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GOPEN RAI

WASTED POLITICS

● Shristi Karki

Rotting garbage on Kathmandu's streets may finally start being cleared after a meeting of officials of Kathmandu, Dhading and Nuwakot reached an agreement on Wednesday with locals to allow the trash trucks passage in return for safe transport to the landfill site.

But there have been many agreements like this before, and it could only offer temporary respite from problem that has plagued Kathmandu for decades.

Politicians allowing garbage to pile up on the streets of the capital to expose the 'incompetence' of rivals is nothing new.

With federal elections around the corner, mainstream parties are worried about the popularity of

independent candidates like Mayor Balen Shah and are resorting to their old tricks.

Kathmandu Valley generates 1,200 tonnes of waste daily, most of which is biodegradable and can be turned into valuable compost or gasified. Plastic, glass and metal can be recycled to reduce the volume being dumped at landfill sites.

Mayor Balen wants to address this by segregating rubbish at source. But first, he needs to clear the streets of accumulated trash by transporting it to the new landfill site at Banchare Danda, 27km west of Kathmandu.

On 8 August, 14 garbage disposal trucks were vandalised by local protesters belonging to the three parties of the governing coalition as they headed to the new landfill site.

The mayor, who swept local elections in May after defeating candidates from the main parties, did not mince his words in a Twitter video, and directly blamed Maoist leader Dahal for trying to score brownie points.

'What moral high ground do you have to talk about development ... when you back those who have

kept the Kakani road in the state it is in?' the Tweet read.

As an independent candidate for mayor, Balen Shah made the capital's garbage disposal his primary election agenda, visiting landfill sites in Nuwakot after his win to convince locals. He has since been trying to get to the root of the garbage management problem, instead of temporary fixes. "Our solid waste system is just collecting and dumping, not processing and management," explains environmentalist Shilshila Acharya. "We are landfill-dependent, which means if roads are blocked by rains or politics, it affects waste collection in Kathmandu."

She adds, "Not enough people are committed to solving the problem because

they are unwilling to change a system that benefits them. So, now, they have resorted to a political blame game."

In June, former Urban Development Minister Ram Kumari Jhakri of the Unified Socialists blamed the KMC for the problem, accusing officials of colluding with locals at the dumping site. She resigned in July following

MOUNTAINS OF TRASH: The volume of garbage dumped at landfill sites like this one at Banchare can be reduced by segregation, as Mayor Balen Shah wants. But locals are playing dirty politics with trash.

a cabinet reshuffle, and her successor Metmani Chaudhary vowed this week to crack down on "syndicates and gangs obstructing waste management".

An exasperated Balen Shah posted on Facebook: 'Our state mechanism envisions coordination between all levels of government, but one level of government is trying to ensure the failure of another. Let us not play dirty politics.'

Shilshila Acharya thinks fatalism has set in because everyone thinks Kathmandu's garbage crisis is an intractable problem. She adds: "Solid waste can be managed if we do things right. And if there is political will we can solve the problem in the next five years."

 nepalitimes.com

Photo gallery of Banchare Danda landfill

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 **HYUNDAI**

Young Turks not getting their turn

A citizen's campaign to defeat all elder prime ministers in forthcoming elections is going viral in the Nepali cybersphere, and reaction from the ageing leaders of the political parties shows that they are starting to fret.

But can we expect the Young Turks in the main parties to behave any better?

One of the more charismatic members of the younger breed of politicians is Gagan Thapa, but even he is nearing 50. In televised Parliament proceedings, he usually gives fiery speeches.

Even though his Nepali Congress (NC) is leading the 5-party coalition, Thapa had been critical of the government. He is in the dissident group opposed to the NC contesting the elections in an alliance with the Maoists.

These days, Gagan Thapa is muted when he speaks in Parliament about the possibility of Nepal being blacklisted for money laundering.

As General Secretary of the NC, Thapa wanted answers on Maoist Finance Minister Janardan Sharma secretly including a corporate middleman in the budget drafting process. But by reinstating Sharma, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba ignored and demeaned his own party colleague.

Since then, Thapa has not spoken up about the scandal. This is very unlike him, and probably indicates fear of being refused a ticket for elections three months away.

When more independent-minded Gagan Thapa, Biswaprakash Sharma and Dhanraj Gurung were elected to senior NC posts last year, there was optimism that Nepal's foremost democratic party would now see fresh direction.

Many thought the superannuated old guard would now be swept away, and under Gagan Thapa's leadership the party and country would turn a new leaf through better governance and transparency.

Alas, we have not seen much of Thapa's influence on the NC's functioning. In fact, Prime Minister Deuba prefers to take advice from Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal rather than his own party general secretary.

Deuba is now 76. He is prime minister for the fifth time. He has teamed up with

Dahal, and spends most of his time these days parcelling out plum constituencies to his Maoist partners than to the NC's own leaders like Gagan Thapa.

Deuba's coalition is sinking deeper in a quagmire of corruption and impunity. As a young democrat, Deuba once defied the Panchayat system and did not compromise on principles. Seeing what he is up to now, one wonders what it was all for.

The track record of the NC's 'younger' leaders is making us rethink the wisdom of passing the torch to a new generation of leaders (*see page 10*). Just because a politician is young does not seem to guarantee that they will be for reform.

Age does not have anything to do with governance ability. Elders have got a bad rap because of the septuagenarians who have messed up the country, but we have plenty of examples of corrupt, greedy leaders who are in the prime of their lives.

Instead of expecting youth leadership to be a panacea for all our ills, we should be on the lookout for competent, honest leaders with a wealth of experience in governance — even if they are long in the tooth.

In fact some of the best prime ministers this country has ever had were nearly 80 when they held office: Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Manmohan Adhikari.

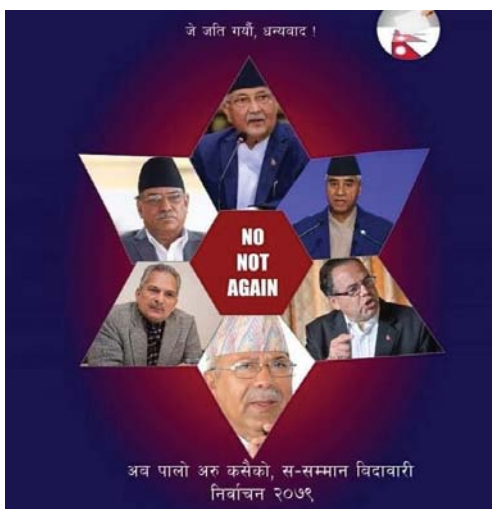
This does not mean that youth leaders in all the

parties and among independents should patiently wait till they also get on in years. It is understandable that when aged politicians exhibit chronic incompetence even when they were repeatedly given the chance at leadership positions, Nepalis will hanker for a generational change.

But the grizzled leaders are not going to just hand over the baton to young leaders. The youth have to show that they have what it takes. After all, Deuba was 49 when he became prime minister for the first time in 1995, by challenging the leadership of ageing Girija Prasad Koirala.

At the rate we are going, when these 'Young Turks' finally get to leadership positions, they will be old. Leaders like Gagan Thapa will then be challenged by 30 something leaders telling them to step aside.

Arjun Dhakal



It is natural that Nepalis want a generational change in government, but age alone does not guarantee competence and honesty.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Coming Full Circle

How the times have not changed in Nepal.

Back in 2002, the big question was if the elections would be held as scheduled. The two main actors back then were prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and the Maoists who were waging an insurgency that was at its peak. Two decades down the line, Deuba is prime minister again but his main ally in the coalition is his former arch-enemy, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and both are now partners-in-crime.

Federal and provincial polls have been set for 20 November and campaigning has begun. Parties have split, former comrades have reunited and new alliances have been formed. There is both anticipation and dismay in the air with the rise of independent candidates.

Excerpts from editorial published 20 years ago this week on issue #107, 16-22 August 2002:

Who gets the tree symbol is not really that important. What is more critical is what happens if elections can't be held as scheduled. Now that he has brought us so far, it is up to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to show that he

can hold credible polls and guarantee free and normal campaigning. For this, he needs to lift the state of emergency two weeks from now. But he can't do that until he has a truce with the Maoists. The Maoists are offering to talk, but once-bitten Deuba is twice shy. And he's under pressure from his hardline mentors not to buckle. It is a precarious time to be prime minister.

The Maoists are also in a fix. A scuttled election and the ensuing constitutional crisis will not be to their strategic advantage. The Maoists have now realised that their fast-forward revolution went out of control and resurrected the ultra-right. This wasn't how it was supposed to be.

For the moment, going by the past record, the only thing we can be absolutely sure about is that even if elections are held, and even if they are relatively fair, the old familiar faces will be back. However, it can't be politics as usual. The country cannot — will not — endure another 12 years of this.

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



ONLINE PACKAGES



AT THE MARGINS

Considered to be one of the few fully Bön practicing villages in Nepal, Lubra in Lower Manang nurtures over 800 years of cultural and ancestral significance, but it may be wiped out within the next few years because of an increasing threat of flash floods. Read the field report on *page 6-7*, watch video of the 2021 flood in the village, and a 3D model that depicts in detail the damage caused.



YARSA 101

Highly prized in traditional Chinese medicine, yarsagumba has fetched up to \$110,000 per kg internationally. It is extensively hunted across the Himalaya and in Nepal, caravans of people from rural villages move to the higher elevations to follow the pre-monsoon yarsa gold rush every year. Watch this video and learn more about this unique Himalayan fungus. Read story on *page 6-7*.

HIMALAYAN MELTDOWN

It's happening, the ice level is reducing ('If the ice is gone, we are done', Ramesh Bhusal, *nepalitimes.com*). Water shortage in our Himalayan foothills tell us that global warming is real. Climate change is real.

Akku Chowdhury

Before the ice will be completely gone, there will be terrible wars over the rivers and water bodies which in turn will affect billions of people downstream who depend on them.

Edi Mühlemann

ANGKOR WAT

Irrespective of our religious beliefs and practices ('An anchor to Cambodia's past', Ashish Dhakal, #1123), human beings have divine faith in god and goddesses and worship them in different forms. Religion teaches us the essence of shared human values and a way to peaceful co-existence.

Dil Bahadur Pakwal

YOUNG LEADERSHIP

The same old corrupt politicians playing musical chairs for prime ministership ('Young Turks not getting their turn', Editorial, *page 2*). Politicos are incompetent, corrupt and have almost nothing to show to the people of Nepal except getting rich themselves. Nepal needs to throw out these corrupt types, old or young.

Roger Ray

FOREIGN LABOUR

Another exceptionally well-written and deeply moving story about a Nepali migrant in Bahrain working for a kind employer ('Painting a bright future', *Diaspora Diaries*, #1124). Your *Diaspora Diaries* are clearly going to be the best part of your paper for many of us. Thank you very much.

Buddha Basnyat

For the upcoming football World Cup, there are 100 dead Nepalis for every of the 62 matches to be played ('Migration not a wish, but necessity for Nepalis', Shristi Karki, #1124).

Ben-Erik Ness

POKHARA AIRPORT

Kiss goodbye to the most precious wildlife ecosystem of the Pokhara valley ('Pokhara Airport ready for take off' Sanjaya Ranabhat, *nepalitimes.com*). Passenger jets will bring tourists, but they will quickly leave Pokhara.

Marc McConnell

How can the airport be "ready for takeoff" if "relocating a garbage landfill site to reduce risk of bird strikes," still remains to be done? How can a landfill be relocated in five months, specially when a new site has not even been identified? It took Kathmandu 25 years to build the new Banchara Danda landfill after identifying it. Even if the landfill is relocated by December, the birds found in the area around the landfill will not suddenly fly away.

Bhushan Tuladhar

A hill needs flattening and a landfill site needs removal as both are in the flight path. I do hope both are accomplished by 1 January 2023.

Rajiv Desraj Shrestha

It looks a lot better than Kathmandu airport. I wish they had invested here as well.

Era Shrestha

Best wishes for a smooth, safe and successful operation.

Bob Prasad

LGBTQIA+ RIGHTS

Don't think so ('Nepal is ahead of many countries in LGBTQIA+ rights', *nepalitimes.com*). There is zero family acceptance.

Pan Chy

Nepali Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Peddling the Great Himalayan Trail

by Sarah Watson

Mountain bike racer Mangal Lama is the first person to solo cycle Nepal's mountains from east to west. Read about his feat in this profile on *nepalitimes.com* with photos and video from his adventure.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



Nepal's citizen scientists track climate change

by Erica Wu

The inhabitants of Phortse below Mt Everest have joined an initiative to monitor melting glaciers, receding snowlines, changes in vegetation and, record temperature and precipitation among the world's highest mountains to monitor climate change.

Most popular on Twitter



The trail builder of Everest

by Sarah Watson

78-year old Pasang Lama Sherpa has dedicated his life to making the Everest trail safer for thousands of trekkers and villagers, constructing safer paths below the world's highest mountain. Lots of photos and video online.

Most commented



Nepal doesn't produce its 2 biggest export items

by Ramesh Kumar

Nepal's first and second biggest items of export are Soyabean Oil and Palm Oil, which the country does not even produce. Re-exporting these imported oils to India unnaturally inflates Nepal's trade figures and kills the domestic industry. Read the investigation on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#Nepalrisks losing billions in investment in #hydropowerunless projects plan for #climaterisk. Climate-smarter Himalayan infrastructure, @ SoniaAwale reports:



Mark Perrin @MarkPerrin9
Good article on an important set of issues.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
"#Nepalis ahead of many countries in the world because it explicitly recognises gender and sexual minorities in the constitution. The rest of us need to learn from this precedent." In conversation with US Special Envoy Jessica Stern. #LGBTIQ



licensed to drive (a scooter) @neesh_chal
Sure. But how much of that can actually be seen in practice?

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Remembering Hubert Decleer

The old-school intellectual, researcher and digger into Buddhist texts who lived and died in Kathmandu

● Peter Moran

These past weeks I have been thinking a lot about Hubert Decleer, who died a year ago at age 81.

I vividly remember when he related his cancer diagnosis via video call in early 2021, his remarkable wife, poet Nazneen Zafar, sharing the cramped screen and awful news.

But Hubert was happily himself when we spoke that day, me in Washington, DC, and Hubert and Nazneen at home in Chhauni in Kathmandu. As I teared up, Hubert was gently pragmatic.

With a wry smile he said that “the end must come to each of us”, he was grateful, grinning, for “the very good life” that he had lived, and expectant, eyes bright, in preparing for the next great journey. With his death on 25 August 2021, at home near the glorious, self-emergent *chaitya* of Swayambhu, Hubert was still the teacher and consummate connector of people that he had been for decades.

Hubert (pictured right) read widely in Buddhist texts, translating and annotating works that literally traced journeys: of Buddhist pandits, translators, and pilgrims, and the transmission of lineages and pith instructions they spread.

A traveller himself, he came overland from Belgium to Asia in 1963, continuing for dozens of trips afterward, often at the helm of a tour bus wending through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, before reaching India.

He particularly loved ancient biographies and pilgrimage guides, partly because they showed us what many 11th century Newars, Biharis and Tibetans already knew — and we often seem to forget at our peril — that the world is awash with artistic and spiritual borrowing, copying, trading: humans are eminent cross pollinators.

Hubert would trace references,



PHOTOS: PETER MORAN



footnotes, oral legends across centuries, as if they were the clues to a completely current mystery: Bengali and Kashmiri pandits who passed through the Valley *en route* to Tibet, or an eminent Tibetan reincarnate lama, down from the cold plateau in the mid-18th century, writing praises to the ‘Lord of the Plain’ (our Great Black One of Tundikhel).

Hubert was absolutely an old-

school intellectual, researcher and digger into texts. But, with his feet firmly planted on the ground, he loved a good yarn, being himself a master storyteller. He used that gift as an educator: in print, in formal lectures and in private conversations with students.

As a teacher, and powerfully well-read and reflective individual, Hubert could be intimidating. Formidable. He wanted to hear not only what you thought, but how ... what kind of a person are you?

Hubert watched you. He listened. He noticed. I found that unnerving. But there was no pretense, instead a quick readiness to admit the things he knew “nothing about” (though that wasn’t usually true). He expected authenticity and integrity without ever using those exact words — because he lived in that space.

He seemed to ever be bringing his students to questions, goading them to ask, and pursue, the

unknown. He believed that young people *a priori* could do original research contributing to what we all could learn, something his students at first found hard to believe about themselves.

Most of all, Hubert wanted people to leave their bubbles: travel, truly observe the world and the people you meet, and treat them with deep respect. He was interested in what so-called ‘ordinary’, working people did. What taxi drivers, porters and dishwashers thought.

We both shared a love for the old Hindu and Buddhist trope of the hidden yogi, a figure who enlivens a good tale and serves as cautionary reminder about the pitfalls of mistaking appearances for truth. The *dakini* sitting on the bus. The camp cook or shepherd or the kid next door — who is actually a *siddha*, if you could just see.

Hubert also had a profoundly tender side, and either it grew over

the years, or he let me notice it more. Memories of him feeding huge rhesus mama monkeys, his head slightly turned away, arm extended with a bit of old potato, as the whole troupe surrounded him (pictured left).

He was curious about so much beyond the texts he pored over and translated. His love for music, visual arts and history made his face gleam and the talk flow. Hubert was a seasoned traveler, but from 1980 until his death, Kathmandu was his only home. He did not ever seem to complain, he expected challenges and he expected work. He was one of the greatest exemplars of the cumulative power of certain daily practices: reading and translation, exercising powers of observation, working with self-doubt, appreciating unexpected small joys.

What was better than Hubert laughing, eyes lit up, over a stupid pun? Or humming along, punctuating the air with mouth-trumpet sounds, as he listened to a delta blues track he couldn’t believe I didn’t know. And Hubert and Nazneen shared one of the greatest romances and partnerships that I have ever witnessed.

Hubert Decleer died as he lived, never wanting to make a fuss, always looking after others, and very aware of his surroundings. That he passed away sitting up, with his body unmarked by any signs of decay for three days after his heart stopped (during Kathmandu’s monsoon season), is both utterly remarkable and, somehow, not.

For a man who lived so simply, whose only true possessions was a room (or two) of books, his passing was the expression of his life and his daily practices. To teachers, mentors and friends of the heart like Hubert: we keep you with us. We gratefully remember. 🇳🇵

Peter Moran was the Executive Director of the binational Fulbright Commission in Nepal 2005-2009 and is currently the Director of the Humphrey Fellowship Program for the Institute of International Education in Washington, DC.

prabhu BANK

Turkish Technic

Turkish Technic has signed a 10-year global repair license agreement with Honeywell for Air Data Inertial Reference Unit of Boeings 737MAX, 737 next generation and 787. Honeywell will supply subparts to Turkish Technic which will then be the authorised global service centre for Honeywell's ADIRU components.



Says CEO of Turkish technic Mikail Akbulut: “While cementing our long-standing partnership with Honeywell, this new agreement will allow us to support operators in their ADIRU needs.”

Yamaha Premier League

Yamaha Nepal and Routine of Nepal Banda have collaborated for this season's Fantasy Premier League. To participate, enter the code 'yi23yo' in the Fantasy Premier League app after registering at a Yamaha showroom. There will be a weekly draw and lucky winners will receive Yamaha merchandises and one lucky winner can win a Yamaha RayZR 125 FI scooter.



Hospital discount

Global IME bank and Maya Metro Hospital have agreed to provide a 15% discount on medical services to customers who use the bank's card.

Daraz discount

The week long Daraz Mall fest offers discount vouchers up to Rs7000, flash sales and a return policy of 2 weeks. Customers can save up to 15% with debit and credit card prepayments, and also can get discounts and win vouchers every day.

Nabil in Khokana

Nabil Bank organised a financial literacy and digital banking awareness program for locals in Khokana, proving information on digital banking, QR code and other services.



IME TMS

Customers of IME Pay can now conduct share transactions, collateral loan and fund settlements through its Trade Management System (TMS). Meanwhile, IME life has completed the 5th year of its life insurance training which has now been given to over 60 schools and 5,848 students.

Toyota contest winner

Nikita Bhattarai won the Toyota Dream Car art contest with her work 'artificial intelligence based car'. The contest received 530,000 artworks from 78 countries.



NMB IFC deal

NMB Bank has received a loan of \$25 million from the International Finance Cooperation to promote small and medium enterprise financing in Nepal. NMB Bank



is the only bank in Nepal to sign three debt investment deals with the ICF. It has also signed a 4-year agreement with the cooperation.

Nexon No.1

Tata Nexon has become the no.1 most popular SUV in Nepal. Nexon comes with 1.2 litre turbo petrol engine, 1.5 litre diesel engine, as well as the Nexon EV. All have high ground clearance.

Ghorahi Premium

Ghorahi Cement has issued shares to the general public at a premium over the par value, giving out 7.9 million shares, and has appointed Nabil Investment Banking and Himalayan Capital as its issue managers. Ghorahi produces Clicker, OPC and PPC cement with Sagarmatha Cements.



Veedol dealer meet

VG Lube, authorised dealer and importer of Veedol lubricants, organised a dealer meet. Veedol lubricants can be used for all vehicles from two wheelers to heavy equipment.



Coalition set to snub President Bhandari

They want to ignore her points of concern about discriminatory provisions in the Citizenship Bill draft

● Santa Gaha Magar

The House of Representatives is set to pass an amendment bill to the Citizenship Act of 2014 after President Bidya Devi Bhandari this week returned it for a review along with a 15-point message.

This is the first time the President has sent back a bill passed by both Houses since Nepal adopted a federal Constitution in 2015. She was using a constitutional provision that the President can ratify a bill passed by both Houses of Parliament within 15 days, or send it back for reconsideration.

“The Constitution has given the President the authority,” explains constitutional expert Bipin Adhikari. “Now Parliament must seriously deliberate on her 15-points.”

In her nine-page message, the President raised concerns over the provision of self-declaration, the right to privacy, and dignity of mothers. She also suggests a historical overview of the drafting processes of the citizenship law, and has requested a detailed study before amending the law.

President Bhandari also suggested discussing the report presented by the State Affairs Committee of Parliament before passing the amendment, pointing out the need for a long-term solution to the controversial issue of naturalised citizenship.

Seven years after the promulgation of the Constitution, Minister of Home Affairs Bal Krishna Khand registered the draft Bill in Parliament and it was passed by both Houses less than a month later. The debate on a serious issue like citizenship did not even last three weeks, and House Speaker Agni Sapkota did not think it necessary to send the bill to the parliamentary committee for discussion.

Speaker Sapkota appears to have followed the instructions of his bosses in the



Maoist party and other leaders of the ruling coalition.

“It was wrong to fast track a subject like citizenship,” says Adhikari. “It isn’t something that should have been passed without proper discussion.”

The matter is further complicated because the coalition partners see President Bhandari as being close to former prime minister K P Oli of the opposition UML.

The amendment itself has become a partisan issue. Although thousands of Nepalis, mostly living in the Tarai, will finally get their citizenship papers, critics have said the coalition has tried to appease the plain’s vote bank ahead of elections.

But the amendment also makes it more difficult for Nepalis to get citizenship in the

name of their mothers, whereas it is easy to get one in the name of their fathers.

“We cannot say that the President has taken a position. She has not issued an order, she has sent the legislative branch a reminder. We cannot compromise on national issues for the sake of speeding things up,” Adhikari says.

The Office of the President maintains discussions were held with Prime Minister Deuba, Law Minister Khand, the Attorney General, leaders of the ruling party, as well as 30 other stakeholders.

“The President consulted people without citizenship, experts, supporters and opponents of the Bill,” says Tika Dhakal, the President’s communication adviser.

Advocate Satish Krishna Kharel says

that the draft Citizenship Bill is progressive because it addresses the problems of non-resident Nepalis. “However, the bill is flawed in terms of gender equality,” he adds.

The Bill sent back to Parliament for reconsideration states that children born to a Nepali mother whose father cannot be identified can get citizenship by descent only when a self-declaration is made that the father ‘is not known’. Experts say that this clause holds stigma and is an insult to mothers.

Likewise, whereas a foreign woman married to a Nepali man will be granted citizenship immediately, there is no provision to grant citizenship to foreign men living in Nepal after marrying a Nepali woman.

Advocate Meera Dhungana says that naturalised citizenship should be given to foreign men married to Nepali women even if it means having criteria such as minimum period of residence in Nepal and renouncing the citizenship of the country of origin.

“The bill should be ratified only after removing those gender discriminatory sections,” she says.

It also seems that some coalition leaders want to make the retraction of the Bill a political matter, and want re-verification without addressing the President’s concerns.

However, legal experts say President Bhandari’s letter is an opportunity to improve on the draft Bill and address shortcomings.

Former Speaker Daman Nath Dhungana says that ratifying the Bill as it is could backfire on the ruling coalition. He suggests having proper discussions over the points sent by the President, and adds: “Trying to send a Bill without addressing the President’s 15 points of concern is against the dignity of both the President and Parliament.” 🇳🇵



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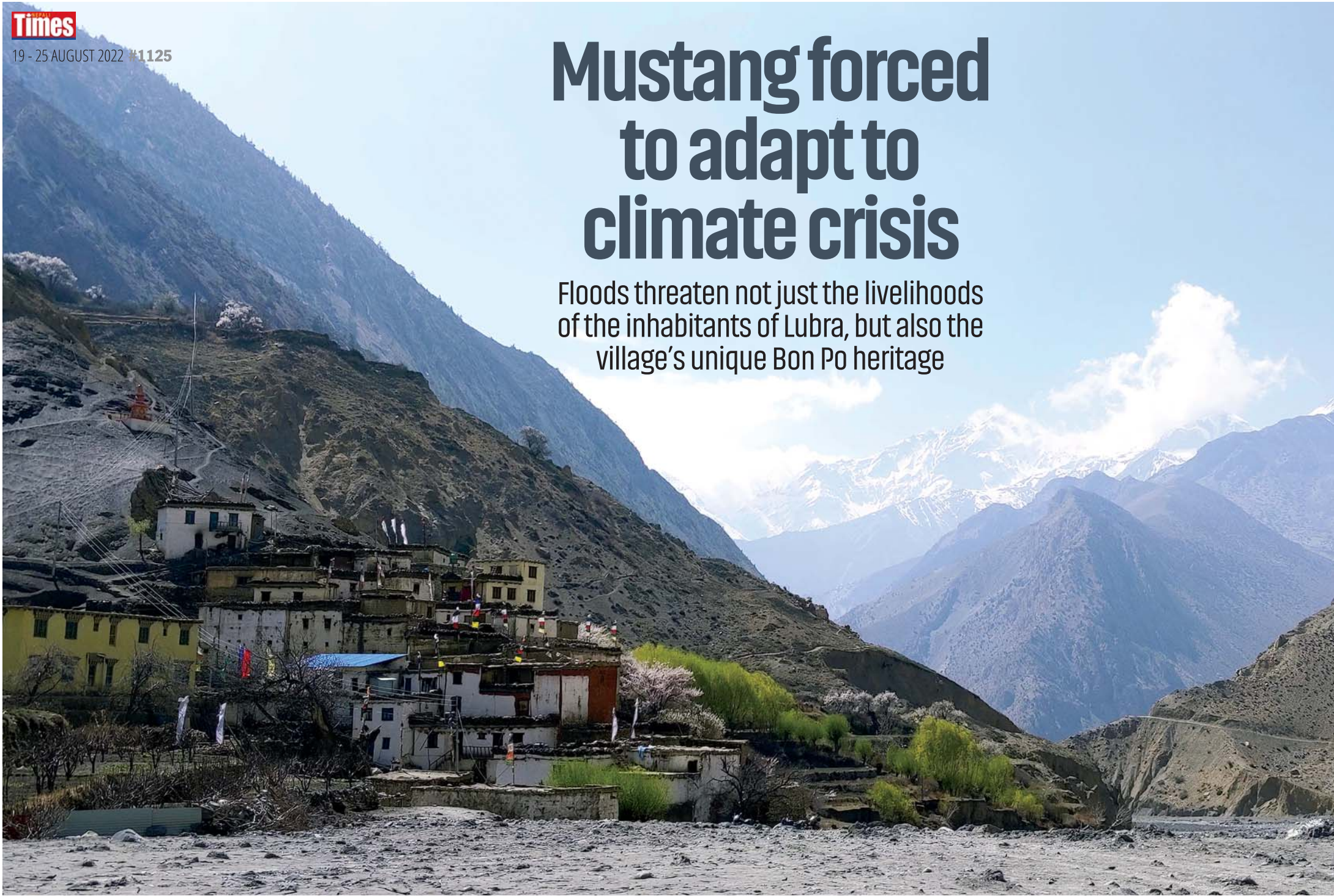
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MOBILITY FOR ALL



Aug 21st - Aug 24th



Lubra Village is under constant threat from flash floods.



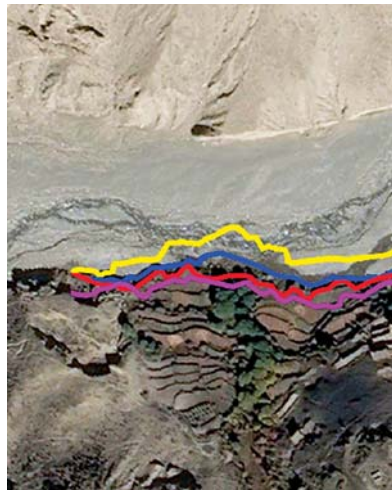
Sludge-like mixture of sediment, stone, and water sets like concrete.

DARA VARGONGMA



Flash floods span the entire riverbed adjacent to Lubra Village.

DARA VARGONGMA



Lubra River's edge in 1964 (yellow line), 2002 (blue line)

● **Ronan Wallace and Yungdrung Tsewang Gurung**

As weather patterns change across the world, many communities impacted by the climate crisis go unnoticed, or are disregarded. Himalayan villages are suffering an increase in flash floods and droughts.

One such community is Lubra

village in Lower Mustang, one of the few villages in Nepal fully practicing the Bön Po faith.

Lubra has over 800 years of cultural and ancestral significance. Established in the 12th century by Lama Yangton Tashi Gyaltsen, who is said to have crossed over from

Tibet, made the area suitable for settlement by subduing the land's unruly local spirits, and ensured the survival of the Bön belief.

Situated at 2,950m, the village today is home to over 100 inhabitants, and has a school with 90 children. Farming their own

land, they also carry community responsibilities involving one member from each family.

There are a handful of mud buildings, guesthouses and fields at the edge of Lubra River. A school, two monasteries, several *chörten*, a children's hostel and water tanks



Yak Kharka in Manang and people searching for yarsagumba in May 2022.

Over-harvesting and climate change affect yield of the prized Himalayan fungus

● **Achyut Tiwari** in Manang

PHOTOS: ACHYUT TIWARI

Giving yarsagumba a

A young girl in Ray-Ban sunglasses is singing along to a portable woofer. She has just come out of Yak Kharka lodge in Upper Manang and is on her way to collect yarsagumba for the day.

Throughout the yarsa-picking season from March to June, Tashi Gurung has been going to the meadows daily to pick the valuable caterpillar fungus.

"I feel energised and happy when I manage to gather 50 or more pieces in a day but when we pick only a few, my friends and I have to go hungry," she says.

Highly prized in traditional Chinese medicine, yarsagumba is supposed to have health benefits and once fetched up to to \$110,000 per kg in Beijing in 2012. It is extensively hunted across the Himalayas and in Nepal, caravans of people in remote areas move to higher elevations to follow



Yarsagumba, ready for packaging and sale. The caterpillar fungus can get harvesters up to Rs1,000 per piece but internationally has been sold at \$110,000 per kg.



RONAN WALLACE



blue line), 2018 (red line), and 2022 (purple line).

RONAN WALLACE AND DANE CARLSON

span the rest of the land. Although small, Lubra is an important cultural component of Mustang.

Every year during the monsoon, the entire valley faces flash floods as the Lubra River's trickle expands into a 150m wide debris flow of sediment and boulders, spanning



RONAN WALLACE

Lubra Village clings to a mountainside and is situated on the river's edge.

the riverbed to meet the Kali Gandaki downstream.

This turns the valley into a concrete mixer, as the sediment-stone-water turns into a viscous sludge. Higher up the valley, the water may not always be able to find passage through the sludge, causing it to be dammed. Eventually, the blockage gives way, bringing down a rush of aqueous concrete. These flood bursts repeat without fail over two months and swallow any obstacles in its path.

Increasingly frequent floods are directly attributed to climate change. Rising temperatures have been altering the water cycle across the Himalaya, including Mustang.

The region is in the Himalayan rain shadow, and monsoon clouds are blocked by the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri massifs. However, rain patterns are changing, and what used to be light, seasonal rain has turned to destructive downpours.

Glacial runoff has also been increasing over the last five years. Rangelands upriver from Lubra are deteriorating, loose soil is easily carried downriver in sudden floods.

For Lubra, this is disastrous. Living on the edge of the riverbank, families are sitting ducks. When the monsoon season concludes, new sediment sets and hardens like concrete, increasing the height of the riverbed, making the village more susceptible to damage. Over the last decade alone, the riverbed has risen by an astounding 12m in elevation, and buried terrace farms.



Land change comparison between 2016 (left) and 2022 (right) showing how the elevation of the river bed is rising.



RONAN WALLACE

In the 2021 monsoon, homes were damaged, leaving two families to take shelter in a guesthouse for three months. Jzimey, 25, saw the flood rush into the lower most room of his home. Having lived his entire life in Lubra, he felt the loss, but said: "It is what it is. If the next monsoon is like the last one, the rest of my house will be gone."

Because the majority of homes are stacked upon each other on the slope, the main village stands as one building, each home depending on the other for structural and foundational strength.

Damage to one home threatens the structural integrity of the entire village, putting families in harms way. The next two monsoon

seasons could leave several families without homes. "In next ten years, the entire village could be gone," Jzimey says.

For over 20 years, families have tried to adapt by building rock walls using gabion boxes and digging trenches to redirect flow. However, these walls are not as effective as they need to be, since floods flow over the barriers.

The community has discussed relocating the entire village to a safer place. However, relocation is no easy task. There are complexities in both civil engineering and the community's opinion.

Moving the entire village means considering every aspect of Lubra's way of life, and asking if it will

thrive in the new location. Lubra is having to rethink hundreds of years of cultural and ancestral heritage. Much planning needs to happen, but time is running out.

Additionally, families face fears of land security, as allotted plots for personal use might not be guaranteed.

As the riverbed continues to rise, the need for an immediate, community-conscious solution is evident and imperative. Floods threaten not only the livelihoods of the community, but the security of Bön traditions as well.

Decades of culturally significant land is being wiped out, and many families fear that their ancestral heritage will go with it. 🇳🇵

a chance for regrowth

the pre-monsoon yarsa gold rush every year.

Demand has gone up during the pandemic due to the belief that the fungus has therapeutic properties.

Local collectors do not get anywhere near international prices, but the lucrative hunt has largely lifted many parts of rural Nepal from poverty, allowing them to afford food, healthcare and education.

This year the price of yarsa at the collection site is Rs300-350 per piece depending on the quality, but the caterpillar fungus can get harvesters up to Rs1,000 if it is larger and golden yellow in colour.

Local contractors usually buy the fungus from collectors as soon as it is picked. This rids collectors of having to clean and dry it as well as prevents theft

and bargaining.

"We have more than 1,000 people this season in this area and over half of them are from Gorkha," says another collector Dhan Bahadur Gurung.

Dwindling harvests of the 'Himalayan viagra' can lead to conflict. In 2009, seven pickers from Gorkha were killed in Manang's Nar Phu region in a dispute with locals. Six local people were convicted of the murders.

Tashi Gurung of Manang's Nagawal is among more than 20 local contractors involved in yarsagumba trade from Upper Manang and has a target of trading 10kg of yarsa worth Rs20 million this season.

But over-harvesting and climate change in have meant that this unique Himalayan fungus is in steep decline.

As it is, very little is known about the

life cycle of this composite species which is a fungus that grows out of a caterpillar hibernating underground.

Now, intensified human activity during collection such as digging and trampling, and increasing day temperature and early melting of snow have affected the regeneration of the fungus.

Unseasonal spring blizzards due to climate change could also be affecting the life cycle of the fungus. Heavy snowfall in May in Upper Manang was unusual for the season and halted the yarsa hunt as 1,000 local collectors were stranded.

Yarsagumba (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*) is the fungus that parasitises the larvae of swift moths, resulting in the development of fruiting bodies which is the highly popular herbal remedy. After the germination of the larvae by the fungus, the latter kills the insect

and mummifies it. From the fruit body, a dark-brown coloured stalk emerges from the dead insect and stands upright.

Yarsagumba is found at 3,500-5,000m in upland meadows in Nepal, Bhutan, India and Tibet. In Nepal, it is collected in 12 districts and exported to Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Burma, Thailand, Singapore and Japan.

Harvesting and selling of yarsagumba was banned until 2001 in Nepal. But the government later re-allowed it as long as collectors paid a royalty.

This year there was a steep increase in the number of registered collectors in the Annapurna Conservation Area because of the pandemic pause. 🇳🇵

Achyut Tiwari is plant ecologist at the Central Department of Botany at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu.

EVENTS



Lakhey Pyakha
Enjoy the cultural dance of Lubhu, Lakhey Pyakha, this weekend.
19 August, 3pm onwards, Lubhu

Ghintang Ghisi Twak
Head over to Bhaktapur and witness the Ghintang Ghisi Twak dance that is performed only once a year in the culturally rich city.
19 August, 1pm onwards, Bhaktapur Optical, Bhaktapur

Public speaking forum
Interested in public speaking or want to learn? This weekly forum has you covered. Join, make friends and learn how to give sound opinions a voice.
20 August, 4pm-5:30pm, Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka



Product photography 101
Join the one-day photography workshop and learn the essentials of product photography. Book tickets now.
20 August, 12pm onwards, The Entrance café

Chikankaari Designs
Authentic hand-embroidered kurtis, anarkali, Chanderi, Kota, etc with designs by Amrita Seksaria from Kolkata. Presented by Beyond the Hanger.
21-22 August 11am-6pm
Yak & Yeti Hotel Platinum Hall

DINING



Merhabha Turkish
With over 90 items on their menu, Merhabha offers the best of Turkish cuisine. The Iskender kebab, a dish that is piled with tender meat, yogurt, couscous and flat bread, as well as the Turkish Pizza are simply delectable.
Chakshibari Marg, Thamel, 9840931141

MUSIC

Kirtan and Cacao
An evening of soulful singing with sound healer and singer of medicinal chants Mariska. Bonus: start with the Cacao medicine used by Aztecs in rituals and healing.
20 August, 6pm-8pm, Tanseem's Kings Kitchen, Jawalakhel, 9801121212



The Elements
Head over to Beers N' Cheers for a live performance by The Elements with rock band Tape.
19 August, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5524860

Abhaya Subba
Live performance by Abhaya Subba and the Steam Engines, with opening act by Accoustix. Call for details.
24 August, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500-8000, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5428362

The Axe Band
The Axe will be performing for the first time in Kirtipur, with supporting acts by Triplets and Swatantra.
3 September, 2pm-8pm, Ticket: Rs1000, Joshi Nani Heritage Homes, Kirtipur, 9803100657



Diwas Gurung
Diwas Gurung is performing live at Moksh, with a guest appearance by Albatross. Call for details.
20 August, 8pm-10pm, Ticket: Rs500-1000, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5428362

About Town

GETAWAY



Shangri-La Village Resort
Head to the idyllic Shangri-La Village Resort and meditate in the outdoor Yoga Pergola, indulge in a massage in Phewa Spa, and soak up the sun in the Sanctuary Garden. Perfect way to bid monsoon farewell.
Gharipatan, Pokhara, (61) 462222

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

Evergreen Eco-Lodge
Evergreen Eco-lodge is a rustic stay in Chitwan. Unwind in one of the wooden tree-house cabins with thatched straw roofs and enjoy the tranquility of the dense surrounding forest.
Chitwan National Park, Sauraha, 9845693879



Hotel Baha
This traditionally built hotel is located in the heart of Bhaktapur and is surrounded by temples. It is tradition meets the wonders of modern hospitality, and you can explore and enjoy the rich tapestry of Bhaktapur's cultural heritage as well.
Bhaktapur, (01)6616810

Newa Chén
This hotel is reminiscent of the golden era of the Malla Dynasty. The open rooms and courtyards embody the palaces of the dynasty that once ruled the city and left behind lasting impressions.
Kobahal, Lalitpur, (01) 5533532

Nina's
Craving wholesome burgers and juicy steaks? Nina's got you. Top it off with unparalleled service and unmatched quality -- you have never tasted anything like it.
Maharajgunj, 9851130043



Mamagoto Nepal
Mamagoto is a fun Pan-Asian restaurant that serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes. Enjoy Maki Rolls, Satays, Dumplings, Ramen and more, all with a side of cocktail in this new quirky eatery.
Panipokhari, Lazimpat, (01)4446299

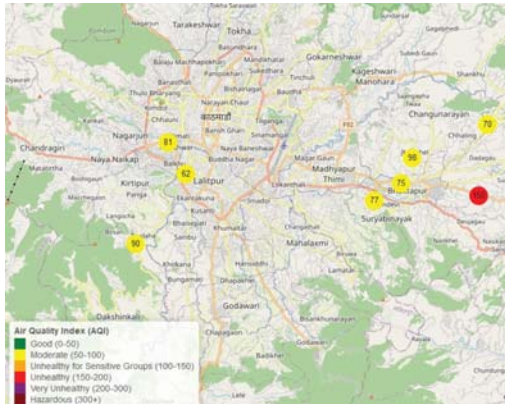
WEEKEND WEATHER



Bhadaure Jhari
A regional high pressure has been restricting the monsoon front to central and western parts of peninsular India. But a circulation in the Bay of Bengal (left) is now infiltrating northwards, bringing the moist air to Nepal. Things will be cloudy, but with little rain on Friday. Saturday will see some heavy showers. This being the Nepali month of Bhadau, the rainfall characteristic of this phase of the monsoon is short, sharp localised showers (jhar) rather than the relentless rains lasting days on end. Despite cloud cover and elevated minimum temperature, days will be muggy and sticky.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
28°/20°	28°/20°	28°/20°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



Thursday morning AQI in the eastern-edge of the Valley (see red dot, left) was worse due to brick kilns, and while the monsoon may periodically scrub Kathmandu's air clean and wash down suspended particles, it cannot do much to clear the stink from rotting solid waste piling up on the streets. Heavy rains this week washed the garbage down the capital's main streets, with the plastic finding its way into the drains and rivers, clogging them up. Summer is the worst time to leave trash on the streets, as it spreads disease and discomfort. Let us expand the definition of air pollution to include the hazards of uncollected garbage.

OUR PICK

The Danish political drama *Borgen*, created and written by Adam Price, continues the story of Birgitte Nyborg, who after becoming Denmark's first female prime minister is foreign minister. Through the three original seasons from 2010 to 2013, the series explores feminism, media, as well as women in power and the personal sacrifices they must make to be successful. The series is now back for a stand alone fourth season in 2022 that focuses on the politics of climate change. Stars Sidse Babett Knudsen, Birgitte Hjort Sørensen, Pilou Asbæk, and Søren Malling all look 8-12 years older.




बाढीपहिरोबाट जोगिन

- जथाभावी सडक निर्माण र वन विनाशले बाढीपहिरो निम्त्याउछ।
 - वृक्षारोपण गरौं, वनजंगल जोगाऔं, बाढीपहिरो नियन्त्रण गरौं।
 - पहिरोको जोखिम भएका क्षेत्र तथा नदी किनारमा रुख, बाँस, निगालोजस्ता भु-क्षय रोक्ने खालका विरुवा रोपौं र संरक्षण गरौं।
 - आफ्नो बस्ती तथा समुदायको रक्षा गरौं।
 - बाढी तथा पहिरो गएको सूचना तल्लो तटीय क्षेत्रमा दिऔं।
- आफु पनि बचौं अरुलाई पनि बचाऔं।




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● Ashish Dhakal

Siddhartha Art Gallery is once again alive with a vibrant colour palette, meticulously textured on canvas. Renowned artist Kiran Manandhar’s latest show ‘Samarpan’ – his first in four years – adds a delectable frenzy of red, orange, blue, black and white to the space, where the canvases are each a window and the viewers stare directly into the eyes of providence.

It is immediately difficult to group these artworks in a single genre. The softer lines, sharper angles and the curves are balanced by almost-distinct faces and amorphous flames and shadows. There is a certain vagueness about the paintings, and the deities look abstract enough, but Manandhar will not relent so easily.

“I am like a bird,” he says sitting under a parasol outside the

gallery, as a sparrow skips across the courtyard paved with bricks into a nearby bush. “I don’t make art in one style or another, I like to hop from one branch, one tree to another.”

Manandhar jokes that birds do not need visas to fly around. This desire for no restriction, to dissolve borders is strikingly conspicuous in ‘Samarpan’. Stylistically diverse, the paintings and charcoal drawings even transcend philosophies and the various global schools of art. Influences of the European masters, for instance, blend in with the traditional Nepali iconography and style.

Nature and light also create an overall dream-like impression, always in motion, which may be explained by Manandhar’s own drive to understand what art is. He is not being coy when he candidly admits, “Even after all these years, I still don’t know what a painting is.”

Perhaps when one knows what painting is entirely, one does not need to paint anymore, but Manandhar has no intention of stopping. He describes the itch to make art, even at odd hours and places: working to figure out, to develop one’s skills and understanding.

‘Samarpan’ took four years to realise, and a couple paintings go far back as 2016. Much of the work was made during the Covid-19 pandemic and the title refers to the dedication and offering made to art, to inspiration, to the many artists who were compelled to give up by the pandemic and the constraints it invited, and to Nepal which Manandhar so lovingly calls ‘devbhum’ – land of gods.

These paintings do not want to be tied down to a particular adjective or movement: they are

Art for art's sake

Kiran Manandhar’s latest exhibition is a contemplative homage to artists, art lovers and Nepal as a centre of inspiration

themselves in motion instead, to show the world and other artists, just how much more there is to do.

To bill them patriotic or nationalistic would be missing the point, for this presupposes borders which Manandhar wishes to bring down. While the gods depicted

are Nepali in essence, the art is an homage to the past and the traditions and a look forward. It also represents a spiritual landscape and the power of divine inspiration. After all, who can traverse partitions as easily as the gods?

But it is not easy being an artist

in Nepal. Many, he says, especially young artists, are forced to stop because there is no immediate ‘sound and effect’ result in art.

He recalls speaking to other artists who are now abroad and no longer painting, who lament the lack of support and opportunities in Nepal. “One works for as long as one can,” he says. “Which is why a good support system is necessary that brings together artists, educators and patrons.”

Samarpan
By Kiran Manandhar
Siddhartha Art Gallery.
Baber Mahal Revisited
Open 11:00AM – 5:00PM
Till 24 August 2022.



PHOTOS: SAGAR MANANDHAR

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After Balen, the Rabi Phenomenon

Nepali celebrity tv presenter-turned-candidate Rabi Lamichhane tries to find his political footing ahead of November polls

● Umesh Shrestha

While mainstream political leaders in Kathmandu were vacillating on a date for the upcoming provincial and federal elections, one Ram Bahadur Biswokarma was up on the stage of an open stadium in Nepalganj.

"May my country be like Rabi Lamichhane," said Biswokarma in a quivering voice. Lamichhane was speaking at a district meeting of the newly launched National Independent Party in Banke.

Another participant, Balkrishna Chapagain added: "May my country be what Rabi Sir has envisioned!"

Because the incumbents are old and incompetent, Lamichhane is using this public preference for independent candidates to his advantage to catapult his National Independent Party to prominence. His personal brand as a well-recognised face has also helped.

According to John Street, English professor and author of *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy*, it is easy to have 'celebrity influence' on politics through television. The reason:



RABI LAMICHHANE/FACEBOOK

compared to any other mass medium, tv is more intimate and people feel they know the person.

Lamichhane's *News 24* show *सिधा कुरा, जनता संग* (Straight Talk with the People) allowed him to generate a massive fan base after it was first aired in 2016. He took on issues of public concern including foreign employment fraud, mismanagement of airport

immigration and corruption.

Heated political confrontation in the studio, or live rescues of abused workers meant that people were now coming to him in the hope of solving their problems instead of going to the police.

Soon enough, Lamichhane was everywhere. At political party events, the crowd lined up

for selfies with 'Rabi Dai'. On Facebook, he has over a million followers: more than Sher Bahadur Deuba, K P Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal combined.

But his influence was perhaps most visible when he was taken into custody by Chitwan Police in 2019 for the suicide case of a former employee. Even then, supporters took to the streets protesting the smear campaign against their idol.

Which might be, but Lamichhane's persona is based on sensational, clickbait journalism. His content is provocative and unapologetic, inciting antagonism against guests. Few anchors on national television have hurled as many invectives as he has.

But when the Press Council sent Lamichhane a warning letter, he wrote back, 'I'm not a journalist, not yet. I would rather be a cobbler than apply for a press pass.' There were roars of approval from fans.

For a tv presenter of his status, lamichhane is quite fast and loose with facts. His forte is not fact-checking, as exemplified by episodes on Nepal manufacturing its own Covid vaccine and a haunted house in Kathmandu which were baseless, problematic and promoted false narratives.

So, it is only natural to wonder if his politics will resemble his journalism. After all, a leader has the responsibility to forge a path without crowd pressure, having judged right from wrong.

Lamichhane accepts that he lacks leadership experience in Nepal, but claims to have led a large workforce in the US to improve customer service as a manager at a Subway sandwich outlet in Baltimore. It was the Chitwan incident that prompted Lamichhane to join politics, he has said. He had even announced a new reality show titled *Leader* to find candidates for his new political party but the pandemic intervened.

Then he joined *Galaxy 4k TV*, where he was also an investor, and there was a marked difference in the tenor of his programs. He was diplomatic with guests.

Lamichhane has said he thought of running for mayor of Kathmandu. And the result of the May election and Balen Shah's victory appears to have emboldened him to launch an entirely new political party.

Lamichhane set some ground rules during the campaign. At party functions, it is not the leaders who

speak and make false promises but participants who talk about their expectations. But the Election Commission has disqualified his party from provincial races because it has not fulfilled conditions in time.

Lamichhane's unclear stance on federalism and secularism sounds suspicious to many. He has been in the news for his anti-republicanism and anti-federal sentiments around the time Rajendra Lingden won the RPP chairmanship.

There was also talk of him joining the RPP prior to local elections in May. Lamichhane's celebrity status combined with RPP's stronghold could have been a powerful alliance, but by setting up his own party, it seems he wants to be his own boss.

We have already seen how Bibeksheel Sajha Party went into decline after its chair, also a former media personality Rabindra Mishra, demanded a referendum on secularism, federalism be scrapped and monarchy restored.

Will Lamichhane be able to connect to the people with his politics as he did with his brand of 'journalism'? Will the voters amid their distaste for mainstream parties and the same old leaders seek an alternative as they did with Balen Shah and Harka Sampang in May?

So far, Lamichhane's new party has witnessed large turnouts at its district meetings. But so do gatherings of rural cooperatives. And despite the Lamichhane Craze, his new party lacks candidates and leaders to properly contest federal and provincial elections. Even Lamichhane's otherwise tv presenter-style provocative oration lacks substance at the hustings.

"Giving a public speech is much more difficult than speaking on tv where we talk based on facts," Lamichhane admits. But one cannot discount the possibility that the celebrity presenter could cut the vote bank of the established parties and even capture their strongholds.

Rabi Lamichhane's transition to politics is an experiment. Voters will also be experimenting by voting for him. For many, given the current crop of ageing leaders, that is worth a gamble. 🍀

Umesh Shrestha is the editor at *NepalFactCheck.org*, a joint initiative of the non-profit Center for Media Research Nepal (CMR-Nepal) and the Nepali language blog, *MySansar.com*

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Nepal's horrorscope

It is only when people start worrying about their future that they strive for betterment. Contrary to what many negativists think, Nepal does have a future. We just don't know what kind of future it is.

And that is where us asstrologers come in: by divining what the coming years may hold so that Nepal's politicians can peer into the future and allow history to repeat itself.

In being able to prophesy the future, we lag behind our neighbours India (the world's foremost leader in fortune-telling) and China (the global fortune-cookie superpower). It is in Nepal's geo-strategic interest to be able to predict what will happen the day after tomorrow, or to be more specific, on Election Day on 20 November.

After all, Prime Minister Dubya pushed the polling date by two days not at the request of the Election Commission, but on advice from Asstrologer General Suresh Rijal. That is the same soothsayer who told Comrade Brave Lion he will be prime minister seven times. Two more to go.

Nations, too, have horoscopes. And in these uncertain times it is good to know what is pre-ordained, so that we can all sit back and relax, safe in the knowledge that what will be, will be, and there is nothing we can do about it. Nepal's horoscope is Top Secret Sensitive Compartmented Information, and we reprint it below only in the strictest confidence:

'With the Moon in the Seventh House,

Jupiter aligned with Mars, and the current Libra-Aries opposition identical to the placement of those constellations during the Peloponnesian War of 431 BC when the plague struck Athens and the Third Punic War when Rome sacked Carthage, war and pestilence are probable for Nepal. Luckily, a Neptune-Uranus conjunction means that nothing can go wrong, because nothing of any importance is going on anyway.'

When politics get uncertain, Nepal's leaders have often relied on Indian godmen like Co-Pilot Baba and Shree 3 Ravi Shankar to plan their future poltical strategy. Not surprisingly, it is the atheist Communist parties who mostly rely on these navel gazing asstrophysists to appease the planets.

Maobuddy leader Comrade Awesome often ODs on the opiate of the asses: worshipping water buffaloes, sacrificing black goats, and engaging the services of Tantric voodoo consultants to cast spells on rivals.

All the nine planets are in alignment with

PKD's constellation, so it will be smooth sailing for him after the elections. However, the James Webb Space Telescope has found another solar system 300 light years away, so those new planets may throw a spanner in the works for Comreade Stupendous.

In no way is Nepal a failed state, we are a fatalist state. This is why Kathmandu is the venue for the Asian Astrologers' Convention in October, even though the organisers are waiting for the planets to align for the date and time to be set. Those planning a government reshuffle, announce election candidacies, or stage a coup d'etat should book seats at the conference in advance.

The conference will also spell out whether Nepal's leaders should adopt Vastu or Feng Shui when greeting Indian or Chinese leaders. Ass's advice: face north while meeting the Chinese, and hide under the table when the Indians come.



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