



SUMAN NEPALI

First, the good news

■ Ramesh Kumar

First the good news: Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) says Nepal's foreign exchange reserves have increased from \$9.54 billion in June 2022 to \$10.5 billion in February 2023.

This is enough to pay for 9 months and 12 days of imports.

This is a result of a spike in remittances and a ban on the import of luxury items after reserves fell last year.

The NRB's *Current Macroeconomic and Financial Situation Report of Nepal* last week noted that imports went down by almost 20% during the first seven months of the current fiscal year. Remittance inflow is still Nepal's economic lifeline and it increased by 16.4% in the past seven months compared to the same period last year as foreign employment permits increased by 57%.

Nepal's balance of payments has also reached a surplus of Rs132 billion, compared to a loss of about Rs274 billion last year, which could

show that the economy is on the mend.

But this is the only silver lining as dark clouds gather on the global economy with bank collapses in US spreading to Europe, and within Nepal there is a looming threat of mass defaults and depositors cheated by micro-finance lenders and cooperatives (pictured, above).

The bad news is that government revenue has plummeted, going down by almost 15% till February as compared to the previous fiscal year. Paradoxically, political uncertainty has meant that the government has been unable to spend much of its allocated development budget.

Revenue has gone down to Rs622 billion and the government incurred a shortfall of Rs150 billion in expenditure this fiscal year. This is in sharp contrast to a consistent increase in government revenue over the past decades.

High interest rates have discouraged investment, real estate transactions are half of last year, and

the stock market is in a slump. Decreased imports have had a knock-on effect on economic activity in general.

"The demand for goods and services has decreased because of high interest rates, bringing businesses to a standstill," says Shekhar Golchha of the Federation of Nepal Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI). Borrowings have declined, and borrowers are unable to pay back. Bank loans to the private sector have only increased by 3.2% this year as compared to a 12.3% increase last fiscal year.

Golchha says a government stimulus package is required to save businesses from recession.

"We need policies to reduce interest rates and facilitate credit," says Golchha.

Preoccupied with coalition politics, the government is distracted. And the central bank says fears of a recession are exaggerated.

"Our economy was in a precarious position due

to the depletion of foreign reserves last year," explains Gunakar Bhatta of NRB. "But economic activity is increasing and the economy is on the mend."

Bhatta argues that monetary expansion and credit extension will only lead to an increase in imports, which will send Nepal's economy back to square one.

Economist Sujeev Shakya also dispels fears of a crisis. He says the private sector is blaming the government for its own business mismanagement.

"Some businesses are facing problems, but to say that the economy has gone into recession is to spread panic," Shakya notes.

Former Finance Secretary Rameshore Khanal agrees, saying businessmen may be in trouble because of bad investment decisions in real estate and shares, and subsequently being unable to sell those assets.

He cautions: "The NRB should not risk being generous with lending just to get businesses out of trouble. Doing so will increase imports and push inflation up."

WHOSE COUNTRY IS IT ANYWAY?
EDITORIAL
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Whose country is it anyway?

President Ram Chandra Paudel. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Speaker of the House Dev Raj Ghimire. Army Chief Prabhu Ram Sharma and Police Chief Dhiraj Pratap Singh. Acting Chief Justice Hari Krishna Karki. Nepal Rastra Bank Governor Maha Prasad Adhikari.

The most powerful people in Nepal today are all men, and all from dominant caste groups.

Top leaders of all major political parties are also all men: Dahal, K P Oli, Sher Bahadur Deuba, Baburam Bhattarai, Madhav Nepal, Rabi Lamichhane, Rajendra Lingden, Mahanta Thakur, Upendra Yadav.

The 2015 Constitution has strict quota

provisions for the representation of women, Indigenous people and Dalits in Nepal's legislature, government and bureaucracy.

Prithvi Nayaran Shah called Nepal a 'garden of diverse ethnicities and castes' but this is reflected nowhere in the corridors of power today.

To be sure, affirmative action and Constitutional provisions for inclusion mean better representation than before of marginalised groups in all sectors.

The 2015 Constitution mandated that 33% of MPs had to be women. In the 2017 elections, women were elected to every local unit as either a mayor or deputy mayor, or both. The Constitution also has a quota for Dalit representation in every ward.

True, many women and minorities tended to be nominal nominations to ceremonial posts just to fulfil quota requirements.

But electoral alliances between political parties with diametrically opposing views in the 2022 elections to all three levels of government meant women and minorities did not even get those token positions.

There is also pushback from dominant caste groups against reservation, arguing that it goes against meritocracy and that more qualified individuals miss out on opportunities to rise up the ranks.

But for a country where the scale of social justice is so skewed, historically-excluded groups need to be given a chance to catch up through proportional representation. A quota system gives a much-needed push for the underserved to at least be more visible, even if they do not immediately become decision-makers.

Yet, reservation laws can be abused. Former president Bidya Devi Bhandari was openly doing the bidding of UML Chair Oli when he was prime minister. There are many examples of women deputy mayors who are

not equipped to fully perform required roles.

Which is why it is crucial that women, Indigenous people, Dalits and other minorities are empowered to function. This can be made to happen through education, training, financial independence and exposure.

The very first step will be to recognise just how lopsided the whole process is. As the largest party in Parliament, the Nepali Congress (NC) and the third largest Maoist Centre gave tickets for just one woman candidate each in direct elections last year. In Karnali and Sudurpaschim Provincial Assemblies there is not a single woman elected through direct ballot.

Even though women have 20% of jobs in

the bureaucracy, they have only 4% of the topmost positions. Brahmins make up only 12.7% of Nepal's population, but hold 70% of higher jobs in civil service.

Janjatis are 32% of the population but have less than 2% of senior positions. Dalits make up 15%, but are even less represented, with only 0.7% of special and gazetted jobs.

To solve any problem, we have to first recognise there is a problem. In Nepal, under-representation of the historically-excluded is a problem.

Given platforms, women have generally proven to be better at governance. Jumla and Hupsekot of Nawalparasi

were two municipalities in which women were voted both chair and deputy in the 2017 local election. They helped improve education, agriculture, conservation, and had effective Covid-19 response in their localities.

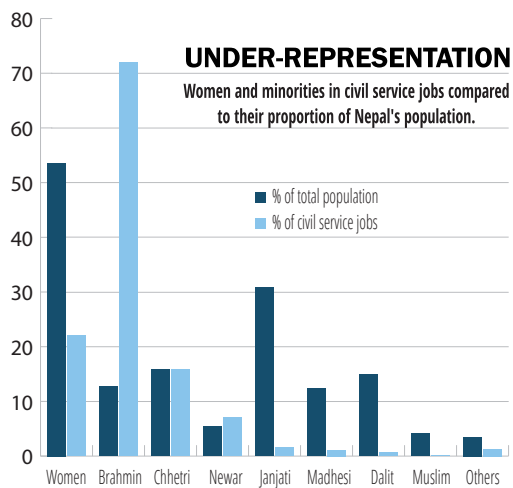
Nepal's female ambassadors have been exemplary in dealing with migrant issues, tourism promotion and economic diplomacy.

Kulman Ghising, Sanduk Ruit and Mahabir Pun are lauded by Nepalis as national heroes. All three belong to Indigenous groups — proof that inclusion is not just morally right, but that there is strength in diversity.

Eventually, we have to move beyond quota-enforced inclusion to one that includes and engages all groups by default. Till then, because some are more equal than others, the excluded need that extra weightage.

The election for Vice President is slated for Friday 17 March. Two of the three candidates are women: Asta Laxmi Shakya of the UML and Mamta Jha of CK Raut's Janmat Party. But Ram Sahay Yadav of Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP) is the heavy favourite to win, even though the Constitution recommends that the vice president should be female if the president is male. Need we say more?

Sonia Awale



The most powerful individuals in Nepal are all 'high' caste men

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

War and peace

Much of 2003 was marked by a ceasefire between the Maoists and the State, and there was finally hope for peace. But the war dragged on for another three years costing the lives of thousands of more Nepalis.

During the 2003 ceasefire, the band Nepathya was on a peace concert tour. Its lead singer is featured in this issue on page 12.

Excerpts of the editorial published 20 years ago this week in issue #136, 14-20 March 2003:

The most bizarre aspect of the present period of national deadlock is that our political forces are fighting over the spoils of peace even before peace returns. A ceasefire in any conflict is the most delicate time, where words have to be weighed before being uttered, actions thought through for their impact. A truce is a tight-rope act. And yet, our politicians are doing aerobics on the high wire with wild and woolly pronouncements.

There has never been a time in Nepali history when the Nepali people had so little trust in the individuals and institutions who purport to rule over them. They have lost what little assurance they had on national-level politicians,



they don't trust the Panchayat throwbacks calling the shots now, they don't trust the Maoists and their brutal methods, they don't trust the Kathmandu elite with its arrogance and pomposity, they fear the security forces almost more than they fear the rebels. They have questions about the king's motives, but are willing to go along with him.

When a group of musicians decided to do a peace roadshow this month, the organisers were surprised by the unexpectedly large turnout. People didn't need to be bused in as they are in political rallies, this was no rent-a-crowd. The 200,000+ mostly-young Nepali men and women who attended the concerts in Dharan, Hetuada, Butwal, Mahendranagar, Dang and Kathmandu were spontaneously and openly telling the politicians in Kathmandu what they want. They want them to stop trying to wreck this chance for peace. The concert in Tulsipur, in the heartland of the insurgency, was the most heavily attended with upwards of 50,000 people from the outlying villages of Dang, Salyan and Rolpa. This was a musical referendum for peace.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



NEPATHYA LIVE IN AUSTRALIA

As part of its Music for Humanity tour, the Nepathya band spent a month in Australia with back-to-back concerts in Darwin, Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Perth, Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart. Last month, a sold-out show in Sydney was attended by 6,000 people. Visit our YouTube channel to watch the clips from one of the performances filmed by Arpan Sharma and read the profile on Nepathya's lead vocalist Amrit Gurung on page 12.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

This is a very comprehensive article ('Nepal's Transitional Justice and the West's recalibration', Kanak Mani Dixit, #1152). Like you said, changing world scenarios such as the Ukraine war and the rise of Chinese global influence in particular, has meant that transitional justice might be buried under the carpet by the West. But people shouldn't always rely on external help to solve internal problems.

Phauda Raj Thebe

■ The Rome Statute of the ICC only covers grave war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. International human rights treaties do not define conflict-era gross violations.

Madhu Acharya

■ The Comprehensive Peace Agreement included a commitment to transitional justice, which has been pending all these years due to prevarication by the Maoist leadership and lack of diligence on the part of the other political forces.

Prakash Chandra Pariyar

■ The West cannot practice transitional justice, for many of their leaders will have to go through the same process.

Bimal Rawal

DIASPORA DIARIES

This reading gave me a lot of sense of current-day UAE ('A mother's sons', Bishnumaya Bhusal, #1152) which used to be like the USA to many Nepali families—particularly parents seeing the world through their children eyes.

Sujana Dhital

■ This is so amazing ('Caring for her own and others', Shyam Kala Rai, #1152). May you inspire thousands more.

Gyurme Dondrup

NEPALI FOOTBALL

Despite the country's love for the game, Nepali footballers have struggled to make a living from their sport ('Food vs football', Swapnil KC, nepalitimes.com). The situation is particularly difficult for young players who are just starting their careers. One possible suggestion to this situation is to invest more in sports. The government and private sector should work together to create a better infrastructure for football, including more training facilities, better coaching, and higher salaries for players.

Rakhi Bind

FEMALE AVIATORS

An excellent way to celebrate women's day with an all-women crew of Nepal Airlines on its Dubai-Kathmandu flight. Congratulations.

Janet Asimwe

■ Great! Flying in Nepal with its mountainous region is very challenging. This all-women crew have proved themselves as brilliant and exemplary aviators to send a message about equality.

Ananth Palakidnar

■ Love to see women all over making strides. Absolutely necessary for humanity's survival.

Kim Bressant Kibwe

1,000 WORDS



BEFORE, AFTER, NOW: (left to right) President Ram Chandra Paudel in an original photo as a Nepali Congress MP. The President's official photograph earlier this week that photoshops his birthmarks, and makes him look fairer. After public ridicule, the new (more realistic) official portrait of President Paudel.

PHOTOS: @PHALANO / PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

WHAT'S TRENDING



A mother's sons

by Bishnumaya Bhusal

Read about the Bhusal couple, proud Nepali parents who for the first time visited sons in the UAE working to support the family back home.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

1923 - 2023

Editorial

Nepalis must ponder whether we have lived up to the scope that the 1923 Nepal-Britain Treaty of Friendship provided us to do business with a country that was then a global superpower.

Most popular on Twitter

Nepal's Transitional Justice and the West's recalibration

by Kanak Mani Dixit

Global geopolitical changes and the rise of China mean that the West has gone cold on Transitional Justice and its humanitarian agenda in Nepal. Join the discussion online.

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The Red Panda house

by Maheshwar Acharya

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Kul Chandra Gautam @KulCGautam
Thanks, @KanakManiDixit for yet another penetrating magnum opus synthesizing the ups and downs of Nepal's TJ process - this one intended to brief & sensitize Western diplomats, HR INGOs & @UN system that have clearly gone cold on the TJ process in Nepal.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Hundreds of arriving passengers throng #Kathmandu airport on Tuesday morning below a poster of a snarling tiger. This 'metal free' X-ray is meant to curb #smuggling of extra mobiles, liquor or gold in hand carried luggage. #Nepal



कमल गाह्रा मगर @kamalKThapa
Useless stuff by incompetent government of #Nepal. Better they focus on increasing industrial production. #Shame

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Bridging the dental divide in Nepal

Moving from cure to prevention to ensure oral hygiene for all

■ Sonia Awale

As anyone who has suffered a bad toothache will attest, it is a singular kind of debilitating pain. But often, people do not feel any pain from infection until it is too late.

In Nepal, there is a wide dental divide between those with access to dental care and the majority who are without. In remoter parts of the country, complications from a simple untreated abscess in the oral cavity can even be fatal.

However, up to 90% of dental conditions like tooth decay and gum diseases in Nepal can be prevented through awareness of oral hygiene. This is not rocket science (or even a root canal) but knowing how to brush teeth correctly, avoiding junk food and eating meals that have to be chewed properly can save people from expensive and painful trips to the dentist.

In the old days the people of Kathmandu would visit Kilagal to nail coins into the stump of a tree in the belief that it would stop excruciating toothaches. Today, most dental clinics in Nepal are concentrated in Kathmandu Valley, and even these are mostly located inside the Ring Road. They have expensive state-of-the-art dental equipment which drives up the cost of care.

Public health experts suggest that instead of planning to invest in expensive dental clinics all over the country, the focus should be on dental hygiene awareness, simple prevention and telemedicine for more complicated cases.



PHOTOS: NATIONAL DENTAL HOSPITAL

“We have two drastically different groups in Nepal: those who need the latest cosmetic dentistry and others who have never ever seen a dentist in their lives. The way to bridge this gap is through technology,” says dental surgeon Sushil Koirala. “We have to digitise the system itself so that the poorest communities in the remotest parts of Nepal have access to dental care.”

There are 13 dental colleges in Nepal which produce some 500 dentists a year on average. Nepal's

dentist-patient ratio is 1:12,000 (WHO recommends 1:5,000). But most of these clinics are in the cities, and in remote districts like Jumla the dentist patient ratio can be more than 1:200,000.

There are some Nepal government scholarship students who mandatorily serve in the districts for two years, but most return to the city to set up clinics in an already saturated market. The government has dental surgeries in district and provincial

hospitals, but the infrastructure is outdated and the staff insufficient.

The way to compensate for the shortage of dentists in rural Nepal could be to prioritise dental hygienists. Ideally, hygienists work under the supervision of dentists helping out with simpler procedures for gum diseases or atraumatic restorative treatment (ART) which involves removing decayed tissue.

Because of the lack of regulation, hygienists have become 'pseudo-dentists' in the village, doing

everything from filling to extraction.

“Dental treatment is actually the last resort. The initial phase should always focus on prevention and proper care. But remote places of Nepal lack education and training,” says another dental surgeon Parakram Parajuli.

To plug the gap, National Dental Hospital, the non-profit Punyaarjan Foundation and MiCD Global Academy have jointly established the Dental Innovation Centre which aims to develop and implement



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Turkish bowling

The Turkish Airlines Bowling Tournament is being held for the first time in Nepal on 19 March. Competing agencies include Empire Travels and Tours, Roaming Nepal Travels and



Tours, Smart Holidays, Flight Connection International Travels, Bon Travels and Tours, Sumegh Travels, among others. The bowling tournament was first held in 2012 to bring together the airline's business partners from all over the world. The grand finale will take place in Istanbul on 5 - 7 May and the champion will win a flight ticket and a vacation in Antalya.

Fertiliser price hike

The Ministry of Agriculture has increased the price of chemical fertilisers by cutting the subsidy rate. Urea is a hefty 78% more expensive and will now cost Rs25/kg, up from Rs14. Subsidised diammonium phosphate (DAP) will now cost Rs 50/kg and potash Rs40/kg. The average chemical fertiliser subsidy is at 59.04%. The ministry cited USD appreciation, and said the savings from subsidy would allow more fertilizer import to meet growing demand which currently stands at 520,000 tonnes annually.

Reduced interest rate

Even as banking collapses seem to be spreading from the US to Europe, Nepal Bankers Association has limited interest rates on loans effective this week. The move is aimed at protecting customers from high interest rates, and make taking loans more affordable. The premium rate on loans has been reduced to 5%, the interest rate on fixed deposits is at 11%, and 8% on ordinary saving accounts. Institutional and remittance accounts are set at 9% and 12% respectively. Interest rate of deposits less than one year will be 11.50%.

Tata exchange

Tata motors concluded its 'Electrifying Exchange 2023' event on Tuesday where customers were offered an opportunity



to exchange their petrol and diesel vehicles for Tata EVs. Some 200 vehicles were evaluated during the three-day event. Customers were also offered test drives and detailed information about battery powered cars.

Exide Xplore



high charging capacity, and a 48-month warranty.

Sipradi Tradings has launched Exide Xplore motorcycle batteries which come with spill-proof design, gas recombination system,

Inflation

The year-on-year consumer price inflation remained at 7.88% in mid-February as compared to 6.24% in the same period last year. Food and beverage inflation stood at 6.19% whereas non-food and service inflation increased to 9.22%. The price index of restaurants and hotels increased 15.24%, cereal grain 12.39%, tobacco products 10.83%, alcoholic drinks 8.78% and spices 8.04%. Transportation was up by 15.58%, health 10.39%, housing and utilities 9.78%. Kathmandu recorded the highest inflation rate increase at 8.47%. The government's goal is to limit inflation at below 7% this fiscal year.

Forex reserve increase

Nepal's foreign currency reserves increased in the first seven months of the current fiscal year mainly due to the rise in the remittance earnings and cutbacks on luxury import items. Foreign labour permits increased by 57.3%, increasing remittance earnings by 27.1% to Rs689.88 billion against a drop of 4.4% in the same period last year. Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) reports that the country's gross foreign exchange reserve grew to \$10.5 billion in mid-February 2023 from \$9.54 billion in mid-June 2022. Merchandise imports decreased 19.9% to Rs919.16 billion. FDI remained at Rs1.04 billion in the review period. The current account deficit is still Rs29.64 billion.

SML ISUZU service

Laxmi Group is organising a week-long free service camp for Isuzu customers. Vehicle owners can register early for special discounts on minor and major repairs, lubricants, spare parts and gift hampers. The camp also includes a training program for drivers and free inspections till 18 March.



ways to make dental care accessible to all in Nepal (box). The team is currently working on an app that allows tele-dental care with use of AI. The initiative also plans a vigorous prevention campaign for oral hygiene among school children.

Dental complications are linked to lifestyle, and this means maintaining teeth and gums. Reducing the intake of junk food and sweets can also reduce prevalence of obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases in the population. There is also growing evidence pointing to a correlation between oral health and mental well-being.

Some 90% of the world's population suffers from oral illnesses at some point in their lives with caries and periodontal (gum) disease being the most common and painful conditions. Nearly all adults and up to 90% of schoolchildren worldwide suffer from caries, and up to 50% from gum disease. In fact, severe periodontitis is the sixth most prevalent disease in the world.

All of this makes prevention critical, but in Nepal dental care is largely limited to filling cavities or tooth extraction when in fact the focus should be on comprehensive care which includes prevention, treatment, follow-up and monitoring. This would also reduce visits to dentists, and timely diagnosis would make interventions cheaper.

Says Koirala: "The most cost-effective approach in a country like Nepal to prevent dental diseases is raising awareness about oral hygiene among school children, because through them we reach the communities. Dental hygienists as well as school nurses should be trained and mobilised in schools to achieve this." 🇳🇵

Leapfrogging with tele-dentistry

Set up only three months ago, the Dental Innovation Centre-Nepal (DIC-N) is working with post-grad students from the Institute of Engineering in Pulchok to develop an app that will connect dental hygienists in rural Nepal with dentists in Kathmandu for tele-dental consultations.

Students are also working on a software which will be the standard treatment protocol for minimally invasive comprehensive dental treatment for professionals as well as record keeping with the patients' oral history.

Explains Sushil Koirala, who is leading the Centre: "On one hand, dentists won't need to be everywhere anymore. Paramedics and hygienists will be able to provide correct and cheap treatment. It also addresses over-treatment, which is another major issue with dental care."

This is also a platform to encourage young innovative IT minds. The Centre will organise an open competition every two years so they get a chance to pilot project for real-life scenarios.

The Centre will also host professionals who want to volunteer so that they adopt some children

and provide them with general consultation free of cost. This will serve to motivate young dentists interested in philanthropy.

While dentistry itself is a lucrative profession, many of the 500 graduates every year in Nepal do not have enough resources to start their own clinics and are underpaid elsewhere. And while some migrate to work overseas, dental licensing abroad is harder to get and even then Nepali dentists are mostly restricted to the role of hygienists.



In the meantime, the dental studies curriculum in Nepal is largely outdated with students not able to practice much of the latest surgical methodologies. The Centre is led by a team of Nepal's foremost dental surgeons to share expertise.

"Most developed countries have problem-based learning and practice approach, where creativity and research are encouraged early in their dentistry course but this is sorely lacking in our part of the world," adds dental surgeon Parakram Parajuli.

At Dental Innovation Centre, the team is in the designing phase of the app which they want to test through remote area hospitals like Bayalpata in Achham which already has an electronic health record of all its patients.

Says Koirala: "It is a business model in that institutions and hospitals have to pay for technology while the patients get the benefit without additional cost. We want to become a model for others to learn from and replicate while also leading the reforms in the field."

Emergencies in Nepal's Emergency Rooms

Hospitals across Nepal need to urgently upgrade ERs to prepare for disasters and urgent treatment

Nepal's major hospitals are not prepared for emergency response and care in an event of another earthquake or pandemic, according to a recent new study published in the *International Journal of Emergency Medicine*. The paper lists a serious lack of preparedness at ERs and compares the capacity of private, government and teaching hospitals in Kathmandu.

The study builds on a 2019 report that identified 39 key points to improve emergency care and another survey in 2011 that showed only two hospitals in Kathmandu Valley at the time had earthquake resistant buildings.

Included in the study are TU Teaching Hospital, Patan Hospital, Dhulikhel Hospital, Bir Hospital, the National Trauma Centre, Grande Hospital and HAMS Hospital. Investigators identified physicians, nurses, hospital administrators and general hospital staff from each as respondents.

Emergency response — which is at the forefront of natural disasters and pandemics — during two major disaster events in the country, the 2015 earthquake and the Covid19 Delta wave in 2021, showed that Nepal's emergency response and care was subpar.

"This study was designed and conducted so that we recognise our weaknesses, and start to slowly improve them," said Olita Shilpakar, an emergency physician at TUTH.

The study concluded that while all the facilities surveyed had general availability of round-the-clock emergency services, there were significant gaps as well as differences in infrastructure, diagnostic, consultant and human resource availability.

"WHO estimates nearly 40% of lives can be saved with appropriate emergency care," said Ramu Kharel, an assistant professor of



SONIA AWALE

emergency medicine at Brown University in the USA who led the study. "Improving emergency care is one of the most efficient public health interventions. Our study identified many opportunities for us to improve emergency care at hospital levels."

Government hospitals were characterised by a lack of a designated triage area, as well as the unavailability of Obstetrics/Gynecology (Ob-Gyn), orthopaedics, paediatrics, or psychiatry consulting services.

Academic hospitals had limited isolation rooms for infectious diseases and were found to not have adequate access to toilet facilities. In private hospitals, protocols for time targets in triage, triage for children below five years of age, trauma care and burn care, among other services, were found to be missing. Safety protocols for managing

hazardous exposures were not there, and there was a lack of protection for staff and patients from violence.

While government hospitals that typically care for low-income populations reported better availability of ancillary services and social care services, private hospitals not surprisingly scored the highest in access to and availability of health infrastructure.

Meanwhile, academic institutions were found to have the highest rating with greater availability of consulting services.

Common barriers across all institutions included a lack of training in key emergency procedures, written protocols, point-of-care testing, and ancillary patient services.

Recommendations include the triage system and time metrics, training and education, written protocols for emergency

care, and health infrastructure in order for the health facilities included in the study to improve emergency care.

"The findings of this study will allow us to find areas of collaboration between institutions as well. For example, some hospitals have better protocols, others have better triage systems," said Kamal Thapa, one of the study investigators and an emergency consultant at Grande Hospital.

Emergency medicine is a new field globally, and especially so for Nepal, but evidence from other countries has shown that even a good triage system in hospitals have a significant impact in saving lives.

Said Kharel: "The next step is to use the findings as a guide to take steps towards addressing gaps. We need a larger research to look at rural area facilities." 🇳🇵

RUST IN PEACE

Looking back at Nepal’s first cargo ropeway built a 100 years ago, and a historical timeline of infrastructure planning in the past century.

■ Daniel W Edwards

JANUARY 1902 Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher Rana informs the British he is considering a “wire tramway” between Bhimphedi and Thankot and wants to hire a European engineer to make a preliminary survey. This plan is not carried out perhaps because the technology was not yet sufficiently developed.

1912 Chandra Shumsher has a survey made for a ropeway from Bhimphedi to Kisipidi (Thankot).

JANUARY 1913 British ropeway engineer R.S. Underhill, employed by the Nepal Government in connection with a ropeway scheme arrives in Kathmandu.

1914 The Nepal government plan for a ropeway is dropped, probably due to the onset of World War I.

1918 Chandra Shumsher gives Keymer, Son & Company of London standing instructions to proceed with an aerial ropeway between Kathmandu and Bhimphedi.

JUNE 1919 PM Chandra Shumsher says he is sending Rs1.2 million to England to meet the cost of materials. He reports a route has been selected which takes off from a point 20 to 25 miles due north of the Bairagnia railway station (near the Nepal border with Bihar) and would enter the Kathmandu Valley east of the trail for foot passengers (ending at Thankot). The ropeway would be 20 to 23 miles long.

AUGUST The War Office in London states that all available ropeway material has been placed at the disposal of the India Office. Indian Government says that material has been assigned for building a ropeway through the Khyber Pass. Keymer Co. states that due to the requirements for the “Afghan and Frontier Trouble,” it has no spare materials available.

One report says Chandra Shumsher later purchased the British ropeway that had been used during the Third Afghan War.

1922 Construction of trestle (tower) foundations begins, but a strike of Indian workers delays the work. The route has been changed to go from Dhorsing to Thankot. Messrs. R. Pearson and A.J. Knight are consulting engineers.



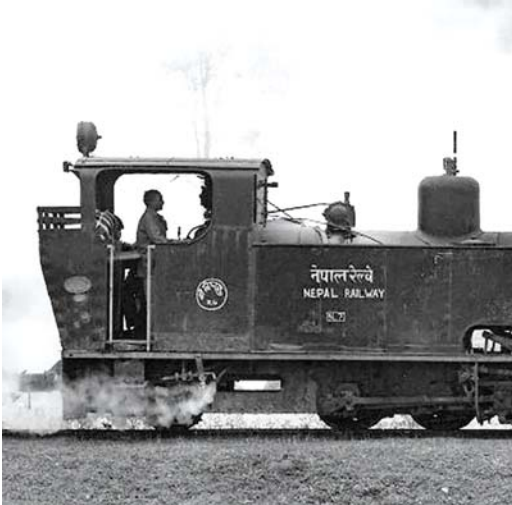
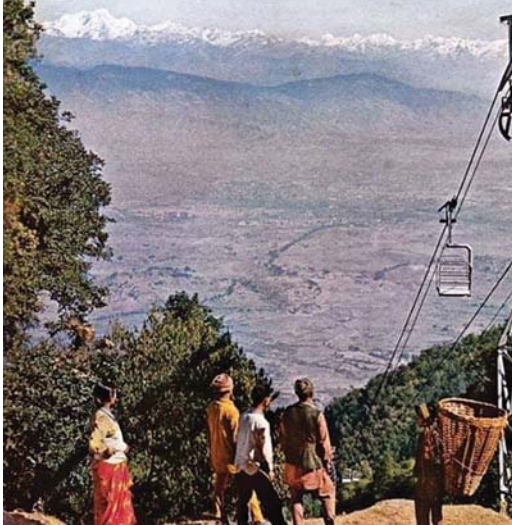
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DANIEL W EDWARDS



5

DANIEL W EDWARDS



MARCH 1923 Erection of trestles begins. Work can only be done during six months of the year.

JUNE 1924 Engineer Underhill estimates cost of the ropeway to be about £100,000. Upon its completion, he gives this description of the ropeway:

'The Nepal ropeway (a mono-cable system) is 14 miles long as the crow flies. It carries general merchandise in average loads of 5 cwt at the rate of 8 tons per hour in either direction, and the heaviest individual load permissible is 10 cwt. (Cwt refers to 'hundredweight', a unit of measurement equalling 45.35kg.)

The ropeway comprises seven sections, each being a complete unit in itself, driven by an electric motor. Each section comprises a single endless wire rope 7/8" thick and of 29 tons strength, which passes round a horizontal wheel 10 feet in diameter at each end of the section. An electric motor drives these wheels through suitable gearing and causes the rope to travel continuously at 4¼ miles per hour. The loads are hung from clips on this rope at regular intervals 240 yards apart and travel with the rope; loads going up to Kisipidi on one side and traveling down to Dhursing on the other.

The rope is supported by sheaves running on ball bearings carried on cross-arms at the tops of 106 steel trestles, which vary in height from 12 feet to 100 feet to suit the configuration of the ground. The largest span between two trestles is 1,300 yards.

At the end of each section, the clips automatically disengage from the wire rope, run along an overhead rail through the station, and then engage with the rope of the next section, so that a load can travel continuously from end to end of the ropeway.

The power required to drive the ropeway when fully loaded is about 80 horse power. The supply of electricity comes from a plant near Pharping.

One obstacle in building the ropeway was the belief in scattered villages that the opening of the ropeway was to be celebrated by the immolation of children at the foot of the trestles, and in some cases, Mr. Underhill found villages emptied as he approached them.

In several places trouble was caused by roaming elephants using trestles under erection as rubbing posts.'

1925 Ropeway construction is completed but probably does not come into regular operation until the Nepal Government Railway (NGR) begins operations from Raxaul to Amlekhganj in February 1927.

1932 The Tainathwalla (chief official) of the ropeway and five other projects is Maj. Gen. Krishna SJB Rana, assisted by Col. Chet SJB Rana.

1941 The चन्द्र आकाश तार माल चलानी अड्डा (Office for Transporting Goods by Sky Wire) is headed by Subba Hiranyaswar Lal Pradhananga, annual salary of Rs1,145. Other employees: 2 dittha, 4 mukhiya, 1 naib mukhiya, 6 naib writer, 1 bahidar, 3 nausinda, 1 tahvildar, and 2 'opretar' (operators), for a total staff of 21. At the Dhorsing Godam (warehouse) is Capt Prem Bahadur Thapa, annual salary of Rs1,200, who oversees a staff of 24.

OCTOBER 1945 It is reported the ropeway operates eight hours a day, transporting about 55 tons of goods. The freight rate is eight annas (about 15 cents) per maund (37kg). A British engineer, Roy Kilburne, is in charge of maintenance.

APRIL 1947 The ropeway extends 122km. It cost approximately \$300,000. Kilburne has just completed a survey to extend the ropeway to the customs house at Teku.

The estimated cost of this 6.4km extension is approximately \$100,000, but the project is being held up until the necessary materials to complete the work have been delivered. The rate charged on the ropeway averages Rs1/12 per maund (37kg). Coolie charges per maund from Kathmandu to Dhorsing average from Rs3-5 depending upon the load.

JANUARY 1950 The Government says the ropeway will be extended from Thankot to Panchali (Teku), where the goods transported by the ropeway will be weighed at the भन्सार अड्डा.

1950-51 [2007 BS] Government expenditures (in Rs) from general revenues:

| Main ropeway | 2007BS | 2008BS |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Salaries & allowances | 99,000 | 133,000 |
| Equipment & supplies | 24,000 | 24,000 |
| Contingency expenses | 3,000 | 3,000 |
| Total | 126,000 | 160,000 |
| Projects: | | |
| Renovation of cables (existing cables are 5 years old) | | 42,000 |
| Procurement of equipment | x | 10,000 |
| Expansion of ropeway (nearly complete) | x | 668,000 |
| Swayambhunath ropeway | | 4,000 |
| Total | | 884,000 |

1951 Ropeway hauls 570,000 tons of goods.

1950-52 General income from ropeway operations (exclusive of freight on goods belonging to the government, as well as on paddy, salt, etc.) is Rs425,000 each year.

1952-53 Expected ropeway income: Rs700,000; ropeway expenditure: Rs629,000

13 MARCH 1953 Ropeway Tariff from Dhorsing to Matatirtha (per maund)

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Dhan (paddy) | 45 paisa |
| Chamal (husked, uncooked rice) | 60 paisa |
| Tori (mustard) | 60 paisa |
| Kodo & gahun (millet, wheat) | Rs1.40 |
| Lumber more than 6 feet in length and more than 1 maund in weight | Rs1.50 |
| Lumber less than 6 feet long and less than 6 maunds in weight | Rs1.20 |
| Rahar & mugo (red and green pulse/lentils) | Rs2.10 |
| Mas (black pulse) | Rs2.10 |
| Musuro & khesari (reddish & yellow pulse) | Rs1.05 |
| Items that must be carried in double loads/containers | Rs3.60 |
| Salt | No charge |

1954 A 6.4km extension of the ropeway from Matatirtha to the Teku customs house has been completed. But it is not yet operating, because its carriers and spare parts have been cannibalised to keep the original ropeway in operation.

JULY 1954 Floods heavily damage the ropeway.

1955-56 Ropeway’s revised income: Rs661,000, revised expenses: Rs461,000 & Irs38,000. Recurring budget expenses: Rs444,000 and Irs40,000.

New budget expenses: Rs26,000 and Irs400,000 (these & figures below from Nepal Gazette).

1955 Wear and tear and the non-replacement of essential parts have reduced the ropeway’s carrying capacity to 5 tons per hour or less. Sixty tons of goods are transported daily, and 75% of the total traffic consists of foodstuffs for the deficit areas of the valley.

1956-57 Budget estimated income: Rs842,000; Revised income: Rs367,000, Revised expenses: Rs436,000 and Irs50,000.

1957-58 Estimated income: Rs928,000. Estimates expenses: Rs564,000 & Rs463,000.

JANUARY 1959 The 6.4km ropeway extension from Thankot to the Teku Customs Office finally begins operations.

APRIL 1959 For the first time, the ropeway begins to carry mail.

OCTOBER 1959 The press reports that ropeway employees have not been paid for the past three years.

1961 The ropeway operates for only six months and carries 80,000 tons of goods. Worn-out cables, the lack of spare parts, and grip failures increase the frequency with which carriers derail from the supporting sheaves, and many goods are lost or damaged.

8 APRIL 1964 The Dhorsing to Matatirtha Ropeway is shut down with the inauguration of the new Hetaunda to Teku (Kathmandu) Ropeway built by USAID. In its last seven months of operation, the old ropeway handled 446,000 maunds (17,840 tons) of goods and took in Rs742,000. 🇳🇵



2

DANIEL W EDWARDS



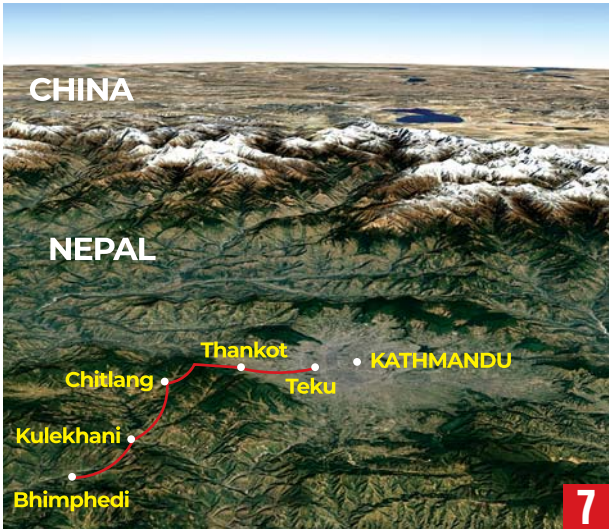
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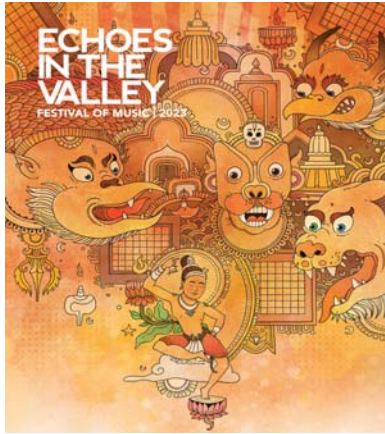


7

SKY WIRES:

- 1** One of the few remaining photographs of the चन्द्र आकाश तार माल चलानी अड्डा (Office for Transporting Goods by Sky Wire) that hauled goods from the Tarai to Kathmandu from 1923 till 1964.
- 2-3** The same old warehouse in Bhimphedi today.
- 4-5** The 1923 ropeway was superseded by a new ropeway from Thankot to Hetauda built with US assistance in 1964. View from Chitlang pass looking down at Kathmandu Valley, and in Kirtipur.
- 6** The Nepal Government Railway (NGR) from Raxaul to Amlekhganj linked the Indian border with the ropeway terminal.
- 7** Route of the ropeway from Dhorsing near Bhimphedi to Teku in Kathmandu, a distance of 128.4km. It was the cargo lifeline to Kathmandu until the Tribhuvan Highway was completed in 1956.

EVENTS



Echoes in the Valley
The 7th edition of 'Echoes in the Valley' is taking place this Friday -- and for two days! Over 70 artists are taking part in this year's edition, most of whom are from Kathmandu, and few from Lamahi and Dolpo, rest are from Chile, Finland, India, South Korea, and the United States.
In addition to music, the festival includes music workshops, a music conference, heritage walks, film screenings related to music, two exhibitions and a Newa-style hookah Bajān stall; and numerous children's activities such as book bus, storytelling sessions, Ranjana Lipi calligraphy, visits to the museum and interactive board games.
17-18 March, teku Pachali Bhairav Temple, Asan and surroundings

Ragini Upadhyay Grela
Celebrate the life and work of the eminent artist Ragini Upadhyay Grela who is known for her fusion of traditional mythology with surrealism and her visual critiques of the socio-political situations of Nepal.
Till 22 March, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal

Japanese Film Festival
The upcoming Japanese Film Festival 2023 will screen five feature films over two days, and will include cultural events including calligraphy and origami-making. Attendees will also get a chance to dress in the traditional Kimono, Yukata, and Happi Coat upon reservation at jaltan2055@gmail.com.
25-26 March, Rastriya Nachghar, Jamal

Francophone Fête
Four French artists, Pauline Driad, Jérôme Edou, Vincent Gréby and Eric Chandra Shrestha, exhibit their works at AFK's newly renovated auditorium this weekend. DJs Maini and Nico also perform.
17 March, 6:30-11pm, Alliance Française de Katmandou, Dhalko Bato, Pulchok



Chiniyamha Kisicha
Attend the launch of Durga Lal Shrestha's seminal poetry collection, originally published in 1965, now re-published by Quixote's Cove alongside an English translation.
18 March, 11am, Nasaa Daboo, Asan.

DINING



Bricks Café
A multi-cuisine restaurant in the heart of Kathmandu offering dishes in a pleasant environment. Their lasagna is a must-try.
Kupondole (01) 5521756

MUSIC



Sound healing
For better sleep and stress release, the sound vibrations by Pranavayuj is just the thing for you, at Avata.
19 March, 6pm onwards, Avata Wellness Center, Baluwatar

Pungmo Khung Lu
Listen to the traditional music from Dolpo, the history of which goes back to ancient times, with musicians from Pungmo village, accompanied by Ser o Duo and Miguel Sawaya.
19 March, 7:30pm onwards, Tickets start at Rs100, Moksh, Jawalakhel



Concert for autism
mark your calendars for the 1974 AD concert supporting autism.
18 March, 5pm onwards, Tudikhel

Pauline's Poupes
Discover new artists, taste stirring cocktails and dishes, and attend art workshops this week with Max Büch, Fatfrog, Flyingspirit, Diwas Shrestha, Anjila Manandhar, Kalam Kapi, Sudeep Balla, Box, Philippe Dardelet, Sajjad Hussein, and more. Check out their Instagram for location reveal.
23-25 March, Thamel



Dyna White
Head over to a fun performance of the Dyna White Vol 3 with DJ Avantika Bakshi this weekend.
18 March, 4pm onwards, Hyatt Place, Soalteemod

Bawarchi
Try the mouth-watering Kolkata Katti Rolls and other fusion Indian dishes at Bawarchi.
Jawalakhel (01) 5526244



Workshop Eatery
Forget about calories and indulge in an assortment of doughnuts, fries and burgers. The Nutella Doughnut and the Workshop BBQ Chicken Burger are the must-haves.
Bakundole, 9860431504

About Town

GETAWAY



The Pavilions Himalayas
This resort has Nepal's first lake-side tented luxury eco-villas that offer every amenity that one could possibly need. The hotel spa also has some of the best treatments that guarantee rest and relaxation.
Chisapani, Pokhara, 9756008117

Hotel Baha
This traditionally built hotel is located in the heart of Bhaktapur, surrounded by temples and rich heritage. Explore the culture and traditions of Bhaktapur while enjoying the peaceful ambience of the hotel.
Bhaktapur (01) 6616810



Kasara Resort
Immerse yourself in the lush greenery in the heart of Chitwan's National Park. With activities for everyone, from cycling to wildlife viewing, Kasara Resort is a fantastic getaway for families.
Patihani, Chitwan National Park (01) 4437571

Dom Himalaya
Dom Himalaya Hotel offers a space for visitors to indulge in traditional Nepali cuisine, relax with Tibetan singing bowls, and bask in the vibrant chaos of Thamel.
Thamel (01) 4263554



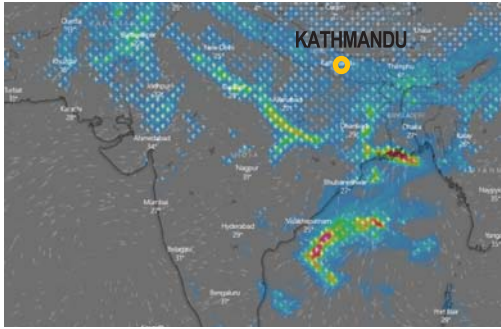
Namo Buddha Resort
Constructed in traditional Newa style and surrounded by lush greenery, the resort is an oasis of peace and tranquility, offering spectacular views of the Himalayas on clear days.
Namo Buddha, Phulbari, 9851106802



Taza
The restaurant brings a bit of Middle-Eastern flair to Kathmandu with its all Syrian items. Shawarma, falafel, hummus, kebab—everything is fresh and finger licking.
Jhamsikhel, 9860960177

Utpala Café
Utpala Café, a monastery restaurant, is perfect for anyone looking for healthy vegetarian options. With their scrumptious buffet lunch, fresh produce and mouth-watering baked goods, this is one of the best eateries in Boudha.
Boudha, 9801052333

WEEKEND WEATHER

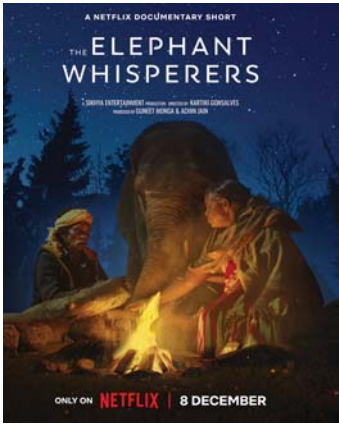


| FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 19° 9° | 19° 9° | 19° 8° | 18° 7° | 17° 7° |

Cold, rainy weekend
There is a trough bearing down on Nepal and will probably return Kathmandu to unseasonably cold conditions with temperature dropping below 20°C and the minima in single digits with stormy showers. The rain is welcome, but the cold probably not. We are looking at 70-80% chance of rain during the weekend and into next week. We saw precursors of this system already this week with snowfall in the trans-Himalaya, and there may be more coming. Forecast: cloud cover and precipitation on 19 March, Sunday at 4PM (left).

OUR PICK

Shot in the Theppakadu Elephant Camp inside the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, *The Elephant Whisperers* follows Bomman and Bellie of the Kattunayakan community, a tribal group that has been protecting the forest for generations, as they care for Raghu, an injured baby elephant who gets separated from his herd. The director Kartiki Gonsalves met Raghu when he was exactly three months old and spent five years following the human-elephant blended family. Permeating with moving scenes of love and devotion between the elephants and their human caretakers, the result made history by being the first Indian film to win an Oscar for Best Documentary Short Film at the 95th Academy Awards last week.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

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



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Nepal’s enterprising women in politics

Female leaders also manage thriving businesses on the side to support their families and political careers

■ Samjhana BK

A Member of Parliament operates a fast-food restaurant. Another MP runs a trout hatchery. A female party leader owns a pig farm.

All three women are in the business of politics, and they have established and run their own enterprises on the side to augment household income and to backstop their careers.

While their male counterparts in local, provincial and federal governments have earned some notoriety for having a conflict of interest because they are also infrastructure contractors, these women multitask without mixing business with politics. 🇳🇵



SUMAN NEPALI

Nabina Lama was an MP in Nepal’s last Federal Parliament and is currently a central member of the UML. But despite an active political career, Lama owns not only one but two businesses.

Her restaurant, Doban Pool Burger House in Kathmandu employs dozens of people. And many more benefit from her clothing store Rimthim Ethnic Collection, where she sells products made out of traditional *dhaka* and *allo* fabric.

Lama’s ethnic fashion store is a joint venture with four other women entrepreneurs, and she is a 70% partner in the fast food restaurant. Whenever Lama is busy with her party work, her husband looks after day-to-day business at both outlets.

Lama says that entrepreneurship has made her financially self-sufficient and independent. She adds, “Having a business is the only reason I have been able to actively engage in politics.”

PIGGERY and SOAP

Dhan Kumari Sunar, president of the Women's Organisation of the Scientific Socialist Communist Party of Nepal, operated a pig farm until it collapsed due to poor market management. But she did not let failure get her spirits down.

Two years ago, she started the Tillikka Jhol Sabun Udhog that makes liquid detergent with Rs120,000 in investments from 12 other women from her party. Sunar took inspiration from her party’s ‘scientific’ ideology of an independent and self-reliant economy to set up her business.

“The economic ownership of Nepali women in terms of resources and property is only 26%,” explains Sunar. “Entrepreneurship is crucial to women’s freedom, we cannot be truly free until we are financially independent.”

Sunar’s business runs on word-of-mouth, and is doing well. But the politician in her is critical of the lack of state support for small businesses, adding that her loan proposal has been stalled.

Says Sunar: “The government promises to facilitate self-employment of Nepali youth, but it is not happening on the ground. Powerful middlemen who control businesses seize the loans set aside for women and low-income individuals and communities.”



SUMAN NEPALI



PHOTO COURTESY: DEVI KHADKA

COFFEE, AVOCADO and BANANA

Devi Khadka is a former guerrilla and Maoist Centre MP from Dolakha who was elected to the Constituent Assembly in 2008. And while she might have once walked the corridors of power in Kathmandu, Khadka is still attached to the roots of her family’s farming profession.

In 2008, Khadka established a trout farm in Dolakha, but it was irreparably destroyed during the 2015 earthquake. However, she remained steadfast in her decision to continue her business and began growing tomatoes in greenhouses in Bhaktapur.

But while Khadka’s farm thrived, things were not going so well back home in Dolakha, where she was the district in-charge under the erstwhile Nepal Communist Party formed after the merger of the

UML and the Maoist Centre.

A meeting of elected officials of nine municipalities of Dolakha were worried that subsidised farming and agriculture in general had become all but impossible in the district because of out-migration and low yield. Khadka was determined to do something about it – not through politics but with enterprise. “The decline of agriculture shook me to my core,” Khadka recalls. “I realised that it would be impossible to revive the people’s hope and trust in farming unless I did not show them myself that properly done agriculture in Dolakha was still worthwhile.”

So, Khadka returned home and set up the Women Floris Agriculture Private Limited in Gaurishankar Municipality, where for the last three years, Khadka and

her husband Raj Kumar Shrestha have been growing coffee, avocados and bananas. Along with two other women, she set up the farm with an investment of Rs5 million. The three women are involved full-time in the business and employ 12 men on a part-time basis whenever it is farming season.

Khadka juggles this with her role as a Central Committee member of the Maoist party. And while avocado and banana sell mostly in the domestic market, she has successfully negotiated to export her farm’s coffee to South Korea, Australia, Japan and other countries.

“The business has not only given me financial independence, it has also made me an ethical politician,” she says. “I am able to engage in politics without resorting to dirty business, I get to demonstrate a high moral standing to my children and ensure that they have a good future.”

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Vishnu has left the



ERIN THOMPSON

■ **Namrata Sharma, Spencer Woodman, Malia Politzer and Delphine Reuter**

In the town of Bungmati, Nepal, above an ancient spring, stand two stone shrines and a temple. On the side of one of those shrines is a large hole where a statue of Shreedhar Vishnu used to be. Carved by master artisans nearly a thousand years ago, this sandstone image was flanked by the Laxmi and Garuda. For many years members of the local community carefully tended and worshipped the statue.

“When women started their labour pain, our elders used to come to put mustard oil on the statue of Shreedhar Vishnu so that the women would be safe and the childbirth would be easy,” recalled Krishna Bhakti Mali, a 53-year-old resident of Bungmati.

But sometime in the early 1980s that tradition abruptly ended when thieves removed the 20-inch statue. Another resident, Buddha Ratna Tuladhar, recalls how the community was “overwhelmed by melancholy” over its loss: “We kept hoping the statue would be restored, but it never was.”

About a decade after the theft and on the other side of the world, a wealthy American collector donated the statue to New York City’s famed Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met), where it would remain for nearly 30 years until an anonymous Facebook account called the Lost Arts of Nepal finally identified it in 2021.

Although the Met has since removed the statue from its publicly-listed collection, signaling that it may soon be returned, the damage to the Bungmati community was already done.

“Nepal has a living religion where these idols are actively worshiped in temples. People pray to them and take them out during festivals for ceremonies,” said Roshan Mishra of the Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign, a coalition formed to restore the country’s lost heritage. “When relics are stolen, those festivals stop. Each stolen statue erodes our culture. Our traditions fade and are

eventually forgotten.”

In the antiquities trade, the Met’s own reputation has begun to erode. Over the last two years, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and its media partners have reported on the Met’s acquisition practices — often in relation to a trove of items obtained from Cambodia in an era when that country’s cultural heritage was sold off wholesale to the highest bidder.

A broader examination of the Met’s antiquities collection, conducted by ICIJ, Finance Uncovered and other media partners over recent months, raises new concerns over the origin of the museum’s inventory of ancient statues, friezes and other relics.

What the Met decides to do about these concerns will have consequences not just for the museum itself, but possibly for what the public can expect from museums all over the world.

“The Met has it all”

In the beginning an informal gallery inside a former Fifth Avenue residence, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York first opened the doors to its own building in 1880, starting out with a purchase of 174 paintings.

Even in the 1960s, the largest museum in North America was still playing catch-up. The Met’s leadership aggressively sought major acquisitions and took a casual approach to, and at times embraced, antiquities smuggling as a mainstay of the museum’s sourcing. Under then-Director Thomas Hoving, the Met embarked on a vigorous buying spree in an effort to build out an antiquities collection that could match rivals in London and Paris. Over the following decades, the institution filled its halls and warehouses with treasures from Greece, Italy, Egypt, India, Cambodia and elsewhere.

“Not a single decade of any civilisation that took root on earth is not represented by some worthy piece,” Hoving later wrote of the results of work he had begun. “The Met has it all.”

And seemingly more than it should. Today, governments, law enforcement officials and researchers have linked a mounting number of the Met’s relics to looters and traffickers. While the Met has voluntarily returned some items, prosecutors have seized others.

Reporters reviewed the museum’s antiquities catalog and found hundreds of pieces previously owned by indicted or convicted antiquities traffickers or their galleries, and more than a hundred of them are on display. Many were removed after stringent

rules were already put into place to restrict the movement of antiquities across national borders, according to museum records.

More than 150 additional items in the Met’s antiquities collection passed through ownership of nearly a dozen more people or galleries from whom prosecutors seized stolen ancient works.

In a 1994 memoir, Hoving wrote that his address book of “smugglers and fixers” and other art world acquaintances “was longer than anyone else’s in the field.” Last year, the Met’s former curator of East Asian art, Martin Lerner, said he relied on “the goodwill and integrity” of dealers like his friend Douglas Latchford, who was indicted in late 2019 for antiquities trafficking. The indictment was dismissed after Latchford died in 2020.

In response to questions from reporters, the Met defended its practices around collecting. Said Met spokesperson Kenneth Weine: “Additionally, as laws and guidelines on collecting have changed over time, so have the Museum’s policies and procedures. The Met also continually researches the history of works in the collection — often in collaboration with colleagues in countries around the world — and has a long track record of acting on new information as appropriate.”

An ongoing problem for



countries hoping to recover stolen works, and for law enforcement officials investigating suspect collections, is that many artefacts in the world’s largest museums lack high-quality origin records. This makes it difficult to know whether the antiquities were stolen and illegally sold before being acquired by a museum.

ICIJ and Finance Uncovered found that hundreds of antiquities in the Met’s collection have no records tracing back to a country

of origin. A look at the museum’s catalog of more than 200 Nepali and Kashmiri antiquities, for example, found that only four have any origin records explaining how they left the regions.

Investigators’ interest in the Met’s collections, along with stepped-up media coverage, has caused experts in the antiquities trade to wonder how many more pieces in the museum’s catalog could be vulnerable to confiscation, and what that might mean for the



हिमालको चैत अंक बजारमा



हिमालमिडिया प्रा. लि.
पाटनढोका, ललितपुर

building

For decades the Met has been adding to its antiquities collection pieces of dubious origin, including from Nepal. Now, its reputation is eroding.



ERIN THOMPSON



NAMRATA SHARMA

art industry at large.

“The Met sets the tone for museums around the world,” said Tess Davis, executive director of the Antiquities Coalition, an organisation that campaigns against the trafficking of cultural artefacts. “If the Met is letting all of these things fall through the cracks, what hope do we have for the rest of the art market?”

“We all believe the stuff was illegally dug up”

Hoving, who served as the museum’s director from 1967 to 1977, is credited with transforming the Met into a world-class museum of major works. In his memoir, he describes how his decade of aggressively acquiring for the Met drew upon an array of illicit sourcing.

‘Being an accomplice to art smugglers,’ he wrote, ‘was a necessary role for a Met director.’ He had approved the purchase of a large batch of Indian and Cambodian antiquities that he suspected had been smuggled.

Hoving hid diary entries detailing his misgivings about the origins of a stolen Greek ceramic work in case prosecutors came looking for evidence. And when Turkish authorities asked for the return of allegedly stolen relics from the Met, he made a striking admission of guilt to a fellow curator.

“We all believe the stuff was

illegally dug up,” Hoving recalled having told a longtime Greek curator. “For Christ’s sake, if the Turks come up with the proof from their side, we’ll give the East Greek treasure back. And that’s policy. We took our chances when we bought the material.”

The Met’s lax approach to acquisitions has subjected large parts of its catalogue to questions today.

“The Met was established to be in competition with the major museums around the world,” said Erin Thompson, professor of art crime at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. “It wants one of everything. When you put those conditions together, it’s pretty dangerous in terms of making the most ethical decisions.”

Hoving wrote that late in his tenure at the Met, he attempted to change the museum’s practices. In the early 1970s, he attended UNESCO hearings on looted antiquities and came away feeling that “the age of piracy had ended.” He “decided to change the Metropolitan’s free-wheeling methods of collecting.”

There is little evidence, though, that the Met tightened its acquisition standards in the years that followed. The number of pieces susceptible to claims of looting only grew.

A mafia-run business

Throughout 2022, US authorities seized 29 items from the Met’s collection, including Greek busts, Egyptian bronzes and ancient plates, helmets and statues made from gold, bronze and terracotta pillaged from across the Mediterranean and India.

The investigators responsible for the seizures are part of an antiquities trafficking unit led by Matthew Bogdanos, an assistant district attorney in Manhattan. Bogdanos’s unit has worked with agents in Homeland Security Investigations, a unit of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Bogdanos said that his office is not investigating the Met specifically but that prominent pieces in its collection have been swept up in investigations primarily focused on individual traffickers. In its five years of operation, his unit has begun to develop a fuller picture of international trafficking rings, and

Bogdanos says he expects the pace of his office’s actions to accelerate as a result.

The Met is not alone in its struggles. Around the world, museums are facing a reckoning over how to deal with looted items in their collections. Just last year, London’s Horniman Museum, Washington’s Smithsonian Institution and various German museums and private collectors repatriated items looted from Nigeria.

And in the first two months of this year, museums and private collectors from the US, Spain and Australia have repatriated dozens of looted relics to their countries of origin. Central to the issue are problems endemic to the antiquities market, in which transactions worth millions of dollars can be conducted with no due diligence on the part of museums or auction houses.

“The antiquities market has been called the largest unregulated market in the world,” said Angela Chiu, an independent researcher and expert on Asian art and the antiquities market. “It’s self-regulating, and you don’t know what goes on behind closed doors.”

This difficulty of confirming an object’s origin history has led some in the art world to rethink whether museums should be buying antiquities at all. The National Gallery of Australia returned more than a dozen sculptures — bought through notorious antiquities dealer Subhash Kapoor for more than \$8.7 million — upon learning that they were stolen. Museum officials also made the decision to stop participating in the antiquities market entirely.

“It’s very, very rare for objects to have the level of provenance that we would need to be able to ethically acquire them,” said Bronwyn Campbell, the National Gallery’s senior provenance curator. “We’ve judged that the antiquities market is just too risky and ethically fraught, and would prefer instead to explore new and creative ways of representing diverse cultures by working collaboratively with source countries and communities.”

The Met’s collection also contains 85 pieces once owned by Subhash Kapoor or his gallery. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has described

Kapoor as “one of the most prolific commodities smugglers in the world.” He was arrested in Germany in 2011 and convicted in India this year of trafficking what prosecutors said amounts to more than \$100 million in antiquities.

Among the Met’s high-profile antiquities from India, Celestial Dancer was acquired in a deal involving Art of the Past, Kapoor’s Manhattan gallery at the time. In 2013, two years after Kapoor’s arrest, the gallery’s manager pleaded guilty to selling stolen Asian works. Yet in 2015, as Kapoor awaited trial on smuggling charges in India, the Met accepted the piece as a donation from wealthy collectors who had purchased it from his gallery.

The Met’s publicly available origin records for Celestial Dancer do not give any hint of how the work left India. An archived version of the Met’s website from 2016 states that the piece “ornamented a north Indian Hindu temple” in present-day Uttar Pradesh. This language no longer appears on the museum’s website.

In response to ICIJ’s questions, the Met provided no information about where the piece came from or how it left the country.

“Like having a heap of cocaine”

More than 40 years later, the citizens of Bungmati, in Nepal, still go without their original statue of Shreedhar Vishnu. But with the aid of Lost Arts of Nepal, coalition volunteers have traced three additional artefacts they say were looted from Nepali temples to the Met’s collection, a claim they support with archival footage showing matches to temple relics.

Site visit interviews with locals confirmed two of the three matches, including a smooth, hand-painted wooden statue of a Nrityadevi that had been looted in 1970 from the I-Baha Bahi, one of the oldest Buddhist monasteries in Kathmandu Valley.

By cross-referencing photos taken in 1969, Lost Arts of Nepal was able to match the lost Nrityadevi to an item in the Met’s collection and claims to have successfully traced several of the temple’s other lost relics in the collections of other American museums. Members of the Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign have requested their government’s help

to approach the museums and get these relics back.

“I understand the concept of preservation, but taking an object away from its living culture and putting it behind glass in a museum and then saying, ‘We are preserving this object for that country’ — it’s just completely wrong,” said Roshan Mishra.

Ken Weine, a spokesperson for the Met, said the museum is “presently in direct discussion with Nepal regarding select objects from the Museum’s collection, and looks forward to a constructive resolution and ongoing and open dialogue.” He did not say which items were being discussed or whether the museum had plans to return them.

Even if all of these items are repatriated, hundreds of additional Nepali artefacts with uncertain provenance remain in the collection of the Met and other museums around the world.

“Having these Nepali pieces on display, it’s like having a heap of cocaine in the middle of the room,” observed Erin Thompson, who is also an adviser with the Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign. “There is no legal justification,” she added.

Because Nepal was closed to foreigners until the 1950s, and has a long-standing ban on the export of culturally significant materials dating back to 1956, the vast majority of items acquired by museums outside the country after that year are likely stolen, according to Emiline Smith, a lecturer in art crime and criminology at the University of Glasgow’s Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research.

“The Met shouldn’t have been dealing with [Nepali] objects at all,” said Smith. “Even if you have an object with provenance dating back to 1970, it should not have been traded after 1956.”

The only listed provenance for nearly 15% of Nepali artefacts in the Met’s collection was the name “Samuel Eilenberg,” a Columbia University math professor and avid antiquities collector who died in 1998. An itemised list appearing in an archive of his personal papers details two dozen antiquities the Met purchased for \$1.5 million, including their original purchase price and country of origin.

Conspicuously missing were any records of the items’ prior provenance. Eilenberg has never been accused of any antiquities-related crimes. However, his files also included correspondence with indicted collector Douglas Latchford.

Despite historical evidence indicating that most of the Nepali artifacts in Western collections may be stolen, most museums only repatriate on a case-by-case basis when presented with overwhelming evidence that a specific object was stolen from a specific site.

Repatriations, when they do happen, are “largely performative,” according to Smith. “They have lots of other items that should also be repatriated, but the burden of proof is on the claimant and relies on evidence rules that are dictated by the global North.”

In the absence of more comprehensive repatriation policies, much of Nepal’s lost cultural heritage will remain behind glass in Western museums, far away from their communities of origin.

“If you want to preserve cultural conservation, you need to restore these objects to the community,” Mishra said. “You need to bring them out of the museum space and reinstate them to their original temples, where a living culture is active and where the object can be worshipped and fulfills the purpose of why it was made.”

Contributor: Karrie Kehoe

A longer version of this investigation will be available online on 20 March.





Amrit Gurung, unplugged

For the lead vocalist of Nepathya, love for country means coming home

■ Ashish Dhakal

Over the generations, most people in the village of Mulpani have moved out. They have retired from foreign military service and live in Pokhara, Hong Kong or London. Younger people work in Qatar or Malaysia.

Amrit Gurung has done the opposite. Nepal's most famous folk-rock musician has come home.

"They think I am crazy," admits the 56-year-old Nepathya lead vocalist, just back from a gruelling month-long concert tour of Australia.

It has been 13 years since Gurung settled down in his ancestral village near Pokhara, surrounded by forests. He has set up his home in the family livestock shed below the village close to a perennial spring. There are no neighbours nearby.

Gurung grows everything he needs: rice, legumes, vegetables, even honey and poultry. The forest has grown back, and this means keeping wildlife away from crops. The monkeys are smarter, Gurung says, and arrive in force for breakfast on the dot every morning. In the evenings, the porcupines are regular dinner guests.

"The monkeys break off corn stalks and run off with one cob in each arm and one in the mouth," says Gurung, doing a hilarious imitation. "I have to be constantly on guard, and have to bang on tin plates to chase them off."

All this lends an intimacy



PHOTOS: ARPAN SHARMA

to Gurung's childhood memory of growing up close to the land. Inspiration flows freely, and he often ventures out into the stillness of the night with his guitar as deer rustle in the undergrowth. The animals have come to accept him as part of their ecosystem.

"I write most of my music like this, or on the go when I travel," says Gurung. It helps that the Mulpani air is clean, the water clear, and nature exudes a sense of calm and contentment.

He does travel down to Kathmandu for rehearsals, but finds the city chaotic, dirty and polluted. "It is painful to see how we have made cities unliveable," he says. "Perhaps we have forgotten to think about anyone but ourselves."

Nevertheless, Gurung is anything but despondent, and gives expression to his attachment and hope for the country through his compositions.

Formed in the early 1990s, Nepathya is the most enduring



Nepali band, and its early folk-rock ballads are still wildly popular.

No concert is complete without 'सा कर्णाली', 'तालको पानी', or the eternal hit 'रेशम' which marked a milestone in Nepali music video-making. During the conflict, Gurung crisscrossed Nepal on शान्तिको लागि शिक्षा peace concert tours.

"During the war, we would not see any young people in the villages, there were flowers everywhere but there was no one to wear them," he recalls, adding, "and after all these years, they declared a People's War Day to remind people of the suffering."

During Nepathya's concerts in Nepal or abroad Amrit Gurung's core message is always peace and tolerance, either in the lyrics or his short exhortations between songs.

In December, Nepathya played across Nepal to raise funds and awareness for Manav Sewa Ashram, a charity that provides homes to the homeless. As part of its Music for

Humanity tour, the band then spent a month in Australia with back-to-back concerts in Darwin, Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Perth, Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart. Last month, a sold-out show in Sydney was attended by 6,000 people.

"Our message is always that we have to make ourselves and our country," Gurung says. "The reaction from the audience is always positive. Many Nepalis in Australia want to return, and do what they can for their motherland. When we played 'रातो र चन्द्र सुर्य' or 'गाउँगाउँबाट उठ', I noticed many in the audience weeping openly."

Increasingly, Gurung sees non-Nepalis at his concerts abroad, meaning that even if people do not understand the words, his music has universal appeal.

Former Australian diplomat Linda Trigg who attended the Canberra concert with her son found the energy of the performance and audience response remarkable.

Farmer and entrepreneur couple Joe and Zorica travelled 50km to watch Nepathya in Adelaide. Said Joe: "We couldn't understand the lyrics, but watching the band play and the audience enjoying it made us feel connected too."

Gurung feels that the real return from these concert tours cannot just be measured in monetary terms. "Even if only 100 of the thousands Nepalis who were there return to Nepal to make real change, that will be enough," he says.

And Amrit Gurung has followed his own songline, charting a path across the land to return to his own beloved village below the Annapurnas. 🇳🇵

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