



SUMAN NEPALI

Remittonomics and conflict

■ Sonia Awale

Dasain homecoming for the Nepali diaspora this year was overshadowed by the killing of 10 Nepalis in a Hamas attack on an Israeli kibbutz on 7 October.

Dasain also coincided with the annual conference of non-resident Nepalis in Kathmandu. Unlike workers, these are Nepalis who have permanent residence abroad, and they seemed more concerned about getting Nepali citizenship.

But fear of a widening war in West Asia is the main concern today for millions of other Nepali workers. As the Nepali diaspora spreads across the globe, many find themselves in war zones.

This is not the first time Nepalis have been caught up in conflict. Many migrant workers are living in active conflict areas like Ukraine. Nepali students there escaped to Poland in February 2022 when the Russians invaded. Some of the others enlisted and there are Nepalis fighting on both sides.

To be sure, Nepal's Gurkha soldiers have fought in most major wars of the 20th century: Flanders Fields, Gallipoli, Italy, Malaya, Burma, Falklands, Sri Lanka-- and

are deployed on India's borders with Pakistan and China.

But it is in the volatile North Africa-West Asia region where Nepalis find their situation most precarious. Twelve Nepali workers were executed in 2004 by Ansar al-Sunna in Iraq. The Saudi-UAE blockade of Qatar from 2017-2021 affected Nepalis, many of whom lost their jobs.

In 2014, 126 Nepalis were evacuated from war-torn Libya to neighbouring Tunisia with the help of the Indian Embassy in Tripoli. In 2016, 13 Nepali guards were killed in a Taliban attack on the Canadian Embassy in Kabul. Some of the Nepalis, mostly female domestic workers, had to be evacuated after the 2020 Beirut blast.

The rescue of Nepali students from southern Israel was swift because they were documented. The presence of an Israeli embassy in Kathmandu, and a Nepal embassy in Tel Aviv helped.

"There are two types of Nepali migrants, those who are compelled to go and those who will leave anyhow. But both need to know about the status of destination countries, and once they get there they must notify the Nepal Embassy

of their location," says former Foreign Minister Bimala Rai Paudel.

Migration expert Ganesh Gurung says the government should at the very least guarantee the safe return of its workers in the event of a disaster of any kind.

Nepal's Foreign Employment Welfare Fund has collected Rs7 billion over the years from fees paid by people leaving for overseas jobs, and is used in rescue and resettlement of migrants. However, it does not take care of people who do not pay the fee. Gurung says the facility should apply for all Nepali workers abroad in case they need emergency evacuation.

Nepal's economy survives on remittances, and money the diaspora sends home has reached record levels this year (page 4).

"One of the major contributing factors to Nepal reducing its poverty rate was the money that workers abroad sent home," explains Gurung. "But if more people choose to come back, it will have a cascading effect on Nepal's remittonomics."

But migration is only a safety valve, there does not seem to be a strategy to create meaningful jobs at home. Those who came home during the Covid-19 pandemic have mostly

gone back because of the lack of job prospects here. Now, as geopolitical tensions rise, risking the very safety of Nepalis abroad, the economy's dependence on remittance will be detrimental. Bimala Rai Paudel says the West Asia conflict is a warning bell for Nepal to rethink its over-reliance on outmigration.

Ganesh Gurung agrees: "What Nepal has been doing so far is crisis management, what we really need is pre-crisis preparedness given the potential dangers of crises--like the one in Israel-- that we will be exposed to in the coming days."

Dasain Destinations Special
PAGE 6-7,11,12-13

HEALTHY & HAPPY DASAIN

Nepali Times and Himalmedia wish readers and partners a healthy and happy Dasain. Let us bring out the best in us as Nepalis to be kind, compassionate, and to help each other this festival season. The Nepali Times editorial team is taking a Dasain break, so there will be no print edition on 27 October. The next hardcopy issue will come out on Friday, 3 November. Follow daily online coverage throughout the holidays on www.nepalitimes.com

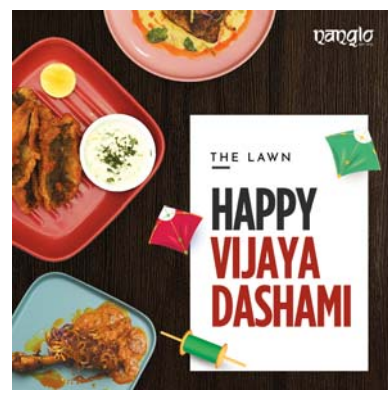


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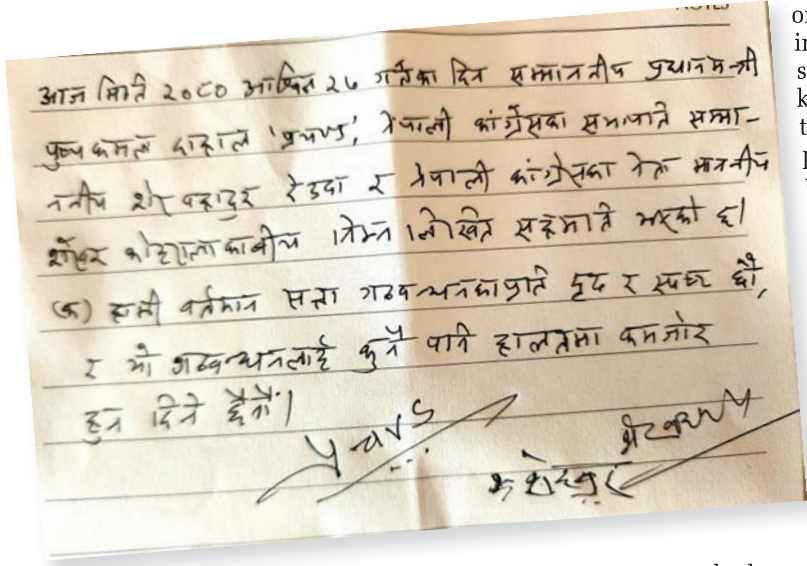
HAPPY DASHAIN

Kosi now, Kathmandu next?

If the frequent collapse of the provincial coalition in Kosi is any indication, all is not well in the power dynamics in Nepal's nine-party governing alliance.

This week, Kedar Karki of Nepali Congress (NC) became the fifth Chief Minister of Kosi Province since elections last November. Karki passed the floor test in the provincial assembly, but with help from the opposition UML. The UML had failed to get enough votes for its own chief minister candidate which precipitated the new election.

This was an embarrassment for Maoist prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal who had got the coalition at the centre to back fellow comrade Indra Bahadur Angbo. And it was also a blow to NC president Sher Bahadur Deuba.



A dissident faction of the NC not happy with party president Sher Bahadur Deuba's conjugal relationship with the Maoists, got UML backing to support Karki's chief ministership. Eight NC members from Koirala's camp and 39 from the UML, which has the majority seats in Kosi provincial assembly, supported Kedar Karki.

What followed was even more intriguing. Prime Minister Dahal and Deuba summoned Shekhar Koirala and tried to convince him to backtrack on Kosi. He refused. But they did manage to convince him not to mess with the coalition setup in return for allowing Karki to be Kosi Chief Minister.

And since Nepali leaders are not best known to keep their word, the three put their deal in writing on a crumpled piece of paper, torn from someone's copy book, and signed it (pictured).

Kathmandu interfering in Kosi is not new. In fact, the former Kosi Chief Minister Hikmat Karki of the UML was actually backed by the Maoists, despite its alliance with the NC at the centre. Rescinding that support is what led to the current instability.

The background to this back-and-forth is the ethnic debate about whether the province should be called Kosi or Kirat. The matter is such a hot potato that Province 1 was the last of the seven to finally vote on a name (Kosi) last year.

The region's indigenous groups want a name that reflects their identity, but the various ethnic groups are not united in what that name should be. Prime Minister Dahal made matters more complicated by saying that Kosi should be changed to Kirat.

All this is ammunition for those who want to scrap Nepal's federalism, saying it is a waste of money, it decentralises corruption and multiplies by seven the disarray at the centre.

However, Nepal's provinces have never been allowed true autonomy on revenue-raising and decision-making, they have been mere appendages of Kathmandu.

Within the NC, the Kosi debate has brought to the surface the strong feelings

about the leadership of the largest party in Parliament shamelessly kowtowing to the third largest party. Leading this dissenting group are Shekhar Koirala and Gagan Thapa, although there is an undercurrent of rivalry to succeed Deuba between them.

So far, the coalition has withstood tensions brought on by controversial provisions in the

budget, as well as a series of high profile corruption cases that shook up and implicated the top leadership of all major political parties.

It is clear that Nepal's governing coalition, especially the alliance between the NC and the Maoists, has remained steadfast because of the sheer opportunism of the leaders in charge of both the parties. (And perhaps a bit of geopolitical goading from the South.)

The aftermath of Dahal's successful attempt to regain premiership from Deuba last year was a power-sharing deal under which Dahal and Deuba gave each other two years each as PM. As per the deal, Unified Socialist chair Madhav Nepal also gets one year at premiership, which is perhaps why he has gone along with the whims of Dahal and Deuba.

All this horse-trading leaves little time for the coalition to govern. Development is at a standstill, inflation is at an all time high (page 4) and corruption has reached pandemic proportions.

The Dasain mood is subdued. Coalition partners will likely use the holiday to plot, and plot some more. They will face fresh challenges, the biggest being the question whether the alliance will hold together long enough, and if Deuba and Dahal will honour their deal to rotate the prime ministership.

Shristi Karki

Will Pushpa Kamal Dahal keep his promise to hand over prime ministership to Sher Bahadur Deuba, or will he do an Oli?

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Trans-Himalayan Holiday

Post monsoon is a great time to explore Nepal and Manang in the Trans-Himalaya is a much sought after destination. Humde airfield is no longer functional but the road will take travellers right up to the Manang village at 3,519m. Maybe treat yourself to a trip this Dasain.

Excerpt of a Manang feature we published in Nepali Times 20 years ago this week on issue #167 24-30 October 2003:

The airfield at 3,200m is an ideal place to start a week-long trans-Himalayan holiday. It is a pleasant two-hour walk down to Pisang along meadows and pine forests.

Next day, walk to the monastery in Upper Pisang, have lunch at one of the numerous restaurants facing Annapurna II, and then on to a cluster of houses that is Ghyaru at 3,800m. The trek from Ghyaru via Ngawal to Manang is the high road that offers a grand panorama of the entire north wall of the Annapurnas. Take



side trips to the numerous pastures on the north side of the valley, including the holy Kecho Lake at 4,800 m where the Annapurnas are reflected on the waters.

Another day trek from Braga is to climb as far as you can up a spur of Annapurna III to Mila Repa's cave and see if you can spot the bow that the Buddhist saint is said to have left behind. The road up from Manang, past the bulldozed remains of the lateral moraine of the Gangapurna Glacier, has spectacular views of a turquoise green lake.

All this will acclimatise you for the tough trek to Tilicho, one of the world's highest lakes at 5,100m. It is a three-day roundtrip from Manang via Kangshar,

and only for the well-acclimatised. After this, if you still want to go to Thorung La, be our guest.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



DESTINATION DASAIN

Increasingly more Nepalis are travelling across the country and what better time than Dasain? Find the top 10 destinations from Ghumante, a popular Nepali traveler on YouTube. From Ramaroshan in Achham in Far West Nepal to Tharu Community Lodge in Nawalpur, the list has everything for everyone looking for an adventure. Read the story on page 12 and 13 and watch videos online.



DASAIN CUISINE

Watch any number of food videos on the Nepali Times YouTube channel, belonging to various indigenous communities across the country. From Tharu escargots and Sherpa stew to Newari aloo gravy and pork blood sausage of the Limbu people, you will find recipes for all the flavourful dishes. You might want to try some this festival season. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.

NEPAL AIRPORTS

Always follow the money ('Activating the new aerial gateways', Kanak Mani Dixit, #1183). Who stands to lose the most if Pokhara and Bhairawa start international flights? Domestic airlines would likely lose at least half of their market share at these airports, including passengers from Chitwan. I believe it is CAAN that is blocking international operations to protect the market for domestic operators.

Anugraha Poudel

■ Sadly, Nepal's politicians are only concerned with power grabbing and party politics.

Bishow Parajuli

■ 'Bhairawa airport is the gateway to Lumbini-Kapilvastu circuit and all Buddhist countries are located to the east of Nepal. Which means not getting descent clearance over Indian air space into Bhairawa is immaterial as we can use existing air corridors.' Love this idea of thinking outside the box.

Rita Thapa

NEPALIS IN ISRAEL

I am full of admiration about the care you have provided to a fellow but an unknown Nepali in a foreign land ('Bringing Nepal to Israel', Prabha Ghimire, #1183) You have proven yourself to be a true Nepali.

Krishnahari Adhikari

■ Thank you so much for taking care of a young Nepali with aspirations in a foreign land. I was sad reading your life story, a woman leaving behind her little children to make an earning for their basic necessities is the biggest sacrifice one can make. Your children will understand and become your biggest support in the future.

Prema Dhungana

■ A very moving account by a Nepali worker in Israel. Well done Nepali Times for giving a voice to the voiceless.

Mark Pickett

■ Wishing for the speedy recovery of Prabin Dangi who lived to tell a tale.

Gita Singh

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Bass and No Treble

by Sajeet M Rajbhandari
Norwegian string musicians Trio No Treble and Nepali singer song-writer Rachana Dahal concluded a tour of Kathmandu performing at concerts with Dahal's powerful delivery of songs with angst-filled lyrics. Read about their tour on our website.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Bringing Nepal to Israel

by Prabha Ghimire
Prabin Dangi, one of the Learn and Earn students from Nepal who miraculously survived the Hamas attack last week, found a new Nepali family in Israel as he recuperated from his injuries. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full story in Diaspora Diaries.

Most popular on Twitter

New aerial gateways

by Kanak Mani Dixit
We cannot simply build hotel rooms and hope the tourists will come. In the case of both Pokhara and Bhairawa, the lethargy of the government is complemented by the lack of marketing imagination of the private sector. Join the online discussion.

Most commented



To-let

by Sahina Shrestha
Although Nepal's macro-economic indicators look positive, there are everyday economic worries about inflation, low purchasing power, and a slump in retail trading ahead of Dasain this year. Follow us for the latest updates.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
How Pokhara and Bhairawa airports can be made to succeed as international portals. Activating the New Aerial Gateways | @KanakManiDixit

Hem Sagar Baral @WorshipNature
A very good analysis on the two international airports of Nepal by @KanakManiDixit. Both are currently proving to be white elephants for Nepal. Thank you Kanakaji for this piece, hope people in right places are sparing time to read for some immediate actions

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Studio Petal's unique exhibition 'Blissful Nature' showcases the work of five contemporary artists, each with a brilliant individual skillset but collectively illustrating the intricate beauty of Nepal's plant life as well as few other exotic species.

J Navin @JNavin_personal
I am trying to understand Nepal's rich biodiversity through botanical art exhibition.

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GOT YOUR GOAT?

Mountain goats brought all the way from Mustang for sale in Bhaktapur on Tuesday for the Dasain festival. An average size goat can cost anywhere up to Rs70,000.



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Business not happy with the IMF

The private sector accuses the International Monetary Fund of interference in Nepal's economic policy

■ Ramesh Kumar

In a move more reminiscent of the days of IMF structural adjustment conditionalities in Latin America, Nepal's business community has bristled at what it called "interference" by the International Monetary Fund in Nepal's domestic economic policy.

In January 2022, the IMF had granted Nepal concessional loans worth \$395.9 million under its Extended Credit Facility (ECF) following multiple discussions with Finance Ministry officials in Kathmandu under the previous government.

At the time, Nepali officials were alarmed at pandemic-induced fall in foreign exchange reserves and increasing current account deficit due to high imports, and agreed to accept the IMF's conditional loan which extends until February 2025.

The conditions included deep reforms to Nepal's financial system, and public finance management, including amending the law to make Nepal Rastra Bank autonomous, a banking regulatory mechanism, preparing a blueprint to prevent misuse of loans, conducting external audits of the ten big commercial banks, and maintaining transparency by making tax exemptions granted by the government available to the public.

In the past, those closely associated with Nepal's communist parties have criticised global financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF for their pursuit of 'neoliberal and imperialistic' policies. But now it is the business community expressing their contempt, accusing foreign donor agencies of interfering in Nepal's internal economic policy.

"Nepal's economy is beholden to foreign donor agencies and the small loans that they have provided us," said the Federation of Nepalese



FNCCI president Chandra Prasad Dhakal (top) and CNI president Rajesh Kumar Agarwal have vocally condemned IMF 'interfering' with Nepal's internal economic policy.

Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) president Chandra Prasad Dhakal during a recent panel attended by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. "If our economic indicators are positive, we should pay off those loans."

Dhakal claimed that Nepal's economy is in crisis on account of the country having to follow strict conditions put in place by the IMF for its loans, and that paying them off would mean that the terms and conditions of the ECF agreement would cease to apply.

ECF provides medium-term financial assistance to low-income countries with protracted balance of payments problems, granting loans at zero interest rates to nations where the amount of money leaving the country exceeds the amount coming into the country.

The Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) was even more direct. Chair Rajesh Kumar Agarwal warned the IMF to "stay in its lane" following a meeting with its representatives in September.

Chairman Agarwal highlighted

the fact that 'undue pressure must not be put on Nepal because economic policies and principles of other nations are not entirely applicable to Nepal's economy, which has its own unique characteristics,' read a statement released by the CNI after the meeting.

And while the government has initiated some reforms stipulated by the IMF in the loan agreement, major terms remain unmet—such as granting autonomy to the central bank.

The IMF withheld the third instalment of the ECF loan, and the funds were eventually released after Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat assured the IMF in October that Nepal would make necessary reforms per the loan agreement.

These commitments have now put the government at odds with the private sector, which has expressed dissatisfaction over NRB's new loan classification as well as the new provision of a six-month wait for non-performing loans to be upgraded.

Industrialists have taken special issue with the recently implemented guidelines on working capital loans, per which the NRB banned the practice of industries taking out current capital loans to clamp down on borrowers who take loans for industries and invest them elsewhere.

The NRB eventually revised the guidelines to make them more flexible for borrowers after the private sector lobbied against the provision, arguing that the guidelines—which they claim is the result of interference by the IMF—could not be implemented when Nepal is in a 'difficult economic position'.

Panicked bankers—who are suspected to have colluded with internal auditors to hide that they were in cahoots with businesses and industries—have also been trying to stop the central bank from implementing the IMF-stipulated international audit of the ten biggest commercial banks.

All of this has led the private sector to attribute Nepal's economic

slowdown to increased regulation of financial institutions by the NRB.

"Our economy is where it is because we have implemented financial and economic policy directives given by Western lenders without contextualising suitability and effectiveness for Nepal's economy," CNI chair Agarwal said last month.

But officials at the Nepal Rastra Bank say that the IMF is being unfairly blamed for trying to prevent the misuse of loans and blocking laws and policies pertaining to financial governance and transparency. "The private sector is trying to block economic reforms in order to protect their own interests," one NRB executive told Nepali Times.

A former secretary at the Finance Ministry says that economic policy terms and conditions set by the IMF expand its influence and force on economically weaker countries to implement its norms, thereby distorting such countries' economies, adding that the IMF is putting similar pressure on Nepal.

But Rastra Bank Governor Maha Prasad Adhikari says that Nepal is making amendments on its own even though they might inconvenience the private sector. Former Finance Minister and governor Yuvraj Khatriwada also doesn't agree that the IMF is interfering in Nepal's economic policy.

"The mandate of these agencies includes giving advice for financial stability and external sector reforms—issues like economic growth and credit expansion are not within their purview," notes Khatriwada, adding that Nepal has no obligation to implement IMF's suggestions. "Instead of pointing fingers at the IMF, the government must set policies that prioritise Nepal's financial and external stability and economic growth."

IMF representatives were unavailable for comment. 🇳🇵



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NMB ePayment Hub

NMB Bank has inaugurated NMB ePayment Hub at its Putali Sadak branch which will provide visa fee payments, student enrollment application fees, PTE, SAT, USMLE, Flywire, Swift, GRE, ACCA and numerous other online services.



Indian Aid

Indian Ambassador Naveen Srivastava and Humla local government inaugurated two school projects built with Rs 55 million Indian assistance on Tuesday in Sarkegad and Chankheli.

New Samsung tv

Samsung has launched its newest line up of Crystal 4K UHD and QLED TV sets for the Dasain-Tihar festive season. The price range for the new C-series begins at NPR 72,159/-, and customers can enjoy discounts up to 41% with a warranty of three years on the purchase made till the end of 2023. Ranging from 43" to 85", these big TVs have built-in AI voice assistant Bixby and IoT Hub.



Old Durbar, new bottle

Yeti Distillery has collaborated with renowned Paubha artist Lok Chitrakar to feature the artwork, "Barahmase Flowers" created by the painter for the recently launched Old Durbar 12 Years Old Blended Scotch Whisky. The Old Durbar x Lok Chitrakar at Rs4,999 is a limited edition release of just 8,000 bottles. In 2022, the company partnered with Tsherin Sherpa for the launch of 8848 Rye Vodka x Tsherin Sherpa Limited Edition bottles.



Win a Tigor

Sipradi Trading has collaborated with Bhatbhateni Supermarket for Dasain, Tihar and Chhath festivities so that customers buying goods worth Rs2,500 or more at 26 Bhatbhateni outlets can now win a Tata Tigor, a 1.2 liter Revotron petrol engine four-wheeler. A lucky draw winner will be announced in the first week of 2024.



Digital Media Society

Twelve digital media portal publishers have joined forces to form a Digital Media Society to strive for greater professionalism and sustainability of online media in Nepal. Chair is Prateek Pradhan of Barakhari and vice-chair Ameet Dhakal of Setopati.

Ncell with Para Players

Ncell organised a see-off event for Nepal's national para team as it left for Para Asian Games 22-28 October in Hangzhou, China. Nineteen players are representing Nepal in 10 sporting events at the 4th Para Asian Games including athletics, badminton, cycling, swimming, taekwondo, judo, powerlifting, shooting and table tennis. Ncell has partnered with the National Paralympics Committee (NPC).



Oriental GM

Oriental Hotel held its 26th general meeting this week where the annual report, balance sheet and other figures of the company were revealed. The total income of the hotel in 2021/22 was Rs1.2 billion and the total operating expense was Rs794.8 million of which Rs416.3 million was operating profit.

Kona on top

Launched in Nepal in 2019, Hyundai Kona has sold more than 1,000 units in the country, making it among the most popular and trusted electric cars in the market. The SUV made it to the Guinness Book of World Records when it took a journey of 700km to Everest Base Camp in the Chinese side.

Belgian Barahsinghe

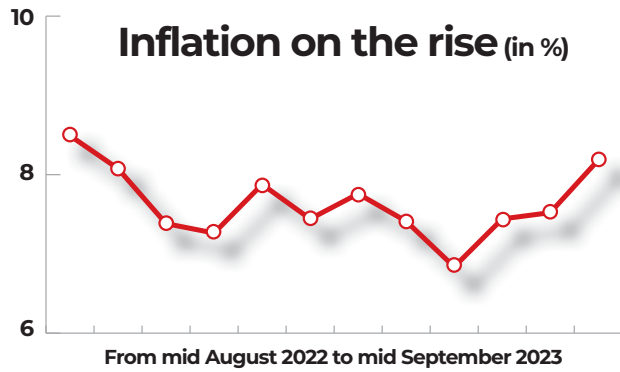
Yak Brewing has released a new craft beer, 'Barahsinghe Belgian Style Witbier' for Dasain-Tihar season. This is a light beer with fruity and spicy notes and low hop bitterness and is the sixth craft beer from Barasinghe.



Bada Inflation at Bada Dasain

Nepal's consumer inflation reached 8.19% in mid-September compared to 8.64% last year, latest Nepal Rastra Bank figures show. Food and beverage inflation hit 9.74%, and non-food and service sector prices increased by 6.99% during the review period. The highest costs hit low and lower middle income families especially hard during Dasain.

The only saving grace is remittances from Nepali abroad, where even the official inflow figures through banks and registered exchanges have increased to record levels.



The cost of spices (especially important items at festival time) went up by a whopping 45.46%. There is a severe shortage of sugar in the market, and even when available it is 17.86% costlier than last year. Vegetable

prices rose 14.51%, and the price of milk and eggs are up 12.6%. Ghee is the only commodity for which the price has declined: by 13.08%.

Prices in the entertainment and culture sub-category have also increased by 15.55%— with miscellaneous goods and services going up by 12.21%, education 9.10%, household goods 8.11%, as well as furniture and household appliances by 6.59%.

While the inflation rate remains high, wages and salaries have not kept pace. The salary and wage rate index increased 5.25% in mid-September compared to 11.68% a year ago.

The government's expenditure was Rs131.14 billion while revenue collection amounted to Rs141.08 billion. Gross foreign exchange reserves have also increased by 3.9%, mainly due to remittances and lower imports. Remittance inflow increased by 22.1% to Rs.228.37 billion compared to a 19.8% increase in the same period last year.

Meanwhile, Nepal's current account and balance of payments were both in surplus during the first two months of fiscal year 2023/2024. The current account shows a surplus of Rs23.5 billion compared to a deficit of Rs36.84 billion during the same period last fiscal year while the BoP had a surplus of Rs53.61 billion by mid-September against a deficit of Rs 20.81 billion during the same time last year. 🇳🇵



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■ **Pema Norbu Lama** in Gorkha

The sacred valley of Tsum lies in the Himalayan rain shadow behind Ganesh Himal, and has set an example for harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature. Much of this do no harm philosophy emanates from the belief of the people there in Tibetan Buddhism and in particular the animist Bön faith which they share with many other secluded valleys in the Himalayas.

Tsum Valley is only 60km on a straight line northwest of Kathmandu in Upper Gorkha district on the border with China. It comprises two local wards: Chumchet and Chhekampar under the Chum (Tsum) Nubri rural municipality.

Tsum Valley was not always a peaceful place. More than 100 years ago, legend has it, a major conflict arose between two communities and when it became impossible to resolve it internally, the Tsumpa invited a high-profile monk from Dragkar monastery in Tibet. They also summoned the Drukpa Lama Ngawang Palsang from Bhutan who at the time was also residing at Dragkar.

The Drukpa Rinpoche resolved the conflict successfully, and is also credited for advising local people to adapt to drought, famine and pestilence which was happening frequently at the time.

Locals were so pleased that they asked Drukpa Rinpoche to reside permanently in Tsum, who in return got the people to adopt

a communal edict for peace and harmony with nature, thereby establishing the tradition of Shargya in 1920.

The term Shargya (ཤར་གཡ་) means (hundreds of) commitments taken by the people or community collectively. It was put into writing on a wood block in Tibetan script and then thumb printed. They were:

1. No to slaughtering (of animals, or humans)
2. No setting traps (hunting)
3. No bee-keeping
4. No selling of domestic animals for commercial purpose (mostly to Tibet and lower valleys)

This indigenous knowledge holds its origin from the ethic of Tibetan Buddhism, and is similar to the non-violence practiced in Khumbu and other Himalayan valleys.

In the few select communities of the neighbouring valley of upper Nubri below Mt Manaslu, local monks have intervened to stop the slaughter and consumption of livestock as well as a blanket ban on wildlife hunting.

The Shargya tradition in Tsum has withstood the test of time and evolved through different historical phases. It has seen war and conflict when Tsum Valley became the launching pad for Khampa guerrilla raids on the Chinese military in the 1960s.

The 1966 documentary ‘Raid into Tibet’ by George Patterson and Adrian Cowell showed the two British journalists sneaking into Tsum to make the film, aided by the Khampa fighters.

Today, surviving elders recall the violence of the time. It did not



Shrinking tourism’s

Nature camp in Bardia reinvents eco-tourism to benefit communities first, while supporting conservation

■ **Akanshya Shah** in Bardia

Although not as popular as Chitwan, tourism has emerged as the backbone of Bardia’s economy, and visitor numbers are growing again after the pandemic slump.

Even so, while traditional lodges and hotels along the buffer zone of Bardia National Park attract tourists, there has been no innovation in their style of operation and the need to fulfil new educational aspects of conservation for Nepali and international visitors.

Eco-tourism today is driven by the need to see unspoilt wilderness areas, and the old jeep safari style is becoming outdated. The trend is away from big luxury hotels to minimum interference with nature, but with the highest standard of service, sometimes exceeding expectations.

One such destination is Burhan Wilderness Camp in Bardia where the natural integrity of the area is maintained with world-class hospitality in the midst of jungles teeming with wildlife calls.

Located near the town of Madhuban, the tented accommodations are comfortable yet intimately connected with nature. The



approach to Burhan is through village and forest trails, crossing one of the branches of the Karnali on a raft or paddleboard.

At camp there is a safety briefing and then the sundowner in a luxurious setup with campfire and barbecue bush dinner. Before sunrise, the next morning is a two-hour river safari or tiger tracking bushwalk followed by breakfast.

Lunch is with the local Tharu community with its traditional food followed by a heritage tour. In the evening, guests gather around a bonfire and enjoy fascinating jungle tales from a Tharu wisdom keeper. There is even a short night safari around camp before dinner. Other activities include patrolling with a local community unit, visiting the Sonaha people to try one’s luck at gold panning.





ALL PHOTOS: PEMA NORBU LAMA

just affect the livelihood of locals, it also violated the Shargya ethos because the guerrillas slaughtered many yaks and wildlife.

Following the defeat of the Khampa by the Royal Nepal Army, Nepal's border police post was set up in Tsum in the 1970s. But while the move lessened the influence of the guerrillas, there was a language barrier between locals and the lowland police who were unaware of the region's non-violent tradition.

This was eventually resolved after the Shargya edict was translated into Nepali. The 2015 Constitution drafting exercise and the introduction of the ILO convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention also played a role in the local people embracing their century-old

tradition.

People of Tsum consider Shargya an everyday practice handed down over generations. It is a way of living that brings positive change within individuals, as well as in the external environment.

The idea is not to commit harm on other sentient beings and nature on which they depend. Shargya is a communal edict, a certain set of oaths taken by people. If violated, people will need to pay a fine.

The decision to declare Chumchet (lower Tsum) as Shargya territory and the 2012 Tsum Shargya Festival cemented the tradition. Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai attended the festival to sign the Shargya ethos declaring Chumchet and Chhekamapar as zones of non-violence, and a

Shargya preservation committee was formed.

The committee teaches the younger generation about the tradition, and also patrols the area to prevent hunting, animal slaughter, deforestation, and wildfires. If there is an extreme violation of the norms, an individual can even be exiled from the valley.

Committee members are rotated every five years, and a centennial celebration slated for 2020 had to be postponed due to the pandemic.

Locals say the indigenous edict in creating a peaceful, harmonious and resilient community has helped adapt to the climate crisis.

They say the region has never suffered a severe drought, famine or major conflict after the introduction

of Shargya. They say individual behaviour change from Shargya ethos has helped create a balanced coexistence between humans, nature and sentient beings.

Farmers in Tsum do not use chemical pesticides, they minimise the use of plastic. Locals also worship the mountains and rocky cliffs as their protectors, and treat water, forest and wildlife as invaluable divine treasures.

As a result, trekkers and visitors to Tsum Valley today see freely roaming wildlife such as the Blue Sheep, the Himalayan Tahr, Snow Leopard and Black Bears in the villages and farms, unafraid of humans.

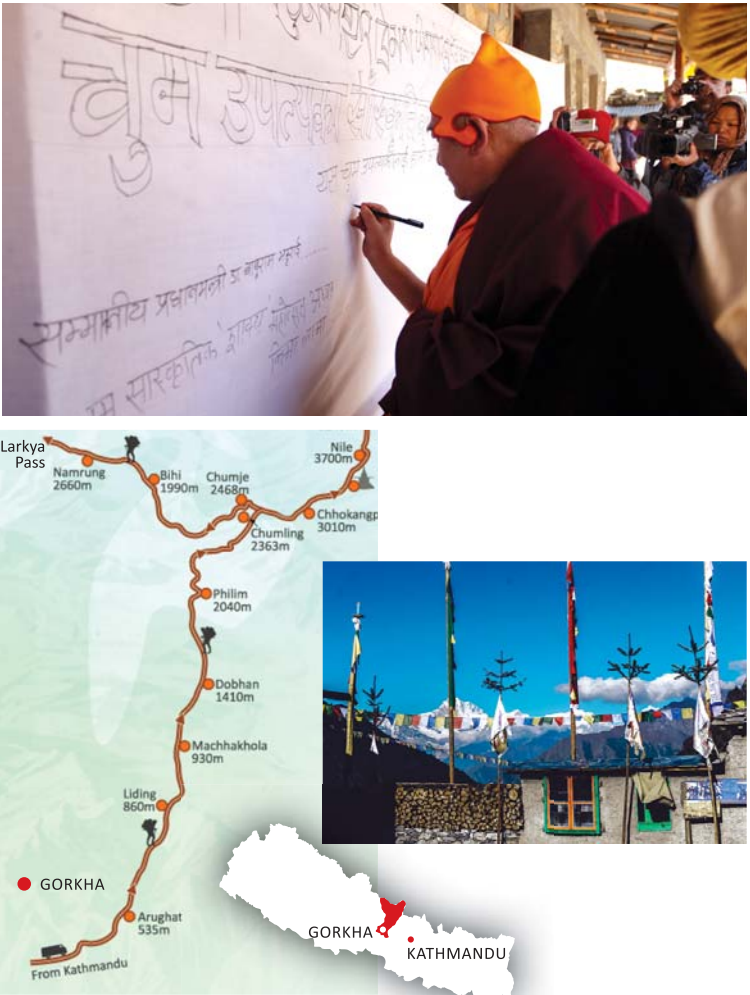
However, despite its remoteness, Beyul Kyimolun is not a hidden valley anymore. There are

challenges arising from haphazard tourism and road construction.

But people are also promoting homestays and small guesthouses over modern amenities. Responsible tourism complemented by the indigenous culture has further cemented Shargya as a unique and resilient tradition.

Tsum Valley today teaches us how an intergenerational commitment can change the world for the better at a time when people are more individualistic than ever before. It is a perfect blend of religious practice and a social construct, preparing the community for the changes and crises to come. 🇳🇵

Pema Norbu Lama is a research associate and social entrepreneur from Tsum Valley.



ecological footprint



ALL PHOTOS: BURHAN



TOURISM WITH A HUMAN FACE: Conservationist Manoj Gautam (far left) set up Burhan Wilderness Camp in Bardia so that humans could benefit and coexist with wildlife. Hemanta Acharya of the anti-poaching unit with nature guides Sushila and Manju (above).

Conservationist Manoj Gautam founded Burhan to try to do eco-tourism differently and more sustainably so that local people get most of the benefit. Burhan in the Tharu language means 'wilderness', and that is where they sought refuge when faced with calamity.

"People in the cities are prisoners of their routine, and they come to Burhan to escape from it, to de-stress and de-toxify," explains Gautam, who discourages the use of electronic devices and loud music. "For us, guests are

not always right. We educate them. Our focus is on nature, culture, and minimalist architecture. We maintain the natural integrity of the place."

Besides the tents, the only building here is the tree house. This is the first camp run on a micro-conservancy style and hopes to set an example, inspire others.

Indeed, because of its isolation, lack of crowds and noise the chances of sighting wildlife here is much greater. Visitors do not necessarily have to go looking for them, the wildlife is all around.

While this has allowed Nepal to achieve relative success in preserving its biodiversity, the efficacy and ethics of such 'fortress conservation' is being increasingly questioned. Nearly a quarter of Nepal's land area is cordoned off for conservation.

Nepal has tried to move away from a narrowly understood ultra-interventionist, top-down conservation model. Nature preservation is vital, but disengaging the communities that depend on them can ultimately undermine the goal.

State-led conservation has hit Nepal's indigenous groups particularly hard, undermining their traditional culture and knowledge systems. There is a history of eviction and landlessness as people were driven out to make way to national parks.

Here in Nepal's western plains, there

has been a spurt in recent years in human-wildlife contact with fatalities from tiger and wild elephants. Nepal's tiger population has tripled in the last 12 years, ahead of the goals set by tiger range countries, and Nepal was hailed internationally as the first country to do so.

The victims of tiger attacks are mainly women who enter forests to collect fodder. Being a conservationist himself, Manoj Gautam is out to change this through a new approach to eco-tourism. Burhan is pricier than other resorts with the same facilities, but his idea is to create a high-value product with minimum investment and maximum returns for the local community.

"It may be exclusive for guests, but it is inclusive for the community," says Gautam, an Oxford graduate who once worked with the Wildlife Crime Task Force in Nepal, and Jane Goodall Institute in Nepal.

In the past year, Burhan has hosted over 500 guests, and has injected funds into local homestays and restaurants. It trains and employs local youth in rescue units and jungle guides.

Burhan also trains and employs local women nature guides. Sushila and Manju are known for their knowledge of the forest, and Gautam hopes to train 100 women guides to empower and augment their income.

Hemanta Acharya of Bardia's community-based anti-poaching unit (CBPU) values his cooperation with Burhan. "It is a different kind of establishment. They have a deep understanding of the conservation challenges in this area. We need to work more closely with the local community and the national park." 🇳🇵

JUST JAZZ in

Surya Nepal Jazzmandu is back home for its 19th edition

KATHMANDU



Plurism (Switzerland/South Africa)

Plurism sees Swiss drummer and band leader Dominic Egli combine forces with the esteemed South African trumpeter Feya Faku and a stellar cast of musicians with a shared friendship as well as musical sensibility.

Plurism is anchored in Egli's intense curiosity about the many colours of African rhythm. The nostalgic sensitivity of his playing is grounded by the bass of Xaver Rüegg, with Faku displaying his uncanny temperament on the trumpet, Mthunzi Mvubu with prolific vocabulary is on the alto saxophone and Sisonke Xonti's audacious yet vulnerable style on the tenor saxophone.

Plurism remains complex yet simple, explosive yet tender, down-to-earth yet otherworldly, with the musicians always drawing out more from each other and the audience.

FEYA FAKU – TRUMPET AND FLUGELHORN | **MTHUNZI MVUBU** – ALTO SAXOPHONE
SISONKE XONTI – TENOR SAXOPHONE | **XAVER RUEGG** – BASS | **DOMINIC EGLI** – DRUMS AND CYMBALS



Lucile Chriqui (France)

Lucile Chriqui, an award-winning singer-songwriter, is one of the brightest new talents in French jazz. Blessed with natural musical and vocal flair, she honed her craft training under the American jazz singer Sara Lazarus and the French violinist Didier Lockwood, among others.

Her list of collaborators includes rising names in international jazz such as Philippe Baden Powell, Munir Hossn, and Nils Frechilla, and she even shared the stage with renowned French singer Camille Dalmis. She has also worked on numerous stage and film productions, including collaboration with the composer Chassol on music for the Netflix series "En place".

Lucile's music melds influences from Cuba, Andalusia, Brazil, and more, with daring harmonies that define an inimitable style.

LUCILE CHRIQUI – VOCALS | **BRUNO SCHORP** – BASS | **ARTHUR LINKS** – GUITAR | **GAETAN DIAZ** – Drums



Nick Aggs & Cadenza Collective (Australia/Nepal)

The Cadenza Collective, headed by the drummer and composer Navin Chettri, is one of the most unique and eclectic bands to emerge from Kathmandu. The group moves seamlessly across jazz, afro-funk, and Nepali folk music, creating a genre-bending sound that's irresistible to the ears.

The Cadenza Collective is joined by the Australian saxophonist and composer Nick Aggs. Hailing from Brisbane, and a key member of the acclaimed Australian fusion band Afro Dizzi Act, Aggs has fronted numerous musical ensembles and performed around the world, collaborating with esteemed musicians such as percussionist Trilok Gurtu, guitarist Jesse Van Ruller, kora virtuoso Jali Buba Kuyateh and many others.

The Cadenza Collective already has seven albums of original music to its name—the latest is Himalayan Songlines—and is working on a new single due out soon after Jazzmandu.

NAVIN CHETTRI – DRUMS, PERCUSSION AND VOCALS | **NICK AGGS** – SAXOPHONE
RAJAT RAI – GUITAR | **SAMIR CHETTRI** – BASS

Samundra Band (Nepal)

Formed in 2004, Samundra celebrates and safeguards the Gandharba community's long tradition of performing Nepali folk music. Holding firm to typical folk instruments, the ensemble plays age-old Nepali tunes recomposed in new forms, updating cherished old music for contemporary tastes.

ANIL GANDHARBA – SARANGI | **SUBASH GANDHARBA** – BANSURI
PUJAN GANDHARBA – MADAL | **RAMKRISHNA GANDHARBA** – ARBAJO
BUDDHA GANDHARBA – KARTAL





Himalayan Highway (Nepal)

A Nepali-American instrumental fusion band formed in Kathmandu, Himalayan Highway weaves together American Bluegrass and old-time Nepali folk music. Inspired by unexpected similarities in the two traditions, the band's members put a fresh spin on traditional tunes, with infectious harmonies and catchy beats that bring a unique new collaboration to the global music scene.

PRINCE NEPALI – SARANGI | **ZOE LEVITT** – MANDOLIN
ANISH TAMANG – GUITAR | **YUSON MAHARJAN** – PERCUSSION



Under the Surface (Netherlands)

Under the Surface is an extraordinary combination of three generations of Dutch musicians seeking communion in improvisation. Sanne Rambag's voice rhymes, whispers and sings over the melodic lines of Bram Stadhouders' guitar and the subtle percussion style of Joost Lijbaart, transporting listeners into an almost dreamlike new reality.

Their music offers both intellectual and emotional pleasure, springing from unshackled improvisation yet far from abstract, adopting surprising forms akin to thoughtful composition. Their eponymous debut album, released to great acclaim in 2017, was nominated for the Edison, an annual Dutch award for outstanding musical achievement. The group's live album Trinity, from 2019, captures the essence of a sound they have shared with audiences at major festivals across Europe, Asia, South America, Africa, and the Middle East.

JOOST LIJBAART – DRUMS AND PERCUSSION | **SANNE RAMBAGS** – VOCALS
BRAM STADHOUDERS – GUITAR AND ELECTRONICS



CONCERT FOR STUDENTS

Thursday, 2 November
11am-1:30pm
Venue: St. Xaviers School, Jawlakhel
Entry by invitation only.

GROOVING AT UPSTAIRS

Thursday, 2 November
7pm-9pm
Venue: Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat
Rs900
Gates open at 6:30pm

VALLEY JAMS

Friday, 3 November
7pm-9pm
Rs700
Gates open at 6:30pm and close at 7pm.
Venues:
Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat
Electric Pagoda, Thamel
Evoke, Jhamsikhel
EDN, Sanepa

JAZZ BAZAAR

Date: Saturday, 4 November
Time: 3pm-10pm
Venue: Gokarna Forest Resort
Price: Rs1,500
Gates open 2pm and close at 7pm.

SOUNDS OF LATIN JAZZ

Monday, 6 November
7pm-9pm
Venue: Mulchok, Baber Mahal Revisited
Rs1,800
Gates open at 6pm and close at 8pm.

MASTERCLASSES

Tuesday, 7 November
11am-1:30pm
Venues:
The Music Room, Bhatbhateni
Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka
FREE ENTRY (limited seating)

JAZZ AT PATAN

Tuesday, 7 November
7pm-9pm
Venue: Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka
Rs1,800
Gates open at 6:30pm and close at 8pm.
Seated by 6:45pm.

JAZZMANDU FINALE

Wednesday, 8 November
5:30pm-10pm
Venue: Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg
Rs1,500
Gates open at 4:30pm and close at 8pm.



Palouse Forro (USA)

Drawing its name from its home base in the Palouse region of the northwestern United States and the forró music of northeastern Brazil, the Palouse Forró brings to the world a much-beloved Brazilian genre that is yet to get its international due.

The band is led by American accordion player Adrian Crookston, who has played with forró ensembles such as Gente Boa, Xaxado Mission, and Forró de Quintal, and has taken his music to audiences across the United States, Europe, South America, and Asia.

ADRIAN CROOKSTON – ACCORDION AND VOCALS
NAVIN CHETTRI – DRUMS | **RAJAT RAI** – GUITAR



Eastern Classical Musicians (Nepal)



JONISHA POUDEL – VOCALS
As a gifted exponent of khayal, the preeminent genre of Hindustani classical music, Jonisha Poudel has already made a deep mark at a young age. Trained under the guidance of Shree K.C., one of Nepal's most respected khayal and dhrupad vocalists, she has won multiple honours and performed at many prestigious classical music festivals.

SANTOSH BHAKTA – ISHRAJ
Santosh Bhakta Shrestha has dedicated himself to the ishray for two and a half decades and has achieved tremendous mastery of this classical instrument. A pupil of Mohan Joshi, Shrestha has performed and toured in Nepal and abroad and has contributed to hundreds of recordings.

DHAN BAHADUR GURUNG – FLUTE
Dhan Bahadur Gurung began his training in the flute at the Kalanidhi School of Music – the same school where he is a teacher today. He has honed his skill with the legendary Ustaad Hariprasad Chaurasia and was selected as the best flautist in the Shastriya Sangeet Samiti competition in 2008.

NIMESH KAPALI – TABLA
One of Nepal's most promising young Tabla players, Nimesh Kapali began his journey in music learning the Nadal with his father at the age of three before starting on the tabla at the age of six with his guru Nhuchhe Darshandhari. He went on to study for five years with the late Nepali tabla maestro Rabin Lal Shrestha and has received instruction from the Indian master Pt. Gourishankar Karmakar.

EVENTS



Fulpati
The seventh day of Dasain is dedicated to Kalratri, seventh form of the goddess Durga. A holy kalash, banana stalks, jamara, and sugar cane is brought out after which there is a military parade.
21 October, Tundikhel



Maha Ashtami
On this day, animals are sacrificed to appease Goddess Kali. Newa communities also celebrate 'Khadga Puja' to worship their weapons.
22 October, Basantapur Darbar Square



Maha Nawami
The ninth day of Dasain is the only day when Hanuman Dhoka's Taleju Mandir opens to the public. Devotees worship Bishwakarma, the divine architect and craftsman. Offerings are made to vehicles, machines, and tools for safety and well-being.
23 October, Taleju Mandir, Hanuman Dhoka



Bijaya Dashami
The main event of the festival is the celebration of goddess Durga's victory over the demon Mahisasur and Lord Ram's victory over the demon Ravan. From the tenth day until the full moon, people receive tika, jamara and blessings from family.
24 October

DINING



Mezze by Roadhouse
Smart interiors and a chic terrace with a view of the palace provide a great atmosphere to enjoy dinner with friends. Get the nachos platter, smoked mo:mo and grilled chicken with linguine vegetable.
Mercantile Plaza, Darbar Marg, (01) 5323087

MUSIC

Ladies' Night
Stop by Meze by Roadhouse on Wednesday evenings with some girlfriends and enjoy live acoustic music— with the first cocktail on the house.
Wednesdays, Mercantile Plaza, Darbar Marg (01) 5323087



Loud & Wicked
Get ready for London Pub's Stoner Rock series, during which Shree 3 and Jai Faak will perform live all evening.
20 October, 7pm onwards, London Pub, Darbar Marg



Live music
Stop by with family and friends as Bibas Sitoala takes the stage for an unforgettable night of live music this weekend.
20 October, 6pm, Vinoliva Restaurant & Bar, Lazimpat



Samsaara
Enjoy an evening of free shots at Waterning Hole's Queen of the Night Wednesdays. Food and drinks will be accompanied by live music from Cambodia-based Nepali band Samsaara.
Wednesdays, Waterning Hole, Naxal

Anu ra Bimba
Get into the festive mood and listen to Anu ra Bimba performing original music this weekend.
20 October, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel



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

Haopin Hotpot
Hotpot is best served with a side of good and hungry company. Haopin offers a wide range of meats and vegetables, along with delicious sides to keep one satisfied while it cooks.
Narayanchaur, 9808064999

GETAWAY



Shangri-La Village Resort
Head to the idyllic Shangri-La Village Resort for the weekend. Meditate in the outdoor Yoga Pergola, indulge in a massage in Phewa Spa and soak up the sun in the Sanctuary Garden.
Gharipatan, Pokhara (061) 462222

Kantipur Temple House
With its red brick walls, wood carvings, floor seating and traditional courtyard, Kantipur Temple House on the outskirts of Thamel resembles the palaces of Nepal's past.
Thamel (01) 5904231



Jagatpur Lodge
The lodge is nestled in eight acres of jungle grassland. Stay in special tents which are no less than five-star rooms, each consisting of a private viewing deck to witness Chitwan's wildlife and nature.
Jagatpur, Chitwan (056) 411085

Soaltee Westend Premier
Located in the green plains of Nepalganj, Soaltee Westend stands out for its elegant architecture and interior design and is one of Nepal's more energy efficient and eco-friendly getaways.
Nepalganj (081) 551145



The Dwarika's Resort
The Dwarika's Resort is the place to go for an overnight getaway, or even just for a meal outside the city. Spend a couple of hours in the salt room for Crystal Salt Therapy and come back ready to tackle the chaos of the city.
Dhulikhel (01) 4579488

Pho 99
As the weather gets cooler, get some of Pho99's piping hot bowl of pho, a Vietnamese soup dish filled with noodles, vegetables, meats and sauces. Also try Vietnamese stews, curries, and barbecue.
Jhamsikhel, 9803203119



Zen Bistro & Cafe
Zen Bistro offers some of the best Red Curries and Pork BBQ for anyone who wants to venture into the palatable world of Thai food. Try the refreshing Papaya Salads during the day and warm bowls of Tom Yam during the cool nights.
Bansbari (01) 4017654

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
21° 13°	25° 14°	25° 14°	25° 13°	25° 13°

Cooler and Drier
That first westerly of the season this week brought thunder, lightning and rain. This looks like it will be the trend in the Himalayan autumn with long-range weather models predicting above-normal precipitation in October-November. The rains have brought down the temperature to the mid-20s and the minimum in Kathmandu Valley to the low teens. There has been snow in the higher valleys down to 4,000m. Expect breezy afternoons, with gusty conditions on higher ridges over Dasain.

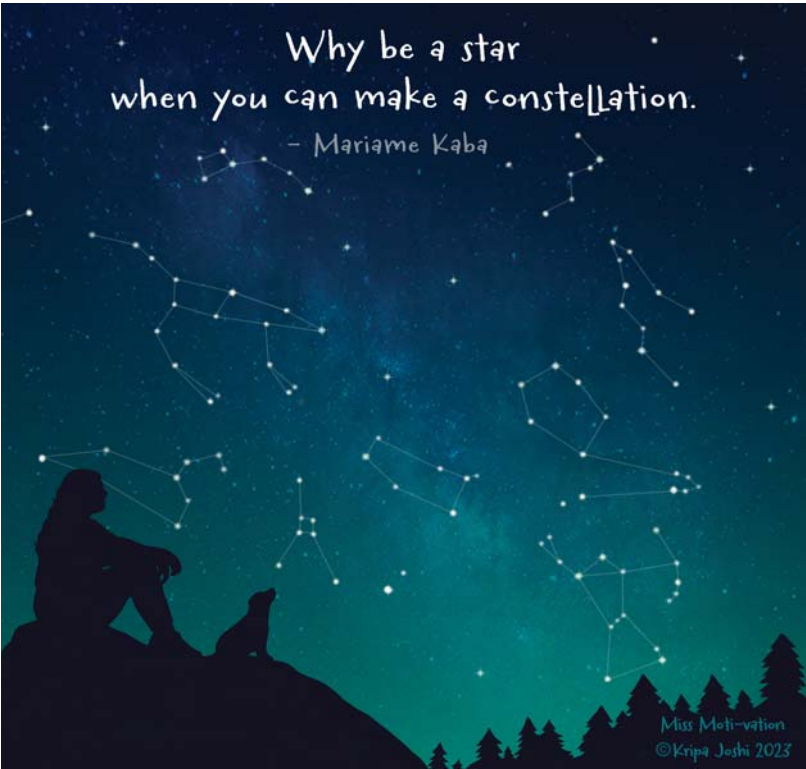
OUR PICK

In Mike Flanagan's 2023 gothic horror drama The Fall of the House of Usher, siblings Roderick and Madeline Usher -- ruthless and corrupt--have built a family dynasty out of their pharmaceutical company Fortunato. But their empire begins to crumble when Roderick's children die brutally under mysterious circumstances one after another-- forcing the man to confront the ghosts of his past. Loosely based on Edgar Allan Poe's 1839 short story of the same name--as well as his other works-- the miniseries stars Carla Gugino, Bruce Greenwood, Mary McDonnell, Henry Thomas and more.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउ 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



PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT

Getting up close and personal with the mountains

The Everest and Annapurna sightseeing flights are more popular than ever



The first-ever Mt Everest sightseeing flight was undertaken in 1933 by a British pilot duo flying from northern Bihar over Nepal in a flimsy Westland Wallace biplane with an open cockpit (above). We have come a long way since then.

The next celebrity was UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld when he visited Nepal in 1961. King Mahendra had just staged his coup and jailed elected Prime Minister B P Koirala, and was cultivating the international community. The king loaned his private DC-3 for the secretary general to get up close and personal with the world’s highest mountain.

Hammarskjöld went back to New York and contributed an article for National Geographic in its January 1961 edition with his black and white photographs of the trip (left), and possibly launched the first promotion of Everest sightseeing flights.

In 2013, the grandson of Douglas Douglas-Hamilton, the Marquis of Clydesdale, Charles Douglas-Hamilton commemorated the 80th anniversary of the 1933 overflight of Everest by going on a sightseeing flight himself from Kathmandu.

Today, there are dozens of hour-long Everest-view flights every morning from Kath-



mandu that fly at 24,000ft along the central Himalayan mountains, make a U-turn over Lukla and return. Before Covid, there used to be 30 Everest flights a day from Kathmandu airport.

Buddha Air has the most flights, and leaves aisle seats empty so all passengers have a window seat. This also makes the flight expensive, but most passengers say it is well worth the experience. It is one of the few flights in the world that takes off and lands from the same airport, and the fare is \$220 for overseas passengers and Rs14,000 for Nepalis and Indians.

Unlike other flights, where cabin attendants are busy serving food and drinks, on Everest flights they go up and down the aisle pointing out prominent peaks and escorting passengers one by one to the cockpit for better views. That is the other difference: in these flights, passengers are actually allowed into the cockpit. Opinion is divided about which side of the plane offers superior views, but there is a general feeling that the right side

is better because the plane is closer to the mountains on the return leg. But this does mean that passengers do not have much of a view during the first half of the flight – unless there are some empty seats on the left side.

The other debate is about whether it is better to sit in front or at the back. The turboprop engines of Buddha's ATR-72s are mounted below the plane's high wings and are relatively small (compared to the Q400, for instance) so it does not obstruct the horizontal view much. Still, a seat at the back of the plane (#13-16) are best because there is nothing to block the view.

Right after takeoff, the Buddha Air ATR-72-500 makes a wide climbing turn over Kathmandu Valley, and the western Himalaya with Annapurna, Himalchuli, Manaslu heave into view. As the plane sets a northeast heading, out of the left window there is a parade of the central Himalaya peaks: Langtang, Shishapangma, Dorje Lakpa, Phurbi Ghyachu, Gauri Shankar.

The plane gains height, and the pastel pla-

INSTANT EVEREST: Buddha Air's Everest Experience is the classic Himalayan sightseeing flight that allows passengers to be shoulder to shoulder with the highest mountain in the world (above and left). Each passenger gets a window seat, and passengers are invited individually to the cockpit for brief photo-ops.

teau of Tibet can be seen behind the mountains. The rivers that flow down from there have carved deep gorges through the mighty mountains. At this point, passengers get 2-3 minutes each in the cockpit, and a clear view of Mt Everest, Lhotse and Makalu silhouetted by the rising sun, and only 30km away to the north.


Far below, in the shadow of surrounding peaks, one can make out Lukla, Namche Bazar and on the horizon, the imposing massif of Cho Oyu and Nepal's longest glacier, Ngazumba. As the plane turns back, the aircraft is usually abreast of the summit of Numbur which is the same height as the cruising altitude of the plane.

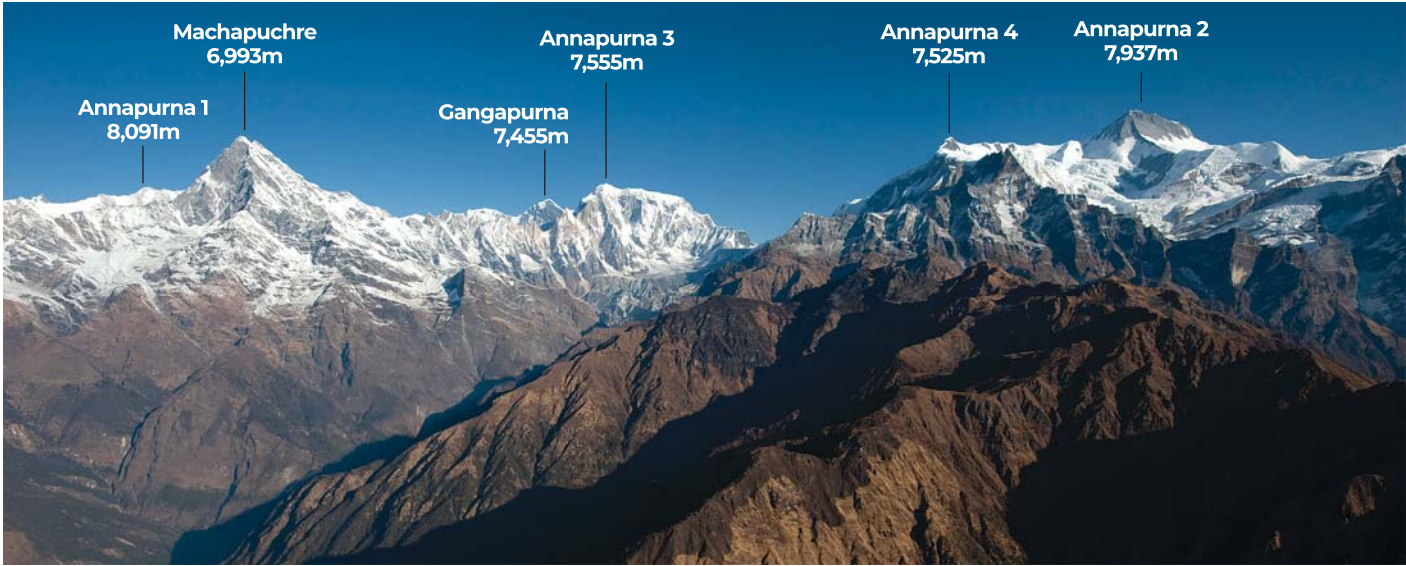
On return, the plane starts descending after Gauri Shankar, but the mountains are usually visible right up to the point where the gears come down and the plane prepares to land back in Kathmandu.

Without having to scale the actual peaks, mountain flights are a fantastic way to take in the breathtaking views of the Himalaya, and one of the most popular activities tourists undertake while in Nepal.

Most flights in Nepal are actually also mountain flights. A Kathmandu to Tumlingtar or Bhadrapur flight on Buddha Air, for example, offers almost the same views. Similarly, flights to Pokhara, Bhairawa, Nepalganj or Dhangadi have a spectacular panorama of the western Himalaya.

Since it began operations 26 years ago this month, Buddha Air has been the domestic airline conducting the most Everest flights. These days, besides its Everest Experience, it also offers the Annapurna Experience and the Kora Experience (see box, below).

Passengers also get a 'Himalayan Peaks' map to identify the mountains on this once-in-a-lifetime experience.  www.buddhaair.com



GUÐMUNDUR PÁLL ÓLAFSSON

The Annapurna Experience

Although Mt Everest gets all the attention because it is the highest, the mountains of Central Nepal are equally if not more spectacular, and the sightseeing flights actually fly closer to the massifs of Annapurna, Himalchuli, Manaslu, Machapuchre and Dhaulagiri. This is a 30 minute flight from Kathmandu and lands in Pokhara, and Buddha Air offers charter flights.

The Kora Experience (Everest + Annapurna)

Buddha Air is now also offering a mountain flight combo that combines the Everest and Annapurna experiences, and the name is derived from the Tibetan word 'Kora' which is a pilgrimage circumambulation. The charter flights take off from Kathmandu towards Everest, circle back west to Annapurna overflying the Valley, and land back in Kathmandu in a flight lasting 1.5 hours.

The journey is more interesting than the destination

What started as a hobby for one Nepali has inspired a whole generation to explore their country

■ Text **Sahina Shrestha**
Photos: **Kanchan Rai and Rishav Adhikari for Ghumante**

Kanchan Rai caught the travel bug young. During holidays, he would spend the entire day roaming around Kathmandu, coming home late into the evening, much to the dismay of his mother. She called him ‘ghumante’, a wanderer. The obsession with wandering never left Rai even when he grew up, and the nickname stuck. Over the years he explored parts of Nepal, far from the beaten track. He has now built the Ghumante brand that has through social media inspired a whole new generation of Nepalis to pursue the roads less taken. “Ghumante is not an insult anymore,” says Rai. “There are now many other accounts on social media that have the word ghumante in their ID.” Ghumante first started as a blog back in 2013. As an IT professional, Rai was aware of the emerging trends and he wanted to set up a

travel blog to earn a side income from Google ads. A friend familiar with SEOs helped him to ensure rankings. He also started a Facebook page, where he crowdsourced photos from fellow travellers. Initially he asked his siblings for photos from their travels to ensure regular posting, as he could not travel as often due to work. He collaborated with another friend, Prakash Buda, who was into t-shirt designing and gave away t-shirts to contributors. The blog and Facebook page saw modest success. “I was conscious about copyright, so I did not lift things from the internet, even though I could have got more followers,” says Rai. The turning point came in 2015, as the internet pivoted to video. Rai was working in Thailand and travelled to Nepal every holiday. He bought a GoPro and also found a group of Nepalis with similar interests. At the end of 2015, they went to Gupha Pokhari, and documented the trip, learning

video editing and script-writing as they went. In 2019, he returned to Nepal for good, and that was when travelling became a full-time occupation. He dedicated time and resources for YouTube with a team. Then Covid-19 hit. “That was the time I wished I was a journalist. Getting travel passes would have been much easier,” recalls Rai. “But it was amazing traveling when no one else was.” Ghumante’s YouTube channel now has 125 videos spanning the mountains and plains with a total of over 24 million views. Rai paid for it with savings in the beginning, but now they have partners and sponsors. Planning for videos can take anywhere from 2 months to a year. The team researches the location including the altitude, settlements and whether there are clear trails, then they find local contacts who can help them navigate and introduce the village to them.

“One should travel because it broadens one’s horizon,” says Rai. “Those who don’t travel only read one page of the entire book that is life.” He is happy that people take his video as reference when traveling but says he feels an added responsibility these days thinking of the aftermath on the environment and culture of a place when a lot of people visit a new place. “It is important to respect the culture, landscape and people when we travel,” says Rai. “We need to be responsible travellers and leave nothing but our footprints--a message we are trying to give through our videos.” When they travel, they also try to convince the locals to preserve their own culture and identity in food and architecture to attract the tourists--like you don’t need a cement building in community homestays, traditional architecture should be kept intact. “We don’t need ugly view towers on mountain tops. Binoculars would be better,” says Rai, who now wants to produce full-fledged travel documentaries. 🇳🇵



10 Ghumante Travel Recommendations

Note from Ghumante: When choosing the destination, consider time, budget, your own physical condition, and research and respect the place, its culture and customs.



1 Millennium Trek, Tanahun and Syangja
In 2000, a new trekking trail through the culturally rich Gurung and Magar villages of Tanahun and Syangja was initiated. Due to the conflict, the trail never took off. Although the highest point of this trek is no more than 1,800m, this fairly easy trail offers unprecedented views of Annapurna, Manaslu and Dhaulagiri.



2 Badimalika, Bajura
More popular as a religious destination, Badimalika can also be a pilgrimage to nature. The remoteness of the place has kept it preserved from the outside world and ‘development’ that has accompanied other tourist spots. Trek there any time, except in winter.



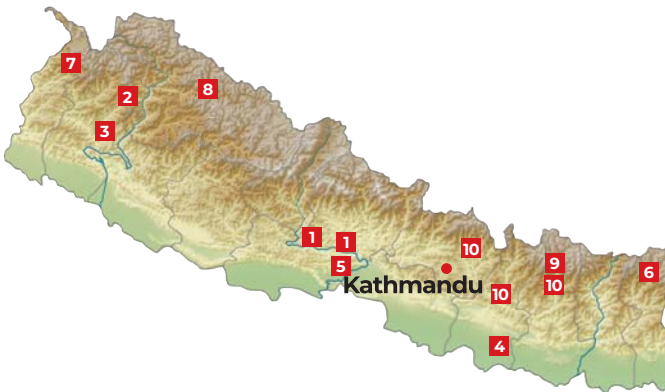
3 Ramaroshan, Achham
With 12 lakes and 18 alpine meadows at a height of 2,500m, the wetland of Ramaroshan is a hidden gem. Now easily accessible by road and air, travellers cross rhododendron forests and grazing horses, waterfalls, and mallard ducks in the clear waters. They can also visit Kinemini maidan, a former Maoist training ground.



4 Janakpur
Often overlooked due to the lure of the mountains, Nepal’s plains offer an equally enriching experience. Home to more than 70 shrines including the Janaki Temple and numerous ponds, Janakpur boasts a rich history and culture. It is noted for its arts, languages, and literature.



5 Tharu Community Lodge, Nawalpur
Experience the rich Tharu culture and architecture against the backdrop of mesmerising sunsets reflected on the Narayani River. Hire a local guide and book a safari to the Chitwan National Park. Even better, time your visit for the annual Holi festival for an experience of a lifetime.



6 Kangchenjunga
The Kangchenjunga Base Camp trek is enough to satisfy even the most avid traveler. Perhaps one of the most diverse treks in Nepal, the altitude goes from 200-300m in the lowlands of Jhapa to 5,140m. The trek is doable in 15-20 days.



7 Api Base Camp, Darchula
Mt Api, 7,132m, is the westernmost peak. Camp at the edge of a coniferous forest and wake up to see the sunrise to the sound of chirping birds and a gurgling brook. Off the beaten path, Api lies in the most remote and hardest-to-get-to parts of Nepal, but the people, views, and culture make the arduous journey worthwhile.



8 Mugu

Mugu is popular because of Rara lake, but the district has much more to offer. From its beautiful pastures to Swangeri, a unique mountain with a big hole on the top, which local folklore says was made by the arrow of Pala Gopo, Mugu's potential for tourism remains untapped.



9 Pikey Peak, Solu

One of the best-kept secrets of trekking in Nepal is Pikey Peak in Solu, which offers a view of seven of Nepal's eight-thousanders from one place, including Mt Everest. The 4,065m peak was bypassed by most trekkers on the Everest trail. Now, the road from Kathmandu to Jiri and the Solu Highway has reached Phaplu via Okhaldhunga, and Pikey is accessible to trekkers of all ages.



10 Panchpokhari, Solukhumbu, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchok

There are many Panchpokharis in Nepal, most of them sacred ponds in the mountains. From lush green grasslands to colourful wildflowers and breathtaking mountain views, the Panchpokhari of Sindhupalchok is perhaps best known with shamans and pilgrims flocking the holy site during Janai Purnima. But there are other Panchpokharis in Solukhumbu and Ramechhap.



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Exploring the genetic roots of the Raute

Studying Nepal's last remaining nomadic group critical to understanding how the Himalaya was first settled

■ Aashish Jha

Much of our species' 300,000 years of existence has been spent foraging, hunting, and gathering in the forests. And nomadism is in our blood, as it were.

Our ancestors were still nomadic when they left their African homeland 100,000 years ago and ultimately colonised all six continents. But even after leaving Africa, they continued practicing nomadism for tens of thousands of years.

Although nomadism has been the primary way of life for most of human evolution, 10,000 years ago some of our ancestors gave it up, settled down, and began farming— a practice that continues today.

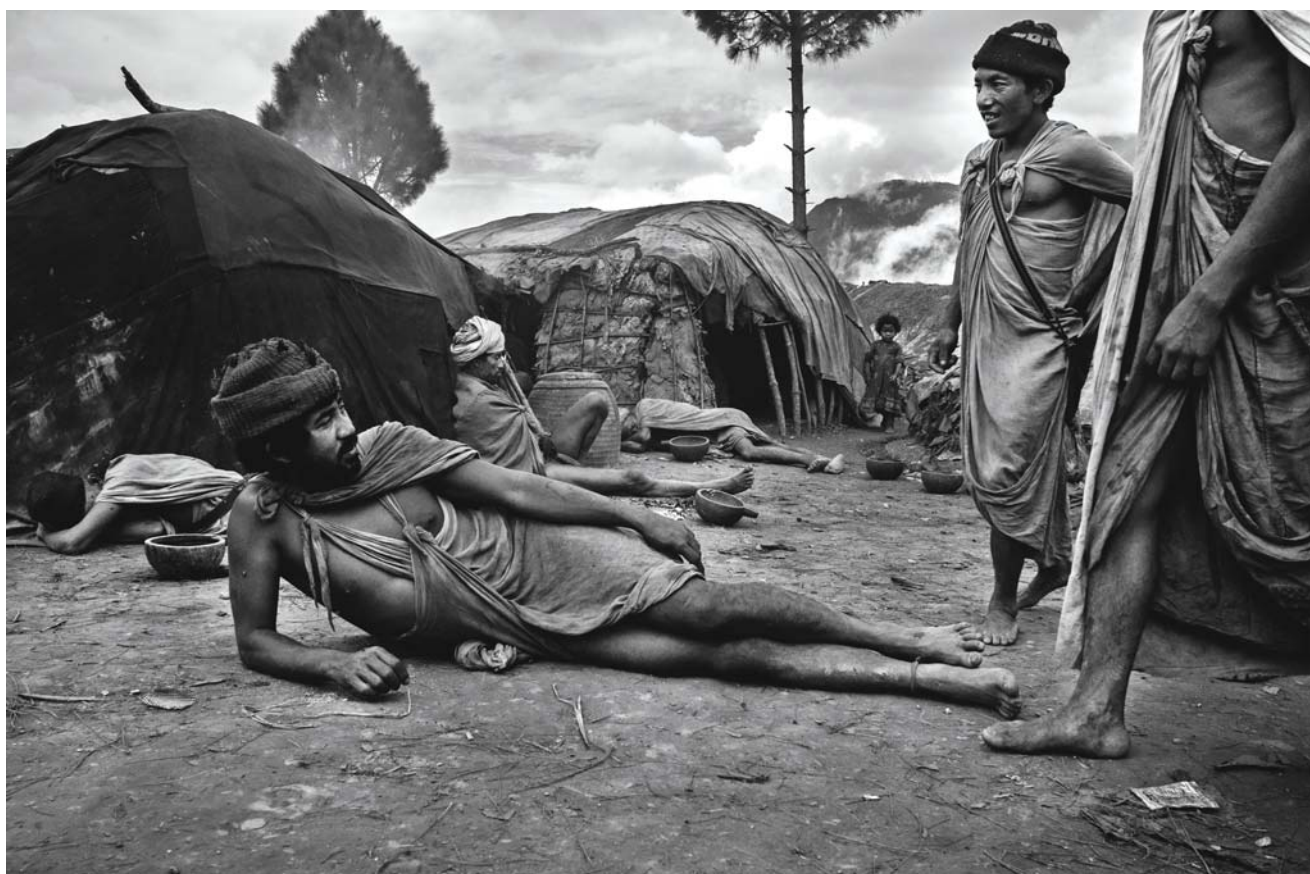
The success of early agriculturalists inspired most cultures across the globe to

transition to farming settlements. Slowly, nomadism became the norm of the past.

Yet, some human populations resisted the new ways of life and continued their foraging, hunting, and gathering lifestyles. Only a handful of them have survived to this day. The Raute of Nepal are the last of the nomadic hunter-gatherers in the Himalaya.

In 2006, while I was researching about the indigenous peoples of Nepal for a study in human genetics, I was surprised to find a chapter in Dor Bahadur Bista's book, सबै जातको फुलबारी in which he described the Raute as one of the ancient peoples of Nepal.

Bista highlighted that there was not enough study on the Raute but postulated that they potentially descended from an Australoid population. The origins and history of the Raute remains unknown to this day.



In 2016, I finally got the opportunity to meet with the Raute people. From Kathmandu, my fellow researcher Yoshina Gautam and I flew to Nepalgunj, where we met Prof Guru Prasad Gautam, who has established a long working relationship with the Raute.

We drove up the winding accident-prone Karnali Highway for several hours and reached Tunibagar of Dailekh district, a small town serving as a rest stop for trucks. We hiked several hours the next day to reach the Raute camp located on the banks of a

small river in Achham district. At first the Raute were apprehensive of us, but they gradually opened up.

The Raute are elusive and mystical, divine yet destitute, enlightened albeit unschooled, appreciated and disliked by mainstream society. Because of their nomadic lifestyle, duodecennial nature, and preference for obscurity the Raute are portrayed as fearsome and savage in folklore.

Yet the Raute consider themselves divine: direct descendants of Lord Ram, and therefore entitled to rule the forest

as kings. They also hunt monkeys, a sacred Hindu symbol that local farmers would not dare to harm despite the nuisance and toll the monkeys take by destroying crops.

They navigate high hills of far western Nepal with precision and are remarkably knowledgeable about the nutritional and medicinal value of hundreds of local plants. The Raute do not seem to disturb the settlers' lives and livelihoods at all, yet their existence seems to irritate them.

While later settlers sometimes regard the Raute with curiosity,

POSSESSIONS

New photobook on the Raute is a poetic documentation of Nepal's last nomadic people

What do we call a people without fixed addresses, without land or proof of citizenship? And what do we call a people who have no desire to possess any of these things?

In 2011, when photographer Kishor Sharma made his first encounter with Nepal's last truly nomadic community in the highlands of Salyan two days walk from the nearest road, he struggled to be accepted and understand their lifestyle. But as he gradually won their trust, and they his respect, the original plan to document in photographs the reclusive forest-dwellers turned into an exercise in visual poetry.

Recording the lives and times of the Raute cannot just be done in a narrative text or through flat photography. "You are the world, we are the Raute," they remind the lensman. It is a life of wandering, a culture that predates history and the modern nation state, before healthcare and the need to learn the alphabet, before buses and mobiles.

Sharma revisits the Raute clan three years later, and shows them a photo on his laptop of tribe member Surendra that he had taken earlier. Surendra had died, but his relatives did not want a printout of his photo.

'Photographs contain remembrances of things past, Rautes with their wandering souls, do not like to be stuck with old memories,' Sharma writes in the evocative bilingual text accompanying the photographs.

But globalisation, the modern Nepali nation, its administration and police are never too far away. Rautes have frequent encounters with townspeople who look down upon them, but also fear their wild ways. Raute life is also being rapidly monetised, a process accelerated by a monthly Rs5,000 allowance they receive from the state. But the stipend is always late, and that has now become their greatest complaint.

Sharma spent six years, off and on, among the Raute in Salyan, Achham and Dailekh, and won their confidence. But one thing they never cared to share with him is their practice of monkey hunting. They do not like



Living in the Mist
by Kishor Sharma
photo.circle, 2022
Rs1,800 (in Nepal), \$45 (International)
ISBN 978-9937-1-2056-2

outsiders joining in the hunt which they see as a sacred duty to ensure survival. They do not use guns or knives, but net traps, and never kill more than they can eat.

It has been a few weeks, and it is time to change camp. The Raute are bundling up their possessions. Bir Bahadur tells Sharma: "It is time to move again."

Many readers may see in Kishor Sharma's *Living in the Mist*, a photographic visual confirmation of an endangered nomadic group with a vastly different lifestyle from ours.

But others may find survival lessons for 'modern' globalised humans of a frugal, gentle and dignified people who only take from nature what they need. They cannot own land because the land owns them. 🇳🇵

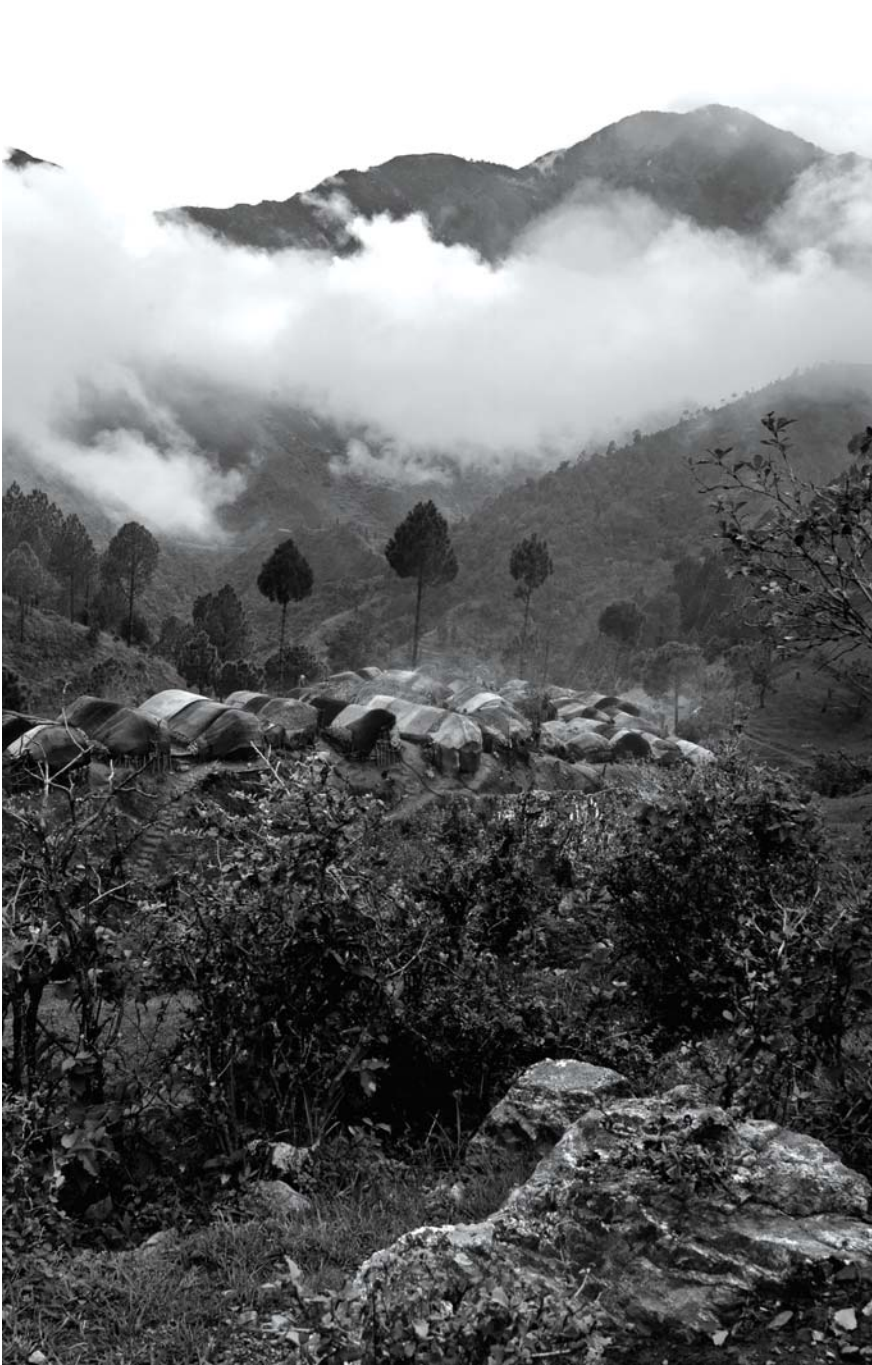
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most of them flatly reject the Raute way of life. Their claims of divinity despite their destitution are incomprehensible to the settlers. The only desire the Raute have is the right to their isolation, and the settlers promise them everything except that.

This dichotomous relationship appears to have existed for a long time because the Raute have incorporated aspects of Hindu culture to establish themselves as equals and not inferior to the higher caste settlers. Whether such elements are superficial and used by the Raute only to deal with the settlers, or it has influenced the Raute identity and self-perception remains unknown.

Even though the Raute have endured immense pressure to give up their nomadism and settle down, dwindling forests and increasing urbanisation has added to the pressure to assimilate.

The Himalayan foothills were once home to several other nomadic groups including the Kusunda, the Ban Rawat (Dadeldhura Raute), the

Raji, and the Chepang. All of them have succumbed to the pressure to settle and this transition has left them fragmented.

They have suffered massive loss of culture, many of their deities have been forgotten, their languages are dying, and these ancient cultures are rapidly becoming extinct. Such loss of cultural heritage makes Nepal's much-vaunted ethnic diversity poorer.

Importantly, the nomads and their ways of life provide us a means to gaze into our past. Understanding their lifestyle, culture, and diet allows us to peek into how our own ancestors lived.

The Raute are the last nomadic group of Nepal, and therefore are the only means through which we can peek into the past to understand the ways of life of our ancestors.

However, the Raute way of life is understudied. From the little ethnographic and linguistic data that exists, the Raute appear to be descendants of an ancient population. Their aboriginal

lifestyle is ancient, and their Khamchi language also appears to be among the ancient Himalayan dialects.

Since historical, anthropological, and archeological data on the Raute is limited, my laboratory at the New York University Abu Dhabi (The Genetic Heritage Group) is relying on genetic analyses to address some of the outstanding questions regarding Raute population history.

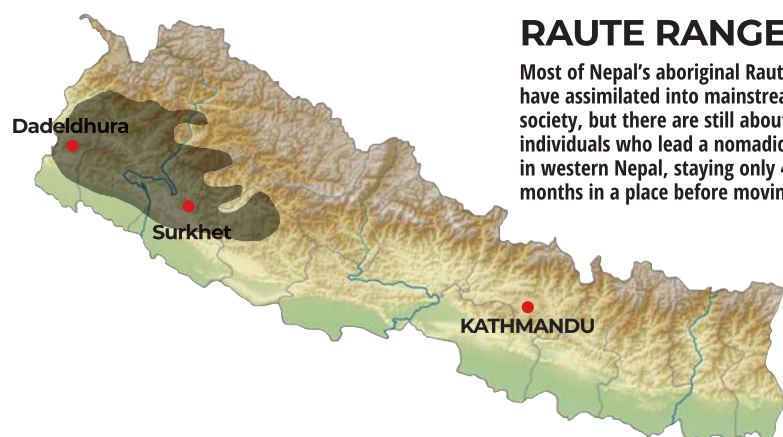
We are analysing genetic variation within the Raute to understand how members of the group are related to one another, which may benefit the Raute to avoid consanguineous marriages. This data can also be useful to estimate Raute population sizes over time, which can provide key pieces of information to understand their history.

Furthermore, we are comparing genetic data of Raute with many other Asian populations to demonstrate how they could be related to neighbouring Nepali populations and their distant cousins elsewhere in the region.

Finally, we seek to compare Raute DNA with publicly available genetic data from ancient populations obtained from thousands of years old bones excavated from archeological sites across Asia.

They could tell us more about the origins of the Raute. The research is ongoing, but we believe the results will provide solid scientific evidence to establish the Raute as the living national treasures of Nepal. 🇳🇵

Aashish Jha, PhD, is Assistant Professor at the Department of Biology at the New York University campus in Abu Dhabi.





Not easy for Nepal to sell buffalo meat to China

Country needs to do much more to improve hygiene and safety standards before that happens

■ Nirab Gyawali

Following the visit of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal to China earlier this month, there was talk that export of buffalo meat to China was on the agenda. If so, not enough homework was done before Nepal raised the possibility.

Some traders in Kathmandu claim there is a growing demand for buffalo meat in China, and there have been reports of slaughterhouses in the eastern Tarai where buffalo meat is processed specifically for the purpose of smuggling it to China through various routes.

Finding out if there is indeed a growing demand for water buffalo meat in China is not easy. The annual Chinese customs import data categorise buffalo meat (not visceral organs like liver, intestine, tongue, etc.) together with other cattle raised for meat under the category 'meat of bovine animal'.

Furthermore, an average Chinese person does not distinguish between buff and beef as separate products. For the average Chinese, beef/牛肉 (shuǐ niú ròu) is interchangeable with buffalo meat. Shuǐ/水 means water in Mandarin.

With the growth of China's economy and rising living standards, the demand for bovine meat is indeed shooting up. Due to the limited arable land and the local bovine population, ever larger quantities of beef/buff need



KUNDA DIXIT

to be imported every year.

China was already importing \$2.52 billion worth of beef in 2016, and this grew to \$17.76 billion in 2022. The top five source countries were Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, New Zealand and Australia.

Export of beef from Nepal is prohibited, but water buffalo meat export to China could be economically viable. But a great deal more homework needs to

be done on the legal or technical infrastructure aspects.

The General Administration of Customs of China (GACC) has strict rules for imports of 18 food items, including meat products. These not only relate to how the meats are produced or manufactured, but also ensure that the food safety management system of the exporter country is equivalent to Chinese standards.

Which means that even a state-of-the-art Nepali slaughterhouse following safety and hygiene practices in frozen meat production has little to no chance of exporting to China unless the GACC has certified it.

Furthermore, there are exhaustive GACC standards in the evaluation and confirmation process, which include confirming legal provisions, animal and plant diseases, competence of food safety supervisory, overall safety and hygiene control in food production, processing, transportation and storage, competence in export food safety, food protection, traceability and recall system, emergency response preparedness, technical support capabilities, so on and so forth.

While there are provisions in Nepal for food safety and animal and plant epidemics, there is a wide implementation gap for safety and hygiene control in food production, transportation and supplies.

The most recent epidemic of the lumpy-skin disease in cattle and the shortage of vaccines is indicative of Nepal's lack of preparedness in responding to the animal and plant epidemics, and the country needs to do a lot more to qualify as an exporter country for food products including bovine meats.

However, assuming that Nepal is planning to export water buffalo meat to China, it must quickly request an evaluation by the GACC -- even if such an exercise will

likely result in the Nepali food security management system not meeting the standards.

Doing so would have practical benefits in having recommendations from the GACC as rectification instructions would also indicate the gaps, addressing which could strengthen technical cooperation between Nepal and China, at least in animal husbandry, and have benefits for Nepal's own domestic meat industry.

Should Nepal pass the GACC evaluation and confirmation assessment, it can expect Chinese investors to be willing to set up meat and other food production and processing facilities here. According to a 2021 FAO estimate, Nepal has 2.32 million hectares of land underutilised which could potentially be developed as pasture.

Increased investment in food production and processing industries in turn can have trickle-down benefits to farming populations, especially in the hinterland where the youth are migrating away from the land due to the lack of opportunities.

What is needed is political will, integrity and a determination to follow through. Or we can continue on being the country with the most bilateral MOUs with no practical significance except junkets for bureaucrats and politicians. ■

Nirab Gyawali is a Nepali lawyer working to be the first Mandarin-speaking transaction lawyer in Kathmandu.

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