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Defence mechanism

In *The Survey of the Nepali People* conducted by Kathmandu University and Interdisciplinary Analysts last year, 91% of respondents said the Nepal Army was the institution they trusted the most.

Politicians were at the bottom of the heap, and the sample showed great distrust towards social media content as well. We can understand politicians being unpopular, but why is the military held in such high esteem?

Nepal's army has not been involved in any external conflict since the Anglo-Nepal War that ended in 1816, although Nepali nationals fight and die in foreign wars to this day. The last time the Army fired guns in anger was during its involvement in the Maoist conflict 2001-2006.

For most of its 260 year history, the Nepal Army has shown loyalty to royalty. Being the army of the founding king, that is understandable. During the Rana period, the Army was under direct command of hereditary prime ministers, but reverted its loyalty to the Shahs after King Mahendra employed the military to stage a coup against

National Pride Projects like the Kathmandu-Tarai Expressway so that the military is also tarred with the same brush as themselves.

Now they are eying the Rs73 billion that has accumulated in the Nepal Army Welfare Fund. Some in the top brass want to invest it in banking and real estate, with the active support of political parties.

The report *Nepal Kleptocratic Network: Mapping Corruption and Impunity* by the Policy Research Institute says political interference corrupts the military and sidetracks it from its primary role in defending national security.

The role of the Ministry of Defence is to strengthen civil-military relations and democratise the military, but it has no say. The National Security Council is supposed to strategise on defence and plan on downsizing the Army, but has become a political pawn.

Nepal borders the two most populous countries with the largest standing armies in the world, and both are nuclear powers. We are not at war with any other country. And yet the Nepal Army takes a big chunk of the annual budget. Can Nepal, like Costa Rica, not have a military at all? We could spend the money on equitable development instead.

While maintaining the trust of the people in the military is important, Nepalis must be made to realise that the Army is not above the Constitution or the laws of the land. The military's financial dealings should therefore be under scrutiny by civilian courts and the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority.

The army has no business being in business. No good has come out of any military in the world being involved in profit-making ventures. We have seen in neighbouring countries what happens when the army becomes a private limited company. As BP Koirala put it more than half a century ago, 'Nepal's military needs a new purpose to establish a prosperous future for our democracy.'

A report by Transparency International UK says this:

'Business engagements are detrimental to the professionalism of the armed forces, as it serves as a major distraction from its core duties. One of the most harmful consequences of such practices is that the element of profit-making breeds corruption within the military. As evidenced from the case studies in the literature, the scale and type of corruption varies. In more extreme cases, corruption encompasses embezzlement of state funds, tax fraud and even brutal coercive practices on workers. Once the military begins to engage in economic activities, it is often difficult to end such practices.'

Those lines could have been written with Nepal in mind.

Rabin Giri



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a nascent democracy in 1960.

Deposed Prime Minister B P Koirala's secretary Kumar Mani Dixit recalls in his memoir how BP expressed his exasperation about the military not being under an elected civilian command. "What can we do when he (Mahendra) has the might of the military behind him," BP said.

Forty years later, BP's brother Girija Koirala was also prime minister when the Royal Nepal Army refused to obey his order to mobilise against a deadly Maoist attack in 2001 on a police base in Holeri of Rolpa district. Shortly after, Girija Koirala resigned as prime minister.

In 2009, after the Nepal Army was made to drop 'Royal' from its name, the military and the political leadership were at odds once again after Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal tried to fire Army Chief General Rookmangud Katawal to replace him with his handpicked Lt Gen Kul Bahadur Khadka. Gen Katawal refused to step down, President Ram Baran Yadav overturned the Prime Minister's decision, and Dahal resigned.

Perhaps past confrontations between Nepal's military and elected governments have made the politicians wary of provoking the Army. So they have co-opted generals in

The Nepal Army has no business going into business

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

CLEARING THE AIR

Twenty years ago this week, *Nepali Times* published a special edition on Kathmandu's pollution.

This editorial that week in 2003 summed up the situation, but it might as well have been written today. Waste management, sewage, over population, air pollution ... everything has only got worse.

Excerpts from the editorial published on issue #137 21-27 March 2003:

It is a myth that Kathmandu is a valley. Actually it is a plateau, the terrain beyond the valley rim on all sides dips down to less than 900m. All these natural impediments pale in comparison to the human bungling that has turned one of the most spectacularly-located and culturally-vibrant capital cities in the world into a toilet bowl. The fact that Kathmandu's old-world charm shines through all the grime, concrete and foul air is a tribute to our ancestors. They left us a legacy of beauty and architectural harmony, but what legacy are we leaving for our grandchildren?



It is said that the test of a civilisation is the way it treats its waste. Well, we don't treat it. On that count alone, we fail miserably to attain a civilised status. The raw sewage emptying into the Bagmati, the industrial waste that makes this holy river froth at Chobar, and the powerful odour of death and decay over the bridge at Kopundole all remind us of our own callousness.

Then there is the growing garbage crisis, each time we pass the neighbourhood heap, the stench reminds us of our inability to separate and turn its organic constituents into valuable fertiliser, and the failure to stop use of non-biodegradables like plastic bags.

Even more shocking is our breathtaking disregard for air quality. As our investigative report in this issue makes clear, we are choking ourselves to death. The paradox here is that we know it, we know what should be done about it, we have the laws in place to do it, but we still don't do it.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



CONCRETE JUNGLE

The narrow strip of plains that used to be a dense jungle till 70 years ago was cleared to resettle mountain farmers and turn it into Nepal's rice basket. Today, it has become an east-west swathe of asphalt and concrete with neither paddy fields nor forests. Watch the video on our YouTube channel to understand how forests and farms along Nepal's Tarai are turning into one long city.

UNDER-REPRESENTATION

I agree with Sonia Awale ('Whose country is it anyway?', Editorial, #1153). The government must look and sound like the country. I sincerely believe (and more importantly, many studies show) that societies become more intelligent when they allow people with diverse experiences. Nepal has always been insular because it disallows this. That should change.

Manjushree Thapa

I think historical and cultural reasons are at the forefront of exclusion. Brahmins as an ethnic group specialised in education and knowledge, and Chhettris had state power. And in the modern day, the power automatically falls into their laps.

Bhumi Ghimire

The Editorial is correct statistically in showing the problems, kudos for that. Wish it was more in depth analysis of years of systemic and cultural discrimination that allowed these conditions to foster. Many people on list are voted officials by the people. We might need to look into voting patterns among indigenous and discriminated communities, possible lack of candidates from such communities and if so, answering why less candidates are likely to stand up. Let's begin there.

Linus

Recognising anything like caste and institutionalising that is the first step to prejudice. Sure, anyone would like to exploit the system as long as it benefits them. Why is it so hard to create discriminatory interventions based on actual financial/risk-hazard appraisal?

Deependra Dhakal

It would be interesting to know if corruption can be reduced with diversity.

Prabhakar Shrestha

Intersectionality reveals even more distinct narratives among the scantily-represented marginal and deprived groups.

Sashi

Caste inequalities are still pervasive in all domains in Nepal, not just the civil service.

David Seddon

Since Brahmins have been in control of the social, political and economic aspects of Nepal for over the last three decades, is it fair to blame them for the pathetic state of this country? Or will they not take any responsibility?

Masked & fully vaxxed

Nepal belongs to those who tend to say that their ancestors unified the country. Dalit and Muslims are the subjects of the ruling castes.

Vijay Kant Karna

It has to do with the culture. There is equality of opportunity to everyone here. Just like Sherpas make way more money per capita than Limbus and hill Chhetris. The Brahmins represented above are more from Gandaki and Lumbini regions.

Melancholy March

For the Brahmin/non-Brahmin equation to change, Brahmins like KPO, PKD, RCP, etc must step aside and say that their position are now for a non-Brahmin. But will they do so?

Krishna Joshi

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Rust in peace

by Daniel W Edwards

Nepal's first cargo ropeway from near Bhimpheedi to Kathmandu used to carry essentials. Now, all that remains of the century-old cargo structure are the rusted hulks of the towers. Read the detailed timeline at nepalitimes.com.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

In search of stolen gods at the Met

by Namrata Sharma, Spencer Woodman, Malia Politzer and Delphine Reuter

For decades the Met in New York has been adding to its antiquities collection pieces of dubious origin, including from Nepal. The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and its media partners including *Nepali Times* investigate the Met's acquisition practices. Read the report on our website.

t Most popular on Twitter

Whose country is it anyway?

Editorial

The most powerful people in Nepal today are all men from dominant caste groups. While the 2015 Constitution has strict quota provisions for the representation of women, Indigenous people and Dalits in Nepal's legislature, government and bureaucracy, there is also pushback that it goes against meritocracy. Join the vibrant discussion online.

Most commented

Amrit Gurung, unplugged

by Ashish Dhakal

Over the generations, most people in the village of Mulpani of Kaski have moved out. Nepathya lead vocalist Amrit Gurung has done the opposite. Nepal's most famous folk-rock musician has come home. Read the profile on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepal Times @NepaliTimes

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.



Karma Tenzing @karma10zing

121 dialects in Nepal; only Nepali is deemed official (language for Lok Sewa, now in English as well). It's an unfair advantage to Brahmins & others whose 1st language is Nepali. Do what India did and make English the official language. Overnight, demographics in civil jobs changes.



ART @AmulyaSir

Structural injustice of 12% pop hoggin 70% of top job is responsible for frustrating underdevelopment and malgovernance in the country.



Dorje Gurung, ScD (h.c.) @Dorje_sDooing

If meritocracy got all those mostly hill so-called high caste Hindu men in positions of power in Nepal, how is it that the country has been one of the five poorest in the world for most of the last 70 years?

1,000 WORDS



RAM RAM: President Ram Chandra Paudel congratulates Vice President Ram Sahaya Yadav after his swearing in at Sital Nibas on 20 March. Outgoing Vice President Nanda Kishore Pun is at left.



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“Victims of conflict may forgive,

The government has decided to fast-track the Transitional Justice bill drafted by Govinda Prasad Sharma Koirala ‘Bandi’ through Parliament. Conflict victims and human rights defenders say the bill may promote impunity. *Nepali Times* spoke with activist Mandira Sharma, who is also Senior International Legal adviser at the International Commission of Jurists. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: Conflict victims and human rights defenders (HRDs) have come out against the bill presented by the Dahal government to Parliament. What are the main concerns?

Mandira Sharma: The main concern of victims and civil society is that by having certain provisions in the bill and omitting others, it is likely to facilitate de-facto amnesty for all those committing gross violations of human rights and international crimes. It provides different protection for victims, depending on who the perpetrators are, and differing treatment for the same nature of crimes, depending on who the perpetrators are.

As the bill provides the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) with several competing mandates, victims and human rights defenders also have doubts that the TRC can deliver without having an adequate legal framework, which the bill fails to provide.

Is the fear that the bill is inadequate or that it will be misused?

Some of the fears are legitimate. Transitional Justice (TJ) is not only about bringing perpetrators to justice, it is also about opening the process to help victims and society know what happened in the past so that we can take measures to correct them to ensure it is not repeated. It is also a process to address the root causes of conflict. However, considering the context of impunity and deep sense of inequality in the society, people are also trying to see more carefully how this TJ process helps to address the extent of impunity to restore rule of law in the country. There are so many aspects



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in the bill requiring clarity.

Firstly, the bill says human rights violations include murder, beating and mutilation, abduction, destruction of private and public property, sexual violence, arson, illegal arrest and detention, forced displacement, etc. In all these violations, perpetrators will get amnesty. Some of these violations if committed in a widespread or systematic manner are of the kind that would amount to crimes against humanity and/or war crimes under international law. However, war crimes and crimes against humanity are neither included in the bill nor in any other legislation, such as the Penal Code. Although certain conditions are required for alleged perpetrators to meet to get amnesty (disclosure of truth, willingness to apologise to victims and to pay compensation etc.) the bill has no

provision to allow those not meeting these conditions to be charged and held accountable. They enjoy de facto blanket amnesty. Thus, in practice, a clear possibility exists under the new bill to provide amnesty (de facto) for those involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Secondly, the bill states that the sentencing will be done as per the ‘existing law’ for some violations listed as serious violations of human rights. This includes ‘murder with cruelty’, cruel and inhuman torture, disappearances, and rape. The Penal Code is the existing law that would provide punishment for these crimes. However, the Penal Code only came into force in 2018 and prevents retroactive application. It also has a provision of limitations in reporting cases. For example, reporting rape has a limitation

of up to 3 years, depending on who the victim is, from the time of occurrence. Thus, victims and civil society organisations were demanding that the government either include a provision in the bill stating that the non-retroactive effect of law, and statutory limitation in existing laws, will not apply to the cases under the jurisdiction of the Special Court or would amend the Penal Code to say that these provisions will not apply to the crimes committed during the armed conflict. However, neither of these proposed options has been taken up.

Thirdly, the definition of certain crimes is narrow in the Penal Code and would in essence provide grounds for different treatment for the same crime, depending on who the perpetrator is. For example, torture in the Penal Code is narrowly defined and does not

include pain and suffering inflicted by non-state actors. Thus, the end result of the provision of this bill is torture committed by the state security forces will be tried in the Special Court but torture committed by the Maoist will ipso facto enjoy amnesty.

Fourthly, many violations require investigation under international law outside the ambit of the TRC and the Special Court. For example, the bill states that human rights violations or serious violations of human rights will come to the jurisdiction of the TJ mechanisms only if they are committed against an ‘unarmed civilian or group’, and if they are committed in a ‘systematic’ manner. These requirements would then mean, for example, that rape committed against Maoist combatants would be outside the ambit of the TJ mechanisms.

A bill was proposed by Govinda Sharma Koirala (‘Bandi’) as minister in the previous Deuba government but was withdrawn after protests. Have the concerns of conflict victims been addressed?

I have noticed four changes made to the bill from the one tabled last time. The text now includes the provision of appeal against the decisions of the Special Court. It has extended the time for the public prosecutor to decide whether or not to prosecute the cases recommended by the TRC from six months to a year. It has also removed one positive provision in the previous bill which allowed the suspension of public officials from their post once the charge sheet is filed against them in the Special Court.

Why do you think that the government hurried this bill into Parliament?

It seems the government wants to ‘fast track’ it through Parliament using its majority, but we need to understand that the new Parliament does not even have committees yet to provide full and transparent debate to discuss many of these provisions in the bill.

Overall, this bill seems to be designed to give priority to the demands of perpetrators rather than the victims. As of today, the bill does not provide clarity on the



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Turkish bowling

Turkish Airlines Kathmandu office organised a bowling tournament among partner travel agencies at KL bowling center. There were 11 teams with three members each. Empire Travels' Empire Emeralds won the tournament with a score of 1,235 points. Flight Connection Travels and Roaming Nepal Travels came second and third respectively.

Metro Mart discount

Customers of Global IME Bank will receive a 10% discount when they purchase goods at Metro Mart using Smart QR. Customers can get a discount of up to Rs100 on a one-time purchase and up to Rs300 through the scheme period at the mart's Jorpati, Sanepa and Pepsicola outlets.

Ncell Mazzako

Ncell Axiata has launched a new prepaid starter plan ‘Mazzako’. Customers can buy the plan at Rs599 including taxes and enjoy 20GB data and 150 minute local call time. They can also get a bonus on every recharge worth Rs200 or more. Recharges from Rs200 to Rs499 get a 5% bonus and Rs500 and above get 10% bonus.

IME AGM

IME Life Insurance concluded its sixth annual general meeting this week with Chair Ram Hari Aryal. The company's insurance fund has increased by 22.31% to



Rs5.48 billion. The company also plans to issue 12 million unit shares to the general public at Rs276 per share. The IPO is will raise Rs3.312 billion.



Sipradi-Nabil

Sipradi Trading has signed an agreement with Nabil Bank to make loans available to those who purchase Tata Motor's Express T electric taxi. Sipradi will invest up to 80% of the credit for customers purchasing the premium EV. The loan will be available at 14.10% interest rate for seven years.

Tata is also organising a special exchange camp ‘Happiness Week’ for its customers. Customers can visit Tata showrooms and take advantage of offers and exchange vehicles for new 2023 models like Nexon EV and Tigor EV. Customers can also have financing, insurance options and free spare parts.

WorldLink Series B

WorldLink Communications has received a combined Series B investment of Rs1.98 billion from British International Investment (Rs1.08 billion) and Dolma Impact Fund (Rs900 million), making it one of the largest investments in the internet sector in Nepal so far. The total foreign investment in WorldLink has reached Rs3.33 billion. The company plans to speed up its internet expansion activities throughout the country, especially rural Nepal.

Fertiliser subsidy

The government has decided to roll back the decision to cut back the subsidies on chemical fertilisers. As a result, the price of chemical fertilisers remain unchanged. The cabinet meeting also decided to make subsidies more systematic and scientific after a detailed study on the issue.

but they will never forget.”

overall architecture of the TJ process which should allow truth-seeking, reparation, justice, institutional reform to work in tandem. We know that it is not possible to disclose the truth in every case, prosecute every single case, or provide reparation to every single victim. If designed properly, the justice component could be leveraged for the truth, reparation, and reforms.

Although the bill looks like it is trying to adopt this model by having the provision of leniency in sentencing, it fails to link this sufficiently to other components of TJ to leverage it for truth, reparation, and reforms. On the contrary, it ensures impunity to those not supporting the TJ process by offering de facto amnesty.

Is the bill designed to please the international community?

As someone who has been following Nepal’s TJ process very closely since the beginning, I have seen varying degrees of interest from international diplomats. In the past, I have been privy to a coordinated strategy of the international community, which contributed significantly to pave the grounds for setting up the TJ mechanisms with a strong legal foundation, one that does not undermine international law. Although I am not too sure such a coordinated strategy exists in Nepal’s TJ effort today, I have to say that the international community is not uninformed.

Why are we seeing much less engagement by Western diplomats and international INGOs who have been active in the past in the transitional justice process?

It is true we have not seen a clear and united public message, that no legitimate clean chit can be provided unless there is an internationally legitimate TJ process. We are left with the hope that perhaps things are done through diplomatic channels, behind closed doors. As we have seen in the past, public messages from the international players are important to clarify misunderstandings. And this is such a time.

It is vitally important for the countries believing in human rights, rule of law, and liberal values to use the leverage at their disposal to create an environment for a credible TJ process in Nepal that does not undermine victims’ rights to an effective remedy. This is important not only for human rights and the rule of law in Nepal but also as a benchmark for future TJ processes around the world. Strategic use of vetting of the UN peacekeepers, visa-vetting, and universal jurisdiction cases are leveraged that can be used, to name a few.

How unique is the TJ process in Nepal?

Every context of conflict is unique. So, the process developed to address the legacies of the conflict could be unique. However, we are in a unique position. We should not make the same mistakes other countries have already made. Understanding of transitional justice has widened and deepened in recent years, and Nepal’s experience is also part of this legacy. As explained in the technical note of the OHCHR and by the jurisprudence of Nepal’s own Supreme Court, the minimum standards for the TJ process have

been set. Nepal has come far, the government has prepared a bill, the conflict victims are keeping the issue alive, and the political parties and civil society are engaged. If we handle this properly, we can certainly set some precedence for the region as well.

It had been said that the unity between victims of the state and victims of Maoists, which was so unique has now been compromised. How true is this?

We faced tremendous challenges when we first started having this conversation when victims from the state side and Maoist side would consider each other as enemies. One would call the other either the mercenary of the repressive state or a terrorist. However, as victims started to come as a united force calling for truth, justice, and reparation, efforts were made and are being made on the political front to weaken and divide them. Unity among victims in all situations may not be possible as they come from different ideological and societal backgrounds, and they may also have different political affiliations, aspirations and ambitions. However, as we have seen in recent times, they have been articulating their demands persistently and with exemplary unity.

What should conflict victims and rights defenders do if the Government does not make the rectification demanded by them? Should they reject the bill or live with whatever is passed by Parliament, where the present government commands a majority?

I do not believe that the Government

can pass the bill as it is. We will be back to square one, back to 2014 when the UN/OHCHR had been constrained to issue its technical note. There is speculation that the way the government rushed to register this bill is to avoid discussion on the bill in the parliamentary committee. This was what had happened in 2014 as well, when top leaders made the deal behind closed doors, and rushed to pass the Act, which faced legal challenges and pushed us seven years behind. We cannot make the same mistake again. The issue here is not just the amendment of the TJ law, but amendment through a legitimate process that provides opportunities to everyone, particularly conflict victims, to own the process. As the TJ mechanisms have inherent limitations in addressing all grievances of victims, an inclusive process helps to fill some of those limitations and gaps.

Having said that, I am not arguing that we can delay this process for too long. We have seen political parties using this as a bargaining chip and wanting to prolong the process. Victims have been suffering and waiting for justice for the last two decades and more. Our failure to address impunity has caused political instability, lack of rule of law, weakening of public institutions, valorisation of violence, and letting a handful of people create a political syndicate with the goal of capturing state power. The interest and confidence of the public in political parties and their leaders are severely compromised and threaten multiparty democracy itself.

But there are those who say it is time for Nepal to put the conflict behind it and give full attention to nation building.

We have been hearing this since way back when the political parties signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Indeed, ‘prevarication’ is the word that defines what the state has been doing for the last 16 years. And so we need to ask: has the country progressed by doing this? Does the law treat everyone equally now? Are public institutions accountable to the people and the Constitution? Is our society more inclusive? Does the police investigate crimes professionally even if the powerful are the perpetrators? Is the judiciary respected? Have we democratised political institutions and political parties? Where are we in nation-building?

A negative response to all those indicators shows why we need to address the legacies of the past and restore rule of law as we cannot move forward toward the positive indicators on the foundation based on violence, impunity, discrimination, and corruption.

How can we argue that those victims whose loved ones disappeared and the families waiting every single moment for their return, who suffer in pain and anguish for not knowing the truth should simply forget? How do we ask a survivor of rape to forget the trauma? How can a son forced to witness the brutal murder of his father forget what he saw? How can a family, who was forced to leave everything behind and leave the place of their dream, being a refugee within his/her own country forget? Is this even practically possible?

I believe, if there are other conditions that are met, the victims of conflict may forgive but they will never forget. 🇳🇵

SUSTAINABILITY INNOVATION. MOBILITY

WHAT IS A HYBRID VEHICLE?

Hybrid electric vehicle is a system that uses two different kinds of power sources, one being the traditional internal combustion engines or ICEs and an electric motor combined with batteries. The combination uses the best of both worlds, giving it a longer range than an ICE and the sustainability benefits that electric vehicles offers.

HYBRID IN NEPAL

The first hybrid electric vehicles introduced in Nepal were the RAV4 and the Camry at the NADA Auto Show in 2019. Since then the vehicle has really gained popularity within the Nepali market and continues to draw more eyes to them.





50 years of Lok Chitrakar

■ Shaguni Singh Sakya

Nobody completely understands the breadth and depth of our art which has developed over centuries. It takes more than a lifetime to achieve complete knowledge of an artistic heritage which is an amalgamation of religious philosophy, figurative symbols, metaphoric concepts and subconscious outpourings.

Paubha is not just simply painting of a deity that follows set iconography and elemental requirements. Paubha can consume every molecule of an artist, especially for a great master like Lok Chitrakar. He dives deep into our ancient artistic practices of traditional paubha, dabbles in issue-based paubha with realism and impressionism, and is also experimenting with contemporary paubha with abstract forms.

Our gods and goddesses are all figments of someone's imagination. Ever wondered about the state of mind and emotional ecstasy of the first paubha painter? How did they render on canvas the compassion of a Green Tara, or the innate power of Lokeswor?

We can assume it was a combination of philosophical understanding, fervent religious belief, and also a strong subconscious outpouring. As he comprehends the challenges of having to express philosophy through figures, Lok Chitrakar agrees that our traditional art too began as abstract. The subconscious plays a big role as the artist imagines forms, expressions, colours and movement of a deity who will evoke a powerful spiritual fervour. Moreover, it has to be visually stunning with intricate details. A dual talent of metaphorical and conventional skills, and a sacred power of making the intangible visible.

Today Wassily Condensky's or Picasso's forms and figures are used as the basis of abstract drawings by artists all over the world. Similarly, our traditional art too had a foundation of abstract notions that was given continuity, and thus became traditional. Through centuries, many contributed to its greater evolution in style, design and methods. Lok Chitrakar is a 21st-century master of preserving tradition, letting artistic styles evolve and revolutionise.

During his early days, there was limited information on paubha protocol as documentation was poor and ancient texts were not researched and translated. He went into great lengths to study the early texts of iconography, including

Buddhist and Hindu theology, and to understand the philosophy behind the concepts. Thus, Lok Chitrakar's art is not just about continuation of age-old techniques, but a homage to the talent of unknown ancient artists: to revive it and leave an indelible mark by preserving it for ages to come.

Understanding the depths of its philosophy so well, he breathes life into the realistic, spiritual and abstract art forms. Paubha art is the spiritual power of giving visibility to the deity one worships, an imaginative force of creative energy that brings the abstraction of god to life. A refined paubha artist like Lok

Chitrakar has the ability to embody its presence and divine qualities.

Says Chitrakar: "Let people look at my paintings and let them forget themselves for a moment. Let it be a divine calling for them."

Viewer may or may not get a calling, but they can see that divinity resides in those artists who have the power of making the unseen seen. 🇳🇵

Shaguni Singh Sakya is the director of KGH Group and Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA).

*Lok Chitrakar : Solo Exhibition
26 March – 26 April 2023
Museum of Nepali Art, Thamel
Kathmandu Guest House premises.*



HEVAJRA MANDALA

(Artist's Collection) Mineral colour on cotton canvas, 56.5 x 44.5in, work in progress

The greatest example of Lok Chitrakar's artistic virtuosity is the 'Hevajra Mandala' on which he has worked for 25 years, and it is still not complete. What drives an individual to assiduously work on a canvas for 25 years? How do you define such passion and dedication? It took 15 years for Da Vinci to complete the 'Mona Lisa' and 3 years for 'The Last Supper'. It took four years for Michelangelo to finish painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and two years for Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus'. The world's most famous and expensive art has been completed in less time, but Lok Chitrakar is still envisioning and studying the scriptures of *Hevajra*, a 500,000-verse tantric text of the Sakya order of Tibetan Buddhism that originated in the 8th century. The text converted to images in a mandala form is a lifetime of study.

The philosophy of the Hevajra is about the impermanence of all phenomena which the artist has been immersed in since the 90s. Chitrakar explains that he cannot complete it until he personally experiences all its teachings. Many of the lessons he has learnt in that time has been painstakingly imbibed, and he continues to work on it as he ages and understands the philosophy further.



CONTEMPORARY CHAKRASAMVARA

(Artist's Collection) Mineral on canvas, 2017

Though Lok Chitrakar is not completely satisfied with his abstract version of Chakrasamvara, the piece signifies a revolution in Nepali art. It is a unique artistic attempt to merge the traditional and the modern. Chakrasamvara means an absolute state of an enlightened or awakened mind. Chitrakar portrays this in a contemporary manner: blending hand gestures, symbols and deities, it is a striking splurge of spontaneity and protocol on canvas. Those who do not understand this tantric philosophy may be lost, but for those who do, it is a delight to analyse the art from the perspective of past and present forms.



CHINTAMANI LOKESWOR

(Private Collection) Mineral on canvas (gold), 26 x 33in, 2005

Sometime in the 1980s, a 16th-century painting of Chintamani Lokeswor remains unknown. Lok Chitrakar was based on the memory of what he had seen – each one better than the previous – the aura and shawl. Such was his devotion beyond description.

The painting intricately depicts Chintamani Lokeswor, a Bodhisattva of altruistic compassion and mother compassionately during her life.



19th-century art piece 'Chintamani Lokeshwor' was stolen from Itum Bahal and its whereabouts were unknown. Lok Chitrakar would often go to study this paubha and he was distressed by the loss of a national treasure. When he had seen, he was so inspired to paint this stolen masterpiece that he completed seven of them. In doing so, he invented a new technique – which adds a transparent touch around the figures. His determination to create the best version of the long-lost paubha that his last one is beautiful.

Lok Chitrakar depicts Chintamani and his consort generously doling out donations. It took Chitrakar 10 years to complete the painting. The central parts were done when he was taking care of his ailing mother. Chintamani Lokeshwor is the central figure and Chitrakar's situation then was similar to the philosophy. He felt blessed to be serving his mother in her last days.



TARA

(Private Collection) Mineral colours with lapis, malachite, gold, silver, 2016

This Tara is inspired by the 12th-century Nepali artist Arniko who was also the inspiration to most paubha artists. Lok Chitrakar does not just admire Arniko, he beautified the classic painting and gave it his unique creative touch by going a step further and applying lapis and malachite mixed paint. He wanted to show the rich skills of the Newa school of paubha and our unique paint mixtures. He learned the art of mixing lapis in Japan and bought 15 grams of high-quality lapis for \$300 especially for this painting. This is the first time in the history of paubha painting that lapis, malachite, gold and silver mixtures have been used. Chitrakar added gold and silver mixtures in the deity's jewellery, and the green background is the purest lapis and malachite mix, a paint technique no other paubha artists have dared practice.



RAKTA GANESH

(Artist's Collection) Mineral on canvas, lapis, indigo mix, 65 x 72.5in, 2020

Lok Chitrakar has painted many forms of Ganesh but the most striking one is of Maha Rakta Ganesh, the red Ganesh which took him 16 years to complete. The inspiration is to bring to light the extraordinary talent of Jiva Ram, a lesser-known Nepali artist of the 15th century, who went to Tibet and mastered its artistic styles. In the 16 years it took him to complete this piece, the canvas was eaten by termites, but Chitrakar continued to paint on it as a symbolic mark – the holes can be still seen. As always, he added his own unique touches, like the women holding the Asthamangal, a message of women empowerment within a strong representation of the male embodiment of Ganesh. The painting was completed during lockdown and Chitrakar was so absorbed in it to emulate the artistic spirit of Jiva Ram that the turmoil of the Covid days did not affect him at

EVENTS



Lok Chitrakar exhibition

Original masterpieces, early works, sketches and prints by Lok Chitrakar are on display at his solo exhibition this week.
26 March – 26 April 2023, Museum of Nepali Art, Thamel, 9802020484, 9802333471

Pauline’s Popup

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. Also includes ink and inkwash workshop and woodcarving.
23 – 25 March, Nana Hotels, Thamel

Sustainability fair

This plastic-free event , organised by WWF Nepal for Earth Hour 2023, will host stalls from sustainable businesses, music performances by Wangden Sherpa, Roselynn Shrestha and Utshab Nepal.
25 March, 11am – 5pm, Bhrikuti Mandap, Pradarshani Marg



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



Euta Sapanako Awasan

Watch the Nepali version of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* at Mandala Theatre.
24 March – 23 April, 5:15pm onwards, Mandala Theatre

DINING



Kyubi’s Kitchen

For customisable bowls of noodles, platters filled to the brim with dumplings, spicy noodles, kimbap, corn dogs, da-pow and more, rooms paying homage to popular animes like *Tokyo Ghoul*, Kyubi’s Kitchen is the perfect place.
12 – 8pm, Jhamsikhel, 9810298050

MUSIC

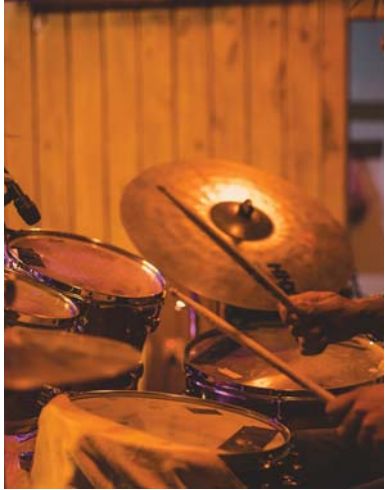


Tribal Haat

Artists and folklore groups from various ethnic communities showcase their music, dance and oral traditions in this cultural fiesta.
25 March, 1pm onwards, Pork Hub, Jhamsikhel

Live music

Enjoy live music from bands and solo artists this week at Trisara. Call to know who is performing.
Every night, Trisara, Lazimpat, (01) 4410200



SPACE X KUSH

Shaurav Bhattarai with Space band and Kush will be performing live. Listen to their solo music and album classics.
24 March, 8:45pm onwards, Titos Pub, Thamel



Guyseika

Participate in the electronic music workshop and performance by French artist Guyseika and band Eka Faune.
24 March, 6pm – 9pm, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Pulchok

Kunga

Kunga Hotel Restaurant & Bar is one of the best Chinese restaurants in Kathmandu. Grab some hot pot, peanut chicken and shredded potatoes in Kunga’s cozy and casual setting.
8am – 9pm, Boudha, (01)4915117



Mughal empire

Taste delicious Biryanis and Kebabs for lunch and dinner, or order combo sets online.
Dhobighat, (01) 5915100

About Town

GETAWAY



Hotel Annapurna View

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

The Old Inn

This bed and breakfast place offers a cozy getaway with a scenic view of Annapurna, Langtang and beyond. Its traditional Newa architecture is reminiscent of old Newa houses of the Valley.
Bandipur, Tanahu, (065) 520110



The Inn Patan

What was once a traditional brick and timber Newa house has been transformed into a beautiful heritage hotel. Experience the vibrant history of Patan Darbar Square during your stay here.
Patan, 9851066897

Jagatpur Lodge

The lodge nestles in 8 acres of jungle grassland. Choose to stay in special tents which are no less than 5 star rooms and each consist of a private viewing deck to rejoice in the breathtaking natural beauty.
Jagatpur, Chitwan, (01) 4221711



Dhulikhel Mountain Resort

This resort blends together culture and comfort seamlessly with well-designed bungalows and Newa accents visible throughout the resort.
Dhulikhel, (01) 4420774



Café de Tukche

Tired of trying to figure out what to cook for lunch day after day? Get authentic Thakali food delivered from Café de Tukche. Order the Thakali Khana set, or take a break from rice and try the Thakali Dhedo set instead. Check out the menu online.
10am – 10pm, Lazimpat, 9828937500

Attic

Enjoy Attic’s signature Royal Aloo and Attic chicken chop in your next outing with your friends and family.
Gyaneshwor, 9801222550

WEEKEND WEATHER



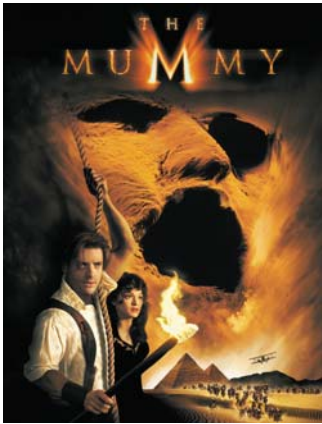
Warmer and drier

The coming weekend will be warmer and drier than it has been. Kathmandu recorded more than 40mm of rain between Friday and Tuesday, and it was unseasonably cold all over the country. There was up to a metre of snow in the higher elevations. There will still be short, sporadic showers this weekend, although Sunday and next week are likely to be largely dry in Kathmandu. Daytime temperature will climb to 25°C, although nights will still be nippy.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 24° 10°	 23° 10°	 25° 9°

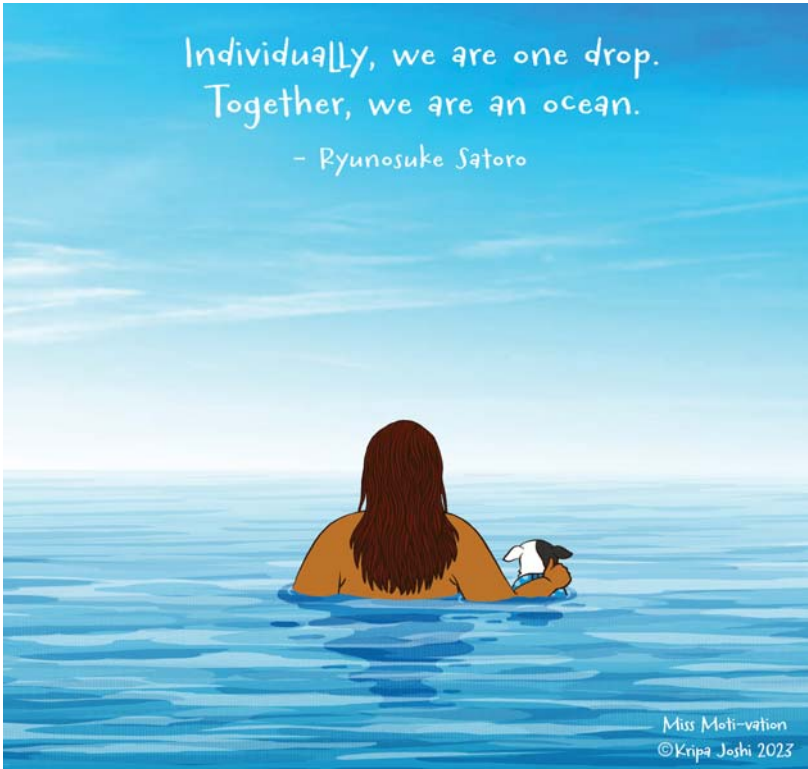
OUR PICK

Take a trip down Nostalgia Lane with the action-packed and overwhelmingly fun 1999 classic *The Mummy*. It is the year 1923 and Rick O’Connell, an American explorer, has discovered Hamunaptra, the city of the dead. Three years later, he meets with a beautiful librarian, Evelyn “Evy” Carnahan and her brother, Jonathan. When Evy accidentally revives the mummified corpse of an Egyptian priest, Imhotep, the pair must find a way to kill him before he rises back into power and destroys the world. A memorable and pleasing blend of heart, humour, heroics and horror, *The Mummy* is a perfect film to kick back and enjoy this weekend. Stars 2023 Best Actor Oscar winner Brendan Fraser, Rachel Weisz, John Hannah, Arnold Vosloo, Kevin J O’Connor, Jonathan Hyde and Patricia Velásquez.



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 नपरोँ ।
- 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-India trans-boundary bonds

National borders do not just divide countries, they also join them

Borders do not just divide countries, they also join them. And few international borders are like the one between Nepal and India. Although the line on the map demarcates two sovereign nations, there is a shared history, culture and tradition that transcend the modern boundary.



BORDERLINES
Chandra Kishore

Culture has its own history and geography. While the state is busy managing and defending its frontier, people on both sides live in a borderless reality. Actually, all international borders should be like the one between Nepal and India.

The boundaries among most European nations were erased with the Schengen agreement, but Europe itself has a hard border with those who are not members of this treaty kept out by Fortress Europe. Even the US-Canada border is not as open as the one between Nepal and India.

The border pillars in the Nepal Tarai pass through rivers, farmlands and even cut across households. This frontier cannot erase the geography, religion, culture and lifestyle of the communities that live on either side that share surnames and family ties.

It is to celebrate this trans-boundary bond that an annual मिथिला परिक्रमा circumambulation of the Mithila region is held. Pilgrims on this circuit travelled 107km in Nepal and 23km in India on the full-moon day of Phagu on 7 March. They start at the birthplace of Sita in Janakpur to the sites associated with Ram in Bihar state.

Rajwati Devi, 78, has been doing the holy circuit every year for the past 18 years. It is an honour to accompany Sita's डोली on foot with song and dance by day, and taking designated night stops, she says. For thousands of pilgrims like Rajwati Devi, the border does not exist.

There are many festivals and traditions that bind Nepal and India, but the Mithila Circuit is perhaps the most meaningful in bringing together the peoples of the two countries on either side.

The Purnagiri Mela in India's Uttarakhand state is similarly significant. It is only after pilgrims from India pay their respects at the Sidhha Baba temple in the border town of Mahendranagar in Nepal's western Tarai that their religious



SURENDRA KAMATI



JIYALAL SHAH

observance is said to be complete. For centuries, this pilgrimage has happened in March-April between two auspicious full-moon days.

The most important cross border festival is, of course, Shivaratri, when hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from India join those from various parts of Nepal to congregate at Pashupati temple in Kathmandu.

To be sure, every citizen has an attachment to their country. The importance of that sense of territorial belonging is not diminished by nationals of another country also sharing a link. Borders are geography, festivals like Mithila

and Purnagiri are culture that has evolved organically over centuries before either of our nation states existed in their modern form.

The Karatapur Gurudwara of the Sikhs fell on the Pakistan side of the border after partition in 1947. For the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak four years ago, India and Pakistan overcame bilateral tensions to form a pilgrimage corridor for India's Sikhs to visit the shrine.

If even India and Pakistan could agree on a transboundary matter, there is a lot Kathmandu and New Delhi can do to better

NO MAN'S LAND: People freely pass across the border at Madar in Siraha district (above). A border pillar divides the village of Sirsiya of Parsa district in this view from India into Nepal (left).

facilitate cultural and religious exchanges between the people of our borderlands.

Despite the open border between India and Nepal, travel, trade and communication can be streamlined even more for the people living on both sides. But their voices are rarely heard in bilateral meetings between Indian and Nepali officials when they discuss more 'serious' matters like hydropower, air routes or energy trade. There is still lot to be done to improve crossborder ties.

One of the areas that needs urgent attention is the preservation of archaeological sites on both sides of the border. Ruins of ancient towns and monuments need to be excavated, relics like coins, religious objects that hold significance to both countries have to be preserved. These artefacts provide proof of the cross-cultural ties that existed before an international border divided us.

Archaeologist Ashok Kumar Sinha from Bihar says the Indo-Gangetic plains that Nepal and India share has been settled since

early human history, and has as yet undocumented sites showing the origin and evolution of pre-Buddhist cultures. There is a lot more India and Nepal can do to cooperate in archaeology.

So far, most archaeological excavations have been done separately and in a largely ad hoc manner. This is a pity since the sites being explored are from a period when the civilization spread across the current territory of the two countries.

The Simraungad kingdom spanned present day Bihar-Nepal, as did Kapilvastu. Mounds and buried ruins from ancient times lie waiting to be discovered so that we can trace back the origin of the Indo-Gangetic civilisation and the religions that evolved here.

These site are common to India and Nepal, there is no point arguing about 'our' and 'their' here. Ram Sharan Agrawal, 78, is an archaeologist in Bihar and a strong proponent of joint excavations of significant sites along the border.

But given the wave of ultra-nationalism on both sides, this may not be immediately possible. But it is precisely to dismantle populist nationalism that we need to dig into our past to find the common culture that unites us. Perhaps Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's forthcoming visit to India could be a start. 🇳🇵



हिमालको चैत अंक बजारमा



हिमालमिडिया प्रा. लि.
पाटनढोका, ललितपुर

Highways, irrigation canals, transmission lines and new railways disturb Nepal's national parks

■ **Sonia Awale**

Nepal's community forestry program doubled tree cover to 45% in 30 years. Nature sanctuaries make up a quarter of the country's area.

Two years ago, Nepal's national parks marked five years with zero rhino poaching. Nepal is also the first tiger range country to nearly triple its population of the big cats.

But new linear infrastructure projects will soon be crisscrossing national parks along the Tarai, disturbing the habitat and blocking wildlife migration routes.

Nearly 400km of the 1,028km East-West Highway slices through national parks in Parsa, Chitwan, Bardia and Banke districts. Transmission lines have been built through protected areas, more are planned. Irrigation canals such as Babai, Ranijamara and Sitka obstruct wildlife movement pathways.

"Nepal is among the fastest growing countries in terms of infrastructure, but projects are also the least well planned," says World Wildlife Fund Nepal (WWF-N) Country Director Ghana Gurung.

Development vs conservation has been a longstanding dilemma for countries like Nepal, but experts say it need not be. Around the



world, planners are now building infrastructure with climate-smart and wildlife-friendly safeguards. With technical expertise and investment, there is no reason Nepal cannot do the same.

In fact, the 30km Narayanghat-Mugling Highway features the first two of Nepal's wildlife underpasses where the busy highway artery passes through an important animal migration corridor. Camera traps at underpasses showed deer, wild boar and other animals used them regularly, with half the wildlife movement occurring in winter when animals search for water.

The Narayanghat-Butwal

highway, which is being upgraded, will have 40 wildlife crossings along the Daunne-Gaidakot section. Their location is being determined after monitoring wildlife movement in the area. The project funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) will also monitor how much the animals use the crossings.

The facilities are necessary not just to prevent the fragmentation of wildlife habitats, but also to reduce roadkill of endangered species.

But there is contradiction between road engineers and conservationists, with the former prioritising connectivity while the latter are blamed for one-

dimensional advocacy for wildlife.

Bridging this gap is the recently launched Asia's Linear Infrastructure safeGuarding Nature (ALIGN) project which aims to protect protected areas from the impact of new infrastructure.

Funded by USAID and implemented by WWF, the ALIGN project was launched at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Montreal in December 2022 with an initial focus on three countries: Nepal for its rich biodiversity, Mongolia for its fragile protected areas, and India which is accelerating investment in infrastructure.

ALIGN has three main objectives: refine and strengthen existing policies such that they align with international best practices, enhance partnerships to promote and support investment, and implement safeguards for linear infrastructure and capacity building.

"As it stands we have a very weak policy framework but we must strengthen it to avoid the impacts of big infrastructure. Soon we will be reviewing them," says Semina Kafle of the ALIGN project.

She adds: "Our focus is on producing our own experts. But there is a big gap between

Wildlife-people coexistence in

While farmers try to avoid encountering tigers, tourists want to encounter them

■ **Kunda Dixit** in Bardia

Bhadai Tharu and a group of a dozen villagers were collecting firewood inside Bardia National Park when there was a rustle in the undergrowth. Before he could react, a tigress leapt out of the bushes and pinned him down with her claws.

The others fled, but Tharu fought back, punching the animal with his fist. The tigress let go, and Tharu felt his face covered in blood. There was a hollow cavity where his left eye used to be.

That was 20 years ago. But instead of fear and revenge against tigers, Bhadai Tharu, 54, (pictured, right) is the foremost conservationist activist on the fringes of this national park in the western Tarai.

"The tigress was just trying to protect herself. It was us who were intruding into her space," says Tharu, who is now involved in protecting the community forest of the Khata Wildlife Corridor that connects Bardia National Park with the Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary across the border in India.

Tharu was awarded the Abraham Conservation Award, and still proudly wears the shades Leonardo DiCaprio gifted him during a visit to Bardia in 2010.

The wildlife corridor is important because although not within the park boundary, it is a



JANA AŠENBRENNEROVÁ

trans-boundary landscape allowing free movement of wildlife between India and Nepal. As a social mobiliser, Bhadai Tharu has even composed a romantic song which he sings jauntily at community gatherings about an Indian tigress and a Nepali tiger falling in love and having lots of cubs.

Nepal has nearly tripled its

wild tiger population from 121 in 2009 to more than 355 today, far exceeding a target set by tiger range countries in 2010 to double the population of this endangered mammal in 12 years. Of these, 132 tigers are in Bardia National Park alone, and 40 or so roam the Khata Wildlife Corridor commuting back and forth between India and Nepal.

But the growing numbers of tigers, wild elephants and other predators mean that the danger of human-wildlife encounters has also increased. On Monday, two sisters were killed by a tiger while they were collecting firewood inside Khata. More than 20 people have been killed in attacks by tigers and wild elephants in Bardia in the past

four years.

Most of these encounters have happened in the buffer zone outside the national park, or in Khata when villagers enter the forests to forage for wild mushroom and fern or to graze livestock. A young woman was killed by police last year in Bardia when an angry protest against a villager who was killed by a tiger turned violent.

Experts are now trying to figure out the best way to conserve Nepal's conservation success story. They say people living on the fringes of the park need to be convinced about the benefit of protecting the wildlife habitat and feel ownership of the national park (see adjoining piece).

"We cannot change how wildlife behaves, but we can change how humans behave," says Shiva Raj Bhatta who was involved in Bardia National Park before joining World Wildlife Fund Nepal (WWF-N). "The reason for Nepal's success in conservation is that it has been participatory, and we must continue to put the priority on the livelihoods of communities."

The strategy is to ensure that villagers outside the park and in the community forests in the buffer zone are allowed rotational harvesting of fodder grass, deadwood or edible forest crops. In addition, communities get help from the park and the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) to set up homestays so they

s from infrastructure



PHOTOS: JANA AŠENBRENNEROVA

PARKLAND: The East-West Highway, a transmission line and the Babai irrigation canal bifurcates Bardia National Park (*left*).

The 1.02km Kothiyaghat Bridge is Nepal's longest (*above*), and is an example of wildlife-friendly infrastructure design.

how an engineer thinks versus a conservationist. So we have decided to go back to school and make the impact of linear infrastructure on climate and wildlife an integral part of engineering studies."

ALIGN is working with the Institute of Engineering (IOE) in Pulchok Campus to develop a syllabus for an elective for students of civil and electrical engineering, and urban planning.

The team is also collaborating with American universities to bring engineering lecturers to the Institute. As the demand and interest for the course increases,

the elective will be upgraded to a core course or even a Master's program.

"It is crucial that we equip our students with the latest technologies and construct linear infrastructure while also ensuring the safety of the wildlife," says Shashidhar Joshi, dean of IOE.

He adds: "This is already practiced elsewhere in the world and we are integrating it now into our engineering studies to redefine infrastructure and planning."

Poorly planned highway, power line, or railway alignments now threaten to undo Nepal's conservation success. With poaching controlled to a large extent, protected areas are now getting overcrowded leading to more frequent contact between people and tigers, wild elephants and leopards (*read article, below*).

Wildlife crossings over or

under highways or irrigation canals can make them safer for endangered species. Otherwise roadkill will be a problem on upgraded highways because of more vehicles and their speed.

Safe routes for animals will also reduce human-wildlife contact. They provide drainage, preventing inundation especially as climate-induced weather extremes lead to more downpours and flash floods.

Wildlife friendly structures across highways and irrigation canals are helpful, but they need to be maintained and monitored.

An underpass in Barandabhar, a 29km-long forest corridor bisected by the East-West Highway in Chitwan is often cited as a notable wildlife crossing.

But, says Sandesh Singh Hamal of the ALIGN Project, lack of upkeep has turned it into a garbage dump.

He adds: "Who should be responsible for their maintenance? There should be no conflict regarding the jurisdiction, we cannot pass the buck from one agency to another."

The ALIGN project has a performance period until September 2025 during which it will also facilitate learning and sharing between the three focal countries. With Nepal embarking on mega projects like the East-West Railway, Nijgad Airport and the Kathmandu-Tarai Expressway, wildlife crossings need to be integrated into their planning.

Says Ghana Gurung of WWF: "We will work with governments and try to bring engineers and conservationists together to ensure infrastructures do not disturb protected areas." 🇳🇵

Nepal national park



can benefit from eco-tourism.

Citizen scientists from the community are trained to operate camera traps to identify and monitor problematic tigers, schools in Bardia conduct vocational training in running homestays and have active eco-clubs.

"Our income depends on saving wildlife. If there are no tigers, there are no tourists," says Mangal Tharu, who runs a homestay in Dalla on the edge of the national park. It has become an international model for heritage conservation and eco-tourism, and needs to be replicated in Bardia and other parks in Nepal.

"We should stop calling it wildlife-people conflict, this is wildlife-people natural coexistence," he adds.

Indeed, the balance

conservationists have to strike is that while farmers try to avoid encountering tigers, tourists who come here want to see them. The park's success in protecting nature is paradoxically the problem: increased concentrations of tigers, leopards and wild elephants mean communities need more help in building watch-towers, electric fences and leopard-proof goat corrals. An early warning system that detects wildlife movement alerts villagers through SMS.

Since most of the fatalities in the past four years have been of villagers entering the forest alone, WWF-N and Bardia National Park are working with community forest user groups to raise awareness

about changing their activities. But that is of little consolation to the two women who were killed in Madhuban village in Khata this week. Eleven others have been killed by wild animals, six of them this year alone.

The revival of jungle has increased the danger to the community in villages like Madhuban near the Indian border.

Raj Bahadur Chaudhari remembers the surrounding land having just a few scraggly trees and a dusty floodplain. Today the Khata Wildlife Corridor is not just a corridor for wildlife movement: it is a conservation success story in its own right – thanks to the efforts of the community forestry user groups.

Indeed, Nepal's longest bridge across the Geruwa channel of the Karnali River has itself become a model for how new infrastructure can allow unrestricted wildlife movement (*see story, above*). The 1.02km Kothiyaghat Bridge crosses a wide floodplain that used to be a barren wasteland, but is now a dense jungle allowing wildlife safe passage underneath its span.

Says Hari Gurung of an umbrella group of Khata's community forests: "Khata is now a vital wildlife habitat outside the national park. It is a successful example of landscape level cross-border nature conservation. Now we have to also make it safe for people living here." 🇳🇵

Does Nepal need the army to guard parks?

Despite the military's anti-poaching role, local communities have a better track record in conservation

■ Tanka Dhakal

Nepal's success in doubling its forest cover in 30 years has been possible for two reasons: community management of woodlands, and the protection of the country's national parks by the Nepal Army.

But questions are now being raised about why national parks need to be guarded with guns when protection by local communities have been so successful.

"Our internal evaluation has shown that it is due to the presence of the military that endangered species have been successfully protected," says Megh Nath Kafle of the Ministry of Forest's Department of Biodiversity and Environment. "Without the army, conservation would have been much more difficult."

However, some activists say giving all the credit for Nepal's successes in conservation solely to the military would be a disservice to the scores of local communities that have been even more successful in protecting wildlife habitats.

"People living at the edge of national parks have played the most important role in nature conservation," says Bharati Pathak of the Federation of Community Forest User Groups.

"By praising only the army, we ignore the contribution of local communities. The Annapurna Conservation Area is an example of successful conservation even without a military presence," she adds.

The Nepal Army has also been accused of harassing local communities for entering buffer zone forests to collect wild edibles, or grazing livestock even though those areas outside the parks are not within the army's jurisdiction.



WWF NEPAL

Conservationists, however, say that the military's presence is critical in parks along the border with India to deter poachers. Killing tigers and rhinos for their pelts, bones and horns nearly decimated India's wildlife in the 1980s and 1990s. Poaching increased in Nepal during the Maoist conflict when the army was redeployed elsewhere.

The Royal Nepal Army's involvement in guarding national parks started in 1975 after Chitwan National Park was established, mainly to protect the seriously depleted numbers of rhinos and tigers.

Today, more than 8,000 soldiers are stationed in Nepal's various nature reserves, with battalions in Chitwan, Bardia, Shuklaphanta, Banke, Parsa, Shivapuri and Langtang, while there are company-strength bases guarding Khaptad, Sagarmatha, Bara, Shey Phoksundo, Makalu Barun, Kosi Tappu and Dhorpatan reserves. Conservation areas like Annapurna, Manaslu, Kanchenjunga and Gauri Shankar do not have an army presence.

The main duty of the soldiers is to control encroachment and poaching with regular patrols as well as to help with wildlife census and wildlife translocation activities.

"Problems arise when villagers enter the national park from the buffer zones, and our patrols have to take action," explains Brigadier General Krishna Prasad Bhandari. "Our units constantly work with the national park authorities to spread awareness about park rules."

Even so, for many activists and locals it is not clear why nature needs to be protected with guns when local communities everywhere in Nepal have a proven track record in effective nature conservation.

"It would be much more effective if the army worked more closely with local communities because without their cooperation, genuine conservation is not possible," says Ramprit Yadav, a pioneer naturalist who was involved in the establishment of Chitwan National Park.

Soldiers have been accused of terrorising local villagers, especially those from Indigenous communities like Tharu, Bote, Chepang and Majhi.

"Conservation does not come out of the barrel of a gun, you have to involve local communities, especially Indigenous peoples who have traditionally managed their forest habitats," says Naya Sharma Poudel of Forest Action Nepal.

Nepal's forest cover has increased from 26% in 1992 to 45% today, largely due to the role of the community forestry program. Nearly 24% of the country's area is now protected nature reserves, and the army is deployed in 15 of them. 🇳🇵

From serf to solicitor

Urmila Chaudhary pursues a law degree to provide former bonded labourers like herself legal support

■ Santosh Dahit

At age 9 Urmila Chaudhary was sent from her home in Dang to be an indentured servant in a Kathmandu family. At 21, she was still doing household chores, washing dishes at her owner's house. She always dreamt of one day going to school. At 36, she is now a third-year student at Kathmandu School of Law and determined to provide legal aid to children like her who were bonded into indentured servitude. "I have reached here after struggling and suffering for years, but there are hundreds of young girls like me," says Chaudhary. "I understand what they are going through, and want to help them as a lawyer and friend." Families in Kathmandu used to source household help from the children of Tharu families in Dang, Banke, Bardia, Kailali and Kanchanpur districts as unpaid household help (*kamlari*). Mostly girls, they would be promised a salary and schooling, but usually got neither. Chaudhary was from Manpur in Dang and was also brought to Kathmandu under the same pretext, and instead of being a student she was a serf as she grew into adulthood. Instead of going to school, she



PHOTOS COURTESY URMILA CHAUDHARY

LEGALLY FREE: Urmila Chaudhary giving a speech at a function in Berlin in 2018 after being freed from servitude, and with classmates (at left) at Kathmandu School of Law.



was made to do the dishes in the mornings and the evenings, wash the clothes and clean the owner's house in the afternoon. "I used to think that was my destiny," recalls Chaudhary. After the Society for Women's Awareness (SWAN) Nepal and Friends of Needy Children (FNC) began a campaign to eradicate the *kamlari* tradition, Chaudhary was

finally freed in January 2007 after 12 years of bonded labour. Overnight, Urmila Chaudhary switched from slave to activist, and joined the movement to declare Dang *kamlari*-free. She also joined the Free Kamalari Development Forum, and after pressure from all sides, the Nepal government finally abolished the practice of indentured labour in 2013. Also abolished was the *kamaiya* system, which like *kamlari*, was a feudal practice in which mainly landless Tharu families from the western Tarai would be bonded to owners who made them work in their fields to pay off inter-generational debt. In 2018, Chaudhary was conferred the 'Freedom from Fear Award' in New York by the Roosevelt Institute to Americans and in Middelburg, Netherlands, by the Roosevelt Stichting to non-Americans. Previous laureates include Malala Yousafzai, Hussain al-Shahristani, Aung San Suu Kyi and Louise Arbour. "I want to dedicate this award to my fellow 13,000 free *kamlari*," Chaudhary said in her acceptance speech in 2018. She has got five other international awards for her anti-slavery activism, including the United Nations Youth Courage Award for Education and International Human Rights. She adds that the awards inspire and encourage her to carry on, to work even harder for the children from disadvantaged communities in Nepal. Says Chaudhary: "After I become a lawyer, with continued support from other activists I am sure I can fulfil my dream to carry on the struggle for justice for all underprivileged Nepali children." 🇳🇵

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