

NEPALI Times

#1047

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Rival factions of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) are headed for a showdown on the streets, even as the Supreme Court continues to hear arguments for and against Prime Minister K P Oli's dissolution of the House.

On Thursday, the Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led faction of the NCP enforced a nationwide shutdown that for many harked back to the instability of past. There was outrage on social media against arson attacks and vandalism.

The real purpose of the shutdown appears to have been to prevent government supporters from travelling to Kathmandu for a planned rally on Durbar Marg on Friday. Oli's supporters on Wednesday staged "the biggest ever" motorcycle rally in Nepal, creating monstrous traffic jams.

In fact, the two factions seem to also be competing to make the lives of citizens as miserable as possible.

Oli and Dahal are engaged in one-upmanship to pack more people in their rallies. The Dahal faction claimed to have brought 100,000 people to its demonstration near Tundikhel on 22 January, while the Oli group is aiming to amass 200,000 on Friday. Dahal is responding with another rally in Kathmandu on 10 February.

COCKFIGHT

"Our rallies are to mobilise the people for elections. Make no mistake, there will be elections," says Ananda Pokhrel, chair of the NCP's Bagmati Committee.

A show of strength is also the intention of Dahal and his ally Madhav Kumar Nepal--not for elections, but to demonstrate public support while the Supreme Court deliberates on the House dissolution, and the Election Commission decides which faction will get the NCP flag and symbol.

"Our rallies are to show public support against the regressive and anti-constitutional move by the prime minister, and we will continue our protests until the House is restored," says Dahal-Nepal supporter Pampha Bhusal.

Aside from the show of strength on the streets, leaders from both sides have been using increasingly abusive, and derogatory language against each other.

Cornered and isolated by the Dahal-Nepal faction and the support it has from media and civil society, Oli has planned the optics well—a raised platform at the gates of Narayanhiti hinting at support for restoring a Hindu monarchy.

Oli himself has been sending not-so-subtle signals. In an interview with Zee News last month, he expounded at considerable length about Nepal's Vedic past.

This week, he made a high profile visit to Pashupati to offer prayers, and sanctioned 140kg of gold to decorate the shrine at a cost of Rs1 billion. In Chitwan, he reiterated the theory that Ram was born in Nepal.

Analysts have also taken the Nepal Army's decision to conduct a drill on the Ring Road with an APC parade on 1 February as a symbolic warning on the day of the military coup in Burma, and King

Gyanendra's coup in 2005.

Also this week, Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa paid a visit to Nakhu Jail, ostensibly on an inspection. But he made no effort to hide his meeting with incarcerated former Maoist comrades of the underground Biplav faction.

All this is happening while the Supreme Court is debating 13 writ petitions against Oli's dissolution of the House, as well as multiple contempt of court petitions against Oli, Dahal, Nepal and other leaders.

C P Mainali of the NCP (ML) doubts that the prime minister will use the Hindu monarchy card: "Oli is just using opposition to secularism and federalism to gain votes, he is not going to declare a Hindu state or call for a restoration of monarchy. But he is perfectly capable of pulling another rabbit out of the hat."

Mukesh Pokhrel

Nepali Ama

EDITORIAL

PAGE 2

AIR AMBULANCE SAVES MOTHERS

PAGE 14-15

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Nepali Ama

There are many reasons cited for the sharp reduction in Nepal's maternal mortality rate (MMR), from 901 per 100,000 live births to less than 240 today.

Among them are the presence of trained community health volunteers even in the remotest village, and the spread of the road network that allows women with complicated pregnancies to be taken to hospital.

But perhaps the greatest factor is the rise in female literacy in the same period, which in turn reduced the total fertility rate, and raised the average age of marriage through awareness and empowerment.

However, an MMR of 240 is still unacceptably high—it translates into 3 deaths at childbirth every day, 1,200 every year.

For comparison, only two mothers out of 100,000 die at childbirth in Norway, and the figure for Sri Lanka is just 30.

Besides, Nepal has to reduce its MMR to 70 in the next nine years to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals target. The country has already failed to attain the interim target of reducing MMR to 125 by 2020.

The worrying thing is that the graph for maternal mortality has now flat-lined, mainly because government hospitals in the districts are under-equipped, understaffed and under-funded. Many other families cannot afford delivery in private hospitals.

The latest figures for 2020 have not come in, but the Covid-19 crisis may have even increased the maternal mortality rate because fewer mothers could have institutional deliveries. In fact Nepal's first Covid-19 fatality in May was a mother from Sindhupalchok who had just given birth, but her family could not get an ambulance to take her to hospital during the lockdown.

Yet, if we probe the reasons for past progress it will show us the path forward. One of the factors contributing to the drop in MMR since 1990 was that the percentage of skilled birth attendants in rural health facilities went up from 4% to 53%.

In the meantime, as the *Saglo Samaj* report shows, the President's Program for Women's Upliftment has been conducting free emergency airlifts of post-partum mothers in remote areas facing life-or-death situations at childbirth. (See page 14-15)

The eligibility process is complicated for families who do not know how to work the system, but in the past two years, the program has conducted 170 emergency rescues and

saved the lives of many mothers and babies.

Impressive as this is, it is not a sustainable way forward. The focus should be on decentralising medical care and making it the responsibility of provincial and municipal governments.

The emphasis must be on primary health care that can prevent communicable diseases through awareness, and carry out most common surgeries like broken bones, and caesarian operations at the local level.

We have seen how hospital buildings are not enough, those structures need basic equipment like x-rays, anaesthesia machines, surgical units, and capable, motivated medical staff to use them.

Institutional delivery is not the answer if maternity wards of hospitals are poorly-staffed, cannot conduct safe delivery in complicated cases, or do not have nurses for ante- and neo-natal care.

A family physician who can perform basic orthopaedics, or deliveries including c-sections, can be more valuable than a specialised but expensive hospital that few can afford.

Nepal should already have been on a war-footing in meeting the MMR 70 target by 2030, and we have no time to lose. Action must be focused on the hotspots for maternal deaths, including districts in Far-western and Karnali Provinces, and Province 2 with community-based midwife training and district birthing facilities that have life-saving services 24/7.

So far, we have seen no visible strategy or a sense of urgency on the part of the Ministry of Health to meet the SDG target on reducing the maternal death rate. In the past year, Covid-19 has sucked much of the oxygen out of even existing efforts to upgrade medical care to make it more affordable and accessible. Pilot health insurance schemes are isolated success stories.

The story of 31-year-old Rejiya Nepali (*pictured above*) of Bajura encapsulates the human tragedy of many mothers who have to give up their lives to give birth to new lives. *Nepali Times* reported last year about how the mother of four in a remote village in Bajura was taken in a stretcher to a nearby health post after prolonged labour.

She gave birth along the way to a baby boy. But there was no one at the health post, and Nepali had to be carried to the house of an Auxiliary Nurse Midwife. She died along the way.

Three other mothers died during childbirth in just that one Bajura village during the month.



ROJITA ADHIKARI

Rejiya Nepali died age 31 while giving birth to a baby in a Bajura village last year. Her mother Deuma now takes care of the baby and is raising Rejiya's three other small children.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Quake Alert

Twenty years ago last week, on the morning of India's Republic Day on 26 January 2001, an earthquake of magnitude 7 struck Gujarat in India. This was a part of the Subcontinent regarded as being seismically stable, no one expected a disaster like this. More than 20,000 people were killed. The quake was so strong it made the entire region ring like a bell. The tremors were even felt in Kathmandu.

The quake sent shock waves of a different kind in Nepal—a warning that a disaster like that was imminent in the Himalaya. But lessons were not heeded, and 14 years later, Central Nepal was indeed struck by a quake on 25 April 2015 that killed nearly 9,000 people.

Hemlata Rai had an analysis in *Nepali Times* edition #28 of 2-8 February 2001. Excerpt:

An earthquake of similar, if not greater, magnitude as the one that hit Gujarat last Friday can hit Kathmandu anytime. But experts assure us, the scale of devastation and human tragedy can be minimised if adequate precautions are taken and preparations made. "It's not the earthquakes that kill people, it's the constructions we build," says Ramesh Guragain, structural engineer with the National Society for Earthquake Technology-Nepal (NSET-Nepal).

A major lesson to be learnt from the devastation in Gujarat is that house-owners must invest to make their houses safe. In fact 80% of structures that collapsed in Gujarat had violated the Building Code of India.



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Editorial

ONLINE PACKAGES



LIGHTROOM CONVERSATION

The second season of Lightroom Conversation kicks off with Nirajan Kunwar and Muna Gurung talking about the fears and gifts of being queer, about rescuing hidden selves, and re-authoring certain dominant narratives. Watch the video on our YouTube channel.



AIR AMBULANCE SAVES MOTHERS

Every day, at least three mothers die while giving birth all over Nepal. The President's Program for Women's was launched in 2018, and has made air medevac of 170 mothers who may not have survived if they did not get urgent hospital treatment. Patients in remote districts can apply for rescue. Full story on Page 14-15

STOLEN DEITIES

Lot of Gods and Goddesses left Nepal ('Nepal's gods return from exile', Alisha Sijapati, Issue #1046). They were termed by Lain Singh Bangdel as the 'The Stolen Images of Nepal'. Slowly, as time passed, few people including Dina Bangdel raised voice against such matters, and few of such images are being returned home.

Poonam Rana RL

- We've had conversations with Denver Art Museum about the provenance of Uma-Maheshwor. They've claimed that the evidence from Bangdel, Deva, and Pratapaditya Pal is not enough. If we are serious, we need to coordinate our different efforts in the US and Nepal. In the words of the Denver Art Museum "...we continue to have confidence in the propriety of the provenance of the piece." And, "...we are unaware of any substantiated claims of theft of this piece."

Nepal Pride Project

- Denver Art Museum could show us they were cruel by NOT returning stolen-art, and instead getting defensive about calls for accountability.

Keenan

- Unfortunately the thieves are among us. I remember the news published many years ago a lot of old images were found at the ceilings of Hotel Crystal at New Road.

Ram Babu Rimal

- When India can persuade museums to give back their artifacts then we should also be able to raise the concern regarding our objects which were smuggled in large quantity during the hippie era.

Niraj Rana

- Who stole and sold them in the first place?

Shubha Giri

- Gods are never in exile, we humans are. God lives in every person, and that has to be respected and loved.

Niranjan Gurung

Welcome home!!!

Martin Silverman

TOURISM REBOUND IN 2021

As per the government's quarantine is still required ('Nepal hopes for tourism rebound in 2021', *Nepali Times*, Issue #1046).

Plan Himalaya

- If they make it easy, I'll go, a 72-hour Covid test lab and without quarantine, as in many countries today

Valentini Martinez Prats

PRESERVING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Compilation of terminologies and glossaries of endangered languages might be helpful to preserve it for future ('Lost in translation', Alisha Sijapati, Issue #1046). Well, this is my opinion as a translator.

Ngawang Tenzin

- Some Australians tried to maintain terminologies of the indigenous languages. One indigenous radio announcer said there are still some native people in Australia who don't speak English.

Michael Tharchin Kamperman

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Nepal's gods return from exile

by Alisha Sijapati

More than 30 stolen gods have been returned to Nepal from various museums and private collections in the past years, and although it is only a small percentage of the stolen images, it does represent a trend. Full story on nepalitimes.com

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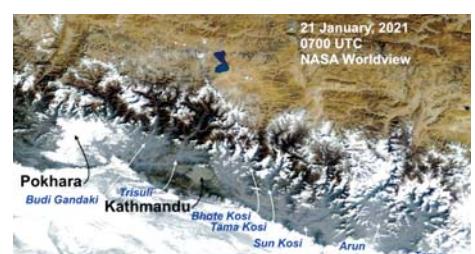


Panoramic encyclopaedia of the Himalaya

by Lisa Choegyal

Himalaya, A Human History by Ed Douglas is both concise and lengthy, readable but dense, factual and fanciful, with all the various strands distilled into an immensely entertaining read. Read the full review and join the online discussion.

Most popular on Twitter



How transboundary haze affects Nepal

by Prabhakar Shrestha

As Nepal's rivers cut through the mountains, their valleys allow smog from the Indo-Gangetic plains to penetrate deep into the mountains. Regional collaboration is required to combat this transboundary pollution. Read the full article for details.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Over 37 languages spoken in Nepal are 'endangered' and are likely to disappear in the next ten years. By Alisha Sijapati.

हिमालय Night @Night04812666

If a country decides on one language as its lingua franca to the detriment of other national languages, some people might feel ambivalent. The language everyone speaks in common is necessary, while indigenous languages closely connected with their cultures need to exist forever.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

More than 30 stolen deities have been returned to Nepal from various museums and private collections in the past years. By Alisha Sijapati

Trishna | त्रिष्णा @TrishnaTweets

Our stolen gods are returning. But too many are still held ransom by greed, captive in museums and hidden in private collections. They long, I am certain, to be home, surrounded by flowers, incense and reverence.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Nepal has to publicise the fact that it is a safe destination, and rebrand to promote its unspoilt nature and wilderness adventure for the post-pandemic era.

Hemraj Khatriwada @HemrajKhatiwad

Tourism and other allied sectors contribute hugely to the economy of Nepal and now when inoculation process initiated today, following a gift of one million doses from neighbour & dear friend India, Nepal should actively start rebranding to promote tourism for post pandemic era.

AjayaDeuba @AjayaDeuba

Nepal tourism is about to rebound after a gap amid #COVID19 and all thanks to the timely supply of vaccines from our friend & neighbour India...Let's hope with the revival, Nepal's tourism will get quick started with major push to the economy.

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Kathmandu creeps up



ALL PHOTOS: MUKESH POKHREL

Valley's urban sprawl into watershed depletes aquifers, triggers landslides

● Mukesh Pokhrel

As Kathmandu reaches the limits to its growth with nearly every square metre now built up, developers are moving to the slopes on the Valley's rim to set up housing colonies. This is affecting the aquifers, and increasing risk of landslides for residents.

Gokarneswar is located directly below the forests of Shivapuri National Park and nearby is Sundarijal, the source of fresh water for much of Kathmandu. These villages had perennial springs that fed household taps and irrigated fields.

In the past year, the springs have

all gone dry. Residents blame it on real estate developers moving in with heavy machinery and carving up the slopes into plots for new housing colonies.

"I am 60, and I have never seen the springs go dry, even if there is a trickle, it is all muddy," says Ramsharan Bhandari. More than 200 families of Wards 2 and 3 of Gokarneswar face water shortages, and many are thinking of moving out.

Locals say the developers have bought up terrace farms, and encroached on dry streams and community-owned land. After the trees were cut and excavators tore up the slopes, the last monsoon saw destructive landslides. This has affected the groundwater that used to replenish the springs at the base of the Shivapuri.

When a team from Nepali Times visited the village of Sultakhana last week, excavators belonging to real estate developer Dipak Bista were gouging out the slopes. After buying the land, the contractor first mines the sand and quarries stones to sell to construction companies in the city, and then plots out the property to sell to individual

buyers.

"Till two years ago these slopes were all green," says another local Ramkumar Bista. "It was after the dozers tore up the slopes above us that the springs went dry."

The steep slopes are made up of sand on top of bedrock, both of which are valuable for contractors. Once the terrace farms are levelled, the slope is shored up with sand bags and sold, even though it is still too steep and unstable to build houses on.

"So far, we have mostly suffered from springs going dry, but the mountain above us is now so unstable, we dread the landslides that are sure to happen in the monsoon," says Madhusudhan Bista, a resident of the neighbouring village of Baluwā.

Even in the 2020 monsoon, the Suryamati River burst its banks after moderate rains led to slope failure. Shankar Bista, 65, says a pasty mixture of sand and water flowed down the mountain and washed away everything in its path.

"We see increased sediment load in rivers, and without tree cover the water does not seep into the ground but runs off, causing a lot of

damage," says Basanta Raj Adhikari, a professor at Pulchok Engineering Campus, who has been researching landslides on the valley rim for the past 20 years.

Along with Gokarneswar, the phenomenon of contractors mining and quarrying the mountains and then selling the property for houses is going on at the base of mountains all around the valley—in Chandragiri, Budanilkantha, Godavari, Lele, Nagarkot, and elsewhere.

"This rampant destruction is affecting the nature and ecosystem, making slopes unstable and reducing the recharge of the Valley's underground aquifers," says researcher Adhikari.

There has not been a comprehensive study of Kathmandu Valley's groundwater, but a Japanese research project in 1994 concluded that the northern end of the Valley was critical for groundwater recharge. The study showed Kathmandu Valley could sustainably pump out only 20 million litres of groundwater, but the city is already extracting 70 million litres a day through pumps and deep tubewells.

That study led to the

establishment of the Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park to protect the watershed. However, the unchecked destruction now taking place at the edge of the park and in the buffer zone will reduce monsoon recharge, and lower Kathmandu Valley's water table, which has already been depleted by over-extraction.

The northern fringes of the Valley are made up of sandy slopes and forests which absorb rainwater and let it percolate into the ground, but all this construction is affecting the seepage," says retired Tribhuvan University professor and water management engineer Ashutosh Shukla.

Locals in Gokarneswar say they have taken up the water shortage issue with their mayor Santosh Chalise many times, but nothing has been done. In fact, they suspect the mayor himself is in partnership with real estate developers.

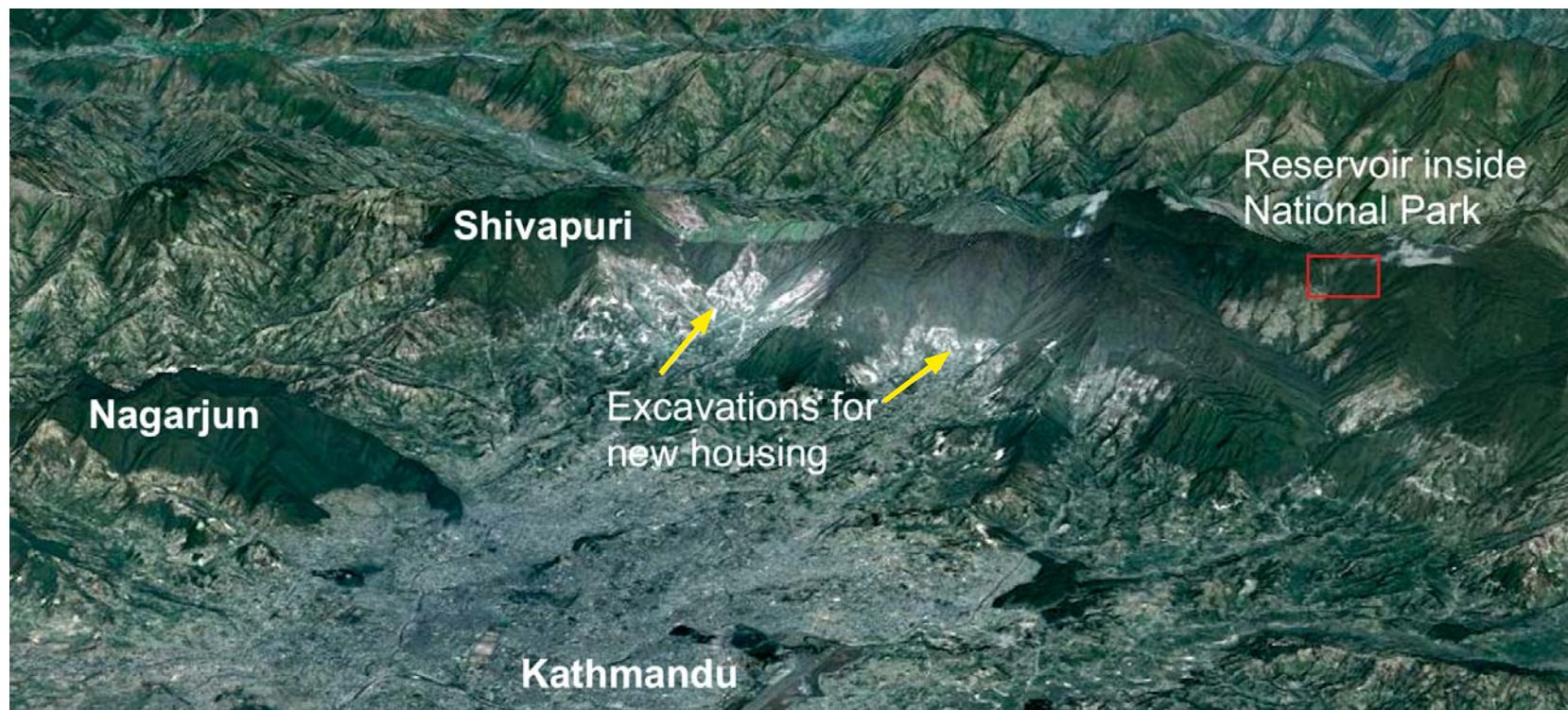
"The contractors get permission to flatten slopes for housing, and do whatever they like," says Buddhi Bista, a local. "If the mayor wanted, he could have stopped them then and there. It is hard to believe that he is not hand in glove with the developers."



Excavators busy on the fringes of Shivapuri National Park last week. Resident Shankar Bista (right) says springs have gone dry and there is risk of landslides.



surrounding mountains



Chair of Ward 3 Rajendra Bhandari is also frustrated that whenever he takes the complaints to the municipality, there is no one willing to listen. "I have written to the ministry in Kathmandu, to the municipality, to the national park,

I raise the issue in meetings, but no one listens," says Bhandari.

We asked Mayor Chalise why all this was happening during his watch, but he instead blamed locals for selling off property to real estate speculators for quick cash. "If I try

to stop them selling their land, they oppose me. If I let them sell their property, they blame me. None of the contractors have encroached on any community land," Chalise said. "The locals sell the land, they are the ones driving the dozers, they are

responsible."

Last week, a team made up of the Kathmandu CDO, District Coordination Committee, the National Park conservation chief made an inspection visit. CDO Kali Parajuli ordered an immediate stop

Bagmati Civilisation

Even with the imminent arrival at Sundarjal of water through a 26 km tunnel from Melanchi, Kathmandu Valley's population has grown so rapidly that it will not be enough to meet demand.

Which is why the government has started building two reservoirs on the Bagmati tributary of Nangmati within the Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park. The construction activity can be clearly seen in recent Google images (pictured above).

The reservoir at Dhap has a 25m high rock and concrete dam that can store up to 850,000 cubic metres of water. When construction is complete later this year, the reservoirs will discharge up to 400 litres per second of water to replenish and flush the Bagmati.

The Bagmati Civilisation Integrated Development Committee will then build another reservoir 4km downstream on the Nangmati. Project engineer Nischal Chhatkuli says the environment impact assessment of the NRs 510 million project with support from the Asian Development Bank is nearly complete.

to the excavation of the slopes. When no one took heed, the Home Ministry stepped in and the excavation has stopped for now.

Locals suspect the encroachment will resume as soon as the gaze of officials turns elsewhere. "We do not just want the destruction to stop, we want the perpetrators to be punished," says Buddhi Bista.

Laxman Poudel of the National Park says: "The slopes do not fall within the park boundary, but because of the impact on the watershed, we have written to the local government to immediately stop this destruction. It is now up to them."

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Niranjan Kunwar: Queering the story

In December of 2020, Niranjan's memoir, Between Queens and the Cities, became the first queer memoir in English to be published in Nepal. In this month's Lightroom Conversation, Niranjan and I talk about the fears and gifts of being queer, about rescuing hidden selves, re-authoring certain dominant narratives, and about male anger, the complexities of that emotion that we often do not talk about.



LIGHTROOM CONVERSATION

Muna Gurung

Niranjan Kunwar: There's a story that my relatives recount how I wanted to be a cow herder when I grew up. In a way, I had a streak that was a bit unusual; I wanted to be adventurous. I wasn't attached to my parents. When I was going to Budhanilkantha at age nine, I was eager to say goodbye to them. The appeal for me was the school's sprawling jungle and all the new friends I would make. And whenever my grandmother used to go to our village in Chitwan, I would follow her. There, I would graze cattle and run around all day.

Muna Gurung: Tell me more about Chitwan. What was there?

We have an old house there and my grandmother would visit regularly. We would go on a local bus, the roads were bad and I would get carsick. But despite that, I would fight with my parents if they didn't let me go with her. There was no electricity in the village and I liked that because we would eat under the light from a lantern and there were delicacies like khatte, which was puffed rice deep fried in butter. I realise now that I feel calmer in nature and it was a striking juxtaposition with my life in New York, a culture that had very little space for animals, nature, pets. I used to love animals, but in the city, I felt myself hardening. It's like in literature, we read about how the city hardens you. I guess that is also the queer experience, that sense of distance that is created between you and yourself.

But there is one line in your book where you say that you had forgotten about the 'gifts of being queer'. What were and are they? As a child I was very influenced by my three female cousins and Bollywood, so I would frequently wear their skirts and dance for them. They also encouraged that behaviour and I remember walking all the way to Chabel Chok to get a Bollywood film tape in a skirt! When you're a child, adults accept that, but only to a certain extent. Even in Budhanilkantha, I would wear skirts and perform, but then when the bullying and teasing starts, that's when you begin to suppress and conform. By 9th and



SAGAR CHHETRI

10th grade, I had begun to conform and even act 'macho'.

The story of young boys dressing up as girls is not uncommon. But as you said, only to a certain extent, after which they have to become a 'boy'. Sometimes my family also rationalises a young boy's 'femininity' as simply the remnants of their previous life, as in he must have been a woman before.

This is making me think about how perhaps in many janajati cultures, gender queerness is more accepted. For example the maruni dance where men dress up as women and dance is an important part of most Gurung cultures and even celebrated. But that too is perhaps only relegated to that space. I don't know how much of this has been investigated.

You write that because you read a lot as a child, your queerness did not feel strange to you. What did you read as a child that affirmed your being?

I would listen to my grandmother tell stories from the Mahabharat or the Ramayana, but I was especially taken by the month of Swasthani, when my grandmother would read one chapter of the Swasthani tale a day and I would also read chapters with her. The stories were always full of possibilities like gods chopping off heads, or people reincarnating and becoming

different; that immediately is a message that one can change form or travel far, or have magic powers. What does that mean for kids?

And then I encountered Western literature and it was about humans living very different lives in very different worlds. When I was a little older, I made sure to buy every single Filmfare and Movie magazine. Whether you call that reading or just studying pop culture and glamour, or looking at stars being themselves, it was a queer activity. Because fashion is also about people transforming into someone else, or something they are not. Today, I feel like I have lost this side of me, and I want to reclaim it.

What did you have to destroy?
My feminine side. Whether it's Bollywood, Filmfare, wearing skirts and dancing as a girl, I think I have it in me. I am definitely not ashamed of it. I think it is a really powerful thing if an individual can be a man or a woman, it's a skill and that's also what is actually needed in this world today—the fluidity rather than the rigidity. There was one time that I dressed up in drag in New York and even then, I remember I was not completely at ease. The flipside of the question is how much anxiety and fear there is for marginalised people, starting with women. And because of this fear, so many things are hidden, invisibilised, not talked about. That is why I really appreciate younger Nepalis now

who are out there in public being bolder than I am or I have been.

On being bold, when you wrote this memoir, you were filling it with people who are connected to you in real life, how did you balance what to reveal and what to conceal?

I chose to write nonfiction because I knew that I wanted to document this story as 'real' and I wanted to visibilise it, as most queer stories are often made invisible. Although I also know that writing about someone's life comes with ethical questions and one has to ask for permission, I didn't do that because I knew that I wasn't going to reveal any personal details of the characters in the story. But this begs the question, why did I write it? We teach in primary school that we have to write about things that give us strong feelings. While writing about my family, I began to write about certain family dynamics that was bothering me and I didn't think about censoring, I just had to write it out, but it was only later in revising that I began to get anxious about these issues of sharing sensitive information. But how do you ask for permission from your family? It's a tricky thing.

Poet Nibha Shah said that we are not taught how to love, and I was thinking, perhaps it is the same with apology, too. And how much we need that education.
This is why I wanted to become a

primary school teacher. One of my first encounters in the US was in a preschool classroom where the kids were learning, through story books, how to treat one another and the people in their communities with respect. I immediately saw that it was completely lacking in my life and in Nepal. It really moved me and when you think about family dynamics or even politics, I maintain that we learn our behaviours in the primary school classroom. If you don't learn how to listen or respond to each other with respect, you won't automatically learn it in parliament or after you get married. It's too late by then. There are many of us who didn't have this education or opportunity, and it is just something that we have to carry with us and try to do better.

Lightroom Conversation is a monthly page in Nepali Times that features interesting figures in Nepal's literary scene. Muna Gurung is a writer, educator and translator based in Kathmandu. www.munagurung.com



OUT OF BUSINESS

First episode of Season Two of Lightroom Conversation is between Muna and Niranjan, where the two friends talk about being queer. Go online to watch.

♦ prabhu BANK

Nepal to get satellite

Nearly 40 years after being allotted its own geostationary slot, Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTA) is preparing to put up its own satellite, saving the country billions annually from broadband satellite links.



Nepal had been given the slot by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) back in 1984, but lack of adequate traffic did not make it viable earlier. After the adoption of a new telecommunication policy in September, the NTA is moving ahead with selection of a consultant to advise on the project. Nine companies have submitted expressions of interest.

"Areas of Nepal that are not covered by telecommunication like Karnali, Achham or Darchula can easily be connected to the internet," says Sudhir Parajuli of the Internet Service Providers Association.

One Show Asia 2020

For the first time, two advertising campaigns from Nepal—#Basichumanity and #TogetherAhead—have been selected for the One Show Asia 2020 which showcases the best from the Asia-Pacific. This year, 62 jury from 29 countries curated more than 2,600 submissions from 59 cities in 17 countries, of which the two Nepali campaigns were part.

Turkish sports support

Turkish Airlines and the Nepal School Sports Federation (NSSF) are promoting school sports and tourism. NSSF's



Pradeep Joshi and Raj Karki signed the agreement with Turkish Airlines Nepal General Manager Abdullah Tuncer Kececi. Turkish Airlines will provide discounted fares and extra luggage facilities to school sports participants.

AVO Nepal & Aakansha Creation

AVO Nepal and Aakansha Creation's Tekka Initiatives have joined hands to create jobs for women in Sindhupalchok displaced by landslides and floods last monsoon. They will be trained to make crocheted soft toys, and given an opportunity to produce soft toys for AVO Nepal. At least 100 women will get jobs.

Sanima offer on Samsung S21

Sanima Bank has tied up with IMS Smart and Samsung Plaza to provide customers free credit card and zero percent interest on EMI upon purchase of the new Samsung S21 series. Customers looking to buy the phone will also be exempt from paying EMI processing fees. The new Samsung S21 is expected to launch on 5 February.

Dish Home Fibernet

Dish Home Fiber Net is modernising communications services with expanded broadband capacity necessary to support increased usage of wireless devices within the workplace and residents first in locations around Kathmandu and then all over Nepal.



ETCHING FROM MEMORY

Kabi Raj Lama creates a reprieve at his lithography studio

Kabi Raj Lama was a student in Tokyo when Japan was hit by the Great Sendai Earthquake that set off a deadly tsunami in 2011. Nearly 16,000 people were killed.

As he watched the disaster ravage families and property, the scenes became deeply etched in his mind. He did not know at that time that it was going to reflect in his art.

"The disaster made me think about life. When I saw houses collapse and people die, I wondered about unfulfilled dreams. The trauma left a hollow inside me and I had to find a way to fill it, so I started sketching," recalls Lama.

At the Meisei University Centre of Art and Design in Tokyo, he spent much of his time sketching his memory. "I documented my trauma in sketches and photographs to overcome it. And as a student of lithography, I turned those into prints," he says.

Some of his work went on to be exhibited in Tokyo's Senbyakudo Gallery in 2012, where Lama's work received attention from Japanese professors, artists and collaborators.

"In Japan, print-making is a tradition, so the visitors were curious about my work. They asked me about print culture in Nepal and if I would be continuing doing it," says Lama.

Back in Nepal in 2015, he experienced the second great earthquake of his life.

Along with memories revived by the disaster, he was dealing with the state of being "unsettled". He had also lost friends and felt like the chaos in his mind needed organising.

He turned to sketching again, and started archiving heritage sites in Nepal to document the earthquake's aftermath for which he set up a studio close to his home in Bouddha.

The place has an industrial feel about it -- the white walls and the



high ceiling give an airy impression of space. In the centre is a press machine, there are litho stones propped up on a pedestal. There are stocked-up canvas, papers, tools and a yellow colour lab that draws the space together like it is a throbbing heart.

"I have been using the studio not just to create art, but also to meet other artists and to teach," says Lama.

"Working space matters because if you are in familiar space, it can transport you to another zone."

When Nepal went into lockdown in March 2020, Lama finally found the quiet he was looking for. Working hours on end without having to entertain anyone, the studio was where he worked, ate, slept.

"I had been stockpiling material and I had time. I had been planning techniques," and so Lama started working on a new series involving

wood, stones and copper plates.

One of the prints he made during the lockdown is that of the Biswarupa. He had always been fascinated by the temple in the Pashupati complex whose statue was heavily damaged during the 2015 earthquake, an image of which circulated on Facebook. Lama used it to recreate the energy exuded by the figure.

"The Bishwarup is a powerful image with its thousand hands, and it took me months to finish. I like to

gaze at it for hours," he says, looking proudly at his creation.

With print-making, Lama tends to invest more observation in details. The idea of creation is associated with a heaviness that clouds him before he starts, almost like a gestation period. His research entails looking up historical archives, work done by other artists on the topic and relevant references. "I collect them. I pull together ideas and make sketches."

After the sketches are done,

he picks from the three of his techniques—lithography, cutting and etching—depending on which fits the sketch best. As opposed to a more prolific time when he was working on canvas, Lama has learned that putting more thought into what he creates, gives him more satisfaction.

"There are so many variations in tools and even if I change chemicals a little, the outcome is different. Noticing small things is like meditation for work," he explains.

Apart from creating, Lama is promoting his studio as a resource for those who want to learn about lithography. He says it is all about tracing relevance.

"In Newa culture, we have the Chitrakars who do blocks, Ranjikars work with dye. We have Tibetan influenced, flags in print. We just need to identify and create a printmaking curriculum," says Lama, who explains that print is also connected to education and industry.

"When there was no offset press, people printed manually: newspapers, religion, entertainment, we've always depended on manual printing. But they have evolved, and if we set up community studios, we could teach children to do this. It's the only way to preserve art."

Kabi Raj Lama's solo series, Cycles of Impermanence, will be on display at Siddhartha Art Gallery from February 19 onwards for a month.



OUT OF BUSINESS

Kabi Raj Lama's is a contemporary printmaker, who works with lithography. For a virtual tour of his studio in Bouddha log on to ofallthingsart's youtube channel. ofallthingsart is a non-profit art platform run by KUart students.

Protecting Lumbini's

• Rajendra Suwal

The region around Lumbini is an important wildlife habitat, but is facing an imminent threat because of increases in industrial pollution, urbanisation and mechanised farming.

A World Heritage Site associated with Lord Buddha, Lumbini has a diversity of farm-dependent biodiversity and is designated as an important Bird Area by Bird Life International. The fields and river channels provide an important habitat for many species and serve as a corridor for animal movement.

The farms are studded with oxbow lakes formed by Tarai rivers such as Danob, Tinau, Kothi and Telar which overflow into floodplains during the monsoon, but are mostly dry rest of the year. These lakes are important wetland habitats for many species of birds, amphibians, turtles, snakes and mammals, such as the Blue Bull antelopes.

Sarus Cranes are monogamous birds, and hold a unique place among all other species in Lumbini, owing to their legendary connection with Lord Buddha when he was Prince Siddhartha of the Kingdom of Kapilavastu.

Siddhartha Gautam is supposed to have rescued a wounded crane and saved it from his cousin Devdatta. In a statement that becomes the aphorism for modern day conservation, King Suddodhan then declared that the bird belonged to the one who saved its life.

Many historic images show the Buddha in the presence of the crane, and ornithologists believe this non-migratory species has been living in the Nepal Tarai for over two millennia.

The Sarus Crane has become symbolic of an ancient culture that valued all forms of life and its deep connection to it. Also regarded as 'Siwan ka Raja' meaning 'Royals'

of the Wetlands', the tallest of flying birds, Sarus Cranes hold a special relationship with the farmers of Lumbini as their presence in the paddy fields is believed to be indicative of healthy wetlands, a harbinger of good crops. The birds are protected by the community and have been named the mascot by the Lumbini Cultural Municipality.

Much like the Sarus Cranes, Kala Namak (black salt rice) holds unique allure for its association with Prince Siddhartha. Also known as 'Buddha's rice', the crop holds a cultural significance to the people of Kapilavastu who consider it a holy gift. After his enlightenment, Buddha is said to have distributed black rice to his people as a gift and a mark of homage.

The fields where the black rice grows also serve as a foraging habitat for Sarus Cranes and their chicks in the post monsoon season. However, fast-growing hybrid rice varieties have almost completely replaced them in recent times, with only a few farmers continuing to grow the fabled paddy.

Driven by this spiritual link, Lumbini has taken strides in protecting critical species and their farm habitats. The Lumbini Crane Sanctuary was set up by International Crane Foundation in the early 90s, which doubles up as an outdoor nature education centre. The refuge was built to showcase model wetland habitats for nesting cranes.

In 2010, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Nepal joined the conservation effort by partnering with Lumbini Development Trust. The collaboration began with an initial goal of planting one million trees under the Green Lumbini Initiative. Over the years, WWF Nepal has expanded its scope of work and partnerships to conserve and protect Sarus Cranes and their habitats.

The Lumbini Development Trust, International Crane Foundation, Lumbini Cultural Municipality and local youths are currently partners of the WWF in actively

working to conserve Sarus Cranes and promote Kala Namak rice with tree planting, building levees to store rainwater and forming eco-clubs to generate awareness on crane conservation.

There is a sense of urgency to this work because Lumbini's wetlands are increasingly threatened by pollutants, land encroachment, proliferation of industries, siltation, invasive vegetation and pesticide and fertiliser use.

Mechanical harvest of rice and wheat also deprive Sarus Cranes and other birds from their food source. New highways, transmission lines and mobile towers have also endanger the remaining Sarus Cranes and other large birds.

Urban expansion, unmanaged effluent, sewage and garbage are polluting water sources, and affecting biodiversity in the wetlands. Globally, freshwater biodiversity decline is happening at an alarming rate of 84% average since 1970.

However, there is still hope to reverse this loss, protect Lumbini's wetlands and prevent the birds becoming extinct. The Nepal Government needs to make a stronger commitment to protect, restore and manage existing wetlands.

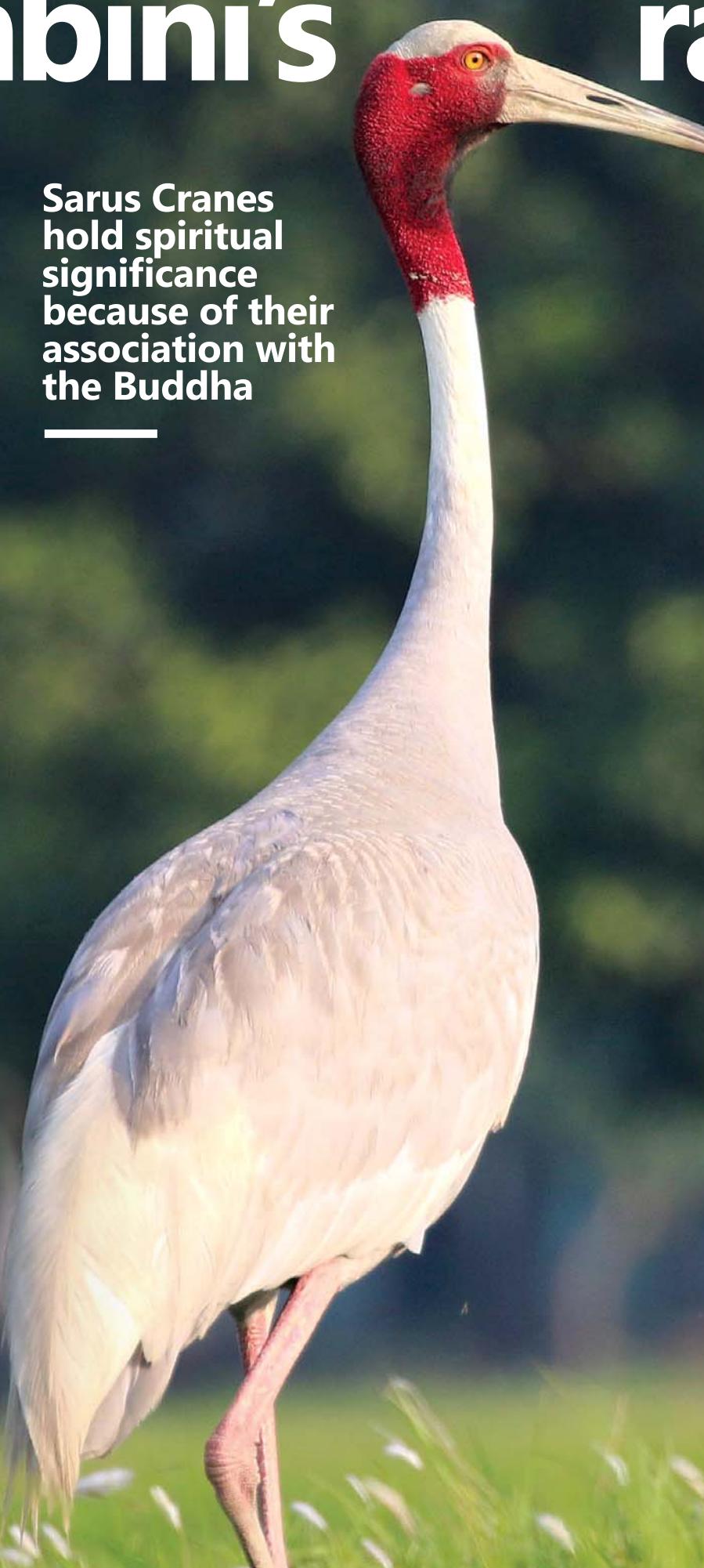
It would be crucial to promote stronger community stewardship towards conservation of wetlands and Sarus Cranes, alongside promoting organic farming, reducing use of harmful pesticides and mobilising youth in the conservation efforts.

As we embrace the theme of World Wetland Day 2021, we must pledge to protect and value water and wetlands. Sarus Cranes represent a lifetime of partnership, and these large, elegant, birds are our messengers for how we all need to work together to save them. ☺



Rajendra N Suwal is the Head of Partnerships Development at WWF Nepal.

Sarus Cranes hold spiritual significance because of their association with the Buddha



Decline in wintering water fowl

On World Wetlands Day, a look at the importance of Nepal's lakes and rivers for migratory birds. Experts have called for urgent protection of wetlands following another winter with a sharp decline in the number of migratory water fowl in Nepal's lakes and rivers this year.

Preliminary results of this year's bird census conducted from 2-18 January show a fall in not just the total number of water birds, but also the species count – a third year in a row with such a worrying decrease.

The Kosi River this winter recorded a total of 19,522 water birds of 62 species, much lower than the 21,744 waterfowls of 58 species counted last year. The Jagdishpur Ramsar site also recorded only 12,476 water birds against last year's 15,496.



Birders at Chitwan, Karnali River and Badaiya Lake also counted fewer ducks, geese and other migratory species compared to previous years -- raising serious concern about the health of Nepal's wetlands as well as the safety of the birds en route from Siberia and Mongolia.

Waterfowls breed, graze and spend most of their time in and around Nepal's lakes and rivers in winter, migrating over the Himalaya. Over 100 species of waterfowls have been recorded in Nepal, most of them migratory.

But shrinking lakes, destruction of wetlands, pesticide use, obstructions in flight paths, climate change, depleted fish in rivers and lakes as well as hunting along migratory routes are the main reasons for the decline.

"Wetland protection is a must for bird conservation, for their survival, their food and shelter," says Krishna

Prasad Bhusal of the Bird Conservation Nepal. "Waterfowls are an indicator species, they show us the condition of the habitat."

In January's bird census, over 300 enumerators fanned out across 60 wetland spots across Nepal over a two week period. They did not just count birds and their species, but also collected information about illegal hunting and habitat destruction.

The good news this year were sightings of new species: the Mandarin Duck in Pokhara, Yellow-billed Duck in Kosi and the Baikal Gairi in Barju Lake and Thopla Chuche Nadun Duck in Jagdishpur.

Nepal's annual bird count started in 1987 simultaneously with other parts of Asia under a Wetlands International initiative, which tries to tally the total number

Rare cranes



International: "With this census we aim to increase public awareness about bird conservation by engaging local communities."

Nepal's great ecological diversity, a terrain that soars from 70m above sea level to 8,848m within a horizontal distance of less than 100km means that it has more than 886 bird species, more than continental United States.

Of these, more than 150 are migratory in nature, 60 of them in summer, when migration is relatively shorter in distance.

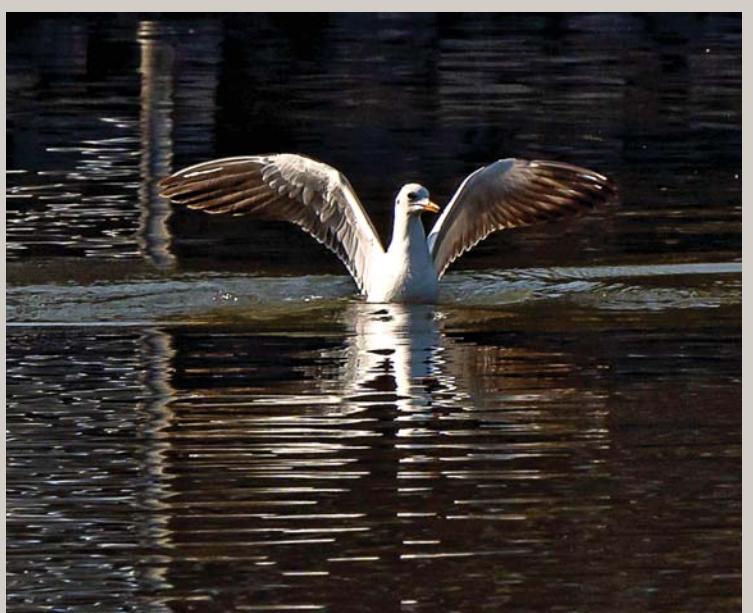
Every winter, birds from as far as Siberia, Europe, South Africa, Central Asia and East Asia travel to Nepal in search of favourable weather and habitat.

They spend most of their time in Kosi Tappu, Bishajari Lake in Chitwan, Jagdishpur, Ghodaghodi Lake in Kailali, Shuklaphanta Lake area and Kosi, Gandaki, Narayani and their tributaries.

of waterfowls in Asia at the same time.

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, the Nepal Bird Conservation Association, and community groups took part in the census.

Says ornithologist Hem Sagar Baral of Wetlands



Brown-headed Gull at Taudaha

● Kamal Maden

It was one of those brilliantly clear autumn mornings at Taudaha on the southern outskirts of Kathmandu. This historical pond is regarded as the last remnant of the lake that once covered Kathmandu Valley, where the serpents are still supposed to live.

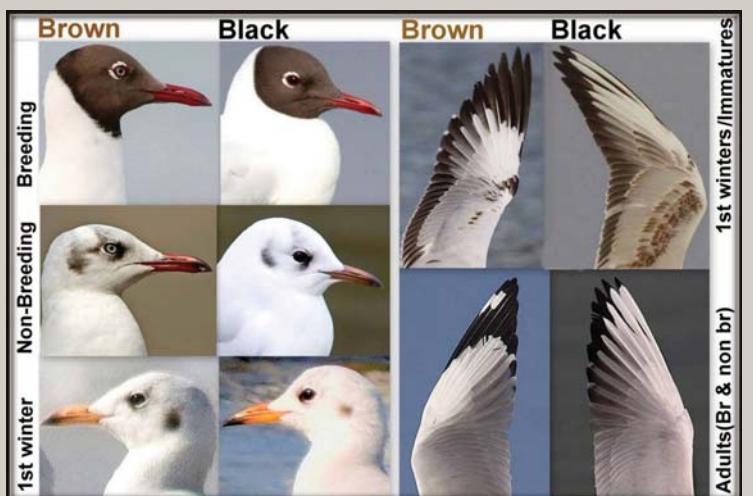
We do not know about serpents. But Taudaha is an important stopover for migratory waterfowl en route from as far away as Siberia to the plains of the Subcontinent.

While bird-watching at Taudaha in late November, I saw a gull feeding near flocks of other waterfowl that had just flown in from the north. I could not make out through my zoom lens whether it was the Black-Headed, or Brown-Headed Gull. But this was an exciting sighting, and I clicked several shots.

About a dozen migratory duck species are sighted in Taudaha every winter, including the Common Coot, Common Moorhen, Little Cormorant, Oriental Darter. In summer, the Brown-Headed Gull breeds in the high plateau of central Asia from Tajikistan to Inner Mongolia. In winter, it migrates south, crosses the Himalaya along the river valleys to winter in the lakes of the Subcontinent. According to one satellite tracking research it travels 2,400 km in two weeks.



Rare sighting of a migratory gull on the outskirts of Kathmandu



Brown-headed Gulls are rare in Kathmandu Valley, with just two records of sightings in November 2004 and October 2005. The Brown-Headed and Black-Headed Gulls are similar in appearance, and are easy to confuse. The Brown-headed Gull is slightly bigger, but on closer observation the shape of its head, the colour of primaries eye are different.

The Brown-headed Gull has a steep forehead, whereas the black-headed gull has a smaller and rather rounded head. This feature is hard to view in flight, but easier to notice when they are floating. Brown-headed gull has striking long dark outer primaries or longer flight feathers. Ninth and tenth primaries are completely dark with spots near the tip, which is often indicative that it is young or their bird's first winter. The gull seen in Taudaha was probably a Brown-headed Gull because of its dark eyes.

EVENTS

**Dim Sum Festival**

Join a week-long dim-sum festival event exclusive from Utpala's vegetarian buffet and engage in a variety of vegetarian dim sum games by specialty chefs.

5-7 February, 12pm-7pm, Utpala Cafe

**Sips of Poetry**

Celebrate the month of love with poems alongside a list of curated poetry performances by the poetry band Kavindrapur. This edition of Jamghat will have poems on love and other themes both in Nepali and English. Visit the website.

13 February, 3pm

**Kanta Dab Dab**

Wind up on Saturday afternoon with a live session, accompanied by excellent wines and delicious food prepared by Curilo's chef. Through sitar, bass and percussion Kanta dab dab will also blend ethnic, traditional, Nepali classical and various western musical influences to create a groovy night.

6 February, 1pm-8pm, Curilo, North Side, Dining

Beyond Activism

The US Embassy is hosting a virtual panel event, "Beyond Hashtags: Mental Health Activism in Nepal". Join US Ambassador, Randy Berry and four Nepali influencers for a discussion on how social media has become a key component around mental health and illness. Visit the website.

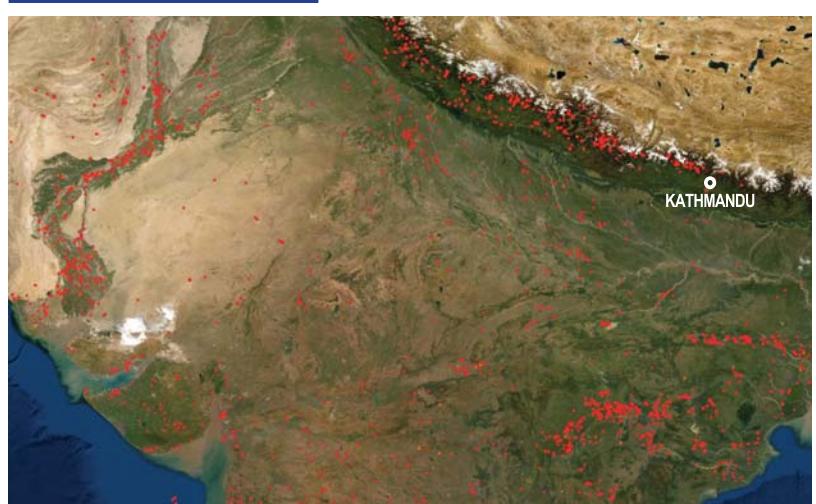
12 February, 11am



Finally a westerly front of moderate intensity is headed our way, and should start bringing cloud cover over Kathmandu Valley on Friday itself. There is 70% of precipitation on Saturday, and the mountains to the north should get much needed precipitation to douse wildfires. This is good news for farmers in Central Nepal, who have suffered a 3-month drought. The Annapurnas, Ganesh and Langtang may see the first snow of the season. However, this is a fast-moving system and the sun will be back on Sunday, with temperatures climbing to 21-6 Celsius next week.

FRIDAY	17°	SATURDAY	13°	SUNDAY	18°
	6°		3°		4°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



This satellite infrared image of the Subcontinent from NASA's Fire Information and Resource Management System (FIRMS) satellite on Thursday shows wildfires in western and Central Nepal. The one in Manang (west of Kathmandu) has been raging since November, devastating forests in the trans-Himalayan Valley. Smoke from these fires, combined with crossborder emissions as well as Kathmandu Valley's own pollution have worsened air quality in Kathmandu. The good news is that there may be some rain Fri-Sat that will put out some of these fires.

ONLINE ARCHIVES

**Photo Museum Nepal**

Take a look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal's history and learn the stories behind the photographs.

**The world at home**

Travel may be limited these days, but discovering incredible experiences from across the globe doesn't have to be. The world at home initiative brings some of their top tours, activities, and attractions to you online. Find everything on their YouTube channel.

Kurzgesagt

Kurzgesagt— in a Nutshell creates animated educational content on scientific, technological, political, philosophical and psychological subjects. If teachers, parents, or casual viewers are looking for creative educational material, head on to the Kurzgesagt YouTube channel.

**Google underwater tour**

Take Google's Life in the Ocean Deep underwater tour and discover the mysteries of the sea with Sir David Attenborough. Watch videos and underwater maps, and learn about the unique creatures that inhabit the world's oceans.

Access Mars

Take a virtual trip to Mars. NASA has partnered with Google to offer a tour of a 3D replica of the surface of Mars recorded by NASA's Curiosity rover.

OUR PICK



Almost a year later, the American action drama *Mulan*, is set to release on the big screen in Nepal's QFX Cinemas. The Walt Disney flick, which has been released in online streaming platforms and silver screens abroad has received mixed reviews. For those who enjoyed the 1998 animated version of this movie can relive their childhood, once again. The movie stars Chinese actor Yifei Liu in the titular role.

DINING

**Raithane**

Celebrating and promoting often underutilized local nutritious grains to produce ethnic cuisines of Nepal, Raithane is back with a winter menu. Eat your way through Nepal.

9801002971

**Deli Akuj**

Deli Akuj has you covered when it comes to your indulgences of quality food and interiors. From a plethora of coffee choices and international delicacies, choose what fits the mood and season.

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**The chocolate room**

Right from sizzling hot or chilled cold slurpees to sweet or savoury snacks, the chocolate room is equipped to satisfy chocolate hankering.

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Jhamsikhel



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

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौ।



नेपाल सरकार
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय
सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

Be water

Two flash stories about how water, with its quality to cleanse is a draw

My mother is grieving. She has lost a chunk of her childhood. Loss is sometimes unnamed. But this loss, she likes to talk about. They're gone, she tells me.



SUBURBAN TALES
Pratibha Tuladhar

The water hyacinths and lotuses. There were pink and white lotuses and lavender water hyacinths. We could sit by the side of the pond and wait for the fish to flip. Sometimes, one floundered for a bit on the surface before finding the way back below the water's surface. Sometimes, we would see snakes and frogs and confuse them for fish. We even confused tadpoles for fish, she says.

She likes to talk, my Mother. She goes on:

There weren't just ponds. There were springs, that had been fenced in by walls of red bricks, turning them into कुवा that served as community wells. There were three of them at a distance of six minutes' walk from the house. Father had built one of those for the community. There were two others built by others, who also wanted to be of service to the community.

These were places of doing—there were always women washing clothes. The dirty water was led away by a gutter to meet the canal that irrigated the fields that sprawled as far as the eyes could see. The fields always stayed irrigated,



PRATIBHA TULADHAR

the कुवा always had plenty of water. On days when no one washed clothes there, the water would flow out, clear, clean water that glittered in the sun. Sometimes, its reflection made you squint.

There were fish, and sometimes snakes. Sometimes, a toad. When the water overflowed, the fish would often show up at the brim, stare in fright at the human encounter, plop and dive back quickly into its depth. Children waited to catch them. हिल माछ ! They would catch some, thrust them in a bottle and take them home, but would bring them back

eventually because the Horlicks jars didn't make good aquaria.

There was something soft about the way the water lapped against the walls when women leaned down to draw water out with dippers. Children helped their mothers with smaller utensils. Fathers helped carry buckets full of water home—walking sideways as the weight of the water dragged them down. Some women would bring their गाँठ and fill them slowly to the brim. But there was never a wait. There was always plenty for everyone.

The springs were located 6m from

each other, the one at the farthest end, called मुहान, the main source, was bigger than the other two and always overflowing. Young men would dip in the pool. Women only went to that one if the men were not around.

Sometimes, a boy pinning for a sight of his beloved would wait by the springs, hoping to catch a moment of privacy with her—to look into her eye directly without having to say anything. Sometimes, a girl sat on the roof, prostrate, surrendering herself to the sun, in deep contemplation about a life that was momentarily stolen to be free of surveillance. The कुवा were so much.

But people in the neighbourhood soon started planting pipes and used machines to pump the water out to fill private tanks. Then houses started going up in the vicinity. Wells were being dug for each household. The water level started to recede so people had to tie their buckets to a rope to draw out water.

There was never enough water. And their platforms where women formerly sat, washing clothes, became scattered with colourful plastic bags, discarded toothbrushes, soap wrappers, and whatnot.

They are like empty temples now, says my Mother. I hear they no longer hold water. And with that, a chapter of my childhood has also closed.

•••

We decided to abandon the play halfway. It was excruciatingly long drawn and boring. Through much of it, we had sat sighing. In longing for something else. It was during the interval that we ran into one another in the Ladies. How're you liking it? She asked.

Meh.

Want to take a walk?

Where?
Kamal Pokhari?
Umm... Okay.

She was carrying a bouquet of flowers in her arms. For the cast, perhaps. She brought it along when we left the theatre. We bought a big bag of fries and crossed the road to arrive at the side of the pond. Kamal Pokhari, the one dedicated to the lotus. We found a little gate that let us into the area, marked off by walls to enclose the pond. There were walkways around it. Some people were walking, too. Brisk walking. And a couple on a date, walking slowly, their fingers twirled in one another's.

The pond had been cordoned off by a barbed wire fence. But we managed to find a niche and stepped in and sat by the edge of the water. We were so close to the water hyacinths. Closer to the center were lotus in bloom—still, as Kathmandu moved around it a thousand sounds.

Ah! This is pretty. I've never done this before.

That's the whole point, isn't it? Then she extended her arms and dropped the bouquet in my arms gently, like it were a baby.

Yesterday was your birthday. It was.

We smiled at each other and nibbled on the fries. She asked me at some point about my heart. I told her I was healing. Only, there isn't healing for some wounds.

True. True.

But we can make it lighter. Therefore, these moments.

And there, at Kamal Pokhari, in twilight, two awkward girls, introverted to the extent of withdrawing from the world, sat in silence a long time, eating potatoes and looking at flowers, until the guard came and told us we had ten more minutes.

Even moments were timed.

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१ वर्षको नयाँ subscription लिन मन छ
तर बजेट अलि कम छ?



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सबै कर र शुल्क सहित १२ महिना अवधिको EMI **रु.१९५६** मात्र



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MASKED MEN: Pushpa Kamal Dahal and comrades march on the empty streets of Koteswor on Thursday as his faction of the NCP called for a national strike to protest the swearing in of appointees to constitution bodies.



THEY SWEAR: Thirty-two new appointees to constitutional bodies including the CIAA and NHRC after being sworn in by President Bidya Devi Bhandari on Wednesday, pose with Prime Minister Oli.



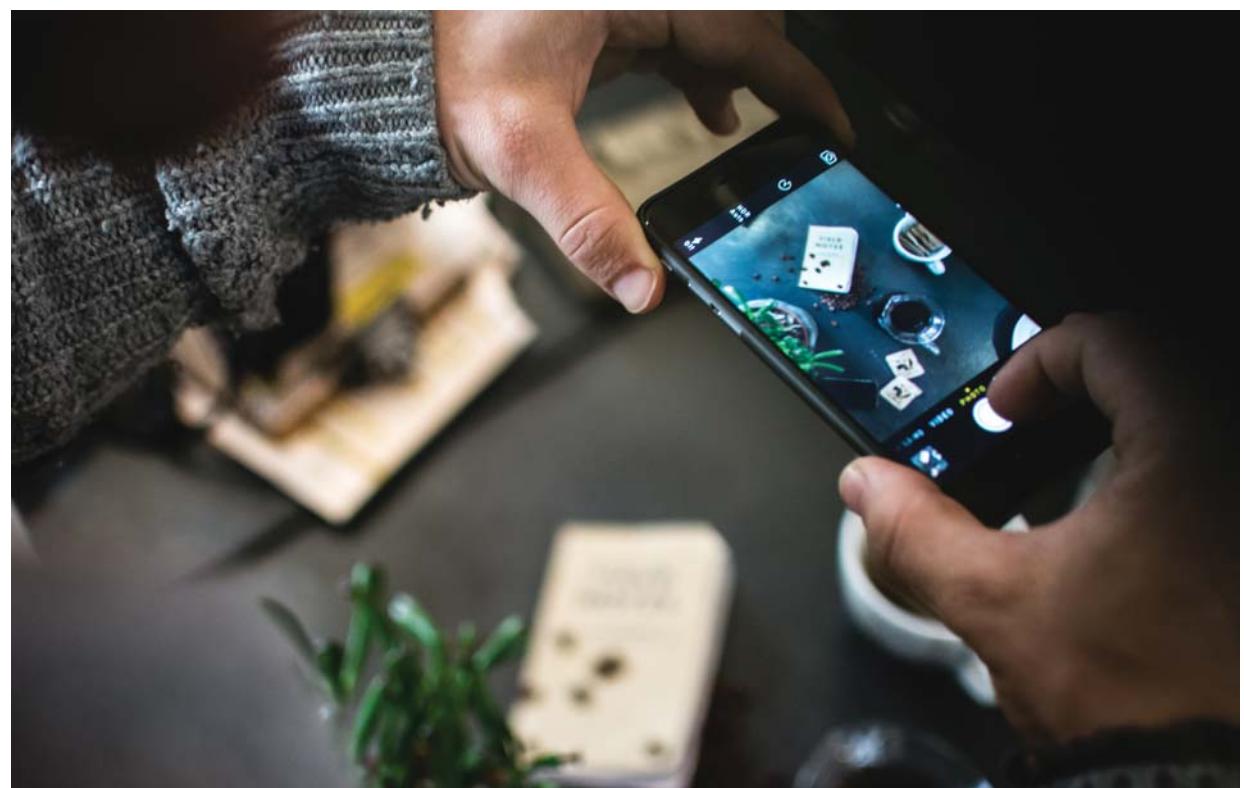
INFERO: A wildfire in Syangja's Phedi Khola on Tuesday raged for 24 hours, out of control because of winds and steep terrain.



JAIL VAX: District Public Health Officers from Lalitpur vaccinate the inmates at Nakku Prison on Wednesday.



TOP TEN: Mountaineer Nims Purja (centre) and other members of the Nepali K2 Winter ascent being felicitated at Aloft Kathmandu on Wednesday.



The full picture on phone cameras

Even before ultra-high resolution cameras make it to Nepal, there are already phones with impressive performance

There was a time when smartphone shoppers looked for phones packed with every feature they could possibly need. Everybody wanted a phone that is a radio, torch, camera, Internet portal, gaming console, alarm clock, calculator, map, calendar, personal assistant, notepad and more – all rolled into one block of various metals, wrapped in plastic (or glass).



TECH-AWAY
Sania Shah

These days, phone users are just looking for a great camera to capture moments to share. Yes, battery life and physical features are still important when making a purchase, but with most premium phones averaging at a battery capacity of 3500-5000mAH, the power bank is hardly a matter of contention.

Regarding the physical appearance, snazzy phone covers and pop sockets are still trending, making it easy for people to regularly reinvent the way their phone looks. Turns out that choosing a smartphone is like choosing a romantic partner -- it helps to have good looks, of course, but quality and performance are what will determine whether the relationship is a lasting one.

So, the camera is queen. The key point to keep in mind is whether the smartphone you have your heart set on has the camera quality you want or need.

In most cameras, the image sensor plays an important role. The bigger the pixel size, the better the camera performance. For example, a 48 MP camera with a 1/2-inch sized sensor is considered pretty good. You want your pixels to be large, as a larger pixel can capture more light than a smaller pixel.

The ability to capture more light means better performance when you're taking pictures with friends at a dimly lit bar, when light is at a premium. A lot of phone makers tie up with well-known brands to bump up their camera setup, which allows Nokia to offer a Carl Zeiss lens and Huawei to partner with Leica.

However, bigger, better sensors

and a larger pixel size is not always possible. Enter a technique called pixel binning, a powerful process that sees data from four pixels combined into one.

So, a camera sensor with tiny 0.9 micron pixels will produce results equivalent to 1.8 micron pixels when taking a pixel-binned shot. Smartphone manufacturers use this to keep customers happy with camera quality, especially in the budget phone segment.

Ultra high resolution cameras may take time to come to the Nepal mobile market, but the current crop of 40MP and 48MP sensors are already showing impressive results when using pixel binning. With ever-improving capabilities like night modes, better zoom, and AI smarts, there is plenty of potential for better smartphone photos right now.

The tiny hole that you can see inside your phone camera lens concerns the opening of the lens, or the aperture. Let's pretend there are doors sliding in front of your camera lens: you may call these doors Aperture. How much these doors open and close, and how much light they let in, determines the quality of picture.

The lower the number next to the 'F' (signifying Focal Length), the brighter and more visible your photo will be. Unlike DSLR cameras, most smartphones come with a fixed aperture, but luckily, nowadays the 'Pro' mode on your phone camera offers customisation of the aperture.

Google Pixel is a great example of a phone that excels with a single lens, but multi lens is an added bonus. Instead of counting the visible camera lenses on your phone (triple cam, anyone?), you are better off judging the phone's image processing skills.

This is a software that processes the data that is captured by the camera. Unlike a sensor or a lens, which cannot be changed or replaced after you get your phone, image processing is an AI system based on algorithms that can actually be altered or improved post-purchase.

Tip: To test the power of image processing, try installing G Cam (the Google Camera app) on your Android phone and check out the different it makes to your picture quality.

Basic features to look out for:

HDR Mode: High Dynamic Range mode allows the camera to click over-exposed, under-exposed and normal images which it combines to produce a well-balanced high-definition photograph with great clarity, excellent detailing and accurate colouring.

Portrait Mode: This premium feature blurs the background, and keeps the object in the foreground sharp and clear. Portrait Mode plays with the depth of field to give a unique, dreamy effect that will garner heavy Likes.

Optical Zoom vs. Digital Zoom: Optical Zoom uses the actual lens of the camera to zoom into a frame before clicking. Digital Zoom uses digital software to zoom into the frame and crop it to produce the picture, but this compromises the quality of image.

EIS and OIS: Often photographs and videos come out blurry or shaky because of manual handling of the phone without a stabilising accessory like a tripod or gimble (popular with professionals). This is when EIS and OIS come to the rescue. EIS (Electronic Image Stabilisation) helps make the video recording smoother by cropping some of the bad frames automatically. OIS (Optical Image Stabilisation) is hardware-related and not a digital shortcut to perfection. This means that phones that offer camera setups with OIS support tend to cost more, usually because high-end flagship models offer it.

Panorama Mode: Labelled 'Pano' on many phones, this feature was once a novelty, but now an expected 'essential' that allows the phone to capture more of a scene by combining images to create a horizontally wide panoramic photo. This is a great addition for people in Nepal who regularly capture mountain views on treks.

Time Lapse: A filmmaker's favourite this feature lets you take a sequence of frames at set intervals to record changes that take place slowly over time. When the frames are shown at normal speed, the action seems much faster, as you may have seen the sun setting bit by bit really quick, or flowers blooming in movies. ☺

Kathmandu remembers Aung San Suu Kyi

Well-wishers in Nepal hope she will be freed soon, and Burma will return to normal

● Sajana Baral

Burma is in the news again with this week's military coup, and Nepalis who had known Aung San Suu Kyi during visits to Kathmandu are concerned about her safety and of other democracy leaders.

Aung San Suu Kyi first came to Nepal when her mother Khin Kyi was Burmese ambassador to Nepal and India. In a later visit in 1975 with her husband Michael Aris and her infant son Alexander, she stayed at the Dharma Kirti Vihara in Kathmandu for five months.

Every time she visited Nepal after that she went to the monastery near Asan which is headed by Guruma Dhammavati. The venerated Buddhist nun remembers Aung San Suu Kyi as a patient and quiet person.

"Politics is full of ups and downs, I believe she will soon be released," says Dhammavati who taught the Burmese leader about Buddhism.

Rina Tuladhar at the Dharma Kirti Vihara says Aung San Suu Kyi had a special connection with the monastery and Kathmandu: "She had said during one of our conversations that she turns to the teachings of Guruma Dhammavati when she is going through difficult times. She is going through a difficult time now."

Aung San Suu Kyi went to Lady Shree Ram College in New Delhi and lived in Thimphu and Kathmandu, writing two books about Bhutan and Nepal. Her husband was a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism in the Himalaya.

"I always wanted to learn English and when I heard there was an English teacher at the vihara, I joined the class. It was only many years later, when I saw her on tv that I realised she was an important political figure. We called her Maa Suu Kyi," recalls Chinikaji Maharjan, who was tutored by Suu Kyi when he was five.

There were 20 pupils in the English class, and one of them was Trilochana Tuladhar, who remembers being told that a Burmese teacher had joined the vihara, but did not know who she was.

Aung San Suu Kyi and President Myint Swe were arrested on 1 February by the army in night-time sweeps in Yangon along with other ministers and members of parliament. There is heavy military presence in the capital Naypyidaw and Yangon, and media control has been tightened.

Aung San Suu Kyi visited the vihara again in 2016 when she attended the controversial 'Asia-Pacific Summit' in Kathmandu in 2016 organised by the Korean Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon.

During the visit there was a special gathering at the vihara, where she enquired about her students. "We stood up from our seats so that she could see us from the stage, but because it was a big event, we did not get to speak to her," Tuladhar recalls.

Ever since news came of the military coup in Burma and Suu Kyi's arrest this week, Guruma Dhammavati has been recalling her days at the vihara.

"Her eldest son Alexander was only three months old at the time," remembers Dhammavati. "Her husband headed to the mountains to conduct a study on gumba there, and Suu Kyi stayed at the vihara with her son."

Born in Cuba, Michael Aris was a historian and wrote books on Buddhist traditions in the Himalaya. He died in Oxford in 1999, while Suu Kyi was still under house arrest



in Yangon.

Dhammavati herself visited Aung San Suu Kyi during her trip to Burma with other Buddhist nuns from Nepal in 1992. "She was under house arrest at the time and would spend her time in meditation and reading. We had lunch at her house, and there was a tight military presence," she says.

Aung San Suu Kyi was released in 2010, and her National League for

Democracy swept the election five years later. She was also awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her struggle for democracy.

But the international respect she had was soon eclipsed by her refusal to speak out against the persecution of the Rohingya. Some 700,000 people from this ethnic group in western Burma have fled to Bangladesh since 2017, with a few thousand even finding their way to



refugee camps in Kathmandu.

Burma's military junta has come under worldwide criticism in the wake of the coup, with only Beijing supporting it at the United Nations this week. The Nepal government has also called for the release of President Myint Swe and Suu Kyi.

"This seems like a time of political turmoil the world over," says her student Trilochana Tuladhar. "Things are not any

different in Nepal after Prime Minister Oli dissolved the House."

At the Dharma Kirti Vihara, Aung San Suu Kyi's Nepali students and teacher are praying for her early release, and for things to return to normal in Burma.

Says Guruma Dhammavati: "What makes me sad is that these events keep repeating themselves in countries like ours." ☎

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SAGLO SAMAJ

Lokmaya Darlami who was bleeding profusely after giving birth in her village in Kavre, being carried to a Nepal Army helicopter to be flown to Kathmandu for emergency treatment last month.

Nepal's air ambulance

Helicopter emergency service is a lifeline for women in remote areas with birthing complications



and needed to get to hospital in Kathmandu as soon as possible.

Earlier, Lokamaya's husband and family had called the hotline to the President's Program for Women Upliftment under the Ministry for Women, Children and the Elderly in Kathmandu.

Section Chief Anju Dhungana had taken the call and asked about the mother's condition, instructed the family to immediately get an endorsement from the health post, and noted the location of a landing spot.

Dhungana then called the Nepal Army Air Wing, and said, "We have an urgent maternity rescue in Kavre." Another call to the CDO in Dhulikhel to coordinate the rescue, and a last one to the relatives of the patient to assure them that a rescue chopper was on its way.

Every day, at least three mothers die while giving birth all over Nepal. Despite remarkable achievement in reducing its maternal mortality rate (MMR) from 901 per 100,000 births thirty years ago to less than 240 today, Nepal still has a long way to go to meet the United Nations MMR target of 70 by 2030.

The rotor of the Nepal Army Bell 407 helicopter is turn even before the cabin door is closed. The crew rushes through pre-flight checks, and is ready to take off for the 20 minute trip to an isolated village high up in the mountains of Kavre. There is not a moment to lose. Skimming the forested ridges on the eastern edge of Kathmandu Valley, the helicopter gains altitude as it approaches the village perched on the Mahabharat Range. The pilots consult a map to get the exact location right.

The olive-green helicopter lands in a cloud of dust on a fallow terrace. The patient is 28-year-old Lokmaya Darlami, who has given birth that morning at the village health post. She is still bleeding profusely.



Pushpakala Rai of Solukhumbu with her baby after recovery at the Maternity Hospital recently. She got an emergency airlift after prolonged labour.

The main factors in the reduction of MMR are: rising female literacy, fewer child marriages, the contribution of female community health volunteers, and increase in deliveries in health facilities

after the recent spread of the road network. However, the graph is flattening out because of the lack of health care in remote areas. There has also been a spike in MMR during the pandemic in 2020.

In fact Nepal's first Covid-19 fatality was a woman who died on 16 May, ten days after safely delivering a baby at the Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu. She was sent home to her village in Sindhupalchok with symptoms of coronavirus but delay in getting her to hospital because the family could not afford an ambulance during the pandemic cost her life.

The President's Program for Women's Upliftment is an initiative to save the lives of mothers at childbirth. It was launched in 2018, and has made air medevac of 170 mothers who may not have survived if they did not get urgent hospital treatment.

Patients in 19 remote districts and parts of 29 districts that do not have roads can apply for rescue. Areas with adequate maternity facilities or road connectivity are not eligible. The program has an annual budget of NRs50 million.

Lokmaya is getting intravenous fluid as she is loaded into the helicopter which takes off immediately for Kathmandu with her baby and relatives. Along the way, blood covers the floor of the

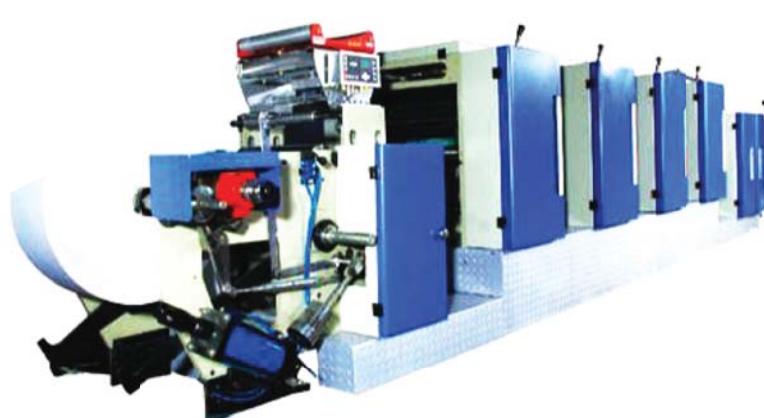
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Ambulance at Kathmandu Airport, to take Lokmaya Darlami to the Maternity Hospital.



SUSHIL MAINALI

Lokmaya Darlami during her convalescence, and ready to go home with her baby. "I thought I would die," she said.

saves mothers

helicopter.

Lokmaya is semi-unconscious, and because the nurse at the health post had warned against it, her mother keeps stroking her, and playing a favourite song on a mobile pressed against her ear.

The helicopter lands at Kathmandu airport, and Lokmaya is transferred to an ambulance which rushes her to the Maternity Hospital with siren blaring. The hospital itself was built in memory of the mother of King Birendra who died at

childbirth at age 24 because of loss of blood.

Lokmaya is treated, and two days later her condition had improved enough for her to sit up and breastfeeding the baby.

Not all the emergency airlifts have a happy ending. Sometimes the relatives wait too long, at others the helicopter is not available, or is delayed by weather.

Recently, a mother who had just given birth at a private hospital in Biratnagar had post-partum

haemorrhage. The relatives could not afford the hospital's fees, and drove her home on a 12-hour journey to Sankhuwasabha. They applied for an air ambulance, but it was too late for the mother.

"Complications usually arise when it is a teenage pregnancy, a home delivery, or a maternity case that needs a caesarian that is no available in the village," says Sangita Mishra, Director of the Maternity Hospital.

The program has the following

criteria for eligibility for free emergency airlift: prolonged labour, if the baby in the womb has died, complicated pregnancy, post-partum haemorrhage, or those who cannot be treated at local facilities.

Pushpakala Rai of Solukhumbu had been in labour for five days, and was in intense pain. Her husband applied for an emergency airlift, and she was flown to Kathmandu where the Maternity Hospital performed an emergency caesarian, saving both mother and baby.

"We mothers risk our lives giving birth," says Pushpakala, "especially when there are health complications."

Two days after Lokmaya Darlami was flown to Kathmandu, we go back to check up on her at the Maternity Hospital. She had received two sachets of blood

transfusion, and was in stable condition. She smiles and says, "I thought I would die."

President's Program for Women's Upliftment hotline: 98416918, 98416068 +97714200328



AIR AMBULANCE SAVES MOTHERS

Every day, at least three mothers die while giving birth all over Nepal. The President's Program for Women's was launched in 2018, and has made air medevac of 170 mothers who may not have survived if they did not get urgent hospital treatment. Patients in remote districts can apply for rescue.

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Nothing doing

Thanks to the Nahal-Depal faction of the Nepal Commissary Party, those of us nostalgic about this country's glorious past could on Thursday once more relive some of our fondest memories of a wholesome, old-fashioned bund.

Once again, there was the familiar smell of a tyre bonfire at the Thapathali intersection, the uplifting sight of heroic agitators cremating a vegetable vendor's bicycle in order to defend the Constitution, and a taxi undergoing spontaneous combustion in Gomgabu. Hadn't realised how much we missed the good old days, but here we are: back in the roaring nineties once again.

Those who say Nepal has been pushed back a decade are wrong: we are exactly where we were 30 years ago. Just as Sir Issac Newton so eloquently put it in his Third Law of Thermodynamics: 'A nation at rest will continue to remain at rest even if the ruling party has a two-thirds majority.'

A political lockdown is proof that we live in a vibrant democracy, where every citizen has the right to hold and express a dissenting point of view, and is free to make a complete arson of himself or herself. We can all rejoice that an important part of our traditional heritage that was about to be relegated to the dustbin of history has been carefully revived for posterity.

Just as we were beginning to feel that Nepal's lock-tantra and gun-tantra were in danger and our freedoms were in serious jeopardy, came resounding proof that it is alive and kicking ass.

We are still a dynamite between two boulders, as Unserer Führer once proclaimed when he was still preparing for trench warfare with India. The only difference is that the gelignite stick is now between his two hind cheeks.

Since both Comrade Awesome and Comrade Oily are in complete agreement about wanting to destroy the

country, why don't they do it together? Why fight about it? It would save time, and much of their ill-gotten wealth, if they pooled their resources to make things worse by organising future shutdowns jointly.

Thanks to the Supreme Leader and Dear Leader, we are marching resolutely to restore our hard-won demagoguery. Being a never-colonised, sovereign nation, Nepalis will not tolerate foreigners trying to destabilise us. We are perfectly capable of wrecking this country all by ourselves.

Forcing the country to stop for a day on 4 Feb was such a master-stroke. Thursday was a relief because we could all stay home comforted by the knowledge that a country that was already at a standstill was brought to a complete halt.

Here are some of the other achievements of the bund:

- With offices closed, bribes were not transacted and corruption was controlled to a certain extent.
- There was a 24-hour moratorium on kickbacks.
- Slow-down in Fast-track projects reduced their negative environmental impacts.
- Because meetings and rallies were put off and public transport was off the roads, thousands of Nepalis who would otherwise have been infected with coronavirus were not.
- Nepal's petroleum import bill came down a notch, reducing our per capita carbon footprint to the targets set by our Nationally Determined Contribution.
- Air pollution in Kathmandu on Tuesday came down to the 'Good Enough to Breathe Without Dying Level'.





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