



NAREN THAKURI

70 years after the first ascent of the world's highest mountain, at least 550 climbers this season followed the route taken by Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary to the summit of Mt Everest (pictured left on 17 May).

Next year will be the centenary of the 1924 British expedition to Chomolungma during which George Mallory and Andrew Irvine were last seen below the summit pyramid. Did the pair reach the top? Mallory's body was found in 1999 on the North Face, but no clues about whether they were the first to climb the peak.

A lot has changed in Himalayan climbing in the past seven decades, but new records are still being broken. This year Kami Rita Sherpa and Pasang Dawa Sherpa broke their own and each other's records twice with 28 and 27 summits respectively (page 5). Hari Budha Magar became the first above knee double amputee to reach the summit (page 4).

The style of expeditions have also changed. Most purist mountaineers shun the crowds on Everest, and are tackling lesser unclimbed peaks, and exploring new routes alpine style without guides, oxygen and fixed camps.

The record set by Nims Purja to climb 14 eight-thousanders in just six months in 2019, and the worldwide publicity from his Netflix documentary and the Covid backlog brought many more mountaineers to Everest this year. The trend of climbing multiple 8,000ers in Nepal by hopping on helicopters from one base camp to the next has also caught on.

Ad hoc mountaineering rules, bureaucratic hassles in Kathmandu, over-commercialisation, theft of expedition gear, corpses, garbage and traffic jams have tarnished the Everest brand. But just this mountain earns the Nepal government \$5 million every season in fees, aside from the income to guides, porters and lodges along the way.

There are still expeditions led by well-known Western climbers, but more and more slick Nepali companies like Seven Summits, Elite Exped or Imagine Nepal are now guiding clients up Himalayan peaks not just in Nepal, but in Pakistan and China as well.

There are calls to diversify expeditions to other mountains, and climbers have been flocking to Ama Dablam, Manaslu and Annapurna.

But the main attraction is still Mt Everest because, as Mallory famously said, "it is there".

Inside

EVEREST @ 70
Special Coverage

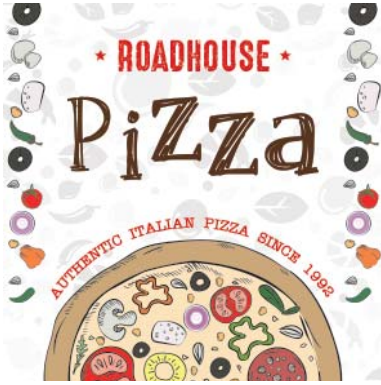
Hari Budha Magar p4

Kami Rita and Pasang Dawa Sherpa p5

Lisa Choegyal on 70 years of Everest

Everest Timeline p6-7

Himalayan Rescue Association is 50 p10



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Institutionalised inequality

Ranadevi Harijan, 45, had no choice but to borrow money from a village loan shark. He drew up papers for Rs60,000 but gave her only Rs13,000. Later, he demanded Rs100,000 with interest from her.

Seeing no other way out, Harijan and others who had fallen victim to similar extortion walked for weeks from Nawalparasi to the seat of power in Kathmandu for justice. It has been a month since they have been camped out in various locations in the capital.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's coalition is basking in self-glorification for having cracked the fake refugee scam that has led to the arrest of high-profile former ministers and implicated other top political leadership. For the Maoists who preside over the home ministry that is in charge of police investigating the case, the scandal has been a convenient way to distract from their own past wrong-doing, and to put the Nepali Congress and the UML in the firing line.

Otherwise one cannot help but notice a culture of silence among politicians when it comes to corruption cases between them. A Nepali omertà of sorts, if you will.

The financial monopoly of local usurers and the fake refugee scandal may not seem related, but reveal two characteristics of Nepal's contemporary political-economy: the remnants of feudalism are deep-rooted and powerful, and cronyism has flourished in the neoliberal economy.

In 250 years that Nepal has existed as a nation state, one thing has remained constant no matter whether it is the Shah or Rana regime, the Panchayat or a federal democratic republic, the privileged and new-rich remain in power, while the poor are as neglected as always. The gap has got wider because the political-economy is rigged in favour of an entrenched ruling class (page 10-11).

Economists argue that inequality is an inherent characteristic in a capitalist economy. But it is the long-standing wealth differential that is a root cause of economic inequality. Capitalist countries with a welfare state redistribute wealth and opportunity through a weighted tax system.

Most of Nepal's wealthiest are from families who have long profited from their ancestors having received favours, influence, and wealth from the rulers of the past. And then there are the neo-rich who are trying to play catch-up.

While Nepal's affluent class might attribute its circumstance to inter-generational privileges, this accumulation of wealth also has to do with luck and opportunity.

These advantages have been enhanced by modernisation, which has meant that the economy is no longer controlled just by real estate tycoons, industrialists, and old money, but also those who have access to information technology.

Not much has changed since the Rana-era licensing policies that enabled individuals to financially monopolise the import trade. Banks, insurance companies, the stock market, and other big businesses still make a profit through dubious license manipulation.

Policies grant tax and other concessions to business lobbyists. Budgets are drafted in clandestine nocturnal meetings with favoured family businesses behind locked doors. Laws are changed to protect wealth amassed by the rich through illegal and criminal means and to facilitate money laundering. Parliament's committees are infiltrated by political cronies, and it is now difficult to tell the difference between MPs and CEOs in this rent-seeking economy. All of which has concentrated

much of Nepal's wealth within a select few groups.

Nepal's new breed of elected representatives have their work cut out to end the centralisation of privilege by the politically connected. They need to be single-minded in the creation of equal opportunities, just access to resources, entrepreneurial development, and redistribution of benefits to the grassroots.

The state needs to intervene and invest in education, health and human resources. The new budget must introduce comprehensive tax reforms to ensure the wealthiest pay more. Economic expansion must go hand in hand with equitable distribution. An inheritance tax should be introduced to prevent inter-generational bonded corruption.

This year's budget will be presented to Parliament on 29 May. It comes at

a time of deep economic crisis, and the government faces a challenge in balancing Nepal's declining revenue even as the import bill and government expenditure grows. Ironically, underspending of the development budget remains a chronic problem that is linked to corruption.

Structural inequality and state-sponsored economic disparity is a form of political violence. It is detrimental to Nepal's stability and prosperity. If Nepalis decided they have had enough, those at the top of the economic and political food chain will be blamed.

If such a situation were to arise, it would not take long for political or other extremists to weaponise grievances and channel it to a despotic, bigoted and depraved quest for absolute power.

Rabin Giri



The rich-poor gap in Nepal is state-sponsored violence, and is detrimental to stability and prosperity

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Dash to the summit

May 29 is the 70th anniversary of the first ascent of Mt Everest by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953. So far, 2023 has been a season of new records with more than 1,000 mountaineers attempting 25 peaks. Everest has more than half of those climbers, and there have been 11 fatalities on the peak.

20 years ago this week, Nepali Times marked the 50th anniversary of the event with special coverage. That year, too, saw a record number of climbers dashing to the summit before the weather window closed. Among them were the sons of Hillary and Tenzing.

Excerpts from the page 1 report published in issue #146 23-29 May 2003:

If Thursday was anything to go by, this will be a wild week on Sagarmatha in the run-up to 29 May, the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of the world's highest mountain.

After days of fierce winds, nearly 150 climbers from 25 expeditions have been moving up the mountain from



the Nepali side, and 30 expeditions from the north. Till presstime Thursday, some 26 Nepalis and 11 international climbers got to the top from the south.

In the coming days, more expeditions will be making summit bids—traffic and weather permitting. There are the South Africans, trying to put the first black woman on the summit, the Italian

speed expedition is acclimatising and moving up to the South Col and the 50-strong French expedition is planning to go for the top in two groups this week. Most expeditions have been sharing Sherpas to fix ropes while they wait for the weather window to make the dash to the summit.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



As we celebrate 70th anniversary of the first successful Everest expedition, Base Camp is 50m lower than when Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbed the mountain in 1953. In fact, there is now a river running through it. Watch this video where climbers and scientists alike weigh in why the Himalaya matters. Special Everest coverage on pages 1, 4, 5, 6-7, 9 and 10.



Nepali Times interviewed Reinhold Messner on a visit to Kathmandu last year, the first climber to scale all 14 eight thousanders without oxygen. Watch him talk about his first ascent of Everest without bottled oxygen and the climate crisis. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.

AI

AI is unconsciously but surely taking human civilisation to its extinction ('Ayo AI', Naresh Newar, #1162).

Ramesh Shrestha

■ A good write-up. However, that Covid was a factor for AI to flourish is highly debatable as AI and Machine Learning started many years before that.

Kancha Sau

■ This is the power of chatbot.

David Seddon

KAMI RITA

Very true that there is no mountaineering without Sherpas but Nepal government should acknowledge this fact and implement policies accordingly (. "Without Sherpas, there is no mountaineering", Bhadra Sharma, page 5).

Dawa Sherpa

HITI

The reasoning that not having to rely on ground water is possibly the reason for dhunge dhara springing to life does not hold water ('Water for the ages', Anita Bhetwal, #1161). The mining of ground water has been so colossal that a few months of no use will have no effect, whatsoever.

Hemanta Arjyal

BAYALPATA

There is some great work going on out there in Achham ('A rural lifeline', Sonia Awale, #1162).

Slow Trekking

AIR POLLUTION

I remember watching footage of Kathmandu during the Covid lockdown, and there was no smog ('Bad air gets worse', www.youtube.com/@NepaliTimesVideo). It was beautiful, and you could see all the lovely mountains.

Lucky 7 Tattoo

WOMEN IN POLITICS

Nothing is said about ensuring diversity within women FPTP candidates ('Placing Nepal women first past the post', nepalitimes.com). How do we ensure that Dalit, Tamang, Tharu women are selected by their parties?

Keith D Leslie

Nepal Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Nepal's rural lifeline

by Sonia Awale

It is possible to provide free quality medical care to isolated communities in Nepal, and Achham's Bayalpata Hostpital is proof of that. Patients come from all over Sudur Paschim and Karnali Provinces seeking treatment for broken bones, childbirth, mental health disorders. Read about this model facility at nepalitimes.com



Most reached and shared on Facebook

Thunderstruck in Nepal

by Shristi Karki

In the last 10 years, lightning accounted for the third-highest number of deaths due to disasters, ranking after the 2015 earthquake and landslide. And yet, there is little awareness or preparedness. Get the details on our website.



Most popular on Twitter



Ayo AI

by Naresh Newar

The pace of progress of generative AI is faster than any new technology in history. AI applications create images from natural language descriptions, known as 'prompts'. But although this will be a game changer, artists have started to question the ethics of text-to-art generators. Join the discussion online.



Most commented

"Without Sherpas, no mountaineering"

by Bhadra Sharma

Kami Rita Sherpa, who climbed Mt Everest for the 28th time this week, has been climbing Mt Everest almost every year since the first time he helped an international expedition get to the summit in 1994. But younger Sherpas no longer want to be guides, he says. Read profile and mountaineering roundup on page 4-5.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Kathmandu's ancient water spouts provide more reliable supply than the \$700 million Melamchi project.



Archana Thapa @archana_thapa

#heritage and #nature #conservation go hand in hand, both must be protected.



Sabeena Khatri @sabinakhatree

Traditional Water Supply systems in Nepal are indeed much sustainable and equally climate resilient. And annual tradition of cleaning them, "सिँथि नखः" least known! Besides that, it can be one of the water heritage sites @unescoWATER #doaa #archeology #waterheritage



Samanta Shakyia @samantaa999

Worth the read!!

1,000 WORDS



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA/ RSS

CATWALK:

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Parliament earlier this week where he proposed discussions on the government's annual policies and programs.

Nepali Times

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Pinnacle of determination

Double amputee Everest summiteer Hari Budha Magar becomes an inspiration for people in Nepal and globally

■ Bhadra Sharma

On 23 May, hundreds gathered at Kathmandu airport to greet Hari Budha Magar, who created history as the world's first double above-knee amputee to summit Everest, becoming an ultimate icon of hope and courage.

"We made it!" Magar, 45, is said to have shouted as he made it to the summit of the world's highest mountain at 3:10PM on 19 May. Magar posed for a photo sitting on the top holding his two prosthetic legs.

Mt Everest, even in the most favorable of weather conditions, poses extreme challenges for the best of climbers. Till presstime on Thursday, nearly 550 mountaineers had made it to the top this season, while 11 lost their lives on the mountain. Magar climbed with the help of fellow-Nepali high altitude guides in extreme weather, defying all the odds and breaking stereotypes. The former British Gurkha soldier has since received much praise from the world over for his exceptional achievement.

After losing his legs in a mine explosion in Afghanistan in 2010, Magar fell into hopelessness before his ambitions for the great mountains reignited. Before long, he went paragliding, ventured onto tough roads cycling and skiing, and climbed mountains with his prosthetic legs.

Eventually, he set his eyes on Everest. And led by former Chief Mountain Instructor at the British SAS commando unit, and world-renowned climber Krish Thapa, the team crossed the treacherous Khumbu Icefall paths from Base Camp to the South Col and onto the summit.

'Congratulations, Hari Budha Magar. Unbelievable,' wrote British actor Tom Hardy on his Instagram following the climb. Indeed, the publicity he has generated has now become an unprecedented source of inspiration, especially for individuals with disabilities, not just in Nepal but worldwide.

Says Magar: "I am climbing Mt Everest to inspire people with disabilities, to show that



we can achieve the same feats as able-bodied people." Since the first successful ascent in 1953 by Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Edmund Hillary, up until 2022 a total of 6,383 people have reached the summit. The proportion of individuals with physical disabilities is only 20, two of whom are Nepalis.

Born in the secluded village of Mirul in Rolpa, Magar spent much of his life grazing cattle on a hilltop from where he would view Sisine Himal and Dhaulagiri every day, igniting in him an early fascination with mountains and a longing to climb them someday.

In adherence to village tradition, his parents got him married at the age of 11 while Rolpa was in the war zone during the Maoist conflict. Magar had two distinct choices: either join the Maoist militia or the state military. Magar's father charted a third route by sending him to Liwang municipality to complete his education. After completing

school, Magar was among the few to be enrolled in the British Royal Gurkha Rifles in 1999. He served in the British Army for 15 years in five continents. In 2010 in Afghanistan's Helmand province, he was on NATO patrol when he was hit by a roadside bomb. By the time he regained consciousness in hospital, both his legs had been amputated.

Coming to terms with his disability was an uphill challenge—the very thought of having to rely on someone else even for the simplest acts like eating, sleeping, and using the restroom had him depressed. He descended into alcoholism and despair.

Magar got himself admitted to the Rakshya Medical Rehabilitation Centre for rehabilitation, and soon discovered new possibilities with his prosthetic leg. He started finding solace in adventure, and started out by learning to paraglide.

"This restored hope in me that even a

person with a disability can accomplish great things," says Magar, who then turned to his childhood dream of mountaineering. He travelled around the world to build up his climbing skills and stamina, climbing Mont Blanc (4,810m), Kilimanjaro (5,895m), Cho Oyu (6,059m) and Mera Peak (6,476m), all of which were preparations for his ultimate goal, Mt Everest.

By 2018, Magar was all prepared, but the Tourism Ministry imposed a ban on individuals with disabilities, citing safety concerns. Dissatisfied with this decision, Magar filed a writ petition in Nepal's Supreme Court, which ruled in his favour.

Then the Covid-19 pandemic delayed the climb, and he used the time to prepare. Magar is now an icon of the triumph of the human spirit. He says: "Dreams and challenges may seem unattainable, but with the right mindset, everything is possible." 🇳🇵



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Turkish wins at APEX

Turkish Airlines received two awards from the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX) in Istanbul this week. The flag carrier received the Best Entertainment in Europe award at the APEX Passenger Choice Awards® and the Best Food & Beverage in Europe award. "These significant awards indicate our high standards in health safety, service quality, and sustainability as a global carrier and bring us closer to our goal of being one of the most digital airlines. Within that framework, we will continue to prioritize brand experience and health safety for our guests' satisfaction," says Turkish Airlines Chief Marketing Officer Ahmet Olmüştür.

PKD to DEL

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is to make a three-day visit to Delhi starting 31 May, where he is expected to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi. On the agenda from the Nepali side are hydro joint ventures, transmission lines, new air routes for the Pokhara and Bhairawa airports, and publication of the bilateral Eminent Persons Group report.

Chinese are back

In April this year, there were 3,000 Chinese tourists, and these numbers are expected to rise as flights pick up post pandemic. Nepal's largest domestic airline Buddha Air has seen a rise in the number of Chinese passengers from Kathmandu to Pokhara, Bharatpur and Bhairawa. Tourism entrepreneurs say the Gautam Buddha International airport in Bhairawa and the new Pokhara airport could serve to increase Chinese arrivals if there were direct flights from Chinese cities. In the meantime, many businesses in Kathmandu have adopted the WeChat payment app including Buddha Air for flight bookings and tour packages specifically targeting Chinese tourists.

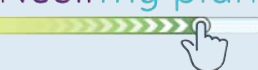
RA to Sydney

Nepal Airlines is to begin a bi-weekly service between Kathmandu and Sydney on 21 June to cater to the estimated 130,000 Nepalis who live in Australia. The Airbus 330 flights will make a transit stop in Singapore. RA flew to Australian airports during the pandemic to bring home stranded Nepalis.

Ncell my plan

Ncell customers can now customise volume data, on-net and off-net voice, and SMS services as required with Ncell my plan which can be activated digitally through the Ncell App. Under the scheme, there are two options—My Plan 500, which is a bundle of voice, data, and SMS services worth a total

of Rs. 500. Meanwhile, My Plan Flexi has the flexibility to define more volume of voice, data and SMS service but the maximum resources are 200GB data, 2,500 minutes of talk time in voice, and 2,500 SMS.



Private contribution

A recent Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) study showed the private sector is contributing 81% to Nepal's economy and accounts for 85% of total jobs. A total of 517 firms were involved in the study.

Laxmi-Sunrise merger

Laxmi Bank and Sunrise bank are merging with a swap ratio of 1:1. The banks will jointly operate after getting an approval from the Nepal Rastra Bank and Company Registrar's office.



Free electricity

The government plans to distribute free electricity to households that consume up to 30 units in winter and 50 units in monsoon. The plan was presented by President Ram Chandra Paudel at Parliament.



More loans

Nepal has added Rs140 billion more in its loan kitty in just 10 months. The current debt is at Rs2.154 trillion with Rs1.083 trillion being domestic loans and Rs1.070 trillion external. The debt GDP ratio is 44.40%.



Road to Humla

Humla will be connected to the national road network by next year. The government plans to connect Mahakli and Karnali districts.

“Without Sherpas, there is no mountaineering”

Kami Rita Sherpa scaled Mt Everest for the 28th time last week, but says younger Sherpas no longer want to be guides

This has been a season of new records on Nepal’s Himalayan peaks but perhaps the most absurd of them all was the race for most summit tops between compatriots Kami Rita Sherpa and Pasang Dawa Sherpa. Combined, they have climbed the world’s highest peak 55 times, making the whole ordeal sound all too easy. But it is not, 11 climbers have lost their lives on Everest this year.

Kami Rita summited Everest twice in one season this year, taking his total to 28. He is once again ahead of Pasang Dawa Sherpa who tied his record of climbing 27 times a day previously. Pasang Dawa also scaled Everest twice this season.

Kami Rita has been climbing Everest every year since he helped an international expedition get to the summit in 1994, sometimes reaching the top twice in the same season. The only years he could not climb were in 2014 and 2015 because of deadly avalanches, and in 2020 due to the pandemic.

But Kami Rita says with characteristic understatement that for him it has never been about the record. It is just another job that requires him to guide expeditions to the top, and it is a job he does well.

“Had I been chasing records, I could have summited many more times,” says Kami Rita, who has turned back several times from near the summit because he had to rescue foreign climbers. “I have seen first hand how unpredictable and unforgiving the mountain can be.”



BROKEN RECORDS: Kami Rita Sherpa after reclaiming the record of 28 summits of Mt Everest on 23 May (left). Pasang Dawa Sherpa also reached the top twice this season to bring his total climbs to 27.

He was at Base Camp in 2014 preparing for a live telecast with his brother for a National Geographic expedition when an avalanche slammed into the Khumbu Icefall, killing 16 fellow Sherpas.

A year later, 19 climbers and Sherpas lost their lives when an avalanche triggered by the 2015 earthquake destroyed Base Camp. Then the Covid-19 pandemic halted all expeditions, depriving many guides and porters of income.

Throughout all this, Kami Rita has remained in Nepal, declining job offers from overseas. “For me, there is nothing more meaningful than serving my community and people,” he says matter-of-factly.

“The younger generation is aware of the dangers and some have given up working on the mountains. But if we Sherpas were not here, there would be no mountaineering.”

Many, including previous summit record holders like Apa Sherpa, have migrated abroad. A new generation of Sherpas are now scientists, climatologists, or airline pilots, and their success has been made possible because of the sacrifices of their parents.

For Kami Rita, it looks like his family’s involvement in mountaineering may end with him. His son Lhakpa Tenzing is studying tourism and does not want to follow in his father’s footsteps. His

daughter Pasang Dolma is pursuing a computer science degree.

“I worked hard all my life so they got a good education, even though mountaineering is an unpredictable business with seasonal income,” he says. “I have made sure that they have opportunities I never got.”

Expedition guides are now increasingly being replaced by ethnic groups from lower valleys, as younger Sherpas move out. Kami Rita says younger Nepalis from other ethnicities should have access to rock and ice climbing training so that they can take over.

Born in the Khumbu, Kami Rita attended school in Thame, one of many established by Edmund Hillary, who along with Tenzing Norgay became the first to climb Mt Everest 70 years ago this week..

Kami Rita’s own father went to Darjeeling with Tenzing Norgay, and one of his two brothers Lhakpa Rita Sherpa was the first Nepali to climb the Seven Summits.

It was no surprise that Kami Rita followed in their footsteps, becoming a porter at 12.

His only regret is that the Nepal government has never really helped. He says, “The sad truth is that we have always thought of the nation first, but the nation has not shown us the same consideration.” 🇳🇵

Bhadra Sharma

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Everest 70 years on

The lives and legacy of Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary

■ Lisa Choegyal

If you raise your head and take a look around the cast of characters who define Nepal in the international arena, none loom so large in the popular imagination as the enduring duo of Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Percival Hillary KG ONZ KBE.

At 11.30AM on 29 May 1953, Hillary and Tenzing made history as the first mountaineers to stand on the summit of Mt Everest. A combination of strength, organisation, tenacity, experience, luck and sheer grit was their key to success.

With that last summit step to the highest place on earth, the climbing duo 70 years ago broke altitude and endurance barriers venturing beyond the known limits of human physiological capacity. The rest of their lives were changed forever by this accomplishment. Both from humble backgrounds, Tenzing and Hillary had to reinvent themselves as the celebrity conquerors of the world’s highest mountain.

Both refused to answer the pressing question of ‘Who got there first?’ as being irrelevant to their spirit of solidarity and mutual respect. It was only after Tenzing’s death in 1986 that it was revealed that Hillary had in fact been leading.

Only a few days prior to their successful summit, Tenzing had saved Hillary’s life when a chunk of ice gave way whilst he ‘unwisely’ tried to jump across a crevasse in the Khumbu icefall.

“Teamwork got Tenzing and me to the top of Everest,” Hillary told an audience during the 50th anniversary 20 years ago. When Tenzing tightened the rope that bound them, enabling Ed to climb out of the sheer-walled ice chasm, the phlegmatic New Zealander was not particularly surprised: “Tenzing and I were a team. I expected Tenzing to carry out the right procedures in an emergency, just as I would.”

Born in 1914 in the Kama Valley of Tibet as the 11th of 13 children, ‘Tenzing Boutia’, which evolved into ‘Sherpa Tenzing’ and ‘Tiger Sherpa’, was first known as Namgyal Wangdi before being renamed Tenzing Norgay by the head lama of Rongbuk Monastery. As a boy yak-herder, he remembered seeing the Mallory expedition of 1921 pass through his village, awakening in him a taste for high adventure.

Tenzing recalled: ‘Usually Chomolungma is said to mean “goddess mother of the world”. Sometimes “goddess mother of the wind”. But it did not mean either of these when I was a boy in Solukhumbu. Then it meant “the mountain so high no bird can fly over it.” This is what all Sherpa mothers used to tell their children – what my own mother told me – and it is the name I still like the best for this mountain that I love.’

Whilst still a child, Tenzing’s family migrated to Thame village in Nepal where he was brought up. The adolescent Tenzing worked for a Khumjung household before running away to Darjeeling where he was much sought after for his mountainering skills.

As a high-altitude porter Tenzing was valued for his warmth, strength and good character. Although never learning to read or write, he was fluent in several languages, had an enquiring mind, and was recognised as being exceptional amongst the Sherpas for his passion and interest in mountaineering. Tenzing spent the WWII years in Chitral of Pakistan, returning to Darjeeling after partition. ‘The pull of Everest was stronger for me than any force on earth,’ he said.

A veteran of five failed expeditions to the world’s highest point, in 1947 Tenzing was promoted to sirdar by a Swiss team following his courageous rescue of Wangdi Norbu who had been injured after a climbing fall. He went on to summit Kedarnath (6,940m) in the western Garwhal Himalaya, his only major peak

other than Everest, and also a first ascent.

The year before Tenzing’s triumph on Everest, as a full climbing member of the spring 1952 Swiss expedition team, he reached (8,595m) with Raymond Lambert on the South Col route, before they were forced to turn back.

Tenzing was just turning 39 when he stood on the top of the world’s tallest peak in 1953. After Everest, he championed the mountains he loved as Director of Feld Training at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling, ran a trekking business with his family and travelled widely. To help make ends meet, Tenzing rented out rooms in his home – guests remember him personally bringing them morning tea with his winning grin.

He accompanied Australian trekking groups to Kangchenjunga and Sikkim with Ausventure and with Lars Eric Lindblad, the adventure travel pioneer, Tenzing escorted American tours through South Asia, including the first group to Bhutan. He often stayed in Tiger Tops in the Chitwan jungles during my time there. Popular for his radiant smile, gentle nature and celebrity status, together we travelled with Lindblad groups to the Indian hill stations.

Regarded as a legendary national hero by both Nepal and India, Tenzing in later life suffered from a debilitating lung condition, and died of a cerebral haemorrhage on 9 May 1986 aged 71. As New Zealand High Commissioner to India living in Delhi with June Mulgrew, Hillary regularly visited Tenzing in hospital when he came to the capital for bronchial treatment. When he died, Hillary braved Gorkhaland travel disruptions to reach Darjeeling in time for Tenzing’s funeral.

A proposed Tenzing Norgay biopic has faltered, but several books have been published about his ground-breaking life, including a ghost-written autobiography, a biography by Ed Douglas, and a memoir by his second son

Jamling. Last month a street in New York was re-named Tenzing Norgay Sherpa Way to mark the 70th anniversary.

From his persona as a modest beekeeper and New Zealand mountaineer, Ed Hillary transformed into a superstar explorer, writer, philanthropist and Knight of the Garter, the gracious approachable Kiwi whose home number was listed in the Auckland telephone book. ‘It’s not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves,’ he wrote. A folk hero famed for his courage, but so painfully shy that he had to prevail upon his first wife Louise’s mother to ask her to marry him.

Although a man of few words, Hillary’s books were eloquent and even poetic, sharing with millions his love of challenge, stories of his adventures to remote Himalayan ranges, rivers and arctic wilderness.

He was the first person to reach both the North and South Poles as well as the summit of Mt Everest, ‘the Third Pole’. Hillary’s distinctive profile squints into the distance on New Zealand’s five-dollar bank note, and his reaction to this was typical: ‘I thought you had to be dead or royal to get onto a banknote!’

But if Everest defined Hillary, he preferred to be remembered for "giving back", investing his time and energy in the people whom he found struggling for survival in the shadow of Chomolungma, and without whose help he could not have made it to the top.

He wrote: ‘I believe that of all the things I have done, exciting though many of them have been, there’s no doubt in my mind that the most worthwhile have been the establishing of schools and hospitals, and the rebuilding of monasteries in the mountains.’







Wanting to help his Khumbu friends, the story goes that Sir Ed started his philanthropic work after asking: ‘If there was anything I could do for the Sherpa people, what do you think that would be?’



The much-quoted reply was: ‘Our children have eyes but they are blind and cannot see. We would like you to open their eyes by building a school in our village.’

With his own hands and family helpers, Hillary constructed the tin-clad shed that in 1961 served as the first classroom of Khumjung school. More do-it-yourself Kiwi buildings followed to house the region’s first medical clinics at Khunde and Phaplu. To support the schools and hospitals, Hillary built Lukla airstrip in 1964 on a steep hillside at 2,860m, mobilising a chorus line of Sherpa and Sherpani dancers to flatten and compact the earth with their stomping steps.

From these beginnings, personally hauling timber and hammering nails on annual visits between global fundraising forays grew Hillary’s Himalayan Trust. He enabled the entrepreneurial spirit of the Sherpas to emerge and flourish, their innate highland hospitality

<div>EVEREST TIMELINE</div> <div>1733</div> <div>First mention of Chomolungma in an atlas by French cartographer D’Anville. It is not known then that this was the highest peak in the world.</div>	<div>1852</div> <div>Radhanath Sikhdar, a mathematician with the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India calculates the height of what he thinks is the highest peak in the world and measures it at exactly 29,000ft, but added 2ft so people wouldn’t think his calculation was inaccurate. He calls it Peak XV and it is 8839.80m, not too far from modern computations.</div> <div></div>	<div>1865</div> <div>Peak XV is officially named Mt Everest after Sir George Everest, the retired surveyor general of British India. Sir George, it is said, was a bit embarrassed.</div> <div>1921</div> <div>The first British reconnaissance expedition from the Tibetan north side reaches 7,000m.</div> <div>Mallory climbs up to Lho La from the north to look into Nepal, and thinks the Khumbu Icefall is impassable.</div>	<div>1922</div> <div>The British return and get up to 8,320m, the first time humans had climbed higher than 8,000m.</div> <div></div>	<div></div> <div>1924</div> <div>George Mallory and Andrew Irvine disappear on 8 June on the North Ridge near the summit. It is still not known whether they made it to the top. Mallory’s body was discovered by an expedition in 1999 on the North Face.</div>	<div>1933</div> <div>Two Westland PV-3 biplanes take off from Purnea in Bihar and fly over the summit of Everest on 3 May. One of them is piloted by Douglas Douglas-Hamilton. Go online to watch video.</div> <div></div>
<div>1979-80</div> <div>First Joint Inspection Survey of the Nepal-China border officially demarcates the Lhotse-South Col-Everest summit and West Ridge as the national boundary.</div> <div>1990</div> <div>Edmund Hillary’s son, Peter, summits.</div>	<div></div> <div>1993</div> <div>Pasang Lhamu Sherpa is the first Nepali woman to reach the top on her fourth attempt, but dies on descent. A documentary about her was released in 2023.</div>	<div>1996</div> <div>Tenzing Norgay’s son, Jamling, climbs and writes the book, Touching My Father’s Soul. He and Peter Hillary climb for the second time on the 50th anniversary in 2003 of the first ascent by their dads.</div> <div>Eight climbers die when a blizzard strikes the top of the mountain, the tragedy recorded by Jon Kakauer in his book, Into Thin Air.</div>	<div>1999</div> <div>On 1 May an expedition finds Mallory’s body on the North Face 600m below the summit. Watch video.</div> <div>2000</div> <div>Temba Tsheri Sherpa becomes youngest climber to scale the mountain. In 2010, 13-year-old American Jordan Romero broke the record.</div>	<div>2005</div> <div>First helicopter landing on top by an AS350 B3 piloted by the Airbus Helicopters X-test pilot Didier Delsalle on 14 May. This highest ever takeoff and landing by a helicopter is still not officially recognised by Nepal because it lacked permission. Watch video.</div> <div>Chinese Academy of Sciences puts Everest height at 8,844.43m (29,017.16ft).</div>	<div>2009</div> <div>Nepal government holds a cabinet meeting at Kala Patthar to draw international attention to the impact of climate change on the Himalaya.</div> <div></div>



MICHAEL DILLON

THE LEGEND LIVES ON: Tenzing Norgay on top of Mt Everest on 29 May, 1953 in the famous photo taken by Edmund Hillary (left).

Hillary and Tenzing on the South Col ahead of their summit push (top).

Tenzing Norgay and his sons Jamling and Norbu (above). Hillary devoted his life with hands-on assistance to the people of Solukhumbu (right).



renamed Tenzing-Hillary Airport, and memorial chortens consecrated high on a ridge above Khunde next to those of Louise and Belinda, forever contemplating Everest.

Edmund Hillary, ‘the greatest New Zealander’, was honoured with a rare state funeral in Auckland cathedral led by Prime Minister Helen Clark. The ceremony took place by auspicious coincidence on the 49th day of his passing, whilst Sherpas performed Buddhist rites in Nepal’s high places that he loved so deeply.

flags wreathed in mist. Sir Ed was not the only person looking grey and gaunt when the two helicopters finally landed, just long enough to pick us up whilst the rotors roared, frantic farewells were waved, and rhododendrons bowed in the gusts.

The Sherpas of Solukhumbu have been able to take the best from the many helping hands offered to them, and Edmund Hillary is respected as the first and most crucial of these. Venerated as burra sahib, he was lauded under mounds of white kata ceremonial scarves whenever he came to Nepal. He received the country’s highest award from King Birendra, and was ordained and robed as a Buddhist monk in Salleri Gompa.

One evening in Kathmandu at the golden jubilee celebrations of the climb in 2003, Hillary was conferred with honorary Nepali citizenship.

It was Hillary’s vision that the Sherpas take over his humanitarian work, and the younger generation step up. He died on 11 January 2008 peacefully in Auckland. Fifteen years later, his legacy proudly remains. Responsibility for the Himalayan Trust Nepal is now shouldered by the Sherpa people themselves. Sir Ed’s son Peter and grandson Alexander have taken over running of the Himalayan Trust in New Zealand.

During his lifetime Hillary never sought personal accolades, resisting statues and tributes in his memory. He preferred that his actions and achievements speak for themselves. It was only after his death that monuments were erected in Khumbu and Kathmandu, Lukla

Next week, the legacy of Tenzing and Hillary is being celebrated in Nepal, New Zealand, India and the UK in an orchestrated series of events and receptions attended by families (www.everest70.com). In the Khumbu, statues will be unveiled in a newly-planted park beside Lukla runway, Khumjung School’s first ‘schoolhouse in the clouds’ has been refitted as the Sir Edmund Hillary Visitor Centre, and the Tenzing Norgay Sherpa Heritage Centre in Namche will be officially opened.

Special escorted trekking groups are at Sagarmatha National Park, and the Everest Marathon’s gruelling Extreme Ultra 70-km run to mark the occasion is being held (www.everestmarathon.com).

An Evening on Everest event on 1 June will be presented by Helen Clark and the sons Peter Hillary and Jamling Tenzing with renowned mountaineer, Dawa Yangzum Sherpa, Nepal’s first internationally certified woman guide and Rolex brand ambassador.Looking to the future on a very different planet from theirs, the combined achievements of Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary continue to inspire the lives of many around the globe.

News of the triumph on Everest Sagarmatha Chomolungma took a few days to reach London from Base Camp. ‘The crowning glory’ headline brightened a war-weary Britain on the rainy morning of young Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation. In a strange circular echo of history, the coronation of King Charles III took place this month in Westminster Abbey, almost exactly 70 years on. 🇳🇵

1934

Maurice Wilson attempts to climb Everest solo, and his body was later found 6,200m on the North Face.

1952

After World War II, Tenzing Norgay who was guiding a Swiss expedition from the Nepal side, reaches 8,595m on the Southeast Ridge.



1953

Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary of the British expedition become the first climbers on the world’s highest mountain on 29 May.

1955

Survey of India calculates elevation of snow cap at 8,848m (29,029 feet). Erwin Schneider makes detailed 1:50,000 map of the Everest region.

1956

The government in Kathmandu gives the peak its Nepali name: Sagarmatha.

1960

Three Chinese mountaineers Wang Fuzhou, Gonpo, and Qu Yinhua make the first known climb from the north side.



1963

Tom Hornbein and Willi Unsoeld of an American expedition make the first traverse, climbing up the West Ridge and descending via the South Col. Go online to watch National Geographic documentary.

1975

Junko Tabei from Japan is the first woman to get to the top.

Expedition led by Britain’s Chris Bonnington makes the first ascent via the South West Face.



1978

Austrian Peter Habeler and Italian Reinhold Messner are the first to climb without bottled oxygen.



2010

Nepal and China agree on 8848m as the official snow cap height of Everest, with 8844.43 as the rock head height. Ncell installs 3G mobile network till Mt Everest Base Camp.

2013

Fist fight breaks out between Sherpa guides and Alpine style climbers at Camp 3.

2014

Avalanche hits climbing team on Khumbu Icefall, killing 16 Nepali porters and guides. Watch video.



2015

Earthquake induced avalanche hits Base Camp on 25 April, killing 16 Nepali and 2 foreign climbers. Watch video.



2019

Nims Purja completes his record-breaking 14 peaks in 6 months and 6 days. A record 891 climbers summit in spring. Purja’s photo of traffic jam on Everest goes viral.

2020

Peak closed due to pandemic, but a team of Chinese surveyors climbs from the north to re-measure the height of the mountain.

2021

Nepal government and some expeditions tried to cover-up a Covid outbreak at Base Camp. Then two cyclones affected climbs.

2022

Nepal struggles to cope with Covid backlog on expeditions, and is accused to over-commercialising the mountain.

The era of chopper-hopping from one base camp to another to climb more than one 8,000er during a season begins.

EVENTS



Women's volleyball

Cheer on the women's volleyball team as Nepal competes against teams from Bangladesh, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan at the Women's Volleyball Challenge Cup. 26-29 May, Dashrath Stadium, Tripureshwar

Art Exhibition

Check out the rare collection of Pichwai paintings by artist Nikita Singh this weekend. 26-27 May, 11am-5pm, The Kala Salon, Chhaya Center, Thamel



Macbeth Massacre

Macbeth Massacre promises a fusion of theatre and opera, verses in Nepali and a team of Nepali artists and international opera performers. Book tickets at bookings.mandalatheatre.com 26-28 May, 5.30pm-8pm, Tickets: Rs300-1000, Mandala Theater, Thapagaun (01) 5245147

Illustration workshop

Explore imagination, folklore and legends at the Heroes, Monsters and Villains workshop with award-winning illustrator/Graphic Designer Sana Nasir. 1 June, 3-5pm, Kaalo.101, Kulimha, Patan, 9803553123



Le Sherpa Market

Support small and local businesses. Shop for fresh and organic vegetables, fruit, cheese, bread, meat products, honey, and much more at Le Sherpa farmers market. Saturdays, 7:30am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa Maharajgunj

DINING



Turkish Kebabs

Head to Turkish Kebabs and Pizza Hub to try some authentic Turkish cuisine. Order the kebabs, or try the Turkish street food dhurum. Ekantakuna (01) 5439733

MUSIC



Albatross

Head over to Albatross' album launch and Nepal tour, with an opening act by Saisha Hayes. 26 May, 7pm onwards, Rs1500-2000, Moksh, Jhamsikhel



SPACE

Enjoy a live performance from SPACE and join the official video launch from the band's album 'Sansaar'. 26 May, 6pm-8pm, KyampaThe Social Hub, Sanepa

Khatra Jam

Attend Khatra Jam and brace for a night of hip-hop and rap music including freestyle sessions, live performances and an open mic. 26 May, Khatra Bar, Thamel



Live bands

The bands Hexas, Neck Deep in Filth, Discord, Maranatha and Blood Rage will be playing this week in the capital. 26 May, 1pm onwards, Ambience Lounge, Satdobato

Fundraiser

Spend a musical day in the company of a talented lineup of artists and musicians including Cobweb, Rochak Dahal, Rohit John Chhetri and more, and raise funds for reforestation in Swayambhu. 27 May, 1pm-5pm, KyampaThe Social Hub, Sanepa



Tukche Thakali Kitchen

Having a hard time deciding what to make for lunch? Head to Tukche and get a taste of Thakali food centred around the Nepali staple dal bhat. Darbar North Gate (01)4412462

Bricks Café

Try out the wood-fired pizza that Bricks Café is known for, and enjoy a variety of other cuisine in warm and pleasant surroundings. Kupondole, 9801179333

GETAWAY



Barahi Jungle Lodge

Stay in the individual or two-in-one private villas, or guest rooms that the eco-jungle lodge offers and revel in the beauty of the surrounding Chitwan National Park. Megauli, Chitwan (01) 4429820

Kathmandu Guest House

Kathmandu Guest House is the place for trekkers for a rejuvenating stay. The buildings offer hospitable and comfortable accommodation, serene gardens and the guest house is only a short walk away from the Kathmandu Darbar Square. Thamel (01) 4700632



Dhulikhel Mountain Resort

Dhulikhel Mountain Resort is the perfect getaway, from the blend of Newa-influenced bungalows to views of majestic mountain ranges. The resort also offers body massage and spa services, evening cultural dance programs, and appetizing multi-cuisine food. Dhulikhel (01) 4420774

Sapana Village Resort

Wake up to witness elephants lumber through the forests, and stay amongst rich Thar and Chepang culture at the heart of Sauraha. Sauraha, Chitwan (56) 580308



Namobuddha Resort

This traditional Newari style resort is perched on a hilltop with an amazing view of the Himalayas each morning. The peaceful, tranquil environment is also perfect for short hikes. Namobuddha, Phulbari, 9851106802

Hermann Helmers

Relish in a wide range of pastries, cookies, biscuits and cake that Herman serves with a hot delicious beverage to accompany the food. Jhamsikhel Road (01) 5424900



DanRan Restaurant

Enjoy a filling Japanese meal at DanRan restaurant. Don't miss out on the soft tofu, pork cutlets and don varieties offered. Jhamsikhel Road (01) 5521027

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
25° 13°	25° 15°	26° 15°	29° 16°	31° 17°

Weekend storms

Central Nepal is experiencing cooler than usual temperatures with the maximum up to 5°C below normal for this time of year. We are likely to get two more waves of moisture-bearing westerlies into the weekend that will bring afternoon, evening and night-time showers accompanied by lightning. But after Sunday, things are expected to be on the sunnier side with the temperature in Kathmandu climbing to a more normal 31°C. The southwest monsoon seems to be slightly delayed.

OUR PICK

Have you ever wondered how politicians and diplomats live their lives outside the public lens? The Diplomat (2023) entertains the idea exploring the political thrills while also depicting the emotional dramas that surround the personal lives of the officials. The Netflix series follows Keri Russell as Kate Wyler, a newly hired U.S. ambassador who tackles a mysterious bombing in the UK. The eight episodes take viewers on a journey through a failed marriage, a confusing workplace romance, and an international emergency. Rufus Sewell, David Gyasi, Ali Ahn, Rory Kinnear and Ato Essandoh also star.



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

■ Pradnya Pradhan

Mountaineer, climbing chronicler and international humanitarian worker, Billi Bierling has been in many dangerous places in her life. But it was while riding her bicycle down a street in Kathmandu last month that she broke her ankle.

When they see her limping around with her right leg in a brace, many who know the Swiss-German climber ask her if she suffered a mountaineering accident. But that freak mishap seems deliberately timed for the launch of Bierling's new book, *Ich hab ein Rad in Kathmandu* (I Have a Bike in Kathmandu) this month.

Bierling first came to Nepal in 1998 as a free-spirited youth from Garmisch-Partenkirchen in the Bavarian Alps. “The mountains were too close and I always had the feeling they were limiting my view,” she explains.

After dropping out of high school her concerned parents sent Bierling to work as an au-pair in the United States. Soon, she was roaming around the world, and after completing her masters in journalism at City University London, became a reporter for Swiss Radio International in Berne.

Coverage of mountaineering brought her close to Elizabeth Hawley, the famous Kathmandu-based chronicler at The Himalayan Database. After Hawley died in 2018, Bierling's team is carrying on her work of keeping detailed records of expeditions in Nepal.

Bierling has combined her mountaineering career, work at the Himalayan Database, with being a communications officer with Swiss Humanitarian Aid (SHA) in hotspots like Afghanistan and Ukraine.

She has summited six eight-thousanders (Makalu, Manaslu, Everest, Lhotse, Cho Oyu and Broad Peak) besides lesser, but no less formidable, peaks like Nuptse.

Elizabeth Hawley had her trademark blue Volkswagen Beetle in Kathmandu, and Bierling has her trusted bicycle. She bought that bicycle even before she had a city map of Kathmandu, and has earned notoriety for showing up unannounced at hotels to interview mountaineers back from expeditions.

Bierling admits to having an attention span of a five-year-old, but when she commits to doing something, gives it her best. A German newspaper once even called her, “The woman who says yes before thinking.”

Despite her many avatars, at 55 Bierling is still a journalist at heart, and it satiates her sense of

adventure and curiosity about the world. When the Austrian publisher Tyrolia first approached her to write a book, her immediate answer was, “No, but thanks for asking.”

Later, the persuasive publisher got her to join hands with co-author Karin Steinbach. *Ich hab ein Rad in Kathmandu* is a memoir, but more about the people Bierling has encountered rather than herself.

“I am first and foremost a journalist, so I write about other people, not just about myself,” she says. Elizabeth Hawley looms large in the book, a turbulent first year with an unyielding American.

But Bierling finds that beneath the tough skin, Hawley was a sensitive person obsessed with accuracy. It is apt that the book comes out this year, when Hawley would have turned 100.

The book is only available in German for now, but Bierling is working on an English translation. As the Managing Director at The Himalayan Database and a prolific mountaineer herself, Bierling has witnessed first-hand the evolution of climbing in the Nepal Himalaya. The author does not dwell much on her own climbs, but discusses the commercialisation of climbing.

In the 1980s, there would be only a few international flights landing in Kathmandu, and Hawley would drive to the airport in her Beetle to catch hold of climbers to



PRADNYA PRADHAN

collect information. Today, there are hundreds of expeditions and thousands of climbers to keep track of as Bierling pedals around Kathmandu to reach them.

The change is not just in the numbers of climbers, but also the way they climb. Says Bierling: “Helicopters on Everest have

AMONG FRIENDS: Billi Bierling on the Nuptse ridge in 2013, flanked by Mt Everest and Lhotse in the background (above) and bicycling in Kathmandu with her ankle brace (left).

become as common as microbuses in Kathmandu.” She is concerned that the pressure to get to the top has led many to forget the essence of mountaineering.

She explains, “You don’t conquer a mountain, you don’t attack a mountain. You and the mountain have to be friends so it allows you to get to the summit. You go there together.”

Another significant portion of the book examines a progressive change in the mountaineering community: the reclamation of Sherpas as mountaineering entrepreneurs. Bierling delights in the fact that a new generation of Sherpas is finally getting long overdue credit for the sacrifices of their forefathers. Expeditions are finally acknowledging that it is not possible for Himalayan expeditions to climb peaks without Sherpas.

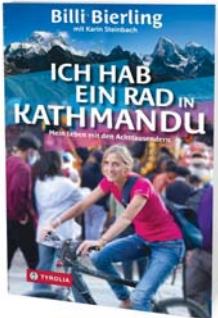
Bierling summarises the essence of her book: “I am not solely my own self. I am a composite of all those whom I have met, seen, and loved. Their experiences, memories, and emotions reside within me, shaping the person that I am.”

Even with an ankle brace on one

foot and trekking boot on the other, Bierling was riding her bicycle around Kathmandu this week as news came of more summit records being broken on Everest.

This is the same bicycle she bought 19 years ago, and the same bicycle in the title of her book, and the same bicycle she fell off, breaking her leg.

As she pedals off, Billi Bierling looks more at ease on her bicycle in Kathmandu than she is on foot. But it is on the mountains where she is obviously most at home. 🇨🇳



Ich hab ein Rad in Kathmandu: Mein Leben mit den Achttausendern. Bergsteigen im Himalaya und Alltag in den Krisengebieten unserer Welt. (German)

by Billi Bierling (Autor), Karin Steinbach (Autor)
Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner (Vorwort)
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हिमालको जेठ अंक बजारमा



हिमालमिडिया प्रा. लि.
पाटनढोका, ललितपुर

NEPAL'S TAX SYSTEM WIDENS RICH-POOR GAP

The new budget needs to overhaul the tax structure that favours the privileged

■ Ramesh Kumar

It is that time of the year again. The last-minute construction spree is underway to make up for chronic underspending of capital expenditure, right ahead of the new budget to be presented in Parliament on 29 May.

The paradox is that while the government faces a severe cash crunch due to falling revenue, it spent only one-third of the development budget in the last 10 months of the fiscal year.

The new parties in Parliament like the RSP have been trying to shake things up and urge multi-partisan consultations before the budget, but given the obsolete structure and leadership of the parties, not much is expected to change.

But there is a strong argument for tax reform since the government faces a major challenge in balancing revenue with expenditure. The previous government's ban on luxury items to augment depleting foreign reserves post-pandemic and increased bank interest led to the decline of real estate transactions

resulting directly in a drop in revenue.

But what makes matters worse is that the government has been profligate in spending beyond its means. Salaries, allowances, administrative expenses, grants and loans have all gone up. The government collected Rs756 billion in revenue in the last 10 months against the target of Rs1.4 trillion whereas its expenditure has exceeded Rs1.04 trillion.

Taxation is the primary source of income for any government. Contrary to what the wealthiest Nepalis think, the government is not run with their tax money but by what ordinary citizens pay in taxes. While tax evasion concentrates the wealth within the already privileged, the tax the poor pay is not proportional to their earnings.

Nepal's liberal economic policy since 1990 was expected to alleviate the income gap with trickle down effect, but the economic disparity in society is more stark than ever. A 2020 report Equality for Prosperity showed that while the wealthiest 20% of Nepalis own 56.2% of wealth, the poor 20% have only 4.1%. This economic gap is likely



High Himalayan rescue

A non-profit has been quietly saving lives of trekkers and porters in the Himalaya for the past 50 years

■ Buddha Basnyat and Gobi Bashyal

The Himalayan Rescue Association Nepal (HRA) is a voluntary, non-profit set up in 1973 to reduce casualties among trekkers and porters in the Himalaya.

Its aid-post in Pheriche at an altitude of 4,250m has been saving lives of Nepali and foreign hikers for 50 years. It is staffed twice yearly during the trekking season by volunteer doctors.

Another permanent aid-post in Manang at 3,550m has been treating patients since 1981. Ivan Somlai and Basanta Thapa were instrumental in opening the Manang aid post.

The HRA started Everest ER medical camp at Everest Base Camp in 2003 to mark the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of the world's highest mountain in 1953.

Everest ER provides medical support to the porters, climbers, expedition staff and visitors and promotes safety. Luane Freer spearheaded the establishment of Everest-ER. HRA also has a temporary medical camp at Gosainkunda lake during Janai Purnima Festival to provide free medical care to Nepali pilgrims. Young Nepali volunteer doctors from the Mountain Medicine Society of Nepal (MMSN) have been working here since 1997.

For the first time, HRA staffed the Manang, Pheriche Aid-posts and HRA Everest-ER with all Nepali volunteer doctors in spring 2021 due to the pandemic.

The HRA has published pamphlets on mountain safety, especially dealing with the prevention of altitude illness and updated



HIMALAYAN RESCUE ASSOCIATION NEPAL

information on prevention and treatment.

Major credit for the foundation of HRA goes to John Skow, an American national, who in 1973 went to Khumbu on completion of his assignment as a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal. It saddened him to see trekkers severely ill from altitude illness, which is 100% preventable.

He organised a meeting of officials from

the Ministry of Health, doctors and trekking companies which figured out that this was in the best interest of their clients and hence good for business.

Joining HRA were John Dickinson from Shanta Bhawan Hospital and Mr Tek Chandra Pokharel from the trekking industry.

The charismatic Peter Hackett was one of the first doctors to volunteer at the Pheriche

aid post. Based on his experience of seeing patients there, he co-authored a milestone article in 1976 (including a placebo controlled, double blind, randomised controlled trial using Diamox) in the journal *Lancet*, 'The incidence, importance, and prophylaxis of acute mountain sickness'.

This paper is a classic in its field and clearly helped establish the relevance of the HRA in tackling altitude illness in all its spectrum, from the relatively benign acute mountain sickness to life-threatening high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE) and high altitude cerebral edema (HACE) in the Himalaya.

An example of the usefulness of the HRA was recently illustrated this spring season. A comatosed porter was brought to the Pheriche aid post by passing fellow porters who appeared to know nothing about him except that he was found very drowsy and somnolent in a teahouse. The HRA staff got to work right away and determined, with the help of a portable butterfly ultrasound, that the patient had HAPE which probably led to HACE.

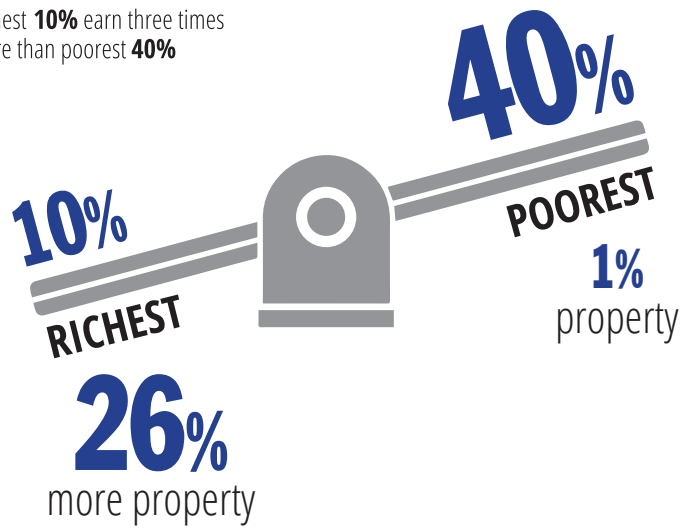
He was treated suitably with oxygen and dexamethasone. In two days the patient, under the competent care of the volunteers, was able to walk and was subsequently helicoptered out.

Since its inception in 1973, the HRA has quietly helped countless sojourners to the high Himalaya and saved many lives. Many Nepalis used to dismiss altitude illness as a "bideshi" (foreign) disease, Nepali trekkers, mountaineers, porters, pilgrims and soldiers now take it much more seriously. 🇳🇵

Buddha Basnyat, MD is Medical Director of HRA, and Gobi Bashyal is CEO.

Inequitable Nepal

Richest **10%** earn three times more than poorest **40%**



to have widened with the current crisis.

This income gap is not just in Nepal. Worldwide, a skewed tax system is blamed for rising inequality. A new Oxfam report points out that two-thirds of the wealth that has increased globally after the Covid-19 pandemic is in the hands of the richest 1%. It recommends tax reforms based on wealth accumulation.

“Because the tax system is not progressive in Nepal, wealth is piling up in the hands of the rich, while the income of the poor is not increasing,” explains economist Dilliraj Khanal. “We don’t have a system of taxing the rich because of policy weakness and dominance of middlemen.”

Who pays taxes?

Two-thirds of the government’s annual revenue is collected not from corporations and industry, but from various taxes and revenue paid by the general public. The share of tax on corporate profit

is in fact very small. In the fiscal year 2021/22, the government collected a total of Rs989.62 billion in revenue. Of this, the income tax paid by businesses from the profits earned through private companies is only 5%. So while income tax did bring in Rs229 billion, which is 24% of total revenue collected, this amount is largely from the income tax paid by ordinary citizens on their personal income.

The tax paid from the profits of private companies is only Rs47.5 billion. When adding public limited companies (issued shares to the general public) and other types of companies, corporate income tax comes to only about Rs114 billion, which is just 11% of the government’s annual revenue.

The government collected Rs314 billion from VAT last year, and this made up about one-third of total government revenue. Similarly, Rs241 billion was collected as customs duty and Rs155 billion as excise.

“A society with unequal income

and wealth, but equal taxes, burdens the poor and favours the rich, it is a regressive tax system that makes it difficult for the poor to survive,” says Khanal. For example, VAT is the same 13% for all Nepalis – rich and poor.

“In essence, five-star hotels in Kathmandu and the poor are both taxed equally for LPG fuel,” he adds. “From a social justice standpoint, taxes must be based on income.”

Taxation expert Roop Khadka disagrees, saying it is impractical to have a different VAT rate for rich and poor, and even if it was introduced it would be impossible to enforce.

Instead, Khadka favours revoking VAT exemption on goods and services consumed by the upper classes, which are worth nearly Rs100 billion per year. Tax evasion by the rich is another problem that needs to be tightened, and collusion between business and politicians means that the government itself abets tax evasion.

Real estate speculation has helped select groups in Nepal to become immensely rich immediately, but the government collects a bare minimum in tax from profits made in land transactions.

A real estate sale within five years is required to pay 7% of its profit. If the transition happens within 10 years, only 5% of the profit is taxed. This means most of the astronomical profits made in real estate sales in the past years have gone into the pockets of brokers and large landowners.

On the other hand, the 60th report of the Auditor General’s Office says many evade tax by showing less than the actual value of the property. The VAT bill scandal 10 years ago also revealed the widespread tax evasion by the commercial sector.

The politics of patronage

means that businesses are now colluding with politicians and bureaucrats to loot the treasury. The Tax Settlement Commission decided to collect Rs9.54 billion from businesses that have not paid tax for a long time, but the Auditor General’s Office later revealed that the decision was made in cahoots with the businesses themselves who actually needed to pay Rs30.52 billion.

The most egregious and blatant wrongdoing was by former Finance Minister Janardhan Sharma who was making backroom deals with select business groups importing steel rods and electric vehicles so their products got customised tax breaks in the budget last year. The deal cost Sharma his ministership but the unholy nexus between politicians and business continues with impunity.

Alternative to the wealth tax

In this state, the only sector keeping Nepal’s economy afloat is the estimated \$9 billion Nepalis abroad send home every year. Still, Nepal’s debt has reached 43% of GDP, a sharp rise from 28% a decade ago. This will have a direct impact on the tax system. Sooner or later, the government will raise taxes. But for whom?

If the status quo continues, and the poor are subjected to more taxes, the income gap will widen further, inviting social unrest. Taxation relative to the size of the economy is about 22% in Nepal, one of the highest in South Asia. But for every Rs100 the government receives as revenue, only Rs23 is collected through income tax. The rest is made up of common citizens paying for the consumption of goods and services.

All over the world, different levels of income are distinguished and income tax exemption is given to the lowest which is known as a

basic exemption. Welfare states also have a weighted system of taxes of the richest that ensures socio-economic equality.

But even though there is a flat tax on salary and allowances, windfall profits including from real estate transactions are not taxed properly, leading to a consolidation of wealth among certain groups.

Experts have proposed wealth-based taxation to reduce the disparity between the rich and poor. Economist Keshab Acharya says that the government should levy an inheritance tax on ancestral property to children as is done in the US, Japan and Europe. This encourages entrepreneurship and inspires the new generation to find creative ways to earn money.

But the historical distribution of land in Nepal was largely unfair where families close to the ruling class were granted ownership exempt from tax. These assets have been handed down through generations and ownership of a large part of it is still limited to certain families.

Historian Mahesh Chandra Regmi in his book Land Ownership in Nepal states that before 1951, more than one-third of the total arable land had been handed down intergenerationally in that manner. An inheritance tax will also reduce corruption because the mentality that wealth should be passed on to children will be weakened if such a tax is implemented.

Meanwhile, land prices in Kathmandu skyrocketed thanks to the government. Since the state has spent on the infrastructure that led to the rise in value of property, it should get a share of the profits.

“The government should get the benefit of increased property valuation in the form of taxes which will increase the spending purse for the welfare of the poor,” explains Khanal. 🇳🇵



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Nepalis rock in the desert

Two workers from Nepal quit their jobs in Qatar to perform professionally in a rock band

■ Shrijan Pandey in Doha

When Nepalis in the Gulf make it into conversation, it is usually about security guards or construction workers. It is definitely not about a pair of head-banging rock musicians.

But in Qatar’s underground rock and metal scene, you will find Ameet Kunwar rocking the drums and Satish Thapa Magar grooving the crowd with bass and vocals, defying the stereotype.

Winterburn, a hard rock band fronted by Jordanian-Pakistani singer and Gibson-endorsed guitarist Naser Mestarihi and the two Nepalis, is the only rock band performing original music in Qatar.

Having received much acclaim for their singles, the trio were named pioneers of the rock scene by Musivv digital platform, Vents Magazine, and Fox News.

Back home in Nepal, Satish was a digital marketing officer by day and performed gigs by night. Yet, it was not enough to support his family. Three years ago, he left to work as an accountant in a bar in Qatar. Ameet migrated 14 months ago for similar reasons.

“I missed the music I was really passionate about. I had been playing since I was 17,” says Satish, now 27. “So when I was introduced to the music circle here, I took the risk to quit my job to do music.”

The duo plays in three bands in Qatar: Kathmandu Musical Band for the Nepali diaspora audience, Afterlife, a rock-cover band for the



PHOTOS: SHRIJAN PANDEY

expatriate community here and Winterburn.

“The pay difference between Qatar and Nepal is huge, just two to three gigs a week is good income,” adds Satish. But being an independent rock musician in an expensive city like Qatar is not as glamorous as it sounds. Audiences prefer covers and DJs compared to live, original music.

But the band is committed to keeping the spirit of real rock alive, even at the cost of losing lucrative performance offers. This means it is Naser’s local friends who make up most of the crowd. While Winterburn is gaining popularity, the music scene is still challenging.

Satish and Ameet have been approached by bars to sing covers for a monthly income, but they refused. The contract binds them to a single bar where the musical expectation is specific and leaves little room for self-expression and experimentation. The market is saturated with Filipino bands who often play covers for lower pay. And many here expect a Nepali band to perform Bollywood hits.

“It is especially hard being Nepali, and by extension South Asian. The music scene is perhaps the only place where we don’t have to worry about racism,” says Ameet.

Nepalis are often branded as low-paid menial workers. People

fail to recognise the Nepali identity beyond KFC counters and Talabat rides. When Satish and Ameet climb on stage, most are surprised they are Nepali. However, some sign them on just for the novelty of having a Nepali rock band. And it is the very rebellion in their musical expression that has given Satish and Ameet their identity.

“When I am up there on stage, it doesn’t matter if I am a Nepali. Music erases boundaries and pre-conceptions,” adds Ameet.

The duo often gets feedback from fans amazed by the diversity of Nepali music. Even Naser Mestarihi is impressed: “One thing about Nepalis like Sabin

Rai, Albatross, and other bands is that they know their music. My bandmates are some of the best musicians in the world who come from Nepal’s rich musical scene. They deserve much more recognition.”

Winterburn wants to make original music and take it to the masses. Members are working on their second album, II, to be released globally, and a regional tour of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and eventually Nepal.

Adds frontman Mestarihi: “I want to play where people understand and appreciate our music, and Nepal seems to be the best place for that.” 🇳🇵

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