



RASTRIYA SWATANTRA PARTY/FACEBOOK

Ringling in the new

Economist Swarnim Wagle's resignation from the Nepali Congress (NC), accusing its conjugal leadership of "bullying" has been the talk of Twitter for the past week. Now, it is disagreement with the non-Deuba faction of the NC that is holding up Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's attempts to complete his Cabinet.

Even after the 31 March appointment of new ministers, Dahal still holds six portfolios: Foreign, Law and Federal Affairs, Health and Population, Youth and Sports, Forest and Environment and Water Supply. The NC faction led by Gagan Thapa and Shekhar Koirala is understood to be demanding at least three of the vacant ministries.

It was PM Dahal who was under pressure to balance demands from his 10 coalition partners, but it is now Deuba who has to deal with the insistence of dissident factions within his own party. As a result, NC leaders like Gagan Thapa are getting impatient with the Deuba-Dahal leadership of the coalition.

"We are walking when we need to be running to ensure good governance and delivery,"

Thapa said on Wednesday. "This will not do." Deuba and Dahal do not just have to deal with the NC but also need to placate the independent RSP, which is fielding three prominent candidates in by-elections on 23 April – Wagle in Tanahu-1, Chair Rabi Lamichhane in Chitwan-2 and former police chief Ramesh Kharel in Bara-2.

Coalitions insiders told *Nepali Times* the prime minister is in no hurry to fill Cabinet positions just yet and may want to wait till the by-election results are in. That would essentially mean waiting to see how well the RSP does.

Swarnim Wagle created a political tidal wave when it emerged that he was resigning from the NC because of his differences with Sher Bahadur Deuba and his powerful wife, Arzoo. In a WhatsApp resignation message sent to NC General Secretaries Gagan Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma as well as dissident leaders Shekhar Koirala and Govinda Pokharel, Wagle reportedly said: 'I am stepping down because of constant insults

and bullying from the Deuba-Arzoo gang...I would now like to deliver to the public while my age, knowledge, and energy are still relevant, rather than simply wait and watch.'

Soon after, the NC decided to field Govinda Bhattarai against Wagle in Tanahu-1, the constituency vacated by Ram Chandra Paudel after he became president.

Wagle was heavily involved in drafting the NC's 2022 election manifesto, and had previously also been denied a ticket in November's federal polls.

"The party's activities and state over the last few years would cause any self-respecting member of the Nepali Congress to hang their head in shame," wrote Wagle on social media announcing his departure. "The historic party of BP Koirala, Ganesh Man Singh, Subarna Shamsher, and Kishunji (Krishna Prasad Bhattarai) has turned into a dysfunctional nepotistic gang.'

The RSP immediately offered Wagle the Tanahu ticket, even while Rabi Lamichhane is still

tangled in a legal case involving his citizenship. On Wednesday, the Supreme Court asked Lamichhane to furnish proof that he had renounced his US citizenship even though Attorney General Dinmani Pokhrel earlier decided not to file a case against him.

The Chitwan-2 seat became vacant after Lamichhane had to resign from his MP seat after an earlier Supreme Court ruling on his citizenship, and also had to give up his home ministership. It does not look to be smooth sailing for the RSP chair this time amid persisting questions about his US passport.

By-elections on 23 April will also be held in the Bara-2 constituency vacated by vice-president Ram Sahaya Prasad Yadav, and here the arithmetic is even more complex. Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) chair Upendra Yadav, who lost in Saptari-2 to Janamat Party founder CK Raut in November, is up against Shiva Chandra Kushwaha, again of Janamat, whom Raut got to defect from the Maoists. Essentially, the Bara polls will be a contest between Raut and the JSP's Upendra Yadav.

Interestingly, there are no by-election candidates from the Maoist Centre, which heads the coalition government. So 23 April will be a kind of referendum on which among the RSP, NC, UML or JSP has more public support. 🇳🇵

Shristi Karki

GOVERNMENT
IS GOD
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

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Government is God

Smack at the start of the tourist season, the government announced with just two week's notice that effective 1 April all trekkers will need to hire licensed guides. It was not an April Fool's joke.

Talk about bad timing. Even if a ridiculous and unenforceable decision like this was necessary, it should have been made at least one season in advance.

Another such ad hoc announcement was made last week by Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality to ban all helicopter cargo flights to Everest Base Camp (See 'Choppers vs Chauri', page 4-5). The restrictions went into force just as expeditions started arriving in Lukla. Now, there are not enough porters, yak and zopkyo trains for the five-day ferry to base camp.

Some expeditions have already switched from climbing Lhotse to other Himalayan peaks, Icefall Doctors are packed ten to a tent because their gear has not arrived.

assistance, and was already being criticised as being redundant.

Adding the guide provision further bureaucratises trekking, adding to hassles visitors already face and increasing chances of extortion and bribery along the trails.

Trekking and mountaineering are about the freedom of the wilderness. Adding more layers of whimsical rules defeats the whole purpose. There are other ways of increasing employment and earnings from tourism by upgrading facilities and convenience, for which many visitors would gladly pay more.

We should not be milking tourists every step of the way with National Park Fees, Municipality Fees, Trekking Permit Fees, TIMS Card fees, guide fees, or charging three times more than locals for flights.

Trekkers found without a TIMS card or a guide will henceforth be fined Rs12,000, and the operators fined Rs10,000. The



KUNDA DIXIT

Nepal's tourism slogan 'Guest Is God' is turning into a farce.

The ostensible reason was to protect the environment and provide jobs. But herding has been in steady decline in the Khumbu, leading to a lack of yaks. And many young males from Khotang and Okhaldhunga who used to do portering have migrated to cities or to the Gulf.

No doubt, helicopter traffic over Sagarmatha National Park needs to be regulated. At peak tourist season, the constant sound of choppers flying up and down from Base Camp is a disturbance. Some rescue helicopter operators have been implicated in insurance fraud.

The trekking guide rule was made by Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation Sudan Kirati. It appears to be politically-motivated to appease unions and trekking agencies. If safety was such a concern, how about first making domestic aviation safer? And how come Nepali trekkers do not have to take guides if it is so unsafe?

Foreign hikers need a Trekking Information Management System (TIMS) card before hitting 14 trails, and it is not available without booking a licensed guide.

The Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal which has long lobbied for a 'one trekker one guide' rule is in on the deal because it will be managing the card and guides. The TIMS card was also devised to keep track of trekkers and provide emergency

apprehending officer will get a 20% cut. Most trekkers to Nepal come in groups, and already hire guides and porters. Only a quarter of the 100,000 tourists who come to hike in Nepal every year are 'Free Independent Travellers', which means they plan their own trips without assistance from travel or trekking agencies.

Many of these visitors share photos and videos of their travels on social media and are Nepal's most effective influencers. The TIMS and guide rules have been greeted with ridicule and outrage on social media. Potential tourists have said they are going elsewhere.

This is damaging publicity for Nepal as a destination at a time when the industry is struggling after the pandemic and negative publicity from air safety concerns.

Free and independent travellers tend to spend most of their money in rural areas where tourism income matters the most. Most foreign trekking groups, on the other hand, pay holiday wholesalers in Europe or elsewhere who then hire Kathmandu-based agencies, and very little of that trickles down to where trekking income makes the most difference.

The mandatory trekking guide scheme will suffer the same fate as mountaineering liaison officers, most of whom are hardly ever at base camp and just go along for the ride.

ONLINE PACKAGES



Upcycling is gaining momentum in Nepal. Everything from paper to cars has been transformed into usable and wearable items. Discarded buffalo horns are turned into Maori-inspired pendants, waste fabric into clothing items. Watch this video for details.

OUTMIGRATION

Nepal's reliance on foreign labour migration and remittances is an indication of a fundamental economic and social failure ('No country for young men,' Priti Thapa, #1155).

David Seddon

■ Outmigration is the reality of all Nepalis due to political uncertainty. In ten years time there will be hardly any youth left in the country. The politicians are never going to realise this.

Binod Karki

NEPALI FARMERS

There are many projects in the country with the intention of improving the status of farmers, but they do not seem to have helped much ("My children shouldn't be farmers," Anita Bhetwal, #1155). It would help if real farm-based cooperatives are operated at the federal level.

Netashwa

■ The top concerns for farmers continue to be input prices, input availability, government policies, lower output prices, low self-esteem, absence of respect and recognition. Farmers also expect inflation to push up the cost of living for farm families every year.

Krishna Ghimire

EDUCATION

The situation described in this article about school performance is concerning, as it reveals a significant gap in the quality of education in Nepal ("Why so many Nepali Students underperform?", Anita Shrestha, nepalitimes.com). The report suggests that the root causes lie in inadequate teacher training, poor teaching-learning strategies, insufficient subject teachers, and the promotion of weak and failed students from lower grades. The government and policymakers in Nepal should focus on implementing practical and implementable educational policies, prioritising the hiring of qualified teachers to improve the quality of education in public schools.

Rak Hee

NEPAL ARMY

Military presence in parks generates employment, reduces animal poaching, it deters our corrupt politicians from making our forests and wildlife another gold mine to plunder ('Does Nepal need the army to guard parks?', #1154).

Alpa Badani Shakya

■ Demanding transparency in the army is well and good but claiming that Nepal does not need a military at all is not only stupid but dangerous (Defence Mechanism, Editorial, #1154)!

Mingmar Sadhana

■ After successfully finishing the police, bureaucracy and the judiciary, now the whole motive seems to be to finish off the last institution of the country. Then Nepal is up for grabs either by China or India. Or even made into another Afghanistan by the US.

Ananta Adhikari

CHILD LABOUR

Such an exemplary journey of a former kamari Urmila Chaudhary despite the hardships she faced along the way ('From serf to solicitor', Santosh Dahit, #1154). Thank you for sharing the story.

Teju Limbu

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Letter to Sikles

by Kunda Dixit

The doors of many homes in the village of Sikles are padlocked. The barren terrace farms have forests growing in them. The health post ambulance is permanently stationed in Pokhara, and the student body of the secondary school has shrunk by half. As depopulation hits home, those who remain in Sikles mull ways to reverse outmigration. Visit nepalitimes.com for full story.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Eastern Nepal's depopulating mountains

by Gopal Dahal

The farming household of Gopal and Rupa Pariyar is the only one still left in the village of Chaubise Rural Municipality, where 10 years ago, there used to be 20 households. They all left one after another for the Tarai. Their farms have turned into jungle, and the monkeys now regularly destroy crops.

Most popular on Twitter

No country for young men

by Priti Thapa

For high schoolers Nirajan, Niraj, Rajan and Bisan, overseas work is the only way out of their station in life. Nirajan and Niraj want to migrate to Japan, while Rajan and Bisan want to work in South Korea under the Employment Permit System. Join the discussion online.

Most commented

Sherli goes trekking

by Sahina Shrestha

Sherli Doma Sherpa is just four years old, but her travel atlas can make even the grown-ups envious. She goes hiking regularly in Shivapuri National Park, has trekked around Lamjung, explored Parsa in scorching heat, decorated houses in Dharan, and went on a seven day trek to Gosaikunda. Read about the young traveler on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

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.



Deepak @FT_Deepak

How about decreasing the corruption in administrative offices all over Nepal and strict implementation of protocols rather than pointing fingers on defence budget.



A R T @AmulyaSir

Yes no army, just armed police are enough for domestic security.



Sujeev Shakya @sujeevshakya

Important editorial to ponder upon. Post retirement benefits will drain the economy in the long run. Bigger issue than the current guffgaff selling crisis.



Nepal Times @NepaliTimes

It took 15 years for Da Vinci to complete 'Mona Lisa' and three years for 'The Last Supper'. The greatest example of Lok Chitrakar's artistic magnanimity is the Hevajra Mandala which has taken him 25 years, and is not yet complete.



Guru Ng in the Green Valley @amritviral

This is simply Awesome! Absolutely Beautiful and a Masterpiece.

1,000 WORDS



RSS

CHAIRMAN AND HIS MEN: Rastriya Swatantra Party chair Rabi Lamichhane introducing two fellow candidates for the by-elections to be held on 23 April, Swarnim Wagle (left) and Ramesh Kharel (right).

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Narayani Pollution

Twenty years ago this week Nepali Times exposed toxic effluent being discharged into the Narayani River by a paper mill which was threatening the ecology of Chitwan National Park downstream.

The Chinese-aided Bhrikuti Paper Mill in Gaidakot was set up by Nepal government in 1984 and was later privatised. It eventually shut down in 2011 after workers went on strike.

But many more factories have sprung up along the Narayani since then. Excerpts of the report published on issue #139 4-10 April 2003:

Over the years, Bhrikuti's discharge has been analysed and tested. One toxicity analysis of samples of Narayani water by independent researchers last year showed just how serious the problem is. One indicator of pollution is Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD), and according to Nepali law, COD content in industrial discharge cannot exceed 250 mg/l. A sample of Bhrikuti's effluent showed a whopping 979.6 mg/l. Even 1 km below the mill, the river had COD of 58.14 mg/l, whereas the international threshold for drinking water is in the 5-10 mg/l range.

Another indicator of pollution is Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) which measures the amount of biologically usable oxygen in the water. A low BOD value implies a lot of micro-organisms present in the water (which is a healthy sign). Bhrikuti's effluent water had a BOD count of 74 mgO₂/l, and 1 km downstream it was 6.4 mg O₂/l. Narayani water above the mill was measured at only 3.6 mg O₂/l.

Measuring the pH value of discharge is an indicator of alkaline content, and the paper mill's effluent was 11.5 on the pH scale, whereas this value is not supposed to exceed pH 9 in industrial discharges. Since the pH scale is logarithmic, this means that the alkalinity of Bhrikuti's effluent was almost 1,000 times more than permissible standards. The researchers also detected high concentrations of ammonium nitrate and nitrite.

All this is poisoning wildlife like gharial, tiger, rhino and other animals, birds and plants in the national park.

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



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Securing Nepal's electric future

The country is set to increase hydropower generation eightfold, but risks wasting the power

■ Kumar Pandey

For decades, Nepalis have lamented the country's inability to harness its enormous hydropower potential. Now, the problem seems to be the country's inability to use the surplus that will soon be generated.

Since 1989, 123 large hydropower projects have been constructed on Nepal's fast-flowing Himalayan rivers bringing the total generation capacity to 2,148.5MW. After new projects come online in the next six years, generation capacity could be 18,000MW during the monsoon and 11,000MW in winter.

Our focus now should be not just on generating more power, but finding out ways to boost consumption by making electricity more competitive and sustainable.

Private sector projects generate 51% of Nepal's hydropower, and the rest are government projects. We also need to decide on these three options: whether to entirely privatise hydropower production, give more ownership to the government, or create a strong regulatory body to let private and public go hand-in-hand.

Private investments in power projects usually revert to government ownership in 30 years. Given how battery and hydrogen technology is revolutionising the world, it is difficult to say what will happen in the energy sector in the next three decades. Even so, Nepal's development may continue to rely on hydropower as the primary alternative to petroleum.

At present, 95% of Nepali households have access to electricity. But domestic consumption is not likely to keep pace with the increase in generation capacity. As it is, much of the valuable electricity generated in the monsoon is 'spilled' in the monsoon while there is a shortage in winter when 30% of power demand is met with imports from India (at up to Rs32 per unit last year).

Nepal first started producing hydroelectricity in 1911 with the opening of Chandra Jyoti in Pharping. King Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah ushered in the dawn of the electric age by turning on the first electric lamp in Tundikhel.

Nepal was only the second country in Asia to generate hydropower 111 years ago, and it was Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana who brought in British engineers to commission the plant.

The intervening decades have been characterised with inaction and wasted opportunities. Nepal now has to play catchup so that electricity is affordable and accessible to increase consumption. One way to do that



KUNDA DIXIT

is to lower the electricity tariff so that it is competitive with the price of LPG.

Nepal is still overwhelmingly dependent on biomass for energy, and many rural homes use only one electric bulb for light and cook over firewood. This is largely due to the lack of access to electric stoves, refrigerators and other appliances.

In 2021, the government announced that it would shift entirely to electric vehicles (EVs) by 2031. But this means investing in the necessary infrastructure, such as charging stations, and incentives for EVs.

Cement and steel industries are the largest consumers of electricity in Nepal. Proper planning is necessary to keep electricity production from going to waste, especially as it is expected to rise almost eightfold by 2030. Sadly, there seems to be no sense of urgency on the government's part.

It costs about Rs200 million to generate 1MW of electricity. A waste of 5,000MW is a loss of Rs1 trillion, and that is money invested by private shareholders and banks. Under such circumstances, loans and interests cannot be paid on time, which could

lead to defaults.

The trickle-down effect on the rest of the economy could be devastating. Serious economic diplomacy is needed to push efforts to export surplus electricity to India at a meaningful price until domestic demand rises.

Despite rhetoric to increase production, Nepal also lacks enough domestic and foreign investment in the sector. Banks do not have enough capital and the interest is too high. We do not have the necessary infrastructure either: project sites are accessible only for five months in a year due to bad roads during the monsoon.

Extension of transmission lines is sluggish. Local obstruction like in the construction of a substation in Lapsipedi is hindering progress. A national strategy and consensus is needed to expedite transmission lines.

During the Panchayat era, a resettlement company was formed to arrange accommodation for residents displaced by the construction of large projects. But it was dissolved when democracy was restored in 1990. Today, there is no land acquisition body at the national level.

Moreover, related agencies are working at cross purposes and have conflicting interests. For example, the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) is not only a producer but also the sole buyer of electricity generated by the private sector. It also determines the price of power, and it is often not attractive enough for the private sector. The Electricity Production Company, Hydropower Investment and Development Company and Electricity Development Department were all formed to generate hydroelectricity but there is no effective regulation of these bodies. The Electricity Regulatory Commission does everything but solve the existing problems or prepare for future challenges.

Governmental agencies like the Ministry of Energy, NEA, Nepal Stock Exchange, Nepal Securities Board, CIAA, Electricity Regulation Commission and Parliament committees should all coordinate their activities with a national strategy in mind.

With such vested interests, hydropower investors also have to navigate a sluggish bureaucracy. But if we want to secure the future of electricity in Nepal and not waste precious power, it is imperative that a single strong regulatory body be formed to streamline the sector in the national interest. ■

Kumar Pandey is General-Secretary of the Independent Power Producers' Association Nepal (IPPAN).



NMB BANK
एनएमबी बैंक

Turkish -Emirates

Turkish Technic and Emirates Airlines have signed an aircraft maintenance agreement to perform maintenance services on 5 of the UAE airline's Boeing 777s. Says CEO of Turkish Technic, Mikail Arkbulut: "We are delighted that Emirates has entrusted us with the base maintenance operations for five of



their Boeing 777 aircraft. As a leading maintenance, repair and overhaul provider of comprehensive aircraft and component services, we are committed to delivering the best-in-class MRO services for our customers. We believe this agreement marks the beginning of a long-standing partnership with Emirates."

USAID and MoHP

USAID and the Ministry of Health and Population launched a \$25 million health direct financing project that will support Karnali Province and three local governments to achieve the new Nepal Health Sector Strategic Plan which aims to provide Nepalis with equitable access to quality health services.

Nepal growth

The ADB's Asian Development Outlook says Nepal's economic growth will stabilise at 4.1% in 2023 after a growth of 5.8% in 2022. Nepal's GDP is projected to slow due to the monetary policy, low domestic demand, Covid-19 and global effects. Agricultural growth is expected to decrease to 2.0% from 2.3% as scanty rainfall has affected crop yield. Industry growth is likely to decelerate from high interest rate, import restriction measures, slow consumption and low external demand. Service sectors, on the other hand, will grow from 4.4% to 5.9% with a boost in tourism. The country's inflation is expected to increase up to 7.4% from 6.3% despite the monetary policy.



Nepal-China border

The Nepal-China Kerung border has reopened after nearly three years of being closed due to Covid. Industry and Commerce Secretary, Madhu Marasini, and Vice-Chair of Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, Chen Yongqi, jointly opened the border on 3 April.



UN coordinator

UN Resident Coordinator in Nepal, Hanaa Singer-Hamdy, presented her credentials to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal on 4 April. Hanaa previously worked as the UNICEF representative in Nepal and was the UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka.

Samsung New Year

Samsung is offering its latest range of TVs, refrigerators, washing machines in special New Year 2080 deals. The offer is valid till 16 May and includes up to 41% cashback on consumer durables and is available throughout Nepal with HIM Electronics and Triveni Byapar.

Hyatt Earth Hour

Hyatt Place, in its support for climate action, observed 'Earth Hour' by turning off its lights at 8:30pm for an hour on 25 March.

Toyota upgrade

United Traders Syndicate is organising a nation-wide Upgrade Event for Toyotas for New Year 2080. The event will be held in all Toyota outlets or dealers in Kathmandu Valley, Chitwan, Pokhara, Biratnagar, Dhangadi and Birtamod from 9–13 April. Customers will be able to trade in vehicles of any brand for a brand new Toyota.



Loconov

Loconov Motors, distributed through Sipradi Trading, is gaining popularity among Nepalis. The motor comes with a sustainable fuel and maintenance cost, and also a tracking and fleet management software.

Tyranny’s propagandists are winning

Democracies must support fact-based news and ensure its access to all to defend against the rising tide of authoritarianism

■ Maria Ressa and Nishant Lalwani

If democracy had its own doomsday clock, it would be at two minutes to midnight. According to the most recent analysis by Varieties of Democracy (known as V-Dem), 72% of the world’s population lived in autocracies last year, compared to 50% a decade ago. For the first time in more than two decades, there are more authoritarian regimes than liberal democracies – and we are not doing enough to address this threat.

The reversal has been stunning. In the Philippines, Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos won last year’s presidential election, 36 years after a popular revolt overthrew his father’s dictatorship. In Brazil, millions still refuse to accept former president Jair Bolsonaro’s defeat to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has forced its citizens to rise up against an occupier. On every continent, illiberal politicians are portraying democracy as an impractical historical relic.

We must do more to stop this rapid democratic backsliding. During World War II, when democracy was similarly threatened, the free world came together to bring about a more peaceful international order.

We are at a similar moment today – with an important twist. The current conflict between autocracy and democracy is fought



not only on the battlefield and in the political arena but also on social media and broadcast tv. If democracy is to prevail, credible, independent news media will be essential. Without trusted, impartial media, we cannot have shared facts. Without shared facts, we cannot have political accountability or fair elections. And without fair elections, democracy cannot survive. And yet, just when we need it most, fact-based, public-interest journalism is dying out. The ongoing demise of advertising revenue has severely limited news outlets’ ability to inform citizens, hold the powerful to account, and tell important stories.

The failure of journalism’s

business model has led to two decades of collapsing revenues, cost-cutting and layoffs. Thousands of news organisations across the world have shut down, while political actors have acquired others as a vehicle for spreading propaganda.

A 2022 report by the Center for International Media Assistance says funding for free media amounted to \$385 million in 2019 – roughly 0.3% of overseas development assistance. It has not grown since then. This is woefully insufficient. Public and private funders must increase support for media organisations to at least 1% of global development assistance, thereby providing an additional \$1 billion a

year to support public-interest journalism.

The defining challenge of our time, saving democracy, must be a collective effort. Last week, US President Joe Biden’s administration held its second Summit for Democracy, which aims to make democracies “more responsive and resilient”. The first summit took place (virtually) in December 2021 and ended with several heads of state – including Biden, then-New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and French President Emmanuel Macron – committing support to the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM).

IFPIM is a first-of-its-kind multilateral institution seeking to boost the economic resilience of news outlets and usher in a new paradigm for public-interest journalism within the next decade.

IFPIM has received financial contributions of almost \$50 million from 16 donors, including seven governments and nine firms and philanthropies. Many of these funders are contributing meaningfully to global media support for the first time. Since the last summit, IFPIM has funded 11 news outlets in ten countries,

including Brazil, Ukraine, Niger, Tunisia and Colombia.

And yet our funds are still only a fraction of the billions autocrats spend on strengthening their networks for disseminating disinformation. Democratic states must step up and commit significant funds to scale up the fight for independent media.

Wealthy democracies that have long understood the importance of a free press, including the G7 countries, must mobilise their vast resources to support the creation of a global information ecosystem that is more resilient to disinformation. Private firms, which rely on accurate information to thrive, must take a prominent role in this effort by committing capital to fix the market failure that has weakened public-interest journalism.

Support for public-interest media is not nostalgia for some halcyon era. The ability to access real-time, accurate information is essential to a well-functioning democracy.

To defend against the rising tide of authoritarianism, fact-based news must be readily accessible to all. Liberal democracy’s doomsday clock is edging closer to midnight. We must act now, or regret our indecision during the long tyrannical darkness that follows. 🇵🇭

© Project Syndicate
Maria Ressa, Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM), received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021 for her work as an investigative journalist in the Philippines. Nishant Lalwani is CEO of IFPIM.



NEW YEAR
NEW TOYOTA




Apr 9th – Apr 13th



CHOPPER vs CHAUR

Expeditions impacted by rule to replace ca

■ Bhadra Sharma

The spring mountaineering season had started when the Nepal government suddenly banned cargo helicopters to Everest Base Camp and told expeditions to use porters and yaks instead.

Just like another rule making it mandatory for all trekkers to hire guides, the decision has been greeted with cheers and jeers.

Helicopter companies and expeditions are outraged, while porters and owners of mules and yaks support the idea.

So far, 400 international climbers are expected on Mt Everest, about the same number as last year. Nepal's trekking and mountaineering industry is seeing a revival after the 2020-21 break.

The Expedition Operator's Association Nepal estimates that there will be more than 2,500 Nepali guides and support staff at Base Camp for expeditions on Everest, Lhotse and Nuptse peaks. They have to be supplied by food, energy and material for 3 months.

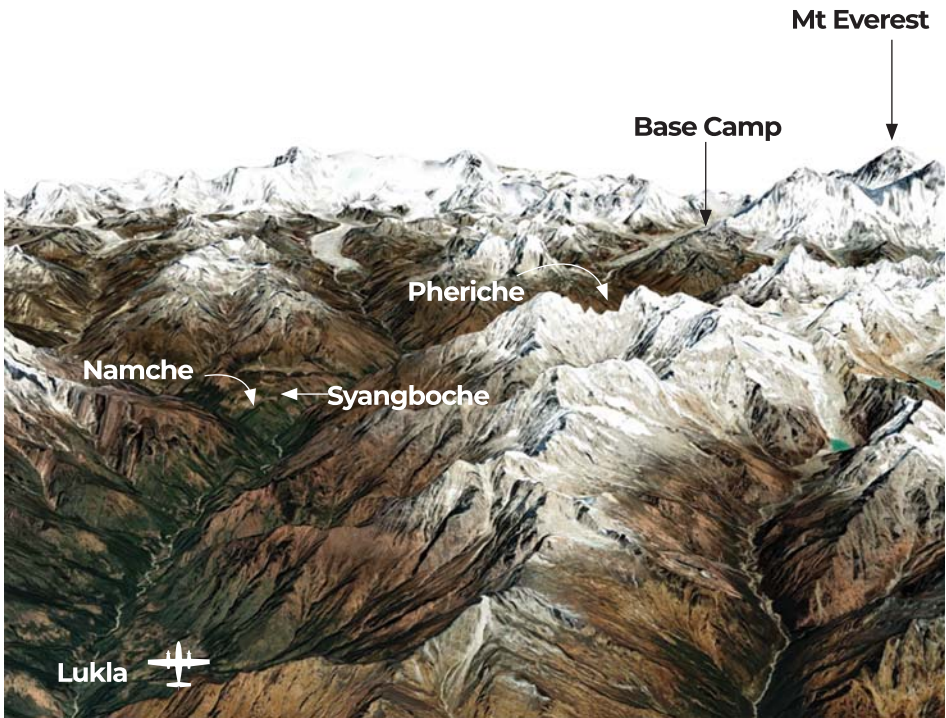
Nepal shares Everest (Chomolungma) with China, and expeditions from the north Tibet side have also been opened this season after a three year gap. Nepal gets some of the largest numbers of mountaineers from China as well.

This year also marks the 70th anniversary of the first ascent of Everest by Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hilary on 29 May 1953, and this is expected to attract more climbers and trekkers.

Many mountaineers already arrived at base camp before the climbing season officially began, in order to acclimatise to the high altitude. Even before they arrived, helicopters have already been doing the heavy lifting from Kathmandu and Lukla.

Expeditions begin only after climbers have made sure that they have all the necessary supplies, and the Icefall Doctors forge a route and fix ropes, which is already underway.

The sheer volume of climbers will mean that it will be difficult to get essential supplies to base camp in time. Now, tourism operators say that the difficulty will be compounded after the





PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT



MONIKA DEUPALA

RI BELOW EVEREST

cargo helicopters with yak trains and porters



ADAM STERN

local government of the Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality banned helicopters from making supply runs to base camp for environmental and employment reasons.

At present, the municipality allows helicopters to transport supplies up to Dingboche (4,400m) and nearby Pheriche. Now choppers will only be allowed to fly gear up to Syangboche airfield (3,800m). The municipality has stipulated that porters, yaks or jokpe be used to move supplies from Syangboche.

It can take up to four days for yak caravans and porters to carry supplies from Syangboche to base camp. Expedition operators complain that they are facing difficulty finding porters and pack animals. Local youth from districts to the south have migrated to cities for better education and employment.

Farmers in Khumbu are also moving away from traditional pastoralism, which means fewer yaks and jokpe.

The sudden rule change at the cusp of the climbing season has not given expeditions time to prepare logistical alternatives. In fact, one expedition to Lhotse through Seven Summit Treks switched to climb Makalu after facing delays in supplies reaching Everest Base Camp. Other expeditions may follow suit.

But some residents of Namche and surrounding villages are against what they see as “hyper-commercialisation” of Everest by expedition operators and helicopter companies which have taken away local jobs.

Chopper flights in the Everest region have increased after climbers who could afford the fares began paying to be flown down even from Camp 2 under the guise of rescue operations.

Locals add that the amount of trash in the region has increased significantly since helicopters started transporting goods directly to base camp.

This politicisation of mountaineering will hurt this season’s expeditions if the local government and tourism bodies do not find a solution in time, say

operators.

Fifty climbing clients are booked for Everest just through Lhakpa Sherpa’s ATK Expedition, and 15 have applied to climb Lhotse, and 160 guides will be helping them. But Sherpa says his supplies are stuck at Syangboche.

“I have 14 tons of supplies waiting for transportation, our guides at base camp are spending nights in cowsheds,” he adds.

Operators are worried that delays in organising base camp and fixing ropes will reduce the summit window, leading to a repeat of dangerous overcrowding on the peak.

“The icefall team has not even made it to Camp 2 yet,” adds Lhakpa Sherpa. “I can already see traffic jams on Everest making headlines in the global media once again.”

The Everest Pollution Committee is contracted by the operator’s association to fix the route up the Khumbu Icefall to Camp 2 for most expeditions.

Some 11 climbers and guides lost their lives while summiting Everest in 2019, with many of the deaths attributed to long delays in the summit ridge.

The Expedition Operator’s Association Nepal met with Hom Prasad Luitel of the Department of Tourism, after the local government banned helicopters to base camp warning that this would affect the industry adversely. The Department of Tourism has since written separate letters to the rural municipality and district administration office to find a compromise.

“Concerns about employment are valid, but the timing of these demands just at the start of the climbing season has led to tension between locals and tourism operators,” admitted Bigyan Koirala at the Department of Tourism. “The local government must come up with a solution immediately. We cannot afford to prolong this problem.” 🇳🇵

EVENTS



White Gumba hike

The days are clearing out more or less and now is as good a time as any to enjoy a weekend hike to the beautiful White Gumba monastery. All proceeds will go to running programs for kids. Call for more information. 8 April, 9840887058

Godawari Mahotsav

Save the date for the largest business festival of the year, with over 200 stalls promoting handicraft, jewelry, garments, clothing, local food products, florists, agricultural products, banks, and more. 12 – 16 April, Godawari Bus Stop, Godawari, 9813732972, 9849835659, 9851221778



Vacation camp

Register your kid for the vacation camp and learn about fire drill, plantation, medical first-aid, and enjoy the full-range of activities, including painting, camping, football, picnic and more. 9 – 11 April, Rs8000 per child, Buddhanilkantha, 9801916113

New Year fête

Bid adieu to the seventies with a memorable event. Enjoy a package of live snack stations, dinner, accommodation and breakfast, with live music and a free Pulchoki trip, this New Year's Eve. 13 – 14 April, (01) 5174242



Absence unbothered

Dalai-La Art Space invites you to the new exhibition of works by Sofia Maharjan, 'Absence unbothered', which looks at motherhood and independence. 7 April – 6 May, Dalai-La Art Space, Thamel

DINING



Haadi Biryani

Craving for Biryani? Haadi is just the place. Their slow-cooked biryanis are seasoned with a secret spice blend and enhanced by the clay pots that they come in. Dilli Bazaar, (01) 4438444

MUSIC



Music room

Learn western and eastern music from the best instructors in town at the Music Room initiated by Jazzmandu. Call for more details. 9818856982

Shahas and Denish

Enjoy a special performance by Shahas and Denish, with the opening act by Bijju Limbu, this New Year's Eve. 13 april, 6pm onwards, The Shot Station, Narsingh Chok



Honey Singh

Prepare for an unforgettable experience with Honey Singh performing live in Nepal. Book tickets now through eSewa. 8 April, 2pm – 8.30pm, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu



Karma Band

Leave your worries behind and enter the new year with joyful spirits with the Karma band and Liquid band. 13 April, 5pm onwards, Liquid Lounge, Darbarmarg

New Year performance

Enjoy a live performance by Shree King Nepal and exclusive table packages at the Ai-La lounge. 13 April, 6pm onwards, Ai-La Lounge, Kumaripati



Captain Egg

Egg-lovers can rejoice at this egg-themed restaurant. Have a savoury Amritsari Egg Chole, Potato Egg Rosti or even an Egg Sizzler. 12pm – 10pm, Gahanapokhari, 014445330

Baker's Den

Is a loved one's birthday coming up, or need a just-because cake? Order from Baker's Den. Or get freshly baked doughnut, muffins, and bread. Place orders here. (01) 4416560 (01) 4411886

GETAWAY



Jal Mahal

Hotel Jal Mahal lives up to its name, with three large swimming pools in its sprawling property. So, even if one doesn't stay a night, a dip in one of the pools is a must to ward off the summer heat. Gharipatan, Pokhara, 9851054404

Heranya Yala

Get an authentic Newa experience right in the middle of Maha Boudha and the Hiranya monastery. The hotel provides a complete tour package to immerse yourself in the rich cultural heritage of Patan. Gujibahal, Patan, (01) 5523168, 9851067168



Meghauri Serai

Relax with fine dining and wildlife safaris in Chitwan at Taj Safari's luxurious lodge. Chitwan National Park, 9851218500

Mirabel Resort

Perfect for families, Mirabel Resort offers comfort, continental cuisines and views of Kathmandu Valley. Take a walk around Dhulikhel before the Nepali lunch or the mouth-watering barbecue. Dhulikhel, (01) 490972



Grand Norling Hotel

Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel with spacious bedrooms, adjoining bathroom, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer herds, and, not to forget, the exquisite garden. Gokarna, (01) 4910193

Freddo Café

Browse Freddo Café's menu for all things pizza. Try the Calzone pizza. Call for direct delivery or order through Foodmandu and Bhoj Apps. 9818883350, 9843451390, (01) 4218792



Dhokaima

Try the Chicken Florentine, tender chicken breast marinated with herbs and grilled, served with spinach sauce, corn and salad on the side for dinner at the café. Patan Dhoka, (01) 5522113

WEEKEND WEATHER



Things heating up

The North Indian plains and the western Tarai are in the grip of an early heat wave with temperatures in some areas touching an unseasonable 40°C. Kathmandu is also heating up and the temperature in Kathmandu will reach 28°C on the weekend and beyond. This is unusually hot for early April. This is dry heat so there will not be too many convection systems along the mountains.

| FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|--|--|--|
|  27° 12° |  28° 12° |  28° 13° |

OUR PICK

Based upon the bestselling novel of the same name by Taylor Jenkins Reid, *Daisy Jones & The Six* charts the rise and fall of the fictional titular rock band through a documentary-style series of interviews with the members and footage of concerts and recording sessions, and explores the reason behind their split at the height of their success. Partly inspired by the beloved real-life band Fleetwood Mac, *Daisy Jones & The Six* has been lauded as a captivating mix of blazing passion and tragic insecurities, bolstered by the leads' impressive performances. Stars Riley Keough, Sam Claflin, Camila Morrone, Suki Waterhouse, Will Harrison, Josh Whitehouse, Nabiyah Be and Timothy Olyphant.



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

WALK OF SHAME

Society has different rules for men and women in love

I heard you were seen hanging out in Basantapur with a very young woman. I wonder who. I imagine your face, warmed by the golden hour as you walked alongside your young friend,



SUBURBAN TALES
Pratibha Tuladhar

discussing philosophy and talking mysteries. Young people swarm to you like you're their human magnet. Your face always lights up in their presence-- like you were born to do that. To talk to them. It has been a while since I've seen your face. I wonder if there are gray strands in your beard now, or other signs of aging. I wonder what takes you out of your cubicle where you sit observing the world, battling it like a keyboard warrior. You once said one could destroy the world like that-- with your words. I wonder what it might be like



PRATIBHA TULADHAR

if I had been seen in your stead, sauntering in Basantapur, alongside a younger man. Walking, talking or perhaps just standing there in silence. I wonder what they'd say about a woman like me with "loose morals". Cougar. What could a woman like me, who lives sequestered, say about morality? I wonder what a man like you would say about cloistered virtue. A man like you, who believes in morality and nothing. Unlike a woman like me who

believes in nothing and everything. One time, I ran down that temple in Basantapur-- the one in the centre with a long flight of steps-- with you trailing behind me, shouting my name. Don't do this, you said. The life of a single woman is not what you need. Society will never let you live in peace. It was 10:30PM. The courtyard had started to wear a deserted look with just a couple of men walking it at intervals.

I don't care, I yelled back, as I ran all the way to the entrance to the Darbar Square. You caught up with me and grabbed my arm. By then, I had tears streaming down my face. Today, I saw that the temple is still being rebuilt-- it has taken all these years since the earthquake for the reconstruction to begin. During the April 2015 earthquake, it had been flattened to the base. It is one of the last temples in Basantapur that is yet to go up since. The stone steps I ran down, with you at my heels, are gone. They will be replaced by fresh masonry, new stones, new bricks. Just before I had run down the steps, we were sat on the temple parapet, legs dangling, talking. About love. It is what we always did. In circles. The destiny of unhealthy attachments that follow the never-ending pattern of hurt and heal and hurt. I remember men walking past had stared at us. There's a certain way people look at a woman who sits with a man in public places in the darkness of the night. There's a certain way people look at a woman who sits with a man in any place in the darkness of the night. When the reconstruction of that temple is complete, I shall go back and sit on those steps. In the darkness of the night. There will no longer be your voice telling me a woman has no business living a single life in a world where being affiliated with a man is the only way she can be safe. In the darkness of the night, after I have sat long enough at the temple, I will walk home, clutching my bag close to my chest, hoping the streets are deserted all the way. And that I don't have to worry about running into a stranger. Man. Who will most likely brush past me. Or stare.

The internet is a devious place. On some days, it is just a place. Where people meet. And find people. You looked me up on an obsolete platform one day and said-- Hi, remember me? You're that little boy I met at a cafe a decade ago. I pull together fragments of memory and chisel you whole. You are 17. I try to add a list of attributes so I can create the persona of an adult you, in my head. I imagine you're a kind, bright child, interested in books and music. And not so much in me. I have always meant to ask you out, but I was too young, you say. I do not laugh. I feel a pain tear through me. It no longer becomes possible for me to see you as you are now, because in my head, you become arrested in your late teens-- the child. And as I start to pull away from the conversation, I ask: what does the world make of women who converse with younger men? Paedophile? Cougar?

And yet. And yet, I heard you were seen hanging out in Basantapur, lending one arm to this very young woman. You, with pepper in your hair. She, with a lilt in her steps. I walked the courtyard today and wondered if you'd taken the same path with her as you had with me. Perhaps love is a pattern too, you know? Perhaps we kiss the same way every single time we love. Kiss, pine, long, pull away, break, scatter. How is your love different from mine then? How is it that you're a man who's decided to move on and I, a cougar? Suburban Tales is a monthly column in Nepali Times based on real people (with some names changed) in Pratibha's life.

Orchestrating cross-cultural collaboration

The Norway-Nepal Orchestra Project returns to Kathmandu post-pandemic inspiring a new generation of musicians

Tayama Rai

Young boys and girls holding cellos, violas and sitars gather at Narayan Gopal's residence in Maharajganj, ready for practice. Norwegian cellist Eivind Rossbach Heier and violist Ole Rasmus Bjerke lead in tuning the instruments. Soon, the sound of classical renditions of Nepali and Norwegian folk music accompanied by more traditional sounds of sitar and flute, wafts through the neighborhood. "In these moments, you can see how music is the strongest lingua franca," says Heier, who first came to perform in Nepal, and has kept coming back. He is enamored by Nepali hospitality and has been organising the Norway-Nepal Orchestra Project in collaboration with Annapurna Chamber Orchestra, bringing together musicians from Nepal and Norway to perform together. "The goal of the project is to help establish an orchestra in Nepal, and educating the youth is the first step," explains Raj Kumar Shrestha, director and conductor of the Annapurna Chamber Orchestra. Shrestha was a student of national anthem composer Ambar Gurung and shares his mentor's goal of reaching the world with chamber orchestra with classes on the property donated by popular Nepali singer and music composer Narayan Gopal. Shrestha and his colleagues reached out to Norwegian musicians through the World Federation of Amateur Orchestras, eventually forming the Norway-Nepal Orchestra Project in 2015. Since then, the number of Nepali musicians in the production has grown from 30 to nearly 80 in its eighth rendition.



PHOTO COURTESY: EIVIND ROSSBACH HEIER

For Bjerke, the ties of Nepal and its music has only deepened with each visit. He recently became the board member of the Norway-Nepal Friendship Association in Oslo. The Norwegian duo has facilitated cultural exchange by bringing Norwegian tutors to Nepal and welcoming Nepali students to perform in Norway -- including playing Nepal's national anthem with a viola and violin before Queen Sonja of Norway. "I have seen the growth of Nepali musicians from unsure classical beginners to being skilled players," says Heier, "and we are now resuming where we left off before the

pandemic." However, the Annapurna Chamber Orchestra members have been using the lockdowns to practice, and they return this week with Nepal's first Viola Ensemble and Cello Concerto. "I still performed the day before my 11th preboard exam, it has become a passion" says Rojan Rai, who has been a member of the orchestra since Grade 6. Rai is Nepal's fourth-generation orchestra student and strives to continue the legacy. He adds: "Sadly, one cannot make a living through just music in Nepal. And our education system actively discourages us

from being involved in anything aside from books." This fact is evident in the empty chairs of orchestra members who are busy at school. Most students in the practice room are taught instruments by private tutors, and leave after graduating. Students working outside Nepal do not return at all. "Non-profits like us have a limit on what we could do," says Shrestha, pointing to the building constructed by Kathmandu Metropolitan City to train classical musicians. In the past, Royal Nepal Academy fostered the preservation of Nepali culture through music. Now, only non-profits like Narayan Gopal Music Trust, donors like Marit Bakke from Norway, and publishers like Taleju Prakashan sponsor Nepali musicians who strive to entertain, educate, and communicate through music. The Norway-Nepal Orchestra aims to rekindle the love of music with ochestral performances of Nepali classics like 'Taal Ko Pani' and 'Asare Mahinama' in Kathmandu this weekend. In addition, Heier's string trio, Trio no Treble, plans to return to Nepal this October with singer Rachana Dahal. The Norway-Nepal Orchestra Project is not only fostering the next generation of Nepali classical musicians but also strengthening the cultural bond between two geographically distant nations. "I saw Heier's group perform in my school shortly after I started learning the violin," says Rojan Rai, "I hope to spark the same passion I got from watching their performance in others." Norway-Nepal Orchestra Project is performing on the grounds of LRI School in Kalankisthan this week on 7 April 3PM onwards.

NEW DENGUE OUTBREAK LIKELY THIS MONSOON

Last year's dengue virus is in mosquito larvae, ready to spread when the rains come



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

Another Covid wave,



Experts urge caution for at-risk groups, but no panic

Fever accompanied by chills, body aches, runny nose, sore throat or cough? You probably have Covid, and are likely over it.

After only recording a handful number of new Covid-19 cases for the last few months, Nepal registered over 500 in the last week. But these are only the official figures. Doctors say there are flu-like cases recovering in almost every family.

The latest surge is once again in line with the rise of cases in India where the new sub-variant of Omicron has been found to be responsible. On 6 April, there were 5,335 new reported Covid-19 cases across India and 15 deaths in the past 24 hours. Some 60% of the

new cases have been attributed to the new variant circulating in the country, XXB.1.16, a subtype of the Omicron variant.

"This is proof that when it comes to Covid-19, we are not out of the woods yet, it is a reminder that we need to continue to be careful, especially with the elderly and populations with comorbidities," says Buddha Basnyat, physician at Patan Academy of Health Sciences.

However, unlike in India, it is not yet known which strain is driving the new infections in Nepal. A genome sequencing in 2022 found that there were 17 sub-variants of Omicron circulating in Nepal.



At Teku Hospital, virologist Sher Bahadur Pun has been observing a gradual increase in the number of Covid cases and old-age patients being admitted. Most symptoms are mild, but interestingly many are complaining of a lack of smell and taste, which was typical of pre-Omicron cases. Over time, Covid-19 symptoms

have also gradually changed.

"What I'm seeing are breakthrough cases, these are people who have taken three shots, including a booster dose. This means we are likely to see a large number of such breakthrough cases in the near future," explains Pun.

He adds: "This could very

well be a new variant, a hybrid of these that were already circulating or XXB.1.16 like in India given there are no restrictions preventing the strain from travelling."

But public health experts agree that while there has been a noticeable surge in the number of new cases being recorded, there has been no significant increase in

■ Sonia Awale

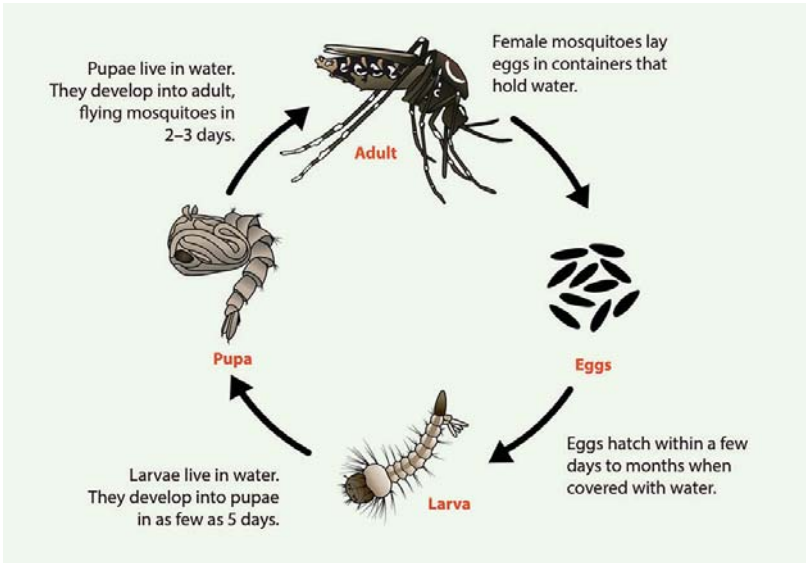
Dengue ravaged Nepal last monsoon, with over 55,000 hospitalisations and 88 fatalities. But that is just the official count, and many who died from the mosquito borne virus that caused haemorrhagic fever were healthy adults.

Public health experts had warned last year that the virus would strike again in the 2023 rainy season because the virus hibernated with the larvae of infected mosquitos. They say the larvae are just waiting for the puddles to hatch, and with it the virus can again spread exponentially. Waiting until the monsoon to target mosquito breeding areas will be too late.

“Local government must start the search-and-destroy larvae campaign now, we cannot wait for the rains,” warns virologist Sher Bahadur Pun at Teku Hospital. “Dengue is a real public health crisis and we cannot prevent it without the government and the communities working together, individual precaution can only go so far.”

The key is to raise awareness, preferably through school children so that we can reach their families and subsequently the community at large, about the nature of *aedes* mosquito that carries the dengue virus and the protective measures.

Last year, almost every family in Kathmandu had multiple members suffering from dengue. Although 90% of patients were asymptomatic, they helped spread the virus.



Dengue patients generally have two weeks of high-grade fever accompanied by extreme muscle and joint aches, loss of appetite, nausea, and pain in the eye sockets. Many who had both dengue and Covid said dengue was much worse.

Covid-19 is also back again (read the story below), possibly

with a circulation of a new variant in the region. So all three levels of government must prepare for both outbreaks simultaneously.

“Dengue is among the biggest public health challenges of the 21st century, given the disease burden and its socioeconomic impact in these parts of the world,” says Buddha Basnyat, physician

at Patan Academy of Health Sciences. “And there is every potential of another outbreak given that we have not learned our lesson from previous outbreaks or taken any measures to prevent another one this year.”

Indeed, Kathmandu had a major dengue outbreak in 2019, just before Covid-19 spread out of China in December of that year. There were over 17,000 official cases that monsoon but they were largely adult patients, most of which had milder symptoms and the fatality was very low.

But last year’s outbreak was much more widespread and serious. Although debilitating, fatality from dengue is rare but there were more complications and deaths. The mosquito eradication campaign came too late, and by that point dengue was out of control.

We did not learn the lessons of 2019, and we haven’t learned the lessons of 2022.

“How not to get dengue? It is simple, do not get bitten by a mosquito,” says Pun. “But preventing a mosquito bite is anything but simple because we do not do anything until it is too late.”

Unlike the *anopheles* mosquito which carries the malaria parasite, *aedes* is active during the daytime, particularly in the early hours of the morning and evenings. This means avoiding the outdoors during these hours, if possible. So, mosquito net or coils at night do not help. Insect repellents should not be toxic, and contain the active ingredient that the *aedes* mosquito avoids. Full-sleeve clothes are always a better alternative.

Also important is the knowledge of the breeding habits of *aedes* mosquito. Any pool of water is a fertile breeding ground,

even egg shells and water bottle caps in garbage piles. Fumigation, as some Kathmandu wards did two months into the outbreak last year, was ineffective because the virus was already spreading from already-infected people.

In short, destroying the larvae by removing possible breeding sites is the best preventive measures. “Every step that the government took last year after the onset of the pandemic, take them now. In fact, the people should pressure their local governments to do so right away,” adds Basnyat.

Unlike Covid and most other infectious diseases, a dengue reinfection is even more dangerous and can be fatal. Writing in the journal *The Lancet* in 2020, authors Sudeep Adhikari, Buddha Basnyat and Kripa Maharjan explain: ‘Primary infection with any serotype in a non-immune population generally causes mild disease. When secondary infection with another serotype occurs in the same population, there is antibody-dependent enhancement, which usually causes severe dengue. Over time, this secondary infection might lead to a so-called explosion of the disease.’

Such an explosion occurred in 2022 in Nepal’s urban areas, affecting mostly children and young adults. Misdiagnosis also caused complications in patients. Hospitals were overwhelmed and many patients had to be turned away. There was rampant overtreatment, often with antibiotics which are ineffective against viruses.

With global warming, disease vectors like mosquitos and the virus are also moving to higher altitudes spreading not just dengue but malaria, kalazar and chikungunya. 🇳🇵

Additional reporting by Ritika Tewari.

but milder



PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI

hospitalisations and deaths.

In other words, while the newer variants are more infectious, they are less virulent and unlikely to cause complications, further helped by the fact the much of the population has gained some level of immunity due to natural infections and vaccinations.

Even so, it is important for

vulnerable populations to be protected, and the best way to do that is by taking a booster. As of February 2023, 76.5% of Nepal’s have taken two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine which is nearly 96% of the target population. But the booster intake is much lower at about 27%, as of December 2022.

“Given that it has been quite some time since the second dose or even a booster was administered, I urge the elderly, immuno-compromised individuals and frontline workers to take a booster shot or a second booster even,” says Pun. “If there is an option, take a bivalent booster, it will protect you against both the original coronavirus strain and the Omicron variant.”

Back in February, Nepal received 345,600 doses of Pfizer-BioNTech’s bivalent vaccine under the COVAX initiative, the first of the 1.5 million doses promised in four phases. But officials say the uptake has been discouraging, even in Kathmandu and other urban centres.

The new surge is likely to pass before long and without causing much impact on the overall population. But not taking preventive measures may endanger the elderly and people with comorbidities.

Warns Buddha Basnyat: “This surge is a reminder to continue to mask up and maintain hygiene not so much for Covid-19 at this point but to protect ourselves from a wide range of other equally prevalent infections in our part of the world, like TB, typhoid and a host of diseases caused by air pollution.” 🇳🇵

Sonia Awale



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