

PEAK TOURISM IN 2023

While tourism in most parts of the world has bounced back post-lockdowns, Nepal has struggled to welcome back visitors. It is beginning to pick up after a two-year pandemic slump, but the arrivals in 2022 were still less than half of pre-Covid annual total. Pent-up demand and the post-Covid rebound meant that numbers were beginning to climb again, but Russia's invasion of Ukraine upended the global supply chain for fuel, which hit Nepal's tourism and airlines particularly hard. Arrival numbers for January to November 2022 reached 550,000 and hotels ran at near-full occupancy during Dasain, but experts say the year could have been much better. "2022 did not go as expected," says Deepak Raj Joshi, former CEO of Nepal Tourism Board. "But 2023 can be much better because Nepal is a nature-based destination, has isolation-based activities – exactly what

most people are looking for post-Covid." Tourism used to be the mainstay of Nepal's economy, with hard currency income from visitors making up 37% of earnings in 1981. By 2019, income from the tourism sector was Rs60.8 billion but that was only 4.6% of the country's total foreign exchange earnings. In 2022, the industry made up less than 2% of foreign currency income. Remittances from Nepalis overseas has overtaken everything else, including tourism. Before Covid, the sector still contributed directly to the livelihoods of 1 million Nepalis in Nepal. Trekking and mountaineering alone employ more than 18,000 guides, 50,000 porters and other service providers. In recent years, Nepal has been diversifying its tourism brand from just trekking and mountaineering to other adventure sports, as well as wildlife and religious tourism. "Nepal has never looked into its full potential as a

tourism destination beyond the mountains," says Suraj Vaidya who led the Visit Nepal 2020 campaign. "Even with mountain tourism, we have failed to look beyond EBC and ABC, when the far-western mountains have so much to offer. We have to also look beyond Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur. We need to look at Nepal as more than a two-season destination." Although Nepal didn't live up to its full tourism potential in 2022, experts are cautiously optimistic that the tourism revival can pick up the pace in 2023. But Nepal needs to work on strengthening the tourism sector by improving flight connections, facilities and connectivity within Nepal. The hefty price of aviation fuel at Kathmandu airport has dissuaded international airlines, and kept airfares high. "Being the only European airline flying to Kathmandu, we hope to surpass 2022 figures," says Serkan Basar, General Manager of Turkish Airlines

Kathmandu. "Tourism Ministry and private sector should be in full cooperation for the betterment of the country as a tourist destination." Joshi agrees: "Tourism cannot develop in isolation. There needs to be multi-level coordination between tourism institutions, concerned ministries, as well as diplomatic missions across the world to effectively maximise our tourism potential." Indeed, tourism has so far failed to be a priority for policymakers who are forever chasing arrival numbers and not planning enough to promote high-end tourism that brings in actual revenue. Says Suraj Vaidya: "We have to look not just towards increasing the number of tourists, but consider the limits posed by our existing infrastructure, and reflect and strategise about how we want to position Nepal to the world in preparing for 2023." **Shristi Karki**

FULL STORY PAGE 10-11



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Nepal's political economy

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is busy garnering support from parties left, right and centre for the 10 January vote of confidence he has to prove in the Federal Parliament. On Wednesday, he met Madhav Kumar Nepal of the Unified Socialist (US) for the first time since he broke away from the Nepali Congress (NC) led coalition.

With his Maoist Centre (MC) being only the third biggest party with a mere 32 seats in Parliament, Dahal has had to give away powerful ministries: Finance to Bishnu Paudel of the UML, and Home to Rabi Lamichhane of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP).

And with less than a week before the confidence vote, there will be more wheeling and dealing behind the scenes. There is already talk of adding two more deputy prime ministers to specifically appease the far-right Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and Janata Samajbadi party (JSP).

new government and their staff will only add to unnecessary expenses in security, infrastructure, salary and other administrative costs. Increased ministries and staff doesn't guarantee better service delivery either.

The appointment of Bishnu Paudel of the UML as finance minister has made businesses hopeful, but there is only so much he can do to rectify the blunder made by his Maoist predecessor, Janardan Sharma. On Wednesday, Nepal Rastra Bank, acting on a directive from Paudel and Prime Minister Dahal, has revised its new guidelines pertaining to current capital loans to spur investment.

Nepal's imports decreased by 20.17% in the last five months compared to the same time period last year owing to the central bank's ban on luxury items following rapidly declining foreign exchange reserves. This helped increase the reserves but also reduced



RSS

The new government's biggest challenge is to save Nepal's economy (and itself) from collapse.

The Constitution sets a limit of 25 ministers in the Cabinet. But Dahal has to balance the disparate demands from members of his coalition for posts. He will exceed that limit, and for that he will have to split some ministries.

Dahal may be Prime Minister, but it is UML's K P Oli who is pulling the strings. As the head of a high-level political committee, Oli will essentially be running a parallel government.

The UML is the second largest party with 78 seats and Oli has shrewdly gained the upper hand by playing the long game by agreeing to give Dahal the first go at premiership while bagging plum political positions for his party in the process.

The committee Oli heads is an extension of this power-sharing deal between him and Dahal. The fact that the Prime Minister is the executive head of Nepal but will now have to adhere to a committee on high-level political decisions has essentially turned Dahal into a puppet of Oli's making.

But regardless of who is in the coalition or who has an upper hand, the biggest challenge for the new government in 2023 is to save Nepal from an impending economic collapse.

As of 4 January, the total expenditure of the Nepal government in the current fiscal year stands at Rs517 billion against its revenue of Rs362 billion. Nepal is unable to support the government's spending, and herein lies the biggest problem.

The additional ministries in the

revenue from imports, which continues to be the government's biggest source of income.

In the meantime, Nepal's export in the same time period decreased by 34.61% to Rs67 billion and trade deficit by 18.77%. But reduced demand for goods and services can lead to a recession. Year-on-year inflation is also high at 8.08%. In response, banks have increased interest on loans to reach more than 15% which has discouraged businesses from investing.

Moreover, leakage in revenue and lack of economic activities as well as investment in unproductive sectors continue to pose formidable challenges to Nepal's stagnant economy which is propped by remittance money sent home by Nepalis overseas.

But remittance is an unsustainable source, especially as Nepal needs its workforce at home for agriculture, construction and manufacturing, among others. Nepal needs to reduce its nonessential spending, stop revenue leakage in VAT and others, expedite development projects and promote industries and manufacturing at home. All of this will need to be facilitated by reformed policymaking, not just directives.

Instead, planners bring about ad-hoc schemes like the Mobile Device Management System (MDMS) benefiting select businesses, further adding to the frustration of the common people and making service delivery even more difficult.

Sonia Awale

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Sikkim works, Nepal doesn't

In the first issue of 2003, Nepali Times published a report with a Sikkim dateline, noting why this Indian state one-tenth the size of Nepal and with one-fortieth our population has surpassed us in every development parameter.

The answer was simple: good governance, grassroots democracy, and a strong, visionary leadership, all of the things Nepal was lagging behind and continues to, in spite of waging a revolution, or perhaps because of that, among others.

The report is still an interesting read in 2023, when Nepal has a new government. Excerpts from the report published 20 years ago this week on issue #1263-9 January 2003:

Nepal's rulers and planners may not need to go on governance junkets to the West to figure out how to run this country. The model is right there across our eastern border in Sikkim.

The erstwhile Himalayan kingdom that once lagged behind Nepal in every development parameter is now surging ahead in literacy, child survival, health services and infrastructure. And not just Nepal, Sikkim is overtaking

other Indian states as well. In terms of ethnic diversity, topography, culture and traditions there is no other place more similar to Nepal. So, theoretically, what works in Sikkim should work in Nepal. Sikkim's formula is good governance, grassroots democracy, and a strong, visionary leadership. The can-do state secretariat in Gangtok couldn't be more different from the officialdom one encounters in Singha Darbar.

"What happens in Nepal touches us," says Sikkim's Chief Secretary, Sonam Tenzing. "In Sikkim's development we're trying to do everything Nepal didn't do and should have done, and what Nepal has done and shouldn't have done."

Sikkim's formula for success is appropriate planning, true devolution of power and decision-making to elected grassroots councils, and an idealistic and accountable leadership. Sonam Tenzing gives full credit to his boss, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling whose long-term development goals are ambitious, but not unrealistic in a state with a population of only 500,000: universal literacy, eradicating poverty and near-zero unemployment by 2015.

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



ONLINE PACKAGES



Abin Shrestha started out as a cartoonist almost 30 years ago when he joined the *Nepal Times* daily in 1993. Today, his daily single-column cartoons on Kantipur under गजब छ बा! are widely recognisable, with their characteristic geometric political figures, sharp, witty one-liners, and his unique signature. Read his profile on page 5 and watch video. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.

LAST ASS

The Ass was an effective antidote for these sad times ('VACANCY,' Ass, #1142). But I guess everyone has a right to retire. It is time for a new generation of jack and jenny asses to step forward.

Dipak Gyawali

■ Please Ass, I'm sorry, you're my favourite. Please stay? You give the politicians too much credit, nobody does assery like you do.

Kaflesque

■ It is a sad day, but thank you for the laughs.

Mark Horrell

■ Can't beat the politicians, so join them!

Stewie McLean

■ April's fool has come 4 months early it seems?

Krishna Joshi

■ No, YOU ARE NOT!!! You are not retiring. If you do, we fans of the Ass will burn tyres, go on hunger strikes, and take out *masal julus* on Facebook and Insta! You are our only go-to guy. You are irreplaceable, my Ass!

Nirmal Niroula

■ Very funny haha, heeheeaaaaa.

Sheilin Teo

■ I will now have to change my habit of reading your paper from the back to front, and also not start my Fridays with giggles and smirks. I thought you'd go on for donkey years.

Rupa Joshi

■ The Ass is irreplaceable.

Om Astha Rai

BABURAM BHATTARAI

Exactly what did the Maoists achieve ('Baburam Bhattarai's 4-point formula', Namrata Sharma, page 4)? The communist party won the first free election post-revolution and proceeded to get bogged down in intra-party jockeying for power and ideological nonsense and failed to follow through on the huge reforms promised to the people of Nepal.

Roger Ray

ANALOGUE PHOTOGRAPHY

It is the same here in the Netherlands ('Reliving analogue photography', Suman Nepali, #1142). I gave all my darkroom equipment to a poor student 15 years ago. No doubt about buying new material for only developing film and scanning the negatives.

Oswald Kunne

■ Excellent. Away from the gimmickry of today's mass edited world. The only way for a photographer to advance their talents.

Gary Parkinson

MDMS

The Nepali government certainly knows how to attract tourists ('Think twice about bringing your mobile to Nepal', Ramesh Kumar).

Arne Walderhaug

Nepali Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Back to Manang after 43 years

Czech photographer Zdeněk Thoma spent three weeks photographing the scenic trans-Himalayan valley of Manang in 1979. In 2008, he got his son Michal to retrace his steps, carrying with him an album of black and white photographs taken 30 years earlier. Details online.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

VACANCY

by Ass
The Ass retires after 22 years of service to the nation at large to enter politics. Read the last Backside column, where the Ass bids goodbye, at nepalitimes.com. Also, read the overwhelming feedback where many thought April's fool came four months early.

Most commented

Most popular on Twitter



Reliving analogue photography

by Suman Nepali
Film photography is staging something of a comeback worldwide, and there are aficionados in Nepal also trying to keep the technique alive. Photographers are reviving the lost art of film developing in the darkrooms of Kathmandu. Full story and video on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

- **Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**
Last Ass. The donkey retires after 22 years of writing the Backside satire column in Nepali Times with this last projectile:
👉👈👉👈
- **Kul Chandra Gautam @KulCGautam**
Dear @kundadixit, hope the Ass is not serious about retiring in 2023. It is the one column of @NepaliTimes that I never want to miss. Being able to scratch the Backside of the Ass is what helps relieve many of us from the sordid saga & shenanigans of Nepal's political drama.
- **Amul Gyawali @amul_04**
Sad to see the end of what had become a weekly reading ritual while living outside Nepal, following the circus back home with laughter rather than the more-appropriate dismay.
- **Paavan Mathema @paavan11**
Ass will be missed by all @NepaliTimes readers, especially those who begin their Fridays with the paper's last page. Thank you for all the laughs.
- **Bhumi Ghimiré @BhumiGhimir**
A beloved national treasure retires. A great big thank you for your service The Ass, you will be terribly terribly missed.
- **Aashish Mishra @AasMishra**
A bitter end to 2022 with @YourHindness's retirement. I think I speak for all @NepaliTimes readers when I say that the absence will be felt.

PICTURE OF THE WEEK



A view of a polluted Kathmandu Valley as seen from Chobar on Monday morning.

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Baburam Bhattarai's 4-point formula

National consensus needed on geopolitics, federalism, inclusion and infrastructure-led growth

■ Namrata Sharma

Former Maoist ideologue, ex-prime minister Baburam Bhattarai of the Nepal Samajbadi Party is a rare politician who voluntarily sacrificed his constituency and did not contest the federal elections in November.

Ever since the Maoist conflict ended in 2006, and in subsequent elections, Bhattarai never lost in his Gorkha home base. In an unexpected gesture, he offered his prized constituency to his one-time comrade-at-arms Pushpa Kamal Dahal, now Prime Minister.

The two had a major falling out during the conflict, when Bhattarai and wife Hisila Yami were actually put under house arrest. In 2015, Bhattarai broke away from the Maoist party, citing fundamental differences with Dahal — some of which are mentioned in Yami's memoir, *From Revolutionary To First Lady*.

Dahal contested and won the Gorkha seat to be Prime Minister again. There has been much speculation about why Bhattarai gave up his sure seat to someone he was estranged with.

Some have speculated that it was a trade-off between handing over a sure-win to Dahal in Gorkha in return for Maoist Centre support for Bhattarai's daughter Manushi who was contesting from Kathmandu, and which she lost.

I wanted to hear it from the horse's mouth, so I asked him directly, during a meeting at his Nepal Samajwadi Party office this week.

"I strongly felt that we have to always play a strong role in strengthening our federal democratic republic system," Bhattarai answered. "The Maoist revolution in Nepal has played a big role in establishing this. It was because of the fear that the revolution might be forgotten that I supported Prachandaji (Dahal) to contest from my seat and I still am convinced that I did the right thing."

Bhattarai stressed that he felt the achievements of the Maoist revolution are slowly being forgotten — either because of internal reasons within the Maoist



BABURAM BHATTARAI / FACEBOOK

party, or because those opposed to the revolution want to preserve a corrupt system and maintain the status quo.

"As far as Manushi's loss in the election is concerned, there is a general perception that a talented youth like her should not have lost," Bhattarai added. "Later, based on evaluations and feedback we realised that the urban youth were disillusioned with the Maoist symbol of hammer and sickle. There was an understanding among the general public that if she had contested with another symbol, she would have won."

That argument carries some weight because if there was one strong message Nepal's electorate sent in May and November elections it was that many were fed up with politics as usual and were voting in young, fresh faces from both old and new parties.

Bhattarai accepted that the outcome of the election as well as the dramatic turnaround in coalition-making that elevated Pushpa Kamal Dahal to become



Prime Minister for the third time was as per Nepal's constitutional provisions.

Despite that he is apprehensive that the seven-party coalition led by Dahal and supported by K P Oli of the UML is fragile: "There is a fear that the country could still be mired

in continued instability."

Bhattarai says he has always been a strong advocate of overhauling the political process that perpetuated the old ruling system which was holding the country back. Which is why he split from the Maoists to first form

the Naya Shakti Party and later the Nepal Samajbadi Party.

As Nepal's only Prime Minister who has a PhD, Bhattarai is also a student of political science, and says that the whole idea of a coalition is a consensus among its members about a minimum program. Foremost should be about geopolitics and Nepal's need to balance the interests of India, China, and the United States.

Nepal's political parties must also reckon with the country's geographical, ethnic, caste and linguistic diversity in the Himal, Pahad, Tarai and Madhes. To achieve this, he said, there must be a unity of purpose across party lines.

His third point was that the jurisdictions between the federal, provincial and municipal governments need to be sorted out because they have not been institutionalised. This has affected governance, and trapped the country in a vicious cycle of poverty and unemployment.

Fourth is something he tried to push throughout his tenure as finance minister and Prime Minister between 2009 and 2012: investment in infrastructure-led job-creation and growth.

He says there needs to be a national consensus and proper direction to address these four issues.

"If we are able to get consensus on these four points, democracy will be strengthened in this country," he said, adding a note of warning: "If not, no matter which individual or party is in the ruling seat, the current state of crisis will remain."

On his plans for his Nepal Samajbadi Party, Bhattarai said that his party will try to steer a different path from the Nepali Congress' liberal democratic capitalist approach and the UML's centralised communist party structure.

"We are taking a different stand from these two approaches," he explained. "We are grounded in a democratic socialist approach suitable for Nepal's geopolitics and the country's economic social underdevelopment. We are a small party now, but we have planted the seed." 🇳🇵



NMB BANK
एनएमबी बैंक



Turkish and UEFA league

A special Turkish Airlines plane with UEFA Champions League livery flew on 1 January. The carrier is sponsoring the Champions League which is set to have its final match in Istanbul. The airline also painted one of its Airbus A330 for the occasion.

Nepal debt

Nepal's total debt has exceeded Rs20.07 billion with external debt at Rs10.5 billion and internal debt at Rs9.57 billion. The government has repaid Rs298 million in principal and interest of its internal debt in the first quarter of the current financial year, by issuing bonds, savings and treasury bills. However, external debt is more difficult to pay off owing to national and international events, increase in the loan and interest, and the foreign exchange rate. Nepal has been using subsidised loans from foreign donor agencies with low interest rates. The World Bank has a Rs5.26 billion loan, followed by the Asian Development bank, JICA and International Monetary Fund.

Himalaya in Pokhara

A Himalaya Airlines Airbus A320 completed a demonstration flight to Pokhara International Airport on 1 January. The airline was the first to land an Airbus in Pokhara's newly opened airport.



Samsung warranty

Samsung is offering a 20-year warranty on the digital inverter motor and compressor used in washing machines and refrigerators to promote sustainability and reduce e-waste.

Blood donation

Global IME bank organised a blood donation program across all 7 provinces in the country to celebrate its 16th anniversary. The bank also felicitated 59 staff members working there for the past 15 years.



Worldlink awarded

Worldlink received the 2022 ISP Corporate Excellence Award given to organisations contributing to the economic and social development of a country. Worldlink has more than 700,000 customers across Nepal and employs more than 5000 people. Bayalpata Hospital run by Nyaya Health Nepal (NHN) also won an award for the best-run hospital in the country.

Outreach awards

Outreach received 2 bronze awards at the 2022 ECI Award in China for product and model innovation and marketing innovation. Other winners included companies from Hong Kong, Switzerland, Canada, USA and UK.

Oil corporation profit

Nepal Oil Corporation is expected to make a profit of Rs990 million in the next 15 days after a new price list from India. However, despite making a profit, petrol prices are not expected to decrease. Oil products will be sold at the price fixed on 1 January: per liter Rs178 for petrol, Rs175 for diesel and Rs190 for aviation fuel. Meanwhile, LPG cooking gas is priced at Rs1,800 per cylinder.



Aloi NMB partnership

Aloi Private Limited and NMB Bank entered a strategic partnership on digital financing. The banks agreed to provide digital lending services to micro-entrepreneurs in the electric transport sector.

TOON TALK

“Cartoons are a form of satire, and good things don’t need to be satirised”

Ashish Dhakal

On 19 December, *Kantipur* daily ran a cartoon by Abin Shrestha: Sher Bahadur Deuba of Nepali Congress, which emerged as the largest party in the November general election, stood at N°1 on a winner’s podium holding a golden cup, reminiscent of Argentina’s win the night before in the World Cup, as K P Oli of the UML took second place, watching on with no sense of urgency. In contrast, Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoist Centre leapt from third place, one hand outstretched towards the cup which Deuba caught close with trepidation.

The cartoon was a clever premonition. The coalition collapsed on 25 December and the two estranged Communist parties, Maoist and UML, reunited for the next government in a repeat of the agreement Dahal and Oli made after the 2017 elections. Dahal was appointed prime minister for the third time last month.

This was not so much a prediction as it was an evaluation of Nepal’s political climate. Abin Shrestha reminds us that cartoons are not news but analyses, and a political cartoonist aware of the happenings in the country depicts what they understand and



GOPEN RAI

expect based on their studies and observations. But satire is the medium with which the message is conveyed.

“All I wanted to show in the cartoon was that Dahal, who came third in the election, wanted to be prime minister when Deuba’s party got first place,” Abin explains. “Practically, this is a little strange, isn’t it, as the winning party usually gets the position?”

Abin, 50, started out as a cartoonist almost 30 years ago when he joined the *Nepal Times* daily in 1993. Today, his daily single column cartoons on *Kantipur* under गजब छ बा ! are widely recognisable, with their characteristic geometric political figures, sharp, witty one-liners, a *daura-surwal* clad silent man standing in for the ordinary

citizens, and his unique signature. But it was not until he was 30 that he felt attuned to cartooning, later becoming the president of Cartoonist Club of Nepal for two terms, from 2014 - 2021, and reviving the almost-defunct group with regular programs and workshops for up-and-coming Nepali cartoonists.

“When I began, I was very young,” he recalls. “I did not fully understand the politics or the parties, did not know how Congress was or UML.” His editor would sit him down and explain to him the intrigues, the policies and the workings of Nepal’s politics. Based on these and the day’s happenings, Abin would then make his cartoons.

After the end of the Panchayat system 1990, the major political parties in the new multi-party

system were NC and UML.

“Democracy was freshly reinstated after the Panchayat rule, there was freedom of expression, and also new developments in printing technology.” Media was unshackled and there were new newspapers, which in turn gave more opportunities to cartoonists.

Before, cartoonists would often have to use pseudonyms to keep their identity and work separate. This is not so much the case now. “Personally, I have not had to face censorship to that degree,” he adds. “There was a time, not too long ago, when party cadets – never the leaders themselves, mind you – would threateningly call or email me after a cartoon was out, telling me it was inappropriate. This has not happened in recent times.”

This, he attributes to the

changing attitudes among people regarding the leaders and politicians. Abin says. “And perhaps the audience has also got more mature, knows a thing or two about satire and humour.”

A cartoonist, Abin emphasises, observes, analyses and expresses a society’s climate and temperature. And perhaps for this reason alone, most cartoons are political in nature. “Especially in Nepal’s case, digging deeper, one finds that issues of education, health, and society are all tied to politics,” says Abin. “As such, it is difficult to not be political in our cartoons.”

There are sometimes complaints too, that his cartoons almost exclusively depict frustrations and society’s negative aspects, but Abin reminds that his works are forms of satire after all. Satire, he explains, aims to shame or expose the vices, or shortcomings of individuals, corporations, governments and society to ridicule. There is humour involved but not always, and the intention is to improve. “And good things, events don’t need to be satirised at all,” he adds.

Consequently, single-column gag cartoons or wider editorial ones in Nepali papers lampoon the government’s deficiency and detachment from the general public, issues of corruption. In 2022, Abin’s cartoons reflected the waves of hope that Nepali felt with the two elections, and were sharply critical when the elected leaders did not deliver as promised.

“Fresh and younger people are elected now,” Abin says. This also means newer characters to draw and newer expectations to express. “As a cartoonist, I hope that we also get to draw our cartoons differently this time, breaking the same tired tropes of the same people in power,” he adds. “Otherwise what is new, even?” 🇳🇵

HILUX
THROUGH ANY ROAD



Having requested an appointment with the American Consulate in Calcutta, BP Koirala went to the Consulate on October 15, 1953, and talked with the American Consul, who sent a record of his conversation with Koirala to the American Embassy in New Delhi. The trenchant criticisms Koirala expressed about the dominant and controversial role India had assumed in the internal affairs of Nepal are well worth noting, particularly since BP was often accused of being 'pro-Indian' at the time.

Back then, BP's brother MP Koirala was in charge of the government, but there was no Nepali Congress member in the cabinet. King Tribhuvan had left Nepal in September for medical treatment in Switzerland. BP was president of the Nepali Congress but had held no government position since November 1951. The Congress itself was split into three factions, and the Koirala brothers remained at odds.

This document (from which a few parenthetical remarks have been omitted here) is part of the U.S. State Department files on Nepal and was located in the U.S. National Archives in College Park, Maryland.

American Consul Garrett Soulen who spoke with Koirala wrote the following report at the conclusion of the meeting:

I [Consul Soulen] must say that after having read at least some of the press reports about B.P., I had expected a man older appearing in years and a person with more or less a firebrand temperament. I was surprised on both counts: B.P. appears to be not more than 35 or 36 (he says he is 40, with a 5-year-old son at school in Patna) and he was anything but a demagogue or a firebrand. I have seldom heard a less dispassionate recitation of facts and opinions from a purported nationalist. I was impressed with his [B.P.'s] apparent frankness and probable sincerity.

I could not help but think many, many times during his conversation, "I have heard this before;" the correlation between the facts and opinions as [B.P.] recited them and like facts and opinions made to me by Sikkimese in regard to their state (Bhutan also) was striking to an extreme. The gist is "big stick GOI [Government of India] policies towards border states and against minorities in those border regions, coupled with a most inept implementation of such policies." Despite the fact that we here in Calcutta, primarily because of the reserve exercised by Indian officials in discussing these matters, undoubtedly hear much more of the other side of the question than the GOI's, it would appear that the implementation of GOI policy toward Nepal, Sikkim, Naga Hills, Lushai Hills, and to a lesser extent Bhutan (only because they hold themselves aloof) is always to the benefit of Indians, and especially from a monetary standpoint.

Among the various subjects which B.P. brought up and on which he discoursed at some length, the following are worthy of note.

[B.P.] saw Prime Minister Nehru August 13 and on a subsequent date. At both meetings when he endeavored to point out to Nehru the errors which the Indians were committing in Nepal in the implementation of their

policy, he was cut off short and told that because of geographic location Nepal was going to have to develop under the aegis of the GOI. B.P. tried to point out that Nepalis were slowly but surely developing a nationalist spirit, that this nationalist spirit could be channeled into agreeable Indo-Nepal relations which could be mutually beneficial to both countries, or it could develop as a hard core of absolute independence from all other nations, or it could develop in such a way that Communists under the guise of nationalism and with the aid, abetment and tutelage of the Communists in Tibet (possibly with the help of Indian Communists as well) could establish a Red regime on the southern slopes of the Himalayas.

When B.P. asked Nehru what Nehru's intentions were for Nepal, Nehru reportedly was very angry with such a direct question and answered only to the effect that he, Nehru, wished to see a strong economically prosperous Nepal develop.

On the Communist issue, B.P. claims Nehru lectured him severely to the effect that for the next ten years there would be no danger from Communism to India or Nepal, because "China has her hands full with her own problems." (In our conversation this morning the USSR was never mentioned). In B.P.'s opinion, Nehru might possibly be correct with his ten-year prognostication if he is thinking only about armed invasion of the sub-continent. However, B.P. pointed out that even with plenty of problems on their hands in China, Korea, Indo-China and Tibet, the Chinese Communists and/or their Tibetan, Nepali and Indian cohorts could still carry out enough disruptive tactics, especially in the fields of economics, industry, finance and state administration, to seriously hamstring and thwart the efforts of any but a very strong, stable national government.



Conversation between BP Koirala and the American Consul in Calcutta in 1953



- 1 Rare photo of the triumvirate of the interim arrangement after 1951: last Rana prime minister Mohan Shamsher, King Tribhuvan and Home Minister BP Koirala.
- 2 King Tribhuvan swearing in MP Koirala as prime minister in 1951, Crown Prince Mahendra in shades behind.
- 3 BP Koirala, King Tribhuvan and Jawaharlal Nehru in 1951 at New Delhi airport.
- 4 Charge d' Affaires L. Douglas welcomes BP Koirala to the US Embassy inauguration in 1959.
- 5 6 BP Koirala with Jawaharlal Nehru in New Delhi in 1960.



etween merican Consul 1953



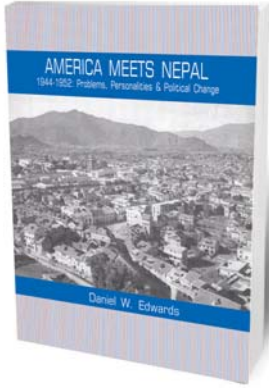
[Regarding American TCA (Technical Cooperative Assistance)], B.P. said that until July 1953 he had been “quite friendly” with Paul Rose [head of the U.S. Point Four Program in Nepal] in Kathmandu and that although they had not discussed politics as such, B.P. thought Rose “understood his mind.” B.P. had occasionally visited Father Moran’s school [at Godawari] and had discussed many of his problems with that gentleman. He had over the previous year been in contact with other Americans and certain other foreigners, including British Ambassador Summerhayes, and certain FAO [the UN Food & Agriculture Organization] people who had been to Nepal on inspection trips. During the August conversations, Nehru had brought these contacts to B.P.’s attention and in no uncertain terms had let it be known that the GOI did not approve of such activities, and that such contacts should cease, especially contacts with Americans. B.P. went no further than to say that Nehru had spoken deprecatingly about America.

B.P. claims that the usurpation by the GOI of the most prominent place in Nepal’s economic and political situation is borne out by many facts. Among many which he mentioned [were that] M.P. Koirala is under the direct jurisdiction of the GOI. The GOI has also directly controlled the King. [U.S.] Ambassador Bowles’ endeavors to break through that barrier were unsuccessful. For example, a [U.S.] expert [on administration] by the name of [Merrill R.] Goodall, who is supposed to have been assigned in Nepal for a matter of three months as an adviser, lasted only two weeks before GOI forced his recall. The [American] TCA program in Nepal has been hamstrung, primarily by GOI intransigence, if not by design, which was reflected through the Government of Nepal’s lack of cooperation in getting its projects rolling. [An FAO expert] told B.P. it appeared to him that the GON was purposely holding back cooperation with TCA on the orders of the GOI.

Nepal at the present time has 11,000 men under arms. Five thousand of these men are supposedly under training with the Indian Military Mission. The remaining 6,000 are under the Nepalese Army command. The Indian Military Mission ranks most Nepalese officers, and the same feeling against it is held by the majority of the rank and file. In B.P.’s opinion, there was absolutely no necessity for the GOI to set up this separate headquarters for its military mission. In fact, the mission itself is much too large, and its scope of operations is much broader than contemplated by any Nepali who entered into the negotiations. According to B.P., the Nepali Army needs outside assistance training in only two categories: (1) engineering troops, and (2) artillery. According to him, the Gurkhas have earned a world-wide reputation as excellent infantrymen not only in world wars but also in the continuous skirmishes and incidents in which the British (with Gurkha troops) have been engaged for many years. Nepalese officers, who during the last war had certain Indian officers under their command, now find themselves with those same officers in command of them, for training purposes but nevertheless on Nepal’s soil. Nepali army officers consider themselves superior soldiers to the Indian, and although they may not have as “smart a step or cut of uniform,” they are only too willing to stand on their reputation earned through actual battle experience. Nepali Army officers are fearful that the Indian Military Mission will break down the morale

of the Nepali troops, for the Indian officers tend to be haughty with the Nepali officers and on many occasions criticize them in front of Nepali troops. Evidently B.P. took up the matter of the Indian Military Mission with Nehru in August, for he remarked that Nehru had said, “Well, we have at least made your troops smart,” (meaning good appearing for parade ground exhibitions). B.P. claims that the anti-Indian feeling (which he did not specifically mention as such) pervaded the entire Nepalese Army and the police force. He believes both units have a majority of men who are extremely nationalistic in outlook.

Trade with Tibet is considerable. [B.P.] implied that India encouraged such trade and especially for Indian manufactured articles. He said that the Chinese in Tibet were assiduously cultivating Nepalese traders there, and that although these men were of small account financially and at present of little moment politically, nevertheless practically all of them were coming back into Nepal favorably impressed and to a certain extent condoning the Chinese action in Tibet. B.P. feels that these men, with their tales, have had and will continue to have a disturbing influence on the people in the mountains. He said it was not so much a question about the correctness or propriety of what the Chinese had done and were doing in Tibet, as it was the impression made on [Nepalese



*America meets Nepal
1944-1952: Problems,
Personalities & Political Change
by Daniel W. Edwards
Ratnasagar Prakashan, 2022
262 pages
Rs995*

traders] of how much easier it is to live under a stable government (even totalitarian) than it is to live and do business in a country with practically no government.

[Regarding the Indo-Nepal trade agreement of 1950], I cannot remember all the various details [B.P.] mentioned. The gist of it was, however, that India is now pressing for the Government of Nepal (which means private traders as well) to handle all of their imports into Nepal through GOI offices. I remember one specific example of what appears to be economic exploitation: Nepal imports considerable quantities of betelnut, primarily from Malaya. It used to be possible for a Nepali trader to deal directly with a trader in Malaya or some intermediary for this commodity. Now it has to be obtained through the GOI, and if there is a licensee in India for the import of this commodity, the Nepali trader must deal through that licensee, in effect making the Indian an extra middle man to squeeze out a bit more blood from the turnip.

When B.P. was speaking about exports, imports, Indian policy, etc., he said that in August Nehru, in pointing out to him the dangers of becoming dependent upon “great countries,” had told B.P. about [U.S.] Ambassador Allen’s representation to Nehru, because

India had exported a ton of thorium to Communist China; the Battle Act was mentioned in this connection. [The U.S. Mutual Defense Assistance Control Act of 1951 banned U.S. assistance to countries doing business with the Soviet Union, and India refused to accept any American-imposed limits on its trade.] Nehru was evidently incensed over that episode and had spoken very disparagingly about the United States in that connection.

B.P. claims to have very drastically revised his opinion of Nehru over the past year and a half. He said that in mid-1951 he had been warned by Jai Prakash Narayan that he, B.P., was putting much too much trust in Nehru for the good of Nepal. Narayan had continued with a softening remark to the effect that one must not put that much trust in any foreign nation’s prime minister, for countries, like people, are still antagonistic toward each other and try to take advantage. Since mid-1951, B.P. has realized more and more that Nehru is not the master of his own destiny and feels that during the past year Nehru has taken a backward step from his previous high ideals and ideology. B.P. implied that this change may have been forced upon Nehru, and actually said that a small group in the Ministry of External Affairs has been responsible for most of this retrogression. He gave Nehru the benefit of the doubt on general policy matters, but blamed Nehru for being so busy with so many things that he could not properly control his lieutenants. B.P. said that when he spoke to Nehru about generalities, they were in near agreement, but when it came to discussion of the implementation of policy, Nehru invariably became upset to the point of anger and would not listen to reason. B.P. believes that Nehru’s subordinates force upon Nehru their own ideas when it comes to implementation [of policy]; the result is probably not what Nehru had anticipated. B.P. said there is the possibility that Nehru is the kind of man who believes he must back up his subordinates in the decisions which they take whether they are right or wrong—in any event, the developing situation is not one which could be considered conducive to good Indo-Nepal relations.

B.P. stated categorically that the situation within Nepal was deteriorating and had been for the past nine months. He claims to be most anxious over the way the Communist situation will develop this next winter and spring. As he expressed it, the Communist Party is under ban but is still operating quite openly. The people are extremely dissatisfied not only with their economic ills but with the fact that their government is not a government, that day by day it becomes more and more a puppet, subject to the whims of GOI. The Nepalese people, at least those in the Valley, are fast losing faith in what government there is, and as a result, seeing practically only one alternative—Communism—are slowly but surely tending to listen more and more to the promises and claims put out by its adherents.

B.P. asked for nothing. He did say that he had hoped on his last visit to New Delhi to see Ambassador Allen but that circumstances had been inopportune. He mentioned the fact that he had no contact with the [U.S.] Embassy. I offered no help in this regard, but merely expressed my pleasure in having had an opportunity to listen to him. 🇺🇸

Note: The above passage has been reprinted by permission from the recent book, America Meets Nepal, 1944-1952: Problems, Personalities and Political Change, by Daniel W. Edwards.

EVENTS



Game night
Enjoy exciting games with great company at Hostel Nextdoor's game nights. 12 January, 5.30pm-9.30pm, Hostel Nextdoor, Kupondol

Ranjana lipi and Aila
Keen to learn the traditional and beautiful Ranjana lipi of the Nepa Valley? Traditional Stay has got it covered. Participants also get to enjoy delicious traditional Newa cuisine. Register now. 7 January, 1pm-4pm, Traditional Stay, Swotha, Patan

Movie screening
Bikalpa will be screening *Maa ka Doodh*, which shows the dark side of the dairy industry. 11 January, 5pm-7.15pm, Bikalpa Art Café and Bar, Harihar Bhawan, 9851147776



Chhaimale hike
Enjoy a 6-hour hike to Chhaimale organised by Hike for Nepal, with scenic views and cultural moments along the way. 7 January, Rs700-1400, 9846190957

DINING



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

ONLINE ARCHIVES

Tasty
This is the time to broaden culinary horizons. If there was one app made for millennial and gen-Z chefs, it's Tasty. The Tasty website and the mobile app has hundreds of recipes to choose from, and quick 'n easy how-to videos.



Forest 404
Forest 404 is a nine-part environmental thriller podcast set 200 years into the future where forests do not exist anymore. Each episode is followed by an expert discussing the theme of the episode. Find on Apple podcasts, Spotify and Google podcasts.

Minesweeper
Brush up on childhood memories with this engrossing single-player puzzle game. Google 'Minesweeper' and start playing online.



CrazyGames
Find fun games and puzzle-based activities on CrazyGames.

Poem-a-Day
Poetry lover? Subscribe to the daily digital poetry series featuring unpublished works of today's talented poets.

Tasneem King's Kitchen
Tasneem's mouthwatering authentic Bohra Muslim cuisine is a must for anyone who loves flavorful, spicy and savoury dishes. From slow-cooked Dum Biryani to traditional 10-course Bohra Thaals, Tasneem is a place that brings food-lovers together. Jhamsikhel, 9801121212



The Chocolate Room
Enter a world of pastries, cupcakes, decadent brownies and chocolate of every size and shape. Don't forget to try the Peri Peri fries and milkshake too. Jhamsikhel, 9851056096

About Town

GETAWAY



Meghauli Serai
Leave worries behind and enter this luxurious safari lodge at the heart of Chitwan National Park. Overlooking the Rapti river, this lodge not only offers scenic views but accommodation that integrates local culture and art. Chitwan National Park, 9851218500

Raniban Retreat
Located on a hillock of Raniban forest, this environmentally-friendly boutique hotel offers a spectacular view of the mountains. Pokhara (01) 5185435

Peacock Guest House
This guest house is a 700-year-old UNESCO heritage building that represents true Newa architecture. Take a stroll around the Old City of Bhaktapur, indulge in local cuisine, and join the Himalayan Wood Carving Masterpieces Workshop. Tachupal Tole, Dattatreya Square, Bhaktapur (01) 6611829

Mystic Mountain
This beehive-looking resort in Nagarkot is exquisitely built using ultra modern designs and world-class comfort. Enjoy the vast view of the mountains on a clear day. Nagarkot (01) 6200646



Gokarna Forest Resort
The resort is a paradise, situated amidst a thick forest of centuries-old trees rustling out natural tunes, with great restaurants for fine dining. Golf, anyone? Gokarna (01) 4450002



Utpala Café
Located within a Buddhist monastery in Boudha, Utpala Café offers an all-vegetarian menu made from locally grown produce. Their mushroom dishes are a must-try! Boudha, ++9801978106

Everfresh
Perfect for brunch and breakfast lovers, Everfresh is the place in town for elevated avocado toast, fluffy pancakes, brioche french toast and buckwheat crepes. Lazimpat

WEEKEND WEATHER



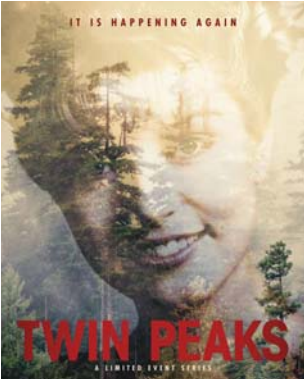
High pressure, clear skies

An enormous high pressure area dominates northern regions of the Subcontinent, which means clear skies and a further drop in temperature to near freezing on the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley. However, this also means the inversion layer will trap pollutants at ground level not just in Kathmandu, but right across the Indo-Gangetic plains. The fog there stretches from Peshawar to Chittagong every morning. Some of this smog will continue to be blown up-valley in Nepal by afternoon winds. No rain on the horizon, with crisp, cold and sunny days forecast above 2,500m.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
19° 2°	20° 2°	20° 2°

OUR PICK

Who killed Laura Palmer? This question sets off David Lynch's cult classic mystery drama *Twin Peaks* when the body of the homecoming queen washes up on the shore one morning, and FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper arrives to investigate. Drawing on elements of detective fiction, with an uncanny tone, supernatural elements, and campy, melodramatic portrayal of eccentric characters, *Twin Peaks* is distinguished by surrealism, offbeat humor and distinctive cinematography. The initial success of the series was followed by the 1992 feature film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, which serves as a prequel to the series, and the 2017 revival, which saw many of the original cast return, with Lynch directing. Stars Kyle MacLachlan, Michael Ontkean, Mädchen Amick, Sherilyn Fenn, Piper Laurie, Sheryl Lee, and David Bowie in a special cameo.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI

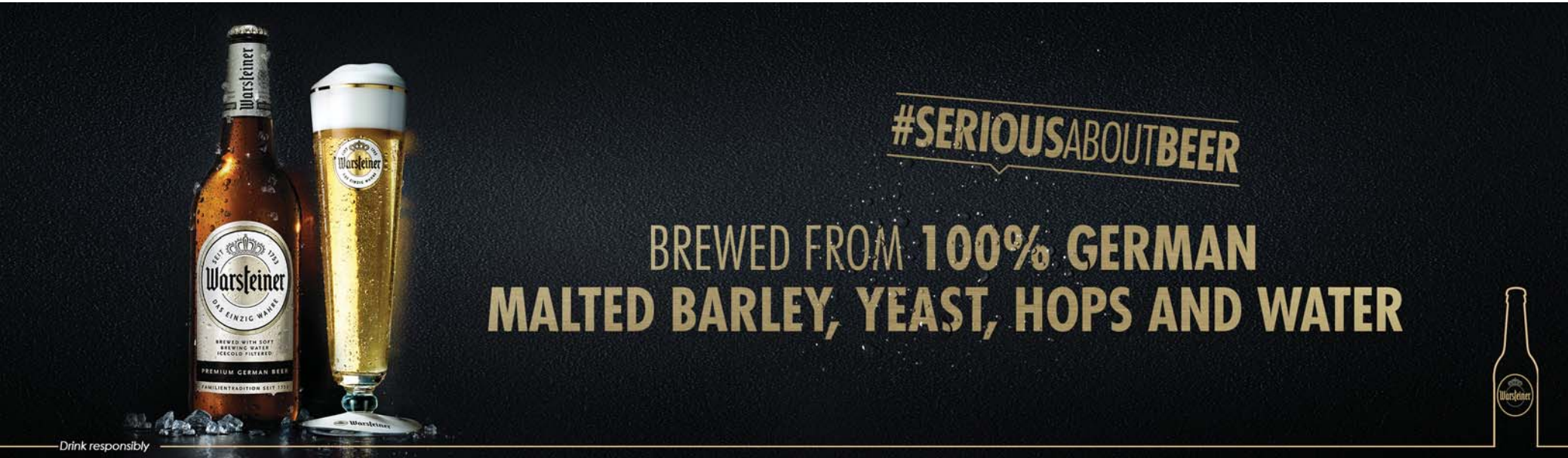


सम्पत्ति विवरण समयमै बुझाऔं, जरिवानाबाट बचौं

- सार्वजनिक पद धारण गरेको व्यक्ति तथा राष्ट्रसेवकले आफ्नो व्यक्तिगत विवरण अद्यावधिक गरौं ।
- आर्थिक वर्ष शुरू भएको साठी दिनभित्र आफ्नो सम्पत्ति विवरण तोकिएको निकायमा पेश गरौं ।
- भ्रष्टाचारमा शून्य सहनशीलता अपनाऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड



Work hard, play hard

A national sportsman from Nepal had to migrate for work in Qatar, even as life threw curveballs at him



Coach Lekhnath Lamsal with his volleyball team in Pokhara after his return from Qatar.



Lamsal with his daughter, who died at 16 while undergoing treatment for cancer.

■ Lekhnath Lamsal

For most people life is a continuous transition from one stage to another. Not for me.

I am in my mid-40s, currently pursuing a bachelor's degree with students who are my son's age. My life is a series of seemingly random vignettes strung together in no particular order. Yet, in retrospect, they have collectively shaped who I am today.

As a school student in Pokhara, I suffered from a bone disease that caused body ache, restricted my mobility and caused recurrent fever. After expensive visits to hospitals, I finally landed a good doctor in Delhi who cured me. Had there been a delay in treatment, he said, I would not have been so lucky.

His last words before discharging me from hospital still rings in my ears: "Forget you were ever sick. You are young and have your whole life ahead of you. From now on, bring out your inner courage and zest for life." And I did.

When I started Grade 11, I felt like I had been given an empty slate to start a new life. I was finally free of pain, and anything was possible.

I developed a love for sports, especially volleyball, which I was surprisingly good at. Standing tall at 1.88m, I was the best spiker and was known for my ability to jump high. The cheers of supporters made me feel formidable. On the volleyball court, I was king.

I was getting noticed and had started to build a fan base. The chief of Pokhara police recruited me, and I got even better at the game with practice and training. Before long, I was in the national team playing in different tournaments, including the South Asian Games.

My salary was low, and I couldn't even afford to buy new shoes when they wore out. Life was getting unaffordable, and I had responsibilities to provide for my family. Which is why I had to take the difficult decision to leave for overseas work, just like everyone else. I was passionate about volleyball, but there was no future and security in it.

This is the reality of Nepal. Whether you are a national player or not, all roads eventually lead to the Gulf or Malaysia.

In 2002, I got on a plane for Qatar where I was to work as a security guard. My wife was

pregnant back in Pokhara with my daughter, our second child. This was a time when there were not as many Nepalis in Qatar.

I eventually spent 14 years in Qatar, my new home. During that time, I was promoted five times, and ultimately became a branch manager overseeing other security guards in the company. My starting salary was 900 QAR but by the time I left, it was 7,000 QAR (\$1,900).

I was luckier than most Nepalis. I knew that because I had taken bodies of migrant workers to hospital, or watched construction workers struggle in the extreme heat for low wages in Qatar.

I also managed to find time to play volleyball in tournaments organised by the Qatar Volleyball Association between various nationalities. There were moments when cheers from fellow Nepalis gave me an adrenaline rush and a powerful feeling.

I was lucky enough to go home frequently, every two years initially and once a year after my last couple of promotions. But then my daughter Alisha became ill, and I had to rush back to Nepal.

She, too, was having chronic body aches and it was hard for her to move. I had to find out what was wrong, and nip it in the bud. It reminded me of similar symptoms I had as a child, and recovering in a hospital in India. Except in my daughter's case, doctors found a tumour.

I could not extend my one-month emergency leave. My wife stayed back in the village with our two sons while I took my daughter to hospital in Kathmandu. Doctors removed her tumour, after which she had to go through several rounds of aggressive chemotherapy.

My savings from the job in Qatar made it possible for me to afford to pay her medical bills which had racked up to almost Rs6 million. Friends who had known me through volleyball across the world as well as colleagues in Qatar pitched in, donating Rs1.7 million.

My daughter kept her spirits up throughout her struggle. Once, she told me that she was not going to make it and had a premonition that the end was near. Her body was unable to handle the painful side effects of chemotherapy. I could feel her slipping away.

The image of her looking frail and small in the ventilator is etched in my heart. It is painful when I remember how we communicated with each other through eyes blurred with tears, as she tried to

make a few feeble gestures and I struggled to mumble words of comfort. I was not ready to say goodbye. Ten days after she had shared with me her premonition, Alisha passed away. She was just 16, with her whole life ahead her. It has been four years now.

I am too old now to play volleyball professionally, although I play in tournaments for 40+ year olds here and there. I have no interest in going back to Qatar because I will have to start from scratch.

So I picked up where I had left off, and recently joined a bachelor's

program in sports management at Gandaki College, while working as a volleyball trainer on the side. I hoped to improve things for players so they would not have to struggle as much as I did.

Players, who should be at the centre in Nepal, are nowhere in the priority list. Like everything else in Nepal, sports governance has been infiltrated by politics and vested interests.

Although I am two decades late, I realise the importance of education and a degree. My classmates are half my age, and I switch back and forth between

being their guardian figure and friend. I study hard and am a grade topper in my cohort. But university homework does not relieve me from my household responsibilities, I am up by four am every morning taking care of household chores, including tending to our cow and buffalo. 🐮

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



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Prospects for Nepal's tourism in 2023

More than 70 years after Nepal opened to the world, the country has yet to fully benefit from tourism

■ Ramesh Kumar

In 1950, French mountaineers Maurice Herzog and Louis Lachenal climbed Annapurna I, the first ever eight-thousander peak to be climbed.

The French team walked down to the Indian border, took a train to Raxaul, re-entered Nepal and trekked up to Kathmandu to be felicitated by Prime Minister Mohan Shamsher Rana.

After being closed to foreigners for centuries, Nepal opened up to the world for the first time. Three years later in 1953, Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Edmund Hillary catapulted Nepal and the Himalaya into the global limelight.

But more than 70 years later, Nepal's tourism sector has yet to take full advantage of the economic opportunities that the industry can provide for domestic job creation, production of local products and foreign exchange income.

That Nepal's tourism has not lived up to its potential to become the backbone of the country's economy while it grows exponentially in the rest of the world — including in other mountain countries — proves that there are a lot of missed opportunities.

Summing up summits

Visitors flock to Nepal for culture, wildlife and pilgrimage, but our unique selling points are the world's highest mountains. Some 16% of tourists who visit Nepal come for trekking and climbing, and yet mountaineering opportunities have been woefully under-advertised.

In fact, when Mt Everest does get into the international media, it is either for the 'traffic jams' on the summit or as the mountain of garbage. Lately, it is for how global climate breakdown is melting its glaciers. Apart from eight out of the 14 eight-thousanders in the world which are in Nepal, there are 326 mountains above 5,500m that are open for climbing in the country.

Records show that in 1964, only 9,526 tourists entered Nepal, rising to 500,000 two decades later. But it took another 34 years for it to double and exceed 1 million in 2018.

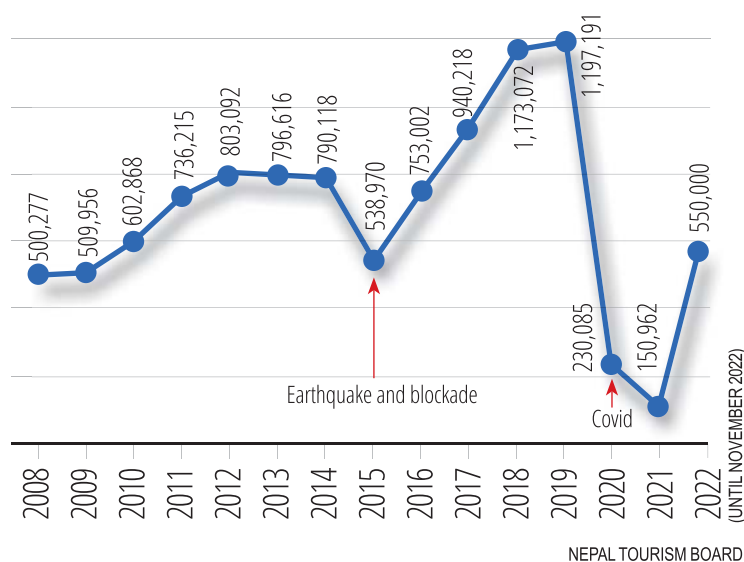
In comparison, 40 million tourists visited relatively more isolated Tibetan region of China in 2018. Even Bhutan, which is four times smaller than Nepal in area, and has only 700,000 population, has priced itself on the higher side and got 315,000 tourists. Cambodia welcomes more than 6 million tourists annually, promoting its main attraction: the Angkor Wat temple complex.

Nepal launched its Visit Nepal 2020 campaign just as Covid-19 struck. Nepal Airlines jets still have its logo on their fuselage, and it is a reminder of a failed drive. Tourism is beginning to pick up again after a two-year slump, but the prospects for 2023 are not so sure.

Even if the numbers pick up again, Nepal will not benefit as much as it should since it is selling itself too cheap. The tourist to Nepal spends an average of only \$48 a day. Bhutan with its 'high cost, low impact' model, requires



Number of tourists in Nepal



its tourist to spend \$200-\$250 per day in fees.

Despite the unique 'product' that Nepal has in its mountains, wildlife and heritage, the country is just not benefiting as it should from the tourism industry which now contributes less than 2% to the

national economy.

In 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic, income from the tourism sector was Rs60.8 billion, which made up only 4.6% of the country's total foreign exchange earnings.

Tourism's contribution to Nepal's hard currency income

reached its peak way back in 1981, when it made up 36.8%, up from 30.2% in 1965. (*See graph*)

At the time, Nepalis seeking to go abroad for work or studies benefited greatly from being able to exchange dollars for rupees before they left. Ironically, by the 1990s as more and more Nepalis pursued foreign employment their remittance replaced tourism as the major contributor to Nepal's economy.

Now, money that Nepalis abroad send home makes up two-thirds of the country's total foreign exchange income, while tourism, exports, foreign investment and development assistance, combined, contribute only one-third. Taking the annual average from 2010-2020, the tourism sector on its own made up only 5.2% of Nepal's foreign exchange reserves.

This is not to say that tourism has not contributed to the economies of localities within Nepal. The Khumbu region, for example has an annual per capita

income more than five times higher than the national average. Trekking has transformed the economies of Langtang, Manang and Mustang, where locals previously depended almost entirely on agriculture or pastoralism.

Indeed, the trekking and mountaineering sectors employ more than 18,000 guides, 50,000 porters and other service providers. In 2018, more than 8,000 mountaineers paid over Rs680 million in climbing fees and created jobs for more than 1,700 Nepali high altitude guides, who are now also hired by expeditions on mountains abroad.

Before Covid, tourism was estimated to provide direct jobs for about 1 million Nepalis and indirectly benefit many more. But industry experts say that the potential for economic benefits should have been much higher.

Climbing numbers

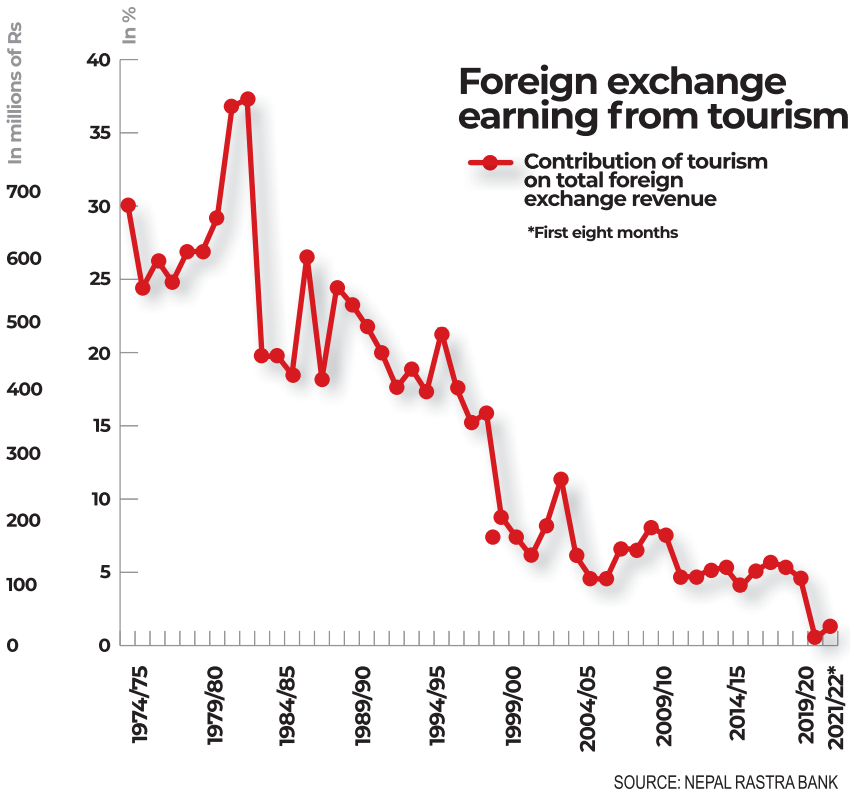
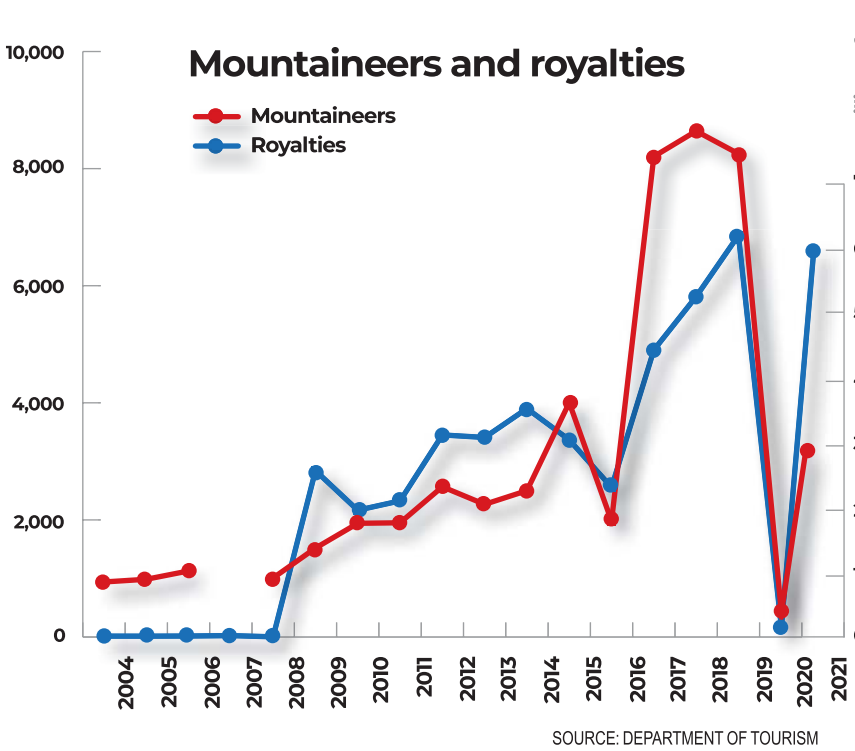
Tourism in Nepal has been impacted by major historical events in recent times: the decade-long insurgency from 1996-2006 and subsequent political instability hit arrivals hard. Mountaineers had just returned to Mt Everest after a deadly avalanche in 2014 at Base Camp killed 16, when the earthquake struck one year later.

It was only in 2018 that Nepal was finally able to exceed its target of bringing 1 million tourists, and planners aimed higher to double it with the 2020 campaign.

Nepal spent \$2 million dollars in the run-up to the Visit Nepal 2020 campaign. Much of that money was wasted, most Nepalis who lost their jobs migrated overseas for work, many hospitality sector businesses closed down, and hotel projects were abandoned.

Nepal did reap benefits from free promotion by films about mountaineering, including Nims Purja's *14 Peaks*, on streaming services like Netflix, when people were locked down worldwide

2023



during Covid.

In 2021, as Nepal confronted a deadly second wave of the virus, foreign visitors dropped to 150,962. The biggest drop was in Chinese arrivals, who were starting to top the list of tourists.

But in 2022, pent-up demand and post-Covid rebound has meant that the numbers were beginning to climb again — when Russia invaded Ukraine in February.

The war has hit incomes of source countries in Europe and Asia hard, and Nepal's own economy has gone into a slump. At a time when tourism income could supplant depleted foreign exchange reserves and falling exports, the industry was again adversely affected.

But there was an uptick of arrivals in 2022. Numbers for January-November 2022 reached nearly 550,000, filling up hotels

in Kathmandu and Pokhara with most running at near-full occupancy during Dasain. Still, experts argue that Nepal has not been able to build enough of a portfolio in the world market as a tourist destination. Besides, the Kathmandu gateway is getting bad publicity from bloggers and influencers because of its chaos and air pollution.

"We have struggled to build a brand as a tourist country globally because of the lack of necessary tourism infrastructure inside the country," says tourism entrepreneur Basanta Mishra. "This means our adventure tourism destinations are overshadowed by other global tourist attractions."

Nepal has been diversifying its adventure tourism brand from just trekking and mountaineering to white water rafting, bungee

jumping, paragliding, ziplines, canyoning and other sports. But sustaining adventure tourism will be a tall order in the absence of proper infrastructure or promotion in the global market.

The good news is that Nepal is seeing improvements in tourism infrastructure over the years, especially in the hospitality sector. In recent years, more than a dozen 'star' hotels as well as multinational hotel chains have opened up in Nepal, with more under construction. And although new international airports have opened in Pokhara and Bhairawa, poor planning has meant that there is almost no prospect of international flights from there. Meanwhile, it can take up to 9 hours to drive from Kathmandu to Pokhara because of congestion and poor roads.

But above all, Nepal's tourism

sector has not been a priority for planners even though they have never tired of giving speeches about its potential for decades.

Should Nepal promote high-end tourism rather than just chase numbers of arrivals? There has been no discussion on carrying capacity for various trekking areas and mountaineering peaks.

Given its topography, location and culture, Nepal should be able to sell itself. Still, promotion has been sloppy, ad hoc and inadequate — especially to China and India which are already replacing arrivals from Europe and the Americas.

Says tourism analyst Rajiv Dahal: "Nepal's policymakers do not yet understand that reviving the tourism sector is in the country's best interest, and that tourism will not gain momentum unless its potential is fully explored." 🇳🇵

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