

DECLARING AN EMERGENCY

The Sagarmatha National Sambaad held this week was a dress rehearsal for a bigger international event slated for April, Nepal’s own version of Davos. Fittingly, the theme for the national gathering was ‘Climate Change, Mountains and the Future of Humanity’.

The title may be grandiose, but that is because at the rate of warming we are currently seeing, mass extinction is an imminent threat. Thresholds agreed on in Paris in 2015, and forecasts in last year’s Himalayan Assessment brought out by ICIMOD may have to be revised because the rate of polar ice melt predicted for 2050 is already beginning to happen.



GOPEN RAI / NT ARCHIVE

The concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere has risen from 300 parts per million (ppm) at the start of the Industrial Revolution in 1820 to 415ppm today. Cascade effects like the loss of albedo as Arctic ice melts, the undermining of the West Antarctic Ice Shelf by warm ocean currents, and methane released from melting permafrost in Siberia means global warming is not linear.

Greenhouse gas emissions from the mass burning of fossil fuels in the past 200 years have warmed the atmosphere by 1.3°C. Another 1.5°C increase will happen in the next 30 years. And due to a phenomenon called ‘elevation-dependent warming’, during that time the Himalayan mountains are expected to warm 0.3°C more than the rest of the world.

Himalayan ice will be nearly gone during this century. The impact of this on biodiversity, weather, stability of slopes, society, economics and ultimately politics, will be catastrophic. There is just not enough time to adapt.

Which is why it is important for Nepal to take the lead in drawing global attention to the unique crisis faced by the Himalaya, for this does not just affect us but 1.2 billion people living downstream from Asia’s water towers.

While global CO₂ cutbacks are put on fast-forward, Nepal and other countries in the region need to quickly come up with ways to reduce risk, and to manage the severe

disruptions in natural systems that are sure to gain pace in the coming decades.

Even without the climate crisis, Nepal faces enormous environmental challenges. Our rivers are ravaged by sand mining, our mountains are mauled by excavators, and infrastructure projects are undercutting gains in forestry. Air pollution in urban areas exceeds accepted international standards all year round, waste management is a mess, and plastic litters the countryside.

The climate emergency is happening in parallel with an unprecedented transformation in all spheres of life. Nepal used to be known as a predominantly rural, agriculture-based society. Not anymore.

Agriculture now comprises only 27% of the economy. More than 60% of Nepal’s population lives in urban corridors.

But 70% of Nepalis still rely on biomass for cooking and heating, which gives us the advantage of being poor – there is still time to leapfrog directly to being a green economy, bypassing fossil-fuel energy.

Household biogas plants have reduced the pressure on Nepal’s forests, but only 3% of the population use these. There is vast untapped potential to extend this, as well as utility-scale biogas plants. Making electricity accessible and affordable will enable more families to switch to electricity for cooking and space heating, reducing our per capita carbon footprint by bringing down LPG imports, and improving indoor air quality at the same time.

It is no use anymore placing the blame on historical emissions by industrialised countries and rising fossil-fuel use in neighbouring India and China for melting our mountains, if we do not move towards clean energy ourselves. Cutting air pollution will not just improve our health, but also reduce the soot deposition that accelerates glacial melting.

There is a tendency in Nepal to blame everything on the climate crisis. Food deficit in the Karnali, outmigration, and floods in the Tarai all pre-date the climate crisis. If we address the structural issues, we as a nation automatically become climate resilient.

Nepalis emit only 0.2 tons per capita per year of fossil carbon (Qatar emits 40) and so whatever we do will not make a big dent. Nepal needs to switch to a green economy and renewable energy not to save the planet, but to save our economy from the mounting burden of petroleum imports.

We need a government with a single-minded focus on creating jobs through renewable energy projects and tourism development. In the final analysis, everything rests on improving governance, and setting far-sighted goals that ensure we are prepared for this global emergency.

There is still time for Nepal to leapfrog directly to being a green economy, bypassing fossil energy. But for that we need vision.



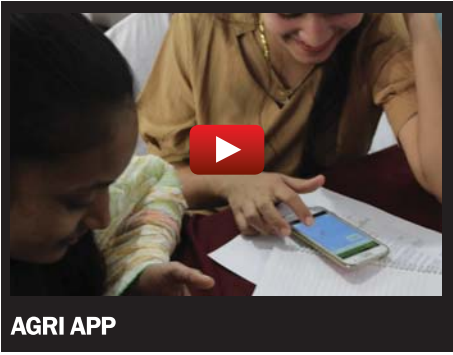
10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

An editorial 10 years ago this week discussed how people in rural Nepal were still dying of easily preventable diseases because of the lack of doctors, hospitals and affordable drugs. Sadly, that editorial could have been written today. Our health system continues to fail us when it comes to simple ailments, so it makes sense that the Covid-19 scare should have caught it off-guard. Excerpt from Nepali Times #489 of 12-18 February 2010:

This is still a land where people die of simple, preventable causes. A lung or stomach infection, easily treated by modern medicine, can be fatal in rural Nepal. We know what to do to improve public health. Apart from more work on awareness, the country needs more hospitals and affordable drugs. Half the doctors in Nepal practice inside the country’s Ring Road, so more needs to be done to retain them in district hospitals by giving them incentives to do so. Diseases like TB, malaria, encephalitis, typhoid, diarrhoea and pneumonia can be treated with drugs. But they are not just medical problems. The root causes of sickness in Nepal are societal discrimination, economic disparity and political neglect. These cannot be treated with medicine.



ONLINE PACKAGES



AGRI APP

43-year-old Rajan Bajracharya left his job as GIS specialist to develop GeoKrishi, an agriculture information web and mobile-based app that provides crucial contextual and location-specific information for farmers. The project recently won the US Data-Driven Farming Award and got a cash prize of \$100,000. Story: [page 4](#)



TRANSPLANTING LOVE

On Valentine’s Day, watch this remarkable tale of true love. When a man’s kidneys fail, he gets one from his wife, while if a woman’s kidneys fail, she is unlikely to get one from her husband. But Bhoj Bahadur Ghale did not think twice before giving one of his kidneys to his wife, Sabitri. V-day coverage: [page 8-9](#).

DURGANATH SHARMA

A beautiful tribute to a man whose contribution to Nepali journalism will leave an indelible mark on the annals of Nepali history (‘Durganath Sharma, 72’, Kunda Dixit, page 7). Some loved him, and some disliked him, but he was there with his distinct voice telling us what was going on in the country and around the world. Durga Dai was a gentle soul who will be dearly missed.

Nirmal Niroula

■ A befitting obituary of a legendary fellow. **Binod Kumar Bhattarai**

CORONAVIRUS AND WILDLIFE

Hopes for curbing global wildlife trade, a timely story by *Nepali Times* (‘Coronavirus outbreak may curb wildlife trafficking’, Sonia Awale, page 5).

Ying Chan

■ Perhaps the window of opportunity to push for a permanent ban on wildlife trade? **Rastra Raj Bhandari**

■ At least some positive side effect of the coronavirus outbreak. **Giulia Rossi**

PSEUDO-COMMUNISM

Nepal’s ruling elite’s use communism as a flag of convenience to broker a majority vote base, all the while maintaining the illusion of a ‘fledgling democracy’ (‘Read and let read’, Anil Chitrakar, #996). In fact, Nepal is listed in the International Democracy Index as a ‘Hybrid Regime’. It is in fact an Oligarchy.

Alex Ferguson

BIMALA TUMKHEWA

I was very moved by your article (‘Bimala Tumkhewa: Putting kinema on the map of Nepal’, Muna Gurung, #996). It amazes me how silly Nepali actors who do nothing but imitate Bollywood get more attention than a story like yours.

Evil Tom

MIGRANT WELFARE

I appreciate the added efforts that are being dedicated towards supporting migrant workers from Nepal (‘Zero-sum game in zero-cost migration’, Upasana Khadka, #996). It is no secret that the treatment and overall well-being of migrant workers around the world needs improving. This debate is a great step forward.

Improve Rights

■ Nepal Government is not doing enough to protect the poor Nepali migrants workers who bring financial benefits to the country.

Naran Klyphree

WHAT'S TRENDING



Arko, the Nepali minstrel from Bengal

by *Sewa Bhattarai*
Meet Arko Mukhaerjee, a Bengali musician who grew up in Darjeeling, India and travels the world performing Nepali folk songs. He cherishes memories of tongba and sukuti sessions with Nepali-speaking friends where he learned to sing *Resham Firiri*.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



The Great Trans-Himalayan Bird Migration

by *Sewa Bhattarai*
Of the 880 species of birds in Nepal, 150 are migratory, some of these travelling here from as far away as Siberia. But their numbers have declined. What do preliminary findings of the on-going bird census say? Go to our website for the full story.

Most popular on Twitter

Coronavirus outbreak may curb wildlife trafficking

by *Sonia Awale*
China is the world’s biggest market for the illegal wildlife trade, and the blanket ban Beijing announced this week following the coronavirus outbreak may save some endangered species from extinction. This piece generated a lot of comment, and you can join the debate online. Story on [page 12-13](#).

Most commented

Bimala Tumkhewa: Putting kinema on the map of Nepal

by *Muna Gurung*
Tehrathum’s Bimala Tumkhewa is known for her hard-hitting journalistic articles, but is at heart a poet. Her writing is loud, fearlessly straight-forward and kind. She is honest and unafraid to question not only others but her own deeply held beliefs. Don’t miss this heart-to-heart conversation on [nepalitimes.com](#)

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Raju Dhakai is the only physical medicine & #rehabilitation doctor in #Nepal. His days are packed with back-to-back consultations but he does this with ease as he moves about in his wheelchair greeting patients at @SpinalNepal. Read full report @SoniaAwale

manohar budhathoki @drmanohar04
Timely and relevant article on the challenges of road traffic accidents and rehab medicine in #Nepal. ‘The government will ultimately have to take responsibility for people’s health’. Was great to meet Dr Raju Dhakai recently.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#China is world’s biggest market for the illegal trade in #wildlife for food and traditional medicine, and its blanket ban announced this week following #WuhanCoronavirus outbreak may actually save some #endangered species from extinction. #Nepal #Pangolins

Ranjana Bhattarai @RanjanaBhattar4
So coronavirus has done some good to animals

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
This month’s #LightroomConversation features Bimala Tumkhewa. Popular for her hard-hitting journalistic articles where she writes about women’s rights, #literature, politics and society, Bimala is at heart a poet. @munagr #nepali #poetry

Suvin Lohorung @SuvinLohorung
Very interesting! Keep writing #Bimala jee.



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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER



LOVE IS EVERYWHERE

Happy Valentine's Day.



TURKISH AIRLINES

ARTVIN - TURKEY

Building an information bridge for Nepal's farmers

Rajan Bajracharya quit a secure job to help farmers with relevant data through a mobile-based app

In this space over the past three months, we have profiled successful entrepreneurs from various arenas of business. All have in common that they are determined to make their ideas work, are willing to take risks and learn from mistakes, and have a passion for what they do.



MADE IN NEPAL
Naresh Newar

The goal for these people is never simply to make money but rather to create something new. Rajan Bajracharya is another such entrepreneur. He left the comfort of a secure job as a geographic informational systems (GIS) specialist to found his business three years ago, ignoring the many who told him the move was foolish.

Bajracharya didn't take the leap into the unknown on his own. He convinced his buddies in information technology to do the same, to leave their full-time jobs to start a company with him.

"What really excited me, despite a lot of fears of financial risks, was to use my freedom to create innovative products without any limitations and inhibitions," says 43-year old Rajan, who led his team to work on a world-class agriculture information web and mobile-based app called GeoKrishi to provide crucial contextual and location-specific information for farmers during each stage of the agricultural cycle, from planting to harvesting.

The project has received international recognition. It was awarded the U.S. Data-Driven Farming Award in a global competition with entries from over 60 countries and got a cash prize of \$100,000, which Bajracharya has ploughed back into his company for use in agricultural research and development.

Rajan's team translates scientific data and research into inputs that



NARESH NEWAR

ideally can reach real beneficiaries of that information. Although the share of agriculture in Nepal's economy has fallen to 30%, some 65% of the population is still dependent on farming. Much of this is subsistence agriculture, which is rainfall-dependent and low in productivity.

Nepal must aim for self-sufficiency and surplus in some agricultural products, but for that farmers need data. There is no scarcity of research on how mechanisation or changing crop rotations and cropping patterns could help, but that information much reach where it is needed most.

"If we do not work on information delivery mechanisms, even the best information will be of little use," explains Bajracharya.

"The information must reach real end users and be packaged in a way that they can understand."

In trying to bridge this information gap, Bajracharya and his team found that creating a mobile app was not enough, as many farmers did not have access to the internet or to smart phones. So they established call centres in Salyan and Surkhet, where farmers can call in and ask for advice from experts directly. In more remote areas, the company seeks to connect farmers to local "heroes", highly successful farmers who are already well-respected locally and whose advice counts for something.

GeoKrishi also provides farmers with low-cost equipment for measuring soil fertility and advisory services on what unfamiliar crops to grow at what time. This is

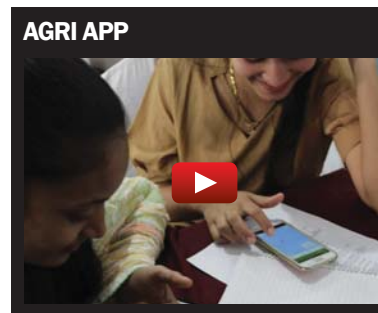
important given disruptions to seasonal farming practices because of the climate crisis.

Because farming doesn't offer quick returns, non-farmers are often reluctant to invest in agriculture. However, Nepal has tremendous potential to export niche products. The country's geographical diversity and altitude variation give

it subtropical and tropical regions, mountains as well as river basins, and different micro-climates across the country during the same season. This is nature's gift to Nepal.

"There are no limits to innovations in this sector. And it is time for tech companies to not just focus on products but on creating platforms that reach out to the most neglected communities, like the farmers," says Bajracharya. These platforms are important to create functional connections between farmers, agro-based vets, traders, marketers, scientific communities and consumers.

For now Bajracharya is not making a huge profit, but as a social entrepreneur he believes the company's value is not just based on cash returns but on its ability to help millions of struggling Nepali farmers to benefit from their hard work. 🇳🇵



Listen to Rajan Bajracharya explain the reasons for Nepal's immense potential for agriculture diversity, and why he quit a regular job to start a company that blends information with agriculture to allow farmers to solve problems and germinate new ideas.

nepalitimes.com



GEOKRISHI

Information is power

"Information gives us the power to make good decisions and build new confidence, and GeoKrishi has really made a difference to many farmers like me," says Tilak Sharma, a 33-year-old farmer from Kapurkot Rural Municipality of Salyan district.

Through the GeoKrishi app, Sharma learned about safer production practices that use less pesticide, reducing farm expenses, and proper scheduling of different stages of the agricultural production cycle. This information has helped him to increase the

productivity of his farm by over 20%. Sharma shared his new learnings with 40 fellow subsistence farmers in his region and hopes that the productivity of their farms will increase as well.

Sharma now also sends feedback to the GeoKrishi team to help it create more locally-relevant content. The collating of farmers' knowledge in this two-way information exchange helps GeoKrishi to customize information to the local context, thereby better serving farmers in each region.

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Turkish to Malabo

Turkish Airlines started its operations to Malabo on 7 February, making the capital of Equatorial Guinea its 319th destination. As the 60th destination of the global carrier



on the continent of Africa, flights to Malabo will be operated on an Istanbul – Port Harcourt – Malabo – Istanbul route with Boeing 737-900 aircraft.

Etihad

Etihad Airways has announced a partnership with Norwegian technology developer Braathens IT, to develop TravelPass, a subscription-based travel



solution, that allows customers to purchase a pass for a set number of trips or a particular travel period instead of purchasing flights one by one.

Deltin Casino

The Deltin Group, one of India's largest gaming and hospitality companies and one that is publicly listed, recently launched its very first International Venture Deltin Casino at The Marriot Hotel in Naxal, Kathmandu on 8 February.



Ncell & Microsoft

Ncell collaborated with Microsoft Corporation to provide Microsoft's productivity



and communications solutions, cloud resources and online meeting tools to businesses. Under this partnership, Ncell will provide three products—Office 365 (O365), Azure and Teams to Nepali businesses.

Oxemberg

Oxemberg launched its flagship store at Civil Mall on 13 February. It is a one-stop shop for urban men looking for formal, casual and party wear. Outlets are at Kumari Pati, Labim Mall and Biratnagar.

prabhu BANK

Durganath Sharma, pioneer tv broadcaster

The careers of many journalists of Durganath Sharma's generation spanned the technology transition. We started out as reporters in the age of cold type and letter press, and then graduated to Linotype and seeing our stories laid out with photographs in zinc blocks.

Then in the 1980s came photocomposition and offset printing, and after that we got rid of film and went straight from computer to plate. Now there are digital presses. We reporters filed our stories by postal mail, dictated them on landline phones, used telex machines, fax, dialup, and finally email and internet apps.

Durganath Sharma, who died at age 72 on Wednesday in Kathmandu, was a celebrated and celebrity television journalist. But he started out in *Gorkhapatra* in the age of the letter press, and his career advanced with the advancement of printing and broadcast technology.

From the *Radio Nepal* broadcast studio in Singha Darbar, his “Yo *Radio Nepal* ho. Aba Durganath Sharma bata samachar sunnuhos” was the most recognised voice across Nepal as he read the morning news on the short and medium wave bands.

Later, when Nepal Television started relatively late in the 1984, Sharma was the chief news anchor and set the standard for camera presence and audience connection.



The joke then was that he should say “Aba Durganath Sharma bata samachar hernuhos”.

Durganath Sharma travelled across Nepal, often accompanying King Birendra on his annual winter inspections of Development Zones, visiting remote areas of the country by rotation. Because of his frequent reportage from the field, close friends had given Durganath the moniker ‘Durgam Kshestra’ (Remote Area), a play on his name.

In radio too, Sharma presided over rapidly changing technology, from analog shortwave to AM (amplitude modulation), and witnessed the spread of FM (frequency modulation) and finally satellite radio and digital broadcasting. He worked through the evolution of television technology from the age of video parlours to terrestrial broadcasting, and on to cable to direct to home dish. From cameras that were so large and heavy they had to rest on burly shoulders, to the Sony Handycam of the 1990s, and finally mobile phones that could take videos and edit.

Durganath Sharma was the screen persona telling Nepal what was happening around the world. This was the age of Panchayat, so

domestic news had to be taken with a pinch of salt. The democrat in Durganath Sharma valued the freedom of press, but while cynical in private about censorship, he was not an activist and did not question it. Later, as the Panchayat gave way to democracy, he used his reach on Nepal Television to start the *Biswa Ghatana* (World Events) program, a video news aggregator that catapulted him to even greater stardom.

In the age before Twitter provided instantaneous notifications about goings-on at home and abroad, *Biswa Ghatana* became a window on the world for a whole generation of Nepalis. As anchor, Durganath Sharma did not just list the news line-up but also explained the background and context that drove events like the Israel-Palestine conflict, Chernobyl, the Security Council debates and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In later years Sharma taught media studies and penned several handbooks for journalists. He had a bypass surgery 15 years ago, but continued to teach and write columns in Kathmandu newspapers. He died of cardiac complications on 4 February, and with him we lose a media practitioner with institutional memory of Nepal's political transitions and the advance of mass media technology over the past decades. 🇳🇵

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“लोभ, लालच र प्रलोभनमा नपरौ अबः
लैङ्गिक हिंसा विरुद्ध लागौ सब ।”

“समन्वय, सहकार्य र साझेदारी सरकारः
लैङ्गिक हिंसाको अन्त्य मानवअधिकार ।”

“सीप, सृजना र रोजगारी सहित अघि बढौः
लैङ्गिक हिंसा र दुर्व्यवहार हामी नसहौ ।”

The Climate-Smart Great Himalayan Trek

It has been eight years since the hikers and a dog walked across Nepal for tourism and highlight the climate crisis

A broad smile lit his bearded face as Dawa Steven Sherpa strode towards us down the mountain path. The afternoon sun glinted off grey stone walls and wheeling crows croaked overhead on his approach, a dark coloured dog trotting cheerfully at his heels.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

Behind Dawa, Apa Sherpa grinned broadly, a diminutive figure brimming with taut energy, followed by Samir, the tall, shy photographer hung with cameras, and an entourage of assorted small children and curious hangers-on. After a month walking the Great Himalaya Trail the team were bronzed and hardened, their leg muscles solid under the dusty grime, and shoulders rippling beneath sweaty tee-shirts and big packs.

"Great to see you guys. We are almost halfway!" called Dawa Steven optimistically, hugging his girlfriend who had travelled with us to Gorkha from Kathmandu that morning. "The dog has been with us since Thame!" After our early start, we were happy to sit with the party exchanging news over cups of milky tea in a village shop, prior to the official municipal welcome felicitations within the lofty precincts of the Gorkha palace.

The Great Himalaya Trail Climate Smart Celebrity Trek was the brainchild of Prashant Singh, traversing the 1,700km length of the Nepal Himalaya through 22 districts from Ghunsa in the shadow of Mt Kangchenjunga in the east to Darchula in Humla on Nepal's far western border. Its high-profile purpose was to draw attention to the effects of climate change on mountain ecosystems, and spread the word to the local communities through which they passed.

The historic town of Gorkha was a convenient meeting point, although closer to one third the total length. Prashant and I had brought a bus-load of Kathmandu-based media to further publicise the initiative. And to check how they were getting on in those days before widespread cell coverage connected the hills.

Apa, the first 'Super Sherpa' to summit Everest 21 times, came from his Utah home for the awareness-raising event, and Dawa Steven took a break from mountaineering and climate-ambassador advocacy activities. Prashant's Himalayan Climate Initiative was just newly formed in 2012, and keen to



LISA CHOEGYAL



KUNDA DIXIT

make its mark on the government, local NGOs and foreign donors concerned with environmental issues whom he had persuaded to fund this novel expedition.

The effort was lauded by the President and Prime Minister, and several intrepid ambassadors and Kathmandu development workers accompanied sections of their hike. Messages of goodwill and "god speed" were received from international supporters such as Al Gore, Reinhold Messner and Joanna Lumley. At a roadhead in Sindhupalchok, Apa was presented with a certificate from the boss of the Guinness Book of Records in a

makeshift ceremony.

Films and photos taken along the route are still being used today, showcasing some of the most rugged and breath-taking mountain landscapes on earth, and passing beneath eight of the world's highest peaks. Both VNY2020 and Nepal Tourism Board are dedicated to promoting the Great Himalaya Trail as a long distance multi-day walk, conveniently divided into bite sized sections to encourage repeat visits. Tara Airlines has painted the GHT logo onto its STOL aircraft and boarding passes.

Himalayan Climate Initiative has since become one of Nepal's

DOGGED TREKKERS: Members of the Climate Celebrity Trek team at the Gorkha Palace in 2012 with Setuk the dog who joined the expedition in Thame and never left (*above*).

A Tara Air Viking aircraft with The Great Himalayan Trail livery at Lukla Airport.

most innovative organisations, dedicated to finding sustainable solutions and practical business responses to the rapidly escalating environmental concerns that are engulfing Nepal. Recycling plastic bottles, producing re-useable shopping bags and collecting rainwater are just some of the ideas they have turned into thriving social enterprises. Based in an expansive Budhanilkantha site, I recently listened to exciting experiments from college kids that included vertical vegetable farming, natural water purification, plastic waste for road building, and reuse of household grey water.

The celebrity trek was cleverly created as part of the overall Great Himalayan Trail Development Programme, a government project supported by the British and Dutch, and designed by a TRC team of Nepali consultants of which I was team leader. Our objective was to spread tourism benefits and stimulate local livelihoods by promoting trekking beyond Sagarmatha, Langtang and Annapurna. In 2010 an estimated 95% of all trekkers to

Nepal were concentrated in those popular protected areas with only 6,000 tourists venturing further afield. Today, that figure has grown to nearly 30,000, and more when Nepali trekkers are included.

I certainly did not conceive this 'iconic and globally significant new tourism product' for Nepal, but I was the first to weave it into government plans -- the National Ecotourism Strategy and Marketing Plan first featured the Great Himalaya Trail in 2001, a long time ago.

Two people had stumbled upon the GHT concept concurrently from their different perspectives -- marketing and rural development. Jamie McGuinness, a Kiwi climber and trek organiser, one evening in 2000 on my pink sofaed sitting room, explained his inspired idea to film a multi-country trek along the length of the entire Hindu Kush Himalaya. Shortly afterwards, Malcolm 'Mac' Odell of The Mountain Institute, over lunch in his Baluwatar home, shared his brainwave to harness tourism to bring benefits and business opportunities for remote communities between and beyond the three established trek areas.

We were following in the footsteps of early pioneers. Mountaineer Peter Hillary led the first high altitude traverse in 1980, Americans Arlene Blum and Hugh Swift first walked the full length from East Bhutan through Nepal and India in 1982, and the British Crane brothers first ran the Nepal Himalaya in 1983. Many adventurers have ensued including commercial trips, boosted by Robin Boustead's 2011 book, several websites and a series of published maps.

We modified the route to maximise benefits for mountain residents, using a cobweb of lower trails winding east to west through the middle hills, ensuring the widest appeal for hikers and even bikers. Like the historic Silk Road, the precise path moves with the time of year and aspiration of the trekker.

Waving goodbye in the sunshine outside the glowing brick walls of the Gorkha palace, Apa, Dawa Steven, Samir and their team still had a very long way to walk. Speeding along the trails as their fitness levels increased, and despite daily stoppages to explain their mission to ever-growing crowds of interested villagers and local authorities as word spread ahead of them, they completed the traverse in just 99 days.

And when they returned to Kathmandu, tired and triumphant, Setuk the dog 'with yellow eyebrows' was still with them. 🐕

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Here comes the sun. There is a big high-pressure system holding sway over northern India that is deflecting a westerly front and sending it off north to the Pamirs. This means we are going into a largely dry weekend, with temperature climbing to more seasonal levels after that cold spell. Maximum will rise to 21 Celsius on Friday and the minima will hover in the 8-9 degree range. No rain on the horizon till at least the middle of next week.

| FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|
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Erna Anema is a Dutch artist who has painted landscapes, worked with copper, and created digitally. A professor of art at Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, she credits Nepal with having inspired the artist in her. She is currently in Kathmandu with her students for a collaborative project with the Kathmandu University School of Arts. An collaborative exhibit of her work titled *Earthquake Blue: 53 seconds, 5 years later*, is on display at Siddhartha Art Gallery in Baber Mahal Revisited 14-17 February. The students’ work will be exhibited under the same title once it is complete in March. Anema spoke with *Nepali Times* this week about the exhibit, the collaboration with local artists, and her love for Nepal.

Nepali Times: What role has Nepal played in your development as an artist?

Erna Anema: I have always loved Nepal and I have been coming to this country for over 40 years now. I saw a documentary about Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary’s ascent of Mt Everest as a child and decided then that I would grow up and travel to Nepal. I trekked around Nepal and started off as a mountain landscape painter. Nepal really inspires the artist in me and I have returned time and again. I even had a short stint of teaching arts at Nepal Arts Academy and managed to exhibit my first project at Siddhartha Art Gallery in 1996. The culture, heritage and art work is so versatile here that the more you explore, the more there is to learn.

The 53 seconds, 5 years later exhibition depicts the 2015 earthquake. How did the idea come about?

This is a collaborative project with my peers Ellert Haitjema and Renate

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VISA

Schwarz. In 2016, the year after the earthquake, I travelled to Helambu for a trek. Walking around I could sense the pain the residents must have suffered. Window frames were laid together with window frames, pillars with pillars. There was a certain order in the disorder, even in villages where there was only one house left. There were several storylines in the many hundreds of photos I took. The idea was initially unclear, but with the help of Renate, we settled on ‘earthquake blue’ and it went on display in Amsterdam in 2018.

Why *Earthquake Blue*?

When I was in Helambu, everywhere I walked I saw the blue colour, either the blue plastic covers wrapped to create a makeshift home or to cover the debris, or the blue sky. In the hundreds of pictures I took, blue was the most prominent colour. The *Earthquake Blue* exhibition started in Amsterdam and this is the first time it will be on display in Kathmandu.

How different will the display be in Kathmandu?

While *Earthquake Blue* in Amsterdam was a solo exhibition, *53 seconds, 5 years later* is a collaboration between 20 students each from Reitveld Academy and Kathmandu University of School of Arts. The Nepali and Dutch students will work in pairs with a starting point of where the Nepali students were during those 53 seconds of earthquake. The project is a month long and I am looking forward to seeing the results. Their work will be on display by March 6.

Also, Renate and Ellert’s work will be exhibited for the same duration as my work, and they present visual stories of the contradictions we encountered, the destruction and at the same time the indestructible life.

What has been your experience of collaborating with Kathmandu University?

This isn’t the first time we have collaborated with Kathmandu University, but this year’s project is really special. Working with the department head Sujana Chitrakar has been an honour. The ideas that have stemmed from there are amazing and have helped both groups of art students to learn from one another. I hope we can have more collaboration in the future too.

Visa Domestic Card* प्रयोग गरी Cashback पाउने अवसरलाई नजान्नुहोस् । अब हरेक सामान खरिदको बिल भुक्तानी गर्दा Visa Domestic Card* प्रयोग गरी 15% सम्म Cash आफ्नो खातामा फिर्ता पाउनुहोस् ।

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Alisha Sijapati

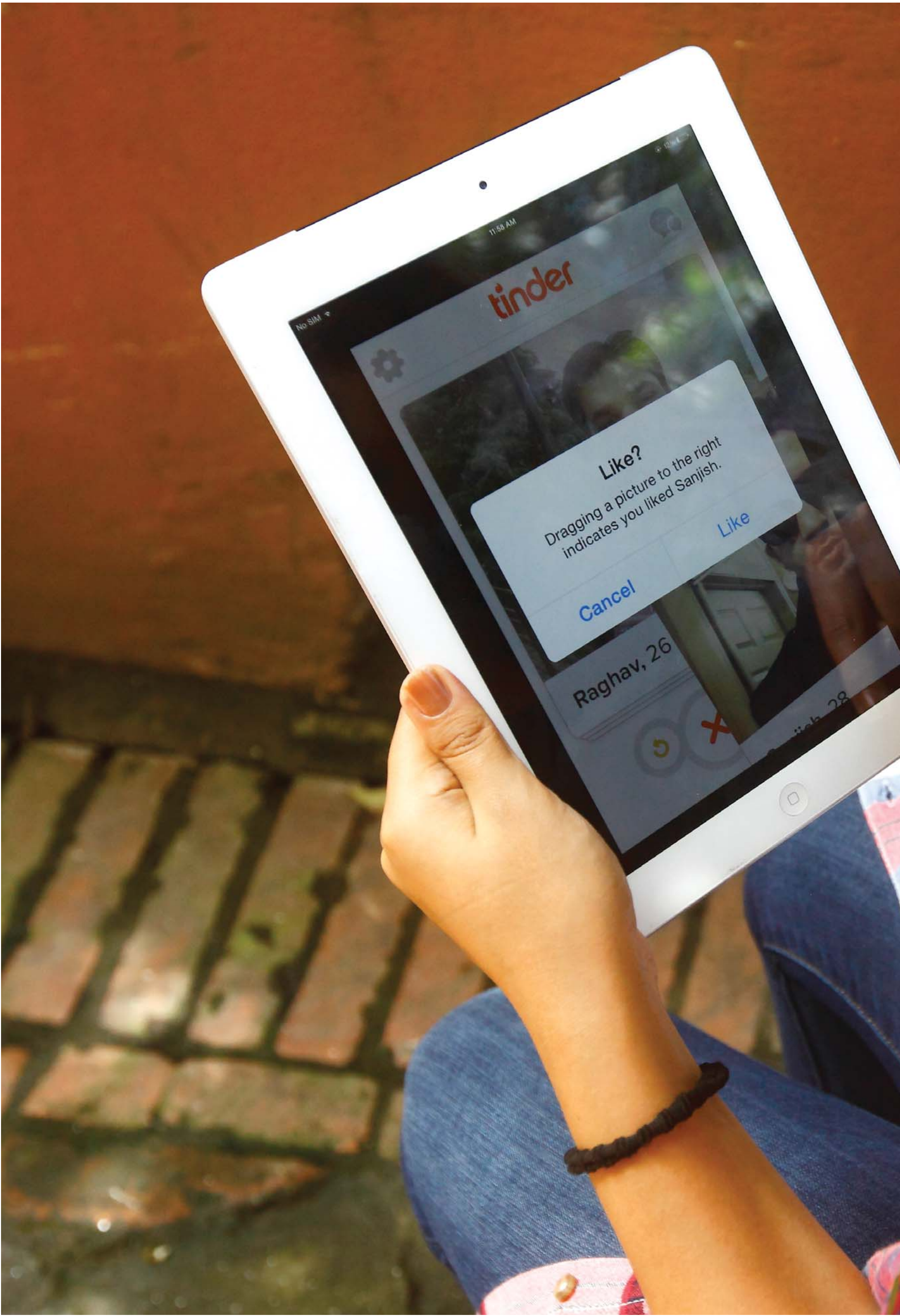
Single and no one in your offline life to ask on a V-Day date? There are plenty of ways to find someone in cyberspace. We have to admit that a lot of these methods are more suited for millennials. Many in their 20s and 30s have found their matches through social media – through Facebook, and now increasingly through applications downloaded to their phones. Dating apps are not just about finding ideal matches. They can help singles to find love, but also new friends, professional connections, or casual partners. Try these out:



Swipe right

Tinder has earned a reputation in some parts for facilitating casual sex -- though life has a mind of its own and married couples that met here do exist. This dating app invented the format of swiping right on the profile of someone you are interested in. Either because of social stigma or because many women are looking for a level of commitment, Tinder in Nepal is populated largely by men. Because of this, it took 27-year-old Anuj three months on the app before he found a date in December. “We were together for an hour or two in a nice restaurant,” says Anuj, “We talked about everything under the sun, and it was a feel-good moment, but that’s about it.” Neither asked for a second date.

Anuj is now back to swiping left and right to hatch himself a date for Valentine’s Day. “I am not ready for commitment,” he says, “But maybe a casual date would be a good time-pass.”



Make the first move

Bumble is new to Nepal, and set up similarly to Tinder, but here only women can initiate conversations. This encourages them to break out of gendered expectations to make the first move, and it has been found in many places that women feel safer online when the ball is in their court. Women, if you want a date this Valentine’s Day, or any day, just be bold.



Cut to the chase

Coffee Meets Bagel seeks to avoid small talk and push users into something deeper. “When were you last excited?” the app asks, “What are you passionate about? What did you have for breakfast?” Such pre-questions may lead to a person have more interesting dates. Started in 2012, the app is new to Nepal but many users find it works for them.



Choose what you'd like

Grindr is dedicated to lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people, and is popular among those who so identify. It has more explicit questions for you about your preferences than do the other apps. Grindr has had some damaging news coverage internationally of late, but men in particular in Nepal have found matches here.



Must love dogs

Not many in Nepal know yet about Dig, the dog person’s dating app. But Hollywood has shown us that people who love dogs will love each other. Dig helps you find a suitable match not just for yourself but for your pooch as well. Available on both iOS and Android, Dig lets doggie and you go on a double date and discover puppy love.





GOPEN RAIN/TARCHIVE

The new age of Romance

Some ways to find yourself a date in cyberspace



BIJAYABAR PRADHAN

Dating in no time

Abha Dhital (*left*) is co-founder of the greeting-card company Little Things and organiser of speed-dating events in Kathmandu. At these fast-paced events, 20 women and 20 men each have five minutes to interact with each other one on one. Dhital spoke with *Nepali Times* recently about organising Speed Date 3.0 for this Friday.

***Nepali Times:* When did you begin the speed-dating program?**

Abha Dhital: Feb 14, 2018. We wanted to host an event. Our company has a lot of love-themed products and we wanted to do something for singles.

This is going to be your third speed-dating event. How does your upcoming event compare to the previous two?

Honestly, we were planning not to do it since many other companies have hopped on the bandwagon. But since September we have been getting many queries about the 'next speed date', so we decided to continue.

We wanted also to do queer speed dating, but we didn't want to overstep and do it ourselves. We have reached out to our queer friends and as soon as they agree to co-host, we'll organise one.

Who is eligible to participate?

If you go through our registration form you'll see that it's very elaborate. People need to be single and 25 or older, but they also need to understand the concept of consent and be able to handle rejection. The form we designed will make clear that we're looking for quality participants.

Do you know of any past participants becoming a couple?

There are three pairs who have found love through our event and it makes us happy.

Any tips for the participants?

Be confident but also be cool and respect your counterparts.

(Basecamp, Jhamsikhel, Friday 14 February, 6 pm.)

EVENTS



Figure Skating

Be a part of Visit Nepal Year 2020. Attend the pre-launch of an international figure skating event and a friendly ice hockey match at 4790 meters.
14 February, Gokyo Lake

Stills from Films

Photojournalist Bikas Rauniar’s cinema-related photo collection from Nepal, India, UK and USA- spanning 30 years- is on display at the Nepal International Film festival.
13-17 February, Nepal Tourism Board courtyard, Bhrikuti Mandap

Word Warriors

Word Warriors live presents Maya Khatra Cheese Ho. Listen to spoken word poets perform their hearts out this Valentine’s Day. Featuring a mix of Nepali and English Poems, and an open mic session.
14 February, 4pm-6:30pm, Nepal Communitere, Pulchowk (01) 5536974



Playback Theatre

Katha Ghera presents a special playback theatre performance to celebrate all kinds of love. Be a part of an evening of listening, watching, and sharing your love story.
14 February, 4:30pm-6pm, Kausi Theatre, Teku, 9861315317

Chatpate&Chill

Celebrate romance beyond the binary and opposite with the Queer Youth Group. Chatpate on the house.
14 February, 2pm-5pm, Body and Data, Cholincha, Bhaktapur, 9808580398



Chocolate Workshop

Experience the journey of getting creative with your hands and learn how to concoct fresh, rich items with chocolate.
15 February, 1pm-5pm, Tickets: Rs1000. Hotel Nana Thamel (01) 4700251

Art and music Mela

Spend the day with art and artists and discover the real story of art in Kathmandu. Didgeridoo workshop , art workshop, art display , live music and a lot more.
15 February, 11am-11pm, Farmer Yeti’s, Thamel, 9869818812



Love ‘a’ Fair

Celebrate Valentine’s day with your loved ones at the Valentine’s Day Themed Art Fair. Tarot reading, Food stalls, music and more.
14 February, 12pm-8pm, Gallery of Creatives, Thamel, 9849415642

Flea Market

Shop for a cause. Save money and promote sustainability. All proceeds go to Rangjung Yeshe Shenpen Education projects in Nepal.
15 February, 9am-1pm, Utpala Cafe, Boudha, 9801978106

Aitabāré

Shop for sustainable ‘Made in Nepal’ products like organic honey, veggies and eggs, freshly baked goods, books, locally made artisanal crafts at this new Sunday market.
Every Sunday, 8am-12pm, Dhokaima Cafe, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 9803228588

MUSIC



Panhelo Batti Muni

Expect an evening of great music with Pahelo Batti Muni performing live at Tito’s Pub & Lounge.
21 February, 5pm-11:30pm, Tito’s Pub & Lounge, Jhamsikhel, 9841647747

Valentine’s Karaoke

Head to the English Pub for some karaoke, live barbecue, and a fire camp this Valentine’s Day.
14 February, 4pm-12:30am, The English Pub, Lazimpat, 9843093645



Riddim Sons

Celebrate Valentine’s Day with roots reggae and ska music live from the Riddim Sons.
14 February, 6pm-10pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel (01) 5528362

Electromance

Electric Pagoda presents Electromance, featuring Hakuna Matata. Drop in with your loved ones and treat your soul to some good music, delicious cocktails, and great ambience.
14 February 7pm-10pm, Electric Pagoda Bar & Cafe, Thamel (01) 4700123



Emerge Live

Join the band Emerge for an afternoon of great music.
15 February, 3pm-6pm, Sasaa The Newa Restaurant, Kirtipur (01) 4336770

DINING



Hotel Annapurna

The secret ingredient is always love but great food definitely helps! Celebrate with your loved ones this Valentine’s Day with specially curated menus at The Coffee Shop, Arniko Room and Ghar-e-Kabab. Leave with a basket full of memories and a heart full of smiles from The Cake Shop.
14 February, Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg (01) 4221711

Smoky Thursdays

Make your Thursdays fun with unlimited barbeque. Vegetarian and vegan barbeque are also available.
20 February, 5pm onwards, Rs.600/person, NepaliTravellers Cafe, Kupondole, 9801002974

Red Mud Coffee

Red Mud, a casual eatery in Jhamsikhel, is the perfect place to with your friends to grab some coffee and sandwiches or one of the best chicken sizzlers in town. Try the delicious chocolate milkshakes too.
8am-10pm, Jhamsikhel, 9861665829



Octave

Celebrate the day of love at the heart of the city overlooking Darbar Marg. Make your Valentine feel extra special with delicious food and tasty cocktails. Dedicate a song to your lover. Free entrance and complimentary shots for ladies.
14 February, 1pm-11:30pm, Octave Kathmandu, Darbar Marg (01) 4220569

Olive Garden

Express your love and spoil your beloved with the six-course dinner, including a Valentine’s Day special Romeo and Juliet Cake and a bottle of Prosecco Italian sparkling wine.
14 February, 6:30pm-10:30pm, Rs7999, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat (01) 4411818

GETAWAY



Gokarna Forest Resort

The ultimate couple’s retreat awaits lovebirds this Valentine’s Day. Get the Valentine’s overnight package.
14 February, Rs18,000-45,000, Gokarna, 9862237267

The Famous Farm

This three-storey boutique hotel is Nuwakot’s best kept secret. The traditional architecture and rich cultural history will transport you to another time.
Kuwapani, Nuwakot (01) 413044



Raniban Retreat

This unique boutique hotel located on the secluded hillock of Raniban forest offers an eco-friendly environment and an experience tailored to the needs of the guest. A must-visit for peace and serenity and views of Himalaya.
Pokhara (01) 5185435

End of the Universe

In this quaint sanctuary, located in scenic Nagarkot, settle into one of the rustic cabins, eat local cuisine and marvel at snow-capped mountains.
Hotel at the End of the Universe Mahankal Mandir, Nagarkot, Bhaktapur (01) 6680109



Hotel Mountain Top

Hotel Mountain Top offers some of the best views of Fewa Lake and the snow-capped mountains to be had in all of Pokhara. Sip drinks and enjoy Nepali cuisine at The Altitude Bar and relax in rooms reminiscent of the clean whites and light blues of Santorini.
Lakeside Road, Pokhara (61) 461779

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



PLANT FOR BEES AND BUTTERFLIES

Bees and butterflies are critical pollinators and crucial to our ecosystem. Without them many plants would die out, and the food chain would suffer. Welcome bees and butterflies by planting a variety of pollinator friendly plants (specially wild flowers local to the area), allow lawn ‘weeds’ like dandelions and clovers to flower before cutting them and avoid using pesticides, specially on open flowers. In urban areas, even window box planters and rooftop/balcony gardens help.

OUR PICK

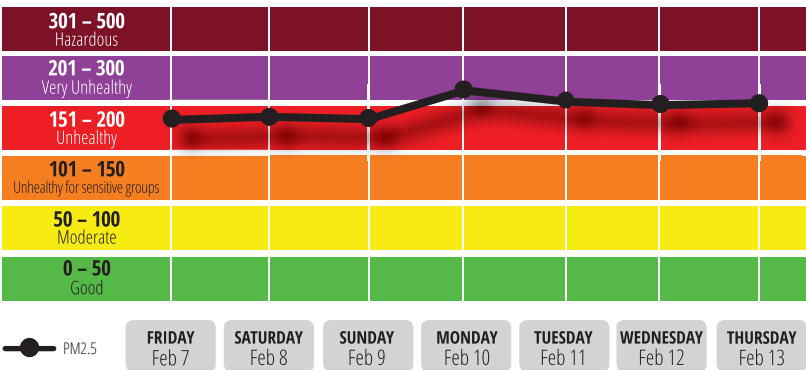


Opens in Kathmandu 21 February

Aama tells the story of two women —a daughter (Surakshya Pant) who is struggling to conceive a child and her mother (Mithila Sharma) who is grappling with the critical illness of her husband. Together, they deal with the difficulty of having to sell everything they own to pay for medical treatment and the inevitable loss of their husband and father.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 7 - 13 February



The last four days saw the concentration of pollutants in Kathmandu’s city centre spike to above AQI 200, bringing the daily average to the purple ‘Very Unhealthy’ zone. This is unusual because with rising temperatures, the inversion effect would be reduced. This can only mean that vehicular emissions and open garbage burning is adding particulate pollution load to the city air. We suggest limiting outdoor activities during peak hours and wearing masks when leaving home, though there is now a shortage and a price hike following the Covid-19 outbreak.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Two takes on the Nepal-India nexus

Shyam Saran and Sudheer Sharma have diametrically opposing views on Nepal's political transition



Alisha Sijapati

The *Nepal Nexus* -- the English translation, with updates, of the 2013 bestseller *Prayogshala* by editor Sudheer Sharma -- offers readers a rich account of Nepal's ten-year conflict, the 2006 people's movement, the fragile transition that followed, and the Maoists' subsequent rise to power. The translation was done by Sanjaya Dhakal for Penguin India and the book was released last year.

Sharma, who was and is once more the editor of *Kantipur*, begins with a personal account of his experience as a war reporter during the time of the state-Maoist conflict. Although he describes the book as an inside account of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), the reader finds it more of an account of Prachanda's rise to power, and only tangentially of the party he led.

Sharma has a soft spot for Prachanda, and does not conceal his sympathies for the erstwhile revolutionaries the man led. "It is my view that the major credit for restructuring the state should go to the Maoists," he writes. This may come across to many as giving too much credit to the CPN(M) for what was essentially a violent shortcut to power. To be fair, the journalist in Sharma tries to be objective and balance his views with those of others, through explanations and interviews. (*See interview, right*)

The translation may not exactly be a page-turner, but has gripping revelations about the dynamics between the palace, Parliament, the (Royal) Nepal Army, Nepal Police and the Maoists between 1996 and 2006. The account of just how much India's intelligence agency RAW was micro-managing Nepali politics throughout the conflict and during and after the 2001 royal palace massacre gives new insight into the cloak and dagger world of spooks.

One of the highlights of Sharma's book is the treatment of Nepal's relations with its neighbours, in particular India's role in helping the Maoists join mainstream politics -- apparently as a way to weaken a nationalist monarchy and to show India's own Maoist revolutionaries that there was an electoral path to power.

Shyam Saran, who was Indian ambassador to Nepal (2002-2004) and went on to become foreign secretary (2004-2006), looks at the broader question of India's place in the world in his book. There are sections in *How India Sees the World* that deal with the same historical period as *The Nepal Nexus*, but from New Delhi's

perspective. Saran arrived as envoy after the royal massacre and witnessed Gyanendra's four years of steady power consolidation. By 2005, the king was in open confrontation with New Delhi, and Saran writes that India's 'twin pillar' doctrine -- to support constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy -- became untenable, and Delhi turned to the seven party alliance and the Maoists (nicknamed 'SPAM').

Almost every Nepali is an expert on relations with India, and social media has profuse conspiracy theories about Big Brother. Many writers and diplomats have dissected Indo-Nepal relations during the turbulent period from 1990-2017. For his part, Sharma tries to provide evidence of India's constant meddling in Nepal's internal affairs -- from the 1950 Treaty to the 2015 blockade.

Sections of Saran's book that deal with Nepal present things quite differently, of course, and that is to be expected. He has an opposite take on New Delhi's behind-the-scenes dealings in Kathmandu.

In the chapter 'India and Nepal: A Relationship of Paradox', Saran describes the souring of the relations between the neighbours after the promulgation of Nepal's Constitution in 2015 and the economic blockade that followed. Saran defends India's handling of

that tumultuous period, absolving South Block and the PMO of all blame for allowing bilateral relations, which Prime Minister Modi had had rebooted with his 2014 visit to Kathmandu, to disintegrate. But the chapter may as well have been titled: 'How the Indian State Wrecked Relations with Nepal'.


Saran describes how it was India that steered the Maoists into above-ground politics in 2006 and introduced secularism into Nepal's new constitution, and how India opposed that same constitution for the sake of the rights of Madhesis. Ironies of ironies: regime change and the rise of the BJP in India means that New Delhi is no longer a fan of Nepal's secular constitution.

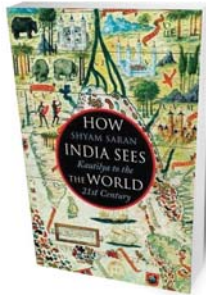
Sudheer Sharma's analysis of the Indian blockade calls a spade a spade: India was angry about not being consulted about the new Madhes province, which did not include five contentious districts: Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari in the east and Kanchanpur and Kailali in the western Tarai. "After it refused to entertain India's counsel and coercion, many in Nepal thought India decided it was time to teach a lesson to its small neighbour ... with the ultimate weapon of a border blockade," writes Sharma, providing examples of covert Indian involvement in supporting the Madhes agitation.

Shyam Saran sees it differently: "Supplies from India to Nepal were blocked by the Madhesis in the border leading to hostile sentiments among Nepalis." Saran sticks with the story that India supported the rights of Madhesis in the writing of the 2015 Constitution. He writes, rather condescendingly, that India has always been generous towards Nepal and that, despite all the help, Nepalis have always misunderstood their large neighbour.

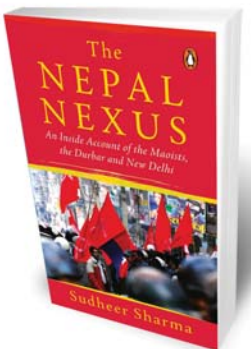
Interestingly, Shyam Saran himself reviewed Sudheer Sharma's *The Nepal Nexus* in the India's *Business Standard* newspaper. He wrote: "The book creates the impression that the Madhesi issue is somehow created by India and that it flows from the ethnic links of the people of the Nepal Tarai and those living across the border in UP and Bihar. However, there are several million Indian citizens of Nepali origin especially in Uttarakhand, West Bengal and Assam, and they are all from the hill districts of Nepal. Mr Sharma could have at least acknowledged some of these additional and significant dimensions of the relationship between the two countries."

Saran goes on to accuse Sharma of making the "illogical claim" that India was afraid that the communist insurgency would spill over from Nepal into the Gangetic plains and destabilise the entire region, and that this was why it felt Nepal's Maoists needed to be mainstreamed.

Bilateral relations between Kathmandu and New Delhi are once more at a low point because of the border dispute over Kalapaani, and perspectives that do not engage beyond the state's official line will not help us to find common ground. Hopefully both political leaders and the general public in Nepal and India will better understand the complex chemistry of their ties, and will find a better way of engaging one another. Alas, neither of these books will help do that. 



How India Sees The World: Kautilya to the 21st Century
by Shyam Saran
Juggernaut 2017
292 pages
Rs800



The Nepal Nexus: An Inside Account of the Maoists, the Durbar and New Delhi
by Sudheer Sharma
Penguin India 2019
521 pages
Rs1,120 (hardcover)

Sudheer Sharma on *Nepal Nexus*

Sudheer Sharma, who has returned once more to *Kantipur* as editor, speaks to *Nepali Times* about the English translation of his book *The Nepal Nexus* and how it has been received in Nepal and India.

Nepali Times: How has your book been received?

Sudheer Sharma: I have always wanted readers of English to be able to read and have documentation that would help them in their research. I have been to various book shops in and around Kathmandu to sign my books, but it was in Pokhara that I saw the overwhelming reaction of readers. At this week's *Kantipur Conclave* there was much positive response and the book has been selling well in Delhi's Khan Market.

What is different in *The Nepal Nexus* as compared to *Prayogshala*?

Prayogshala was released in 2013 after the Constituent Assembly had just been dissolved. Since then there have been significant changes in Nepal's politics. *Nepal Nexus* is not just a translated version of *Prayogshala* but is rather updated with four additional chapters that look at the promulgation of the Constitution in 2015, the Madhes movement, the Indian blockade, the rise of KP Oli and Narendra Modi and the growing relationship with China.

How did the idea of *The Nepal Nexus* come about?

Soon after the release of *Prayogshala*, Penguin India contacted me about releasing the book in English as well. It sounded interesting. Sanjaya Dhakal did the translation with initial help from Thomas Bell.

While many have appreciated your book, some have not.

Whether official or unofficial, India never declared the 2015 border blockade. But I have documented the facts with research and investigation. Naturally, some people do not like what it reveals. Some readers think the book is based on the history of Maoist movement, but in reality, it's about three entities that have shaped Nepal -- the monarchy, Maoists and New Delhi. The monarchy is gone, and the Maoist party is dissolved, and we are still trying to mend our relationship with New Delhi.

Former Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran criticised your book in a review.

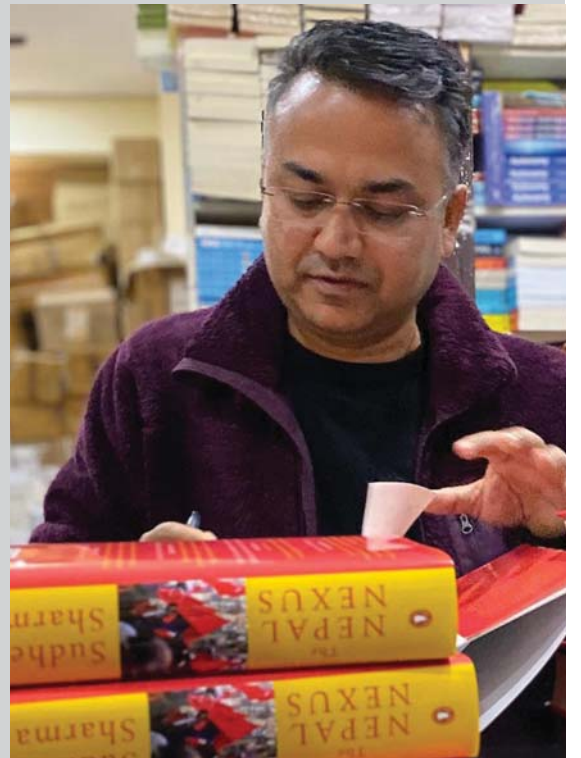
He has not challenged me factually. We all have different interpretations and it is fair to have different opinions. As a matter of fact, I liked his review. The book is now public property, everyone is entitled to their opinions on it. The more discussion, the merrier.

Where are India-Nepal relations now?

Nepal and India need to have a relationship that is built on equality and respect. India has always tried to micro-manage Nepal, and that was clear when they sent a special envoy to stop the Constitution in 2015. It was the border blockade that really damaged relations. Nepal and India should have a vibrant relationship; there are problems and we need together to find solutions. There are more problems from India, but Nepal too has problems.

How can the two neighbours redefine their relationship?

There are many clauses and treaties that should be revised. Particularly the 1950 Treaty and some other clauses that have kept Nepal in an unequal and unfair position. India needs to change its mindset and should not treat Nepal like its 'little brother'. Nepal also has to change its behaviour. We are overly dependent on India, and this needs to be reduced. If treaties and agreements are revised, I am sure the relationship between these two neighbours will be stronger than before.





PRADEEP RAJ ONTA/RSS

CLOSE WATCH: President Bidya Devi Bhandari inspecting the reconstruction of Dharara tower, destroyed in the 2015 earthquake, in Kathmandu on Saturday, accompanied by Sushil Gyawali of the National Reconstruction Authority.



NEPAL POLICE

OUTGOING IN-COMING: Outgoing Police Chief Sarbendra Khanal (*right*) received a send-off from his successor Thakur Prasad Gyawali in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



CANADIAN EMBASSY

SAY CHEESE: Visiting speaker of the Canadian Senate, George Furey, flanked by Canada's Ambassador to Nepal Nadir Patel (*right*) and Canada's Honorary Consul to Nepal Buddha Basnyat in Kathmandu this week.



RANDY BERRY/TWITTER

TEAM SPIRIT: US Ambassador Randy Berry receives a jersey from the visiting US cricket team on the final day of Cricket World Cup League 2 on Wednesday. Nepal defeated the United States in the shortest match in the history of One Day International.



MONIKA DEUPALA

UNITED WE STAND: General Manager for Nepal of Turkish Airlines Abdullah Tuncer Kecici (*left*) and Joey Foster of British College after signing an agreement on Wednesday to facilitate travel for higher studies of its students and employees.

Covid-19 outbreak



epidemic'. However, conservationists, including Chinese academics, are pushing for a permanent ban and believe the outbreak can be an opportunity to protect endangered Asian and African wildlife.

"A temporary ban does not address the larger problem. There will always be a risk of infections like coronavirus as long as there is demand for wildlife in China," says Tulshi Laxmi Suwal of Nepal's Small Mammal Conservation and Research Foundation, who did her PhD on pangolins from National Pintung University in Taiwan.

Early studies have pointed to bats as the source of the 2019 novel coronavirus -- now named Covid-19 -- and scientists are trying to figure out how it jumped from animals to humans. The origin of the epidemic has been traced to a seafood market in Wuhan that also sold wild animals.

Last Friday, some Chinese researchers said that pangolins, the world's most trafficked mammals,

Sonia Awale

China ban on wildlife markets could stop threatened species being smuggled through Nepal

China is the world's biggest market for the illegal trade in wildlife for food and traditional medicine, and Beijing's blanket ban on the wildlife trade may save some endangered species from extinction.

The Chinese government said the ban on selling wild animals in markets would be in force 'until the end of the national

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may curb wildlife trafficking

could be the missing link between bats and human beings.

African and Asian pangolins are hunted for their meat, considered a delicacy in China. Their scales are used extensively in Chinese traditional medicine. All eight species of the mammals are on the endangered list.

“Bats alone are known to carry anywhere between 40-200 different viruses. Eating the meat of wild animals or having close interactions with one can transmit the virus to humans,” says Sanjan Thapa, who is pursuing a PhD on bats at China’s Quangchau University.

Whatever the mode of transmission, the Covid-19 outbreak has once again highlighted the rise of zoonotic diseases and their critical association with the flourishing illegal wildlife trade, especially in China.

There is a fear that the Covid-19 epidemic will push many in China to resort to powdered rhino horn as a cure for the flu. Rhinos poaching in Africa and India already feeds the demand in traditional Chinese medicine.

Covid-19 has killed at least 1,300 people as of Thursday, more than SARS in 2002-2003, despite its lower fatality rate of 2.2% against 9.6% for SARS. The newer virus, however, is the more contagious and has spread to 28 countries with over 60,000 confirmed cases.

Before the Covid-19 epidemic, SARS and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) also originated from animals. The SARS virus moved from bats to civets and then to humans. Camels were the source of the MERS virus in 2012 in West

Asia. The Ebola outbreak (2013-2016) was also traced to bats.

Experts believe that the Covid-19 scare will lead to a decline in poaching and trafficking of wildlife in Nepal, which is on the traditional route for the trafficking of endangered species from India to China and has in recent years flourished as a transit hub for pangolin scales, rhino horns, tiger and leopard skins and elephant tusks.

“Once the demand in China goes down, poaching and smuggling here in Nepal will also decline. Conservation efforts in Nepal will gain a lot if a permanent ban on wildlife trade is placed in China,” adds Suwal. “This is also a good time to create awareness about the higher risk of zoonotic diseases on those involved in the illicit trade so that they are discouraged to continue.”

According to the District Forest Office in Kathmandu, 1,798 wild animals and their body parts from ten different wildlife species were confiscated in the last eight years. Of those, 1,468 belonged to different species of birds, 94 to red pandas, 92 to leopards and 42 to pangolins. Nepal Police has filed 880 cases against poachers in the past 18 years.

Says Sindhu Dhungana of the Ministry of Forest and Environment: “National and international coordination is essential to control wildlife crime and impossible to do so without a cross-border collaboration between Nepal, India and China.”

With additional reporting by Mukesh Pokhrel.



ALEX DUDLEY

Nepal is the first tiger-range country to double the number of the endangered big cats in its reserves, and has marked five successive years of zero rhino poaching -- setting a model for conservation, especially as a country with limited resources.

Yet at the same time Nepal has become a thriving transit hub for trafficked endangered species from India, and even Africa, to China. Although the current Covid-19 epidemic is expected to temporarily reduce the market for wildlife (see adjoining piece), improved trans-Himalayan connectivity between Nepal and China could increase smuggling of tiger and rhino body parts and pangolin scales.

The value of wildlife trade worldwide is estimated at \$20 billion a year, making it an incredibly lucrative illicit business, behind only narcotics, human trafficking, and the arms trade. Poverty is often thought to be the main reason behind people's involvement in this trade. But is it?

“There is a common assumption that illegal wildlife trafficking is linked to poverty, but we cannot generalise,” explained Nepali conservationist Kumar Paudel, currently a researcher at the University of Cambridge. “What is the extent of the poverty that leads to wildlife poaching? Are they poaching to provide the next meal for their families, or do they not have enough money to afford a car or a bungalow?”

Three years ago, Paudel interviewed 116 individuals serving time in jails across Nepal for trafficking in wildlife, and he has published some of his findings in a recent paper in the journal *Conservation Biology*. He asked interviewees about their trade practices, economic conditions and motivations.

What drives wildlife poaching?

While 56% percent were living below the World Bank poverty line, Paudel found that for many others, poaching was a means not of survival but rather of increasing disposable income. Comfortably-off people and even university graduates were involved in illegal hunting.

More than 60% of the respondents were arrested for involvement in rhino poaching, and said illegal wildlife trade was a relatively easy occupation compared to other employment. Nearly all poachers were male, and almost all knew what they were doing was illegal. Three-fourths were from indigenous communities living near protected areas.

Interestingly, Paudel found that 65% of the detained poachers did not think they would be caught, and 84% said they would go back to illegal wildlife trade after being released. “This goes to show that despite having some of the world's stiffest penalties for wildlife crimes, poachers and smugglers undermine Nepal's enforcement mechanism or know of loopholes to avoid the penalties, which points to impunity and a lenient system,” Paudel told *Nepali Times* in an interview. Still, most of the respondents were arrested within a year of having gotten involved in poaching, which seems to show that enforcement is working.

The involvement of the Army in guarding Nepal's national parks has often been credited for the country's success in curbing the illegal wildlife trade. In India's protected areas, poaching is rampant. However, while enforcement works in the conservation of mega fauna like wild elephants, rhinos and tigers, there are questions about smaller endangered species living outside parks, and of sustainability of the method.

“An enforcement-based approach is expensive given the number of police and army officials that need to be recruited, so it begs the question: who will pay for it, especially when we need to work on protection of other smaller species too?” asked Paudel, pointing out that most of those detained appear to be small fry. He added: “It is time we reviewed our enforcement approach and better communicated research to improve the mechanism for conservation.”

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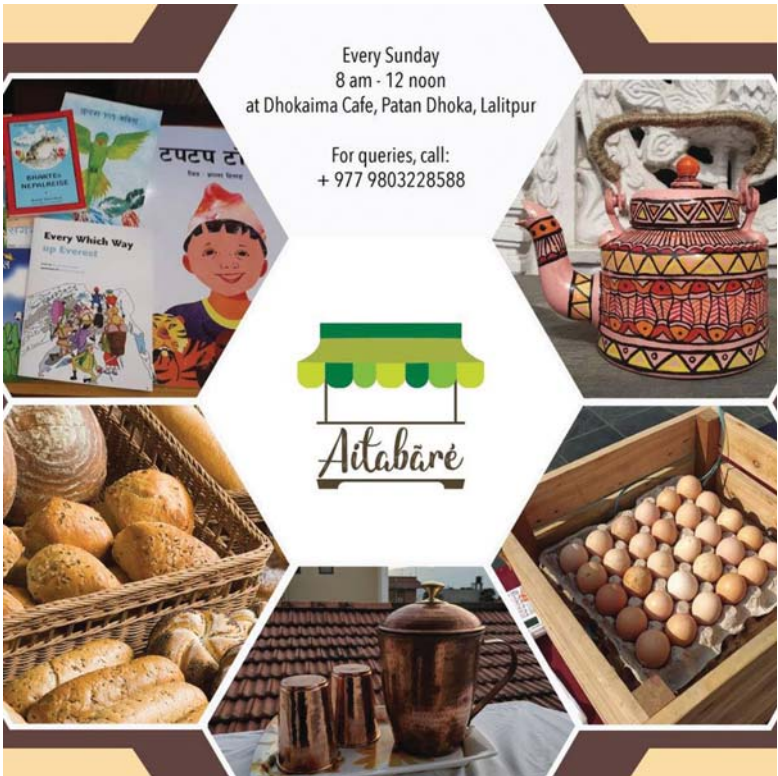
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Crossborder cybercrime and punishment

Nepali women blackmailed over private content on the social web seek justice

Sabina Devkota

Rama married Raju of Lalitpur, after which Raju moved to Sydney to pursue higher education. The couple talked regularly over the internet, exchanging sexually suggestive messages and intimate pictures. Rama was blindsided when she found out months later that those pictures and conversations had been sent to her relatives’ phones from fake accounts on Facebook and as links to pornographic websites.

Asmita, a 12-grader from Lalitpur, had been talking to Facebook user Sanjiv. The two had never met face to face. At Sanjiv’s request, she had sent him a nude picture of herself, but one picture did not suffice. He began blackmailing Asmita for videos, threatening to leak her picture unless she complied. Her picture ended up on porn sites, which put her under extreme mental stress.

Thirteen-year-old Rabina from Dhankuta was sent a nude picture with her face morphed onto it by someone she had been talking to on Facebook. She was then coerced into sending back similar pictures of herself. Afraid, she did as she was instructed, after which more nude pictures were demanded of her every day.

Rekha of Sitapaila had responded to a job offer in Canada via Facebook when she was asked to strip naked for an online medical exam, something she found strange, but that she thought might be



BIKRAM RAI

routine in Canada. She was asked also to show her genitals to the camera. Later, she was told that nude pictures of her would be made public if she did not pay \$5,000.

All four women went to the Nepal Police, who tracked down Raju’s address in Sydney, and in Asmita’s, Rabina’s and Rekha’s cases traced the Internet Protocol (IP) addresses of the offending Facebook users to Bangladesh, India and Canada respectively. In all four cases the police contacted law enforcement and perpetrators, but failed to get a response. The suspects were never caught.

Extortion, blackmail and illegal sharing of private images and videos on social media as well as the sale of such visual content to porn sites have become more prevalent as the number of Facebook users in Nepal approaches 9 million. The lack of media literacy in the population means most young people are unfamiliar with privacy settings, and naive about sharing personal images. This leaves them vulnerable to sexual predators not just from their immediate environments but from all over the world.

Experts say Nepal’s cybersecurity policies and laws like the Electronic Transaction Act 2007 are not applicable in the context of cyberspace at present.

However, Rishiram Tiwari, joint secretary at the Ministry of Information, claims that the draft Information and Technology Bill addresses cyber-related concerns that the Electronic Transaction Act failed to.

For its part, the National Cyber Security Policy 2007 does not clearly define laws or have set guidelines for investigating transnational crimes. According to the Metropolitan Crime

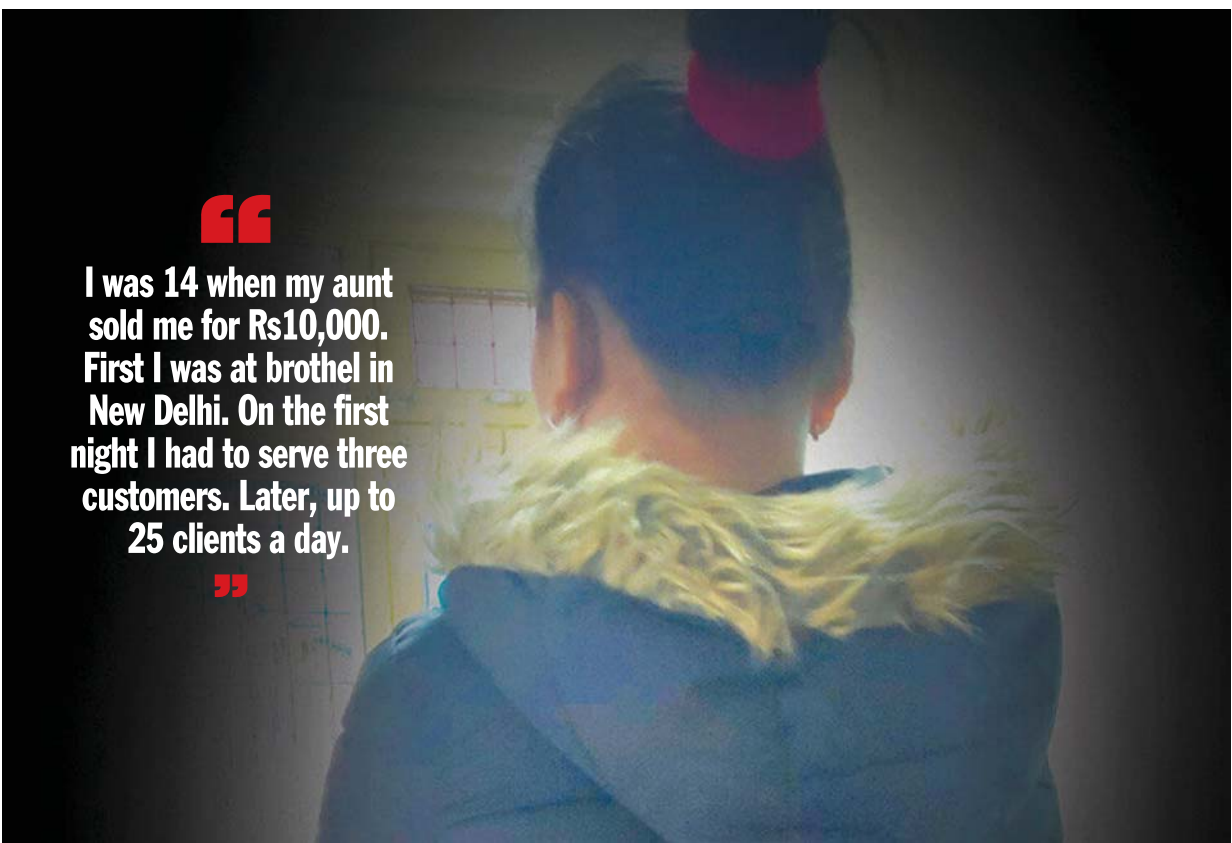
Trafficked Nepali woman’s testimony

“I used to live with my father and stepmother, and never knew who my real mother was. Since my father was poor, I did not get to go to school. So I followed a relative to Kathmandu from Nuwakot, and started washing dishes at a restaurant in the city. After about a year, my aunt came to see me, and told me she would educate me back in the village. Happy, I followed her.

Since I have motion sickness, my aunt gave me some medicines on the bus and I fell asleep. In the middle of a jungle, in a remote location with only a couple of small tea shops, I was woken up to eat. The next time I woke up, I found out I was in Delhi. I was 14 years old. My aunt had sold me for Rs10,000.

Early the next morning, my aunt left me with a woman named Hema, and said she would come back in a month. When I tried to follow her, a Nepali woman called Laxmi Tamang beat me up. I was kept under lock and key, but one day when I got a severe headache they took me to a hospital where they put me on medication for two days and jabbed me with injections.

That made me feel very hungry all the time, and I started eating a lot. For a month, they gave me whatever I wanted to eat. Later, I learnt that those medicines and



“
I was 14 when my aunt sold me for Rs10,000. First I was at brothel in New Delhi. On the first night I had to serve three customers. Later, up to 25 clients a day.
”

injections were meant to spur my growth and make me appear more curvaceous and feminine.

Hema then sent me to Brothel Number 511 at Kashmiri Building in New Delhi with Laxmi Tamang. There, a manager called Simran told me to go with a man. When I balked, Laxmi again beat me up. Eventually, they sent three customers to be with me on the very first day.

After that I had to take up to seven men every night. Later, it sometimes went up to 25 clients a day. Sometimes I did not get to sleep all night. And if someone lingered too long, I was the one yelled at.

After about two years, everyone from Kashmiri Building was

transferred to Brothel 64 so that the girls would appear to be ‘new’ to a different set of customers. Thus, they took us from one brothel to another for seven years.

When I was in Brothel 64, I fell seriously ill. I had stomach ache and fever for days. But they gave me no medical attention, and did not take me to hospital. Every month when I menstruated, I bled a lot and it was very painful. But I did not get to rest. Often, I wished I was dead, or that someone would come and kill me.

Once, a truck driver from Gorkha called Arjun came to me. Then he started coming every month. When I was sick, he would secretly bring me medicines. Since I was an old employee by then, I was allowed to use a mobile. I used to talk to him secretly. I begged him to take me away from there.

Arjun asked me to elope with him, but it was not so easy with CCTV cameras everywhere. Sometimes we old employees were allowed to go out. One day, when I was sick, I called Arjun and he took me away. He cooked for me and got me medical treatment as well.

One day, a friend named Puja came to see me and said she was going home to Surkhet. Last year, I joined her and came to Surkhet

Division, almost 20% of cybercrime complaints are transnational, and countries like Nepal are hotbeds for extortion, blackmail and breach of privacy.

“Social Media Operators and Internet Service Providers who are not based in Nepal are not legally obliged to provide the police with any information,” says cyberlaw expert Baburam Aryal. “Because the authorities cannot access important details about the crime, they cannot build an ironclad case.”

Police spokesperson DIG Siless Thapa Chhetri points out the difficulty of investigating cybercrimes that occur beyond our borders: “The challenge is that we have not been able to coordinate with Interpol due to time constraints and lack of personnel.”

Through such coordination, parties involved in transnational crimes are usually brought under investigation through an international letter of request. But the success of this exercise depends on the diplomatic relationship between countries involved. It is possible to seek the extradition of criminals who operate across borders, but this requires bilateral extradition agreements.

Advocate Aryal says developed countries use international diplomatic networks to address cross-border cybercrime. In response to the transnational nature of crimes involving cyberspace, the Council of Europe agreed on the Budapest Convention in 2001. The treaty aims to combat cyber-related crime through cooperation while recognising the different legal and technological landscapes across countries. The treaty has been ratified by 64 countries, but Japan and Sri Lanka are the only two countries from Asia to have done so.

Advocate Sanjiv Ghimire states that treaties like these will make cyber laws less complex and help the international community follow a common legal policy regarding cybercrime. He says: “It is time for Nepal to take the initiative to either make treaties like these or ratify ones that already exist to protect our citizens.”

Some names have been changed.

to celebrate Teej. Arjun had told me that after I returned from Surkhet, he would marry me and we would go to Nepal. On the way back from Surkhet, he came to receive me in Nepalganj.

When the Maiti Nepal people at Nepalgunj border asked me about myself, I could not lie. The police even brought Arjun over for questioning. They kept me at Maiti Nepal, but they let him go when they learnt the truth. I do not know where he went.

When I was in India, I never thought I would come back home alive. But seven years later, I celebrated Dasain at home. I have begun taking informal classes called School for Life. But my mind does not grasp what I am reading. I keep getting stomach aches, my blood pressure is high. Images of the brothel and the terrifying experiences there flash in my mind, making me cry.

I think of Arjun a lot. Maybe he would not have married me, but had he not rescued me I would still be in Brothel 64 in Delhi.

With help from Maiti Nepal I have now filed a case against the uncle and aunt who sold me. The police have arrested them. But now I am scared they will be set free. I hope they do not come out of jail to torment me again.

As told to Laxmi Basnet



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Selling sex tourism

Visit Nepal Year is off to a rocky start because coronavirus has gone viral, and it is unlikely that the country can meet its 2 million target for 2020. To compensate, it is the humble opinion of this scribe that Nepal Tourism Board, under new management, should sell sex.

You read it right. Nepal is losing a huge opportunity to cash in on the erotica depicted on our temples, monuments and other erections as a value-added tourism attraction and should revive the slogan, 'Visit Nepal: We Make Love, Not War'.

This Ballantine's Day let us pledge to honour our past Tantrick masters who, unlike present day Nepalis, were not bashful about putting up porn on their sites. Our forebears didn't beat around the bush when it came to depicting the birds and bees. No, they got straight to the point. It is hard to tell today that we are descendants of an outstanding and upright people who contributed valuable research data to Prof Vatsyayana for his ground-breaking PhD dissertation, *The Kamasutra*.

Alas, much of that research is now lost. But some of the early ornithological and apiarian data can still be found in the Valley's three Durbar Squares. A pair of powerful binoculars is all you need to unlock the secrets of Nepal's holy edifices (From Sanskrit: 'edi'=dirty, and 'fices'=stuff).

The carvings allow us to take a sneak peek into what constituted fun and games for our prehistoric ancestors during lunch breaks while they were laying the foundations of our glorious civilisation. And thanks

to their meticulous documentation, we have evidence of the kind of playful hanky panky they indulged in. The carvings show us that they did not just mix business with pleasure, but they also made pleasure their business as they are caught in flagrante delicto on many of these x-rated wood panels frozen in time immemorial.

After casual perusal, many visitors may get the mistaken notion that the temple eaves are not amorous scenes, but depict memorable replays of prehistoric World Wrestling Federation bouts. Protagonists are seen grabbing each other with vice-like bodylocks, tying themselves into knots, entangled in half-nelsons, and pulling each other over with gutwrenches and ankle-laces.

Our ancestors had such fertile imaginations that there are even carved selfies of them exhibiting posterior motives towards sheep, water buffalo and other semi-mythical fauna. They were such eager beavers they humped anything that moved. They grappled in groups, and sometimes they even grappled with themselves.

This Valentine's Day let us pay silent homage to these illustrious acrobats of yore who laid the groundwork of our proud heritage, and without whose seminal contribution we would not be here today to pen these words of grateful tribute.



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