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## Solution to Pollution

● **Sonia Awale**

There is high public awareness among urban Nepalis about air pollution and its hazards, yet successive governments have not been able to reduce it. Just like solid waste management, poor air quality in Kathmandu is proof of chronic political failure.

Traffic police has successfully reduced drunk-driving and honking, but seems powerless to control emissions in vehicle exhaust, smoke from brick kilns and open garbage burning.

All this dirty air means that Nepal has the highest rate of lung disease in the world, and the life expectancy of people in Kathmandu Valley is cut by three years. The most dangerous pollutant are tiny soot particles smaller than 2.5 microns. (See page 6-7)

Nepal's foremost atmospheric scientist Arnico Panday, who is standing in federal elections in November from Lalitpur-3 says: "There are several sources that need urgent addressing: cleaning up indoor air quality by switching to clean cookstoves, reducing the large year-round sources from motor vehicles and industries, and reducing the agricultural waste burning and forest fires."

He adds, "But the easiest source to address is waste burning, which can contribute a quarter of Kathmandu's air pollution during winter mornings."

Suspended particles can be seen, but there are invisible and odourless gases like carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and ozone (O<sub>3</sub>). The main source of these toxic gases are the 1.2 million two-wheelers on the streets of the Valley. Kathmandu's

average annual exposure to nitrogen dioxide is 30 µg/m<sup>3</sup> which is the highest among South Asian cities. It is 12 µg/m<sup>3</sup> in Pokhara.

"NO<sub>2</sub> is a pollutant most closely associated with vehicular traffic, and in Kathmandu the concentration of this gas is higher than in Karachi, Dhaka and Delhi," warns Pallavi Pant of Health Effects Institute. "The data indicates the need for continued action to reduce emissions at source," she adds.

Another paper in 2017 by a research group led by Anobha Gurung of Yale University found nitrogen dioxide levels in Kathmandu to be higher than Ulaanbaatar, which is notorious for high pollution levels.

Asked what he would do if elected, Arnico Panday replied: "Air pollution will be one of my highest priority national issues in Parliament. In the first year I plan

to empower and incentivise local governments to crack down on polluters within their jurisdictions, create an entity to fight forest fires from the ground and the air, and introduce a comprehensive clean air act that will bring Nepal's air quality within WHO guidelines by 2030." 🇳🇵



**FULL STORY PAGE 6-7**

**THE X1**

**Sheer Driving Pleasure**



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# A decent person

**B**P Koirala's famous advice to fellow Nepalis was that they should not necessarily strive to be great. "Just try to be a decent person," he used to say.

Many Nepali Congress (NC) leaders who succeeded B P continue to disregard that dictum, most so his own relatives. But one leader who took the sage advice to heart and lived it was Pradip Giri, who died in Kathmandu on Saturday at age 74.

Pradip Giri was an iconoclast and a gentle giant of Nepali politics. He never craved power and position, preferring to remain behind the scenes to be the conscience of his party and nation. He was elected member of parliament several times, and always spoke up for those left behind by the Nepali state, refusing repeatedly to serve in government.

While in exile in Banaras during the Panchayat years, Giri fell out with the Koirala clan. And after B P's death in 1982, he became closer to another Congress leader with whom he shared traits of austerity, humility and honesty: Krishna Prasad Bhattarai.

Ironically, it was throat cancer that prematurely claimed the lives of both Koirala and Giri — 40 years apart. And just as he struggled for democracy, struggled to keep the Nepali Congress true to its social democratic roots, he struggled against the malignancy in Nepal's body politic, and in his own body.

Pradip Giri was the last of a generation of Nepali politicians who witnessed India's freedom struggle, and knew many of its post-independence leaders. He was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi to lead a frugal and honest life, and to adopt *satyagraha* as a strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience to confront the structural violence of the state.

When B P was imprisoned in 1960 and Nepal's first democratically elected government was driven underground, Giri was arrested several times and cumulatively spent more than four years in detention.

After the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, Giri was elected member of parliament from his home district of Siraha, although he lost the seat in 1999. He drifted away from Girija Koirala and joined the Nepali Congress (Democratic) of Sher Bahadur Deuba in 2002.

He was nominated to the Constituent Assembly, but disagreed on a matter of principle with the 2015 Constitution for not

meeting the aspirations of the people of the Madhes.

Deuba is currently prime minister of Nepal for the fifth time, and Giri has never served even once as minister in any NC government. In that respect, the two could not be more different.

But some of Pradip Giri's efforts to make the party more inclusive and responsive to the country's needs did see results. He pressured the party to induct members from neglected regions like the Karnali and Tarai, as well as to bring in more Dalit, women and Indigenous members.

Pradip Giri did not just talk about socialism, he practiced it. He tried to redress the inequity and imbalance in Nepali society by always speaking up for those historically left out by Kathmandu, and keeping them at the centre of his focus.

Even so, successive NC governments practised politics of patronage, coddled corporate interests, got mired in corruption, as the party's ideology shifted rightwards. Throughout it all, Giri called it like he saw it. His dialogue spanned party lines at times of deep polarisation, and it must have frustrated

him to no end that national leaders showed such utter disregard for the national interest.

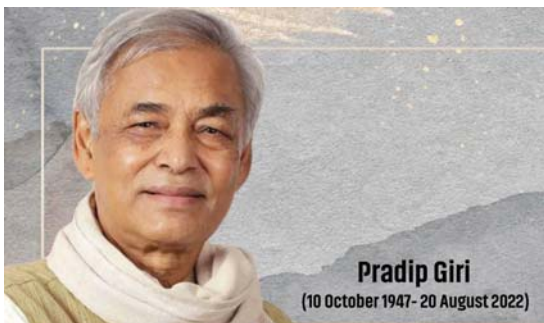
They don't make political leaders like Pradip Giri anymore. There is no one that even comes close to having the knowledge base

and experience, and the confidence to engage across the political spectrum. He was not a communist, but his belief in socialism was purer and more genuine than all of Nepal's leftists put together.

We will miss his deep baritone, holding forth on the meaning of democracy, and telling us to rise above the kickboxing of day-to-day politics and see it as a process to serve a deeply unequal society.

Although respected within the Nepali Congress, the cadre did not follow Pradip Giri because he was never in a position to dole out perks and positions.

In a *Nepali Times* tribute, Raghu Panta, the UML MP who engaged with Giri in Parliament in the 1990s, wrote: 'The more distorted Nepali politics became, and as the NC distanced itself from its founding principles, Pradip Giri's puritanical belief in socialism with a human face became more and more a cry in the wilderness.'



**Pradip Giri**  
(10 October 1947-20 August 2022)

**Pradip Giri did not hanker for power and position, he was satisfied with being the conscience of his party and nation**

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Power Play

Earlier this month, Investment board of Nepal and Indian state-owned NHPC Limited signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to build the 750MW West Seti project, designed specifically for export to India. It has been stuck since the 90s with successive governments awarding it to the Australians and the Chinese.

20 years ago this week, Binod Bhattarai's Page 1 story looked into why India and Nepal could not agree on the electricity trade when Northern India was facing power cuts and Nepal had surplus supply.

Two decades down the line Nepal is still negotiating to sell more power to India. Nepal's rivers have become more of a geopolitical chess game than a revenue stream.

Excerpts from Page 1 story published 20 years ago on issue #108, 23-29 August 2002:

Clues about why Nepal and India are stuck lie in Nepal's only project designed specifically for export to India—the 750MW West Seti dam, a Nepali joint venture with Australia's Snowy



Mountain Engineering Corporation (SMC). The \$1 billion project has been stuck since 1997 because a power purchase agreement with India got caught up in domestic Nepali politics, and has been stalled in India's Ministry of External Affairs.

Analysts told us New Delhi seems to want hydropower to be part of wider bilateral give-and-take with Nepal that would include border and trade disputes, and security issues. Meanwhile, Nepal loses potential export revenue and royalties, Indian consumers suffer power cuts, and the villagers of Uttar Pradesh do not benefit from West Seti's irrigation and flood mitigation effect on the Karnali River.

It is clear where the main obstacle to Indo-Nepal hydro trade lies: in the lack of political trust. Says hydropower expert Ratna Sansar Shrestha: "India's security concerns seem to override all economic arguments. How can you talk business without that changing?"

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



**WORKING FROM HOME**

After working abroad for nearly 15 years, Tanka Nath Ghimire returned to Nepal hoping to inspire others to stay back and work in Nepal. Today he runs Ranimahar Resort in Palpa. Watch his journey from a dishwasher to a hotel owner in the video online.



**WASTED POLITICS**

Nepal is still mixing garbage with politics as Kathmandu's chronic garbage problem is magnified by politicians trying to score brownie points. Read the report on the website, and watch the video on the Nepali Times YouTube channel.



**MEASURING THE MUCK**

In this 2021 video, Nepali Times reporters fanned out across Kathmandu with AQI monitors to measure air pollution. The conclusion then remains true more than a year later: from Singha Darbar to Khasi Bazar, the air is bad. Watch the video on YouTube.

### YOUNG LEADERSHIP

Don't see the baton changing hands even this time ('Young Turks not getting their turn', Editorial, #1125). The young challengers in the respective mainstream parties just aren't up to scratch. They talk a lot, and some talk well too, but the oldies know how to do what it takes to remain in power. Speeches alone will not bring change.

**Krishna Joshi**

● In Nepal "Youth Club" members are parents and grandparents.

**Shirini Barakzai**

● They are not only fresh faces, but also have vision, image and potential ('Nepal's Gen Next Election', Yugottam Koirala, nepalitimes.com)

**Bidhy Udavi**

● He is a better alternative than the time tested failed political parties candidate, that is for sure. ('After Balen, the Rabi Phenomenon', Umesh Shrestha, #1125)

**Desh Ratna**

### PRADIP GIRI

Pradip Giri was one of a kind. ('Pradip Giri, the passing of an iconoclast', Raghu Panta, nepalitimes.com)

**Paritosh Jha**

● Pradeepji was an intellectual, a revolutionary who exemplified 'simple living, high thinking. A bright star has set. My condolences

**Rajib Kandel**

### YARSAGUMBA

They may be over harvesting yarsagumba ('Giving yarsagumba a chance for regrowth', Achyut Tiwari, #1125) - but the real problem here is under-harvesting of everything else. Over 40% of Nepal's agricultural land is lying unused, which is mismanagement of the highest order.

**Aleksandr Verkovsyn**

● This means that climate change is rapidly prevailing all over Himalaya.

**Wangchen 4 Change**

### HUMAN MILK BANK

Great to hear about the successful launch of the first milk bank in Nepal ('Nepal's first Human Milk Bank', nepalitimes.com). This will help a lot of small and sick neonates.

**Gaurav Sharma**

### MUSTANG CRISIS

This is a very sad situation for the villagers ('Mustang forced to adapt to climate crisis', Ronan Wallace and Yungdrung Tsewang Gurung, #1125).

**Roger Ray**

### SANU SHERPA

Great achievement. Had this feat been achieved by a white person — the entire global media would have their headlines illuminated with this news.

**Ramesh Shrestha**

**Times.com**

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Art for art's sake

by *Ashish Dhakal*

Renowned artist Kiran Manandhar's latest show 'Samarpan' — his first in four years — is a homage to the dedication, inspiration, and to the many artists who were compelled to give up by the pandemic. Read the review of the exhibition at nepalitimes.com.

**f Most reached and shared on Facebook**

### Mustang and the climate crisis

by *Ronan Wallace and Yungdrung Tsewang Gurung*

As the riverbed continues to rise, floods threaten not just the livelihoods of the inhabitants of Lubra, but also the village's unique Bon Po heritage. The need for an immediate, community-conscious solution is evident and imperative. Join the discussion online.

**t Most popular on Twitter**

### Young Turks not getting their turn

Editorial

Just because a politician is young does not seem to guarantee that they will be for reform. Instead of expecting youth leadership to be a cure-all for all our ills, we should be on the lookout for competent, honest leaders. Join the conversation online.

**“ ” Most commented**



### Remembering Hubert Decler

by *Peter Moran*

Peter Moran pays tribute to Hubert Decler, the old-school intellectual, researcher and digger into Buddhist texts who lived and died in Kathmandu. Read the obituary on the Nepali Times website.

**🔥 Most visited online page**

## QUOTE TWEETS



**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**

Over-harvesting and rapid environmental change in higher elevation areas of the Himalaya have meant that yarsagumba, the unique Himalayan fungus is in steep decline.



**Forester @kuenvmgt504**

Can we rule out climate change and global warming reducing the subalpine grasslands area for yarsagumba?



**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**

In Lower Mustang as the riverbed continues to rise, the need for an immediate, community-conscious solution is evident and imperative.

Video: Digital model showing the current state Lubra Village in relation to Lubra River.  
<https://nepalitimes.com/banner/mustang-forced-to-adapt-to-climate-crisis/>



**Jackie Ihowa @jackieMustangi**

Remembering @AlokSharma\_RDG opening speech at COP26 Glasgow



**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**

Floods threaten not just the livelihoods of the inhabitants of Lubra, but also the village's unique Bon Po heritage.



**Calvin Shrestha @Calvin1472**

Need to handle the safety measures ASAP.



**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**

Nepal's First Human Milk Bank  
'Amrit Kosh' will give premature, low birth weight and other at-risk infants access to breast milk.



**neerajain @neerajPATH**

At PATH we are proud to have been part of this journey and congratulate @mohpnep and @unicef\_nepal for this brilliant initiative!  
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# Don't give up on Nepal,

Dishwasher to hotelier, a migrant worker returns to Nepal and inspires the next generation

● **Sahina Shrestha**  
in Palpa

The first time Tanka Nath Ghimire stepped outside Nepal was on a bus to Mumbai with his uncle. He was 15, and the three-day journey across India was unfamiliar, noisy and hot.

For the next four years, Tanka toiled in the crowded city working as a dishwasher in a restaurant, with a single goal in mind: to earn money. But the pay was poor, and the work hard.

When he returned to Nepal, he knew he had to go abroad again to improve prospects for a better life for himself and his family.

The last time, he was not on a bus, but on a plane to Doha. He covered three times the distance to Mumbai in a mere five hours.

In Qatar, he worked in an electrical company, and earned enough to send back a little to his family at home. He returned after four years, determined not to migrate anymore. He decided his destiny was in his own country.

“Living and working abroad for almost 15 years taught me how to work hard, and much later it also taught me the value of that hard work in my own motherland,” says Tanka, who with his wife Laxmi now own and run the Ranimahal Resort in Aawal of Palpa.

The hotel is on the way to the famous Rani Mahal, the palace on a bend on the Kali Gandaki River built by Khadga Shumshere Rana for his youngest wife, Tej Kumari Devi.



ALL PHOTOS: AMIT MACHAMASI

Recently refurbished, the palace is known as Nepal's Taj Mahal.

Tanka's hotel caters to the steady stream of visitors to the palace, and with his wife by his side he serves customers, maintains the property with a sense of belonging and ownership that he did not have abroad.

But it has not always been smooth sailing. Tanka grew up

## STRIKING ROOTS

in a family that had to work hard in the fields to grow enough food to feed everyone.

That is what drove Tanka to accompany his uncle to Mumbai to escape the drudgery and poverty.

“At that time all I thought was about getting a job,” he recalls. “The experience in Mumbai taught me that I had to go to a better country to earn more.”

Back in Nepal, he borrowed Rs120,000 and flew to Saudi Arabia. His meagre salary of 350 riyal was not enough for himself, and he could not save much to send home.

Moreover, the managers of the company where he worked set a target for workers, and if they did not meet it they were fined. The Nepali workers banded together and went on strike. They were thrown in jail. After four and a half years, he decided he had enough and

returned home, and got married to Laxmi.

But unable to eke out a decent living, he decided to go abroad once again. In Qatar, things were better, and he saved enough to send money home regularly and visited his family every couple of years.

It was during this time that Tanka started noticing the changes around the village and in himself.

There were no young people left. The terrace fields were barren,

## prabhu BANK

### Turkish for Youths

Turkish Airlines Kathmandu Office and Nepalese Young Entrepreneurs Forum signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for a yearlong partnership starting with



flagship events. With this collaboration, the Airlines hopes to encourage more youth- and entrepreneurship-based cooperation between Turkey and Nepal.

### IME video KYC

Global IME bank has started a video customer identification KYC service. Customers opening a new account can now fill up the KYC form and verify the documents through online video.



Nepali citizens living abroad can also open a bank account online through the video KYC service.

### Brand ambassador

Nabil bank has appointed social worker and influencer Prensa Regmi as the brand ambassador for their new digital product 'Nabil Gen Alpha'. The Gen Alpha which is set to be launched in September targets children below 18 years and parents can create, set and assign tasks and earn points.



The bank has also launched a digital lending facility to QR merchants through the NABIL Fone loan. QR merchants registered under sole proprietorship can access digital loans if they have done QR transactions worth Rs10,000 the previous month.



### Dental Discount

Mukthinath Bikas Bank customers can receive discounts on various services at Himal Dental Hospital and Vivanta Dental Hospital. Visa and debit card holders can get 15% discount on the services.

### Empowering Women

NMB Bank has announced six women-led and women-only branches in Nepal. The announcement was made during a program where women working for women empowerment shared their experiences.



The bank has also launched a deposit scheme 'Smart Nari Bachat Khata' for Nepali women living in and outside of Nepal. Customers can get yearly cash back of Rs5000 on digital payments made for health checkups, free debit card, credit card, dollar card, as well as Mero Share and DEMAT account. They can also get 25% discount on loan processing fee for retail as well as loans to start business.

### Toyota Upgrade Camp

United Traders Syndicate, the sole distributor of Toyota for Nepal, is organising a festive upgrade camp till 24 August. Customers can exchange their old cars with new Toyota Raize, Rush, Hilux, Corolla Cross, Fortuner, RAV-4 Hybrid/Corolla Cross and Prado. Customers can also get instant vehicle evaluation, exchange bonus, additional accessories and gift hampers.



### School Support

Everest Bank under its corporate social responsibility has handed over Rs479,910 to Shree Yamunananda Namuna Secondary school to improve school infrastructure and facilities.

### Sunsilk Gang of Girls

Sunsilk Nepal has featured winners of the previous Dashain contest as brand ambassadors for the limited special edition shampoo packs. Winners Aashina Deula,



Pratima Karki and Lalana Chimariya will represent the three variants: hairfall solution, black shine and perfect straight. Sunsilk will also relaunch the Sunsilk Dashain Vibes campaign this year.



# it has lots to offer



and overgrown with bushes. When someone in the village died, there would only be older people during the cremation ceremony.

"If this continued, there would be no home to come back to. Our society would collapse, so I decided to come back for good," he adds.

Once back, he was faced with a problem: he did not have enough capital to start his own business. What little he earned abroad was spent on taking care of the family, and since he was absent for so long, no one knew and trusted him enough to loan him any money.

He managed to borrow Rs20,000 and invested in a poultry farm. But he did not have any experience, and 40 of the 100 chicks he bought died. "I thought I'd have to go back abroad again," he recalls.

But he raised the remaining chicken and sold them to hotels and butcher shops in the neighbourhood, bypassing the middlemen. Slowly, he expanded his business and added more chicken.

He started a vegetable farm, and fertilised it with chicken manure. He ferried the vegetables and chicken on a motorcycle over rough roads. He often got stuck in the mud, and needed help to push his bike.

Once, some foreigners who could not find a hotel stayed as guests in his own house, and that is when Tanka and Laxmi got the idea to get into the business.

"If they were willing to stay over at my old house, maybe we could get more people to come here if there was a better place for them to

room," he says.

So, he once again borrowed money and put what little saving he had into opening Ranimahal Fishing Resort. At that time, there were no motorable roads leading to Rani Mahal, and Tanka's little cottage resort with a man-made fishing pond was in the middle of nowhere.

"It was a gamble. People here said that I was wasting money I had earned abroad and once I'd spent it all, I would go back abroad again," says Tanka.

Some of his relatives were also not happy with the decision, because as a Brahmin, he was selling meat and alcohol. But with support from Laxmi, Tanka was confident he was on the right track. "I did not care, I knew they would change their mind once I was successful," says Tanka.

For the first several months, the flow of customer was slow. Every night, Tanka would sleep in different rooms to keep the rats away.

But slowly things started looking up, Rani Mahal started getting more attention. To set themselves apart from the rest, the Ghimire couple used a simple tactic: provide clean and hygienic stay with local organic food. In order to ensure that his neighbours benefited as well, they source everything locally.

During the initial days much of the marketing was through word of mouth, and after the lockdown ended last year, the couple took a loan to upgrade the property and

rebranded it as Ranimahal Resort.

Apart from fresh fish from the pond, local chicken and organic vegetables, customers can now also feast on *kalij* pheasant.

With the road leading up to Rani Mahal currently being upgraded, the Ghimires are hopeful about the future. "When we started we were at zero. Now we have something to show, and it proves that hard work always pays," says Laxmi.

Tanka is happy that more and more local youth have learnt from his experience and have changed their mind about migrating abroad for work. Relatives who once snubbed him for running a hotel now come and stay over.

Says Tanka, "Anyone who is thinking about migrating should listen to my story. Where I was and how far I have come. And I have many more things to achieve. My message is: don't give up on Nepal, our motherland has lots to offer." 🇳🇵

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



WORKING FROM HOME

After working abroad for nearly 15 years, Tanka Nath Ghimire returned to Nepal hoping to inspire others to stay back and work in Nepal. Today he runs Ranimahal Resort in Palpa. Watch his journey from a dishwasher to a hotel owner in the video online.

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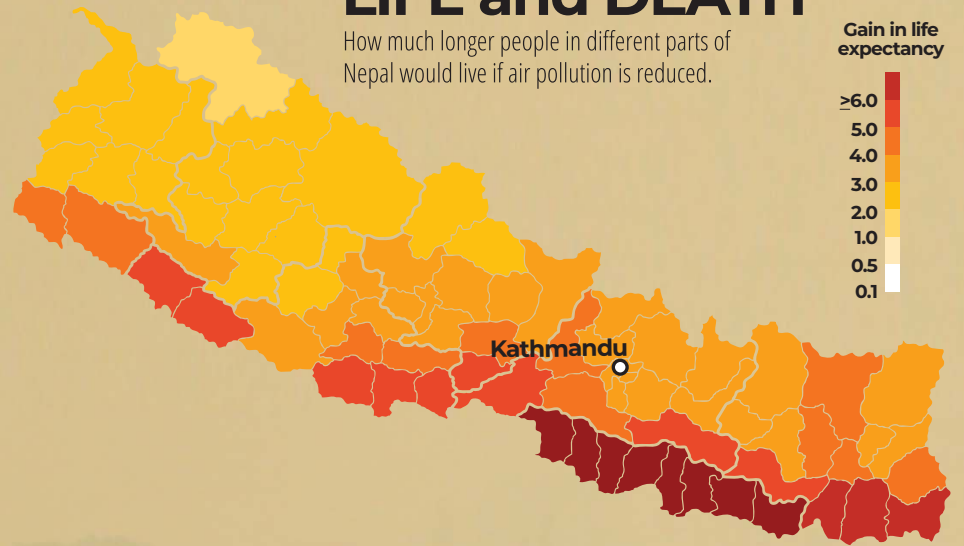
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## LIFE and DEATH

How much longer people in different parts of Nepal would live if air pollution is reduced.



SOURCE: AIR QUALITY LIFE INDEX

# WARNING: Breathing is hazardous to health

New studies warn that Kathmandu's air is even more toxic than previously known

● Sonia Awale

**T**wo studies published this week show that the air in Kathmandu is even more hazardous to health than previous research showed because of high concentrations of toxic gases, leading to premature deaths from lung diseases.

Dirty air is reducing the lifespan of Nepalis by nearly 7 years in the Tarai, by 3 years in Kathmandu Valley, and Nepal has the highest lung disease death rate in the world, new research papers warn. Another study points to very high concentrations of poisonous nitrous oxides as well as tiny suspended particulates, due to the increase of vehicles in Kathmandu Valley.

Released on 17 August, *A State of Global Air Report 2022* zeroes in on two main urban pollutants in over 7,000 cities around the world — particles measuring 2.5µm or less (PM<sub>2.5</sub>), and nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>). While Kathmandu is surprisingly not on the list of top 20 most polluted cities, the study shows that the Valley has seen a dangerous increase in the concentration of both pollutants since 2000.

“Kathmandu does not feature among the cities with the highest PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels, but average annual exposures to these dangerously small particles are higher than

the WHO Air Quality Guidelines, and even the least stringent interim target of 35 µg/m<sup>3</sup>,” explains Pallavi Pant of Health Effects Institute which collaborated with Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation for the annual pollution study. Household fires, brick kilns, open garbage burning and diesel vehicles are primary sources of PM<sub>2.5</sub>.

Nitrogen dioxide, on the other hand, is a key marker of traffic-related air pollution and is abundant in urban areas like Kathmandu. Nitrogen dioxide belongs to a group of highly reactive nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) which combine with other gases to form toxic ozone (O<sub>3</sub>).

“NO<sub>2</sub> is a pollutant most closely associated with vehicular traffic, and in Kathmandu the concentration of this gas is higher than other cities in the region like Karachi, Dhaka and Delhi,” warns Pant. “The data indicates the need for continued action to reduce emissions at source.”

Indeed, a 2016 study by the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies found that the emission of oxides of nitrogen have increased significantly in Nepal in the last decade, and is second only to carbon monoxide (CO).

Another paper in 2017 by a Yale research group led by Anobha Gurung observed high levels of NO<sub>2</sub> with an annual average 22.1 ppb (parts per billion) in 2014. By comparison, it was only 10.7 ppb in a highly polluted city like Ulaanbaatar.

Atmospheric scientist-turned-politician Arnico Panday, however, says the data for NO<sub>2</sub> for the last 20 years are not based on surface measurements, and extrapolate satellite data which could make them less accurate.

“While they do show an increasing trend, the reported levels are far below levels that have health impacts,” Panday told *Nepali Times*.

“That said, NO<sub>2</sub>, along with its sibling nitric oxide does play a significant role in the chemistry of ozone, a gas that impacts lungs

and leaves, and that has increased in Nepal, especially during the spring months.”

Vehicular pollution has long been identified as one of the major sources of air pollution in Kathmandu. But while diesel buses and trucks emit CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon monoxide and tiny soot particles, the contribution of two-wheelers has been overlooked.

Motorcycles and scooters are considered less polluting because their petrol internal-combustion engines are very efficient in converting fuel to energy. However, their exhausts give off harmful pollutants like hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxides. This is not a problem if there are only a few two-wheelers around, but the number of motorcycles and scooters in Kathmandu Valley now exceeds 1.2 million.

“Two-wheelers, in general, emit PM<sub>2.5</sub>, black carbon, nitrogen oxides, and volatile organic compounds. Two-wheelers with older, two-stroke engines can be an important source of air pollution,” explains Pant. Motorcycles also emit other harmful gases including carbon monoxide (CO) and convert atmospheric oxygen into toxic ozone (O<sub>3</sub>).

Siva Praveen Puppala, an aerosol scientist at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) says motorcyclists alone cannot be blamed if other forms of public transport are not reliable. He says, “Unless we come up with cleaner alternatives for them, like an efficient mass transit, we are also at fault.”

These poisonous gases and suspended particulates together have increased the prevalence of respiratory ailments among Nepalis. A study published in the medical journal *BMJ* this week revealed that in 2019 Nepal recorded the highest age-adjusted death rate due to chronic lung diseases in the world at 182.5 per 100,000 population.

Over 3,000 years were lost to ill health or disability from the condition, with nearly all cases of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) being environmental in origin, according to lead author Jay Kaufman of the Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health at McGill University in Montréal.

The *Nepal Burden of Disease 2019* report by the Nepal Health Research Council also





shows that chronic respiratory diseases are the biggest killers in the country, making up over 20% of all deaths, behind only cardiovascular ailments.

“We have enough evidence to prove that air pollution is leading to a sharp increase in respiratory ailments and yet not much has been done to control this major risk factor,” says Raju Pangen, a pulmonary specialist at HAMS hospital in Kathmandu.

“Perhaps because its impact is not easily visible much like that of the climate crisis, we are paralysed into inaction. But the burden of outdoor air pollution is so high that an individual alone can’t do much, we need politicians and bureaucrats to intervene for an actual change,” Pangen adds.

According to the Air Quality Life Index, an initiative of the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago, Nepal is the third most polluted country in the world with all of its 30 million population living in areas where the average particulate matter concentration exceeds the WHO threshold of 5µg/m³.

‘Measured in terms of life expectancy, particulate pollution is the greatest threat to human health in Nepal, reducing life expectancy by 4.1 years on average,’ the report says. ‘Child and maternal malnutrition reduce average life expectancy by about 1.3 years, while smoking reduces life expectancy by about 2.5 years on average. In Kathmandu, residents are on track to lose 3 years on average.’ (See graph, right)

Safety measures against Covid-19 such as masking up and avoiding crowded spaces are also effective in preventing a majority of respiratory diseases. There is also an increased level of awareness following the pandemic about the timely diagnosis which has made treatment manageable.

Lesser known risk factors like the burning of incense sticks or being around funeral pyres, which can equal to smoking 100 cigarettes a day, should also be communicated. Experts say that the most dangerous pollutant in Nepal are suspended particles smaller than 2.5 microns that are given off indoors from fireplaces, vehicles, brick kilns and open garbage burning. All these interventions need political will and an implementation strategy.

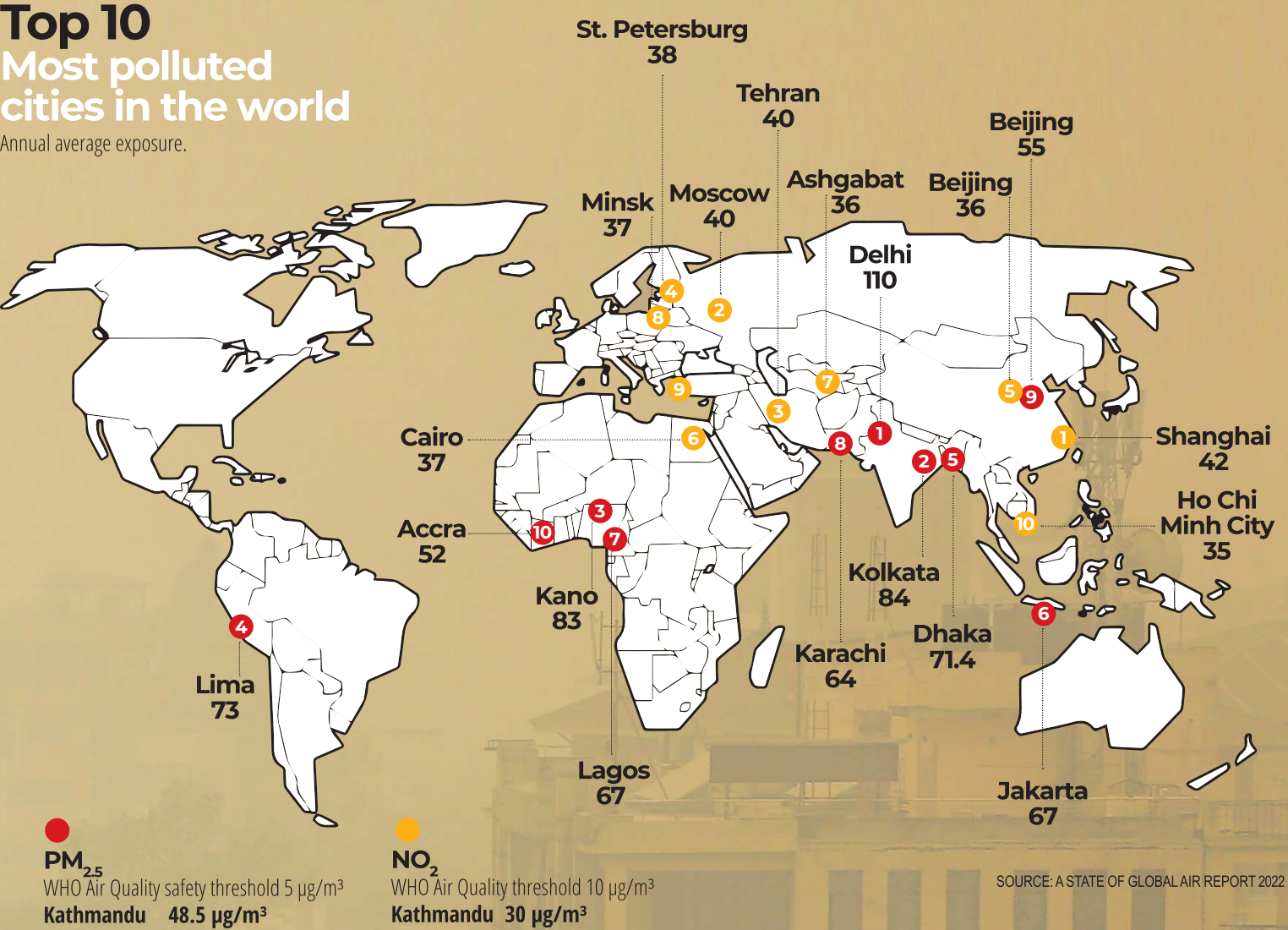
Kathmandu’s deadly air pollution should not just be seen as an environmental hazard, but an indication of political failure. Which is why it is encouraging that Nepal’s foremost atmospheric scientist, Arnico Panday is standing for federal elections in November from Lalitpur-3.

He has made the reduction of air pollution his highest priority along with climate adaptation, transport safety, heritage conservation, domestic job creation, and access to high quality education and healthcare.

Said Panday: “If elected, in the first year I plan to empower and incentivise local governments to crack down on polluters within their jurisdictions, create an entity to fight forest fires from the ground and the air, and introduce a comprehensive clean air act that will bring Nepal’s air quality within WHO guidelines by 2030.” 🇳🇵

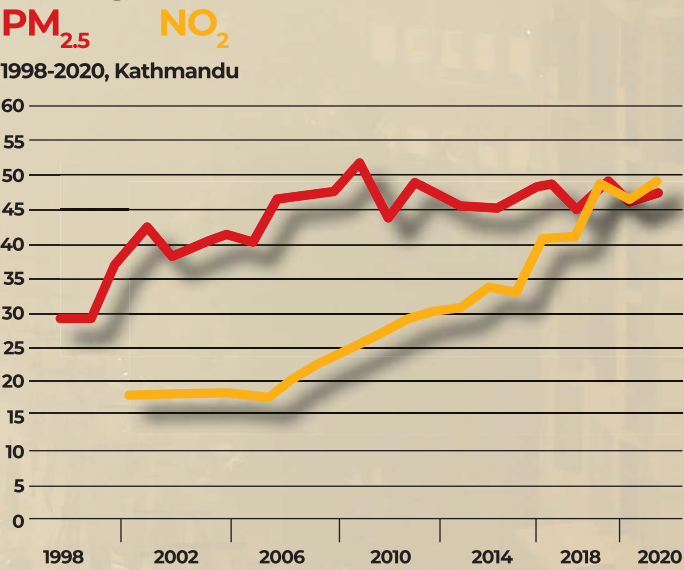
# Top 10 Most polluted cities in the world

Annual average exposure.



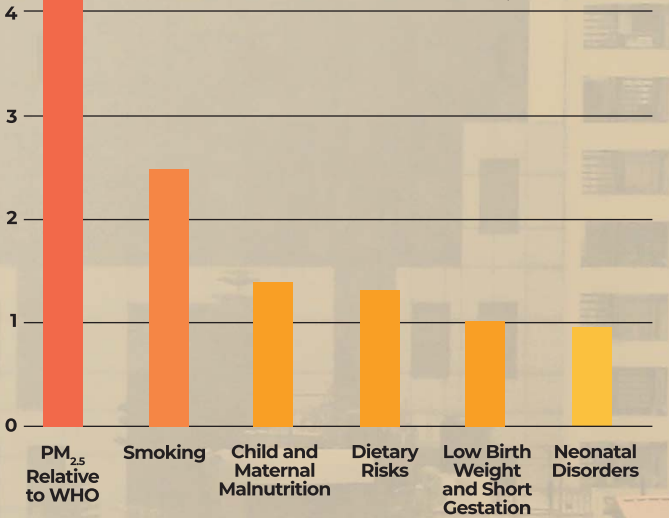
SOURCE: A STATE OF GLOBAL AIR REPORT 2022

## Average Concentration



## Cause of Death

Years of life lost dues to various causes in Nepal



SOURCE: AIR QUALITY LIFE INDEX



EVENTS



**Theatre**

Catch the stage performance *Dhumdham ko Ghumgham (Adventures of a Nepali Frog)*, written by Kanak Mani Dixit and produced by Rato Bangla Kitab in collaboration with Katha Ghera.

26-29 August, Rato Bangla School  
More shows at Kausi Theater in September.

Virtual Heritage Tour

The latest edition of the Virtual Heritage Tour will be led by journalist Pratibha Jha and will delve into her research on the ceramic tradition. The tour will be broadcasted live on the StoryCycle and British Council Facebook pages.

26 August, 4pm-5pm

**Photo Exhibition**

QUICK TIME, OLD RIVER, AND A SKY FULL OF DREAMS, the photo exhibition by seven research fellows of the Kathmandu Valley Urban History Project, addresses Kathmandu Valley's change over the decades.

Until 30 September, Patan House, Dhaugal

Cine Night

Grab some beer and popcorn and watch impactful films from all over the world every Wednesday at Cine Night. Send a DM to Bikalpa Art Center to register.


Wednesdays, Bikalpa Art Center, Harihar Bhawan, (01) 5013524

**Boudha market**

Buy fresh and organic fruits and vegetables, baked goods and other delicious goodies. Support local products and businesses, and follow physical distancing guidelines.

Saturdays, 8am-5pm, Utpala Café, Boudha

DINING



**Grill Durbar**

At Grill Durbar, there is nothing that can't be grilled—from slow-grilled chicken to grilled vegetable shawarmas.

Shankhamul, 9813578858

MUSIC

**Concert by Night**

New-school folk band Night will be giving a pre-tour performance as part of their 'Let's Folk Pokhara' concert series. Tickets at <https://thuprai.com/event/concert-night-studio-theatre/>

27 August, 5pm, Rs500, Studio Theatre, Pingalasthan

**Charity Show**

Situsit Foundation and Garage Entertainment's show to help animals will include musical guests Bekcha, Oasis Thapa, Prabesh Kumar Shrestha, Samir Shrestha and Ashish Khadka. All proceeds go to charity.

27 August, 2pm, Rs500, Trisara, Lazimpat



**The Edge Band**

This weekend, listen to the The Edge Band live after the opening act by Dynamix. More music from Djs Sundyp, Aacis, Rolling and Iraz.

26 August, 6pm, The Soaltee Kathmandu, Tahachal

**Almoda Rana**

Enjoy live music from Almoda Rana Uprety this Friday. Get tickets at [t.ly/9H72](https://t.ly/9H72)

26 August, 8pm, London PUB Kathmandu, Darbar Marg



**Anuprastha**

Rock and roll with Anuprastha this Saturday, with an opening act by The Babal Band. 10% of the proceeds from the show will go to charity.

27 August, 7pm, Uptown Lounge, (01) 5409070

Buingal

With a variety of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian options, Buingal has something for everyone. Give the vegetarian sekuwa a try.

Maitidevi, (01) 4421393



**Pho99**

Enjoy mouthwatering Vietnamese food including fresh Banh Mi Sandwiches, Vietnamese salads and curries, along with Vietnam's national staple, the delicious Pho.

Jhamsikel, 9803203119/ Boudhanath, 9801143330

GETAWAY



**Godavari Village Resort**

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Godavari, (01) 5560062

**Maruni Sanctuary Lodge**

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Sauraha, 9865381010



**Soaltee Westend Premier**

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Nepalgunj, (081) 551145

**Borderlands Eco Resort**

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Sindhupalchok, 9802025888

**Pataleban Vineyard Resort**

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Chisapani, (01) 4316337



**Sweet Fix**

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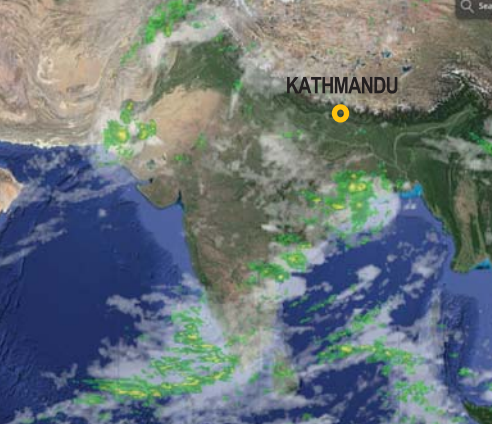
Patan, 9828583465

**Casa Mexicana**

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Thamel, 9823407060/Bakhundol, 9803624067

WEEKEND WEATHER

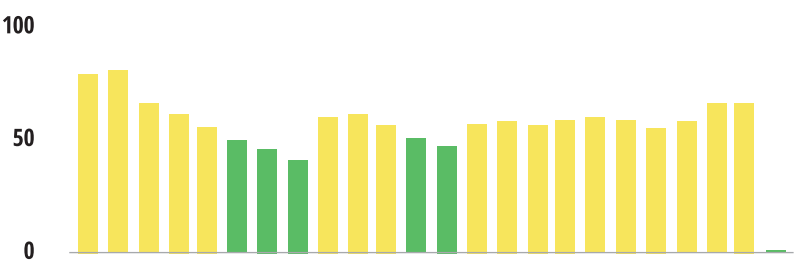


**Monsoon Gasp**

There was that monsoonal trough over central India that moved west, and sucked in drier, hotter air over Nepal, giving the monsoon a weeklong reprieve. But another low pressure system has now moved in from the Bay of Bengal, and is making its presence felt on Friday and the weekend. There will still be spells of hot, sticky weather, but the combination of this moisture and convection will make the coming days relatively more showery. There is still another month to go before the final departure of the monsoon.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 29° 21°	 28° 20°	 25° 20°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



**Kathmandu AQI from 10AM 24 August - 8AM 25 August measured at US Embassy, Phora Darbar**

Localised storm systems in Kathmandu Valley in the coming days will make things breezy, which is good news for air quality. The combined action of rain and wind will improve the AQI, even while there will be some build up of dust from the streets and suspended particulates as the traffic picks up around rush hour. This means better visibility and the perfect time for morning walks on the outskirts of the Valley.

See [page 6-7](#) for a review of recent research papers, which highlight the role of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) from vehicular exhaust in making the city's air so toxic.

OUR PICK




In *Hoy se arregla el mundo (Today We Fix the World)*, the 2021 Argentine comedy-drama on Netflix, television producer David Samarás is shockingly informed during an argument with his son Benito's mother that he is not the father of their nine-year-old child. David, who helps other people fix their problems through his tv show, then sets out on a mission to find Benito's biological father. Stars Leonardo Sbaraglia, Benjamín Lasarte, Natalia Oreiro, Luis Luque and Charo López.

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 ।




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# No time like the past

A memoir of Pratap Malla and the golden age of Kantipur, in French

● Ashish Dhakal

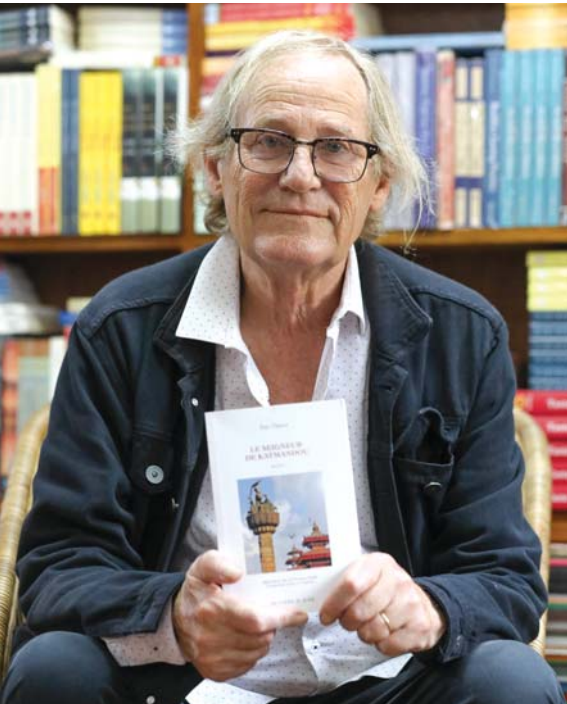
Noted French scholar of Himalayan art Éric Chazot in his historical novel *Le Seigneur de Katmandou* bridges the chasm between the past and the present of the Nepal Mandala. Published by Éditions el Viso in 2021, this French-language fiction is a detailed retelling and even reimagining of the life and times of King Pratap Malla told in his own voice, almost as though it were from his diary.

The narrative weaves together the legends the Valley in the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century to create a portrait of a king, who was also a poet, philosopher, son, father and husband.

Pratap Malla was one of the best-known kings of Kathmandu. His historical persona has been embellished and undermined in the last three centuries through folklore, propaganda and scant contemporary records.

He built the Rani Pokhari for his queen who was grieving the death of their son, and allegedly kept a harem of 3,000 young girls, even ravishing one 11-year-old and causing her death.

This already ambivalent portraiture is coloured further by Pratap Malla's cultural and religious legacies, many of which are still standing in Kathmandu: the statue of Hanuman outside the Hanuman Dhoka Palace, Chyasini Dega, the Bhandarkhal pond, Anantapur and Pratappur spires in the Swayambhu complex,



SUMAN NEPALI

Guheshwari temple, Bhimsensthan, and the many *chok* inside his palace.

Chazot is a scholar of masks and art of the Himalaya, with a special interest in Tantrism. In 2015, he published the translation of the *Tantra of Chandamaharosana* into French, and a year later he brought out *Tantra: Théologie de l'amour et de la liberté*, which goes into the details of the philosophy and aesthetics of the Tantric Nepal.

Pratap Malla was a contemporary of Shah Jahan in Mughal India and Louis XIV in Bourbon France, and showed comparable, fierce love for the arts

and philosophy, with a dash of decadence. Chazot first came to Nepal in 1973, and finished the first draft of what would be *Le Seigneur de Katmandou* six years later. It was 600 pages long, he recalls, "and very complicated". So, he began to rewrite it. The published version is the fourth draft of the work.

"I really wanted to write a good novel," he says. "It could not be a little book you read once, enjoy and then forget about it. It had to be concrete and well-written, with historical

facts integrated with the legends of Pratap Malla so that people find it believable."

Chazot could not remove the folklore, such as Pratap Malla entering the mythical caverns of Shantipur temple in Swayambhu during a drought to recover a *paubha* drawn in the Naga's blood to bring back rain. Or the story of how Jamana Gubhaju once turned himself into an eagle and carried away the heart of a young boy one foreign sorcerer had cut up and promised to bring back to life through Tantra.

"I could not say that because I am a historian, none of that could

have happened," he adds. Instead, Chazot built the book as a first-person narration by Pratap Malla, giving us a direct look into his mind. Sometimes the king himself appears to be unreliable, prompting us to wonder if separating facts and fiction truly matters after all: because would Pratap Malla be the character he is without the legends and stories?

Devout and ambitious, it had been the king's great wish, although left unrealised, to unite the three kingdoms of Nepal Mandala fractured by King Jayayakshya Malla some 200 years before, for which he was constantly at war with Yala (Patan) and Khwopa (Bhaktapur). But it was also during this time that Yen (Kantipur, or Kathmandu) saw unprecedented economic growth, fuelled largely by a treaty with Tibet which allowed the Newa merchants a virtual monopoly over trade with India and Tibet.

"He was an important king of Nepal," says Chazot. "He was also a tantric king and pretended to know 15 languages. I was always fascinated by him."

The famous stone inscription outside the Hanuman Dhoka Palace to the goddess Kalika is written in 15 languages, including Farsi, Maithili, Hindi, Tibetan, Nepal Bhasa, Arabic, with three European words for the seasons: AVTOMNE, WINTER and LHIVERT — the last one a lasting spelling error, maybe made by a distracted sculptor or scribe.

It is said that whoever can read all 15 languages on that tablet will

be blessed with milk miraculously flowing out of a duct at the bottom of the inscription. It may have flowed only once.

Chazot portrays Pratap Malla as almost a philosopher king who cared for his subjects and royal dreams, but also as a lascivious man, equally hungry for power as for knowledge, a man who may or may not have conspired to kill a popular *kaji*, and a man who, to repent for killing a prepubescent girl, performs *tuladan* — the practice of offering Brahmins gold and silver equal to one's weight.

With a rather cubist portrait, where may we draw the line? What is honest and dishonest? The answers readers must decide themselves.

"I want to caution the reader because it is not an objective retelling," says Chazot, who tries to keep the story simple, subtle and coherent, often using juxtaposition to show the contrasting or coalescing viewpoints of cultures, countries and cults.

An English translation is currently being undertaken by Vajra Publication.

"Pratap Malla wanted to be a myth," Chazot says, "and I have tried to make that come true." 🇳🇵

*Le Seigneur de Katmandou*  
Éric Chazot  
Éditions el Viso (2021)  
256p

 [nepalitimes.com](https://nepalitimes.com)

A longer version of this review is online.

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# INDIA’S TRIAL BY FIRE FOR SOLDIERS FROM NEPAL

Narendra Modi’s new military recruitment plan has implications for Nepal’s economy and politics

● Anita Shrestha

A Tripartite Agreement in 1947 allowed the continued recruitment of Nepalis into the British and Indian Armies, but New Delhi’s plan to reform its military has implications for Nepal’s economy and politics.

However incongruous it may be in this day and age for nationals of a sovereign nation to be serving in the military of another country, enlistment overseas provides income for tens of thousands of Nepali families as well as being an important source of foreign exchange for the country.

Now, the Indian government is set to implement the ‘Agnipath Yojana’ to reduce its defence expenditure. The scheme will allow soldiers below the rank of commissioned officers across three branches of India’s armed forces to be hired only for four-year periods.

There are an estimated 32,000 Nepalis in the Gorkha Regiments of the Indian Army, but many new recruits in recent years are Indians of Nepali origin. Pensions

of retired soldiers is an important source of Indian currency for Nepal’s economy, which relies overwhelmingly on imports from India. Agnipath will mean that only a quarter of the 46,000 soldiers between 17-23 years hired in 2022 can stay on in the military after four years. Those being let go will get golden handshakes of INR1.7 million and will not be eligible for lifetime pension.

As the clock winds down to its launch in September, there have been angry protests against Agnipath in India. But the Nepal government has been conspicuously silent despite the potential impact on recruitment, the economy, as well as implications for the 1947 Tripartite Agreement on the rights of Nepali soldiers.

Says senior advocate Yuvraj Sangraula: “The Agnipath scheme violates the Tripartite Agreement signed at India’s independence which stipulates that pensions and other financial benefits be given to Gorkha soldiers as per the Indian



TO A DIFFERENT TUNE: A Gorkha Regiment marching contingent on India’s Republic Day Parade in New Delhi.

Army Pay Code.”

Recruitment of Nepalis into the British Army started even before the end of the 1814-16 war with the East India Company. Nepali soldiers have served in 10 Gurkha regiments of the British Army ever since, serving in both World Wars, in the Malaya insurgency, and in Afghanistan. At least 55,000 Nepalis in the British Army have been killed in action, and many thousands have died fighting for India since 1947.

Following Indian independence in 1947, six of the 10 regiments were assigned to India and four to Britain. India has since added another Gorkha Regiment, and there are currently 32,000 Nepali soldiers in 40 battalions. (India refers to its Nepali soldiers as ‘Gorkhas’, while the British prefer ‘Gurkha’.)

The Tripartite Agreement between Britain, India and Nepal spells out the rights of Nepali soldiers, their salaries, pensions, financial compensation, as well as facilities for families.

The treaty guarantees equal basic pay for Gorkhas as other Indian soldiers, as well as pensions for servicemen who have served a minimum of 15 years.

On 23 July, UML leader Bhim Rawal raised the Agnipath scheme in Parliament, asking for clarification from the government. He demanded that if Agnipath included Nepali soldiers, then Gorkha recruitment into the Indian Army be terminated.

India earlier had informed the Nepal government that it would go ahead with recruiting Nepali youths in Butwal and Dharan. But

after Foreign Minister Narayan Khadka held talks with Indian ambassador Naveen Srivastava on 24 August, the recruitment has been postponed in Butwal for now, and officials say that further discussions are underway. Experts, including former Nepali military brass, had called at the Prime Minister’s Office as well as the Foreign Ministry last week to urge talks with New Delhi about the impact of Agnipath on Nepal.

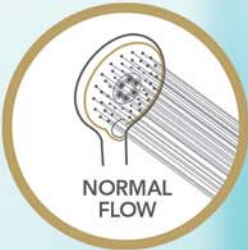
Lt Gen (Retd) Bala Nanda Sharma says both sides should sort it out: “Nepal should decide and state its position on the scheme in no uncertain terms after discussing its intricacies with India.”

Former Indian Ambassador to Nepal Ranjit Ray confirmed that the scheme applies to recruitment of Nepalis, and also urged the two

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governments hold talks.

“There is much confusion in Nepal about the terms and conditions of the Agnipath scheme. This reform will affect Nepal, especially its economy,” Ray admitted.

International relations experts are surprised that as a signatory to the Tripartite Agreement, and as the country whose citizens will be directly impacted, the Nepal government was not involved in decision-making. Instead, New Delhi just asked for Nepal’s ‘views’ as recruitment under the new scheme was due to start.

“As a member of the Tripartite Agreement, Nepal should have been asked for input prior to any decision by the Indian government,” says historian Pratyoush Onta. “It is clear that Nepal was given little importance in the new recruitment scheme.”

Onta notes that India and Britain only tout the agreement when they have problems. “This has been happening for 75 years,” continues Onta. “Just like Nepal was not consulted when the British decided to scale back Gurkha recruitment, India now wants to stop giving pensions to Gorkha servicemen.”

Writer and journalist Kanak Mani Dixit agrees that India going ahead with the military reform without discussing it with Nepal is a violation of the Tripartite Agreement.

“When Nepal signed the agreement in 1947, Nepali servicemen were guaranteed a tenure, and all the benefits that came with it up to and beyond

retirement, even if pension was not explicitly stated in the agreement.” Dixit says. “Now, the term has been reduced to four years.”

However, former ambassador Ray argues that Agnipath has not violated the Tripartite Agreement. “I have thoroughly read the 1947 agreement,” he says, “There is no provision for pension in it.”

Former Maj Gen Gopal Gurung of the Indian Army Gorkha Regiment concedes that there is no mention of pension in the 1947 agreement, and the Indian Army Pay Code that Nepal’s argument hinges on has been subject to multiple revisions over the years and does not guarantee pension for Indian soldiers after retirement.

“The reform should only be considered a violation had Indian and Nepali soldiers not been treated equally,” argues Gurung. “There has been a severe gap in understanding because of the lack of dialogue between the two countries.”

There are 125,000 Nepali retirees from the British, Indian and Singapore security forces who received Rs61.9 billion in pensions in the last fiscal year. After Agnipath comes into force, that amount could decrease by a quarter. The remittance Nepalis in the Indian military send home will also go down now due to the four-year military term limit.

Former Lt Gen Ashok Mehta of the Indian Army predicts that Agnipath will henceforth discourage Nepali youth from enlisting.

“They will not want to risk their lives just to get a lump sum of money in four years when they could be earning that amount by working in Japan or the Gulf,” Mehta says.

The Agnipath scheme has once more opened the debate about the absurdity of recruitment of Nepalis into foreign armies. Nepali soldiers in the Indian Gorkha Regiments have fought and died in wars against Pakistan, China and in Sri Lanka – all neighbouring countries with which Nepal has friendly relations. When the Maoists launched their insurgency in 1996, they presented 40 demands to Sher Bahadur Deuba who was also prime minister then. One of those demands was a stop to recruitment by Britain and India of Nepali nationals into their army.

Twenty-six years later, Deuba is prime minister for the fifth time in a coalition with the Maoist party. Demand for jobs in the Indian and British armies and the narrative of valour in battle appear to be too powerful for Nepalis and the Nepal government to stop enlistment into foreign armies. 🇳🇵

# Tolerating Nepal’s religious tolerance

Nepal cannot be a Hindu state just because of vote bank politics backed by imported Hindutva

● Shekhar Kharel

In the 1760s, Prithvi Narayan Shah raised one rupee from each household and travelled down to Banaras to buy weapons for his military conquests. While there, he saw that the Hinduism practiced even in the holiest place in India was different from what he was used to in the mountains of Gorkha.

He felt that 250 years of Mughal rule and two centuries of British colonialism had ‘contaminated’ the faith. It was nowhere like the ‘*Sanatan Dharma*’ way of life that he was used to back home, and said as much in his *Dibyopadesh* text in which he called Nepal ‘*Asal Hindustana*’ (The Real Hindustan).

Moghul invaders tried to uproot Hinduism and Buddhism by razing temples, shrines and monasteries in the subcontinent. They burnt religious texts, and forced priests, monks and sages to flee. Most of them escaped into the remote Himalayan fastness of what is now Nepal.

They brought with them their scriptures and religious books, and passed down the holy *mantra* and chants from one generation to the next, thus preserving them in their pure form for posterity.

But that was not the only reason this land was deemed to be the ‘genuine Hindustan’. Most sacred sites of Hinduism and Buddhism, the holiest pilgrimage places were located in the original Gorkha Empire. Even after 1816, many of these shrines like Pashupati, Muktinath, Gosainkunda, Damodar Kunda and Lumbini were within modern day Nepal’s boundaries.

Even among Hindus in India, there was a feeling that perhaps Hinduism in its untainted form existed in Nepal, the dwelling of Lord Shiva and the place of meditation for the sages, explains cultural historian Govinda Tandon, the former head of the Pashupati Area Development Trust.

“When I myself go to India on pilgrimage and meet holy personages, they ask me why I travel to India when Nepal is such a special place where the real Hinduism has been preserved,” Tandon adds.

The other aspect of Hinduism in Nepal is its Tantric element. A thousand years ago the Pal and Sen dynasties of Bengal fled to what is now Nepal to escape invaders together with their priests, holy texts and their esoteric Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The assimilation of these practices evolved into the syncretic blend of Hinduism and Buddhism in Nepal, and especially Kathmandu Valley, giving the culture its unique character.

In fact, the same Hindu gods and goddesses in

India and Nepal are worshipped differently. In Maharashtra, there are no sacrifices to Lord Ganesh as there are in Nepal. Similarly, animals are sacrificed to goddess Kali in Nepal, but not in Bengal during the Navaratri festival. Dasain and Dushhera are not similar. Tihar and Diwali are observed differently. Janai Purnima and Raksha Bandhan are unlike each other in Nepal and India. Nepali and Hindi may use the Devnagari script, but the languages are distinct. Hinduism as practiced in Nepal and India are therefore different, despite what many like to think.

The Hindu nationalist Vinayak Damodar Savarkar while being imprisoned by the British in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 1922 wrote a declaration titled ‘Essentials of Hindutva’ in which he defined Hindutva as a political ideology, and different from the Hindu religion. If Hindutva was the trunk of a tree, Hinduism was its branch. India was not a nation but a race. He wrote: ‘We are all Hindus of one nation because it is the blood of Indian heritage that flows in our veins.’

Savarkar’s Hindutva has now been adopted by the RSS and its political wing, the BJP, in India. And with the wind of this ideology blowing across India, Nepal is also feeling the breeze. It is tempting for some political parties to try to also cash in on this wave in a majority Hindu country that used to have the world’s only Hindu monarch.

But Hinduism in Nepal has a relatively more tolerant tradition, and whether Nepal should revert to being a Hindu state or not should depend entirely on Nepalis themselves, and not on who is in power in New Delhi. In fact, Nepal should be a country where there is a freedom of religion and followers of all faiths are free to practice their culture and tradition. And that is the essence of what Prithvi Narayan Shah understood as ‘*Asal Hindustan*’.

Either during the Malla period or later under Shah rule, there were no strictures against conversion, but forced proselytisation was banned. Through the centuries, Nepal’s Muslims were accepted into the fold. Why import the seeds of intolerance now? India itself is a vast nation with a rich diversity of cultures and faiths, all protected under its Constitution.

The New Delhi establishment looks at Nepal not through a religious lens, but a security one. It is therefore unlikely that, although some Nepali politicians may be tempted to whip up a religious vote bank, it will happen just because some entities in India back them. The Hindutva ideology is quite different from the liberal *Sanatan* way of life and tradition that exists in Nepal. 🇳🇵



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