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■ Shristi Karki

The election of Ram Chandra Paudel of the Nepali Congress (NC) as president was a foregone conclusion, but what is less certain now is what the bruising battle for the ceremonial post will now do to Nepal's fragile politics.

Paudel's candidacy was a quid pro quo between Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoist Centre and the NC's Sher Bahadur Deuba in which Dahal had to agree to step down as head of government in favour of Deuba and Madhav Kumar Nepal of the CPN (US). And all this was to break the Maoist-UML alliance and prevent K P Oli from being all-powerful.

The fight for head of state was just shadow-boxing, the real struggle was over who gets to become the head of government. The UML had fielded lawyer Subhas Nembang, knowing fairly well he did not have the electoral college votes.

Despite it being a post bound by constitutional strictures, all parties in the fray have ulterior motives in having a pliable president because of the inherent discretionary powers. And because the struggle to have their own president became so politically fraught that it actually broke the 5-party coalition, there is now a danger that Paudel will be under pressure to let his benefactors extract a pound of flesh.

For the same reason, post-president politics in Nepal will be a minefield. The UML's Oli is still smarting from being stabbed in the back by Dahal and Deuba and will be waiting to exact revenge. Prime Minister Dahal will find it even more difficult to distribute ministerial rewards to his new 9-party coalition for backing him. The RSP, ever eager to be in any government, voted for Paudel, while the royalist RPP abstained.

Dahal's first immediate challenge will be to face a floor test in the House, since he has lost his majority after the UML pulled out.

With the presidential elections over, fence-sitters of the 9-party coalition will now wait to see what ministerial portfolios will be awarded to their parties in exchange for loyalty.

The intriguing coincidence that the Supreme Court hearing on a writ petition against Prime Minister Dahal for war-era crimes began on the same day as the presidential election has aroused suspicion that

Post-presidential politics



RATNA SHRESTHA / RSS

even the current coalition could be short-lived, with the UML and the NC joining hands to expel Dahal. Given the fickleness of past alliances, anything is possible.

A single bench of Justice Bishowambhar Shrestha heard the case filed by advocates Gyanendra Aran and Kalyan Budhathoki seeking investigation into Prime Minister Dahal for his self-confession taking responsibility for 5,000 killed during the conflict. The writ petitioners are conflict victims.

On the face of it, it should not matter who is president: Paudel or Nembang. Both have been Speakers and served multiple terms as ministers. They are also largely untainted, and both command respect across party lines.

Paudel being president also means there is now a three-way power balance with a UML Speaker and Maoist Prime Minister.

theoretically, this could mean more stable politics. Or not.

However, Paudel is a career politician, and Nembang is a lawyer and his rise within the party has been relatively rapid.

Ram Chandra Paudel, 78, has been representing the NC from Tanahu since the early 1990s. He joined the democratic movement at the age 16. He rose up the ranks in student union politics, and served 13 years in jail. Despite his solid commitment to democracy, he is a part of the old guard that Deuba saw as a threat.

For Paudel, this will be the culmination of six decades in politics, and he lobbied vigorously with Dahal, Deuba, and even Oli.

As president, Paudel may not be the yes-man Deuba and Dahal want, unlike outgoing President Bidya Devi Bhandari.

Nembang has been politically

active in the UML since his student days in 1971 in Ilam. As a lawyer, he was general secretary of the Nepal Bar Association in 1987, and was elected to the House of Representatives in 1999.

Nembang served as the Speaker of the House in 2006, and served as the chair of the Constituent Assembly in both 2008 and 2014. He was re-elected Speaker in 2015, and became the UML vice-chair in 2018.

Many feel that Nembang would have been a better fit as president because of his persona, legal background as well as the fact that it was the turn of a person from an indigenous background to be president.

Nembang is seen as a non-confrontational politician who often mediated to resolve deadlocks in party disputes – even though he was criticised for not speaking out against Oli for his attempt to dissolve Parliament in 2021. 🇳🇵

1923 - 2023
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

new
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1923 - 2023

After the Sugauli Treaty of 1816 that brought the Anglo-Nepal War to an end, Nepal was nominally independent, but was treated by the British as just another Indian princely state. But through skilful diplomacy and two years of lobbying in Delhi and London, Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher Rana leveraged the sacrifice of young Nepali warriors to get Britain to sign the 1923 Treaty of Friendship that formally recognised Nepal as a sovereign country. Chandra Shumsher himself visited London in 1908. Later, to soften the British military and royalty to sign the treaty he hosted Lord Kitchener, and invited King George VI and Prince Edward for elaborate tiger hunt diplomacy in Chitwan (*pictured*).



Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher Rana 'softened' the British with tiger hunt diplomacy to sign the 1923 Friendship Treaty.

Prithvi Narayan Shah may have been Nepal's founding king, but it was Chandra Shumsher who first gave Nepal its place in the world. In 1937, Nepal established an embassy at 12A Kensington Palace Gardens where it is located to this day. At that time, Nepal was one of only four Asian countries with a mission in London. Things changed after Indian independence in 1947, and the Ranas were soon out of a job. The rest, as they say, is history. This year marks the centenary of the Nepal-Britain Friendship Treaty signed on 21 December 1923 in Singha Darbar, which went some way to address the historical humiliation for Nepal of the Sugauli Treaty. British envoy to Nepal William O'Connor was given royal treatment, taken with a 20-horse escort from Lazimpat to Singha Darbar for the signing ceremony. British residents in Kathmandu now became full ambassadors, and the Ranas declared two days of holiday. Although Nepal was never colonised, the Treaty helped the country to be finally accepted on the world stage as an independent nation. Among its seven articles, the treaty guaranteed Nepal's sovereignty, reaffirmed the Sugauli Treaty, addressed security guarantees, opened the door for import of weapons by the Nepal military, and removed tariff barriers for bilateral trade. The treaty was not welcomed by everyone, however. Anti-Rana dissidents and those who were against Gurkha recruitment opposed it. Chandra Shumsher died six years after the

treaty signing, and his successors did not fully exploit its potential to, for example, join the League of Nations or push Nepal's presence more forcefully. Nepal is not a member of the Commonwealth, but having 8,000 or so of our nationals in the British Army should have made Nepal-Britain ties much closer, so the country could take greater advantage of political, economic and trade cooperation. Nepal has not been able to fully capitalise on the 'soft power' of Gurkha recruitment. Adventurers and researchers who explored Nepal in the last two centuries are almost unknown in Britain: regent and Nepalophile Brian Houghton Hodgson, botanist Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, naturalist Joseph Dalton Hooker,

Himalayan explorers A W Tilman and Eric Shipton, or the ex-British Gurkhas Mike Cheney and Jimmy Roberts who made Pokhara his home. Much of this is due to Nepal's own inadequate diplomacy over the years. But while members of the British royal family have made multiple visits to Nepal, starting with Queen Elizabeth's first tour in 1961, no serving British prime minister has bothered to come to Kathmandu. In Nepal the 1923 treaty is overshadowed by Sugauli and the India-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950. There are some in India who maintain that 1950 supersedes 1923. History moves on, empires rise and fall. Next door, we have rising China. We must ponder whether we have lived up to the scope that the 1923 treaty gave Nepal to do business with what was then a global superpower. These days, the two big neighbours and the United States regard Nepal's leaders with distrust and disdain. Our politicians are not true to their word, they are incapable of the geopolitical tight-rope walk that is now necessary to keep Nepal stable and viable. Nepal's serial leaders either play victim and grovel, or recklessly pit neighbours against each other. Nepal borders two of the largest emerging economies in the world. The sooner we realise that they are not always fighting over us, the sooner we can take advantage of our location for national advancement.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Preventing Peoples' War II
There is no real justification to a war but the fact that a just and fair Nepal is still only a dream makes all the violence during the Maoist conflict even more senseless. Families of the victims continue to wait for transitional justice (page 5) while perpetrators walk scot-free. This could be a recipe for another war we do not want. 20 years ago this week our former columnist Dhawal SJB Rana wrote about how Nepal can prevent another war by addressing the root causes behind political, social and economic inequities. Dhawal is now a RPP MP and wrote columns in this paper for federalism, but his party is against it. Excerpts from the piece published on Nepali Times in issue #135 7-13 March 2003:

It has been said many times before, and there is no harm in repeating it: we will not resolve the insurgency just by stopping the violence. In the long term we have to address the root causes buried in political, social and economic inequities in society. Until we begin to take these problems more seriously, there is no surety that Peoples' War II will not



answers, and the mechanism to get there is multiparty democracy all the way from the ward level to municipality to national parliament, where all communities, marginalised geographical and social groupings have their say. All it needs is a sense of integrity, accountability and good management skills among elected leaders.

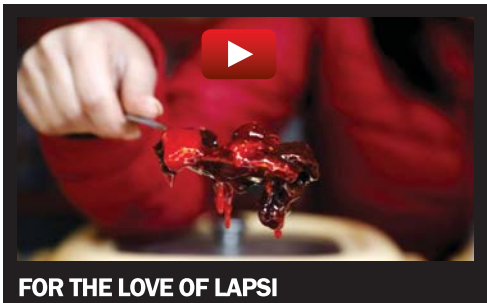
From archive material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

ONLINE PACKAGES



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Nepal is celebrated globally for its success in fighting malnutrition but the progress has stalled in the recent years. Follow Himalmedia's *Saglo Samaj* tv magazine crew to Dhanusha and Mahottari districts in Nepal's Tarai where children in most families suffer from chronic malnutrition. Watch what the locals have to say and what do the experts recommend for this chronic national problem. Latest on Nepal's school lunch program on *page 9*.



FOR THE LOVE OF LAPSI

The beloved *lapsi* of Nepalis comes in many forms like in *umami titauras* and sweet or spicy pickles. Watch how *lapsi ko achar* is prepared from start to finish as it is peeled, boiled in a sugary syrup and spiced to perfection. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.

POKHARA TOURISM

You have hit the nail on the head ('Pokhara's desperation and hope', Kanak Mani Dixit, #1150). All decisions seem to be made with money and 'self branding' in mind. A more comprehensive, if you will holistic, approach is essential for keeping the little that is, sustainable, liveable for the communities.

Renate Schwarz

■ The best use of the old airport land could also be a game changer. Debate is picking up here.

Anil Chitrakar

HOMEMAKERS

This story on homemakers is so relatable in the context of Nepali society ('A homemaker's worth', Swapnil KC, #1151). It highlights the undervalued and often overlooked role of homemakers and the immense amount of work that goes into maintaining a household and raising a family, and the lack of recognition and financial compensation for these efforts. It has raised important questions about the value society places on traditional female roles and gender inequalities. It is a powerful reminder to all of us to appreciate and acknowledge the hard work of homemakers who work tirelessly behind the scenes.

Rak Hee

GOOD FELLOWS

It is because of the good natured people like Sarala Basnet who understand and advocate for basic philanthropy with courage gained through their strong perspectives and their own experiences that one is inspired to overcome one's own and society's dogmatic beliefs ('Nurture in her nature', Babita Shrestha, #1151). It is good to be aware of the hopefulness of hardworking people driven by their dedication, with a moral pursuit in their minds that practically benefits the future of an entire population.

Priya Neupane

HOLI COLOURS

Two years ago my friend found the best powders, literally just corn starch with bright colors but minimal staining (Un-Holi Colours, Ashish Dhakal, #1151). The first time I played Holi in Jaipur I was pink for a week.

Joke Aerts

WHAT'S TRENDING



Baking as a metaphor for life

by Aliza Basnet
Finding work overseas has been the icing on the cake for Nepali baker Aliza Basnet. Read about her journey from being a loyal customer in her uncle's bakery as a little girl in Butwal to a hotel in UAE in the popular *Diaspora Diaries* column. More stories of Nepali migrant workers on *pages 10-11*.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Political patriarchy

Editorial
Most Nepali women are now aware of their rights and potential, many have proven themselves. But the attitude of men towards gender equity has not changed at the same rate. This means young men and boys must unlearn the culture they have grown up with.

Most popular on Twitter

A homemaker's worth

by Swapnil KC
Nepali Times tallied what an average Nepali middle-class full-time homemaker in Kathmandu would be earning if she were to be paid for all the work she does around the house. The total came to Rs115,000 a month, much more than a mid-level government official. Read for details and join the online discussion.

Most commented

Feminising farm-based firms

by Shristi Karki
Women CEOs and entrepreneurs are taking the lead in expanding agribusiness in Nepal. Meet Pratibha Rajbhandari of Nepal Agribusiness Innovation Centre and Srijana Pradhan of Organic Online, two of the finest examples paving the way for other women professionals. Visit nepalitimes.com for full story.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

- Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**
If their work was monetised, Nepal's homemakers would be highest earners in most families. Read on, A homemaker's worth: [link](#) [link](#) [link](#)
- Chun B. Gurung @Chun_Gurung**
Great angle! It is goes underreported. Yes, homemakers work 24/7, they cannot complain, they get no breaks. They do not get annual leave. There is no annual bonus, no pension. They do not have a sick leave. [link](#) [link](#) [link](#)
- Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**
Only when men are educated do they respect all individuals, their choices and decisions. International Women's Day on 8 March should not just be about women: it is about educating men, the men in our families, in our communities, and society. #editorial [link](#) [link](#) [link](#)
- marty logan @martylogan**
A slight revision - start educating them as boys [link](#) [link](#) [link](#)

1,000 WORDS



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA/RSS

THE RED BOOK:

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal presents the government's annual report to outgoing President Bidhya Devi Bhandari at Shital Niwas on Sunday.

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Domestic aviation flies into headwind

But Buddha Air expands flights through its secondary hub at Pokhara's new airport



KUNDA DIXIT

High fuel costs and concerns about air safety have dampened growth of Nepal's aviation despite passenger demand remaining high.

Coverage of the Yeti691 crash in Pokhara on 15 January led to cancellations just as bookings were being firmed up for the spring trekking season. For one month, passenger volume dropped sharply, but is now picking up again.

Pokhara still wears a deserted look, and tourist footfalls have fallen along popular trails in Manang and Annapurna. Even so, Nepal's biggest domestic airline Buddha Air is making Pokhara's newly opened international airport its second hub for cross-sector flights.

From 9 March it is basing four planes in its all-ATR fleet of 14 aircraft in Pokhara for daily early morning departures to Bhadrapur, Bharatpur, Bhairawa, Nepalganj and Kathmandu. Pokhara airport will also be opened for night flights this week.

The robust passenger demand is due to the poor condition of the

main highways to Pokhara from Kathmandu and Bhairawa which makes air travel attractive despite high fares. Another contributing factor is domestic tourism, as more and more young Nepalis discover their own country.

"Pokhara is a game-changer," says Buddha Air's Managing Director Birendra Bahadur Basnet (pictured, above). "We are excited about Pokhara becoming our secondary hub."

Basnet's optimism comes despite considerable headwinds from high price of Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) which is now Rs170/l, more expensive cost of operations because of the strong dollar vis-a-vis the Nepali rupee, as well as difficulties in sourcing aircraft components because of continued global supply chain constraints.

Added to this is air traffic congestion at Kathmandu airport, which forces planes to burn fuel on extended holding queues for landing.

Buddha Air's business plan

appears to focus on diversifying its operations base, pioneering new domestic inter-city routes and expanding connections to north Indian cities beyond its current thrice-weekly Kathmandu-Varanasi flights.

The new Bhadrapur-Pokhara route, for example, hopes to tap Indian tourists from Sikkim, Darjeeling and Assam, while allowing Nepalis to fly to Indian destinations via Bagdogra bypassing Kathmandu. In anticipation of increased demand on the new routes, Buddha Air is adding two ATR-72-500s, bringing its total fleet strength to 16.

"We do not have to look too far for tourists in Nepal, there is the huge Indian market right next door, we just have to make flight connections more convenient," says Basnet.

Buddha Air has been lobbying to start flights from Pokhara directly to Varanasi, Lucknow and Delhi, but the Indian authorities have raised strategic objections to Pokhara Airport being built by the Chinese under the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) — similar to India refusing to buy electricity from hydropower plants built by Chinese contractors.

India has also refused to allow inbound flights to Kathmandu, Pokhara and Bhairawa via routes B345 from the south and L626 from the west. Both routes are open only for outbound international flights. This means longer flight time and fares from Bhairawa and Pokhara to Indian airports.

Even so, Basnet says the Indian side is positive about connecting Janakpur to Ayodhya, and Nepalganj to Delhi. Existing flights from Pokhara to border cities in Nepal will increase Indian pilgrim and tourist traffic, as well as give access to cheaper domestic flights within India for Nepalis via Bagdogra, Darbhanga, Faizabad or Gorakhpur.

Buddha has been trying to counter the negative international publicity following the Pokhara crash by highlighting air safety and focusing on crew training and strict safety protocols. It is the only domestic airline with its own fully-equipped maintenance hangar with FSTD simulators to train and check its 141 pilots.

Basnet told *Nepali Times*, "We are concentrated minutely on safety in all departments, specially flight operations, maintenance and ground handling department." 🇳🇵

Fuel cost dampens tourism growth

Despite the recent decrease in global oil tariff, Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) this week decided not to reduce prices of petrol, diesel and Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF), saying it needed to make up for previous losses.

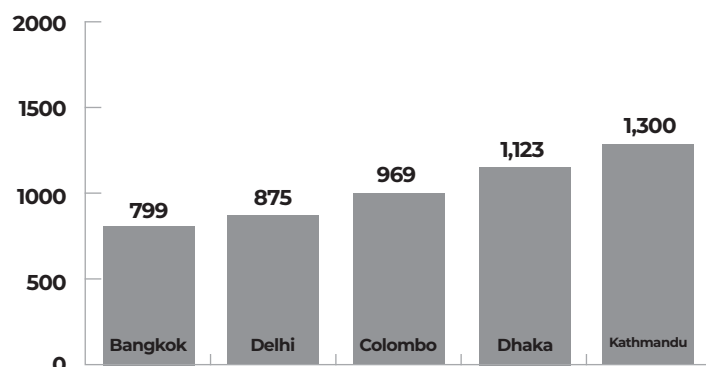
However, high fuel costs have had a dampening effect on aviation which in turn has affected the revival of post-Covid tourism in Nepal. International airlines serving Kathmandu say they can add frequency, but are deterred by fuel costs, as well as high ground handling and landing charges at Kathmandu airport.

NOC officials say this is because of the need to bring the fuel in tankers from refineries in India, and also due to a hefty government petroleum tax. They also regard flying as a luxury, and say the high prices are needed to subsidise the cost of LPG and diesel in Nepal.

"This is absurd, maintaining high fuel costs is just so NOC can distribute bonuses to staff, and it subsidises LPGs so rich Nepalis can use garden heaters," scoffs one airline executive. "High fuel cost has a knock-on effect on inflation and the economy. And with bus passengers now travelling by plane because of bad roads, it is not just the rich who fly on domestic flights anymore."

AVIATION TURBINE FUEL

Cost in \$/kl at airports in the region.



ATF at Kathmandu airport is one of the highest in the world, and is double the cost of refuelling for airlines in Bangkok. Which is why even Nepal Airlines fills up the tanks of its aircraft in Dubai, Doha or Delhi and only tops it up at Kathmandu for its subsequent flight.

ATF costs \$799/kl in Bangkok, about \$969 in New Delhi and Colombo, while it is a whopping \$1,300 in Kathmandu, even with discounts.

The hardest hit are airlines that fly long-haul routes from Seoul, Istanbul or Kuwait, and which have to fill up in Kathmandu for the return flight. Fuel is at most 40% of the operational cost of the offices of most international airlines, but for some airlines serving Kathmandu it can be as high as 73%.

Fuel cost and low profitability are the main reasons these airlines do not want to increase frequency to Kathmandu despite passenger demand, and this is affecting tourism arrivals in Nepal.

An Airbus 330 or Boeing 777 on a 7-hour flight from Kathmandu to Incheon or Istanbul burns 40 tonnes of fuel which costs about \$80,000 in Nepal. In addition, aircraft on a holding pattern for one hour at Kathmandu airport due to air traffic congestion would waste fuel worth more than \$10,000.

Outgoing international flights also have to wait more than one hour for takeoff clearance, which means many passengers miss their connecting flights, adding to the burden on airlines.



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Nepal-Britain centenary

The British Embassy in Kathmandu marked the Centenary of the 1923 UK-Nepal Treaty of Friendship this week at Lwon Chok in



Hanuman Dhoka. Deputy Mayor of Kathmandu Sunial Dangol welcomed visiting UK Minister of State Anne-Marie Trevelyan and British Ambassador Nicola Pollitt, who also joined a panel discussion.

Standard Chartered

Standard Chartered Bank has reaffirmed its issuer rating of AAA through ICRA Nepal. The rating considers the highest degree of safety for timely servicing of financial obligations and low credit risk. The bank reported a capital to risk weighted assets ratio (CAR) of 14.91% and tier-I of 13.38% as of mid-Jan 2023. CEO Anirvan Ghosh Dastidar said: "The reaffirmation of AAA rating for four years in a row is strong validation of our commitment towards our clients and all our stakeholders in Nepal."

Himalayan incubator

Himalayan Capital, subsidiary of Himalayan Bank, has launched the Himalayan Incubator for entrepreneurs providing free workspace, training and guidance. The startups can connect and network with investors, suppliers and customers and have training on operationalising companies, framing business models, scaling businesses, and raising finances.

Oz aid

Australian ambassador Felicity Volk was in Jumla to on International Women's Day to launch a project to support 380 women-owned agroforestry small businesses being implemented by Business and Professional Women



Nepal. Said Volk: "The Australian Embassy is pleased to mark Women's Day by promoting women's economic empowerment through their involvement in agroforestry businesses."



EV and women

Tata Motors organised 'Nexon EV Women Drive the Nation' event on 8 March in which female customers, doctors, Sipradi female members and Miss Nepal 2022 who were all informed about EVs and their climate friendly attributes.

Hyundai i10

Laxmi intercontinental, the distributor of Hyundai in Nepal, has launched the facelifted variants of Grand i10 Nio. The car comes with a painted black radiator grille, tilt steering, footwell lighting and more at a starting price of Rs2.996 million and can be bought at 17 dealers and 19 service centers across the country.

New Exide battery

Sipradi trading has launched new e-rickshaw batteries for electric rickshaws in Nepal. The Exide batteries have a 15-month warranty and come with a special alloy system charge and consume less treated water. Customers can get new batteries by exchanging old ones.



Hafele Nepal

UHS Holding has launched a Hafele design studio which will showcase architectural hardware and glass fittings, furniture fittings and wardrobe solutions as well as digital security solutions, surfaces, lighting and appliances.

Padukone with Qatar

Qatar airways has launched a campaign with Indian actor Deepika Padukone which aims to redefine the premium experience of the flag carrier. Qatar airways flies to more than 150 countries worldwide.

Nepal's Transitional Justice and the West's recalibration

Global geopolitical changes and the rise of China means the West has gone cold on transitional justice and its humanitarian agenda

Transitional Justice was a term plied by Western governments and international human rights organisations on Nepal, and it was a good thing. After experimentation in South Africa, Colombia, Cambodia, Uganda and elsewhere, it was thought that a 'truth and reconciliation' process was required for Nepal to heal the wounds of the Maoist conflict.



OPINION

Kanak Mani Dixit

Nepal's state and society embraced transitional justice as the country came out of the conflict in 2006, translated it as सम्क्रमणकालिन न्याय, and made it their own. It was understood that for the country not to be entrapped in another war, society needed memorialisation, reparation, reconciliation, while promoting accountability for crimes that amounted to atrocities.

Victims of conflict of both sides came together to demand justice for the most heinous crimes of rape, abduction, torture, disappearance and extra-judicial killing. Human rights defenders also sought to overcome inertia among the political parties to ensure that the two commissions (on truth and reconciliation and on disappearances) started their work.

Transitional justice (TJ) would be a domestic project, but supported and scaffolded by outside actors. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague would not be able to look at heinous crimes committed by the security forces and rebels, because Nepal is not signatory to the Rome Convention. So, beyond the TJ formula internally, Nepal's rights defenders developed hope in the concept of 'universal jurisdiction'.

Sabotage and subterfuge

The perpetrators in the security forces were not able to speak up after the People's Movement of 2006 and Nepal's transformation into a republic, so the key saboteurs of the TJ process have been the Maoist bosses Pushpa Kamal Dahal (present prime minister) and Baburam Bhattarai. While it is Dahal who is most in the news, former prime minister Bhattarai, was the principal ideologue of the 'people's war' and headed the 'people's government' which conducted the gravest abuse.

As individuals who instigated youngsters to pick up arms against parliamentary democracy in 1996, the Maoists came out of the conflict a decade later when they were at the cusp of defeat. They signed the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) that specified the 'management of arms and armies' as well as a TJ process.

The CPA included a commitment to transitional justice, which has been pending all these years due to prevarication by the Maoists and absence of diligence by the other political forces, and so the peace process is as yet incomplete with TJ in suspended animation. Dahal and Bhattarai mainly did not have the courage to jeopardise their place as top dogs of Nepali politics by ensuring that the commanders and cadre accused of atrocities were held accountable, in a process

where accused perpetrators from the army and police would also be prosecuted.

The difference between the two streams of perpetrators is only that the Maoists are today on top of the political heap, destabilising Nepal's democracy and its future, while the army and police personnel are mostly retired without agency.

To this day, the Maoist supremo duo desperately want everyone to accept the 'forgive and forget' formula, even though they have not shown any contrition themselves. The TJ procedure has also been blocked because of the top-level camaraderie that developed between the Maoist leaders and those of the CPN (UML) and Nepali Congress (NC). Youthful entrants into the political arena during last year's elections, including the RSP of Rabi Lamichhane, have thus far shown no appetite for understanding and implementing transitional justice.

There is not much to be expected of New Delhi when it comes to the TJ agenda, which the Indian authorities can and will use only as a tool for their own presumed diplomatic ends. And there is not even the expectation that the Beijing will speak up on human rights in Nepal or elsewhere.

Western societies have enough skeletons in their own closets, from domestic mass-killings to atrocities from Vietnam to Iraq to Afghanistan, but they deserve due credit for promoting TJ in post-conflict societies. Which is why it is incongruous for them to back away from watchdogging the process in Nepal, one of the few countries where a proper process has a chance of success due to the steadfastness of the conflict victims community.

As the Western states and entities directly and indirectly cosy up to the Maoists with an eye to geopolitical convenience, this abandonment of Nepal's victims and polity must be challenged. Why would the American and European governments and human rights organisations forget the use of child soldiers by the Maoists, which is a war crime? The issue was firmly raised when Special Rapporteur Radhika Coomaraswamy produced a former child soldier, a young woman from Chitwan, at the UN Security Council chamber for the

Council's 6341st meeting on 17 June 2010.

Why would the Western powers and the United Nations system ignore the detailed dossier titled the Nepal Conflict Report, published by UN-OHCHR in October 2012 that contains details of war crimes and crimes against humanity conducted by both government forces and the Maoists?

Western embassies and entities in Kathmandu do not seem perturbed by the amendment bill introduced last year by then law minister Govinda Sharma Koirala ('Bandi'), Dahal's anointed oarsman to get him across the TJ shoals. The document Bandi presented before Parliament was clearly designed to give a clean chit to the Maoists and state-side perpetrators of conflict era atrocities, for example by distinguishing between 'murder' and 'extreme murder' so as to get all perpetrators off the hook through a sham process.

The plan of the current government is to fast-track the bill as designed, using the brute majority it commands with NC support, and then to tell the Western world that TJ in Nepal has been taken to its 'logical conclusion'.

TJ is now a living and continuous reality of Nepali society, and even as some human rights defenders have waffled after reading the signal from the Western 'donors', the victims have by and large stayed firm. Indeed, the uniqueness of the TJ process of Nepal has been that the victims of both state and rebels came together, in particular under the aegis of the Conflict Victims' Common Platform, which produced a landmark transitional justice 'charter' in order to conclude the process with justice and practicality.

Even as the Maoist leadership have tried their utmost to divide the victim community by for example railroading the 'People's War Day' as a national holiday on 13 February, there are enough victims of both sides that remain united. But theirs will be an increasingly tough fight to remain relevant, given the political consolidation of Dahal as reflected in his latest collaboration with Sher Bahadur Deuba to foist a जनयुद्ध दिवस by a party that has such slim representation in Parliament.

The fact that the Maoists have no regrets about ten years of horrific

violence and do not care for TJ was starkly visible in the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision of 4 March. All that the division bench of Ishwar Prasad Khatiwada and Hari Phuyal did was to order the court administration to admit the case placed by Gyanendra Aran and 19 others to hold Pushpa Kamal Dahal accountable for a speech where he said he would take responsibility for 5,000 of the 17,000 who were killed during the decade of conflict.

The moment the Supreme Court order was handed down, erstwhile Maoist factions went berserk, challenging the court and threatening the victims. The directive was all that took for nine Maoists sub-groups to come together and, in the presence of the sitting prime minister, threaten further bloodshed and mayhem.

These included Netra Bikram Chand, who suggested that the 'instigators' of the court case should/ would have been killed during the conflict years. PM Dahal and all the others chimed in, blaming the court decision on 'imperialist conspiracies', 'Western design' and 'revisionist agenda'.

Because Dahal had command responsibility in the Maoist party, and because his various public statements have conceded his directives for extra-judicial killings, including 'elimination without torture', in the eyes of the Nepali public there is every reason to delve judiciously into the matter of his culpability.

A faux TJ

The Western powers and the non-profit human rights organisations based in the West were the ones who promoted, supported and funded TJ in Nepal. India, as the neighbour that looms over Nepal's day-to-day politics, mostly stayed away from TJ except once when it used it as a threat against Pushpa Kamal Dahal at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in 2015, asking for the "prosecution of those responsible for violent insurgency".

The 'original sin' of many Western diplomats, 'peace consultants' and activists has been to believe that Maoist insurrection was justified because of the extreme structural and historical injustices in Nepali society. But the reality, was that the Maoist raised arms in 1996

against an incipient parliamentary democracy.

Western re-calibration on Nepal after backing and supporting the TJ process to the hilt seems explained by two factors. Firstly, a diversion of funds from INGOs worldwide due to the Syrian refugee crisis and the Ukraine war. 'TJ fatigue' among European diplomats in particular, who are in a rush to have it dusted and delivered during their respective assignments, has meant that Nepal is used as a place of experimentation.

Much more importantly, it is the spectacular economic and geo-strategic rise of China as a world power that has the West led by the United States reassessing their engagement in numerous fronts.

When it comes to Nepal, the Americans seem to have decided to live with Dahal regardless of their earlier distaste, much as they have with Narendra Modi of India who earlier could not even get an American visa. The US allowed Dahal to visit the US on an exceptional basis on March 2019 for the treatment of his ailing spouse, but it is clear that all hurdles will be lifted in future.

The Prime Minister has been invited to participate in the second 'Summit for Democracy' to be hosted by President Joe Biden in 29-30 March, even though it is expected to be a virtual conclave.

Fearful of 'losing Nepal' to Beijing, and given that New Delhi has made it possible for Dahal to remain in Nepali politics, the US has decided to backpedal on TJ. On the Nepali side, Dahal and cohort are open to exploit American nervousness while fully open to Chinese overtures. Beijing has also ratcheted up its involvement after decades of benign indulgence.

Under the circumstances, the West led by the Americans has begun to look at Nepal through the global geopolitical lens, even though the head of USAID Samantha Power responding to a query by this writer during a 'town hall meeting' in Patan on 8 February insisted that US development assistance given to Nepal was guided by the intention to help the Nepali people rather than the result of geopolitical calculation.

Meanwhile, West-based human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that were so enthusiastic on TJ seem to be grudging in their response to negative developments, and the UN Office of the Human Rights Commissioner has also been half-hearted.

Nepal has taken TJ further than most post-conflict societies, but सम्क्रमणकालिन न्याय is now a homegrown process and it will proceed with or without the West. Nepali society now has to proceed on its own pace for its own purposes, and the Supreme Court decision to allow a case to be brought on a claim made regarding conflict era killings against Dahal as sitting prime minister is proof that whether the outside powers recognise it or not, Nepal marches to its own drummer. 🇳🇵



SUBHAS RAI



nepalitimes.com

A longer version of this article will be online on Weekend Longread.



THE RED PANDA HOUSE

New building in Taplejung is not just a training centre, but a base camp for Kanchenjunga trekkers

■ Maheshwar Acharya

While Dutch conservationist and architect Anne Feenstra was giving a presentation ten years ago at a World Wildlife Fund (WWF) event in Kathmandu, Ang Phuri Sherpa was fascinated.

This was a whole new way to design modern buildings in Nepal's mountains that respected heritage, conformed to the climate, and conserved energy using locally available raw material.

Sherpa was working for WWF at the time, but when he became Country Director

for the Red Panda Network (RPN) he remembered the presentation from all those years ago, and approached Feenstra's Sustainable Mountain Architecture (SMA) to help design a new resource centre in Taplejung.

RPN has been working in Kanchenjunga Conservation Area in eastern Nepal to protect the endangered red panda, and its researcher Sonam Tashi Lama in 2022 won the Whitley Award for his work.

Feenstra and his Nepali colleague Sapana Shakya at SMA designed the Rs20 million two-storied building at Deurali near

Taplejung airport which serves to provide information about the red panda and the need to protect its habitat.

The tastefully designed and functional multi-purpose resource centre is also supposed to pay for its own upkeep by offering accommodation and dining to trekkers, researchers, students and other visitors.

Since it is located on the route to Pathibhara, it could also be a comfortable stopover for pilgrims. And all guests will also automatically learn about the need to preserve the red panda habitat.

Known as हल्ला in Nepali, the red panda

is critically endangered and lives on the canopy of broadleaf in mixed temperate forests from western Nepal to Sichuan. The mammal is not related to the giant panda, and is not a bear but is closer to raccoons and squirrels.

There are now less than 10,000 wild red pandas, with 800 in zoos around the world. In Nepal, there are about 1,000 of the animals living in bamboo and rhododendron forests in 24 of the country's mountain districts, mostly in eastern Nepal.

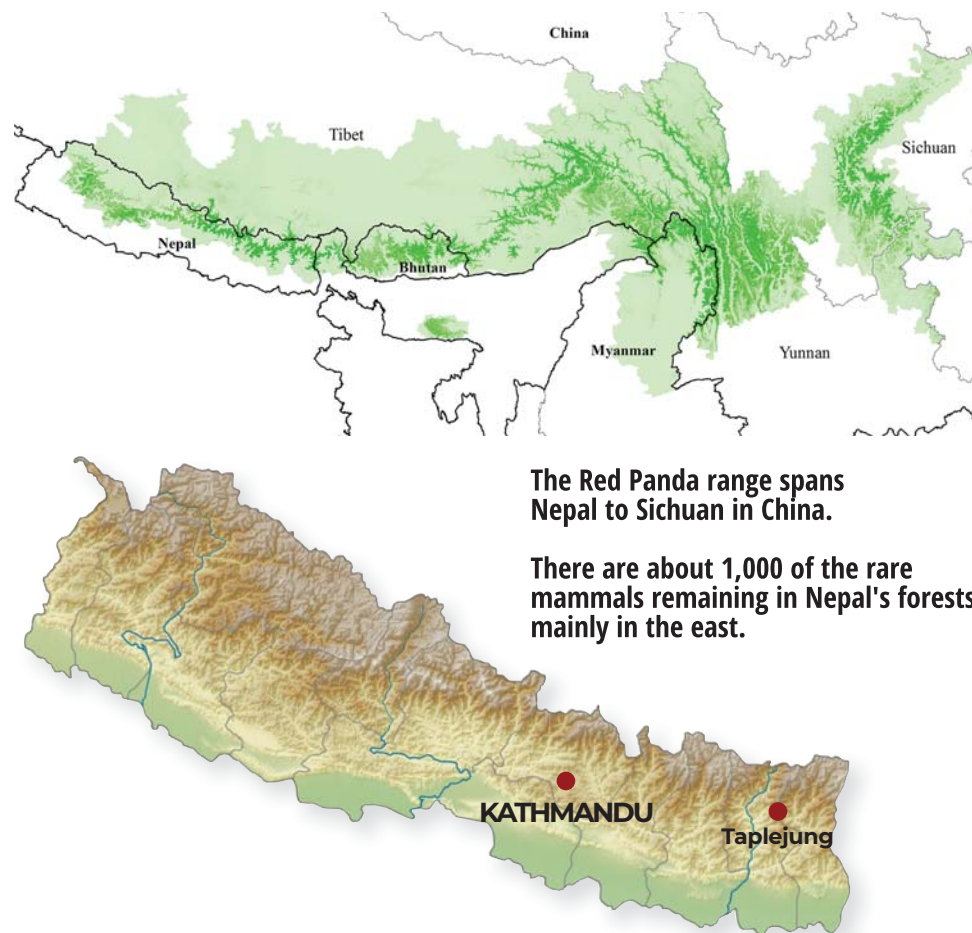
But their population is in decline because of poaching and habitat destruction. Despite not having any medicinal, cultural,



PANDA MONIUM:
The Red Panda Research Centre is located on a ridge top near Taplejung (left). Architectural renditions of the interior of the structure which has been designed with local materials and to also serve as a visitor centre and a lodge to generate income.



ALL PHOTOS: SUSTAINABLE MOUNTAIN ARCHITECTURE



or religious value, red pandas are being poached for their pelt.

Anne Feenstra has designed more than 50 similar sustainable buildings in mountain regions across the world in the past three decades, including a structure in an Afghan national park that is home to snow leopards.

“As a student of architecture, I have always been a proponent of climate-friendly construction,” explains Feenstra. “When rainfall, the sun, and other topographical and environmental elements are not taken into account, a building will not be sustainable.”

Indeed, Feenstra explains, every mountain region is different, and requires a specific building approach from the type of roof, windows and height of the ceiling based on local climate and available local materials.

The Red Panda Centre in Taplejung sits on a forested ridge 2,600m in Deurali near Taplejung. The wood-and-stone structure is conceptually modelled on a mountain lodge, is built to withstand heavy winter snowfall, and is earthquake resistant. The floor is made of local stone, while the second floor is timber. The roof is up-cycled tin coated in tar.

Feenstra and Shakya studied indigenous building materials and construction

techniques which are disappearing because of cement and concrete.

“When we use indigenous resources, we must always pay the utmost attention to native skills and materials,” says Shakya, who helped design new school buildings in Makwanpur and other districts after the 2015 earthquake.

“It is the combination of local skill and resources that makes any building stronger,” she says.

For Ang Phuri Sherpa of Red Panda Network, the building is exactly what he had hoped for. He says the use of cement for construction would have been costlier and

less climate friendly.

“The reduction of our carbon footprint and the use of local skill and resources were our primary objectives in the construction of this resource centre,” says Sherpa.

The research centre also serves as a place where knowledge about water harvesting, smokeless fuel-efficient use of firewood, and other techniques will be shared with local people who are suffering a scarcity of water in the dry season. As the number of trekkers to the Kanchenjunga region grows, villagers will also be given practical knowledge about running homesteads and promoting ecotourism. 🇳🇵

EVENTS



NIFF
Good news for film geeks, the Nepal International Film Festival is back. Participants can chose screenings of films from over 35 countries and interactive workshops. Book tickets now.
16-20 March, QFX Cinemas

Rhododendron hike
Sping is upon us. Go on a rhododendron hike via a six-hour Gupteshwor temple route.
11 March, Rs700, 9851014616/9841178536

PhotoKTM
Head over to photo.circle's bi-annual festival displaying visual works with a focus on co-existence and nature.
Till 31 March, 11am-7pm, Lalitpur

Ladies night
Ladies, enjoy a night out with your girlfriends at Pauline's Rooftop and get a free cocktail every hour.
Thursdays, Lazimpat (01) 4002711



Labim Bazaar
Shop local at the Saturday Labim Bazaar. Buy baked goods, meals, handicrafts and clothes from 80 vendors.
Saturdays, Lalitpur, 9861119954

DINING



Dokdo Sarang
A variety of Korean dishes like Tteok-bokki, Gimbap and Bibimbap or even the full set, all for your picking.
Kupondole Heights, 9803472187

MUSIC

Noise Trepanation
A collaborative effort of artists showcasing variety of contemporary music and sonic art at Beers N' Cheers in Jhamsikhel.
11 March, 5pm onwards, Rs300-500



Music for Türkiye-Syria
'Samjhana: Songs for the Inner Lovers', a concert by Grammy-nominee Manose in aid of Türkiye-Syria Earthquake at Moksh in Jhamsikhel. Read more *page 12*.
11 March, 7PM, Rs2,000 (limited), 9841389652

Osho Jain
Head over for the first performance by Osho Jain festuring Surakshya Malla.
10 March, 7pm onwards, Privé Nepal, Soaltee



Music room
Sign up to learn western and eastern music from the best music instructors in town at the music room.
9818856982

Sundowner
Might want to check out a fun performance by DJ Quinn this weekend.
Saturdays, 3pm-7pms, Hyatt Place, Soalteemodd



Momotarou Restaurant
Enjoy a Japanese meal at Momotarou restaurant. Don't miss out on the soft tofu, pork cutlets and don varieties and the mouthwatering bento box.
Sanepa Chowk, Lalitpur (01) 5537385

Honacha
Originally established to feed hungry farmers, this family owned restaurant now welcomes anyone craving authentic Newa cuisine.
Mangal Bazar

GETAWAY



Lake View Resort
The resort's private huts, featuring hand crafted wooden furniture, local stone exterior and a private veranda, offer a great weekend escape.
Lake Side, Pokhara (061) 461477/463854

Bandipur Safari Lodge
Bandipur is famous for its rich cultural heritage but it is also home to a wide variety of wildlife. Go beyond the temples and explore the jungles with Bandipur Safari Lodge.
Bandipur, 9449597880, 08229-233001

Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur
A Newa-style boutique hotel that incorporates the rich art and architecture of the ancient city of Bhaktapur.
Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur, (01) 6611628

Jagatpur Lodge
Jagatpur Lodge's private tents will transport travellers to the heart of the grassland in the comfort of luxury amenities.
Jagatpur, Chitwan (01) 4221711



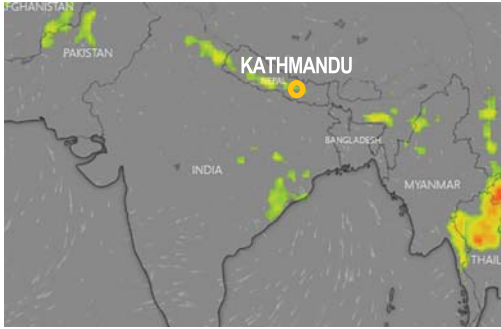
Mystic Mountain
Amid the forest of Nagarkot is a resort exquisitely built using ultra modern designs and world-class comfort.
Nagarkot, (01) 6200646

Pawan Sweets
Craving for some Indian? Head to Pawan Sweets. Try their dosas, naan, juju dhau and sweets. You'll leave wanting more.
Baneshwor, Kathmandu, 9813538897



Utpala Cafe
A monastery restaurant with healthy vegetarian options. Their scrumptious buffet lunch, use of fresh produce and mouth-watering baked goods makes Utpala one of the best eateries in Boudha.
Boudha, 9801052333

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
24° 10°	25° 11°	25° 11°	26° 12°	25° 11°

Blustery afternoons
A weak westerly system moved across Nepal this week, moisturising the parched foothills and plains. The lingering water vapour will rise in convection systems as the region heats up, bringing thunderstorm activity (*in yellow, left*) across the mountains, mainly in the afternoons over the weekend and into next week. It may be gusty towards evening, even if there is no precipitation. Higher elevations will get some snow flurries. The rain was not heavy enough to douse wildfires, so air quality may remain poor in Kathmandu and the valleys of central and eastern Nepal.

OUR PICK

Any reader of *Nepali Times* knows that an ass is never an unlikely hero – case on point is the 2022 Polish road drama *EO*. A spiritual update to Robert Bresson's 1966 film *Au Hasard Balthazar*, this film follows EO, a circus-born grey donkey with melancholic eyes, as he meets good and bad people on his life's path, experiences joy and pain, and endures the wheel of fortune randomly turn his luck into disaster and his despair into unexpected bliss – but not for one moment does EO lose his innocence. The world is a mysterious place when seen through a donkey's eyes (as you, dear reader, may be well-aware), and *EO* is a brilliant drama that will stubbornly refuse to leave you long after the credits roll. Stars Sandra Drzymalska, Lorenzo Zurzolo, Kościukiewicz, Isabelle Huppert; and, as EO, Ettore, Hola, Marietta, Mela, Rocco and Tako.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Bluesheep Journeys Pvt Ltd, Trekking and adventure company, is looking for:
Business Development Manager

- Requirements:**
- Marketing strategies knowledge
 - Perfect knowledge of trekking trails around Nepal
 - Researching new markets; knowledge of European market.
 - 5+ years' experience in the trekking industry
 - Masters' degree /5+ years' experience of finance knowledge
 - Age (30-40 yrs)
 - Excellent Spanish and fluent in English language both in written and verbal along with outstanding computer skills

Candidates can apply within 15 days from the publishing date with CV and cover letter at hr@bluesheep.com.np

Salaries and benefits will be as per company rules.

Note: Priority will be given to experienced Nepali citizen.

Bluesheep Journeys Pvt. Ltd
P.O. Box: 3124
Kathmandu, Nepal

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 चिठ्ठा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपर्ौं ।
- 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

Nepali students get a second helping

Municipalities topping up Rs15 per meal provided by the central government could lead to inequity in children's nutrition

■ **Marty Logan**

After the Nepal government announced it would provide Rs15 per meal for community schools to serve lunch (दिवा खाजा) to students, headmasters in Kathmandu took a stand.

“Rs15 is not sufficient, we demanded additional money. The municipality also realised that Rs15 was not enough,” says Dilli Prasad Sharma Khanal, principal at Vijaya Memorial Secondary School in Dillibazar.

Last year, Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) responded by topping up the Rs15 with another Rs10, and also said it would provide the full Rs25 to feed students in Grades 7 and 8 in its 89 community schools. The central government program provides meals up to Grade 6 only. The total cost to Kathmandu is Rs90 million in the current year's budget, says Rukmila Itani in the city's education office.

KMC joins Tokha and Budhanilkantha as local governments in Kathmandu Valley that have concluded that the central government's funding is insufficient to feed students a nutritious meal. While other local governments outside the valley have done the same, the move raises the question of equity for those students whose meals remain limited to Rs15, an amount roundly criticised as inadequate to cook a filling and nutritious meal.

According to a report in *Setopati*, Beg Bahadur Thapa, headmaster of Palanchoki Bhagwati Secondary School in Kavre, turned to local organisations after the school decided that Rs15 could not provide an adequate lunch. He collected enough to add Rs5 to each meal.

“Even with Rs20, it was not possible to provide a balanced lunch as per the instructions,” said Thapa. Other needed resources were also missing. “The school lacks classrooms, there is no space to manage the kitchen. The role of school helper is also varied.” In the end, the school bought meals prepared outside the school.

It is no surprise that some schools are 'topping up' their meal budgets. In 2022 the Nepal



MARTY LOGAN

government official leading the program told *Nepali Times* that funding was his greatest challenge. The bill for school meals was nearly \$70 million in 2020, the highest cost in the education budget after teachers' salaries.

“Each child is allotted only Rs15, this is the main challenge. This amount is very low—prices are increasing day by day and there are management costs. How can we survive?” said Centre for Education and Human Resources Development (CEHRD) Director Ganesh Poudel.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has been providing food for Nepal schools in various forms for 46 years, and has partnered with the Nepal Government as the latter has gradually assumed control of the programme in the last decade. From 2017 to 2020 the *diya khaja* budget almost quadrupled (from US\$20 million to nearly \$70 million), and external support fell from \$4.2 million to \$2.8 million in 2020, according to a WFP report.

In a 2022 interview WFP Representative and Country

Director Robert Kasca said participation of communities in school feeding will be essential as WFP transitions from being a provider of food to focusing on technical assistance, by 2024. “The most important thing to me is that we get complete buy-in from the local communities... they (local representatives) do have money, it’s not that they don’t have it. It’s how they allocate and spend it.”

Itani says that KMC decided to top up the government's meal budget to address malnutrition and a high drop-out rate in community schools. KMC has a system for checking the quality of the meals, and cleanliness, she adds, but with the programme barely six months old, data is scarce.

Early feedback is that attendance is up, but schools are grappling with a lack of resources such as kitchens, utensils and designated staff. Some are able to prepare meals in an existing kitchen or turn to mother groups for help while other schools buy from outside providers. And while

some schools are following the central government's menu, which calculates amounts of energy, fat, protein and essential vitamins so that meals deliver 30% of a child's daily nutrition needs, others do not.

At Harisiddhi Secondary School in Lalitpur, Principal Aasha Devi Maharjan says the municipality has pledged to top up the central government's Rs15 per meal, but has not done so to date. However, the school is now feeding students up to Grade 6 meals that cost more than Rs50 thanks to funding from the China Foundation for Rural Development.

The foundation's Smiling Children Feeding Programme started in March 2022 and research prior to the programme's launch found that many students of community schools come from families of daily wage earners, who often start work early. As a result, many children are given Rs10-20 in the morning to buy food instead of eating a cooked meal, says Mukti Marasini, Chairman of the Global Cooperation for Development

(GCD), an NGO working with the foundation.

The feeding program provides Rs57.3 per meal to 21 schools in Lalitpur and Kathmandu, including Rs7.3 to create and fund mother groups, which cook the midday meals. Schools combine the China Foundation money with the central government's allotment, Marasini adds during a visit to Harisiddhi school, and can even serve second helpings to extra-hungry kids.

Marasini says GCD worked with nutritionists to determine the amount needed to provide an adequate meal. "Rs15 won't even buy a cup of tea," he says about the government allotment.


Students get a different menu each day, such as egg with a bean-vegetable curry and *puri* on the day we visited. They also receive a fruit snack in the morning. Maharjan says that since they started serving the meals in August, far fewer students complain of illnesses or are absent.

"Once word got out about the school's meals more than 100 families approached us to enrol their children but we had to say no," she adds. "It was the middle of the year and we wouldn't have had the budget to feed an extra 100 students."

The central government worked with WFP to develop the Rs15 meal, but the amount is being revisited, says the UN agency. "We are working closely with our government counterparts to understand the details of how much the Rs15 actually buys, in particular in the context of recent inflation trends and in rural areas."

“Early indications do show that the transfer values should be reviewed as the situation has changed since these values were first determined in 2015. Ultimately we advocate for an equitable approach that ensures a nutritious meal,” added WFP.

Ganesh Poudel from CEHRD was unavailable for comment.

Thursday, 9 March was International School Meals Day. Worldwide, 388 million students, or 1 in 2 school children, received at least one meal or snack per day at school before the COVID-19 pandemic, in what WFP calls the world's "most extensive social safety net." 

Caring for her own and others



■ Shyam Kala Rai

This is the 24th instalment of Diaspora Diaries, a regular series in Nepali Times with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.

I grew up in a *lahure* household in Dharan and my parents were in the military abroad and were good providers. But life took a different track when I was married at 15, and sent off to my husband's village in Jhapa.

For someone raised in freedom and comfort, being a daughter-in-law in a conservative household was challenging. Wearing a *kurta* or speaking to neighbours was frowned upon. As a *buhari* daughter-in-law, I was kept out of any family decision-making.

My day would start at 3AM and I was busy throughout with non-stop household work. By 17, I had my first child, and later two more.

The family I was married to was well off in terms of property, but was consistently cash-strapped. It was a weird reality, we were poor and struggling to make ends meet while sitting on large tracts of land. I relied often on my maternal family for financial support.

I felt the real pain of being cash poor when my eldest daughter, a special needs child, passed away at a young age. This was the pre-mobile era and my mother-in-law was traveling in Pokhara. Not having the money to pay for her last rites, I left my daughters body in the verandah and ran to a shop to sell my jewelry. I will never forget this moment.

This must have inculcated in me a desire to work for money. But what work would I do in Nepal with no education? My expenses were rising as my other two children were growing up. The everyday struggle to earn enough to pay for basics was frustrating.

So I decided to try for overseas employment and managed to collect enough money with the help of my family, and by selling the remaining jewelry paid for a job in Israel as a caregiver. At that time, migration to Israel was not as well managed as it is now under the government program.

The manpower agencies facilitated the recruitment based on how much you paid them. I was probably one of the few migrants who did not cry at the airport. What I was doing was for my children's secure future, I did not have a choice but to be strong. I felt more comfortable leaving my children with my mother in Dharan.

As a *lahure* child, I had visited the UK but did not have much memory of it. So Israel as an adult was fascinating. Even little things like rotating the shower handle to get hot or cold water was new and amusing.

I was placed in a wonderful

A mother who raised her own (and her employer's) children now wants to open a Nepali restaurant in Turkey



family. The elderly lady I took care of was in her 80s, and kept reminding me how I was like a daughter she had never had. She had four sons. I found a guardian's love with her.

Compared to the household work I was doing back in Jhapa, the job in Israel actually felt easier because my *boju* was elderly and needed rest. My day started only at 7 and by 12, she would need a four hour nap, and by 7PM in the evening, she would call it a day. I had to cook only once every three days because the family had a system of freezing food.

Not only was the work relatively easy, I was getting paid up to \$1,200 a month. My Israeli *boju* used to tell me how I was her 15th caregiver, and the only one with whom she was able to develop a rapport and feel comfortable with.

The only downside was that I was home all the time and seldom went anywhere, and only hung out with two other Nepalis in the community. Tel Aviv was 90 minutes away and I did not feel like travelling even though I had family there. Other than finances, there was not much I picked up in Israel.

Boju often pleaded with me not to leave Israel until she died. I did not have a reason to go back, I was sending money home and I was happy in the family. I naturally got close to her and we had personal conversations. She knew her end was close, and would often express how she feared dying in pain and instead wanted to die peacefully in her sleep.

One morning, when *boju* did

A mother's sons

Proud Nepali parents for the first time visit sons working in UAE to support the family back home

■ Bishnumaya Bhusal

This is the 25th edition of Diaspora Diaries.

I am 70 years old, and finally got to travel to the UAE where two of my sons live. It was multiple firsts: the first time I left the country, the first time I got on a plane, and more importantly, it was the first time I saw what my sons, Krishna and Ram do in the UAE.

We struggled to raise our children amidst poverty and hardship to ensure they got a good education, which was not easy. From dawn to dusk my husband and I ensured they were well fed and educated, while taking care of the livestock and farm.

I did not have enough money to run a shop so I sold tidbits like chocolates, biscuits, cigarettes and *bidi* on a box by the wayside. Even this makeshift shop had its fair share of local customers in the village.

When Krishna, my eldest, finished Grade 12, he decided to go for foreign employment. Not many people had left our village for overseas work in those days, unlike now when every house has someone abroad.

We were worried about sending him away, but he was determined to go. The only consolation was that we had a family member in the UAE who had helped Krishna secure his job, and would be there in case he needed support. Even then, we all wept when he left home, not knowing what to expect.

He wrote us letters every month or so, and there was much relief when they arrived. My family read out those letters to me and they responded on my behalf. Krishna's letters always told us not to compromise on the education of his siblings, like he had to.

Ever since he went to the UAE 21 years ago, as the eldest son he had taken up the role of being the guardian of my children. Despite being young himself, he provided financial support for the family back in Nepal and ensured that his siblings had a good



education. Fortunately, my children did not squander this opportunity and have done well for themselves.

Even though Krishna sent us letters, it was only two years after he left that I first got to hear his voice. The shop with the phone was three hours away from our house, and I had to walk there to speak with him. The minute I heard his familiar voice, I choked and could not utter a single word.

It was overwhelming and it felt like my son's voice was coming from a vacuum. The following year, he came home to visit for the first time. Since then, his trips have become more frequent.

But this time, it was my turn to visit him in the UAE. My husband and I finally got to see where two of our sons worked. My youngest son, Govinda, who is now in Nepal, is also a UAE returnee who after spending a

few months there, quickly realised that if he was to progress like his brothers have in the UAE, he should first complete his studies so he returned mid-contract.

I had seen the UAE through pictures and videos my sons showed me. But experiencing the place myself was completely different. The buildings are really tall, and the roads are wide. Everything is systematic.

I especially liked how they treated my husband and me with respect in public places. We were not expected to wait in lines, for example. In Nepal, elderly people do not receive the same kind of respect.

Despite being busy, our sons pampered us in the UAE for an entire month and showed us around. Even then, Krishna complained that he did not manage to take us to a couple of places he had planned because of time. I especially liked the tall aquarium and the botanical garden.

We met many other Nepalis, I have lost count how many. There were at least a dozen from our own village who made it a point to come and see us. The person who drove us around was also from Arghakhanchi.

Many of the Nepalis we met, reminded us just how lucky we were to be in the UAE. There are many Nepalis there, but not all parents have the luxury to visit their children.

The Nepalis we met showered us with love and attention. One girl, in particular, who had lost her mother a few months back, cried saying we reminded her of her parents, and that she missed them terribly. As we consoled her and gave her our blessings, we too could not stop our own tears.

There were many moments like this when we felt emotional in the UAE. After all, it is a country in which my sons spent significant periods of their lives.

One such moment was visiting Krishna's office, a travel company that he

recently started in the UAE. At the office, they welcomed us with bouquets and sacred *khada* scarfs. It is his perseverance that has brought him so far.

He started small as an office boy 21 years ago and worked his way up, supporting his parents and siblings on his back as he rose. We could not have been prouder. What more can a mother ask?

The month in the UAE went by quickly and I have come back bearing gifts for my grandchildren. I tell them we will visit my sons again “बाँच्यो भने” (if we are still alive).

Because we were not used to travelling, Ram had come to Nepal to escort us to the UAE, and Krishna returned with us to Kathmandu. He will spend a few weeks with us, and this will make the separation somewhat easier.

I have six children and ten grandchildren but such is life that other than during festival times, we do not get to see everyone. As they say in Nepal, “छोरीहरु अर्काको घर जाने जात, छोराहरु कमाउन जाने जात” (the daughters get married and move out, the sons get jobs and move out).

Because of my sons, we now live in a *pakki* house in Butwal, very different from our thatch-roof home in the village which had *खर्को* *छानो*, and later a tin roof.

Our home in the village is now empty. We go there once a year during festivals, when the abandoned house comes to life temporarily as we fill it with laughter, *भैलो* music and singing.

Krishna refuses to let me sell the village house even though it is locked up most of the year. He does not want to give up the clan home where he was born and raised. There is too much emotional attachment. 🇳🇵



nepalitimes.com

Translated from an interview with the author.
More pictures online.



OLD AND YOUNG: My Israeli *boju* (above) who was like family for 5 years, and my employer's child in Turkey (below).



not ask me for water at 7 as she usually did, I knew something was wrong. She was quiet and non-responsive. By the time we called the ambulance and her family, she had passed, peacefully, just like she had wanted.

I mourned the loss of a guardian, and not just as an employee. Such is the work of a caregiver. The seniors die. Babies grow up. But both are people in such vulnerable ages that it is very easy to get personally attached to them.

Having spent more than five years with *boju* in Israel, I did not know what was next. I had crossed the period when I could legally change jobs and I did not want to return home as I had to take care of my children.

So in 2011, I did what someone in my position without a choice does. I carried on as an undocumented worker, knowing the risks. I found a good family. But Israeli authorities soon found out that I was breaking the rules, and came to the house knocking loudly at the door when my employers were away.

Hiding or escaping was not an option as it felt like they were going to break down the door. They helped me pack and took me to a detention centre. Ten days later, I was escorted by them right up to the plane and sent home.

While I was in detention, my *boju's* grandson came to see me. He told authorities that I was like family and he would send me home in dignity, but that he didn't want my last memory in Israel to be bitter. The authorities refused, but treated me well. I would be banned from Israel, and if I visit again it can only be as a tourist.

Back in Nepal, it was impossible for me to stay idle. I had got too used to earning money. I thought of Korea next

and started studying for the exam. But given the uncertainty, I came to Turkey instead through a manpower agency. I had to pay Rs400,000 for the job which only paid €350 a month. This was much lower than what I was earning in Israel, but what choice did I have? Over the years, my salary has increased and I now make €1,200 a month, taking care of two babies.

Since 2017, Turkey has seen more Nepalis, and we have organised ourselves better. I am now Vice President of the NRNA Turkey and during times of crisis like the recent earthquake, we rally together to support those affected.

We provided support to Nepali students, although they were not injured their hostels were deemed unsafe to live in and were kept in shelters. We sent them as well as other Turkish people affected by the earthquake some financial support. We got contributions from all over the world including from my friend, a Nepali caregiver I met and became close with in Israel, who is now in the US.

My daughter became a registered nurse in Australia a few months back. I am proud of her and also of myself because the odds were really stacked against us. I, too, was a class topper back in Dharan, but life had different plans for me. I paid for my daughter's expenses growing up, including her studies in Australia. I brought my son to Turkey as he needed more parental guidance. I hope my story reminds other women how much we are capable of, if we trust ourselves.

The adversaries I have faced as a woman and a mother in Nepal's patriarchal society is by no means unique. If I had not taken a few bold decisions for the well-being of my children or rebelled against societal expectations, our

reality probably would have been different.

I have been lucky with the employers I have been placed with both in Turkey and Israel. Not all fellow Nepalis in other parts of the world are as fortunate. Even then, being a foreigner always makes you a second class citizen, with many rights inaccessible and more importantly, you are under the control of the employer with whom your immigration status is tied.

I found out that in Turkey you can apply for citizenship after working for five years. I now hold a Turkish passport, perhaps the first Nepali caregiver who has transitioned here. I went that route because a documentation status, can free you from being under another person's control and change your reality, and your sense of freedom and control.

My dream is to eventually open a Nepali restaurant in Turkey, primarily targeting Nepali caregivers but also to promote Nepali food among locals. I remember when I first came to Turkey, my employers never had rice. There was chicken, bread, vegetables and cheese, but no *dal bhat*. After a few weeks, I asked her if we could have rice and she was taken by surprise because she had been feeding me well, what her family ate. For my employer, rice was both unhealthy and relatively more expensive. But she did some online research and realised Nepalis need *dal bhat* and started providing it.

For Nepalis missing *dal bhat* in Turkey like I did, the restaurant that I want to start will hopefully bring home a little closer. 🇳🇵

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Kind of music for kindness

Grammy-nominee Manose concert in Kathmandu in aid of Türkiye-Syria Earthquake

Ashish Dhakal

Manose Newa was just eight, growing up in Kathmandu, when a haunting, mystical sound came through the night and stirred his soul. As he grew up, he searched for that sound, and only the sound of air being blown through a hole in a bamboo pipe came close to what he heard that night.

It was not the same sound, but close enough. And that is what today has made musician Manose synonymous with the flute.

“The flute is a device for connection,” says Manose, “with it one can move souls, hearts, and create beauty.”

At 46, he is now a world-renowned flute virtuoso and has played with Cadenza Collective, 1974 AD, Ani Choying and his own band, Sukarma. In 2019 he also became the first Nepali to be nominated for a Grammy for his contribution to musician Deva Premal’s album, *Deva*, in the Best New Age Album category.

Manose is preparing for a concert in aid of survivors of the Türkiye-Syria Earthquake. The ‘Samjhana: Songs for the Inner Lovers’ concert will be held 11 March at Moksh in Jhamsikhel.

“Music is instantaneous,” he snaps his fingers to recreate that lightning-speed contact between musician and audience in real time. Flute sound brings him close to the creator, spiritually and literally.

“The distance between the divine and ourselves closes. I want



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to transfer this inspiration to my audience,” he adds.

Music came naturally to Manose from a young age as he scoured Boudha and Pashupati in search of that sound. In 1998 at age of 20, he left Nepal for a tour with the Nepali *tabla* player, Homnath Upadhyaya. He has performed in over 25 countries since, and says he is still searching for that magical sound he heard at night when he was eight. It is that quest that keeps him going.

“The longing itself is beautiful,” he smiles, “and it keeps the journey alive, gives me purpose. It makes me curious and motivates me.”

Manose is back in Nepal, playing with 1974AD and is working on projects that had been on hold previously, including an album with a pianist from Slovenia.

“After Covid, I felt like I needed to be more present in Nepal,” he says. Manose recently performed in Australia and New Zealand with 1974AD, with Australian ambassador to Nepal Felicity Volk present in one of them.

“We wanted to send a message of unity to the community there, to encourage them to give back to Nepal,” he adds. The response from the diaspora was heart-warming.

“So many do want to return, but the system ...” he trails off, shaking his head.

It is a different experience to play for a Nepali audience than international listeners. Playing at a flute festival in California is an invitation to a global audience to interact with the music and culture of Nepal.

To Nepalis, on the other hand,

the बाँसुरी becomes a means to connect and access its own ancient culture. “It is not whether one is better than the other,” he adds, “they are just different.”

“We have so much to offer to the world,” Manose says. “There is a lot of materialism coming from the west, and we, in turn, could present our culture, our temples, our music, history and rituals to counter that. This is our treasure.”

The concert ‘Samjhana’ is also an offering. Manose recalls running into a friend of a friend from Türkiye recently at Moksh after the deadly earthquake on 6 February.

“I said I was very sorry for what was happening to their country and that I wished there was something I could do,” he says. “They had tears in their eyes as they thanked me.”

Manose was not in Nepal when the 2015 Gorkha earthquake of the same magnitude rocked the country. “Still, I felt the tremors, it was a traumatic experience for all Nepalis, whether here or abroad. And now to see the same is happening elsewhere in the world ... what would happen if the disaster had struck here instead of there,” he says.

The concert is not so much about raising money, but an offering of kindness. Manose will be singing, playing his flute, joined also by the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory choir.

“It will be a gathering of friends, loved ones and music for a good cause,” he says. “As a community we must practice being kind to each other, not turn away when someone else is in need. When you do things from a place of good intention, it comes back to you ten-folds.” 🇳🇵

‘Samjhana: Songs for the Inner Lovers’
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