



ALL LIT UP: The Machindranath chariot undergoing final touches during a thunderstorm on Monday. The chariot of the rain god needed structural repairs after leaning on homes in Na Tole during the first day of its month-long journey.

DINESH SHRESTHA

THE REIGN GOD

■ Santa Gaha Magar

When the chariot of Machindranath, the rain god, got stuck at Na Tole in Patan this week, it became a symbolic of the Nepal's shambolic politics.

But there was hope from Tanahu and Chitwan, where citizens disenchanted with the corrupt gerontocracy voted for change. RSP Chair Rabi Lamichhane was re-elected by an even bigger margin than November despite scandals. Swarnim Wagle, who defected from the Nepali Congress (NC) to contest as RSP in Tanahu won in the Congress stronghold.

In Bara-2, JSP Chair Upendra Yadav was the only coalition candidate to win, after having lost from Saptari last November.

While the RSP and the JSP were

able to retain seats they won in federal polls, the NC lost one seat to the RSP, which is the fourth-largest party in Parliament.

And while a single House seat may not matter in the grand scheme of politics, the by-elections were a barometer of the public mood, and could alter the dynamics in the coalition led by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

"Two out of three coalition candidates lost seats despite the prime minister himself campaigning on their behalf. This sends a clear message that this coalition does not have the mandate to rule," states political analyst and former Nepali ambassador to India, Nilamber Acharya. "These results will likely affect the arithmetics of the House and government."

Lamichhane has said it was "no longer reasonable" for the RSP

to support the government, which means it could quit the 10-party coalition. "It is now pointless for us to remain in the alliance and the consensus within the party is that we should stay in the opposition," RSP spokesperson Mukul Dhakal told Nepali Times.

We will know soon enough if the RSP really means it or if this is just a bargaining ploy by Lamichhane who was angling to be Home Minister again to clear his citizenship case.

One RSP leader admitted to us that the party would only participate in the government if given "respectable portfolios" like the Home Ministry and the Deputy Prime Minister once again. Spoken truly like one of the big parties that the RSP has vowed to be different from.

Lamichhane is also having backroom meetings with K P Oli

of the UML, and political analyst Indra Adhikari thinks it is possible for the two to form a partnership in the opposition.

She added: "Still, Rabi Lamichhane may ultimately decide to stay in government or hover nearby because of controversies, including the legal case about his dual passport."

If the RSP withdraws support for the coalition, Prime Minister Dahal would need a simple majority of 138 to remain in charge of the government, failing which he will have to take another floor test.

On 20 March, Dahal received 172 votes of confidence. Since then, CK Raut's Janamat which has 6 MPs has exited his government after disagreement over Cabinet slots. A RSP withdrawal would subtract another 21, leaving Dahal with 145.

Given the volatile dynamics between Dahal and coalition partners like the JSP, the Nagarik Unmukti and the LSP, the prime minister could have the rug pulled from under him. He will therefore have to dangle Cabinet positions to keep his coalition intact.

The Maoists may have thought they were kingmakers, but now it is the RSP that has the role. 🇳🇵

**OLD WINE IN
OLD BOTTLES**
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

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Old wine in old bottles

Ever since the Panchayat, Nepal has a history of 'alternative' candidates being elected to office as a protest vote against non-performing incumbents. But once in decision-making positions, most have proved less than capable. The superstructure of Nepali politics rests on weak foundations, and there is little one candidate can do, no matter how visionary.

The victory of Swarnim Wagle and Rabi Lamichhane in by-elections in Tanahu and Chitwan this week has been greeted with high expectations, but because of our past history, it is tempered with cautious optimism. Even so, the by-elections were a litmus test in which voters made their discontent with the established parties loud and clear.

The results have reaffirmed that Nepal is finally abandoning inter-generational party allegiances.

The reason for that shift is in the behaviour of the main parties in which the Nepali Congress (NC) was asking people to vote for Maoist candidates, or vice versa. Nepal is now starting to vote for individuals and not parties, especially old men in old parties.

Wagle and Lamichhane are both from privileged caste groups, so their win does not signify more inclusion. But it is an important shift in the public mood which the main parties will ignore at their own peril.

The trend actually started much earlier when non-politicians and relatively unknown candidates were elected in major urban centres in May local elections last year.

Then, during the November federal election, the independent RSP came out of nowhere with more young political aspirants of varying professions to become the fourth largest party in Parliament.

And it has now added one more parliamentarian to its numbers: Harvard-educated economist Wagle, who defected from the NC to join the RSP in March. Wagle won by a large margin in Tanahu-1, a traditional NC stronghold.

In Chitwan-1, Lamichhane defeated his NC rival by a landslide for the second time despite simmering scandals, proving just how disenchanted Nepali voters were with traditional parties.

The big parties were punished for not seeing the writing on the wall and continuing to play politics as usual. Coalition candidates could only hold one of the three seats after JSP chair Upendra Yadav's win in Bara-2.

NC chair Sher Bahadur Deuba admitted that voters had "stopped showing an interest in old parties". UML and CPN- Unified Socialist leaders echoed that view.

Only Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoists refused to take the by-election for what it was, blaming the messenger and saying there was a "danger of anarchy and emotion holding sway because of the unregulated spread of social media". It was no surprise that he shifted the blame to everyone else but himself.

The RSP has maintained its support for the Dahal government but both Lamichhane and Wagle will demand their pound of flesh to fill five remaining Cabinet positions. Lamichhane wants back the Home Ministry which is now occupied by the Maoists who are unwilling to part with a powerful office they bargained hard to get.

Lamichhane is playing coy, saying the RSP did not plan to join the government, and may even withdraw support for the 10-party



KRISHNAACHARYA/RSS

Nepal's ageing career politicians, it is time for you to bow out gracefully. You have failed. Give someone newer a chance.

coalition. This could be a ploy to get the plum post back. The former tv anchor could also be angling for an alliance with K P Oli of the opposition UML.

The RSP is less than a year old, and would do well not to rush into government again, focusing instead on being a strong opposition voice in Parliament which

we are sorely lacking. Lamichhane can then use that time to build his nationwide party structure.

The challenge for the mainstream parties until the next federal election will be to stop the slide and not alienate Nepal's young voter base any more. The older leaders should also make way for younger ones within their own rank and file. Otherwise there may be more defections like Wagle's from the NC.

The NC, UML and the Maoists need to reinvent themselves. Voters are sick of them. They want them to stop dithering and shuffling the deck. They have given the coalition one last chance to perform in the next five years. Nepal cannot be a proper democracy if political parties themselves continue to be autocratic, exclusionary and corrupt. There are populist reactionaries and extremists waiting on the wings.

Nepal's ageing career politicians, it is time for you to bow out gracefully. You have failed. Give someone newer a chance.

Shristi Karki

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

BRB, then and now

At the height of the Maoist insurgency in 2003, former classmates and rivals Baburam Bhattarai and Upendra Devkota were once again on opposite sides. Bhattarai was the ideologue of the Maoists while Devkota was Health Minister under king Gyanendra.

Two decades later, neurosurgeon Devkota is no more while Bhattarai is still active in politics, after serving as finance minister and Nepal's only prime minister with a PhD. But that does not seem to have helped with his politics.

Excerpts from the report published 20 years ago this week from issue #142 25 April – 1 May 2003:

When Thomas Varughese came to Nepal from Kerala to teach in a missionary school at Luitel Bhanjyang in Gorkha, he knew he wanted to raise a generation of well-educated Nepalis who would be dedicated professionals in their fields.

Two of his brightest students-Baburam Bhattarai and Upendra Devkota-went on to stand first and second in the whole country in the 1970 SLC exams and may soon be sitting face to face across the negotiating table to find an end



to the Maoist insurgency.

After leaving Gorkha in the early 1970s, Thomas and Mary set up three schools in Kailali. The Maoists' ideological campaign against the country's education system badly affected the Gorkha school as well as those in Kailali.

The Maoists closed down two other missionary schools in Gorkha and Thomas' Kailali school was bombed and torched last year, although the Maoist leadership denied responsibility.

Thomas and Mary are hoping to meet Baburam soon. What is the one question they want to ask him? Thomas says: "I will ask him, Baburam, where do you think you went wrong?" And he even has an answer for his own question, "His goals are good, but the end never justifies the means. Violence begets violence, he is a smart boy, he should learn from history."

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



AIR POLLUTION

Nepalis breathe some of the dirtiest air in the world. Two weeks ago, the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu hit 400 due to smoke, emissions and imported pollution. Even the HEPA filter lungs put up by the Ministry of Health started going dark in five days. People with chronic illnesses have their conditions aggravated. Watch the video on our YouTube and subscribe for more.



RATO MACHINDRANATH

Rato Machhindranath jatra, the longest chariot festival in Kathmandu Valley began this week. The pulling of the chariot of the rain god Bunga Dya: coincided with a day of much needed rain. Watch and join the celebrations of this month-long jatra on our TikTok, [nepalitimesofficial](https://nepalitimesofficial.com), and follow for more.

NEPAL, 2080S

From what can be read off the mindset of old, new and aspiring politicians, new decade will be different than the previous one, or the one half century ago ('New Nepali decade', Sonia Awale, #1157). Hard working young Nepal is still be forced to toil abroad, and send in their remittance to feed the greed of leaders. Few courageous who still plant vegetables, will see them rot in their gardens as the market will be flooded with chemical laden products from the neighbourhood. The intellectuals will continue the brain drain, as they can find no use of their knowledge as the politicians keep mocking them. If things were on track, we could be hopeful.

Lal Bahadur

■ Need to burn forest litter much earlier as there is very less grazing and collection of leaf litter these days but too much protection. We must practice prescribed and controlled burning, since wildfires are also killing nesting birds and other wildlife. Too much of dried forest litter, compounded by hot temperature and high wind and a spark is all that is needed for wild forest fires. May-June would be worse with crown fires of the forest.

Rajendra N Suwal

TRASH ON EVEREST

This is so sad ('Nepal can't keep up with trash building up on Everest', Bhadra Sharma, nepalitimes.com). They should be made to bring their rubbish down with them.

Diane Slessor

ARCHITECTURE ARCHIVE

Great to read about this positive example of an architectural heritage archive, especially as it contrasts starkly with another article this week - the wasteful failure to rehouse earthquake victims ('An archive of Nepali heritage', Ashish Dhakal, #1158).

Marty Logan

NORWAY TO NEPAL

Asbjorn Voreland used to wonder why God had afflicted his daughter, but this story is his answer ('One person's adversity brings hope to many', Kunda Dixit, #1158).

Marian Burrows-Smith

DAL BHAT

I love eating *dal bhat*, ('Dal bhat power', Ashish Dhakal, #1157) a staple food for most long-distance cyclists.

Sirintr Khumwong

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Fashionable, naturally

by *Shristi Karki*

The fashion industry is said to be the second most harmful for the global climate, but the Nepali designer Sanyukta Shrestha is out to change this. Her sustainable wear has earned her the name, 'Green Goddess'. Read her profile at nepalitimes.com



Most reached and shared on Facebook

Nepal can't keep up with trash on Everest

by *Bhadra Sharma*

Mt Everest Base Camp will have a record number of international expeditions this year, turning it into a global village. A ban on littering at source is the only way to clean up the world's highest peaks. Visit our website for the story.



Most popular on Twitter

New Nepali decade

by *Sonia Awale*

We have embarked on a new decade in Nepal. With this comes a test of political will of our elected representatives at all three levels of government. We know what the crises are, and we can adapt and prepare for them. Join the online discussion.



Most commented

Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, the film

by *Tayama Rai*

The new documentary is an inspiring story of the ambition, dedication, and triumph of Nepal's first woman to climb Mt Everest. It is also the retelling of a tragedy that transcends socio-cultural boundaries. Review on page 9.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Nepal can't keep up with trash building up on Everest A ban on littering at source is the only way to clean up the world's highest peaks. Nepal can't keep up with trash building up on Everest | Bhadra Sharma



samnbiddev @samnbiddev

Every person climbing can be thoroughly checked. As much as possible, 1. non disposable items should be removed and alternate should be available. 2. Every 30 or 50 meters should have garbage collection bin so that climbers keep garbage in bin only obviously.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"When air quality plummets, there are immediate side effects. Even healthy individuals get irritation in the nose and throat, skin rashes and coughs. But more importantly, people with chronic illnesses like asthma and heart disease will find their condition further aggravated."



kpila @kopinoora

Exactly, KTM sky is over polluted never had an opportunity to see blue sky. A day ago I took a flight from Chitwan & after 5 minutes we were completely disappeared in a dark polluted fog. I was scared to death, from that point I realised the pollution level.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"Pasang: In the Shadow of Everest" brings the real Pasang Lhamu Sherpa to life, beyond what little is depicted in school textbooks while also addressing controversies surrounding her final climb through first-hand accounts.



Rita Thapa @bheribas

Would love to see this documentary!

1,000 WORDS



SOCIAL MEDIA

SNACK TIME: Nepali Congress chair Sher Bahadur Deuba and Baburam Bhattarai of Nepal Socialist Party at a meeting in Baluwatar earlier this month.



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Independent journalism is in financial crisis

International Fund for Public Interest Media's open letter calling for more international support

Facts are hard to come by these days. Disinformation plagues our information landscape and independent, accurate journalism is struggling to compete. Yet, without a shared understanding of facts, the most important elements of our societies suffer: elections are corrupted, social polarisation accelerates, family ties fray. The purpose of public interest journalism has always been to share truthful information and valuable context about the issues that affect our lives. Why is it struggling now, when we need it most?

Independent news outlets around the world face a deepening financial crisis. With digital advertising increasingly flowing to large tech platforms instead of news media, the traditional business model of independent media has been severely undermined. In the last five years, global newspaper advertising revenue dropped by half. During this period, political and other actors have ramped up investment in their own propaganda, further undermining the credibility and independence of news sources and damaging our information ecosystem with disinformation. Meanwhile, the financial and security costs of carrying out independent journalism have escalated. In many places the choice to practice independent journalism is a choice between freedom and imprisonment, life or death.

And yet, if democracy is to endure, journalism must endure.

Many media organisations around the world, especially in low- and middle-income countries, are at the forefront of reimagining the news and finding new ways to reach their audiences. Others continue to guard their independence against an onslaught of market and political forces conspiring against them at great cost. This battle has resulted in a widening gap between those able to access quality information and those who are systematically excluded. Without urgent action,

the crisis may prove catastrophic to peace, democracy, global health, and the struggle for climate justice.

The work of adapting independent news media to a challenging and rapidly changing digital environment is continuous, difficult and context-specific. It will take years for us to implement new systems to support the financing of media. But while we adapt to the arrival of that future, we must arrest the media extinction that is happening now. If we don't, there will be no public interest journalism left in many countries. Accountability and democracy will be weakened irrevocably.

We urge collective action to ensure the protection of independent media by the actions of governments, corporate entities, and civil society. Like clean water, basic health care or public education, independent journalism is a public good. It is indispensable to democratic values and institutions.

We are now suffering through a market failure of this public good. As for any such market failure, we need governments to step in.

Our request is that governments increase spending on media as part of their Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). International media funding has been static at 0.3% of ODA for many years, despite the crisis of disinformation and accelerating public interest media extinction. That amount is woefully insufficient to confront the scale of the problem we face. We, the undersigned, call for an urgent increase in the allocation of Overseas Development Assistance for the benefit of public interest media to 1% of all foreign aid. This would result in an extra \$1 billion per year to tackle one of the most important issues of our time. To do nothing would be to exclude millions from the right to access the news they need to shape their lives. 🇳🇵

Signatures

Maria Ressa – Nobel Peace Prize laureate and founder of Rappler (Philippines)

Mark Thompson – Former President and CEO of The New York Times Company and former Director General of the BBC (UK)

Gina Chua – Executive Editor, Semafor (USA)

Pascal Lamy – Former Director-General of the WTO and President of the Paris Peace Forum (France)

Nanjala Nyabola – Writer on African politics, democracy and digital rights (Kenya)

Dr Julie Posetti – Global Director of Research at the International Center for Journalists (Australia)

Rana Ayyub – Writer & Journalist at the Washington Post (India)

Carlos Eduardo Huertas – Director, Connectas (Colombia)

Styli Charalambous – CEO, Daily Maverick (UK)

Sonia Awale – Executive Editor, Nepali Times & Himalmedia (Nepal)

Dele Olojede – Writer & Publisher (South Africa)

Frane Maroević – Executive Director, International Press Institute (Austria)

Anton Harber – Caxton Professor of Journalism/Executive Director (South Africa)

Brenda Leonard – Managing Director, Bush Radio (South Africa)

Alex Thier – Ceo, Lapis (USA)

Juanita Williams – Managing Editor, allAfrica Global Media (South Africa)

Mkuseli Veto – Presenter, Bush Radio (South Africa)

Juan Camilo Maldonado – Director, Mutante (Colombia)

Maria José Jaramillo – Comunicadora (Colombia)

Renata Rizzi – Co-founder, Nexo Jornal (Brazil)

Francis Sowa – National Coordinator, Media Reform Coordinating Group (Sierra Leone)

Zoe Titus – Director, Namibia Media Trust (Namibia)

Gwen Lister – Trustee, Namibia Media Trust (Namibia)

Emre Kizilkaya – Editor, Jouro (Turkey)

Turkish World Amateur Golf Cup

The Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup, the largest amateur golf tournament, is coming to Kathmandu in its eighth year, and will be held on 30th April in Gokarna Forest Resort. From each 85 qualifying tournaments in 57 countries around the world, the winners will advance to the Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup Grand Final, which will be held in December at Gloria Serenity Resort in Antalya, Türkiye.



SUMAN NEPALI

“The Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup is something we are pleased to be part of again as it continues to expand. Turkish Airlines is committed to supporting and working with international sports organisations and bringing people together from all over the world,” said Turkish Airlines Chief Marketing Officer Ahmet Olmüstür.

Adds Serkan Başar, Turkish Airlines General Manager in Kathmandu: “We are glad to hold this event in Kathmandu this weekend, and we hope it becomes a popular part of the sporting calendar here. We were proud to welcome so many competitors to Antalya in 2019, and we look forward to creating many more incredible memories in 2023.”

Thai food fest

Finding Thai food in Kathmandu can be a little tricky, not because there is a lack of specialised eateries, but because it makes it difficult to choose from all the eateries that do a decent job of catering traditional as well as creative Thai dishes. Now, for those looking to have an authentic taste of Thailand, Bao Xuan restaurant at The Soaltee is back with its Thai Food Festival.



SUMAN NEPALI

Bao Xuan means 'the flavour of China', but till 30 April epicures in Kathmandu can delight in the diverse gastronomic flavours of Thailand especially prepared by Chef Wimon Junlawong and her team who have flown in especially for the event. Known for its aromatic flavours and spicy edge, Nepalis are bound to feel right at home with Thai food.

Chef Junlawong and her team have curated a special à la carte menu including Som Tam, Moo Yang Num Jim Jaew, Panang Curry, Pad Keemao, among others. In addition to leading the event, she is also training the chefs at The Soaltee in Thai cuisine. Opened eight years ago, Bao Xuan serves Chinese and Asian cuisine.



NMB BANK
एनएमबि बैंक

ADB meeting

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) organised a two-day country portfolio review meeting last week to review its Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Project and Bagmati River Basin Improvement Project, SASEC Highway Improvement



Project. Visiting ADB South Asia chief Kenichi Yokoyama and Finance Minister Prakash Mahat took part. Since the start of its operations in Nepal in 1969, ADB has provided about \$7.6 billion in financial and technical assistance to the country. As of 31 December 2022, ADB's active portfolio in Nepal stands at around \$3.2 billion.

IPPF's Bermejo in Nepal

International Planned Parenthood Federation will be hosting Director General Alvaro Bermejo in Nepal next week. Bermejo will be meeting Prime Minister Dahal and discuss the national sexual and reproductive health policy landscape.

Nabil lifetime card

Nabil Bank has launched a lifetime free credit card with no annual, joining or renewal fees. Customers can apply for the card in any of the branches across the country and withdraw cash without additional charges.

Samsung tv factory

Samsung has inaugurated a television factory in Nawalparasi in collaboration with its longstanding partner in Nepal, Him Electronics. This is the first instance of a multinational company setting up an electronics manufacturing facility in Nepal and is expected to influence the local economy.



Speaking at the function, JB Park, President & CEO of Samsung Southwest Asia said, “This new television factory with our partners Him Electronics will further deepen our bond with Nepal and underline the work we are doing to strengthen local industry and provide employment opportunities to people here. It will also facilitate development of skilled manpower.”



WorldLink for cricket

WorldLink Communications will be providing a 40 Mbps dedicated internet service at Mulapani and the Kirtipur cricket grounds for three years. The company has also installed the infrastructure that will provide 100 Mbps dedicated internet at the grounds for the entirety of the ongoing ACC Men's Premier Cup 2023.

Auto boutique

Pitstop Incorporated, a subsidiary of VOITH, is unveiling a new boutique workshop that will offer a comprehensive range of automobile services including cleaning, waxing, sealing, dent repair, painting, detailing, carbon ceramic coating, PPF, vinyl wrapping, modification, accessories and restorations.

Honda scheme

Honda has launched a New Year offer for customers to win up to Rs100,000 in scratch coupons, spare parts, engine oil and free servicing worth Rs8,000 or Rs10,000 in purchase of Annual Maintenance Contracts of 5 years at Rs12,500. Honda is also providing finance schemes at 1% interest rate.

NMB—Samsung

NMB Bank has partnered with HIM Electronics to provide up to 23% discount on Samsung's washing machines and ovens to NMB Smart Nari Bachat Khata account holders. Samsung is also offering Rs2,000 cashback on the purchase of Galaxy A34 5G and Galaxy A54 5G. Customers have to use a Nabil VISA debit or credit card to access the offer.

Shrestha in Everest

Kiran Krishna Shrestha of nepa-laya has been nominated director at Everest Bank in Kathmandu by the Board on 21 April, replacing Arun Shrehan.

Religiously following politics

Nepal's traditional communal harmony could be disturbed by imported intolerance

On an extended visit to India recently, it was clear to me that the country has changed. There is an infrastructure building spree and the economy is vibrant. But underneath it all, there is an ominous undercurrent of intolerance, persecution of minorities and silencing of the media.



BORDERLINES
Chandra Kishore

During the Ram Nawami processions on 30 March there were communal clashes in Bihar and elsewhere. Those taking part wielded knives and raised slogans inciting violence against other communities. Black-or-white media coverage of the events magnified the slant and hate speech.

Combining politics with religion is a volatile mix, and this has polarised the two communities in India as extremism by one side is met with retaliatory action by the other. There is a long history of Hindu-Muslim clashes in India, and some of it dates back to the divide-and-rule policy of colonial Britain. The bad blood of partition has not yet coagulated, and the riots following the Babri Masjid demolition and the Gujarat pogroms are still fresh in the collective memory.

Despite our open border with India, these communal conflagrations did not affect Nepal much in the past. After all, Muslims have been living largely peacefully in Hindu-dominant Nepal even



JIYALAL SAH

before it existed as a nation state.

But things are changing. Just like all the other things Nepal imports from India, some elements coming in from across the border are also importing bigotry and politically-instigated fanaticism.

This year's Ram Nawami and Hanuman Jayanti processions in Madhes Province were laced with religious tension. They were much bigger than earlier years with more saffron flags, knives and swords on display. (Pictured, above) In Janakpur and Birganj, this exhibitionism of supremacy and an angry reaction from the other community could have easily turned violent.

Across the Tarai, car stickers, posters and flags now show the fearsome aspects of Ram and Hanuman instead of their benevolent avatar. Hanuman used to be shown lifting a chunk of the Himalaya to bring healing herbs to Ram wounded in battle with Ravana, or kneeling in supplication before his lord. But we are now seeing a fiercer Hanuman visage being imported from propagators of majoritarianism in India. There is a deliberate message in these depictions.

It is true what they say: gods reflect the personality of the humans who create them. It is when people use religious figures to propagate

their political agenda that we push society to the edge.

There is now debate in India about this politico-religious fanaticism. We in Nepal have to be aware of what is happening in India so that the virus of intolerance does not spread across the border.

During the Covid pandemic two years ago there was an organised effort in India to blame Muslims for being superspreaders. Seeds of this were planted in the Nepal Tarai as well but, luckily, did not take root.

There is a danger of escalation on both sides of the India-Nepal border as hatred breeds more hate and various groups compete for a show of force on the streets. It takes

only a spark to ignite this tinder-dry community at large.

Religious belief is a personal matter. Nepal's Constitution gives every citizen the right to believe in whatever they want to. But when one group interferes with another's right to worship as it sees fit, or when weapons are displayed threateningly and the visuals spread through social media -- that crossing the line.

With freedom comes responsibility. Unless the authorities in Madhes Province curb such threatening activity, Nepal will face tensions similar to the ones in Indian states during religious commemorations. Sacred observances will turn into festivals of fear and hate.

Nepal may have an open border with India, but the collective psychology of Nepalis is different than what prevails on the other side. Our traditional tolerance is now being disturbed by hate speech on social media platforms in India. This is creating a rift in Tarai society that could lead to violence.

The Nepali media has to be careful not to be a weapon of intolerance and fan the flames. There was a precedent for this in the 2007 Kapilvastu riots when FM radio stations were implicated.

Nepal's municipalities need a strict code of conduct for religious processions. Hindu-Muslim religious harmony exists across a broad societal spectrum in Nepal. There are instances of joint religious observances. The Janaki Temple honouring Sita was built by Muslim artisans, and Muslims in many parts of the Tarai greet their neighbours in the morning with a friendly "Ram-ram". Let no one disturb and distort this co-existence for narrow political ends.

Chandra Kishore is a Birganj-based political commentator. This is his monthly column BORDERLINES in Nepali Times. @kishore_chandra





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1960s Parked in Patan

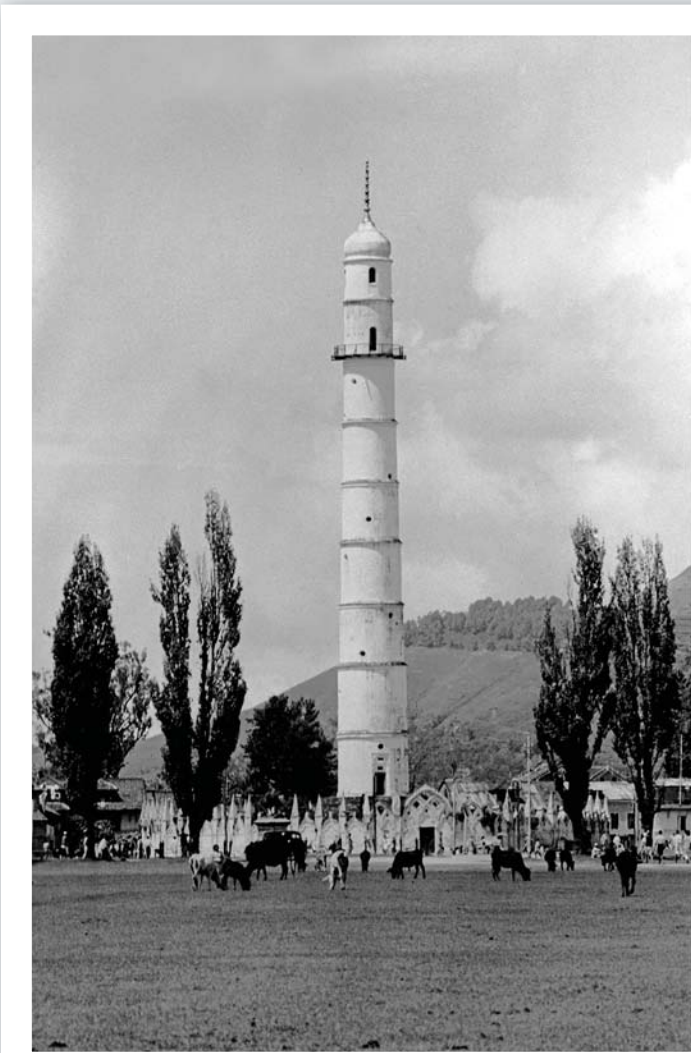


1980s recreation of Parked in Patan

Times
28 APRIL - 4 MAY 2023 #1159

Postcards from Kathmandu

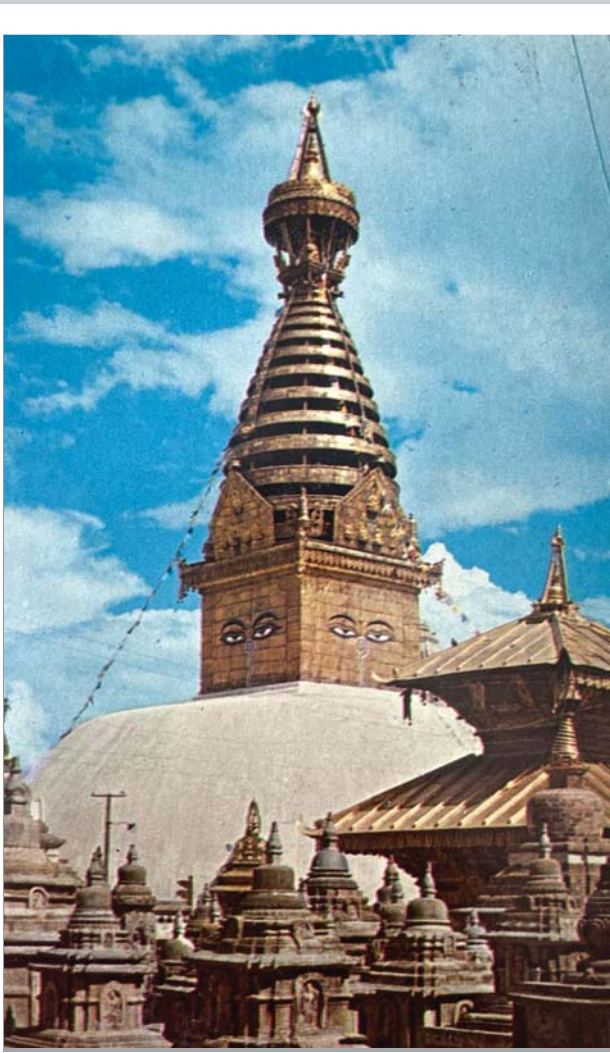
Three generations of photographers from the Das family with



Dharara, circa 1960



Dharara after the 2015 earthquake



1960s Swayambhu postcard that helped define the most popular framing of the stupa



The Old Pokhara panorama, the city has changed but the mountains have not



The classic Top of the World photograph from Kala Pattar that became the iconic view of Mt Everest



GYANENDRA DAS SHRESTHA



KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

2023 recreation of Parked in Patan

mandu

th a visual overview of a changing Nepal



DWARIKA DAS SHRESTHA



KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

the stupa
Recreating original Das postcard of Swayambhu 3 days after the 2015 quake

Thakur Das Shrestha, originally from Nepal, established the famous Das Studio in Darjeeling in 1927. Since then, his descendants have been documenting the changes of their home country through photography.

Their work will be displayed in Postcards from Kathmandu's Past, an exhibition of photographs by three generations of the Das family, with works by Dwarika Das Shrestha (1926–2004), Gyanendra Das Shrestha (born 1955) and Kashish Das Shrestha (born 1982).

The exhibition opens on 28 April and will go on till 4 May at Wind Horse Gallery located at Moksh Bar in Jhamsikhel. One particular image has an expressed commentary: The Basantapur AI Blue Sky, produced two weeks ago, on a day when Kathmandu city ranked as one of the top most polluted cities in the world.

The sky and some colour tones of the smoggy day with fiery sunset has been deliberately AI enhanced to emphasise how blue-sky spring days in Kathmandu valley are rapidly becoming rarer.

Dwarika Das Shrestha was the second of four sons of Thakur Das in Darjeeling. By 1950s, Das Studio was already a popular social hub for locals and visitors. People stopped by to have conversations about current affairs and photography.

They bought Das Studio's postcards and posters of Darjeeling and Sikkim which were immensely popular in the days before the Internet. Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark regularly spent time there, and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and French monk Matthieu Ricard were close family friends.

Dwarika was active with the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute and went on several expeditions with Norgay from Darjeeling. Although he had wanted to join an Everest

expedition, his grandmother convinced him to abandon the idea because of the risks involved.

In 1960, Dwarika moved back to Kathmandu permanently and set up the Das Photo Store in Khicha Pokhari, just off New Road. Apart from studio services and documentary photography, he also offered photo and video classes, and volunteered as a photography teacher at St Xavier's School in Jawalakhel.

Dwarika helped introduce the country to the outside world during the 1960s and 70s as he was the first person to produce commercial postcards of the country for visitors to mail back home.

Dwarika maintained an active social life in Kathmandu, which included the royal princes of Nepal whom he had known since their boarding school days in Darjeeling. He also met Nepal's former Prime Minister B P Koirala, who was at that time an underground national leader spearheading the pro-democracy movement against the monarchy. Dwarika took a photo of Koirala and printed it as a poster for his supporters to use.

Dwarika's image of Swayambhu, photographed from the stupa's west face, had become immensely popular in the 60s and 70s as a postcard. His son Gyanendra re-created and published an updated version of the image in the 80s and 90s with equal success. It remains a defining frame and this angle on the stupa has been reproduced by countless professional and hobby photographers and, more recently, Instagrammers and TikTokers.

Gyanendra Das Shrestha was born in Kathmandu, and is an internationally published award-winning photographer. In 1976, aged just 21, he won his first international photography award, the Koishikawa Rotary Club Prize, organised by the Asian Cultural Center for UNESCO. Two years later, he won the Asian Cultural Center for UNESCO Prize itself.

Gyanendra opened his own photo shop, Das Color Lab, in early 80s, pivoting from documentary to commercial photography, and focused on expanding the studio services and postcard and poster market his father and grandfather had pioneered.

His 'Top of the World' poster of Mt Everest from Kala Pathar became the defining image that popularised the Everest Trek and that vantage point. His Annapurna panorama from Pokhara lakeside taken in the 80s became another instant classic and the view has been replicated endlessly by photographers since.

Das Color Lab closed its shutters for good before Gyanendra joined his family in New York in 2006. But the posters and postcards it produced through the final decades of the 20th century continue to influence and define the market for commercial photography today. His son, Kashish, is in turn an internationally published writer and photographer with 25 years of print and broadcast media experience.

Kashish picked up photography and writing as a teenager because it was in his blood, and also because he wanted to document the youth culture he was part of in the 90s. He also photographed Bhutanese refugee resettlement in eastern Nepal and the Maoist conflict, and later in North America.

Kashish traveled to Rolpa and spent a week with the Maoist rebels, many of whom were teenagers. As the conflict continued to grow, he photographed and wrote about the rebels extensively for *Nepali Times* from deep inside their strongholds in the western plains and the eastern hills. Kashish uses his writing and photography to fund independent research and pro bono policy work on sustainable development in Nepal. His works have been exhibited at various venues over the years, including at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, Stanford University in California, and all seven Bhutanese refugee camps in southeastern Nepal. His 2009 solo Americana exhibition, 'Marfa to Manhattan', was supported by the US State Department.

Kashish is currently working on a food anthropology and pop culture project on the history of momo.

"The transformation of spaces, as small as a public square, or as large as the valley, gives us much to think about," he says. "These transformations have been shaped by us, and affect us. This is not to say that old was good or new is bad. Nepal has rapidly urbanised in the last decade, and it can fairly be said this transition has been neither thoughtful nor sustainable. It has simply just been." 🇳🇵

Postcards from Kathmandu's Past
Friday, 28 April 3PM till 4 May, 2023
Wind Horse Gallery with support from Photo Concern
Moksh, Jawalakhel
Limited Edition Prints from the Das archives on Hahnemühle paper.
The first editions on display at the exhibition are Giclée prints.



GYANENDRA DAS SHRESTHA

EVENTS



Blood donation

Start the week well by donating blood at the weekly blood donation program, and help save a life.
Every Sundays, 11am–3pm, Bhandarshwar Mahadevsthan, Sijal

Photo exhibition

The new exhibition ‘Postcards from Kathmandu’s Past’ showcases the ever-changing urbanscape of Kathmandu as documented by three generations of the Das family, Dwarika, Gyanendra and Kashish. (See page 6 for full story).
28 April–4 May, Wind Horse Gallery, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Nepal dance fest

The Nepal dance fest features a 32-hour workshop with 8 different styles and live jamming sessions. Call for more details.
28–29 April, 4pm–10pm, Bento Lounge, 9865083360



Gardener fest

One with green fingers? Immerse in the plant-tastic festival featuring a wide variety of plants and attend sessions on repotting and plant care.
4 May, 10am–6pm, Ekatabasti, Mandikatar

One-day Meditation

Leave all your worries at home and relax in the one-day Vipassana meditation session.
29 April, 8am–3pm, Gyankirti Vihar, Pahiko Sadak, Nayabazar (01) 4360030



Thai food festival

The diverse gastronomic flavours of authentic Thai delicacies, with Master Chef Wimon Junlawong, come to Kathmandu, including the Som Tam, Home made curry, Pad Kimao and more. (Details on page 4).
28–30 April, Bao Xuan, The Soaltee Kathmandu, 9801067036

DINING



Sapporo Japanese

Experience the authentic Japanese delicacies and drinks at the restaurant known for homemade fresh noodles, ramen, udon, soba, and more.
Anamika Marg, Baluwatar, 9803445405

MUSIC

Arun Thapa

Head over for a revisit to timeless classics of Arun Thapa at the 3rd episode of ‘Cassette’, an initiative to enjoy the rich heritage of Nepali Adhunik and Folk music.
6 May, 7:30pm onwards, Rs500 per person, Moksh, Jhamsikhel



Bobin Bajracharya

Enjoy a live performance by Bobin Bajracharya this Friday for an electric start to the weekend.
28 April, Beers ‘N Cheers, Jhamsikhel



Sabin Rai & The Pharaoh

Put on those dancing shoes for a night with songs by Sabin Rai & The Pharaoh who will perform live this weekend.
28 April, 5pm onwards, LOD, Thamel



Live music

Enjoy live music every day at the oldest live music venue in the city, Reggae Bar, with great bands and artists. Call ahead to know who is performing.
Reggae Bar Thamel, Thamel, 9846195216

Charity concert

Book tickets now for the ‘Music to heal and help’ Charity Concert featuring artists The Axe Band, Mukti & the Revival, Cobweb, Anuprastha, Dong, and more.
20 May, 12pm onwards, Rs2000-2500, Calm, Tangalwood, Naxal



Erma Restaurant

Erma Restaurant offers an upscale fine dining experience with chef-curated continental dishes. With a farm-to-table approach and an assortment of wines, Erma turns every meal into an experience.
11am–10pm, Hotel Shambala, Chakrapath (01) 4650351

La Dolce Vita

Probably the best ristorante Italiano in Thamel, La Dolce Vita – the sweet life – comprises three floors with a restaurant, an espresso bar and a terrace. Pizza, pasta, steak, illy coffee and more.
Thamel (01) 4700612

GETAWAY



Shangri-La Village Resort

Get away for a couple days this spring and head to the idyllic Shangri-La Village Resort. Meditate in the outdoor Yoga Pergola, indulge in a massage in Phewa Spa, and soak up the sun in the Sanctuary Garden.
Gharipatan, Pokhara (61) 462222

Newa Chén

This hotel is reminiscent of the golden era of the Malla Dynasty. The open rooms and courtyards embody the palaces of the family that once ruled the city.
Kobahal, Lalitpur (01) 5533532



Sapana Village Resort

Experience the rich Tharu and Chepang culture, marvel at the beauty of the lush national park, and witness elephants lumbering through the forests, all in the heart of Sauraha.
Sauraha, Chitwan (56) 580308

Gokarna Golf Resort

Against the backdrop of the snow-capped Himalayas, the golf resort is stunningly set within Gokarna Forest Reserve. The 6,715yard with 72 courses boasts the only Bent Grass Greens in South Asia where deer and monkeys wander freely, as well as the spirits of all who enter. Truly an enchanting sanctuary!
Gokarna (01) 4451212



Lapsi Tree Resort

Escape the noise of the valley and experience a serene, peaceful stay at Lapsi Tree with delicious food, comfortable rooms and a mesmerising view.
Danda Gaun Marg, 9844888116

Baker’s Den

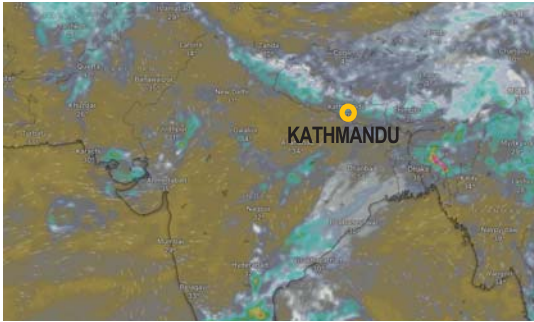
Is a loved one’s birthday coming up, or need a just-because cake? Order from Baker’s Den. Or get freshly baked doughnuts, muffins and bread.
(01) 4416560/(01) 4411886



Taza

Taza has the softest pita breads, perfectly spiced shawarmas and an assortment of middle eastern dishes that will have one yearning for more.
11am–8:20pm, Pulchok, 9860960177

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
27° 13°	27° 13°	22° 12°	21° 11°	22° 11°

Cooler week ahead

If you thought summer was here, think again. We are headed to a stormy new week after intermittent showers across the Himalayan foothills on the weekend. Friday will be fairly clear and warm, but there may be thundery rain falling especially towards afternoon with moderate snowfall at higher elevations. The rain has doused many of the forest fires, improving air quality. More rain next week will replenish springs, but it will also bring down the maximum temperature to 21°C. Air quality will see a steady improvement.

OUR PICK

Imagine you are the new United States ambassador to the United Kingdom. Now imagine you have to defuse international crises, forge strategic alliances in London and adjust to your new place in the spotlight, while trying to survive your marriage to a fellow career diplomat. Created by Debora Cahn of Homeland and The West Wing, Netflix’s latest political thriller The Diplomat is a highly bingeable and entertaining – and often refreshingly chaotic – take on statecraft, focusing on Kate Wyler who lands a high-profile job for which she is not suited, with tectonic implications for her marriage and her political future. Starring Keri Russell, Rufus Sewell, David Gyasi, Ali Ahn, Rory Kinnear and Ato Essandoh.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउँ र बचाऔँ

- गर्मी मौसममा मलेरिया, कालाजार, डेंगी, हैजालगायतका विभिन्न संक्रामक रोगहरू फैलिन सक्छन् ।
- संक्रामक रोग फैलाउने झिँगा, लामखुट्टे, भुसुना आदिको नियन्त्रण गरौं ।
- संक्रामक रोगबाट बच्न शुद्ध र उमालेको पानी पिऔं ।
- बासी तथा सडेगलेका खाना नखाऔं ।
- घरभित्र र वरपरको सरसफाइमा ध्यान दिऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, the film

A new docudrama about Nepal’s first woman to climb Mt Everest is a tale of discrimination, dedication, triumph and tragedy

■ Tayama Rai

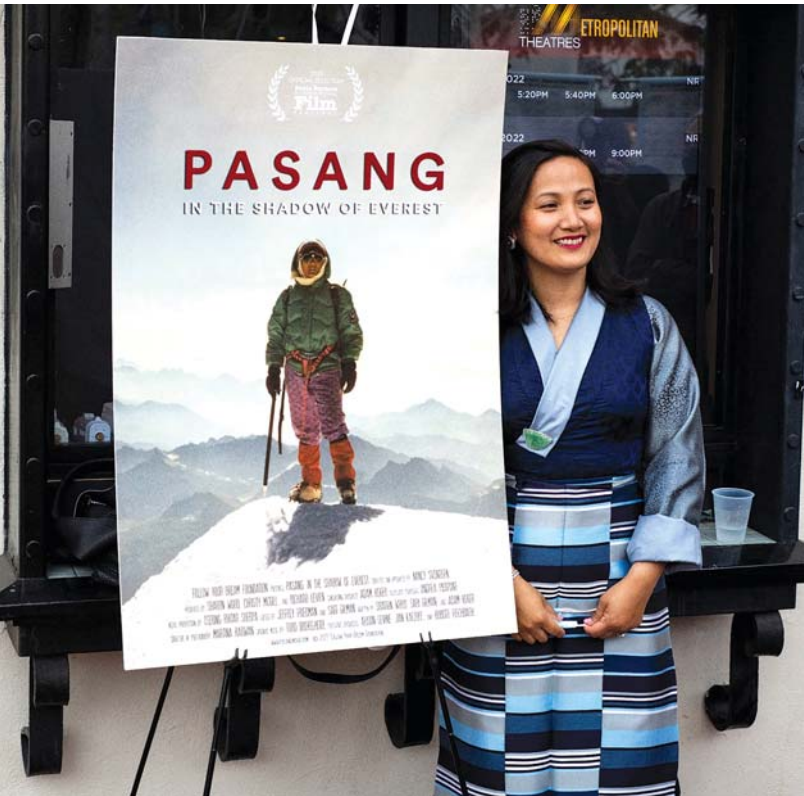
The Sherpa high altitude guides who take climbers to the tops of Himalayan peaks and glory have for decades been nameless and consigned to the shadows. They are also exposed to the most dangerous parts of mountains for the longest period -- as the tragic death of three guides on the Khumbu Icefall this month proved.

Things were not much different back in the autumn of 1990 when Pasang Lhamu Sherpa attempted to climb Mt Everest. The French leader of the expedition she was with ordered her to go back down. He seemed to be worried Pasang would steal the thunder from his climbers. As it turned out, Christine Janine became the first French woman to climb the world’s highest peak as Pasang Lhamu looked on from a lower camp. She realised it was her identity as a Nepali Sherpa woman that prevented her from getting to the top too. This ordeal only made her more determined to become the first Nepali woman to conquer Chomolungma.

Pasang: In the Shadow of Everest is an inspiring story of the ambition, dedication, and triumph of this amazing woman. In equal part, it is the retelling of a tragedy that transcends socio-cultural boundaries.

“Her incredible story moved me,” says Nancy Svendsen, the director of the 72-minute documentary that premiered on 19 April, ahead of the 30th anniversary of Pasang Lhamu’s historic climb on 22 April 1993, and the 70th anniversary of the first climb on 29 May 1953.

Svendsen was first introduced to Pasang Lhamu not as a Nepali



national hero, but as the late sister of her brother-in-law, Ang Dorjee Sherpa. But the climber’s story resonated strongly with Svendsen, who had worked in corporate America, a field traditionally dominated by men.

“From that moment, I have been working to gather her archival footage and pictures. I started with very little. We had maybe a few home videos and scrapbooks of pictures her daughter gave me, and that was it,” recalls Svendsen.

Pasang Lhamu came from a deprived farming family. So, much of her climbs and expeditions were never filmed. But Svendsen makes it work with press footage combined with contemporary

photos to portray her life. Svendsen has also deployed clever edits and animation to show Pasang Lhamu’s last journey.

The entire production took 10 years with Svendsen changing her career to become a first-time filmmaker to locate and interview the late mountaineer’s colleagues, including Pemba Norbu, the last person to see Pasang Lhamu alive.

“It seems that much like everything, even risk-taking is gendered,” says Dawa Futi Sherpa, Pasang Lhamu’s eldest daughter and president of the Pasang Lhamu Foundation and Nepal’s former ambassador to Spain. “For the longest time my mother was criticised for leaving her family and



PHOTOS: PASANG LHAMU FOUNDATION

taking risks with her life even as she was doing it for her country and Nepali women.”

Pasang Lhamu, born the only daughter of a Sherpa mountaineer, was not allowed to go to school or mountaineering with her brothers like the majority of Nepali women of her time. She eloped, escaping an arranged marriage, with Lhakpa Sonam Sherpa and opened her own trekking company in Kathmandu.

Mother to three, she was a homemaker determined to level the status of Nepali women to what Western women had at that time. It was not necessarily her mountaineering skill she wanted to prove. Her struggle is seen in the backdrop of Nepal’s quest for democracy as she clashes with the prime minister, political parties, and Western mountaineers to fund her expeditions.

As she embarks on her fourth and final mission to Everest, we can see how the subordinate status

inflicted on her for being a woman, a Sherpa, and a Nepali led to decisions that proved to be fatal for her and her team in that 1993 expedition.

Pasang: In the Shadow of Everest brings the real Pasang Lhamu Sherpa to life, beyond what little is depicted in school textbooks while also addressing controversies surrounding her final climb through first-hand accounts. It equally showcases her trailblazing character that led to national mourning after her demise.

“Climbing Mt Everest as a Nepali woman then is harder than climbing 14 peaks now,” notes Dawa Yangzum Sherpa, the first Nepali international mountain guide who was at the premiere of the film in Kathmandu this week.

Dawa Yangzum Sherpa herself started her career by climbing the Pasang Lhamu Foundation walls, and says that a whole generation of Nepali women mountaineers has grown up inspired by the legacy of Pasang Lhamu. After Pasang Lhamu, 65 Nepali women have scaled Mt Everest.

Winner of 14 international film awards, Pasang: In the Shadow of Everest honors the legendary climber while also delving into the realities of Sherpas, often sidelined in mountaineering films. Public screenings of the Nepali version will begin on 28 April at QFX Cinemas and there are plans for shows in 15 locations in Kosi and Madhes provinces with donations raised during its Nepali premiere.

House Speaker Dev Raj Ghimire and famed ophthalmologist Sanduk Ruit were among the attendees at the premiere where Ang Dorjee Sherpa said: “This documentary will encourage Nepali women to dream big and conquer their summits.” 🇳🇵

Girl, unbothered

A young artist explores absences through stitch, fabric and photographs, with striking results

■ Ashish Dhakal

A piece of fabric can take on a dynamic meaning in art, as evidenced by Sofiya Maharjan’s works currently on display at Dalai La Art Space in Thamel. Viewers are made aware of delicate childhood memories: clutching on to one’s mother’s hem for a sense of security, or perhaps to call, to seek attention, to be invited into a world that is at the outset far from reach for a young child.

Maharjan plays not only with her own memory but also of her mother’s, and that is the central theme of the exhibition Absence Unbothered. Raised by a single mother who left her husband when she was only eight, Maharjan is 26 now. She is as inspired by her mother’s nostalgia for her own childhood as she is by how that yearning and the stories told by her mother shaped her own experience growing up.

Maharjan’s works are visually striking and unique in their execution. Using white fabric, stitch and photo transfer, a vision of an absence is rendered to canvas – an absence of a man, a father, that her mother made sure the children never felt in their lives. The artworks express a profound sense of loss worsened by the patriarchal fist that limits a woman’s choice, freedom and desires, but at their core, they are about an absence that is not present. The absence also gave her brother an opportunity to step up, filling in the role of her father, as shown by ‘Jhin Nima’.

The idea had been in the back of



Maharjan’s mind for some time, but it did not start to take form until her third year in college when she worked with her family archives. “At the time, I was not entirely sure what the idea looked like concretely,” she recalls, “but it was in the middle of the

pandemic and that allowed me a chance to know my mother more intimately.”

She began to collect stories of her mamaghar, where she was close with her mother’s family. Her mother, too, would tell her and her brother stories of her own childhood in fragments, which then Maharjan would piece together like stitching together a large, colourful tapestry of joys and sorrows, laughter and comfort – almost a precursor to her matured works in the exhibition, where these emotions and stories get concrete shape in objects such as gherwa lamps, karuwa, dalchaa and gha.

The objects themselves take on a double significance in Absence Unbothered. While they are most naturally the tangible connection her mother has with her past, they also speak of another added layer. When her mother left her husband and his family, she had to leave behind many things that she had collected over the years. Some of them were gifts of love from family members while others were fruits

of her own hard work.

“When I was growing up, many of my friends used to wear their mother’s jewellery and clothes, but that was not possible for me,” says Maharjan. “When I used to ask my

mother for her things, she would say, ‘Oh, I left that behind’. She used to miss them but did not have anything from her past with her that she could share with me.”

Now, the cousins on her father’s side wear the same jewellery and clothes and seeing this fills her with sadness. Maharjan’s mother now keeps a clothing store in Pinchhen in Lalitpur, she re-collected all that she lost: the cha: cha:, the ghadi. The fabric Maharjan uses is also inspired by clothes she found in the store. “And she worked hard, standing tall and independent, warmly holding us in her arms, and giving us space and peace,” says Maharjan.

This fact is immediately represented by a series of three larger works, which show a mother with her children. Each is faceless and the details are in their clothes, meticulous stitchwork that add depth and an inviting texture. Here, it becomes apparent that the story Maharjan is telling is not just her own but of countless young people who grow up in a similar absence.

“There were times when I felt the difference from many of my classmates who grew up in families with fathers,” says Maharjan. “But not anymore. My mother built a house without a husband and that’s okay. It has brought us closer. I am who I am now because my father was not around.” 🇳🇵

Absence Unbothered
Sofiya Maharjan
Dalai La Art Space, Thamel
Until 6 May

“I went to earn and learn”

Former policeman seeks his fortune in the Gulf and returns to Nepal to start a business

■ Nawaraj Chhitiz

This is the 29th instalment of Diaspora Diaries, a regular series in Nepali Times with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.

For a young man like me during the Maoist era, it seemed like those of us who were staying behind in rural Nepal only had two choices: join the Armed Police Force (APF) or the Maoist militia.

I used to be a social worker in Tanahu, collecting data on visually impaired locals and connecting them to health camps. The job was neither easy nor financially rewarding. But it was meaningful.

However, traveling became too risky because of the conflict, and I had to stop the work. I chose to join the APF because my brother was in it.

I remember feeling out of place at the barrack. I had grown up reading and writing literature, but suddenly it was not words but bullets that I learned to use. My true passion lay in pens, not pistols. Death felt even closer when 82 APF personnel were killed in Shamsheganj in Banke, the same place where my elder brother was stationed.

This terrified my mother who would tearfully insist that we quit



the police. I had just completed my training and was not enjoying this new stint. My brother, however, was too attached to the job and could not quit despite the danger. He did advise me to resign so our mother would not worry. I joined an undergraduate course, but as family responsibilities took over I decided to travel to the UAE for work as a security guard. It would be my home for the next 12 years.

It was a higher salary that brought me to the UAE. But soon

enough, I realised it offered a lot more than just economic stability. As I often tell my friends, if you have gone to the UAE, you have travelled the world because you meet people there from all over. I remember exchanging a few words with a New Zealander who had paid AED21,000 (\$520) for a ticket at a VIP booth at a Formula 1 race where I was stationed as a guard. I was shocked at the ticket rate, but was pleased with myself that I was getting paid to watch the same race

while at work.

I have been stationed at other high-profile places: guarding Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, which I had previously only read about. During New Year, I got to see great extravaganzas while on guard duty. I was focused on crowd management and ensuring people were safe, of course, but I also got to witness many historic events.

These are neither desires nor expectations that people from simple backgrounds like me have.

I was there just to earn, but I also got to learn. I gained exposure to what the world has to offer, even though I was just a poor guy in a guard uniform. I now know that no matter what corner of the world you throw me in, I will adjust and make a decent life for myself.

But I also know not everyone is as lucky in the Gulf. I landed a good employer and made up to \$900 every month as my security company got contracts with the best employers. But others in



Migrant worker returns to create v

Duped by an agent who promised work in Kabul, former security guard fulfils his dream back in Nepal

■ Sunil Bhujel

This is the 30th instalment of Diaspora Diaries, a regular series in Nepali Times with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.

The last time I counted, I had done 23 odd jobs by the time I was 22. From teaching computer classes to running a digital photo studio, to even performing in a dance bar, I had done it all.

But nothing stuck. I discontinued my undergraduate in humanities because I did not find it practically useful. On the advice of the principal of the school I was teaching in, I applied for a job in Afghanistan via an individual broker who had also sent his son there. After the series of failures I had faced in Nepal, going overseas felt like the only remaining option. After paying 3.5 lakhs for a visit visa, I was en route to Afghanistan in 2010 via UAE.

Or so I thought.

I was instead transported to an abandoned house in Ras Al-Khaimah. There were about 60 people like me crammed in that windowless house who were sold the Afghan dream. A few had failed in previous attempts to travel to Afghanistan but were determined because the agent was good at exploiting their desperation. There were no pillows or blankets in the rooms, just thin mattresses.

From day 1, I knew I was in trouble. A sinking feeling of hopelessness tugged at my heart. We tried at least to make our situation bearable, and some of



us used whatever money we had to cook our own food. It helped us to kill time.

On the 20th day, a foreigner finally came to interview us. I was selected but instead of Afghanistan, he wanted to send me to Iraq. I declined.

I complained loudly to my agent, and he reluctantly allowed me to leave the house. I used that opportunity to go to an internet café to print resumes which I passed on to Nepalis that I met along the way. I helped my friends do the same. A Nepali security guard came through and 14 of us were invited for interviews at a hotel opening. On the 26th day in the UAE at the interview venue, we finally got to eat good food for the first time. Seven of us passed the interview.

The agent tried to prevent us from taking the job by holding onto our passports and, later, from repaying our recruitment fees, claiming credit for our job placement. I was not having any of that, so I returned to Nepal and took back every paisa I had paid the agent. After two months, our new employer sent us our work visas and we went to the UAE again to work as a housekeeper in a hotel.

I did not understand the concept of dignity of work, and hid from my family how I was making beds in a hotel for a living. As a former teacher, I did not want them to see me as a failure and pressure me to return home.

The hotel allowed us to cross train, and I tried out the engineering department where the Sri Lankan

supervisor was impressed with how I answered his technical questions and completed his construction related tasks. As a grandson of a carpenter and mason, I grew up with construction tools and had picked up skills.

Every day, I would do housekeeping for 9 hours, and spend another 5 to 6 hours in the engineering department. My passion for what I was doing fuelled me despite the long hours. That sense of belonging had been missing when I was a teacher, a housekeeper, a pastry maker and even a dancer. I started applying for jobs at other hotels and got a call from the Marriott in Qatar and got a job in the MRT (Make Ready Team), a standby for all types of maintenance work.

I worked extremely hard at various Marriott locations and received Best Employee of the Month awards regularly. I even got a Spirit to Serve award signed by Bill Marriott himself. Later I would find out that a German long-stay guest in one of the Marriott apartments had sent a glowing reference about me to headquarters as I helped with maintenance work in the couples' apartment. She was short-tempered with a record of formally complaining about other Marriott staff including the GM himself, so it was quite flattering that the couple was impressed with me.

After spending four years in Qatar, I again transferred back to the UAE where I worked as a senior technician at a Marriott there. When Covid-19 hit, my life priorities changed. The virus demonstrated the fragility of our lives, and I just wanted to be with my wife and daughter. My managers did their best to keep me back, even offering to let me take a six-month leave. But I just wanted to come home, as being away for 11 years was too long. With travel restrictions, coming home was not as easy, and it was a while before my name was finally in the Nepal Embassy's list of people eligible to travel.

My insistence to return home could also have been driven by my confidence about job prospects, especially in maintenance and repairs in new hotels. I had a niche to fill.

Today, my company in Kathmandu Complete House Repair and Maintenance Solutions provides a one-stop service for all kinds of maintenance and repair services including plumbing, painting and electricians. Clients



my position have it much more difficult. My biggest fear was losing the job that I had, and this kept me on my toes at all times. Neither my family nor I could afford to lose the job and salary, and at my company, even a small mistake could be costly. I had bought shares in a transportation company back in Nepal. My research showed that it was a promising firm that was going to break the syndicate in the country. After leaving the UAE, I joined the company as an operations manager but soon realised the job was not for me.

I was used to order, rules and working within a system, but in Kathmandu, I found it difficult to adjust to the chaos. So I quit and sold my shares for a loss from my hard earned savings. It was literally down to my पसिनाको पैसा (savings from my sweat).

Back home in Chitwan, I could

not stay idle for long, and I could not bear the thought of going overseas for work again either. After 12 years away, I treasured the time with my family. A little bit of research taught me that there is potential in cleaning products so I took two short-term training sessions on how to make them.

I started a small production and supply outfit in Chitwan. YouTube is also a good place to learn for someone like me without a good background in business.

For a new company that started after Covid-19, we are doing pretty well financially, selling cleaning products for toilets, marble and glass, as well as hand liquid soap. We have 21 clients including hostels, hotels and resorts and often struggle to keep up with the rising demand. 🇳🇵

Translated from an interview with the author.

work at home



safety wear, and feels a sense of responsibility about finishing work in a timely manner as we commit to our clients. I find it especially surprising because the same Nepalis in Qatar or UAE that I worked with are recognised and valued for our work ethics. The wage difference, I am sure, is a factor to drive motivation, but so is the overall work culture in shaping work ethics.

I have come a long way from the first time I entered the UAE in 2010

as a victim of fraud. Today, I am in a much better position, with knowledge and finances that are serving me well in Nepal.

Reflecting on my journey makes me emotional. The friends that I am in touch with from the cramped building in the UAE are also doing well for themselves. One is in the UAE working in the kitchen of a Sheikh's family. Another works in a hotel in the Maldives. And the third who worked in the laundry department runs a tailoring store back in Nepal. I have not forgotten them, and our deeply disappointing start 13 years ago as migrant workers hoping to get into Afghanistan. 🇳🇵

Translated from an interview with the author. Diaspora Diaries is a regular column in Nepali Times providing a platform for Nepalis to share their experiences of living, working, studying abroad. Authentic and original entries can be sent to editors@nepalitimes.com with <Diaspora Diaries> in the subject line.

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Love and loss. Healing and hope.

Personal saga of an American teenager who helps to shape the future of Nepali children

Maggie Doyne was a wide-eyed 19-year-old in 2006 when she came to Nepal to backpack. But she was not trekking to Everest Base Camp or the Annapurnas. She was in the remote Karnali region where tourists seldom venture.

While walking along a dry river bed in Surkhet, she spotted a 6-year-old girl helping her mother break boulders for a construction contractor. The two smiled at each other.

Her name was Hima Tamata, and she became the reason Maggie Doyne stayed on in Nepal to help disadvantaged children in the Karnali with money she earned from baby-sitting back home in Mendham, New Jersey.

Seventeen years later, the act of enrolling Hima in school has grown into the BlinkNow Foundation that runs the Kopila Valley Children's Home and School in Surkhet.

Along the way, Maggie Doyne was named CNN Hero in 2015, and has been featured in The New York Times, Forbes, and this newspaper. She was named Woman of the Year by Glamour magazine — all of this helping fundraise for BlinkNow's many activities, which include educating 500 children at the Kopila school (pictured) and vocational training for women.

Kopila proves that high-quality education can be free, and its new campus in Surkhet is a model for sustainable architecture with rammed earth walls, rainwater harvesting, solar cooking, and a vegetable farm.

Last year, Doyne's biography *Between the Mountain and the Sky: A Mother's Story of Hope and Love* was published by HarperCollins in North America, and the South Asian edition is being launched on 29 April in Kathmandu.

The book is an emotional coming-of-age story of how one gap year student can change the world. Along the way, there are personal hurdles, financial challenges, the tragic loss of two children, and finally finding love.



ALLISON SHELLEY



BLINKNOW

Parents, including her own, back in the States do not understand why Doyne is not in college like everyone else's kids. She does not fully comprehend it herself, but knows it was all because of one little girl breaking stones by

the river in Surkhet.

Doyne (pictured, left) grapples with contradictions about Nepal: 'I wonder how a culture that so celebrates children can also fail at protecting them ... How can we alleviate suffering and improve the lives of children without westernising the world?'

As charities in Nepal have found out the hard way, there are obstacles when they try to do the work that the government should be doing. A powerful local Maoist implicated in the abuse of a 13-year-old girl gets journalists to smear Kopila, and suddenly there are death threats and physical attacks.

'We've crossed the line,' Doyne recalls. 'We're no longer just feeding the forgotten women and children of Nepal; we're empowering them. Nobody asked us to do that.'

She develops strong bonds with two rescued children: Juntara who has a tumour in her eye, and little Ravi who was found abandoned. Losing them scars Doyne deeply, but she gradually rebuilds inner strength by finding personal love, and a renewed motivation to expand and sustain Kopila.

Just like the old song 'Love will keep us together', in the end it is love for Nepal and her children, for her co-workers that inspires Doyne. She writes: 'We can choose love. We can create the world we want to live in, and the first step is believing that it's possible.'

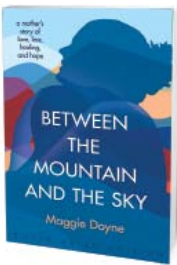
After nearly two decades, Doyne says it is time for her to step back from the limelight and put the focus on Nepali change-makers like Tope Malla who will take Kopila's mission into the future.

Doyne writes, 'As people in positions of privilege and power, it is our responsibility to help, not constantly be the centre of the story.'

Kopila's alumni are now in jobs and universities around the world, they are teachers, scientists, farmers, entrepreneurs and even a striker in Nepal's national female football team.

Hima Tamaka is now a confident 24-year-old chef. Inspired by her friend and mentor, she wants to help other Nepalis like her. 🇳🇵

Kunda Dixit



Between the Mountain and the Sky: A Mother's Story of Love, Loss, Healing, and Hope
by Maggie Doyne
Safu Publications, 2023
(South Asian Edition)
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