

ONE HORSE RACE

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal cleared a floor test in Parliament, securing 268 out of 270 votes of confidence to keep his position.

With 89 lawmakers from the Nepali Congress (NC) deciding to back him, Nepal's Parliament has become a one-horse race.

That the main opposition party (and one that had the most seats in Parliament) chose to give Dahal the vote of confidence has invited much concern and criticism, both from within and outside Parliament.

Only two parties, who have one lawmaker each in Parliament, voted against Dahal on Tuesday: Rastriya Janamorcha Party (RJP) chair Chitra Bahadur KC, and Nepal Majdur Kisan Party (NMKP) leader Prem Suwal.

“Opposition to the government is crucial in a democratic system. Without a strong opposition, government becomes autocratic,” thundered Chitra Bahadur KC in his address to the House. “What we have seen today sets a dangerous precedent, and weakens our democracy.”

A leader of the third-largest party in Parliament that commands just 32 seats — only 18 of which were obtained through direct ballots was already illogical to start with. Now, he has no opposition at all.

Deuba's decision to give Dahal his party's vote of confidence has diminished NC's role and responsibility to be a watchdog (some would say lapdog) of government. A Parliament sans opposition means there is no one to hold power to account.

For his part, Deuba remarked that his party had decided to give Dahal his party's vote of confidence to protect the Constitution from the coalition itself, referring to Oli's comments about dissolving Parliament.

That Dahal and Deuba have come together after their divorce indicates the fear both have that K P Oli of the UML was becoming the



power behind the throne in the coalition. The NC's decision to back Dahal would most certainly clip the UML's wings slightly.

Dahal and Oli have a rocky partnership themselves, and many have doubts about how long this coalition will last. Oli himself seemed to warn Deuba not to act too smart in a speech to Parliament on Tuesday: "Any attempt by the NC to spring a political trap will be unwise and fruitless."

But Deuba's show of support has also tipped the scales of power a bit more towards Dahal, who had been at a disadvantage since he lost key positions for his party to Oli and the UML in favour of securing the premiership for himself.

While another confidence motion cannot be called for two

**NOW THE
ECONOMY,
STUPID**
EDITORIAL
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Dahal's seven-party coalition also includes Rabi Lamichhane's independent RSP, Rajendra Lingden's royal-right RPP, Ramsahay Prasad Yadav-led JSP, former separatist CK Raut's Janamat, and the Tharu-dominant Nagarik Unmukti.

Nepal's government is now a melting pot of career as well as anti-establishment politicians, royalists and communists, as well as pro and anti-federalist forces.

With the relationship between leaders of the left-led coalition as unpredictable as it is, the RSP as the fourth-largest party in parliament

will play an even more important role for both the Maoists and the UML in the future. Which party it aligns with on agendas could determine the future of provincial governments and federalism respectively.

Following the confidence vote, all eyes will now be on the selection of the Speaker on 19 January, the next President, as well as the 17 unfilled Cabinet positions.

Dahal having secured the premiership for himself means the UML and the RSP had more say in ministries and presidentship. But the NC joining in support of Dahal has complicated Oli's plans.

The challenge for Dahal now will be to appease leaders of seven parties with limited positions so that he might keep his shaky alliance intact. 🇳🇵

Shristi Karki



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Now the economy, stupid

Bishnu Poudel has inherited the Finance Ministry at a time when the country's finances are in a shambles because of ill-advised and inept policies of his predecessor.

The Nepal government is living beyond its means. Expenses are not in line with revenue. As of 11 January, the total expenditure of the Nepal government in the current fiscal year stands at Rs559 billion against revenue of only Rs398.7 billion. This year's budget projected a 21% increase in revenue from last year. However, data as of November 2022 shows that revenue collection has actually decreased by 20%.

Revenue therefore has not kept pace with increases in government salaries, allowances, and bonuses. If this trend continues, the newly elected 7-party opposition-less coalition government will be in serious trouble.

Nepal's imports decreased by 20.17% in the last five months compared to the same time period last year due to the Nepal Rastra Bank's ban on luxury items to sustain dwindling foreign exchange reserves.

With year-on-year inflation reaching 8.08%, ordinary citizens' demand for goods and services has fallen sharply. Meanwhile, increased interest on loans to more than 15% as a response to rising inflation has discouraged investment.

Nepal's primary sources of revenue are remittances, tourism, and export. Tourism is still not back on track post-Covid due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the country's exports in the last five months decreased by 34.61% as compared to the same time during the last fiscal year. This country is running just on remittance money that Nepal's abroad send home — either through official banking channels or hundi.

But Nepal cannot depend on remittance forever, especially as we need workers at home to stimulate the agriculture sector, manufacturing, construction and tourism, which in turn will create more domestic jobs.

Moreover, in his third term at the finance ministry, doubts as to the Bishnu Poudel's budget discipline are not exactly unfounded. Despite the country's inability to spend, Poudel during his first term as Finance Minister in 2015 introduced a budget that was 28% larger than the previous fiscal year and passed it through ordinance. And during his second tenure in 2020, he revealed a budget

that was 12% bigger than the previous one.

Although the minister may have inherited a country facing financial ruin from his forerunner, his own record is not particularly stellar. He is also known for recklessly increasing spending by increasing salaries and social security allowances during his terms in office.

But the finance ministry and the minister think they are beyond reproach and criticism.

It might seem like a given, but the finance ministry needs to take the initiative to reduce the wasteful government expenditure. Minister Poudel must work towards bridging the communication gap formed between his ministry and Nepal Rastra Bank during Janardan Sharma's tenure. Unlike his predecessor, Poudel cannot interfere with the central bank's autonomy on monetary policies.

Too many parties in this coalition government means that there are too many hands on the budgetary honeypot. This will not make the minister's job easy — but he will now have to navigate the will of seven political parties and their affiliated special interest groups and not be swayed by unreasonable demands from all sides. In fact, the Minister needs to be prepared to go against the coalition in order to prevent any misuse of the budget.

As finance minister, Poudel also bears the responsibility of raising the morale of business institutions and people to encourage investment and stimulate the economy.

All of this is not to say that there have not been positives. Nepal's foreign reserves increased by 2.5% from July 2022 to November 2022, following the embargo on the import of luxury items — even as there had been fears that Nepal would become 'the next Sri Lanka'.

Likewise, Nepal Rastra Bank's recent amendment of the Working Capital Loans Guideline to increase investment might ease the strain on the economy.

But embargoes and directives can only take the economy so far. Now, Poudel needs to work not just towards undoing and repairing the mismanagement of the ministry, but actively work towards policy reforms in order to get Nepal's economy back on track.

The minister must thus focus on good governance, refuse to buy into the demands of special interest groups, and facilitate the protection and appropriate use of state resources.

Ramesh Kumar



RSS

Finance Minister Bishnu Poudel must undo the mistakes of his predecessor, but his own past record is not stellar.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Moving with the times

Back in the early 2000s, mobile phones were still a novelty with less than 50,000 subscribers. But people were flocking to buy them even as the service was sloppy, expensive and the first private joint venture Spice Cell backed by Modi Corp in India and Nepal's Khetan group was stuck.

20 years later, total mobile subscribers in Nepal has grown to 40 million, more than the population of Nepal. Mobile penetration rate is reaching saturation, with 90% of individuals above 18 years in the Nepal Media Survey 2022 saying they owned a hand phone. Of these, 67% were smartphones with access to internet data.

Excerpts from a report published on issue #122 10-16 January 2003 of Nepali Times 20 years ago this week:

You have to make an urgent call on your mobile during peak hour. After dialling six out of ten times you get: a) "network busy" b) "subscriber you are dialling is not responding or is out of range" c) no ring, no response, no recorded message, d) after connecting you are cut off for no reason e) voice at the other end keeps cutting out.



In most of all these cases, you end up paying for the call even if you couldn't get through. At a time when mobile phone rates are plummeting everywhere else, Nepal's cell phone subscribers are paying more for a much shoddier and limited service.

"We are working on improving the quality of the reception with the Chinese contractor, these are teething problems because we are expanding the network to deal with congestion," explains a Nepal Telecommunications Corporation (NTC) official.

After suspending new mobile connections for two months, NTC started accepting new subscribers since Sunday. Its Jawalakhel office has been swamped with applicants all week. It costs Rs 14,450 deposit and Rs 5,500 for NTC's Nortel handset.

NTC recently slashed its rates to Rs 2 for an incoming call and Rs 4 for an outgoing call, but it is still high by regional standards. It is set to extend mobile reach along the highways from Bharatpur to Kakarvitta. Soon, there will be 40,000 new subscribers, bringing the total to 67,000.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



BISHNU'S FARM

Some seven years ago, while working at a milk cooperative Bishnu Pandey wanted to go abroad just like other men from his neighbourhood. He had a change of heart when he did not score as expected in the Korean language exams. Instead of migrating to a foreign land, he imported foreign goats to start a business of his own. Take a trip to his goat farm in Tilottama with this video. Read his profile on [page 9](#).

LAST NAME

If you start digging, there are many more questions, why do children inherit their fathers' last names and not their mothers' ('The last word on last names', Anjana Rajbhandary, nepalitimes.com)? The whole naming system is crude, all about property, inheritance, power.

Sheilina Khan

■ I didn't, just for practical purposes like updating passports etc. But also glad I didn't because having a long first name as well as a long last name, would have been a real mouthful.

Sharmilee Amatya

■ I did, but wish I hadn't. Part of what I hated is all the paperwork. It would mean even MORE to change it back.

Erin Voulkidis

■ I did. As a family I wanted all of us to have the same last name. I'm still the same old Anisha Kansakar.

Anisha Tuladhar

■ Sense of male ownership.

Mesbah UI Haq

■ There are people for whom there is no such thing as a surname. But because the systems set up by the so-called high-caste Hindu rulers assumed it exists for everyone and/or required it, they have adopted surnames of other ethnic groups. Officials in offices around the country still take issue with that. Secondly, there are surnames that have negative denotation and/or connotations, most to do with the caste of the person. And so, many have adopted surnames that are not theirs or modified their surnames in order to hide their caste identities so as not to be discriminated etc.

Dorje Gurung

LAST ASS

■ Hope you are not serious (VACANCY, The Ass, #1142)!

Ananta Armugam

■ Tribute to the Old Ass who is leaving while one is at the peak of success. I turned to the back page this week. It had full page ad -- good for NT. It seems the Ass knew how to give a final blow: fire himself and post a Vacancy. This is a glorious example that the Ass has set. Will the septuagenarians follow suit to let the grandchildren generation fill the vacancies in the corridors of power? Now the Ass's Government may one day be a Government with rise of new blood. Yes, we need new blood Asses.

Bhola Shrestha

GOLDEN TORTOISE

I think that the list of protected species of Nepal must be updated as soon as possible ('Saving Nepal's rare tortoises', Asmita Shrestha, nepalitimes.com).

Art DS

TOURISM

Far-west has so many potential destinations but investors and advertisers aren't keen at all ('Peak tourism in 2023', Ramesh Kumar, #1143). Most destinations have decent roads too. Tourists won't come unless we provide them with better infrastructure.

Samaya Upadhya

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Work hard, play hard

by Lekhnath Lamsal

A national volleyball player recounts his journey from Nepal to Qatar and back. When life became unaffordable as an athlete, he migrated to Qatar and rose up the ranks to be branch manager. His savings and earnings from Qatar made it possible for him to afford treatment for his daughter. Read his story on nepalitimes.com.

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The last word on last names

by Anjana Rajbhandary

There is no universal rule about changing one's last name after marriage. But there is an unspoken pressure of various forms on Nepali women to change their last name after their wedding, which is quite obsolete in this day and age. It is a norm in many societies for married women to take the husband's last name. Read the column online.

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BP Koirala and the American Consul

by Daniel W Edwards

On 15 October 1953, after requesting an appointment BP Koirala talked with the American Consul Garrett Soulen, who sent a record of the conversation to the American Embassy in New Delhi. The document is part of the US State Department files on Nepal and was located in the US National Archives and was published in the book *America Meets Nepal, 1944-1952: Problems, Personalities and Political Change*. Read the excerpt online.

🔴 Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Even if Rabi Lamichhane were to be given the benefit of the doubt and allowed to do meaningful work in government, the fact that he insisted on taking charge of the Home Ministry when he could have chosen other portfolios has raised a lot of red flags.



Anurag Joshi @anuragjoshi0

Nepal is a democracy and people can choose whatever they want. No justification necessary from personal level. We want changes, be it from a leader or dictator or evil sith lord we don't care.



Subash Suhang @suhangvai

Lets not get ahead of ourselves and start assuming things.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

There is no universal rule about changing one's last name after marriage. But there is an unspoken pressure of various forms on Nepali women to change their last name after their wedding, writes @AnjyRajy.



Manoj Rawal @ManojRawal111

So, a double-barreled name is the best option. It does not bereft you of your history. In fact, accommodates the history of both sides. .



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"A cartoon is not just a picture but a form of journalism as well, and there is always a sense of duty and responsibility to being a cartoonist."



Saloni Sarraf @SaloniSarraf4

We should appreciate their work.

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Japanese Yen, Made in Nepal

Money may not grow on trees, but it grows on bushes in Nepal that are used to print Japanese currency notes

■ Maheshwar Acharya

Nepal's unique ecological diversity and topography gives the country many cash crops, but there is one crop that is actually turned into cash.

In recent years, there has been a dramatic rise in exports of the bark of a Himalayan bush, *Edgeworthia gardneri*, prized in Japan to print currency notes, passports, envelopes, postage stamps, and other stationery.

Common at altitudes from 1,500-3,000m in the Himalaya, the plant is known colloquially as Argeli, and with its increasing demand, farmers in Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, Taplejung, Ilam, Baglung, Myagdi, among other districts, have begun to commercially cultivate it.

"Argeli is the only export from our region," explains Lhakpa Sherpa, a paper bush farmer in Dolakha. "It has brought in over Rs2 million income into our municipality."

According to Narayan Manandhar's Plants and People of Nepal, techniques to make paper by hand are believed to have been introduced to Nepal in the 14th century from China. The Tamang community in Rasuwa and Dolakha have used the bark of the Lokta plant, the more famous wildcrafted, handmade paper indigenous to Nepal, for at least 700 years.

Nepal began exporting the paper bush to Japan over a decade ago and it has already served as a replacement for Mitsumata which was traditionally used to make Japanese paper. "While Japanese paper is considered the best in the world," says Kiran Kumar Dangol of Nepal Handmade Paper Association, "Nepali paper is seen as stronger and better quality than most paper abroad, which has led to its high demand."

Today, *Edgeworthia gardneri* is cultivated in 55 districts of Nepal. It is a small evergreen shrub that grows in dry and shaded areas, with brownish red stem, long stalks and yellow flowers, and can self-pollinate. Also called *Arili*, *Arkaale*, *Tinhaange* Lokta, *Pachyaar* in



PHOTOS: LAKPA SHERPA



MONEY PLANT: Women in Dolakha process Argeli plant *Edgeworthia gardneri* which is used to print currency notes. Argeli replaced Mitsumata which was traditionally used to make Japanese paper.

yearly profits now total up to more than Rs100 million.

Vijay Suvedi, biotechnologist at Tribhuvan University's Applied Science and Technology Research Centre emphasises that there is huge potential for sustainably profitable farming of Argeli, especially in Eastern Nepal.

"Right now, all work is done by hand, which takes a lot of effort.," he says. "We need to mechanise the planting and harvesting to make it systematic and economically viable."

Nepali paper bush could be one of Nepal's best-known exports, alongside Pashmina, carpets and garments. Apart from making paper, the leaves, stems and roots of the plant can also be sold commercially by farmers.

The Nepal Handmade Paper Association currently conducts training and workshops with local stakeholders and designers to increase demand for Argeli bark and handmade paper. Says Kiran Dangol: "We have the next generation of designers who are really good. By tapping into local employment, we can increase the demand for Nepali paper locally and globally." 🇳🇵

Gurung, *Warpadi* in Tamang and *Dhyarpati* in Sherpa language, the plant can quickly shoot up to 3m depending on soil conditions and plays an important role in preventing drought and increasing greenery.

"Unlike most plants, it does not suffer from disease and is avoided by insects and cattle," adds Sherpa. But cultivation requires detailed attention – the plant will spoil if not dried properly in the cold months.

The bushes are harvested five years after being planted, usually from October to February, during which time it has a distinct white colour. High water-content Argeli is

greenish in colour and is not considered suitable or of good quality.

The inner fibrous cover of the stem is used to make paper and the outer bark to make ropes, while some places also use its roots to cure scabies. There are three different grades of Argeli -- A, B and C -- with prices ranging from Rs100 to Rs575 per kg.

"Argeli is a good source of income for communities in the hilly and Himalayan regions," says Benu Das Shrestha of Jugal Nepali Paper Industry in Sindhupalchok. "The plant does not require any irrigation and is easy to cultivate."

According to Chet Bahadur Sherpa, a cultivator from Dolakha employing 40 people in his business, farmers work for two months at a rate of Rs1,000 per day, while women workers are paid Rs20 per kg.

The Forest Research and Training Centre estimates that more than 100,481 tonnes of Nepali paper bush is produced yearly across 2,091,000 hectares in the country. One kilogram of the fresh, mature bark makes 400 grams of Nepali paper. In 2015/16 FA, 60,000kg of Argeli bark worth nearly Rs36 million was exported to Japan. Last year, exports rose to 95,000kg and



NMB BANK
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Mongolian and Turkish

Turkish Airlines is in a codeshare agreement with MIAT Mongolian Airlines, which will now offer passengers more alternatives for direct flights between Turkey and Mongolia, and for connecting flights to Istanbul. Turkish Airlines General Manager Bilal Eksi said, "Both flag carriers have strengthened their cooperation by signing the codeshare agreement in question and increasing the flights between Istanbul and Ulanbator."



Munhktamir, CEO of MIAT Mongolian Airlines. "The agreement will provide customers of both airlines with more choice and connectivity."

Turkish Airlines will use the code 'TK' for flights between Istanbul-Ulanbator-Istanbul, operated jointly by MIAT Mongolian Airlines. MIAT Mongolian Airlines will be able to fly with the code 'OM' to 10 other points of Turkish Airlines connected to Istanbul.

In addition, Turkish will now connect more destinations with MIAT Mongolian Airlines. "This is an important milestone in the cooperation of both companies," added

Airfares lowered

Airfares for domestic flights have been lowered by Rs100-900 after fuel prices went down. New fares will be effective 27 January. Nepal Oil Corporation had reduced the per litre price of domestic aviation fuel from Rs190 to Rs170. Now, the mountain view flight from Kathmandu, including the Rs500 airport tax, will cost Rs14,205. Similarly, Kathmandu-Bhadrapur route is priced at Rs12,355, Kathmandu-Pokhara at Rs6,665, Kathmandu-Bharatpur at Rs4,775, and Kathmandu-Biratnagar at Rs9,720.

NMB AGM

NMB Bank held its Annual General Meeting this week and approved distributing 8.25% cash dividend on the current paid-up capital of the bank. The bank has a Rs3.29 billion net profit, Rs186 million deposit and Rs182 billion loan investment.



Upaya Investment

The logistics company Upaya has received Rs60 million from Nepal Investments Infrastructure Fund Limited. The fund will be used for business expansion and growth of Upaya 2.0 to move towards profitability.

Global operations

Global IME bank and Bank of Kathmandu have begun operations after merging. The bank now has Rs57 billion in total capital, Rs408 billion



total deposits, Rs35.77 billion paid-up capital and Rs376 billion loans. In addition, Global IME's banking transactions will be paused in the weekend for data migration. Customers will, regardless, still be able to use other bank services such as mobile and internet banking, ATM and remittance services.



Kidney transplant

Norvic International Hospital has begun a kidney transplant service led by consultants Rakesh Burma and RK Aggarwal. The hospital has already successfully conducted the transplant operations on two patients, and is now also expanding its liver transplant services.

Nepal Police and Israel

The Embassy of Israel awarded certificates of appreciation to Nepal police personnel for their work in providing security. The ceremony also had a joint exercise program which saw the police perform their regular workouts.





PHOTOS: HEMANT OJHA

Reviving Nepal's community forestry success story

After restoring its forest cover, Nepal should now look at harvesting and regeneration of trees to raise living standards

■ Hemant Ojha

Nepal's community forestry success story has been praised internationally. Other developing countries have tried to emulate it, and in November even *The New York Times* noticed this success, running a story titled 'How Nepal Grew Back Its Forests'.

The Times reported: 'Large swaths of national forest land were handed to local communities, and millions of volunteers ... were recruited to protect and renew their local forests, an effort that has earned praise from environmentalists around the world.' It went on to cite emerging issues including increased wildlife

and rural migration.

However, what *The New York Times* missed out on was how community forestry is now facing a multi-faceted and systemic crisis from dysfunctional local groups to regulatory recentralisation that I observed during my recent fieldwork in Kavre, Sindhupalchok and Lamjung districts. Kavre and Sindhupalchok were where Nepal's community forestry concept was first piloted in the 1980s, with support from an Australian aid program.

"No one attends the meetings for the community forest anymore. The forest has become a jungle of weeds and unwanted shrubs, increasing the risk of fire," a community forestry leader in Kavre

told me. "Twenty years ago, people used to pay for small tree branches and even leaves, but today, people are not interested in receiving any forest products even when I offer free delivery."

This 80-year-old Kavre resident has experienced a systemic institutional decline in his community forest, so much so that he is the only member of the village committee running and keeping the group afloat.

In another community forest in Kavre, mature trees had fallen and were lying on the forest floor, left there for months or perhaps even years.

"These trees have good commercial value in the market, but the forest user group is not interested in investing time and effort to clear complex regulatory requirements for sale," explained Sarada Tiwari of ForestAction Nepal. "And they don't need fuel wood as they buy LPG from local shops."

Indeed, in almost every site I visited, I found that community forests had become dense jungles, increasing fire hazard. Restrictive regulations prevent communities from harvesting trees, leading to a decline in the interest of local user groups in managing forests. As a result, good market value trees are left dying.

After 40 years of glorious history, community forestry in Nepal is facing a new generation of problems which threaten to undermine past gains.

Perhaps the primary source of this crisis is the significant shift in

people's dependence on forests. With increased road networks and the flow of remittance from family members working abroad, people have shifted from using fuel wood to fossil fuels. With the decline in farming, the use of other forest products has also significantly dropped. But this new forest-people relationship is yet to be reflected in plans and policies of community forestry.

Policymakers in Kathmandu believe that community forestry is mainly a source of subsistence livelihoods, a proposition that was true two decades ago. That is why they continue to impose restrictions on harvesting and marketing of forest products.

A forest official told me: "We are careful not to encourage commercial harvesting of timber from community forest areas".

This is what happens in practice, despite formal laws being open to marketing forestry products side-by-side with what is seen as progressive community forestry policies at the federal level. Nepal's Forest Law, 1993, was one of the world's strongest forest legislations to devolve power to local communities willing to take control of an area of forest in their locality. The same spirit continues through the Forest Act, 2019. However, in actual practice, regulatory enforcement hardly follows the policies and legal provisions in letter and spirit. A senior community forestry activist once said: "In Nepal, forest laws are undermined by rules; rules by working procedures, working procedures by written notices, and written notices by oral instructions. How can you then comply with all of them?"

What's worrying is that even community forestry activists seem to have an orthodox attitude that denies more active and sustainable use of community forests.

"We are worried that some projects aim to promote marketing of forest products which can jeopardise community forestry," said one community forestry activist working at the national level. He seemed to have settled on the idealistic narrative of community forestry, and believed

LOGGED OFF: Mature trees lying neglected on the forest floor in Kavre district.

it was not necessary to think of ways in which communities could benefit from the growing market values of forest products.

Even when trees are harvested as per the sustainable use plans and with necessary approvals, the wider public and the media portray it as destruction of protected woodlands. This has prompted forest officials to take a risk-averse approach, further reinforcing regulatory restrictions in marketing surplus products.

To be sure, felling trees may sound synonymous with the act of deforestation. But our research has reconfirmed some of the existing scientific knowledge and community wisdom that it is possible to undertake sustainable forest harvesting without jeopardising the forest ecology. Indeed, active use of forests can also protect them from fire hazards and foster good ecosystem health.

Proven techniques exist to facilitate forest regeneration after harvesting mature trees. However, operational regulations and the mindset of policymakers and community leaders that forests are for subsistence farmers, prevent innovation for more active and equitable use.

Nepal's community forests are an important natural capital for locals. Forests make up nearly 45% of Nepal's land area and there are over 500 commercially tradable products, with 150 species already in trade. Across the country, over 22,000 forest user groups manage 34% of the total forest area, but only a small fraction of community forests are under active management.

Yet, Nepal is spending billions to import timber because domestic forests are under-utilised. Clearly, local communities as well as the national economy cannot afford this crisis in community forestry.

There is no one solution to tackling this impending crisis. The absence of marketing is not the only problem. What is required is a holistic socio-ecological solution that empowers communities to take action, with incentives accruing to them as per the ecologically sustainable levels of natural capital use.

In a research project funded by the Australian Centre for Agricultural Research, we are analysing the political and economic roots of this crisis to inform an exploration of actionable ways to revitalise community forestry institutions at the local level. Our focus is on Kavre and Sindhupalchok where we are also tracing historical evolution of community forestry from the days of the Australian project in the 80s.

But a problem of this scale is not solvable by a research initiative alone. It is crucial to foster critical dialogue among policymakers, communities and research groups. Every aspect of community forestry should be brought to the table for new policy discussion – from resource rights to local organisational models, from financial governance to social equity, and from business models to market linkages. How local governments and community groups can work together should be a key dialogue agenda.

But dialogue without practice-based insights and research-based evidence is pointless. Moreover, change cannot happen without key policy actors appreciating the changing context of community forestry. 🇳🇵

Hemant Ojha is associate professor at the University of Canberra, and also an adjunct associate professor at Australian National University, Australia.





Full panorama of the Himalaya as seen on a clear day from Sunakothi on the southern outskirts of Kathmandu Valley, from Annapurna in the west to Numbur on the east.

KNOWING OUR MOUNTAINS

Only if we can identify individual peaks will we value and respect the Himalaya

Binod Krishna Shrestha remembers in the 1970s seeing foreign visitors to Nepal being mesmerised by the vista of mountains to the north of Kathmandu.

They used to ask him the names of the individual peaks. He was embarrassed to admit that he had no idea which was which.

So, in 1975 he started working on a panorama of the mountains, identifying the individual Himalayan peaks. He was helped by journalist Kunda Dixit, who sketched and identified the peaks as seen from Patan, and took it to Delhi to print a brochure.

The folder also had captions providing information on which expeditions had climbed the peaks, and it was later useful for celebrations by the Ministry of Tourism marking the 30th anniversary of the first ascent

of Mt Everest in 1983.

After this, Shrestha was involved in rural development projects and trekked across Nepal, and this brought him up close and personal with the mountains he had been seeing from Kathmandu.

He also visited other countries and took up philately, all along keeping up his interest in knowing Nepal's mountains.

He found that Mt Everest is depicted in 84 postage stamps of 46 countries. And Nepal's other mountains are on 41 other postage stamps of various countries. Shrestha collected these stamps, and brought out a book, *Nepal Himalaya: The Roof of the World on Postage Stamps*.

"The fact that other countries put Nepal's mountains on their stamps was a recognition of their importance," Shrestha says. "And it was





PHOTOS: BINOD KRISHNA SHRESTHA

a pity that we Nepalis did not bother to know them.” Shreshta feels that this is a failure of the geography curriculum in Nepal’s schools. The peaks all have names, either of Hindu gods and goddesses given by the people of the lower valleys, or Tibetan names by dwellers of the high mountains.

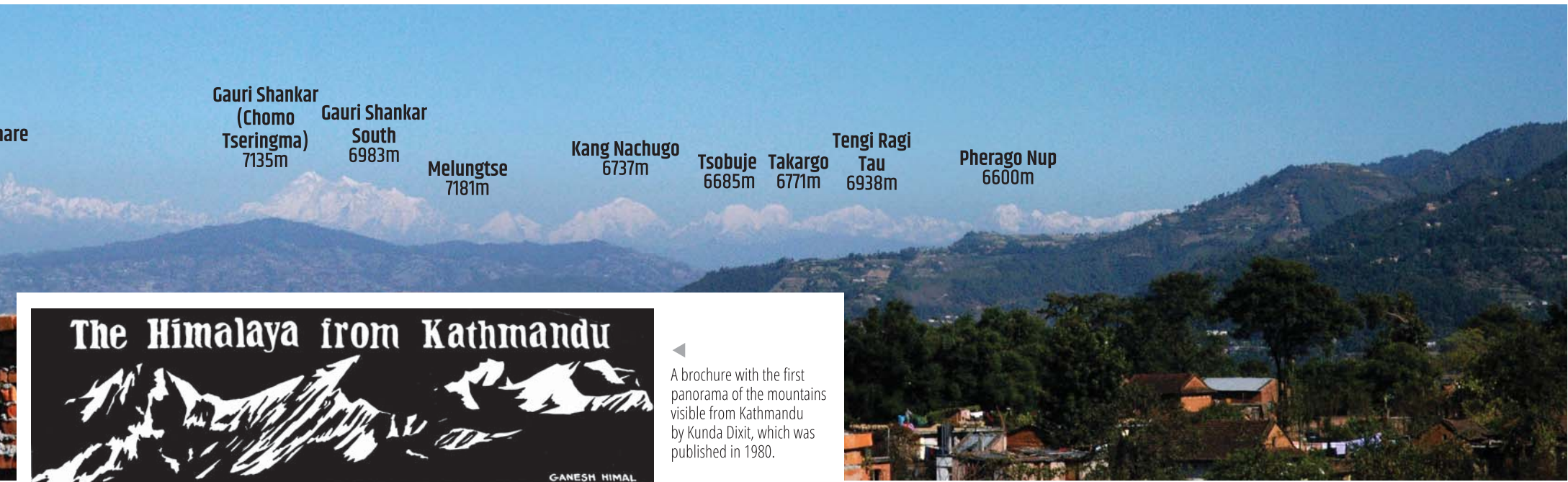
The southern outskirts of Kathmandu Valley on clear days like this week provide a sweeping view of 250km of Himalayan mountains from Annapurna in the west to Numbur in the east. Few know that even Mt Everest is visible from Lagankhel and Kirtipur, peeking from behind Kang Nachugo in Rolwaling Himal.

In those days there was no pollution in Kathmandu, and the peaks were visible most days from the city itself. And from the ridges on the southern rim of the Valley, the view is

of mountains further still — from Dhaulagiri to Makalu. Shrestha credits his passion for identifying mountains to his Jesuit teachers at St Xaviers School in Godavari, and especially Fr James Donnelly who passed down his interest in mountains to boarding school students like himself.

“Every December, we used to climb Pulchoki and Fr Donnelly used to point out each peak and tell us their names, and we never forgot them, they were etched in our memory,” says Shrestha, who clambers up to the terrace of his home in Sunakothi every day with clear skies to take pictures of the panorama. “With climate change threatening the Himalaya, it is important to know our mountains,” he says. “Only if we know them will we respect them, and value them.” 📷

▶ A Jesuit priest at St Xavier’s School helps a student identify mountains visible from the summit of Pulchoki in the 1970s.



◀ A brochure with the first panorama of the mountains visible from Kathmandu by Kunda Dixit, which was published in 1980.



EVENTS



Weekend hike

Enjoy a five-hour weekend hike to Bhundole and immerse in the scenic views around.
14 January, 9801910218

Deurali Daandi

Deurali Daandi, a new play directed by Rose Schwietz and written by Sahalesh, opens on Friday at Studio Theatre. The play incorporates the elements of Sati Ghaatu of the Gurung and Magar Indigenous communities to tell a poignant story of the labour migration epidemic in Nepal. Call for tickets.
13-29 January (Mondays off), 5pm onwards, Studio Theatre, Pingalasthan, 9843932952

Galpa

The ongoing exhibition of paintings, ‘Galpa’ by artist Suresh Basnet, recipient of the Himalayan Light Art Award, focuses on the immediate socio-political reality influenced by his life experiences.
12–17 January, 11am-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited



Blood donation camp

Participate in the blood donation camp and help save a life.
14 January, 11am onwards, Lalitpur Metropolitan City office

DINING



Attic

Attic’s signature Royal Aloo and other tasty dishes are reminiscent of the comfort of home. Go to Attic’s Facebook page for more information.
Gyaneswar, 9801222550, 9801222551, 9801222554

MUSIC

Music and movement

The music and movement workshop with Shreeti Pradhan invites participants to explore and feel connected to body and soul through therapeutic musical activities.
15 January, 1pm-3pm, Kaalo 101, Patan, 9803553123



Sound healing

Restore harmony and wellbeing to one’s self with a sound healing session, and reconnect with the self.
17 December, 6pm-7pm, Rs1000, Kundalini Ayurveda, Bakhundole, 9803436520

Kaura Dance

Attend a live performance of Kaura dance by the Magar community of Nepal this week.
18 January, 12:30pm-10pm, Magar House Bhanchaghar, Samakhushi



Deepak Bajracharya

Another trip down Nepali pop with Deepak Bajracharya. Book spots now.
20 January, 7pm onwards, Elevate Lounge, New Road

Mongolian heart

The famous Mongolian Heart brings an evening of great music and continuous delight, with opening act by the Uptown house band.
20 January, 7pm onwards, Uptown Jhamsikhel



Baker’s Den

Is a loved one’s birthday coming up? Or need a just-because cake? Baker’s Den has it covered. Also try the freshly baked doughnut, muffins and breads.
Naxal (01) 4416560/(01) 4411886

Buingal

A multi-cuisine restaurant and bar great for a casual get-together with relatives and friends. Their vegetarian sekuwa is finger-licking good!
Maitidevi (01) 4421393

About Town

GETAWAY



Hotel Annapurna View

Situated at 1,600m atop Sarangkot, this boutique hotel offers breathtaking views of the snow-capped mountains and Phewa Lake. Catch a glimpse of the panoramic scene of the Annapurnas in the dining area.
Sarangkot, Pokhara (01) 443566

Bandipur Kaushi Inn

A cosy, rustic place to stay in the idyllic village of Bandipur, replete with cultural diversity and traditional architecture.
Bandipur, Tanahun (065) 520083

Hotel Fireside

Kalinchok, a quiet village in Dolakha, is covered in a blanket of snow in winter that makes the town as picturesque as the Alpine valleys. This hotel provides a warm refuge after a day in the winter wonderland, with heated rooms, comfortable beds and soul-warming Nepali food.
Kuri Village, Kalinchok, 9841958694

The Little House

At this sanctuary in the middle of gorgeous and green rice fields, one can enjoy beautiful views from the terrace, a peaceful walk in the garden, and relax in the cozy shared lounge.
Khokana, 9841370022



Prakriti Resort

A small, cosy retreat for anyone wishing for a quiet getaway from the bustle and noise of the valley. Enjoy the organic meals and nearby hiking routes.
Haibung, Chisapani, 9801041896

Club House Restaurant

The panoramic view of the 18-holes golf course with evergreen timberland compliments the Thai and Chinese culinary journey in a blissful environment. Chefs here are selective in using organic and fresh products to create culinary masterpiece.
Gokarna Forest Resort (01) 4451212



Erma Restaurant

Erma Restaurant offers an upscale fine dining experience with chef-curated continental dishes. With a farm-to-table approach and an assortment of wines, Erma turns every meal into an experience.
Hotel Shambala, Chakrapath (01) 4650351

WEEKEND WEATHER



Fog-bound Tarai

A cold front has been keeping the Tarai ground fog from dispersing for several days now (satellite image Thursday morning), and this trend is expected to ease somewhat in the coming week. This means towns like Birganj and Janakpur are now seeing a maximum temperature of barely 10°C with no sun, when Kathmandu is seeing a maximum of 18°C with sunshine. Kathmandu itself saw above-average temperatures last week, but it has now returned to more normal levels for this time of year. This can only mean one thing: more open burning in the streets for heat and the smoke getting trapped with vehicular emissions due to overnight inversion at ground level are worsening the Air Quality Index.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
19° 4°	19° 3°	18° 3°

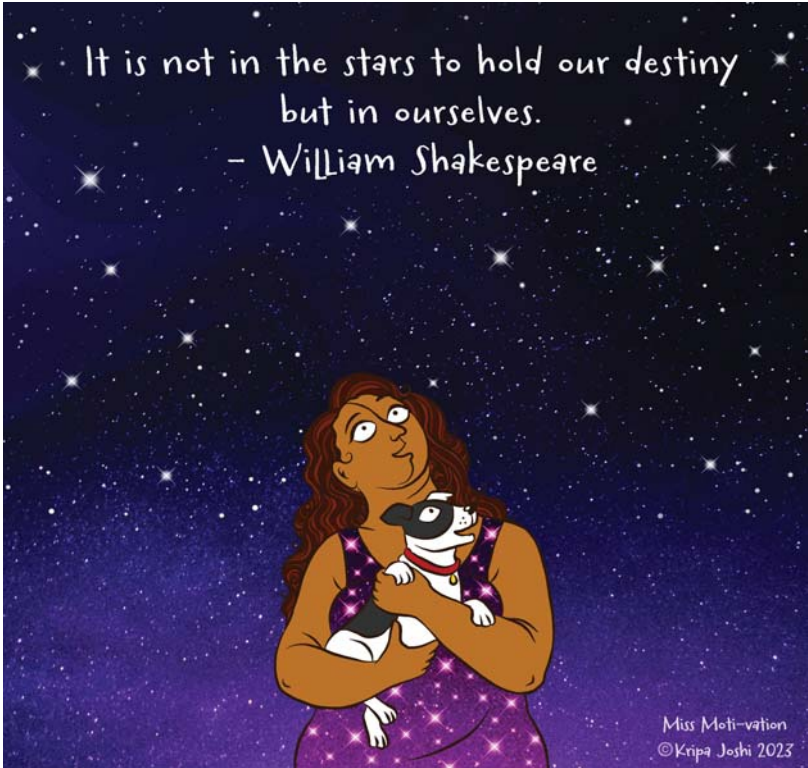
OUR PICK

Roland and Corinne are a bourgeois couple, each with a secret lover and conspiring to murder the other. They drive out to Corinne’s parents’ home in the country to secure her inheritance from her dying father, resolving to resort to murder if necessary. The trip quickly becomes a chaotically picaresque journey through a French countryside populated by bizarre characters and violent car accidents, as they wander through a series of vignettes involving class struggle and absurdist postmodernism. No film gets more French and cerebral as auteur Jean-Luc Godard’s 1967 masterpiece *Week-end*. Stars Mireille Darc, Jean Yanne and Jean-Pierre Léaud.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI

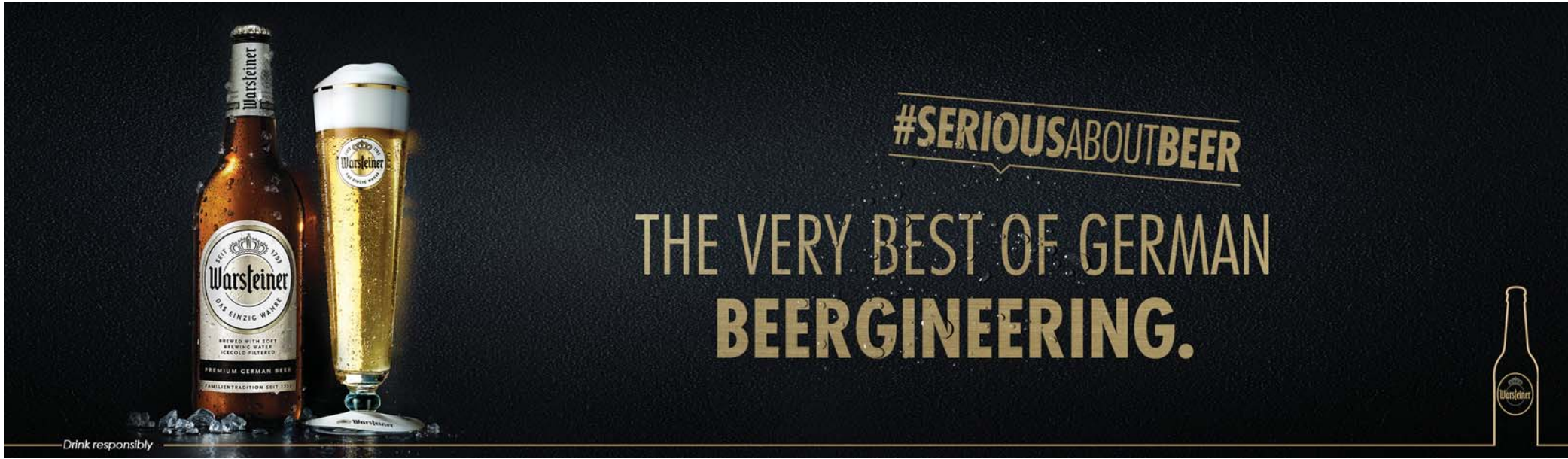


सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिन्ता पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड



Down on Bishnu's farm

A Nepali farmer who changed his mind about migrating to Korea, and feels fulfilled raising goats for a living

■ Sahina Shrestha in Rupandehi

Bishnu Pandey's family was involved in subsistence farming. They could only grow just enough to feed everyone, and had a few cattle and goats.

As a young boy, Bishnu tagged along when his father ploughed the fields. When siblings were too lazy to feed the animals, he would volunteer. Even when his friends invited him to play with them, he preferred the company of the goats and cattle.

Even though his family had always been involved in farming, it was just to survive — never to earn money from it.

So when Bishnu first decided to start a goat farm, his family and friends thought it was a daft idea. After all, he had a growing dairy depot, so, why give up a thriving business to take up something so labour intensive?

But as a person who enjoyed the outdoors, Bishnu knew he could only be truly happy working with livestock. So, despite the family's mild protests he shut down his shop, and invested the amount to import three Boer goats from Australia, bought 20 local female goats and housed them in a modern shed.

Three years down the line, Ankita Krishi tatha Pasu Bikas Kendra, named after his younger daughter, is a thriving business and has 90 Boer and hybrid goats.

"They are happy now, or so they tell me," laughs Bishnu. "My family sees that I am serious about this work and that it gives me satisfaction. They also see it is commercially viable."

For the first one and half years of starting the goat farm, however, Bishnu found it hard to break even. But with a ten-year plan, he was confident his business plan would work.



AMIT MACHAMASI

His confidence was boosted when he sold the first purebred Boer kids for an average of Rs190,000 each.

"I understood that this profession requires a lot of patience along with hard work, so I was not only mentally prepared, I also planned my budget accordingly," he says.

Bishnu first got the idea to import Boer

STRIKING
ROOTS

goats and got the design for his shed with feeding stalls from a YouTube video of a farmer in Chitwan breeding goats.

He was worried that South African breeds would not take to the Tarai climate, they may not always have access to grazing. But when he looked up videos of modern sheds he finally took the plunge.

"Goats are cheaper compared to cattle and can easily be sold," says Bishnu. "During Dasain and other festivals, we need to import goats but if more people do their research and get involved in this, we can eventually be self-reliant and create job opportunities here in Nepal."

Seven years ago, as people from surrounding villages started migrating abroad in search of work, Bishnu too had set his eyes on going to South Korea where working conditions and pay were better than the Gulf.

He joined Korean classes with three of his friends, and appeared for the EPS exams. But he was not satisfied with his score, and decided to stay back and work in Nepal. He has no regrets.

"The economic condition of my friends who have gone abroad is definitely better than mine. They have rebuilt their houses and bought land. But socially I feel like I am in a better place," says Bishnu. "People here know me because of the work I do. Moreover, I get to spend time with my family and see my children grow up."

These days, people from adjoining districts come looking for Bishnu to learn the ropes, and he is more than happy to share his knowledge.

Over the years he has also picked up some essential skills that have helped him take care of his animals better. He mixes his own feed for the goats. He also took a 15-day veterinary training in Kathmandu since vets would be expensive.

Bishnu now employs two people to help him around the farm. But when they are not around, his wife Laxmi lends him a hand. With each passing year, he says his sense of fulfilment has grown: "It is hard work, but it is something that makes me happy." 🇳🇵

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KATHMANDU'S TOXIC TRASH

Open garbage burning is reducing the lifespan of Nepalis

■ Sonia Awale

All things considered, living in Kathmandu has been unusually pleasant this winter. The temperature has been relatively mild, visibility has not been too bad, and there are majestic views of Himalayan peaks to the north.

Records show that even the air is relatively cleaner than previous winters when the Air Quality Index (AQI), sometimes, was as bad as 700 — 14 times higher than the WHO standard. Brick kilns are not operating, no major construction

projects are starting soon due to the economic slump, and the wildfire season has not yet started in earnest.

But we should not be fooled by all this. Hospitals in Kathmandu have seen a sharp increase in patients visiting for respiratory ailments this winter, even though Covid-19 cases are negligible.

“From regular cold, cough and wheezing, to bronchitis, asthma and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease [COPD], we are seeing a marked increase in patients, primarily because of Kathmandu’s dry, cold and polluted air,” says pulmonary

specialist at HAMS hospital, Raju Pageni.

He adds: “Children and elderly are at most risk, and I advise everyone to try not to undertake any activities that will worsen air quality or avoid those that will expose them to bad air.”

Indeed, while AQI reading in Kathmandu is nowhere near breaking records, it exceeded the 200 mark some mornings this week in parts of the Valley. This is considered unhealthy for all populations. The air quality is much worse in Tarai towns bordering India because of transboundary pollution, local

industrial emissions, as well as the thick and persistent fog that engulfed the Indo-Gangetic plains all week.

Open burning of waste is one of the biggest sources of air pollution in Kathmandu in winter. During biting cold winter mornings, people huddle around garbage fires in street corners that give off carcinogenic gases like dioxin and carbon monoxide.

A 2020 regional study found ‘that garbage burning emissions could increase PM2.5 concentrations by nearly 30% in India and Nepal, and result in some 300,000 premature deaths from

chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in the two countries.’

According to another 2020 research by Kathmandu University, some 9% of the capital’s waste is burned, adding to its hazardous levels of pollution. A Tribhuvan University survey in 2016 said that open burning in Nepal was three times as high as government estimates.

“Compared to some of the other sources, the total contribution of garbage burning to levels of air pollutants is less well-understood but it is an important contributor, especially in urban areas,” says Pallavi Pant of the Health Effects

Garbage in, garbage out



Trash content

plastic, paper, heavy metal, wood, glass, rubber



Toxins emitted

CO, CO₂, dioxins, C₄H₄O, Pb, NO_x, SO_x, Cd, As, Hg



Health hazards

COPD, asthma, bronchitis, cancers, birth defects, eye irritation, mental disorders



Kathmandu Valley generates over 1,200 tonnes of solid waste every day. Of this, nearly 75% ends up in the landfill site in Nuwakot, while the rest is burned, left in open spaces, or dumped into the Bagmati.

Municipal waste is an ecosystem of its own with perishables and non-biodegradable garbage often mixed together because of a lack of segregation. They can contain food items, plastics and paper, to metals and construction materials.

When burned, plastics release toxic gases, like dioxins, furans (C₄H₄O), mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls. Even a plain sheet of paper often contains chlorine which when burned also gives off dioxin associated with cancers and congenital defects.

Similarly, dry ink in books and newspapers generates lead which in any amount is harmful to children and their mental growth. Burning heavy metals like cadmium (Cd), arsenic (As), lead (Pb) and mercury (Hg) all produce carcinogens, while burning wood emits carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO₂), sulfur oxides (SO_x), and nitrogen oxides (NO_x).

Solid waste management is becoming a huge concern for Kathmandu residents. The lack of a reliable municipal system has left people to fend for themselves, and most do not even segregate waste. Mayor Balen Shah’s announcement last year that he would mandate segregation of waste has been all but forgotten.

Even before segregating waste, Kathmandu residents could reduce, recycle and turn much of the household garbage into compost. Studies have revealed that Kathmandu’s waste can be reduced by as high as 80% if proper segregation, reuse and recycling were in place.



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

Institute, a Boston-based non-profit specialising in research on the health effects of air pollution.

She adds: “Open burning of waste can also contribute to ozone formation, and is a source of benzene, a cancer-causing compound. Recent studies in South Asian countries have included garbage burning as an important source of fine particulate matter or PM2.5.”

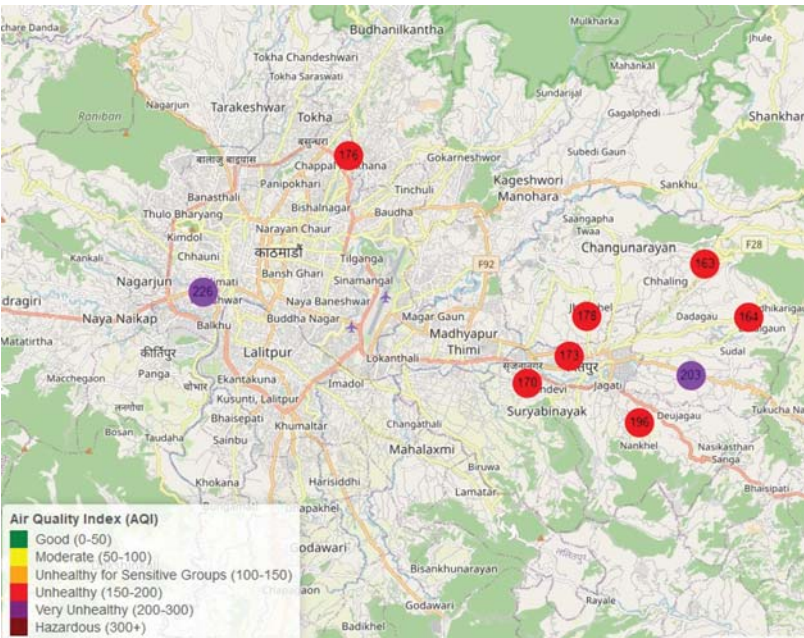
Kathmandu and major urban centres in Nepal are seeing a worrying rise in the prevalence of non-communicable and chronic diseases, which in turn is making Nepalis poorer because they have to pay expensive medical bills. While there are multiple factors involved, exposure to carcinogens is one big risk.

“By burning garbage we are not only inhaling toxins but contaminating our water resources and, in turn, our very food system. So without us ever knowing or even getting directly involved, carcinogens enter our lives often causing irreparable damage,” warns Raju Pangeni. “No wonder people who have never smoked are getting cancers or individuals with no family history of chronic illnesses are getting sick.”

The irony here is that putting a stop to open garbage burning could be one of the easier things the Valley’s municipalities could do — instead of going after sidewalk vegetable vendors.

“Our research over the past decade has shown that up to a quarter of winter-time air pollution in the Kathmandu Valley is from open burning of garbage,” explains atmospheric scientist Arnico Pandey who is now a central committee member of the Rastriya Swatantra Party, the fourth largest party in Parliament and whose chair Rabi Lamichhane is the Home Minister.

“This is a very low-hanging



SOURCE: PURPLE AIR

Air Quality Index measurements in Kathmandu on Wednesday morning, showing hazardous levels of suspended particles.

fruit to improve air quality ... municipalities are empowered to stop garbage burning, but have shown very little interest to date. Stopping it would require both punitive action by the city police as well as better managed and predictably scheduled garbage pick-up services.”

In November 2022, Kathmandu Metropolitan City banned open burning of waste. Back in 2018, the Supreme Court also prohibited open burning in the Valley. And yet, burning continues — another manifestation of the chronic implementation failure from which Nepal suffers.

A blanket ban alone is not a solution. It is equally important to educate people about the dangers of burning trash and provide them with a better municipal waste disposal system.

“The issue of garbage burning is complex, especially because

it can be very widespread, and trends can vary significantly from location to location,” adds Pallavi Pant. “Similar to residential use of biomass, charcoal, dung, etc. as a cooking fuel, it is also important to consider socio-economic factors that prompt people to burn garbage.”

Garbage burning in winter to keep oneself warm is tied to the economic status of people. The very fact that Nepal witnesses hundreds of deaths every winter because of cold is proof enough that structural changes are required, not just a piecemeal approach.

Says environmental activist Bhushan Tuladhar: “A ban on garbage burning is a good start but we need a sustained and strategic campaign to phase it out, backed by effective implementation of policies, public awareness and cleaner, healthier alternatives.”



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१ माघदेखि बजारमा



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