

TERRITORIALISM

The dispute over the tri-junction of India, China and Nepal on the remotest north-western tip of the country is the latest strain on bilateral relations.

The Sugauli Treaty of 1816 between the East India Company and the defeated Gorkhalis clearly stated that the main channel of the Mahakali River would form a shrunk Nepal's western border with British India. But the Survey of India maps of 1850 and 1856 slyly tucked the area back into Garhwal.

Successive rulers in faraway Kathmandu were either unaware or did not care that the boundary had been moved. After the Chinese annexation of Tibet in the 1950s,

drum beat. Nepal's own official map in 1975 showed Lipu Khola as the boundary between Nepal and India, and not the Mahakali River. Ultra-nationalists cry themselves hoarse about 'big bully' India, but why would a neighbour respect your boundary if you yourself do not really care where it is?

New Delhi has not really been bothered about winning the hearts and minds of Nepalis, either. It believes in carrying a big stick and showing who's boss. And all this is convenient for Nepal's India-bashing pseudo-nationalists, who have a handy excuse to take to the streets every time the border dispute flares up.



Nepal allowed India to put up 17 military checkpoints along its northern border. China and India fought a fierce Himalayan war in 1962 during which the Indian military set up a base on the strategic Lipu Lekh Valley. That base is still there.

In 1969, Prime Minister Kirti Nidhi Bista got Delhi to remove all its checkpoints on the Nepal-China border, except the one in Kalapani. Was Lipu Lekh a quid pro quo for the removal of the other bases? Did King Mahendra sacrifice the region in return for Indian support for his takeover? Historians are divided.

Whatever the case, the elected rulers of Nepal after 1990 used anti-Indian nationalism for political benefit but did little to press Nepal's legitimate claim over the territory. KP Oli, who now heads the united NCP in government, was one of the most vocal in Parliament demanding that India return the area. Current Tourism Minister Yogesh Bhattarai even led a student group to Kalapani to raise the Nepali flag in the tract occupied by India. Yet many field reports from the area have just gathered dust in Singha Darbar. No action was ever taken, except when it was politically expedient to raise an anti-Indian

What good is it to work ourselves into a frenzy over this tiny strip of land when we couldn't care less what happens to the rest of the country?

One of the few instances in Nepali history when anti-Chinese protests broke out in the streets of Kathmandu was after that India-China joint communiqué on Lipu Lekh was issued, four years ago. Yet, Nepal's governments since then did not dare broach the subject with the Chinese — it was not even raised last month during Xi's state visit to Kathmandu.

Nepal cannot go to war with India over this. (For one thing, our men are enlisted in their army.) How about first revising our own official map, and then taking up the matter at the highest level in every future bilateral? And then we may as well also talk about disputes along the Tarai caused by rivers changing course, and border pillars mysteriously moving under cover of darkness.

The time is right for dialogue: there is a government in Kathmandu with a solid two-thirds majority, we have rare all-party unity over the matter and Nepal's international stature is higher than it has been in a while.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Ten years ago, the peace process hit a snag, and the government blamed the UN for the impasse. See our page 1 story from issue #476 of Nepali Times, 13-16 November 2009:

The impasse in Nepal's peace process and the danger of it unravelling appear to be rattling policy advisers at the United Nations. Baluwater's sharp reaction to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's report to the Security Council took UN officials in New York by surprise. Although UNMIN clarified that the need for political consensus was something all political leaders in Nepal had themselves articulated, the speech became an opportunity for the ruling coalition to draw attention to UNMIN's perceived pro-Maoist bias.

Said a Baluwater insider: "Whose side is UNMIN on?" What hasn't helped UNMIN are Pushpa Kamal Dahal's speeches claiming that the UN's report has vindicated his party's protests.



Times.com

ONLINE PACKAGES

WHAT'S TRENDING



It may come as a surprise to many that Nepal has been gaining ground in artificial intelligence, developing not only machine learning software but producing world-class engineers. Watch industry experts train students in AI with cutting-edge technology to deliver intelligent solutions. Story: [page 14-15](#).



Henry Edmundson is an avid mountaineer who has trekked over most of the Himalaya from Afghanistan to Bhutan, but Kanchenjunga was the missing bit. Watch beautiful and rare views from the lesser known but dramatic trails in eastern Nepal. Story: [page 8-9](#)

NUTRITION

As long as no law in the country bars the private sector from engaging in the fight against malnutrition, it should be allowed to do so ('Nearly half of Nepali children still malnourished', Sonia Awale, #983). However, its sole motive in doing so should be fighting malnutrition.

Anil Shrestha

■ It is the duty of the government of every country to assure that children have enough food.

Stephan Kocher

UNSUNG HEROES

Our media is busy after scandal and gossip ('Migrant worker finds farming in Nepal more rewarding', Naresh Newar, #983). Our government is busy welcoming foreign adversaries. Youths are busy enjoying weekend life. Kudos to *Nepali Times* for highlighting the real heroes of Nepal. It is people like Bishnu Bhujel who are the backbone of our country and the world. They are the unsung heroes.

Cloud Pun

KALAPANI

The land is an indispensable resource, people living there are more so ('Territorialism', Editorial, page 2)? I have immense respect for people living in borderlands.

Milan Poudel

■ Nepal should sue India at the international tribunal for claiming the territory.

Raman Lama

RANGER CONGRESS

A great opportunity to share knowledge and tactics to prevent poaching ('Chitwan is venue for World Ranger Congress', #983).

Chandra Gurung Conservation Trust

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Enjoyed reading this ('Champions of Nepal's conservation movement', Lisa Choegyal, #983). A couple of months back I read two books by Hemanta Mishra and came to know of Gyanendra's contribution to the conservation history of the country.

Rohit Jha



Champions of Nepal's conservation movement

by *Lisa Choegyal*

Nepal's royalty spearheaded the country's conservation movement, transitioning from being hunters to preservers of its flora and fauna. If you missed this popular column, visit our website to read the piece.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Migrant worker finds farming in Nepal more rewarding

by *Naresh Newar*

In the new fortnightly multimedia column Made in Nepal, we meet Bishnu Bhujel and his wife Sanu, who found that returning to Nepal to run a farm was more rewarding than working abroad. The story and video was seen by thousands at [neplitimes.com](#)

🔴 Most visited online page

Chitwan is venue for World Ranger Congress

Around the world, rangers in protected areas are at the frontlines of wildlife conservation, yet they receive little recognition for putting their lives at risk. The 9th World Ranger Congress held for the first time in Asia, plans to change that.

🐦 Most popular on Twitter

Territorialism

Editorial

'How about first revising our own official map, and taking up the matter at the highest level in every future bilateral? And they may as well also talk about disputes along the Tarai caused by rivers changing course, and border pillars mysteriously moving under cover of darkness.' Our editorial on the Nepal-India border dispute generated heated debate online.

💬 Most commented

QUOTE

TWEETS

Times

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

This week Nepali Times introduces a new multimedia column, 'Made in Nepal'. Every month, journalist turned farmer Naresh Newar will profile success stories of small and medium entrepreneurs, like returned migrant Bishnu Bhujel who is now a farmer.

Michelle @redheadlethand

Good. These stories need to be told

Times

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

People gather at Matighar Mandala on Wednesday to protest India's apparent inclusion of the disputed Lipulek Valley in the latest map of its territory.

Leguwan @HinkuKhola

I wish there would also be a similar collective outrage for issues which actually affect common people such as unequal citizenship rights, cartels and VIP road closures, rather than some Indian map.

Times

Weekly Internet Poll #982

Q. Should the private sector be involved in fighting malnutrition?

Total votes: 260

Yes: **81%**

No: **13%**

Can't say: **6%**

Weekly Internet Poll #984

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

Q. Will this week's Power Summit be a watershed for Nepal's power sector?

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

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TURKISH AIRLINES

Products and services are subject to change depending on flight duration and aircraft.

Cars before roads in Nepal

At next week’s Power Summit, let us finally put the horse before the cart

Nepal’s development dilemma has always been that we get things backwards. Cars were carried over mountain passes on porters’ backs to Kathmandu before the city even had roads. The people of Pokhara saw aircrafts before they saw automobiles. We set up a university before we built a



1/2 FULL
Anil Chitrakar

network of schools. We make plans to distribute wealth before we have found ways to create it. That is perhaps why Nepal’s rulers and politicians are great with populist slogans, but not so great at delivering them. And the media reports unquestioningly on these grandiose plans. King Birendra’s Panchayat-era goal was for Nepal to reach ‘Asian Standards’ by 2000. We boasted of the country’s 83,000MW hydropower potential over candles and kerosene lamps. There was nothing wrong with the slogans — what was missing was the homework, the technical expertise, managerial skills and a real understanding of the market. Today, Nepal has many of these ingredients for success in place. The recent financial closure of the Upper Trishuli Hydroelectric Project hopefully sends a message that it takes nine domestic and international agencies to work together to build a 200+MW hydropower plant. Unless we show real growth in the domestic



MADAN PURUSKAR GUTHI

and regional markets, no one will invest, and if no one invests we cannot open up new energy markets. Both have to be managed, like two sides of the same coin. The energy sector is highly compartmentalised — there are too many agencies that take too long to analyse projects and provide necessary approvals. Nepal’s energy system, from ideas to market, is in the hands of too many people. We need to complete each part of the process, but much more efficiently. We require a level playing

field to scale up the production of affordable and clean hydropower, and the Nepali state needs to step up to use our tax money to absorb many of the costs that have been unfairly piled upon every unit of power generated. Access roads to potential sites, transmission of the generated power, and distribution to demand centres are the obvious costs. There are also the unjustified costs of building schools and health posts, mitigating environmental impacts as well as ‘donations’ to all the

gold earring wearing political cadre in the locality. In the same way, subsidies given to LPG and other fossil fuels must be removed and a pollution tax imposed to support hospitals to admit more people with respiratory problems. These are all different facets of the energy market. We can start by replacing cooking and driving fuels, which pollute and contribute to climate change. Nepal has a huge fossil fuel import bill that provides money to oil-producing economies. The current balance has been

maintained by sending young people to work in those countries, with these migrants then returning money home. Hydropower can help break this vicious cycle. We need our young men and women back home. It will not be easy, because it seems that the happiest day in a Nepali’s life is when a visa to the US or Australia gets approved. The government is happy because it does not have to create jobs at home, the banks are glad with the cut they make from all the transactions, and the airlines are happy. Even the person selling plastic covers for passports gets business. Having a readily available and affordable clean source of energy and a young, dynamic population are the best things Nepal has going for it. When history books are written 100 years hence, this could be the moment when we went from being a poorly-managed country to one of the best-run emerging economies. Norway and Nigeria both have oil, and yet look at where the two countries are: the real variable is governance, not oil. There is a global trend to elect rich people to public office because they are rich and presumably know how to become rich. Yet today in the USA, Chile, Lebanon, Hong Kong and Spain, people are sending a clear message from the streets that wealth is important, but it is not everything. Democratic values and principles should not be sidelined by simply pointing at the rising stock market. As the Independent Power Producers Association of Nepal hosts Power Summit 2019, from 21-29 November in Kathmandu, let us all take this long-term and broader view. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc. His fortnightly column in Nepali Times, 1/2 Full, looks at Nepal’s potential.

Harvard alumni condemn Roop Jyoti arrest



HARVARD CLUB OF NEPAL

SOLIDARITY: Roop Jyoti (*third from right*) pictured with Nepali Harvard University Alumni at a meeting of the Harvard Club of Nepal in 2015. The alumni released a statement Wednesday in support of Jyoti.

Thirty-eight graduates of Harvard University have signed a petition to the Nepal Government on behalf of fellow alumni and industrialist Roop Jyoti and his family members, who they said are being unfairly persecuted. Jyoti, who did a PhD from Harvard in 1999, was picked up at Kathmandu airport on 7 November after arrival from Singapore. He and his daughter, Suruchi Jyoti, have been detained since then, while the rest of his extended family are in hiding. A renowned businessman, philanthropist, Vipassana meditation teacher and Vice Chairman of Jyoti Group, Roop Jyoti was charged in a real estate dispute. ‘He has been charged with a crime he was not involved in. A multi-year and multiparty business dispute that should and could have been settled via mediation or an arbitration process appears to have

been blown out of proportion into a criminal offence,’ the Harvard alumni statement reads. ‘While we expect the rule of law to prevail and to take its course, the circumstances and the manner in which Dr Jyoti and his family are being treated appear to be arbitrary, disproportionate and unfair,’ the statement added. The group strongly urged the Government of Nepal to free Jyoti and his family members. Not doing so would ‘send an adverse signal that the authorities in Nepal can arrest anyone under any pretext, thereby ruining the person’s reputation, damaging the worth of their societal contributions, and casting a chill in the way that civil society and the private sector operate with rights and privileges granted by the Constitution of Nepal,’ adds the petition. Jyoti was arrested on the basis of a complaint filed by Bikendra

Krishna Malla in December 2018 against the Jyoti Group. Malla claims that since 2014 he has paid Rs27.6 million to the Jyoti Group for a housing complex in Bansbari but is still unable to take possession of it. Although the police obtained an arrest warrant in December 2018, Jyoti filed a writ against it and a court issued a stay order. Earlier this month, the stay order was vacated by the court, allowing the police to arrest Jyoti and his daughter. On 12 November, an arrest warrant was issued against Padma Jyoti, Chairman of Jyoti Group and older brother of Roop Jyoti, for his alleged involvement in the housing fraud. There are media reports that Malla has reached an amicable settlement with the group and lawyers from the two sides are trying to reach a deal. 🇳🇵

BIZ BRIEFS

Turkish traffic

Turkish Airlines’ load factor was 83.3% in October 2019, meaning the total number of passengers carried rose 1.9% to 6.6 million. The domestic load factor was 86.2% versus

Extreme Mustang

The location of the Mountain round of the Extreme E has been confirmed as Mustang district. The fourth location of the pioneering electric SUV off-road racing series was announced by Alejandro Agag, Founder and CEO of Extreme E, alongside Yogesh Bhattarai, Nepal’s Minister for Tourism.

Ncell Voice Pack

Ncell Private Limited has launched the All Network Voice Pack for prepaid subscribers. With the pack, customers can buy 20 minutes of talk time applicable for all networks for just Rs20 (Rs 25.54 with taxes). The offer came into effect from 12 November and will remain in place till 9 February 2020.

Qatar codeshare

Qatar Airways has signed a codeshare agreement with IndiGo, India’s largest passenger airline, to place its code on

Shangri-La mixing

Shangri-La Kathmandu organised its annual cake mixing ceremony on 10 November 2019 with a festive spirit. Special guests from the travel industry, corporate world, celebrities and in-house guests joined the event, when ingredients were mixed well and stored until Christmas to prepare the hotel’s traditional plum cakes.

Beyond the nation state in South Asia

Academics go against the grain to promote a trans-national mode of thinking

Binit Gurung

Against the Nation: *Thinking like South Asians* contains 22 essays authored by three sociologists — Sasanka Perera, Dev Nath Pathak and Ravi Kumar — who argue that adherence to the nation-state concept is preventing the South Asian region from building upon its shared myths, culture and more.

The book promotes a non-statist discourse of South Asia, which is especially relevant at a time when Pakistan-India and India-Nepal relations are strained by Kashmir and Kalapani, and SAARC is being sidelined. The authors focus on existing regional links in myth, folklore, religion, art, literature, food and popular culture, which can be the building blocks for re-imagining South Asia. The essays are prefaced by an intellectually provocative and boldly reflexive chapter co-written by the authors, who are affiliated to South Asian University in New Delhi.

Re-imagining South Asia is imperative in the face of perennial bickering among nation states in the region, which the authors argue, has made the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) hostage to nationalist politics.

The authors attribute this state of affairs to the parochial framework of the nation under which SAARC continues to function despite its regional rhetoric. They assert their opposition to the idea of nation, taking a crucial step towards realising a South Asian mode of thinking.

Written in a markedly passionate tone, the book makes no pretence of academic objectivity. Rather, the authors call their approach 'ideological', informed by their own politics of knowledge. Anyone familiar with the sociology of knowledge knows that what we call 'knowledge' is always rooted in particular social and temporal contexts and



RIGHT SIDE UP: This map of South Asia, by *Himal Southasian* magazine, in which 'north' is reversed to force a different perspective on the nation state, was deemed to be unnecessarily subversive at the South Asian University in New Delhi.

shaped by the politics of social actors. It is an intellectual fallacy to view knowledge as universalistic and disinterested, particularly when the knowledge claims to represent human society. Such fallacy blinds us to alternative ways of seeing and, thereby, enslaving them to the dominant discourse.

The authors suggest that the official imagination of South Asia, as a coming together of eight nation states for regional co-operation, is ideological. This ideology is that of the nation state, which imagines the existence of hostile 'others' across its boundaries, something that impedes the mainstreaming of organic regionalism. The book deconstructs this ideology by showing several instances of amicable artistic and

cultural crossovers in the region currently, as well as in the past.


Yet, it would just be all talk and no substance if the proposed re-imagination of South Asia was not substantiated in some ways. The authors, based at a university established by SAARC, are apparently in a position to take concrete steps towards promoting a truly regional consciousness that defies the insular imagination of 'nation'. Yet they confront the messiness of everyday life inside the university.

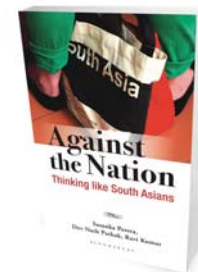
The book mentions an incident when a senior academic took exception to the inverted map of South Asia, first conceptualised and published by *Himal Southasian* magazine, which was used by

one of the university's departments in a presentation. The upside-down map was envisioned to promote a re-imagining of the region centred on people rather than the nation state. At the university however, it was deemed unnecessarily subversive, and it was suggested that the department get rid of it.

The authors deplore such nationalist modes of thinking among colleagues and students, which make critical discussions on South Asia, inside and outside classrooms, difficult. They advocate an alternative regional framework in teaching and research, recounting their interventions in the sociology curricula at the MA and PhD levels in the university.

Academics have little or no incentive to write for the popular media and prefer to converse with peers by publishing in discipline-specific academic journals. In their 'publish or perish' world, popular writings are either ignored or frowned upon in the university system.

Against the Nation tries to engage the public outside such enlightened spaces of academia. Far from being an instance of populist anti-intellectualism, the accusation that the authors anticipated, the book is steeped in the traditions of reflexive and public sociology. It can therefore resonate with a wider audience and will especially appeal to those who are intellectually interested and emotionally invested in the idea of South Asian regionalism. 



*Against the Nation:
Thinking like South Asians*
By Sasanka Perera, Dev Nath
Pathak and Ravi Kumar
New Delhi, Bloomsbury, 2019
Price: INR 1,299
ISBN - 978-93-88630-22-1

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A westerly disturbance over Pakistan has wafted the smoke from stubble burning away from Nepal, which explains the slightly better air quality in Kathmandu. The frontal system will bring some snow flurries in the higher regions of central and western Nepal but they will pass, leading to a bright and mostly clear weekend. With this, the minimum temperature will fall into the single digits on the Valley rim, while the maximum has dropped to a more winter-like low 20s.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
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SEWA BHATTARAI

Sewa Bhattarai

Lanky British magician Drummond Money-Coutts knows only one word of Nepali, “Namaste”, which he learned from children at a shelter in Kathmandu. But he does not need language to communicate with these children — his tricks make them squeal and scream with delight.

The magician, who goes by his initials ‘DMC’, uses the power of magic as therapy and entertainment for Nepali children who have been rescued from traffickers and still suffer psychological trauma.

It looks like he has nothing in his hand. Yet when he swipes it around a child’s ears, out comes a little red ball. The children are incredulous when the ball vanishes as suddenly as it appeared, and then magically reappears in the palm of another child at the other end of the row. How did he do that?

“Visual magic has the capacity to transcend language barriers. It inspires a sense of wonder and mystery in children,

and creates a bridge to the mysteries of the world,” said DMC during a recent visit to a shelter run by Chora Chori charity in Godavari. “I am especially interested in performing for children because I want magic to do for them what it did for me as a child.”

DMC had a lonely childhood, struggling to be accepted by friends after his parents got divorced. His mother moved away, and he was a shy boy at boarding school. Magic became his happy place, and he practised for hours and hours, as rigorous a discipline for him as music or martial arts was for other children.

Since then, magic has been a springboard for DMC, who was heir apparent to a baronage and left behind lucrative prospects at investment company Goldman Sachs to become a professional magician. He has performed around the world and for celebrities including the Queen of England, and has been featured in several tv series.

For the Netflix show *Death by Magic*, DMC performs dangerous stunts that have killed previous magicians. Sometimes

he sets himself on fire, at other times he is submerged under water as he tries to re-create rigorously rehearsed acts. Occasionally, despite practice, accidents do happen.

“It seemed like a powerful notion, celebrating the lives of incredible people who attempted brave, courageous tricks that went wrong. It is a way of paying tribute to them, and of showing how dangerous stage magic can be,” says the daredevil magician.

Some magicians, like Harry Houdini, tried to explore magic beyond sleight of hand, the latter making his name synonymous with dangerous stagecraft. DMC created *Beyond Magic with DMC*, in which he travelled the world learning about the roots of magic and explaining them through tv.

“I wanted television to be more than just entertainment and performance of random tricks. I wanted to take viewers on a journey with narration, and tell a story with history and knowledge,” he says.

What interests DMC is how every culture has its own view and definition of magic. In

South Asia it may be more spiritual, while in Africa or Haiti it is seen as dark arts or voodoo.

“I create the illusion of magic, but the real magic lies in the natural world,” he says. “Childbirth for instance. It may seem like a commonplace thing. But if you really think about it, creating life from almost nothing is the most magical thing imaginable.”

Before coming to Nepal, DMC visited the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya and orphanages in Mumbai and Indonesia. “There is such purity with children when they see magic. Sometimes adults become cynical and it changes the way they perceive it. But children always respond innocently,” he says.

He has tattooed the words *Hausla Pyar Vishwas* on his bald head over his left ear: ‘Courage to believe in love’. He explains: “It is the mantra I live by, no matter how my other thoughts might change.”

DMC is already planning a new tv show that he will launch after his Nepal trip, but details are under wrap. He will only say this: “The last show was about magic and danger, this one will be about magic and kindness.” 🇳🇵

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A man and a woman are sitting on the floor, back-to-back. The man is on the left, wearing a grey sweater and light blue pants, using a laptop. The woman is on the right, wearing a blue t-shirt and black pants, holding a remote control. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera.

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PETER DEAN

A personal encyclopaedia of the Himalaya

If there is one book you must set aside, either for new year holiday reading or as a Christmas gift to a fellow traveller, it would be *Tales of the Himalaya* by the British climber-turned-trekker Henry Edmundson (pictured above), which has just been published by Vajra Books.

Edmundson was a boy when news came to his home in England that Hillary and Tenzing had climbed Mt Everest. His father, an outdoorsy type, immediately took the family out on a celebratory hike over the hills. Soon, Edmundson was devouring books on mountaineering and exploration.

"It became a sort of obsession," Edmundson said in Kathmandu this month after a trek over Lumba Sumba Pass. His wife, and lifelong trekking partner Connie, piped in: "Not just 'sort of'."

By age 19, Edmundson was climbing in Kashmir and in Balistan in Pakistan, and in the past nearly 50 years he has trekked almost the entire Himalayan arc, from Afghanistan to Bhutan. The Kangchenjunga Base Camp-Lumba Sumba was one of the last missing bits before he did it this year. (See adjoining story.)

The view from Lumba Sumba pass towards Kangchenjunga is the cover image of *Tales of the Himalaya*. The title may sound a bit prosaic for a personal encyclopaedia of the Himalaya spanning everything from the politics, geopolitics, geotectonics, geography, geology, cartography, history, adventure, culture and religion of these mountains. Vast in scope, and leaving out no details however slight, it is clear this is Edmundson's life's work.

Graduating in mathematical logic, he worked for an oil prospecting company to bring out a technical journal, and kept a meticulous diary of all his treks, fully intending to write a book about the experiences one day. "I wanted the book to be holistic because I believe in a non-specialist approach to make the subject interesting to non-experts," Edmundson explains. "I try to make complicated things simple and not make simple things complicated."

The book is divided into thematic chapters that are interwoven with his own personal travels across the Himalaya: Religion, Geology, Politics and Society — the last chapter dealing exclusively with Nepal's political transition from war to peace, and up to the 2015 earthquake and Indian Blockade and their aftermath.

When he first arrived in Kathmandu in 1971 as a young lad, Edmundson had three letters of introduction from John Tyson, who was part of an unsuccessful attempt on Mt Api in 1953: one to the British Ambassador, another to trekking

pioneer Col Jimmy Roberts and one to Swiss pilot Hardy Furer. That gave him all the access he needed to set off to the deep hinterland, with the help of legendary porter and activist Mike Cheney.

For his first trek, the author's team chose one of the most difficult ones they could find: to Kanjiroba and Dhorpatan. In that respect, Edmundson was doing the Great Himalayan Trail even before the concept was invented, confining himself not just to the Nepal Himalaya but to the entire 3,000km mountain arc. Along the way, he encountered more than just adventures in the wild: he found himself in the middle of a skirmish in Kashmir, in an earthquake in Nepal, witnessed the changes to trekking brought by new mountains roads and the climate crisis.

One useful thing about this book is that you do not need to read it cover to cover. Curled up on a cosy sofa by the fire, you can open up any section and start reading. There is a lucid account of Toni Hagen and his early geological exploration of Nepal, which leads directly into seismicity and the orogenesis of the 1934 and 2015 earthquakes. Backgrounds to upheavals of the political kind in mountains are also all here, starting from the British Afghan campaign of 1847, the Chinese annexation of Tibet and the Sino-India War of 1962, right up to Nepal's Maoist conflict.

Edmundson has put a huge amount of work into this book, in terms of research, gathering illustrations and maps, and the sheer exertion of undertaking trips across some of the most arduous terrain on Earth.

Maybe you do not need a more exciting title when the content is so stimulating. And, finally, we have a Western writer who does not pluralise the word 'Himalaya'. 🇳🇵

Kunda Dixit



Tales from the Himalaya:
Religion, Science, Politics, Society
by Henry Edmundson
Vajra Books, Kathmandu, 2019
424 pages, Rs4,800
ISBN 978-9937-9330-3-2

The Lumba

Trekking is evolving fast on once remote

Henry Edmundson

My time in the Himalaya began as a climber in Kashmir in 1965. But the years pass, and climbing has given way to trekking.

It started in Baltistan, when the youngest of our three children was seven, and during the last seven years my wife Connie and I have trekked every season, covering the entire span of the Himalaya from Ladakh, through Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, to Nepal and Bhutan.

This year's trek covered a wonderful circuit in eastern Nepal, starting in Taplejung, crossing four major passes: the Lasiya Bhanjyang (3,420m), Selele La (4,632m), Nango La (4,700m) and Lumba Sumba (5,159m) to finish down the Arun River in Num.

Accompanying us was an old friend, Peter Dean, who had been with us in 2013 when we traversed from Jumla to Darchula in far-west Nepal, skirting the great Api and Saipal ranges. Our support team was led by our friend Ang Tsering Sherpa, manager of the Khumbu



Fresh snow above Langjang campsite (3,722m).

Shangrila agency.

His cousin Ang Namgel Sherpa, seven-time Everest summiteer, lead the group, ably assisted by Temba Tashi Sherpa and cook Karma Tenji Sherpa, both of whom we knew from before. Three cook boys and eight porters, three from Taplejung, completed the team — a more reliable group of young men would be hard to imagine. And we knew that this trek might also be our final.



View of Kanchenjunga and Jannu massifs seen from the Lumba Sumba (5,159m) on a fine day.

Sumba Passage

the east Nepal routes



HENRY EDMUNDSON

Filling missing sections of the Himalaya will henceforth be done with less sense of urgency.

The year before, we had been in the same region and completed Nango La, but missed the Lumba Sumba due to a medical emergency. The time-lapse view allowed us to witness how trekking is evolving in the remotest region of east Nepal.

Trekking to the north and south base camps of Kangchenjunga is

becoming increasingly popular, and perhaps taking a rightful share off routes such as the Annapurna circuit, which are so compromised now by road building. Last year, there was substantial traffic up to Ghunsa and beyond, heading for north base camp. This year there were several large parties negotiating Selele La, an obligatory passage from north base camp to south, or vice-versa.

For this popular route, lodges are abundant or being expanded. Less travelled was Lumba Sumba pass, which needs camping and full kitchen staff. But for how much longer?

The Kangchenjunga Conservation Project Agency has set up a hut, toilet and tent areas on the approach to the Nango La, and some of the paths are transformed into well made stone highways 1m wide. A stone path from the new road to the Chinese border from Tiptala La now heads to Lumba Sumba and continues to Pass Camp (4,458m) and beyond. It made for rapid progress, even if it dumbed down the walking experience.

After crossing Lumba Sumba, however, the trail is tough. Between Thudam, an isolated village with more affinity to Tibet than Nepal,

and Chepuwa, boot tracks are rare in the vertiginous jungle paths.

Our style of trekking, with complete kitchen team, might soon become obsolete. Just a couple of new lodges and some trail clearing would make the whole area far more accessible. In Ghunsa, locals told us: “You camping trekkers with kitchen staff don’t add anything to the local economy.”

The rewards of camping, however, are extraordinary: visiting the isolated village of Olangchungola and its fabulous Nyingma-pa monastery housing multiple copies of the Kangyur and Tengyur stacked to the rafters, the golden millet fields of Chepuwa, and the mighty and wild Arun River, which cuts straight through the Himalaya between Kangchenjunga and Makalu massifs. 🇳🇵



HENRY EDMUNDSON

The difficult exit via the Kharka campsite (2,701m) to the Arun River.



JACQUES CORDOLA

EVENTS



Film South Asia

This year's Film South Asia presents thought-provoking films from Nepal to Bhutan. Choose from over 20 stimulating documentaries to watch over 4 days.
14-17 November, timings vary, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan (01) 5547279

Thrift Bazaar

Get yourself a snazzy vintage piece at Thrift Bazaar. Thrifting and second-hand shopping are the most ethical and sustainable ways to shop!
16 November, 11am-2pm, Nepali Travellers' Cafe, Kupondole, 9801002975

Pop-up Festival

Celebrate your emotions with a pop-up festival. With sticker booths and workshops that allow you to reflect on your emotions, this event teaches young children and adults how emotions matter. The festival is organised in partnership with UNICEF in celebration of World Children's Day.
20 November, 3pm-5pm, Nepali Travellers' Cafe, Kupondole, 9801002975

Sustainable Night Market

Peruse stalls that sell sustainable products, grab a bite to eat and enjoy the buzz of the best night market in Kathmandu.
17 November, 4pm onwards, Astrek Park, Thamel



Heritage Cycle Rally

Pancbike's Ultimate Heritage Cycle Rally invites cyclists from all over Nepal to take a tour of Kathmandu Darbar Square, Swoyambhu, Patan Darbar Square, Pashupatinath and Bhrikutimandap.
16 November, 7am onwards, Starts from Kathmandu Darbar Square

Drawing Workshop

Tap into your creative side with an introductory drawing workshop that is perfect for anyone regardless of their age. The three-day workshop will take you through the basics of illustrating and sketching.
16-18 November, Rs1,200 per person, Sattya Media Arts Collective (01) 5521812



Modern Feminist Humanitarian

Tara Tran, a PhD candidate at Johns Hopkins University, presents The Modern Feminist Humanitarian: History and Practice. She questions the idea that feminism and humanitarianism were modern inventions of the post-World War Two era.
17 November, 3pm onwards, Martin Chautari, Thapathali (01) 4102027



Nepal Impact Marathon

The Impact Marathon Series aims to bring together runners from all over the world while raising money for local charities. This year, the marathon has three levels: Starter for ten (10km), Loop the loop (21km) and The beast of Shivapuri (42km). Register online: nepalimpactmarathon.com
16 November, 7am-4pm (depends on race level), Race starts at Kakani, 9803781310

Japan 4

MCube Gallery present, Japan 4, a collection of paintings by Japanese Artists Izumi Tanabe and Hideo Iida. Their artwork features ink bleeds, dual colours, ink washes and gentle brush strokes. Opens 15 November at 5pm.
16-24 November, 11am-6pm, MCube Gallery, Chakupat, 9851170110

MUSIC



Rock on Saturday

Acoustic trio The Elements and Pahelo Batti Muni, a five-member rock band, will be debuting their new music this Saturday.
16 November, 5pm onwards, Rs250, CALM, Tangelwood, Naxal, 9808771281

Sarangi Soiree

Sarangi Soiree is a weekly entertainment event that promises good music and food. This week's soiree features Anugraha, a Gandharva band, and fusion cocktails by pop-up bar Bar Stories by Abhishek.
16 November, 2pm-6pm, Rs2,500 per person, Maya Manor Boutique Hotel, Naxal (01) 4428028



Bikram Baral

Bikram Baral, the first runner up of Nepal Idol Season 2, will be performing his original songs. His soothing tone, heart-touching lyrics and big stage presence will provide an unforgettable musical experience.
15 November, 7pm onwards, Rs500, Guitar Lounge and Bar, 9803638485

Funk in the house

Funk in the house is back for another evening of funk, jazz, disco and dancing. Their music will get you off your seats and on your feet in no time.
15 November, 9pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel, 9849377915

Jamarko Jatra

Jamarko Jatra is a festival that brings together established and aspiring folk musicians from all over Nepal. Organised by Project Sarangi, the event aims to keep Nepali folk music alive.
16 November, 1pm-8pm, Lalitpur Metropolitan City Garden (01) 5553511

DINING



Merhabha Turkish Restaurant

With over 90 items on their menu, Merhabha offers the best and most Turkish food in town. Their Iskender kebab, a dish piled high with tender meat, yogurt, couscous and flat bread, and their Turkish Pizza are musts. Ask the chef for recommendations if the menu overwhelms you — he will happily guide you through it!
9am-10pm, Chakshibari Marg, 9840931141

Flavours of Kashmir

Experience the flavours of "Paradise on Earth" with a tantalising menu curated by Indian Celebrity Chef Sanjay Raina.
12-24 November, 6:30pm-10:30pm, Aloft Kathmandu, Thamel (01) 5252000



Yala Cafe

Grab a stack of fluffy pancakes, well-seasoned eggs benedict or a country breakfast at Yala Cafe. With a cosy ambience and soul-warming food, Yala is the best way to kick start your day.
7am-10pm, Thamel (01) 4249602

Arabian Souk

Savour the taste of the Middle East with mezze, shwarmas, kebabs and more by Chef Mina Ayoub from Dubai.
8-16 November, 6:30pm-10:30pm, Kathmandu Marriott Hotel, Naxal (01) 4442030



Sarangi

For fantastic vegetarian options and a relaxed atmosphere, Sarangi is one of the best Kathmandu has to offer. Their beetroot hummus with fresh pita bread, eggplant lasagna and decadent nachos are delicious and healthy.
10am-10pm, Thamel, 9813992602

GETAWAY



Baber Mahal Vilas

Once the home of the Ranas, Baber Mahal Vilas is now an architectural marvel and quaint boutique hotel. Largely built in the style of a neoclassical Rana Darbar, the property has Newa accents, Mustang designs and Tarai influences.
Tanka Prasad Ghumti Sadak (01) 4257655/ 4248747



Bodhi Suites Hotel

Situated in the City of Lakes, Pokhara, this boutique hotel is modern, classy and offers a wide variety of luxury amenities. The rooms are spacious, stocked with goods and the perfect place to unwind after a long day of exploring Lakeside.
Lakeside (61) 467657 / 58

Lake View

For a weekend of rest and relaxation, escape to Lake View Resort's cosy wooden huts, one of Lakeside's oldest establishments.
Lake Side, Pokhara (061) 461477/463854



Tiger Mountain Lodge

The rustic hand-cut stone lodges in the midst of greenery and the backdrop of breathtaking mountains offer a restful stay. With kid-friendly meal options and guides who can take you to secret spots in Pokhara, Tiger Mountain will make your stay unforgettable.
Kandani Dada, Pokhara (01) 4720580

Begnas Lake Resort & Villas

Located in one of the most agriculturally flourishing areas of Pokhara, guests have the opportunity to explore and try locally grown coffee, grains, oranges and more.
Begnas Lake, Pokhara (61) 560030



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OUR PICK

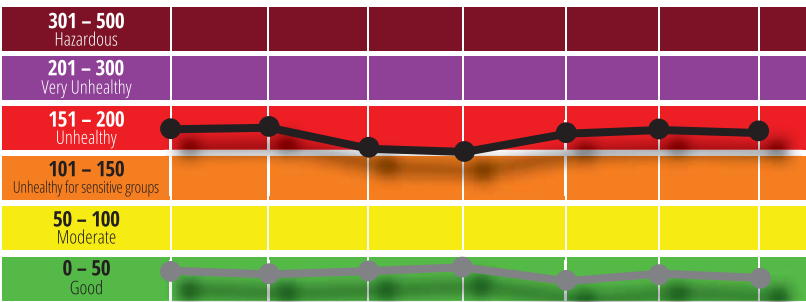


Opened in Kathmandu on 8 November

Bala is named after his shiny, silky hair — only he is losing it prematurely. Ayushman Khurana, known for his witty comedies with social messages, delivers another comic caper that the entire family can enjoy. This film about the woes of balding men, especially their dating difficulties, has been getting a lot of critical and commercial approval. Directed by Amar Kaushik, it also stars Bhumi Pednekar, Yami Gautam and Javed Jaffrey.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 8 - 14 November



PM2.5
Ozone
FRIDAY Nov 8
SATURDAY Nov 9
SUNDAY Nov 10
MONDAY Nov 11
TUESDAY Nov 12
WEDNESDAY Nov 13
THURSDAY Nov 14

Luckily, prevailing winds from the northwest prevented the worst of the smoke from stubble burning in India and Pakistan to blow towards Kathmandu. Now, a westerly disturbance is dropping some rain on the fields and dousing the smoke. However, Kathmandu's winter inversion is trapping pollution from vehicles and trash burning, which is why the daily average for AQI remained in the Unhealthy red band all week. Rush hour traffic pushed AQI above 200 on some days. For live updates go to [www.nepaltimes.com](https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/)
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>



ALL PHOTOS: ALTON C BYERS

Too many mules on the Everest trail

Alton C Byers
in Khumbu

The Sherpas reportedly have a saying — “there’s only one Everest” — meaning that because Everest is the highest mountain in the world it will always be the preferred destination of trekkers, climbers and extremely wealthy middle-aged men. Visitor numbers support this claim — over 60,000 foreign tourists (not counting support staff) will come to Sagarmatha National Park this year.

Along with the economic benefits there are also downsides, such as overcrowded trails, bottlenecks at check posts and bridge crossings, and the feeling of being in a perpetual traffic jam. Every day during the peak season, 500 tourists arrive in Namche Bazaar from the south and 500 more from trails east and north.

The vast majority of these tourists are cordial and having a wonderful time. What is not good about the trekking experience in the Khumbu — and on dozens of other popular trekking trails in Nepal these days — is the presence of mule trains carrying supplies from Kharikhola (2,500m) south of Lukla to Namche Bazaar (3,440m).

Mules were introduced to the Khumbu about 10 years ago, in response to the growing number of tourists and the demand for food and other supplies. Today, about 500 mules are based in Kharikhola, to carry supplies up from the road head.



They have largely replaced the use of *dzopkio* (yak-cattle cross breeds) for the Lukla to Namche supply run, although *dzopkio* and yak continue to be used from Namche onward to the higher altitudes. On a recent walk from

Phakding to Lukla there were well over 100 mules in trains averaging about 15 animals each.

The locals hate them because mules destroy the trails with their sharp hooves, and leave behind so much poop that one seemingly



spends more time playing hopscotch than trekking. Worse, they seem to think they have a right of way on the trails. *Dzopkio* and yak always seem to go out of their way to avoid making any kind of contact with humans. But not mules.

There has been talk of building a ropeway from Lukla to Namche capable of delivering the food and other supplies needed for the large and growing tourist trade. Especially if placed beyond the sight of the main trekking trail, a ropeway would provide a more environmentally friendly way of delivering goods. It would also be a means for transporting pre-processed solid waste, such as shredded plastic water bottles, compacted and baled aluminium beer cans and other materials from

Namche to Lukla, where it could then be transferred to Kathmandu for recycling.

The proposal to build the ropeway is being held up by the central government in Kathmandu for reasons that are not entirely clear, but the plan certainly has the support of the majority of the people here.

Meanwhile, construction of a motorable road to Chaurikharka, just below Lukla, continues, largely in response to the large number of flight cancellations in Lukla due to weather. Typically, hundreds of tourists get stuck in Lukla for up to two weeks, and a road would be an alternative access route. Expect the numbers of tourists visiting the Khumbu annually to keep growing as a result.

But at least the traditional trail from Lukla to Namche and beyond will remain in its present condition, for future generations of mountain lovers to enjoy. This is good news at a time when Nepal continues to relentlessly destroy its system of once-world class trekking trails through the construction of poorly-planned and often unnecessary roads, such as the Annapurna circuit, Dolpo, Manaslu and much of the Kangchenjunga treks.


Unplanned road construction has overall negative environmental, economic and social impact. But that is another story. Let us find an alternative to mules first. 🇳🇵

Alton C. Byers, PhD, is Senior Research Associate and Faculty Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research, University of Colorado at Boulder.



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वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने
बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने
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Love thy self

Sanghamitra Subba

Kanchan Burathoki felt massive pain and grief when her mother passed away, wishing especially that she had taken better care of her during her cancer treatment. “I had to learn to be kinder to myself in order to let go,” she says.

Burathoki’s piece ‘Breathe In, Breathe Out,’ in the first issue of a new comic anthology deals with the loss of her mother and the journey she took to stop blaming herself for things beyond her control.

Burathoki is one of eight artists in the first issue of the Virangana Comics series titled *Self Love*. To her, self love is essential in a time of healing. She portrays this in her piece through simple illustrations, using a limited palette — muted yellow, beige and burgundy — and scattered text revealing inner thoughts.

Self Love, released by FinePrint in October, uses comics-style illustrations to talk about a variety of topics, from masturbation to dealing with the loss of a loved one.

The cover is pink, powerful and embedded with text. A woman with a cart shopping in the Self Love aisle of a store in front of shelves stocked with ‘Power Dust!’, ‘Anti Anxiety Antiseptic Liquid’ and ‘You Can Do It Buttery Biscuits’ is representative of what’s inside.



The anthology depicts how we navigate modern patriarchy, overcoming anxiety, dealing with loss, finding yourself and, at its core, learning how to love yourself.

One of the most striking pieces in the comic belongs to Shraddha Shrestha, whose entry, ‘The Permission Game’, rings true for many Nepali females seeking independence but limited by strictures of conventional society.

Shrestha’s illustrated persona, decorated in bold black lines and

bright colours, navigates the trials and tribulations of living in Patan, where the judgemental eyes of family and neighbours critique her every move, even at age 31. To her, ‘self love is getting to do what you want to and experiencing things on your own terms.’

Other contributors include Bandhana Tulachan, who accepts that it is okay to feel and to heal, Ujala Shrestha, who navigates life with her anxiety baggage and Rashmi Lamichhane, talking about ‘getting to today.’

Each woman expresses her deepest emotions and inner thoughts in distinct artistic and visual styles. For each of them self love has a different meaning, but its importance is paramount to all.



Self Love
Virangana Comics Anthology Issue 1
FinePrint Books, Nepal
Price: NRs600
ISBN: 978-9937-665-75-9



RATNA SHRESTHA/RSS

SITE SEEING: Bangladeshi President Mohammad Abdul Hamid, who was in Nepal on a four-day state visit, tours an earthquake damaged heritage site in Bhaktapur on Tuesday.



CHANDRAKALA CHETTRI/RSS

OCCUPY TUNDIKHEL: Former PM Baburam Bhattarai, media personality Rabi Lamichhane and singer Yogeshwor Amatya, protesting encroachment of Tundikhel on Saturday.



TEAM ABU DHABI CRICKET

GLOBAL GAME: Former national cricket captain Paras Khadka, who recently signed with T10 cricket league team Abu Dhabi, with teammate Rameez Shahzad of UAE.



NABIN LAMICHHANE/RSS

RACE TO THE TOP: A Singaporean athlete during a cycling race in Manang on Wednesday.



GOKARNA FOREST RESORT

HAPPY HOLIDAYS: Turkish Airlines Country Manager Abdullah Tuncer Keceli, Filiz Keceli and Russian Ambassador to Nepal Alexei A Novikov were among those at a cake mixing ceremony at Gokarna Forest Resort on Monday.

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US-bound Nepalis trafficked to Malawi

6 Nepalis rescued, 5 others still being held hostage as human traffickers extort migrants

Janakraj Sapkota in *Kantipur*,
13 November

Four Nepalis who had been held hostage in the Southeast African nation of Malawi have been rescued by the Nepal Police Human Trafficking Bureau. They had hoped to go to the US, yet were rescued and returned to Kathmandu on Monday.

All four had got in touch with an Indian agent a year ago, who had promised to take them to the US through Bolivia, which has visa on arrival at La Paz for Nepalis. Subjected to mental and physical torture in Malawi, they were freed in coordination with local police, and their families bought their flight tickets home.

Those rescued informed police that there are five other Nepalis in Malawi, who have been unable to contact police. Two other Nepalis who were stranded in the country and did not have money for air tickets have also been rescued. Malawi police arrested Indian



national Najir Ahmad, who had sheltered the human traffickers.

Among those rescued, one is aged 36, and the others are below 26. The human trafficking ring had taken them to Malawi in a convoluted route through Vietnam, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Jordan, Dubai and Azerbaijan. After 20 days

in a hotel in Vietnam, they stayed in Addis Ababa for 4 months. The victims spent a few weeks to a few months at every other location after that, and in Malawi were made hostage after the traffickers demanded more money. They offered to take them to India for INR300,000 and for INR700,000, to

fly them to Bolivia.

"The Indian agent threatened and beat us up. Then local men came in, asked us for money, and beat us up," one of the victims told police.

The traffickers had taken their passports and other identification, and threatened to extract their kidneys and sell them if they did not pay more. Though they did not reveal the amount they had spent, police estimate that it could be more than Rs 1.5 million each. Those rescued were devastated to learn they had not reached Bolivia after spending so much money.

After continuous harassment and beatings by traffickers, the Nepalis contacted their families, who informed police, triggering the rescue operation. Trafficking Bureau DSP Narahari Regmi became acquainted with a Malawi police officer when he was in the country on a UN peacekeeping mission, and used this informal channel to coordinate with police. Three Nepali women who had been taken to dance bars in Malawi were also rescued a

few months ago.

According to the bureau, there may be more than 100 Nepalis stranded in countries around the world, after being trafficked. Six Nepalis stranded in Indonesia for nearly six months were returned home this week.

They told police that they paid Rs2.8-3 million each to traffickers. The police are in the process of rescuing eight others from Ethiopia, who have been there for seven months. Some of them still hope to make it to the US, while others are looking for ways to return to Nepal.

Traffickers' routes

The route to the US through India, Russia or Spain, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala or Mexico used to be popular with traffickers. They would try to lengthen the journey so that they could extort more money from victims.

Now, other routes through the Latin American countries of Suriname, Guyana or Colombia are more frequently used. Bolivia is popular because it offers visa on arrival for Nepalis. From there, traffickers try to sneak people into Mexico. In fact, Interpol and US security have now placed Bolivia's immigration department on their watchlist.

V A C A N C Y



Rato Bangala School is seeking **Music Teachers** for its Music Department. The candidates are expected to teach music across the grades and work as a team. The Music teachers should be able to engage the students and inspire them to develop a love for music and be well versed in the child friendly approach. Sound knowledge of music and technical skill in a variety of musical instruments and instructional ability in singing is expected.

If you are a qualified and passionate teacher looking to share your love of music with students who are eager to learn, send your application by 29 November, 2019.

Interested candidates are requested to collect application forms from the school office or download it from www.ratobangala.edu.np and submit it.

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Artificial Intelligence is here, better get used to it

Sonia Awale

For those who think that Nepal is too underdeveloped to make full use of artificial intelligence (AI), think again. That is exactly what they used to say about computers and mobile phones in the 1990s. It may come as a surprise to many that Nepal has been gaining ground in AI, developing not only machine learning software but producing world-class engineers. One company at the forefront is Fusemachines Nepal, which has started using industry experts to train AI students with cutting-edge technology to deliver intelligent solutions. “I wanted to see if I can contribute in bringing the best AI education to Nepal and make Nepal known around the world as one of the best sources of AI talent,” says the Nepali founder of Fusemachines, Sameer Maskey, a professor at Columbia University. This is the age of surveillance capitalism, where algorithms determine election outcomes, Siri knows what you want before you do, wearables correctly deduce the state of the heart and Facebook recognises friends. AI simply imitates human

ALL PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA / SONIA AWALE

Making Nepalis

Tech company started by Columbia University professor wants to make Nepal an AI hub

During a visit to Nepal six years ago, Columbia University professor Sameer Maskey handpicked three students from engineering schools across Kathmandu who were able to solve a mathematical equation. The three went on to become the core of Fusemachines, a global company that aims to democratise artificial intelligence (AI) through education and software solutions. Headquartered in New York, Fusemachines has since opened branches in Canada, UK and the Dominican Republic to develop intelligent software solutions that have transformed brands and businesses around the world. One of its biggest operations is in Nepal,

Fusemachines employs 100 top Nepali software engineers who work on projects that use AI applications in fields ranging from telecommunications and banking to hospitals and governance. Unlike other back office companies that work on outsourced software development, Fusemachines is a school in itself, training engineers while coming up with product solutions. “We employ senior engineers and industry experts with PhDs along with upcoming engineers, who work together to solve client-specific problems though AI,” explains Susmana Shrestha who heads Fusemachines’ Nepal operation. “Such collaborative approach allows

young talent to continuously learn and grow.” Following Maskey’s vision, Fusemachines tries to make AI accessible to everyone through education, which is why it initially offered training fellowships and then, to meet the demand for engineers, launched AI Sikchya — a year-long, in-house training program. “With our own proprietary platform and content we have partnered with engineering colleges in Kathmandu to offer AI,” says Shrestha. “The program is a blend of online and on-site, the course material is not too academic, is industry focused and instructors are seasoned engineers up to date with new algorithms.”



INTELLIGENT APPLICATIONS: (left to right) Artificial Intelligence through OCR can make banking smoother, customise tourist itineraries for Visit Nepal Year 2020, identify patients at high risk from cancer, and make poultry farming more productive through Precision Livestock Farming.

Kathmandu Valley

thinking by recognising patterns in data, so that repetitive everyday work can be done by machines that learn as they go along.

Nepal missed the bus on natural resource processing, manufacturing and information technology. But experts say that training a critical mass of engineers in AI can allow the country's economy to leapfrog and become globally competitive.

Fusemachines Director of Academic Affairs Bülent Uyaniker, who was in Nepal recently, rejects the notion that Nepal is not ready for artificial intelligence applications. "It is happening already, it is inevitable. If there can be 8.5 million Facebook users in Nepal, then it has the special conditions for AI."

Proof of this is the increasing number of software companies in Nepal using local engineering talent to work on software solutions for customers in North America or Europe. However, most of the engineers and recent graduates need training in AI to keep up with customer requirements. America alone will need 200,000 data scientists in the next five years, and most of these will come from the UK, Finland, Canada, Singapore, China and India.

Which is why Fusemachines Nepal is also emphasising education. Says the head of its Nepal operations, Sumana Shrestha: "You cannot learn AI in a one-day bootcamp, it needs intelligent mathematics, but there is a huge demand versus supply gap for engineers proficient in machine learning or other AI components everywhere."

Coming to terms with AI

Artificial Intelligence: Ability of computer systems or machines to think and learn like humans, or the ability to perform tasks requiring human intelligence

Machine Learning: A subset of artificial intelligence that provides a system with the ability to automatically learn and improve from experience without being explicitly programmed, relying on patterns generated from data

Deep Thinking: Machine learning that is applied on a large set of data, also known as deep neural learning

Natural Language Processing:

Interaction between computers and human languages, deals with programming computers to process and analyse natural (human) language

Computer Vision: Enables computers to see, identify and process images in the same way that human vision does

Image Processing: Analysis and manipulation of a digitised image in order to improve its quality

Big Data: Extremely large data sets that when computed can reveal patterns, trends and associations.

Nepal established itself as a sought after destination in the past 20 years for outsourcing services such as software and app development, website design and big data management to overseas clients, mostly due to the country's inexpensive English-



speaking workforce.

This move from IT to AI will not just create jobs in Nepal, but also allow the country to increase efficiency and productivity in the workplace. General practitioners in rural hospitals will be able to make diagnoses faster so they can spend more time with patients, high-risk individuals can be identified with cancer screening, and targeted advertising and customised itineraries will lure potential tourists during Visit Nepal 2020.

Recently, a group of engineering students developed a model to help poultry entrepreneurs understand fowl behaviour and the state of their animals' health, helping them to raise the farm's business profile.

"With precision livestock farming we can generate patterns to help farmers recognise symptoms

before an outbreak of a disease by implementing AI components such as image processing and deep learning," explained engineering student Sajil Awale at Pulchok Engineering Campus. "This allows for timely intervention to prevent mass deaths and reduce losses."

Computer vision (which enables computers to see and process images as humans would) can also help identify rotten fruit swiftly, and prevent misuse of pesticides by identifying areas on the farm that require chemicals, and the amounts needed. AI can also estimate future harvests, allowing farmers time to find markets for produce.

Engineers at Fusemachines Nepal are working on Nepal's first optical character recognition (OCR) system so forms filled out with Nepali handwriting can be digitised

and translated into English. This will have huge scope in Nepal's banking, hospital and government sectors, where pen and paper continues to be the norm.

Sixit Bhatta, CEO of ride-sharing startup Tootle, says Nepal is ripe for AI applications: "Our efforts now should be on preparing for a world in which machines perform skills-oriented tasks and for humans to take on the roles that require creativity and empathy. But before that, the government should design policies that allow AI to grow, and not restrict it."

Sumana Shrestha at Fusemachines says that as long as salaries for clerical staff are low, there is less potential for AI to flourish. But she adds: "The curse of cheap labour means companies will prefer to employ people to do repetitive work. But sooner or later, AI will be here. Nepal needs to develop despite government. And the private sector needs to prepare itself for disruption." 🇳🇵



Join us on a visit to Fusemachines Nepal to speak to engineers engaged in developing AI applications, and also training Nepali engineers in artificial intelligence.

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artificially intelligent



FUSION ENERGY:

Fusemachines Nepal head Sumana Shrestha (centre) with engineer Rojesh Shikharkar and staff Sunij Shrestha at the Kamaladi office on Wednesday.

The company also has its own AI schools, open to professionals who want to grow their business or anyone interested. Fusemachines also offers a foundation course, open to high school graduates. A year-long, micro-degree program consisting of four major courses — including machine learning, deep thinking, natural language processing and computer vision — will be the next step.

"In school we were always presented with clean data sets to work on but that is rarely the case on the job. But this year-long training program gets people ready to take on real-life problems and provide AI solutions," says Rojesh Shikharkar,

engineer at Fusemachines Nepal and a post-grad at Pulchok Engineering Campus.

Apart from training, Fusemachines has given engineers who would otherwise have migrated to work in the US and Europe an opportunity to find meaningful work in Nepal.

Says Shrestha: "If you create opportunities here, people might actually stay, and once we have mass education in artificial intelligence, companies here will start adopting and see the value of AI products, ensuring more opportunities at home." 🇳🇵

Sonia Awale



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WHEAT
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VODKA

FIVE TIMES
5
DISTILLED
IMPORTED

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NO SUGAR SYRUP, GLYCERIN OR ADDITIVES ADDED

Bad Ass Nation

Threats to Nepal’s national insecurity cannot be underestimated in these perilous times. There are countries with spurious claims to Buddha’s birthplace or who want to purloin a desolate windswept mountain range in northwestern Nepal. And not a day goes by that a Nepali somewhere in the world doesn’t have to punch someone in the nose to prove that not all flags have to be rectangular.

The nation needs to be on high alert against expansionist forces which want to take over and overtake us. Nepal has been kicked around too often by our Bigger Brothers, and we will not take it lying down anymore — we will kowtow.

But seriously, if we are serious about being taken seriously we cannot pussyfoot around anymore — we must take the bull by the horns of a dilemma. How have other countries that have become pariahs done it? How can Nepal also become notorious and thumb our nose at land-grabbing neighbours?

The idea is to project ourselves as a Bad Ass nation and punch above our weight. Show that we, too, can be belligerent, expansionist and have territorial ambitions again. And we must also make it impossible for anyone to launch an invasion of our territory by keeping our highway arteries in such a state of disrepair that even enemy tanks would get bogged down.

Not that the Ass has been asked, but I have prepared some pointers for the Nepal Grovelment on our response to the occupation of Lipu Lekh-Lampiyadhura.

- 1 Nepal Army’s Cybernetic Warfare Unit to infiltrate Wikipedia to reclaim Darjeeling, Garhwal and Kumaon and Make Nepal Greater Again.
- 2 As a card-carrying member of the League of Failed States, Nepal to internationalise the Kalapani dispute by getting President Maduro to issue a strongly-worded statement.
- 3 Order a whole bunch of centrifuges to enrich plutonium to build up our nuclear deterrent with an arsenal of atom bums.
- 4 Warheads are pretty useless without a missile delivery system, so the Nepal Army is to redeploy its deadly leather cannons last used to defeat British India in 1814. Slogan: “Nalapani to Kalapani!”
- 5 Resume hostilities where we left off during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and occupy Lucknow.
- 6 The Nepal Communist Party to declare Nepal a ‘dynamite between two boulders’ and establish fraternal relations with Maoist comrades in China and India.
- 7 Boycott Hindi movies in cinemas — watch pirated ones on Bigflix.
- 8 Move Nepal Time 1 hour and 15 minutes ahead of Indian Standard Time.
- 9 The Nepal Army has experience occupying Tundikhel, and the PMO encroached on a whole chunk of real estate in Baluwatar. So, Nepal could easily Sikkimize Sikkim.
- 10 The Ministry of War Footing to rubber stamp every Indian map with the following: ‘The external boundaries of Nepal as depicted in this map are neither authentic nor correct.’



TPU HEEL CAP
*Heel Support
*Enhanced Durability

MESH UPPER
*Extra Breathability

RUBBER BASE
*Enhanced Durability
*High Flexibility
*Tight Grasp

EVA Sole
*Ultra Lightness
*High Performance

Caliber
SHOES
MADE IN NEPAL

GET SPORTY:
WEAR TRAINERS

Inside Valley

Durbarmarg, Capitol Building
Tel: 014244748, 9843833871, 9819133595
Koteshwor, Tel: 9841368259, 9866474767
Ason, Kamalakshi, Tel: 9851065706, 9808631557
Civil Mall, Sundhara, Tel: 9861584279
Basundhara, Tel: 9851193433
Kumaripati, Tel: 9843144204
New-Baneshwor, Tel: 9851019207

Chabahil Chowk, Tel: 9819009338
People's Plaza, Khichapokhari,
Tel: 9851199046, 9880315815
BG Mall, Gongabu, Tel: 9814145265
Eyeplex Mall, New Baneshwor Tel: 9860806194
Sitapaila, Tamrakar Complex,
Tel: 9810082278, 9841205410
Old Baneshwor, Bhimsengola. Tel: 9851066632

Outside Valley

Jhapa, Damak, Mishal Bazaar, Namuna Marga
Tel: 9852670837, 9815099351
Bahrabise-4, Sindhupalchowk, Tel: 9851047099
Singh Complex, Butwal, Tel: 9857025137
Pokhara, Chipledhunga, Tel: 9856086634
Birgunj, Adarshnagar, Tel: 9855021294
Dang, Ghorahi, Tel: 9813338636
Chitwan, Narayanghat, The Town Center, Lion's Chowk Tel: 9855052851
Biratnagar, Traffic Chowk, Tel: 9824311855
Dharan, College Road, Tel: 9824311855

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