

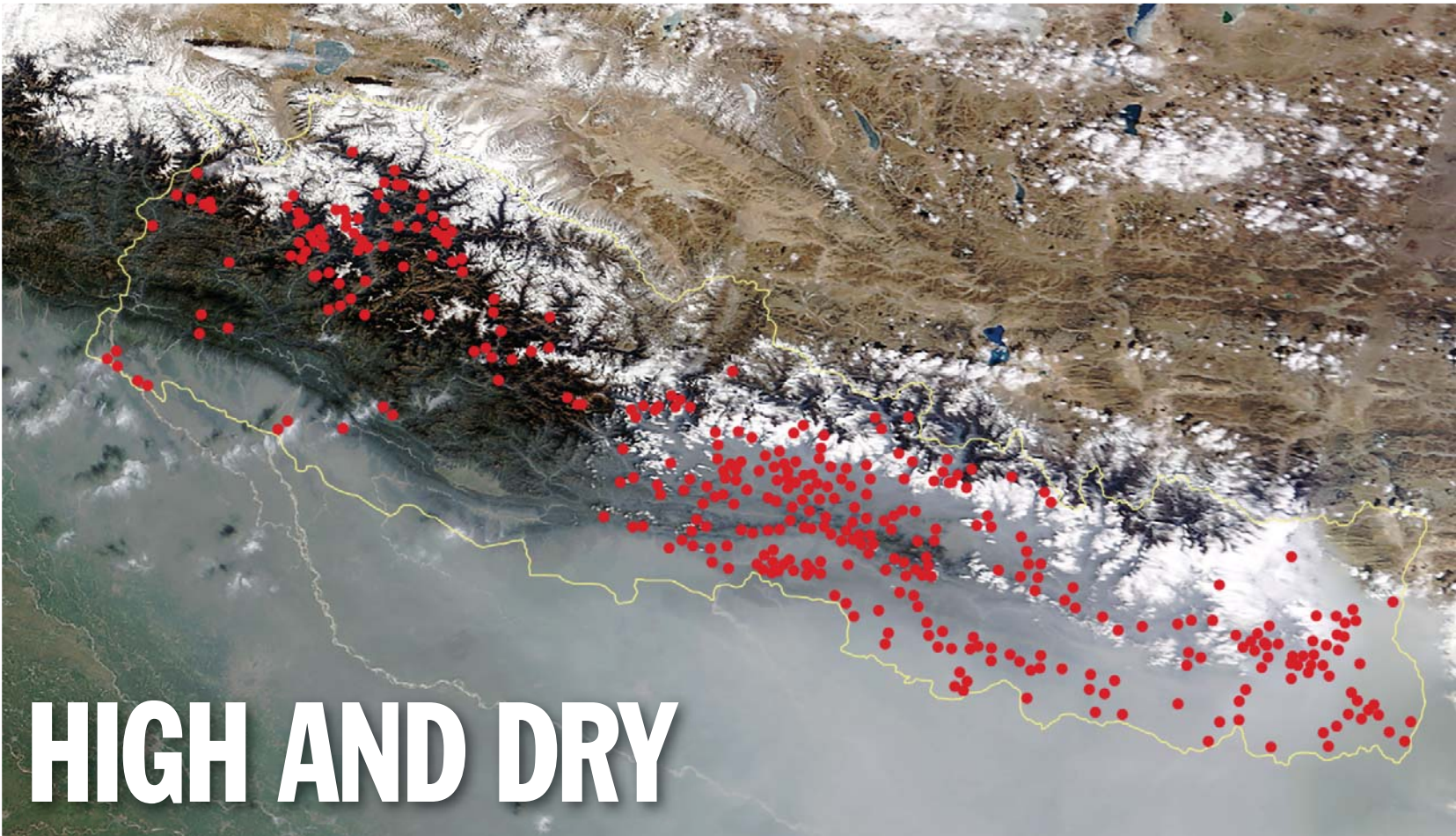
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WILDFIRES ACROSS NEPAL THIS WEEK SUPERIMPOSED ON SATELLITE IMAGE OF NEPAL ON WEDNESDAY MORNING.

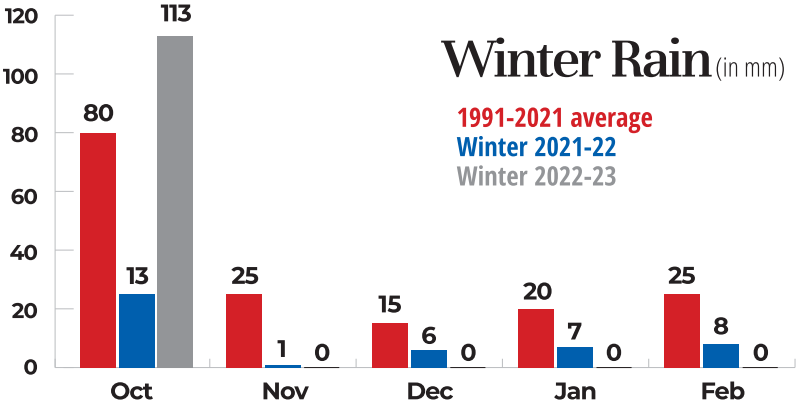
■ Ramesh Kumar

On average, Kathmandu Valley used to get about 95mm of rain between mid-October and mid-February. This winter, there has been zero precipitation. The last rainfall in Kathmandu was a late-monsoon shower on 12 October 2022. And while there was some rain and snow in Karnali and Sudurpaschim Provinces last month, the rest of the country has remained high and dry for nearly five months.

This prolonged winter drought has affected farmers in a country where 65% of agricultural land is rainfed. The wildfire season has started early. Rivers are running low, reducing hydroelectricity production by more than half.

The Meteorological Forecasting Division predicts that the dry spell will continue for at least two more weeks. In that case, this winter will be the driest in decades. Previous driest winters were in 2007-8 and 2016-17, but even then there was 10-15mm of rain between December and February.

Nepal's Department of Hydrology and Meteorology had used computer modelling to predict this winter's drought due to the Pacific La Niña effect, and a Polar Vortex pushing the jetstream north



of the Himalaya.

"We don't like to say we told you so but the forecasts have been accurate," says Binod Pokhrel, meteorologist at Tribhuvan University. "The westerlies that were supposed to bring winter rain in January vanished along the way."

Nepal gets more than 80% of its rain during the monsoon between June-September with a generally east-west rainfall gradient, except for the region around Pokhara which receives the country's heaviest annual rainfall of nearly 4,000mm.

The drought has also worsened winter air pollution in Kathmandu. There is no rain to wash down suspended dust particles. Smoke

from wildfires have worsened the Valley's Air Quality Index (see page 6-7).

"Winter wheat, mustard, dal, barley and vegetable crops are affected," says Januka Pandit at the Department of Agriculture. "The lack of snowfall this year will also affect the apple and corn crops at higher elevations because of the proliferation of pests."

Springs have gone dry right across the Himalayan foothills. Villagers have to trudge longer distances to fetch water for drinking and household use. In one village in Kavre, vegetable farmers have

migrated to the city or abroad because of the lack of water.

"They would still be here if there were

enough water for the cabbage and mustard terraces," said Surbir BK, who was making a one-hour roundtrip trek to a community spring with a water jar strapped to his back. Hydroelectricity production has fallen by 72% compared to last year because of reduced flow in rivers. Suresh Bhattarai of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) explains: "Most of our electricity comes from run-of-the-river plants without storage reservoirs, when the flow drops so does the power they generate."

Nepal's total installed capacity is now 2,300MW, but currently plants are only generating 700MW when total demand is 1,700MW. NEA is managing the shortfall with 500MW of imports. Even that is not enough and NEA is rationing power to industries.

There is usually more water in Himalayan rivers during the spring thaw, but since there was no snow the flow is low. NEA expects the situation to improve only when the monsoon rains arrive in June.

Average temperature across the country this winter has also been higher than normal. Lack of rain and higher temperatures increase the danger of wildfires, which in turn worsens air quality.

Says Binod Pokhrel: "The fire risk this year is much higher. We are already seeing wildfires that used to start in April-May." 🇳🇵



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# Constitutional President

Besides a viral video of hysterical female fans at an Eleena Chauhan concert, the other trending clip on YouTube in Nepal this week is of women pilgrims hurling expletives at President Bidya Devi Bhandari for being driven right to the gate of Pashupati on Shivaratri on 18 February, making everyone wait.

The most important role of Nepal's Constitutional President is to be a symbol of national unity. The persona of the head of state therefore should command widespread respect. It would be fair to say that aside from partisan support of the UML that elevated her to the ceremonial post in 2018, President Bhandari is not held in very high regard by the public.

As the widow of the charismatic and popular UML leader Madan Bhandari who was killed in a car crash in 1993, President Bhandari had a lot going for her. Nepal's second president and the first woman to hold the post could have built on those plus points.

Instead, President Bhandari has been ridiculed as a political sidekick to K P Oli

the protocols, but the damage has been done.

Inconvenience to the public from blocked roads is symptomatic of a larger national malaise since 2017 of lack of accountability, erosion of rule of law, impunity and abuse of the Constitution. All political forces are guilty, they have all meddled with constitutional norms for personal or partisan benefit, have pardoned criminals for political expediency, declared a 'people's war' day to appease cadre, passed ordinances to bypass legal hurdles to get what they want.

Even the new RSP, came out of nowhere to become the fourth largest party, behaved in the same roughshod manner by putting forward Rabi Lamichhane as Home Minister (and another minister) despite clear conflicts of interest.

Nepal's 2015 Constitution envisions the president as the head of state, a guardian of national unity, defender of the Constitution and the ceremonial head of the Army. In this respect, the president's role is no different than that of the king after 1990 – the only difference being that the monarchy was hereditary.

The President and Prime Minister should therefore be meeting every week. The head of government briefs the head of state on the matters at hand, and if needed, the president offers non-binding suggestions to the prime minister which should not be made public. That is the way it is supposed to work.

President Ram Baran Yadav fulfilled his role to the letter, even though he had to make a move in 2008 against Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's removal of the Chief of Army Staff Rookmangud Katawal and replacing him

with a Maoist nominee.

President Bhandari's immediate support for K P Oli's dissolution of Parliament, while she dilly-dallied on the Nepali Congress-Maoist ordinance on the Citizenship Bill in 2022 was widely criticised as partisan double-standard.

A ceremonial president is not weak, the post has residual powers that are quite critical in times of crisis. Which is why the prime minister and president should be on the same side – on the side of national interest.

The next president need not be regarded with reverence, just respect. It would help if we elect a non-political president on 9 March, someone who is held in high esteem by all Nepalis. As symbol of national unity and inclusiveness, it is turn of a candidate from the indigenous community or a Dalit.

May better sense prevail so that coalitions are not made or broken depending on who gets to be a Constitutional President.



of the UML when he was prime minister. Oli did use President Bhandari's power when faced with a challenge from Pushpa Kamal Dahal in 2021-2.

Lately, the criticism has swirled around how her motorcade creates monstrous traffic jams everywhere she goes, inconveniencing the public.

Posts on social media poke fun at her inability or unwillingness to get the Nepal Army, of which she is titular supreme commander, to relax the protocol for presidential convoys. The tacky and ostentatious of the hall where she regally receives dignitaries is the subject of much mockery on social media.

Why does all traffic have to come to a halt when the President is driven to address Parliament? A National Trauma Centre surgeon was beaten up by police for daring to walk on the sidewalk on 10 February as the presidential convoy approached.

President Bhandari must be aware of this rising public anger, but what is puzzling is why she has not used her powers to get the security apparatus to go easy on the bandobast. The government says it is revising

**The next president need not be regarded with reverence, just respect.**

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Singha Darbar, not Singapore

The obsession of our leaders with Singapore is unmatched. Every prime ministers we have had in the 30 years (some of them serial prime ministers) has promised to turn Nepal into a Singapore one too many times. Why not just build a Nepal that is just and fair for everyone?

Many readers

are going through a withdrawal syndrome after the Ass formally stepped down, including the author his-self. This week we revisit one of the earlier 'Under My Hat' columns which takes a dig at our Singaporean aspirations.

Excerpts from issue #133 21-27 February 2003 20 years ago this week:

If, one day, we want to become filthy rich like the Singaporeans, it is pretty clear what we must institute stiff fines for all major and minor misdemeanours and also turn ourselves into a penal colony.

But let's be realistic: do our army, navy and air force have the capacity to instill fines on every non-flushing Nepali? Sadly, the answer is an unequivocal "no". So, unlike Singapore, which penalises offenders with fines, we must

### Under My Hat A fine city

It is a tragedy that a country which has been known for its high standards of living and governance, has been reduced to a state of lawlessness and chaos. The government has failed to maintain the standards of living and governance that it once had. The country is now a lawless state where the rule of law is a mere illusion. The government has failed to maintain the standards of living and governance that it once had. The country is now a lawless state where the rule of law is a mere illusion.

While it is true that the country has a long history of lawlessness and chaos, it is not the only country in the world that has. The government has failed to maintain the standards of living and governance that it once had. The country is now a lawless state where the rule of law is a mere illusion. The government has failed to maintain the standards of living and governance that it once had. The country is now a lawless state where the rule of law is a mere illusion.



use positive enforcement by rewarding those who do things right. In Nepal, instead of taking money away from those who litter, we must give money to those who don't.

Cash prize of Rs 2,000 for the lone pedestrian who actually used the overhead walkway at Bhotahity in the last fiscal year. To be presented at a public

felicitations ceremony chaired by the Mayor of Kathmandu or the MP of Kathmandu, whoever is elected first.

The Honest Cop Award in Cash or Kind for the pre-embarkation security check personnel at Tribhuvan Intercontinental Ballistic Airport who doesn't ask you to open your wallet during the mandatory body search and contribute generously to the Free Lunch Fund for Kathmandu's Finest. The columnist who adheres to the highest standards of personal hygiene by not grooming his nostrils in full view of the rest of his staff during the course of writing the above column. This award carries with it a permanent residence certificate for Singapore. Terima Kasih.

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



FOOD VS FOOTBALL

The latest season of Nepal's homegrown Martyr's Memorial (Sahid Smarak) A Division football league is just a week away but there is not much excitement, neither among players nor fans. In fact, unable to make a living, Nepali footballers are migrating for greener turf. Watch video on our YouTube channel and read story on [page 4](#).



WORKING TOGETHER

Meet Madan Bhusal and his family, originally from Nawalparasi now settled in Rupandehi who have decided to stay in Nepal to establish a thriving dairy venture instead of migrating abroad for work. Watch video and read profile on [page 12](#). Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.

### ARMED CONFLICT

The Maoist movement wasn't a peoples' revolution, it was an insurgency ('Delay, dilute, deny', Shristi Karki, #1148). Even if there is a debate on whether it was an insurgency or a counterinsurgency, one cannot accept a 'people's revolution day'. A commemoration day for loss of lives on both sides might have been accepted. But this was insensitive decision.

**Phauda Raj Thebe**

### QUAKE SAFETY

This will fall on deaf ears as always ('Turkey and Nepal face similar seismic risks', Surya Narayan Shrestha, #1149).

**Hemanta Arjyal**

■ We already have an existing seismic code that works pretty well. It might need a revision that incorporates new findings in the coming days. But for new findings to be observed, this must be put in practice.

**Darkguyindark**

■ This is the most important thing the Nepal government should be prepared for. It will be tough, but we can definitely put our best effort to minimise the damage caused by earthquakes.

**Kamal Gaha Magar**

### GEOPOLITICS

I think this is the time we try to allow FDI of either of the countries, especially in technology ('Geopolitical tectonics', Editorial, #1149). I wonder how much innovations would be there to outsmart another in name of capability, cyber security and intelligence. Beneficiary could be Nepal with high tech. Similar fights in the gulf countries has made them grow from rags to global hub wherein money is from gulf countries but positive in our case the money will be theirs.

**Samnbiddev**

### SCHOOL NURSES

This has also created employment for nurses in the country ('Nurses ensure nutrition for Nepal's children', Anita Shrestha, nepalitimes.com).

**Art DS**

■ Because of the lunch program in the US, parents stopped sending children in with food.

**Sigmund Stengel**

## Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Lights, Camera, Action in Nepal

by *Ashish Dhakal*  
From *Little Buddha* starring Keanu Reeves to Marvel's *Doctor Strange* with Benedict Cumberbatch and others, Nepal has been a prime location for international movies. Visit [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com) and find out more about the selection of films shot in Nepal.

**f Most reached and shared on Facebook**

### Climactic change

by *Nicole McCloskey*  
Tenzing Chogyal Sherpa studies his melting Himalayan home to contribute to mitigating climate risks in the coming decades. Read the full profile of the young Nepali glaciologist on our website.

**t Most popular on Twitter**

### Nurses ensure nutrition for Nepal's children

by *Anita Shrestha*  
Nurses in Nepal's public schools do not just take care of medical needs but also ensure that students eat better. The school nurse program has brought about noticeable improvements in nutrition-related problems, mental health, menstrual health, and even school dropout issues.

**💬 Most commented**

### Final moments of YT691

*Nepali Times*  
A preliminary accident investigation into the crash of flight Yeti 691 in Pokhara on 15 January has confirmed that both the plane's propellers were feathered just before the plane dived to the ground. But what remains unanswered is how and why one of the two captains in the cockpit feathered the engines. Join the discussion online.

**🔍 Most visited online page**

## QUOTE TWEETS



### Nepal Times @NepaliTimes

Even as relatives of victims demand justice Nepal's political mechanism and leadership, which is made up of former enemies, has ensured that no side is held accountable for the atrocities committed during the conflict.



### Kul Chandra Gautam @KulCGautam

As perpetrators of the fratricidal Maoist insurgency and counter-insurgency celebrate "People's War Day", thanks @NepaliTimes for your modest but meaningful effort to remind all, especially Nepali youth about horrific atrocities & impunity committed in "the People's" name. Never again!



### Nepal Times @NepaliTimes

The provincial and federal governments need to prepare a hazard map of the Tarai for next year's winter, and declare certain areas disaster zones. The fog is a calamity affecting more people than landslides and floods in the mountains.



### Anil Pokhrel @anilpokhrel

Many thanks @Kishore\_chandra and @NepaliTimes. The @NDRRMA\_Nepal is working on #समस्या issue to better prepare for and reduce its risk to the most vulnerable with @moha\_nepal @DHM\_Weather @ClimateDhm @mohpnep @CareNepal and other relevant agencies.

## 1,000 WORDS



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA/RSS

### THE EMPEROR'S NEW ROBES:

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal at the 18<sup>th</sup> graduation ceremony of Pokhara University on 20 February this week.



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# The race for Shital Nibas

Major parties discuss presidential nominees ahead of date for filing candidacies on Saturday and election on 9 March

■ Shristi Karki

So fierce is the competition between Nepal's three major parties to have a say in who the next ceremonial president is that it is threatening to break the governing coalition.

Which is puzzling, why are they concerned about a post that is largely symbolic and with residual constitutional powers? Because all the three parties have since 2017 misused (or been the victims of) the misuse of presidential powers.

On Saturday, 25 February political parties will officially register their candidates for the presidential election set to take place on 9 March. There are many trial balloons being floated with names of potential candidates which include former prime ministers, ministers, top party leadership, as well as non-partisan figures.

From the Nepali Congress (NC) the names floating around include Ram Chandra Paudel, Krishna Prasad Sitaula, and even former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba himself. Possible candidates from the UML include Ishwar Pokharel, Subhas Chandra Nembang, Bishnu Rimal, and Asta Laxmi Shakya.

CPN-Unified Socialist Chair Madhav Kumar Nepal as well as Nepal Socialist Party leader Baburam Bhattarai's names have also come up in connection with the presidency.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal



RSS

Dahal is in the horns of a dilemma because he has promised the presidency to the NC, UML as well as his own party's leaders. This means he is bound to disappoint and make enemies of everyone who does not make it to Shital Nibas on 9 March.

The decision should have been simple. On 25 December, Dahal broke his party's alliance with the NC and erstwhile Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to form a coalition with the UML and five other parties, in return for the UML

getting the presidency.

But Sher Bahadur Deuba threw a spanner in the works when he gave his party's vote of confidence to Dahal on 10 January, keeping the door open for future political collaboration between the NC and Dahal's Maoist Centre (MC).

And while the prime minister has maintained that his coalition will remain intact beyond 9 March, he has refused to guarantee a UML candidate for head of state.

"The ground reality has shifted between then and now,"

spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara said following the MC's meeting to discuss the presidential election on Monday.

The NC's Deuba, Paudel, Sitaula, Gagan Thapa, and Bimalendra Nidhi have visited Dahal many times, apparently to assure him that he will get to be prime minister for five years if the NC gets the presidency.

This a lollipop for Dahal, who would otherwise have to rotate prime ministership with Oli. And the UML would get to be

all-powerful if it also gets to have a president as well as speaker, prime minister, and other heads of constitutional bodies.

The Maoists have maintained that it will seek a 'national consensus' in appointing the next head of state, which is another way of saying 'anyone but a UML candidate'.

But while allying with the NC might mean that Dahal can avoid a power imbalance with the UML, Dahal has concerns that NC may pull the rug before his tenure runs out. Multiple high-ranking Indian and US officials have made visits to Nepal in the days leading up to the presidential election, and Dahal suspects that they do not like Communists in general.

Dahal and Oli have also been meeting frequently to discuss the presidential election, and Oli has dangled a clever carrot: proposing Madhav Nepal of the CPN-US as a candidate. Nepal issued a coy response about the proposal, but has made it known he will be happy to step in. This puts Dahal in a dilemma, since he has already indicated to the NC that he is willing to make a deal.

If no party gets a simple majority in the votes on 9 March, a re-election will be held on 10 March. The election for vice president will be held on 17 March. The Election Commission is readying for the election in the Parliament premises in New Baneshwor.

There are 884 voters in the electoral college who will cast their ballots, of which 334 are from the federal House of Representatives and 550 from provincial assemblies. The votes will be weighted with federal parliament members getting 79 points to make 26,400 points and provincial assemblies getting 48 points each to make 26,386 votes. 🇳🇵



## The EU calls for an end to Russian aggression against Ukraine



24 February marks one year since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, its peaceful neighbour. This is a brutal war, which has brought immense suffering and destruction upon Ukraine and its people.

Ukraine is the victim of an illegal and unprovoked aggression by Russia, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, which is bound by the UN Charter.

For the past year, Russia has been shelling Ukraine's cities on a daily basis.

These attacks are blatant violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. Moreover, in 1994, Russia committed itself to guarantee Ukraine's security, when it joined the Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Budapest Memorandum) and yet Russia is brandishing the threat of nuclear weapons against Ukraine.

On 9 February, the Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the European Union reiterated their resolute condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter.

On 23 February, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution urging Russia to stop this atrocious war immediately.

Russia continues its deadly and indiscriminate strikes against civilians and civilian infrastructure. Such international crimes must stop. International humanitarian law, including on the treatment of prisoners of war, must be respected. Ukrainians who have been forcibly transferred to Russia, in particular children, must be immediately allowed to return safely.

The European Union stands ready to support Ukraine's initiative for a just peace based on respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Alas, to date, Russia has not shown any genuine willingness regarding a fair and sustainable peace.

Russia is also waging a war of misinformation.

For example, Russia claims it is conducting a special military operation to "de-nazify" Ukraine which is backed by the "anti-Russian" powers. There are no "anti-Russian" powers, only UN members determined to defend a rules-based international order and the principles of the UN Charter.

Moreover, as recently recognised by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine started in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, already in 2014.

Russia is also accusing the European Union of targeting fertilisers through its sanctions regime, when in fact, Russia itself is restricting the volume of its exports of fertilizers, so as to artificially increase their price. The transfer of Russian fertilizers to third countries through European ports is still permitted and EU Member States are working closely with UN agencies to facilitate their transfer to third countries.

Also contrary to Russian allegations, it is not action by the International Community that is affecting food security but Russian action. The EU is supporting the Black Sea Grain Initiative as well as the "Grain from Ukraine" initiative, that facilitates the export of Ukrainian grains to third countries in need. We support the extension and full implementation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The prolongation of this agreement beyond March 2023 is crucial to stabilize prices and allow the continuous flow of grains, including for humanitarian purposes. It is important that Russia fully commits to its implementation, and scales up the necessary inspections, instead of blocking them.

The EU remains the world's biggest provider of food and development assistance. Together with our Member States, we have increased our financial support to address the global food crisis, providing around 18 billion EUR this year.

As President Putin escalates this illegal aggression, weaponising winter, food and hunger, the European Union will continue to support the Ukraine with all its resolve and all its might, until Ukraine is liberated from its aggressor.

Signed by:

H.E. Nona Deprez, Head of Delegation, European Union  
H.E. Gilles Bourbao, Ambassador, France  
H.E. Riina-Riikka Heikka, Ambassador, Finland  
H.E. Thomas Prinz, Ambassador, Germany



■ Swapnil KC

Although cricket is the rage right now, football is by far the most sought-after game in Nepal. However, the national team has never made it anywhere close to the World Cup.

Yet, when Argentina won the tournament this winter, Nepalis celebrated as if their own team had won. English Premier League, LaLiga and Serie A all have a mass following in the country of 30 million.

The latest season of Nepal's homegrown Martyr's Memorial (Sahid Smarak) A Division football league is just a week away but there is not much excitement, neither among players nor fans.

The Covid-19 pandemic has played a part in dampening the enthusiasm but the inconsistency of the league is a bigger factor. Nepal's professional footballers are so undermotivated to play that they are not just quitting the game, but the country as well.

The league was to start on 10 January earlier this year but after a meeting with 14 competing clubs, the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) postponed it to 3 March. Football clubs complain that the ANFA is not providing preparation expenses, thus delaying the league.

The annual Martyr's Memorial 'A' division football league began in 1954, but since 1987, the tournament has been held only 16 times. There are many reasons: the Maoist insurgency, financial hardship, unstable governments, strikes, lack of infrastructure, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the earthquake.

And when the league does happen, the matches are tightly scheduled, allowing players limited time to rest and recover before the next game. The league lasts only a couple of months and players are only paid for those months.

"We players have to look for



ANFA

## Food vs football

Unable to make a living, Nepali footballers are migrating for greener turf



local games to keep us afloat," says Ashok Khawas, a footballer from Biratnagar who plays for Three Star Club. "This is the only thing that keeps us going physically and financially."

The 2023 league is returning, but some 45 players who used to play for the 'A' division will not because they have either quit football or

Nepal. Just last month, five players from major clubs left for Australia: Tej Tamang, Dinesh Rajbanshi, Gautam Shrestha, Nitin Thapa and Ranjan Bista.

Only a handful of Nepali players have got an opportunity to play football outside Nepal, the rest have migrated, possibly for good.

A Nepali footballer's lifestyle

is not lavish, players do not get the opportunity to train, the games are not played all year round, and training isn't all year round either. Players do not get offered millions of dollars and are signed on to clubs which do not have money even to sustain themselves.

Ironically, the Nepali players who have left have been replaced by foreign players, some of whom are making good money. "Players from Nepal are going abroad and foreign players are coming to Nepal to play football, it is happening more and more and that is sad," says national team player Bikram Lama.

Until recently, players and clubs from Kathmandu Valley used to dominate even the limited number of footballing tournaments in the country because talent outside the urban centres did not have the platform or exposure. But this is now changing: most of the players are now from outside Kathmandu.

"The primary reason for this shift is that youth in major cities like Kathmandu and Lalitpur

now have various other sources of entertainment and do not look forward to playing outside as much," says Megh Raj KC who coaches Nepal's Under-20 team. "Children in cities these days also do not have open space to take up football or other team games. But that is not the case in the rest of the country."

But lack of infrastructure continues to be a problem. The passion for football has not allowed for stable income: in the past three years, Nepali footballers have had the opportunity to play for only 10 months, which means they got paid only for that time.

Nepal does not lack talent but players are not given optimum opportunity. Newcomers and foreigners might take on spots left by players in domestic leagues, but that does not fill the gap in the national team.

Says Megh Raj KC: "At this rate, we will continue to be a footballing country to have never made it anywhere internationally." 🇳🇵



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एनएमबी बैंक

### Helping Türkiye

Turkish Airlines has provided critical support to the survivors of the 7.8M Türkiye-Syria earthquake even as a powerful aftershock rocked the region. Turkish has carried 238,112



search and rescue personnel with 1,324 aid flights while evacuating 230,980 citizens from the earthquake area with 1,302 evacuation flights. Similarly, it carried 15,648 tons of relief material free of charge to areas affected by the earthquake including food, medicine, clothing, generators, hygiene kits, tents with 156 cargo flights.

Says Turkish Airlines Chairman Ahmet Bolat: "We will be building a Turkish Airlines neighborhood in the region with 1,000 homes for those affected by the earthquake. We will also employ 1,000 personnel from 1,000 families affected by the earthquake."

### Tata facility

Sipradi Trading has showcased an 'EV learning centre' and battery repair centre for two of its Tata electric vehicle brands.

### German aid

Germany has handed over more than 1.5 million doses of Pfizer-BioNTech booster vaccines to Nepal through the COVAX facility. German Ambassador Thomas Prinz presented the vaccines to Health Minister Padam Giri.

### Explorers' Club

Nepali conservationist Manoj Gautam has been included in the Explorers Club's '50 people changing the world that the world needs to know about'. Gautam has worked in natural resource management and human-wildlife conflict, championing local communities' rights and agency over the ancestral lands.

### BYD Everest



BYD and Everest Bank have partnered to give easy financing options for BYD's electric vehicles. The bank will provide customers up to 80% financing on the purchase of any BYD electric vehicle and customers can pay back within 7 years.

### Power deal

The Nepal-India Energy secretary-level joint committee has agreed to expand crossborder power connectivity with two more high voltage lines within 6 years for electricity trading. Nepal will then have five transmission lines of 400 kV capacity. The committee also decided to implement the Butwal-Gorakhpur line and increase the electricity capacity of the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur line to 800 MW.



### Toyota art contest

United Traders syndicate has announced winners of the 16th Toyota Dream car art contest from 485 participants. The top 3 winners will enter as representatives of Nepal for the world contest in Japan later this year.

### IME-Police tie-up

Global IME bank is supporting Nepal Police in setting up the Nepal Police-Global IME bank scholarship endowment fund of Rs2.5 million. Scholarships will be provided to ex-servicemen and children of police personnel.

### Ncell IOE scholarship

Ncell has given scholarships and excellence awards to top-ranking students across five faculties at the Pulchok Engineering Campus. Eighteen students were awarded the scholarships for 2022, and 6 students with the highest marks from each faculty received the excellence award.

### NatGeo Aloï funding

Aloï CO has received funding from the National Geographic Society to help climate micro-entrepreneurs access business financing. The social enterprise works with entrepreneurs and helps them access financing and business expertise.





# दिगोपन र सशक्तताको नयाँ समय

आफ्नो बैंकिङ्ग सेवालाई नयाँ समय अनुरूप अझ दिगो तथा सशक्त बनाउन **हिमालयन बैंक लिमिटेड**ले **सिमिल बैंक लिमिटेड**लाई प्राप्ति गरी एकिकृत कारोबारको शुरुवात गरेका छौं ।



कूल पूँजी  
**३४ अर्ब**

कूल निक्षेप  
**२७४ अर्ब**

कूल कर्जा  
**२५० अर्ब**

शाखा सञ्जाल  
**१८९**

**HBL**



हिमालयन बैंक लिमिटेड

**Himalayan Bank Ltd.**





# Pokhara's desperation and hope

## Pokhara's tourism revival depends on residents and entrepreneurs understanding the treasure they own

■ **Kanak Mani Dixit** in Pokhara

Pokhara is where so much of Nepal's tourism prospects rest, with its lakes, proximate Himalaya, indigenous culture, adventure sports, unique geographical setting, and enchanting geology. Residents look to riding Pokhara's placement and possibilities to achieve prosperity. The past has shown the future, provided there is proper stewardship of this unique place.

But the 15 January air crash of Yeti Airlines that took 72 lives was a blow at a time when tourism was in revival (*see below*). This was the biggest air crash ever of a national airline in terms of lives lost, and its worldwide publicity combined to devastate prospects of Pokhara's new airport inaugurated just two weeks previously. It was a blow to a country already in the European Commission's black list for poor civil aviation oversight.

Boat owners on Lake Phewa are dejected, many eateries and businesses along Lakeside are shuttered, one Pokhara hotel lost Rs6 million in business in the month following the crash. If the roads were good, Pokhara could recoup with domestic tourists, but approach highways are horror stories.

Pokhara used to be the staging ground

for trekkers, but tourism has declined with the expansion of the road network. Over the years, the kind of urban blight that defines Kathmandu Valley has overtaken the city as well. The natural terraces that define the valley floor are no longer visible.

The Yeti aircraft crashed right into the narrow and serpentine Seti Gorge; this unique canyon is no longer touted as a tourist attraction amidst the concrete sprawl.

For all the hype surrounding it's opening, we cannot call Pokhara's new aerodrome an 'international airport' as long as it only serves domestic flights. Kathmandu has been lax in economic diplomacy to get cross-border flights to Pokhara.

The Yeti crash was a blow to Nepal's national economy as a whole, at a time when tourism as a mainstay was struggling to revive. In Pokhara, like elsewhere, the industry was finally recovering from the decade of conflict and political instability, followed by the April 2015 Gorkha Earthquake, which was trailed by the Indian blockade – and then came the back-to-back disasters of Covid and Dengue.

Chinese tourists had started arriving in large numbers in the mid-2000s, and before long Pokhara was full of signage and restaurant menus in Mandarin. But the Chinese have stayed away, and even President Xi Jinping's declaration during

banquet address at Shital Niwas in October 2019 that Nepal was where Chinese citizens most wanted to visit among all South Asian countries has not helped in a revival of arrivals.

Beijing has not included Nepal in its January list of 20 'approved destinations' for Chinese travelers after its Covid closures of 2022. However, the list includes nearby Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

It is no exaggeration to say that Pokhara is one of the finest attractions for tourists in all of Asia, and the reasons are many. Sub-tropical Pokhara Valley is 300m lower than Kathmandu and sits less than 50km from the semicircle of the Annapurnas. The steep viewing gradient that makes visitors gasp is Pokhara's primary attraction, and the reflection of Machapuchre on Phewa Lake has been the stuff of postcards for decades.

The geology of Pokhara is wondrous even if the tourism brochures pay no attention to it: massive lake outburst floods in historical time brought up to 5 cubic km of rock and debris down the Seti River, encasing the hills and dales like a viscous fluid.

The earlier mid-montane hilltops ended up as 'islands' on Pokhara's plains, Phewa and other lakes were formed when side rivers were blocked. The exceptional 'natural terraces' of Pokhara's debris plain were carved by water and gravity, and the Seti ultimately made its way across the plateau through a labyrinthine gorge cut through the boulders.

Locals would do well to study the work of Harka Gurung, the multi-disciplinary scholar who studied and wrote on geography, anthropology, ecology, mountaineering, migration, and had a special place in his heart and mind for Pokhara Valley, the subject of his 1965 PhD thesis from the University of Edinburgh. He was also the person behind the International Mountain Museum at Rato Pairo, one of the few genuine attractions created in Pokhara over the modern era.

Pokhara is the meeting ground of the Magar and Gurung communities, with their unique heritage that includes the mesmerising and meditative *ghatu naach*. The valley is further enriched by its mix of communities including the Newa of the bazars, the Bote fisherfolk and Gaine troubadours, the Thakali from up north who have sunk roots here, and the Chhetri and Bahun. Tibetan refugees were residents after the 1950s, but their presence is now much diluted.

The environs of Pokhara are a bird-



watcher's paradise, and up below Machapuchre is a hill flank set aside as a pheasant sanctuary with five species. The promenade by the lake, boat excursions, eateries and tourist services have helped evolve a sophisticated ambience that South Asians travelers in particular find inviting. The café culture, the warmer climes of the relatively low valley, and quick escape to nearby mountains has made Pokhara a cosmopolitan destination even for Kathmandu's recreation-minded.

'Trekking' was a term whose modern meaning evolved in Nepal in the 1960s-70s under the stewardship of outfitters such as Col Jimmy Roberts and Mike Cheney. Pokhara was a staging point for treks to Jomsom and Mustang up the Kali Gandaki, 'round Annapurna' and down to Manang, straight into Annapurna Sanctuary, as well as midhill treks to places like Ghandrung, Sikles and Poon Hill.

The road-building boom since the mid-2000s pulled the rug from underneath the trekking industry, with the roads mostly overlapping the trekking trails, and Pokhara was the most affected.

For Pokhara to do good for itself and to benefit the national economy, it must understand the value of the prize it holds in its hand. It can start by plumbing the depths of history, geography and mountain lore related to the locale, with school children

# Final moments of YT691

Pokhara air crash report says propellers were feathered, but why is still a mystery

A preliminary accident investigation into the crash of flight Yeti 691 in Pokhara on 15 January has confirmed that both the plane's propellers were feathered just before it crashed. What remains unanswered is how and why.

With the propeller pitch in a feathered position, the engines do not provide any thrust. The plane was therefore going too slow to maintain lift, stalled and crashed

while making the final turn to the runway (*see map, right*).

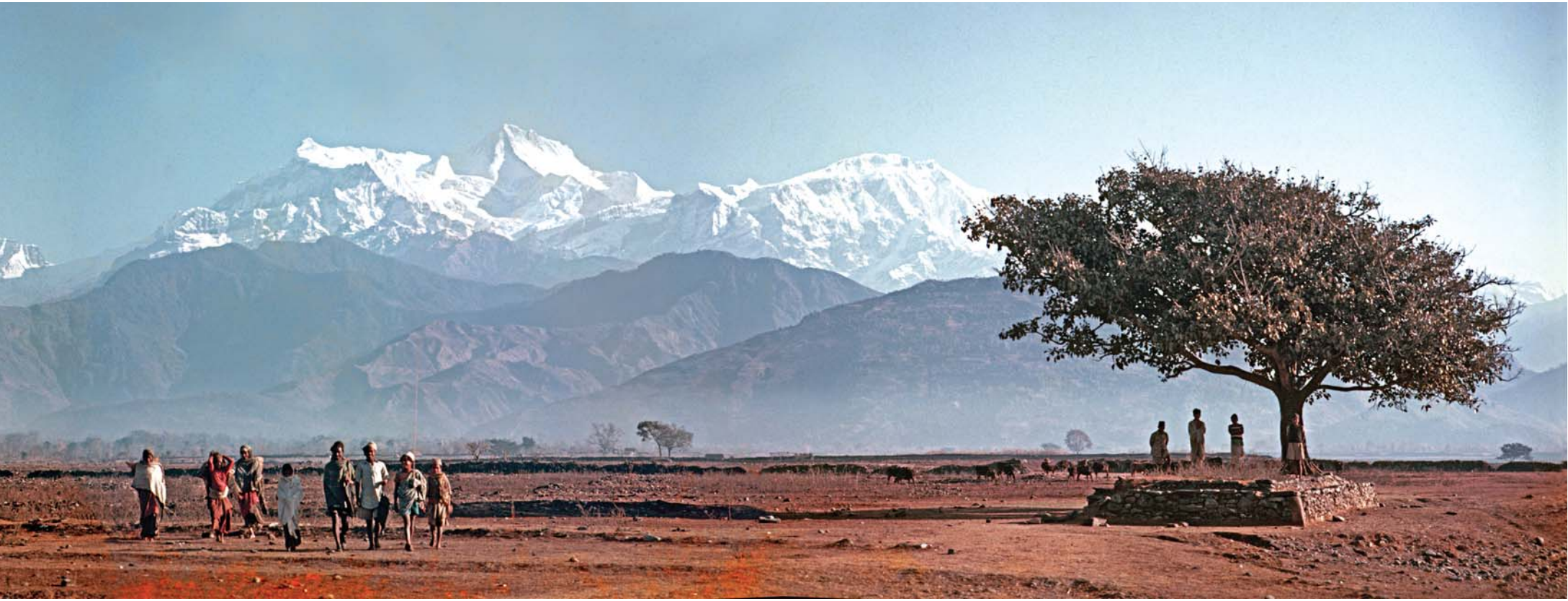
The ATR-72 500 turboprop was making its third flight of the day between Kathmandu and Pokhara with the same crew. Captain Kamal KC was a veteran with 22,000 hours, while Captain Anju Khatriwada had logged 6,500 hours, and was on a final familiarisation flight to Pokhara's new international airport that had come into operation only two weeks previously.

There were 68 passengers and four crew on the plane with tail number 9N-ANC which was just about to complete the 26 minute flight from Kathmandu.

The investigation committee analysed the Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) and Flight Data Recorder (FDR) in Singapore and concluded more investigation is needed to find out why the propellers on both engines went into feathered condition.







TONI HAGEN



EL GOLDMAN



RSS

taught to distinguish between the peaks of the Annapurna range beyond Machapuchre – Gangapurna, Annapurna South, Annapurna II and of course the summit ridge of Annapurna I – to read up on Maurice Herzog as the first climber of a 8000m peak in 1950, or learn the geology that delivered ammonite (*saligram*) on the Kali Gandaki defile.

Pokhara must protect its lakes from pollution and encroachment. The competition to place ever-taller statues and view-towers on hilltops is actually the path to hell, they attract picnickers rather than well-paying tourists, and distract from the indigenous culture and himal views that lie at the heart of what it means to come to Pokhara. Why not view platforms rather than view-towers?

Let the homestays be welcoming for their warmth and comfort, rather than sheds masquerading as hospitality places. Respecting its own cultural depth, Pokhrelis should not let *ghatu* be the stuff of *dohori* restaurants, and require travelers to visit villages at appointed dates to watch performances in the community setting.

For the sake of history, some of the *simal* dugout canoes must be retained on the Phewa amidst the rowboats and paddle platforms. The song-and-dance sequence from *Maitighar* film shot in 1966 must be studied for its adoration of Pokhara (*‘Basanta nai basna khojchha yahan lolayera...’*) and used to project what the valley has to offer.

Let us remember Dharma Raj Thapa,

who propagated Pokhara-based folk singing sensibility throughout the land. The great Pokhara panorama by Toni Hagen (*above*) in his pioneer 1960 work *Nepal: The Kingdom in the Himalayas* must be put to better use, as also photographs of the DC-3s parked by the great *pipal* tree that used to serve as the terminal of old Pokhara airport.

It should not be difficult for Pokhara’s tourism entrepreneurs to wage a campaign to bring visitors from within flying range of narrow-body Boeing 737s, Airbus 320s that the airport can handle. This means marketing forays to Dhaka, Colombo, Lahore, Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad. Also Chengdu, Kunming, Lhasa and Ulaanbaatar. Start with chartered flights before moving on to scheduled ones, but first pressure Kathmandu authorities for customs and immigration desks. The grand hang-gliding from Sarangkot allowing circles over Phewa Lake has been discontinued due to the new international airport, and the adventure travel companies need to quickly relocate to retain Pokhara’s place as an international centre for the sport.

Pokhara must push self-centric Kathmandu to wake up to the evolving needs of national tourism, such as the urgency for sub-regional understanding between India, Pakistan and Nepal to prevent the Indus-Ganga haze – which among other things is helping obliterate Himalayan views. The cost to tourism of soiled mountain vistas has not yet been calculated.

#### TIME TRAVEL:

Swiss geologist Toni Hagen’s famous panorama of the Annapurnas from Pokhara in 1955 (*above*).

A DC-3 flight parked next to the ‘pipal terminal’ in 1967 with Lamjung Himal in the backdrop (*far left*).

The first flights from Kathmandu on 1 January 2023 when Pokhara’s new international airport was inaugurated. The Yeti Airline ATR-72 seen here is 9N-ANC, the same one that crashed two weeks later.

Pokhara seems to be losing its charms before it gets to even fully understand them, as the city begins to urbanise. The fully empowered local government must develop a sewage system. As the capital of Gandaki Province, Pokhara must work on revival of surrounding farmlands to prevent the terraces from reverting to jungle.

Many of the ‘hilltop islands’ on the Pokhara plain have been mined for stone, and one has just been decapitated to allow better approach to the new airport. The concrete jungle is covering up the Seti terraces. And there are harebrained ideas aplenty beyond more and taller hilltop statues – such as a local hotelier’s campaign to have Begnas Lake empty into Rupa Lake through a tunnel in order to create a waterfall. As if Pokhara needed additional attractions rather than nurture and project the heritage it commands.

One identity marker of Pokhara used to be walls made of boulders and ubiquitous *chautari* of *bar-pipal*, but mostly they have not been preserved. Built as it is on a massive sea of stones and boulders, Pokhara must be attentive to seismologists’ warnings of the great earthquake that has been pending for 500 years along the western Nepal seismic gap.

There are two large spaces in the centre of Pokhara’s urbanism that need to be kept open and un-encroached. Ratna Mandir, the royal estate on the banks of the Phewa, is an arboreal gem whose gates should be opened to the citizens and tourists alike. It will provide continuity to the lakeside walkway and add incredible texture to the Pokhara Experience, but already there are signs of encroachment – a military hospital has opened gates on one side, and the grove of trees that hosted hundreds of egrets by the lake shore has just been summarily chopped down. Whoever thought of that, and why?

The prize that everyone is going to fight over is the old airport grounds. Most likely

it will be apportioned between government entities and/or leased out to private developers in decades-long leases. Rather than such an abominable solution, Pokhara needs to decide on a ‘central park’, a large swathe of green within the urbanised valley. Only those with little imagination will be unable to see what an economic boon it would be for Pokhara, already attractive to the world, to have such a space.

The old airport was small, but it had charm, and it was a less than ten minute drive from Lakeside. It had possibly the finest restaurant terrace in the world, providing views of the runway as well as the Annapurna ramparts. The new airport terminal resolutely turns away from the Himalaya, is an hour away from lakeside, and no restaurant seems to have been planned, with or without a view.

Amidst the dislocating changes, Pokhara must take heart that the lakes will remain as will the mountains, even though the volume of snow and ice may reduce due climate change. And no one can take away the location. In fact, Pokhara is part of a touristic continuum that starts with Lumbini and Kapilvastu to the south, and the Kali Gandaki valley that leads right up to the Lo Manthang and the Tibetan plateau.

Pokhara’s residents and planners must look to the future by incorporating the mindset that their valley is the true geographical mid-point of Nepal. Since historical time through the Panchayat era, down to the present, Kathmandu has perceived itself as the east-west centre of the country, and so the ‘Central Development Region’ was established in what was obviously the east.

While Kathmandu was and remains the power centre, however, true geographical, demographic and economic balance is achieved at the Pokhara-Narayangat longitude, and this scientific reality must help guide not just tourism, but equity-based economic planning. When the time comes that Pokhara understands its place and placement, we will all be richer. When Pokhara understands its riches and wonders, it will be appropriate to have a touristic slogan for worldwide marketing – simply put, ‘Only Pokhara’.

 [nepalitimes.com](https://nepalitimes.com)  
Longer version online

An ATR cockpit has the engine throttle levers, the condition (feather) levers and the flap selection lever in a console between the two pilots. The feather lever is rarely used in flight, unless there is engine failure. One ATR pilot told *Nepali Times* it was unthinkable that either captain would deliberately feather both engines. Khatiwada was sitting on the left (captain’s) seat and KC was on the right. There is speculation KC was not as familiar sitting on the right side, and may have inadvertently feathered the propellers. But even that is unimaginable because the flap selector is white

and has an airfoil shape, while the condition levers and the throttle levers are so different to the touch that pilots are supposed to tell them apart even without looking. On their second flight into Pokhara, the pilots who had already been cleared for a straight-in approach to runway 30 requested runway 12 from the west. It is not clear why that request was made. Five miles from the threshold of 30, the plane broke right and went downwind parallel to the runway. Landing gears were lowered and flaps were down to 15°. Just before the turn into base leg, the CVR indicates Khatiwada requesting KC for 30° flaps. KC immediately acknowledges, saying

“Flaps 30, descending”. However, the FDR did not detect any flap movement, but the propellers were feathered and not generating any thrust. Neither pilot seemed to be aware of this until much later, by which time it was too late. Twenty-five second before impact, Khatiwada is heard on the CVR saying twice there is no power from the engines. Thrust levers are then pushed to full power. But since the propellers were feathered there was no thrust. KC then takes control of the plane. The stick shaker warns of a stall. There is a 200ft radio altimeter alert as the plane goes into a banking dive, with the sound of impact on the CVR four second later. Following is a timeline of

flight YT691 based on the Aircraft Accident Investigation Commission of the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation released on 13 February:

**10:32:00** Takeoff from Kathmandu  
**10:51:36** Descent to FL65 (6,500ft) at 5DME (5 miles from airport)  
**10:56:12** Plane downwind, landing gear lowered, flaps extended to 15°  
**10:56:27** Autopilot disengaged at 721ft AGL (above ground level)  
**10:56:32** Pilot Flying (Khatiwada) calls for “Flaps 30”, Pilot Monitoring (KC) confirms “Flaps 30 and descending”  
**10:56:33** Flight Data Recorder (FDR) does not detect any flap movement, but propeller rotation speed (Np) on both engines decreases to 25%, and Torque (Tq) falls to 0%  
**10:56:33** Master Caution alarm sounds in cockpit

**10:56:50** Radio altimeter sound alert “500” AGL and plane is on a bank angle of 30°  
**10:56:54** Flaps are finally set to 30°. Khatiwada asks if she should continue the left turn, KC answers in the affirmative. She asks if she should descend, he replies no need but to increase power.  
**10:57:07** ATC: “Cleared to land runway 12”. Khatiwada says twice that engines are not giving any power. Throttles are then advanced to maximum power.  
**10:57:18** Khatiwada hands over controls to KC  
**10:57:20** Khatiwada again repeats that engines are not delivering power  
**10:57:24** Stick shaker stall warning activated at 311ft AGL  
**10:57:26** “200” Radio altitude sound alert  
**10:57:32** Sound of impact on CVR

*Full report of the Investigation Committee online.*



## EVENTS



**Mithila Art**  
Spend time with kids, family and friends at the Mithila art session this weekend. Take the artwork home.  
25 February, 2pm-4pm, Rs 3000, Kyampa The Social Hub, Sanepa

**Bimokshya**  
Enjoy *Bimokshya*, a stage play about love, reunion, and identity written by Yubaraj Ghimire and directed by Pravin Khativada.  
1 March-1 April, 5pm-7pm, Shilpee Theatre Nepal

**Simchaur Hike**  
Enjoy a seven-hour hike to Simchaur and take in nature throughout the new trail.  
25 February, Rs700, Bhrikuti Mandap Expo, 9851014616/9841178536

**Music room**  
Sign up to learn western and eastern music from experienced music instructors at the Music Room.  
9818856982



**Film Screening**  
Attend FDB's screening of various Nepali short films including *The Contagious Apparitions of Dambarey Dendrite*, *Dadyaa: The Woodpeckers of Rotha* and *The Big-headed Boy*, *Shamans* and *Samurais*.  
24-27 February, 5.30pm-7pm, Film Development Board, Chabahil

## DINING



**European Bakery**  
For a loved one's birthday, special event, or a just-because cake, order from Baker's Den. Also get freshly baked doughnuts, muffins, and bread.  
Baluwatar (01) 4422047

## ONLINE ARCHIVES

**Audio Bites**  
*Audio Bites* by Shutter Corp films offers discussions with Nepali public figures on socio-cultural topics including mental health, motherhood, social media, the environment and more. Find the podcast on YouTube.



**Children's Library**  
Find children's books from across the world at the International Children's Digital Library archives and encourage kids to read.



**Poem-a-Day**  
Poem-a-Day is an original daily digital poetry series featuring over 250 new, previously unpublished poems by some of the most talented poets at present. Subscribe to poets.org to read.



**Tasty**  
The Tasty website has all the recipes. Search for, watch and cook any and all kinds of food from hundreds of instructions online.

**Arkadium**  
Arkadium is home to free online games of all types, from puzzles to memory based games. Go to the Arkadium website to get started.



**Achaar Ghar**  
Head to Achaar Ghar and enjoy an assortment of pickles prepared from recipes handed down generations.  
Jhamsikhel (01) 5541952

**Casa Mexicana**  
At Casa Mexicana, enjoy the taste of Mexico through a feast of tacos, quesadillas and tres leches cakes.  
Gairidhara, 9840542082

## GETAWAY



**Hotel Barahi**  
Located just beyond the banks of Phewa Lake, Hotel Barahi offers stunning views and luxury rooms. The rooms are decorated with rustic pieces, earthy tones and a clean design that will leave one feeling relaxed.  
*Lakeside, Pokhara (61) 460617*

**Bandipur Kaushi Inn**  
Bandipur Kaushi is a small, rustic place to stay in the idyllic village of Bandipur, replete with culture and traditional architecture.  
*Bandipur, Tanahu (065) 520083*



**Kasara Resort**  
With activities for everyone-- from cycling to wildlife viewing--Kasara Resort at the heart of Chitwan's National Park is a fantastic getaway for families.  
*Patihani, Chitwan (01) 4437571*

**Peacock Guest House**  
Housed in a World Heritage Site, the three-storied Newari-style building provides splendid views of the Dattatreya Square and the Bhimsenthan temple.  
*Bhaktapur (01) 6611829*

**Nanee**  
Stay at Nanee for breakfast, a two-hour community heritage walk, and dinner.  
*The Nanee Bhaktapur, Itachhen -2, Bhaktapur, Rs18,200, 9851314541*

**Koto**  
Take a gastronomic tour of Japan at Koto. Try the maki sushi, cold tofu, tempura, fried chicken, miso soup, chicken karaage, katsu don and more  
*Darbar Marg (01) 4220346*



**New Orleans Café**  
Sit by the Newa-style courtyard and enjoy Continental, Indian, Thai, and Nepali cuisine. Live music on Wednesdays and Fridays.  
*Thamel (01) 4700736*

## WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
23° 9°	22° 9°	21° 9°	22° 9°	23° 9°

**Slim chance of rain**  
There is a chance of rain during the weekend but it may just be a few drops, or none at all. There is a westerly approaching, and it will bring cloud over Saturday and Sunday. However, some forecasts show the chance of rain in Kathmandu Valley as only about 20%. But Nepal's Meteorological Forecast Division does not predict any rain for the foothills, and just some snow flurries in the higher elevations. This extended drought has brought an early onset of wildfire season, and the resultant smoke is blanketing central and eastern Nepal. The haze filters the sun, depressing the daytime temperature, and will keep nights chilly. Weekend will feel even colder because of passing clouds and afternoon breeze in Kathmandu.

## OUR PICK

Directed by Ahn Gil-ho of the *Memories of the Alhambra* and written by Kim Eun-Sook, the scribe behind *Descendants of the Sun*, *The Glory* follows a woman's decades-long mission to seek revenge on her high-school bullies who not only gave her physical scars but also left her with many mental ones. Decades after graduating from high-school, Moon Dong-Eun starts her meticulous plan to unravel the lives of each of her tormentors and the bystanders who did nothing to help her. Starring Song Hye-Kyo, Lee Do-Hyun, Lim Ji-Yeon and more.



## MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI

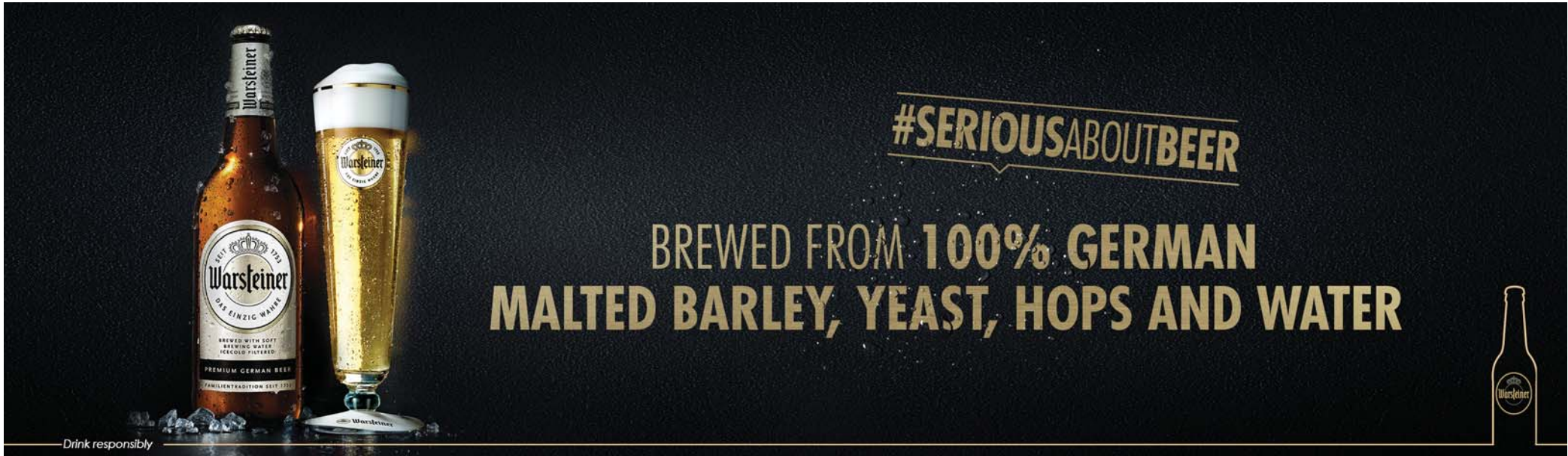


## सार्वजनिक सेवालाई पारदर्शी बनाऔं

- सार्वजनिक निकायका कामकारबाहीलाई पारदर्शी बनाऔं ।
- सेवाग्राहीले सहज र सोभै सेवा लिन सक्ने व्यवस्था मिलाऔं ।
- आधिकारिक सेवा प्रदायकबाट सेवा लिऔं, बिचौलिया मार्फत काम नगरौं ।
- सकेसम्म सेवाग्राही आफैले सेवा प्राप्त गर्ने गरौं ।
- सार्वजनिक सेवालाई सरल, सहज र पारदर्शी बनाऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड







MÓNICAALCÁZAR-DUARTE



DAVE HOHL / NEPAL PEACE CORPS PHOTO HISTORY PROJECT

# PhotoKTM 5's visual extravaganza

Annual festival returns to Kathmandu with a focus on co-existence and nature

The fifth edition of PhotoKTM is coming to town for a month-long festival of various lens-based work. From 25 February-31 March, photo.circle's bi-annual festival aims to create resources for visual storytellers, researchers, educators, activists and other cultural producers to engage with social change.

The theme this year is the natural world, and PhotoKTM 5 will have over 60 participants from 16 countries to highlight 'non-human entities', re-learn histories and pay attention, encouraging participants to imagine ways to co-exist and co-habitat this earth.

The opening on 24 February at Bhandarkhal in the Patan Darbar Square will feature an immersive audio-visual performance, curated by Irina Giri and musical performances by artists Pushpa Palanchoke and Ser o Dúo, and



THC PHOTOGRAPHY NEPAL

the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory Choir, accompanied with visual projections by Phatcowlee.

Chitwan National Park will see activities from 3-6 March. Indian filmmaker Amar Kanwar will teach

a five-week course 'Learning from Doubt' on crime, politics, human rights, and ecology.

PhotoKTM 5 will also have Bangladeshi artist, curator and teacher Munem Wasif, Swiss

artist and writer Uriel Orlow, Indian filmmaker Sriram Murali, the Feather Library, Alana Hunt from Miriwoong country in the north-west of Australia, Mexican/British multidisciplinary visual artist Monica Alcazar Duarte, among others. Nepal Picture Library, and KTK-Belt Project which works on biodiversity preservation in eastern Nepal will also be presenting their work at the festival.

PhotoKTM also hosts a research residency, and this year it is being organised in collaboration with Jatayu Vulture Restaurant in Nawalparasi, and Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN).

The South Asia Incubator for emerging and mid-career visual practitioners will allow participants to engage with global professionals and provide inputs to exhibit, publish and develop practices. 🇳🇵

Festival attendance is free.  
[www.photoktm.com](http://www.photoktm.com)

## EXHIBITIONS:

**As We Know Them: Bird Names in Tharu**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11am - 7pm  
Khapinchhen

**Sungabha: Encounters in the Wild**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11:00 am - 7:00 pm  
Dhaugal

**A Very Clear Picture**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11:00 am - 7:00 pm  
Patan House

**The Skin of Chitwan**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11am - 7pm  
Bahadur Shah Hall

**Ikamo Tlalli – Earthless**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11am - 7pm  
Gallery MCube

**Drawing From Nature**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11:00 am - 7:00 pm  
Dhaugal

**Minmini**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11am - 7pm  
Chyasal

**The World like a Jewel in the Hand**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11am - 7pm  
Bahadur Shah Hall

**Chhimeki Chara**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11:00 am - 7:00 pm  
Chyasal

**Seeds Shall Set Us Free**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11am - 7pm  
Gallery MCube

**Indigenous Knowledge Portal**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11am - 7pm  
Khapinchhen

**Feather Library**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11am - 7pm  
Chyasal

**What Plants Were Called Before They Had a Name**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11am - 7pm  
Khapinchhen

**Searching for the European Roller**  
25 Feb - 31 March 2023 | 11am - 7pm  
Namkha

**TATA MOTORS**  
Connecting Aspirations



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# Why is the air in Bhaktapur so bad?

Brick kilns, heavy highway traffic and prevailing winds make air quality the dirtiest in Kathmandu Valley

■ Sushila Budathoki

Bhaktapur used to be a town where people from Kathmandu went to get away from it all, for a quieter place and fresh air.

No more. Khwopa, as the historic town is known in Newa, has consistently recorded some of the worst air quality in Kathmandu Valley, outranking even the industrial belts of Biratnagar and Bhairawa.

A recent Air Quality Index (AQI) measurement of 22 sites in Kathmandu Valley found Bhaktapur to have the most hazardous concentrations of suspended particles below 2.5 microns (PM2.5), aerosols and toxic gases. On 8 February,

Madhyapur Thimi recorded the highest AQI at 310 closely followed by Duwakot at 296 and Sallaghari at 279. Changunarayan registered 234, Tathali 234 and Ghyakhel 246.

Elsewhere in Kathmandu on that day, the AQI count was still dirty at 181, but much lower than Bhaktapur. Pokhara recorded 143, Birganj 131, Chitwan 69, Nepalganj 71, Biratnagar 85 and Hetauda 81 on 8 February.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) considers AQI up to 50 to be good, up to 100 as medium, 100-150 bad, 151-200 unhealthy, 201-300 very unhealthy and above 300 hazardous.

As for the PM2.5, the WHO maintains that concentration has to be below 25µg/m³ to be healthy for humans. But even in mid-February with winter almost over, the PM2.5 in Bhaktapur on 21 February was 25 times higher than the WHO annual air quality guideline value.

“During winter, the inversion phenomenon traps polluted air at ground level,” says pollution specialist Bhupendra Das. “It is still winter and the fact that there has been no rain has meant that Bhaktapur’s pollution has nowhere to go.”

Indeed, much of Nepal has not had any rainfall since mid-October 2022 (*See page 1*). Kathmandu

valley alone should get about 95mm of rain between mid-October to mid-February but this dry spell has meant that there has been no precipitation to wash down the pollutants. Smoke from early wildfires across the country has added to the problem.

But the reasons why Bhaktapur has the worst air quality has more to do with prevailing winds blowing all of Kathmandu’s vehicular emissions and other pollutants to the eastern rim of the Valley where it is blocked by the hills.

In addition, most of the Valley’s brick kilns have relocated to the outskirts of Bhaktapur where they spew out black smoke from coal and other fuel into the already polluted air.

Says Regina Maskey of the Central Department of Environment at Tribhuvan University: “The prevailing westerlies are transported over Bhaktapur, where they are trapped.”

Dirty air consists of several different types of pollutants including particulate matter made up of smoke, soot, dust, and poisonous gases like carbon monoxide and ozone from two-wheelers. Then there is open burning of agricultural residue and garbage.

On top of all this, there is



Brick kilns spewing smoke and steam in Bhaktapur on Tuesday morning, the same time these Air Quality Index measurements (*above*) were made showing hazardous pollution over the eastern corner of the Valley.



## हिमालको फागुन अंक बजारमा



हिमालमिडिया प्रा. लि.  
पाटनढोका, ललितपुर



the cross-border pollution from the north Indian plains which researchers say can constitute up to 40% of the pollution in Kathmandu Valley in winter.

But brick kilns are perhaps the biggest culprits for Bhaktapur. There are 60 registered brick kilns in the town, with 40 of them currently operating. Most of them are right outside the densely populated old town.

After nearly three years of stoppage due to the Covid-19 crisis and subsequent decline in construction, the kilns are back in operation to fulfil pent-up demand. Only a few kilns have begun to replace coal with less polluting biomass pellets because of coal

prices going up after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

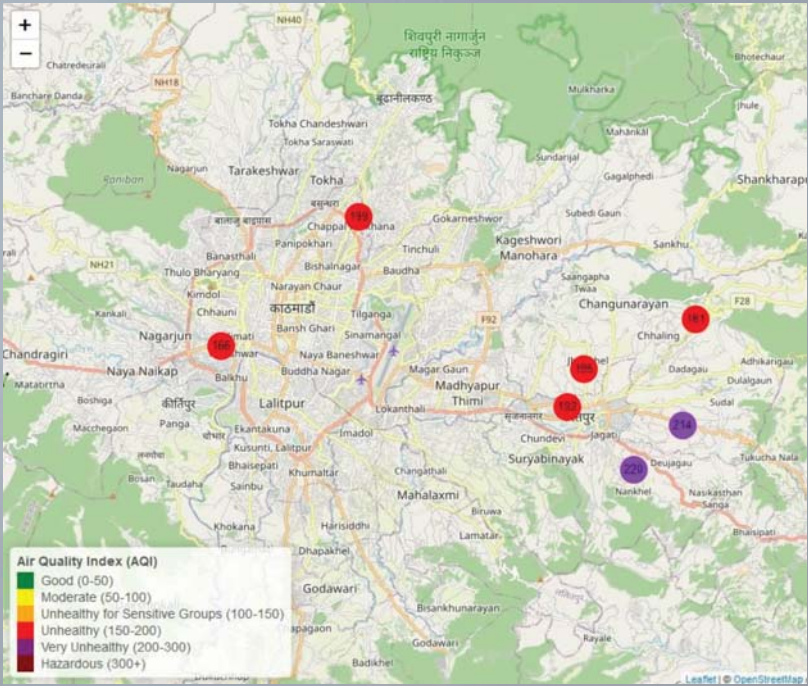
Ultimately, there is no alternative but to opt for alternatives to fired bricks like cement blocks or compressed stabilised earth bricks (CSEB). Stricter control of polluting diesel buses and trucks entering and exiting the Valley through the busy Sanga pass and a conversion to electric public transport would also help.

Reducing Nepal's petroleum import from India by only 10% will save us more than Rs30 billion a year. This money along with a seizable pollution tax in our reserves can help incentivise electric mass transit for Nepal, if there was a political will to do so.

Worsening air pollution also has consequences on visibility. All of February, the air quality in Kathmandu Valley has been so bad that flights into the airport have had to hold for landing clearance, leading to delays.

“Lack of visibility has made it difficult for flights, which is a serious problem,” says Das, adding that while new technology has been adopted to reduce the smoke, there has been no innovation to remove sulfur dioxide emissions from low-grade coal used in brick kilns.

Given the hazardous levels of air pollution in the cities, the government back in 2020 issued



the Air Quality Management Action Plan for Kathmandu Valley with a provision for a state of emergency to be declared when the AQI exceeds 300. But AQI exceeds 300 most mornings in Bhaktapur with no action from either the national government or the municipality.

Research has shown that the average life expectancy of Kathmandu Valley residents has been reduced by four years due to air pollution. The figure is 7 years

for people living in the Tarai across the Indian border.

In 2019, 17,800 deaths in Nepal were attributed to PM2.5 by the State of Global Air report. From 2010-2019, nearly 150,000 lives have been lost across the country due to respiratory ailments caused by worsening air pollution.

Air pollution causes a wide range of chronic health problems including but not limited to heart attack, cardiac arrest, pneumonia,

bronchitis, lung cancer, breathlessness, diabetes, mental health disorders and congenital issues.

According to the WHO, more people have lost their lives to air pollution than the Covid-19 pandemic which has killed over 6.7 million people globally since 2020. Comparatively, air pollution killed 9 million people in just one year in 2019. And yet, there is not much effort into reducing the impact of air pollution or serious measures to reduce the emissions and save millions of lives.

The report also stated that the concentration of PM2.5 in Nepal was as high as that in Indian cities which often make it to the most polluted list. Kathmandu and Tarai cities often make it to the list too. What is surprising is that Bhaktapur municipality has been a stronghold of the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party which has been known for good governance, and for service delivery in education and health.

It is time the federal and provincial governments worked with Kathmandu Valley mayors to clean up at least the vehicular emissions and open garbage burning that is disproportionately affecting Bhaktapur. And Bhaktapur itself could ban brick kilns so close to its town centre. 🇳🇵



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# A family that works together stays together

The Bhusals have decided to stay in Nepal to establish a thriving dairy venture

■ Sahina Shrestha in Rupandehi

At the corner of a road in Tilottama Municipality that stretches between mustard fields, stands a white one-storey house. In front of it an old tree, and underneath the tree a table and a few chairs.

The neighbourhood is quiet under the pale sun of early spring. The only sounds are of rustling leaves, punctuated by occasional grunts and moos from a nearby shed.

Madan Bhusal, 27, is busy preparing feed for the cattle as his employees clean the shed. Inside, his wife Ambika and sister-in-law Sanchita prepare lunch as they wait for Pawan, Madan's brother, to return home from their dairy shop.

It has been nearly seven years since the Bhusals moved to Tilottama from Nawalparasi in search of a better life. Over the years, this dairy farm has been their home and the source of a proper livelihood.

"We moved here because there was a larger market than back in Nawalparasi," says Madan (pictured). "When we started out, there weren't many commercial dairy farmers here. We saw the opportunity to fill the gap."

Madan's parents were farmers too, so he took easily to rearing and milking cows and buffaloes.



AMIT MACHAMASI

Like many in their village, their family too was involved in animal husbandry but on a much smaller scale. But as he grew older, Madan felt constricted by the narrow market and wanted to expand the business. He looked at Narayangad and Butwal, studying the dairy market in both the areas.

Of the two, he felt Butwal offered better opportunities. "It was a growing market, and I knew we

could tap into it if we strategised and worked hard," he recalls.

He ferried some of the family livestock from Nawalparasi and started the business from scratch with his brother. The family now owns 16 buffaloes and 45 cows, and together operates Narayani Gai Bikas Farm.

It now produces 350 litres of milk every day which is sold directly to customers through the

Pawan Dudh Dairy shop by the highway in Kotihawa. Apart from milk, the farm also produces paneer, yogurt and other dairy products. Business is thriving with an income of Rs150,000-200,000 every month, part of which the family invests back into the business.

"What sets us apart from others is that we don't mix water in our milk, and we ensure that our products are of the highest quality,"

says Madan.

While Madan monitors the production cycle, his brother Pawan handles the daily distribution, delivering milk to the customer base every day. Ambika and Sanchita help out wherever they can, from looking after the cattle to preparing feed for them and food for the staff.

Both of them are glad that their husbands have chosen the route of entrepreneurship rather than opting to go abroad like many others from their village.

"I am happy they are here and we get to live together as a family. It is hard work, but we all take care of the chores together and look after each other," says Ambika.

The enterprising family has had its fair share of challenges in the business. In the initial days when they did not have a milk cooling machine, much of the leftover milk was wasted every day. They soon learnt to make less perishable dairy products to minimise loss.

Pawan does not regret following his brother to Rupandehi despite the hurdles along the way. "If it is about earning money, we can do it in Nepal: "Why bother going abroad and working for others when you can be your own boss and live with your family?"

Ironically, even while Madan and Pawan have established a thriving dairy business in Nepal, their biggest challenge is to find farm workers, as most young Nepalis in the area have migrated abroad. But the brothers don't want that problem to get in the way of their expansion plans. Says Pawan, "The next step is to scale the business both in production and distribution." 🇳🇵

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