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Everything you need to know about the fake refugee scam.

There is speculation that

In the near future, it will be worth noting how this controversy will affect the Bhutanese refugees who remain in Nepal, along with the lives of those who have been resettled across the world. 🇳🇵

www.natureknit.com

Human flight

Nepal's economy is now a migrant economy, and has brought about a deep socio-economic transformation. There are 4 million Nepalis now spread across 180 countries, and they send home an estimated \$18 billion a year through formal and informal channels. These remittances make up a quarter of Nepal's GDP.

Nepal's hinterland is emptying. Young men and women are moving to Kathmandu, waiting here to get their papers before flying out. Yet, this is not a new phenomenon. Nepalis have been migrating for centuries, driven by indebtedness to loan sharks, subsistence agriculture, discrimination and exclusion, or to join foreign armies. Many of these push factors are the same today.

According to the World Bank's World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies launched in Kathmandu this week, 184 million or 2.3% of the world's population live in countries they are not citizens of, 80% of them are economic migrants and the rest refugees. Almost half live in low- and middle-income countries.

Every day, over 4,000 Nepalis leave for jobs overseas, not counting those crossing over into India. For many, it is not smooth sailing. Cheated by recruiters in Nepal and in destination countries, paid less in jobs not in the contract, working for months just to pay off loans. Government efforts to address this injustice have been ad hoc and lack focus.

But migration is not black and white as the World Bank Country Director Faris Hadad-Zervos put it at the launch event: "It's not whether migration is good or bad, but rather how we can better manage migration so that it serves as a force for development and prosperity for all countries."

The Nepali media's largely adverse portrayal of migration is driven by how 'news' itself is defined. Journalists are taught to highlight the negative and the unusual. Selection of what we choose to report has its own bias, and distorts the true picture.

The media's coverage of criminal mistreatment overshadows stories of tens of thousands of Nepalis who have struggled, but have done well for themselves, their families and their communities. The stories of abuse and exploitation have become so commonplace that the public is desensitised.

This newspaper runs the Diaspora Diaries columns about the struggles and successes of migrant workers. The series is now in its 31th episode, and tries to go beyond the statistics to humanise the lives of workers.

The migration discourse in Nepal also largely leaves out young Nepalis leaving for higher studies, primarily to Australia, Canada,

the UK, Japan, India and the US. Over 100,000 Nepalis left last year, some to never come back. Many Nepalis on student visas are migrant workers. The Nepal government knows this, and so do the host governments – it is supply-demand economics.

Nepal is graduating from LDC status, but nearly 16% of the country's population is out of the country at any given time. Nepal's population pyramid now shows fewer children, a youth bulge, and a growing proportion of seniors. The population below 14 years is down to 28% from 35% 10 years ago. Those older than 60 has increased to 10%, up from 8%.

Nepal must make the best of its demographic dividend, and has about 20 years before it becomes an ageing society. To prepare for that, we need all the nurses we have gainfully employed in Nepal, not in the UK.

Aside from a few new bright sparks, Nepal's democracy is not bringing up the kind of leadership that understands these challenges. The Bhutan refugee scam shows that the rot is right at the top. The implication for Nepal's international image and moral standing on the Bhutan refugee issue is incalculable.

The other type of migration we must start preparing for are climate refugees. Nepalis are on the move because springs are going dry, monsoons have become erratic, and there are prolonged droughts. Climate collapse will intensify this trend, as the record heat wave across Asia in May proves.

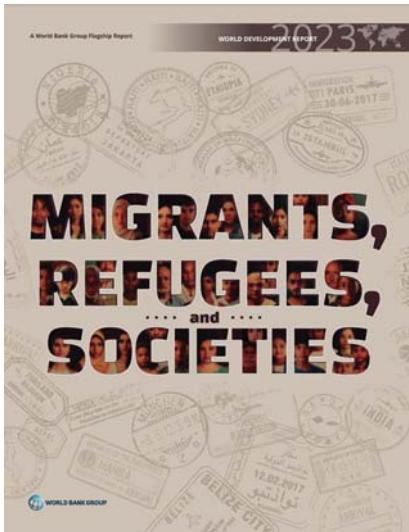
Gaia Vince in her book Nomad Country warns of the need for governments to be prepared for global mass migration because it will be too hot for people to survive where they live. For

us in Nepal, this means being prepared for people moving back up to the mountains from the Tarai.

It may be too much to ask the present crop of politicians to think that far into the future when they cannot even address the immediate concerns of migrant workers including abuse and exploitation of vulnerable aspirants, reintegration of returnees into society, incentives to come back to invest their savings and make the best use of skills gained abroad in productive sectors for job creation. But there may be hope in the next generation of technocrats.

As Prajwal Sharma of the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) said at the report launch: "Nepal can reap the benefit of overseas employment only by investing in skills and building human resources, and with the smarter investment of remittances through the promotion of entrepreneurship, and efficient mobilisation of skills and knowledge of diaspora to ensure brain gain."

Sonia Awale



“It’s not whether migration is good or bad, but how we can better manage it for development and prosperity.”

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Power Play

We often lament how Nepal has remained the same (or got worse) in 20 years. But we have also seen dramatic progress, including the electrification of households which has increased from 18% in 2003 to 95.5% today.

While the installed capacity of hydropower projects in Nepal is expected to cross 3,000MW this monsoon and projects with 3,200MW more are under construction, much of the power is at the risk of being wasted. India refuses to buy electricity from projects with Chinese involvement, choosing to get its companies to invest as water becomes a strategic commodity.

Excerpts from the report published 20 years ago this week in issue #144 9-15 May 2003:

As evening falls over this small villager in southern Lalitpur, the inky darkness is broken only by the unsteady flickering of kerosene lamps and tuki. But outside, the sky above Kathmandu glows with bright city lights.



Shanti Kala Shrestha, a primary school teacher, misses the convenience of electricity that she had grown accustomed to in her home village. "It's little wonder that children in this village do so poorly in their exams," she says. The villagers used to complain, now they

are just resentful. "It is sheer negligence on the part of the government. They are happy to sit in Kathmandu with their bright lights, not one cares for small villages like ours," says Dilli Prasad Ghimire, Shrestha's neighbour.

With only 30,000 new connections a year, the Nepal Electricity Authority's (NEA) rate of distribution is outstripped by growing demand. Half of the 525 MW electricity available in the national grid is consumed in Kathmandu Valley alone, and the NEA spends more than 45 percent of its income on purchasing electricity from independent power producers.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



Listen to this podcast with spoken Kusunda, a language isolate with no other language in its category, one of the rarest in the world with just one native speaker alive. Sewa Bhattarai speaks to Kusunda language teacher Uday Raj Ale and one of his students Hima Kusunda. Listen to the podcast on Spotify and read the story on page 10-11.



Ancient water spouts or hiti are considered a great technological achievements of the Kathmandu Valley Civilisation. Centuries after they were built, these systems still support the growing urban population of Kathmandu Valley because modern water mains are so unreliable. This year, stone spouts in Patan are gushing water even in the dry season. Watch the video on YouTube. Story: page 6-7.

HIMAL MEDIA MELA 2023

It is good to see this celebration of the principle and practice of free speech.

David Seddon

■ Many of us still lack awareness about the difference between media and social media, their roles and responsibilities. These differences need to be made clear.

Phulmaya Puri

■ Newsrooms are dominated by people from outside the valley, and they should write more about their places, so there will be balanced coverage.

Kamal Ratna Tuladhar

■ With the age of the AI, work in media is going to be almost impossible. Just survey how many people of Gen Z watch news or read newspapers—they get all their news from 30 second clips.

Yogen S

ANALOGUE PHOTOGRAPHY

Analogue photography is definitely making a comeback ('Reliving analogue photography', Suman Nepali, nepalitimes.com). My teenager loves taking pictures with a film camera and it is very popular amongst her friends too.

Manjima Sharma

HINDUTVA

The government should ban hate mongering hindutva outfits ('Religiously following politics', Chandra Kishore, #1159).

Andrew Blacksmith

SRAVASTI

This is a lot of historical information ('SRAVASTI', Sravasti Ghosh Dastidar, #1160). There is a Sravasti Abbey in Oregon, America too that has shown the way forward to many.

Netashwa

WATER GEOPOLITICS

India is investing in Nepal not just because water is a strategic commodity for India, but also to ensure that Nepal does not succeed in breaking its dependency on India, which has been the main disincentive preventing Nepal from industrialising ('Geopolitics of Nepal's rivers', Ramesh Kumar, #1160).

Ratna Sansar Shrestha

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



SRAVASTI

by Sravasti Ghosh Dastidar

On Buddha Jayanti, a journalist pays homage to Sravasti, the town she was named after which dates back to the Buddha's time. Sravasti features among the eight most significant sites of the Buddhist pilgrimage circuit. Get details at nepalitimes.com



Most reached and shared on Facebook

Geopolitics of Nepal's rivers

by Ramesh Kumar

India's interest in regulating Nepal's rivers is not new, but with the Himalaya becoming a geopolitical and climate hotspot, its strategic interest in Himalayan water has grown, and is edging China out of Nepal's river projects. Read more on our website.



Most popular on Twitter

#HimalMediaMela2023

The second annual Himal Media Mela on 3 and 4 May brought together editors, journalists, media owners and practitioners to discuss the survival and relevance of journalism in the new age. Join the discussion online.



Most commented

The new news age

by Sonia Awale

This is what the current media landscape looks like: social media videos and posts by politicians become grist for the mass media, which then pushes it out as news via the same platforms on the social web. As politics and the media merge, it is getting difficult to tell who is using whom.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

We don't take ads, we just take donations based on reader satisfaction. We are at a crossroads where society wants good information, valid and independent news. So I think it is a viable business. @AmPyakuryal of @ukaalonews at #HimalMediaMela2023



Chun B. Gurung @Chun_Gurung

Yes! #journalism practices are at a crossroad. We need to explore new avenues and approaches to promote #ethicaljournalism.



विवेकशील अभियान @bibekeheelgroup

This is wonderful, ukaalo.com says it's a publicly funded news Outlet, to maintain its independency. Hope this remains as it is.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

We still need to tell many more unheard, unseen stories. @cbidhya of @hernekatha #HimalMediaMela2023



Elina Pradhan @epradhan

@cbidhya and @hernekatha team shine much needed light to untold stories that define us as a society. Kudos to the team. Looking forward to your continued brilliance.



Kul Chandra Gautam @KulCGautam

Salute Bidya Chapagain-ji @cbidhya. You do an amazing job bringing out so many touching untold stories @hernekatha that need to be told & heard. A unique brand of people-centric admirable journalism. Keep it up!

1,000 WORDS



NEPAL EMBASSY, LONDON

SHREE 5:

King Charles III shakes hands with Nepal's new Foreign Minister N P Saud in London after his coronation ceremony on 6 May at Westminster Abbey.



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Norway supports Himalayan climate research

Norway, Nepal and ICIMOD are extending their partnership to protect the Water Tower of Asia

■ **Anne Beathe Tivnnerheim**
and **Pema Gyamtsho**

This year marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Norway and Nepal, and also the 60th anniversary of cooperation with Nepal in renewable energy. Our people-to-people contacts go back even further. Now, Nepal and Norway have renewed their joint commitment to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Norway and ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) are also long-term partners. Since 1993, Norway has been working with ICIMOD through its Nepal headquarter to develop better solutions for the Hindu Kush Himalaya region to address challenges related to climate change and poverty alleviation. We have been partnering with ICIMOD for 30 years, and this week we signed a new agreement for continued support.

Both the Hindu Kush Himalaya and the Arctic are affected by climate change: snow, ice and glaciers are melting, and the frozen land is thawing, changing ecosystems and impacting the way of life for the people.

The triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution are amplified in the Hindu Kush Himalaya. Crossborder pollution is affecting both the Himalaya and the Arctic due to long range transport by the wind. Global action is needed to reduce these effects to save nature and people.

The Hindu Kush Himalaya



CLIMATE FOR COOPERATION: ICIMOD General Director Pema Gyamtsho and Norwegian Minister of International Development Anne Beathe Tivnnerheim after signing a four-year agreement at the Himalayan Living Lab in Godavari on 10 May.

stretches across eight Asian countries from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, to Pakistan. The rivers that flow from this mountain range support the lives and livelihoods of nearly two billion people living downstream.

An incredible diversity of flora and fauna provides a range of ecosystem services. A region of extraordinary diversity of peoples, topology, and nature, holds the largest reserves of fresh water outside the polar regions largely in the form of frozen water. That is why it is known as the Water

Tower of Asia.

The Norway-ICIMOD partnership is rooted in a shared affection for mountains, affection for the people that live in the mountains, and the opportunities that come from sustainable use of the mountains, for instance in hydropower and farming.

The partnership focuses on increased resilience of farming practices to a changing climate, the revival of drying springs, the protection of fragile mountain ecosystems, and assessment and reduction of disaster risk.

The Norwegian Water Resources

and Energy Directorate will continue its collaboration with ICIMOD on important scientific work in the field to monitor changes in snow cover and glacier melt on a twice-annual basis – building upon the work done over the past eight years.

By setting up the world's only monitoring stations above 5,000m, our teams have created a unique repository of knowledge: both for those living in the Himalaya and for policymakers and analysts of climate change worldwide.

As we have seen with the catastrophic floods in Pakistan last year, the flood disaster at Melamchi

the year before, and the unseasonal heat waves that engulfed much of Asia last month, the climate crisis is an emergency for the region. The time to act is now.

Climate impact is already compounding the extreme hardships borne by so many families across countries in this region, where an unacceptable 30% of people face food insecurity and half experience some form of malnutrition. As the impact of temperature rise accelerates, compromising water security, agriculture, children's capacity to study, and people's ability to work and increasing the risks of natural hazards, the challenges of everyday life are only set to intensify.

But by leveraging a vast breadth of knowledge, scope of work, and historical data, we stand ready to support the Hindu Kush Himalaya transition to a greener, more inclusive, and climate-resilient region.

Through this catalytic partnership, we set out to ensure the protection of many more communities, habitats, and species – safeguarding this unique and precious region for generations to come.

As we celebrate the 50-year milestone of diplomatic relations between Norway and Nepal, as well as 30 years of collaboration with ICIMOD, we are happy that the partnerships remain strong, and we are committed to further deepening our cooperation in the years to come. 🇳🇴

Anne Beathe Tivnnerheim is Minister of International Development of Norway, and Pema Gyamtsho is Director General, ICIMOD.



NMB BANK
एनएमबि बैंक

Economic woes



A new status report by Nepal Rastra Bank has shown an improvement in remittances and the country's foreign exchange reserves. As of mid-April, Nepal

had \$10.94 billion in reserves, worth more than 9 months of imports. Nepal received Rs1.2 trillion in remittances. But import and export have decreased by 18% and 26% respectively. Despite a positive macro-economic picture, however, economic growth will be less than 2% this year, and many businesses have closed because of a slow economy.

Nabil new saving

Nabil Bank has launched the 'Dhukka Bachat Khata' insurance scheme wherein customers can get medical insurance for Rs100,000, critical illness insurance for Rs375,000 and group personal accident insurance for Rs1 million. Customers will also receive free debit card, credit card, mobile banking, DMAT, ATM, Meroshare services and locker facility for a year. The savings account also comes with a 7.40% interest rate.

New Ncell CEO

Jabbor Kayumov has been appointed the new CEO of Ncell Axiata Limited. Jabbor has 20 years of senior management experience in the telecommunications industry with several companies such as Telia (previously TeliaSonera) and Vimpecom (now VEON). Prior to joining Ncell, Jabbor worked as the CEO of Digicel Trinidad & Tobago followed by Digicel Jamaica until April 2023.



Turkish to Palermo

Turkish Airlines will now fly to Palermo in Sicily, increasing its number of destinations in Italy to nine following its routes to Rome, Milan, Venice, Naples, Bergamo, Bologna, Catania, and Bari. The flag carrier will operate the Palermo flights on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays with Boeing 737-800 from Istanbul. Palermo is Turkish's 344th destination.

FNCCI for tax cuts

FNCCI has asked the government to put its economic house in order to prevent an economic slump. It said reducing spending was not the answer, since that would lead a further stagnation in the economy. Rather the forthcoming budget should reduce wastage in administrative costs to free up resources for development. FNCCI President Chandra Dhakal suggested that Finance Minister Prakash Mahat take steps to align fiscal and monetary policies. The business sector also wants priorities on reviving construction, tourism, aviation and manufacturing.



Yamaha blue streaks

Yamaha Nepal has launched the 'Blue Streaks' for Yamaha owners to access exclusive events, rides, special promotions and discounts.

Everest new branch

Everest Bank inaugurated a new branch at Bardaghat in Nawalparasi this week. With this, the bank now has 125 branches, 7 provincial offices and 3 extension counters. The bank has also started operations from its Bhairahawa branch.



EU-Nepal biz forum

The first EU-Nepal business forum, organised by the EU Delegation to Nepal and Nepal's Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, ended this week with more than 250 participants. Government officials, EU member states representatives and traders attended the eight sessions on investment and trade opportunities and promoting businesses in Nepal.



JICA reconstruction

JICA has completed reconstructing 274 schools in Gorkha, Dhading, Nuwakot, Makwanpur, Rasuwa and Lalitpur districts that were damaged in the 2015 earthquake. The Rs14 billion project used the National Building Code and has child, gender and disability-friendly facilities.

Indian aid

Indian ambassador Naveen Shrivastav and Mingma Chhiri Sherpa, chairman of Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural municipality, have laid the foundation stone for the Rs41.13 million Khumjung Khunde Wastewater Management Project.



New Nexon

Tata Motors has launched the new Nexon EV MAX in Nepal at a starting price of Rs4.649 million. The SUV comes with a 40.5 kWh Lithium-ion battery pack, fast charge time, modernised interiors and a multi-mode Regen feature for easier braking. The five-seater is available in Intensi-Teal, Daytona Grey and Pristine White. Siddhartha SJB Rana of Sipradi and Shailesh Chandra of Tata Electric Mobility inaugurated the second Tata showroom in Bhaktapur.

Samsung Galaxy

Samsung has launched the Galaxy M14 in Nepal which comes with a 50MP triple camera, 6000 mAh battery, and 5nm processor at a starting price of Rs24,999. Customers can buy the new model at any Samsung retail outlet across the country.



“Democracy gives you a chance to throw rascals out”

Interview with
Kevin Casas-Zamora,
Secretary General of the Stockholm-
based International IDEA during his visit
to Kathmandu this week.



FUNDACIÓN CAROLINA

Kevin Casas-Zamora, PhD, is the Secretary General of International IDEA, the Stockholm-based intergovernmental organisation supporting democracy worldwide. He used to be Costa Rica's Second Vice President and Minister of National Planning and National Coordinator of the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report. Nepali Times caught up with Casas-Zamora during his visit to Kathmandu this week. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: In your recent op-ed for The New York Times, you wrote about democracy in Latin America and anti-corruption populism. You noted that the collapse of party systems would lead to an emergence of outsiders who would accelerate the erosion of democracy. How similar is this scenario to other parts of the world, like Nepal?

Casas-Zamora: It would be very presumptuous of me to start babbling about Nepali politics, but we are seeing a global trend towards the dissolution of the mechanisms that society had created to aggregate social preferences, social demands, like political parties. Latin America might be a particularly acute example, but it is certainly not unique. The World Values Survey covering 80 countries showed the people's trust in political parties was in the single digits. This is particularly damaging, because one of the big problems that democracy has globally is that democratic communities are being torn apart.

Polarisation is on the rise pretty much everywhere. Disinformation on social media is one of the key centrifugal forces. Inequality is another, and it weakens democratic communities.

When political parties are weakened and party systems become fragmented, it becomes very difficult to govern, to build majorities, to implement any kind of agenda. In the end, what do you reap out of that is dissatisfaction. We are seeing a growing gap between growing social expectations, growing social demands and the inability of democratic institutions to respond to those demands. It is in that gap that monsters are growing. And it is in that gap that populism finds fertile ground.

When IDEA was established in 1995, there was euphoria about democracy, the Soviet Union had just collapsed, and many thought it was the end of history. Things did not turn out that way. Is there a design defect in the democratic project itself that allows this algorithm-driven populism to gain foothold?

It is an interesting question, and I don't think so is the answer. The normative case for democracy continues to be very strong. It is the only system that treats people according to their human dignity and respects their agency. That's not a small thing. But beyond the purely normative argument, there is a very practical one, which is that democracy resolves in an elegant way, something authoritarian systems have great problems resolving: the issue of succession. Democratic systems also have the ability to self-correct. This is really the essence.

And this is where the real value of democracy in practice lies. The pandemic proved very telling in that respect. Three years ago a lot of people blamed the faulty performance of democracy and the messiness. And sure enough there were democracies that performed very poorly, others that did better.

But there was this sense that well, democracies are not up to the task, when it comes to a very acute crisis. They're not efficient enough to respond to the problem, whereas in China, they are very efficient and they do what needs to be done. Well it turns out the performance of democracies with regards to the pandemic is looking much better than it did three years ago. And the performance of China with regard to the pandemic is not looking nearly as good. That's down to the ability of democracies to self-correct.

If you live in a democracy, and you don't like the policies that are being enacted in four or five years, you're going to have a chance to throw the rascals out. You may or may not succeed, but you have that chance. Living under an authoritarian system is like playing the roulette. You might be very lucky, and end up with Lee Kuan Yew and you do great. But you might not be so lucky and end up with Idi Amin.

Still, we need to rethink democracy for a new time. If you take the basic design of democratic institutions, the emergence of political parties about 100 years ago, it hasn't changed much for the past two centuries. You have this dissonance between the speed and the scale of social change over the past century, and the relative lack of institutional innovation in democracy over the same period. It is time to rethink representative institutions.

One concrete example could be citizens assemblies, selected randomly that are given the task and the information to study an important problem for society and then they are expected to make recommendations, which are then taken up by the political system. They've used it for abortion in Ireland, in France for environmental issues, and that is the kind of innovation that needs to happen.

It's a time for institutional

innovation and for political reform. And if we do that, if we take those serious issues seriously, a democracy has a strong case to make for itself.

How does IDEA's membership model work? What if a democratic member country goes rogue and elects a despot?

It's an issue that we're grappling with. Backsliding was not a thing back in 1995, the assumption was that the good times would last forever. That is perhaps the biggest mistake that was made: the notion that this was a linear process. Well, there's no such a thing in human affairs as a linear process other than ageing.

Even in the best of circumstances it is a case of two steps forward one step back, which may also be the case for Nepal. That's the way most democratic transitions work. Where the performance of our own member states is less than adequate in terms of adherence to democratic values that we put in place, we establish a process of dialogue with the country in question. IDEA offers some support to the country. But ultimately, it's up to the country to put that action plan in place.

We are having that discussion at the moment and it's a complicated one, because to be very honest, and this is something that I've seen at just about any intergovernmental organisation, member states are loath to pass judgment on other member states. But we have to face up to the fact that democratic practices can really break down in some of our member states in gradual ways, or in abrupt ways.

Our statutes have a clause that allows for a country to be suspended. It has never been used but what we are trying to put in place a due process so that this doesn't come out of nowhere, but then there are certain steps that are followed before we get there. And hopefully, we'll never get there.

In many democratic Asian countries, there is disillusionment with poor governance and lack of delivery. We look enviously at China or Singapore and the Asian tiger economies. Even in Nepal there are many who say we have tried it for 30 years and democracy is not delivering.

Evidence tends to show that in the long run, democracies perform better. Of course, you may say that in the long run, we're all dead. Most authoritarian systems are not like China or Singapore, the average is much lower. But while you can accept the proposition that on average democracies do better than autocracies when it comes to economic performance and development, China and Singapore are a big distortion. At the same time, we have to admit that in vast swaths of the world the pressure for development forces governments to adopt certain practices of democracy that are less than liberal.

There is a lot of lecturing going around. When I travel I sense an increasing impatience when Western countries talk about democracy. A lot of folks in places like India, South Africa, in parts of Latin America roll their eyes. And this has become very evident in the context of the war in Ukraine. The West is baffled that much of the rest of the world is not seeing the war in Ukraine as part of this huge struggle against authoritarianism. Well no: that's not the way it's perceived. So, a little more sensitivity to the pressures for development that countries find themselves under is called for.

We owe it to ourselves to have a truly global conversation about what democracy means in different places. We might not be talking about the same thing. So a little more humility, and more sensitivity is called for. A truly global and respectful conversation about the meaning of democracy can agree on certain, common denominators as the core tenets of democracy. But beyond that, there's a lot of flexibility.

Where does the media fit into this?

The Erdogans, Orbans, Dutertes, Bukeles of the world are united by a desire to weaken any kind of check on executive power. And that means weakening the independent judiciary, press freedom, the ability of civil society to self-organise and demand things, and to hold people in power to account. They are weakening autonomous electoral authorities. And this thing comes in different sequences in different places, but the result is always the same. Some governments start out going after the press before they go after the judiciary, some do it the other way round. But in the end, the result is the same.

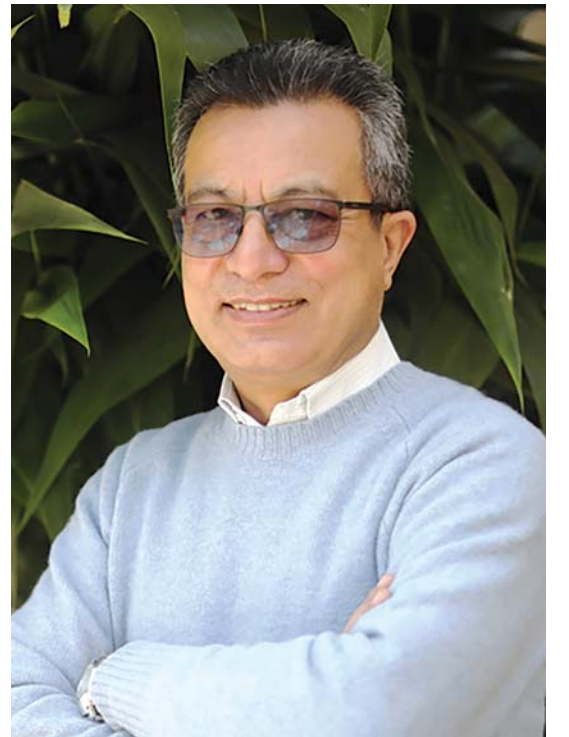
The press is one of the scapegoats. I remember when I was an active politician, you lived in fear of the press, and that is the way it should be. That is the single most important check on your power. There is a reason why wannabe-autocrats go after the press, or buy them off. The more sophisticated among them buy the media off, others go after journalists.

According to our measurements, one of the aspects of democracy that is most acutely under siege is freedom of the press. Out of 18 Latin American countries over the past decade, press freedom has decreased in 15 of them.



SUMAN NEPALI

“Respect our ancestors by saving the hiti they built.”



■ Padma Sundar Joshi

In the last 30 years, many hiti in Patan and elsewhere in the Valley have gone from being perennial sources of water to becoming completely dry. First, the flow of water decreased. Then the water began to flow only during the monsoon, before stopping altogether.

Unregulated construction because of the Valley’s population density destroyed both the sources of water as well as the underground channels connecting water sources to the ancient hitis.

People in the valley began drilling tube wells to ensure water supply, but this lowered the water table and dried up the hiti. Now, with the Melamchi water supply, many of those wells are not used as much. This, in turn, has meant that the water table has risen, reviving the flow in the ancient spouts even in the dry season.

However, if Kathmandu Valley’s population continues to grow at an unprecedented rate, it won’t matter how much water is supplied from Melamchi, Yangri, or Larke. There simply will not be enough water. Managing urban growth must be the priority.

A hiti’s age is often cited as the reason for it going dry, but that is not the case. The Mangal Hiti in Patan has been providing water continuously for 1,500 years. How long a hiti has existed is immaterial as long as it is managed and protected. And that means not only making the sunken spouts more attractive, but to strengthen its functionality.

A key to making water flow again in the Valley’s hiti is to bring back the recharge ponds and lakes which have been built over. But conservation of our ancient water supply system has been neglected because it is deemed too expensive. In fact, water should be an election agenda, and elected leaders must fulfil their promises.

The good news is that many of our hiti have been flowing again, even in the dry season. This reminds us that heritage and nature conservation go hand in hand, both must be protected.

Kathmandu’s hiti define our civilisation and our place in history. To disregard them is to disrespect our ancestors. 🇳🇵

Padma Sundar Joshi is an urban development expert and the author of Hiti Pranali, a book on his research into the ancient hiti system.

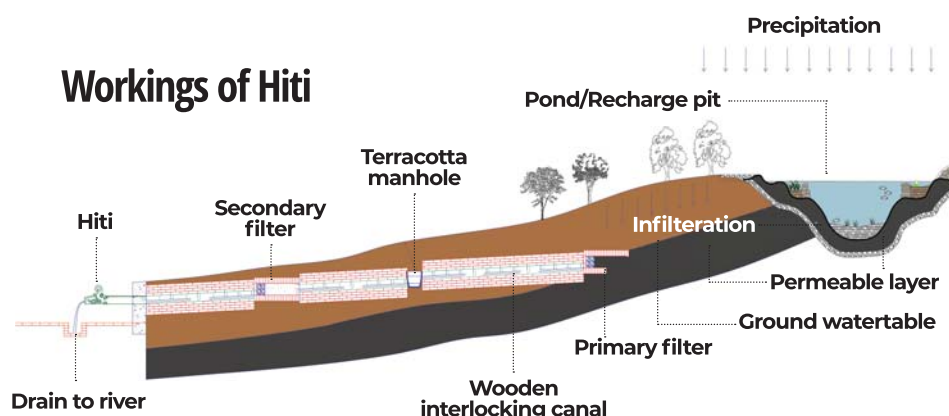


GOPEN RAI

falls in three months, we can store monsoon runoff in recharge pits and make use of existing wells for storage as well.”

A new system of channels is being built to amplify the water flow to Patan’s water spouts from a distribution centre in Khumaltar, and it is set to come into operation in a few months.

Says Chandra Kumar Shrestha of the municipality’s Project Implementation Directorate: “If water supply from Melamchi is more regular, it will help recharge ground water and revive our dry hiti and benefit more people.” 🇳🇵



EVENTS



Bird count

Watch and count birds from anywhere in listed Himalayan regions and anytime on Global Bird Day for the 2nd edition of the Himalayan Bird Count. Upload your findings and information on eBird.org.
13 May, 9849327473

Film festival

The Nepal-European Union film festival is back starting with the screening of Any Day Now. Take friends and family to watch, enjoy and reflect on the stories presented.
12-15 May, Film Development Board Hall, Chabahil



Virtual exhibition

Join the virtual tour of the exhibition 'A Retrospective of An Artist' featuring works by Ragini Upadhyay at Siddhartha Art Gallery. The tour features a selection of 300 prints and paintings from the diverse periods of Upadhyay's life. Access the link here: <https://www.siddharthaartgallery.com/virtual-tour>

REINTERPRETATION

For all art lovers, REINTERPRETATION is here, featuring artists Sagar Manandhar, Sujan Dangel, Sundar Lama, Kuntishree Thapa and Prakash Pun Magar.
12-21 May, The Nanee Bhaktapur (01) 5915110



Macbeth Massacre

Shakespeare joins Verdi and Nepal in a fusion-adaptation Macbeth Massacre, bringing the force of drama and opera, verses in Nepali and a team of Nepali artists and international opera performers together. Book tickets now: <https://bookings.mandalatheatre.com/>
19-28 May, 5:30pm-8pm, Tickets: Rs300-1000, Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun (01) 5245147

DINING



The Workshop Eatery

Forget about calories and indulge in an assortment of doughnuts, fries and burgers. The Nutella Doughnut and the Workshop BBQ Chicken Burger is a must.
Jhamsikhel, 9860431504

MUSIC



Katgrass

Head over to Katgrass: a Bluegrass and Nepali Folk fusion concert with artists Manaslu Blue and Ryan O'Donnell.
13 May, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1000, Moksh, Jhamsikhel



Albatross

Be present in the new release of Raat ko Rani Album of the band Albatross this week.
13 May, 7pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1000-3000, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Paryatan Marg



Adarsha

Enjoy a live performance by Adarsha Bikram Shahi with great food and ambience.
12 May, 7:30pm onwards, Club Nine Café and lounge, Hotel Shambala

Live music

Enjoy a special line-up of Firoz Rai, Kush, Space and Pahlenlo Batti Muni at Attic. Buy tickets on ticketsansar.
13 May, 5pm onwards, Attic, Gyaneshwar

Rajiv Gurung

Rajiv Gurung will be performing live at Beers N' Cheers this week. Do not miss out!
13 May, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel (01) 5524860



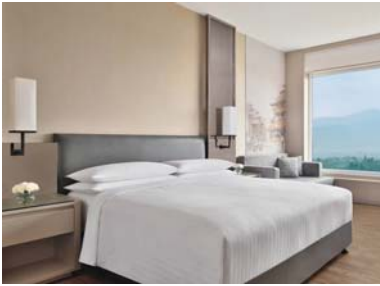
Raithaane

Eat the way through Nepal at Raithaane, a restaurant that is committed to using locally sourced foods. Each dish on the menu is connected to the different communities of the nation, so one can eat everything from east to west.
12pm-7pm, Patan Darbar Square, 9801002971

Red Mud Coffee

Red Mud, a casual eatery in Jhamsikhel, is the perfect place to grab some coffee, sandwiches and one of the best chicken sizzlers in the city with family and friends.
Jhamsikhel, 9861665829

GETAWAY



Marriott Hotel

Celebrate the reappearance of the sun and take a dip in Marriott's refreshing infinity pool. And if one is there for the food, the shrimp cocktail is a must!
Naxal (01) 4443040

The Little House

A sanctuary in the middle of gorgeous and green rice fields. One can enjoy beautiful views from the terrace, a peaceful walk in the garden, and relax in the cozy shared lounge.
Khokana, 9841370022



Barahi Jungle Lodge

The first eco-jungle lodge in Chitwan directly overlooks Chitwan National Park, with spa, boutique guest rooms, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.
Megauli, Chitwan (01) 4429820

Chhaimale Village Resort

Adorned with pear trees, this resort is an ideal destination for anyone seeking to escape the dust and bustle of Kathmandu city.
Chhaimale (01) 4268121



Raniban Retreat

A unique boutique hotel located on the secluded hillock of Raniban forest, offering an eco-friendly environment specifically tailored for guests. A must visit for peace and serenity and views of Himalayas.
Pokhara (01) 5185435

Fun Café Brunch

Bring along family to the buffet brunch at Radisson hotel where you can make your own salad and enjoy discounts on the spa, beauty salon and swimming. Call now for reservations.
Saturdays, 12pm-3:30pm, The Fun Café, Radisson hotel, 9851048331



Kyubi's Kitchen

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

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
30° 13°	31° 15°	30° 14°	29° 14°	29° 14°

Hot again, wet later

The big story this week is Cyclone Mocha (named after the coffee from Yemen) in the Bay of Bengal, which is expected to move northeastwards making landfall along the Bangladesh coast later this week. The prevailing westerlies will be trying to push this circulation off, but its tentacles will graze eastern Nepal. The accompanying moisture will feed convection along the mountains with thundery rain from Sunday onwards as far as Kathmandu Valley. But till then we will see maximum temperature cross 30°C in the city, although there will still be a night-time nip in the air.

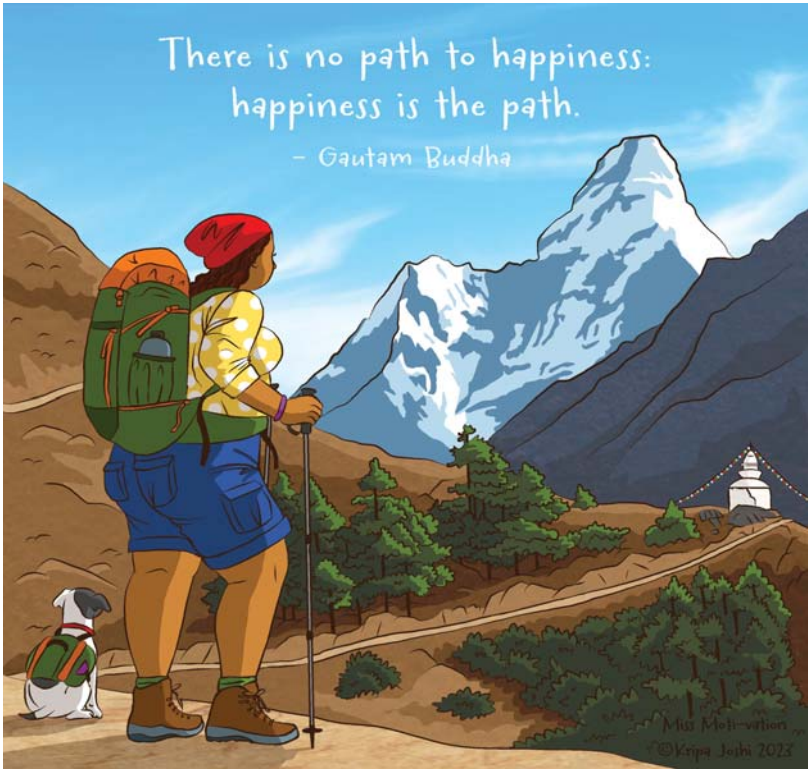
OUR PICK

The premise of Beef is simple: a road rage incident between two strangers — Danny, a failing contractor, and Amy, an unfulfilled entrepreneur — sparks a feud that brings out their darkest impulses. But this cleverly written and superbly acted dark comedy is more than just the tit-for-tat relationship, leading to escalating acts of revenge as Amy and Danny learn about each other's identities and families and become more and more involved in each other's lives. Delectably existential and surreal, Beef explores the themes of generational trauma, muddled humanity and the nature of anger. Revenge may be best served cold — but Beef is raw, equally wicked, funny and bold. Stars Ali Wong, Steven Yeun, Joseph Lee, Young Mazino and Patti Yasutake.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



आगलागी हुन नदिन चनाखो बनौं

- खाना पकाइसकेपछि आगो, ग्याँस चुलो, स्टोभ वा हिटर निभाऔं ।
- सिलिन्डरको रेगुलेटर, पाइप वा चुलोबाट ग्याँस लिक भए/ नभएको यकिन गरौं ।
- ग्याँसको गन्ध आए बेवास्ता नगरौं ।
- सलाई, लाइटर बालबालिकाले भेट्टाउने ठाउँमा नराखौं ।
- दाउरा बालेर खाना पकाइसकेपछि पानी छ्यापेर आगो निभाऔं ।
- चुरोट, तमाखु, चिलिम, सुल्पा नखाऔं । खाएमा आगो राम्ररी निभाऔं ।
- बिजुलीका तार, प्लग, स्वीच वा वायरिड ठीक अवस्थामा भए/ नभएको जाँच गरौं ।
- घरबस्ती नजिकै पोखरी, ट्याङ्की वा अरू कुनै तरिकाले पानीको जोहो गरिराखौं ।

आगलागीजन्य विपद्बाट बच्न चनाखो बनौं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

‘Used and thrown’

Nepali guards who protected British forces in Afghanistan still face unemployment and deportation

Almost two years after the war in Afghanistan ended, Nepali security guards who worked to protect the British Embassy in Kabul are still largely unemployed, facing uncertainty, with most already deported from the UK.



COMMENT

Jenna Mae Biedscheid

International media attention following a raid in early April, that led to the arrest and detainment of 10 evacuees, forced the UK government to pause the deportation process and released some of the detained evacuees – only to secretly depoted them less than a month later.

Throughout the war in Afghanistan, Nepali security guards served as the first lines of defence, protecting the lives of military personnel, officials and citizens of foreign governments. They risked their lives and, in some cases, watched their friends die in the line of duty.

Many of the Nepali guards who worked at the British Embassy had faith that the UK government or their company, GardaWorld, would evacuate them safely – and they did. But their job security and income for the future of their families was completely lost.

Private defence contracting, the hiring of armed combat and security services by private companies, has become an increasingly common method to lower the costs of war and military interventions in the 21st century. The labour required for prolonged military interventions, such as the war in Afghanistan, is outsourced to countries such as Nepal, whose GDP relies heavily on remittances from foreign labour migration.

Given the legacy of the Gurkhas who have been serving in the British army for more than 200 years, international private security companies supplying labour to foreign embassies in Afghanistan looked mainly to Nepalis and Indians of Nepali descent to meet the security demands, as detailed in the book Under Contract: the Invisible Workers of America’s Global War.

According to the Department of Foreign Employment, approximately 12,500 Nepali migrant workers have received non-renewed, first-time labour permits for Afghanistan since 2001. Those who took informal routes are not included in this figure.

For Nepali guards, many of whom are retirees from the Nepal and Indian militaries, work in Afghanistan was lucrative. Many knew it would be dangerous but lack of opportunities with comparable salary in Nepal meant that they agreed to take on the job. This also benefited the private defence companies and governments that contracted them, as Nepali guards were willing to take lower salaries.

Niraj, an evacuee, explained that working in Afghanistan after retirement from the army meant that he could better support his family and give his children quality education. While the evacuees interviewed said that they were happy with the salary,

they knew that it was lower than what was deserved considering the conditions, risks, and duties of the job.

As the Taliban advanced across new territories in Afghanistan, many of the Nepali guards still did not have a full picture of what was going on. It was not until a few hours before boarding a repatriation flight that they were told of the Taliban takeover.

Nepali guards who worked at the British Embassy in Kabul guarded the compound until the last minute, after most of the British forces and officials had already been evacuated. On 15 August 2021, they boarded a Royal Air Force plane to Dubai before reaching the UK.

Upon reaching the UK, they had received 6-month emergency visas and were placed in military housing facilities. While many returned to Nepal only two days after arriving in the UK, some were able to contact immigration lawyers and secure legal pathways to stay there.

All third country guards working at the British Embassy, including the Nepali guards targeted for deportation, had an opportunity for resettlement in the UK under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), as listed on the UK government website. The ACRS states that ‘the scheme will prioritise those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan...’

As GardaWorld contractors, Nepali security guards were eligible for indefinite leave to remain (ILR) status under Pathway 3 of the ACRS. The scheme states that ‘Pathway 3 was designed to offer a route to resettlement for those at risk who supported the UK and international community effort in Afghanistan’. However, this pathway was only open to GardaWorld contractors for the first year after evacuation.

It seems this opportunity for resettlement was not properly communicated to the Nepali guards. Now that the year of eligibility has passed, most missed their chance to gain ILR status. Those interviewed who did apply under the scheme were denied.

Things are not any better for those who returned to Nepal. In the rushed evacuations, Bibek, an evacuee who worked at the British Embassy, said that all of his belongings were lost, including his passport. Upon returning to Nepal, the guards explained, there was no follow up from GardaWorld, the British Embassy in Afghanistan, or the Government of Nepal. Those who lost their luggage or passports were not compensated or provided assistance in obtaining new documents.

Back in Nepal, the evacuees set up a Facebook group to combine their efforts in finding their lost luggage and gaining new employment. Together, they filed a formal application of complaint to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kathmandu.

The complaint had three requests: help find new employment opportunities either in Nepal or the UK, compensation for their lost luggage and documents, and compensation for loss of income. Only some were able to receive compensation for loss of income due to abrupt repatriation after negotiating with the company.



HASTY RETREAT: Nepali guards sub-contracted for security at the British Embassy in Kabul hurriedly boarding a Royal Air Force plane to Dubai on 15 August 2021 before being flown to the UK.

Juddha, a Nepali evacuee, described the company as being reluctant to provide loss of income compensation, despite it being promised in employment contracts. The evacuees did not receive any follow-up communication regarding the application of complaint they submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs either. Out of the 111 Nepali guards working at the British Embassy in Afghanistan at the time

of evacuation, only a handful were able to secure their pathway to a life with more opportunities in the UK.

“We really felt we were used and thrown,” said Bibek after his evacuation. “We were there to provide security, and we did our job dutifully... They (the British government and GardaWorld) did not empathise with what we were going through. They did not

understand that we had been rendered unemployed, or that we faced an uncertain future. They could have at least asked us what we wanted.”

The very concept of employing Nepali guards to create a barrier of security to protect British citizens inside the Embassy implies that these guards’ lives are somehow more dispensable than British citizens. The blatant disregard for their well-being after the evacuation only adds to this notion of the dispensability of the guards in the eyes of GardaWorld and the British government.

“We need support in the form of employment either in Nepal or in the UK because we need to look after our families. At present, many of us are past the age to find fresh employment. We feel really victimised,” added Bibek. Manish, another evacuee, is worried about his children, who would have a good future in the UK.

Instead of feeling “used and thrown”, these evacuees should feel respected, appreciated, and honored for the vital role they played in protecting peoples’ lives in the war in Afghanistan.

After all they have endured, at the very least, the Home Office of the UK needs to provide an explanation as to why those few guards who were able to secure a pathway to stay in the UK were treated as though they had done something illegal and deported.

Furthermore, all the security guards who risked their lives to protect the British Embassy should be given the opportunity to attain gainful employment to be able to provide for their families. 🇳🇵

Jenna Mae Biedscheid is a graduate from Colorado State University who is currently in Nepal as a Fulbright Research Scholar.

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The last of the Kusunda

Social exclusion by mainstream society is driving this endangered ethnic group and its unique language to extinction

The Kusunda are one of the two last remaining hunter-gatherer societies left in Nepal, the other being the nomadic Raute.

The 2011 Census showed that there were only 273 Kusunda individuals remaining. The Kusunda language is not related to any other language group in



ON THE MARGINS
Sewa Bhattarai

South Asia, and has only one native speaker still alive: Kamala Khatri Sen in Dang. Decades of social exclusion has nearly obliterated this ethnic group.

One of the earliest mentions of Kusunda comes from Brian Houghton Hodgson, the British Resident to Nepal in 1833, who extensively documented Nepal's human and natural diversity.

'Amid the dense forests of the central region of Nepal, to the westward of the great valley, dwell, in scanty numbers and nearly in a state of nature, two broken tribes having no apparent affinity with the civilized races of the country, and seeming like the fragments of an earlier population,' Hodgson wrote of the Kusunda and Chepang.

More than 150 years ago, Hodgson was already calling the Kusunda 'a broken tribe'. Today, they are even fewer in number with a few scattered between Gorkha and Dang, as the groups migrated westwards.

Researcher Narayan Prasad Adhikari writes that the Kusunda believe their ancestors lived originally in Arghakhanchi and Palpa, wandering to Tiram of Pyuthan and Ambapur of Dang.

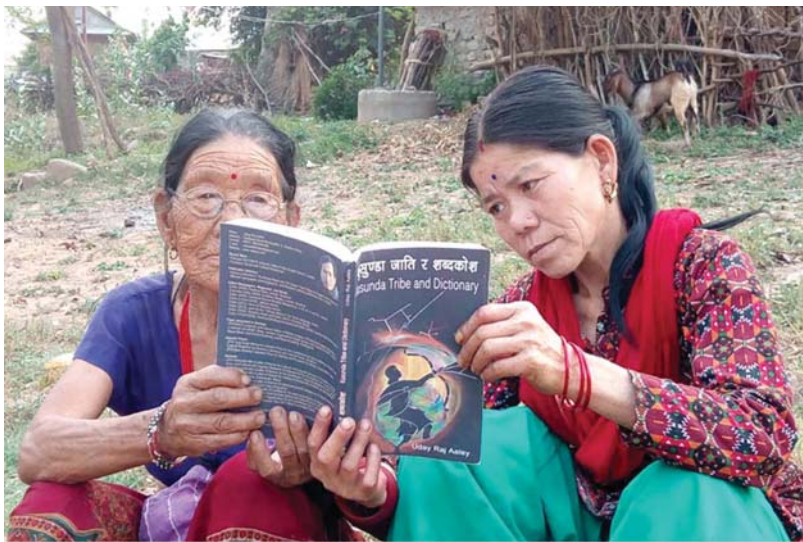
Hodgson noted in 1870 that the Chepang, Kusunda and Hayu are of the same lineage, and Adhikari notes that there are indeed some similarities in their physiognomy



Two Kusunda men engaging in ritual sacrifice



Jhankri attending to a patient.



Gyani Maiya Sen and Kamala Khatri Sen leafing through a Kusunda dictionary.

and language. Hodgson conjectured that the Kusunda migrated from even further east, and are a branch of the Lhopa of Bhutan.

Kusunda language and grammar cannot be categorised under any regional language family, although some researchers say it is derived from Tibeto-Burman roots because of the similarity of some words.

"There is no other community like the Kusunda in the whole world," says linguist Madhab Prasad Pokharel. "They do not drink running water, and only drink spring water. They do not touch cows or drink cow milk. They hunt and eat monitor lizards and weasels. Their DNA shows some links to the eastern Pacific."

Pokharel says Kusunda language has many unique features. For example, although they live in the forest, they have no word for the colour green. The way they create pronouns is different from other languages. My hand is 'tawei', your hand is 'nawai' and his/her hand is 'ginawai'.

Uday Raj Ale and Tim Bodt note in a 2020 article in the journal Babel, that spoken Kusunda has sounds not found elsewhere. 'The voiced uvular and the uvular nasal have now basically disappeared from the language, but we can still recognise that they were once pronounced,' they wrote. Uvular stops are relatively common in Caucasian, Semitic and Pacific Northwest languages, but are absent in South Asia.

The Kusunda could be a branch of some early migration streams out of Africa en route to the Subcontinent, East Asia and Australasia. The Babel article says: 'They may have inhabited a much larger geographical area, but were gradually replaced or absorbed by speakers of other languages.'

Can we find these stories in

the origin stories of the Kusundas? Can their myths trace the path of the primitive humans who had wandered through the earth? Is it possible to find their relationships with the indigenous people of East Pacific Ocean through their folklore? One is curious to know whether the oral history of one of the world's most unique communities can answer these questions. Sadly, we find that the history, mythology and folklore of the Kusundas have already disappeared a few generations ago.

Imposed mythology

Uday Raj Ale has researched and documented the Kusunda extensively, and has collected some of their origin stories in his book Gemjehaq.

The Chepang chapter of Dor Bahadur Bista's book Sabai Jat ko Phulbari traces the origin myths of Kusunda history to the Ramayana: Sita gave birth to a son named Lohori at the Valmiki Ashram. She took the baby out of its crib to play with it, and when Valmiki saw an empty crib, he panicked. He created a baby from the kush grass and put it in the crib.

Deciphering Thangmi

An ethnolinguist's race against time to document Nepal's endangered language

■ Ashish Dhakal

The Tibeto-Burman language Thangmi (or Thami) is spoken by 33,500 Nepalis. Historically unwritten and genetically related to Nepal Bhasa, Rai, or Baram, the language is also among the least documented in Nepal.

But this will change thanks to a new two-volume monograph, A Grammar of the Thangmi Language, by Vancouver-based anthropologist and linguist Mark Turin.

Originally published in the Netherlands in 2012 by Brill, it was launched last month by Social Science Baha and Himal Books and is now available to the Thangmi-speaking community and researchers in Nepal and India.

Thangmi has two major dialects spoken in Dolakha and Sindhupalchok, and there is a wide variation even between them, with differences in verbal agreement systems. For example, the word for 'to come' is completely different on the two sides of the Bhote Kosi River. The verbs 'to come' or 'to go' are different according to the direction whence and whither to where the speaker sees the object of the sentence arrive or leave.

Turin's involvement with Thangmi

dates back to 1996 when he moved to the Netherlands for a PhD at Leiden University, where he joined the Himalayan Languages Project under the tutelage of George van Driem, himself a Himalayan researcher. Turin had lived in Nepal previously, researching Thakali in lower Mustang.

"I was in George's office looking at this incredible map of the Himalayas with coloured pins and flags on it, and he asked me which language I would like to work on," recalls Turin.

The pins showed the locations of endangered and undocumented languages. Turin chose one which read थामी. By the spring of 1997, he was living in Damarang in Dolakha, learning and studying Thangmi.

Among the more than 100 languages spoken in Nepal, many boast a robust documentary tradition, either by the community, foreign linguists, or both. However, the only mention of Thangmi then was by missionaries who had identified the world's least evangelised 100 peoples, which included the Thangmi, and wanted to bring the Bible to those communities by the year 2000.

"There was no comprehensive documentation then," Turin says. "It was striking how you could be in Kathmandu in

the cusp of the new millennium and there was a language spoken not far away, and so little was known about it other than by the community itself."

Turin's approach to the study of Thangmi was influenced by his interest in relationships and recording stories. People would walk long distances to bring him words or plants that he had not documented. Trained in anthropology, he was not studying the language, but rather learning it. The work was in the service of the community rather than solely in service of the language.

"It is important to recognise local expertise not just as something you can extract but reimburse and elevate through co-publishing, co-authoring," he says. "To try and offset the incredible differences of power, access and imbalance so the community's own research can be promoted and made more visible."

This was when the Adivasi-Janjati movement, calling for recognition, reparation and justice for caste and ethnic discrimination was beginning in Nepal. There were demands for more proportionate representation of indigenous communities, including Thangmi, that had not got attention by the Nepali state for various political and cultural reasons.



THAT WAS THEN: Thangmi children in Dolakha from a picture Turin took when he first came to the village 25 years ago.



Hima Kusunda



Uday Raj Ale

When she returned, Sita was surprised to see another baby in the crib. She raised the second baby as her own. The baby which was made from kush was called Kushari. Kushari’s descendants became Kusundas and Lohori’s descendants became Chepang.

Interestingly, an aboriginal forest-dwelling community with distinct lifestyle and language unconnected to mainstream Nepali culture has a Hindu story for its origin myth. Elderly Kusunda reject this story, however, as Ale writes in his book. Dhan Bahadur Kusunda, president of Kusunda Development Society, states that the Sita story has no resonance in his community.

Even the very word ‘Kusunda’ seems to have been imposed on the community. Ale says that word does not even exist in Kusunda language, and the people call themselves Myak or Gemyehak. He speculates that people who were familiar with Hindu mythology manufactured this lore for the Kusundas.

But the question remains: how is a community that calls itself ‘Gemyehak’ come to be called

‘Kusunda’ in the first place. The answer may be found in the popular meanings of the word Kusunda. In rural Nepal, the word ‘Kusundo’ is derogatory and means ‘uncivilised’ ‘barbarian’, or ‘stupid.’

In the Ghatu dance performed in Gurung and Magar communities in Central Nepal, there is a section called ‘Kusunda Ghatu,’ where the protagonist King Pashramu wanders into the jungle as a mendicant, hunts deer and begs for alms.

The 2001 movie Darpan Chhaya also has an episode where the hero is marooned in a jungle, forced to wear leaf-skirts, and expresses his anger by saying he became a Kusunda. The tenth edition of Nepali Brihat Shabdakosh (dictionary) gives the first meaning as ‘a nomadic tribe that lives in the jungles south-west of Kathmandu, and is presently declining’ but establishes the secondary meaning of Kusunda as असभ्य (uncivilised).

Overshadowed ‘Gemyehak’

It is not clear whether the existing word ‘Kusunda’ was used to describe the Gemyehak, or whether the lifestyle of the Gemyehak was

the reason this word was created. Whatever the reason, the Kusunda today feel insulted that a derogatory word is used to label their community in the country’s most respected dictionary.

The Kusunda name for themselves, Gemyehak, has a much more exalted meaning. ‘Ge’ means forest and ‘Myak’ means tiger. Hima Kusunda, 20, from Pyuthan says: “So Gemyehak means tiger, king of the forest. Even today, we call ourselves वनराजा or king of the forest.

In Pyuthan the Kusunda are called ‘Ban Raja, substantiating the claim that Kusunda ancestors were indeed kings of the forest, writes Narayan Prasad Adhikari. Hodgson himself noted that the Kusunda ‘had clearly once known a condition far superior to the present one or to any that has been theirs for ages.’

How did a community that called itself kings of the forest look at nature, life and mainstream village life? Their perspective was probably quite different from the villages and settlements. But today, we can only imagine what it was like, because the myth of ‘Kushari’ has overshadowed all these earlier narratives.

Although Gyani Maiya and other elderly Kusunda reject the story of Kushari, they have no story of their own to replace it, and are also unable to remember any songs or dances in their language.

“I believe songs existed in the Kusunda language and their nomadic past, because they have words for ‘song’ and ‘dance’, but when asked to sing, they only sing in the Nepali language,” explains Ale.

Extinction is forever

Kusunda society started fragmenting when their nomadic lifestyle became threatened by modernity, leading to the decline. When the government started strictly regulating forest use, the Kusunda found it impossible to sustain their traditional lifestyle. They could not find people of their own tribe to marry, and started assimilating with villagers and settled down.

Hima Kusunda’s grandfather and his younger brother lived in the forests as nomads even after their parents died when they were young. But one day, his brother ate a snake egg, believing it to be a lizard egg,

and died.

Hima says, “Then my grandfather had no option but to come live in a village to be near people. Also, there was no Kusunda woman for him to marry so he married a Kwar woman.”

The pace of development, the changing times, socialisation, deforestation, difficulties in livelihood, exogamous marriage system, lack of unity among Kusundas, their reluctance to develop, and their traditional viewpoints were found to be the reasons why Kusunda language and culture are near extinction, writes researcher Adhikari.

‘When Kusundas started marrying villagers and dispersing instead of living together, their language and culture disappeared. They stopped practicing their language and culture in order to assimilate with modern society.’

The Kusunda have been further pushed out of their forest homes by societal exclusion, population pressure and competition for resources. Community forests, national parks and nature reserves have also driven them away.

The Kusunda started hiding their identity when they inter-married non-Kusunda villagers, and that is also one reason for the decrease in their numbers, says Hima. When her father married a Dalit woman, he was teased and harassed by the villagers. He did not like the Kusunda label, and started calling himself a Thakuri.

Ale says that the drive to identify themselves as Thakuri is widespread among Kusunda, and many have adopted the surnames Sen, Shahi, or Khan. When Kusunda married members of Magar, Kumal or other communities, their children adopted those names instead of Kusunda.

Saving what is left

There have been some efforts by the government to save what is left of the Kusunda people, culture and language. With Gyani Maiya Sen and Kamala Khatri as source persons, the Language Commission has already completed three phases of Kusunda language classes. These are facilitated by Uday Ale and have 20 students, most of them Kusunda. Hima Kusunda, a student of class 12, and her younger sister,

are among them.

“As a child, when I heard people from other communities like Tharus of Dang and Magars of Pyuthan speak their languages, I wished I could speak in my own language too,” Hima recalls. “So, when the opportunity to learn the language came up, I signed up eagerly. The language class has extended the life of the language, but we need to do more.”

Hima’s father and grandfather have died, and she and her sister are the only ones who know the language in their family. The two teach the language to elders at home, and Hima has even written a song in Kusunda which she sings at events. The lyrics are about living with wild animals in the forest and surviving on foraged food, stories she heard from her father and grandfather.

“The next phase of language classes should be held at the family level. Otherwise, the language will not survive past this generation,” Ale says. “Students who have learnt it cannot converse at home, and the language is unable to flourish.”

The government has also been providing social security stipend to the community for the past few years. As soon as a Kusunda baby is born and registered, the family gets a stipend of Rs4,000 per month.

“I have not faced any harassment for being Kusunda but my father did,” says Hima. “The government’s incentive has made us less embarrassed about our identity.” Indeed, people who had adopted surnames like Sen, Shahi and Thakuri in the past are now reverting back to Kusunda.

The language classes also help extend the lifespan of the language, its corpus and preserve the history and culture of the Kusunda people.

Says researcher Uday Raj Ale: “Since they lived in the jungle, they had vast knowledge of the forest, wildlife, plants, and nature. When they hunted, they rarely killed, instead skillfully snaring animals. Gyani Maiya Sen used herbs to remedy minor illnesses. But she believed that sharing it would reduce its efficacy. So now all of that knowledge is lost.”

Sewa Bhattarai is a freelance journalist. Her series, *On The Margins*, will focus on folk music, folklore, and mythology of Nepal’s marginalised communities.



MARK TURIN

“Many communities like the Thangmi were looking for some kind of representation,” Turin says. “It was very clear that as much as I was working with the language-speakers, they were working with me. Language is valuable to people as it is the emotional, effective, embodied experience of their sense of self.”

What this meant was taking local positions around language seriously, as well. “For example, if the community says ‘this is sensitive, don’t write it down’, then don’t write it down,” he adds. “Some things are lost if they are not written down – but that is not my prerogative, it’s the community’s decision.”

But there are often two points-of-views: linguistic and political. This is conspicuous in the case of the use of terms ‘Thami’ or ‘Thangmi’, and the proposed script for the language.

‘Thami’ is a Nepalified term for ‘Thangmi’, and many older members of the community believe they should continue using the word because it is familiar at a national level. But the younger generation favour the endonym ‘Thangmi’.

There are also discussions whether to use the Devanagari to write the language or invent a new script. Thangmi is Tibetan-Burman but Devanagari is used to write Nepali, an Indo-European language. How appropriate is it for a writing system generated within one language family to map on to another? While this happens all the time – Nepal Bhasa is written in Ranjana or Prachalit

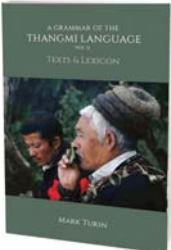
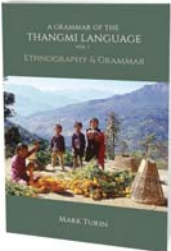
scripts – Turin points out that there is also the matter of history, and an ethnic-cultural distinctiveness.

Perhaps Devanagari would be more practical for Thangmi than Tibetan scripts, but then it is the script of the dominant castes who have historically overlooked the Thangmi community. Some are examining the Limbu script as a possibility for written Thangmi.

There is also the issue of language revitalisation. Many Thangmi speakers remark that, growing up in the 90s especially, their parents would encourage them to speak in Nepali so as to fit in.

Documentation is one step to reverse the devitalisation – as the monograph is testament. “But I feel like the real work has just begun,” says Turin. “Many languages have been documented in Nepal while others not, but it is an ongoing process. Then there is the future-proofing of that documentation through digitisation or archiving.”

The last step is to connect, to publish the collection of documents, analyses, and to get them into schools. “And this never ends,” adds Turin. “Nepal now is in a great position with the new constitution and schools becoming more inclusive. Not a single young Thangmi speaker I know is mono-lingual and that is as it should be. This helps support innovation in the language, for Thangmi — as all languages — is always evolving.”



A Grammar of the Thangmi Language (in 2 volumes)
Vol I: Ethnography & Grammar
Vol II: Texts & Lexicon
By Mark Turin
Social Science Baha and Himal Books, 2023
506p (Vol I) | 967p (Vol II)
Rs1500



Kesang Tseten is still silent, but not absent

Nepal's foremost documentary filmmaker is back with two new films chronicling diversity and transition

■ Sonia Awale

Like the documentaries where he is mostly off-screen, Kesang Tseten in person is also self-effacing. In his award-winning films like *We Corner People*, *In Search of the Riyal* or *Who Will be a Gurkha*, Tseten lets the protagonists speak for themselves.

He is now putting finishing touches on two new films: one about people in remote corners of the Himalaya, and another profiling Nepalis in the heart of New York.

Like his other work, both films are about people and places in transition. The technique is the same: following characters as they go about their everyday lives. The director's inputs are evident only in the editing.

Tseten's trademark is his ability to deliver the most impact while keeping himself in the background: silent but not absent.

His documentary, *Trembling Mountain*, was an intimate portrayal of the survivors of the earthquake-avalanche in Langtang in 2015. In this and his other films, Tseten dives right in, showing the raw reality of life from the perspective of those most affected by calamities, conflict, injustices or neglect.

The film-making has a light touch, and this allows the director to deliver the message without being prescriptive or polemical, and ultimately brings out the stories of survival and inner strength of individuals in communities facing wrenching change.



KATE RYAN

"Filmmaking is a powerful tool. It is more than just collecting information and stating facts, it captures emotions, allowing us an in-depth look," says Tseten, who now lives in Berne.

We Corner People is a simple story of villagers in Rasuwa and a bridge they built. As Stacy Leigh Pigg of Simon Fraser University noted in a review: 'Kesang Tseten's decidedly non-preachy documentary is a subtle, multi-dimensional film telling the story of the bridge, not as a monumental or

heroic achievement, but as an event that occurs within a local social history ... told entirely without romance, false egalitarianism, or teleological overtones.'

One of Tseten's two new documentaries, *Diversity Plaza*, about the Nepali immigrant community in Jackson Heights in New York follows the same technique. This 'unprompted' style is modelled after American filmmaker Frederick Wiseman.

"There is no wrong or right technique. In *Trembling Mountain*

we had to ask questions of the survivors in Langtang, there were no houses standing to document, we didn't also want to be voyeurs," he says.

But in *In Search of the Riyal* there is no script, and the director had no idea what would happen as he filmed. He explains: "We just followed the characters as things happened to them, an example of show, don't tell."

A lot goes into how the crew also approaches the people being filmed. Tseten chooses to keep it simple, and let them know what they are doing without making a big deal out of it.

He does not prompt the characters to act a certain way, and this is reflected in the final cut where they are natural, and not at all camera-conscious.

Tseten's newest documentary is on the Bön Po, the animist faith of Nepal's trans-Himalayan region that predates Buddhism. The central character is a 75-year-old Lama in

Lubra of Lower Mustang.

"He is waiting for his son to return to continue in the family line, but his son is a sushi chef in New York who does not seem all that eager to return," adds Tseten.

Lubra, a village of 15 families entirely Bön, is located near a river that has seen climate change-induced glacial floods.

"The film is an attempt to capture this rugged region, its subsistence way of life and fragile balance with nature in the face of modernity," adds Tseten.

It was while he was in New York to persuade the son of the Lubra monk to be filmed for the Bön Po film that Tseten heard about Diversity Plaza in New York, with its strong Nepali presence. It was a place he was familiar with ever since he was a college student at Columbia University in the 1980s.

"Diversity Plaza is like Thamel. People are empowered and restaurants are filled with our own people," adds Tseten, who struggled to fund the film and ended up paying his own way.

However glamorous the world of documentary filmmaking may seem, it is a hard slog, money is hard to find. And once a film is made, there is usually no market for them because audiences do not readily pay to watch documentaries.

So what motivated him? Tseten replies with characteristic modesty: "I do it because I'm passionate about it. I want to tell stories. But be warned, it is a full-time commitment." 🇳🇵

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