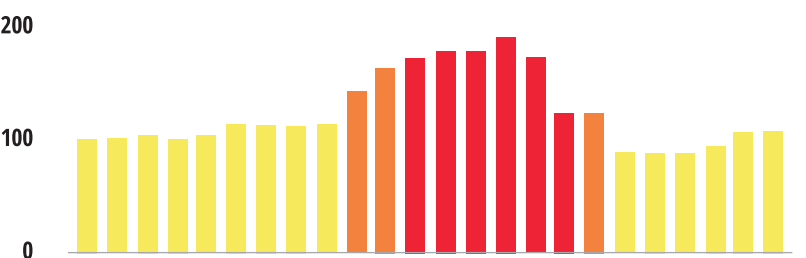
WEEKEND WEATHER



After a wetter-than-usual May, it looks like the monsoon is catching its breath. The average rainfall for May is about 120mm, but this year Kathmandu Valley had 210mm. Although the monsoon was forecast to arrive one week ahead of the scheduled date of mid-June, it has been held back temporarily by the lingering westerlies. But the jetstream has now moved north of the Himalaya and a large trough over southern Tibet is drawing moisture-laden winds from the Bay of Bengal. Expect heavy squalls with sunny intervals over the weekend.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 28° 19°	 29° 20°	 29° 20°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



Kathmandu AQI from 11AM 8 June - 9AM 9 June measured at US Embassy, Phora Darbar

The Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu Valley has been improving steadily as the rainy season sets in. The showers scrub down the suspended particles from vehicle exhausts and dust from the air. In addition, since the wind direction changes to easterly with the monsoon, trans-border industrial pollution from India is also diverted away. The graph above shows AQI for Kathmandu over 24 hours on Wednesday-Thursday.

OUR PICK



Director Wanuri Kahiu's 2018 Kenyan drama *Rafiki* follows Kena and Ziki who live very different lives in Nairobi. Kena works in her father's shop and awaits the start of nursing school, while Ziki passes the days hanging out with her friends and making up dance routines. They have been told all their lives that "good Kenyan girls become good Kenyan wives" - but they yearn for something more, and when their paths cross, their interest quickly grows to affection and the girls find ways to love each other despite the ever-watching gaze of the neighborhood. *Rafiki* (Swahili for 'friend', referring to how people in same-sex relationships are compelled to refer to each other as "friends" because of society's homophobia) is a story of romance set to in the vibrant colours and music of Nairobi, and a beautiful addition to world cinema. Stars Samantha Mugatsia, Sheila Munyiva, Neville Misati, Nini Wacera, Jimmy Gathu, Charlie Karumi and Muthoni Gathecha.

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 संक्रमणबाट बचाउन लक्षित जनचेतनाका लागि स्वास्थ्यकर्मी तथा नाई

खोप खान्ने
खोप छुने
खोप बेच्ने

नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड



#SERIOUSABOUTBEER

WE PUT SERIOUS HOURS IN YOUR HAPPY HOUR.

Drink responsibly



● Sahina Shrestha in Palpa

The mountains of Palpa in central Nepal are famous for *dhaka* weaves. Besides the colourful handcrafted fabric, Palpa is now also the centre of lemon cultivation in the country, thanks to an enterprising couple.

Goma Bhandari with her husband Hum Nath run the Bhandari Lemon Farm in Kutedanda of Tinau Rural Municipality which does not just supply lemons to surrounding market towns, but grows saplings to encourage others to switch to this cash crop.

Over the years, the two have cultivated a piece of land that was considered too arid for farming, and made money grow on trees.

“If you are disciplined, have a support system and the drive to continue pushing forward, nothing is impossible,” says Goma, who is fondly known in the area as ‘Kagati Didi’.

For someone who did not even know the ABCs of farming till the age of 19, Goma has come a long way to carve a niche in Palpa’s booming agro-business. She was raised in a family that valued education, even for girls.

Busy with school, Goma never had to work in the fields. At her maternal home in Riddhikot, she was the youngest of the three siblings and her father, a schoolteacher, made sure she completed high school.

Over 20 years ago, she married Hum Nath, who was a teacher in a local government school. His salary was not enough to support the new family with two children. Goma wanted to find a salaried job but with ageing in-laws much of the household chores fell on her shoulders.

She would help her father-in-law in the fields, as he patiently taught her the basics of farming. In the terraced farm at the edge of a hill near their home, the two would work the soil to grow maize, millet, buckwheat as well as vegetables.

When her first son was born a year after marriage, Goma knew she had to do something to augment the family income. By now, she had enough confidence to know that farming was the way forward.

“I asked my father-in-law what if we planted two saplings instead of one. He laughed and said that it wasn’t about the number but the care we give to it that yields fruits,” recalls Goma.



PHOTOS:AMIT MACHAMASI



Taking all she had learned from her father-in-law, she tried her hand in commercial farming, producing vegetables like cauliflowers and tomatoes and fruits like litchi and mangoes.

This brought in decent earnings, but it was hard work. There was no irrigation, and the monkeys would raid the crops by day and rabbits and deer would destroy it at night.

“I often thought what the use was of working so hard for months only for all of it to be eaten by wild animals. We had to look for alternatives,” Goma says.

There was an old lemon tree at the edge of their field that her father-in-law had planted decades ago. It did not need much water, nor did they need to tend to it as carefully as the other crops. Yet, the

tree would yield enough lemons to earn up to Rs10,000 every season.

Goma and Hum Nath studied the lemon market and did some back-of-the-envelope calculations. “We found out there was a huge demand, but Nepal imports millions of rupees worth of lemons every year from India.” The couple was sure they could meet at least a part of the demand locally.

So, in early 2013 they planted ten saplings along with the other vegetables. The acidity and sourness in the fruit and the thorns in the plant meant that the animals would not easily destroy it. It also did not require much care or water, which made it perfect, explained Hum Nath. Neighbours laughed at them, and the family was not happy with the decision. They all

expected the couple to fail.

But Goma added more lemon saplings, and by the third year, they were selling their first harvest in the market in Dumre and Butwal. Today, her lemons go to Chitwan, Kathmandu, Pokhara and further afield.

“No one believed me at first. My in-laws were very worried. As a woman it was difficult navigating the market. But the quality of my produce spoke for itself,” says Goma. “And once things started picking up, our parents were very proud. I am happy they got to see us succeed before they passed away.”

And now, people who once mocked the Bhandaris have started planting lemon themselves. Goma has sold over 10,000 lemon saplings. Annual sales of lemons have crossed 9 tonnes, giving Goma’s company a profit of over Rs1.2 million two years ago.

They also sold 150 litres of concentrated lemon juice to test the market, and they want to add that and lemon pickle to the range of value-added products on offer.

“Farming is not easy but if you work hard there are good returns,” assures Hum Nath. The couple’s oldest son has enrolled in a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture on a full scholarship in Bhairawa. Their younger one is also majoring in science.

When she is not busy on her farm, Goma spends time in community work. She has served

as the chair for a local women’s agricultural cooperative, as well as in the management committee of two local schools.

“For the society to progress it is important that women come out of their homes and take ownership of the space around them,” says Goma. “This can only happen when they are financially independent and develop leadership skills.”

She worries about cheaper saplings and lemon from India, but the couple is confident that with economies of scale they can compete. Goma says much of her success is due to her husband and family.

Adds Palpa’s famous Kagati Didi: “If my in-laws and husband were not supportive, I would not be where I am today.” 🇳🇵

This is the first in the series Striking Roots, where we feature the stories of entrepreneurs from across the country. If you know someone whose story needs to be told, email us at editors@nepalitimes.com.



LEMON COUNTRY

Take a tour of Bhandari Lemon Farm in Dumre, Palpa, and see how Goma Bhandari and her husband Hum Nath have turned an arid piece of land to a sustainable business.

TATA MOTORS
Connecting Aspirations

ALL-NEW H5

THRILL OF 170 PS POWER. COMFORT OF AUTOMATIC.

PANORAMIC SUNROOF

6 SPEED AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION

ESP TERRAIN RESPONSE MODES

BASED ON LAND ROVER'S LEGENDARY DB PLATFORM

TATA





THE HIGH LIFE

His people are known for climbing mountains, but Lakpa Dawa Sherpa climbs skyscrapers

I moved from Solu Khumbu to Kathmandu when I was 10-11 years old with my brother for my education. My childhood back in my village was a combination of school and work, since I also helped my parents on the farm whenever I could.

My father is a high altitude guide who has summited Mt Everest 11 times, while my mother is mostly busy in the potato field, and also manages a trekking lodge. Our village falls in the Mera Peak trekking route, so we often have tourists staying over.

I was a shy kid and did not interact much with them, although the chocolates they handed out were always something I looked forward to.



I first joined a trek when I was 18 with my father. He was my mentor, he taught me how to fix climbing ropes and take care of our clients. It was an 18-day trek to Mera Peak, and I still remember earning Rs2,000 per day along with a \$300 summit bonus.

My father would later tell me that the guests complimented my work and how despite being young and new, I had the

strength of a strong climber. It is exciting on new trekking routes, but if you keep going over the same trails the up and down can start to get monotonous.

During such times, you are just left with your thoughts. It is up to you to distract yourself and find ways to stay engaged, entertained and even challenged by breaking your own previous records. My father was



A father's sacrifice for his son

Daily-wage earner invested in his hard-working son's education so he could study abroad

Most mornings, Laldev Mandal walks over to a road intersection in Kathmandu, which is called लेबर चोक, where daily wage workers like him wait on the sidewalk to be hired. There is not much work to go around, and Laldev often returns home empty handed to hope for better luck the following day.

But for the past week, the 52-year-old has not been at the roadside looking for day work. He was busy preparing for the departure of his son, Anil, to Japan to study computer engineering.

Laldev is from a village in Saptari in Nepal's Tarai plains and has been a daily wage labourer in Kathmandu for the past 25 years. With his meagre earnings he paid for his son's education so he will have a bright future. That investment appears to have paid off.

After Anil flew out this week, Laldev has been staying home to keep track of his son's journey from Kathmandu to Osaka.

With pride in his voice, he tells us: "I don't have a smartphone so have not been able to connect with my son directly. But his friends have been sending me updates. Anil had told me in advance that it would be a while before he got a sim card in Japan to call me on my mobile. From tomorrow, I will start looking for work again."

Laldev's sense of happiness is palpable. "Even when he was still in school back in Saptari, Anil wanted to study computer engineering abroad," recalls Laldev, who visited many labour recruitment agencies before



finding out that it was educational consultancies that made student migration possible.

Anil Mandal is now in quarantine in Osaka, and told us over the phone this week, "It helped that my father went to school, so he always prioritised our education. I saw how he, despite being educated, was not able to get a proper job which in Nepal depends on power, networks and money. We had none of that. That is why I was determined to find opportunities abroad."

Studying in Japan also provides a chance to earn on the side to support the family. At first, Anil's

father had advised him to go to South Korea where the salaries are higher under the Employment Permit System (EPS). But Anil wanted to study, and Japan was the better option.

"EPS in Korea was only for work whereas Japan provided opportunities for studies as well, which is what I was more interested in. Earnings are my second priority. Countries like Australia and the USA were a lot more expensive," he adds. But for the Mandal family, Japan, too, was going to be unaffordable. Laldev had to borrow over Rs1.1 million from three money lenders from his village at

36% interest.

This is the single biggest investment that the Mandal family has ever made. But Laldev believes it is well worth it and there is a high rate of return on the investment.

"I have seen my son put in the effort, now he has the right platform that will open more doors for him with hard work," says Laldev. "He taught himself Japanese from the internet because his tuition classes got canceled midway during Covid-19. For hours, I would see him recite words that sounded strange to my ears."

Whenever he had some time

free, Anil would join his father at the intersection waiting for day work to supplement the family income.

Even as Laldev boasts about his son's strong work ethics, Anil in turn credits his father for his lifelong focus on securing his future.

Said Anil: "I came to Kathmandu with my sister with the money I earned working in construction in my village for a few weeks. In Kathmandu, I saw how my father was struggling to make ends meet with his daily earnings so I joined him whenever I could. My father had taught me not to be ashamed of doing any kind of work, unless it is bad work. I was never ashamed of doing



PHOTOS: ANIL AND LALDEV MANDAL

IN THE NAME OF HIS FATHER:
(left to right) Anil Mandal's selfie at Kathmandu airport before boarding a flight for Japan this week.

Laldev Mandal outside his rented room in Kathmandu.



CLIMBING FAMILY: (left to right) Dawa Sherpa's father, Sanga Sherpa, has summited Mt Everest 11 times but aims to hit his target of 25 times in his lifetime.

Dawa Sherpa dangled on the ropes to clean windows of skyscrapers in the UAE.

Dawa Sherpa and his brother (pictured above), both UAE returnees, now run a rope access cleaning company in Nepal.

strict about not letting me listen to music on my earphones during treks.

Even as the son of a climbing guide with a strong reputation in the mountaineering community, I did not face a lot of pressure to get into the same profession. I did ask myself whether the risk was worth it, and felt sad whenever my father returned from the more difficult expeditions with a black weather-

beaten face that took weeks to recover.

Many high altitude guides never return from expeditions, and there is always a gnawing fear before each of these difficult expeditions that something might go wrong and we may never see him again.

I remember this used to be very stressful, especially for my mother. In 2014, when we heard that there was an avalanche at Everest Base Camp, my father was out of touch for 12 hours. All we could do was pray.

The money may be good in climbing, but there are big risks. It is also more than just money, as there is so much tied to these climbs — our aspirations, a personal record we want to beat, or history we want to make. My father wants to summit Mt Everest 25 times in his lifetime.

I worked as a guide during trekking seasons, but decided to go to the UAE in 2019 where my brother had been working for a few years as a rope access cleaner.

It is not common for people from our village to go to countries in the Middle East or Malaysia. Only a handful have gone there for work from our village while some have emigrated to Europe, Japan or the USA for further studies.

Most continue to follow the mountaineering profession of their fathers. On my brother's guidance, I took a one-week training in Kathmandu on rope access cleaning provided by a French trainer, received my Level A certificate and went to Dubai to work in the same company as my brother. The training cost Rs95,000, and the recruitment cost Rs89,000.

In the UAE, I still remember how my first descent after a two-day refresher training was cleaning windows of an 89-storey skyscraper. I had never seen buildings that high in my life. Despite being used to mountains, my body was trembling as my supervisor pushed me off the ledge from the top.

Nothing from my climbing experience or the training in Nepal had adequately prepared me for this. I was disappointed about being so scared, as I descended nervously and cautiously.

The high-rises in UAE were much taller than the buildings in Kathmandu we trained on, and we had to carry two 30-litre water containers, unlike the small buckets we used in the Nepal training.

Up there 89 floors high, I felt nauseous and my feet felt weak. By the time I was finally done, my colleagues who had a similar assignment in the same building had already been resting for three hours.

But I gradually got used to the task, the height and the heat. When the temperature climbed, we used to try to find cooler parts of the buildings to clean. As we swung in the air, cars in the streets below looked like tiny toys.

The views inside through the windows were also interesting when blinds were not drawn — especially the lavish and luxurious interiors. Often, the residents would wave at us from the inside, and a few generous ones even tipped us.

My earnings in Nepal during trekking

seasons were quite good, but I did not really value money that much. I had a carefree खायो-घुम्यो-उडायो attitude towards the seasonal work on the mountains.

But in the UAE, I learnt to value money perhaps because of the demanding work I did day in and day out in the heat. My pay was Rs45,000 a month, and I used to send money home and save whatever I could.

After two years there, I decided to return to Nepal with about Rs600,000 in savings. I was not satisfied with my salary and there was no overtime work which makes a big difference for migrant workers who are just there on temporary contracts.

My brother also returned soon after I did, and we decided to use our skills and experience to start a company in Nepal, called Rope Access Professional Cleaning Service. Our business is doing quite well as we have managed to secure contracts with hotels, malls and office complexes including Marriott and Durbar Mall.

While there are challenges to running a company in Nepal, we must be doing something right as there are other players in the sector who have been around for longer. My father who initially had told me not to go abroad, now admits that this overseas experience was in fact quite beneficial for me.

I still have not left mountaineering and want to continue guiding climbers. I had wanted to take a high altitude climbing course this year, but could not enroll in time. I am now trying to get experience in mountains higher than 7,500m, after which I have set my eyes on Mt Everest.

We climb for more than just financial reasons. I have the dream to get to the top of the world's highest mountain at least once in my lifetime. When I do, I will unfurl my company's banner on top.

A friend who is in the trekking business had offered to do it on my behalf during his Everest summit, but I refused the offer even though we had a banner ready. It is personal, and I dream of doing it on my own someday. 🇳🇵

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

son's dream

and study computer engineering in Japan

menial labour, although I always saw it as a transitional phase which I hoped would not be my destiny."

Anil's day work was to carry sacks of sand on his back to the seventh floor of a high rise bank building that was being constructed in New Baneswor. Anil recalls: "I learnt a lot watching my father work hard, and how despite struggling as a daily wage earner, his vision and dreams for us was larger than life."

There were times when Laldev had also considered emigrating,

visiting recruiting agencies in Kathmandu to try his luck. He was turned down because he was more than 35 years old. He remembers, "They wanted younger men for first timers. So I gave up and still have not made my passport."

Before going to Kathmandu airport to see his son off this week, the only previous time Laldev had visited the airport was when he was working on a construction project there. Anil said it is still uncommon for students from their Saptari village to travel to countries

like Japan, most are used to going to Gulf, Malaysia or India. He is only the second person from the consultancy travelling to Japan in the past decade from the Tarai. There are even people from Anil's village with undergraduate degrees who are doing back-breaking work in the Gulf and Malaysia.

Back home in Saptari, the Mandal household is empty. When Laldev lost his wife to an accident, the local panchayat demanded that the driver, in addition to paying for her medical fees, also compensate the family with Rs350,000. He built the house with that money and from his savings in Kathmandu, while his children grew up in the village.

"In many ways, the community helped raise my children so the neighbours are also very proud of

Anil's achievements," says Laldev.

Anil was in Grade 9 when his mother died, and he assured his grieving father then that he would take care of his siblings and the household while he worked in Kathmandu.

"He used to send us money but managing household chores was not easy," Anil recalled. "Especially as I had a young sister to take care of. I always had to borrow money from friends or buy food on credit. I had to often study under a street light." Laldev does not want to sell his house in Saptari, because that is where he intends to live when he retires. As he walks around Kathmandu, he sees many buildings which he helped build over the decades. He says: "I am not as strong as I used to be. I could work for 2-3 months straight, now I

often need to take days off."

Even then, with his son now in Japan he is not worried about the future and not being able to work. It was an emotional moment for Laldev to see his son off at the airport this week, and he regrets not having even a farewell garland for Anil in the rush.

From Osaka, Anil said: "I did not get to say proper goodbyes at the airport. It was only after my bags were checked in and I had a moment to myself that it hit me that I was actually leaving my family and friends behind. Even now, in Japan, I cannot believe someone like me, a simple boy from a poor background has made it to Japan to study. It took my father and my community to get me here, and I will forever remain indebted and will make everyone proud." 🇳🇵

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Muckraking in 'Mandu

Nepal's post-Covid planners need a different tactic. Trying to convince people around the world to visit Nepal because it is there is not working. Maybe they should try to tell them not to visit Nepal. Go away. Scat. Vamos.

That way people may actually be more curious about why we are trying to keep away, and they will have FOMO and want desperately to visit. Tourists are also told not to visit Nepal in the monsoon. Some guidebook in the 1960s declared the rains as the off-season, and that has stuck.

It is time to change that. We need a new slogan, how about: 'Off to Nepal in the Off Season', or 'Visit Nepal: Take a Rain-Cheque'. With our picturesque flooded streets and casinos in every hotel, Nepal can be the combination of Venice and Las Vegas. Only in Nepal can visitors expect the unexpected at every step. Elsewhere in the world it rains cats and dogs, but in Nepal it rains only dogs. And lots of them.

Soon the monsoon will be here. And the Tourism Revival Committee should be trying to turn Nepal's liabilities into asses. For example, Kathmandu can rebrand itself and turn its name into mud. If Glastonbury can make wallowing in mud pools a tourist attraction, we have far more ooze here. Every monsoon, Nepal turns from a dust bowl into a mud bath, and we are wasting the opportunity by not making the best of it.

New tv commercials can show monsoon scenes with hit songs like 'Singing in the Rain', 'Have You Ever Seen the Rain', or 'A Hard Rain's A-gonna Fall' and dub them in Arabic so we can woo visitors from the Gulf countries where it has not rained since dawn of the new millennium. We give them workers, they give us tourists.

Three months a year, we turn Kathmandu from a dust bowl to a mud bath, opening up a great opportunity to launch an innovative new ad campaign. After all, if an obscure village in England like Glastonbury can put itself on the world map by selling its sludge, there is no reason why Gyaneswor should not be able to do it since it is losing in the stuff.

The Ass has a few free tips for catchy taglines to market the monsoon:

- 'Nepal: Where It Always Rains on Your Parade'
- 'Visit Nepal in the Monsoon for a Crash-course in Political Mud-slinging'
- 'Join the Kathmandu Muckrakers'
- 'Be a Stick-in-the-Mud'
- 'Visit Nepal and watch it rain water buffalos and hippopotami'
- 'Nepal Airlines: Takes You to the Slime with a Smile'

Monsoon is the time for Nepal's national disease: gastroenteritis. But this explosive affliction need not be a deterrent, it can be turned into an asset. We can in fact promote diarrhoea, we just need to figure out how to spell it correctly. And that opens up the opportunity for more slogans:

- Enjoy Runs in the Rain
- Guaranteed Weight Loss Plan: Lose 10kg in 10 Days
- Visit Nepal and Take Part in a Violent Uprising
- Develop a Gut Feeling for Nepal

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