



DINESH SHRESTHA



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PTI

# RED TO SAFFRON

■ Analysis by **Shristi Karki**

When he was still leading the Maoist insurgency as Prachanda, guerrillas under his command executed priests, desecrated temples, burnt Sanskrit books. Even after being elected prime minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal tried to replace Pashupati's high priests with Nepalis. Indian priests resigned, and the move angered Hindus in both countries. During the insurgency, Dahal exhorted his fighters to wage war against India, even while he was in a safe house in a New Delhi suburb.

Fast forward to 2023. Prime Minister Dahal visits the Mahakaleswar Temple in Ujjain during his official visit to India, offering prayers clad in saffron, with sacred ash smeared on his forehead. Faced with criticism, Dahal defended his temple run an act of "cultural diplomacy".

The cultural diplomacy continued on

Dahal's return from India. He paid homage to Pashupati with his finance, foreign and tourism ministers in tow. The irony was not lost on the public.

On Wednesday, Dahal attended a graduation at the Nepal Sanskrit University in Dang, the same institution his cadre set fire to in 2002, destroying ancient texts. He said the university was important for Nepal's "cultural reawakening".

Dahal is overseeing a cultural revolution in reverse. It was a matter of time before India's Hindu supremacist politics would influence Nepal, but few expected it to be as dramatic and sudden as the 180 degree turn by Nepal's prime minister.

Dahal has dabbled in Hindu rituals before. In 2010, he was ridiculed after worshipping a water buffalo in Sunsari to "ward off bad luck" as per an astrologer's advice.

Dahal has not tried to hide that he is a born-again Hindu. With Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi probably headed for re-election next year, he may think it expedient to be on the BJP's good books by shedding his red cloak for a saffron one.

Dahal's party is the third largest in Parliament, and he has a hush-hush deal to hand over rotational prime ministership to Madhav Nepal of the CPN-US and the NC's Sher Bahadur Deuba. He could be courting support from a majority of Nepalis who in past polls have said they want to dump

secularism and declare Nepal a Hindu state.

He could also be trying to take the wind out of the sails of the RPP, the party which itself has been using the Hindu-monarchist card. In fact, the RPP's Rajendra Lingden has dismissed Dahal's new Hindu avatar as mere optics, adding that the real test would come when the RPP tables a proposal to Parliament to remove secularism from the preamble to Nepal's Constitution.

UML leader Bhim Rawal said Dahal would have saved the country from much grief if he had visited Pashupati back in 1996 instead of going to the jungle. Rawal wondered if the prime minister's volte face was a result of his one-on-one with Modi in Delhi.

Dahal's one time comrade-at-arms, Baburam Bhattarai tweeted obliquely: 'One cannot question someone else's decision to visit a religious place, that is a matter of personal faith. But when it is a Cabinet that makes the visit together, there are questions as to whether this is politically motivated.'

Dahal seems undeterred as he tries to kill multiple birds with one stone. Even Nepalis critical of the Maoists says it is better that the former guerrillas are visiting temples instead of destroying them.

Dahal also wants to keep Modi and the BJP happy, given their aggressive Hindu-right agenda having a ripple effect in Nepal. Modi's backing will be beneficial if

Dahal faces another power struggle within his coalition. The BJP also seems more comfortable with a rebranded Maoist Brahmin leader in Nepal rather than the RPP, whose agenda it may consider too monarchist and nationalistic.

The Maoist party fell to third position due to a lack of institutional structure and the abandonment of its anti-status quo ideology. Using the Hindu card may be too tempting for Dahal, who must have noticed the support among young Nepalis for populist persona like mayors Balen Shah and Harka Sampang, or new technocrats in the RSP.

Dahal faced criticism back home that he did not raise the issues of the Akhanda Bharat map. Balen Shah and Harka Sampang immediately hung their own 'Greater Nepal' maps including territory lost to British India in 1816 in their offices.

Dahal must have expected criticism for his Pashupati visit, and it remains to be seen if the prime minister will make rounds of monasteries, mosques, churches, and other places of worship across the nation to show that he supports Nepal's constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom. 🇳🇵

**Excerpts from Sanjay Upadhyas new book Democracy in Turns: A Political Account of Nepal**  
**PAGE 6-7**

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MANISH POUDEL/NT ARCHIVE

# When it rains, it pours

The Department of Meteorology and Hydrology has declared that the southwest monsoon entered eastern Nepal promptly on schedule, and will advance over the whole country in a week.

This was a relief because weather models had suggested the onset of the rains would be delayed by at least 10 days. Let us hope simulations were also wrong about deficient rainfall this monsoon.

News of the arrival of the rains could not have come sooner. So far, this June has been the hottest month on record in Nepal, with half of the country's population mostly in the plains reeling under heat stress. Wells had gone dry in parts of the Chure and Tarai, and ritual frog weddings were being performed for rain.

This year's El Niño effect should be a warning about things to come, as the ocean and atmosphere heat up globally. Here in Nepal, we must now broaden the scope of disaster planning beyond droughts, floods and landslides to lethal 'wet bulb' combinations of temperature and humidity.

In the next decades, unliveable heat waves in the plains could force mass migration of people to northern latitudes and higher altitudes. For Nepal, this could mean a future reversal of population movement back from the plains to the mountains.

But Nepal's rulers cannot pass all the blame for chronic food insecurity on climate breakdown. The Karnali is food deficit because of decades of state neglect, and climate change-induced drought just puts farmers under added pressure.

Crop failure due to lack of irrigation and agricultural input in turn will worsen malnutrition among children, and increase the push factor for outmigration of men. Not all disasters are sudden, Nepal must also prepare for slow-motion calamities like these.

Our coverage from Jumla and Kalikot of Karnali Province in this edition (page 10-11) shows how investment in rural irrigation can transform the lives of farmers, making them more resilient to face extreme weather.

The climate crisis is a water crisis, and year-round access to water will improve food availability, raise household income, reduce drudgery for women, and allow Nepalis to adapt to climate change. It is common sense. Why didn't we think of that before?

The DHM and South Asian Climate Outlook Forum forecast normal to below-normal rainfall this year, and an increase in

maximum and minimum temperatures across South Asia. Rainfall in western Nepal is expected to be 60% below normal, and 30% deficient in the rest of the country.

But those are averages, and we also have to be prepared for cloudbursts of the kind that triggered the deadly Melamchi flood on 15 June 2021. Robust early warning and real-time localised information systems are vital to save lives and infrastructure.

Again, we cannot blame loss of life along settlements in flood-prone high-risk areas on the climate crisis. We cannot call them 'natural disasters' when the real culprit is bad planning and poor preparedness for calamities that are certain to happen.

The rampant building spree of mega-infrastructure, primarily hydropower projects along Nepal's major rivers, without proper Environmental Impact Assessment also spells disaster. So does illegal extraction of riverbed products along the Chure. But perhaps the most glaring example of environmental terrorism is haphazard road construction triggering slope failure and disrupting water supply.

There are things that are happening globally over which we have little control. The Paris Agreement to cap average global temperatures to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels by 2050 is now dead in the water. Last week, CO2 concentration in the atmosphere hit a record 422ppm, and at this rate we are looking at an increase of 2°C or more in the coming decade. The polar regions

and the ice-caps of the Alps and the Himalaya are already melting at unprecedented rates.

New York experienced air quality worse than Kathmandu last week as Canadian wildfires sent smoke plumes across North America. Pakistan suffered catastrophic nationwide floods last year due to heavier than usual monsoon rains and melting glaciers. For us in Nepal, there is no option but to be prepared for what we know is coming. Rescue and relief after a disaster, as is often the case, is too late. Preparations for prevention for this monsoon should have started last winter.

A strong environmental protection strategy requires long-term vision and commitment, it needs politicians who think beyond immediately visible populist actions to boost vote banks. As with everything else in Nepal, the answer to disaster preparedness is a smarter and more accountable government.

**Sonia Awale**

Below average precipitation is forecast this monsoon, but we must also be prepared for extreme localised rain

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Driving me mad

Another thing that has not changed for the better, if not worse, is Kathmandu's road traffic. There were less than 200,000 automobiles in all of Bagmati in 2002, today just the number of two-wheelers in Kathmandu has reached 1.2 million. But rash drivers in a rush are also to blame, not just the increasing number of cars and motorcycles.

Excerpt from a relatable Under My Hat satire multiple choice quiz published 20 years ago this week on issue #149 13-19 June 2003:

**The best procedure for taking a vehicle from a parked stationery position into the traffic flow is to:**

- Swing out into the lane without looking behind to see if any other vehicle is approaching, especially if you are a bus.
- If there are school kids waiting to cross the zebra, accelerate so you can beat them to it.
- Look into the rearview mirror and wait for a safe gap in traffic to move into lane, even if it means waiting till the next bandh.



d. Only for Safa Tempos: "Stop, don't look, and go go go!"

**The fastest way for a motorcyclist to go from Point A to Point B is to:**

- Overtake slowpokes by cutting into the opposite lane, avoiding multiple head-on collisions by the skin of your teeth.
- Driving on the wrong side of the road is allowed in Nepal and the answer 'a' (above) is legal under the Geneva Convention.
- If oncoming lane is occupied by traffic, overtake slowpoke cars from the left by cleverly employing the blind spot where they least expect you to be.
- Stay behind vehicle in front of you and adjust speed depending on traffic conditions.

From archive material of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

## ONLINE PACKAGES



WATER FOR FOOD

Irrigation projects in Jumla and Kalikot provide year-round water to fields, generate electricity, and reduce drudgery for women. Follow our reporters to Karnali Province as local women who helped build the irrigation canals share their stories. Watch video and subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.



TARA PARIYAR

Watch video of Tara Pariyar and the example she has set for others like her in the Karnali to overcome caste and gender discrimination to care for her family and be an inspiration for Nepali women. Read her story on page 10-11.



PUNGMO PODCAST

Hear rare songs from Pungmo village in Dolpo which are similar to music from South America. The podcast focuses on the songs from Dolpo, the experiences of the Chilean musicians who went up to Pungmo to learn and document the songs. Story: page 9.

### FEDERALISM

I agree with the Swiss ambassador, but how long does it take to implement these pending issues ('Give federalism a chance', #1165)? Nepali politicians are enjoying life by occupying posts, and we see controversial people recommended to constitutional posts in the name of power-sharing. There is no outcome, only undue benefit.

**Subhash**

### EV TAX

The irrelevance of another pipeline project could only be justified if there was a relation between fuel losses, annual consumption of diesel and petrol, and whether heavy equipment could be replaced by electric vehicles ('1 step forward, 2 steps back in Nepal', Sonia Awale, #1165).

**Utkarsh Jha**

### NEPAL DEBT

If corruption is controlled, we can curb current expenditure ('Till debt do us part', Ramesh Kumar, #1165). All public procurement should be processed through the centralised government. Moreover, all public IT infrastructure and management should be made through platforms like the National Information Technology Center (NITC) or the Department of Information Technology (DoIT).

**Samnibid Dev**

### MIGRANT MILKMAN

The story of Korea returnee Ravi Lal Pantha shows strong dedication and hard work, and sets an example to thousands of people who think that good opportunities are only available abroad ('Milking every opportunity', Sahina Shrestha, #1165).

**Prakriti Thapa**

## 1,000 WORDS



NARAYAN DHUNGANA/RSS

### ART OF GOVERNANCE:

Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat at an exhibition organised by Nepal Academy of Fine Arts on Monday.



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# First Scotch on the summit of

The journey of a bottle of Royal Salute Coronation Edition being auctioned in London for charity

■ Lisa Choegyol

Around 7,000 people have now reached the highest point on the planet, the top of Mt Everest, since it was first scaled by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953. But only one bottle of whisky has ever made it to the top, and that was on 23 May this year.

And not just any whisky, but a unique bottle of Royal Salute Coronation of King Charles III Edition, one of only 500 crystal decanters specially created to mark the new British King's crowning in Westminster Abbey.

Priced at a whopping \$25,000, the amber spirit is 'a luxurious blend of 53 rare malt and grain whiskies'. A limited edition reflecting the year of Queen Elizabeth II's ascension to the throne, the birth of the Royal Salute brand and the year of Everest's historic first ascent.

And not just for any trivial reason, but as a contribution to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration events the flagon number 61 of the precious Scotch donated by Chivas Bros will be auctioned to benefit the people of the Himalaya at a charity fundraising event in London hosted by Bear Grylls, Peter Hillary and Jamling Norgay, sons of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay.

The first ever bottle of Scotch



**FEELING HIGH:** Ang Dorjee Sherpa on the summit of Mt Everest with the special Scotch on 23 May, his 22<sup>nd</sup> ascent. Closeup of bottle (right).

ADVENTURE CONSULTANTS

to reach the top has notched up yet another record on Sagarmatha, to be added to the list of wondrous, admirable, astonishing and sometimes frankly bizarre summit successes.

To great relief all round, the bottle survived the gruelling ascent,

not in its elaborate presentation box but carefully packed in bubble wrap and duct-tape by Adventure Consultants' expedition leader and Khumbu aficionado, Guy Cotter. The expensive content remained intact in the skilled, courageous and capable care of Nepali mountain

guide Ang Dorjee Sherpa on his 22<sup>nd</sup> Everest summit (above).

The story of how the bottle got to the top started 20 years ago at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary when Sir Ed Hillary himself was presented with a 50-year-old bottle of Chivas Regal by brand leader Peter Prentice and

the Duke of Argyll in full highland dress. Bearing the bottle aloft in tartan kilts, the music of massed bagpipes stunned the audience in the Hyatt Ballroom on 29 May 2003.

I suggested to Peter Prentice that Royal Salute might like to



**NMB BANK**  
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## Foreign reserves increase

Nepal is receiving Rs100 billion in remittance every month, with overseas Nepalis sending home Rs1.05 trillion in the last 10 months -- an increase of 23.5% from the same period last year. Nepal Rastra Bank said foreign exchange reserves increased to \$11.21 billion, a 17.6% increase. The government banned the import of luxury items bringing down imports, but that also led to a drop in tax revenue.

## Peace Corps

Twenty-one new Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Kathmandu this week, the first group since the pandemic. The new volunteers will add to the nearly 4,000 who have



previously served in Nepal since 1962. Volunteers will be assigned to districts in Gandaki and Bagmati Provinces to teach English in government schools and work on food security and health projects.

## Nabil Asian Paints

Nabil Bank and Asian Paints have agreed to provide channel financing facilities to its dealers with better pricing and less collateral coverage. Channel partners can also use other services and loan facilities to meet financial requirements.



## StanMetLife Premium

Standard Chartered Bank, MetLife Nepal Insurance and Nepal Clearing House have agreed to an e-Mandate feature for payment of premium. The bank's system will be integrated with the National Payments Interface of Nepal Clearing House. The feature is a first in Nepal's insurance sector.

## Turkish turns 90

Turkish Airlines is marking 90 years of service with a new film about its journey since Ghazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established it in 1933. From its humble beginnings, Turkish Airlines now has a fleet of 418 aircraft and serves 344



international destinations. The anniversary coincides with Brand Finance awarding the top spot of Most Valuable Brand to Turkish Airlines for the sixth consecutive time. Turkish carried 7.4 million passengers in May, an increase of 13% compared to 2022 with a load factor of 82%.

## BYD EV price

Following the new budget for the upcoming financial year, Cimex has revealed new prices of the BYD



ATTO 3 electric vehicles. The 100kW and 150kW motor versions have starting prices of Rs5.599 million, Rs6.588 million, up to Rs8.199 million.



## Mountain cleanup

Nepal Army and Unilever Nepal have collected a combined total of over 35,708kg of garbage from Everest, Lhotse, Annapurna and other peaks this season.

## Chengdu to Pokhara

Sichuan Airlines says it will operate two charter flights from Chengdu to Pokhara this month, marking the first by an international carrier to the city's new international airport. The airline resumed flights between Chengdu and Kathmandu in March with introductory fares for Nepalis transiting to Australia and Japan.

## Bajaj at 25

Hansraj Hulaschand, distributor of Bajaj motorcycles, offers 25% down payment option, a cash discount of Rs10,000 and an offer for 25 people to win 1kg of silver on its 25th year of Bajaj in Nepal. Customers can also choose to receive a 25-litre refrigerator by purchasing a 125cc motorcycle.

## Daraz-NMB tie-up

Daraz has launched an NMB loan program for sellers to access collateral-free loans for their businesses. Sellers can apply for loans up to Rs500,000 by visiting the Daraz seller center.



## Inflation up

Food prices rose by nearly 14% last year but may drop this year, according to Nepal Rastra Bank. Prices of spices went up by 26.61%, dairy products and eggs by 10.41% tobacco products by 8.49%, household goods by 9.65%, and furnishings and household appliances by 8.27% last month.



# Everest



**HANDLE WITH CARE:** Guy Cotter and Lisa Choegyal return the Royal Salute whisky back from Mt Everest in its summit packing to be auctioned by Sir Graham Wrigley, Chair of Himalayan Trust UK on 15 June.

follow this up by donating a bottle to the Everest70 auction along with an escorted tour of Speyside distilleries. The French owners were reluctant and slow to respond, distracted by the London promotion. Peter and I persisted, and their interest piqued when I rashly proposed added value with an attempted Everest summit.

You never know what is going to happen on any expedition, and it was with some trepidation one warm spring afternoon at lunch in a Kathmandu courtyard that I requested Guy Cotter to arrange for this very special bottle to be carried to the summit with one of his Adventure Consultants guides.

A consummate professional

mountaineer and Himalayan Trust member, Guy did not hesitate. It would obviously be an additional burden to his team and no unnecessary risks would be taken, but in essence: ‘Yes, but no guarantees.’

Peter was jubilant, and a Royal Salute bottle was delivered to me by courier in London in late April. Not daring to mess with the packaging, it reached Kathmandu carefully wedged in my suitcase. Still wrapped, I handed over the Scotch to Iswari Paudel of Himalayan Guides Nepal, Guy’s long-time partner agency.

The instructions were to send the package by helicopter directly to Everest Base Camp, but Guy later

told me there were some anxious days when the bottle went missing, having been despatched by mistake via Lukla. Luckily it turned up at the Adventure Consultant’s camp with a client who had no idea of its importance.

Although a cold and difficult year on Everest, the Adventure Consultants team achieved their goals. Originally from Pangboche, Ang Dorjee’s famous father Nima Tenzing climbed new routes with Chris Bonington in the 1970s. By chance, Sir Chris will be present when the bottle is auctioned by Himalayan Trust in London, with all proceeds benefiting health, education and women’s

projects throughout the Everest and Kangchenchunga regions.

In a Lazimpat garden, Guy and I returned the Royal Salute bottle with triumph to Sir Graham Wrigley, Chairman of Himalayan Trust UK and former Chair of British International Investment PLC -- still in its summit packaging. It was Graham who had first conceived the Everest70 celebration programme, arranging with Tenzing, Hillary and Hunt’s descendants to trace the journey of the original expedition from Khumbu to Kathmandu, Delhi and London. He had co-opted me to help him coordinate in Nepal.

Seventieth memorials to honour the anniversary with the families included Khumbu treks, curated

films, talk programmes, lauding summiteers, lectures, processions, openings, unveilings, speeches, receptions and parties. Everest70 celebrations culminate this week in London with the fundraising auction, a Nepal Embassy party and program at the Royal Geographical Society with Kenton Cool, Stephen Venables and Hari Budha Magar. The families have had audiences with Nepal President Ram Chandra Poudel in Kathmandu and King Charles III in Buckingham Palace

I was in Khumbu on 29 May this year for events to mark the 70 years. It included the opening of Sir Edmund Hillary Visitor Centre in Khumjung’s refitted ‘schoolhouse in the clouds’ by New Zealand’s former Prime Minister Helen Clark, and the Tenzing Norgay Heritage Centre with Kanchha Sherpa, the only surviving member of the 1953 expedition.

Helen Clark used the global media attention for a powerful call to action on climate change and its Himalayan impacts. A new 70km loop was added to the Everest Marathon as an ultra-extreme option, rhododendrons were planted by distinguished guests, the music of local instruments reverberated around the white peaks, Sherpa dancers stomped and swirled, and a couple of skydivers filled the sky with a huge Nepali flag above Syangboche.

The weather was kind and as Everest slipped behind the clouds Sue Leyden, daughter of expedition leader John Hunt, reminded me that Tenzing and Hillary were ‘the right people’ to have made the first ascent, two humble men who both gave so much back to the people of Nepal. She remembered the moment when the news reached London, the day that changed their lives forever. She was 12 years old and sharing a bath with her sisters. 🇳🇵

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# THE STORY

We have to understand the past to make sense of Nepali politics today

## SO FAR



Excerpts from the last chapter of **Sanjay Upadhyaya's** new book **Democracy in Turns: A Political Account of Nepal** which looks back at the country's struggle to construct a new democratic identity under 7 constitutions in 7 decades.

It is a rare republic where the deposed monarch enjoys state privileges under the successor regime, continues issuing messages on national observances, and whose activities and movements draw abiding political interest.

Former King Gyanendra Shah may have become a commoner in May 2008 through a constituent assembly vote, but he has not been out of the public's imagination. Supporters blame the abolition of the monarchy for the country's sordid state today. Critics accuse him of continuing to play spoiler from behind the scenes.

Both groups wonder what the ex-monarch might plan next. If King Gyanendra's coup on 1 February 2005 removed the vital cushion the political parties had provided between the people and the constitutional monarchy, today's political class has lost a referee in the turbulent power play, even though they are reluctant to admit it openly.

The prime beneficiary of the repeated breakdown of democracy in Nepal was, without doubt, the monarchy. Yet it would be wrong to blame the palace, which always retained significant influence through its hold on the military and the loyalty of the traditional elite, for engineering the collapses. If the last 15 years of Nepal's political development have provided a lesson, it is that the monarchy was not the

country's problem, at least not the preponderant one.

The institution has always been controversial, beginning with whether Prithvi Narayan Shah was a unifier or a conqueror. Mahendra, who is remembered mostly as an autocrat, has undergone some rehabilitation lately as a nationalist who raised Nepal's international profile and built its early infrastructure. The tragic nature of Birendra's death has etched him in public memory as a modernizing monarch attuned to the popular sentiment.

But the collective consciousness easily forgets that most of his benevolent achievements were under the still reviled partyless Panchayat system. Dipendra's three-day reign was a technicality.

The circumstances of King Gyanendra's enthronement, his reputation as a palace hardliner and shrewd businessman, his son's poor public image, and especially the debacle of his second takeover, reinforced a negative image. His actions and activities as ex-king have helped to rehabilitate that persona somewhat, assisted in no small measure by the conduct of the politicians succeeding him.

Beyond the demonisation of the monarchy, the blame game has been insidious enough. Many point to the internecine bickering in the NC. Others single out the CPN-UML for spending most of the period as a disruptive opposition or a would-be NC in power. The Maoists have been castigated for wrecking a

system that stood every chance of working in their quest to build a nebulous new Nepal.

External powers have been accused of fostering instability to further geostrategic ends. Others have targeted the feudal culture the major political parties had fought against for decades but ultimately succumbed to. Then came the stark question: Had real democracy ever been achieved?

Nepal's failure to consolidate broader reforms and sounder institutional arrangements became clearer as the euphoria of the 1951 revolution and the two People's Movements wore off. The fact that the Maoist insurgency was driven more by a combination of historical, economic, social and gender grievances than ideological fealty to the Great Helmsman told its own story.

Monarchists continued to stress the reality that the democracy movements had taken place while Nepal was caught in India's geostrategic adjustments. The implication that the three democracy movements were a foreign-inspired ploy is an insult to Nepal's underlying aspiration for freedom. However, the dismal performance of the political parties made it harder for them to fight off such explanations.

In the aftermath of all democracy movements, the political leadership moved ahead with a progressive discourse amid heightened public expectations but was hardly prepared for the challenges of governance. Having won the right to choose their leaders, the people now had to ensure they did not go astray.

In theory, checks and balances among the executive, legislature and judiciary were carefully written into the constitutions. However, those entrusted with operating them brought their personal perspectives and prejudices. Great emphasis was placed on the supremacy of law

and order in the emerging open and transparent order.

The commitment was undermined by such things as the haste with which the new leaders withdrew criminal cases against some of the high-profile offenders. Yet the same personalities and proclivities kept getting re-elected, further sully the national conversation.

Distrust ran deep among the protagonists. NC leaders could not forget how the palace allowed communists greater freedom to operate during the partyless decades. The communists, worried by the global tidal wave against their ideology, were anxious to prevent the NC from striking a broad coalition with the palace.

### IDEOLOGY - PERSONALITY

With the two main political forces having emerged from the anti-Rana movement and matured in their own fights against three decades of palace-led partyless rule, Nepali politics perhaps had a greater propensity for confrontation. In that context, the emergence of the Maoists to provide a more radical hue to the political ambience could only have had disruptive effects.

By the end of the 1990s, the ideological content of the NC

campaign fizzled amid similar self-interest.

Such behaviour bolstered criticism that the CPN-UML excelled in turning every vital national issue – corruption, economic development, good governance, women, ethnicity – into a political weapon to serve narrow partisan purposes. That criticism would dog the party well into 2021 during the parliamentary ratification of the \$500 million MCC grant.

The smaller communist parties had a minuscule electoral representation. Despite this, they were accepted as active members of the combined opposition. For the main opposition party of the day, such broad basing proved politically expedient. The corrosive effects were two-fold: As ideology gave way to narrow politics depending on the winds of the day, the smaller parties were tempted to exercise power disproportionate to their influence. Similar was the case of the royalist right.

### DIVIDE AND (MIS)RULE

As the Maoists became deadlier in their attacks on the symbols of state as part of their 'people's war', they became shrewder in political pursuits. Behind their arcane prose

lay a clever campaign to play off power centres in Kathmandu. They succeeded in pitting the palace and political parties against each other.

Blaming the parties for corruption, mismanagement and cold indifference to the people's concerns, the rebels were subdued in their comments against the palace. When Maoist leaders sometimes hailed the palace's nationalistic credentials, it easily raised suspicions of collusion. Reported contacts between palace confidants and the rebel leadership went on to deepen such suspicions.

By holding consultations with the CPN-UML and other communist parties, however, the Maoists could sow suspicions in the royalist and NC camps. Most parties, for their part, appeared to acknowledge the political, social and economic grievances behind the movement while in the opposition. Once in power, they relied on the reinforcement of police units.

The rebels also gained from pitting one faction within a party against the other. In July 2001, Prachanda virtually ensured Deuba's ascension to the premiership by insisting that the rebels would not negotiate with "Girija or Girija-like" leader.

After the first peace talks' failure, the rebels lost little time in reaching out to Koirala. This tactical gambit helped their immediate political objective but raised questions about their motives.

The prime reason for the constitutional deadlock, in the end, was the Maoists' threat





to disrupt the elections, which led to the two royal takeovers. Those tactics continued long after the Maoists joined competitive politics. Their role in creating and destroying a unified communist party between 2018 and 2021, doublespeak on the MCC compact and craftiness in striking power-sharing deals could only erode the polity.

NON-POLITICAL ACTORS

With political forces locked in intra- and inter-institutional skirmishes and leaders struggling to halt the depletion of credibility, key non-political actors emerged to exercise significant influence over the national discourse. The creation of a strong judiciary independent of executive and palace interference was a major achievement of the People’s Movements. As the top judicial authority of the country, the Supreme Court’s interpretation of a law or legal principle, orders and decisions were binding on all.

As the guarantor of fundamental rights and personal liberties laid down by the constitution, the Supreme Court had the authority to declare a law as void ab initio if the bench found that it contravened the constitution’s provisions. The Supreme Court also had the power

security if they worked honestly within the new policies and directions. Initially, the middle and lower-level officials appeared to be more loyal to their political mentors than the civil service.

As for the military, the royal takeover of 1 February 2005 was the most explicit role the institution had played in politics. The generals were subsequently credited with help in ensuring the end of royal rule as well as the smooth advent of the republic. (A less charitable view holds that the generals simply scrambled to preserve their institutional and individual interests in the emerging order.) Another positive instance was the initiative the chief of the Nepal Army undertook with his Indian counterpart to ending the Indian embargo in 2015-16 following the promulgation of the Nepali constitution.

In the post-2006 years, the military has remained behind the scenes and eschewed a political role. The question is whether this is out of lack of opportunity or interest. Having successfully blocked the aspects of the peace accords relating to its downsizing and ‘democratization’, the over 90,000-strong force has been participating in development and humanitarian activities. Its growing

deliberations. Proof was hard to come by in specific cases, but there were constant allegations of ministers taking commissions from contractors or improperly steering business to their own family or friends. The NC and CPN-UML appointed party activists and loyalists to senior positions in the bureaucracy and state corporations with the dual objective of ensuring prompt implementation of policies and political mobilization. The Maoists were quick to emulate the other parties. Those not part of the patron-client relationship were going to shock the polity.

CAST ASIDE

The constitutional guarantees of freedom, equality, democracy, human rights and sovereignty encouraged women, trade unions, human rights activists and ethnic groups to voice their grievances. The perception that the system was unable or unwilling to address such concerns soon set in. During the 1990 constitution drafting process, suggestions on ending the excessive domination of a few caste groups in all important spheres of national life were cast aside as a distraction to the larger imperative of consolidating democracy. Disaffection with

Each party put up just enough ‘right’ candidates to meet the constitutional requirement. The people discovered that the sanctity of the ballot box was further undermined by the politico-bureaucratic nexus that registered voters, oversaw voting, supervised security and influenced the media.

The restoration of democracy in 1990 sparked a proliferation of professional organizations, trade, consumer and student unions, human rights organizations, environment protection groups and women advocacy agencies. This outpouring of public activism was in conformity with the broad-based, participatory and transparent milieu Nepal’s emerging democratic structures pre-supposed. Decision-makers in power confronted in the vibrancy of civil society a catalyst for empowering initiatives.

But the political and bureaucratic conformity that thrived under the partyless decades often stood in the way of cooperation. Undeterred, the non-government sector influenced the democratic process through such platforms as public hearings and the emerging vibrant media. The quest to limit the state’s ability to impose arbitrary rule resonated in the deliberations.

The strains between the state

and macro-economic stabilization programmes prescribed by the IMF and the World Bank brought distant promises to the people.

Cuts in agricultural and industrial subsidies led to production crises, job layoffs, migration of youth to urban areas and abroad. Privatization, touted to boost efficiency, resulted in asset stripping by the powerful and influential. As donors’ pleas for public patience failed amid the pains of the people, the political system came under severe strain.

ANGUISHED VOTERS

Opposition parties led heckling, sit-ins and walk-outs, which often became the language of policy deliberations. General strikes and transportation stoppages became the more menacing manifestation of freedom. The wider corrosion was visible in the weakening of the tourism industry. Discontinuity and interruptions delayed project implementation, resulting in cost overruns. Perceptions that contractors and middlemen illegally profited from all this only went on to add to the electorate’s anguish.

A mutation of group dynamics would go on to produce pejorative terms like ‘factions’, ‘lobby’ and ‘coterie’ within the parties,



ILLUSTRATIONS: NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

to issue appropriate orders and writs, including habeas corpus, mandamus, certiorari, prohibition and quo warranto.

In exercising those powers, the judiciary became an early participant in the political arena. Of the four prime ministerial orders on the dissolution of the House of Representatives in the 1990-2002 period, three ended up at the Supreme Court. Both dissolution orders under the republic were tossed out by the apex court. From the Tanakpur Accord to the Citizenship Bill, judicial interpretation became a predominant feature of the political discourse. The Supreme Court ruling that the Tanakpur Accord was an agreement, not a mere understanding as Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala had been insisting, weakened Koirala’s political standing and emboldened the opposition CPN-UML.

The Supreme Court infuriated the political class in other ways. By striking down the provision of pensions for former MPs, the judiciary was accused of needless political activism.

After 2006, packing the judiciary with political loyalists in the name of consensual governance made impeachment an easy and tempting resort once the political opportunity arose.

Meanwhile, justice for common people was getting out of reach both in terms of cost and time.

Hailing them as members of the ‘permanent government’, the political leadership moved swiftly to assure top bureaucrats of job

interest in commercial ventures has raised unsavoury questions about professionalism as well as the implications for the polity. The police forces lack the training and equipment to ensure public security and to safeguard basic human rights, a condition exacerbated by constant political interference and corruption within.

CORRUPTION CONUNDRUM

Even before the people could properly appraise how different the new leaders were from the discredited ones they replaced, new allegations of corruption began circulating. It was politically inexpedient for the new leaders to try to explain to the people that the scourge of corruption would be magnified in a multiparty system because of the expenses organized politics entailed and the liberties it presupposed.

However, the people could not contemplate the prospect of political instability creating more frequent election cycles and the need for additional reliable (and renewable) sources of cash flows. The power games that came to characterize the NC’s majority governments over the course of the late 1990s, in particular, raised the threshold of political budgeting by several notches.

In the absence of credible monitoring from the state, electoral politics became an exercise in fund-raising. In an economy still struggling to raise money for regular state expenditures, political fund-raising could hardly have avoided stepping into the realm of the shadows. As a result, politicians found themselves having to work on a personality that hardly conveyed their ideological orientation or policy position.

Amid public perceptions that corruption had increased rather than lessened in the post-Panchayat years, the CIAA found itself at the centre of political

the 1990 democratic reforms grew as the representation of historically marginalised ethnic, caste and religious groups in politics, elections and other state structures declined compared to their representation during the Panchayat period.

Although the CPA did not make any reference to federalism, Madhesi and indigenous activists pressured the government into enshrining it in the interim constitution. However, during the protracted 2008-2015 exercise, the inclusion imperative was advanced to the point where it precipitated a backlash from dominant social groups and closer scrutiny of inequities within disadvantaged groups, stalling the representational justice agenda.

Federalism was a demand driven by the desire for local self-governance, improved service delivery and true political and economic empowerment of people through grassroots democracy. With its implementation, public sentiments began souring amid budgetary and agenda issues, recurring political turmoil, the ineffective performance of provincial government.

Moreover, the quest for inclusion conflicted with other realities of state-building. How many provinces, ethnicity- or identity-based, could a resource-strapped country afford, especially when offices were seen more as a source of patronage than empowerment?

The ethnic- vs. identity-based inclusion and representation debate gradually morphed into the general alienation of the Nepali voter from the political process. Although constitutionally sovereign, many Nepalis feel they are unable to choose their own representatives. Since the parties lacked internal democracy, the selection of candidates became a compromise among the powerful competing factions.

and the NGOs took little time in surfacing and grew exponentially after 2006. The government, which traditionally funnelled development assistance, saw NGOs as competitors for donor money. The NGOs, for their part, remained critical of the waste and inefficiency of the state. A civil society that benefited from foreign funding found it hard to foster candid discussions on matters of importance to the broadest audiences. The perception that civil society organizations had become part of the political system and had little incentive to challenge the status quo gained ground. The depth of the mutual animosity shrouded the space where their missions converged.

FOREIGN HAND

The best gauge of the influence of the ‘foreign hand’ in Nepali politics is perhaps the regularity with which the term appears in the political conversation. Perceived or otherwise, the notion that Nepalis are not the ultimate arbiters of their fate has struck deep roots. Admittedly, foreign powers bring their own interests and expectations into their engagements with Nepal.

For a country with Nepal’s dependence level, managing these pressures was always going to be difficult. The task was made even more challenging by the sharp shifts in the individual interests of foreign players such as India, China, United States, United Kingdom, European Union.

The pervasive effect of the ‘foreign hand’ in the economic sphere carried pronounced political implications. The state’s neo-liberal economic policies, which began during the waning years of the Panchayat system, limited growth to a few urban areas. At other levels, gender, regional, caste, class and sectoral levels disparities widened. The structural adjustment

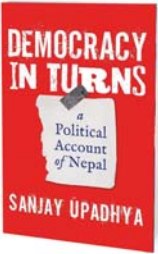
terms which indicated careerist pragmatism and the paucity of principles that would lead both the large mainstream parties from one quagmire to the next in the years to come. The corruption debate became part of the wider discussion on the criminalization of politics.

The people had the right to be angry with their leaders – and they had more channels of venting their fury. The freedoms unleashed by the People’s Movements, incomplete as they might have been, were unprecedented in scope. Without being fully aware of its significance, the notion of popular sovereignty retained a clear appeal among the masses.

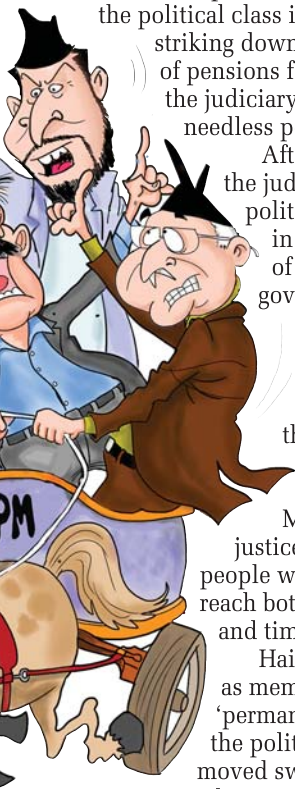
Nowhere were they manifested more than in the sector that conveyed and channelled public grievances. A market fed for decades by state-owned publications saw almost a dozen broad-sheets in Nepali and three in English. The FM spectrum became crowded with commercial and community broadcasters.

Private television joined hands with the state network to enlighten, entertain and often exasperate the people. Social media levelled the playing field, sometimes sensationalizing ideas and events to the point of shocking the system.

New and old media became a true mirror of grievances and resentments. In this sense, at least, democracy proved to be its own worst foe. Without an alternative, however, democracy itself – in its various manifestations – has taken turns in the Nepali public imagination as well as the public square. 🇳🇵



Democracy in Turns: A Political Account of Nepal by Sanjay Upadhyay FinePrint Books, 2023 www.fineprint.com.np 280 pages Rs698





E-VENTS



Bird watching

Go bird watching with fellow ornithophiles to enjoy the many species that call Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park their home. 17 June, 6.30pm onwards, Mudkhu Bhanjyang, Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park, 9841653962

Studio 7 Naga Theatre

Stage performance of Franz Kafka's A Report to an Academy dramatic adaptation by director Sabine Lehman, titled Red Peter. Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays in June 7:15 PM Hotel Vajra, info@hotelvajra.com



Dragon Boat Race

Watch the Nepal-China Friendship Dragon Boat Race Festival, a joint initiative of the Nepal Tourism Board, Chinese Embassy and Pokhara Metropolitan City. Eight teams, 4 each from China and Nepal, will compete during the two-day event. 23 June onwards, Pokhara

Labim Bazaar

Shop local and support small businesses at the Saturday Labim Bazaar. Buy baked goods, meals, handicrafts and clothes from 80 vendors. Saturdays, 10am-8pm, Labim Mall, 9861119954



Poetry evening

Poets and theatre artists are set to perform with live music on poetry evenings at Shilpee Theatre. Fridays, 6-8pm, Shilpee Theatre, Battisputali

DINING



Haadi Biryani

Craving Biryani? Haadi is the place to go to. The slow-cooked biryanis are seasoned with a secret spice blend and the clay pots that they come in enhances the experience. Dilli Bazaar (01) 4438444

MUSIC



Music room

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



Sreeya Nepal

Get some drinks and be part of a musical evening with Sreeya Nepal, drummer Jitendra Sunam and guitarist Prabesh Sunam. 16 June, 6pm onwards, Watering Hole, Naxal



Cadenza

Celebrate music with the Cadenza collective on World Music Day. Tickets are available at Jazz Upstairs, Electric Pagoda and Kathmandu Jazz conservatory. 21 June, Rs500-700, Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat

Charity gig

Revel in performances from Anuprastha, Animals, Shepalika Dhakal, Surakshya Malla and Amit Jung, who will perform at a charity gig this week. 17 June, 7pm onwards, Entry fee: Rs300+, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel

World Music Day

This World Music Day, four Nepali bands will perform four genres of music, along with a renowned French pianist and DJ. 21 June, 4pm onwards, Alliance Française, Jawalakhel

Dhokaima Cafè

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



Baker's Den

Is a loved one's birthday coming up, or need a just-because cake? Order from Baker's Den. Also get freshly baked doughnuts, muffins, and bread. Call to place orders. (01) 4416560 (01) 4411886

About Town

GETAWAY



Jal Mahal

Hotel Jal Mahal lives up to its name and boasts three large swimming pools on its sprawling property. So even if there are no plans for a night stay, take a dip in one of the pools to beat the summer heat. Gharipatan, Pokhara, 9851054404

Heranya Yala

Experience authentic Newa heritage right in the middle of Maha Boudha at the Hiranya monastery. Heranya Yala provides a complete tour package to immerse in the rich cultural heritage of Patan. Gujibahal, Patan (01) 5523168/ 9851067168



Megghauli Serai

This luxurious safari lodge at the heart of Chitwan National Park overlooks the Rapti river. The lodge not only offers scenic views but accommodation that integrates local culture and art. Chitwan National Park, 9851218500

Mirabel Resort

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



Grand Norling Hotel

Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the Grand Norling, which has spacious bedrooms with an adjoining bathroom, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, the garden, monkeys and deer herds. Gokarna (01) 4910193



Freddo Cafè

Browse Freddo Cafe's menu for all things pizza. Try the Ham and Salami, Smoked chicken, the Grilled Vegetarian Pizza, or the Calzone. 9818883350/ (01) 4218792

Vegetarian food fest

The vegetarian street food festival with its vibrant and diverse flavours will take visitors through a gastronomic tour of India. Go with an empty stomach and an open mind. 22 June-1 July, 10.30am onwards, Annapurna Sweets, Patan Dhoka

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
27° 18°	28° 19°	28° 19°	27° 19°	27° 19°

The monsoon is here

Despite predictions that it would be delayed, the monsoon arrived more or less on schedule, and will advance westwards from Kathmandu over the weekend. The Valley recorded 100mm of rain in 24 hours on Wednesday as the rains arrived with a bang. There will be sharp bursts of rain, mainly in the evening and night over the next days. The western Tarai is still sweltering under a heat wave, but Kathmandu will be much cooler.

OUR PICK

Before there was Brokeback Mountain, there was The Wedding Banquet. A 1993 Ang Lee directorial follows a gay Taiwanese immigrant Gao Wai-Tung in Manhattan who is living happily with his partner Simon. He is, however, not out to his traditional parents back in Taiwan who constantly nag him about getting married. Simon devises a solution: a marriage of convenience between Wai-Tung and his tenant Gu Wei-Wei, a mainland Chinese woman who needs a green card. But things get out of hand when Wai-Tung's parents arrive in the United States to plan his wedding banquet. Nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film at the Oscars, The Wedding Banquet has Winston Chao, May Chin, Gua Ah-leh, Lung Sihung and Mitchell Lichtenstein playing the leads.



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 भेट्नुउने 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 अरु कुनै तरिकाले पानीको जोहो गरिराखौं ।

आगलागीजन्य विपद्बाट बच्न चनाखो बनौं ।



नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड





PHOTOS: ERIC CHANDRA SHRESTHA

# Bridging the Andes and Himalaya with music

Chilean musicians find familiar music in the trans-Himalayan district of Dolpo in Nepal

Two Chilean musicians came to Nepal just before the pandemic, and stayed on exploring the country's musical diversity.

Thomas Carrasco Gubernatis and Moa Edmunds Guevera (pictured above in Dolpo) have found uncanny similarities between



**ON THE MARGINS**  
Sewa Bhattarai

the traditional music of their native Andes and the Himalaya. They are now collaborating on the music of Pungmo, a remote village in Dolpo five days away by plane, bus, and foot from Kathmandu.

Tomas and Moa grew up listening to South American folk music, and then studied Western Classical music in Chile. Tomas wanted to explore other kinds of music which took him first to Bulgaria and Turkey where he learnt local wind instruments, then Spain to master the Japanese flute. Next, it was India to learn raga.

Tomas learnt the flute at Hariprasad Chaurasiya's gurukul in Mumbai, and Moa was soaking in different kinds of music in the region. They went to Banaras to attend the Dhrupad Mela, found that they had to leave India for a visa run and crossed the nearest border into Nepal.

But Nepal shut down due to Covid, and the duo has been stuck here ever since. In Kathmandu, they started teaching music at Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory and working with folk musician Jhuma Limbu on mundhum.

They met Nepali-French filmmaker Eric Chandra Shrestha who told them about endangered music from Dolpo. Eric's mother Marina came to Nepal from France in the 1980s and visited restricted Dolpo disguised as a local and reached Pungmo to take a photo of a lama.

"When the lama passed away, the villagers had no photograph of him. Many years later, Semduk Lama from the village happened to connect with my mother. The photograph came up in conversation. My mother shared the photo, and a link with Dolpo was established anew," explains Eric.



Eric has always been interested in music, with a background in sound engineering and video projects. Semduk Lama spoke to Eric of the rare songs in his village and Eric shared the story with Tomas and Moa. This got them excited to go to Dolpo to learn the songs.

Tomas, Moa and Eric took a 24-hour bus ride to Nepalganj, flew to Jufal and walked two days to Pungmo (pictured above).

Eric, who has been trekking in Nepal since he was a child, was used to walking, but the Chileans were not. "I had heard about places which can only be reached on foot. It was very strange to experience it myself," recalls Tomas.

In Pungmo everything needed double translation. The villagers spoke in the local language, someone translated that to Eric in Nepali, who translated it again into English for the Chileans.

They had reached the village just before winter set in, and villagers were out in the fields stocking up and were too tired to sing in the evening.

But they eventually opened up, sang a song in the evening, and the next day Tomas would convert it to musical notation, and Tomas and Moa learnt the melody.

"We played the song back to them on our instruments and that made them happy to teach us more songs," recalls Tomas. "On the last

day we had a party and sang and played. We hastily constructed a make-shift studio and recorded some songs. Lamas and villagers came, and people danced all night."

Away from home, the music of Pungmo reminded Tomas of the Andes and Moa the music of his father's native Easter Island.

"Although you can find similarities in all kinds of music, the way some notes and melodies were used reminded me of South American music," says Tomas.

According to Semduk Lama, a Pungmo resident and music conservationist, people from upper Dolpo used to spend the winter in the village because despite being at a high altitude, it is not as cold as upper Dolpo. "But nowadays people from the upper regions spend the winter further down in the hills or Tarai, but we still stay at Pungmo in the winter," he adds.

Pungmo is more isolated than other villages in Dolpo which is probably why it has been able to preserve more of its heritage.

Says Semduk Lama: "When I was young, we did not have schools. When night fell we lit bonfires and sang and danced around them all night."

Even then, residents say that the songs are dying out. A genre called Khunglu, sung sitting down, is considered the oldest.

Pungmo has preserved not just its music, but also its traditional

lifestyle of barter trade.

"There are only 40 houses, and you can walk from one rooftop to another. Villagers are all related, and live like a big family which is beautiful," says Tomas.

In the past, music was a part of the community and it had many functions: pass on knowledge to youngsters. Songs of the Chho-Pungmo community teach life skills, and even making chhyang.

"We found a very original way of making music," says Tomas.

"In many communities, there were no professional singers. People created and performed music alongside their daily work. In such communities, music is not necessarily called art, it comes under other crafts like making clothes or jewelry."

Adds Moa Edmunds: "Learning folk music does not mean just learning the melody or the lyrics. It also means learning about its function in the community."

A song about the Tamyen, which is a long instrument with five strings, does not just praise it, but also gives detailed instructions to make it.

*You need to gather many things to make this instrument  
Bring wood of the male Bhoipatra tree to make the head  
Bring a grass called Langma to make the screws  
Bring goat intestines (of a particular*

*goat) to make the strings*

Tomas and Moa, in their effort to help promote the music, accompanied the singers from Dolpo at the 2023 edition of Echoes in the Valley in Kathmandu. They do not call themselves 'folk musicians,' instead choosing to identify their music as a fusion of various genres.

"The theories behind classical music all come from folk music. Some people have a special affinity to music, they create it intuitively without any theories," says Tomas.

All three hope to work more with musicians from Pungmo. "I don't particularly think that culture needs to be preserved as it is. Culture is constantly evolving, and if it is static it might lead to conservatism. Yet, the past should not be forgotten, but documented for future generations," says Eric, for whom this has been a personal journey as well because of the connection to his mother.

"Many people remembered my mother passing through the village so many years ago. The singers were very young, but they remembered her. I felt like I found a special connection," he adds.

Today, songs have been reduced to entertainment. Exposed to the outside world, young Dolpopa sing Nepali, Hindi, and English songs which are livelier and instrument heavy, says Pasang Lama. "People in other villages do not know these songs, and do not wish to learn them either," he laments.

Semduk has made a documentary of old songs which are now forgotten. Since then, some of the elderly women who sang the songs have passed away.

The Chileans plan to stay in Nepal for the next two years, teaching and working on folk music. "We landed up in Nepal accidentally, but now we are staying here by choice," says Tomas. "And do they miss home? "If I have my guitar and I can play, then it doesn't matter which corner of the world I am in," says Moa. 🇳🇵

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



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# The gift of water is life-changing in

■ Anita Bhetwal in Jumla

Water is life. Nowhere is that adage as relevant as in a village along the Tila River in this valley in far western Nepal. Fed by glaciers, the river flows strong all year, but just a few metres above its banks, terraced farms are high and dry. Crops depend on the annual monsoon. Farmers had a traditional irrigation system that channeled water through wooden conduits carved out of tree trunks. But the wooden canals have fallen into disrepair, the water leaks, and little reaches the parched fields. The village of Ghodesim is located on a steep slope below one of these water canals, and its 86 households are at risk of landslides from leaking water. The municipality has now replaced the wooden conduits with a more permanent cement canal: providing year-round water to the fields, generating electricity, and reducing the drudgery for women here. “Now everyone has as much water as they need. People have started to plant not just paddy but also vegetables,” says Lakshmi Rokaya, a farmer in Ghodesim. Jumla and adjoining Sinja valleys grow the highest rice in the world, a red starchy local variety that is extra nutritious. Rokaya stopped farming wheat and barley because the wooden canals had gone dry. Now, she points proudly at her terraces ripe with wheat and barley swaying in the afternoon breeze. “For so long, these terraces were barren and dry, just look at them now, they are ready for harvest,” she says. Plentiful water has given the 30-year-old the confidence to plant vegetables on a larger scale next



year to sell in the market. The adjoining district of Kalikot in Karnali Province, Shubhakalika Rural Municipality has also built a 658m long irrigation canal that also generates 35KW of electricity. “Our whole world now looks brighter,” beams 50-year-old Jokala

Shahi of Howdi Gad village in Kalikot. Until two years ago, she had never before seen an electric bulb. The irrigation project was built with Rs2 million from the local government and Rs2.3 million from the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) and shows

how much can be achieved with a relatively small investment just by providing water. Batti Chaulagain, 50, of Shubhakalika used to wait for spring rain to plant corn, and monsoons for paddy. During the rest of the year, her terraces were

empty. But her terraces now grow enough to feed her family, and her husband no longer has to migrate to India for work. The gift of water was all it took for many households in Karnali Province to grow enough food, reduce their drudgery and empower women.

## Tara Pariyar’s Karnali

One single mother’s struggle against stigma and poverty to support her family and community

Decades of media stereotyping has given the Karnali a bad rap for chronic hunger and poverty, but more and more women here have shown that this need not be so. Pariyar’s husband and two relatives were killed during the Maoist conflict 20 years ago. Supporting three children and in-laws fell on her young shoulders. When we met her earlier this month in Jumla’s Lihi village, 42-year-old Pariyar was in her apple orchard. The trees were heavy with fruit, and there was a fresh cool breeze blowing down from snow-capped Kanjiroba Himal. The orchard allows Pariyar to earn a decent income to turn her life around, and single-handedly care for her family and community. As a single mother from the Dalit community, Tara Pariyar had to constantly struggle against caste and gender discrimination in this culturally conservative area. Added to this was the stigma of widowhood.



LIFE IN KARNALI: Tara Pariyar crossing the bridge over the Tila River with a load of apples for the market, and tending her trees (right).

Till five years ago, she knew nothing about apples. She was a day labourer in a farm, and believed that owning an orchard was only for rich farmers. Climate change also altered the weather pattern, and prolonged winter drought affected apple trees. She was convinced apple cultivation was too risky for someone with limited means. All that changed with the government’s insurance scheme in Humla, Mugu and Jumla districts for apple and other cash crops.

Farmers did not have to worry about losing their crop, and Pariyar took the leap. The government pays 80% of the annual premium and the farmers bear the rest. The UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) distributed families with up to 25 apple saplings each. Pariyar already had five apple trees, and she bought another 20 saplings. She then insured some of them for Rs40 per tree per year. The company compensates farmers for

drought if precipitation in Jumla is less than 70mm from March-May, like this year. Pariyar received Rs4,500 in insurance payout which she ploughed back into her business, buying 40 more apple saplings. “Because of climate change I was hesitant at first, but insuring the trees made business sense, and it has lifted my family’s status,” Pariyar says. Her first apple harvest last year was 200kg, from which she made Rs12,000





# rural Nepal

## Irrigation in the far west empowers women and helps them adapt to climate impact



KRISHNA NEUPANE



PHOTOS: ANITA BHETWAL

Chaulagain says, “We are not limited to just one crop of paddy a year. I am already thinking of planting seasonal vegetables.” Chaulagain’s neighbour Primkala Acharya also used to grow only one crop a year, and it was not enough to feed her family. She says,

“We no longer leave our terraces fallow since we have water all year round. We plan to grow as much as possible and sell it in the market.” Farmers here used to plant potatoes only in the rainy season when there was enough water. This year, they were done by early

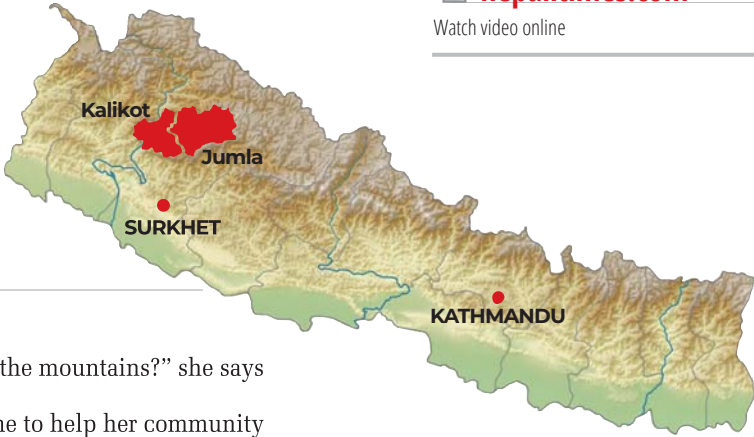
May and are now going to invest in apple orchards. To be sure, the irrigation canals do not reach all farms, but they have a demonstration effect. Villagers are now asking for the same facility from their local governments so they can grow cash

**WATER IS LIFE:** Local women in Jumla’s Tila municipality themselves were involved in the construction of a new irrigation canal (far left). Traditional irrigation system that channeled water through wooden conduits carved out of tree trunks was leaky and only little water reached the parched fields (left, above).

crops, and afford healthcare and education for children. One of the other visible changes is the number of women construction workers. Of the 1,600 residents in Shubkalika, 800 are men, of whom half are working in India. Women are more visible in farms, households, and even earning income building roads, irrigation canals and bridges. In Jumla’s Ghodesim, the irrigation canal was built by 50 women and 35 men in two months. In Howdigad, 70 villagers, more than half of them women, worked on the irrigation scheme. Women are also chairs and secretaries of irrigation management committees. Rupa Rokaya, 36, worked on one of the canals. Her small terrace grows only enough to last four months. Her father-in-law, husband and son all went to India in January. Income from construction helped support her three children and mother-in-law. Gorikala Budha, vice chair of Tila Rural Municipality in Jumla, says the irrigation projects are ideal because they generate employment

during construction and then provide downstream benefits when finished. “The projects give confidence and independence to our women,” she says. “Some of them probably for the first time are able to buy what they want for a change, not just what they need.” In Kalikot, Jokala Shahi earned Rs30,000 after 40 days of construction work and is delighted that she will buy her food for three months. She has also experienced that having an income increases confidence as well as respect for women in their families and communities. She says: “Earlier, we women used to cover our faces, sit in a corner, and did not even dare look at the men. Now we speak up, we do things that only men used to do in the past.” This was always not the case. Women were not seen to be fit enough, but with the men away they have the opportunity to prove they are every bit as strong. Past disparity in wages has also started to disappear with the increasing ability of women in construction. “Our husbands used to get more wages in the past, now the daily wages are the same,” adds Jokala Shahi. Jumla and Kalikot are proof of how modest investment in irrigation, honestly implemented, can make the once chronically food deficit region self-sufficient by giving women more say. 🇳🇵

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PHOTOS: ANITA BHETWAL

income. But this year, with 100 fully grown trees, she hopes to sell up to 1,300kg for Rs74,000. She has her fingers crossed that there will not be one of those fierce spring hailstorms that Jumla Valley is famous for. The income helps pay for her elder son Munal to learn Korean and the younger one, Upahar, to finish Grade 11 in Surkhet. Her daughter Sharada is already married. Income from apple farming has given Pariyar the confidence to also raise chickens

and breed rabbits. She is also carrying on her family tradition of growing rice and buckwheat in a small plot of land a steep one hour walk up the mountain. Although the harvest is not much, it does mean she does not have to buy the staples. Hard work on the farm has taken its toll. Tara’s face is wrinkled, the soles of her feet have hardened with callus. “I don’t mind how they look, at least I can provide for my family, and after all, isn’t this

the reality of life in the mountains?” she says with a bright smile. Pariyar finds time to help her community with a WFP supported lift irrigation program to pump water up from the Tila River to fields along the valley. The cash for work program earns her additional income. The community recognises Tara Pariyar’s struggle and sacrifice to provide for her family, and she has become a source of inspiration for her Lihi village. “All this did not come easy,” Pariyar says, “It was a long struggle. Eighteen years ago, I saw my husband being killed before my eyes, and two other members of my family.” Tara’s husband Harilal had been forcibly recruited by the Maoists. One monsoon night in 2002, Royal Nepal Army soldiers on patrol came into the village, and Harilal fled up the mountain to hide. Tara had told her husband not to run away since he was not a Maoist. The next morning, the sound of gunfire echoed in the surrounding mountains. She ran outside to see her husband being led away by four soldiers, who shot him dead. She fainted, and by the time she came to, learnt that the soldiers had already buried her husband on the banks of the Tila. He brother-in-law Khadka had been killed by the Army, and sister-in-law Sopana was raped and murdered a year earlier. After their two sons were killed, Tara’s mother-in-law and father-in-law became mentally ill, and she had the added burden of taking care of them. Tara went into depression and even tried to kill herself. But it was the thought of leaving behind three young children that brought her back from the brink. Munal Pariyar has memories as a child of his mother facing constant taunts from neighbours. How she would go hungry to be able to afford to educate him and his siblings, while face social ostracisation in

the village for being a Dalit and a widow. “It was a very difficult time, people would come to the house, say unkind things and make our mother cry all the time,” Munal recalls. “But she was like a pillar for us. We had no other support.” But today, villagers who used to spit on Tara and consider it inauspicious to even pass her by on the road come for advice on apple farming, insurance and irrigation. Tara Pariyar is happy she has set an example for women to be independent, but says gender and caste discrimination is still common in Jumla. She remembers Maoist guerrillas using cruel words to tell her she would have to live as a widow if her husband did not join the militia. She became a widow anyway. Those former guerrillas are now all in Kathmandu, and the country’s prime minister is a Maoist. Says Tara with a wry smile: “One day I would like to go to Kathmandu to see for myself why the Maoists from here have all gone there, and what is so special about that place.” 🇳🇵 Anita Bhetwal in Jumla



TARA PARIYAR

Watch video of Tara Pariyar and the example she has set for others like her in the Karnali to overcome caste and gender discrimination to care for her family and be an inspiration for Nepali women.



# Nepali doctor's love for Urdu poetry

## A Nepali emergency physician with a passion for Urdu couplets wows Pakistanis

■ **Abdullah Zahid** in Karachi

**O**n a bustling March morning in Karachi, roads choked with traffic and the air thick with trumpeting horns, the clock is ticking for Ramu Kharel's morning show appearance on Geo TV.

A physician of Nepali origin who teaches emergency medicine at Brown University in the US, Kharel was on his way back from Nepal after training staff in hospitals.

Karachi is only two-and-a-half hours flying time away, but since there are no direct flights from Kathmandu, he had to overfly Pakistan all the way to Dubai and fly back after a long layover.

Kharel was in Pakistan for the first time and it was at the invitation of Dr Junaid Razzak of Pakistan Life Savers Programme (PLSP) at Aga Khan University. It aims to educate 10 million lay persons over the next decade on cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and bleeding control. Cardiac arrests claim up to 47 lives per hour in Pakistan.

"The possibility of resuscitation increases if a person is trained in CPR and choking prevention," says Kharel. "It typically takes 45 minutes for an ambulance to arrive, but by then the brain suffers irreversible damage."

Kharel was in Nepal to introduce a similar program, training frontline providers, police officers and bystanders who are often first responders.

Kharel was born in Gulmi



PHOTOS: ABDULLAH ZAHID/SAPAN NEWS

district, and experienced first hand the devastating consequences of poverty and poor health infrastructure. He lost his mother when he was just eight because she could not be taken to a hospital in time, and this fuelled Kharel's determination to improve healthcare access to underserved communities.

His uncle was a migrant worker in Qatar who died while making infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup. His employers in Qatar only listed his cause of death as 'cardiac arrest'.

A member of the Southasia Peace Action Network (Sapan) that works for cooperation in the region, Kharel says Nepal can learn a lot from Pakistan's experience with trauma care.

“Our mountains unite us and

we even look alike," he says. "Sadly, it's the petty egos of those in power that keep us divided."

Highway crashes claim some half a million lives a year in South Asia, and as a member of Japan's road-safety group, Kharel has been trying to find region wide solutions.

When cataclysmic floods swept one-third of Pakistan last year, the government of Nepal promptly donated relief goods, including tons of food, shelter, and medical assistance for the victims.

And in 2015, when a deadly earthquake killed over 8,500 people in Nepal, Pakistan sent four aircrafts with a 30-bed hospital, special search and rescue teams including Army doctors and food items.

It was in the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake that Kharel established a health advancement

committee in Nepal in collaboration with local communities to provide more decision-making power over their healthcare systems. Working with local governments, he led a program to overhaul local healthcare systems.

Nepal and Pakistan are likely to face more flood disasters due to accelerating climate change. "Since local communities will be first to react in an emergency, preparing them for disaster response and developing their healthcare systems is crucial," he says.

When he is not working on ways to improve healthcare, Kharel is actively creating content on social media as @namedstodoc on Instagram and TikTok. While his target audience is largely Nepali, Kharel has a TikTok following of nearly 100,000 with over 3.8

million likes on his videos.

He began using social media to spread health awareness during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, starting with a TikTok video from Nepal appealing for vaccines.

Guided by his mentor Syed Akbar Hyder, an associate professor of Asian Studies and Islamic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, Kharel is a fluent Urdu speaker, and loves Urdu poetry.

The Nepali doctor's love for Urdu poetry started when Hyder shared a couplet by Ghalib at an introductory class. "We spent the entire class discussing one couplet. I was hooked by the 'ibham' (ambiguity), the beauty and the depth of the lines, and I knew I had to learn this language," he recalls.

Under UT Austin's Hindi-Urdu Flagship programme, he along with six other students lived for a year in India in 2009, travelling and immersing themselves in Urdu language and culture. Kharel interned with an organisation in Lucknow working to raise the standard of living and education for Muslim women in India.

He believes that poetry has the power to heal and inspire, and often turns to Urdu verses to make sense of life's mysteries.

In the car, he recites lines from Faiz Ahmed Faiz by heart: "*Chale chalo ke woh manzil abhi nahi aayi.*" (Let's keep going, we have yet to reach the destination.) 🇵🇰

*Abdullah Zahid is a student of mass communication at the University of Karachi. @AbdullahZahid. A SAPAN News Feature.*

A blue MG ZS EV is shown from a front-three-quarter view, parked on a dark surface. To its right is a white and black electric vehicle charging station. The background is a dark blue night city skyline with lights reflecting on the water. The MG logo is in the top right corner. The text 'THE BIGGER EVOLUTION' is at the top left, with 'MG ZS EV' below it. The text 'BOOKING OPEN' is in large white letters, followed by 'ZS EV (DELUXE) MRP 52,99,000\*' and 'OLD PRICE: 52,49,000\*' in red. At the bottom right, there are six circular icons representing car features: Range (WLTP) 320 km\*, Maximum Torque 280 Nm, Maximum Power 99 KW, Wireless Phone Charging, 80% Fast Charging within 30 minutes, and 8 Years Battery Warranty\*. The Paramount Motors logo is in the bottom left corner, followed by the company name and contact information.

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