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JYALAL SAH

GRAIN DRAIN

Nepal's poverty rate may have gone down, but hunger still stalks the land.

Here in the southern plains, paddy fields are parched by a delayed monsoon, wells have gone dry and only 40% of rice fields have been planted.



BORDERLINES
Chandra Kishore

Madhes Province produces a quarter of Nepal's rice, and the projected harvest shortfall and India's ban on rice exports have raised fears of inflation.

Covid, climate change and conflict have made Nepal more food insecure. Record heat waves, droughts and storms have hit the northern hemisphere, and Russia exiting the UN-brokered grain export deal last week made the global fuel, food and fertiliser situation even more precarious.

In chronically food deficit areas Madhes and Karnali, vulnerable families are most affected.

"Who listens to us small people?" asks Nathuni Yadav in Dhanusa district near the Indian

border, gesturing at yellowing seedlings on her sunbaked paddy patch that should be filled with water this time of year.

Better-off farmers have diesel pumps, but even these have gone dry because the water table has fallen. It is not just the late monsoon, over extraction of ground water, rampant quarrying and denudation of the Chure watershed are affecting the entire Tarai.

Even a border city like Birganj with a population of 300,000 does not have water and there are reports of similar shortages in cities across the border in India. The rain when it does fall, comes in brief destructive torrents.

This year's water crisis in the Tarai did not happen suddenly, there were signs over years. Infrastructure and mining of the watershed and low rainfall reduced recharge of ground water, while deep drilling in Bihar and Nepal sucked up what remained.

When Ram Baran Yadav went on a state visit to India as president, he had warned Indian leaders including the leaders of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh state that the destruction of the Chure would affect the Indo-Gangetic plains in Nepal and India.

This was the first time that a Nepali leader had raised this issue at such a high level in India. But the Nepal government is still stripping the Chure, and India has not curbed deep drilling. The Chure is a gigantic sponge that soaks up monsoon water, but the little rain that falls now runs off its denuded slopes and the pumps lift the little water left in the aquifers.

The climate crisis is a water crisis. Access to water used to be determined by who bore deeper wells. But even those with pumps do not have water now, and the worst hit are the poorest families.

More than half of Nepal's population now lives in the Tarai, which is also the country's grain basket. The water crisis is affecting food supply, which in turn is increasing the push factor for migration. Dhanusha is already the district with the highest rate of out-migration and water scarcity will feed the vicious cycle – lack of food forces people to migrate, and because they migrate there is no one left to grow food.

Bishow Parajuli, who till recently was the World Food Programme (WFP) representative in India, says food insecurity needs short- and long-term interventions.

PARCHED PRADESH: Desiccated paddy fields in Kalaiya of Bara district on Wednesday. Rice has been planted in only 40% of farms in Madhes Province because of delayed monsoon rains, and wells going dry.

He says, "We need emergency response to reach food to the most vulnerable. In the longer term inflation due to the Ukraine crisis and the Indian ban on export needs to be controlled. Nepal has to re-farm fallow land, expand irrigation and increase productivity."

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who addressed the World Food Summit in Rome this week said all the right things about meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to eliminate hunger by 2030.

But at the rate Nepal is going, zero hunger looks unattainable in the next 7 years. Even without this year's crisis, the proportion of children with wasting remained stalled at 12%, with Madhes and Karnali Provinces showing even higher proportions of undernourished children at 30%.

The ratio of stunted children has dropped from 57% twenty years ago to 30%, but it is still double the SDG target of 15%.
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Nepal’s nurse flight

N

ews of Nepali migrant workers being cheated, abused and exploited make headlines every day, but they overshadow stories of many who return with earnings and exposure to start anew back home, or contribute from afar.

Recruitment and employment malpractices obscure the predictability of emigration outcomes. It can be transformative, but in many cases it is not.

We have in this paper previously likened it to a lottery in which desperate Nepalis are forced to gamble with their future.

Bilateral labour agreements between Nepal and host countries can ensure a better managed migration process in which there is a greater guarantee of worker welfare. One such government-to-government (G2G) agreement is between Nepal and the UK.

Since 20 July, Britain and Nepal have started accepting applications for nurses under the bilateral scheme (see page 10-11).

In its pilot phase, 100 nurses will be recruited at zero cost, and enjoy equal benefits and protection with others in the UK.

Such transparency can allow more predictable consequences for workers seeking jobs overseas. A bonus is their ability to take their spouse and children along, and that the agreement will benefit mainly female workers.

Nurse emigration also highlights the sorry state of their employment conditions in Nepal. One nurse listed three problems nurses face: lack of respect, low wages and overwork. Indeed, nurses have to work for as little as Rs15,000 a month in private hospitals in Nepal after spending millions on their degrees.

These are all results of neglect of the nursing profession by the state. It is therefore hardly surprising that nurses are moving overseas to meet a global shortage of healthcare professionals.

If not the UK, Australia or the US, it is the UAE or Saudi Arabia. A Saudi-based nurse said she left because she had to do one full time and one part time job to make Rs23,000 a month in Nepal, while she saves more than four times the amount in Saudi Arabia for an 8 hour shift with all expenses covered.

If working conditions and salaries do not improve, the more apt question may soon be why nurses stay, rather than why they leave.

There are challenges abroad as well. Britain is itself facing strikes over pay disputes for nurses. But as one UK-based nurse told us, despite the struggle, earning and learning prospects are better there.

Emigration is linked to aspirations and desires. And improving the domestic labour market and outmigration are not mutually exclusive. What nurses are escaping from merits attention, but so does what they will be facing abroad.

Those who choose to leave can then maximise the benefits of overseas opportunities that are rife with high recruitment fees and insufficient protection.

In the UK, there are also voices being raised about importing nurses for cheap from Red Zone countries with fragile health systems like Nepal.

A managed bilateral agreement makes migration better for nurses who will benefit from the scheme as they can compete in a fair environment.

But Nepal should also go beyond traditional labour agreements to enter into mutually beneficial skills partnership models that would also

support health training and infrastructure back home. This requires proactive diplomacy, thinking outside the box and a realisation that benefits of migration can go beyond remittances.

Nepal needs to view its diaspora as its strength and seek ways to engage those abroad. As UK-based nurse Binod Simkhada says, “To contribute to Nepal, one does not need to be in Nepal.” At the Nepal Nursing Association in UK, he was involved in establishing a birthing center in Jumla that was recently handed over to the local government.

In many cases, Nepalis can provide more help from outside than from within Nepal, given better access to resources and networks. And for those who come back, reintegration policies are overdue to leverage the social and financial remittances returnees bring home.

As the Nepali Times Diaspora Diaries series show, good migration can be transformative and help families break out of intergenerational poverty. Because the government took a proactive initiative on managed migration of nurses to the UK, the 100 nurses could have life-changing stories.

But that by no means absolves the Nepal government from its responsibility of ensuring that nurses here are treated with respect and earn liveable wages. It is the least the state can do.



If nurse salaries and work conditions do not improve, we will have to ask why nurses stay, rather than why they leave.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Bad air is worse

Over the last two decades, most things have gotten worse in Nepal, but perhaps few things have gotten worse faster than air pollution. So much so that some Nepalis have lives cut short by up to 7 years.

Twenty years ago, environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar wrote about Kathmandu’s rapidly declining air quality and its adverse impacts on public health in Nepali Times.

Two decades down the line, Tuladhar is still at the frontlines of clean air advocacy and is pushing electric public transport. Garbage burning, brick kilns and cross-border pollution have all increased, making air pollution one of the biggest crises of our times.

Excerpts of the report published 20 years ago this week on issue #155 25-31 July 2003:

Just before this year’s monsoon arrived in mid-June, the Putali Sadak station recorded 461 micrograms per cubic meter concentration of dust particles less than 10 microns, also known as PM10.

This is almost four times higher than the national ambient air quality standard (NAAQS) which is 120 micrograms per cubic meter for particles that size. The



WHO guideline for PM10 used to be 70 micrograms per cubic meter (WHO does not have a guideline value for PM10 anymore because it says there is no safe limit for such fine dust.) These numbers should be sending out alarm

signals to anyone breathing Kathmandu’s air.

The data also indicates that the air quality has deteriorated significantly over the past few years. In November 1993, Environment and Public Health Organization (ENPHO), a local NGO, took several 24-hour measurements of PM10 in Putali Sadak and reported an average value of 92 micrograms per cubic meter. Ten years later, the figure for PM10 in November had shot up to 270 micrograms per cubic meter.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



Hari Chandra Prajapati was only 14 when he started learning how to mould a lump of clay into a work of art like his forebears did. Today he has a successful enterprise and is also training a new batch of artists. Watch the video to find out how pottery and ceramics are experiencing a renaissance in Nepal. Read the profile on page 12.



Rishad Patel, the co-founder of Singapore-based Splice Media, sat down with Nepali Times to talk about the challenging business of media and the need for an audience-focused approach in journalism. Watch the full video. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more multimedia content.

POKHARA ORIGIN

A rare revelation of geological upheavals of the Himalaya and Pokhara is close to our concerns ('Pokhara 800 years ago', Kunda Dixit, #1171). Kudos to both the researchers and the reporter for this!

Namindra Dahal

■ The probability of fragility. This is the most fascinating article I have read this week.

Ashutosh Tiwari

BUREAUCRACY

Those who were or are in positions to change this are never affected by the state’s incompetence and corruption ('Inconvenient truths', Editorial, #1171). Alternate political parties like RSP should just focus on this aspect, and they will win the upcoming elections hands down.

Krishna Joshi

■ 360° State Corruption: If they work behind a desk in a GoNe office - they are syndicated.

Aleksandr Verkovsyn

MOUNTAIN LIVING

E F Schumacher’s, ‘Small is Beautiful’, was one of the books I brought with me to Nepal when I arrived in 1976 as a member of Group 56/57 ('Small is possible at Godavari park', Pinki Sris Rana, #1169). It is encouraging to see that his viewpoints are still being put to practical use.

Richard E Domis

■ From 1995-1997, I worked at ICIMOD as a Rangeland Specialist. Great job and it is nice to see that ICIMOD is still making a difference in the Himalaya-Karakorum-Hindu Kush mountains.

Daniel Miller

ANG PHURBA SHERPA

A very inspiring story ('Down in Sherpa’s farm', Sonia Awale, #1171). This is the way Nepal will develop.

Pratap Chhetri

HERITAGE RECONSTRUCTION

There has been a remarkable recovery in the period since the 2015 earthquake ('Rebuilding better than before', Kunda Dixit, #1171).

Mark O'Donnell

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WHAT'S TRENDING

Down on Sherpa’s farm

by Sonia Awale

Ang Phurba Sherpa’s cows produce up to 22 litres of milk a day while Nepali cows on average give only 5 litres daily. The Israel-returnee runs a profitable agro-business while also helping other Nepali farmers thrive. Read the full story on our website.



Most reached and shared on Facebook

Pokhara 800 years ago

by Kunda Dixit

Geologists have known that it was a debris flow on the Seti that formed Pokhara Valley, but a new paper has for the first time described just how cataclysmic this event was and that it could happen again. Visit nepalitimes.com for details.



Most popular on Twitter

Inconvenient truths

Editorial

Instead of making things easy for its citizens, Nepal excels at putting up obstacles every step of the way. Kickbacks and payoffs have become such a part of life that the English word ‘setting’ has entered the Nepali lexicon to describe collusion between unscrupulous businesses, bureaucrats and politicians. Join the discussion online.



Most commented



Rebuilding better than before

by Kunda Dixit

Rohit Ranjitkar’s Monuments of the Kathmandu Valley: Before & After the 2015 Earthquake is a sort of post-mortem of how Nepal’s monuments were rebuilt from the ground up – with both good and bad examples. Read more at nepalitimes.com.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Farmers from western Nepal now prefer to migrate to the capital than to India. Kathmandu’s Little Bajura | Dhanu Bishwakarma



Fraser Sugden @frasersugden
Very interesting article and reflects diversification of migration patterns. However, title perhaps a little misleading. Livelihoods in far-west are structurally dependent on migration to India, it’s highly unlikely that development in Kathmandu will replace this.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Rohit Ranjitkar’s book is a pictorial documentation of the restoration of Kathmandu’s monuments after the 2015 earthquake. Rebuilding Better Than Before | @kundadixit



Ruth Boreham @RuthBoreham
I would love to get hold of a copy of this book! I visited some of the monuments on my last trip to Nepal in October 2015 and saw the devastation which was just heart breaking. Am desperate to go back and visit this amazing country - this book will do in the meantime!

OVER THE MOON:

Former prime minister K P Oli of the opposition UML posing with delegates attending a conference in Phnom Penh organised by the Universal Peace Federation founded by Korean evangelical Rev Dr Sun Myung Moon last week.

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Making monsoon flying safer in Nepal

Airline shows it is possible to ensure safety by strictly adhering to flight protocols

There has been a revision of safety protocols for flying in the monsoon in Nepal after the latest crash of a helicopter near Mt Everest on 11 July.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) grounded all helicopter flights after the crash that killed five Mexican passengers and the Nepali pilot, but some rescue flights have resumed during the lean tourist season.

While CAAN is trying to more strictly implement its rule about only flying under Visual Flight Rules (VFR) in flights to and from airfields in the mountains without navigational aids, private airlines have been taking their own measures.

Data scraped by Nepali Times from multiple sources show that more than 90% of fatalities in crashes in the past 60 years in Nepal have happened when planes fly into mountains hidden by clouds.

And nearly all of what are technically known as Controlled Flight Into Terrain (CFIT) incidents have occurred in the three monsoon months of July, August and September – and most of them have happened on approach or after takeoff.

Interestingly, almost all of these accidents have happened in flights on mountain routes, very few have been due to mechanical problems and none have occurred in the Tarai in the past six decades.

This is why CAAN and private operators have been trying to strictly enforce VFR protocols that absolutely forbid pilots from flying into clouds even briefly while flying in mountain airfields not equipped with nav aids.

“High terrain and unpredictable mountain weather make flying in the Himalaya the most challenging in the world,” admits Manoj KC, a 22-year veteran of Buddha



BUDDHAIR

Air with more than 17,000 flight hours. “However, the risk can be minimised by strictly following rules and adhering to protocols.”

Buddha Air is Nepal’s largest domestic airline with 16 ATR-72 and -42 aircraft, and besides international and CAAN safety regulations, it also has in place its own extra steps to ensure that flight crew are prepared for monsoon flying conditions.

Nepal’s pre-monsoon in April-May-June has rapidly developing buildups with strong updrafts, thunderstorms, hail and high winds. In the monsoon months of July-August-September, clouds and heavy rain can reduce visibility as well as make runways slippery or water-logged. Winter brings fog at airports in the Tarai and in

mountain valleys as well as ice and snow in the higher reaches.

However, it is in the monsoon that more attention is needed.

Buddha Air, for instance, has a monsoon briefing for flight crew before the start of the rainy season with safety reminders and long term forecasts.

Buddha air also has a flight dispatch centre at the domestic airport where a Japanese software gives critical go, no-go information about various airports in real time.

“The system helps us not just track our fleet, but also provides up to date weather conditions at airports,” explains Buddha Air’s flight dispatcher Umesh Khadka.

CAAN also inspects aircraft tyres more frequently during the monsoon so their treads are intact to

prevent skidding on wet runways, and wipers are also a part of the Minimum Equipment List (MEL).

Buddha Air designs its own procedures when starting operations to new airports like Surkhet and Tumlingtar, taking into account all contingencies, including poor visibility during the monsoon. For Tumlingtar, for example, its engineers did a drone survey of the runway, and plotted obstruction and terrain before verifying performance of ATR-72s on simulators even before the first proving flight.

“We only started flying to Tumlingtar after all the procedure turns and decision points were double checked,” explains Manoj KC, who flies ATR-72s. Only in the past month, three Tumlingtar

flights have diverted back to Kathmandu because of sub-optimal visibility.

Buddha Air is now lobbying to have new satellite based Area Navigation (RNAV) for more precise navigation in Surkhet and Tumlingtar, as well as Pokhara which has an Instrument Landing System (ILS).

CAAN switched its radar coverage to Bhatte Danda, which covers more of the country, but the new system does not plot weather systems like the older radar. This means air traffic controllers now cannot give planes waiting to take off more precise information about the location of storm cells. Pilots have to rely on the plane’s own radar which can track weather only after takeoff.

In some cases, airline crew are pressured by passengers to fly because they are in a hurry to reach their destinations. This is why Buddha Air has installed at its departure terminals a Flightradar 24 map showing the live position of its flights, as well as webcam images of destination airports. The carrier says this has helped passengers better understand why there can be delays or even cancellations due to bad weather.

Because many of the mishaps in the past have also happened due to pilots not knowing what en route weather is like, CAAN has installed live webcams on critical high passes like Ghorepani on the Pokhara-Jomsom route, and Lamjura on the Luka-Kathmandu route. More are planned.

Says Buddha’s Manoj KC: “We strictly follow safety procedures so that even airline management, government officials or passengers cannot pressure us to fly when weather parameters en route or at departure and destination airports are no-go.” 🇳🇵



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Dusit Thani hotels

Thai hospitality company Dusit International has opened two new luxury spots in Nepal: Dusit Thani Himalayan Resort in Kavre and Dusit Princess Kathmandu in Lazimpat. The resort



in Namobuddha offers rooms with views of the Himalaya vista and focuses on wellness activities. Dusit Princess Kathmandu is centrally located and reflects local architecture with a Thai restaurant, a rooftop lounge and bar with the city’s highest infinity pool.



Cooking training

Australian ambassador Felicity Volk and BBC MasterChef: The Professionals Rematch 2021 winner Santosh Shah awarded graduation certificates to 15 participants of a commercial cooking training organised by Didi Foundation Nepal on 25 July at its training centre.

Stan Chart eyecare

Standard Chartered Bank has donated Rs4.7 million to Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology’s Nepal Eye Programme which will establish a Community Eye Centre (CEC) at



Parsa’s Nichuta to address eye disorders and diseases. It also donated Rs6.7 million to MITRA SAMAJ for its Cataract Blindness Alleviation Project.

Tata price cuts

Tata Genuine Spare Parts has reduced prices across its entire network including at Sipradi and other authorised service centers, Emergency Maintenance service centers, the Tata genuine parts dealer network, certified garages, and the Tata Champion Zone. Customers can now access high-quality parts at lower costs with a warranty of 6 months and other perks.



Debt rises, deficit down

Nepal’s national debt increased by Rs208 billion to exceed Rs2.2 trillion in the last fiscal year, says the Public Debt Management Office. More than Rs1.1 trillion of this is domestic debt, and the rest from foreign lenders. Meanwhile, Nepal has reduced its trade deficit by 15% (Rs265 billion) during 2022-23 compared to the previous fiscal year, but is still at Rs1.4 trillion.



Golyan Challenge

Golyan Group has opened registration for its nationwide case study competition on the theme of agri-business. Undergrad and graduate students in the management field must form groups of four to be eligible and can win Rs150,000 prize money. Entry fee per team is Rs4,000.



New HCCN dean

The Honorary Consul Corps Nepal (HCCN) appointed Honorary Consul Vishnu Kumar Agarwal as its new dean at the 16th General Assembly and Charter Day conducted at Hotel Radisson. Agarwal is honorary consul general of the Czech Republic. HCCN has helped foster bilateral relations with 59 nations where Nepal lacks residential diplomatic missions.

Cement exports

Nepal’s Palpa, Arghakhanchi, and Balaji cement factories have collectively exported 1 million metric tons of cement worth Rs779



million to India since June this year. Nepal’s cement industries have an annual capacity of approximately 22 million metric tons.

Drift to digital disrupts media business model

Nepal's advertising industry, advertisers and the media struggle against headwind from online platforms

■ Jharana Khanal

Conventional media and the advertising industry which sustained Nepal's free press are being disrupted by competition from the Internet and the economic slump, and it is now a case of the survival of the nimblest.

Newspapers, radio stations, and tv networks are navigating uncharted territory as the digital revolution reshapes how Nepalis consume information and entertainment. Even digital portals that started in the past decade are in trouble as most follow the same business model as legacy media.

The morning newspaper which used to be the primary source of information was gradually replaced by evening tv news, radio bulletins, and now social media platforms.

Many tech-savvy Nepalis have never even touched a printed newspaper or magazine, and most from the younger generation cannot remember the last time they did so. Traditional print media's readership and advertising income have therefore continued to plummet, thereby undermining its check-and-balance role in Nepal's democracy.

With the ability to simultaneously consume and contribute to news, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and lately TikTok have emerged as significant disruptors. Social media's real-time functionality has broken down boundaries, democratised information sharing, and amplified the voices of specific groups and individuals. The rise of citizen journalism has also challenged traditional media's authority and gatekeeping function.

Thanks to the growth of streaming services, the tv and film industries are no longer constrained by strict timetables. Content on demand is made possible by services like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Hulu, and the ease and low cost of streaming services have transformed customer behaviour.

One of the most significant consequences of the decline of traditional media is faced by the advertising industry dealing with shrinking budgets from brand promoters that shrank further after last year's Supreme Court ban on alcohol advertising in print media.

The prohibition of liquor advertisements has exacerbated the



GOPEN RA

crisis, and left a void in revenue for the agencies and the media where the ads were placed.

Agencies have shifted a sizable percentage of their advertising budget to digital platforms, and have been compelled by this transition to reconsider conventional strategies to service portfolios to include influencer marketing, social media campaigns, digital marketing, and content development.

One advertising agency that has adapted well to the digital ecosystem is Prismark. Its executive director Pankaj Pradhan says, "Data-driven strategies have transformed the way we service clients. The day when advertising was only based on the audience's understanding or presumption is long gone."

Agencies are compensating for the income loss by expanding services, experimenting with new channels, and looking for customers in non-alcohol areas, including FMCG, healthcare and technology.

“We have managed to adapt by focusing not just on selling advertising space but on effectively reaching various audience profiles and segments,” explains Ujaya Shakya of Outreach Nepal. “Nepal has a predominant youth population. These young individuals often possess ambitions surpassing our country’s opportunities. Many aspire to study or work abroad and thanks to the internet and media, they now have access to global information.”

Nepali youth also share a

common longing to understand their cultural heritage, identity and a sense of belonging. Therefore, creating campaign ideas that integrate consumer insights with local culture becomes crucial, cutting through the noise to provide meaningful solutions to marketing challenges that hold value for the end consumer, says Shakya, who strives for what he calls “Nepalisation”.

This approach allows Outreach Nepal greater audience engagement and that resonates with their combined desire for global exposure and a connection to their roots. Shakya has managed to thrive by aligning marketing strategy with the aspirations and values of Nepalis.

Since liquor companies were a significant contributor to advertising revenue, the ban also affected creativity, prompting organisations to develop new strategies to address the needs of other sectors of the economy. But to reach new consumers, the agencies had to change their methods, which necessitated substantial study and adaptation. Nepal does not presently have a policy on surrogate ads in the news format, which makes things complicated for the advertising industry as they look for other options for product placement at events.

If alcohol advertising was banned by the Supreme Court on health grounds, some have said promoting carbonated soft drinks with high sugar content, or even diet

drinks that contain cancer-causing aspartame, and junk processed foods should also be restricted.

“The blanket ban on alcohol advertising lacks clarity on what constitutes adverse effects and who can determine which products fall under this category,” says Ahimsa Yonjan from TWB/Benchmark Nepal. “Fizzy drinks have high sugar content and can contribute to obesity, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and inflammatory diseases. Is that not a health hazard?”

What would have been better would be specific rules for marketing and product promotion rather than an overall ban. Such laws would strike a compromise, allowing customers the freedom of choice while protecting them from inaccurate or misleading information.

Advertisements exist so businesses can promote their brands, and the revenue from them sustains the media. It is a transparent transaction, since readers, viewers and listeners are all aware of who is promoting what.

Like advertising agencies, advertisers have also changed their brand promotion strategy. For example, Hyundai in Nepal now prioritises online platforms. Says Hyundai's Sandeep Sharma: "We now focus on digital media to provide comprehensive coverage rather than instant, short-lived updates since our target audience are those with decision-making

power within families.”


By synchronising its advertising with feature stories, Hyundai wants to reach a wider audience and ensure its messaging remains relevant over time. Sharma admits that even the older generation is now increasingly relying on Facebook and not newspapers and magazines.

Hyundai's budget for tv commercials has also gone down in Nepal because its target demographic is no longer watching television. Government tax adjustments in the budget may also harm Hyundai's marketing efforts in the electric vehicle segment.

Ghorahi Cement, on the other hand, has thrived because it has kept up its below-the-line (BTL) advertising intact, demonstrating the resilience of its marketing methods even during difficult economic times. “Our success rests in identifying the distinctive traits of our target market,” says Ghorahi’s Pratik Adhikari. “The people of Nepal continue to build houses when they are ready to do so, contradicting traditional market predictions.”

This realisation led the business to use a marketing approach that heavily relies on sides of buses, cabs, houses and non-traditional media. By posting inscriptions on solar panel lights in Butwal, for example, Ghorahi has supported attempts to preserve wildlife. The company's brand image is further improved by this strategy, which increases awareness and appeals to the ecologically sensitive public.

Despite the growing popularity of digital advertising platforms, therefore, Ghorahi Cement adheres to specific market dynamics and employs tactics that appeal to its target market. This has helped the company establish a market niche.

At a time when internet advertising is king, this is proof of the potency of cutting-edge marketing that transcends business as usual. Hyundai, Ghorahi and others are examples of companies that investigate alternative advertising strategies and customise them to the unique requirements of their target audiences by continuing to prosper during difficult economic times. 

Jharana Khanal is a student at Kathmandu University School of Law researching the entertainment industry and media in Nepal.



Dapcha's old world charm

Newar town has been bypassed by modern influences and can revive its fortunes through

Dapcha by night.

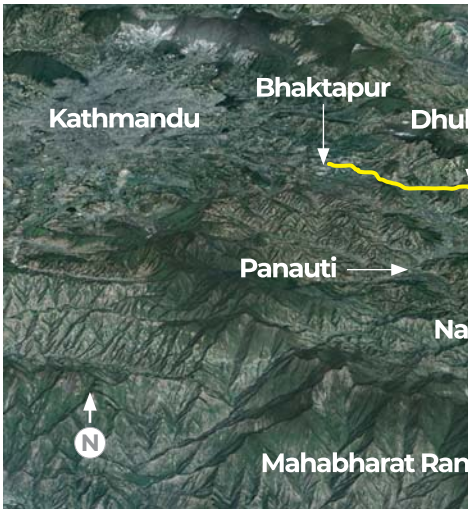
■ **Kanak Mani Dixit** in Kavre

The town of Dapcha sits on a ridgeline stretching eastwards from the revered shrine of Namobuddha, its urbanscape left largely intact by inhabitants who have moved out. But as the only Newar settlement in the Valley's proximity that retains its old character, Dapcha can prosper as a getaway for visitors. This must happen before the brick houses are replaced by painted cement structures, as elsewhere. Dapcha has survived, while Khokana, Bungamati, Sankhu, Banepa and other towns have lost their traditional character, either through rapid demographic change and modernisation, or the destruction of the April 2015 earthquake. While the surrounding villages

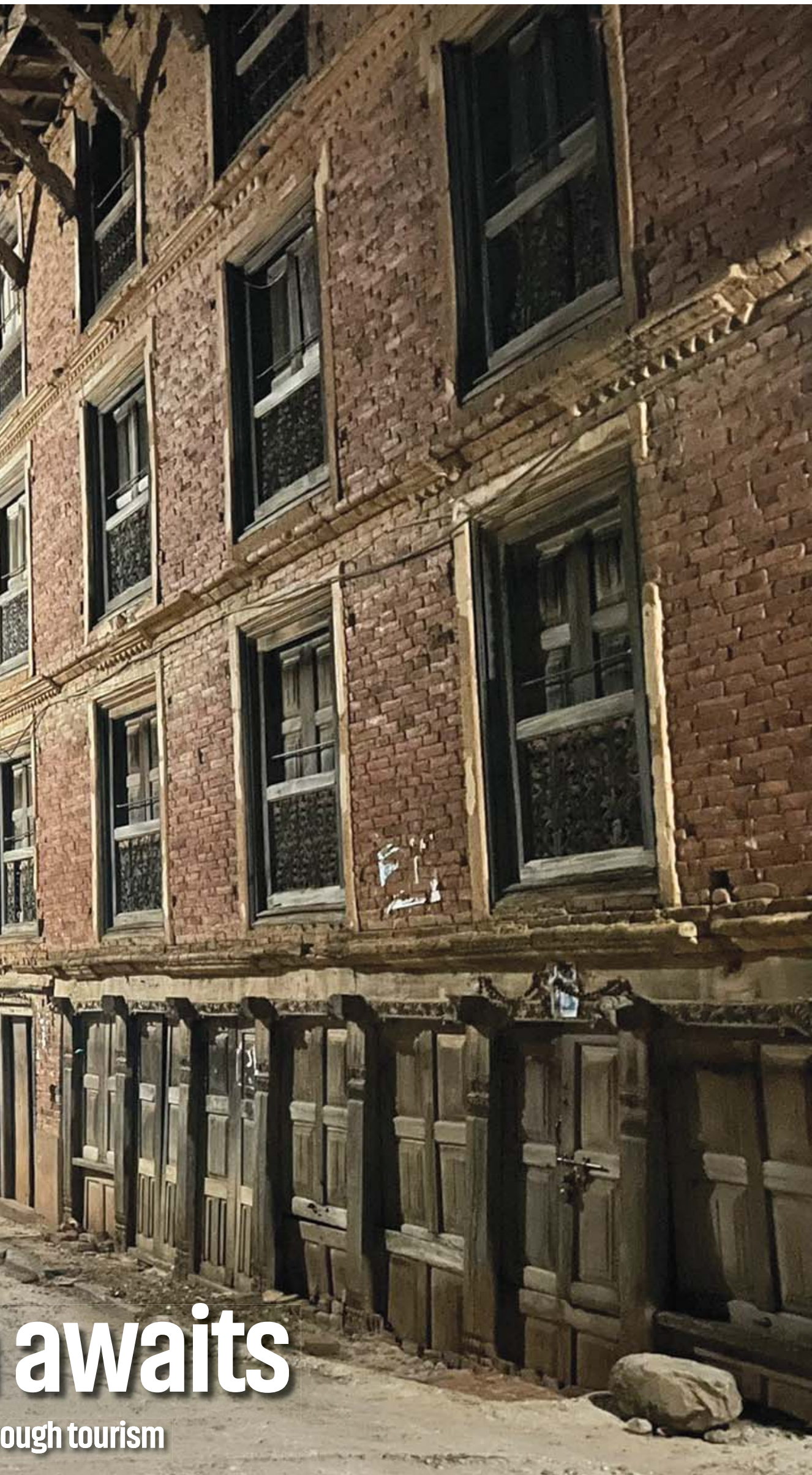
of Kavre were damaged in the earthquake, geological good fortune left Dapcha largely intact. The 45 or so ancient buildings of brick, carved wood and mud mortar still stand, though weakened by age. Dapcha awaits entrepreneurs who understand the thirst of city folks for traditional Newar urbanscape, and international tourists who want to experience tangible and intangible heritage amidst the natural splendour of midhill Nepal. Om Krishna Shrestha, a recently retired bureaucrat, who owns one of the larger homes in Dapcha agrees that the preservation of his town requires quick investment to retrofit the townhouses and provide the interiors with modern spaces and amenities. "We can revive homeowners like me, unconvinced of this," he says.

Dapcha's main street is lined with old townhouses, and the settlement commands a view of 350km of peaks from Khumbu Himal to the Annapurnas. The surrounding hills and valleys are scenic, and the high Mahabharat Lek dominates the southern horizon. Nestled in a mountain cleft to the west of Dapcha is the shrine of Namobuddha, worshipped for what the jataka tales tell involve Shakyamuni Buddha. Namobuddha's Newar community reveres not one but three temples dedicated to Bhimsen, and the east end of the town has a Kalika Devi temple on a dramatic wooded hilltop. There are jatra all year around, with the biggest one centred on Krishna Janmashthami. The surrounding villages have Tamang, Dalit, Bahun and Chhetri inhabitants. The long 2,500m high ridge on which Dapcha is located is more

or less level, making it perfect for mountain biking. The nearby villages of Phulbari and Patleket are the centre of Nepal's organic farming movement, and host frequent training programs. The seasons are marked by the tint of the terrace fields, from the yellow mustard in autumn to the green of mid-monsoon maize. Dapcha's historical importance is as a trading town on the main route heading east from Kathmandu. Till just a decade ago, the trail nearby used to display 'Jungay kos' markers, indicating the distance from Hanuman Dhoka in Kathmandu. Dapcha was on the route that pilgrims, traders, invaders and defenders used between the Valley and east Nepal, as also the Mithila region to the southeast via Sindhuli. Dapcha can emulate the 'tourism repurposing' of Bandipur, the other Newar settlement located on



a high saddle midway between Kathmandu and Pokhara. There are other historical trading posts from Doti in the west to Chainpur in the east that could also pick up the example.



awaits

ough tourism

SUNITA BAJRACHARYA



Bandipur was left literally high and dry when the Tanahu district headquarters was moved down to Damauli during the Panchayat in 1968, with the opening of the Prithvi Highway. Traders and

bureaucrats moved out, and for more than three decades Bandipur became a ghost town, until tourism experts came to the rescue.

The first concrete activity to uplift Bandipur's prospects was a brochure produced in 1998 with the help of the Partnership for Quality Tourism, researched and written by Ujwal Sherchan. Tourism entrepreneur and expert Dilendra Shrestha who helped in the revival of the Swotha neighbourhood in Patan also got involved with Bandipur.

Says Shrestha, "Our job was to convince Bandipur homeowners, many of whom had moved to Narayanghat, that there was income from saving their ancient town. We persuaded them to preserve the old buildings, and convert the main thoroughfare into a pedestrian zone."

Dapcha is only two hours from Kathmandu via Dhulikhel (see

map, left), and is less compact than Bandipur although its buildings are taller and more ornate. Dapcha is now connected by well-built roads down to the BP Highway and to the Namobuddha shrine.

Successive mayors of Namobuddha Municipality of which Dapcha is a part (TP Sharma and the incumbent Kunsang Lama) are alert to the tourism possibilities, and have helped build two bypass tracks north and south so that the town can also have a pedestrian boulevard.

Dapcha holds possibilities as a fine destination at a time when the mountain settlements of Nepal are losing their traditional architecture. What Dapcha needs is collaboration between home-owners, investors, conservation architects and marketing experts, to prove that preservation can bring prosperity.

All it takes to start it off is a couple of townhouses to be retrofitted and converted. 🇳🇵



Autumn view of Jugal Himal from Dapcha, with Phulbari in the foreground.

KANAK MANI DIXIT



Dapcha Chhatrebangh bazar in 2019.

WIKIMEDIA



Newar Elder of Dapcha.

SAURAV THAPA SHRESTHA



Thoroughfare of the old town.

KANAK MANI DIXIT



Dapcha marks Dya Pyakon jatra.

PRAJWOL SHRESTHA

EVENTS



Art Therapy
Immerse in art through this therapeutic, beginner-friendly three-hour-long event. Call for more information.
29 July, 3pm-6pm, Rs2,000 Gharipatan, Pokhara, 9802855271

Amalgam
Siddhartha Gallery's latest art exhibition Amalgam brings together artwork from various Nepali artists.
Until 27 August, Siddhartha Art Gallery



Airo Yoga Classes
Experience the fusion of Vinyasa Yoga, Pilates, and Acro-Play with Airo Yoga. The classes are accessible to all ages and fitness levels, and are perfect for enhancing one's fitness journey.
30 July, 10:45am-11:45am, Rs800, Jhamsikhel, 9801029668

Wounds of War 2.0
Be one with the nature. Join Bird Conservation Nepal's bird watching this Saturday in Godavari Hill.
29 July, 6:30am, Godavari Bus Park, 9851129773



Stand-up Show
Be a part of an unforgettable evening at the Saag Sisno ra Sandesh stand-up comedy show including Sandesh Devkota and the rest of the lineup. Also featuring a magic show by magician Luis Shrestha.
28 July, 6:30pm-8pm, Rs199, Sinamangal, 9814200600

DINING



Erma Restaurant
Try out the multi-cuisine restaurant by Hotel Shambala featuring selected favourites from all over the world and chef-curated continental cuisine.
Hotel Shambala, Bansbari, 9803867240

MUSIC

Tribal Rain
Go on a one-of-a-kind musical journey and embrace the rhythmic beats and melodies by Tribal Rain at their live concert.
5 August, 8pm, Rs1000, Rolling Stones Rock Bar, Pokhara, 9827122881



Swoopna Suman
Catch performances from Swoopna Suman and The Asters and have a fantastic evening of live music and great vibes.
4 August, 7pm onwards, Paradiso Pokhara, Lakeside, 9846081325



Prayogsala
Grab some drinks and be part of an acoustic night with the band Prayogsala. Get tickets at MySansar.
29 July, Rs 300, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel



Javed Ali
Treat friends and family to a musical evening and attend renowned playback singer Javed Ali's concert. Get tickets from MyPay.
4 August, 7:30pm, Privé Nepal, Soaltee Hotel

Sitar Fusion
Sita Maiya Rajchal will be performing Live Sitar Fusion this week at Blue Note Coffeeshop. Don't miss.
28 July, 7-10 pm, Lazimpat, 9818137771

Akari & Koko
Visit Vivanta Hotel's Asian-inspired fusion restaurant and bar and try out an impressive assortment of East Asian dishes with modern twists.
Jhamsikhel (01) 5525002



Cafe de Tukche
Get authentic Thakali food at Cafe de Tukche and take a break from cooking. The menu has both rice and Dedho sets.
Lazimpat, 9828937500

About Town

GETAWAY



Dusit Thani Himalayan Resort
Visit this luxury resort in Nepal that offers breathtaking 180-degree views of the Himalayan vista. Experience exquisite dining and wellness services.
Patlekhel, Dhulikhel, 9851373755

The Last Resort
The Last Resort at Bhote Koshi River near the Tibetan border is for those who want to ignite their inner adventurer. Visitors can partake in bungee jump, tandem swing, or white water rafting.
Bhotekoshi, Sindhupalchok (01) 4700525



Temple Tree
It will be difficult to leave once visitors get to Temple Tree Resort and Spa, which offers a peaceful haven complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna.
Gaurighat, Pokhara (61) 465819

Dusit Princess Kathmandu
The newly-opened Dusit Princess Kathmandu reflects local architecture. Dine at the Thai restaurant, and relax at the infinity pool in the rooftop lounge.
Lazimpat (01) 5970265



Lapsi Tree Resort
Escape the hustle and bustle of the valley to reconnect with nature at Lapsi Tree Resort. Get delicious food and comfortable rooms, all topped off with mesmerising views.
Danda Gaun Marg, Nagarkot, 9844888116



Doko Deli
Take a pick from a variety of appetisers, pizzas, and pasta at Doko Deli. The Mustang ko Piro Aloo is a must-try.
9869188070/ 9848997461

Everfresh
Everfresh offers the best chocolate-chip cookies and matcha latte to an incredible Teriyaki Bowl, a must visit for coffee lovers and breakfast enthusiasts.
Panipokhari, 9702026438

WEEKEND WEATHER

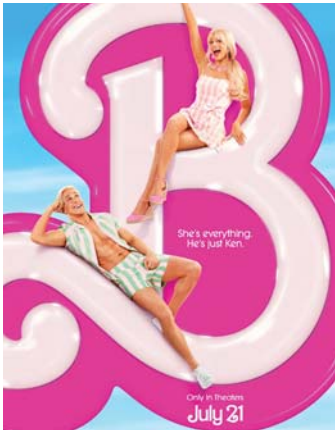


FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
 27° 20°	 27° 21°	 27° 20°	 28° 20°	 29° 20°

Monsoon gets 2nd wind
Given the weather extremes in the rest of the world with hail storms in Italy, record sea surface temperatures in the Atlantic, record low Antarctic sea ice, and an El Niño about to erupt, Nepal's weather so far has been relatively normal. Monsoon precipitation is catching up, making up for a sluggish start, especially in the Tarai. The heavy rain this week will abate slightly on the weekend, but begin again in earnest next week.

OUR PICK

The other half of the 'Barbenheimer' global cinematic phenomenon, Barbie is directed by Greta Gerwig and written by Gerwig and Noah Baumbach. The 2023 American fantasy comedy is based on the Barbie fashion dolls by Mattel and follows the eponymous character played by Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling's Ken on a journey of self-discovery following an existential crisis which sees them crossing over to the real world. Simultaneous theatrical rerelease of Barbie and Oppenheimer is one of the biggest openings in the global box office. If you haven't watched one or the other, you can still check them out in theatres near you.



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



GOPEN RAI

Itumbaha's living museum

Is the Rubin's involvement cul tural restitution or invasion?

■ Sahina Shrestha

Itumbaha is one of 18 Buddhist monastic enclaves of Kathmandu established by the Shakyas who fled Lumbini.

According to legend, the site was built in the 11th century, and the complex retains most of its original layout with monasteries, courtyards, and votive shrines.

After the 1960s, many of Kathmandu's sacred objects were stolen and smuggled out to collectors and museums in the West. Itumbaha was not spared.

"It is said that there are many artefacts that have been stolen from here, but we do not have any documentation," says Pragya Ratna Shakya of the Itumbaha Conservation Society.

In 2022, the Rubin Museum of Art in New York returned two artefacts to Nepal after they were found to have been stolen from religious sites in Kathmandu Valley. The anonymous site Lost Arts of Nepal had located the items at the Rubin following which the citizen-led Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign (NHRC) wrote to the museum for their return.

One of the artefacts was a 14th-century Flying Gandharva (apsara) from Itumbaha. The Rubin also announced a partnership with the Itumbaha Conservation Society and Lumbini Buddhist University (LBU) to 'research, preserve, and display the collection of one of the oldest, largest, and most important monasteries in Kathmandu'.

"While working on the return of the apsara, the Rubin wanted to help the community in any which way it could," recalls Swosti Rajbhandari, a museology lecturer at LBU who mediated the collaboration.

The Itumbaha Conservation Society wanted to use vacant spaces to display its collection, and the Rubin contributed \$20,000 for a three-room display. Rajbhandari and her students cleaned, researched, and catalogued some 500 artefacts.

The Itumbaha Museum was set to be opened on 29 July with nearly 150 of these items on display.

The concept of a museum has been around ever since the restoration of Itumbaha began in 2003, and Shakya sees the museum as an attempt to save its heritage.

"There is no point keeping the objects hidden in storage," says Shakya. "If we display them, there is documentation including

photographs and that will hinder theft. It will also help in claiming the artefact if it is stolen."

The Rubin Museum says it is seeking opportunities for meaningful exchange of knowledge, experience, and perspectives across Nepal and the Himalayan region.

In an email interview from New York, Jorrit Britschgi, Executive Director of the Rubin Museum, told Nepali Times: "For us, the Garland Bearing Apsara demonstrates our commitment to continual collection, research, and our support of Itumbaha's vision for these galleries is an example of what a return can lead to."

Swosti Rajbhandari, who is helping curate the museum, agrees that this is a positive step and can contribute to the repatriation of stolen artefacts.

Yagyaman Pati Bajracharya, intangible heritage conservationist and Buddhist priest, agrees: "This will help the younger generation, educators, and researchers from all over the world learn about our culture and heritage," he says.

But not everyone is happy with the Rubin's involvement or the idea of a museum in the vihara complex.

"Itumbaha itself is a living museum," says Jyoti Ratna Shakya, a local. "A museum here is counterintuitive. Moreover, why take money from the Rubin or anyone else? Itumbaha was built by our ancestors, why involve anyone else? It is a disgrace."

Activists involved in repatriation also say the Rubin could be doing more to ensure stolen Nepal artefacts are returned.

"We are happy that the Rubin Museum has returned the flying apsara once attention was drawn to the fact that it was stolen from Itumbaha," says Kanak Mani Dixit of the NHRC campaign. "This is a starting point for the Rubin, which considers itself a museum of the Himalaya. It has accountability towards Nepal and other parts of the Himalayan region."

Dixit says the Rubin should go public with the result of its investigation on the provenance of the apsara that was returned, and the route it took to get to New York.

"The Museum should conduct a systematic review of its holdings to ensure that there are no other stolen artefacts from Nepal and elsewhere, and must be proactive in returning such items to the host communities rather than wait for activists to come in pursuit," adds Dixit.

A quick search on the Rubin's website shows 101 artefacts from

Nepal, but activists say there may be many more that have not been listed or on display. In a 2018 documentary by Al Jazeera, art dealer Deepak Shakya had named the Rubin as one of his family's connections in New York. When the journalist Steve Chou approached the museum, it denied having anything from Shakya in its collection.

Britschgi says provenance research is a critical and ongoing process for the Rubin, and recent returns have made the museum more aware of the continued need to dedicate resources to it.

"The returns have also led us to re-evaluate elements of our acquisition policy," says Britschgi.

"If the Rubin learns, through its own research, or by another party, that objects in its collection are claimed to have been stolen, looted, or illegally excavated, the Rubin immediately addresses these claims carefully and seriously."

But activists are skeptical of Rubin's motive and concerned that the museum is using Itumbaha to blunt criticism about stolen items.

By accepting the Rubin's help and allowing it to host events, some say Nepal is legitimising the museum's past acts.

"This is whitewashing," says heritage conservationist Rabindra Puri, who chairs the Museum of Stolen Art in Bhaktapur. "If it is about good faith and goodwill, the museum should investigate its collection and return the Nepali artefacts that are rightfully ours."

"There could be potential conflict in future repatriation of other sculptures if discovered in the Rubin's collection. There may also be other museums with stolen artefacts that may approach other communities in Nepal to absolve themselves. This is setting a negative precedent," Puri adds.

The bahas and bahis of Kathmandu Valley are already living museums, and are sacred spaces that have served as places of learning and worship for centuries. Critics say introducing the western notion of a 'museum' devoid of emotional attachment to the visitor is cultural invasion and a form of neocolonialism.

Another activist who wished to remain anonymous said, "There are many examples of collectors and traffickers who have funded scholarly excavations and laundered their reputation by donating or helping museums with collections. The Rubin's involvement can be viewed in a similar lens." ■

Bedrock of Buddhism

Restoring Itumbaha also saves the Valley's intangible monastic heritage

■ Kunda Dixit

All Nepalis take pride in the fact that the Buddha was born in Nepal, but few may know that Kathmandu Valley has the longest uninterrupted Buddhist tradition.

Legend has it that the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka visited the Valley and married his daughter Charumati to a Patan nobility 2,000 years ago. The stupas of Chabahil and Pim Baha date back to that period. Buddhism has been preserved and continuously practiced in Kathmandu Valley since then to this day.

Because of Kathmandu Valley's relative isolation, the monastic tradition survived here while it was destroyed by waves of Muslim invasion in north India. The centres of learning and worship safeguarded Theravada practices, while evolving into the unique Vajrayana traditions that are the characteristic of Newar Buddhism that then travelled north into Tibet, China and up to Japan, assimilating local influences along the way.

It was in the Valley's monastic sites, known as baha, that rituals and tantric practices of Newar Buddhism thrive to this day. Seven of Kathmandu Valley's temple complexes are in UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites, and Itumbaha is one of five main Newar Buddhist monastic enclaves in Kathmandu.

The World Monument Watch has included Itumbaha in its list of most endangered sites. A visit to the square shows why: while the courtyard and temple are intact, it is now surrounded by concrete high-rises of inner city Kathmandu.

Itumbaha has existed for at least 800 years, and many of the carved wooden struts and columns, steles and votive structures survived earthquakes, invasions and political upheavals. Indeed, Itumbaha is only one of three monastic structures in Kathmandu Valley that have preserved their original architecture for so long.

The monastery is a part of the community and its rituals and activities are managed by the local sangha made of non-celibate priests, and the leadership in itself has been passed down through the generations.

Because of its importance, Itumbaha was selected for urgent protection in 2003, and work started in restoring the collapsed south wing of the courtyard by Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) with support from the German Embassy and the local community. The eastern wing was subsequently restored with support from the World Monument Fund.

The historical and cultural importance of Itumbaha and its meticulous rehabilitation from 2002- 2016 is now documented in a new book launched by KVPT last week: Restoration of Itumbaha.

The book has contributions from a star cast of heritage conservationists and architects like Niels Gutschow, Thomas Schrom, Rohit Ranjitkar and contributions by other local and international experts.

Alexander von Rospatt of Berkeley has a longish chapter on the monastic traditions of Itumbaha and explains why its intangible heritage is the reason the place is such a culturally vibrant shrine to this day.

Gutschow documents in great detail the restoration work, with revealing before and after illustrations. One of the elaborately carved wooden tympanum was stolen in 2003 and has never been found. It was probably sold by art dealers to collectors or museums.

As a part of the effort to protect existing artefacts and to spread awareness about heritage theft, a small room in the southwest corner of the courtyard is housing a museum that is being upgraded with support from the Rubin Museum (see adjoining report).

The Itumbaha Initiative did not even try to fight the tidal wave of concrete that engulfed the historic heart of Kathmandu in the past decades. There was no legal way to stop private property owners to go high, and neither was there the political will to implement zoning laws.

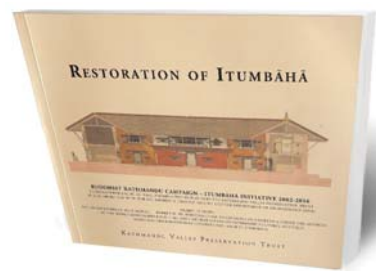
Gutschow notes: 'Entering the courtyard one experiences a world of its own, a confined sanctuary with a horizon below the eaves. Rising the eyes only one is aware of the other world, contemporary Kathmandu ... (with its) aggressive environment.'

And that is the message of this book: that Kathmandu's best treasures like Itumbaha are hidden away. Finding them needs work. One has to walk down narrow alleys with cantilevered high-rises that block out the sky, through the fumes, noise and crowds of Asan Tole, to enter the Kayagunani square and from there cross the threshold of the inner courtyard and then the sanctum sanctorum.

Centuries of history speak from the corners, cobble stones are polished by the feet of ages, the bricks are eroded with time, chaityas encrusted with vermilion dot the courtyard.

Restoration of Itumbaha is a documentation of the heritage and conservation of this priceless secret jewel of Kathmandu, and the book can serve as a useful guide for first time visitors and frequenters alike.

Once is not enough because there is so much history and culture crammed into such a small space. Best to take the book along, sit in the square and let the architectural drawings, pre-restoration images and progress of pilgrims immerse you in Itumbaha's universe. ■



*Restoration of Itumbaha
Buddhist Kathmandu Campaign — Itumbaha
Initiative 2002-2016
Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, 2023
200 pages
ISBN 978-9937-3-3637-2
Rs2,000*

Nepali nurses gone and going to

Three nurses speak about higher pay, greater appreciation and learning opportunities in Britain



DIASPORA
DIARIES 39

This is the 39th instalment of Diaspora Diaries, a regular series in Nepali Times with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.

Binod Simkhada

I have lived in the UK since 2004. My years spent abroad have started to outnumber the years I have lived in Nepal, and I find myself facing an identity crisis.

I feel like an outsider in Nepal except when I am at home with my parents in Balaju. Yet, I am still not British enough in Britain. Most of my non-working hours are spent with Nepalis in the UK, talking about Nepal and reminiscing about growing up back home.

As a male nurse, I am in the minority in my profession, and



patients often mistake me for the doctor when I am making rounds with a female physician. This has become even more common as my hair goes grey.

I did not intend to study nursing when I first came here from Nepal as an 18-year old. My sister and wife are also nurses in the UK, and I once served as president

of the Nepalese Nursing Association UK (NNAUK) that promotes the welfare of Nepali nurses in Britain.

Nepali nurses who come to the UK these days are much better informed, aware about the benefits and rights of the job, and have aspirations to rise through the ranks.

Before coming, they weigh their options against other countries like Australia and the US. They are not here arbitrarily just because it is the UK. Work can be demanding with 12-hour shifts, little assistance from staff and lots of mandatory documentation.

I am glad that the Nepal government has signed a bilateral deal with the UK (see report below) as it is rare for Nepal

to even contemplate a managed migration scheme for skilled workers.

But even without the agreement, nurses have been coming to the UK individually. As Nepal is in the WHO's Red List of countries with a fragile health system, British employers cannot proactively recruit Nepalis and deprive

their home country of trained healthcare staff. But nurses do apply, and come on their own.

Retention of nurses in Nepal, especially in remote underserved areas, is a persistent problem because of low benefits and poor facilities.

How can we call it a job when a nurse working even at a private hospital earns only Rs15,000 a month? This is barely enough to survive. The salary structure of healthcare workers in the private sector in Nepal needs to be regulated and policed.

There are many unemployed and under-employed nurses in Nepal, and allocation of nurses rather than shortage is a bigger problem. In fact, the supply of nurses increases when opportunities for foreign employment opens up, and youth choose job prospects abroad.

Nepal needs to also rely more on its diaspora. My whole organisation was behind me during the 2015 earthquake when others in the British National Health System (NHS) including those who do not even know me extended their spontaneous support.

I was not in Nepal nor was my immediate family affected in the earthquake, but we all came together as Nepalis to help. NNAUK continues to support Nepal, including the establishment of a birthing center in Jumla that was recently handed over to the local government. One does not need to be in Nepal to contribute to Nepal.



Purnima Chimire Gumagai

I arrived in the UK six months ago and went through the same process as the UK-Nepal government-to-government deal for nursing staff, but I did all the job hunting on my own. I did not apply through an agency, so I was not swindled like many others are.

I had passed Nepal's civil service exam and had relatively better pay and stability, yet I decided to leave. At a health post in rural Lalitpur, the position itself was politicised.

Transfers were at the discretion of local officials and there was no respect and appreciation nor

Nepali nurses don't wait for UK

Supply-demand rules govern Nepal-UK agreement to provide nurses to the NHS

From 20 July, the Nepal government and UK have started accepting applications from nurses under a bilateral government-to-government (G2G) mechanism signed last year. In this pilot phase, 100 nurses are expected to benefit from zero-cost recruitment and receive equal treatment as other nationalities including benefits, rights and protection.

But Nepali nurses are not waiting for this agreement to be implemented, they are already migrating on their own to Britain and elsewhere in large numbers (see adjoining Diaspora Diaries).

Nepali Times spoke with nurses in Bhairawa, Kathmandu, Saudi Arabia and the UK who are applying to go overseas, are current migrants, and returnees. Nurses are in high demand in many industrialised countries and there is a severe labour crisis in the healthcare sector globally.

The Nepalis, mostly women, have various reasons for choosing a specific destination country. A friend, a relative, or ease of migration. Three of our respondents complained that Australia's paperwork is too cumbersome. The UK allows faster track for registered nursing. Japan has strict language requirements. Both preparation and testing costs for exams like OET (UK) and NCLEX (US) are high, others said.

And if all else fails, UAE and Saudi Arabia also offer good pay and are attractive transit destinations before they apply elsewhere to countries that offer permanent residencies. In addition, there is also demand from Israel for Nepali nurses and caregivers.

It is as if the nurses are all saying:



anywhere but Nepal.

Purnima, a UK-based nurse, says that among her batchmates of 40, 26 are in Australia, six in the UK, three in the US and one in New Zealand.

In Bhairawa, lab technician Rita is headed to Canada for her studies. Despite

being a scholarship student, she does not want to apply for jobs in hospitals, not just because of the low salary but also because she knows that her better networked peers will have a head start.

Rita did a six-month unpaid internship in Nepal when she had to cover her own

expenses despite working long hours. She says, "I know I entered this field to provide selfless service but when you have an uncertain future in Nepal, you do feel the urge to rush to find a way out."

She has already got loans worth 15,000 Canadian dollars, and knows it will not

the UK



proper growth opportunities. Transfers also overlooked considerations like whether you are a new mother, which I was.

Respect for nurses is sorely missing in Nepal, even though the health system would collapse without us. We work in under-equipped and under-funded health posts and still are not appreciated or paid adequately.

In 2017, I withdrew an offer to study in Australia because I wanted to serve my country. Somewhere down the line, that urge dissipated, and frustration took over.

When I first started working in the UK, everything felt new, and I had difficulty understanding the foreign accent. Perhaps my apprehension was evident on my face one day when on a palliative

case an elderly, kind patient noticed and asked if I was nervous. I said no. A month later he was admitted again, and remembered me. He complimented me on how I looked much more confident than the last time.

And I do feel more confident. I am learning new things every day. A few weeks into the job, I got an email from my manager thanking me for my work that day which had been quite stressful. I was pleasantly surprised. It is these little things that matter.

Back at the health post in Nepal, one day I received a call from a patient who needed a cesarean that was not available at my health post. As there was no ambulance readily available, I had arranged for a truck to rush her to hospital and she called to thank me after her delivery. Very different contexts, but it is the same feeling of being appreciated that is most important.

Earning more is just one aspect of working here. Options like nursing are good for people who prioritise learning and career growth. If the expectation is solely to earn, that will not happen. We get carried away converting our salaries into Nepali rupees, but living costs here are high.

We got a raise in June following strikes staged by the Royal College of Nursing in the UK to protest insufficient pay. My savings are modest, but as my husband will soon be joining, it will be easier to save.

I am excited about my husband and daughter joining me in a month or so. I cannot wait to hug them at the airport.



Shradda Karki

I have been a professional nurse in Nepal for the last seven years. I was primarily involved in the maternity section. The best part of my job has always been handing over a newborn to the mother after delivery.

At that moment, all is forgotten by the emotional mother including the excruciating pain she just endured. It is easy to get attached to a job that allows me to be part of such moments of bliss.

However, I resigned a few

days back. I am headed to the UK to pursue further education in healthcare management. Nursing in Nepal has three main problems as I see it that need to be fixed: lack of respect, high patient to nurse ratio, and low salary.

Even after seven years as a nurse, I make Rs34,000 a month which is still better than what many other nurses earn but is not sufficient considering the amount of work I put in, rising costs and high tuition fees. There are

“ I am aware of the struggle that awaits me overseas, but I am prepared for it. Hopefully, there will be a sense of fulfilment from the higher earnings, better growth and learning opportunities.

44 beds in my ward, and just two of us. What I like about my job the most is patient care but the workload seldom gives me a chance to really connect with my patients.

I chose a degree in the UK because it will open new opportunities for me globally. Most of my classmates are now abroad. On balance, things are significantly better abroad for the same level of effort I put in here.

In the last two months, four colleagues have resigned and gone abroad. Those who have not are already preparing for language tests, and getting documents together for visa applications.

I am aware of the struggle that awaits me overseas, but I am prepared for it. Hopefully, there will be a sense of fulfilment from the higher earnings, better growth and learning opportunities. 🇬🇧

Diaspora Diaries is a regular column in Nepali Times providing a platform to share experiences of living, working, studying abroad.

Authentic and original entries can be sent to editors@nepalitimes.com with Diaspora Diaries in the subject line.

deal to migrate

be easy to pay it back along with next year’s academic fees, but she hopes her effort will be rewarded ultimately.

Another Kathmandu based nurse says, “After ten years working as a nurse here, I decided to call it quits.” She is now studying for her PTE because the Occupational English Test (OET) that is required for nurses in the UK was both too difficult and expensive. She plans to apply for a senior care position in the UK which will be easier than applying as a registered nurse.

“I earn Rs50,000 a month in my semi-government position but somehow, when everyone leaves, you too start feeling like you are missing out by staying back,” she confides. “I am shocked that the allowance for overnight duty is only Rs150 here.”

However, a UK-based nurse told us that it is not all a land of milk and honey overseas. Senior care workers, in particular, are vulnerable to abuse by fraudulent agencies and charge high recruitment fees and delayed job placements in elderly care homes.

Nurses who are not leaving for countries like the UK, US and Australia are headed to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. A Dammam -based nurse told us on the phone: “There is no comparison between working in Saudi Arabia versus Nepal. I had to do a full-time job and a part-time job to make a total of Rs23,000 a month in Nepal. Here, I am saving Rs100,000 a month with all living expenses covered.”

She adds that exposure to new technologies and the training in topics like infection control make nurses more competitive in the job market. For many Nepalis, the Gulf is a transit as they

prepare for the IELTS, OET or NCLEX on the side, save, and get the required work experience so they can apply via consultancies based in the Gulf itself to go further afield.

With or without the Nepal-Britain deal, nurses continue to follow the money, convenience, and new opportunities overseas. Brexit and the end of free movement of EU nationals has further increased the shortage of nurses, but the rise in migration has nonetheless sparked public discussions in Nepal and the UK.

Public attitude surveys show strong support for an increase in overseas workers in the UK in several sectors including nursing. Binod Simkhada, a UK-based nurse who formerly headed the Nepalese Nursing Association UK, says international recruitment in Britain is also viewed by some activists with criticism as a “quick fix” rather than a long-term solution to the severe healthcare professionals shortage there, and there are calls for the National Health Service (NHS) to invest in UK-trained healthcare workers instead of just relying on international recruitment to fill shortages.

But the UK is struggling to meet its student nurse recruitment targets and has also seen large volumes of leavers who quit service for various reasons including high pressure and poor work-life balance.

Simkhada recognises that better managed legal pathways like the G2G pilot can promote ethical and well-managed recruitment, preventing Nepali nurses from looking for backdoor entries with student visas that are expensive. He says skilled emigration is a positive net gain for Nepal.

Critics are not so sure. They say the UK’s gain would be Nepal’s loss. Britain, they say, is “stealing nurses” from countries with fragile health systems. They also say nurse salaries in the UK under the G2G deal that are considered high by Nepali standards should address the high living costs there.

Nepal is one of the 55 countries in the WHO health workforce support and safeguards list that are facing the most pressing health workforce challenges related to universal health coverage including a density of nurses below the global median.

The UK’s own Department of Health and Social Care has listed Nepal in the Amber List since 2022 with the government piloting managed and ethical recruitment of healthcare workers while prohibiting other organisations from actively recruiting from Nepal. WHO says G2G deals with countries like Nepal should also specify benefits to the health system of source countries that are ‘commensurate and proportional to the benefits accruing to destination countries’.

This is also echoed in calls for Britain to help countries like Nepal with weak health infrastructure that are essentially subsidising the UK health system by sending their trained workforce. Countries like the UK should consider going beyond traditional labour agreements to mutually beneficial skills partnership models that would also benefit the health training and infrastructure of migrant origin countries. The UK-Nepal model can serve as an important platform in making overseas migration better.

A UK-based Nepali nurse said, “I seriously doubt that there is a shortage of nurses in Nepal, but I hope the perception of shortage

ensures that the government and employers address the rock-bottom wages, lack of respect and mentoring, and poor working environment for nurses in Nepal.”

Simkhada adds, “There are already many unemployed nurses in Nepal. Allocation rather than shortage is a bigger problem at the moment.” He notes that the supply of nurses in fact increases when opportunities for foreign employment opens up, as youth choose fields of study with job prospects abroad. Indeed, there is widespread dissatisfaction about the working condition and payment of both public- and private-sector healthcare workers and many just view it as a springboard for overseas opportunities, as nurses collect the required work experience or buy time to prepare for overseas jobs. Resignation letters are handed in with little or no remorse.

The UK itself is also facing criticism for the working conditions of its nurses. Nurses have been staging strikes over pay disputes, especially given the cost-of-living crisis in the UK that has left them struggling. In response, the government has recently agreed to a 5% pay rise to last year’s salary and a one-off lump sum amount.

The sorry state of employment conditions of health workers in Nepal diverts attention from the challenges experienced by nurses working abroad to integrate, work and make the most of their overseas opportunities. But as Nepali migrant workers overseas point out, at least nurses abroad benefit from career growth and higher earnings that they invest in their children’s future. In Nepal, they just struggle alone for low pay and little appreciation. 🇬🇧



HARI the POTTER

Clay worker of Thimi expands to new ceramic products

■ Aayusha Pokharel

Hari Chandra Prajapati (right) was only 14 when he started learning how to mould a lump of clay into a work of art just like his forebears did.

There was something about shaping wet clay into everyday items that fascinated the teenager, and inspired him to follow his ancestral trade at a time when his peers were more into video games and movies.

By age 15, he had taken over the family business in Thimi started by his great-grandfather.

Today, Jwojolapa Ceramics, tucked away in a narrow alley of this ancient town is a showroom, and a training centre.

Beginners and professional pottery makers all come here to revive a millennia-old tradition that Thimi is famous for.



PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI

Kathmandu Valley used to be a lake till as recently as 10,000 years ago, and when the water drained away it left fertile alluvium ideal for agriculture and pottery.

“Nobody is ever perfect in the art of pottery, but we all carry on the legacy of our ancestors and also innovate with ceramics,” says Prajapati.

Nepal’s handmade ceramics have been replaced by mass produced items from India and

China that are more durable.

But ceramic kitchen items and household pottery products are experiencing a renaissance in Nepal, as demand grows for more home and hand-made articles with artistic designs.

Clay pots and earthenware have always been extensively used in religious rituals, now people are eager to incorporate them in their daily lives as well.

“As more people become

aware of its significance, they are relearning and reviving this art, which makes me happy,” says Prajapati, who is also a certified pottery and ceramics skills trainer having taught in Korea and many schools in Kathmandu Valley.

Many who visit Prajapati’s shop to learn pottery do so because they consider it a form of therapy as they let the fingers shape the oozing clay.

With help from the Association

of Craft Producers, Prajapati has connected with buyers from all over the world.

Business suffered after the 2015 earthquake and during the Covid lockdowns. Prajapati tried his hands at other businesses but it was inevitable that he would return to a profession he was passionate about.

Large objects like flowerpots are still fired with wood, but electric kilns have simplified the process and most pieces are glass-glazed.

“We used to turn the potters’ wheel with our hands in the past, but it is easier now with an electric motor. I can focus better on the designs,” he says.

Raw clay has become difficult to source because Kathmandu is getting more built-up. Prajapati used to truck in clay from Sintitar, but the place now has apartment blocks, so he has to venture further afield to Sankhu.

Despite challenges, Prajapati is excited for what the future holds for the handicraft art form. He says, “It makes me happy to see the enthusiasm of the younger generation in traditional craft. Now we can preserve our cultural heritage and create opportunities for future generations.” 🇳🇵



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