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THE OUTCASTS



CHANDRA KISHORE

These are the forgotten Nepalis, who do not seem to matter to anyone in all three levels of government. Elected members of ward, municipal or provincial councils should be listening to them, but they do not.



BORDERLINES
Chandra Kishore

The demand for federalism was first raised from these districts which were always treated as peripheral by Kathmandu. Yet, even after the provinces were carved out in 2015 to devolve decision-making, these families on the margins still do not count.

They are not powerless, they were never given any power. They are not voiceless, they are not allowed a voice.

The state does not need to move mountains to meet their needs. Their needs are simple: make the citizenship process easier, provide a hand pump in the village for safe drinking water, make sure the health post has a nurse, protect them from persecution from

powerful castes.

But the gap between Nepalis who have access to state services and those left out is widening. Grassroots democracy under federalism has not changed the fortunes of those at the grassroots. A new class of politicians is emerging who are riding identity-based provincial politics, but they have no time for the corner people who elected them (see Editorial, page 2).

The state's legitimacy should stem from how much the perennially outcast, landless or Dalits are allowed to voice their concerns. Eight years after the Constitution, and two elections later, there has been no improvement in the condition of Nepal's most underserved.

The problem of landless Dalits in the Tarai is different from others from this community in Nepal. Families are crammed inside mud and thatch huts come winter, summer or monsoon.

I ask them if the ward or municipality leaders they elected have ever visited, and they shake their heads. Provincial politics is just a proxy for Kathmandu's bloated centralised system.

In these backwaters of the Tarai,

political power comes out of the claws of excavators mining sand from rivers. Power is flaunted by hobnobbing with imported godmen, by ignoring the victims of loan sharks, or neglecting the neglected.

The Constitution guarantees freedom of expression. But that freedom means nothing to people not given the means to express themselves. Grassroots democracy was supposed to be the mechanism for them to be heard, but that channel has been muted by power brokers.

Local radio stations and media should have stepped in, but they are victims of self-censorship themselves. Media owners are hand in glove with the powers that they cannot hold to account. The social media sphere is too preoccupied with sharing selfies.

The local media should be the medium to amplify the concerns of excluded castes and classes, and be the solution. But it is a part of the problem. Local journalists are megaphones for the already rich and powerful, they have no time for those at ground zero.

These are families so deprived and abandoned they do not even have the resources or connections to march to Kathmandu to press


their demands. Small people have small wants, but multiply these with the expectation of millions and it becomes a wildfire of outrage that can engulf those in the ivory towers.

A recent visit to the hinterlands of Madhes Province was a chance for me to hear about local governments engaged in local plunder. In paddy fields and roadside shacks, there was talk of corruption, extortion and a sense of abandonment. These districts in the plains used to be ignored by Kathmandu, now they are ignored by the local officials they themselves elected.

The movers and shakers of the Madhes regard genuine empowerment at the grassroots with suspicion, afraid that freedom will allow the anger to erupt one day.

And to distract public attention from this failure to address the needs of the neediest, politicians use aggressive intolerance and refuse to even acknowledge that the people they were elected to serve do exist. 🇳🇵

Chandra Kishore is a Birganj-based commentator who writes this monthly column Borderlines for Nepali Times.
@kishore_chandra


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Faith in tolerance

Dharan's Bijayapur is home to both Hindu and Kirat places of worship, one of which is the Balgopal Temple. But in May, residents woke up one day to the arrival of Holy Trinity Believers Eastern Church across the street.

Various religious groups wrote to Dharan's firebrand mayor Harka Sampang to urge him to relocate the church, saying it was built illegally. The Christian community also reached out to the mayor, defending the site.

Mayor Sampang instead of trying to defuse the situation, washed his hands off the matter and referred it to the courts. The city had already been on edge after the 2022 local election campaign when Sampang and his rival accused each other of stoking ethno-religious tensions.

Matters came to a head earlier this month when a gathering of indigenous communities dined on beef and live-streamed it. Killing cows is still punishable by law because it is Nepal's national animal. The video ignited a wildfire of ethnic tension not just in Dharan, but across the country and in the diaspora.

Radical Hindu groups in neighbouring districts of Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari began to mobilise, organising a save-the-cow rally on 26 August. On social media, the discourse became extreme with threats of violence. Mayor Sampang had to declare a curfew to douse the flames, but continued to post inflammatory remarks on social media.

Sampang was elected in 2022 on a populist anti-establishment wave just like Kathmandu's Mayor Balen Shah. But he has been on the defensive ever since a decade-old video emerged in which he appears to support conversion to Christianity.

Fortunately, Dharan's former mayors who are from all ethnicities came together to call for de-escalation, describing Dharan as a culturally, linguistically, ethnically and geographically, religiously tolerant and diverse city. This has defused the situation somewhat, but the root of the problem lies in politicians of all hues using religious populism for support.

Dharan is now calm, but there is concern that it could be calm before the storm. There is also concern that outsiders are trying to keep tensions high by whipping up Hindutva nationalism and identity politics.

In Kathmandu, leaders from across national political parties released a joint statement expressing concern. Shekhar Koirala, who leads a rival faction of the Nepali Congress (NC), accused Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal of plain identity politics. To stanch a possible conflagration that

could spread across the country, the national parties need to reaffirm Nepal's secular status to mean religious freedom and inclusion and the leadership must go beyond joint written statements.

But with the end of ideology in Nepali politics and winds of intolerance blowing from the South, Nepal's politicians are falling back on populism and bigotry. Politicians should be worshipping at shrines dedicated to all religions, not just their own. It is not enough to give speeches from the pulpit saying they "respect all religions".

A sitting MP and Nepal's supposedly richest man has invited a self-declared Indian godman who has repeatedly expressed misogynistic, casteist and Islamophobic sentiments and openly called for violence against minorities. He has been given a VIP welcome and politicians of all hues, including the Home Minister, are lining up to pay respects.

Dharan's troubles are a continuation of the ongoing debate about whether to name the province Kosi (based on geography) or Kirat (based on identity). This debate can

easily be resolved if moderate politicians on both sides are more vocal, and not let the hotheads whip up tensions.

The royalist-right Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) wants secularism expunged from the constitution, and the re-establishment of Nepal as a Hindu monarchy.

Nepal's public sphere, disillusioned with establishment politics, has seen a shift to pro-Hindu discourse corresponding with Hindutva in India and its growing influence in Nepal. The political leadership and aspirants have taken notice, and weaponised social media to appeal to the voter base.

Nepal has long prided itself as being a 'garden of many castes and ethnicities' and for its religious tolerance and harmony. Often, ethnic and caste-based bigotry, discrimination, and violence are swept under the rug.

Nepal's ethnic, cultural, and religious mosaic is our strength. Diversity is the basis of our national unity. Freedom of religion also means respecting the faith of others.

TikTok beefeaters were provocative, but so were the demonstrators who were disrespectful of the customs and culture of fellow-Nepalis.

Separation of powers also means keeping religion out of politics, that is the true essence of secularism. At any other time, the co-existence of a temple and a church next to each other could be a fitting symbol of the tolerance that Nepalis are supposed to espouse.

Shristi Karki



Diversity is the basis of our national unity. Freedom of religion also means respecting the faith of others.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Ceasefire no more

20 years ago this week, Maoist supremo Prachanda, now Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, broke seven-month ceasefire. A Nepali Times editorial at the time interpreted it as the Maoists embarking on a campaign of top-level assassinations possibly leading to urban guerilla warfare.

Today, the end of war has not brought peace. There are now anti-secular, anti-federal forces that want to turn the clock back.

Excerpt of the editorial published on issue #160 29 August-4 September 2003:

An overwhelming sense of national despair greeted Prachanda's statement. Even though the comrade left a small opening for talks to restart, it is clear that the Nepali people now have to be prepared for the worst while hoping for the best.



No war is civil. It is by definition a nasty affair, but we must be able to control the brutality and prevent the suffering of innocents. This time, we have to get both sides to agree to a human rights covenant not just a statement of good intentions, but with a mechanism in place to directly monitor

violations on the ground.

The parliamentary parties, whatever their past misconduct, are the one entity that needs peace to exist. Because their very survival is tied up with an end to conflict, they have to be a party to its restoration.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



Tsherin's Takpa

Tsherin Sherpa, the internationally renowned Nepali artist known for his distinctive, and sometimes provocative, fusion of traditional and contemporary has returned home. He has set up a new gallery in Kathmandu called Takpa. Watch the video and read the profile on page 9. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.



Bad Air Gets Worse

Nepal is the world's third most polluted country with the poor air quality reducing life expectancy of Nepalis by up to 6.5 years in the Tarai. The latest Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) data from the University of Chicago reveals that the particulate pollution is a bigger public health risk than other diseases. Watch the video. Air pollution special on page 10-11.

CORRUPTION

This is a depressing state of the state ('Gold Medal for corruption', Editorial, #1176). Why we keep tolerating this as Nepalis is both embarrassing and beyond belief. Are we so fatalistic that we just accept it? Or are we equally to blame?

Raj Gyawali

■ Looks like Nepal needs a popular uprising to get rid of the corrupt rulers. Oh wait, isn't that what the Maoists said last time?

Stewie McLean

WATER RESOURCES

Extremely happy to see that we are now realising the greater importance of our water for multiple local uses rather than just the generation and export of electricity ('Balance of Power', Sonia Awale, #1176).

Netashwa

■ After landscape and seascape, now the time is to discuss riverscape which is the most important and urgent agenda for a climate-resilient Nepal, but very few people are willing to discuss this perspective ('India, Nepal ignore climate crisis in river talks', Ramesh Bhushal, #1176).

Maheshwar Dhakal

CRANES

Europe had a mild winter last year ('Saving Lumbini's Sarus', Maheshwor Acharya, nepalitimes.com). Many of our migratory cranes stayed here over winter.

Slow Trekking

SRI MAHAL

Nepal seems to have little respect for its built heritage ('A palace fit for a prince', Asmita Khadka, #1175).

David Seddon

SNAKE RESCUE

It is really urgent to raise awareness about these beautiful and ecologically important snakes which are facing hardships because of habitat loss and human activity ('Snakes on plains' Bishal Prasad Neupane, page 12). Thanks, Asbin Raj Ojha and Anjali Thapaliya ji for your efforts.

Pradeep Bhandari

WHAT'S TRENDING

Where wild things are

by Mahendra Singh Limbu
Just a short drive from the Ring Road is Pulchoki, Kathmandu Valley's biodiversity treasure trove. Pulchoki shelters a wide variety of interesting mammals, rodents and reptiles which are fascinating for wildlife spotters. More on our website.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Balance of Power

by Sonia Awale
Probably the best thing to happen to Nepal's economy lately is India's refusal to buy more electricity. It could eventually force the government to expedite transmission infrastructure and increase domestic demand. India's real interest is to ensure future water supply rather than electricity. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full story.

Most popular on Twitter

Gold Medal for corruption

Editorial
There is national consensus among politicians only when it comes to protecting each other from prosecution. The stench from scam after scam this year has become unbearable. If this was an international tournament, Nepal should get the Gold Medal for corruption. Join the discussion online.

Most commented



India, Nepal ignore climate crisis in river talks

by Ramesh Bhushal
Poor water management with poorly designed flood control embankments and infrastructure, insufficient groundwater recharge, and over-pumping have worsened the effect of weather extremes due to the climate crisis in Nepal and India. Join online debate.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#editorial Nepal gets Gold Medal for corruption
There is national consensus among politicians only when it comes to protecting each other from prosecution.

Ramu Sapkota @ramusapkota
Dreams come true!
Nepal's golden days!

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#editorial Since senior figures from all three main parties are now entangled in one scandal or the other, a devious effort is afoot to protect each other from prosecution.

Ramsaroban @ramsarobandas
And we are expecting FDI. Investors don't want their money to be used by some fat old politicians. Youths know about the situation and they are leaving the country for better future.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepal's view tower pandemic accelerated after the local elections of 2017, when rural municipalities vied with each other to build concrete structures on mountain tops in the mistaken belief that it enhances the view and helps attract tourists.

Forester @kuenvmgt504
Oligotopic mania

1,000 WORDS



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA/RSS

DANCING TO THE SAME TUNE: Nepal's top politicians, including Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, NC's Sher Bahadur Deuba and UML opposition leader Bhim Rawal performed the 'deuda' dance of western Nepal on Monday in Kathmandu. Commentators wondered why they do not have the same bonhomie in running the country.





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Flying with special needs

Nepal's airports are not very well designed for access, with crowded concourses, limited turnstiles, shoddy ramp buses and pot-holed parking lots. But for passengers who have special needs, they are a nightmare.

The state of domestic airports is even worse. Most are not wheel-chair friendly, the staircases and ramps are steep and not designed with people with physical disabilities in mind.

However, airlines try to work with the facilities offered by the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) which manages the country's airports. It almost seems as if making airports accessible for those with special needs is the last thing in CAAN's mind.



This is all the more evident in domestic flights which also serve as a medical evacuation service for passengers travelling for hospital treatment in the cities. Passengers, some of them even in stretchers, have to be carried on regular flights from remote area airports to cities like Biratnagar, Nepalganj and Dhangadi. Some even have to transit those airports for onward flights to Kathmandu.

Often, domestic flights on trunk routes also have patients or expectant mothers flying to or from Kathmandu. Aside from this, there are also many passengers with special needs who may find airports, ramp buses and getting in and out of planes not wheelchair-friendly.

Getting on planes requires waiting in numerous lines, check-in, and security

procedures. This creates a challenge for persons with disabilities, pregnant women, seniors or minors.

Now, domestic carriers like Buddha Air provide special assistance to passengers needing medical equipment and support while traveling such as wheelchairs, seniors with movement difficulties, pregnant women.

"Special assistance in airlines is necessary so travel is convenient to all passengers regardless of their age, medical condition and/or mobility impairments," says Dipendra Karn of Buddha Air. "Providing special assistance promotes inclusive and accessible air travel to all passengers and prevents discrimination."

Buddha Air is the first airline in Nepal to replace steps with ramps so wheelchair passengers can board planes without having

to be physically carried on and off the cabin. Passengers have to make a request with necessary documents laying out their mobility restrictions. The carrier also requires a personal attendant to accompany such passengers and an Indemnity Bond from next of kin.

Passengers also have to fill out a Medical Information Form (MEDIF) so that the airline can determine whether the passenger is fit to fly.

Special seating arrangements

can also be made for passengers requiring stretchers or Portable Oxygen Cylinders (POC). The captain is notified if there is a passenger carrying POC onboard, as well as the nature of the passenger's oxygen needs.

Passenger stretchers are placed in the last three rows of the ATR-72 or -42 aircraft and are required to be escorted by qualified medical personnel as per the doctor's recommendation.

Pregnant women can get special assistance if they are 29-36 weeks along and must present a medical certificate stating that they are fit to fly. Women less than 28 weeks pregnant do not need to submit any documents. Women are not allowed to fly if they are more than 37 weeks pregnant.

Special needs requirements can be made through the Buddha Air app online. 🇳🇵



Parmigiana di Pollo

PINKI SRIS RANA

Back in the Olive Garden

One of the first authentic Italian restaurants in Kathmandu reopens after four years with delectable changes.

Radisson opened Olive Garden in 1998, the same year the hotel chain opened in Lazimpat, making the restaurant only the second of its kind after Fire and Ice pizzeria to specialise in Italian cuisine in Nepal.

Located right off the lobby level of Radisson Hotel's main building, the restaurant now offers a five-course meal with a table d'hôte menu, a fixed menu opening exclusively for dinner time between 6-10:30PM.

"We have tailored the menu and timing targeting families and married couples keeping in mind their work hours," says Kedar Pandey of Radisson. "They do not have to spend much time deciding what to eat. We have meticulously curated the menu for them." The restaurant's soft yellow glow makes for a cosy ambience. A lighted candle on each table and soft background melody sets the mood right for an intimate candlelight dinner, especially on a rainy evening.

The restaurant can seat 46 people and the management is planning to add a live piano solo to accompany the dining experience. There are two options for the table d'hôte menu. Within each course, there are 2-3 additional options offering both vegetarian and non-vegetarian delicacies as per one's preferences. Either

of the two options of the full-course menu is available at a net total of Rs4,500 per person. A bottle of Italian wine is extra. Providing a five-course meal at that price is not exorbitant by today's standards and is comparable to any other high-end restaurant in Kathmandu.

The full course is packed with elevated flavours: Zuppa soup Minestrone is rich tomato broth with zucchini and carrots.

For the Antipasti, there is 'Gnocchi alla Sorrentina' which hits all the right taste buds. Gnocchi, made of mashed potatoes, flour and eggs with cherry-like tomato toppings and garlic sauce, has a base of green basil pesto sauce.

The 'Spaghetti con Gamberi' is served with shrimp in red tomato sauce. The main course Secondi is the 'Parmigiana di Pollo' -- breaded chicken topped with melted cheese and the grana padano layered over it. Last but not least is the Classic Tiramisu for the Dolci dessert.

Olive Garden sources its ingredients from Italy itself, and Executive Chef Gyanesh Dass has more than 25 years of experience in continental cuisine and says: "We have tweaked the dishes just right to serve the Nepali palate all while staying true to our Italian roots." 🇳🇵

Pinki Sris Rana

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2023 Peace Corps

Twenty-one Peace Corps volunteers were sworn in by US Ambassador Dean R. Thompson and the Peace Corps Nepal Country Director Troy Kofroth to begin their two-year service in Nepal on the 61st anniversary of the Nepal-US Peace Corps program



agreement. The new volunteers, who are the first group to come to Nepal since the Covid-19 shutdowns-- arrived in June 2023 and underwent 11 weeks of intensive language, cross-cultural and technical training in Kavre District. They have been assigned to five districts in Gandaki and Bagmati provinces to teach English in government schools and to work on food security and health projects.



Star Alliance Lounge

Star Alliance's LAX lounge won the North America's Leading Airport Lounge at World Travel Awards 2023 for the fourth consecutive year. The lounge features an outdoor terrace, runway views, and peaceful spaces. The LAX lounge was also named World's Best Airline Alliance Lounge by Skytrax. Turkish Airlines is a member of Star Alliance.



Architecture & Design

The 8th Architecture and Interior Design Student Competition sponsored by Asian Paints tasked architecture students with the 'Pokhara Monumental Park' project and interior design students with the 'Boutique Hotel' project. Winners Sandeep Tandukar and Neelima Pradhan received a Rs70,000 cash prize, while Anmol Bhandari and Cathy Munankarmi, who came second, received Rs40,000.



Everest discount

Everest Bank has signed an MoU with the Himalaya Drishya Resort Hotel in Dhulikhel, so cardholders, mobile banking users, and bank employees get a 10% discount on food and beverages at the resort. Everest Deputy CEO Vijay Kumar Sharma Himalaya Drishya Resort Hotel's Babita Pandey signed the agreement.

Ncell awarded

Ncell clinched the Organizational Marketing Excellence Award 2023 at the 7th Sales Summit. The



award highlights Ncell's commitment to sales and marketing and underscores the service provider's sales achievements, adaptability to market changes, and customer satisfaction. Meanwhile, Ncell CEO Jabbor Kayumov spoke at the Kathmandu Youth Conclave 2023, addressing over 5,000 attendees aged 16-25 on the theme Inspiring Youth, Leading the Nation.

Nabil award

Nabil Bank Limited received the Sales Excellence Award 2023 in the banking sector from the Growth Leadership Academy. The award recognised Nabil Bank's growth post-merger with NBB.



MCC launch

Nepal's Millennium Challenge Compact agreement with the US--which involves a \$500 billion grant-- has come into effect from 30 August. The Nepal government's share in the project has risen from \$130 million to \$197 million. The program, finalised by the Millennium Challenge Account Nepal (MCA-Nepal) Steering Committee, aims to upgrade infrastructure construction within five years.

Electricity network

Nepal's electrical transmission network has increased by 3,118km in the past nine years. The NEA's focus on electricity supply has led to an increase in grid substation capacity to 8,867MVA. Operational



transmission lines include 66kV, 132kV, 220kV, and 400kV. There are further plans to construct various substations with capacities of 10,469MVA and 15,564MVA.

NADA Auto Show

The NADA Auto Show 2023 by the Automobiles Association of Nepal will feature 16 car brands, 22 bike types, seven light commercial vehicle models, and 30 component companies from 12-17 September and is sponsored by TATA Motors Genuine Oil.

Make way for Makalu Coffee

As cardamom productivity declines, one rural community in eastern Nepal has a new cash crop

Hanna Wells
in Sankhuwasabha

Nepal’s geographic and climatic conditions deliver the finest quality coffee, and so far Gulmi, Nuwakot, Lalitpur, Kavre, Palpa, Syangja, Kaski and Sidhupalchok have been traditionally famous for beans. Now, even eastern Nepal is proving itself to have the ideal conditions for coffee plantation. In the village of Simma in the Arun Valley, men are mixing fresh soil, women and children pack saplings into plastic sacks, and men water coffee plants under the hot sun. After four years of careful planning by Lakpa Nurbu Sherpa of Ekuwa Makalu Ward 3, who is the founder of the non-profit NPO Nepal, the coffee farm is finally seeing substantial growth. It was only five months ago that Sherpa and Chun Bahadur Rai, an agricultural officer based in Bhaktapur and a local, introduced the coffee plant to farmers from Simma and other neighbouring villages. Locals were enthusiastic about the cash crop, and Makalu Ward 3 officer Badri Bahadur Rai convinced them that a coffee farm can support local incomes even as the productivity of cardamom drops. Cardamom has been one of the highest income sources for residents in the Sankhuwasabha district for over two decades. But after 25 lucrative years, the crops are reaching the end of their lifespan



SMELL THE COFFEE: Simma residents packing fresh soil and tree saplings into small plastic nursery bags to be distributed to households.

HANNA WELLS

and suffering from fungal and pest diseases. Nepal’s cardamom production has declined by an estimated 20% since 2021, and export is down by 30%. Simma resident Karna Bahadur Gurung was earning Rs100,000 for every 40kg of cardamom he sold until recently. Farmers now get only one-fourth of that amount. “Few people still have cardamom, but I see the fields are all dying,” notes Gurung. “It was unreal for everybody to get so much money from cardamom, nothing else can pay us that much.” Cardamom crops also reduce the fertility of the soil, and it can take decades for it to be viable again. Still, Gurung hopes to plant

cardamom again once the soil has recovered. While the profit has significantly decreased, cardamom remains the largest income source for many in this region below Makalu, the world’s fifth highest mountain. The hope is that coffee can remedy the income gap caused by the decline of cardamom. The global organic coffee market is expected to continue to grow rapidly and reach an estimated \$20-30 billion by 2030. Nepal has been slow to adopt coffee compared to other countries, but domestic and international demand for organic coffee has risen. Nepal’s coffee export reached an all-time high in 2021-2022 at Rs117 million. There is a lot of potential

for Nepal to grow its organic coffee industry even more, and Lakpa Nurbu Sherpa is bringing this crop to rural Sankhuwasabha. Sherpa is also involved in school and health clinic initiatives in the Makalu region, and was looking for income sources to substitute cardamom. He wanted to see if coffee trees could thrive in the area after having seen them in Pokhara and Solu Khumbu. Sherpa’s trekking clients were also interested in tasting Nepal’s local organic coffee while visiting the country and he was made aware of the large foreign market for local flavours. He was also concerned that everyone in the village was migrating abroad for work, and was

exploring ways to increase local income sources. He planted the first coffee seeds in Simma four years ago, and watched them grow into trees within a year. It was clear that Makalu’s soil and climate are ideal for a sustainable coffee farm. Sherpa approached the mayor with a proposal to develop a larger nursery, and the local government gave Rs400,000 for the project. Other villages are seeking similar alternatives: Uwa is beginning an orange farm, and Ulling is looking at honey production. Last month, as the monsoon rains arrived, Simma residents of all ages were packing fresh soil and tree saplings into small plastic nursery bags to be distributed to households. Both young and old helped each other, reflecting the richness of community bond here that is vital for the coffee project to succeed. There has been little top-down oversight of this project. There is trust and confidence that residents will put care and effort into nurturing their coffee plantation. Generational knowledge of farming, collective energy, and a deep concern for the future of their home and children is critical to the success of this project. Locals are cautiously optimistic. Says Karna Bahadur Gurung: “We still do not know how the new coffee plants will fare, no one else has done it in our area before. We must be patient and care for the trees first.”

Hanna Wells is a Fulbright scholar researching the impact of the Kosi Highway project on traditional livelihoods in Makalu Municipality.

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SIPRADI

■ Sonia Awale

The deadly flood season is coming to a close, and soon Nepalis will be exposed to the season of lethal air pollution. Their government has done precious little to protect them from both calamities.

Air pollution kills more people than just about every other natural and human-made calamity afflicting Nepalis. Toxic air cuts 4.6 years off the average Nepali’s lifespan, the figure is higher for people in the Tarai who live nearly 7 years less because of transboundary pollution.

In comparison, tobacco use reduces life expectancy by 2.8 years and high blood pressure by 1.7 years. Furthermore, all of Nepal’s 30 million people live in areas where the annual average particulate pollution level exceeds the WHO guideline of 5µg/m3. From 1998 to 2021, the average annual particulate pollution in Nepal increased by 75.2%.

These and even more alarming statistics are highlighted in the latest Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) issued this week by the Energy Policy Institute of the University of Chicago.

The study shows that hazardous levels of particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM2.5) in the air has overtaken malaria, HIV/ AIDS, malnutrition, unsafe drinking water, road traffic accidents and alcohol use to emerge as the biggest public health threat of the 21st century worldwide.

“Bad air is getting worse, I’m not really surprised. The AQLI report reinforces what we already knew,” says environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar. “But the Tarai has gotten progressively worse both because of its own local emissions from industries, garbage and open burning as well as due to cross-border pollution from India.”

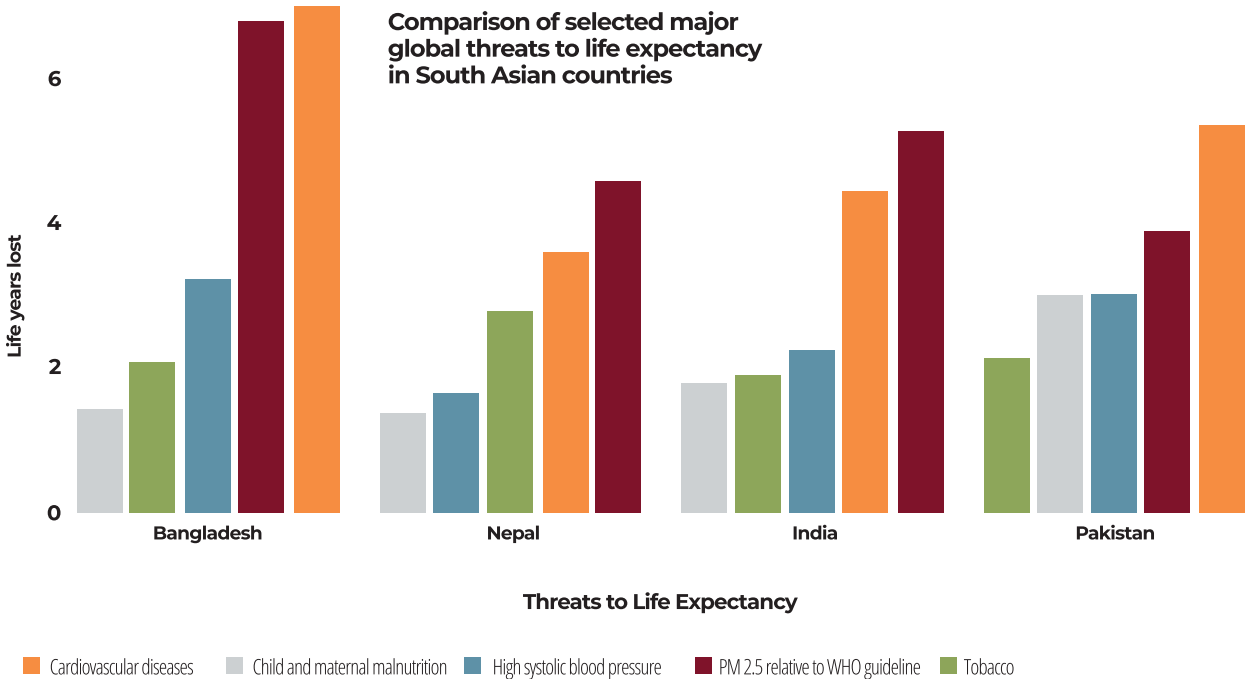
More specifically, the national annual average for PM2.5 has hovered around 50µg/m3 since 2018. In Kathmandu, the annual average has fluctuated in the vicinity of 35-50µg/m3, explains Christa Hasenkopf, the director of AQLI and air quality programs at EPIC. These figures are several times higher than WHO recommendations

Inversely, if Nepal were to clean up its dirty air, people in the mid



EPICENTRE OF POLLUTION

Shocking fact: Polluted air reduces life expectancy by up to 4 years in Kathmandu and 6.5 years in the Tarai



and eastern Tarai region where 53% of the country's population lives would gain 6.5 years of life expectancy. Similarly, Kathmandu residents would live 3.5 years longer.

Madhes Province is the most polluted followed by Lumbini, while Karnali and Gandaki have the clearest air. The report reveals that PM2.5 is the biggest threat to life expectancy in Nepal ahead of cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory illnesses, tobacco consumption and blood pressure.

Vehicular emission, soot particles from brick kilns, open burning of trash as well as industries are the biggest contributors to air pollution in Nepal.

The AQLI report calls South Asia the global epicentre for pollution, home to the world’s four

Cleaner Air = Longer Lives

Air pollution reduces lifespans, and people in South Asia are the most affected

Even though heat waves, floods and wildfires are ravaging the planet, it is actually suspended particles in the air that pose the most serious immediate risk to human health, reducing average life spans across the world. Moves to control carbon emissions by switching to renewable energy will help in also reducing pollution thereby improving public health and allowing billions of people around the world to live longer. The latest data from the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) issued by the Energy Policy Institute of the University of Chicago shows that fine soot particles in the air that are less than 2.5 microns (PM2.5) in diameter are the most dangerous. Nepal is among countries most affected by particulate air pollution from its own vehicular emissions and open

fires, and is downwind in winter from the most polluted parts of north India. The report reveals that particulate pollution carries the greatest external risk to human health, with the impact on life expectancy comparable to that of smoking, more than 3 times that of alcohol use and unsafe water, and more than 5 times that of traffic accidents. However, the risk is not spread equally across the world. Six countries in the world are at much greater risk than others and most of them are in Nepal’s neighbourhood. “Three-quarters of air pollution’s impact on global life expectancy occurs in just six countries, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, China, Nigeria and Indonesia, where people lose one to more than six years off their lives because of the air they breathe,” says Michael Greenstone, Professor in Economics at the Energy Policy Institute at the University of

Chicago (EPIC). Even though awareness about the danger of pollution is growing, slow changes in state energy policy have not led to meaningful action. The pollution is also being transported across national boundaries, which means regional cooperation to improve air quality is as important. The first priority is to provide citizens with real time open air quality data, yet only 6.8% of Asia knows how dirty their air is. Knowledge about pollution can create public pressure on governments to act. As it is, only one-third of the countries in Asia even have air quality standards, the basic building block for policies, the AQLI report says. Investment in air quality infrastructure also does not match where air pollution is having its greatest toll on human life. “Timely, reliable, open air quality data in particular can be the backbone of civil society





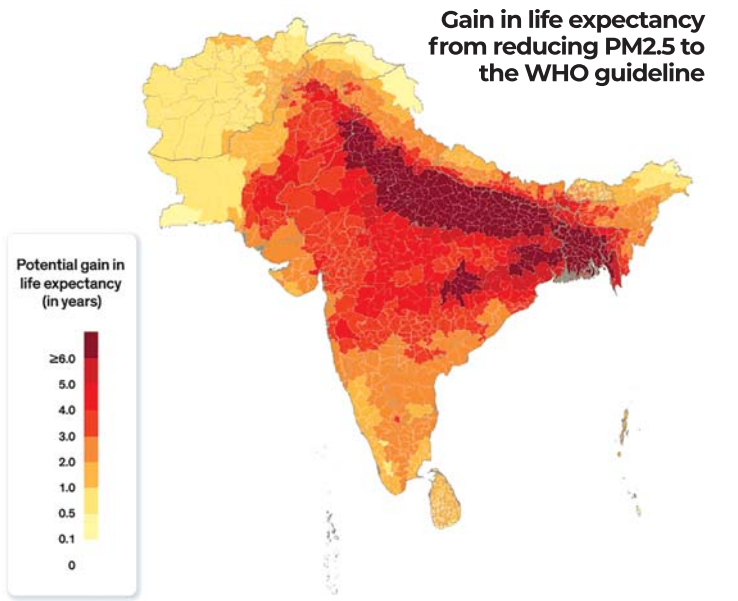
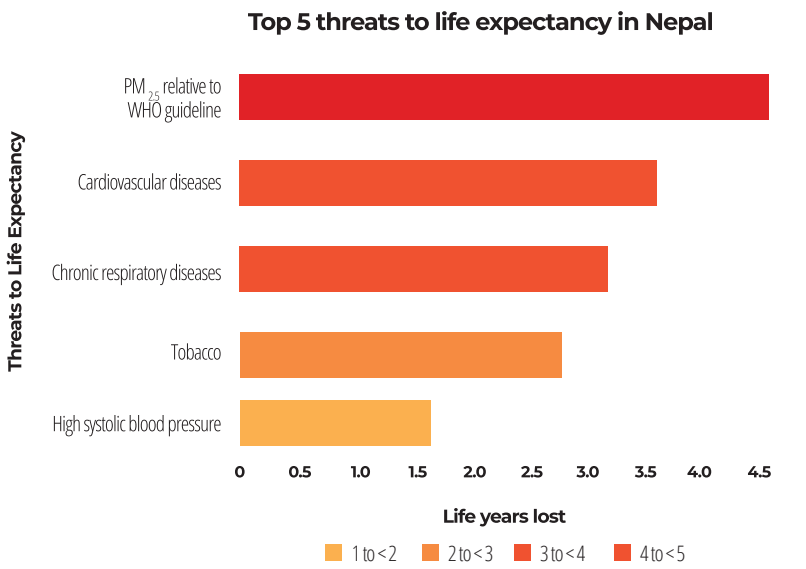
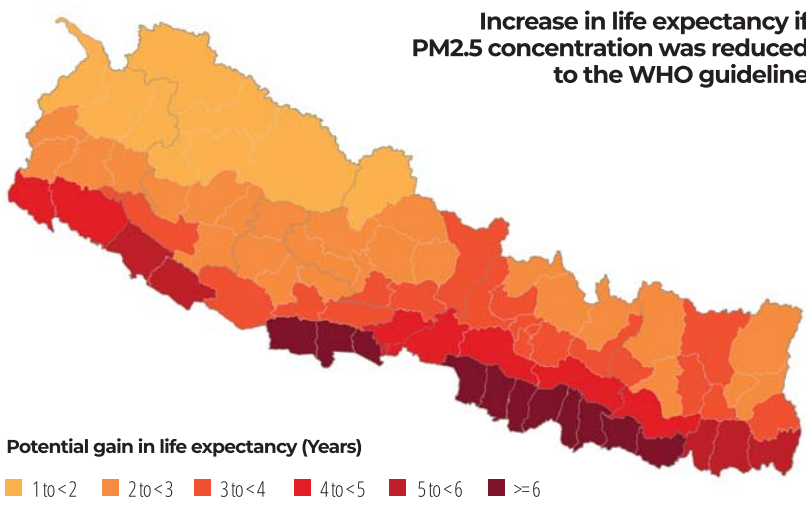
SUMAN NEPALI

most polluted countries and nearly a quarter of the global population. The region also accounts for 52.8% of the total life years lost globally due to high pollution, residents in the region are expected to lose about 5 years of life expectancy on average.

“Pollution in South Asia has been increasing over the past two decades, with PM2.5 annual average concentrations 1.5 times that of those at the turn of the century,” confirms Hasenkopf, one of the two authors of the report.

She adds: “While our study isn’t equipped to precisely identify sources, generally speaking, the rising levels are likely due to a combination of economic development, population increase, and stubble burning across some parts of South Asia.”

But this shared problem of



air pollution in the region should be an opportunity to collaborate instead of blaming each other, says Bhushan Tuladhar. “The emission sources are the same in South Asia, our economies are similar for the most part, we need to learn from each other, and bring our governments together to resolve the problem.” Within Nepal, electrification of transport and cooking are low-hanging fruit to reduce air pollution. Nepal now

has surplus power generation at nearly 3,000MW with an additional 3,300MW under construction. Reducing petroleum imports by just 10% will save Nepal at least Rs30 billion a year. An electric transition will reduce the trade deficit with India.

“The government needs to do three things immediately to hit the ground running: subsidise big buses to reduce financial risks for private operators, build charging



SUMAN NEPALI

EV OR NOT EV

The International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies is on 7 September, and it is well timed for the start of the season of dirty air in Kathmandu and the region.

Vehicular pollution, soot particles from brick kilns as well as emission from garbage burning turns Kathmandu into an uninhabitable bowl of dust and smoke every winter. Some brick kilns are using biomass pellets instead of coal. People are starting to use compressed hollow bricks instead of the polluting variants. These newer technologies need to be upscaled.

Garbage burning is a major polluter, and local governments must crackdown on this with hefty fines. Emission checks can penalise polluting vehicles. Battery powered private and public transport need a boost.

As a part of the International Day of Clean Air, Nepal International EV Expo is opening from 1-3 September in Bhrikuti Mandap which will primarily feature start-ups and entrepreneurs working to promote electric two-wheelers in Nepal.

There will also be panel discussions on public vehicles and charging infrastructure, battery-operated two-wheelers and on the transport sector: plans and policies moving forward.

“Our main target is the youth. We want to connect them to entrepreneurs and the policy-makers,” says environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar.

Over the last five years, successive governments have flip-flopped tax rates on battery-powered vehicles and it is confusing to figure out the rebate formula. The latest

decision to increase tax on cheaper EVs and battery powered buses does not correspond to the government pledge to increase private electric vehicles to 25% by 2025 and 90% by 2030.

The target is to make 20% of all public transport electric by 2025 and 60% by 2030. But there is no way that will be met with current policies.

“Even so, Nepal is doing well in terms of larger electric private cars but taxing entry-level four-wheelers higher is discouraging many,” adds Tuladhar. “But two-wheelers make up 79% of all our registered vehicles, and that is where most of our effort should be.”

Popular two-wheeler brands in Nepal such as Honda, Bajaj and Yamaha however are not yet importing electric variants. Newer brands do not aspire as much confidence in first-time buyers.

What can drive the market is public procurement of electric two-wheelers. Institutional procurement for delivery services, banks, among others can also help.

It is, however, electric public transport that needs the biggest boost. Big buses carry the most people, reduce traffic and emissions but they are also very expensive, many times over their diesel counterparts. In India by contrast, the government provides the private sector with subsidies to operationalise them.

“The government has to help with the capital cost of these big buses, and provide some kind of incentive. But equally important is charging infrastructure for public buses,” adds Tuladhar. “But most of all, we need to overhaul the mess that is the mismanagement of our public transport system.”

infrastructure on a large scale and overhaul the whole public transport sector,” says Tuladhar.

Combating air pollution requires the government and private sector to invest in renewable and clean energy. Access to open air quality data can be the backbone of civil society and government clean air efforts, says AQLI’s Hasenkopf.

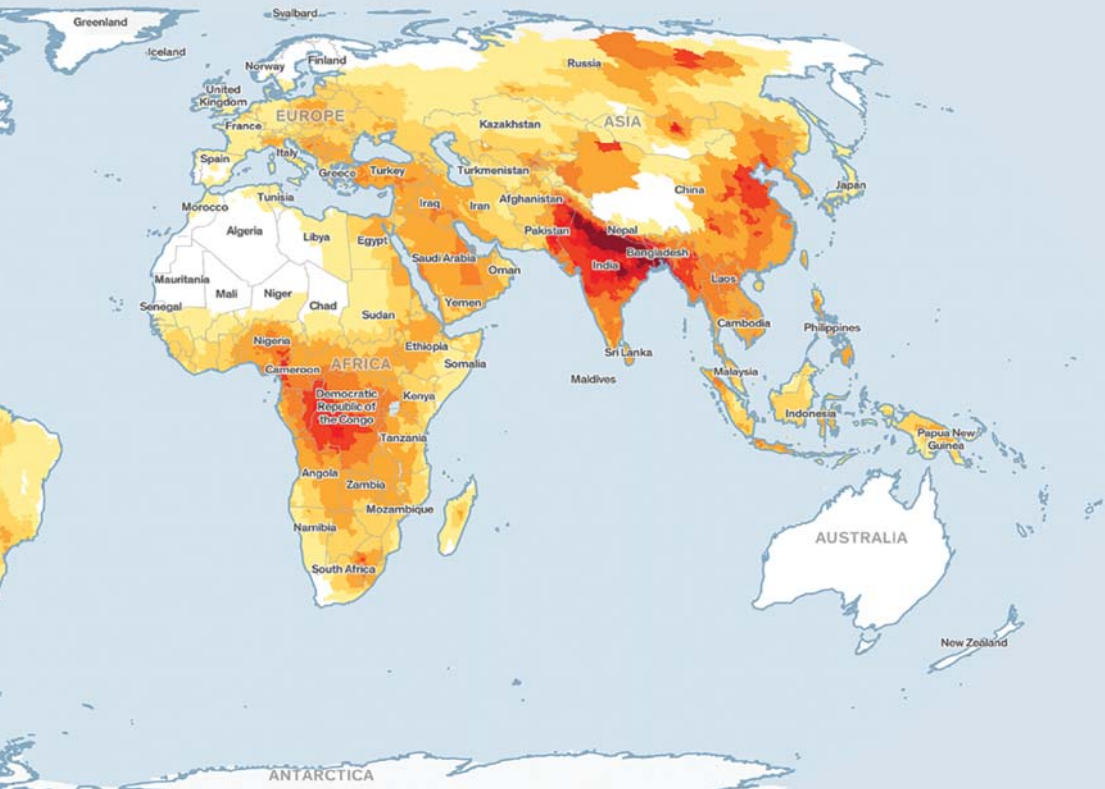
This data is not just conveyed as an air quality index appearing on a website, but rather information provided in a programmatic way, like an Application Programming Interface.

“Data on its own is not sufficient for creating change, but it is one of the basic building blocks necessary to allow change,”

Hasenkopf adds. “Timely, publicly accessible fully open air quality data produced by governments, in particular, is essential for transparently gauging effectiveness of air quality policies, fostering public accountability, and building awareness and solutions that sustain social will on the issue.”

In the meantime, China has proven that the energy transition can be achieved together with economic growth as long as there is political will. China is driving down wind and solar costs and creating economic opportunities in green manufacturing. Renewable sources now make up nearly 51% of China’s generation capacity. (See sidebar) 🇨🇳

if PM2.5 concentration is reduced to the WHO guidelines



ILLUSTRATIONS: AIR QUALITY LIFE INDEX

and government clean air efforts—providing the information that people and governments lack and that allows for more informed policy decisions,” says Christa Hasenkopf, the director of AQLI and air quality programs at EPIC. “Fortunately, we see an immense opportunity to play a role in reversing this by better targeting—and increasing—our funding dollars to collaboratively build the infrastructure that is missing today.”

The release of the AQLI report comes just ahead of the UN’s International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies. While much of multilateral and bilateral development assistance goes to control of diseases like malaria and tuberculosis, the resources for pollution control are much less even though many more people die or are affected by dirty air.

The report singles out South Asia, especially its densely-populated northern areas as suffering the deadliest impact of pollution. More than a quarter of the global population in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan are the most affected,

losing five years of their lives on average.

Although China had some of the worst air quality in 20 years ago, the report cites its remarkable success in reducing pollution by 42.3% since 2013, when it declared a ‘war against pollution’. The average Chinese citizen can now expect to live 2.2 years longer.

Even industrialised countries have high air pollution levels. Americans are exposed to 65% less particulate pollution than in 1970 before the passage of the Clean Air Act, yet 96% of the country still doesn’t meet the WHO’s new guideline of 5µg/m³. In 2021, California was the most polluted state, not because of vehicular pollution but wildfires.

Europeans were exposed to 23% less pollution than in 1998, improving their life expectancy.

But even then, most European cities do not meet the WHO’s new guideline. Eastern Europeans are living 7.2 months less than people in the west due to dirtier air. 🇨🇳



EVENTS



Literary Festival

Celebrate the shared essence of Nepal and India's heritage at the three-day Kalinga Literary Festival starting this Friday. 1-3 September, 9am-6pm, Hotel Himalaya, Lalitpur

EV Show

The International EV Show – Unveiling the Electrifying World of Electric Vehicles and Beyond will have all the latest on the world of electric vehicles. 1-3 September, 9am-6pm, Bhrikutimandap



Charity painting

Every stroke of paint at the Paint for Animals' Rights charity event will go towards animals in need. Save the date. September, 12pm-5pm, Rs200, Loving Heart Vegan Restaurant, Kathmandu

Tokha Mart

The Tokha Saturday Mart this weekend will feature products ranging from homemade delicacies to handicrafts. Stop by the mart and support small and local businesses. 2 September, 11am, Tokha Urban Farm



Badminton tournament

Aspiring athletes will be able to take part in the under-19 boys singles badminton tournament. 8 September, 9am, Revive Leisure Park

DINING



Chez Caroline

Tucked away from the street noise and fumes, this is the place to visit for authentic French and continental cuisine in Nepal. Try the Truite Amandine and Steak d'Autruche grill  . Baber Mahal Revisited (01) 4263070/ 4264187

MUSIC

The great gig

Cheer for emerging Nepali musical artists as they take the stage to showcase their talents at Moksh this Saturday. 2 September, 6pm onwards, Rs500, Moksh, Jawalakhel



Music Industry Conference

Connect with visionaries and various personalities of the music world at the National Music Industry Conference, where music and ideas will come together. 2 September, 8am, Rs5000 per person, Marriott Hotel



Cobweb live

Unleash your inner rockstar and be part of an electrifying evening featuring Cobweb live, supported by Aawartan as well as a lineup of powerhouse DJs. 8 September, 6pm onwards, Fahrenheit, Kathmandu



Music for Medicine

Music For Medicine, a musical charity event, will feature a live performance by the band Blue Fret. Funds raised will go towards the treatment of patients in need. Call for reservations. 1 September, Dechenling Garden Restaurant, 01-4512158/9803810554

Tribal Haat

Tribal Haat, featuring music and performances from the far-west, will reflect the richness of Nepal's heritage. 2 September, 2pm onwards, Pork Hub Restaurant, Jhamsikhel



Bricks Caf  

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

The Diplomat

Experience luxurious culinary delights at The Diplomat's Indian and Continental restaurants, without compromising on comfort. Hotel Ambassador, Lazimpat (01) 4410432

GETAWAY



Dahlia Boutique Hotel

A luxury hotel at the bank of Phewa Lake with a 180-degree mountain and city view, Dahlia Boutique Hotel is a good end to a memorable trek. Lakeside, Pokhara (061) 466505

Chhaimale Village Resort

Adorned with pear trees, the Resort is an ideal destination for anyone seeking to escape the madness of Kathmandu city without having to travel very far. Chhaimale (01) 4268121



Maruni Sanctuary Lodge

From the comfort of the cabins and cottages of Maruni Sanctuary Lodge, one can take a peek at the wandering wildlife and nature of the Chitwan National Park. Sauraha (01) 4700632

Hotel Baha

What better way to start the day than with a beautiful view of Bhaktapur Darbar Square and the Nyatapola Temple, and a homely meal of rice, lentils, vegetables, meat and pickles? Bhaktapur (01) 6616810



Park Village Resort

Experience an urban oasis in the heart of Kathmandu. Enjoy the services of the Himalayan Wellness Centre, a one-stop centre to relax the mind and body. Budhanilkantha (01) 4370286

Le Trio

The vintage-esque posters that line the walls and the rustic wooden tables all give the impression that one has stepped into a 1960s Parisian caf  , but the menu is very much local. Jhamsikhel (01) 5521674



Cibo Bistro

With simple dishes and fresh ingredients, Cibo Bistro's menu features a wide variety of pastas, pizzas, sandwiches and mouth-watering desserts. Kid-friendly options are available as well. 10am-10pm, Pulchowk (01)5541940

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
 25° 20°	 26° 20°	 25° 19°	 26° 20°	 26° 20°

Easterly vs Westerly

The annual monsoon cycle is now being played out in reverse with fresh westerlies playing a tug-o-war with a still persistent monsoon circulation from the east. The moisture-laden clouds are being pushed by a vigorous trough in the Bay of Bengal. This means more spells of isolated but heavy showers in the days to come, driven by convection systems along the mountains. Some of these may be thundery.

OUR PICK

Alex Claremont-Diaz, the son of the President of the United States, has hated Prince Henry of England since the day they met— and has no intention of changing his mind about the young royal. But when a public feud between the two makes headlines across the world, they are forced into a staged friendship that turns into something more—and could have tremendous consequences in the lives as children of world leaders. Based on author Casey McQuiston's acclaimed 2019 novel of the same name, Matthew Lopez's feature film directorial debut Red, White & Royal Blue stars Taylor Zakhar Perez, Nicholas Galitzine, Sarah Shahi, and Uma Thurman.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउन र बचाऔं

- गर्मी मौसममा मलेरिया, कालाजार, डेंगी, हैजालगायतका विभिन्न संक्रामक रोगहरू फैलिन सक्छन् ।
- संक्रामक रोग फैलाउने झिँगा, लामखुट्टे, भुसुना आदिको नियन्त्रण गरौं ।
- संक्रामक रोगबाट बच्न शुद्ध र उमालेको पानी पिऔं ।
- बासी तथा सडेगलेका खाना नखाऔं ।
- घरभित्र र वरपरको सरसफाइमा ध्यान दिऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड



GOPEN RAI

Tsherin Sherpa returns home to Takpa

Internationally renowned Nepali artist nurtures young talent to build a vibrant art community

■ Aayusha Pokharel

The art scene in Nepal is witnessing a renaissance, and at the centre of this resurgence is Tsherin Sherpa, the internationally renowned artist known for his distinctive, and sometimes provocative, fusion of traditional and contemporary.

Sherpa has now embarked on a new chapter in his career by returning to Nepal to open Takpa, Kathmandu's newest art gallery strategically located in Lazimpat.

'Takpa' is a playful spin on the Buddhist expression of 'Mitakpa' which means impermanence. So, Takpa is permanence and for Sherpa this name encapsulates his exploration of the dynamic interplay between the sacred and the secular and reflecting his journey from traditional thangka painting to the unique, hybrid approach he has mastered.

"Growing up, I never thought I would be an artist. My father was

an established thangka painter, and he always wanted to hand over his knowledge to one of the children. For better or worse, it happened to be me," quips Sherpa, who started painting thangkas at 12.

But in the late 1990s, venerated thangka art was becoming commodified as tourist souvenirs. "I was discouraged seeing this, and did not want to follow in my father's footsteps," recalls Sherpa, who enrolled in a Computer Science course in Taipei and later went to the United States in 1998 to live there for the next 20 years.

Away from home, Sherpa needed an emotional outlet, which he found in art. He visited museums and exhibitions, and rediscovered the real sacred significance of thangka paintings.

Two exhibitions of South Asian and Chinese art pushed him to experiment with traditional techniques like Chinese brush in contemporary art.

But Sherpa does not regret his Computer Science degree, in fact it allowed him to integrate

technology into his art. He explains, "Computer Science actually helped me visualise my work, allowing me to spend less time drawing sketch after sketch. I do one sketch, scan it, work on the computer and finalise it."

Sherpa's shift from traditional thangka painting has been shaped by encounters with diverse art forms during his time in the United States.

For instance, his first experience of painting something non-traditional was a marketing poster for Jamba Juice. This made him realise that he could go beyond the traditional confines to express himself and bridge the gap between older and modern art forms.

Sherpa now divides his time between California and Kathmandu and draws inspiration from diverse cross-cultural lifestyles to imbue vitality in his artistic expression.

And yet, each of Sherpa's works is a visual representation of his heritage. The modernised thangka themes represent his heritage and identity.

Collaboration has become a hallmark of Sherpa's artistic approach, and he works with local artisans to develop skills and

offer them platforms to exhibit. His tie-up with traditional copper repoussé artists after the 2015 earthquake resulted in exhibitions spanning continents and landing collaborative work at the Rubin Museum in New York.

Back in 2018 when he relocated back to Nepal, Sherpa noticed that there were not enough platforms for emerging artists to showcase talent.

In 2022, Nepal participated in the Venice Biennale for the first time, where Sherpa collaborated with many local artists and sculptors, providing them with the exposure they deserved.

Takpa is an extension of this collaboration with Nepali artists, which comes after Windhorse Gallery in Jhamsikhel which he also had a hand in opening three years ago. Takpa is currently showing artist Pooja Duwal's first solo art exhibition *The Stranger Is a Friend*.

Takpa also showcases Tsherin Sherpa's work from time to time, but the artist says his main intention is to help Nepali artists.

"I am more visible internationally and I want to use that opportunity to create a platform for other emerging artists so they get more visibility," he says.

Sherpa also has a non-profit, the Himalayan Art Initiative, that provides training to young artists.

He says, "If there is potential, we showcase the work at our gallery and then internationally. It all comes back to not letting art die." 🇳🇵

Strangers no more

With an array of both large and small oil on canvas and charcoal created in six months, Pooja Duwal's exhibition *The Stranger* is a Friend invites viewers to contemplate the transformation of Bhaktapur.

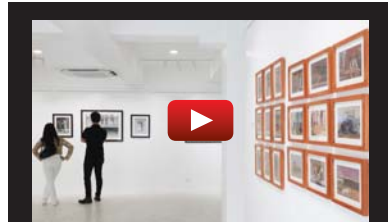
The charcoals are strikingly monochromatic and melancholic, and are a commentary on what Nepal risks losing in its frenzied march to modernity. The portraits depict Duwal's family members, with her sister as a recurring muse. These alla prima creations exude an immediacy and authenticity.

Duwal paints Bhaktapur's labyrinthine alleys and hidden corners, meticulously capturing the mundane yet profoundly meaningful everyday activities: laundry drying in a terrace, people sipping tea, reading a newspaper or strolling down by a pond.

The Stranger is a Friend is a visual documentary of the tangible and intangible threads, and an enduring spirit in life's fleeting moments. In two pieces, Duwal employs diptychs and triptychs, weaving together narratives that transcend individual frames, drawing viewers to complex connections between specific instances, individuals, and the city itself.

Duwal's art serves as a reminder to slow down and savour memories and moments of life as time races by. The paintings offer a haven for contemplation.

The Stranger is a Friend
Pooja Duwal
Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat
Until 17 September



TSHERIN'S TAKPA

Tsherin Sherpa, the internationally renowned Nepali artist known for his distinctive, and sometimes provocative, fusion of traditional and contemporary has returned home. He has set up a new gallery in Kathmandu called Takpa. Watch the video profile.

WEATHERCOAT LONG LIFE
EXTERIOR EMULSION WITH PU & SILICON

**घाम-पानी छेक्छ,
१० वर्ष टिक्छ**

Berger
Paint your imagination

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मुसलधारे वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ

१० वर्ष वारेन्टी



Saving one

Rural Nepali mothers need more nurses like Anju Chaudhary

■ Naresh Newar in Udaypur

As a nurse, Anju Chaudhary (left) has to often test the limits of her skills when dealing with complicated pregnancies that arrive at the government hospital here in Katari. She is also the leader of a team of nurses who are on duty for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, caring for patients. Chaudhary has helped deliver over 1,000 babies and prevented the deaths of many mothers and newborns. But no case was as challenging as that of Sharmila Surkheti. One morning in March, the 30-year-old Dalit woman arrived at the hospital, weak and bleeding profusely. “We had never seen a mother in such a near-death situation, but we were prepared, and we got into action immediately to save her life,” recalls Chaudhary. Surkheti had already been pregnant 13 times in her young

Migrants returning from

Workers back from the Gulf have a disproportionate rate of sterility

■ Sagar Budhathoki

Migrant workers returning from the Gulf and Malaysia make up 40% of infertility cases at Paropakar Maternity and Women's Hospital in Kathmandu. Studies have highlighted the problem of sterility among men who have returned from working abroad in extreme temperatures and are prone to unhealthy lifestyles including smoking and alcohol consumption. Sarlahi resident Sanjeev Sah had gone to Saudi Arabia for work just a year into his marriage. Concerned about his wife having to raise a child alone during his absence, 32-year-old Sah and his wife postponed their plans for a baby. Three years later after his return, the couple has not been able to conceive. They sought treatment at Paropakar Hospital in Thapathali. Sah was diagnosed with azoospermia, with no measurable sperm count. “Doctors told me that working in high temperatures abroad reduced the quality of my sperm,” says Sah. Suraj Adhikari from Dhading worked in Malaysia for three years. He married at 28 but was unable to conceive with his wife and was also diagnosed with azoospermia at an infertility clinic. Adhikari worked at a construction



site in Malaysia which left him little time for basics such as food and water. Despite extremely high temperatures, he often went without water for prolonged periods because it was not always available. Doctors blame his time and lifestyle for the decline in his sperm quality. “Neglecting essentials while working abroad has led to a costly and time-consuming treatment for me,” Adhikari laments. Infertility is on the rise, globally and in Nepal. This is especially true for workers returning from the Gulf and Malaysia, having worked in hotter temperatures. Half of the patients with childlessness visiting the outpatient department at Paropakar

Maternity and Women's Hospital every day are migrant returnees. “Working conditions with high temperatures reduces the quality and quantity of sperm in young men,” confirms Vinita Thapa, sperm specialist at the hospital. Shree Prasad Adhikari, the director of Paropakar Maternity and an infertility pathologist, notes that 25 out of every 100 couples face infertility presently, and the problem has now grown particularly among those returning from foreign employment. Two years ago, Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital conducted tests on 186 men seeking infertility treatment at the institute. Of these, 46.2% had previously worked in the Gulf. The research report,

published in the journal PubMed, revealed low sperm quantity and quality in some cases as well as a very low number of sperm capable of fertilising eggs in others. According to the WHO, one in every six adults, or 17.5% of the world's population suffers from infertility. In Nepal, where children are seen as a form of security and add to the social prestige, infertility can have far-reaching implications. An increase in infertility could also be a contributing factor to an ultimate decline in population together with delayed marriages. And yet, assisted reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilisation (IVF) remain financially inaccessible and carry social stigma for many individuals.

Nepali mother at a time



life. All six of her newborns were delivered at home, and she had undergone seven abortions. Barely a year ago, she had another baby who died at childbirth.

This year, she decided to try to

risk her own life to try for another son but there was post partum haemorrhage after the baby was born. Her husband helped get her to Katari Hospital while leaving behind the newborn. It was a two

hour walk from home.

There was no General Physician at the hospital that day so it was up to Chaudhary and her nurse team to save her life. A quick decision had to be made. They used the

bundle approach in postpartum haemorrhage (PPH) management to control the bleeding.

As a chronic anaemic patient, the mother had a low haemoglobin of only 6.1, which was alarming. To save her life, the nurses planned to take Surkheti to a better-equipped hospital in Gaighat but the family could not even afford transportation.

Her blood pressure dropped alarmingly low, and the nurses immediately created an emergency fund to pay for the private ambulance to reach Gaighat.

She also needed blood transfusion, but Surkheti's husband was malnourished and there were concerns about his health.

The nurses then found a male colleague at the hospital who agreed to donate his blood. They closely monitored the mother, and her haemoglobin improved to 8.8.

The next day, the nurses gave her iron tablets, B complex, and vitamins and she was sent home. But during a post-natal home visit, the nurses were dismayed to see the utter poverty of the Surkheti's family, including her husband and six children.

Given her anaemic state and being very weak, Surkheti was unable to produce milk and had been feeding biscuits to her baby which worried the nurses. The family had no money to buy formula milk.

So the nurses started

collecting cash from their own pockets and started a fundraiser through online requests and on the phone. But there was very little response, and the six nurses put in their own money to save the mother and baby.

"The greatest gift for me was to hear the words of gratitude from the mother who survived the ordeal," says Chaudhary modestly.

Despite her training as a Skilled Birth Attendant that she had done many years ago, Chaudhary had no knowledge of uterine balloon tamponade, which can help in the treatment of PPH.

After graduating from her nursing education, she was transferred to Bir Hospital where she never got the chance to work with mothers and babies, as she was too busy handling injuries and accidents in the emergency department.

It was only after she moved back to Katari Hospital in Udaypur that her career path changed with the help of the non-profit One Heart Worldwide (OHW).

She received an invitation from OHW to attend its Simulation-based Mentorship Program in 2017 which allowed her to learn new skills.

"I feel fortunate that my team was there to help Surkheti, and today, both she and her baby are healthy," she says.

Indeed, at a time when many Nepali nurses aim to migrate abroad the nation should be thankful for the dedication and passion of nurses like Anju Chaudhary. 🇳🇵

the Gulf with infertility



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

A study by the Hebrew University of Israel and Mount Sinai School of Medicine in the US found that the average sperm count globally has decreased by half over the past 50 years.

The study also revealed a decline in sperm quality, including a decrease in the number of sperm capable of fertilising eggs. Between the 1970s and 1990s, the rate of sperm count decline increased from 1.16% per year to 2.64% by the early 2000s.

Paropakar Maternity and Women's Hospital introduced a semen storage service in June, allowing Nepalis to preserve semen and eggs if they require delayed childbirth.

For instance, young individuals going abroad for a long time can store semen for

reproduction upon their return. Additionally, if the husband is absent, the wife can undergo artificial insemination using the stored semen, a technique called intrauterine insemination (IUI).

In the IUI process, women are given medication and injections to stimulate egg production. Once mature eggs are produced, they are released through an injection. About 36-40 hours after releasing the eggs, a viable sperm is selected and placed into the uterus using a catheter, explains sperm specialist Thapa.

The hospital is performing IUI on four to five women on a daily basis, at Rs5,000-10,000 per procedure. If pregnancy doesn't occur after six IUI attempts, IVF is

recommended. Adds Thapa: "Many are not aware but 90% of couples facing childlessness can be treated."

Since the introduction of the storage service in June, 15 couples have inquired but only two couples have agreed to store semen.

The maternity home is also launching semen and egg donation programs wherein women having difficulty producing eggs can use donor eggs and the husband's sperm. Similarly, when their husband's sperm isn't viable, the wife's egg can be combined with donor semen for insemination.

"The stored semen remains effective for almost six years, retaining 60% of its initial quality," assures Thapa.

But more often than not, most childless

couples fail to seek medical attention on time, resorting instead to shamans, witch doctors, and other ineffective measures.

Paropakar is the sole government facility providing effective treatment for childlessness at present. Hospitals often lack counselling services.

Infertility treatment depends on the underlying cause ranging from pharmaceuticals to embryo implantation through assisted reproductive technologies (ART).

Some 80-90% of childless couples can find solutions through regular treatment, says Paropakar director Adhikari. He adds that weight loss could be a solution for obese women struggling with infertility. In the case of blocked fallopian tubes, there are medications. For those with uterine tissue growth causing pregnancy complications, surgery can help their chances.

But while normal medication can stimulate egg production, up to 50% of women facing infertility lack viable eggs. "Some older women might have reduced fertility despite having eggs. In such cases, medications and hormones can increase their capacity," says Adhikari, adding that the government doesn't need as much resources to fight infertility as much as it needs commitment.

Treatment needs to be scaled up to reach all the district hospitals so that couples can easily access artificial insemination and other services while also promoting awareness and reducing the stigma associated with childlessness in Nepal.

The fact that migrant workers who are in every sense the backbone of Nepal's economy don't have access to treatment means it is even more crucial that infertility, the stigma and the treatment are prioritised and effectively addressed. 🇳🇵



Snakes on plains

Young couple volunteers to rewild rescued snakes

■ Bishal Prasad Neupane

Last week on 21 August was Nag Panchami, a day dedicated to the mythical serpents that were once said to inhabit the lake that was Kathmandu Valley. But although snakes are worshipped, they are also threatened because of public perception that they are dangerous.

Asbin Raj Ojha is out to change that. Growing up in Vorletar, Lamjung close to nature, he was curious about wildlife and as a hobby tried to find out more about the slithering reptiles.

Most snakes in the mountains are non-venomous, but even so, Ojha was struck by how people felt threatened by them and would kill the animals even when they were harmless.

His fascination with snakes grew as he watched YouTube videos of conservationists effortlessly catching and handling even dangerous snakes on the National Geographic channel. He started being called to rescue non-venomous grass snakes from people's houses.

By the time he was a teenager, Ojha's family moved to Rajahar in Nawalpur and his obsession with snakes travelled with him. But the snakes of the plains were more dangerous, and on his own he studied their habitat and habits and ways to identify different species.



Asbin Raj Ojha and Anjali Thapaliya with a King Cobra.

SHYAM BASHYAL

Two years ago, he got a call about a King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) on the loose in Nawalpur. News about his snake expertise had got around, and he successfully

trapped the 4m long snake and relocated it back into the jungle.

"Cobras are sacred, but they are also feared, and rescuing them was a milestone in my life,

and increased my confidence in handling such majestic snake species," recalls Ojha, 30, who later realised the danger he had put himself in by handling the snake without protective gear. Even 12mg of cobra venom will kill an adult human.

The video of the dramatic rescue went viral, and many more people found out about his work. But Ojha got to work doing more research about safety protocols in handling venomous snakes, and methods in handling non-poisonous ones without harming them using gloves, tongs, safety pads and hooks.

After getting married, Ojha's wife Anjali Thapaliya has also been infected, as it were, by his snake bug. She comes along on every rescue call, and together they have rescued 15 King Cobras from farms and households and translocated them to Chitwan National Park in coordination with the warden's office.

Anjali Thapaliya was initially not too keen about snakes, but understood her husband's passion for snakes.

One day, while rescuing a venomous Krait snake which is 10 times more poisonous than a King Cobra, Ojha was bitten on his hand. Thankfully, he was wearing gloves but Thapaliya was worried sick and decided to accompany her husband on his rescue missions after that.

"In the beginning, I used to look at the rescue from afar, but as I started working more with snakes, I developed a soft corner for them," says Thapaliya, 29.

Snakebites are widespread in the Nepal Tarai during the monsoon and can be lethal because antidotes are often not readily available at health posts. As many as 3,000 people are said to die every year from snakebites according to the National Institute of Health.

Lack of awareness about snakes and snakebites also end up harming snakes, which is why Ojha and Thapaliya have made it their mission to better educate communities by conducting classes to help reduce snake-human conflict.

Says herpetologist Santosh Bhattarai: "Their work in King Cobra conservation is really praiseworthy and has directly contributed to reducing the death of snakes as well as in lethal snakebite cases."

Ojha is a teacher by profession and is often interrupted in class to attend to an emergency rescue. But he has trained some young volunteers to also help in rescues.

He says his team needs more support from the Forest Department to spread awareness and invest in snake translocation efforts. They often face legal and community issues while relocating snakes.

"Sometimes people call us killers because they think we are releasing venomous snakes near their homes," says Ojha, who wants the same priority in conserving snakes as the protection that tigers and rhinos get. 🇳🇵

Bishal Prasad Neupane is a zoology undergrad specialising on the amphibians and reptiles of Nepal.



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