



# KNOCK, KNOCK

Nepal's leaders show political promiscuity as the November elections near

● Shristi Karki

With federal and provincial elections barely three months away, Nepal's leaders are flirting with regional powers, exhibiting political promiscuity, and switching sides.

Maoist Centre leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal has made no secret of his intention to succeed Sher Bahadur Deuba as prime minister after November, and has been trying to ensure that his project has the green light from Beijing and New Delhi.

Just days after he met the visiting head of the International Liaison Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Liu Jianchao in Kathmandu, the Maoist chair jetted off on a previously unannounced three-day visit to India at the invitation of India's ruling BJP.

Dahal has been prime minister twice since the end of the conflict in 2006, and he has been forging party-to-party ties with both the CPC and BJP to assure the rulers of China and India that whatever the past, he will be a reliable partner.

"It is clear that he (Dahal) is impatient to be prime minister again, so he is pulling every lever for his political longevity," says political analyst Puranjan Acharya. "He probably clarified his position to Liu, and immediately went off to New Delhi to placate Indian leadership."

The CPC delegation also met Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Foreign Minister Narayan Khadka, Unified Socialist chair Madhav Nepal, as well as opposition leader K P Oli.

The Chinese may have carried back the message that full Communist unity may not

be possible before the November election, but having a 'Maoist' prime minister may not be such a bad idea.

While his meeting with the Chinese delegation may have been normal for a foreign delegation visiting Nepal, Dahal's visit to India on such short-notice was unusual.

Dahal met Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and the BJP party chief. But a breakthrough meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was cancelled.

Dahal's visit to Delhi coincided with the presence there of Arzu Rana Deuba, NC leader and the

wife of Prime Minister Deuba. The timing raised eyebrows in Kathmandu, and especially after he said in an interview that there was a pact with the NC to take turns being prime minister after November.

Immediately after his return from Delhi, Dahal met with his former nemesis Baburam Bhattarai, freshly ousted from his JSP. The former Maoist comrades have apparently been discussing the formation of a 'socialist front' for November.

Although an electoral alliance with the UML seems unlikely, Dahal has also met Unified Socialist chair Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jhala Nath Khanal and Bamdev Gautam of a new left party to discuss an electoral alliance.

"K P Oli stands in the way of a leftist alliance, and if he extends even the hint of an invitation, nobody should be surprised if Dahal dumps the Congress to jump at the chance of leading a Communist super-alliance," says Acharya.

Meanwhile, in the NC the rift between Deuba and leaders like Gagan Thapa and Shekhar Koirala is widening as the two have decided not to engage in a power sharing deal if the coalition wins a majority in the upcoming elections. This would mean that the NC would hold prime ministership for a full term after the elections.

Experts say it is clear that the decision of the NC to not pursue a power sharing deal is a result of the pressure on the prime minister from those outside Deuba's camp within the party.

"The NC's decision has foiled Dahal's plan, and he will now actively pursue a leftist alliance or a socialist front. But he has continued to say that any such alliance

**GEOPOLITICAL  
TUG-O-WAR  
OVER NEPAL**  
EDITORIAL  
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will not hinder the coalition in any way, so as to placate the NC," says Acharya.

The NC's Shekhar Koirala says his party made a mistake by encouraging its cadre to support other parties to the detriment of its own interests. He says: "We are discussing electoral alliances for November, but it should be done in such a way as to minimise losses for our party."

Dahal, meanwhile, has been coy in interviews about his prime ministerial ambitions. He seems impatient to lead the country once more, and he is trying to make sure that domestic dynamics and regional geopolitics will be conducive. 🇳🇵



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# Geopolitical tug-o-war over Nepal

Barely days after Pushpa Kamal Dahal met the visiting head of the International Liaison Department of the Communist Party of China, Liu Jianchao in Kathmandu, he was off to New Delhi.

The undisputed supremo of Nepal's Maoists has been known to play all sides before, but this puts his balancing act on a whole new level. It also shows that Nepal's giant neighbours are engaged in a tug-o-war as the country heads for federal and provincial elections on 18 November.

Ever since Nepal was founded as a nation state, the country had to do a tightrope between British India and the Chinese Empire. Recognising this, Prithvi Narayan Shah famously compared Nepal to a yam ensconced between two boulders, and laid out the doctrine of equidistance.

Inspired by Mao Zedong, Dahal took on the mantle of 'Prachanda' to wage an armed struggle that killed 17,000 Nepalis. At the time, Dahal paraphrased Nepal's founding king, to describe the country as a "dynamite between two boulders".

Here is a man who in 1998 declared a 'tunnel war' to prepare for an Indian invasion, but who spent eight of the ten war years at a safe house in a New Delhi suburb.

After the conflict ended in 2006, Dahal has been prime minister twice. The first time, he had to resign after barely a year in power after overstretching his hand in an unsuccessful bid to sack Nepal Army chief Gen Rookmangud Katuwal in 2009, and replace him with a yes-man.

It did not go unnoticed that President Ram Baran Yadav had to force him out after some critical late night intervention from New Delhi.

Last week's visit by Liu Jianchao and Dahal's sudden air dash to Delhi prove once more that Nepal's domestic politics is, more than ever, a reflection of regional geopolitics.

The Chinese, who had so far been content with letting Nepal languish in New Delhi's sphere of influence have, since Xi Jinping, been taking a keener interest in micro-managing Kathmandu's power corridors.

Beijing's real worry is not so much about India as it is heightened American activities in Nepal, mainly vis-a-vis Tibet. The active lobbying by the Chinese against the US-supported Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and lately the scrapped State Partnership Program (SPP) pointed to this.

The Chinese have openly expressed their desire for Nepal's Communist parties to

unite, and actually fulfilled that wish with the merger of the UML and the Maoists into the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) after the alliance's overwhelming victory in the 2017 election.

And when Dahal fell out with prime minister K P Oli and the power struggle threatened the NCP, Chinese Ambassador Hou Yanqi shuttled between the Oli and Dahal residences in Kathmandu to patch up their differences.

As it turned out, not only did the NCP split, but so did the UML, the MCC was ratified, and the ruling coalition in Kathmandu adopted a Indo-Western alignment.

This must have unnerved the Mandarins in Beijing, who did not have to send a high level party emissary just to feel the political pulse in Kathmandu. Liu Jianchao's main aim was to reforge Communist unity ahead of November, and do a repeat of 2017.

After all, the Maoists, UML and the Unified Socialists have been trying to suss things out through emissaries. So much so that it has sent off tremors within Nepali Congress (NC), where an anti-Deuba faction led by Shekhar Koirala and Gagan Thapa have been trying to get the party to contest elections on its own.

Ironically, Deuba's own position within his party is now dependent on the coalition staying intact. This in turn has made the NC almost a junior partner in the coalition, with Dahal asserting himself as heir apparent.

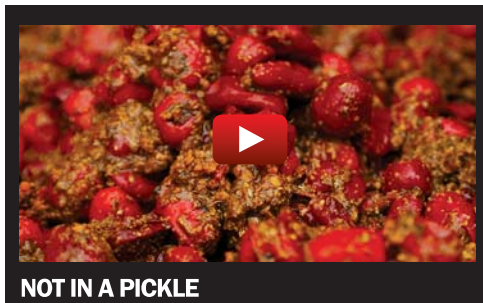
In a meaningful interview in Delhi with *Kantipur*, Dahal talked about meeting his 'old friend' in India's intelligence apparatus who is Prime Minister Modi's National Security Adviser, and hinted that he had blessings on a rotational prime ministership with Deuba — just as he had with Oli.

The danger in all this dalliance is that closer ties with India now means closer party-to-party ties with the BJP, and the prospect for instability in the Nepali polity that it entails.

All this comes as the Deuba-led coalition completes one year of misrule and miscues. It has outdone the K P Oli administration in pushing through ordinance after ordinance to amend constitutional provisions, has drafted a bill to grant further immunity from prosecution for war crimes among the Maoist militia and the government.

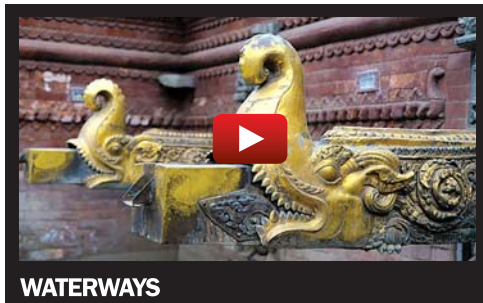
With these tectonic forces at play, the ruling class appears unable and incapable of arresting looming economic collapse.

## ONLINE PACKAGES



NOT IN A PICKLE

Parvati Giri from Tiltottama in Rupandehi married husband Bhes Raj at the age of 14. But at 37 she went back to school and now runs LaKaC pickles and makes Rs75,000 a month. She is also training others in pickle making. Get to know her success story. Read story online and watch the video on our YouTube channel.



WATERWAYS

Considered one of the greatest technological achievements of the Kathmandu Valley civilisation, *hiti* are traditional stone water spouts where drinking water flowed non-stop. Centuries after they were built, these systems still support the urban populations of Kathmandu Valley. Watch this episode on the Valley's ancient water system from the first season of Walkabout with Anil Chitrakar. Keep an eye out for the new season.

### ROUTINE OF NEPAL BANDA

We have to accept that the social media content reaches further than the print media ('RONB's media model, decade in the making', Nobel Rimal, #1120).

Pratik Gauchan

- Good and fair read. It would have been even better if Victor had spoken with *Nepali Times*.

Kashish Das Shrestha

- RONB has penetration, engagement and even trust and is the primary source of news because newsrooms don't do anything to game up for obvious reasons. Another example is HamroPatro.

Arpan Shrestha

- Good for RONB, but worrying to see many using it as their main news source.

Bibek Bhandari

- RONB is way better than traditional media outlets, and is the future, whether you like it or not.

Bull Nepse

- What's fascinating is how breaking news and goodnight posts coexist in the same RONB-verse, without diluting the brand. They are the people's page — with flawed English, Romanised Nepali, hearsay news, petrol price updates, celebrity buzz and all. Native advertising or paid posts aren't necessarily a bad business model, as long as they are transparently declared using appropriate labels and hashtags in the caption copy. RONB should start doing this to prevent losing audience trust.

Sanjaa Sah

### CENTRAL BANK

Knowing now what they should have known then, I doubt it will stop them enforcing further lockdowns and doing the same things when the next orders come ('Central role of the Central Bank', Editorial, #1120).

Aleksandr Verkovsyn

### MIDWIVES

Apparently nobody has time for rural maternal health. ('Midwives to the rescue in Nepal', Laxmi Tamang, www.nepalitimes.com). There's no infrastructure. With this and the non-existence of governing policies, the situation is going to get worse.

Keshav Kafle

### ENVIRONMENT

To politicians *Sal* forests are timber mines just like the rivers are a gravel mine ('Safeguarding the soul of *Sal*', Lila Nath Sharma #1120). Heck with the environment and the needs of the local people.

Roger Ray

- Who will protect it ('Why is it vital to protect the Chure?,' Achyut Tiwari, #1120)? Those responsible are steeped in corruption, and aid those exploiting the natural resources for personal gains rather than national requirements.

Lal Bahadur

- Please save the Chure, the Karnali River and protect the natural resources Nepal is gifted with. Greed is destroying our country.

Takeshi Okawara

### MUNDUM TRAIL

Loved reading this travelogue from Mundhum ('Off the beaten trek in Nepal', Ramesh Shrestha, pages 6-7). This will be the most popular trek of Eastern Nepal, we just need to keep it clean and upgrade the service. Let nature lead the change.

Trekking Trail Nepal

### ASS STATUE

God is in Delhi now kissing thieves and butts of the bigger gods ('Statue of The Ass', Ass, #1120)!

Krishna Joshi

Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Why is it vital to protect the Chure?

by Achyut Tiwari

Nepal's Chure Range has 118 ecological systems but its fragile geology makes it prone to landslides, floods, and erosion. And now with the forest cover gone due to settlements, wildfires, and sand mining, it has become even more vulnerable. Read the full report on nepalitimes.com

f Most reached and shared on Facebook



### Safeguarding the soul of *Sal*

by Lila Nath Sharma

Tara's *Sal* forests are the nation's natural treasure trove, not a timber mine. Managing forests only for logging overlooks the dependence of local people for a wider spectrum of ecosystem services. Visit nepalitimes.com for the story.

Most popular on Twitter



### RONB's media model, decade in the making

by 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. Routine of Nepal Banda can also make politicians win elections. Join the discussion online.

Most commented



### Nepal's pavilion afloat in Venice

by Ashish Dhakal

The Venice Biennale 2022 sees Nepali artists challenging the West's exoticised vision of a Himalayan haven. Nepal is among the 82 countries to have national shows at the Biennale until 27 November. Details at www.nepalitimes.com.

Most visited online page

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
While active cases are on the rise in #Nepal, hospitalisations are not, and infected individuals could be putting the elderly and those with co-morbidities at risk at home, or at work.

**Binda Magar @magar\_binda**  
COVID-19 cases increasing in Nepal. It is important to #Mask, #avoid #crowds and get #booster dose

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
The #monsoon may be taking a breather, but the Valley has been experiencing short and sharp showers. #Kathmandu Video: @SoniaAwale

**Ramu Sapkota @ramusapkota**  
A dream came true! Two-wheelers 'Nepali Paani Jahaaj'!

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Mal-governance

One of the lowest points during the decade-long Maoist conflict was the Deuba government's dissolution of elected councils at local and district levels. It took nearly two decades before another local election could be held in 2017.

In the absence of local representatives, the people felt disconnected from their leaders, affecting development and leading to inequitable distribution of basic needs including food, education, healthcare and drinking water.

Excerpts from the report published in *Nepali Times* issue #103 19-25 July 2002 exactly 20 years ago this week:

So, what the Maoists started with their destruction of one-third of all VDCs in the country, this government has finished off. It has gone ahead and done exactly what the Maoists wanted.

It dissolved elected councils at the village and district levels. That the government is legally entitled to take that decision is not the point. The point is that after dismantling parliament to save his own skin in response to an intra-party feud, prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has now



effectively dismantled democracy at the grassroots as well.

After the Congress split, this has not just become a partyless government, but a country without elected leaders (except the house speaker). And how can VDC secretaries run village councils when one third of them have fled because of Maoist threats?

The government has a lot of other options, the most logical being the legal extension of the term of local bodies by another year. Since local officials are so important at election time (for the wrong reasons)

Deuba kangresis probably think it will help them to have bureaucrats in charge. Such narrow, short-term thinking is just what we have come to expect from our politicians.

It is nothing new that state radio and television have become the blatant propaganda arms of the faction-in-power. We don't really need any more proof about the pettiness of our politicians, but recent testimonies to their petulance has crossed all norms of decency.

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

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PICTORAL NEPAL

# Sketching the chariot of the rain god

Sushila Singh reflects on the Machindranath chariot with the intense artistry of her line drawings

● Ashish Dhakal

For 19 days in May, artist Sushila Singh followed the Rato Machhindranath chariot, its construction from the ground up.

She sat, watching the locals gather material to build the *rath* and sketched the progress in real time, the chariot taking form in sharp, meticulously sketched black lines.

By the time *Bunga Dyo* Jatra was over, Singh had made 19 drawings, 16 of which are on display at the upcoming exhibition at the Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA).

Singh came to Pulchok from Baneswor every morning at around 5 before her two children were up.

"It was helpful that they didn't have school then," she quips. She would work for two to three hours before the sun got too warm, sometimes returning in the evenings to plan where she could sit and work the next day.

The series is reminiscent of the chronophotography, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century photography technique that captured multiple phases of motion, and prompts one to imagine the drawings placed side-by-side and then moved at lightning-speed.

The chariot of *Bunga Dyo* grows before the viewer's eyes: first the

wheels, then the wooden columns. Slowly the storeys add and the skeleton rises. Then comes the outer layer of green juniper and vines, which look like lines reached out to the heavens.

Sketched entirely in pen and ink, the drawings strip the *rath* off any ostentatiousness, presenting it in its essential form. In the shifting hues of a consistent palette, the audience notices how the shape, size and depth of the lines change according to the light, and where Singh must have sat when she made them.

The light is not exactly visible on the canvas, but Singh leaves clues. In one of the drawings, for example, a rope extends, curls and breaks. She explains, "I drew it as it appeared to me when the light hit it from behind."

In some ways, the gradual growth in the drawings is also reflective of Singh's own artistic journey, inviting the viewer to think about the dedicated creative process.

Like many artists, she too began drawing at a young age, making hills and mountains in school, and filling in the colours.

"I remember I used to make

postcards during Guru Purnima and other festivals myself and gift them to my teachers and friends," she says, but this did not necessarily mean that she knew she wanted to be an artist later in life: in fact, all she was certain about was that she did not want to do a 9-5 job.

In 2004, after completing her bachelor's in accounting, Singh joined Lalit Kala Campus for fine arts without telling anyone.

"Even then I did not know what I wanted to do," she recalls, a wide smile across her face, "but I enjoyed art school very much, and slowly, almost subconsciously, I became an artist."

Many art students begin with portraiture, and Singh's portraits were well-received in her family. Her parents, she recalls, did not force dreams and ambitions upon her. "They were pleased and encouraging," she says.

Then in 2011, she had a successful first solo exhibition at the Nepal Art Council — some pieces from the show will be displayed at MoNA as well.

These works are striking for their linework, and also the fact that Singh made the canvases herself,

unfolding the paper on a stretcher and then applying three layers of white texture.

But Singh's oeuvre is multimedia. She had in 2019 an exhibition showcasing her work on paper and with ceramics, 'Udaan, Beyond Bounds'.

Highlights of the exhibition were the iconic dream-like temple pagodas in black and orange strokes, with oblique finials, as though one were looking up at an exceedingly tall monument — and earned her a National Award.

She repeated the feat in 2021 with her brick installation at Gallery MCube, a section of which will be reproduced at MoNA.

She did learn to work with pencil in the beginning, but Singh now prefers to draw directly with pen and ink without outlining. But Singh enjoys this intense artistic experience: "I find that it helps me be more confident, and thoughtful."

Perhaps this is only fitting for an artist whose works reflect long periods of careful thinking and thorough patience, often accompanied by philosophical enquiries. "I am also the kind of

person who thinks about where these thoughts come from," Singh says laughing.

She recalls that during her work on the chariot of *Bunga Dyo*, she found parallels between the structure, the construction, and the different private and public persona of people.

"As in the case of the *rath*, we only ever see the outside, what's apparent, and very few of us pause to think about what's hidden," she says. "After all, the *rath* cannot stand unless it is one with the people and the people with each other."

The many layers of meanings and musings are characteristic of Singh's artwork, which become even more pertinent when one realises that no women participate in the construction of the rath, except as spectators or on a specific day when only women pull the chariot from Lagankhel to Thati.

In these 16 exquisite drawings, Sushila Singh has built her own chariot. 📌

*The exhibition is taking place alongside that of Raj Prakash Man Tuladhar at the Museum of Nepali Art, Thamel, 17-30 July 2022.*

## prabhu BANK

### Daayitwa Policy Dialogue

Daayitwa this week held a second Eco-talk policy dialogue titled Promoting Employment Opportunities to Retain Youth Labour Force in Nepal which brought together Gokarna Bista, Jiblal Bhusal, Amun Thapa, Moushumi Shrestha and



Kalpna Khanal. The talk discussed challenges and innovative ways of mobilising human resources while recommending parliamentary actions to promote employment opportunities to retain the youth labour force in Nepal.

### Tata Winger

Sipradi Trading has released the new Tata Winger B26 in Nepal. The 4WD vehicle comes with a 2.2 litre dicor engine and has features including an eco switch and gear shift adviser. The car also has an ABC, fire detection and suppression system and fog lamps.



### IME Euromoney

Global IME Bank has been given the Euromoney Award for excellence. Euromoney, launched in 1969, covers international cross-border capital markets. Global IME is the largest commercial bank in Nepal in terms of capital, network and earnings. IME Pay meanwhile has announced two winners of the scheme 'Booking tickets, win gold silver' for booking domestic flight tickets through the IME Pay wallet.

### Sanima Offers

Sanima Bank will be providing monthly interest on all outstanding accounts from the new fiscal year. The bank has also launched personal and institutional Dhamaka Fixed Accounts that will increase by five times in a minimum period. The bank also operates Remittance Dhamaka Fixed Account, Dhamaka Fixed Account and Corporate Dhamaka Accounts.

### Ncell Female Centre

Aligning with its mission of diversity, equity and inclusion, Ncell has started an all-female managed centre that provides customer services including general inquiry, SIM subscriptions and internet



from 9:30AM to 6PM. Customers can also upgrade their SIM cards to 4G, change their SIM and mobile number, modify CUG numbers, get international roaming, recharge, and make bill payments. Those who recharge from the Maharaiganj Center also get a bonus recharge of Rs50 for one week.

### Incessant and Emmys

Three of the shows Nepali animation company Incessant Rain Studios was involved in VFX works are nominated for this year's Emmy Awards. *Stranger Things* and *Lost in Space 2* are both shortlisted for Outstanding Special Visual Effects in a Season for a Movie meanwhile *SEE* is nominated for Outstanding Special Visual Effects in A Single episode.

### Berger Ride Winners

Arjun Bhatta has been announced as winner of the Berger Festive Ride and will get a Yamaha FZ 25 as a bumper prize. The first prize of Yamaha Fascino 125 FI went to Bharat Sah and the second prize of Samsung S21 to Bhisma Ojha and Shiva Bhandari of Butwal. 50 winners won Samsung M02s as third prize.

### NPR at its Lowest

The Nepali Currency hit a record low against the US dollar this week with the fall of the Indian rupee vis-a-vis USD. On 19 July, \$1 equalled NPR128.26. This is the direct result of the continuous devaluation of the Indian rupee against the US dollar, with NPR fixed at 1.6 to 1 INR.

### Ban on luxury goods

The government has extended the ban on import of Kurkure, Lays, liquor, cigarettes, tobacco, smartphones costing over \$300, colour tv bigger than 32 inches, jeeps, cars, vans, motorcycles with more than 150 cc capacity and various toys till 30 August.



### Best Exide Sealers

Over 100 dealers of the Exide industries from all over Nepal met for an event last week where the best in the business were also awarded.



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# THE MUNDUM TRAIL

● Ramesh Shrestha in Bhojpur

I had heard so many stories of multi-coloured rhododendron along the mountain trails near Bhojpur that I was determined to see it for myself.

So, in April, my wife Tan and I hiked Nepal's famous rhododendron trail at peak flowering season to see forests ablaze with red, shocking pink, and even purple flowers. The Himalayan foothills have at least 30 varieties of Nepal's national flower, and there is nowhere better to observe them than the TMJ Trail (Tinjure, Milke, Jaljhale) that follows a ridgeline at elevations of 1,500-4,000m here in eastern Nepal.

TMJ's rhododendrons are so famous that there is a rural municipality here named Laligurans, and despite new roads and transmission lines the forests are still an explosion of colour in spring.

Bhojpur is now accessible by road from Kathmandu, but the 300km journey would have been too arduous so we plucked some courage to take the Nepal Airlines flight. And although the company website claimed there were flights 6 days a week, the reality was different: only three flights a week and no online booking.

So we headed to the Nepal Airlines building near New Road to book a flight. Then we found out that flights cannot be booked more than a week in advance so we could only book one-way tickets. And since the airline has so few planes and the weather is so uncertain at Bhojpur's small airfield, passengers are lucky to fly even if they have tickets.

After jumping through many hoops, we finally had our tickets in hand and eagerly awaited the flight date. Arriving at the domestic

terminal bright and early, we lined up at the desk with a Bhojpur sign. Check-in was surprisingly smooth.

The flight was bumpy, and a fellow passenger barfed most of the way. The air was fresh and cool, and we went on the ten-minute drive on a surprisingly smooth road to Bhojpur Bazar. We stayed at the Bal Guest House run by Surendra Bal, who worked in Japan and Korea and was using the skills learnt there to run a clean and efficient hotel.

Bhojpur's Saturday market was in full swing, and compared to the open haat bazar of my childhood, this was a much improved version. The tables were overflowing with potatos and vegetables from the surrounding hills, baby pigs, dried fish from Pikhawa Khola, apples and even grapes imported from Sunsari in the southern plains.

Sadly, the one memory from my youth that was missing were the Sherpani wearing their thick wool tongkok, angi or ratuk blouses selling my favorite yak milk sargam.

Bhojpur Bazar is not the sleepy backwater it once was. The boom is ascribed to the district's recent connection to the national Mid-hill Highway linking it to Kathmandu and the Tarai. Traditional mud, brick, stone and timber buildings are being replaced by concrete, cement and glass structures.

The town has turned into a regional shopping hub, with pharmacies, mobile phone shops, grocery stores, restaurants stocked with beer and liquor and guest houses sporting local names such as Sumnima, Tyamke and Kiranti. There is even a six-storey shopping complex with a hardware store on the ground floor and fully air-conditioned hotel rooms upstairs.



## The Way to Mundum

Early Sunday morning our guide Mohan Rai and helper Shiba Hang Rai came to the guest house and we all piled into one of Nepal's ubiquitous workhorses: the Bolero jeep. The 30-minute drive north to Bagkhor was even bumpier than the one on the Twin Otter from Kathmandu.

We rendezvoused with the third member of our team, Ganesh Lama, with his aptly named horse Lambu (the tall one). Mohan and Shiba Hang were delighted that the tourism along the newly developed Mundum Trail was giving them a new income source.

The trail was formally opened in 2018, and runs 100km from Sampang just outside Bhojpur Bazar to Salpa Pokhari past Maiyung and then back to Chakhewa and Tyamke.

It strides high ridges, winds through forested slopes and along gurgling streams. Unlike other treks in Nepal, it does not have too much up and down. The name Mundum itself represents the indigenous shamanistic and animistic beliefs of the indigenous Kirat people who populate these mountains. Once completed, the trail will be one of

the longest ridge walks in Nepal connecting Makalu-Barun National Park to the Sagarmatha National Park.

The trail was a pleasant surprise with pristine paths through the wilderness with well-designed rest areas with wooden benches, stone tables and water flowing out of stone spouts nearby. Some rest stops even featured such local cultural items as *chindo* and *tandhunga*, together with ditches for plastic bottles and other trash.

The higher we got the more picturesque the scenery was. It was almost Tolkien-like amidst huge outcrops and ancient trees. Yaks, cows, sheep and ponies grazed in the high meadows, amidst a backdrop of forested ridgelines and the snow mountains beyond.

A short descent was followed by a climb up the hill until we got to Ekrate where we halted for the night at a 'gothstay', a homestay made of a herder's bamboo shed.

The next day we headed up to Maiyung Danda, 3,333m. The rhododendron were out in force, and we got a lesson in local taxonomy of the flowers. Just as the Inuit have many words for snow, locals here have different names for



Two hidden treasures of the Himalaya that offer wilderness adventures for post-monsoon hiking



# Eco-tourism in Gadi-Siraichuli

● Carol Inskipp and Prem Thapa

Tucked away in northern Chitwan between the Prithvi and Mahendra Highways is a land that has been bypassed by time. And this has helped protect the unique landscape and biodiversity of Gadi-Siraichuli.

The mountain forest here is one of a network of sites in the world designated as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area by BirdLife International. It is the habitat of the Spiny Babbler (*Turdoides nipalensis*), the rare and shy bird that is found only in Nepal.

Ironically it is state neglect of the past decades that has protected the unique ecosystem of Gadi-Siraichuli. The mountains also have historical significance for the 18<sup>th</sup> century fort that dates back to the Anglo-Nepal wars of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A five-day trekking itinerary takes visitors through remote villages and wilderness areas so untouched that it is hard to believe Gadi-Siraichuli is that close to the national highways.

The nomadic Chepang people still practice Shamanism, and it is the only health care for villagers before they can reach hospitals in Bharatpur. Children along the





Silichung Peak  
4,153m

Shalpa Pokhari

Ma Dhap  
2,926m

Hyakule  
2,972 m

Bobato  
2,922m

Hans Pokhari  
2,962m

Mattim Danda  
3,333m

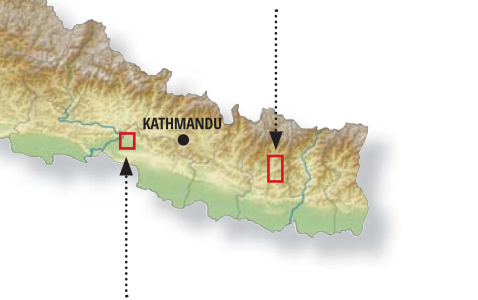
Pakhuwa Bhanjyang

Suntale  
2,430m

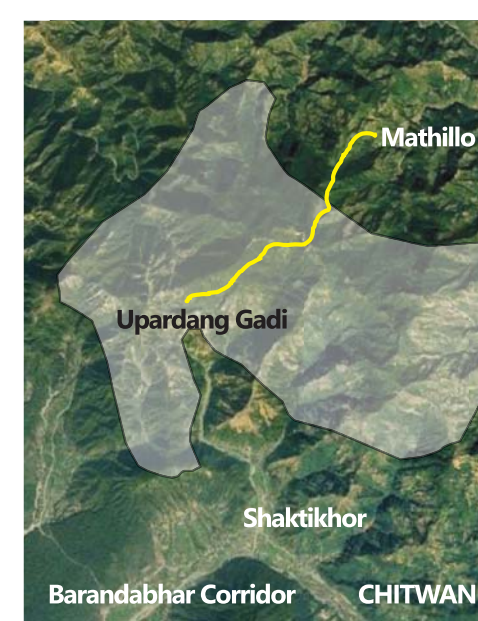
Chakhewa  
3,000m

Bhojpur  
1,600m

## Mundum Trekking Trial



## Gadi-Siraichuli Forest



ALL PHOTOS: THANANYA SHRESTHA



different colours of rhododendron.

The first ones we saw were pink, which the locals call *chimal*. The red ones, we were told are *gurans*, and we saw them bloom on trees at 2,500m and higher. At that altitude, the trees clung to rock outcrops carved over millennia by rain, wind and snow, and covered with moss and lichen.

At the foot of Maiyung we stopped for lunch at a *goth* which had been newly refurbished by the local ward office with wooden tables and benches. We caught a fleeting glimpse of Makalu in the east, and Silichung at 3,929m, the highest peak in Bhojpur.

It was sunny day, and after lunch we climbed another two hours or so to a guest house recently built by the Maiyung village ward. It is a *gurans* country all the way to the guest house.

We were woken up by a bright

shaft of sunlight piercing through the cloud from behind Maiyung. We walked to the top to catch the sunrise, but alas the view of Mt Everest, Kangchenjunga and Makalu was blocked by clouds.

Disappointed, we descended to the guest house for a quick breakfast and then through the fog-bound meadows to Hans Pokhari. The mist parted and we found ourselves as if by magic right in front of a forest full of rhododendron in full bloom.

This part was the highlight of our journey, erasing any memory of our disappointment at missing our mountain view earlier. We were surrounded and mesmerised by the colours of Nepal's national flower.

Horses and yaks grazed all around us guarded by Tibetan mastiffs as we strolled down through the grass. We spotted a pair of *bhotekukur* looking after a host of newly born lambs.

Soon we checked into the Hans Pokhari (2,962m) rest house, which was much more developed than the hilltop one where we had spent the previous night. There was an adjoining grocery shop, a restaurant and kitchen, an outside toilet and a rest area with a large compound. All had been built by the Shadananda Municipality.

Hans Pokhari was surrounded by rhododendron, and some *daphne lokta* plants, from which local paper is made, but we saw none of the migratory swans or ducks that give the pond its name. Perhaps they had already passed through. The trail gets even better from here on. Funded jointly by Shadananda Municipality and the Swiss Development Agency and built under the latter's supervision, the stone and grass paths were dotted with *chautara* and *mane* stones, making the walk a pleasure.

En route to Dhotre (2,752m) we passed some bamboo forests, the home of the elusive Red Panda, and stopped for lunch by the river side in the village of Jaljale.

The Mundum Trail cuts a picturesque path right through Dhotre, and there are water pipes and even a toilet for the use of the village. Our guide arranged with a local shop keeper for us to spend the night there.

On Day 4, we departed Dhotre for Chakhewa Bhanjyang, our final destination. This stretch of the trail is mostly level over ridges with spectacular views of the mountains of Khotang district. The day was cloudy so we decided against climbing Matim Danda and headed straight for Chakhewa pass, where

we spend a night at a hotel by the main highway to Bhojpur.

The next morning, Ganesh left town riding Lambu even before we were awake and reached Bagkhor in four hours. We boarded the same Bolero which had taken us from Bhojpur Bazar five days earlier, thus coming full circle.

The full Mundum Danda trail runs 100+ km from Sampang Chok all the way through Hans Pokhari to Silichung. Our trek from Bagkhor via Hans Pokhari and Dhotre to Chakhewa Bhanjyang covered only about 70 km of the trail. Judging from YouTube videos posted by other travellers, other sections of the trail looked equally well maintained.

The Maiyung Temke Salapa Silichung Tourism Promotion Center was founded in 2017 with the express goal of bringing together the Municipalities of Temke, Bhojpur Municipality, Rupakot Majhuwa Gadi and the Nepal Tourism Board and the Swiss Development Agency (SDA) to develop the trail and the various shelters along the way.

I asked Ramesh Rai, the MTSS president, who was responsible for the trail's upkeep and general maintenance, since even our short outing revealed several instances of vandalism and deterioration.

Will this be another unfortunate case of "Nepali maintenance" – that is, a total lack thereof, in which millions of rupees are spent on infrastructure only to have it all deteriorate due to shoddy work, corruption, and negligence? To ensure that this mostly pristine trail will remain the same five years from now is a question all the stakeholders need to think about. In addition, the overnight shelters need improvement and better facilities, some of which has already happened in Hans Pokhari. Such improvements will attract more travelers and investors.

The shelters need not be fancy, merely clean and functional, with fixed fire areas, outhouses and perhaps piped in water. Perhaps they could be maintained by volunteers as they are on the Appalachian Trails in the United States. Why not put some of that money for more trails with so much fancy stone work, grass pathways and rest areas with cultural markers, and make simple log cabins or improved *goth* to spend the night.

And most importantly start maintaining them right now before they get all washed away in the next rain? The challenge now is to manage and market the Mundum Trail. 🇳🇵

 [nepalitimes.com](https://nepalitimes.com)  
Read full travelogue online.

trail have to travel two hours each way to reach the three government schools in the area.

Thanks to the Bird Education Society, the trail from Kot to Upardang Gadi via Kaaule has become a popular hike for birders from Nepal and around the world.

The trail begins in the village of Hugdi along the Kathmandu-Pokhara highway, from where it is an uphill to Kot Pass that leads to the fort. When the clouds part, there is a panoramic view of Himalchuli and Annapurnas, with Himalayan vultures wheeling overhead.

The walk then follows the Rigdi Khola to the nightstop at Lower Kaaule village. Lush sub-tropical broad-leaf forests cover the valley sides. Black and Bonelli's Eagles appear over the skyline. Lower Kaaule is a Magar and Chhetri settlement with 25 houses situated by the river amidst terraced fields. Villagers practice agroforestry, bee-keeping and organic farming. Recently, tea gardens and black cardamom plantations have sprung up.

The autumn nights are clear and starlit, with the Milky Way, shooting stars and satellites crossing the sky. Visitors fall asleep listening to the calls of Collared Owlets and Mountain Scops Owls nearby.

The next morning it is a climb up a steep forested slope alive with flycatchers, warblers and babblers on the trail to Kotari, and onward to Upper Kaaule where there is also a homestay.

This is where the Spiny Babbler was sighted in 2020, marking a new locality for this bird. The next morning the trail climbs through the dense rhododendron forest of Gadi-Siraichuli to Upardang Gadi village via Chisapanitar. There are plenty of homestays, and the area is a haven for birders. There are stunning mountain views, especially before sunrise.

The fort at Upardang Gadi is situated at 1,275m with unsurpassed views of Chitwan Valley to the south and the mountains to the north. Birds of prey soar over the fort, with sightings of the Greater Spotted, Steppe Eagles and Pied Harriers. At dusk Lesser Kestrels hawk acrobatically for termites.

The next day it is downhill to Shaktikhor in Chitwan, where a forest was cleared for a UN-supervised camp for the demobilisation of the Maoists after the conflict ended in 2006, and then on to the highway.

Gadi-Siraichuli forest has been designated one of Nepal's 37 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas. It includes the largest

extent and the highest quality of subtropical mixed broadleaved forest remaining in Nepal that supports significant populations of bird species as well as four globally threatened and 20 nationally threatened species.

The Chepang people followed a nomadic lifestyle until recently, and various factors including influx of settlers forced them to take up a more sedentary subsistence agriculture. But Chepang families still harvest wild food from the forest which serves as the watershed providing drinking water for seven villages in Chitwan, but it is still outside Nepal's protected area system.

Designating the area as a Watershed and Bird Sanctuary would be invaluable in protecting the forest for wildlife and as a resource for local communities, including their precious water sources. Promoting eco-tourism would also raise incomes and help in conservation of this precious habitat. 🇳🇵

*Carol Inskipp is a UK conservationist and author of books on Nepal birds and their conservation, who has been coming to Nepal since 1977.*

*Prem Thapa is an avid birder, trekker, andlife member of Bird Education Society, and works at Samsara Trekking & Safari in Kathmandu.*



EVENTS



Saturday Market

Support small and local businesses. Shop for fresh and organic vegetables, fruit, cheese, bread, meat products, honey, and much more.  
*Saturdays, 7:30am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa Maharajgunj*

Healthcare Hackathon

Participate in the hackathon that will discuss common health problems and come up with practical solutions.  
*30-31 July, The Entrance Café, 9852062403*

Period yoga

Head over to this session on menstrual health and basic yoga asanas and pranayams for a regular and cramp-free period at Kundalini Ayurveda.  
*6am onwards, 23 July, Rs350, Bakhundole*

TFN Walkathon

Teach for Nepal's 5km Walkathon aims to raise awareness about inequity in education and raise resources to support the cause. Also enjoy a special musical performance with Kutumba. Registration required.  
*23 July, 11am onwards, Rs1,000, 9851275554*



Plant Swap

Plant enthusiasts will come together to exchange cuttings, propagations, and their own houseplants with other green-fingered people.  
*Saturdays, 2pm onwards, Seesha Me Café*

DINING



Mango Fiesta

All mango lovers out there, head over to the Mango Fiesta to satisfy your cravings. Reservation required.  
*Radisson Hotel (01) 4411818, 9851048311*

MUSIC

Monsoon Music

Spend this Friday evening with a musical performance from Albatross's Diwash Gurung.  
*22 July, 5pm onwards, Ai-La lounge, Kumaripati*



Moshma Jaam

Metalheads book the date for performances from the bands Obliterating vortex, Estrotomy from Darjeeling, Strangle, and Discord at Purple Haze Rock Bar.  
*23 July, Rs 200 (pre-sale) (01) 5910126*

Music Lessons

Sign up to learn traditional and western musical instruments alike at Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. Call for more details.  
*(01)5443554, 9813556945*



Laure Live

Enjoy Friday night with a live performance from Laure and Bad company as a part of their tour. Book tables now.  
*Club Fahrenheit, Thamel, 6pm onwards (01) 4541220*

Rock Night

Artists Airspcae, Dev Lama and Meghna Gewali will be performing live this weekend at Shisha Lounge & Bar.  
*23 July, Thamel, 8pm onwards*



Jimbu Thakali

Not in the mood to cook? Head over to Jimbu and enjoy a healthy and tasty traditional Thakali meal.  
*Jhamsikhel (01) 5544011*

Bayleaf

Drop by the garden restaurant for Burmese dishes including Tofu Thoke, Khao Swe Thoke (Noodle Salad), Mohinga (fish noodle soup) and other signature pork dishes.  
*Tangal, opposite Attic Bar (01) 4437490*

GETAWAY



Tiger Mountain

Homegrown high-value eco-tourism at Tiger Mountain uses local products and showcases the best of Nepal's scenery, nature and culture. The weather is also perfect for a view of 8,000thers.  
*Kandani Danda, Pokhara (01) 4720580*

Riverside Springs Resort

Enjoy swimming, hiking, games, and a farm tour at Riverside Springs Resort. Make use of the 25% weekend and 50% weekday discounts till 7 August on the rooms.  
*Kurintar, Chitwan, (01) 5444263*

Gaida Wildlife Camp

Bordering the rhino zone in the central area of Chitwan National Park, the camp is a place to reconnect with wildlife. Drive to Sauraha, and the Camp folks will take care of all from there.  
*Chitwan (01) 4215409/ 4215431*

Chhaimale Village Resort

Adorned with pear trees, the Resort is an ideal destination for anyone seeking to escape the madness of Kathmandu city.  
*Chhaimale (01) 4268121*



Club Himalaya

The hotel is a blend of natural and modern services. The accommodation is comfortable, cozy and the food is delicious. The famous sunrise and sunset can be viewed from the private balcony of each room.  
*Nagarkot (01) 6680080*

Tip Top

Enjoy sweets, South Indian cuisines and other meals at everyone's favourite Tip Top. The Chola Bhatara is a must-try.  
*New Road (01) 4240470*



Everest Arirang

Enjoy a variety of Korean dishes seen in k-dramas from Tteok-bokki and Gimbap to Samgyeopsal at Everest Arirang.  
*Jhamsikhel (01) 5438548*

WEEKEND WEATHER

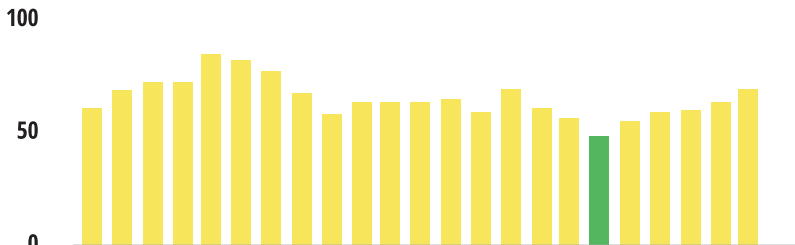


Monsoon Second Wind

The monsoon is getting a second wind after that weeklong hiatus that raised temperatures across the Tarai and low valleys. A new monsoonal trough has now arrived over Central Nepal, and this will bring renewed precipitation Friday and Saturday. But it is central and western Nepal that will get most of the rain over the weekend, from the Arabian Sea arm of the southwest monsoon which has been particularly active lately. Temperature will remain at normal levels in Kathmandu, and thankfully much lower than what Europe suffered this week.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 21°	27° 20°	27° 20°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



Kathmandu AQI from 8AM 20 July - 7AM 21 July measured at US Embassy, Phoba Darbar

The past week showed the combined effect of vehicular emissions and roadside dust in the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu going up and down depending on passing showers. Even though these are hourly readings, they are averages and the really high levels of hazardous pollution will be for pedestrians, as well as those riding motorcycles or cars. Masks may protect us from the particulates, but they do nothing to stop poisonous gases like carbon monoxide.

OUR PICK



The 2018 Hindi-language film *October* follows a group of hotel management interns at a five star hotel. Protagonist Danish 'Dan' Walia played by Varun Dhawan is easily irritable, careless and irresponsible. But following an accident of a fellow intern Shiuli Iyer who then goes into a coma, he begins taking care of her in an unconditional and unconventional way. *October* is unlike any other Hindi movies, it needs patience and concentration, and at times is excruciatingly slow paced. But if you can sit through it all, you will experience a beautiful feeling, not just a movie which in essence is a selfless potryal of human relationship and of grief. The critically acclaimed movie is directed by Shoojit Sircar and written by Juhi Chaturvedi. Stars Varun Dhawan in his career best performance and debutanees Banita Sandhu and Gitanjali Rao in pivotal roles.

कोभिड-१९ को जोखिम पुनः देखापरेको छ

यसबाट बच्न र बचाउन:

- सही तरिकाले मास्क लगाऔं ।
- भेटघाट र जमघटमा कम्तीमा दुई मिटरको दूरी कायम राखौं ।
- समय-समयमा साबुनपानीले हात धुने वा सेनिटाइजर प्रयोग गरौं ।
- खोक्दा वा हाच्छिउँ गर्दा नाकमुख छोप्ने गरौं ।
- आफू बस्ने घर तथा कार्यालय लगायत स्थानमा नियमित सेनिटाइज गरौं ।
- अनावश्यक भीडभाड नगरौं ।
- हावा ओहोरदोहोर नगर्ने स्थान र भीडभाडमा नजाऔं ।
- कोभिड-१९ विरुद्ध खोप लगाउन बाँकी भए तत्काल लगाऔं ।
- कोभिडको लक्षण देखिएमा अरूलाई सर्न नदिनका लागि समयमा नै परीक्षण गरौं ।

समयमा नै सतर्क र सचेत बनौं ।



नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड





● **Mandira Sharma and Mohna Ansari**

Sixteen years after the war, everyone in Nepal still needs Transitional Justice. In November October 2006, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) promised us truth and justice about what had gone on in the previous decade. But nothing has happened.

Perhaps most shocking, the promise that the whereabouts of the disappeared would be revealed within 60 days has been completely ignored, and their families have been badly betrayed.

The only real outcome of the CPA has been the creation of myths and false promises around transitional justice for survivors.

Certainly, the victims, survivors, families, and friends all are central to the process and they must be the first to be consulted. Their priorities and demands fit neatly into what is now an established international tradition of transitional justice after conflict. Four main elements are key: truth, justice, reparations and non-recurrence.

But we must be clear that while reparations and memorialisation are primarily for victims, truth, justice and non-repetition affect every Nepali— all the people who lived through the conflict had their lives changed, mostly in a negative way, even if only at the basic economic level. Some lost land, others were badly treated, many lived in fear, were displaced, lost jobs, income and opportunities. Everyone has the right to know the truth, to know what happened, and why.

As a society, we also need to know what it is to be like to wait for your loved one for years not knowing their fate. What is to suffer in silence following a gang rape? How does it feel to live without a limb and with the trauma of witnessing the beheading of your near and dear people? What is it like to not have closure?

As a nation, we all need to know what led

Sixteen years after the conflict ended, families still struggle for transitional justice



AKASH CHETTRI

to the war that cost so many lives to prevent a similar situation in the future.

All of those old enough to remember the period before conflict will recall how badly the state served them. How awful the police and army were, how hopeless, expensive and slow the justice system was, how the political patronage destroyed the public institution. Finding the truth of the conflict, unpacking the basis of such conflicts, and the experiences of survivors will help us understand how it affects our daily life today and what needs to be done.

Not many people feel that the police force protects and serves us all as it claims. Not many understand why the army is still so big, and why it is such an important economic actor. Not many people realise why law does not treat everyone equally, why they still

have very limited access to justice unless they are rich or have good connections. A truth process about the conflict will shed a lot of light on these issues and our system which is often difficult to understand and analyse.

Sexual violence against women is among the biggest societal issues today, as it was during the conflict. If we understand sexual violence in the conflict, we will be better informed about its nature. This in turn will provide us with a much clearer picture of how we must deal with them at present time.

Many of the young women protesting against recent rape cases including that of Nirmala and Sushmita were not even of school age when the conflict ended. They need to know the history to better campaign today.

It is clear that young people are not

satisfied with the political set up today, 16 years after the CPA. And they have a right to know the history of their country, the events that made it what it is.

This is not really surprising. We are living in a post-conflict period. Those who make decisions for us in 2022 are the same people who did so during the conflict years, whose decisions cost lives of many people and forced many more to suffer silently, including women raped and tortured. These women are not recognised as conflict victims. They are deprived of interim relief offered to other conflict victims.

It's tragic we have learnt very little from the conflict which could have taught us so much. Some of us remember the excitement and promise of Republic Day in May 2008, nearly 14 years ago.

No one told us then that there would be no reformation of the police, why we still need the APF, a counterinsurgency force set up in the conflict which no longer has an insurgency to fight. No one told us that our taxes would be used up paying for an army of nearly 100,000, with no enemy to fight unless we decide to invade India or China. No one told us that the new Nepal would remain a place where the lives of women would continue to be hidden and misreported.

Yes, we demand reparations and memorialisation for victims. But we also want truth and justice because this is the society we decided we wanted when the war started and when it ended.

This week, around 30 women who suffered sexual violence and rape during conflict are coming to Kathmandu from different parts of country once again to demand what they want from the TJ process. Their demand for truth, justice and reparation is to help build a new Nepal, to unearth the past and learn from it.

Let us hope the people who have previously claimed to campaign for human rights provide safe space for those open to sharing their pain and anguish, and deliver their promise to establish a credible TJ process in Nepal. 🇳🇵

**Mohna Ansari** is Commissioner, National Human Rights Commission of Nepal. **Mandira Sharma** is a lawyer and human rights defender who co-founded Advocacy Forum in 2001.

## Impunity through immunity

The Maoist Conflict lasted 10 years but has been over for 16. Two commissions to address transitional justice were set up after the ceasefire, but families of the victims and survivors have got neither truth nor justice.

And now the bill to amend the Act on Commission on Investigation of Disappeared Persons, Truth and Reconciliation, 2071 (2014) further threatens to narrow the scope of criminal accountability. In fact, some provisions are direct attempts to exempt or provide immunity to perpetrators.

The Bill unfairly classifies torture as humane and inhumane, and has made 'humane' torture forgivable. This is against the Convention against Torture, to which Nepal is a party. Even killings are divided into 'brutal' and 'ordinary'. The killing of an unarmed citizen or a non-combatant is a war



HIMALARCHIVES

crime, and cannot be selectively categorised. To exclude such killings from the scope of serious crimes is a violation of international legal standards and jurisprudence.

The amendment further proposes

that the decision of the special court be final. But there should be a provision to appeal to the Supreme Court. And if punishment has been served under the existing law, a provision in the bill does not allow for further investigation.

In short, war crimes will now be treated as ordinary cases where reinvestigation cannot be arranged once a decision has been made. Another issue with the Bill is the statute on limitations: it stipulates that a decision to prosecute or not be made within six months. A thorough investigation is needed to gather evidence on such a complex matter after all these years and this limit is just not enough.

The provision risks turning prosecution into a mere formality. Even if the case is prosecuted, there may be a low chance of conviction by the court.

To be sure, there are some positive aspects to the Bill. The right to compensation is guaranteed and creating a fund for the investigation of missing persons, truth-telling and reconciliation are good. It says that reconciliation and forgiveness can take place only with the free consent of the victim. There is also a provision for interim relief.

An important suggestion raised in the consultation is the re-appointment of the officers of the Commissions. While re-appointment has been addressed, the selection process is ambiguous enough that it opens doors for political appointees.

Reassignment alone is not enough, how the appointments are made makes a big difference.

In short, the Bill is flawed in terms of punishment, serious crimes and amnesty. It must be brought into conformity with Nepal's international human rights law obligations and based on the spirit of the Supreme Court's past precedents.

Otherwise, thousands of families will continue without any closure, truth or justice. Nepal will never resolve war crimes. And Nepalis will perpetually be in a state of confusion and hurt. All of this will tarnish Nepal's international standing irreparably.

Raju Prasad Chapagain is an active advocate in the field of constitutional and human rights law. 🇳🇵

**Raju Prasad Chapagain**

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PANORAMIC SUNROOF

6 SPEED AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION

ESP TERRAIN RESPONSE MODES

BASED ON LAND ROVER'S LEGENDARY D8 PLATFORM





● Sarah Watson

As former Chief of Army Staff of Nepal Army, Gen Gaurav Rana is more used to riding 4WDs and helicopters to remote parts of the country. No one expected to see him at Patan Darbar Square last week being flagged off in this year's #KoraCycleJatra.

Rana, age 66, is a bicycling aficionado, but what makes his participation in the gruelling 50km Kathmandu Kora even more remarkable is that he is being treated for a malignancy, and had his latest chemotherapy treatment just a week before the ride.

The general defied expectations and illness at the 16 July event, even beating his own mileage from past years.

"I want to keep a positive frame of mind, so I set Kora as my goal and worked toward it," Rana told us. "My doctor said it was okay to exercise, and told me to lead a normal life."

Rana comes from an illustrious family of military officers, and began cycling in his childhood. He found similarities between his love of adventure sports, like mountain biking, and his military career.

Rana served as Chief of Army Staff from 2012-2015, when he instituted a policy that all officers should avoid using vehicles on Fridays — and to bike or walk instead both to maintain physical training and reduce reliance on fuel.

While some people may look down on cycling as a lesser form of transport, Rana wanted to be an example, riding a Nepali-assembled bicycle to work.

"When I started cycling to work, people were saying, 'Oh, if the chief can ride, why can't we?' It slowly picked up in popularity," Rana recalls.

The general was impressed by the turnout at this year's #KoraCycleJatra as thousands of cyclists gathered at Patan Darbar Square for the 50, 75, and 100km routes. As he pushed through the race's challenges in spite of his cancer diagnosis, Rana noticed the community-focused atmosphere of this year's Kora.

The Kathmandu Kora bicycling event is the brainchild of ethical tourism entrepreneur Raj Gyawali and a young British volunteer to raise money for Samata School. The first ride was organised in 2011 with just 35 cyclists.

This year's event saw over 3,000 registered riders with parallel Kora events being held in different parts of Nepal, as well as abroad. Gyawali hopes that the Kora can be a message for others facing illness to fight back against depression.



KTM KORA

## Former Nepal Army chief participates in the gruelling Kathmandu Kora to inspire a spirit of adventure



SONIAAWALE

Throughout the race, Gaurav Rana and fellow cyclists supported and encouraged each other. He says, "It was tough — the sun was out all day and the weather was scorching. It was very challenging but also extremely rewarding. I had such a sense of achievement."

Beyond the sense of meeting a shared challenge, Rana was struck by the number of young cycling enthusiasts and how the sport has developed in Nepal in recent years. Whereas five years ago, many participants used worn down bicycles with patched up tyres, this year's ride featured more brand new bikes of all makes than ever before, even electric bikes.

"I was very impressed looking at the variety of bikes," says Rana. "Today, cyclists are more professional and understand their equipment better than in previous years."

Pre-Covid Koras have also seen the participation of organisations supporting cancer survivors. In 2019, the Richa Bajimaya Memorial Foundation took part to raise money for breast cancer screening for patients through the rally.

Says Rana: "I had put the Kora as my target. Everyone knew about my treatment, but I wanted to show that having cancer need not change your quest for adventure. You have to go on with your life and enjoy every moment." 🇳🇵

# Circumambulating Kathmandu

When Raj Gyawali organised the very first Kathmandu Kora in 2011 with a young British volunteer, there were only 35 cyclists who raised money for charity.

In the past decade, the Kora has never abandoned its dedication to help the under-served in society while instilling a spirit of adventure in young Nepalis.

It is a measure of how much the sport has grown in popularity that there were more than 3,000 registered riders on 16 July.

Unlike a traditional race, cyclists push themselves to complete whichever challenge is best for them. "It's not a rally, it's a ride," says Gyawali, explaining the Kora challenge's goal of bringing Kathmandu's cycling community together.

Not only are the bicycle varieties growing in number, but the Kora challenge itself is spreading. There are now 50 or 60 locations in Nepal, including Pokhara, Biratnagar, Birgunj, Nepalganj, Surkhet, Hetuada and



even Jumla. This year over 300 cyclists joined Bhaktapur's first official Kora challenge, compared to only 30 last year.

The Kora Jatra was also held on the same day this year in Singapore and in Geneva, and enthusiasts are picking up the challenge next year

in cities in Australia and Europe.

Each year, Kathmandu's Kora grows in popularity and numbers of cyclists. Now, the ride fills Kathmandu's streets each year with thousands of bicycle-lovers, including inspirational figures and celebrities.



Gyawali's goal is to make it a community event, and keep the cycle challenge accessible to all, whether they are athletes, actors, students, children, or former army chiefs.

"This is a fun ride. There is no other agenda. The pure agenda

is building community and being festive," says Gyawali. He explains that to cyclists, the Kora challenge acts as its own jatra, with entire communities coming together in a wider festival. By now, locals know the route, which is the same each year, and offer special discounts.

The Kathmandu Kora follows a clockwise route that circumnavigates some of the city's most renowned religious sites, including the Boudha and Swayambhu stupas and Pashupati temple.

While initially sponsored through Gyawali's company, socialtours, the annual gathering is now co-organised through Pangro Outdoor Events and Cycle City Network Nepal. Turkish Airlines is the official airlines partner and conducts CLICK2WIN contest where this year both professional and amateur photographers have a chance to win a trip to Istanbul if their Kora picture receives the most views. 🇳🇵



Awesome stuff

The Ass can't figure out what the big deal is about PKD suddenly dashing off to Delhi. It is a time-honoured ritual for Nepal's leaders to visit the Dilli Darbar before and after they become prime minister. It is also a historical custom passed down from Jang Bahadur's time to kowtow to the North and grovel to the South, and our Prime Minister-in-Waiting-and-Waiting-and-Waiting is just upholding that tradition. The optics for the audience with Comrade Liu at Khumaltar was perfect: the two



met amidst a backdrop showcasing travel memorabilia of (1) Petronas Towers, (2) Statue of Liberty, (3) La Tour Eiffel, (4) a ceramic Bavarian

Coat of Arms, and (5) portraits of Friedrich Engels, (6) Joseph Stalin, (7) Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, (8) Mao Zedong, and (9) Gautam Buddhas.

Only one missing is Pol Pot. It had been touch-or-go for PKD's Delhi invite, but the Liu visit clinched it. Awesome was promised an audience with Emperor Namo, and off he went. He had warm up meetings with the Spook-in-Chief who was his guardian in Noida during the war years, the BJP party chief, and Shree Jaishankar the Blockadeer. But the "climax" that Comrade Pukada was promised never happened. There are many theories about why Modi cancelled the meeting. One plausible explanation is that Narendra Modi learnt from the way Recep Tayyip Erdogan made Vladimir Putin cool his heels for a full minute at a photo op in Teheran last week, and thought he could

give Pukada an even better welcome by not appearing at all. The other theory is that Modi had actually agreed to meet Swarnim Wagle, and someone messed up. Or maybe the real climax of the visit for the Maoist Supremacist was not an audience with Modi at all, but a summit with Arzoo. This is understandable, since we know how difficult it is for the two to meet in Kathmandu out of earshot of Hubby. And PKD did let it slip that he and Share Bahadur had agreed on taking turns to be prime ministers after November. Maybe he meant to share with Arzoo, not with Her Man.



The Ass

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# गोर्खा CRAFT

## CRAFTED WITH PASSION

Exquisitely rich in color and refreshing aroma, **'Gorkha Craft'** is moderately hoppy with balanced bitterness and full flavor of toasted Ruby malt.

### Why Gorkha Craft?

#### Rich Color

Eyes create the first impression of taste. Needless to say, the first thing you will notice about Gorkha Craft, is its color. The fine, toasted Ruby Malt is what gives this brew a rich ruby color that is a sight to behold and a taste to remember.



#### Toasty Ruby Malt

Ever heard of the saying, 'Malt is the soul of beer?' Well, the Ruby Malt is what makes Gorkha Craft what it is - toasty, bold and crisp! The texture, flavor and taste of this lager is everything you would expect from a great craft beer.



#### Moderately Hoppy

Whoever said hop brings happiness wasn't lying! The carefully handpicked hops gives Gorkha Craft the right amount of hoppiness, imparts a distinguishable aroma and flavor-one that is pleasant to the nose and the palette.



### POURING RITUAL - Gorkha Craft Ruby Lager

#### Pour the beer at an angle of 45°

Level the glass and start to pour straight in. Pour some beer in the glass, pause for a moment and then pour the rest in. This method increases the aroma and releases the flavors.

#### Look at your beer

Check out the foam and color.

#### Swirl your beer a bit

This releases the aromas and fragrance of your beer.

#### Smell it

Smell is after all responsible for 80% of what we taste. Take the first whiff through your nose. What do you sense?

#### Go in for the taste

Take your first sip. Don't swallow quite yet. Let it settle on your palette and explore every taste bud.

#### Drink up!

Don't leave it to get warm.



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