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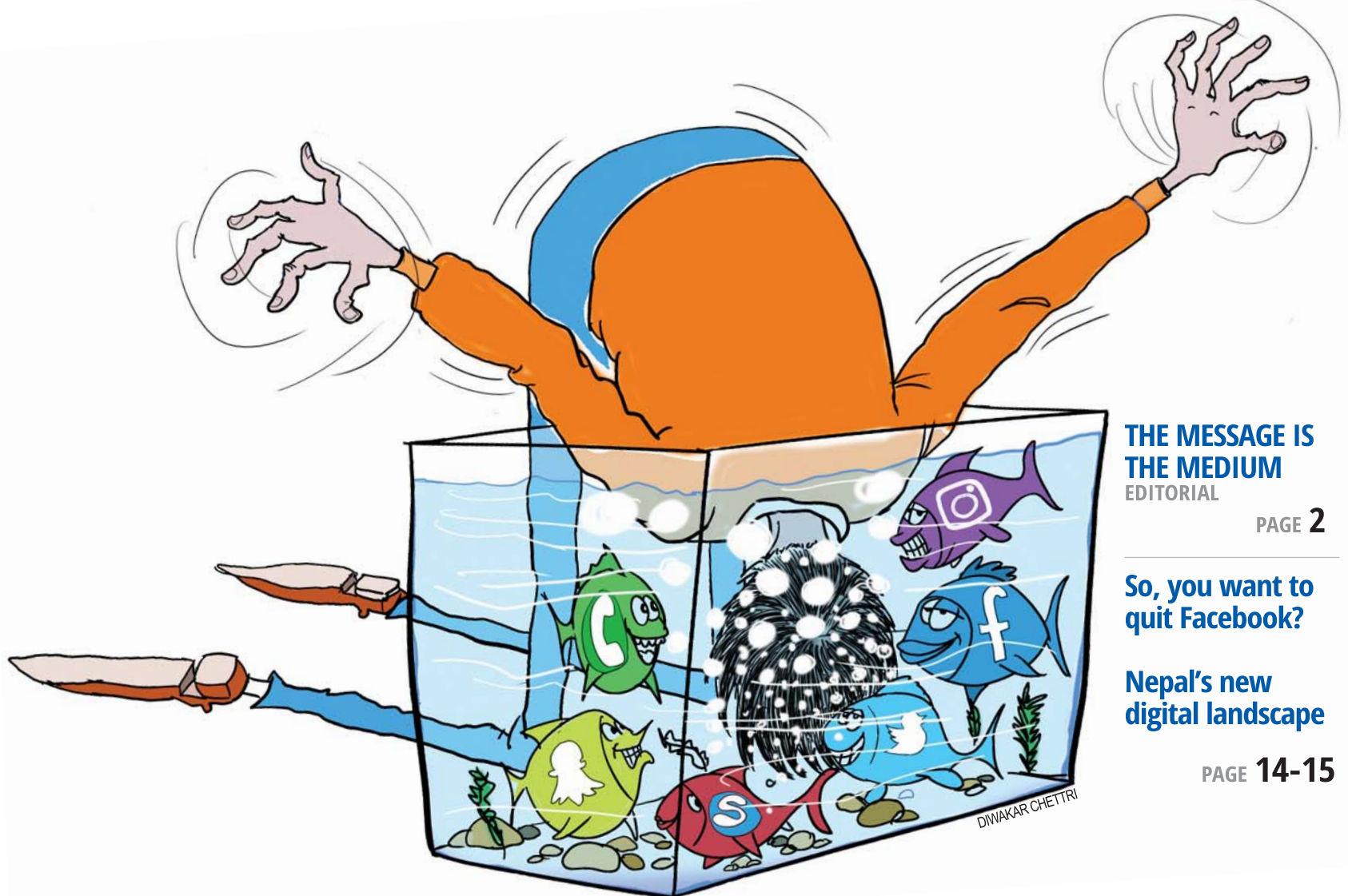
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THE MESSAGE IS  
THE MEDIUM  
EDITORIAL

PAGE 2

So, you want to  
quit Facebook?

Nepal's new  
digital landscape

PAGE 14-15

## DIGITAL DETOX

The surest sign that Nepal has already become an online society is the spreading practice of 'digital detox', where addicted users completely abandon connected devices, or at least take steps to drastically limit their online time.

When checking, then rechecking, devices becomes such a daily distraction that it starts to disrupt our work, sleep or relationships, it is time to take a step back and evaluate the benefit of clicking yet another link to reveal the umpteenth bit of information for the day and ask: 'Is it really necessary?'

To be sure, there are many benefits also of the digital world for Nepal. The internet has democratised information flow, levelled the playing field, and in many cases turned citizens into actors and content providers themselves. #occupywallstreet morphed into #occupybaluwater and the #Metoo movement encouraged long suppressed revelations about sexual assault in Nepal.

Whether we see growing digitalisation as positive or negative, one thing is sure: it is both, and Nepal will be even more digitised in the coming decades. A recent survey showed that 90% of Nepalis now own mobile devices, with half of them producing smartphones when asked, 95% of households have mobile phones for an average 2.5 devices per home, 88% of us use Facebook frequently, and a whopping 8.5 million Nepalis are on the platform today. 45% are on messenger, 35% use IMO for instant messaging and 34% are regularly on YouTube.

These trends already have a major impact on where Nepalis get their information, what information they believe, and how that affects the trust between individuals and the institutions at the heart of a democratic society, including media and government.

The survey found most Nepalis still consider mainstream media as generally reliable, as opposed to information on the Net, which very

few believed. But as recent cases of Rabi Lamichhane, protests against heritage destruction, violence against women and corruption have shown: social media content is now driving mainstream media coverage. It is setting the agenda, and with it the potential for manipulation is growing.

The Nepali Net is affecting politics because the young middle-class is now wired. Half of Nepal's population is under 21, and this networked youth bulge will have huge political implications in the 2022 general election. Where new voters get their information, how they get it and what kind of information it is, will determine who rules Nepal and how in future. If the information is correct and credible, exposes wrongdoing, is fair to all concerned, and lets voters make up their own minds, the New Media will strengthen Nepal's fragile democracy.

If not, expect to hear more cries of 'fake news' and the growth of a digital media landscape that is likely to fuel the 'digital detox' trend. 🇳🇵

**buzz**  
**Pangolin smuggling**  
PAGE 8-9



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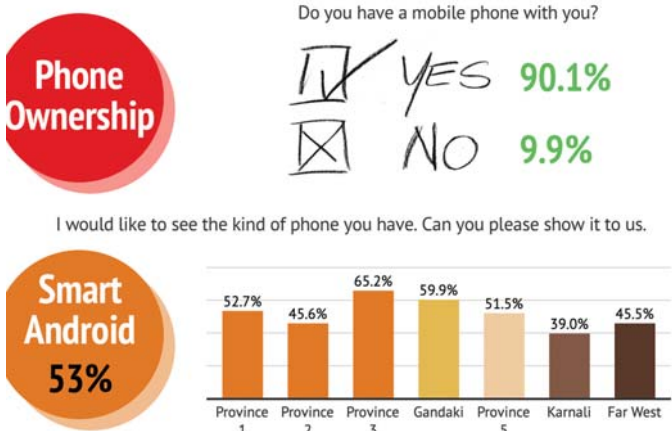
# THE MESSAGE IS THE MEDIUM

There was a time until recently when we wrote editorials in this space about how the global digital divide was mirrored within Nepal. Just like the haves and have-nots, we said Nepal had the ‘knows’ and ‘know-nots’, because access to the internet here was so skewed.

How fast things have changed. Till 2012, we were reporting that there were 1.4 million Nepalis on Facebook. Today the figure is nearing 8.5 million. The number of Twitter users is much lower, but it has a following among the intelligentsia, media and political influencers, which magnifies its impact.

In April, *Nepali Times* printed the results of a Sharecast Initiative survey that showed:

- 96% of Nepali households own a mobile
- 90% of individuals own a mobile
- Half the mobile users had smartphones
- 18% used laptops, desktops or tablets
- Among the 35% who used the internet, 98% said they use mobile phones to get online
- 75% used mobile data to access the internet, the rest on Wi-Fi



As our review of the survey in this edition (*page 15*) shows, the shift of eyeballs to digital media is going to have a profound impact on the way Nepalis communicate with each other, the way Nepal is governed and how Nepali society functions.

While the legacy press is still strong and influential, and people do not fully trust information on the Net, the window for print is narrowing. As elsewhere, it is inevitable that the online editions of the mainstream press, digital news portals and YouTube channels are going to be the main sources of news. Print media will have to re-invent its revenue model, or perish.

Internet viewing patterns in Nepal and other parts of the region show increasing dominance of entertainment content. Facebook and social media addiction is becoming a problem, reducing the attention span of readers, exposing them to click bait, fake news and rumours.

As the recent case involving Rabi Lamichhane — as well as protests against heritage destruction, violence against women and corruption — shows, social media content is now driving mainstream media coverage, setting the agenda, and the priority

**The Internet in Nepal has become a battle ground of populism vs popularity.**

accorded to events, personalities and issues.

Not all of this is improper, damaging or dangerous. The internet has democratised information flow, levelled the playing field, and in many cases turned citizens into actors and content providers themselves. Cybersphere has become the new Nepali public sphere, a *chautari* and our own global village, where the medium is the message.

People like Kulman Ghising of the Nepal Electricity Authority, Vijay Lama of Nepal Airlines, and Sanduk Ruit of Tilganga have been propelled to national stardom through social media magnification. They are seen by the public at large as direct antitheses of greedy and corrupt politicians.

No wonder, then, that the greedy and corrupt feel threatened by these personalities. In the battle between populism and popularity, these new heroes expose the hopeless inadequacies of political figures because of their integrity and selfless devotion to public welfare. When they become icons and political threats, we have seen backlash from the ruling elite.

The Nepali Net is affecting politics because the young middle-class is now wired. Half of Nepal’s population is under 21, and this networked youth bulge will have huge political implications in the next general election in 2022.

Where the new voters get their information, how they get it and what kind of information it is, will determine who rules Nepal and how. If the information is correct and credible, exposes wrongdoing, is fair to all concerned, and lets voters make up their own minds, the New Media will strengthen Nepal’s fragile democracy.

But if in the next three years, fake news goes viral, bot armies are deployed, false social media accounts target individuals to destroy their credibility, and troll factories are created to widen and exploit religious, sectarian, caste and ethnic fault lines, then Nepal is headed for disaster.

For now, social media is a free-for-all. It is still dominated by the personal, but is increasingly being used as a political platform by citizens to air their views. It is in this dynamic, interactive and instantaneous public cybersphere that opinions are increasingly being made and spread.

The Internet is a double-edged sword: it can mobilise pro-democracy protests and be a marketplace of ideas, but it can also radicalise society with algorithm-driven echo chambers, hate speech and corrosive dialogue.

As with all media there are the good, the bad and the ugly. At a time when the mainstream press is co-opted, coerced or bought off by political brokers, social media still holds out the hope of keeping the democratic space open.

Fortunately most Nepalis, wired or otherwise, value peace and harmony. This silent majority must be silent no more, and speak out on the social web to drown out the fake and phoney.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

This excerpt from the front page story in Nepali Times #467 of 4-12 September 2019 shows that however much things change in Nepal, they stay the same:

'There is no other way to write the new Constitution, protect the peace process and reduce foreign interference than for the political leadership to work together. Yet they can't bring themselves to do it.

Individually, they all give speeches saying there is no alternative to consensus politics. But their actions say just the opposite. Even when antagonistic parties get together, like the NC and the Maoists, it is for selfish and partisan reasons. Threatening "to capture state power through a people's rebellion" and a bloodbath will not take the process forward. Openly moving around with guns, refusing to rehabilitate those rejected in the cantonments, continuing to obstruct Parliament, will not help.'

Nepali Times

Come together

KARAOKE KIRAZI

Who says you can't sing?

pg-9

Nepali Times

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

4-12 SEPTEMBER 2019

Times.com

ONLINE PACKAGES

WHAT'S TRENDING



**SCALE OF JUSTICE**

Pangolins are the most trafficked mammals in the world. With increased connectivity between Nepal and China, the country is become even more of a transit point for wildlife smugglers. Even African pangolins are being smuggled to China via Nepal. Story: *page 8-9*



**INDRA JATRA**

Indra Jatra, an 8-day festival that concludes with a chariot procession of the living goddess Kumari, is around the corner. Watch how Kathmandu's beloved extravaganza has changed over the years to incorporate new elements like women pulling the chariots. Story: *page 7*.

**EVEREST TRASH**

Looking at the photo of trash on the South Col strict rules are needed, not only about attempting to climb this great mountain but about cleanliness ('Overkill on Everest', Damien Francois, #975). This is disgusting. *Alan Roadnight*

**CLIMATE BUDGET**

Climate change is not a priority in Nepal since we have not seen economic growth equally distributed ('Cash for Climate', *Nepali Times*, #975). Many Nepalis can't even afford a plate of rice, let alone worry about climate change. According to management theorist Maslow, unless basic and safety needs are fulfilled, higher issues like climate change would be tough to think about. Hope we can get there sooner than later. *Gyurme Dondup*

**GARDEN WALLS**

Never mind 'vertical gardens' ('Garden Walls', Sheilin Teo, #975). What about planting trees and shrubs and making parks wherever possible? For example, along riverbanks and in other open spaces like Tundikhel? *David Seddon*

■ A very interesting idea that needs to be widely disseminated. *Shrikrishna Upadhyay*

**RETIREMENT**

I am just a 63-year-old man who loves Nepal ('Retire in Nepal', Ass, #975). I would like to retire there but the retirement visa requirements are stupid. Having people prove they have \$25,000 makes sense. But requiring people to prove they spent \$25,000 each year is stupid. How do you spend that kind of money in Nepal? \$5,000 a year is enough for a very comfortable life there. *Mark Steven Bigelow*

■ Nepal will need at least 10 years to get ready for genuinely rich retirees in legal ways. Why don't we look at Sikkim in India, which is the most organic place on this planet, or Bhutan? They don't have ridiculous laws like Nepal, and have lovely Himalayan backdrop and scenery. *Kirpal Sodhi*

**Garden walls**

by *Sheilin Teo*

Spanish artist Iñigo Iriarte is experimenting with vertical gardens in Kathmandu that are helping reclaim some of its lost greenery. Sheilin Teo's report of the innovative gardens that fit Nepal's 3D landscape was the most popular on facebook this week. Take a look at ways to help make Kathmandu 'emerald valley' again.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**



**This is how to upgrade Nepal's rural health**

by *Sewa Bhattarai*

Reports from the far away hill district of Achham, where Bayalpata Hospital provides free treatment for up to 500 patients a day, seems to have touched many chords this week. Follow our reporters to this underserved and understaffed region, where Bayalpata has become a lifeline and a model for other healthcare institutions.

**Most popular on Twitter**

**Most commented**

**Retire in Nepal**

Ass

As Nepal makes plans to attract more and more tourists, it is forgetting to cater to retirees who might want to spend the rest of their lives here. Our satirical column about attracting thieves and knaves with big money to settle in Nepal was the most visited page this week. You know where to go if you need a laugh.

**Most visited online page**

QUOTE TWEETS

Times

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

British author @RobGMacfarlane inserts his own adventures and near-death experiences to dissect the philosophy of #mountaineering and deep time combined with musings on our subterranean consciousness. @kundadixit reviews his books

Times

Robert Macfarlane @RobGMacfarlane

Thank you for this wise & generous scrutiny of my first and last books; I am glad to think of them read in Nepal.

Times

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Most rural #hospitals in #Nepal get a bad rap for being understaffed & unequipped to treat patients. But Bayalpata in Achham is changing the face of rural medical care with their accessible & affordable treatments. @DeupalaMonika@sewa\_ditee

Times

Sanjoo Thapa @Sanjoothapa

Dr. Bikas Gauchan, you are doing a great job. You will definitely feel the blessings of those helpless poor people. I request the government to honour such people so that the coming generations can be inspired. @mohpnep @kpsharmaoli.

Times

Dr Nirmal Kandel @kandelnirmal

We need to promote financing health by the government, as security services. Countries where the governments finance their health and regulate health care services have better outcomes.

Times

Weekly Internet Poll #975

Q. Will the new rules for Everest climbers improve the situation?

Total votes: 126

Yes: 46%

No: 26%

Can't say: 52%

Weekly Internet Poll #976

To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

Q. Have you tried going on a social media detox?

Nepali Times

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SUNIL BANIYA

# Let's listen to Nepal's young changemakers

The country needs more risk-taking incubation investors to help social entrepreneurs



**1/2 FULL**  
Anil Chitrakar

There has been a dramatic shift in the way young Nepalis think and generate ideas to bring about social change. Some have built robots that can operate in Nepali and help the differently-abled to live comfortable lives. Others are tinkering with artificial intelligence to improve the quality of health care or education.

Funding for these ideas is currently limited to prize money and support from family. Nepal needs more risk-taking, high return-

seeking, incubation investors and a venture capital culture. This will require individuals who recognise that the ideas and the people who develop them are worth investing in, and are willing to take a calculated risk. They are people who know success will come with high returns.

Parents still want their children to focus on academics, get a stable job that pays a regular salary at the end of each month and eventually have grandchildren who will

provide social security. Buying land in Kathmandu and building a house with a few extra rooms to generate rent is the priority for many. But there are signs these social trends are changing.

Many people may not be aware of the term 'social entrepreneurship' but are practising it in their careers. Young Nepalis are setting up recycling projects to help clean up the city, making garbage their business. Others are turning plastic waste into building materials for

housing. Some are helping slum-dwelling children to stay in school.

The problem with these ideas is finding sources of funding beyond the initial grant, and how to scale the impact in a country that is used to getting things for free. Motivated youth struggle with policy, laws, finance and technology transfer, and this is where mentors can help. Mahabir Pun's National Innovation Centre could be one of the catalysts to help the community understand the value of these new ideas.



SANGHAMITRA SUBBA

## The Inn pizza

Finding pizza in Kathmandu has become almost as easy as ordering momos. From high-end restaurants to corner eateries, pizzas are everywhere.

Enter Pizza Inn. With its unnervingly vertical and narrow building in mid-Lainchaur, this place is in a league of its own. The menu has vegetarian or non-vegetarian, regular or thin, wheat or even heart-shaped crust. The Meat Lover's Pizza on a cracker-thin crust is ideal for the carnivores among us who like a generous helping of salami and ham but prefer to lay off breadly crusts. But if you are not a meaty person, the Popeye, Chicken Hawaiian and Heat Wave are just as good.

Beyond the pizzas, the restaurant offers cheesy garlic bread, chicken wings and pastas, staying true to the American-style pizza experience. Co-owner and chef Satya Deep KC worked at Papa Johns

in the UK and wanted to transplant that sort of casual pizza experience to Nepal.

KC makes everything in house, from the sauces to the dough, using fresh produce and a mixture of cheeses to create the pull. And you do not have to worry about the food not being fresh because everything is consumed the day it is made.

KC created Pizza Inn with Abhishek Agarwal, both pizza lovers. "We wanted a different pizza place in Kathmandu that was affordable, accessible and of course, delicious," says Agarwal. Appetizers start at Rs220 and the most expensive pizza is only Rs700.


Chicken fingers with house-made hot sauce is a yummy starter – strips of chicken are covered in breading, deep-fried and coated with a mixture of savoury spices. Dipped into the spicy and tangy hot sauce, the two hit almost every flavour note.

While pairing a cup of hot vanilla

and blueberry tea with a thin-crust pizza may sound strange, the combination goes surprisingly well, and makes you feel healthier.

Pizza Inn sports a distinct design, with the building divided into three differently decorated floors. The ground floor has an open eating area and multi-coloured walls decorated with drawings of pizzas. The first floor, on the other hand, is a sports watchers' oasis, well-equipped with comfy couches, huge flat screen tvs and photos paying homage to both Nepali and foreign athletes.

"As a huge sports fan, I wanted to create a space in the restaurant to allow other sports fans to gather and watch matches together with good food," says Agarwal. During the US Open or European football matches, the floor is filled with cheering fans.

The rooftop seating area is at canopy level with nearby trees, and isolated from the noise below. By 6pm the terrace is abuzz with birds, mainly parrots, flitting from tree to tree. But you will not forget that you are here mainly for the pizza. 

**Sanghamitra Subba**

### prabhu Bank BIZ BRIEFS

#### Turkish sponsors jersey

Turkish Airlines and Argentina's River Plate football team announced jersey sponsorship at a joint press conference



on 31 August at River Plate Stadium. The famous team's jerseys will carry the Turkish Airlines logo for the next three years, making Turkish the first airline company to sponsor River Plate, also known as 'The Millionaires'.

#### Jeep Camp

Jeep Camp kicked off in Kathmandu on 29 August for four days to demonstrate the potential and capabilities of Jeep vehicles, including the freshly launched



Jeep Compass Trailhawk and Jeep Compass Limited Plus. The camp is being held on an artificial off-road track created on the premises of National Trading in Baggikhana, Kathmandu.

#### Shangri-La's new Menu

The Lost Horizon Café at Shangri-La Kathmandu has launched a new menu designed to provide a unique global experience as well as highlight local delicacies. Executive Chef Vikram Kumar and his team will offer an outstanding culinary experience as per the need and requirements of guests.

#### Golf with Qatar

Qatar Airways' Privilege Club has announced a partnership with Education City Golf Club (ECGC) in Qatar. Privilege Club members can now earn Qmiles through membership packages and golf lessons at the newly formed club. Privilege Club members also gain a bonus of 10,000 Qmiles through the referral program for both member and referred members.


#### ED of Fulbright

USEF Nepal has inducted Reshu Aryal Dhungana as the Executive Director of Fulbright Commission/USEF. Aryal is an experienced educational leader

who chairs the board of Teach for Nepal and is Founder of Habeli Outdoor Learning Centre. She has worked at Ullens Education Foundation and Film South Asia, and is the first Nepali to hold that position.

prabhu Bank



Nepal has competitive labour costs, and the country produces 7,500 IT graduates a year. We have to cash in on this potential, which would provide jobs for youth who would otherwise emigrate to find work. But first, we need to streamline the bureaucracy and legal process, and update our investment laws. 

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TARAGAON MUSEUM

Sewa Bhattarai

Surrounded by overwhelmingly large ‘Sale’ signs is a tiny object in a large hall. Ang Tsherin Sherpa’s golden statue of a Tibetan deity in underwear is literally the object in focus at an exhibition at Taragaon Museum this week, part of the ‘Object in Focus’ series, designed to give viewers the opportunity to understand art in depth.

“When we are surrounded by many exhibits, we often cannot digest what it all means. So this is our effort to delve deep into an important piece of art,” says museum curator Roshan Mishra. US-based Nepali artist Sherpa is the third artist featured in the series.

Sherpa’s statue presents many interesting facets to explore:

its face, hair and headgear are those of a Tibetan Buddhist deity. But instead of wearing the usual finery, it is attired like a modern superhero, and poses with one arm thrown in the air, Superman style.

This piece ‘...and the winner is’ is a replica of Sherpa’s 2D work *Victory in Spirit*, but the actual metal casting was carried out by Shyam Maharjan, a traditional craftsman from Kathmandu.

Sherpa’s work carries on his previous tradition of mixing traditional and modern art. Coming from a family of renowned thangka painters, Sherpa himself trained as a painter from the age of 13, and worked with his father on murals and monasteries for almost 20 years. He migrated to the US and painted there, also giving classes on traditional painting. That was when western art motifs began to infiltrate his work.

Sherpa’s later works have

depicted ancient deities caught in the modern world: gods in non-traditional poses, wearing western outfits, trying to break out of little boxes, shuttered inside claustrophobic modern motifs and trying to be heard amid the cacophony.

The 3D work at Taragaon Museum fits this mould, but Sherpa does not want to talk about what it means. “To me, the pose symbolises a subjugation of negativity, it’s about hope,” he said at an interaction at the museum. “But I don’t want to attribute a particular significance to it. I would rather let viewers explore their imagination.”

Instead, Sherpa wants to talk about traditional art and his role in promoting it. “I used to work for months on a thangka piece, but then clients would ask why they should pay \$3,000 for it when they can get a thangka for \$200.

The ordinary customer does not know the difference between real traditional art and souvenir art. Artists often fall prey to these market forces and are forced to compromise on quality,” he says.

“That leads me to question what will happen to this art form 50 years down the line. Will we have any masters left, or only souvenir artists?” asks Sherpa.

In an effort to promote traditional art, Sherpa visited many museums in the west and spoke to many curators. He found that they too had been desensitised by the flux of copies, and were unable to tell the difference between quality art and mediocre art. Sherpa then decided to contribute in his own way to get more recognition for traditional art.

He returned to Nepal after the 2015 earthquake, and has since been trying to serve as

a bridge between traditional artists and the modern, western art world. For this exhibit, he sought out Shyam Maharjan, renowned for casting religious figures. “I did have to convince him to take up my unconventional work, by showing him photos of myself being blessed by several rinpoches,” laughs Sherpa. “But this is a way of highlighting high quality traditional metal casting as well, when this statue is exhibited abroad.”

Taragaon’s Roshan Mishra also raised the question of ownership about pieces of art like this one: while the metal craftsman is the one who makes the physical object, the art is usually attributed to the designer who conceptualises it. For his part, Maharjan is glad that the statue came out so well.

“Many religious teachers have complimented me on my work, and I know I am a good craftsman. I am happy to see that even this unconventional design looks so good,” he says.


Though his work veers far from his traditional roots, Sherpa contends that he has a deep respect for traditional arts, and aims to put more focus on them. “We don’t have an infrastructure to support traditional artists, due to which it is dying out. Through my work I want to open up a conversation about how to best address this,” he says.

Sherpa has sometimes been accused of ‘sacrilege’ but the art world has welcomed his work as a breath of fresh air. “Thanks to the artist for this diabolical piece,” says Sangeeta Thapa, founder of Siddhartha Art Gallery. “We always see the same deities everywhere and wonder why artists don’t experiment.” 🇳🇵

*Object in Focus 3rd Edition  
3-13 September  
Taragaon Museum, Buddha*

बालबालिका माथि हुने हिंसा, दुर्व्यवहार, शोषण भएको, जोखिमपूर्ण अवस्थामा रहेको वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने

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## How India’s pangolins are smuggled across the country and on to China

**Sahana Ghosh**  
in Kolkata

Pangolin smugglers in India are rigging up the endangered mammals with a battery-operated device that emits sparks from its scales to convince buyers that the animal has magical healing properties. Impressed, some gullible customers pay as much as \$40,000 for a live pangolin.

The scaly anteaters used to be killed for their scales, which were smuggled through the country’s Northeastern states to Burma, and then on to China. But increasingly, live pangolins are being trafficked to feed China’s voracious appetite for the meat, which is believed to have medicinal properties.

“The buyers don’t usually keep the pangolin with themselves, they sell it to the customer for a profit, and everyone in the chain ends up making money,” said RS Sharath, a former inspector for India’s Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) now posted in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Pangolins are small, solitary and largely nocturnal mammals known for their distinctive, armadillo-like appearance. They are hunted for their scales, meat and other body parts. Four species are native to sub-Saharan Africa, with another four spread across south and southeast Asia. India is home to two of the species, the Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*).

The web of illegal trade in pangolin scales spans India, including its Northeastern states. Traffickers sneak some of the contraband to Nepal and Bhutan bound for readymade markets in China and Vietnam.

Earlier, Chennai in Tamil Nadu state was the collection hub for pangolin scales. From there, traders used to transport the contraband to the country’s Northeast. The hub



has now shifted to Berhampur in Odisha state due to the presence of Burmese settlers there.

Poached pangolins from southern India are collected in Chennai and taken to the Northeast via Odisha, where more scales are picked up. Stock from Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh is moved to West Bengal and then by train or road to Burma via the Moreh border in Manipur state. (*See map*)

“The scales are smuggled hidden with dried fish and unless one pulls out all the items they can go unnoticed in checks,” said Sharath.

The other smuggling route

for pangolins and their scales — from Jammu, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Haryana — is across the open border with Nepal, and then over the new roads being built across the Himalayan mountains to China.

Traditional snake charmer communities like the Sapera and the semi-nomadic Bawariyas in catch the pangolins for sale to middlemen.

India’s Wildlife Protection Act 1972 restricted the way of life of



these hunting communities, but they still depend on forest products for subsistence. Being skilled hunters, they can track and kill the reclusive animals. One animal can yield nearly 1kg of scales which they can sell for \$700.

Conservationists say the upswing in the trade of pangolin scales is due to the crackdown on the smuggling of rhino horns. Pangolin scales, like rhino horns, have no proven medicinal value, yet are used in traditional Chinese medicine. Both are made of keratin,

the same tissue in nails and hair.

Samuel K Wasser, a conservation biologist at the University of Washington in the US, has pioneered DNA from animal scat to track wildlife poachers and combat wildlife crime. His team plans to set up a lab at the Wildlife Institute of India to build a pangolin DNA reference library to map the genetic diversity of Asian and African pangolin species.

This can help conservationists and law enforcement officials compare the DNA from pangolins to determine where the creatures were poached. Wasser plans to deploy trained dogs to find pangolin scat.

# Pangolin smuggling to China thrives as rhino

**Anup Sharma**  
in Guwahati

The global focus on the smuggling of rhino horns and tiger parts from India to China has led to a drop in smuggling, but that has been replaced by a surge in trafficking of smaller species like pangolins and geckos.

Pangolins caught dead or alive here and in other parts of India are being trafficked to China’s Yunnan province via Burma, which shares a porous 1,600km border with northeast Indian states like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram.

The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) in Assam has seized 10 live pangolins in the last 3 years from northeast Indian states. In the last seizure in June, undercover agents fixed a deal with smugglers to buy a live pangolin for Rs6 crore.

Eleven seized and rescued pangolins were taken to Assam State Zoo between January 2017 and July 2019, according to Tejas Mariswamy, Divisional Forest

Officer at the zoo. Ten more pangolins were rescued recently from traffickers, who abandoned them to evade a dragnet by law enforcement agencies.

“We have in recent times been able to stop the poaching of one-horned rhinos and smuggling of its horns, but we have noticed a sudden rise in seizures of pangolins from the region,” says KK Sharma of the WCCB, based in Guwahati.

The Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation Conservation (CWRC) near Kaziranga National Park in Assam has also seen a sharp rise in rescues of smuggled pangolins, proving the existence of a trafficking network using the India-Burma-China route. Indian pangolins are also smuggled to China via Nepal. (*See adjoining story.*)

“The recent increase in rescues indicates that there is a racket in smuggling out pangolins,” said Rathin Barman, Joint Director of the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and Head of the CWRC here. “Last month we found one dead pangolin in an abandoned bag at a bus stop in Upper Assam.”

Traffickers buy pangolin scales from farmers for up to Rs70,000 and

take them to Manipur state, from where they are smuggled across the border to Burma and on to China.

Pangolin scales are used in Chinese traditional medicines, much like rhino horns and tiger parts. Enhanced security and an international spotlight on the trafficking of rhinos and tigers has forced smugglers to shift to small mammals like pangolins.

Besides pangolins, the Tockay gecko is also being smuggled into China, following the same route used by traffickers of rhino horns — through Manipur and Burma to Yunnan province of China. Fluid extracted from the geckos is used in traditional Chinese medicine to treat cancer.

The demand for rhino horns rose after rumours spread during the last decade that a Vietnamese minister was cured of cancer after taking traditional medicine that included rhino horn powder. Rhinos in Kaziranga park came under pressure after that.

The state government then set up a special investigation team (SIT) to stop rhino poaching, conducting special operations between 2008-2014, leading to the arrest and killing of several





# World's most trafficked mammal



THE PANGOLIN REPORTS

“Some big freight expeditors are moving wildlife contraband from Africa to southeast Asia, but because the cargo never enters India, they are not breaking Indian law. Those traffickers could easily turn their skills to exporting pangolins from India if the price is right,” Wasser said.

Undercover dealers like WCCB Constable Sudip Ghosh risk their lives to catch smugglers by posing as buyers. He says getting the cover story right is the key.

“You have to know the going price, the size of the animals and other details. If you slip up then the smugglers will be suspicious,”

he said.

Agents like Ghosh use a network of informers to go after smugglers, and it takes him weeks to catch them. The poachers have a specific language for the size ranges for pangolin scales and use slang while transacting business.

“You have to know these code words to gain their trust,” said Ghosh. “They want to see the money first. But we try to keep the dialogue going until we are sure of the moment that we can make a move on them.”

**Sahana Ghosh** is a science journalist with Mongabay in India.



International trafficking routes for pangolins



Pangolins are the most trafficked mammals in the world. With increased connectivity between Nepal and China, the country is become even more of a transit point for wildlife smugglers. Even African pangolins are being smuggled to China via Nepal.

[nepalitimes.com](https://nepalitimes.com)

## poaching declines in Assam



DAUHARU BARO WTI

poachers and seizures of rhino horns. Captured poachers told investigators the smuggling hub was based in Churachandpur district of India's Manipur state.

One SIT agent told us: “The buyers normally come to Churachandpur or Dimapur in Nagaland. The poachers include sharp shooters of Manipur-based militants who hand over the wildlife parts for cash. This network was established for smuggling rhino horns, but it has diversified to pangolins, geckos and other wildlife.”

Although a sleepy town along the Indo-Myanmar border, Churachandpur has been a hot favourite for buyers and sellers of animal parts. “There is hardly anything that you don't get in Churachandpur, from rhino horn to pangolin scales, geckos to arms and ammunition — everything gets traded in Churachandpur due to its proximity with Myanmar and the porous border,” said a WCCB field officer based in Manipur on condition of anonymity.

Added a retired Manipur police official: “Sometimes drugs are also traded with animal parts. Drugs are pushed in through these routes to

the Indian side with the help of militant outfits that frequent these routes. Animal parts such as rhino horns, geckos and live pangolins are smuggled out,” he said.

Assam-based conservation activist Baibhav Talukder is worried that the lack of awareness among farmers in India is leading to the decimation of pangolins in India. Even though the animals are also protected, rhinos and tigers get all the attention, he says. There has been no systematic research on pangolins in Assam, but seizure data indicate a growing problem.

“There are similar punishments for poaching rhinos or pangolins, but our law enforcement agencies were not much concerned about the killing of pangolins till recently,” says Talukder. “Wildlife trafficking should be seen as a national security threat and not merely smuggling of animals.”

**Anup Sharma** is a journalist based in India's Northeast.

*This coverage is part of a joint crossborder investigation project by Nepoli Times, Mongabay and The Pangolin Reports.*

## Better Nepal-China connectivity helps wildlife smugglers

Sonia Awale

On 22 March, Qiu Guorong, 40, and Que Labao, 34, had just flown into Kathmandu from Kinshasa when they were intercepted at the airport. The Red Channel x-ray found they were carrying 162kg of pangolin scales.

This was the largest ever seizure of pangolin scales in Nepal, and the first haul of an African species in Nepal, which has always been a transit point for pangolins and other wildlife from India to China.

The Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) of the Nepal Police learned that the Chinese nationals were travelling with the package from Congo and were to be received by a Bangladeshi man in Kathmandu, where they had booked a hotel room for three nights before planning to fly to Shanghai.

The phones of the smugglers revealed they were part of a WeChat group of Chinese wildlife smugglers. The pair said they were taking the scales to treat people afflicted with cancer due to excessive smoking in China. Both Qiu and Que are being held in Nakkhu Jail, awaiting trial. A Nepali, a Bangladeshi and another Chinese national who were helping the pair are on the run.

“This is a distinct case of international organised crime but it is just the tip of the iceberg. Our investigation shows that pangolins in recent times have become the most poached wildlife in Nepal,” said Birendra Johari of the CIB wildlife branch.

Last week, Shyam Bahadur Tamang, 27, and Bishal Tamang, 17, of Kavre were arrested in Bhaktapur with 380g of pangolin scales. After they were arrested, the pair said they came across a dead pangolin in their home village and were trying to find a buyer in Kathmandu. They are in detention for a mandatory 45-day investigation.

In the last seven years, the CIB has arrested 64 people in 63 pangolin operations. A total of 226kg of scales, 8 pangolin skins, 4 live pangolins and 1 carcass have been seized. Both species of the mammal found in Nepal, Chinese and Indian pangolins, are listed as protected animals and anyone responsible for killing, poaching, transporting, selling or buying the scaly anteater is punishable with a Rs1 million fine and/or up to 15 years in jail.

New trans-Himalayan roads have also made it easier for wildlife smugglers transporting contraband from India to China via Nepal. Besides Rasuwagadi, Olangchungola in Taplejung, Kimathanka in Sankhuwasaba, Ilam in eastern Nepal, Tinkar Pass in Darchula and Hilsa in Humla are new smuggling routes.

Lack of awareness about pangolins and their endangered status also hinder conservation. People hunt and kill pangolins and try to sell their body parts not knowing it is illegal, and get arrested.

Some indigenous communities eat pangolin meat for its supposed health benefits, and farmers kill the mammal if they see one because they believe it to be inauspicious, when in fact pangolins help them control pests.

“We know so little about pangolins and yet they are already on the brink of extinction,” said Shashank Sharma of the Zoological Society of London in Nepal. “Training law enforcement, ducation, and better patrolling at borders are needed to protect pangolins.”



WE MAKE CHANGE

## Scales of justice

Although pangolin smuggling is lucrative that attracts organised gangs, not all those involved are hardened criminals.

As Bishnu Adhikari, 24, came out from behind bars at Kathmandu's Central Jail, his eyes are downcast and he looks subdued. The tall, unshaven young man sits on a narrow concrete bench in a rare media interview.

“My friend came to me with the package and suggested we go together to sell it, and split the money. I knew it was pangolin scales but didn't know that punishment was so harsh if we were caught. I was doing it for money, anyone would -- it is difficult raising a family.”

Adhikari lived with his mother, wife and daughter in Nuwakot district. He dropped out of school and had been supporting his family from carpentry. They were caught at a police checkpoint in Tokha, but his friend managed to escape. The district court sentenced Adhikari to five years in prison, but he is hoping to get out on bail.

“I will go back to my village, back to carpentry, use my skills to support my family,” said Adhikari. After Adhikari was taken back to his cell, we meet Bikash Chhetri, 17, from Dolakha district who is also accused of pangolin smuggling. With his shy pimpled face, it is clear Chhetri is no hardened criminal. It is difficult to hear his soft voice over the buzz of relatives nearby seeking visitors' passes at the Central Jail.

Chhetri was in Grade 11 when he was arrested last year. He was travelling on a motorcycle with college friends to visit his brother-in-law. They were intercepted in Teku, and officers from the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) uncovered pangolin scales in his friend's bag. Two of his friends who were also caught have been released.

“I knew smuggling pangolins was illegal but I didn't know he was carrying it,” said Chhetri who is also serving a five-year sentence. “I would never imagine going through my friend's belongings, I trusted him. I don't know if I can afford bail, but I hope the state will look after me and consider my situation.”

*Names have been changed to protect the identity of the inmates.*

**Sonia Awale**



EVENTS



**Kholo**  
Kholo is a month-long art exhibition that showcases the work of four artists. Each week, works depicting one artist's journey will be presented.  
7 September, 11am-7pm, Woodcraft Gallery, Thamel, 9849501525

**You Can Win**  
Success Vidhi proudly presents “You Can Win”, an all-day workshop with Mr Shiv Khara, author of numerous self-help and motivational books.  
7 September, 9:30am-3:30pm, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, For booking: 9801189681

**Word Warriors**  
Word Warriors presents “फेरि भेटौला”, a bi-monthly poetry session that showcases both seasoned and aspiring poets. Poems will be recited in Nepali and English.  
7 September, 3pm-5pm, Rs50, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamsikhel (01) 5536974



**Cube of Truth**  
Anonymous for the Voiceless presents 'Cube of Truth', a static art demonstration promoting veganism and protesting animal cruelty. You must wear a black t-shirt and bring your own water bottle.  
7 September, 2pm-6pm, Kathmandu Darbar Square

**Film Month**  
Watch some of the UK's finest films about diversity and inclusiveness, crafts and fashion, animation and arts every Friday till the end of September.  
6-27 September, 5:30pm-7pm, British Council, Lainchaur (01) 4237700



**Art Exhibition**  
Renowned artist Hari Prashad Sharma's 'Nepal through the Ages' depicts the glorious history, art and architecture of Nepal. You can look at his paintings and watch documentaries about his artwork.  
7-26 September, 11am-6pm, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal (01) 4220735

**Charles The French**  
Charles, a French comedian and magician, will be performing a fun-filled and humorous show. Sit back, relax, laugh the night away and marvel at his antics.  
8 September, 6pm-8pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9849377915



**Sound Healing**  
Learn more about the history, mechanism and magic of singing bowls at this sound healing workshop.  
8 September, 5pm-8pm, Chakra The Wheel of Life, Chakshi Marg, 9849498364

**Amalgam**  
Paintings, sculptures and mixed-media artworks by more than 50 Nepali artists will be showcased. Exhibition opens 8 September at 5:30pm.  
9-18 September, 12pm-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal (01) 4218048

MUSIC



**Pahenlo Batti Muni**  
Pahenlo Batti Muni is a five-person experimental rock band that takes its name from the experience of playing in Kathmandu by candle light during the days of load-shedding.  
6 September, 6pm onwards, Rs500 per person, Titos Pub, Jhamsikhel, 9841647747

**Reggae/Hiphop**  
Listen to the eclectic sounds of Cultivation, a Nepali reggae musician and Webster, a Canadian hip-hop star.  
13 September, 6pm-9pm, Alliance Française Katmandou, Jhamsikhel (01) 5009221



**Acoustic Atom**  
Enjoy authentic Newari food while you listen to the dynamic sound of the Acoustic Atom Band.  
7 September, 3pm-6pm, Sasaa the Newari Restaurant, Kirtipur, 9813692632

**Sabin Rai**  
Sabin Rai and The Pharaoh will be performing their greatest hits.  
6 September, 7pm onwards, Irish Pub, Lazimpat (01) 4416027

**Nerve**  
Jojo Mayer and Nerve present a new form of musical expression that is entirely unique. Not quite electronic but also not truly jazz or rock, Nerve has a sound of its own.  
11 September, 7:30pm onwards, Prive Nepal, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 9843703529

DINING

**Lucknowi Festival**  
Chef Shabir Ali from Lucknow will be serving a variety of dishes, like Gosht Galouti Kebab, Murgh Banno Kebab, Paneer Anjeer Ki Seekh, Kareli Nehari and more. This food festival is sure to tingle your taste buds.  
7-15 September, 6:30pm onwards, Rs1,999+ per person, The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat (01) 4411818



**Fire & Ice**  
Fire & Ice's pizza is beloved by both Nepalis and tourists alike. But their lasagna and Penne Al Forno are the unsung heroes that deserve more recognition.  
8am-10:30pm, Thamel (01) 4250210

**Raksi Music Bar**  
Ladies, bring your friends, enjoy bottomless cocktails and great food, then dance the night away.  
11 September, 6pm onwards, Raksi Music Bar, Marriott Hotel, Naxal (01) 443040

**Experience Thamel**  
Take a trip down memory lane with dishes that represent the best of old Thamel street food. Join family and friends for a buffet and unlimited beers.  
6 September, 6:30pm onwards, Thamel Kitchen, Marriott Hotel, Naxal (01) 443040



**Vino Bistro**  
Touted as the hub of French cheeses and imported wines in Nepal, Vino offers cheese platters, charcuterie, pastas and some of the best bruschetta, all paired with the perfect wine.  
10am-11pm, Lazimpat (01) 4435982

GETAWAY



**Chandragiri Hills**  
Chandragiri Resort sits atop lush green hills overlooking Kathmandu Valley. Catch glimpses of snow-capped mountains, marvel at stunning sunsets and take a dip in their infinity pool before the summer ends.  
Thankot (01) 4312515

**The Last Resort**  
With the leaves beginning to change, the exciting possibilities of summer are coming to an end. Seize the last of the sunny days by bungee jumping, tandem swinging or white-water rafting.  
Bhatekoshi, Sindhupalchok (01) 4700525



**The Famous Farm**  
The three-storey boutique hotel is Nuwakot's best kept secret. The traditional architecture and rich cultural history will take you back to a time beyond our own.  
Kuwapani, Nuwakot (010) 413044



**Soaltee Westend Premier**  
Located in the green plains of Nepalgunj, this expansive resort is one of Nepal's more energy efficient and eco-friendly getaways.  
Nepalgunj (081) 551145

**Retreat at Damaar**  
Retreat at Damaar is a humble stay within the forest of Kavre. This getaway is ideal for those seeking peace of mind, scrumptious food and a home away from home.  
Bethanchowk, Kavre, 9851052442



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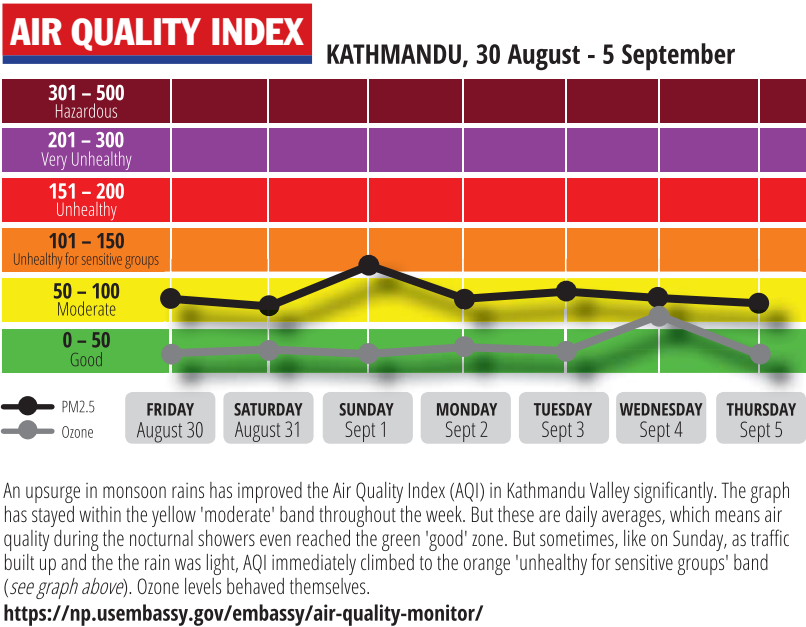
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**OUR PICK**



Opened in Kathmandu on 6 September

This fun-filled movie is about a group of friends in college, who meet as strangers but part as intimate family members. Follow their journey through college and beyond, and be reminded of your own college days. Directed by Nitesh Tiwari, the movie stars Sushant Singh Rajput, Shraddha Kapoor and others in retro looks.





# Freak me out!

There’s at least one bombshell in *Far Out*, an engaging history of Nepal’s tourism

Marty Logan

‘Always read the footnotes,’ someone once told me. If I hadn’t followed that advice I would not have learned that in 1965 an American/Indian spy mission lost a nuclear-powered sensing device in an avalanche in the Himalaya along the Nepal-India border. Five pounds of plutonium were gone: ‘When its container someday splits open, it will contaminate much of north India’s water supply.’

So writes March Liechty in *Far Out: Countercultural Seekers and the Tourism Encounter in Nepal*, a history of the evolution of the country’s visitor industry. Other facts in the book that might surprise those with just a passing knowledge of Nepali history:

- The legendary and immensely well-connected entrepreneur and Royal Hotel owner Boris Lissanevitch, sometimes called the ‘father of tourism in Nepal,’ died penniless in a public ward in Bir Hospital on 20 October 1985.
- Everest pioneer Tenzing Norgay almost made it to the summit with a Swiss expedition in 1952, which turned back just 300m from the peak. But Norgay’s first summit attempt was in 1947 with an unauthorised ‘ultra-light’ Canadian climber, Earl Denman, from the Tibet side.
- A rivalry of sorts existed between hippies living in Boudha and those in Swayambhu. ‘It was a little like the Hatfields and the McCoys’, Liechty quotes one author writing in reference to the infamous American feuding families, ‘except that the Westerners in Bodha were too drunk and the Westerners in Swayambhu were too stoned to ever do anything about it’.
- On 16 July 1973 the Nepal Government banned the sale of pot. The next day a fire started in Singha Darbar that burned for three days and destroyed half of the seat of government. Lord Shiva was not happy, observers noted.

Much more than a collection of entertaining facts and anecdotes, *Far Out* situates tourism in Nepal in a global context. It starts with the trickle of wealthy (mostly) Americans who flew in after royal rulers eased open the country’s doors in 1955, followed by the well-told story of the hippies.

Disillusioned with western society and seeking a deeper meaning to life, they journeyed overland from Europe to India then northward, congregating first in Maru Hiti, in later years Freak Street, and then Thamel. Finally, came the trekkers, who jetted in on increasingly larger and cheaper flights, seeking an adventure experience just as Nepal’s leaders realised that tourism could be a game-changer for the economy.

In their own ways, argues Liechty, all of these different tourists were nourished by ‘deep streams of Western desire for meaning and healing long focused (and fantasised) on the Himalayas and Himalayan people’. Yet, he adds, tourism should not be measured by its impact on Nepal but as an encounter between Nepalis and the rest of the world.

A professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Liechty backs up his thesis with impressive

references and quotes from locals but assembles his information with a light touch in an immensely readable story.

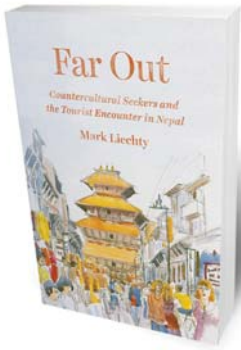
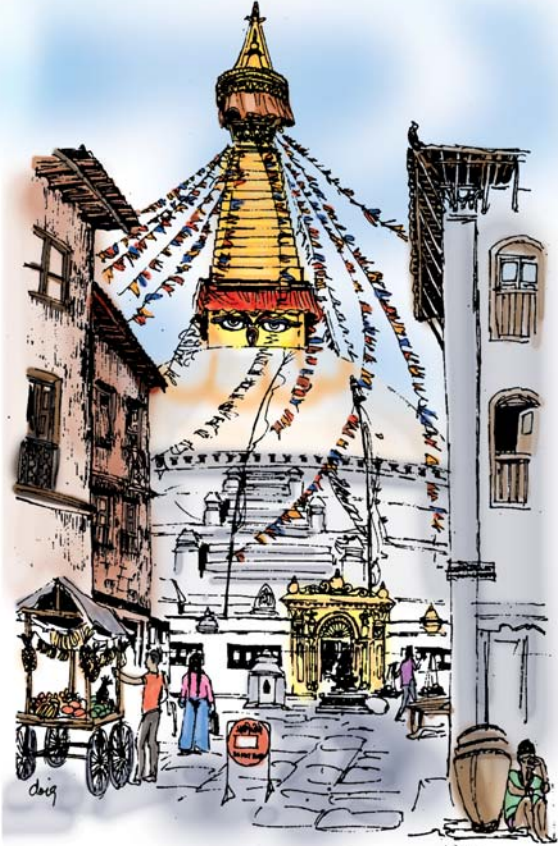
He quotes a merchant: ‘What we would call sadhus they called hippies ... I mean, they had a free life, living this blissful existence, worrying about nothing, not even money. They used to eat as much as they wanted, smoke ganja as much as they wanted. We Nepalis drink booze and go crazy but [with ganja] they would just get peaceful and quiet.’

The numerous quotes from Nepalis are among the strengths of *Far Out*, published in 2017 but released in South Asia last month by Martin Chautari in Kathmandu. One of the few Nepali ‘hippinis’, Vidhea Shrestha remembered walking down New Road in the early 1970s and seeing relatives approaching — they would quickly cross the street.

‘It wasn’t because I had done anything. It was because I was breaking the rules, the norms by which a Nepali woman—a good Newari woman—was supposed to live. So the fact that, “Oh my gosh, she’s smoking dope! She’s been seen with the hippies! She’s having a drink openly!”

After the government’s 1973 cannabis ban, ‘the counterculture still flocked to Nepal ... but the writing was on the wall and it said, with growing clarity, Hippie Go Home’, writes Liechty. The ‘benign neglect’ of tourism was replaced by a government plan that produced new brochures, maps and hotels. In an increasingly conservative world clouded by a global recession, travellers were also changing: career-focused and responsible they were preoccupied with time. ‘Fewer and fewer people were interested in the journey — the Kerouac-inspired experience of life on the road. Rather than pursuing travel as an end in itself, people were now focused on destinations.’

And for Nepalis: ‘If Freak Street had been a lark, Thamel meant getting down to business, a business that transformed tourists from foreign curiosities to extractive resources.’



*Far Out: Countercultural seekers and the tourist encounter in Nepal*  
Mark Liechty  
Martin Chautari 2019, 387 pages, Rs900

# Tales from roads less travelled

In *By the Way of the Border: Travels around the frontiers and beyuls of Nepal*, Maximillian Morch tells the story of not just Nepal’s mountains but of the people who call them home, using descriptions that paint a vivid picture of his travels and help the reader to experience the journey through his eyes.

Morch chronicles his adventures around the *beyuls* (holy hidden valleys) of Nepal, ranging from Kalanga to Hile, during his time as a postgraduate student at Tribhuvan University in 2017.

Filled with extensive background research of the places he visited and of their inhabitants, the book acts as an abridged history that spans both the social and geographical changes of the region. Morch also covers the symbolism and history of the traditions practiced by the people he meets, which could be useful to foreigners who wish to learn more about Nepal beyond Kathmandu.

The book is structured according to the regions Morch visits, with a geographical area as the focus of each chapter. This makes the book an easy read and also allows for quicker comparison of the places he visits. Each chapter also contains photos taken by Morch, which helps readers to visualise his journey and provides a feel of the place.

While remaining reflexive of his position as an outsider, Morch also shares his personal experience and his interactions with the locals, which allows him to make interesting observations about the various places and people he encounters. For one, he acknowledges the rose-tinted glasses via which he romanticises his travels, a position he argues most westerners share when writing about their experiences of the mountains.

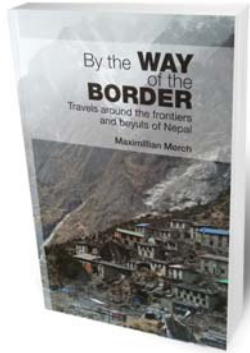
Although he intends it to be a collection of tales from his journeys, Morch’s book does not fit into a particular genre. The mixture of history, personal experiences and observations does not make it a coherent read but rather a *khichdi* (mishmash) that seems to contain all the right elements for a good book, but which is unable to balance them.

Moreover, while he certainly is more thoughtful about his interactions with locals than other western authors, there are numerous instances where he lapses back into similar perspectives. Considering his time in Nepal and his proficiency with the language, Morch is in a position to both be familiar and unfamiliar in Nepal: elaborating on these experiences would have allowed for a more unique experience for the readers.

Nonetheless, Morch has accomplished what he set out to do — provide an insight into areas scarcely covered by travel literature on Nepal while capturing the lives of the very people who call those places their home.

**Rishabh Lama**

*Lama is a freelance journalist and researcher who specialises in political, developmental and human rights issues in South Asia and South East Asia.*



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## बचत गरौं आफ्नो धनको, सुरक्षा गरौं अमूल्य जीवनको

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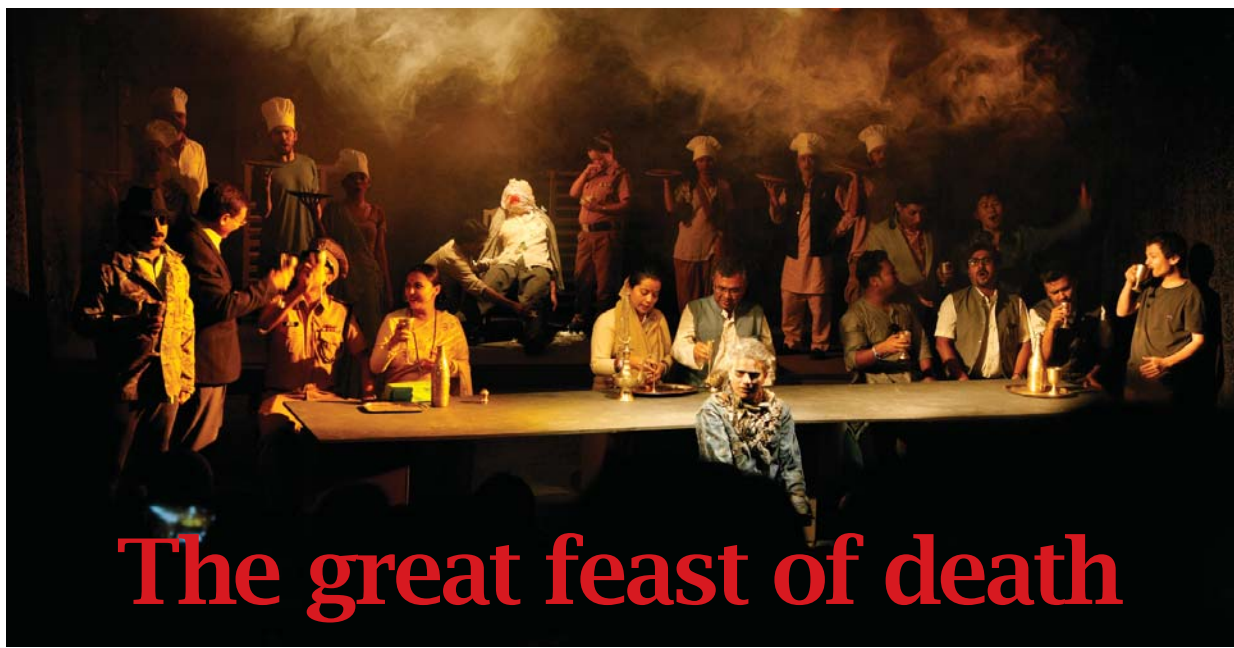
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MONIKA DEUPALA

Right before by-elections for a seat in the Parliament, the corpse of a man called Bishweshwar or 'Bishu' is found below a bridge in Sitapur. Educated and aware young dalit farmers raise their voices for this man. That is how the drama *Mahabhoj* starts.

Bishu has been murdered, but parties politicise his death. Journalists try to take advantage of the situation. Police are complicit with the political parties. Bishu's friend Binod knows the murderer, but the police conspire to frame Binod himself to hide the culprit.

Leaders are merrily enjoying a feast, sharing the stage with the dead Bishu. This is a stark scene depicting how leaders make pawns of ordinary people, and entrenched injustice. The crux of the story is how powerful people make fun of the dreams of the poor and innocent.

The drama is based on a novel of the same name by Indian writer Mannu Bhandari. Written in 1979, it begins with the murder of a dalit

youth just when local and central-level elections are approaching. Bhandari herself converted the novel into a play, and poet Viplob Pratik translated it into Nepali. Pratik says the novel, written 40 years ago, is still relevant in Nepal. "This drama shows the impact on society when the 3P's — politics, press and police — are corrupt," he says.

"Vultures are circling a corpse, dancing as they devour it," says the first paragraph of the novel. Critic Pooja Madan says that writer Mannu Bhandari has evoked vultures as politicians benefitting from murder. The play is also a satire on an opportunistic bureaucracy. Says director Anup Baral: "A drama should not just give a message, but also portray reality correctly. It should be able to communicate to the audience and raise questions and curiosities."

The performance, which is playing to packed halls, shows how ordinary people become hostages and playthings of the media,

politics and police. Director Baral says the play is idea-centric, rather than revolving around characters or events like most dramas, while presenting a realistic story in a poetic way.

Actor Ramesh Budhathoki plays central character politician Ramesh Bikram. "My character shows how a clever politician can turn the situation to his advantage," he notes. Actress Sirjana Subba makes an impact as an honest, pregnant police officer and says her character is meant to show that being pregnant is not unsafe.

The play also includes contemporary songs by the poet Viplob Pratik. Strong acting by Dayahang Rai, Buddhi Tamang, Rajan Khatriwada, Viplob Pratik and Vijay Baral brings the play alive.

**Nunuta Rai**

*Mahabhoj,  
Mandala Theatre, Kathmandu  
5:15 PM, Until 4 Oct*



RSS

**WE DO SWEAR:** President Bidya Devi Bhandari administers oaths of office to newly appointed ambassadors to Bangladesh and Qatar, Bansidhar Mishra and Naradraj Bhardwaj, in Shital Niwas on Sunday.



BRITISH EMBASSY / TWITTER

**NEW DEAL:** DFID's Matthew Rycroft and Shreekrishna Nepal of the Ministry of Finance after signing a pact supporting local government on Monday. Norwegian Ambassador Lasse Bjørn Johannessen and Swiss Ambassador Elizabeth von Capeller Oswald look on.



JICA NEPAL

**FRESH FIGURES:** Suman Raj Aryal, Director General of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), and Yumiko Asakuma, Chief Representative of JICA Nepal, release the National Economic Census 2018 at the CBS on Sunday.



VIJAY LAMA / FACEBOOK

**FREQUENT FLIERS:** Captain Vijay Lama and a Nepal Airlines crew pose in Japan before the airlines' inaugural Airbus330 flight from Kansai to Kathmandu on Sunday.



SNEHA SHRESTHA

**ANIMAL PLANET:** Activist Sneha Shrestha at a protest against the mass killing of dogs in Diktel and the death of cows in Dailekh this week.

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# How ill is Prime Minister Oli?

Ramu Sapkota

Prime Minister KP Oli is returning to Nepal on Friday after his second trip in a month to Singapore for medical treatment. Nepali politics has been in wait-and-see mode as the head of government is away for extended periods. Oli has tried to keep in touch via conference calls, but his party and government are currently on autopilot.

Oli had spent 3-12 August in Singapore, but faced complications and returned on 22 August (pictured right at Kathmandu airport with his wife Radhika Shakya). This time, he got his seventh plasmapheresis procedure at the National University Hospital, and is said to be improving.

Rumours are flying because even as the country's chief executive battles a serious medical condition, government and party channels have said little about the state of his health.

On 26 August, Nepal Communist Party (NCP) co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal informed a meeting of the party's central

secretariat that the prime minister would be undergoing plasmapheresis. Quoting Dahal, a top leader told us: "If he responds well to the treatment, the PM will stay in Singapore for another week. If the treatment is not working, further decisions will be taken based on the hospital's suggestions."

The suggestion could be a transplant of either Oli's previous kidney, or the one that he got from a donor — depending on which one is not performing.

Oli is accompanied by his wife, Chief Political Advisor Bishnu Rimal, Personal Physician Divya Singh Shah. Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali and NCP General Secretary Bishnu Paudel joined him in Singapore this week, and will fly back with Oli on Friday.

Before he left, Oli confidently declared that he would be back to celebrate Constitution Day on 20 September, and lashed out at detractors, saying he would be in politics for 15 more years.

After both of his kidneys failed, PM Oli had one kidney transplanted in India's Apollo Hospital in 2007. Transplanted kidneys work for 8-20 years, but



antibodies can reject the organ, which is why plasmapheresis is needed. If Oli needs another transplant he may have to go on to India after returning to Nepal.

Neither political adviser Rimal nor physician Shah responded to queries about Oli's health on Viber. Physician Sharma noted Oli had to go to Singapore because there is no plasmapheresis machine in Nepal.

The PM stayed only nine days in hospital on his last trip to Singapore, though doctors had advised him to stay a week or more. A hectic lifestyle after returning led to a steep decline in his health. Despite official assurances that he was ok, the second trip fuelled rumours that his condition was much more serious.

The Prime Minister did not refer to his health when he addressed Parliament on 18 August. He flew to Singapore after participating in several high-profile meetings in following days, including with Indian Minister for External Affairs S Jaishankar. Doctors say a patient whose kidneys are failing should be resting at least six hours a day.

People with kidney disease have low immunity and need to

watch their health. But Oli has a habit of not listening to medical advice, and carrying on in the belief that he can be well with sheer will power.

Last Dasain, he gave tika to visitors for four straight days, after which he had to be hospitalised with a respiratory infection. During the 2017 election campaign, his hands and feet got infected. After his health failed to improve despite taking medicines for two months, he was taken to Grande Hospital, which referred him to Max Hospital in Delhi.

The PM's health problems stem from extended periods in jail as a political prisoner, of which he spent nearly 10 years in solitary confinement during the Panchayat. Hypertension and insufficient water intake in jail possibly led to the failure of his kidneys.

Meanwhile, the PM's protracted illness has led to an internal power struggle in the ruling party. Gagan Thapa of the opposition NC told Parliament on Wednesday Oli should step down as PM.

"It is not in the national interest for the country's leader to be away for so long and run the country via Skype," Thapa said. "He has played an important role, but it would be better if he retired on grounds of poor health." ❏

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# So, you want to quit Facebook?

It is not easy, but you will be happier if you do

Reeti K C

Just after waking, the first thing many people across the world, and increasingly in Nepal, do is pick up their mobile phones. Social media now connects not just people, but is deeply rooted in our everyday lives. It has become an addiction, a cure for boredom, a source of information (and entertainment), a new form of escapism.

Research has shown that social media addiction is an established mental health condition. This week, US lawmakers introduced a bill that would require platforms to deactivate algorithms designed to keep users hooked to their sites.

Symptoms of internet addiction are insomnia, irritability, lack of appetite, difficulty in focussing on the task at hand, and distraction. Addicts have a hard time making even simple decisions or taking action because there is too much to consume. It can also divert them from what's really important.

As a result, the number of people who want to disconnect and deactivate their social media accounts ('commit Facebook suicide') is growing even in Nepal.

"I was using many social media platforms. Choosing the right one to post my content was becoming overwhelming. Then there was the pressure to keep posting content. I shared my personal feelings on social media, but it was a false sense of security," recalls Manoj Bohora, who decided to take the '30-day No Social Media Challenge' in February.

"I took part to see what would happen if I totally disconnected. It takes 28 days to get rid of the habit, and I wanted to change desperately," he recalled.

Bohora was social media manager for International Youth Media Summit and being online was a part of work. Now, he gets around it by scheduling posts weeks ahead. He says the 30-day challenge helped him reconnect with friends and family in real time and improved his concentration. He started using reliable websites for information rather than being dependent on friends' posts.

Today, Bohora uses only Facebook and Instagram, and limits online time to under 15 minutes daily. "In the long run, I think I will quit social media altogether, but I am not sure yet," he smiles.



PICS: MONIKA DEUPALA

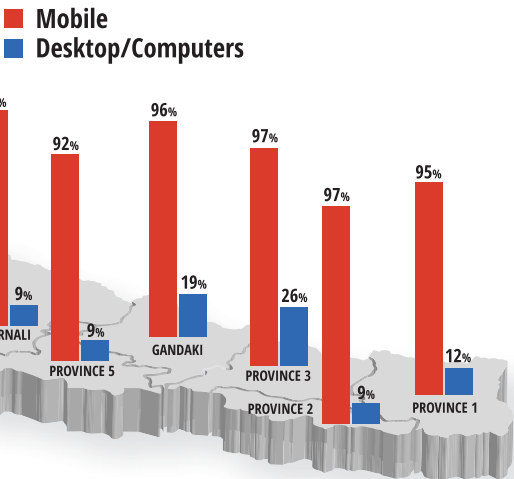
As far back as 2001, Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen published *Tyranny of the Moment: Fast and Slow Time in the Information Age*, analysing Internet consumption. But that was even before Facebook, Twitter, and all the other apps that came later. In a research paper, Eriksen claimed human beings were 'in the process of becoming enslaved by the technology that was supposed to liberate us'. That was then. Nearly two decades later, things have gotten much worse.

The rapid spread of mobile phones in the past five years means that more and more people are seeking instant gratification through their devices. More than 96% of households in Nepal have mobile phones, some have several, and 92% of individuals have one. Nearly all Nepalis who use the Internet do so with their smart phones (*see adjoining review*).

According to Madhu Acharya from Sharecast Initiative, which conducted a social media survey of Nepalis last year, the number of social media users is also rising. Some 88% of Internet users are on Facebook, 45% are on Messenger and 34% use YouTube. Although the numbers are smaller for Twitter, there is a multiplier effect because its users are opinion-makers and influencers.

But even Acharya says he has felt the impact of Internet addiction, and is thinking

### Device ownership of households at provincial level



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# Nepal's new digital landscape

of quitting, or at least limiting the time he spends on it. But it is not easy for internet addicts to be on the wagon.

Says Sashi Shrestha, who runs an FM music show: "Social media is integrated into our lives — if it is not Facebook it is Viber or other apps. You either have to cut off all communication or find a platform you like. It is not easy to get out of social media completely. But what I can do is focus on certain applications that meet my requirements."

Shrestha still uses Instagram and Reddit, but adds, "It has been almost two years since I have not touched Facebook. It was taking a lot of my time, and the information was half-baked. I was not learning anything from it."

Nevertheless, social media in Nepal is now a potent medium for social activism, creating common ground for people to join causes together. It has expanded the horizons of Nepalis beyond our borders. In 2011 #occupywallstreet inspired Nepal's #occupybaluwatar. The global #Metoo movement had an impact here as well.

But in summary, overuse is easy and addiction has a serious downside. Arjun Dhakal of the online discussion group NNSD, an early proponent of the internet as a medium that democratised information concludes: "Addiction to Facebook has also affected activism for causes like environment or social justice. People now think that liking or sharing something on social media is enough, and they do not have to contribute in a more meaningful way to the cause. This is easy, but it is not organised and does not have an impact on bringing reform." 🇳🇵

Nepalis are now increasingly in control of the media content they consume thanks to the proliferation of mobile devices, better internet connectivity and new media platforms.

A survey conducted in 2018 showed that 90% of Nepalis now own mobile devices, with half of them producing smartphones when asked. 95% of households have mobile phones, for an average 2.5 devices per home. Nearly everyone uses mobile phones to access the internet.

These results are from the Nepal Media Survey 2019, which queried 4,129 respondents in 42 districts. A summary of the survey, conducted by Sharecast Initiative, was published in this paper in April, and is now available in book form.

With 88% of respondents using Facebook frequently, it comes as no surprise that 8.5 million Nepalis are on the platform today, while 45% are on messenger and 35% on IMO for instant messaging between friends and relatives. YouTube is also popular, with 34% using it on a regular basis.

Twitter has a much smaller following in Nepal but influencers, academics and movers and shakers are progressively using it to wield power online. This trend is only likely to rise with affordable 3G and 4G services and expansion of broadband Wi-Fi service across the country.



Eyeballs are shifting to online media at a rapid pace. Nepalis are now using Facebook not only to connect with near and dear ones but increasingly as a source of news and information. While very few trust social media content, networking sites are no longer confined to personal sharing but are being adopted by politicians and activists for their campaigns. This has larger implications for Nepali society, politics and development.

Radio continues to be the main source of local information, with 49% tuning in regularly for news bulletins, but tv is catching up. Surprisingly, 58% said they consider neighbours and friends as a key source for local news and information. This number falls considerably when it comes to national and international news, where tv is preferred.

Tv is the most accessed form of mass media in Nepal, with 60% of households owning a set, whereas only 28% of households have a functioning radio. But more people listen to radio on their phones than on a radio set.

Legacy media continues to hold its own against online portals for now, but newspaper readership in Nepal is fast shrinking and is limited to major centres. Distribution is a major hurdle — 59% of respondents said they did not read newspapers and magazine because they were not available in their area.

With alternative methods to access news, publication houses lamenting the decline of

traditional print media might want to invest in better online and multimedia content to hold the interest of readers whose attention span is declining by the day. This is further proven by the fact that Nepalis are ambivalent about the content of all forms of mass media.

The good news is that Nepali media is generally reliable. Among the respondents who regularly accessed tv, radio and newspapers, most trusted the content. And although most get their information on the Net, very few trust it.

#### Notable points:

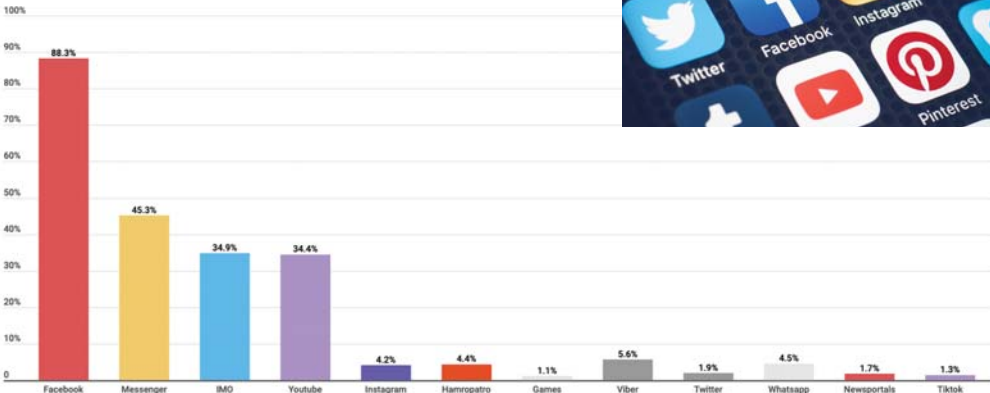
- The 16-24 age group and those with Bachelors degrees are the heaviest consumers of all types of media
- Newars have the highest access to all media except radio, whereas Tarai Dalits have the least access
- Women lag behind in access to all media
- As expected, media saturation is highest in Province 3 while mobile is least accessed in Province 5.

#### Sonia Awale

Nepal Media Survey 2019  
National Survey on Nepali Media Landscape  
Sharecast Initiative Nepal  
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## Most used applications

While browsing internet, what applications do you use most?



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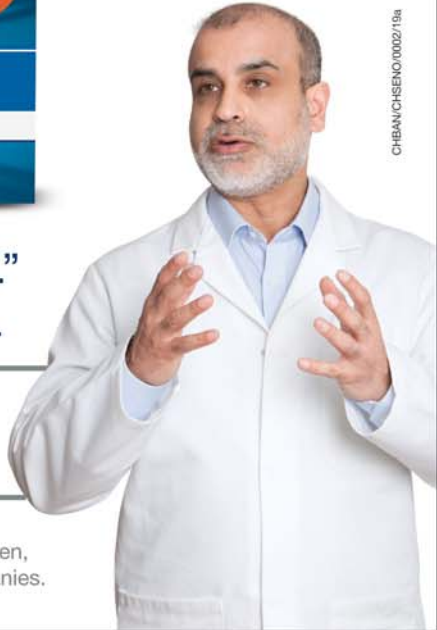
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# Fly-By-Night Airways

The trend in international civil aviation these days is low-cost, no frills airlines like Ryan Air (pronounced “Lion Air” in Thailand).

Thank heavens that in Nepal, despite deregulation, our domesticated airlines haven’t stooped that low. Our carriers will never sacrifice friendly in-flight service to undercut rivals by getting into a suicidal price war. No sir, our airline cartel has opted to keep fares high and slash services instead.

It speaks volumes about our sense of commitment to comfortable and reliable air transportation that Nepal’s no-budget airlines would rather make passengers pay through their noses than provide them unnecessary luxuries while going from Point A to Point B.

When domestic flights first started in Nepal, passengers got to eat actual meals. As time went on, they got rid of the samosas, the next to go were peanuts, then they took away barf bags, and finally they got rid of the co-pilots.

Nepal is also one of the few places in the world where VIPs can take SUVs right up to the plane, but they have to first prove to security personnel on duty that they have contributed in some measure to ruining the country. Next time, ex-prime ministers should take the ramp bus because some of them look more airworthy than the aircraft they board.

For a time, airlines used to offer us the luxury of pre-flight cotton wool and candy (The cotton goes into your ear canal and the toffee goes into your alimentary canal, or is it the other way around?) But as a cost-cutting drive and to avoid further confusion on the 12-minute Kathmandu-Simara shuttle these days, they pass around chewing gum, which you are supposed to stuff into your ears after chewing, thus saving the airline industry lakhs of rupees a year.

Increasing fuel prices mean no-frill airlines are even less frilly, stripping their planes of everything except the bare minimum required to defy gravity. All seats have been taken off flights to and from Pokhara on Gundruk Class, but premium passengers on Royal Uneconomic Class can sit cross-legged on straw mats on the floor at the front of the cabin.

Toilets have been done away with, but a hatch is available for in-flight emergencies. (Not to be used while flying over open-defecation free districts of Nepal.) In the run-up to Dasain, goats will be allowed on board as carry-on baggage provided they do not exceed the dimensions of the overhead racks. If they do, the goats will have to be sacrificed on the spot prior to boarding.

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