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EMPTINESS: Dhanmaya Limbu, 70, whose son was killed last month during a protest demanding the name of Kosi Province be changed.

GOPEN RAI

EAST IS EAST

■ Anita Bhetwal in Morang

Padam Limbu promised his mother Dhanmaya that he would build the family a new house to replace their cement and bamboo structure.

Nine days later, he was dead. Dhanmaya learnt he had been declared a ‘martyr’, but she did not know a martyr for what.

Padam, 43, was affiliated with the Sanghiya Rastriya Loktantrik Sangh agitating against Province 1 being named Kosi in March, and demanding it reflect the identity of the Kirat Limbuwan people.

Padam was injured in the head in Biratnagar on 19 March, and died in hospital five days later, leaving behind Dhanmaya, 70, two younger sisters, and an 18-year-old son.

How Nepal’s federal provinces should be demarcated and named has been a contentious issue

ever since the first post-conflict Constituent Assembly (CA) was deadlocked on the matter.

The Maoists pushed for 14 provinces named after ethnic groups. The NC pushed for a territorial model, while the UML wanted a 15-province hybrid. A compromise on seven provinces was finally reached, but naming them was so contentious they were initially numbered from 1 to 7.

It was only after the first federal elections in 2017 that the provinces got names. Three were after rivers, two geographical, and only Madhes was an identity-based name.

Province 1 did not have a name till earlier this year. Most dominant caste groups wanted to call it Kosi, while indigenous groups insisted on Kirat Limbuwan.

Hikmat Karki of the opposition UML was chief minister when the assembly voted on Kosi. But he was ousted in a confidence vote

earlier this month, and replaced with Uddhav Thapa of the NC. His election faces a challenge in the Supreme Court.

Thapa says Kosi cannot be changed, but Prime Minister Dahal told Maoist supporters it was a mistake to support Kosi, pitting two members of the coalition government against each other.

“The prime minister has poured oil on the fire by saying that the Kosi name was a mistake,” former chief minister Karki said.

Kumar Lingden of the Sanghiya Rastriya Loktantrik Sangh said: “Kosi was named guerrilla style. If Madhes Province can be so named why not ours?”

Even moderate politicians are concerned that renaming Kosi may open up a can of worms and take the country back to the ethnic polarisation of 2011-12. Unrest could also spread as other provinces demand name changes.

Lingden says other ethnicities have no problems with a Kirat Limbuwan Province. But not everyone agrees, as protests spread beyond Biratnagar with rallies also in Kathmandu.

Ashok Kumar Sardar was taking his mother-in-law to hospital last month when police fired teargas at protesters. Sardar was hit by a shell.

“People from the Madhes like us also live here,” says Sardar. “We could also demand to be a part of Madhes Province.”

Another resident, Kunta Rai firmly believes eastern Nepal is the homeland of its indigenous people, and the province name should reflect that identity. She said:

“Naming the province Kosi will erase our civilisation, history, and identity. That is not ok.”

Mixing federal coalition politics with ethnic identity has made the situation volatile.

“In a democracy, indignant voices must be addressed, but it is also important for protesting groups to reassure other communities that their rights will be protected,” says political scientist Krishna Pokhrel.

All this means little for Dhanmaya Limbu, overwhelmed with grief, uncertainty, and empty slogans. “People say my son is a hero,” says Dhanmaya, her eyes brimming. “But certificates won’t bring my son back.”

Keeps happening
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

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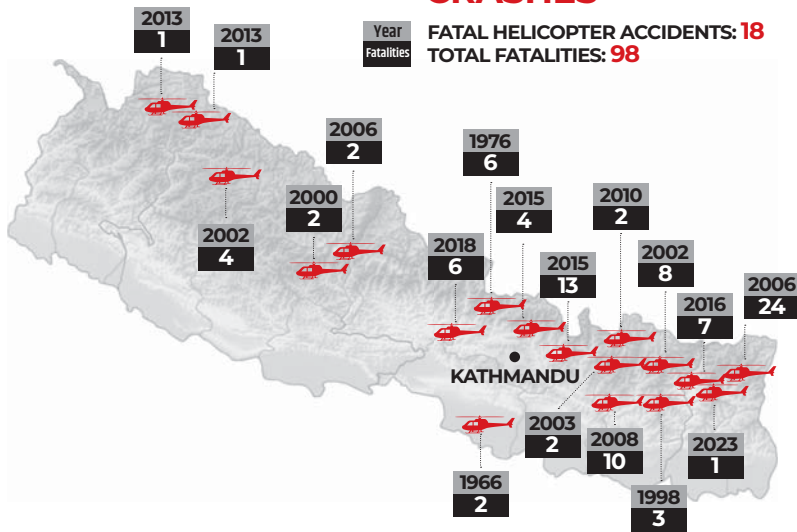
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CHOPPER CRASHES

FATAL HELICOPTER ACCIDENTS: 18
TOTAL FATALITIES: 98



SOURCE: AVIATION SAFETY NETWORK, CAAN, NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

Keeps happening

Air disasters in Nepal have become so commonplace they only make fleeting headlines.

The Yeti Airlines ATR-72 crash on 15 January was the deadliest domestic air disaster in Nepal. Three helicopters have gone down since then, and the Manang Air tragedy on 11 July was the fourth.

The reasons are the same: a reckless disregard for safety, regulators not enforcing protocols, and lack of navigation aids.

Even at the best of times, Nepal's terrain and weather make flying risky. But neglect, apathy and carelessness add to the danger.

Five members of a Mexican family on a sightseeing trip and their Nepali pilot were killed in Solu Khumbu on Tuesday. They had taken off from Surke, an alternative to Lukla in bad weather. Visibility was already marginal in the narrow Dudh Kosi gorge.

The chopper would have had to climb to 4,200m to clear Lamjura Pass which was covered in cloud. Nepal's civil aviation regulations require pilots on mountain routes to always be on Visual Flight Rules (VFR).

A commission of inquiry has been formed, as happens after every crash. But we can already say that the helicopter was not flying VFR.

The helicopter that crashed was one of two bought brand new by Manang Air, it is designed for high altitude rescues. One of the same model landed on the summit of Mt Everest in 2005.

Helicopters are inherently more tricky to fly because of vertical takeoff and landing in built-up areas or rugged terrain, and because they cannot glide in case of engine malfunction. The AS350 Ecureuil family of choppers has had 1,244 incidents since it went into operation in 1991, and there have been fatalities in many of them.

In Nepal alone, there have been at least 18 chopper crashes killing 98 people in the past 60 years (map). About half of them have been due to CFIT (Controlled Flight into Terrain) in which a helicopter impacts high terrain in poor visibility.

In fact, nearly all of the 73 air crashes in Nepal (of fixed wing and helicopters) in the past 70 years in which nearly 1,000 people

have been killed, have been classified as CFIT. Most have occurred in the monsoon, or in seasons when mountains en route or on approach are covered by clouds.

The deadliest helicopter crash in Nepal was also a CFIT. Twenty-four passengers, including renowned conservationists were killed in 2006 when a MI17 flew into a mountain above Ghunsa in the monsoon. Nepal Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari and aviation entrepreneur Ang Tshiring Sherpa were among six killed in Taplejung in 2019 when their helicopter flew into a mountainside in a blizzard.

In the past 8 years alone, there have been seven chopper crashes, including three non-fatal ones on hospital helipads in Kathmandu.

Crashes like the one this week where foreigners are involved garner international headlines. It further damages Nepal's reputation and impacts on tourism, and therefore the economy.

Nepal is already on the European Union's safety list because of repeated crashes in the past in which tourists have been killed. The EU has insisted that the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) be unbundled with separate entities for regulatory and operational functions.

However, we are not sure that will necessarily make flying safer since the causes have more to do with lackadaisical mindsets and a fatalistic culture. Not much will change if the bureaucrats are the same.

VFR protocols by air traffic control and airlines should be enforced. Weather webcams must be installed along dangerous sections like Lamjura and the Kali Gandaki Valley near Jomsom. Pilots should ignore company or passenger pressure to fly in bad weather.

Cockpit hierarchy and complacency on the part of experienced pilots flying frequented routes are also factors. There is a tendency to underestimate enroute weather conditions, and over-reliance on terrain visualisation maps in aircraft with glass cockpits.

Given that we know why most crashes happen in Nepal, they should not happen. The important rule for pilots in Nepal must be: do not fly into clouds, they have rocks in them.

The rule for pilots in Nepal must be: do not fly into clouds, they have rocks in them.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Karnali Plight

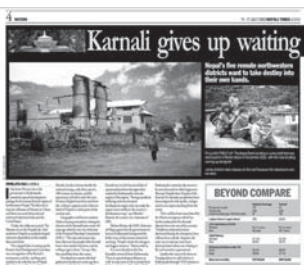
Karnali is a victim of historical neglect of the far west, more so than the remoteness and ruggedness of the region. Even today, 40% of the people here are undernourished, far behind the rest of the country.

Nothing has changed in 20 years. Nepali Times carried a feature story in July 2003 about how Karnali had stopped waiting for faraway and uncaring Kathmandu.

Excerpts from the report published on issue #153 11-17 July 2003:

The infant mortality rate in Mugu, Humla, Jumla is almost double the national average, only three out of a 100 women are literate, and life expectancy at birth is only 40 years. Poverty is higher here than anywhere else, with per capita income only two-third of other parts of the country earn.

Geographer and former minister Harka Gurung remembers visiting the districts of the Karnali basin nearly 40 years ago when he was vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission (NPC). "The only achievement has been that now the people of the Karnali know what needs to



be done, and are willing to get it done," he says. But they need help from the centre.

It is not only physically that Karnali is removed from Kathmandu. There is a psychological distance as well. It costs more to fly to Jumla from Kathmandu than to fly to New Delhi. Kathmandu's

attention also seems to be more focused on what happens to Bhutani Nepalis than Nepalis of the Karnali. For decades, people here have been resigned to this apathy, and got used to not expecting anything from the centre.

This void has been exacerbated by the Maoist insurgency which has further isolated the five Karnali districts from the rest of the country. Telephone and postal services destroyed during the insurgency have still not been rebuilt. Airports, the only way in and out, have been destroyed and airlines are refusing to fly until security is guaranteed.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



Watch Nepali Times Studio with Sagar Rana, the great grandson of Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher as he talks about the mark his family left on Nepal's history and politics. His new book Kingdom Lost: Nepal's Tryst with Democracy 1951-2006 is the sequel to 2017's Singha Durbar: Rise and Fall of the Rana Regime of Nepal. Watch the interview on our YouTube channel and read the review on page 4-5.



The average lifespan of a Nepali used to be 40-45. Child mortality rate was high. Which meant that living long was a cause for celebration in the family, clan and community. People in Kathmandu Valley's Newa community celebrate 'Janko' or 'Buda Pashni' at milestones of 77, 82, 88, 99 and 105 years. Watch this video and subscribe to the Nepali Times YouTube channel for more multimedia content.

CORRUPTION

If you are rich and/or belong to the right caste or syndicate in Nepal - you are above the reach of the 'law' ('Crime and/or punishment in Nepal', Sonia Awale, #1169). Democracy here is a shallow theatrical farce to facilitate FDI and INGO money laundering.

Aleksandr Verkovsyn

■ The situation described in Nepal, with a government crackdown on corruption accompanied by concerns of political vendetta and selective targeting, highlights the complex and challenging nature of addressing corruption. It is crucial to ensure independent investigations and avoid political interference to maintain credibility and accountability. Transparency and comprehensive reforms are necessary to restore trust and rebuild Nepal's international reputation.

Rak Hee

■ We have an informed police but there has been no action. The media is our last hope.

Truth and Reality

■ Prachanda is trying to close the chapters for his allies and himself during this tenure.

Yugeen

DHADING JOURNAL

I was always impressed by how far those kids in remote Nepal would have to walk/run to get to school and back home again ('Dhading journal 1966', Daniel W Edwards, #1169).

Sigmund Stengel

NEPALI TEA

Nepali tea is one of the best in the world but unfortunately we can't add value to it and export it (चिया खानु भो? , Sherali Uprety, #1168). We haven't marketed it properly. We are compelled to sell raw material to India and other countries where it is sold as finished processed goods at higher cost. Nepali farmers aren't getting much from it.

Art DS

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

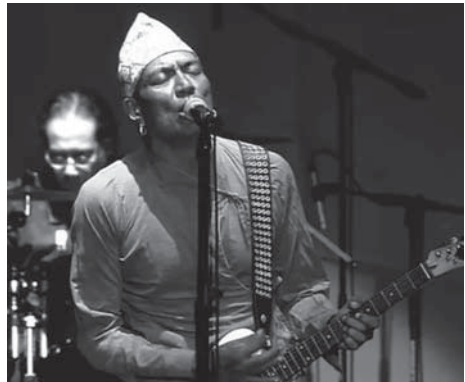
Dhading Journal 1966

by Daniel W Edwards

Former US Peace Corps volunteer Daniel W Edwards flew into Kathmandu in October 1966 and walked to Dhading district where he taught at a village school for one and a half years. Read excerpts of his diary entries at nepalitimes.com



Most reached and shared on Facebook



Robin Tamang 1963-2023

by Kashish Das Shrestha

Robin Tamang landed in the Nepali music scene in the late 1990s, and spent the next two decades leading and nurturing the rock music scene in Nepal. His sudden death on 4 July came as a shock to many fans. Read this tribute by Kashish Das Shrestha online.



Most popular on Twitter

Crime and/or Punishment in Nepal

by Sonia Awale

The fake Bhutan refugee scandal and the organised crime behind the Lalita Niwas real estate scam have shown that Nepal's media, investigation agencies, law enforcement and court system are all playing their check and balance roles. But are bigger heads being deliberately spared? Join the discussion online.



Most commented

China opens Kailas-Mansarovar pilgrimage

by Shirjon Pandey

It has been three years since Hindus have been unable to make a pilgrimage to Mt Kailas and Lake Mansarovar due to the pandemic. But China is gradually re-opening and has indicated that pilgrims will be allowed to visit Kailas-Mansarovar again — at the moment only for Nepalis. Follow us for updates.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Chopper Hits Mountain Near Everest. Helicopter crash kills 6, highlights dangers of monsoon flights in Nepal.



Tteacher @TaraTeacher1

More deaths. More loss. When will we learn? Regulations and stricter rules regarding flying during monsoon are urgently needed. #nepal



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Nepal loses a true music icon and a towering figure who nurtured the rock scene in the country.



Inge B. @Duckesse

A very moving obituary. Thank you. There's a big Robin shaped hole left in the world.



Sanjaya Lanky @Lankysanjaya

You shaped a music genre, grew up with your songs, and Nepali rock music will forever be indebted with your contribution.

1,000 WORDS



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA / RSS

THE TRINITY: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal with Sher Bahadur Deuba of the NC and K P Oli of the opposition UML at Baluwatar on Sunday to discuss lifting the UML's obstruction of Parliament over Dahal's controversial remarks about India.



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Editor Online: Sahina Shrestha Executive Editor: Sonia Awale Layout: Kiran Maharjan
Publisher: Kunda Dixit, Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
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Kingdom lost,



1951

The Rana regime ends. The Ranas and NC form a shaky coalition with Mohan Shumsher as Prime Minister and BP Koirala as Home Minister. Also pictured is King Tribhuvan.



1959

First democratic elections are held. BP is elected Prime Minister, and is sworn in by King Mahendra.



1960

18 months later, King Mahendra stages a coup, marking the beginning of 30 years of partyless Panchayat system.



1960-68, 1977

BP is jailed twice for a total of 9 years at Sundarijal which is now BP Museum, with the bed that he died on in 1982 in his former jail cell.

■ Sonia Awale

Much like in his previous book *Singha Durbar*, Sagar SJB Rana relives the political and physical landmarks along Nepal's tumultuous road to democracy spanning 70 years in his sequel, *Kingdom Lost*.

Chandra Shumsher Rana's former palace at Singha Darbar was a symbol of the feudocracy of Nepal's ruling clan into which Sagar Rana was born. Even after 1951, *Singha Darbar* continued to be the epicenter of power: from the brief experiment with democracy in 1959, three decades of Panchayat, the Maoist conflict, the federal republic right to the present.

In *Kingdom Lost: Nepal's Tryst with Democracy 1951-2008*, Rana chronicles the second act after his clan left the stage. He dives right in with a description of the euphoria as Nepalis tasted freedom for the very first time in February 1951.

But a Rana-NC Cabinet with

ailing Mohan Shumsher as Prime Minister and BP Koirala as Home Minister was a fraught coalition. King Tribhuvan and Crown Prince Mahendra across town at Narayanhi Palace were impatient.

Kingdom Lost is set in other historical landmarks that we pass every day in Kathmandu. Baber Mahal, the art and craft hub which was once the home of Bharat Shumsher (Sagar's brother) who led the Gorkha Dal before its merger with the Nepali Congress (NC). Or Lalita Niwas, today synonymous with corruption in high places, which was nationalised by King Mahendra after 1960 because it belonged to another liberal Rana, Subarna Shumsher.

Sundarijal Jail where BP spent nearly a decade in his two-room lock-up is another landmark. Within tall walls topped with an electrified fence, BP wrote 11 of his 12 books, as well as a diary in English when he returned to Nepal from exile in 1977, which this paper serialised from 2001-2003.

Today, just as Naryanhiti is a museum to the Shahs, Sundarijal is the BP Museum. The rooms are as they were with the bed in which he died in Chabahil in 1982, and low wicker chairs from his time in exile in Banaras. This detention centre for political prisoners after 1960 was once surrounded by forest and farms, but today is over-run by an expanding metropolis.

The museum also houses the Royal Nepal Airlines DHC-6 Twin Otter 9N-ABB which was hijacked on a flight from Biratnagar to Kathmandu in 1973 by NC cadre to loot INR30 million for the anti-Panchayat struggle. The plane carried passengers for another 41 years till it was damaged in a crash in 2014, after which it was patched up and turned into a dusty memorial to the heist.

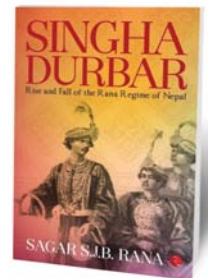
The BP Museum, Lalita Niwas, Baber Mahal, *Singha Darbar* all come alive while reading *Kingdom Lost*. They are like historical milestones in Sagar Rana's chapters: BP's brief 18 month stint as Prime

Minister, Mahendra's coup, the Panchayat years, constitutional monarchy after 1990, the conflict, the royal massacre of 2001, and the first Constituent Assembly.

Two players stand out: BP Koirala and King Mahendra. The latter has been vilified for the coup and the Panchayat autocracy. But Mahendra also steered Nepal in a risky geopolitical tightrope between two giant neighbours not friendly to each other, and the Cold War.

Mahendra deposed BP, saying "Nepal is not big enough for the two of us." But the King and prime minister were not unlike each other in terms of nationalism and statesmanship. While turning the pages of the first half of *Kingdom Lost*, the reader is forced to ponder: How would Nepal have fared if the two were on the same side?

Sagar Rana's book is replete with examples of how little Nepal has changed in the last 70 years. It has revolved around a few men: the Ranas, the Shahs, the Koiralas, the alpha males of the three main



Singha Durbar: Rise and Fall of the Rana Regime of Nepal
Sagar SJB Rana
Rupa Publications, 2017
458 pages
Rs792

parties, the Army, the Maoists.

And off stage, there was always India. As early as 1951, BP described India's first ambassador CPN Singh as believing that he was "greater than the King", and when Jawaharlal Nehru in 1960 quizzed BP about why Nepal was establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, he replied "we are a sovereign nation, we can be friends



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Remittance up

Nepalis abroad transferred Rs12.52 billion through official channels in the last 10 months, an increase of 22.7% compared to the same period last year. The actual amount through informal channels is expected to be as much. The number of Nepalis taking labour permits has also increased by 46.6%



to 459,415 in the same time. Remittances and a cap on imports has also raised Nepal's forex reserves. The Current Macroeconomic and Financial Situation of Nepal report shows that gross foreign exchange reserves increased by 18.5% to \$11.30 billion in mid-June, up from \$9.54 billion in the same period last year. Imports were down to Rs1480.98 billion, a decline of 16% against an increase of 27.5% a year ago.

New UN heads

Alice Akunga is the new UNICEF Representative to Nepal. The Kenyan national has been an advocate for the children's rights in Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Eswatini, Maldives and Afghanistan. UN Women which works in gender rights has also got a new Country Representative for Nepal, Patricia Fernandez-Pacheco.



Paddy down

A deficient monsoon has meant only 26.71% of paddy fields have been planted so far this year, against 40% last year. The monsoon has been late in Madhes, Gandaki and Lumbini provinces. Paddy is cultivated in 1,357,816 hectares and planting is expected to be complete by the next two weeks. The Madhes is the worst hit with only 9.5% of farms planted with rice.

Hetauda-Bharatpur



The Hetauda-Bharatpur 220 kV transmission line has started operation. According to Nepal Electricity Authority, a 73-km double circuit power line was charged at 132kv capacity. With this, 170MW of electricity can be transmitted from Hetauda to Bharatpur and Bharatpur to Hetauda, up from 90MW through the existing 132kv line. The project started in 2008 but was delayed by local opposition.



Tiago 500,000

Tiago by Tata Motors, has sold the first 500,000 units in India in the last 15 months. The car comes in petrol, CNG and electric variants and has a high rating of 51 in the net promoter score and 4-star safety rating from Global New Car Assessment Programme (GNCAP).



Everest aid

Everest Bank has offered financial assistance of Rs200,000 to Samata School which provides education to children of women prisoners serving their term in Birgunj jail.

Loan for migrants

Global IME Bank has launched global foreign employment support loans for Nepali migrant workers. Workers can now receive loans from Rs50,000 to Rs150,000 at 12.8% interest.

JICA scholarship

JICA has announced 'Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship' worth 424,000,000 Yen. The Japanese aid agency



will be providing scholarships to 22 Nepali civil servants to pursue graduate studies in judicial, economic policy etc in Japanese universities. Japan has been providing the scholarship since 2016 and 105 civil servants have since graduated.

Nabil branch

Nabil Bank opened its 256th branch at Putali Sadak which will deal primarily with education loans, registration fee payments



for IELTS/TOEFL/GRE/SAT exams, remit and visa processing fees, tuition fees to colleges and living expenses, foreign currency exchange against passport facility, and payment of overseas student health insurance.

republic gained

Sagar SJB Rana's sequel to Singha Durbar is an insider look at post Rana-era Nepal



1973

The NC hijacks a Royal Nepal Airlines flight to loot INR30 million. The Twin Otter is now on display at the BP Museum.

1980
After street protests, King Birendra agrees to hold a referendum on reforming the monarchy.



1990
People's Movement I leads to the end of the Panchayat system.



1991
Parties are unbanned and Nepal becomes a constitutional monarchy.



1996-2006 Maoist conflict

2001
Crown Prince Dipendra kills 10 family members, including King Birendra. Gyanendra is crowned.



2005
King Gyanendra stages a coup and censors media.



2006
The Comprehensive Peace Accord is signed. The Maoists are included in an interim government.



2008
The Maoists win Constituent Assembly elections and the monarchy is abolished.

with anyone we want". No wonder New Delhi did not mind when Mahendra staged the 1960 coup. The NC also launched a three-year armed struggle against the Panchayat in the early 1960s from India, and it nearly compromised Mahendra's position before the Sino-Indian War. India pressured Subarna Shumsher to discontinue border raids and Mahendra was able to regain control of the situation. India's role in the ultimate downfall of monarchy in 2008 and mainstreaming of the Maoists in 2006 bear all the hallmarks of the modus operandi in 1951. If Gyanendra had played his cards right to reassure Delhi, he may not have been ousted. Sagar Rana also gives us a blow-by-blow account of the triangular tension between the political parties, the Palace and the Army in the 1990s. Even within the Palace there was liberal King Birendra who had to stave off hardliners. The account of the massacre of royals on 1 June 2001 rightly concludes that Crown Prince Dipendra originally intended to only kill his father so he could become King himself, marry whom he wanted, and set the country right. The Maoist conflict also brought out the dual role India played in allowing sanctuary to leaders, including Nepal's current Prime Minister. There was a constant tug-o-war between Delhi Darbar and

Narayanhi Darbar for influence over the Maoist leadership. The underlying message in Kingdom Lost is that puppeteers were in control, and ultimately the Nepali people paid the price. The dislike by the Nehru-Gandhi family of Nepal's royals stemmed from Sonia Gandhi being refused entry into Pashupati in 1984 for not being a Hindu. Later, the Congress-Left government in Delhi engineered the secular republic, despite its earlier 'twin pillar' policy. But since 2014, the Hindu-right BJP is turning the clock back to restore the Hindu state, although maybe not the monarchy. It seems as if every time there is a change of government in India, we in Nepal also have to change our system. But the People's Movement of 2006 also showed that things do not always go as planned for India. On the morning of 21 April 2006, King Gyanendra under pressure from India agreed to hand over executive powers to a PM recommended by the agitating parties. But by then the street demonstrations in Kathmandu had overtaken India's roadmap, forcing Gyanendra to give in. In the last segments of Kingdom Lost, the reader is swept by feelings of déjà vu. Everything that is happening today in Nepali politics seems to have all happened before. The powerful but now defunct Nepal Communist Party post-2018 fell victim to the power struggle

Kingdom Lost: Nepal's Tryst with Democracy 1951-2008
Sagar SJB Rana
Rupa Publications, 2023
326 pages
Rs952

between K P Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal when Oli refused to keep his end of the bargain to rotate the premiership. Girija Prasad Koirala and Surya Bahadur Thapa had a similar gentlemen's agreement in 1998 to take turns being PM, but Girija played foul. The late 1990s was also rife with coalitions between parties of diametrically opposing ideologies, just like the jumbo coalition we have now. One wonders what BP would have made of the NC's present alliance with the Maoists. What would have been his take on the 2015 Constitution? Despite being a staunch NC member himself, Rana leaves it to us to come to our own conclusions. Nepal's history is punctuated

by long political struggles, fleeting moments of euphoria at freedom regained, then of chances squandered by greed and ambition of those in charge. Kingdom Lost records those milestones: 1951, 1959, 1990, 2006, 2015 ... While pulling back from cliff edge in one political crisis after another, pre-existing structural problems of poverty, exclusion and inequality have not been fixed. Kingdom Lost is a stark reminder that the very politicians who once fought for democracy are undermining it today. Sagar Shumsher's two books are must-reads for younger Nepalis to better understand the context behind Nepali politics since, as Rana quotes Robert A Heinlein, 'a generation that ignores history has no past and no future'. Kingdom Lost stops in 2008, and much dirty water has flown down the Bagmati since. Sagar Rana should add a third book on Nepal's rocky transition to federalism, the stalled transitional justice mechanism, a new Constitution and the rise of alternative politicians. That would be a fine trilogy to set the record straight. School textbooks ignore Nepal's political history, do not even mention the Maoist conflict, or are filled with one-dimensional symbols of nationalism. The Ranas used to be portrayed as bad, now the Shahs are villains. It needed a member of the

Rana clan to have a dispassionate, yet staunchly democratic, take on Nepali history. Sagar Rana is the great-grandson of Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher, grandson of hardline general Baber Shumsher, son of educationist Mrigendra Shumsher and brother of Bharat Shumsher. This lineage gives the author intimate knowledge of the often behind-the-scenes struggles in the corridors of power. This book is a tribute to those who fought for freedoms that we take for granted today. The Nepal they envisioned is the one we can still be. 🇳🇵

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■ Sahina Shrestha

Growing up amidst lush paddy fields of Bara district, Babita Shrestha felt the most at home gardening with her grandfather.

Her parents worked in Hong Kong and Kathmandu, so Babita looked after her younger sister, and her life in an age before tv and cell phones revolved around friends and family.

She acted as the sous chef for her grandfather, helping him in the kitchen every day.

At the age of 12, she moved up to Kathmandu from the plains when her mother got pregnant. She took over the kitchen, making chaku bhat and a variety of soups to heal her body. What initially started as a responsibility soon grew into a life-long passion.

Her mother had grown up in Kolkata, and was an accomplished cook, blending the flavours of Nepal and India. In Kathmandu, Babita also learnt from chefs at her father's restaurant.

She absorbed all the knowledge she could get from everyone she met. "The more variety of food I ate, the more I wanted to learn how to make them and experiment with flavours," she says.



saw her love for food. She looked at all the recipe books at a local Barnes and Noble and decided that is what she was meant to do, too. But writing and publishing a book meant money and time, and with bills to pay, she shelved the idea.

After completing high school, her parents had sent Babita to Hong Kong to get away from the conflict in Nepal. She spent three years as a domestic helper, first for some relatives and then for another family.

In 2009, she traveled to the US for an undergraduate degree in Film Studies. A year into the program, she discovered maybe making movies was not for her, and she transferred to graphics design, a skill that proved valuable to publish her own cookbook.

"When I started researching who needs to be involved in producing a book, I found out that writing is only the first step," says Babita. She needed designers, photographers, food stylists, and editors, but as a graphics person, she decided to do it all herself.

She had come to Nepal after 11 years away, and after the lockdown traveled across the country, developed recipes, and took photos for the book.

"I wanted the book to be an introduction to Nepal so that people who have never visited can also know the country," Babita



But at the end of all her culinary explorations, she came back to the basic Nepali comfort food: dal bhat—simple, tasteful, nourishing, and healthy. It is her love for flavours and simplicity that Babita Shrestha brings to her new cookbook, Plant-based Himalaya: Vegan Recipes from Nepal.

The book shows that vegan food is not just about salads, or replacing dairy and meat with more expensive and exotic products. Maintaining a plant-based diet is possible with very little change to the ingredients already used in everyday Nepali food.

For example, the Gajar ko Haluwa recipe replaces ghee and milk with coconut oil and coconut milk, and the carrots and other ingredients are the same. Cauliflower curry that is already a staple in every Nepali household is already a vegan dish if ghee is not used. Babita became a vegan when she realised that milk and meat in the US were not as fresh as in Nepal and contained hormones and additives.

"In an American college, I had an unhealthy diet and was not completely happy with what I was putting in my body. So, I decided to live a vegan lifestyle as much as possible," she says.

Her plan was to move back to Nepal after graduation. But in 2015 after the earthquake, she decided to stay back before deciding what to do next.

She moved to Kentucky from Minnesota, and could not find a single restaurant that served wholesome Nepali or Indian food. Initially, she thought of opening her own restaurant, but the investment was too high. Even a food truck was too costly, so she opened a pop-up at a local night market serving momo and pakoras.

In 2017, veganism was trending and people started lining up at her counter as word of mouth brought more customers. She also ran cooking classes, all the while maintaining a full-time job.

It was her husband who planted the idea of writing a vegan cookbook when he

explains. "I wanted to share some of my favourite recipes I grew up cooking and eating."

Divided into eight sections with 38 easy to follow recipes, featuring 250 photos of food, mountains, Nepali culture, and animals, Plant-Based Himalaya reminds people the beauty of home-style Nepali food.

The book starts with an introduction to the geography and biodiversity of Nepal followed by recipes for different kinds of chiya (tea), khana (grain), dal (lentil), tarkari (curry), sag (greens), khaja (snacks), achar (pickles) and mithai (desserts).

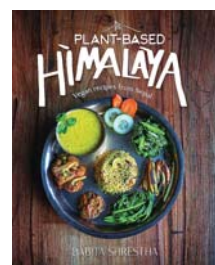
The simple, easy to follow recipes along with the photographs of ingredients and quick tips makes the book suitable for not only those interested in vegan recipes but also Nepali food culture.

The more advanced Nepali home cooks may however find that they already know many of the recipes shared in the book.

Thoughtfully designed with mouth-watering food photography, the book is a visual treat even for those who are not interested in cooking.

This book is especially helpful for foreigners looking to explore what Nepalis eat on a daily basis, and for second generation Nepalis living abroad who are looking for an introduction to the taste and culture of Nepal.

"Cooking is about loving yourself and loving those around you," says Babita. "It is a skill everyone needs to learn and pass down to generations to preserve." 🍴



Plant-based Himalaya: Vegan Recipes from Nepal
by Babita Shrestha
FinePrint Books, 2023
Rs3,500

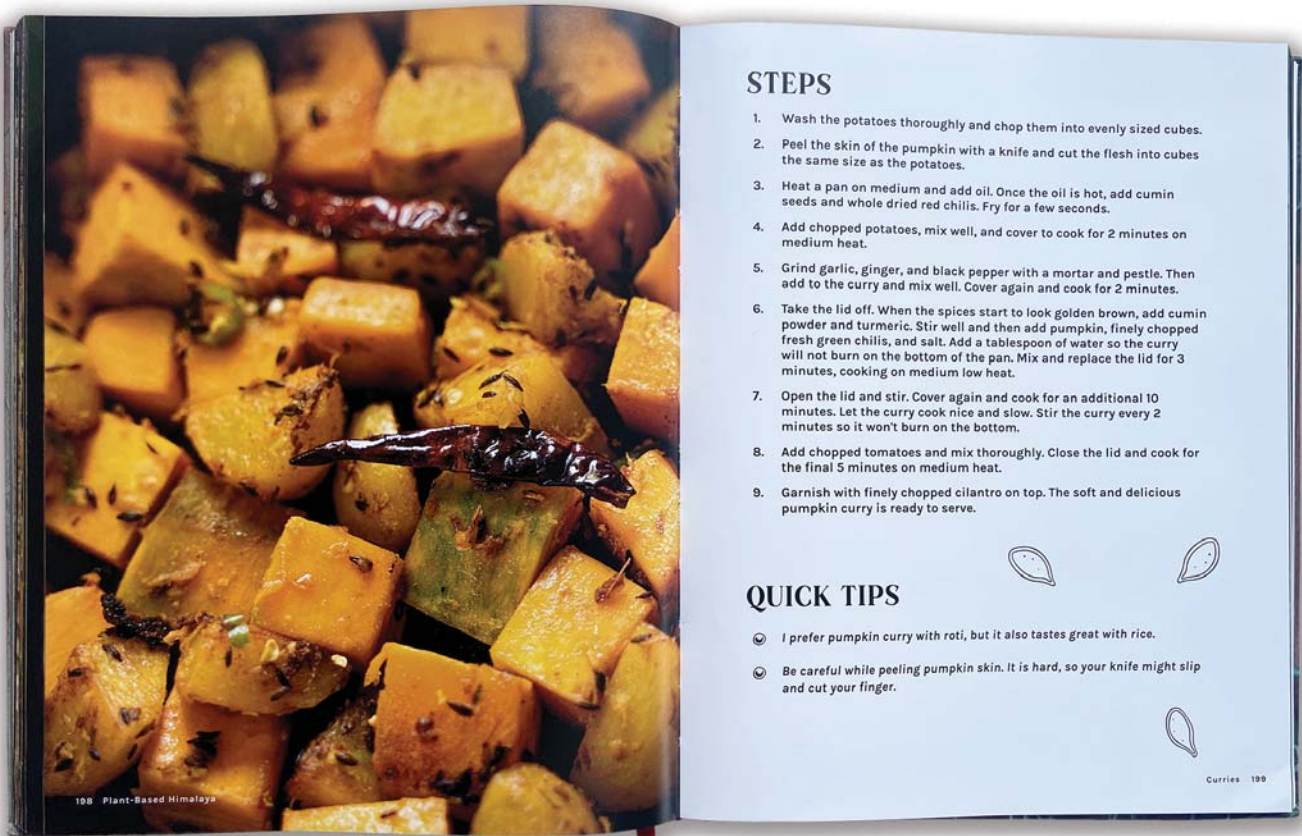
नेपाल VEGA

New book takes recipes to the
that vegan does not have to



नी AN

the world, and shows
to be boring or bland



STEPS

1. Wash the potatoes thoroughly and chop them into evenly sized cubes.
2. Peel the skin of the pumpkin with a knife and cut the flesh into cubes the same size as the potatoes.
3. Heat a pan on medium and add oil. Once the oil is hot, add cumin seeds and whole dried red chilis. Fry for a few seconds.
4. Add chopped potatoes, mix well, and cover to cook for 2 minutes on medium heat.
5. Grind garlic, ginger, and black pepper with a mortar and pestle. Then add to the curry and mix well. Cover again and cook for 2 minutes.
6. Take the lid off. When the spices start to look golden brown, add cumin powder and turmeric. Stir well and then add pumpkin, finely chopped fresh green chilis, and salt. Add a tablespoon of water so the curry will not burn on the bottom of the pan. Mix and replace the lid for 3 minutes, cooking on medium low heat.
7. Open the lid and stir. Cover again and cook for an additional 10 minutes. Let the curry cook nice and slow. Stir the curry every 2 minutes so it won't burn on the bottom.
8. Add chopped tomatoes and mix thoroughly. Close the lid and cook for the final 5 minutes on medium heat.
9. Garnish with finely chopped cilantro on top. The soft and delicious pumpkin curry is ready to serve.

QUICK TIPS

- ☞ I prefer pumpkin curry with roti, but it also tastes great with rice.
- ☞ Be careful while peeling pumpkin skin. It is hard, so your knife might slip and cut your finger.

फर्सी Pumpkin Curry

SERVES ~ 4

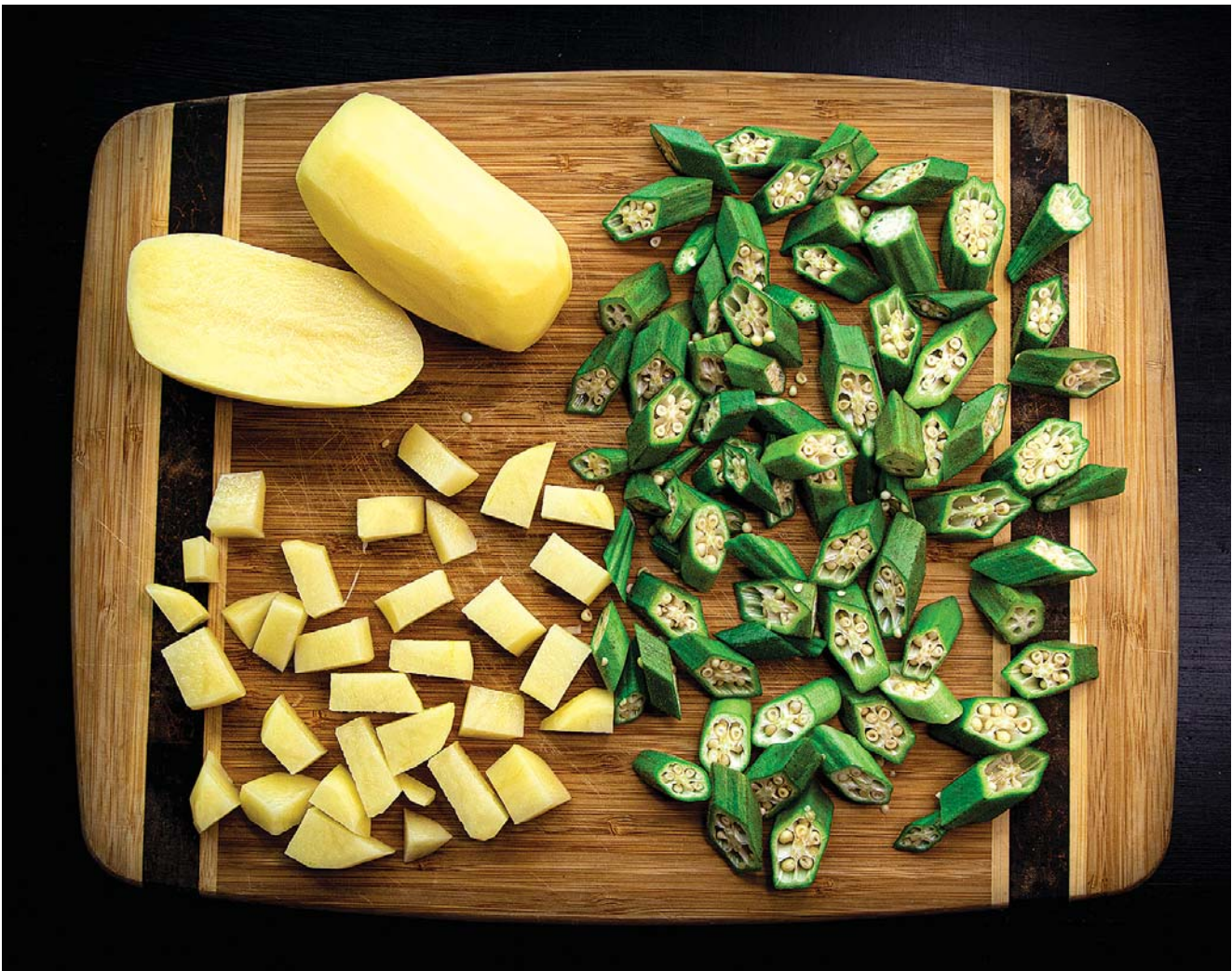
COOK TIME ~ 45 minutes

Ingredients

Pumpkin: 450g
Potato: 2 medium
Tomato: 4 small

Spices

Sunflower oil: 2 tbsp; Cumin seed: 1 tsp; Garlic: 3 cloves
Ginger: 4 slices; Turmeric: ½ tsp
Cumin powder: 1 tsp
Fresh green chili: 2 medium; Dried red chili: 2 medium
Cilantro: ½ cup
Black pepper: ⅛ tsp; Salt: 1 tsp



Vegan diet

A vegan diet is based on plants including vegetables, grains, nuts, legumes, fruits and seeds. Vegans do not eat foods that come from animals, including dairy products, honey and eggs. Many also do not consume products like wines and beers that may have been filtered using animal parts, made with animal ingredients or been tested on animals. A vegan diet may seem overly restrictive or complicated, but Nepalis looking to switch or try it may be surprised at how many local dishes are already vegan, or need only a few ingredients to be replaced. If milk and dairy products are removed from the cooking and garnishing, most Nepali dishes are already vegan to start with. Mas ko dal (black lentil) can be made vegan if the ghee is omitted. Pakora, samosa, chatpatey, pani puri snacks are also vegan. With some planning for a good balanced diet, anyone can follow a healthy vegan diet.



E-VENTS



Mipwa Lakhey Jatra
Dive deep into Newa culture at the Mipwa Lakhey festival. Take your friends and families along.
15 July, 2pm onwards, Saugal, Patan

Bajrayogini Hike
Be one with the nature, participate in this 7-hour 16km hike to Bajrayogini from Sundarijal. Call for more details.
15 July, Rs800-1800, 9851014616



Kora challenge
Join the cycling contest on the same day with five other countries in the annual Kora challenge sponsored by Turkish Airlines being held at 15 locations across Nepal. Book tickets now.
15 July, 7.30am onwards, Patan Darbar Square

Fight Club
Gear up for an adrenaline-fueled evening at the OFC fight night featuring 11 thrilling fights with three professional matchups.
15 July, 5.30pm onwards, Anmol Banquet, Sankhamul

Bird Watching
BCN Nepal is organising a bird watching in Suryabinayak forest in Bhaktapur this weekend. Don't forget to pack an umbrella, binoculars and bird book.
15 July, 6:30 am, Suryabinayak, 9851127249



Stand-up comedy
An evening of fun and laughter with stand-up comedians Gaurab Paudyal, Sahil, Pratik Adhikari, Karkiji and Min.
14 July, 6.30pm onwards, Rs199, Happy Club, Sinamangal, 9814200600

DINING



Mango Mania
Visit RE:FUEL and treat one's taste buds to delightful mango creations. Indulge in seasonal desserts, which include Non-Baked Cheese Cake, Mango Eclairs, Mango Choux, Mango Entrapment, and Mango Sphere.
14-31 July, Aloft Kathmandu, Thamel, 9801976054

MUSIC

Abhaya Subba
The premier of Abhaya Subba's Baasko Ghari with live act from Aawartan and a special guest Legend Dip Shrestha.
14 July, 6pm onwards, Club Farenheit, Thamel



Afro Electro Night
Dance the night away to the beats of Afro electro and analogic music by DJ Maini and Ratna.
July 14, 7pm onwards, Pauline's Rooftop, Lazimpat



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



Music Camp
Join a 4-day pop/rock summer camp. Vocalist, guitarist, bassist, drummer or pianist – all are welcome. Book spots now.
25-28 July, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, 9831556945

Monsoon Session
Nischal Gurung from Over & Out, Pariwartan and Space will be playing at Beers N' Cheers next week. Don't miss the show.
15 July, 6pm onwards, Rs500-1000, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel

Bawarchi
Try the mouth-watering Kolkata Katti Rolls and other fusion Indian dishes at Bawarchi.
Jawalakhel (01) 5526244



Spanish Suisine
Experience the essence of Spanish cuisine with the exquisite Tapas Menu at Terrace Garden. Call for more details.
Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, Lazimpat (01) 4511818

About Town

GETAWAY



Dahlia Hotel
A scenic haven just beyond Phewa Lake, Dahlia Hotel offers a space for rejuvenation and relaxation. The hotel combines traditional Malla architecture with modern designs and includes a pool with numerous restaurants to choose from. Special discounts are available for Nepali nationals throughout August to make their 4th anniversary.
Pokhara, (61)466505

Hotel Baha
This traditionally built hotel is located in the heart of Bhaktapur and is surrounded by temples. Explore the cultural heritage of Bhaktapur while enjoying the peaceful ambience of the hotel.
Bhaktapur, (01)6616810



Kasara Resort
Immerse oneself into the lush greenery in the heart of Chitwan's National Park. With activities for everyone, from cycling to wildlife viewing, Kasara Resort is a fantastic getaway for families.
Patihani, Chitwan National Park, Chitwan, (01)4437571

Dom Himalaya
Dom Himalaya offers a space for visitors to indulge in traditional Nepali cuisine, relax with Tibetan singing bowls and bask in the vibrant chaos of Thamel.
Thamel (01)4263554



Namo Buddha Resort
Constructed in traditional Newa style and surrounded by lush greenery, the resort is an oasis of peace and tranquility, offering spectacular views of the Himalaya on clear days.
Namo Buddha, Phulbari, 9851106802



Taza
The restaurant brings a bit of Middle-Eastern flare to Kathmandu with its all Syrian items. Shawarma, falafel, hummus, kebab—everything is fresh and finger lickingly delicious.
Jhamsikhel, 9860960177

Bricks Café
A multi cuisine restaurant in the heart of Kathmandu offering flavourful dishes in a pleasant ambience. Their lasagna is a must-try.
Kupondole, (01) 5521756

WEEKEND WEATHER

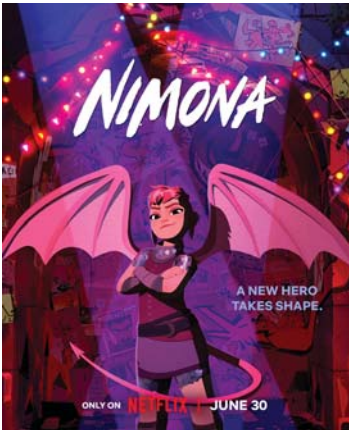


FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
 25° 21°	 26° 20°	 27° 20°	 27° 21°	 27° 20°

Extreme weather
We are seeing more and more instances of extreme weather in the Himalaya, and one of the factors is a warmer atmosphere due to manmade climate change. This means heavy downpours or deficient rainfall during the monsoon, with the impact magnified by poor planning of settlements and infrastructure as seen this week in north India. After a relatively dry spell, Kathmandu will resume getting showers, sometimes heavy, and mostly at night over the weekend and into next week. Sunny spells in between squalls will be hot and humid.

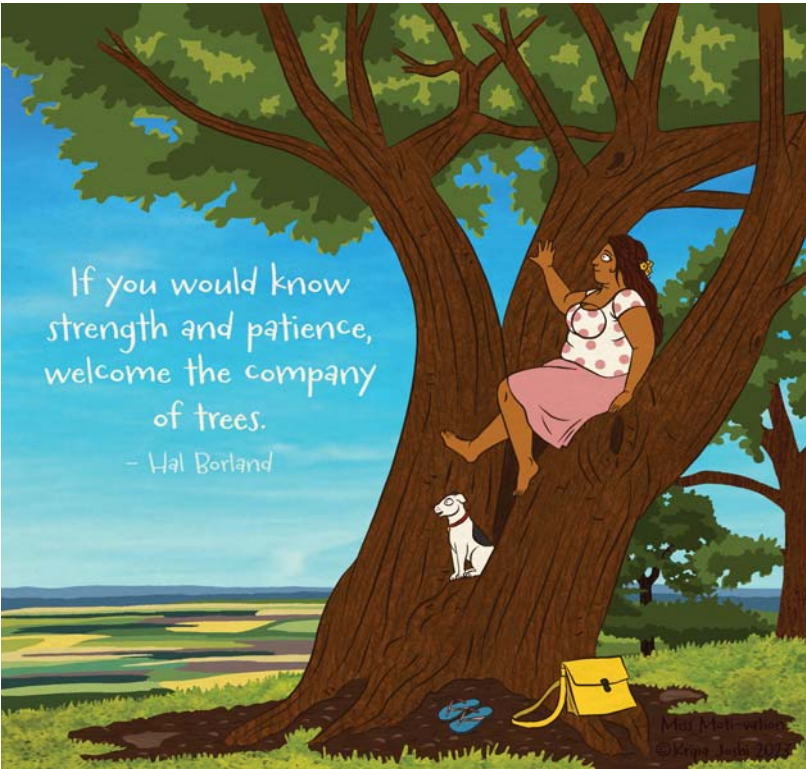
OUR PICK

In Nimona, a medieval-futuristic kingdom's citizens are protected by the Institute for Elite Knights, established by the legendary heroine Gloreth, who, a thousand years ago, vanquished a "Great Black Monster" and enclosed the kingdom with a high wall for its protection. Now, when a knight is framed for a crime he didn't commit, the only one who can help him prove his innocence is the mischievous teen who happens to be a shapeshifting creature he has sworn to destroy. Tapping a rich emotional vein with its dazzling animation and thoughtful allegory, Nimona is hip, out-of-the-box and riotously fun. Featuring Chloë Grace Moretz, Riz Ahmed, Eugene Lee Yang, Frances Conroy and RuPaul Charles.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



सर्पदंश (सर्पको टोकाइ) बाट बच्न...

- घर वरिपरि सर्प लुक्न सक्ने सम्भावित स्थानको खोजी गरी त्यस्ता ठाउँहरूको व्यवस्थापन गरौं ।
- घर वरिपरि सफा राखौं, प्वालहरू टालौं ।
- खुला स्थानमा शौच नगरौं ।
- खाली खुट्टा नहिँडौं, जुत्ता वा गम्बुट लगाऔं, लट्टी लिएर हिँडौं ।
- सम्भव भएसम्म खाटमा सुतौं ।
- सुत्दा झुलको अनिवार्य प्रयोग गरौं ।
- सुत्ने वेलामा ओछ्यान राम्ररी हेरौं ।
- राती हिँड्दा टर्चको प्रयोग गरौं ।
- पराल, दाउरा आदि निकाल्दा होशियारी अपनाऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Nepal census undercounted 800k

The country's population is on the move, and the 2021 census missed out on a whole lot of them

■ Shristi Karki

Nepal's National Statistics Office (NSO) on Wednesday admitted that the census conducted two years ago missed 771,998 people, but demographers say the error could be much higher because it did not include all students, workers and those in the diaspora.

The NSO's Post Enumeration Survey reported that 2.58% of the population was omitted during the census due to errors in data collection. The survey estimated that 2.95% of the urban population was not counted, with the omission rate in Kathmandu Valley even higher at 4.42%. More than 4% of the above 80 age group were also left out.

The survey results were released even as experts expressed concerns over data discrepancy, despite the 2021 national headcount being touted as the most accurate by the NSO itself.

The inaccuracy appears to be mainly due to Nepal's highly mobile population and migration. The census put the country's absentee population at 2.1 million, but this is a gross underestimate as it excluded most Nepali students and workers in India, Australia, Japan or Canada. On the other hand, the study showed that 0.15% of the population was double counted.

The NSO's Deputy Director General Hemraj Regmi explained that the 2.58% error rate had actually decreased since the 2011 census and was at par with international standards that accept a margin of error of up to 5%.

The 2021 census report published in March put Nepal's population at 29,164,578, with an annual growth rate of 0.92%. But adding the missing head count would bring the total population to 29,936,576.

The Post Enumeration Survey of the National Population and Household Census 2021 was carried out last year by the Labour Studies Programme at Tribhuvan University to double check the tally.

Even without the discrepancy, the 2021 census results showed a slowdown in the annual population growth rate and total fertility rate. Nepal's population pyramid now shows fewer children, a wider youth bulge, and greater numbers of elderly. The new data increases the total number of ethnic communities to 142, the total mother tongues spoken to 124, and major religions constant at 10.

Regmi told Nepali Times his



SONIA AWALE

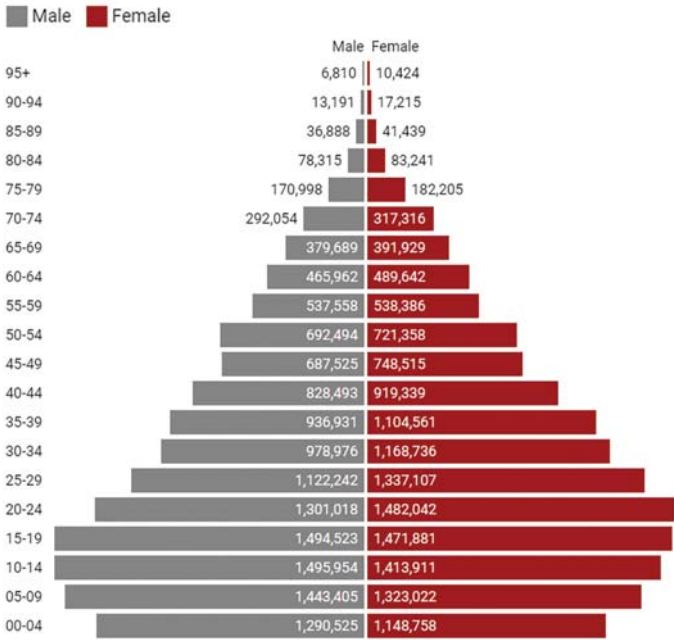
office will continue to use data from the officially published census report, explaining: "There are no systems in place and no practice of adjusting population to show an increase or decrease in census data. However, the missing population will be considered and encompassed into all future national planning projects."

Prior to releasing the detailed report on ethnicities, languages, and religions, the National Statistics Office admitted it had difficulty in classifying caste, religion and language accurately because many respondents claimed to belong to a previously unknown caste and religion.

Since the release of Nepal's 2021 census data on ethnicities, languages, and religions, Hindu nationalists, royalists and anti-secularists have been raising a fuss because the number of people who say Nepali is their mother tongue and that they are Hindus has marginally declined from past censuses.

It is clear from the census data that Nepal's social demographic data reflects its diversity, but not its socio-political makeup. 🇳🇵

Nepal population by age group, 2021



SOURCE: NATIONAL POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS 2021



VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

WWF Nepal, the global conservation organization leading international efforts *for a living planet*, seeks applications from qualified Nepali candidates for the following full-time position. If you think you are an achiever and willing to work within a diverse team in a multicultural environment with commitment and passion for what you believe in, you are highly encouraged to apply.

REGIONAL COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

Major Responsibilities: Under the supervision of the Chief of Party, the Regional Communications Specialist develops and executes strategies that support the project in Nepal, India, and Mongolia. S/he serves as the primary liaison between project teams and all project stakeholders in Nepal regarding project communications. The work of this position drives the overall success of the project's communications regarding the programmatic work.

Qualifications: A Bachelor's or Master's degree in Mass Communications, Development Communications, or a related field with at least five years of work experience in conceptualizing, developing, implementing, and managing communications strategies is required. The Regional Communications Specialist must have strong IT skills including Microsoft Office programs and design software such as Photoshop. The ideal candidate for this position should have a keen eye for detail and should possess ability to work in a team. Strong interpersonal skills and the ability to work in a team are essential. Should be able to work under pressure and meet the deadlines across different time zones. Good facilitation and coaching skills are an advantage. Must be able to travel frequently to the field, including difficult terrain.

Interested applicants are requested to download the **application form** from the website and submit it with an application letter to the **email address** listed below by **17:00 hours on 18th July 2023**. Please mention the position you are applying for as the subject. Emails without an application letter and completed application form will not be entertained. Only shortlisted candidates will be informed. Detailed TOR for the above-mentioned position can be downloaded from our website.

Website: https://www.wwfnepal.org/get_involved/careers/

Email: hr@wwfnepal.org

WWF is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Please join us in our mission to save life on Earth.

Amit and Tilak

Two Nepali former employees of McDonald's in Saudi Arabia speak about starting their own burger chain in Nepal

■ **Tilak Bahadur Tamang and Amit Singh Lama**

*This 36th instalment of **Diaspora Diaries**, a regular series in **Nepali Times** with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.*

Tilak: I always valued education despite my humble beginnings in Ramechhap. In Grade 3, my English teacher used to say he had a Bachelor's. It felt like a lot of years of education to get that degree, but as an impressionable kid who ranked first in class, I resolved to follow his footsteps.

And I did. I completed my Bachelor's degree although the journey was full of challenges. Going from my village school to Dolakha after Grade 8, and on to Kathmandu after my SLC was especially difficult. I took up Intermediate of Arts in English, but was not able to grasp anything, no matter how hard I tried.

I had to rely on an English dictionary for every other word and simply could not keep up. I switched to Nepali instead, but also took private English classes to catch up and completed a second IA in English. The same institute would also later hire me as an English language instructor.



**DIASPORA
DIARIES 36-37**

■ **Lek Yonzon Tamang**

*This is the 37th instalment of **Diaspora Diaries**.*

When I first went to the UAE in 1992, it was for two years. I ended up staying away for over three decades working for the Dubai Port Authority (DPA).

After crossing 55, the retirement age for foreigners, I left in 2022. By then, I had spent more time in the UAE than in Nepal. Somewhere along the way, Dubai started feeling more like home.

I used to be sad leaving Nepal after a vacation, but later started feeling like I was returning home when I boarded a Dubai-bound flight. I cannot exactly pinpoint when that switch happened.

I suppose whether in Nepal or the UAE, I had to work and earn, and job prospects were better there. Vast improvements in mobile connectivity during the past three decades also helped to ease the burden of being away.

As my salary increased and I gained more responsibilities in my job, my aspirations also rose. When you start earning, even the nature of your dreams evolve. Whether they come true or not is a different matter, but even to dare to dream, you need to have something in your pocket.

I applied to go overseas in 1992 knowing nothing about Dubai. My attempt to find a book on Dubai in Asan failed. I had heard about "Arab", not Dubai.

Influenced by neighbours in Patan, I got a job as a stone sculptor. I learnt to transform stones that cost less than Rs500 to artefacts that would sell for 100 times more.

My first assignments were to just wipe stones, but slowly I started getting orders to carve idols of gods and goddesses. I did not understand the theory behind sculpting, but I was quick with my hands as I carefully carved details on stone. Even now, some of my sculptures are on display in the shop where I worked.

Between teaching English classes and carving stones, I was earning around Rs15,000 a month, which at that time was remarkable.

One day in 2001, I received an email from my acquaintance in Saudi Arabia about a potential job at McDonald's. I had never heard of the restaurant chain, and was unsure about life in Saudi Arabia, or the kind of work I would be doing. But I was excited to see the world so I took up the offer even though the salary was just about what I was earning in Nepal.

When the plane took off from Kathmandu, it suddenly hit me that I was leaving behind my home and family, and I felt a chill run through my body. I traveled via Pakistan to Riyadh and Jeddah. The number of South Asians on the plane decreased after each flight, until the final domestic flight had only Saudis in their white robes.

The heat on the tarmac in

Riyadh was overpowering, unlike anything I had experienced before. I am not sure why, but I still vividly remember feeling very low and lost walking away from that plane. I was already unsure about completing my 2-year contract. I ended up spending the next seven years there.

At our dorm we were welcomed by colleagues including Nepalis. They brought us food, McDonald's burgers and fries, which smelled nice. I recognised the golden arches on my burger box which I had seen on my contract document.

I had never seen or tasted a burger before. Little did I know that my first burger would determine the course of the rest of my life.

Amik: I was part of the first cohort of Nepalis hired by McDonald's in Saudi Arabia in 1999. I come from a farming family in Kavre, and have been living in Kathmandu since Grade 7. I was working at a hotel in Thamel and was a second-year Bachelor's student when I had the possibility of working at McDonald's in Saudi Arabia. I thought McDonald's was a five-star hotel.

I remember getting off the plane in Qatar en route to Saudi Arabia. Just a couple of minutes in the heat, and I was completely drenched in sweat. I was nervous about surviving in such conditions. But if others could, why not me?

Two years before Tilak came to Saudi Arabia, I too was welcomed at my accommodation in Jeddah with



McDonald's burgers and fries. Even though I had worked in hotels in Thamel after completing my SLC, this sandwich was unfamiliar to me. I liked the taste, but it was not as filling as dal bhat.

We were allowed to buy 15 riyals equivalent to food and drinks at work, so my diet was mostly burgers in the beginning. But soon the taste got monotonous, and I started using the allowance on coffee while spending out-of-pocket for kabsa meals from outside.

During my initial years there, my Nepali friends and I used to sit closely to people speaking Nepali and eavesdrop. At that time, there were few Nepalis and everyone

from Nepal felt like family. There was an instant bond and a desire to build lasting friendships. All that changed, and within a few years every other person we met in Saudi Arabia would be Nepali.

Within a month on the job, I had already got the Employee of the Month award. I realised that hard work was recognised and rewarded here. They used to organise competitions among McDonald's staff from all outlets in the kingdom in which we were tested for our compliance with the company's standards, among others, by evaluators who observed our work and asked us questions.

I stood first among all Saudi-

Return of the native

For a Nepali, Dubai started feeling like home after 30 years



problem as there were no money exchanges. Sometimes I sneaked some cash inside my letters, or relied on fellow Nepalis who were going home.

Once, I saw a Nepali man wearing a dhaka topi on the street, and asked him to take some money to my family when he told me he was headed home.

He did, although now in retrospect, I cannot believe that I was so trusting. There were so few Nepalis in the UAE in those days that any Nepali you met instantly became family.

When we heard that new Nepali workers had arrived, we even reserved a car to go see them. We wondered if they were from our



based employees and a Filipino, who stood second, and I was selected to travel to Thailand for a week to participate in a wider competition. As luck would have it, only the Filipino went, as Nepalis were not eligible for visas on arrival at Bangkok.

A few years later and after some promotions, I was able to travel to Egypt where I got a Manager of the Year award and also felt a sense of redemption. In 2008, I became sick. The doctors could not figure out what was wrong with me, but I knew something was not right. Falling ill in a foreign country is perhaps the most isolating experience, and I decided to go home. My request

for an extended break was denied, so I resigned. I felt no attachment or nostalgia about saying goodbye even though I was leaving after 8 years and 8 months. After numerous visits to doctors and the temple of our ancestral kul deuta gods, I was healed.

Tilak: Both Amik and I rose to managerial and field trainer positions at McDonald's after starting out as staff crew members. We had met in Saudi Arabia, but were from different cohorts who arrived two years apart so we were not very close. But it turns out that upon return we bought houses with our savings in Saudi Arabia in the same colony at



Boudha. Progress meant the same for both of us as we moved back to Nepal to live in our remittance-funded houses in the same colony.

Amik: We got close in Nepal because we became neighbours by chance. But the bills were stacking up, and our families felt we had to stop fooling around. The natural choice was to re-migrate, this time to Dubai, but when we heard through the grapevine that KFC was launching in Nepal, we decided

to apply. Given our experience at McDonald's, we jokingly referred to ourselves as "Kings of Fastfood". We both ended up joining the company a few months apart and worked for a few years in various managerial and training capacities.

Throughout all this, both of us at the back of our minds, had considered starting our own venture. So many people trusted us to manage KFC in Nepal or McDonald's outlets in

Jeddah. Why were we not trusting ourselves? How long would we continue working for others? The conversation eventually turned to concrete plans when we resigned to be our own bosses at AT Burger.

Tilak: AT is our initials, but also stands for 'anytime burger', which it will be when the government allows restaurants to open 24/7 in Nepal. We celebrated after selling a few burgers a day. It was common for people to walk away when they found out we did not sell momo. But we grew, and our chain now has five outlets.

After customer feedback, we have also introduced momo to our menu. It was not easy, we had to take a crash course on momo-making from experts.

What we liked best about McDonald's was the culture where we learnt to do all tasks from cashier, burger stations, packing, cleaning and customer service. We have inculcated the same culture to our café, and former staff who are now in countries like Australia and Japan tell us how this experience has been helpful for them.

There are returnees from UAE and Saudi Arabia from the fast-food industry and our own long-time staff who have joined us as investors to start new AT branches.

Amik: Working in Nepal takes patience and there are obstacles along the way. One big mistake returnees make is to dive into areas that are 'trending', even if they are not familiar with that business.

Choosing options in our own area of expertise is critical because it gives us the cushion to think about back-up options and innovate when things do not go as planned. In Nepal, things indeed often do not go as planned. 🇳🇵

Translated from a conversation in Nepali. More images online.

village, and were excited to hear all the gossip from home.

Right in front of my eyes, the UAE was transformed and I changed too. My journey as a general helper began at a basic salary of 700 dirhams a month. By the time I left as Senior Clerk, I was making 5,500 dirhams (\$1,360) basic salary along with an allowance of 3,200 dirhams.

I know I am lucky compared to fellow Nepalis, which is why I stayed for 30 years in the same company. Many Nepalis still face problems, and I have helped many of them. There was no Nepali embassy in the UAE until mid-2000, and we had to do what we could to help each other.

When the UAE started prioritising jobs to locals, I was lucky not to be laid off. Many foreign workers had to leave. But I was incredibly unlucky with other things. I could not come to Nepal to spend my father's last days with him. Before he died, I could not hold him and cry. My brother also died while I was away. Nor was I here to hold my wife's hand when my daughter was born.

But my job gave me an insight into activities that enabled the rapid transformation of the UAE. The port I oversaw handled general goods and these also included soil, stones and greenery from different parts of the world like Pakistan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iran that would be used to build the cities and turn the desert green.

Even livestock were brought in from Europe and New Zealand. Some of the cows would give birth en route. The 100 cows that were loaded into ships became 105 by the time they disembarked in Dubai, messing up the paperwork which had to be redone.

I got to see and touch new models of cars even before they were released in the market. Lambos, Ferraris and Teslas, you name it. Someone from my

background could never dream of owning them, and my dreams for myself and my family were more modest. I was not admiring the latest automotive technology so much, but wondered how they would fare in Nepal's rough roads. These slick new cars with low ground clearance would never make it to my village.

My job required me to train in the latest logistics management technologies. A recent visit to the land revenue office in Nepal with stacks and stacks of files made me wonder when we will reach that level.

If the government wanted, I would even work for free for a few months to help upgrade the management system in government offices. The world has really left us way behind. We citizens are also to blame. Nepalis tend to obey laws and rules depending on where we are, and tend to be more relaxed about following them in Nepal than elsewhere.

The UAE has a lot of oil wealth, and has also opened its doors for people from all over the world, offering them opportunities to invest and prosper. You can register a company in minutes using a smartphone. Even Nepalis in the UAE are now running their own businesses.

I chose not to go that route since I wanted to come home. During my last days in Dubai, I remember getting emotional looking at the fully-grown neem tree I had planted in 2005 and nurtured with manure from imported livestock arriving at the port.

Now in Nepal after 30 years, I am trying to find my footing. I know I cannot work for someone else. I am unsure what I will do next, and am aware of my age. I do not have the same energy of the young man who left for Dubai a lifetime ago. 🇳🇵

Translated from a conversation in Nepali. More pictures online.



बारबरा फाउन्डेसनको आह्वान खोजमूलक पत्रकारिता पुरस्कार-२०८१

सरोकारवाला संस्था तथा पत्रकारको जानकारीका लागि खोजमूलक पत्रकारिता पुरस्कार-२०८१ आह्वान गरिएकोबारे अपिल गर्दछौं । पत्रकारिता जगतले सिंगो राज्य पद्धतीमा सुशासनको खोजी गर्न र नियम-कानूनको थिती बसाल्न पुर्याउँदै आएको भूमिकाको सम्मान गर्न पनि यो विशिष्ट पुरस्कारको धालनी गरिएको हो ।

हरेक २ वर्षको अन्तरमा प्रदान गरिने पुरस्कारको राशी २५ लाख रुपैयाको रहनेछ । पुरस्कारमा जोडिएको मुद्दाले नेपालको सामाजिक, आर्थिक वा राज्य संयन्त्रमै परिवर्तन ल्याउन सक्ने वा प्रभाव देखाउन सक्ने तहको सान्दर्भिक सोध/खोजलाई प्रश्रय दिएको हुनुपर्नेछ ।

पुरस्कारमा १५ लाख रुपैयाको एउटा, ७ लाख रुपैयाको एउटा र ३ लाख रुपैयाको एउटा अनुसन्धानमूलक पत्रकारिता पुरस्कार घोषणा हुनेछ ।

यसपटक वैशाख २०७९ देखि चैत २०८० सम्म (२४ महिना) भित्रमा प्रकाशन/प्रसारणमा आइसकेका अनुसन्धानपरक समाचार/सामग्रीले प्रतिष्पर्धामा स्थान पाउनेछन् । वैशाख २१, २०८१ (प्रेस फ्रिडम डे, २०२४ मे ३)मा यो पुरस्कार प्रदान गरिनेछ ।

प्रतिष्पर्धामा आउने सामग्री पत्रपत्रिका, टेलिभिजन, रेडियो, पोडकास्ट वा डिजिटल पोर्टलमा प्रकाशित/प्रसारित हुनुपर्नेछ । यस्ता सामग्रीबारेको आवेदन जोजसले दिए पनि (प्रकाशक, पत्रकार, दर्शक, स्रोत वा पाठक) स्वीकार्य हुनेछ । तर, आवेदकको परिचय स्पष्ट रुपमा खुल्नुपर्नेछ । यो प्रतिष्पर्धाका लागि आवेदन २०८० चैत मसान्त भित्रमा आइसक्नुपर्नेछ ।

(यो पुरस्कारका अतिरिक्त फाउन्डेसनले आगामी भदौ महिनामा जनही २ लाख ५० हजार रुपैयाका दरमा ४ वटा (कूल १० लाख रुपैया) विषयगत पत्रकारिता फेलोसिपको समेत घोषणा गर्नेछ ।)

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