



Experience

our 24x7 Client Care Centre at +977 1 4791800/5424198



Not climate smart

CARBON BOMBS: Heavy traffic on Thursday near Singha Darbar. Instead of promoting electric public transport, Nepal's reliance on imported petroleum is growing, also worsening air pollution.

SUMAN NEPAL

■ Sonia Awale

Countries are watering down commitments for fossil fuel phase-out at COP28 in Dubai, putting infrastructure in the Himalaya at greater risk of climate-induced disasters, therefore making them more expensive to build.

The Sikkim and Hewa Khola disasters this year and the debris flow that damaged the Melamchi project in 2021 are warnings of worse calamities to come.

Accelerated melting of Himalayan ice means the disasters will also have trans-boundary origins and impact, needing countries to cooperate in early warning and mitigation.

The Sikkim and Melamchi disasters were both triggered by cloudbursts on moraines already weakened by melted permafrost. There are new projects being built along the Arun and Marsyangdi rivers with similar upstream risk.

At the beginning of COP28 last week, hosts UAE announced with much fanfare the Loss and Damage Fund to compensate countries for climate-induced disasters like these. But the \$700 million pledged so far is a mere 0.2% of the estimated \$400 billion developing

countries need annually to deal with climate disasters.

"After rejecting the Loss and Damage mechanism for decades, developed countries are finally committing money, but it is a drop in the ocean," environmental campaigner Bhushan Tuladhar told us from Dubai.

In his speech at COP28 last week, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal called the climate crisis "an utter injustice" to countries like Nepal. But just before he flew off to Dubai, Dahal backed an amendment to Nepal's Forest Act to make it easier to fell forests for infrastructure. The country has also been slow in promoting electric public transport as an alternative to growing petroleum imports.

Nepal is off-track to meet its national net-zero commitment by 2045. This makes Nepal's moral case for Loss and Damage compensation weaker.

"Given the increased risk of climate change, we need new technical know-how to redesign Himalayan infrastructure," admits Kenichi Yokoyama, who heads the

South Asia Department of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and oversaw the Melamchi Project as ADB's Nepal Country Director from 2012-2017. Melamchi is currently undergoing costly repairs to reduce risk from future floods.

In Dubai on Wednesday, ADB and the World Bank announced a collaboration on the proposed Upper Arun and Dudh Koshi

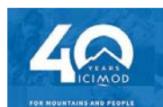
hydropower projects. Nepal's installed capacity is reaching 3,000MW, and will double in the next three years.

Experts say new projects need a new risk assessment paradigm. "We need to incorporate climate-resilient design features, such as flexible structures and early warning systems," says economist Barsha Dharel who specialises in climate-responsive

infrastructure.

She adds: "The safeguards should be funded through national budgets, the private sector, multilateral and bilateral aid, and sharing risk financing."

Huge, expensive infrastructure



Unabated greenwashing at COP28
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



20th
Outsource Your Non-Core Staff Through **Suvidha Staffing**

Licensed Company by DOL, MOLESS
ISO 9001:2015 Certified
100% Statutory Compliance

+977- 9851247213
www.suvidhasewa.com.np



Conference Room

For Booking
9801088356 | Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur

New Orleans Cafe

Thamel
01-4700736

LIVE MUSIC
FRIDAYS & SATURDAYS

eScan
Anti-Virus

#1 Global World

TOTAL PROTECTION
for Computers, Mobiles & Tablets

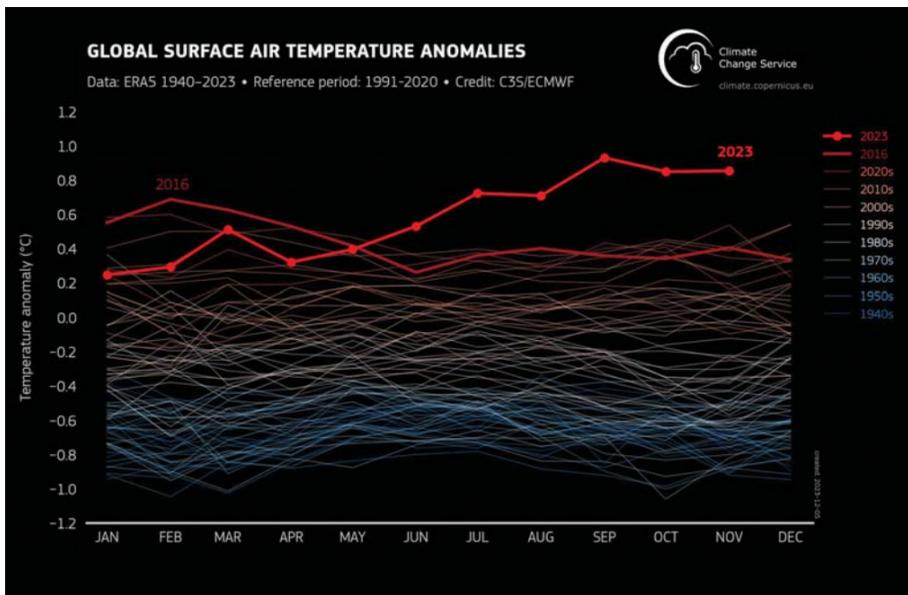
An ISO 27001 Certified Company
Contact no.: 01-4330980
www.escanav.com

welcome winter

From cozy cardigans to stylish scarves, winter can be welcomed with posh cashmere. Find it all at our Thamel showroom —casual wears to homemaker collection, all under one roof.



NATUREKNIT
CASHMERE REDEFINED



Unabated greenwashing at COP28

With all the hot air and greenwashing going on at COP28 in Dubai, it is clear that most delegates do not have the vision or the political will to grasp the implications of global climate breakdown.

Whether it is petrostates or those heavily addicted to fossil fuels, the Conference of Parties feels more like a conference of partying as if there is no tomorrow. This must be what it must have felt like as the band struck up a polka on the tilting ballroom of the Titanic.

The heat, flood, sea ice loss, sea surface temperature and hurricane wind velocity records that were broken in 2023 should be proof enough that incremental calibration of petroleum use will not help. The world (mainly India, China, Europe and North America) is burning twice as much fossil fuel as is needed to meet the outdated 1.5 degree goal.

That was a target set in 2015 at the Paris COP21 for 2050. We are already reaching that level of warming now (graph). There are 100,000 delegates at COP28, it is being held in the world's top petroleum exporting country, and its President is a climate science denier.

The Loss and Damage fund that was announced with drumrolls at the start of COP last week has turned out to be a PR stunt. The fossil industry is strongly pushing geo-engineering solutions in Dubai that already have acronyms: Carbon capture and storage (CCS) as well as Solar Radiation Modification (SRM).

A new report by Climate Analytics shows that CCS alone would be a 'carbon bomb' because of the energy required to

capture and store CO₂. The worst polluters are still pushing 'phase-down' instead of 'phase-out'. And they think they are being clever by adding that they are for phasing out 'unabated' fossil fuels. This is COP28's newest buzzword: unabated.

Unabated means CO₂ from burning fossil fuels is released directly into the atmosphere. The biggest emitters are now qualifying their targets by saying they will phase out just unabated fossil fuels. This semantic gymnastics ignores that carbon capture scale-up is unproven, and pumping sulphur aerosols into the stratosphere will destroy the ozone layer.

The bottom line is that fossil fuel exporters and high per capita users do not want to reduce their carbon footprints. If they cannot agree on accelerated phaseout targets, one-third of Bangladesh will be submerged by ocean expansion, and two-thirds of Nepal's remaining

Himalayan glaciers will be gone during this century. (Page 1)

We do not want to keep saying 'we told you so', but ever since the COP3 cop-out after Kyoto in 1997, journalists have been writing the same editorials verbatim over and over again.

A site search on the Nepali Times home page during COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009, or COP17 in Durban in 2011 shows that we have been arguing that decarbonisation was necessary to save Nepal's economy, and it is something we can manage ourselves.

In an editorial titled 'The Right Climate for Change' in the 9-15 December 2011 edition of Nepali Times ahead of the Durban summit, we wrote 12 years ago this week:

The Conference of Parties in Dubai feels more like a conference of partying as if there is no tomorrow.

2 EDITORIAL

THE RIGHT CLIMATE FOR CHANGE

A world leaders gather at an environment summit in Durban climate change to save the planet. The global recession has slowed the industrial age, backing down from pledges made at Kyoto to help poorer countries mitigate the effects of climate change. Large developing countries like China, India, Brazil and Indonesia are no reason why they should sign binding carbon commitments if the rich countries won't put their money where their mouth is.

For smaller Asian countries like Nepal, the issue is different. Whether we switch to renewables or not is not going to save the planet, but it can save us. Nepal's increasing dependence on fossil fuels is certain to take this country down the path of economic ruin. With the world heading for "peak oil" in 2020, after which total global petroleum extraction will start to fall, petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel will not only be scarce, but dearer.

The question at the summit this week should be a clear warning of the dangers to come. Nepal's petroleum imports from India grow three-fold in the last five years, and we don't have money to pay for it anymore.

As we have argued in this space before, Nepal's balance of payments gap with India is only going to grow in future making us even more dependent on the southern neighbour.

The solution is right under our noses. Making the switch to a hydropower-based economy is both the short-and long-term solution. We can give speeches until we are blue in the face in Durban about how the western countries should compensate us for our melting glaciers, or to help us adapt and/or mitigate, but if we don't have a plan to wean this country away from fossil fuels we might as well forget about it.

We don't expect Nepal's politicians to get fired

grew three-fold in the last five years, and we don't have money to pay for it anymore.

As we have argued in this space before, Nepal's balance of payments gap with India is only going to grow in future making us even more dependent on the southern neighbour.

The solution is right under our noses. Making the switch to a hydropower-based economy is both the short-and long-term solution. We can give speeches until we are blue in the face in Durban about how the western countries should compensate us

for our melting glaciers, or to help us adapt and/or mitigate, but if we don't have a plan to wean this country away from fossil fuels we might as well forget about it.

We need to ensure that future generations of Nepalis (50 million of us by 2030) will inherit a country that is self-sufficient in domestically-generated renewable energy to meet their transportation, industrial and household needs.

Maybe we should have just sent the minister to Durban to deliver his speech, and the rest of the delegation should have stayed home to plan for the future.

ONLINE PACKAGES



HIMALAYAN CLIMATE CRISIS

National and international personalities weigh in on why the Himalaya matters and how its accelerated melting is a threat to the entire world, not just Nepal or mountain countries. Watch the video online and subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.



ELECTRIC DHAK KUMARI

It is a rare enough to see a woman climb up transmission towers. But 56-year-old Dhak Kumari Poudel has been doing this for the past 16 years, clambering up poles to maintain overhead wires, installing new meters and increasing the transmission capacity in Kathmandu. Watch the video and read her profile on page 12.

KINGDOM COME

I do not find the RPP doing anything differently than other political parties but rather seeking to make a broader alliance for power-sharing ('Long leave the King', Alisha Sijapati, #1188).

Surya Deep

■ A person whose sole agenda is to 'bring back the king and make the nation great' cannot have a great vision. They do not have a fundamental understanding of Nepali society. Without a holistic understanding of our societal structure, and community, and our roots, one cannot bring any change.

Billions

■ Prachanda and his supporters identified centuries-old contradictions existing in society which hindered its development and worked towards national progress which many leaders, bureaucrats, businessmen, intellectuals, international players, and even his own party members failed to understand.

Niraj Shrestha

■ Public memory is short. Remember how a greedy, ambitious king ruined the country? We have tried strongman rule, it did not work.

P Joshi

COP28

Widespread and evidence-based criticism of the exploitation of migrant labourers in the lead-up to World Cup 2022 led to some improvement in Qatar's labour practices ('Too hot to work', Editorial, #1187). Hope reports by Human Rights Watch, Nepali Times, and PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal at COP28 will trigger some improvement in the UAE too.

Kul Chandra Gautam

DIPLOMACY

The reality is that Nepal's diplomacy isn't taken seriously enough for Hamas to release the Nepali hostage. ('Deft diplomacy freed Thai hostages', Moontae Jeong, nepalimes.com). Everyone is aware of how easily leaders can be bought and sold. The general public is paying the price for all the corruption.

Ram Bhandari

TOURIST FEES

What is the real problem here? ('Call to scrap Upper Mustang tourist fee', #1188) Some lodges, hotel owners and tourist businesses want to make more money.

Tom van Groeningen

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Hibernating Himalayan students

by Durga Rana Magar
Distance learning in Mustang has a different meaning: every November, students, teachers, admin staff pack everything up and move down from this arid cold trans-Himalayan plateau down to Pokhara. If you missed the article in print, read online.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Improving internet governance

by Sumana Shrestha
RSP MP Sumana Shrestha weighs in on how Nepal can establish government teams to engage with public and encourage new ideas and for organisations to participate. It should create a platform for knowledge-sharing on technology, both within Nepal and globally. Op-ed online.

Most popular on Twitter

Long leave the King

by Alisha Sijapati
Fifteen years after a post-conflict Constituent Assembly abolished Nepal's monarchy, growing public discontent with successive governments is fueling a drive to restore the country's Hindu monarchy. Join the vigorous discussion online.

Most commented



The Subcontinent's original people

by Sewa Bhattarai
The Uranw aboriginal people of southeast Nepal now number just 40,000, and most are landless. Though living on the margins of mainstream Nepali society, their unique culture and language is not just surviving, but thriving. Read about the community at nepalimes.com.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

- Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**
The #COP28 Climate Summit in Dubai spotlights working conditions for Nepali migrant workers.
- Sujeev Shakya @sujeevshakya**
Surely hosting #COP28 in Dubai is like doing a Vipassana session in a nightclub just known for being a late-night watering hole. #hypocrisy
- Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**
Travel to a holy Himalayan valley that champions non-violence and living in harmony with nature.
- Inge Baumgarten @IngeBaumgarten**
In times of multiple crises an indigenous practice of "Do-No-harm" by a community in #Nepal is an encouragement. We need more of this!

1,000 WORDS



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA/RSS

DAUGHTER ALSO RISES: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and daughter Ganga Dahal attended the Zayed Sustainability Prize award ceremony at COP28 in the UAE on 1 December.

Times

Nepali Times on Facebook
Follow @nepalimes on Twitter
Follow @nepalimes on Instagram

Editor Online: Sahina Shrestha Executive Editor: Sonia Awale Layout: Kiran Maharjan
Publisher: Kunda Dixit, Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalimes.com | www.nepalimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: +977 1 5005601-08 Fax: +977 1 5005518



A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

WELCOME ON BOARD: DETROIT



TURKISH AIRLINES

USA

Axiata may find breaking up is hard to do

Malaysian conglomerate likely to be tied down in court battle with Nepal government over its stake sale in Ncell

■ Ramesh Kumar

Malaysian conglomerate Axiata surprised everyone on 1 December when it suddenly announced the sale of its stake in the telecommunication service provider Ncell. But breaking up may be hard to do.

The company said that it had entered into a Share Purchase Agreement (SPA) with Spectrlite UK Limited for the sale of the St Kitts and Nevis-registered Reynolds Holdings Limited, which owns about 80% equity stake in Ncell.

The group said its decision to withdraw from Nepal was 'based on a thorough evaluation of the prevailing business environment in Nepal, which led to the conclusion that continuing operations under the current conditions of unfair taxation and regulatory uncertainties was no longer sustainable for Axiata.'

Axiata's last quarterly report stated that its board of directors had decided to sell its shares in Ncell on 29 September. Axiata acquired Reynolds from the Swedish company TeliaSonera for \$1.365 billion in 2016. In contrast, the group's sale to Spectrlite UK includes a fixed consideration of \$50 million.

"Not only has Axiata made derogatory comments about Nepal's investment climate, the deal sounds fishy and should be investigated," RSP MP Swarnim Wagle told Parliament's Public Accounts Committee on Wednesday.

In front page ads in Nepal's major dailies this week, Axiata denied this was a ruse to evade taxes, Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) has said that it was not notified as per rules of the Ncell sale, and has sent a letter to



SUMAN NEPALI

Axiata saying the company should have got approval first. Rules require NTA to approve the sale and purchase of more than 5% of the paid-up capital of a business.

This is not the first time Axiata is embroiled in a tax row. Its acquisition of Ncell was disputed in 2016 because the agreement between the selling and purchasing

parties had occurred outside Nepal. This meant capital gains tax from the profits of the sale was not paid.

Ncell was subsequently levied Rs62.65 billion in capital gains tax by the Nepal government, which Axiata challenged in the Supreme Court. The court ruled in the government's favour in February 2019, and it took the case to the

International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) in May of the same year which ruled in Nepal government's favour in June 2023.

As it stands, the sale and purchase agreement has come under scrutiny not only because of Axiata's alleged non-compliance with legal procedures, but also because of the murkiness of the purchasing company, Spectrlite UK which was registered in the UK by a Singapore-based Nepali-origin businessman Satish Lal Acharya only two months ago, with paid up capital of just \$1.

Sunivera Capital Ventures, which owns the remaining 20% shares of Ncell, is also owned by Acharya. The businessman therefore now has complete ownership of the service provider.

'[...] This transformative deal signifies the evolution of Ncell towards a greater Nepali-origin ownership and management,' read Acharya's statement in the Ncell ads in the papers.

Axiata's agreement with Spectrlite also includes a profit-sharing deal between the two parties until 2029, the year in which the license reverts back to the government.

The Large Taxpayer Office in Kathmandu levied Axiata an additional Rs60 billion tax upon change of ownership. Section 57 of the Income Tax Act states that if the ownership of any entity changes by 50% or more as compared to its ownership until before the last three years, the entity shall be deemed to have disposed of the property under its ownership or the liability borne by it.

The ICSID ruled that Axiata has discharged its tax liability after paying the capital gains tax to the government, but the case is still

pending in Nepal's Supreme Court.

Ncell said in its ad that it had fulfilled its tax obligations, and it would handle any tax on the current sale in accordance with Nepal's laws. Axiata is said to have been unhappy with expensive fees for the renewal of its mobile telecommunication license. NTA charges Rs20.1 billion for license renewal, and it is valid for 10 years. But Ncell's 25-year license operational period (as Mero Mobile) coming to an end within the next six years in August 2029.

It is assumed that Axiata sold its shares in Ncell to bypass nationalisation. If Satish Lal Acharya, a businessman of Nepali origin, has majority ownership of Ncell, the license can be renewed. But he is a Singapore resident and it is unclear whether or not he has renounced his Nepali citizenship.

With the change in ownership, Ncell's liabilities have also shifted to Acharya. Last year, Ncell received a credit rating from ICRA Nepal to obtain loans exceeding Rs28 billion. Axiata and the Nepal government could be entering a long and complicated legal battle over Ncell's sale, purchase and sale of ownership.

NTA Chair Purushottam Khanal has said that he will seek clarification from Axiata. Officials at the Internal Revenue Office also say that it will be difficult for Axiata to avoid paying taxes.

On Wednesday Parliament's Public Accounts Committee directed the government to halt the transaction pending investigation.

The Patan High Court after an initial hearing last week following Axiata's announcement issued an order asking the company to present reasons for the sale. The next hearing is fixed for 11 December. 🇳🇵

NMB BANK
एनएमबि बैंक

Himalaya to Shanghai

Himalaya Airlines inaugurated its Kathmandu-Shanghai connection on 2 December, adding a fourth Chinese city connected to Kathmandu. The direct route will operate weekly on Saturdays and expand to twice a week on Saturday and Wednesday from 20 December. The inaugural flight saw 137 passengers



fly from Kathmandu to Pudong International Airport. The airline plans to add Chongqing and Lhasa to its destinations in China, as well as possible services to Pokhara. Xie Yu, Economic and Commercial Counsellor of China to Nepal, commended Himalaya Airlines for connecting Shanghai, a major global hub, emphasizing its significance for business expansion.

Ncell's new owner

Ncell is set for a change in ownership as Spectrlite UK Ltd acquired Axiata's entire stake in Reynolds Holdings, the majority shareholder of Ncell. Satish Lal Acharya, owner of Spectrlite expressed commitment to enhancing Ncell's offerings. Ncell's CEO, Jabbar Kayumov, welcomed the change, anticipating collaboration with new shareholders to elevate Ncell into a leading Nepali-driven data and communications hub.

Ncell



Nepal-Australia meeting

The inaugural Nepal-Australia Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) meeting under the new MoU on Water Resource Management was held in Kathmandu on 23 November. Water and Energy Commission's Sushil Chandra Tiwari and Australian Ambassador Felicity Volk co-chaired the meeting that approved the Kamala River Basin Action Plan, support for the Nepal Basin Information System, water source modeling for Pokhara and Tulsipur, and a training program for federal and provincial officials.

KTM Holiday Inn

IHG Hotels and Resorts has opened its first Holiday Inn Express in Nepal. Located in Naxal with 100 rooms, with



Express Café & Bar providing all-day dining, and the Rooftop Asian Bar with mountain views. The hotel is now open and accepting reservations.

Stan Chart support

Standard Chartered Bank has announced a donation of Rs13.3 million to the British Red Cross in response to the recent earthquake in Western Nepal. The funds will assist the Nepal Red Cross Society in delivering first aid, medical aid, and essential supplies like food, water, and emergency shelter kits to families affected by the earthquake. Anirvan Ghosh Dastidar, CEO of Standard Chartered Bank Nepal expressed the bank's commitment to supporting communities in times of need.

Tata Maxchange

Sipradi Trading organized its Maxchange Mela where customers can exchange old vehicles of any brand for Tata's popular Tata Nexon Max. The fair this week December at Tata Motors showrooms across Nepal allowed customers free ev fast charger for vehicles, one year autoplus insurance, one year vehicle tax, accessories, exchange bonuses.



Marriott's calendar

Kathmandu Marriott Hotel has announced the start of its Advent Calendar 2023. From 1-25 December at 5 pm a daily window will reveal exclusive surprises for specially



invited guests. Sponsors are Nebuti Travels, Fishtail Tours & Travels, and others. The event kicked off with a day dedicated to the children of Baby Life Home and Saphala HIV Shiksha Sadan.

40Up liquor brands



The Nepal Distilleries is set to launch premium 40up liquor brands in response to consumer demand. With an alcohol content of 34.23% these beverages benefit from low excise duty. General Manager Shubash Lamichhane says the company aims to establish a strong presence in the 40up segment.

Daraz 11.11 sales

E-commerce platform Daraz concluded its highly anticipated 11.11 sale serving over 5 million consumers in Nepal. Staples like oil and ghee were top-selling products. Daraz supported 19,000 brands and sellers, resulting in a 46-fold growth in sales compared to its non-campaign period. The platform achieved over 600% growth in shoppers outside Kathmandu Valley and covered up to 522 km for its furthest package delivery. Daraz Nepal Managing Director Aanchal Kunwar said the company was committed to communities during economic uncertainty.

Mobile rule makes Nepal immobile

Confusion about new Mobile Device Management System angers visitors

■ Aisha MacDougall

The divestment by Malaysia's Axiata from Nepal's Ncell mobile operator has overshadowed a persistent problem concerning imported handsets.

It has been nearly a month since Nepal Telecommunication Authority enforced its on-again-off-again rule on the use of imported mobile phones, but it has left even more confusion among tourists and Nepalis returning with phones.

The Mobile Device Management System (MDMS) is ostensibly supposed to deter tax evasion, enable tracking of stolen phones, and even geolocate users in emergencies. In theory.

But many believe it is being pushed by powerful phone importers who are losing out on sales to Nepalis who bring phones for themselves and relatives.

The policy was first tested in 2018, but immediately withdrawn after protests, mainly from the migrant worker community. They ran a #NoRemittances campaign on social media prompting the government to allow Nepalis working abroad for at least six months to bring home a maximum of two new mobile phones, avoiding 13% VAT and 5% excise.

Foreigners visiting Nepal who wish to connect to the local telecommunication network or make and receive calls during their stay are now required to register their cellular devices. If they do not do so within 15 days, they can only use their phones to connect to wifi and not to local cell networks.

The NTA MDMS Bylaws, 2079



KUNDA DIXIT

(2022) explicitly states that it 'shall not apply to the mobile devices of subscribers to non-Nepali mobile networks operators while roaming in Nepal'. But a majority of visitors to Nepal get a local SIM to reduce roaming costs, and would be impacted by this new system.

"Many tourists are not as equipped with technology, and are not familiar with Nepali and this convoluted system," says Giancarlo Cattaneo, a Swiss journalist who has been coming to Nepal twice a year for the past ten years. "In fact, a lot of tourists already begin trekking in remote locations upon their arrival and are unable to even

register their phones."

MDMS has not been widely publicised abroad, and most arriving passengers at Kathmandu airport have no idea that there is such a policy. This week, there were unprecedented crowds at SIM card counters of cell phone providers at the airport which are doing brisker than usual business.

The only mention of MDMS that is readily available to tourists is an automated text that one receives upon arriving in the country, but it is in Nepali and contains no links for registration. Their phones can be blocked without warning.

After being told of the policy by a Nepali person, Cattaneo tried thrice to register his phone, but in vain. The process involves the detailed disclosure of both personal and cellular data. Visas and passport information need to be uploaded as JPEGs, however, the maximum file size that the system allows for is 512kb, meaning that these are beyond the upload limit and therefore cannot be submitted.

"I am a friend of Nepal, and it is disheartening to see these frustrating systems," adds Cattaneo, echoing views by other visitors.

MDMS software allows the NTA to manage and monitor all

mobile devices in Nepal through each device's unique International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number. It was implemented after strong lobbying by smartphone importers to help control the grey market of imported phones.

They convinced the government it was losing tax revenue because of the unauthorised imports, and that the system would make it easier to trace stolen phones or geolocate criminals with IMEI numbers.

According to the Nepal Mobile Distributors Association (NMDA), the grey market accounts for 25% of the smartphone market in Nepal. All foreign-bought devices, regardless of the owner's nationality, must be officially registered through the MDMS system within 15 days of entry into the country.

Devices imported by designated importers of iPhones and Android brands already have IMEI numbers and do not need to go through the MDMS process.

Imported devices not registered within the 15-day window can be 'blacklisted', meaning these handsets will be blocked by cellular operators. While wifi use is still possible, users with blocked devices cannot receive or make phone calls or text messages even with local SIM cards.

There are some 5 million mobile phones in Nepal that are yet to be registered through the MDMS system. Ncell contacts blacklisted users to register their devices, but the state-owned NTC blocks phones with no prior warning.

However, the NTA appears to have put the cart before the horse because it does not have the necessary equipment to enforce MDMS automatically. It has to ask operators like NTC and Ncell to manually block users.

Given that the system is currently manual, there are also concerns over data privacy. 🇳🇵



TOYOTA

WHY HYBRID ELECTRIC?

REFUEL AS USUAL

Refueling your hybrid is easy. Top up with petrol as normal at fuel stations.

DRIVE LIKE YOU ALWAYS HAVE

Toyota Hybrid Electric models seamlessly switch between electric energy and a blend of petrol and electric power to optimise driving performance.

SELF CHARGING

The self-charging hybrid battery charges when braking or coasting – so there is no need to plug in.



ONE MONTH AFTER JAJARKOT EARTHQUAKE

The current status and needs of the survivors of the 3 November quake that killed at least 154

■ **Ramu Kharel and Maggie Doyne** in Jajarkot

A rapid assessment of the epicentre of the earthquake that hit just before midnight on 3 November shows that lack of accurate information about the status of survivors and their needs continues to be a challenge.

Our trip to the hardest hit areas from Khalanga to Nalgad in this remote district in the mountains of western Nepal involved the rescue of a month-old infant (pictured, far right) whose mother was reported to have died from the cold.

There has been inaccurate and sensationalised reporting in the media of people dying from the cold. While it is true that winter has set in and long-term illnesses can be exacerbated by the cold, stress or unhygienic conditions, many of the deaths have been due to acute illnesses and pre-existing conditions.

There have also been reports of relief items being stuck in bureaucratic bottlenecks and piling up in municipal offices instead of being distributed to those in need. While that may have happened in the early days of the earthquake, that was not what we saw on last week's trip.

In any natural disaster, it is important to recognise that the scenario for relief can rapidly change from day to day, thus making a rapid response and clear communication channels vitally important.

We are concerned that inaccurate journalism based on hearsay without fact-checking can foster an environment of cynicism and criticism, discouraging collaborative efforts. It can also affect the morale amongst first responders, spreading distrust.

NEED: Relief must be survivor-centred and not be sensationalised or politicised with fake news. A centralised database that can foster collaboration is being put up with accurate and up-to-date information on the Jajarkot Earthquake Response website.

Partners on the ground can also fact-check and debunk false reports, and we urge reporters to seek out these primary sources instead of relying on sensationalised clickbait.

Rubble and destruction

As we approached the epicentre with three vehicles filled with

jackets, sanitation kits, and blankets, the destruction was shocking. Even in relatively accessible areas like the district headquarter of Khalanga, the houses are still in ruins. A month after the earthquake, the rubble still has not been cleared.

Things get worse the deeper we go into the mountains. On the way to Nalgad, there are rows upon rows of destroyed houses. Most people are living under tarp and bamboo tents, in one of them there were seven members of a family huddled inside. One man in Khalanga had broken his arm, and was sifting through the rubble of his home with his other hand. He was sheltering in a nearby school with many other neighbours.

A school in Nalgad was still functioning, and students were attending classes in tents. Their school was damaged and there was fear of aftershocks.

Multiple political groups and nonprofits are helping clear the rubble in places, but no active rebuilding has started yet.

NEED: Corrugated Galvanised Iron (CGI)-based temporary homes are better than tents for this winter. But rapid, affordable, earthquake resistant and sustainable rebuilding must start as soon as possible using the experience and plans developed after the 2015 earthquake.

Rural municipalities must be key partners in all rebuilding efforts. Relief organisations can divide up their efforts to avoid duplication. There are prototypes for winterised temporary shelters and long-term solutions for reconstruction.

Humanitarian Aid

Nepal has a one-door policy currently to manage aid coming into disaster zones. Each district's disaster relief committee is led by the Chief District Officer (CDO), who is in charge of relief items coming to the region. Jajarkot district has received tons of relief material, and local distribution was initially the bottleneck. There are still reports of items not getting to those that live in remote areas.

We saw this week that the distribution management appeared to have improved. Items lying in municipality offices and district offices were in the process of being delivered. The municipal system makes it easy to coordinate with local ward chairs to find the areas of acute need.



Our trucks had to be registered with the CDO with an itemised list and approved for further transport deeper into the district. The process seemed seamless. In Nalgad municipality, where few relief organisations are present, the mayor's office and the Nepal Army have coordinated with NGOs to distribute blankets and clothes to more remote regions.

The municipalities are coordinating better, and working closely with relief aid partners. But there is still a need for logistics management and strategic distribution of relief material in difficult-to-reach villages. Special care must be given to villages at higher altitudes where it will soon start snowing.

NEED: Relief organisations must

respect the one-door policy, and not bypass this effort to coordinate relief and avoid waste and overlap.

The Ward chairs have their feet on the ground and are the best source for exact need. They should be made partners in all aid distribution locally.

Healthcare

Jajarkot has a well-equipped district hospital, and each municipality has a health centre. There are smaller health posts in wards within the municipality. The nearest high-level facility with ICU capacity is in Surkhet.

Jajarkot district hospital had a large number of traumas during the first weeks after the earthquake. The hospital has five medical officers, and one

MDGP (consultant) physician, and can provide basic emergency care, maternal and child care including Caesarean section and vaginal delivery, and has a robust pharmacy. The hospital's patient census was not impressive during our visit.

The Nalgad municipality health centre was busy with only one medical officer available. Large tents from UNICEF had been erected outside for additional inpatient ward and emergency space. There seems to be a gap from the district to support the local municipality's needs.

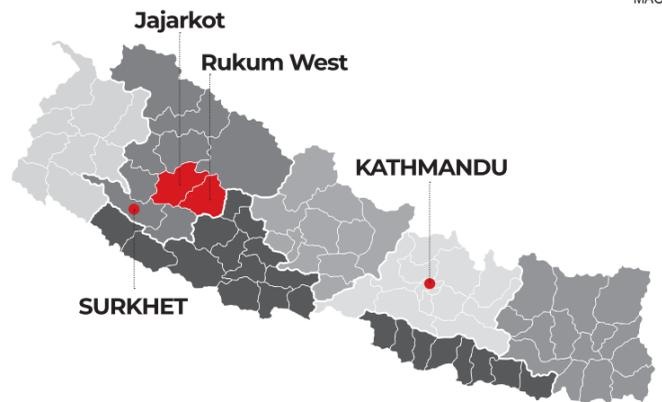
We came across many groups in Jajarkot conducting health camps. Though increased engagement has benefits, it is not so useful to have camps near the health centres or the



PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI



MAGGIE DOYNE



RAMU KHAREL

district hospital as there are already facilities there. Doctors told us that they had extreme excess of certain supplies and not enough of others.

NEED: Groups organising health camps should focus on two areas: 1) bringing specialist care that otherwise does not exist in this region, and 2) reaching areas away from local health infrastructure.

They must also coordinate with the district hospital and municipality health centre to assess their utility. Funds for health camps could help strengthen local health facilities.

The districts should divert some of their resources (doctors, nurses, etc) to some of these busy health centres in local municipalities like Nalgad. It does not make sense for one doctor to see a large number

of patients in Nalgad, while the district hospital is not busy.

Safeguarding Women and Children

There are a large number of pregnant and postpartum women in the most affected areas in Nalgad, Rukum and Kuse. Recent news items have used false narratives to gain viewership, but there is a real need for access to appropriate antenatal and post-natal care, which was an issue that existed before the earthquake in underserved areas of western Nepal.

Jajarkot hospital and the municipal health centres are both equipped to care for most of these women. Various groups are providing warm clothes for the most vulnerable and prioritising these women for safe winterised

shelters is a must.

There are child protection units and National Child Rights Council (NCRC) offices at each municipal office. When a child, adolescent, pregnant or postpartum woman is in potential or imminent danger, it is critically important that officers be notified immediately.

The NCRC works directly with government bodies, police, licensed shelters, and relief agencies to ensure that the woman or child is taken out of danger. NCRC and Kopila Valley are able to work together directly to safeguard the children in distress. The involvement of NCRC also prevents child smuggling and safeguards against family separation, exploitation, and human trafficking. The use of trained trauma-

NEEDS BASED:

Ramu Kharel (above) with the one-month-old premature baby whose mother died at childbirth. The baby is doing well at ICU in Surkhet. Maggie Doyne (left) with survivors in Nalgad last week.

NEED: Water and hygiene must be a priority for development groups going forward. Relief groups must put WASH in their priority.

After meeting survivors, relief workers and local elected officials, we saw resilience and a determination to bounce back. The items we took to Nalgad are being strategically distributed in coordination with municipality offices to reach those most in need.

We were able to locate the one-month-old infant in Nalgad municipality's Ward 8. The infant is now getting safe ICU level care in Surkhet and is doing better. 🇳🇵

Resources for aid information and reporting can be found at: <https://aidpulse.org/aidboard>

Ramu Kharel (ramu_kharel@brown.edu) is an emergency medicine physician with global health and public health expertise, and a decade-long experience in disaster response within Nepal. He is an assistant professor at Brown University, and is founder of HAPSA Nepal.

Maggie Doyne is the co-founder of the BlinkNow Foundation, and has worked for 18 years in the Karnali region caring for at-risk children through community development efforts. She is a CNN Hero and author based in Surkhet.

informed social workers and child protection officers is critically important when discerning information, and keeps the child's rights and protection at the centre.

NEED: Available health centres must be equipped with in-facility and outreach programs to identify and care for the most vulnerable in the region. This disaster could be used as an opportunity to equip and build a system around the municipal health centre and district hospitals to create innovative models like Nyaya Health Nepal's community health care model in Achham, where community health workers are trained and equipped to provide care at home.

When someone is really ill, taking the patient to Surkhet might be the only way but the road is long and hard. A streamlined approach to access government services like helicopter rescue must be available in this post-disaster setting.

A robust ambulance and EMS service from either the municipal health centre and/or Jajarkot district hospital must be made.

Water and Sanitation

Even before the earthquake, Jajarkot and surrounding districts were hit by a cholera epidemic in 2009 that killed over 300 people, many of them children. Running water and sanitation has always been a major concern and this danger has been exacerbated with the earthquake aftermath in the dry season.

None of the temporary tents and shelters we saw had appropriate water access and hand washing stations. Temporary toilets set up by donor agencies were dirty with no hand washing.

Important phone numbers:

National Child Rights Council: 01-5550121
Chief Minister Karnali: 985804444
Chief District Officer Jajarkot: 9858047777
Mayor Nalgad: 9842236335
Mayor Kuse: 9858937755
District Hospital Khalanga: 089-430188
Ambulance: 102
AIN (Federation for NGOs): 01-4468128
Poison information center: 01-4502011
Suicide Hotline: 1166
Police: 100

EVENTS

**Prukai**

Join food historian Binti Gurung as she dives into the flavours and traditions of Gurung cuisine at Prukai. Gurung will guide participants through the process of preparing signature dishes while sharing their secrets and stories.

10 December, 12:15pm onwards, Fee:Rs2000/person Karma Coffee, Boudha

Christmas market

Shop and discover local handicrafts and vendors at Alliance Française Katmandou's 2023 Christmas market. Includes Christmas food, drinks, as well as a kids' corner.

9 December, 10am, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Pulchok

**Weekend hike**

Be one with nature and join Hike for Nepal's Kavre Nagi-Danda hike this Saturday. Get additional information on Hike for Nepal's Facebook Page.

9 December, 6:40am onwards, Rs800, Bhrikutimandap

The Sovereign Forest

photo.circle's upcoming exhibition The Sovereign Forest by Amar Kanwar in collaboration with Sudhir Pattnaik/Samadrusti and Sherna Dastur opens this weekend.

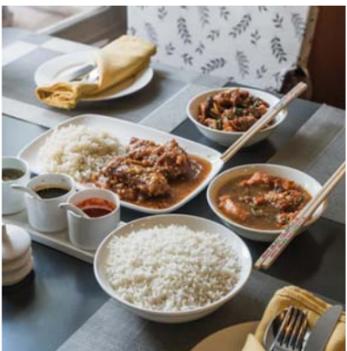
9 December onwards, Nepal Art Council

**Dance exhibition**

The contemporary Dance performance and Exhibition by Argentina-based Constanza Bitthoff opens soon. Call for more details.

8 December, 5pm, Gallery MCUBE, Mitra Road, Chakapat, 9851170110

DINING

**Sam's One Tree**

Sam's One Tree Café has mouthwatering appetisers, a perfect atmosphere and a big, shady tree like the name suggests. The sizzlers there are a must-have.

Darbar Marg (01) 5343610

MUSIC

Bluegrass & Jazz

Stop by the Saturday special gypsy jazz and bluegrass show with friends and family.

9 December, Gypsy Swing Patan

**Music for Medicine**

Dr Suman Thapa and The Blue Fret return with Music for Medicine, a fundraiser supporting Nepali students dedicated healthcare for the benefit of patients in need.

8 December, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Pre-booking Rs800/Door Rs 1000, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

**Psychedelic Night**

Get free shots at Watering Hole for an evening during the pub's Queen of the Night Wednesdays. Food and drinks will be accompanied by live music from Cambodia-based Nepali band Samsaara.

Wednesdays, Watering Hole, Naxal

**Kanta dAb dAb**

Experience a fusion of East and West as Kanta dAb dAb takes listeners on a soulful musical journey through Nepal's rich heritage.

8 December, London Pub, Darbar Marg

Live music

Spend the evening jamming to The Axe Band-Nepali, who are set to perform their greatest hits during the Live Musical Night.

15 December, Billionaires Lounge

**Zen Bistro & Café**

Zen Bistro offers some of the best Red Curries and Pork BBQ for anyone who wants to venture into the palatable world of Thai food. Try the refreshing Papaya Salads during the day and warm bowls of Tom Yam during the cooling evenings.

Bansbari (01) 4017654

Baker's Den

Is a loved one's birthday coming up, or need a just-because cake? Order from Baker's Den. Or get freshly baked doughnuts, muffins, and bread.

Naxal (01) 4416560

GETAWAY

**Lapsi Tree Resort**

Escape the hustle and bustle of the valley to reconnect with nature at Lapsi Tree Resort. Get delicious food and comfortable rooms, all topped off with mesmerising views.

Danda Gaun Marg, Nagarkot, 9844888116

Namo Buddha Resort

This traditional Newari style resort is perched on a hilltop with an amazing view of the Himalayas each morning. The peaceful, tranquil environment is also perfect for short hikes.

Namo Buddha, Phulbari, 9851106802

**Shangri-La Village Resort**

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

Gharipatan, Pokhara (61) 462222

Kantipur Temple House

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

Thamel (01) 5904231

**The Dwarika's Resort**

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

Dhulikhel (01) 4579488

Pho99

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

Jhamsikhel, 9803203119

**Cafe de Tukche**

Get authentic Thakali food at Café de Tukche and take a break from cooking. The menu has both rice and dedho sets.

Lazimpat (01) 4416990

WEEKEND WEATHER



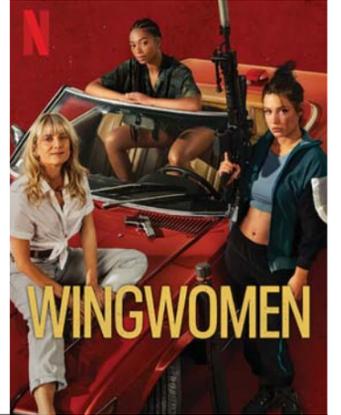
FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
20° 6°	19° 5°	19° 5°	19° 5°	19° 5°

Much colder

The periphery of Cyclone Michaung that doused southeast India this week just grazed Nepal. It did bring the season's first heavy snow in Humla, Dolpo, Mustang and Manang. But the rest of Nepal just got overcast skies, and the lack of direct sunlight increased surface air pollution levels in Kathmandu and the valleys. The effect of this is going to be felt in the coming days with the depressed minimum temperature that will fall to 5°C in Kathmandu, even though the sun should come out. The higher towns will see breezy afternoons and subzero temperatures.

OUR PICK

In actress-filmmaker Mélanie Laurent's 2023 French action-comedy Wingwomen, best friends Carole and Alex are professional thieves working for a formidable woman named Marraine. The two are unable to leave Marraine's employ because they feel indebted to her for having rescued them from the streets. But when an opportunity presents itself, the two young thieves, frustrated at having been under Marraine's thumb for years, recruit motorbike champion Sam for one last grand heist before they can comfortably leave behind their life of crime. Stars Adèle Exarchopoulos, Mélanie Laurent, Manon Bresch and Isabelle Adjani.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउ र बचाऔं

- गर्मी मौसममा मलेरिया, कालाजार, डेंगी, हैजालगायतका विभिन्न संक्रामक रोगहरू फैलिन सक्छन् ।
- संक्रामक रोग फैलाउने झिँगा, लामखुट्टे, भुसुना आदिको नियन्त्रण गरौं ।
- संक्रामक रोगबाट बच्न शुद्ध र उमालेको पानी पिऔं ।
- बासी तथा सडेगलेका खाना नखाऔं ।
- घरभित्र र वरपरको सरसफाइमा ध्यान दिऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Retelling Gurkha history

Paying artistic homage to the lives of wives Nepalis left behind when they went to war

■ Pinki Sris Rana



GOPEN RAI

History is not always fair to the protagonists who find themselves caught up in it. The history of Gurkha soldiers is no exception.

Brave khukuri-swinging soldiers in combat khakis and hats marching off to battle have been an iconic part of Nepal's past. Forgotten on the pages of history, however, are their sarong-clad wives in Nepal or abroad, their struggles and their contribution.

Lately, there has been an effort to correct this with welcome attempts to document the experience of Gurkha wives. Suzana Thapa Shris's recent exhibition *Gurkha Women: An Echo in the Story* helped filled this gap by retelling the stories from the perspective of the wives of soldiers.

"When Gurkha soldiers were fighting wars, it was their women who single-handedly led the households, they were the silent heroes," explains 29-year-old Thapa Shris. "With limited money and resources, they raised families and boys who grew up to be lahure themselves. Their contribution is immense."

After her first exhibition *Bharseli Gurkhas: From Stories to Portraits* which looked into the lives of Gurkha soldiers from her ancestral village of Bharse of Gulmi district, Thapa Shris felt that she also needed to put the spotlight on the wives.

Coming from a Gurkha household herself, where her grandfather was in the Indian Army, Thapa Shris was introduced to her family's praetorian past from a very young age. She grew up with her grandparents in Butwal, listening to the lore both from the battles as well as the home front.

Her father Bom Bahadur Thapa, a horticulturist by profession and a writer, wrote a book *Bharseli Gorkhagatha ra Serofero* about his ancestors. And when Thapa Shris started her project, the father-daughter duo interviewed some 50 women in their 70s and above from Baglung, Gorkha, Gulmi, Kaski, Palpa, Rupandehi, and Sunsari. They were all wives of Nepali soldiers who had served in the UK, India, Singapore and Malaya (now Malaysia).



"The exhibition took shape as we were looking into who these women were, their life stories and their contribution to Gurkha history," she adds. "Their identity and contribution has been the main objective of this exhibition."

Thapa Shris never formally learnt art, but her raw talent for

portraits is there for everyone to see. Also on display at the Nepal Art Council from 25-28 November were sketches, archival pictures, visual footage of interviews, and installation art with traditional music in the background.

But the highlight of the event were evocative testimonies with their respective portraits depicting two kinds of women: those left behind in Nepal and those in foreign lands where their husbands were deployed. Most struggled to make ends meet, and that too in a new place where they did not speak the local language.

"We automatically assume that Gurkha soldiers are well-off and their lives easy but that is not always the case," explains Bom Bahadur. "There was no immediate means of communication or any channel to wire money. It was these brave women who made their way."

While archival footage helped the audience peek into their lives in foreign lands, an installation art of a classic Nepali knitted bag filled with envelopes depicted

how in those days letters were the only medium of contact between spouses.

One section was dedicated to hand photography intended to show the resilience and the kind of lives these women led. All the portraits here had wrinkled hands of the women resting on their patterned lungi.

The exhibition also featured traditional dresses and jewellery of the Gurkha women as well as wooden utensils used by these indigenous communities in the past. Lungi, gold beruwa bangles and traditional gold asarfi rings synonymous with Lahureni were also heavily featured.

"The gold came much later after the wartime," adds Suzana. "One thing all the bojus said was that they were happy that they at least got to wear gold."

The father-daughter duo is now planning to transcribe all the testimonies and turn them into a book. Says Bom Bahadur: "I am glad our Gurkha women are highlighted. The fact that my daughter is working on it makes me even prouder." 🇳🇵

Patan heritage in fantasy fiction

Cultural expert uses novel technique to reacquaint us with Kathmandu Valley civilisation

■ Trishagni Sakya

Radha, a recently retired Kumari, is excited to explore Patan Darbar Square for the very first time as an ordinary girl. She has left behind the elaborate and time-consuming rituals that burdened her childhood as the living goddess of Patan.

Along with her uncle Pradip and brother Dhiraj, Radha spends a Saturday weaving in and out of the square, testing each other's historical knowledge. Meanwhile, Amogh, a vengeful priest whose family suffered unjust displacement during the age of the Mallas, discreetly maneuvers around the square, scheming to regain his supernatural powers.

Just as Amogh spots the former Kumari and her family at the square, an earthquake hits Kathmandu Valley, and a series of strange things happen that threaten the balance of the realms. The new Kumari of Yala is yet to be chosen, but Radha must step up to protect earthly beings as is her divine duty.

The book opens with a compelling journey through the alleys of Patan, immersing the

Nepali reader in tales of familiar structures and temples. It can actually be a good guide to the differences between Mul Chok and Sundari Chok, even to millennial Newas like me who do not know enough about our own people's culture.

And as a researcher and cultural expert who has written interactive heritage maps of Patan Museum and Hanuman Dhoka, author Rishi Amatya is perfectly placed to weave the knowledge into this, his first novel.

The book is about a Kumari, one of the more mystical aspects of Kathmandu Valley civilisation, and the reader is taken along on the tour of Patan Darbar Square with the characters Radha, Dhiraj and Pradip. We are reintroduced to many of the structures, temples and motifs we have all grown up around, but perhaps did not know the stories behind them.

References to Kawas, Khyas, Black Curtains, Mha Puja and Kartik Dances also refer readers to the Valley's intangible heritage, and shed light on questions we all had as children but stopped asking because we did not have access to answers.

The novel's plot itself is gripping, the subject matter intriguing and the reader is kept on edge till the very end. Like most fantasy fiction, the storyline carries the book, peppering the reader with a few explanations of Nepal Bhasa words here and there. Amatya describes esoteric Newa traditions and rituals with just enough detail to keep the action moving.

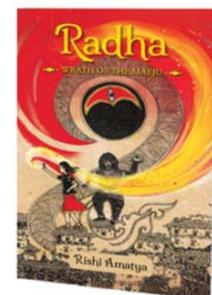
The fusion of fantasy with Newa mysticism is a rare feat, especially in an English-language novel. Amatya has exceeded expectations, tastefully bringing mythical elements to life.

He had his work cut out since he has to introduce readers to the intricate world of Vajrayana concepts, even for those not familiar with this Buddhist system of beliefs. The narrative strikes a balance between humour and spookiness, making it a compelling page-turner. Warning: it can be a bit scary reading the book late into the night.

Young Newa women born and brought up in the Valley may find, like I did, that I needed this book, in this genre, in this language, to revive affinity for my identity.

This may be true for many young Newas scattered around the globe who are distanced geographically from the beauty that is our heritage. We are not equipped with the language or even the stories to do our traditions and culture justice.

Amatya did that for me through *Radha, Wrath of the Maeju*. I was able to walk around Patan Darbar Square, a place I have been through a hundred times, with new found knowledge and pride. I have never felt seen in a fiction, let alone a fantasy. Now I do. 🇳🇵



Radha: Wrath of the Maeju
By Rishi Amatya
Safu
Kathmandu 2023
qcbookshop.com
260 pages

Migrant worker teaches



DIASPORA
DIARIES 48

Rudra Bahadur Gurung

This is the 48th instalment of *Diaspora Diaries*, a regular series in *Nepali Times* with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.

Growing up in Lamjung, I had a very humble childhood. I helped my mother with household chores, and in the fields. My father wanted me to follow his path and join the Indian Army, but after two months at the Gorkha Training Centre in Shillong with its huge billboard that said 'Do or Die', I was put off and returned to Nepal.

I was in awe walking around the streets of Kathmandu. I used to go to Bishal Bazaar just to practice taking the lift. My curiosity about how things worked, and surfing the net helped keep me updated.

I tried to run a café while attending college. But Nepalis had not yet developed a taste for brewed coffee, so my café failed. I also could not continue my studies, so like everyone else going abroad, I left for the UAE in 2004 to work.

My brother, who worked as a driver in the UAE, got me a job as

His foreign trainees were surprised he was from a landlocked country that has no oil rigs

a rope access worker in charge of cleaning windows on tall buildings. We first practiced in a two storied building in Dubai, and would be drenched in sweat. I got my license but on a job to clean the façade of a skyscraper, my knees shook as I dangled 48-floors above the ground.

What I had learnt on the ground did not amount to much hanging on a rope up there on a high rise. It got better with practice, and it helped that my supervisors were Nepalis who got me acclimatised to the height, so I felt safe.

I spent over a decade in the UAE but do not remember much from that period. Work-pay-work-pay, it was a cycle. The kindness of strangers has stayed with me. Some residents on the high floors would offer us fruits as we dangled outside their windows. Small gestures, but they are etched in my memory.

I have helped set up the fireworks display on Burj Khalifa and cleaned seven-star hotels, but when my company set up a new oil and gas division in 2005, I asked for an internal transfer in the inspection and engineering department. We got trained in non-destructive testing (NDT), which I enjoyed a lot and excelled in. I took



courses in visual, ultrasound and magnetic particle inspections, and found a sense of deep fulfilment in learning new things.

Work offshore used to be round the clock. I missed the sense of freedom one feels on firm ground, even though all amenities were provided on board. I still remember how the most rewarding feeling was seeing my name on the list in the control room near the helipad with home leave dates when the chopper would come to airlift us out every month.

It was the best feeling in the world, but for the first few days

we would still feel like the floor was moving. We had got so used to being at sea.

The paid monthly leave was unique among migrant workers. I made sure not to waste time, and used to go to India to take more courses to upgrade my skills. I could not continue my formal education because of my personal circumstances, but I had no excuse not to invest in learning new things.

I had the desire to achieve something, and the training was part of advancing my career. Taking formal classes honed my theoretical understanding of the work right

from the fundamentals.

Given the absence of Nepalis in the management in the oil and gas sector, there was a preference for other nationalities in promotions. Despite meeting roadblocks every step of the way, I did overcome them and moved up the ranks.

I had a starting salary of AED900, but by the time I left the UAE a decade later, I was earning AED20,000 (\$5,500) a month. After ten years in the UAE including one year in Qatar with the same company, it was time for a change.

I tried resigning three times, but was offered better benefits so

Graves of Nepali soldiers in Russia

Families of Nepali soldiers killed in action on the Ukraine front in shock as pictures of their graves appear online

Jibraj Chalise in Kapilvastu

During the Dasain festival last month, Sarala Thapa went to her parents' home in Kapilvastu. It would be a celebration without her brother Rupak, who had gone to Russia.

But the happy occasion turned tragic when three people showed up to tell them that Rupak had been killed in action on the Ukraine front, 9,000km away.

Since then, Rupak's father Man Bahadur, mother Laxmi, and sister have been unable to accept that Rupak is no more.

The 24-year-old had gone to Russia two years ago on a student visa, and like dozens of Nepalis had joined the Russian Army, lured by the promise of a better pay and eventual Russian citizenship.

"My brother called four months ago to say that we might not hear from him during his six-month training period and that he would call us once training was over," recalls Sarala. "It has not been six months yet."

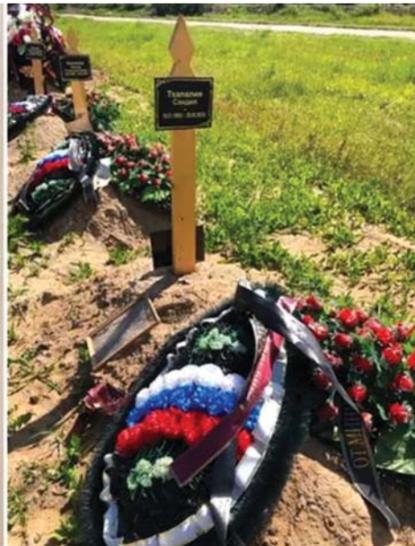
Ward Chair Sanju Saru Magar had received a phone call from Kathmandu about Rupak's death in the Ukraine war. The caller asked them to convey the information to Rupak's family but was unable to say if the body could be brought back.

"They were still sure that their son would call them once he had finished training," says ward council member Rajkumar Tharu, who is also neighbours with Rupak's family. "They found it difficult to believe because we could provide them with no other details surrounding his death."

Ward Chair Magar says that the person who called to break the news identified himself as a Russian Embassy official, but upon checking on Truecaller, they found the number to have been of a labour recruiter.

"We tried multiple times to reach the number again, but in vain," says Magar.

On Monday, Nepal's Foreign Ministry



KILLED IN ACTION: Sandip Thapaliya, who was killed on the Ukraine Front on 28 June, has his name in Cyrillic script on a grave stone with that of Rupak Karki (social media photo, right) in a cemetery in Ivanov near Moscow.

officially published the names of six Nepalis killed while serving in the Russian Army, including that of Rupak Karki.

Others who have died include Sandip Thapaliya of Gorkha, Dewan Rai of Pokhara, Pritam Karki of Syangja, Raj Kumar Roka of Dolakha, and Ganga Raj Moktan of Ilam.

But officials were only able to tell the family that Rupak had been killed in action in the Russia-Ukraine war, not when or how he had died, says Rupak's uncle Gautam Karki.

"Rupak's parents are unable to believe that their only son has died without seeing his body," Gautam says.

Rupak had been learning Korean to try to find work in South Korea, but he along with his neighbour Yuvaraj Poudel decided to go to Russia in early 2022 because it was easier to acquire a student visa and find work there. The two reached Russia in May 2022.

A year later, Rupak signed a Special Military Operations (SMO) agreement with

the Russian Ministry of Defense to serve in the Russian Army. Yuvaraj Poudel, who went to Russia with Rupak, was also recruited and is in regular contact with his family.

The Russian website Book of Memories of Ivanovo states that Rupak was killed on 30 June on the Ukraine front. The website includes photos of a grave with his name in Cyrillic in the city of Novo-Talitsy in the Ivanovo Oblast, 324km north-east of Moscow.

Another Russian news website Cursiv, citing a book of remembrance from the Ivanovo region, states that Sandip Thapaliya from Nepal was also buried with Rupak Karki.

Sandip Thapaliya was said to have been killed in the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, and his body was thought to have been buried near the frontline. According to the memorial, Sandip was killed on 28 June during a 'combat mission'.

Photos appear to show names and dates of birth on the tombs of Rupak and Sandip, with

wreaths placed atop their graves.

In a video, another Nepali in the Russian Army captured by the Ukrainians in Zaporizhzhia, Siddhartha Dhakal, 22, has sent a tearful video appeal to his family asking them to bring him home. Dhakal says he joined the Russian military 2 months ago after having been unable to pay his university fees. He says many other Nepalis in the Russian Army had also been killed in the Red Zone.

Nepal's Foreign Ministry revealed last month that a Nepali recruit in the Russian Army, Bibek Khatri of Bardia was also a prisoner of war in Ukraine and it was using diplomatic channels to bring him back.

On Tuesday, Nepal Police took 10 foreign employment recruiters into custody for allegedly sending Nepalis to Russia on visitor visas for recruitment into the Russian military. Reports said the agencies had sent at least 200 Nepalis to Russia promising huge salaries and Russian citizenship.

others the ropes



decided to stay on. But after the third time, I had made my mind. My resignation letter said, 'I am leaving for my personal betterment.' It was not for financial reasons, I just knew it was time for a change.

I applied for a job in Nigeria in 2012, and was thrilled to be offered \$450 per day for a five month contract. My boss then offered me a longer term contract, and I stuck around in Nigeria for three more years. During my last year, I even helped the company start a training wing and worked as a trainer.

The oil crisis of 2015 slowed things down. Oil prices fell from \$125 to \$25 per barrel, and although my employer asked me to stay on with salary, I left. Nepal was calling.

I started my own Industrial Rope Access Trade Association (IRATA) certified training company, Asset Integrity Group, in Kathmandu in 2016. We provide training in rope access, spray painting, welding,

rigging and non-destructive testing.

I had no guidance in my career choices, I just followed my instincts. I try to be a good mentor to Nepalis interested in this field even though what I earn here does not compare to what I was used to overseas.

But there is a different kind of joy in the training and even the respect I get from my students. Nepalis in the rope access sector renew their licenses or upgrade to the next level at my centre, and many are working in the Gulf.

A handful of Filipinos, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans and Indians have also come to Kathmandu, where I have trained and licensed them as we are an internationally accredited centre and cost less than elsewhere. Our offer to them is that they not only get cheaper training, they also will get to visit our beautiful country.

Luckily, I know enough people in the industry worldwide who

hire me for short-term gigs like protective coating services in the oil and gas sector. I have worked in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia where I spend a few months every year.

My travels allow me to offer similar opportunities to fellow Nepalis. Three Nepalis, for example, joined me in Nigeria. My international colleagues are often surprised to hear that I am from a landlocked country with no oil industry. I myself wonder sometimes how I got here. I tell them: "I learned and earned."

Nepalis in my field know me as Rudra Dai their mentor, who follows their progress even after training. My foreign friends call me Ruddy. Ruddy's occasional gigs makes Rudra Dai's work sustainable. In a way, I have the best of both worlds.

It is not easy, of course. We have to meet strict IRATA standards to pass audits. At our training center,

we simulate different scenarios such as in civil and marine rope access work. We also provide on-the-job training so students can practice what they learn.

There are more complex courses like industrial painting. Additional training for painting or welding inspection combined with rope access training could contribute to boosting earnings.

Many Nepalis still go overseas to earn just \$300 USD monthly. I wish they understood that there are also opportunities that offer much higher salaries if they got training. It cannot be any training; it has to be recognised and valued overseas as well. In rope access, where safety is paramount and licensing requirements are mandatory, just a short training can open up higher salaries, new sectors and upward mobility, as the demand for workers in this field is growing.

This model would work best

if employers themselves were also involved. But Nepali employers do not prioritise occupational health and safety, and training. They just want cheap labour. Overseas companies also hesitate to invest in training workers especially as they have trouble retaining them, and there are competitors who offer small salary mark-ups.

I have come a long way from dangling with shaky knees on a rope off a high rise in Dubai. When I meet young migrant workers on leave in Nepal, I see myself 15 years ago. I used to go to India to get myself trained, now I am glad to say I can offer such training in Nepal itself. 🇳🇵

Translated from a conversation with the author. Diaspora Diaries is a regular column in Nepali Times providing a platform to share experiences of living, working, studying abroad. Authentic and original entries can be sent to editors@nepalitimes.com with Diaspora Diaries in the subject line.

TATA MOTORS
Connecting Aspirations

TATA

INTRODUCING
NEXON EV MAX
NOW GET MAXIMUM FOR MINIMUM

Now at Rs.

45.99

Lakhs*



RANGE MAX

40.5 kWh BATTERY PACK
MULTI-MODE REGEN
GETS CHARGED IN 56 MINS*

PERFORMANCE MAX

100 kW ELECTRIC MOTOR POWER
0-100 km/h IN < 9* SECONDS
250 Nm INSTANT TORQUE
MULTI DRIVE MODES

SAFETY MAX

ADVANCED ESP WITH i-VBAC
ALL FOUR DISC BRAKES
ELECTRONIC PARKING BRAKE WITH AUTOHOLD
IP67 RATED BATTERY AND MOTOR

LUXURY MAX

ELECTRIC SUNROOF
JEWEL CONTROL KNOB
AIR PURIFIER WITH AQI DISPLAY
LEATHERETTE VENTILATED SEATS

go.ev

POWERED BY

ZIPTRON
Advanced Electric Drive Experience

SIPRADI TRADING PVT. LTD.,

An ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 45001:2018 Certified Company

Toll Free No.: 16600155777, 9801575777

For online booking



SIPRADI



■ Anita Bhetwal

Dhak Kumari Poudel tightens her blue helmet, fastens her safety harness, and wrench in hand, climbs the 8m ladder up a transmission pole in Bhaktapur.

A crowd forms nearby to watch. Passing motorcyclists stop to stare at her high above the ground as if it is a free roadside circus with a woman performing a high wire act.

"It is really surprising to see a woman climb up poles to do electrical maintenance work," marvels someone in the crowd to no one in particular. Another onlooker nearby agrees: "I had only ever seen men do this kind of work before."

Poudel can hear some of these comments, but has become used to it in the 16 years that she has been working as an electrical maintenance worker with the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA).

Her everyday schedule involves climbing up to the transmission lines to disconnect those pilfering electricity with hooks, installing new meters, or increasing the capacity of transmission lines.

"People will keep looking up and talking, I have stopped paying attention," says the 56-year-old grandmother, who is currently with the NEA's Bhaktapur Distribution Centre. "It is just another job for me, like anything else."

Poudel was married at 22 and had two boys by the time she turned 25. Her husband worked in the tourism sector in Bhaktapur,



PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI

High wire act

Female electrical maintenance worker defies convention on a job fixing transmission lines



and she would often travel from their home in Dolakha to visit him in the city.

During one such trip in 2007, Poudel participated in a vocational training class on electrical wiring. She got a job at the Thimi division of the NEA connecting houses to electricity.

Some time later, her boss sent Poudel to attend additional 'A' and 'B' level courses at the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT). Poudel was 36, the only woman and most of her classmates were half her age.

"I had to work doubly as hard as the others," recalls Poudel, who

completed the course in two years and returned to the field. Today, 16 years later, she has earned a reputation among peers as a confident and intrepid transmission line worker.

She has got NEA's Best Employee award twice, but even then some men cannot resist passing snide remarks that as a woman she should not be climbing transmission towers.

"It is this attitude that stops many Nepali women from doing what they are capable of, and moving up in life," says Poudel.

When Nepal was facing up to 18 hours of power cuts a day, Poudel like other employees of the NEA, was at the receiving end of constant disparaging remarks, and even verbal abuse from consumers. She remembers sometimes hiding her identity to do her job.

Once, she had to run for her life after a man who was caught red-handed stealing electricity, saw Poudel cut off the power supply to his house and chased her down the street. Bhaktapur district used to have the highest pilferage rate for electricity in Nepal.

Another homeowner threatened to beat her to death with a metal rod after she tried to stop him from stealing electricity.

Even so, Poudel is determined to continue on the job to the best of her ability until her retirement in two years. She has no regrets and does not envy colleagues who have desk jobs. Working in the field has given her more freedom and confidence.

Having fixed the transmission line, Dhak Kumari Poudel is back on the ground, and taking off her gloves. She tells us: "Many women have been discouraged from doing this sort of work because of society's perception that we are weak. Let us show everyone what we are capable of." 🇳🇵



UNILEVER NEPAL LIMITED



WORLD'S NO. 1
SELLING GERM PROTECTION SOAP**

NEW LIFEBUOY
HANDWASH

PUMP RUB CHOO
THE VIRUS



FIGHTS 99.9%
BACTERIA & VIRUSES
IN SECONDS*

**BASED ON NIELSEN IQ UNIT SALES FOR THE SKIN CLEANSING CATEGORY (LATEST 12 MONTHS AVAILABLE) © 2021, NIELSEN IQ. DETAILS AVAILABLE ON [https://www.lifebuoy.com/No1.html]

*BASED ON AN INDEPENDENT SURVEY, 2020. AS PER LAB TESTS ON REPRESENTATIVE ORGANISMS.