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AMIT MACHAMASI / NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

✓ MASK UP
✓ AVOID CROWDS
✓ GET BOOSTERS

● Sonia Awale

A new surge in Covid cases in Nepal has served as a reminder that the pandemic is not over yet, and the need to keep masks on, avoid crowds and get booster shots persists.

Hospitals have not yet reported an increase in admissions, and no fatalities from Covid have been reported since March. But highly transmissible new sub-strains like BA.4 and BA.5 have also been detected in Nepal, as they have been elsewhere in the world.

"For the most part, people who have been fully vaccinated are unlikely to get very sick from the new strains, there has been no real increase in hospitalisation," confirms Sher Bahadur Pun, virologist at Teku Hospital in Kathmandu.

The fact that the new sub-strains are all Omicron variants means that, unlike the deadly Delta variant, they mostly infect the upper respiratory tract and not the lungs. With 82% of the eligible population fully vaccinated, Nepal is now

more protected from severe illness. But the virus is still mutating and scientists are engaged in a cat-and-mouse run to stay one step ahead of the new strains.

"Covid-19 has proven itself to be even more cunning than we thought. It is clearly still prevalent, and can be life-threatening for some," warns Buddha Basnyat, physician at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences. "This is not the end of the Covid story."

That is not to say that the present surge is a new wave. While each new sub-lineage of Omicron is more contagious, they are also milder. But studies overseas have shown that up to half of those infected with the new sub-strains are asymptomatic. As people travel more this summer and shed masks, the BA.5 and other variants are infecting and re-infecting even those who are vaccinated, putting the elderly and those with co-morbidities at risk.

"We must continue to vaccinate and take a booster. It might also be the time to start thinking about

a fourth dose for vulnerable populations," says Buddha Basnyat.

Because 'immune escape' is putting more people who have had Covid-19 still at risk of reinfection, scientists are trying to improve the efficacy of vaccines as they try to keep up with mutations of the coronavirus.

"Eventually, Covid-19 will be like seasonal flu, and perhaps we will have vaccines for different strains," says Sher Bahadur Pun at Teku.

CENTRAL ROLE OF THE CENTRAL BANK EDITORIAL PAGE 2

BA.4 and BA.5 were first seen in South Africa, and are currently the dominant strains in Nepal. This is surprising because it is BA.2.75 that was spreading in India last month, and the surge is now peaking there. Whatever happens in India comes to Nepal after a two-week-lag, experts say, and predict the same scenario could play out again here with the present surge. "Newer strains and mutations are nothing abnormal but we have to continue to mask up and vaccinate. As for the new surge, it is peaking at the moment and it

will have subsided by end-July," predicts Sameer Dixit at the Centre for Molecular Dynamics.

The Centre is leading Covid-19 gene sequencing in Nepal, and it worked with national and international partners to study 1,800 Covid-19 samples collected from across Nepal in the past year. The findings will be released soon, and could reinforce the importance of genetic sequencing in Nepal so scientists can predict the behaviour of the next variant.

Nepal is also a part of the largest Covid-19 recovery study, currently being undertaken in the UK which has come up with significant findings, including the use of some steroids in the treatment of coronavirus diseases.

But the fact that the new strains are milder does not discount the inherent correlation between health and the economy. Nepal with its limited resources and government indifference needs to be even more prepared. Says epidemiologist Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa: "The new surge may look mild, but it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared." 🇳🇵

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Central role of the Central Bank

“We cannot allow the rich to get richer in Nepal. One corporate borrower received refinancing of Rs1.27 billion straight from state coffers, while Nepalis slid into poverty. Small businesses also suffered, but their loans are not being rescheduled.”

That was none other than Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) Governor Maha Prasad Adhikari (pictured below) in an unedited version of a talk show on Kantipur TV in 2020.

Adhikari was sacked by Finance Minister Janardan Sharma earlier this year, and promptly reinstated by the Supreme Court. And then the scandal-ridden Sharma had to himself resign this month.

After the pandemic lockdowns hit in 2020, the NRB set in motion the refinancing procedures to keep the economy afloat, disbursing Rs158 billion by mid-December last year. This was like printing new money, but there was no evidence that the cash bailouts helped prop up the economy.

In his interview, Governor Adhikari was admitting that there are business entities in Nepal that are ‘too big to fail’, and that the central bank’s refinancing policy was being misused by corporates with political patronage.

The result is that instead of keeping businesses afloat during the pandemic, selective refinancing has driven up inflation, increased imports, and upped the value of private assets.

Nepal’s budgets have always been populist, no matter the government of the day, but the monetary policy of central banks across the world are necessarily conservative because of the need to keep inflation in check.

The role of a central bank like the NRB is to control inflation, maintain the external balance of payments and the stability of the financial sector. But the NRB’s credit expansion policy has done the opposite by rescuing those who were never impacted by the pandemic at all.

The NRB in fact massively expanded cheap loans in the past two years to jumpstart the economy. This only served to increase the national debt. Indeed, loans of banks and financial institutions, which stood at Rs32.13 trillion in 2020, have now surpassed Rs47 trillion. There has been no commensurate growth in employment and manufacturing capacity.

It could be that there was too much interference on NRB’s policy by politicians

on behalf of their cronies, but at the end of the day if the central bank had taken a more restrained approach, Nepal’s trade and balance of payments deficits would not have been as high as it is now, and foreign exchange reserves would not have depleted as fast.

Moreover, a sharp rise in real estate and share prices aided by a 5% interest rate in refinancing, increased investment, availability of repo loans and permanent liquidity facilities has unfairly benefited only the top tier of Nepali businessmen, industrialists and media tycoons.

The credit inflow actually increased imports, as the country rebounded from the pandemic. Moreover, a study by economist Biswas Gauchan showed that a 1% increase in private sector credit increased inflation by 0.31% and imports by 0.7%.

Nepal has registered an 8% annual increase in inflation over the last 40 years.

The income of Nepalis may have increased, but it has been absorbed by soaring prices. This means it is the general public that is bearing the brunt even as a chosen few big businesses reap huge benefits from politically-motivated credit outlay in the guise of a pandemic rescue package.

NRB officials blame the failure of their monetary policies on the fixed INR-NPR exchange rate, and say this puts Nepal at a disadvantage every time the Indian rupee weakens against the US dollar.

But this alone does not absolve the central bank, which has (for whatever reason) been reluctant to adopt stricter monetary measures to control debt and inflation.

Even as Nepal’s economic crisis deepens, businesses paradoxically continue to pressure banks for cheap loans so they can keep their profit margins.

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) on Sunday demanded the continuation of concessional loans extended during the pandemic. However, it is not the central bank’s job to save businessmen from a debt trap of their own making.

It is much more important to save the country’s economy from shrinking forex reserves, widening trade deficit and inflation.

Governor Adhikari must know why the misuse of bank credit by those with political patronage has hurt the economy. Awareness of a problem is the first step in solving it.

Ramesh Kumar



Why is the Nepal Rastra Bank so reluctant to adopt monetary measures to control debt and inflation?

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Wildlife Woes

Nepal is internationally recognised for its conservation successes. It is the first tiger range country to double its big cat population and marked zero rhino poaching for over five years. Some might say it has been too successful given the increasing number of tigers and rhinos straying outside parks.

But poaching is still a challenge, especially transboundary wildlife trafficking. Climate change and unplanned infrastructure add to wildlife deaths. In the past 20 years, Nepal has had some achievements too in conservation.

Excerpts of a report on rhino poaching during the peak of the Maoist insurgency from issue #102 12-18 July 2002, 20 years ago this week:

The number of rhinos killed by poachers in the Royal Chitwan National Park has doubled in the past year. Since November, 38 great one-horn rhinos have been killed. Only the carcasses or skeletons were found, with skull bones minus the horn.

Poachers appear to have taken advantage of the Royal



Nepal Army’s deployment against the Maoists to step up killing rhinos for their valuable horns. Government records show that of the 48 rhinos lost in the past year, only eight died natural deaths.

A 2000 census showed that there were 544 rhinos in Chitwan, one of the two viable populations of Asiatic rhinos in the world. As Chitwan got crowded, the government started relocating rhinos to Bardiya two years ago, and 25 have so far made the move. But poachers are active in Bardiya too-four rhinos have been killed there in the past four months, three by poachers.

Nepal’s efforts to save the rhino is an internationally-recognised success story. After being hunted and killed nearly to extinction in Chitwan, the rhino population rebounded in 30 years. Besides Chitwan, there are now 88 rhinos in Bardiya and eight in Suklaphanta.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



CONCRETE JUNGLE

The proposed Nijgad airport would have meant felling the last remaining forest in the eastern Tarai, which 70 years ago used to be a dense jungle before it was cleared to make way for Nepal’s rice basket. Watch video, and follow coverage of why the Chure-Tarai sa/forests are important to protect.

Stories: pages 10-11.



ICE INTO ELECTRICITY

Join us on a trip to Langtang to get up close to the Hungur Microhydro Project, the first-ever scheme to lower the water level of a glacial lake formed by global warming and generate electricity for a tourism-dependent valley. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for exclusive videos.

NEPAL ECONOMY

Only politicians and the dead cannot see the reality of 50 years of corruption, inefficiency and apathy ('Fuelling Nepal's economic crisis', Sonia Awale, #1119).

David Durkan

- What is also urgently required is for the government to help the poor and vulnerable with food or cash support, and cut unnecessary expenses ('State-sponsored economic crisis', Ramesh Kumar, #1119).

Bishow Parajuli

SAJHA E-BUS

Great accomplishment ('Sajha starts e-bus service in Kathmandu', www.nepalitimes.com). Brings a breath of fresh air.

Mahendra Singh Limbu

- It is encouraging to see a female bus driver.

Luniva Twayana

NEPALI NURSES

No words can honour saving lives. ('Balancing life and death in Nepal', Ashmita Hamal and Naresh Newar, www.nepalitimes.com). It is the greatest thing despite the lack of adequate medical resources, you have been doing an incredible job for years. Keep up the good work.

Arjun Khanal

- Heart-warming story. Applaud the courage and strength of these nurses.

Himalee Arunatilaka

TRI-CHANDRA

Thousands of futures are at risk of not seeing the light of day at the dreaded Tri-Chandra ('Tri-Chandra's run-down state is a microcosm of Nepal', Sahina Shrestha, www.nepalitimes.com).

Sanam Oli

- Everyone should be shocked at the state of Tri-Chandra. It is not just the fault of the government, but party-appointed professors, teachers who make irregular appearances, student leaders, and more. If there is no timely remedy, it will mean the erosion of this country's educational standard.

Dinesh Tamang

1990 LYNCHING

The tragic killing of these policemen 32 years ago was tragic ('Mob, movement and mayhem', www.nepalitimes.com). And the government didn't take any action. If it had, it would also have to face the legal course for its undue misuse of state administration to subdue the movement.

Desh Ratna

- No one has the right to take another's life. These men were just doing their job.

Pan Chy

CAPTIVE ELEPHANTS

Captive elephants are dying because corruption is weakening regulatory bodies ('Making the lives of Nepal's captive elephants easier', Babu Ram Lamichhane www.nepalitimes.com).

Sanjay Lama

INFLUENCERS

I don't want to be an influencer but good luck to those who do ('So you want to become an influence', Anjana Rajbhandary, nepalitimes.com). I do feel sad for those who want to be influencers though.

Shivam Shrestha

MUNDUM TRAIL

Four years ago back in 2018, I was on the Mundum trail where I came upon 25 species of rhododendrons ('Off the beaten trek in Nepal', Ramesh Shrestha, nepalitimes.com).

Suraj Hazare Dahal

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Sajha e-bus service

by *Nepali Times*

Sajha Yatayat inaugurated its electric public transport service on 7 July with three buses on two routes in Kathmandu, operated by female drivers and conductors. The first bus was flagged off by founding chair of the public transport cooperative and former minister Biswa Bandhu Thapa, 95.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



State-sponsored economic crisis

by *Ramesh Kumar*

Nepal's poor are bearing the brunt of rising inflation, with things spiralling out of control. Political intervention could help ease the pressure, but the country's politicians lack the will and concentration to bring down the price hike. Read more at www.nepalitimes.com

Most popular on Twitter

Fueling an economic crisis

by *Sonia Awale*

As the Sri Lanka crisis spirals out of control, officials in Nepal say this country is not in the same debt trap. But there are many indications that the crisis is deepening. Join the discussion online, and read Editorial (*left*) about the Rastra Bank's role.

Most commented



Mushroom trekking in the Himalaya

by *Sarah Watson*

A group of Nepali and American mycologists are on a mushroom-finding expedition to Everest Base Camp. Solukhumbu's altitude variation creates niches for hundreds of unique tree species, making it a rich environment for the fungi. Our reporter joined the trek.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"The government should give space and importance to Sign language and promote it culturally. We should conduct more research in the development of the language and train teachers and interpreters." #repost



Vesa Nuorva @VesaNuorva

In Kathmandu, along the Jawalakhel roundabout, there is a bakery cafeteria, that employs sign language people, my favourite place in Kathmandu.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

#repost "Tri-Chandra belongs to no one, no one thinks it belongs to them anymore." As students call on the government to #SaveTriChandra, see how the state of Nepal's oldest college has been a symbol of neglect and apathy.



Ar Ar @AmulyaSir

Trichandra college has been in the news for all the wrong reasons: troublemaking, tyre-burning, student violence; not academic excellence of teachers, students or administration. Parasitising public tax money to build political leaders thru student violence, not educational reforms



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

State-sponsored Economic Crisis #Nepal's politicians lack the focus and will to bring down #inflation.



Arpan Shrestha @arpanshr

Nepal's politicians lack the understanding and the ability to mitigate the economic disaster the country is staring at.



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RONB's media model, decade in

The rise and rise of Routine of Nepal Banda, while Nepal's mainstream press struggles to survive

● Nobel Rimal

A Facebook page started by a student to inform citizens about power cuts and political shutdowns has in 11 short years grown into Nepal's most popular media enterprise.

At a time when the mainstream press and digital portals struggle to survive, Routine of Nepal Banda (RONB) is not only a vital source of information for millions of Nepalis in the country and the diaspora but even makes money while doing so.

Victor Paudel had just finished his SLC exam in 2011 at a time of unstable coalition politics and when parties would routinely enforce

nationwide shutdowns. So, he opened the RONB Facebook page to provide the public information about the strikes, and its effect on ordinary citizens.

It was an instant hit, and the bilingual page became a go-to source of information not just on shutdowns, but also loadshedding timetables, resource for patients seeking blood donors, and even an effective lost-and-found platform for missing passports and other valuables.

RONB's followers grew exponentially in 2015 after the earthquake, when hundreds of

thousands of families spent months in tents and found the Facebook site a prompt and credible resource readily available on their mobiles. It got another boost in the past two years of lockdowns, when home-bound Nepalis gravitated by the thousands to its Facebook page for the latest information on the pandemic.

Today, RONB has 3.4 million followers on Facebook, 1.1 million on Instagram, nearly 475k followers on Twitter, and his TikTok posts regularly get half a million views. It also has a YouTube channel and a homepage that looks

more like a regular media portal. RONB is now registered as a private limited media company, and has spawned many imitators.

RONB perfected a formula of targeting Nepali youth with mostly user-generated content that is relevant and reliable, and complementing the reach of the mainstream press with photo, video and text submissions by thousands of citizen journalists all over the country.

The brand's rapid rise was possible because of the spread of mobile data connectivity in Nepal. The number of Facebook users in

Nepal has expanded from barely 1.2 million in 2011 to nearly 13 million today, although growth has slowed as users migrate to TikTok and YouTube. More than 90% of Nepalis today own mobiles, and 67% smartphones.

RONB was not an overnight phenomenon: it has taken a decade of curating the content for positivity, relevance and credibility. Users prefer its snapshots of Nepali life and its interactive nature. Most posts have thousands of comments, and the sites look like a constant conversation in the Nepali public sphere.



prabhu BANK

Touristanbul is back

Turkish Airlines is back with its popular 'Touristanbul' package which provides complimentary city tours of Istanbul to international transit passengers. There are six different tours



a day under the offer, and passengers with connecting time between 6-24 hours in Istanbul Airport can discover historical and cultural wonders in the capital city in a guided tour before the next leg of their flights. Since 2019, 349,738 travellers have had the chance to discover Istanbul with Touristanbul, but it was suspended following the Covid-19 pandemic. The flag carrier expects some 60,000 passengers to benefit from Touristanbul privilege until the end of this year.



Everest Bardia

Everest Bank has inaugurated its new branch at Rajapur, Bardia. The bank has now 117 branches across the country.



Global IME interaction

Global IME bank organised an interaction program in London on opening a foreign currency account with Nepali banks, and foreign investments in Nepal. Through a foreign currency account, customers are able to withdraw money when needed, invest in Nepal, and spend money through Visa and Master cards. The presentation also centred on foreign currency accounts and how foreign investments help the country's foreign exchange reserves that have been decreasing lately.

Ncell pack

Ncell launched the 'Double Majja Pack' where customers can have 5GB data pack of 7 days at Rs125. If a customer subscribes to it again, the data service they get is doubled to 10GB. The pack is valid for 28 days maximum.



Nabil acquires NBB

Nabil Bank has completed the acquisition of Nepal Bangladesh Bank, receiving all capital and financial responsibilities, and assets and liabilities. The 'A' grade



banks reached an agreement with the swap ratio of 100:42. The acquisition was made with the permission from Nepal Rastra Bank. This now makes the Nabil Bank the largest financial institution in the country.

GWN service facility

GWN-Nepal has started building its after-sales service facility in Chakupat, Lalitpur which will follow GWN's global standards, covering 15,000 sq ft, and will service more than 600 vehicles per month.



Daraz summit

Daraz held its first annual summit last week with panels attended by experts to discuss business and e-commerce in Nepal, the blending of marketplace and commerce for digital economy and uplifting communities. Speakers included Ganesh Prasad Pandeya from the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Baikuntha Aryal from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, and Kewal Bhandari from the National Planning Commission.

Kora Challenge

The 12th edition of Nepal's biggest cycling festival is being held on 16 July with 4,000 cyclists taking part from 14 locations within the country and four from outside. Turkish Airlines is the airlines partner of



the event and will be sponsoring a photo contest 'CLICK2WIN' for both professional and amateur photographers. Whoever draws the most views online will get a free ticket to Istanbul. See also page 8.



the making

The RONB sites are especially popular among overseas Nepalis, who do not want to be overwhelmed with information overload, and prefer the news in easy-to-digest snippets. Feedback in the comments section often addresses Victor Paudel with the intimate “रुटिने दाइ”.

“For the past ten years, I have associated Routine of Nepal Banda with factual news,” says Avishek Bist, an engineering student in the UAE. “I know that this page takes its content seriously.”

Users also seem to like its positive take on happenings in Nepal, at a time when much of the mainstream press is filled with news of corruption in high places, political intrigue and cynical op-eds. While the legacy media’s social media posts with links to stories may get a few hundred likes if they are lucky, RONB’s uploads regularly hit tens of thousands of likes and shares.

RONB has seen a steady increase in its following ever since it started, and it does not show any signs of stopping, according to socialblade.com. After ignoring it for a decade, Nepal’s business community, advertisers and politicians finally appear to be taking notice of its reach. RONB is now monetising its content, and accepts product placements through native advertising, although Victor Paudel has said in interviews that he is selective about brands that he promotes to ensure quality and reliability. The language also avoids hard sell, and most paid posts are subtle and read like regular content.

Politicians also appear to have taken notice. Much of the success in mobilising young voters in Kathmandu to elect rapper-engineer Balen Shah as mayor has been attributed to video posts from his campaign trail. Past RONB posts on its Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube accounts show that the site actively promotes independent mayoral candidates like Balen Shah and Harka Sampang in Dharan.

Nepal’s mainstream parties appear worried about the rise of the independents in local elections, and the impact this is having on provincial and federal elections in November. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba’s wife Arzu last month accused RONB of being in Balen Shah’s payroll.

“How much did Balen Shah pay RONB for publicity on Facebook?” she asked at a rally of the youth wing of her ruling Nepali Congress party.

Nepali Times tried to reach out to Victor Paudel about these allegations, but did not receive an answer till press time. A review of RONB posts in the past weeks have scant mention of some of the blowback that Mayor Shah has been getting for the eviction of sidewalk

vendors, a video clip of his slurred speech at a recent function, and his controversial announcement to erect a statue of fellow rapper, the late Yama Buddha.

RONB appears to be doing a delicate balancing act to ensure revenue without sacrificing the credibility that has given it enormous following. Now that RONB is a media company, critics say, it would be advisable to stick to the strict separation of paid content and news.

In a country with low media literacy like Nepal, paid content on Facebook can easily be mistaken for news, like a recent sponsored post on RONB promoting a local college for its outstanding results.

However, it is a case of letting those without sin cast the first stone. Nepal’s legacy press often mixes advertising with news, and there have been complaints of extortion by mainstream journalists threatening public figures with damaging content.

There are also positive outcomes from RONB posts. Avinash Gyawali’s career took off when he was barely 18 after his photo appeared on a congratulatory post in 2018. “Suddenly, my friends and family treated me like a celebrity, I was getting calls from distant relatives congratulating me for simply appearing on the Facebook page,” he said in an interview.

As part of its positive news slant, RONB regularly features inspirational people like NEA’s Kulman Ghising, or posts heart-warming profiles of local tea-sellers. However, questions arise when it carries upbeat posts like a recent one about about Gopal Hamal being an ‘inspirational businessman in politics’.

Victor Paudel has said in interviews that he “triple-checks facts”, and it is indeed this careful fact-checking of user-generated content that has earned RONB its loyal following for accuracy. It will be interesting to see how RONB’s need to monetise will sit with its emphasis on credible information.

RONB has a successful business model because of extremely low overheads, with Paudel reportedly still doing most of the uploading himself with a small team, while revenue from paid posts, sponsored content, Google AdSense and other social media income keep rising. So much so that Routine of Nepal Banda now regularly sponsors IT events, provides scholarships to students and donates to a charity for treatment of burn patients.

We may have to go no further than the way legacy media has tried to balance sponsored content with news to find out how RONB will handle its future role in Nepal’s cybersphere. 🇳🇵

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TOGETHER AHEAD

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Nepal's pavilion afloat in Venice

Nepali artists challenge the exoticised vision of a Himalayan haven at the Venice Biennale

● Ashish Dhakal

Through the windows of a traditional Venetian building, one catches a glint of bronze. Drawing closer, it begins to take shape: a dramatic knot of hands and feet, in various *mudra*, with coils curling around and through them. It floats in mid-air, like a yellowish-red mass of cloud – defying gravity, defying expectations.

Muted Expressions is one of the three components of the inaugural Nepal Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale this year. Further in is a loom installation *Entangled Thread* which weaves together the rich stories and languages of the artisans behind Nepali rugs and textiles. Then in the back is *Views of Luxation*: 24 canvases that together show a fragmented Garuda – a playful spin on iconography with frames that hold eyes, limbs, beaks, a vajra, all in a puzzling order.

Together, the pavilion is titled 'Tales of Muted Spirits – Dispersed Threads – Twisted Shangri-La', curated by Sheelasha Rajbhandari and Hit Man Gurung, and exhibited by artist Ang Tsherin Sherpa. The project is co-commissioned by Nepal's Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, the Nepal Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) and the Siddhartha Arts Foundation, with lead global support from the Rubin Museum of Art in New York.

The ongoing Biennale is hosting 202 exhibitions, and Nepal is among the 82 countries to have national shows.

"Ours is a modest pavilion in comparison to other countries, many of whom have permanent pavilions in Venice," says Chancellor of NAFA, Kanchha Kumar Karmacharya. "Regardless, it is a matter of great pride that Nepal could participate this year. We feel that our pavilion was able to represent the state and history of Himalayan art."

In 2019 Nepali art was also featured at the Weltmuseum in Vienna, one of the most renowned ethnographic museums in the world. This was a first-of-its kind exhibition to bring the best of Nepali contemporary and traditional art to the global audience, and the first major exhibition of Nepali art outside Nepal, showcasing 100 artworks by 37 artists, including Ang Tsherin Sherpa.

"And because Venice is close by, we also got the opportunity to go to the Biennale that year," says Sherpa.

There were several first-time pavilions that year, from Pakistan, Ghana, Madagascar and Malaysia. "We wondered how we could possibly have Nepal participate in the Biennale, especially as it would shed a huge spotlight on the Nepali art scene," Sherpa says of the time.

But Sherpa was also aware that it would be difficult to get funding domestically. Given that art is not often prioritised, he was not sure the government would be willing to



Entangled Thread. The loom is a 60-year-old original from Chyalsa in Phaplu of the Solukhumbu region.



Ang Tsherin Sherpa. Behind him hangs *Muted Expressions*.

set aside a budget for the project.

In Spring 2021, Sherpa and his gallerist Fabio Rossi approached the Rubin Museum in New York where, back in 2010, he had had his first international exhibition. Sherpa himself was also appointed to the Rubin Museum Board of Trustees on 28 June 2022.

Says Jorrit Britschgi, the executive director of Rubin: “When we heard of the project, we realised that it aligned with what we are trying to do as an organisation, to further the understanding of and to promote Himalayan art.”

The objective of the pavilion is not about a single artist getting the spotlight. With focus on collective memory and the rejection of the fetishisation of a spiritual highland, it is rather that Nepal, as a centre of art, the confluence of multiple ethnicities, Indigenous cultures and histories, take ownership of its voices and identity.

“The driving question behind the pavilion was what story we wanted to tell about Nepal, and from what angle,” explains Sherpa. “Wherever we are today is rooted in the past.”

Indeed, contemporary and traditional art forms co-exist, reacting to one another. To this effect, Sherpa collaborated with local artists Vijay Maharjan, his team, Mt Refuge, Asha Rai and Sunil Bahadur Moktan, to create, with curators Rajbhandari and Gurung, a striking response to the contradictory conceptualisation of Nepal, challenging the stereotype of it being both an impoverished backwater and the Shangri-La.

In the last few decades, Sherpa adds, the artwork, metal craft, wood carvings have all been commodified and collectively termed as ‘handicraft’ and ‘souvenirs’. “But that is not who we are, and even though these industries have economic value, that is not what our art is limited to,” he says.

So, Sherpa worked with sculpture, metal, painting and weaving, which complete the Pavilion; although he was unable to add wood-carvers due to the tight schedule.

But paperwork and bureaucratic dillydallying were not all the challenges. How would they transport a 214 x 68.5 x 61cm bronze sculpture all the way to Venice? Or the 60-year-old traditional loom and tools originally from Chyalsa in Phaplu? Even the canvases would not be easy cargo.

“Further, our space was in an old house where we could not add nails to the walls,” adds Sherpa. “But we were lucky that the place we found looked exactly like a house in Nepal, with exposed bricks and everything. People thought we had designed it ourselves,

and this worked really well with the works on display as well.”

Britschgi agrees: “I think the curators have come up with a great way to display the works and collateral materials in space to highlight the context of the project.”

The venue is a strategic choice as well, on one of the main access points between the two foci of the Biennale: the Venice Giardini and the Arsenale – where visitors passing between the two locations are most likely to see the Nepal Pavilion.

“The variety of objects shown directly relates to the diversity and richness of art practices in Nepal,” Beatriz Cifuentes Feliciano, assistant curator of international art at Tate Modern in London told *Nepali Times*. “This is an important introduction to the arts of Nepal for those who might not know the country’s heritage and current artistic trends in detail. For those more familiar, it is a great showcase of the high-quality artworks being produced in Nepal.”

She adds, “The visual vocabulary shared across the artworks is unique to the Himalayan region, and, as such, Nepal has a fantastic opportunity through this Pavilion to capture international audiences hungry to learn.”

This is in line with the concept of the pavilion and speaks to the interest in decolonisation of the artistic canon, moving away from the Euro-centric view of art and art history.

Chancellor Karmacharya also noticed that walking around Venice he was reminded of the narrow streets of Bhaktapur and centres like Indra Chok or Mangal Bazar – except for the canals.

He says: “One finds art in every corner in Venice, on every wall, even between houses over the canals. In Nepal we need to come up with a mechanism, from the government and the community, to support and appreciate our artists in the country, and showcase their work.”


At the 60th La Biennale di Venezia in two years’ time, Sherpa hopes more Nepalis will take the initiative and participate. He says art is not just for an artist, but also the community. 🇳🇵

Nepal Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia
Sant’Anna Project Space One
Castello 994
Fondamenta Sant’Anna
30122 Venice, Italy.
On View till 27 November 2022
Open Tuesday through Sunday, 11AM to 7PM.



Views of Luxation

EVENTS



Beginners' yoga
Learn basic yoga poses in detail and increase your knowledge of asanas and body alignments.
17-22 July, Sooriya Wellness and Yoga Centre, Lazimpat, 9818481972

Cycling festival
Head over to Patan for Kora challenge this Saturday and cycle to help raise funds for a special cause. Also happening: 'CLICK2WIN', a professional and amateur photo competitions by Turkish Airlines to win free tickets to Istanbul.
16 July, 7am onwards, Patan Darbar square


MoNA exhibition
Visit the exhibition of masterpieces by artists Sushila Singh and Raj Prakash Man Tuladhar at the Museum of Nepali Arts, spanning the length of their careers so far. The showcase features paintings, ceramics and installations.
17-30 July, Thamel, (01) 4700820

Girls in STEM
Hear women speakers talk about women in STEM in Nepal, and share stories from their journeys.
17 July, 10am onwards, Shantinagar Gate, New Baneshwar



Labim Bazaar
Shop local at the Saturday Labim Bazaar. Buy baked goods, meals, handicrafts and clothes from over 80 vendors.
15 July, 10am-8pm, Labim mall, Lalitpur, 9861119954

DINING



Anatolia
Anatolia's Indian and Turkish dishes are packed with spices and an exquisite assortment of flavours. From the Mutton Kofta Curry to the Baklava, the dishes will keep one wanting more. All the food is halal.
Thamel, (01) 4258757

MUSIC

RHCP Tribute
Mark this Friday with a special Red Hot Chili Peppers tribute show in Thamel.
15 July, 8pm onwards, Titos Pub, Thamel, 9851275099



Ankita Pun x Mitsu
Celebrate Friday night with singer Ankita Pun and special guest Mitsu. Tickets at Rs500.
15 July, 8pm onwards, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel (01) 5524860

Tasty Trio
End the weekend with a fun performance from Tasty Trio. Call for details.
17 July, Beers N' Cheers (01) 5524860



Cobweb
Head over to the live performance by Cobweb this weekend. Book your tables.
16 July, 7pm onwards, Uptown Jhamsikhel (01) 5409070

Monsoon music
Enjoy musical performances by Albatross's Diwash Gurung.
22 July, 5pm onwards, Ai-La lounge, Kumaripati



Blenders
Have a refreshing bottle of milkshake at this milkshake bar. Their exciting flavours will keep one coming back for more. And the cute light-bulb shaped glass bottle are completely recyclable.
City Centre, Kamal Pokhari, 9851219100

Achaar Ghar
Missing the taste of home-cooked meals and the various choices of pickles prepared using recipes passed down from generations? Achaar Ghar has you covered.
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5541952

GETAWAY

The Fulbari Resort
With its distinctive architecture, the Fulbari Resort offers a unique space in Pokhara, perfect to unwind and relax. Don't miss their unparalleled spa amenities.
Pokhara, (061) 432451

Bandipur Safari Lodge
While Bandipur is mainly known for its rich cultural heritage, it is also home to a wide variety of wildlife. So, go beyond the temples and explore the rich biodiversity of the town with the Bandipur Safari Lodge.
Bandipur, 9449597880



Megghauli Serai
Relax with fine dining and wildlife safaris in Chitwan at Taj Safari's luxurious lodge.
Chitwan National Park, 9851218500

Grand Norling
Here's a calm and relaxing hotel for you. Enjoy the spacious bedroom with adjoining bathroom, a large balcony overlooking of the golf course. Don't forget the beautiful gardens and the surrounding wildlife, the monkeys and the deer herds.
Gokarna, (01) 4910193



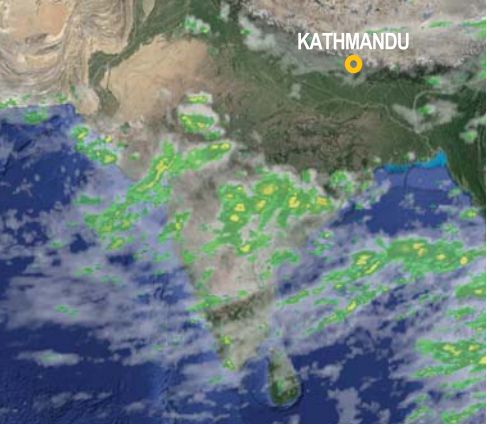
Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur
This is a Newa-style boutique hotel that incorporates the rich art and architecture of the ancient city of Bhaktapur. Not removed from the capital but far enough for a rejuvenating holiday.
Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur, (01) 6611628

Baker's Den
Is a loved one's birthday coming up? Or are you craving a just-because cake? Order from Baker's Den. Also available are freshly baked doughnuts, muffins and breads.
(01) 4416560, (01) 4411886



Dhokaima Café
Don't know what you want for dinner? Try the tender chicken breast marinated with herbs and grilled, served with spinach sauce, corns and salad on the side: Chicken Florentine, only at Dhokaima.
Patan Dhoka, (01) 5522113

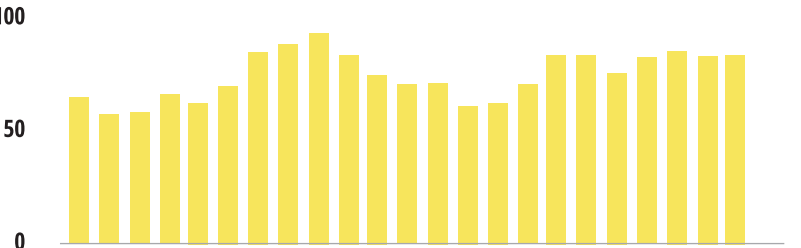
WEEKEND WEATHER



Monsoon Break
The hot sticky conditions will continue till at least Saturday as the monsoon is on a prolonged hiatus. The next frontal system is over central India with a trough, maybe making a leisurely entry into eastern Nepal by Sunday. Meanwhile, the high water vapour content means convection systems will dump a large amount of rain in short, sporadic bursts right across the Himalayan foothills, perhaps mostly in the evenings and night.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
30° 21°	30° 21°	29° 21°

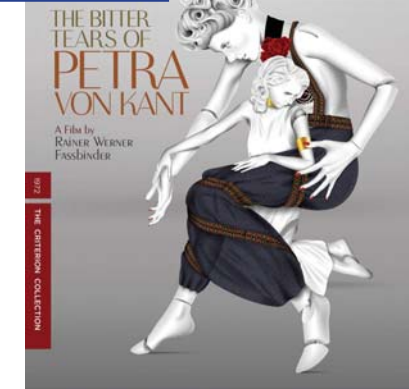
AIR QUALITY INDEX



Kathmandu AQI from 3PM 13 July - 1PM 14 July measured at US Embassy, Phora Darbar


Although we have to watch out for suspended particles smaller than 2.5 microns mostly from diesel vehicles and poisonous gases from petrol-burning two-wheelers, we also have to be wary of larger dust particles during the monsoon. These are above 10 microns from monsoon mud on the streets that dries up and is kicked up by passing buses. They can cause COPD and other respiratory ailments. With Covid cases rising, it is a good idea to be masked up indoors and outdoors.

OUR PICK



How do we feel about something entirely out-of-the-box this weekend? In the early 1970s, writer-director Rainer Werner Fassbinder was inspired by American melodramas of Douglas Sirk to begin working in a new, more intensely emotional register. The result: *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, which balances a realistic depiction of tormented romance with an exquisitely claustrophobic staging reminiscent of experimental theatre. A classic not to be missed by any cinéophile, *Petra von Kant* is an unforgettable, unforgiving dissection of the imbalanced relationship between a haughty fashion designer and a beautiful but icy ingenue — based, in a sly gender reversal, on the Fassbinder's own desperate obsession with a young actor. The full-throttle performances by an all-female cast are led by Margit Carstensen, Hanna Schygulla and Katrin Schaeke.

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	कोभिड-१९ खोप	कोभिड-१९ खोप
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Qatar urged to pay families of dead workers

Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other groups have called for FIFA, football's international governing body, and the Qatar government to stop abuse of migrant workers while preparing for the 2022 World Cup.

Rights groups are especially concerned about the unexplained deaths of workers — an average of three coffins arrive at Kathmandu airport every day on planes ready to take more Nepali migrant workers to the Gulf and other countries.

This month HRW accompanied the body of a Nepali worker who had died in Qatar from Kathmandu airport to his grieving family.

There are drivers especially appointed to take the coffins home.



SHANKAR DAHAL

The frequent arrival of bodies at Kathmandu airport, usually long after midnight, means the drivers are busy round the clock on the final journey of the workers across Nepal's difficult terrain and rough mountain highways.

"Sometimes there are so many cases that we have to rush back to the capital as soon as we drop off one coffin for the next delivery," one driver told an HRW team.

Over long hours on the road, family members recount their tragedies. Each story is different, but share a disbelief over what happened and uncertainty about their future without a breadwinner.

Rights groups have started a campaign #PayUpFIFA to make

the football governing body more accountable to what happens to workers.

FIFA has said it is "currently looking into compensation mechanisms" for migrant workers who suffered workplace injury or death.

An initial inquiry into the repatriation process for deceased migrant workers shows that Qatari authorities, along with governments in Nepal and elsewhere, have records that can be used to develop this compensation mechanism.

For families, the sudden, premature and uncertain passing of a loved one abroad is shattering. But mourning a family member who has passed away in another country

means immediately dealing with a slew of administrative challenges to bring them home.

Documentation requirements for the repatriation of a migrant worker's body vary by country, but broadly include: power of attorney or consent from the legal heir, a death certificate, a police report, a medical report, an airway bill, an embalming certificate, and a No Objection Certificate from relevant origin country embassies.

There are many questions to investigate regarding the unexplained deaths of thousands of migrant workers, and a place to start could be the data bases of countries like Qatar that employ them. HRW says this data could be a critical starting point as FIFA looks into compensation mechanisms. 🇳🇵

ALL-NEW H5

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*17123*22#



A healthy, diverse natural forest in Chitwan with three vegetation layers.



Eucalyptus plantation in an otherwise natural forest in the Tarai.



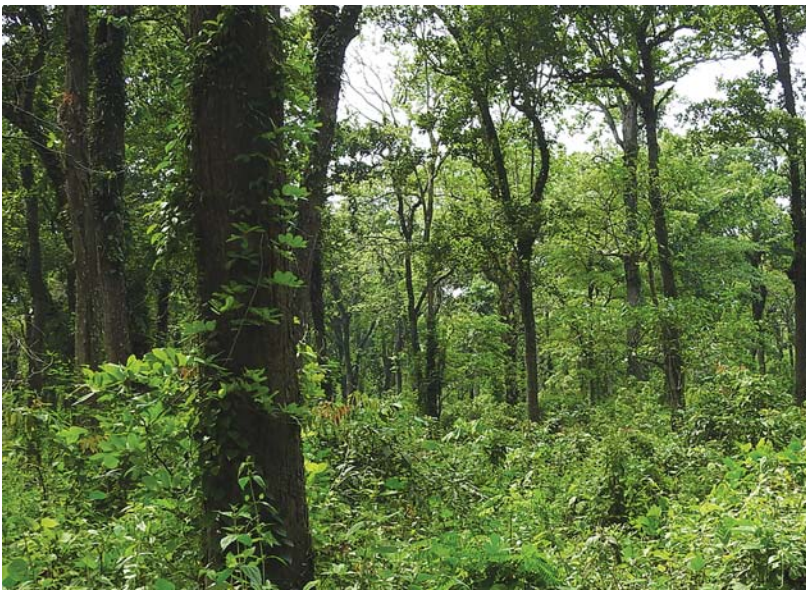
An old growth and degraded *sal*/forest in Chitwan's Barandabhar.



An old growth *sal*/forest that is devoid of undergrowth.



A *simal*/silk cotton tree in Chitwan laden with epiphytes in its trunks.



A biodiversity-rich mixed forest in Jalthal of Jhapa with rich undergrowth.



A monoculture-like successional forest in Jalthal, Jhapa.

Nepal's Tarai forests are the nation's natural treasure trove, not a timber mine

The Soul of Sal

● Lila Nath Sharma

It was a sunny afternoon in December in 2018. I was sitting on a pile of logs at the Janakalyan Community Forest Office in Nawalparasi, waiting for its chair Kabiram Bhandari. I had just finished a three-day survey in the forest that his community had protected since 1996.

It had not been easy to formally manage and protect a forest on which villagers depended for fodder and fuel. At that time, the forest was severely degraded due to illegal felling, encroachment and wildfires.

It took Bhandari, with support from the District Forest Office (DFO), twenty years to formally hand over the management of the forest to the local community. The logging mafia was livid, and he got multiple threats.

With the declaration of the community forest, encroachment stopped, logging declined, villagers collectively controlled wildfires, and underserved communities at the edge of the jungle were provided access to forest products.

Women and Indigenous groups were represented in forest management, local institutions were strengthened, and revenue from the sale of forest products were channelled into maintaining roads, water supply and supporting schools. A forest is not just a clump of trees to count and measure their girth in cubic feet, and convert that at prevailing hardwood timber prices into rupees. A forest is a social, ecological and evolutionary organism. Instead of counting trees in forests, my training in biodiversity made me count the number of species: how many of these are rare and threatened species of plants or animals? How many are non-native?

The condition of a forest is different depending on what parameters we use to examine it. Tree data within a forest is therefore a manifestation of national priority of community forests, and, in this case, a report card for the effort of people like Kabiram Bhandari in Nawalparasi – and the paradoxical goals of protected and unprotected forests in Nepal.

To protect, but how?

Nepal's community management of forests started with a few pilot projects in the late 1970s, and was soon replicated nationwide in later years. It has since been widely hailed as a model of forest protection and biodiversity conservation.

However, the protectionist

approach to forest management is also biased in favour of high value species to the detriment of varieties that are deemed or perceived to have an inferior value.

The Dipad Community forest in Makawanpur district had recently been subjected to the much contested concept of 'scientific forest management'. The custodians of the community forest regarded its shrubs, vines and climbers as not being 'good' for the forest. In fact, the undergrowth in this 'scientifically managed' forest was made up of only *sal* seedlings and saplings.

Further east, the Jalthal Community Forest of Jhapa district looked more like a monoculture plantation of *sal* trees. "See, there are no bushes, no thorns," said the management committee's Chiranjibi Poudel. Be it Nawalparasi, Makawanpur, Jhapa or other community managed forests of Nepal's Tarai, the story is the same – the drive to protect *sal* at the cost of other species. There were fewer tree species with higher commercial value in them.

In the Nawalparasi forest, for example, of the 141 tree trunks I measured, 133 were of *sal*. The other eight species were *badkamle*, *kyamuna*, *siris* and *putali kath*. *Sal* makes up 94% of the species also in other Tarai community forests, which are devoid of shrub or liana.

The Jalthal Community Forest in Jhapa is a rectangular block 10 km long and 5.5 km wide, spanning about 6,000 hectares and located at the lowest elevation in Nepal. Jalthal is currently being managed by 22 community forest user groups and has biodiversity that is disproportionate to its physical area.

Jalthal appears at first glance to be well conserved by communities. Encroachment by squatters and influential people has been stopped. Tree density has increased, with thicker canopy cover. There are fewer forest fires, poaching of wildlife and timber have been controlled. Collection of fuel and fodder is regulated, and revenue from the forest is invested in inclusive local development.

The downside is that forest biodiversity has not been adequately protected, and degradation has continued. Invasive plants are affecting the indigenous vegetation of which there are only a handful of mature individuals left. The critically endangered pangolin is still being illegally hunted. Community forest management does not adequately consider these biodiversity aspects of protection.

The very name Jalthal implies that the forest has wetlands within

it, but not much priority is given to protecting these water bodies which support biodiversity. Wild stands of *latahar* tree found in Eastern Nepal and eastward up to Malaysia are being depleted, with an absence of its sapling layer.

Tree density has increased, but with an overwhelming share of *sal*. The forest is therefore homogenising. Even old growth stands of *sal* have been modified to make them look like a plantation forest. Healthy forests are supposed to be mixed species, but the story of Nepal's community forestry is one of selective protection of certain species to the detriment of others.

A clean monoculture forest that looks like a plantation of exotic species is not what a community forest is supposed to be. Local people rely on forests daily for diverse products, with fodder being the most important. On typical day this spring, more than 2,000 people entered the Jalthal forest mostly for fodder and firewood.

In the monsoon, over 500 people visit the forest every day just to collect fiddlehead fern and other leafy vegetables. We found that people entered the forest for 12 types of products ranging from mushrooms to medicinal plants, edibles to timber.

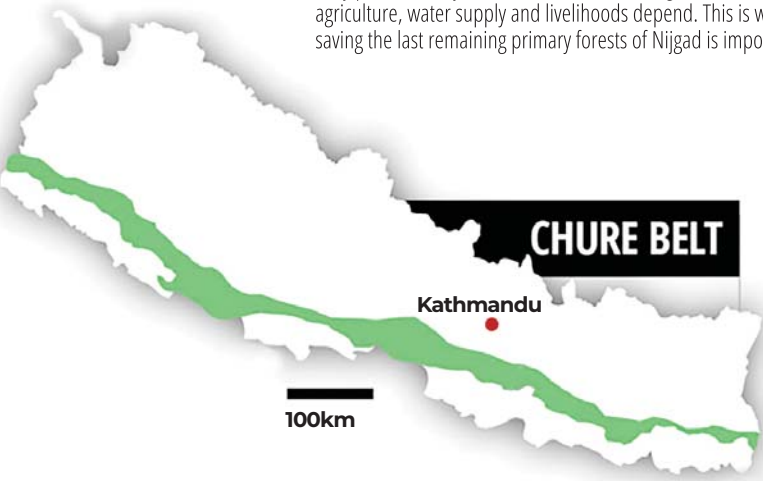
A 'scientifically managed' forest does not support these needs, and prioritises timber species for special protection. Liana like *bhorla* and *bebre lahara* and small trees like *khasreto* are not seen much anymore. Important fodder trees like *kutmero*, *sadan* and *khanyu* have declined. In fact, besides *sal*, there is a proliferation of eucalyptus and teak. Community forests are designed to support local needs, while managing and improving the vegetation. Given their multifunctional nature, Nepal's community forests were supposed to promote diversity and coexistence of multiple species. Higher diversity entails wider ecosystem services and resilience.

Managing forests only for timber overlooks the dependence of local people for a wider spectrum of ecosystem services. Besides timber, high value introduced medicinal plants are also the focus of forest management, like lemongrass and citronella, turmeric oil to bio briquette, rhododendron juice to paper plates.

Promoting enterprise and generating income is not a bad thing in itself, but this cannot be done at the expense of protecting an Indigenous forest. I have seen a dozen or so community forests where local people have benefited from these new forest products, but only from daily wages, not enough

Seeing the forest and trees

A native forest is more than just its trees. It's value cannot just be measured in cubic feet of timber. The ecological value of a living forest is many times more than its economic value. They provide ecosystem services to a wider region on which agriculture, water supply and livelihoods depend. This is why saving the last remaining primary forests of Nijgad is important.



to fulfil their traditional needs. Promotion of fodder trees, for example, would have been much more useful.

Our definition of a forest seems to be restricted to having as many high value trees and medicinal plants as possible. There is rarely any attention paid to preserving biodiversity. The status of a forest does not just depend on a tree census, but past management of community *sal* forests focused mainly on maintaining or increasing tree density and cover. A ‘successful’ forest was one with increased density of *sal*, overlooking the forest as a complex ecosystem.

Preferential protection of *sal* is an outcome of our policies and worldview on forests that treat a forest only as an economic resource, not an ecological treasure. The result is promotion of only high value species, be it timber or herbs, overlooking the wider spectrum of forest ecosystem services.

Hariyo Ban Nepal ko Dhan was a popular slogan in Nepal’s forestry development in the 1980s. The word *dhan* ended up monetising forests. A new motto now is *Ban Marfat Samridi* (prosperity through forests) and this is the thinking that has also turned forests into a resource to be mined for timber.

Nepal’s decade-long scientific forest management initiative was finally abandoned last year, but not before it hailed regeneration density in logged areas as a success, even when it was found that the original forest had been replaced by *sal* saplings. Treated blocks were poorer in species diversity compared to the original forests.

The original conservation-oriented approach of forest management in community forests focused on retaining trees, and increasing crown and tree density. But the increase in density of the most common structural species

was an outcome of the preferential protection by both Forest Department and user groups.

A native *sal* forest is truly diverse in its associated flora and fauna. Old growth forests are also rich habitats for birds, amphibians, reptiles and many insects like beetle and spiders. Old trees have cavities in the trunks and branches which provide shelter for animals. Higher up in the food chain are the bigger mammals. Diversity in vegetation entails diversity in fauna as well.

Nepal’s forests are multipurpose, and people depend on them for a range of direct and indirect products. A *sal* is itself a multipurpose tree. A mixed and diverse forest not only delivers multiple services we need, but also has higher resilience to cope with climate uncertainty and plays a vital role in meeting food security.

Today’s high value timber forest could not be further removed from the concept of what a natural forest should be. But it also has to be said that without community management, even these forests would probably be degraded and encroached.

Our forests need to reflect the need to adapt to the climate emergency, and not just meet the economic needs of communities and the nation. We should build on Nepal’s community forestry success to restore natural woodlands.

We therefore need to reimagine our forests. How an ecologist regards a forest is different from how an economist sees it. Nevertheless, sustainable forest management can balance diversity and meet the need for revenue.

This means conserving a forest with original biodiversity that also meets local needs. Such a forest would be diverse enough to sustain a wide spectrum of biota. Maintaining diversity does not cost more, in fact it protects Nepal’s natural wealth for this and future generations. 🇳🇵

Lila Nath Sharma has PhD in ecology from University of Bergen Norway and is with ForestAction Nepal.



A typical lithology of Chure Range in Sindhuli, which is made up of very soft and erodible sediments.

Chure landscape in Nepal is the home to many orchid species like this *Dendrobium aphyllum* at Jor Kalash of Ilam.



PHOTOS:ACHYUT TIWARI

Why is it vital to protect the Chure?

● Achyut Tiwari

The Chure or Siwalik Range is the first of several folds of mountains that rise from Gangetic plains up to the highest peaks in the world.

The Chure extends east-west for more than 1,600km from the Tista River, across Nepal, northwestern India, and into northern Pakistan, rising to an average elevation of about 1,000m.

In Nepal, the Chure hills cover about 13% of the country’s total area, and is geologically and ecologically fragile. It is rich in biodiversity and provides ecosystem services to millions of people in the Nepal Tarai and India.

Population growth and migration have reduced the Chure’s forest cover, with human encroachment, forest fires, sand excavation, stone quarries, all adding to the destruction.

The Nepal government launched the President’s Chure Conservation Program

in 2011 to protect this fragile landscape, with the Chure Tarai-Madhesh Conservation Development Board implementing various activities for its sustainable conservation and restoration.

The Chure started rising from the plains 40 million years ago as the Himalayan mountains were thrust upwards. The range varies in elevation and width, being narrowest and lowest in the east, and highest and broadest in the west.

In the east, the Chure directly adjoins the Mahabharat Range in some places, while further west it is often separated by broad valleys of the Inner Tarai (*Bhitri Madesh*). In some places, the Chure itself bifurcates into two ranges with valleys in between, like in Dang and Deukhuri.

The Chure is made up of soft, very erodible sediments that form gullies and sharp ridges. Because of its fragile geomorphology and lack of water the Chure was in the past sparsely populated with few settlements. But since the 1980s, there has been migration into the region leading to forests being converted to farms and pastures.

The Chure landscape in Nepal is the home to mega-fauna like the tiger, elephant, rhinoceros, wild buffalo and many other flagship species. The region is the home to over 41 species of mammals, 379 varieties of birds (43% of the total bird species in Nepal), 24 species of amphibians and 75 species of reptiles, 279 species of butterflies, and 104 species of fish.

There is now a network of protected areas in Tarai-Chure including the Kosi Tappu, Chitwan National Park, Bardia National Park, Parsa National Park, Banke National Park, Sukla Phanta as well as wildlife corridors linking them to conservation areas in the Mahabharat as well as in India. The Chure alone has dozens of the 118 ecological systems that have been identified in Nepal. The Chure’s fragile geology makes it prone to landslides, flood and erosion. But with the forest cover gone due to cultivation, settlements, wildfires and sand-boulder mining, it becomes even more vulnerable. All these factors are further exacerbated by the climate crisis leading to extreme weather.

The whole Nepal, including Chure, has a prolonged dry period lasting from September to June. Climate change has extended the drought, or brought excessive unseasonal rainfall. As it is, the monsoon rains are intense and tend to be even more destructive wherever the Chure is denuded.

Wildfires then destroy what is left of the vegetation, and are mostly human-induced. The protection and conservation of the Chure landscape is important not just for the people living there, but also because of magnified impact on farms and towns downstream. 🇳🇵

Achyut Tiwari is plant ecologist at Central Department of Botany, Tribhuvan University and recently conducted forest ecosystem assessment outside protected areas of Chure landscape in Nepal.

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Thanks to our elected leaders, we finally have a solution to the problem of the unspent development budget: build statues.

Great Leader Comrade Awesome got the ball rolling by garlanding a cement bust of The Late Dear Leader Prakash last week to commemorate his son's selfless devotion to the ruling family.

Not to be outdone, Mayor Balen declared that he would be erecting a statue of the late fellow-rapper Yama Buddha. This is what we need: leaders who think outside the box so that Kathmandu's streets can have more statues than potholes.

This action man is not shy about appearing inebriated and incoherent at public gatherings, or evicting tax-evading sidewalk vendors.

Seriously, us voters have to ask ourselves: are we going soft and losing the fire in our bellies? Are we slacking off, allowing lethargy and ennui to undermine the gains of the 2015 Federal Constipation? The answer to both questions is: "Umm, that's a thought."

How else can we explain all this public apathy and indifference, even when the grabberment wants to tax our Dubai shopping holidays? How come the prime minister is not incinerated in effigy? How come we don't see chukka jams, hurtalls and tod-fods?

There was an entire rush hour period on Monday evening when there were no demos at Banaswor Choke, I can't even remember the last time we had a nationwide bund, and no one blocked traffic with burning tyres at Maiti Ghar and made complete arsons of

themselves.

Not a single royal statue was vandalised, no government vehicle was stoned, and no one even bothered to block the Mahindra Highway for six hours when gas prices hit 199.

This just will not do. If we truly value our democracy and hard-won freedoms, we have to learn from our Sri Lankan comrades who stormed the presidential palace, took selfies in Rajapaksa's king-sized bed, worked out in his gym, and took a dip in the president's official pool.

And there you all are, sitting idly reading this column, and not bothering to gherao the prime minister's residence after Sunday was declared a working day again. Why is no one standing up for their rights by bringing the nation's capital to a grinding halt, stage relay hunger strikes, and fast unto death?

Are we going to let go of the gains of the 2006 Uprising so easily? How bad do things need to get before we get off our ifs and butt's? Will we allow the euphoria of democracy to evaporate so easily? Does god exist? Will the world end with a bang, or a whimper? What is the best cure for bromodosis? These are all vital questions if we are to protect our value-system and way of life.

Myself, I am going on a relay hunger strike until the Balenistas erect a statue of The Ass at Asan intersection.



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