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BIKAS RAUNIYAR

Demodification of India

The marathon Indian election race and its nail-biting finish was watched with great interest in Nepal, and nowhere more so than here in the borderlands of the Tarai.



BORDERLINES
Chandra Kishore

Next door in the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the BJP faced a dramatic upset — even in Ayodhya, where Narendra Modi had inaugurated a Hindu temple complex built on the ruins of a mosque earlier this year.

Kathmandu-based India 'experts' spread many conspiracy theories ahead of the elections mainly about how Modi's Hindutva political ideology would spread to the Tarai. They were unable to distinguish between political Hindutva and faith-based Hindu activities.

Even though the BJP is expected to form the next government, it is behaving as if it lost the election. Despite all the parties uniting in the I.N.D.I.A. alliance led by Rahul

Gandhi of the Congress party, it still got less votes than the BJP. Yet the alliance is celebrating a victory.

The main message of the Indian election result that should have relevance for Nepal is that voters in the world's largest democracy refused to wholeheartedly support the BJP's divisive religious extremism, and have given a nod to inclusion, tolerance and equality.

Populism, the cult of personality, faux-nationalism, the muzzling of media and civil society, as well as religious and socio-cultural polarisation will ultimately be rejected at the grassroots. It was India's Dalits, indigenous people, and the marginalised who punctured the BJP's saffron balloon.

But the Indian electorate also put the BJP back in power to reward Modi for the visible progress in infrastructure, and making many Indians feel good about themselves.

The BJP party is facing internal tension as it analyses why the party did not do as well as expected. The ill-concealed rivalry between the RSS and the BJP, the alienation of India's sizeable Muslim and Dalit population strengthened the hand

of the Congress.

It is said that the road to power in New Delhi is via Uttar Pradesh, because of the state's sheer population size. The BJP Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath, who is also the high priest of the Gorakhnath Temple with strong ties to the Nepal monarchy, is expected to now have less clout in New Delhi.

This means the political forces in Nepal who were trying to roll back secularism and restore the monarchy with moral support from the South, will also face a setback. The border states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh both largely rejected the politics of religious extremism.

The election has also boosted Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal, who has been supportive of Nepal's democratic path. The fact that he and the Congress are now stronger in Delhi will reassure Nepal's democratic forces, however the leaders in Kathmandu will have to face the fact that their future political careers depend more on domestic performance rather than who rules in Delhi.

In Sikkim, Prem Tamang of the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha won a

GLORY TO THE PARTY: The mood at the Friends of BJP party at the Radisson Hotel on 4 June was subdued since the expected landslide victory of Narendra Modi's BJP did not materialise. Guests included Nepali politicians, Indian expats, and the media.

landslide, while in Uttaranchal the BJP won with its strident call to make the state an exclusive Hindu Holy Land.

One often overlooked fact is that India's relations with Nepal are determined more by bureaucracy in the south Block of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs than politicians. But India's fraught relationships with several regional nations and growing competition over regional influence with China means that Nepal is very much on Modi's radar.

The BJP was in power when Nepal suffered the 5-month blockade of Nepal, and it could be that an insecure Modi in 2024 will try to assert dominance again to signal detractors back home that he is still in charge. 🇳🇵

Chandra Kishore is a Birganj-based media commentator and writes this monthly column Borderlines for Nepali Times. @kishore_chandra

summer solstice



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CASHMERE REDEFINED

Giving credit where it's due

For months now, Nepal's media has been reporting on depositors defrauded of their savings by crooked cooperatives. The spotlight got brighter after Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane was accused of siphoning off savings from two cooperatives and investing it in his television company.

Given a chance to defend his case in Parliament, he resorted to whataboutery and accused the opposition Nepali Congress (NC) of even greater plunder. After the row brought the House to a standstill for over a month, a cross-party probe committee has finally been formed, but without naming Lamichhane personally.

Nearly 30 crisis-ridden cooperatives across the country which have more than Rs60 billion in depositors' savings at risk will be probed by the committee. Another 500 cooperatives are said to be dodgy, and the government says it will be compensating depositors who had up to Rs500,000 in savings in cooperatives that have gone belly-up.

Economist Pushkar Bajracharya says that Nepal's cooperatives have had problems from their earliest years because of lack of regulation and monitoring which allowed unscrupulous shareholders to invest the savings in questionable real estate deals (best case scenario) or fraudsters to decamp with depositors' savings (worst case).

"The lawlessness in the cooperative sector meant that the hard-earned savings of depositors were misused or stolen," Bajracharya says.

At the root of this pandemic of plunder in cooperatives is the culture of impunity where trusting Nepalis are cheated out of hard-earned savings with the promise of high interest rates. Like pyramid schemes, these are ways for deceitful individuals to cheat gullible depositors because they know they can get away with it.

This is similar to the rampant corruption at all layers of government and across the country where the might of those who hold power seem to have the right to extort and defraud the powerless. In many cases shareholders in local cooperatives are even elected local officials.

There is even a sitting MP, Gita Basnet, who is accused of pocketing Rs165.8 million from her cooperative depositors, and she has been on the run. A mayor and his wife in Baglung siphoned off Rs3 billion from 1,500 depositors. Criminal cases have been filed against all of them in the courts.

Ironically, the crisis in Nepal's banks and financial institutions has turned out to be a bonanza for financially fragile daily

newspapers which these days are filled with pages and pages of paid property auction notices by banks (pictured). These advertisements are from Class A, B, C or D financial institutions and point to an upsurge in loan defaults.

The Credit Information Bureau (CIB) Nepal monitors 129 financial institutions, and says the number of blacklisted borrowers has grown from 3,609 to 96,331 in the past ten years — nearly half of them made it to the list just this year. Bijay Kunwar of the CIB says the numbers shot up after depositors failed to pay back loans from microfinance institutions.

The real estate slump is at the bottom of this crisis. Those who had borrowed from cooperatives or banks to invest in property speculating, hoping for fast returns, were trapped with huge loans they could not pay back. The crisis began during the Covid crisis and continued with the economic slump in Nepal caused by the Russia-Ukraine war.

Many defaulters have rallied around businessman Durga Prasai, himself a wilful defaulter who failed to pay back bank loans for a hospital in Jhapa, and held nationwide demonstrations earlier this year. Prasai urged his supporters to stop servicing their loans and to force banks to cancel their debt.

"Prasai's debt cancellation campaign sowed confusion," senior economist Keshav Acharya explains.

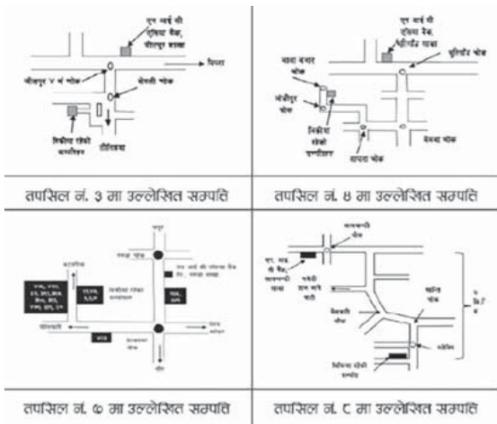
"Some borrowers of cooperatives who wanted to pay back loans were stopped from doing so by activists. And bank borrowers covertly hoped for their loans to be waived."

Nine months of data from Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) for the past year shows that the wholesale and retail sectors had the highest proportion of credit (19.9%) and loans to real estate developers made up just 4.92%.

"Many borrowers took loans for business purposes but used a portion to buy property, but since there is a real estate slump it has led to banking defaults," says Bhuvan Dahal, former president of Nepal Bankers' Association.

The default crisis in turn has been a factor in record outmigration in the past year as Nepalis leave to earn money overseas to pay loans back home. If there is a way out of this crisis, it will be to henceforth provide loans for projects that create jobs and not in unproductive sectors.

Pinki Sris Rana



Nepalis are swindled by Nepalis of savings in rogue cooperatives, even as defaults send banks into crisis

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Deuba 3.0

20 years ago this week, King Gyanendra appointed Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress as the prime minister for the third time. Political analysts thought Deuba had a chance to end the political deadlock and find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. But within a year Gyanendra declared Deuba 'incompetent' and staged a military coup on 1 February 2005.

Deuba has gone on to be the prime minister for the fifth time and according to his astrologer, he will make it seven times. K P Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal have held the position three times each.

Excerpt of the page 1 report published on issue #199 4-10 June 2004:



premiership. But the alliance fell apart over differences between the NC and the UML on whether or not to send a nominee.

Essentially, there was no procedural difference between Deuba's appointment and that of Thapa and Lokendra Bahadur Chand before him. But analysts say where Deuba can make a difference is in showing that he can take the parties along. To do this, paradoxically, he has to prove to them that he is not a palace pawn.

Minendra Rijal of the NC (Democratic) told us his party was taking things step by step, adding: "We are determined to get all the parties

on board." But NC spokesman Arjun Narsingh KC was less upbeat: "It shows regression hasn't ended. Deuba may have been reinstated, but the people's sovereignty has not."

For archived material of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: nepalitimes.com

It took nearly a month to get a successor to Surya Bahadur Thapa, and the delay prompted speculation of back channel talks between the Maoists and palace emissaries. It was reportedly after those dialogues failed that the five party alliance was asked to come up with a common candidate for

ONLINE PACKAGES



Single use plastic pollution is turning into one of the biggest environmental problems of our times. One plastic bag takes 500 years to completely biodegrade, and they have now contaminated water, soil, air, and accelerated the climate crisis. The government's attempts to ban polythene and single-use bags have failed each time due to the lobbying from powerful companies. Watch the 2022 video on our YouTube channel.



Meet the brains behind the bio-degradable prayer flags, Ang Dolma Sherpa, who aims to reduce waste, pollution and the impact of the climate crisis with eco-friendly lung ta and khada. Watch this video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel and subscribe for more multimedia content.

BIRDER'S BARDIA

We must keep Bardia National Park a paradise for birds, protecting their habitat ('Bardia's birds', Carol Inskipp, #1214). **Renate Schwarz**

EVEREST CORNICE

How many times has Mr Malla made an ascent of Mt Everest to be an expert on his suggestion of extending the climbing season date ('Everest cornice collapse', Vishad Raj Onta, #1214)? **Vairochana Sherpa**

ART EXHIBITION

Deities of Nepal II is a wonderful exhibition ('In the realm of the gods', Pinki Sris Rana, #1214). I loved it. **Glen Pallier**

EVEREST BOOKS

'The Last Englishmen' sounds very similar to another book, Wade Davis' 'Into The Silence, The Great War, Mallory, And The Conquest of Everest' ('Mountains of books', Kunda Dixit, #1213). That book is perhaps the best book I have ever read. **Roger Ray**

NEPALI ARCHITECTURE

Wonderful work. So pleased that you are capturing the heritage of these beautiful buildings and documenting it! ('Ode to old', Sahina Shrestha, nepalitimes.com). **Lorraine Lister**

FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS

What a beautiful, thoughtful piece on women in their 40s ('Taking the longcut', Pratibha Tuladhar, nepalitimes.com). **Neeti Aryal Khanal**

BUDGET 2024/25

Nijgadh Airport would be sad event. Mired in corruption in billions and it is environmentally disaster. **Gyurme Dondup**

Times.com WHAT'S TRENDING

Bardia's birds

by Carol Inskipp
The Bardia National Park is a jewel of nature in western Nepal, recording over 525 bird species and 61 mammals. The park is recognised as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area. Go online to read more about this birder's paradise.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Charging Nepal

by Sonia Awale
Nepal's new budget has only allocated 0.46% for environmental protection, and given the green light to controversial projects. As such, Nepal's moral high-ground at the climate summit in Bonn next month will be diminished with budgetary policies that directly contradict our public commitments. Details at nepalitimes.com

Most popular on X

Taking the longcut

by Pratibha Tuladhar
In her newest column, Pratibha Tuladhar writes about what it means to acknowledge that the body will keep changing with age, and how crucial female friendships are to come to terms with such changes. Read the column on our website.

Most commented



Everest cornice collapse

by Vishad Raj Onta
It was a busy week on Chomolungma as climbers pushed for the summit in the narrow weather window 20-22 May, leading to a bottleneck on the southeast ridge near the top. And as spring climbing season closes, climbing guide Vinayak Jaya Malla says this year's deaths on Everest are a warning to reduce overcrowding. Follow us for the latest developments.

Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
What most women want is to be able to buy their own meals, sit in safe places doing what they like doing and then to go home to some peace and quiet. It's not any different from what men want. Yet, often harder for women to experience.

Ajapa Sharma @Ajapa_Sharma
Every gain personal and professional takes twice the effort when you are a woman, because the barriers are twice as much. But moments of connection with others and respite, freedom and peace such as those described in this are sweet.

Rii @3Rii
Beautiful read. I have friends from when I was in school and we are all in our 30s now. Amazing how conversations change over the years and we grow as individuals and evolve everyday.

1,000 WORDS



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA / RSS

FAIR PLAY: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and First Daughter Ganga Dahal watching a live telecast on Tuesday of the Nepal vs Netherlands match in the T20 Male Cricket World Cup being played in the United States. Nepal's star player Sandeep Lamichhane was refused a US visa to play in the game because of allegations of sexual abuse of a minor.



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FAREWELL: (far left) Sir Edmund Hillary and Lady June Hillary at the 50th Everest Anniversary celebrations in Kathmandu on 29 May 2003.

(left) Lady June with Sir Ed, King Charles III and Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand.

(right) Sir Edmund and Lady June Hillary, Elizabeth Hawley, and Richard Blum of American Himalayan Foundation at the consecration of the Thyangboche Monastery.

Lady June Hillary 1931 - 2024

Sir Ed was a towering figure, but Lady June was equally staunch at his side, discrete, always there – his saviour

■ Lisa Choegyal

“She’s gone” the choked voice of her daughter on the call from Auckland said it all. “Please can you tell her friends in Nepal?” As I caught my breath and gazed at the cloud-shrouded Annapurna peaks beyond the balcony, it dawned on me that a great lady had departed.

Lady June Hillary died on 1 June 2024 surrounded by her daughters, grandchildren and great grandchildren in the Auckland care home overlooking the green fields and leafy avenues of Cornwall Park. A tireless friend of Nepal, June was a supportive wife to Sir Edmund Hillary and played a significant role in his life and work.

In her own right, she served for decades as Nepal Honorary Consul General to New Zealand and was patron of the New Zealand Nepal Society, promoting cultural understanding and ensuring that

Nepal’s rich heritage and traditions were celebrated and appreciated in New Zealand. She chaired the Himalayan Trust New Zealand for several years after Sir Ed’s death, 16 years ago.

Dinesh Khadka, the current Honorary Consul General in Auckland wrote: “Lady Hillary was an exceptional individual whose contributions to Nepal and the Nepalese community in New Zealand were immeasurable.” The Himalayan Trust New Zealand farewelled her on social media: “June was involved in the Himalayan Trust since its beginnings through her friendship with Ed and Louise. She had a deep fondness for the Himalaya and the people of Nepal.”

As lamps were lit and pujas planned throughout the mountains, Himalayan Trust Nepal posted: “Lady June Hillary made significant contributions to the humanitarian initiatives to support the people of Nepal throughout her

life. She was a very good friend of the Sherpas. Her dedication and compassion touched countless lives and will continue to inspire us all.”

Effortlessly stylish in her trademark navy and flowing scarfs, not a hair dared escape her elegant silver chignon ever, even on remote trekking trails. From their home in Remuera, Auckland, she accompanied Sir Ed on his punishing schedule of global public appearances, event openings and Himalayan Trust appeals.

Perhaps most of all she will be remembered for her dogged dedication to the wellbeing of Sir Edmund Hillary, a great man in both stature and accomplishments who had been felled by the double disaster of losing his wife Louise and youngest daughter Belinda in the Kathmandu plane crash in 1975.

June is credited with lifting her husband out of the devastation and deep withdrawal that followed this tragedy, Sir Ed’s saviour, his

“steadfast support system”. “June enlivened Ed’s last decades, or maybe even more accurately she kept him alive after the accident,” wrote Australian filmmaker Michael Dillon, who spent many months with the Hillarys.

Raised a catholic in post-war Wellington, June was first married to Peter Mulgrew with whom she had two daughters, Robyn and Susan. A close friend of Sir Ed, Peter was a dashing figure, a mountaineer and yachtsman, who had both feet amputated after a climbing accident on Makalu. The foursome were close friends, travelled together and helped during the early years of the Himalayan Trust. In 1979, Peter was killed in the Mount Erebus air disaster, a sightseeing flight lost over the Antarctic on which he was the celebrity commentator, ironically as a stand-in for Sir Ed.

It was perhaps inevitable after these catastrophes that Sir Ed and June found strength and solace

in each other. At Sir Ed’s side, June accompanied him to New Delhi during his four-year stint as New Zealand High Commissioner from 1985 – her unwed status regularised as his Official Companion. They only married after their return to New Zealand in 1989.

It was during his frequent visits to Nepal as Ambassador that I first got to know June. I loved her caring tenacity, her feisty humour and especially her acerbic wit. June’s fierce and gallant commitment to Sir Ed’s best interests were not always well understood or appreciated, but we knew Sir Ed could not manage without her.

Sir Ed was a towering figure, but Lady June was equally staunch at his side, discrete, always there, ever watchful. No stranger to controversy, newspaper reports of which she did not approve would be dismissed as “wrapping for tomorrow’s fish and chips” with an unhappy shrug. But as a grounded Kiwi, she deftly navigated the privilege and pitfalls of being married to a national hero and “the greatest New Zealander”. After a fundraising dinner in San Francisco, June twinkled: “Quite fun, being seated between Warren Beatty and HH the Dalai Lama.”

As Jim Edward’s guests at Tiger Tops they joined us to present Elephant Polo trophies and party at New Year’s Eve in Chitwan between diplomatic duties and philanthropic trips to the Khumbu. Together they opened Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge in 1998, and June returned to celebrate our 10-year anniversary.

NMB BANK
एनएमबि बैंक



Turkish, Air China

Turkish Airlines and Air China this week announced a ‘freeshare codeshare agreement,’ ending their long-standing ‘blocked space partnership’. This agreement covers flights between Istanbul and Beijing and allows both the airlines to sell any number of the seats on each other’s flights. Previously, certain seats would not be made available.

Everest Exhibition

Mount Everest Foundation grants, which fund exploratory expeditions around the world, are now open for Nepali nationals. Marking a hundred years since the Mallory expedition, ‘The Flight for Everest 1924’ exhibition was on show at the British Embassy and will now move permanently to the International Mountain Museum in Pokhara.

Environment Day

The Indian Embassy with Lalitpur Municipality organised a tree plantation ceremony on 5 June on the occasion of World Environment Day at Sankata Bridge. Minister for Forests Nawal Kishor Sah Sudi and Lalitpur Mayor Chiri Babu Maharjan also took part.

Amnesty Youth Mela

Amnesty International Nepal is organising the 16th edition of its annual national Youth Mela in Pokhara from 6-8 June. The program this year will be focused on the issue of systemic caste-based discrimination showcasing its recent report ‘No One Cares: Descent-Based Discrimination Against Dalits in Nepal’.



Triveni EV

Official Dongfeng distributor Triveni opened an EV showroom in Balkumari this week. The vehicles in the showroom include electric cargo trucks and a 14-seater passenger van with a range of 250km. Triveni Motors has also set up service and charging stations, and will also sell the models through local dealers in cities like Dhangadi, Narayanghat and Bhaktapur.

Sanepa to Sagarmatha

Mountain medic and trekking guide Rajesh Lama walked from Sanepa to the top of Mt Everest. The outdoor company North Face sponsored the 57-day, 432.6km journey, in line with its ‘Never Stop Exploring’ motto. Lama left Sanepa on 1 April, reached Lukla on 15 April, and summited on 20 May. Lama even crossed Renjo La and Cho La passes and scaled Labuche on the way.

DishHome Offers

DishHome Fibernet and Direct to Home subscribers can, through a ‘Smaart Offers’ program, get price reductions on earbuds, smartwatches, and home appliances. The discounts depend on the length and nature of the subscriptions. DishHome Fibernet also offered a free 12 months when subscribers renewed for 24 months on the occasion of Nepal’s first game in the T20 World Cup, against The Netherlands. The offer was valid until 4 June.

Digital Marketing

Business 360 and Catalyst have announced ‘Learning Curve,’ a quarterly meetup for digital marketing professionals. The first session, on 27 June at Hotel Royal Singi in Kamaladi, will have discussions on trends in digital marketing, content marketing, AI, and Data Analytics. Experts in brand management from India will be present.

Ncell, NAASA

Stock Brokerage firm NAASA Securities is partnering with Ncell to give subscribers access to stock trading services



on the Ncell app and discounts on opening or renewing trading accounts. Customers will be able to update identity details, open accounts, etc on the app.



Finance Wuling EVs

Official Wuling distributor Paramount Motors is partnering with Nabil Bank to provide financing options such that customers can get financing for up to 80% of the vehicles, and can choose between fixed rates of 9.99% for 5 years and 10.49% for 7 years, or a fluctuating interest rate system.

IME Infosys Award

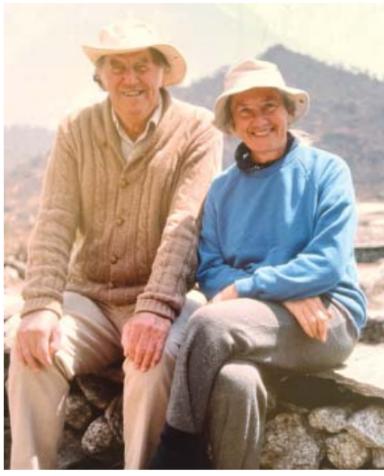
Global IME Bank has received the Infosys Finacle Process Innovation Award 2024. The bank was recognised as the best bank in ‘Integration of Security Deposit Locker Issuance’ and ‘E-commerce Card Issuance.’ IME uses Finacle as its core banking software.

AI landslide

Researchers from the University of Melbourne, Tribhuvan University, and the University of Florence are developing an artificial intelligence system to predict landslides. The system, called SAFE-RISCCS, analyses satellite images and rain data to produce alerts days to weeks in advance.

IME insurance

Subscribers to IME Life Insurance will get special discounts for checkups at the Bluebird International Clinic in Thapathali.



The 50 year anniversary of the first Sagarmatha summit, 29 May 2003, was a hot day in the splendid British Embassy residence gardens. Live broadcasts anchored by TVNZ presenter Mark Sainsbury linked the Sherpa dancing and celebrity interviews with events in New Zealand. Ang Dooly was there to celebrate and remember Mingma Norbu, Kanchha, Pertemba, Lhakpa Norbu, Ang Rita and many others. As the sun beat down and guests sipped drinks, June passed the phone to Sir Ed, and he spoke to his son Peter on Everest. I suggested perhaps they would like a break and a shower. "We're not like

that," June laughed it off, always the trooper. "We'll just carry on."

At Sir Edmund Hillary's state funeral in January 2008, a visibly shaken Lady June sat swathed in black beside Prime Minister Helen Clark as the service was broadcast around the world. The iconic image of her touching the casket in farewell was entirely spontaneous, she told me afterwards. June had thought Sir Ed was being discharged from hospital, "but instead, he died that morning." It was a moment she frequently recalled.

Forever linked with Sagarmatha and the Sherpas, Lady June's death comes just days after the

71st anniversary of Sir Edmund's historic first summit of Mount Everest with Tenzing Norgay, and a week before the centenary of George Mallory and Andrew Irvine's disappearance high on the northern ridges of Everest in 1924.

But Lady June Hillary deserves her own accolades and recognition, independent of the Burra Sahib. A "classic lady," she is remembered as "wonderfully funny, with a tremendous sense of style" and her own special brand of purpose and destiny. It was an honour to have known her. 🇳🇵

Lisa Choegyal is New Zealand Honorary Consul to Nepal since 2010.

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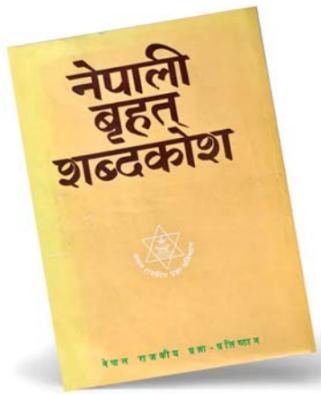
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Steven Brunswijk

RACE AGAINST TIME

There can be no selective indignation as racism remains tenaciously ubiquitous around the world



George van Driem

The great Nepali linguist वल्लभ मणि दाहाल Ballabh Maṇi Dāhāl was the driving force behind the monumental dictionary नेपाली बृहत् शब्दकोश Nepālī Bṛhat Śabdakoś (pictured, above), the most authoritative edition of which appeared in the year 2040 (1983-84AD). Yet few will remember that this renowned lexicographer spent two years languishing in prison.

He was incarcerated in Phālgun 2017 (February-March 1961) and released from prison two years later on grounds of poor health. Twenty years later, his superb work of lexicography was published. His crime had been to indulge in forbidden love.

His wife too was an eminent scholar, the renowned linguist सुभद्रा सुब्बा Subhadrā Subbā, but he was a Brāhmaṇ and she was a Limbū, or rather a Limbunī.

The caste system is thousands of years old, but after the Gorkhali conquest of the Newa kingdoms in the Kathmandu Valley and the subsequent unification of Nepal, new legislation was needed to regulate the relations between the many castes, ethnic groups and language communities that had been incorporated into the kingdom.

In 1854, Jaṅg Bahādūr Rāṇā promulgated the मुलुकी ऐन Mulukī Ain, an elaborate piece of legislation which regulated in painstaking detail how transgressions against caste would be punished in Nepal. The original manuscript of the law even contained one chapter on same-sex inter-caste pollution in order to sanction cases where two members of the same sex, but not of the same caste, had engaged in amorous activities.

Jaṅg Bahādūr Rāṇā brought back a printing press from Europe in 1851, and the first printed version of the Mulukī Ain was published in the 1890s. The chapter on same-sex pollution was not included in the printed versions of the law because such material was not deemed suitable for a large readership, but Jean Fézas published the omitted chapter of the original manuscript

in the Journal Asiatique in 1983.

The law meticulously detailed numerous punishments, ranging from fines and cruel corporeal punishments to the death penalty for transgressions against caste purity. Each type of inter-caste transgression was weighted differently, and the various fines for smaller transgressions were precisely counted out in rupees and paise.

Quite logically, punishments meted out for inter-caste pollution were far more severe in cases involving a man and a woman than in cases involving two men, and lesbian love lay entirely beyond the purview of the law. Between two amorous men, there was no risk of offspring of mixed genealogy, and the honour of a woman was not besmirched.

The severity of the prescribed punishments was based on which caste was doing what and to whom. Moreover, two members of an inter-caste liaison were not punished with equal severity. Close study of the stipulations of this penal code reveals the labyrinthine thinking inherent to the racist psychology of caste in fascinating detail.

Laws have changed, but changing attitudes takes time.

Fortunately for us, Ballabh Maṇi Dāhāl did not languish in prison forever but went on to produce the Nepali lexicography. Meanwhile, attitudes have changed, and increasing numbers of people have begun to embrace inter-caste unions with a passion. Yet ethnic stereotypes are deeply embedded in our psyche, and attitudes change only gradually.

In 2000, I was warming myself in the sun, sitting on the broad

staircase of the house of a well-to-do Nuvākoṭī Brahmin family. An auntie at the top of the stairs called out to the family on the ground floor to shoo me off of the stairway and to have them sweep the stairs.

It was all very well that her nephew had brought home a म्लेच्छ Mlecch, but she needed to be able to descend the stairs of her own house without having her caste purity being polluted by an untouchable कुइरे kuire. Needless to say, she deeply disapproved of my friendship with her nephew, who later accompanied me to Europe and settled in Amsterdam and who now, for all intents and purposes, is very much a Dutchman.

Immigration and naturalisation in the opposite direction are impossible. In stark contrast to the openness of western Europe, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, xenophobic legislation in Nepal enforces an ethnic bias that seals off Nepali society for immigration.

Even with the written approval of His Majesty King Birendra, it took Lt Col John Philip Cross (below) 32 years, 6 months and 2 days before he was granted citizenship. When his struggle was finally rewarded, the legendary Gurkha figure was already deep into his retirement. Yet he is the lucky exception. This grudging attitude with respect to Nepali citizenship reflects a mind-set firmly rooted in the racial attitudes of the Mulukī Ain.

People pay for their phenotype in Nepal and India. People who look like Nepalis or Indians can freely enter Bhaktapur or stroll around Kathmandu's historical centre. European citizens of South Asian extraction and even certain

friends of mine from Hong Kong and Thailand are not charged because the criterion is a purely racial one. Imagine the public outcry if only people of European ancestry were allowed to freely stroll around the centre of Paris without being charged. Imagine the hue and cry if people who were judged not to 'look European' were charged more to ascend the Eiffel Tower.

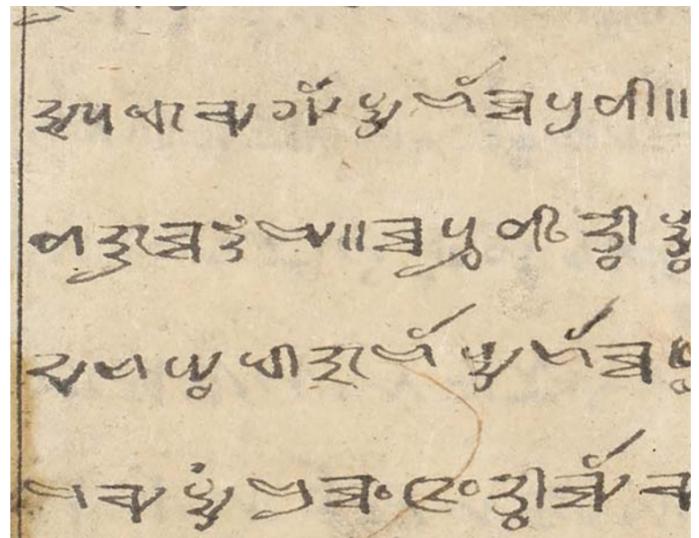
Subaltern views are legitimate perspectives, too.

In the 1980s, any friendship of mine with a Brahmin or Chetri was viewed with undisguised suspicion by the loving Limbu family with whom I lived in Limbuwan. In fact, I was carefully guarded against consorting too closely with any members of the पानी चल्ने जात pānī calne jāt or 'water-pure castes' of the Mulukī Ain, to whom the Limbu refer colloquially by the unflattering term च्चु च्चु च्चु? cwa?/kelakpa 'water lickers'.

I should address him as तिमी timī, he insisted, whilst he addressed me as हजुर hajur and तपाईं tapāi. In Nepali, pronominal usage has begun to change slowly, but such changes should be allowed to evolve naturally and not be forced by meddlesome politicians or language activists. The intricacies and the sheer beauty of the Nepali pronominal system is a topic on which I published a study in 2019.

Kamala Harris is not Black. She is a human being.

In molecular genetic terms, we have understood for over half a century that distinct 'races' as separate subspecies of humankind are a fiction. We are all members of one large human family. The relationship between genes, their phenotypical expression and their pleiotropic interplay is inordinately complex, and our individual differences often tend to be larger than the differences between groups and populations. Moreover, we



The Directorate of Education in Gangtok has been producing Limbu schoolbooks since the 1970s, but in eastern Nepal in the 1980s families lucky enough to have retained deteriorating old Limbu manuscripts guarded these precious heirlooms in secrecy. For over a century the possession of books in Limbu script had been a capital offence in the kingdom.

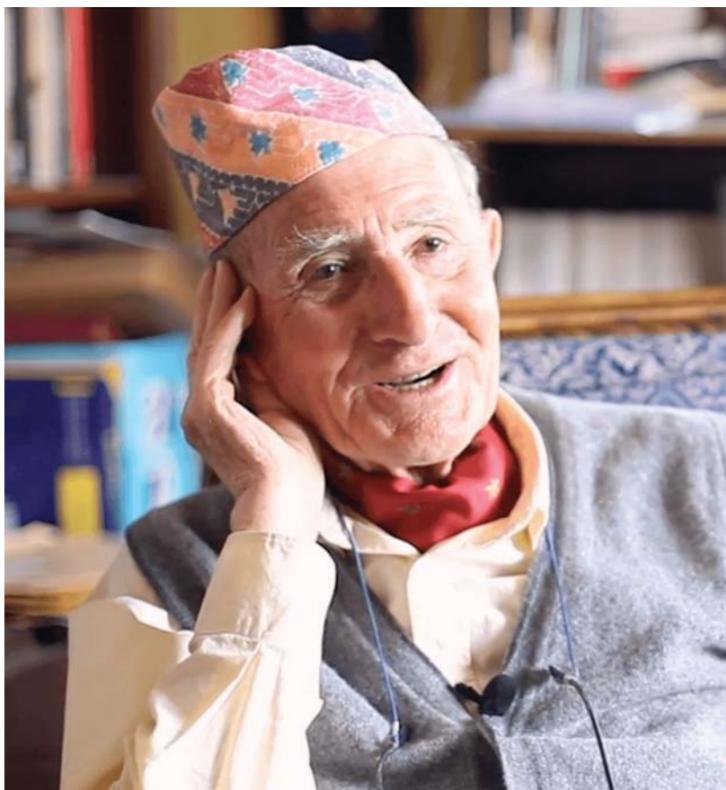
The only completely intact old Limbu books from eastern Nepal were rescued by Brian Houghton Hodgson, to whom these texts had discretely been entrusted. The manuscripts are now safely stored out of harm's way in the British Library in London.

In 1983, a low-caste man in rural eastern Nepal who was twice my age took the trouble to explain to me that it was grammatically incorrect for me to address him as तपाईं tapāi. He asserted that only a foreigner could make such a mistake. Nepalis of high caste would, he insisted, never commit the error of using the deferential pronoun तपाईं tapāi to address someone of his low artisanal caste.

each embody the highly individual coalescence of numerous distinct strands of ancestral lineages. Nobody has just one ancestry. We each have countless ancestries.

Kamala Harris is not Black. She is a human being. More specifically, Kamala Harris is not a negress. Her father appears to be a mulatto (French mulâtre or cāpre) or perhaps a quadroon (Portuguese and French quarteron). Her mother was Tamil. So, she could be described as half-caste, but all such words are nowadays considered taboo by the squeamish, who wrongly think that any such label can diminish our humanity. Besides, there exists a more precise term. The English word used in the Caribbean for an Indian and African métissage is dougla, sometimes written doogala. The term ultimately derives from Hindi दोगला dogalā 'half-breed'. In the caste-ridden society of the Indian subcontinent, the term implicitly used to carry the unpleasant connotation of 'bastard'.

In the Caribbean context, however, the word dougla has lost



Lt Col John Philip Cross



US Vice President Kamala Harris. Her parents (right).



much of its pejorative connotation and is pronounced with the vowel sound in the first syllable instead of the vowel sound. The Caribbean pronunciation may represent a retention because etymologically the Hindi form derives from दु-दु- [~ दो do] 'two' and कुल kul 'race, kin, ancestry'. In the French Caribbean, the offspring of an Indian and African métissage is termed 'un batakzandien' or, in the case of a female, 'une batakzandienne'. A Caribbean French synonym is chapé-coolie.

As a counterpart to the word quarteron 'quadroon', Caribbean French also has the term griffe for a person with three grandparents of African ancestry and one grandparent of European ancestry. The French Caribbean term mamelouque or octavon denotes a person with a single great-grandparent of African ancestry, whereas the term chabin denotes a person of mixed Caribbean colonial ancestry with fair skin, light eyes and light crinkly hair. Instead of placing such words under taboo, these labels can all be lovingly worn with pride. Douglā too can be proudly worn as the badge of a diverse heritage.

Such traditional terms are not only more specific than the new construct 'black', but also less misleading. Barack Obama is described as the first 'Black' president of the United States, but in view of his parentage he is no less of a 'white' man. The historically relatively novel and entirely artificial social construct 'black' fails to reflect any such sense of balance and ends up being no more informative than the label विमहा ष्ठिमहā.

As a politician, Kamala Harris will naturally be professionally inclined to posture in whatever way may strike her as most expedient at the moment. Yet, whichever way she chooses to identify herself in terms of her Asian, African and European ancestry, she did not change her name, as someone joked in Nepal's social web after the 2020 election, from कमला हरिस् to कमला ष्ठित्स् ।

Gay shows the way

In the summer of 1973, I was on a foray across the North Sea to buy English books. Strolling down Charing Cross Road, an arresting image caught my eye. A wall poster featured a side view of the naked muscular torso of a young South Asian man in a bandana flexing the biceps of his left arm whilst looking down defiantly upon the viewer. The caption, in italicised pink capitals, shouted out *PAKI POOF*. I stood still, horrified. My father, walking on ahead towards Foyles, called back to me telling me not to tarry, but I was mesmerised. Was this some racist provocation inciting a pogrom against homosexuals?

Closer inspection of the fine print on the poster revealed the scant details of a one-off dance

event. This bit of news shocked me as much as had the loud caption. Few at that time could have foreseen the fortnightly South Asian gay disco nights of Club Kali near Tufnell Park, which would only begin to be held over two decades later, in 1995.

What puzzled me most was the aggressive use of the derogatory terms 'Paki' and 'poofter'. This was four years after Stonewall, and I was not alone in not having cottoned on to the pivotal change in the politics of usage that had been catalysed by the events of June 1969.

Gay people defiantly began to embrace once scathing terms such as 'gay' and 'queer' and began to wear them as badges of pride. At the time, I was equally disturbed in Holland to hear young men speaking of themselves or their friends as *nichten* in Dutch, or as *janetten* in Flemish. How could people joke light-heartedly about such a hurtful word as *mietje*, which combined the acerbic flavour of *sissy* and *faggot*?

The brandishing of such threatening terms as labels of self-identification baffled and disturbed me. What I failed to understand at the time was that the seizing of ownership of such terms by the gay community embodied the linguistic counterpart of coming out.

Half a century later, this strategic appropriation of usage has proven to be highly successful, even if this process was initially not painless. The bold gay strategy of linguistic defiance can now serve as an instructive example.

Race has yet to come out of the closet.

The politics of 'race' has seen precious few parallel developments. Instead, by sanitising their language with euphemisms, people unwittingly admit to being ashamed of their own or someone else's ancestry. We say *Viśvakarma* instead of *kāmi*, and in the United States people say Afro-American instead of *negro*. Yet being bashful about biology, instead of being bold and brave, can backfire.

In 1932, Mohandās Gāndhī introduced the euphemism Harijan 'children of God' to refer to members of traditionally untouchable castes, but, because attitudes did not change, this label too became a derogatory term. In 1982, the Union government in India was compelled to instruct state governments to refrain from using the term Harijan to refer to Dalits 'the downtrodden', another euphemism.

The gypsies of Europe proudly retained the old word *डॉम* *doma* as their self-designation, Roma or Rroma, but now these people are often being obliquely referred to as 'travellers'.

French linguist Nicolas

Tournadre calls this phenomenon *aseptisation linguistique* 'linguistic disinfection'. He describes how French went from calling swarthy people of sub-Saharan extraction *nègres* to calling them *noirs* to calling them *blacks* in an inflationary spiral of apologetic avoidance. Using *noir* as an excuse for *nègre* acts as an enabler for racist attitudes. Once *noir* itself becomes derogatory, a new excuse had to be found by adopting the Anglo-American term, which takes us to where the cowardly politics of avoidance began in the first place.

The invention of the construct *black* misapprehends that we are in no way 'contaminated' by our biological heritage. There is nothing about us that requires disinfection.

The unenlightened insist on linguistic disinfection.

Russian *negr*, Spanish *negro* and Dutch *neger* have remained relatively neutral terms. Yet in the misguided belief that all American trends must be slavishly imitated, Dutch language activists have recently sought to foist fastidious Anglo-American norms of speech onto the Dutch language. They insist that the Dutch word *neger* likewise be rendered taboo.

Steven Brunswijk became a national celebrity in the Netherlands under the name *Braboneger* 'Brabantian negro'. Brabant is a province in the south, and this prominent media personality speaks his native Dutch with an unmistakable sappig 'juicy' Brabantian accent.

Brunswijk has publicly defied language activists, asserting rightly that there has never been anything wrong with being a *neger* 'negro'. Brunswijk pokes fun at stereotypes and shows that being a negro is a heritage of which to be proud. Indeed, every person can be proud of his or her own unique way of being human.

In their fervour to follow North American fashions, Dutch language activists have been at pains to convince us that there is something racist about the Dutch term *blank*, which simply denotes a person of European ancestry. These intellectual fashion victims insist that instead Dutchmen should now use the adjective *wit* 'white', just like the Americans do, to convey precisely the same meaning that *blank* has always denoted in Dutch.

Not only is this language game of musical chairs a perfect exercise in futility, moreover for Dutch speakers of my generation to call a living person *wit* conjures up the image of a *Pierrot*. In the Dutch sense of the word, people are never *wit*. Even albinos have more colour. Making harmless

words taboo imbues them with a destructive power which they previously lacked. Instead, using existing labels boldly, with pride and with equal respect for all, renders them anodyne.

The cowardly politics of insisting on contrived vocabulary does not contribute to changing attitudes. It is the intent with which we say a word that determines its illocutionary force. This linguistic insight has always been understood by Brunswijk, but not by the intolerant and linguistically ignorant busybodies who have outshouted him in the Dutch media and who have sought to cow him into abandoning his famous epithet.



Pierrot

A few felicitous examples show that the politics of unapologetic usage, boldly employed by the gay community, can be applied just as successfully in speaking about biological ancestry.

Being Indo is the way to go.

Analogous to the British term 'Anglo-Indian' in the Indian subcontinent, the Dutch colonial term for people of mixed European and Asian ancestry in the Dutch East Indies was the euphemistic coinage Indo-European. Dutch colonial attitudes about race being what they used to be, this coinage was quickly colloquially contracted to the pejorative *Indo*.

Meanwhile, in the world of linguistics, the Dutch name for the Indo-European language family, *Indogermaans*, was replaced by the more international term *Indo-European*, a move which effectively forced out the original Dutch term *Indo-European* in its colonial meaning and replaced the Dutch East Indian sense of the word with the linguistic image of a speaker of ancient Indo-European.

At roughly the same time that I was shocked by the poster on the streets of London, people of mixed Dutch East Indian colonial ancestry began to seize ownership of the derogatory term *Indo* and to wear this label as a badge of pride. Consequently, the label is no

longer deprecatory, and today *Indos* celebrate their dual ancestry, which harmoniously unites colonised Asians and European colonisers, as a synthesis which historically produced its own marvellous culinary culture and the creole tongue *petjok*.

In Sri Lanka, all the Burghers whom I have met similarly take pride in their dual ancestry, and in Namibia the Basters of Rehoboth likewise sport their ethnic label with exemplary pride.

Sticks and stones.

The brutal beating of Rodney King in 1992 and the murder of George Floyd by policemen in 2020 are just two incidents that the media have highlighted out of a vast sea of racial injustices perpetrated against people of colour in the United States. A sincere moral stand against racism must condemn with equal vehemence racist injustices in North America, the unspeakable atrocities perpetrated against untouchables and minorities in the Subcontinent, the racially motivated murder of farmer families of European ancestry in hundreds of brutal, systematically planned farm massacres known as *plaasmoorde* in South Africa, the incarceration, torture and disappearance of Uighurs in the Xinjiang Uighur

Autonomous Region, dozens of deaths of aboriginal Australians in police custody in past decades and, indeed, all acts of aggression and injustice against people based on their biological ancestry. We are all one and the same human race, but racism remains tenaciously ubiquitous, and there can be no place for selective indignation.

The trap of 'linguistic disinfection' sets into motion a doomed cycle of squeamish avoidance and unnecessary apology that does nothing to change real attitudes in society. Instead, it is time to bring back good words like *negro*, *kāmi*, *quadroon*, *sārki*, *douglā* and to take proud ownership of these labels and to don them as badges of pride.

How can we demand respect for our ancestry if we render our ethnic affinity taboo and make excuses for our biological heritage by hiding behind epithets like 'harijan' or 'black'? It is time to come out of the closet and demand respect. Instead of hiding behind euphemisms, it is time to bring tabooed good words back into usage and to take proud ownership of this rich vocabulary for all the beautiful varieties of humankind. 🇳🇵

Prof Dr George van Driem holds the chair for Historical Linguistics at the University of Bern in Switzerland and has for half a century nurtured an abiding love for Nepal.

EVENTS



Vanishing Identities

Learn about Himalayan architecture and art at Wang Lama's solo exhibition 'In Search of Vanishing Identities.'

Until 9 June, 11am-6pm, Takpa Gallery

Stand-up show

If you are near Butwal, stop by the stand-up comedy special featuring Aayush Shrestha, Apoorwa Kshitiz Singh and BT Kancha, and experience an evening full of laughter.

7 June, 6pm, Ticket: Rs300, Manigram Bishram Batika, Butwal



Nepal Pride Parade

Be part of the celebrations at Nepal's 6th Pride Parade, which will start from Shanti Batika and end at Narayan Chaur.

8 June, 11am onwards, Shanti Batika

Art exhibition

'Mari Laanu k Cha ra?' by Tashi Salaka Sherpa, winner of Nepal Academy of Fine Arts' national prize, is a must-see exhibition.

Until 12 June, 11am-5pm, Nepal Academy of Fine Arts, Naxal (01) 4511645



Painting workshop

Gather loved ones, let imaginations run free at a painting workshop at Le Sherpa.

8 June, 8:30am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa Restaurant, Maharajganj, 9801830090

DINING



Lunch BOGO

Experience twice the delight for the price of one. Take a companion to Nook's to avail the Buy One Get One lunch offer, and make your meal a delightful shared experience.

Until 28 June (Mondays to Fridays), 12pm-3pm, Nook, Aloft Kathmandu, 9801976054

MUSIC

Live Music

A line-up of various local bands will perform live at Hard Rock Cafe this weekend. Don't miss out on the last day of live music featuring the Udaharan band.

7 June, 7pm onwards, Hard Rock Cafe, Durbar marg, 9801986771



Yak Fest

The Yak Fest is set to be an experience filled with live music performances, cocktails, stalls and an epic DJ night. Vek will also join on the last day.

7-8 June, 2pm onwards, Dancing Yak, Thamel, 9851171709



Pariwarta Live

Sing along with Nepali pop rock band 'Pariwarta' as they perform popular songs as well as their well-loved originals like 'Timi Ra Ma' and 'Ma Chu'.

7 June, 7pm onwards, London Pub, Durbar marg



Ka:Shi Kritipur

Detour to Kirtipur to spend a musical evening with artists Amit Jung and Space. Book tickets now.

8 June, 7pm-10pm, Ticket: Rs200, Ka:Shi Cafe Lounge and Bar, Kirtipur

Summer Music Fest

The Summer Music Fest will feature a live session by NS 1134. DJ Rolex and DJ Praize will get the audience bumping at the afterparty.

14 June, 7pm onwards, The Ai-La Lounge, Kumarijati



Kaiser Cafe

Kaiser Cafe is a quaint restaurant hidden in the corner of the Garden of Dreams. Enjoy fine dining after a relaxing walk around the serene garden.

Thamel (01) 4413217

Kebab Village

The Kebab Village Restaurant & Bar offers some of the best kebabs in Kathmandu. From Hara Bara Kebab to Kebab-E-Sabziyan, this restaurant has a variety of choices.

Naxal (01) 4422177

GETAWAYS



Royal Mustang

With a backdrop of glittering white mountains, fields of flowers and cool blue skies, the Royal Mustang Resort is a mirage amidst Nepal's driest region.

Lo Manthang, Mustang, 9856033555

Maruni Sanctuary Lodge

Chitwan National Park is home to a wide range of flora and fauna. From the comfort of the cabins and cottages of Maruni Sanctuary lodge, one can take a peek at the wandering wildlife and nature of the park.

Sauraha (01) 4700632



The Harbor

With its distinct natural stone architecture, airy rooms, Mediterranean cuisine and proximity to Fewa Lake, The Harbor is one of Pokhara's newest luxury boutique hotels.

Lakeside, Gaurighat, Pokhara (61) 453722

Hattiban Resort

Hattiban Resort is the perfect place to getaway for the weekend. Grab breakfast from the hotel's buffet, lounge by the courtyard, get a massage at the spa and take a tour of nearby Pharping, Champadevi Temple and Khokana Village.

Hattiban, 9801309842



Shivapuri Heights Cottage

Nestled at the base of the Shivapuri Hills, this retreat combines modern comforts with traditional art. It offers fresh farm-to-table cuisine and features an open-air Jacuzzi with breathtaking views of Kathmandu.

Shivapuri Hills, Budhanilkantha, 9846232271

Doko Deli

Doko Deli's open garden and range of appetisers, makes it the perfect place to spend the afternoon hanging out with friends. Try the Mustang ko Piro Aloo.

Jhamsikhel, 9801046708



The Workshop Eatery

Forget about calories and indulge in an assortment of doughnuts, fries and burgers. Give the Nutella Doughnut and the Workshop BBQ Chicken Burger a try.

Jhamsikhel, 9860431504

WEEKEND WEATHER



Monsoon soon

The Subcontinent's southwest monsoon actually enters Nepal from the east because the winds from the Bay are forced to curl around the eastern Himalaya. This year the monsoon front is advancing one week ahead of schedule, and is already bringing rain over Sikkim. Kathmandu Valley will see afternoon buildup with sharp squalls, but these are still local convection systems.

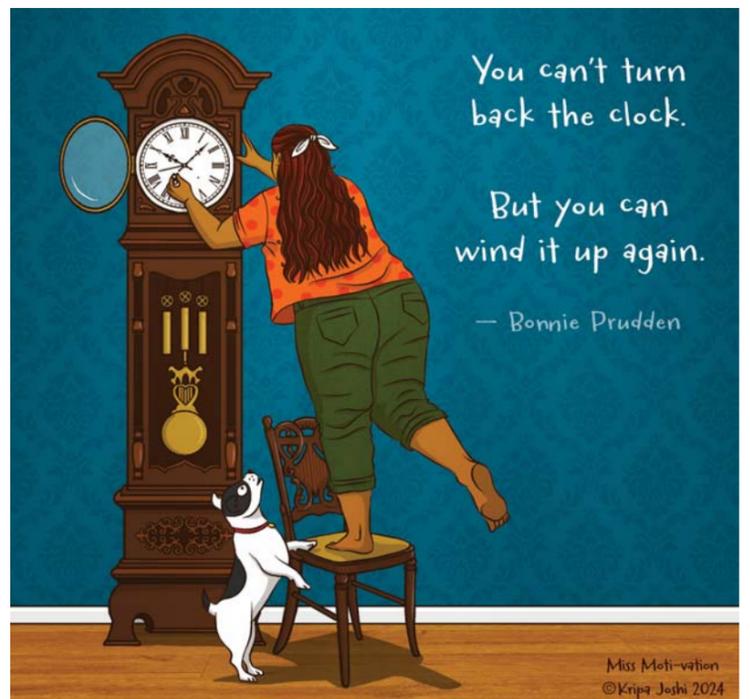
OUR PICK



In director Andrew Haigh's 2023 romance film *All of Us Strangers*, Adam is a screenwriter who lives a lonely life in a flat somewhere in London. One evening, he meets his neighbour Harry in his building, who expresses an interest in him. Adam initially rebuffed his advances, but the two eventually begin a relationship, even as Adam begins to frequently revisit memories of his childhood and parents, who passed away when he was a boy. The critically acclaimed film explores themes of love and grief, and stars Andrew Scott, Paul Mescal, Claire Foy, and Jamie Bell.

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

Between losing and loss

New art exhibition is a wistful take on what we have left when Himalayan identities are gone

■ Pinki Sris Rana

The Himalaya can be seen as a heap of rocks covered in ice and snow, aloof and permanent. But what of the intangible, non-physical Himalaya — the heritage, culture, songs, languages, festivals, lives and livelihoods?

The mountains are in flux, and some of the changes to the climate and weather are global in nature while others are local — outmigration and influences of the outside world.

Wang Lama (pictured) is deeply affected by the changes he sees around him, and using his art tries to peer into the future. Will the Himalaya as we know it survive in the coming decades? He shares these worries in his solo exhibition, *In Search of Vanishing Identities*, at the Takpa Gallery.

Will the yaks, the monasteries, monks and prayer flags be just a memory? Taking reference of villages of three trans-Himalayan districts (Humla, Mustang and Manang) Lama mostly uses pen and ink with watercolour to bring us minutely detailed Himalayan landscapes.

Lama takes refuge in Himalayan architecture and art, his works primarily focusing on the remnants of the past and sites of the present.

“We have always associated identity with people and our cultural dress. But what about the knowledge, architecture, and art of these places?” asks the 35-year-old artist rhetorically. “Villages are emptying, and city dwellers are migrating abroad, there is no one



WANG LAMA

left to recognise the knowledge, to witness the pace of change and associate our space with their vanishing identity.”

Born in the Nyin Valley of remote Humla, Lama is nostalgic about the places of his childhood among the arid mountains of northwest Nepal. Those places are no longer what they were, he worries.

In some of his paintings, he takes us back to a time when yak caravans carried rock salt through the mountain trails which are also slowly vanishing. Then he yanks us back to the present with works showing alleys, houses and monasteries that are abandoned.

Lama has captured Manang and its changing landscape in *Golden Hour* (pictured above), a mix media on canvas depicting traditional mud houses, each with a waving vertical prayer flag. There is a wisp of smoke rising from the houses, and in the middle is an incongruous concrete house. A dilapidated traditional stupa stands amidst the mud houses and a concrete stupa lies next to the cemented house.

“I wanted to show how modernity can kill the essence of a place,” Lama explains. “Today, everyone is opting for concrete structures and the traditional stupa which was made from stones



brought from each household in the locality is being replaced with cement. The idea of everyone coming together to build something is gone.”

Then there are prayer wheels embedded in walls, paintings and carvings on windows and doors, and alcoves embedded in the stone walls of traditional houses. The colours red, blue, white, green and yellow represent the five elements of nature in Buddhist philosophy — and serve as a motif in most of Lama’s art.

There is a rustic tone in every piece. Lama says, “In the past, our ancestors built houses that were a part of nature. The holes in the mud houses were deliberately made as nesting areas for birds, they were a refuge to birds as much as for humans.”

Birds help pollination and insect control in the shrinking arable land of the Himalayas.

In the piece *Eternal Silence*, a monk is meditating inside a sky cave facing the stupa.

“The stone stupa, the sky caves of Mustang and even the monkhood are all on the verge of extinction, and this painting documents their memory,” says Lama.

Though the exhibition’s dominant theme is the changing Himalayan landscapes and its fragile ecosystem, each of Lama’s works also raises the global changes that are affecting us all as we grapple with figuring out the type of world we want to live in.

Is it the world centred solely on human ‘progress’ we want to be part of, or a tradition that believed in co-existing with nature? 🇳🇵

In Search of Vanishing Identities
11AM-6PM (Tuesday to Thursdays)
11AM-7PM (Fridays to Sundays)
Till 9 June
Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat

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A deadly sugar rush

Diabetes is rising among Nepalis, but more than half of the cases are undiagnosed

■ Yugottam Koirala

In a corner seat on the first floor of Bir Hospital, a middle-aged kidney patient winces in pain. Next door, a lady has nerve damage, and is unable to feel the growing wound on her sole. Two floors up, a crowd of desperate patients wait for an appointment with an endocrinologist.

This week, the hospital in Kathmandu was filled with different medical complications. But many of them were related to a single disease: diabetes.

"On any given day, we see up to 200 patients in our department, and more than half have to do with diabetes mellitus," says consultant endocrinologist Manil Bajracharya at Bir.

Diabetes mellitus is a condition where the body either does not produce enough insulin, or use it effectively, resulting in dangerously high blood sugar levels. Untreated, it can lead to life-threatening complications, including disorders

of the cardiovascular system, eyes, kidneys, and nerves.

In Nepal, the incidence of diabetes is on the rise, with an estimated 8.7% of adults between 20-79 living with the condition in 2021. This number was 3.6% in 2011, and is expected to reach 9.4% by 2045.

"This rise most likely has to do with rapid changes in lifestyle and diet," explains Bajracharya. "We have seen a shift from traditional cereal and vegetable-based diets to ones rich in animal products and processed foods high in fat and sugar content. This nutritional transition, combined with reduced physical activity, has significantly increased the risk of diabetes."

Bagmati Province has nearly five times higher prevalence of diabetes than the Karnali. Other provinces with urban centres like Gandaki and Lumbini also have a high burden of the disease.

"Nepalis who migrate to cities often have reduced physical activity and transition to high-calorie diets, which contribute to obesity and



elevate the risk of diabetes," says Bajracharya. City dwellers are twice as likely to develop diabetes compared to rural Nepalis.

Diabetes mellitus has no cure, but it can be managed through careful monitoring, lifestyle changes, and improving medications. Many people

diagnosed with diabetes live for years without experiencing serious symptoms.

But Nepal has a huge gap: 43.5% of adults living with diabetes do not know that they have the disease. This means two out of every five cases go undiagnosed, and therefore untreated.

"If diabetes isn't detected on time, it can become life-altering, and may even be fatal," adds Bajracharya.

Raman Tamang did not know he had diabetes until a wound started growing on his foot. "I first thought it was just a normal cut. But it grew and started stinking. It got so bad

M Y O P I A L P E D

Nearsightedness is an epidemic among Nepal's children, but remains hidden from the public eye

■ Yugeshwor Koirala



The new normal in Nepal's schools are spectacled faces, as a silent epidemic of myopia or nearsightedness spreads among mainly urban youngsters.

Over one million children under 16 have an uncorrected refractive error, according to the Nepal Blindness Survey done 12 years ago. Experts say the numbers have increased vastly, and the main factor is screen time. People with myopia have blurry distance vision so that while close objects appear crisp, corrective lenses are needed to focus on distant objects.

Explains Rohit Saiju, an ophthalmologist at Drishti Eye

Center: "The eyeball grows too long, causing distant light to be focused in front of instead of on the retina, the light-sensitive region of the eye."

Initially, it was believed that the condition was purely hereditary, but the global increase in myopia was too rapid, leading to the conclusion that there were environmental factors.

While children whose parents are both shortsighted are most likely to develop myopia, lifestyle and behaviour can be equally, if not more important.

"How much time is spent staring at screens indoors instead of

EYE SPY

Fluttering and squinted eyes, frequent tearing up, and having to inch closer to get a better view are all symptoms of myopia.

Declining academic performance is also a red flag, but parents are too quick to dismiss it by blaming their child instead of their eyesight.



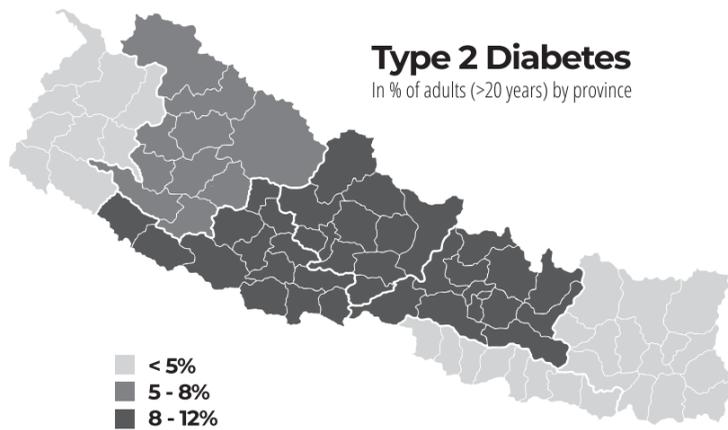


NEPAL DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

that my family started avoiding me," says Tamang.

When he was brought to Helping Hands Community Hospital in Chabahil, his wound had turned chronic.

A patient with long term diabetes suffers nerve damage. This results in the loss of sensation in



SOURCE: PMID 32712902

the feet. Elevation in blood glucose also reduces the body's ability to heal wounds.

"Minor cuts, scrapes, or wounds often go unnoticed until the body can no longer heal them on its own," explains orthopaedic surgeon Hem Limbu at Helping Hands.

Called diabetic foot ulcers, such wounds often persist and in the worst cases may get infected and have to be amputated. Across the globe, 85% of all amputations happen due to diabetic foot ulcers.

"We have to amputate almost half of all cases of diabetic foot because many patients come too late," adds Limbu. Not amputating the leg can lead to infections spreading to the bloodstream.

Studies have shown that 19-47% of diabetic patients in Nepal also have diabetic retinopathy, where high-glucose blood damages blood vessels in the retina of the eye, impairing vision.

However, less than 30% of Nepalis who have diabetes know about this risk of blindness. And an additional 50% never get their eyes checked despite living with diabetes.

Diabetes also elevates the risk of kidney failure, heart disease, and stroke.

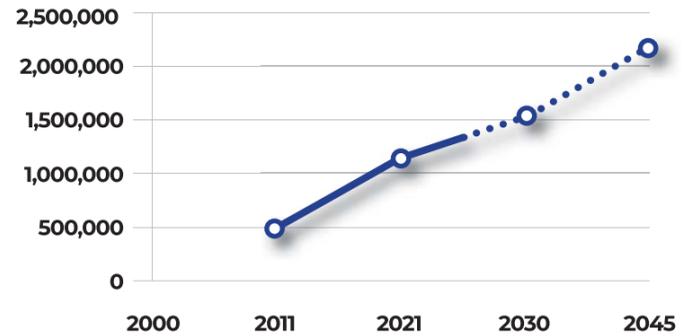
An estimated 9,000 Nepalis under 60 died due to some form of complication attributable to diabetes in 2021.

Then there are 9.2% of Nepali adults who are prediabetic with elevated blood glucose levels that could reach diabetic levels if their lifestyle does not change. "But because most don't know they have the condition, proper screening and awareness is essential," says Hem Limbu.

Screening involves a blood test and to manage high blood sugar, patients require insulin replacement therapy through injections or an insulin pump.

People with Diabetes in Nepal

(per million)



SOURCE: IDF DIABETES ATLAS, 2021

But insulin resistance can often be managed with dietary modifications and exercise.

"Prediabetes is gaining increasing recognition as a significant health concern, and a growing number of adults are seeking assistance even for mild symptoms," notes Bajracharya.

While this trend reflects improved awareness, it is equally vital to identify prediabetes in younger adults. Developing diabetes at a young age prolongs the duration of the condition and escalates the risk of complications.

Timely diagnosis and effective management can mitigate complications: reducing the risk of diabetic retinopathy by up to 95%, foot ulcers and amputations by 85%, kidney disease by 70%, and both cardiovascular disease and stroke by 50%.

"Prevention is better than cure for most diseases, but for diabetes, prevention and early detection are

the only cures. Once the disease advances, reversing its effects becomes exceedingly challenging, necessitating lifelong symptom management," adds Bajracharya. "So Nepal's challenge isn't just about forming an action plan for diabetes awareness, screening and treatment, but about implementing it in areas where essential drugs and equipment are out of reach."

In urban cities, the challenge is different. Drugs, diagnostic services and self-monitoring equipment are accessible, but so are processed foods and sugary drinks.

"After essential healthcare services are in place, preventing and managing diabetes comes down to personal choices and attitudes. Whether or not diabetes continues to surge in Nepal, therefore, depends on each individual more than anything else," says Bajracharya.



PHOTOS: ORBIS INTERNATIONAL

enjoying activities outdoors is a key determinant," says Saiju.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has projected that by 2050, shortsightedness will affect half of the world population. A large portion of this newly bespectacled demographic will be in Asia, over half of whom are already myopic today.

"This may be because of the societal factors that children in Asia are exposed to," says Srijana Adhikari of the Department of Paediatric Ophthalmology at Tilganga. "High academic pressure is the leading concern because extended school time, private

tutoring and after school classes force children to keep their noses in their books or screens for long hours."

Outdoor activity is important not just because it provides a break from too much closed-in work, but also because it offers exposure to sunlight. Natural light helps release dopamine in the retina, which controls the elongation of the eyeball during child growth.

"Too little daylight exposure, and the eye grows myopic, which is why it is so important for children to grow outdoors," says Saiju.

That may be easier said than done. Pramila Sapkota, 40, encourages her 13-year-old son to play at Narayan Chaur Park in Naxal every Saturday afternoon but she has to be ever cautious.

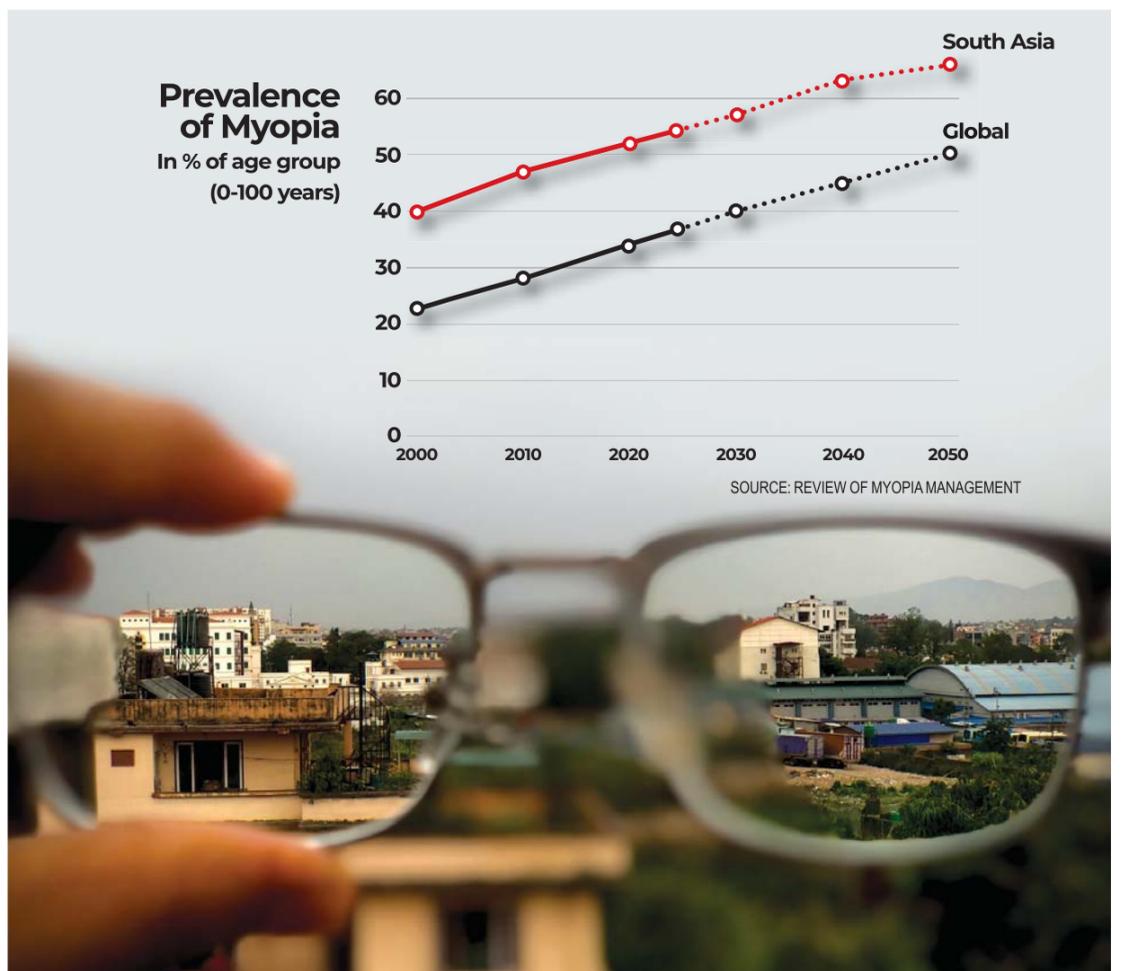
"It's no longer like the old days, most public spaces today are unsafe," she says. "As a parent it isn't easy for me to simply tell him to go outside unsupervised even though he is a teenager."

Kathmandu is bursting at the seams and does not have enough clean, open spaces. Residents, and especially children are paying the price of haphazard urbanisation with their lungs, ears, and now even their eyes.

One parent, Sachita Rai, whose 10-year-old daughter wears glasses of -3.50 diopters, says her eye power shot up after months of Covid-induced confinement.

"She used to attend online classes on my phone, staring at the small screen for hours," Rai recalls. "The very first day of school after the lockdown, she complained about not being able to see the whiteboard properly."

Indeed, experts confirm that the Covid pandemic expedited the spread of myopia among young people. "I have witnessed this in my own practice," says Adhikari. "In the months after the lockdown, the out-patient department at Tilganga was overwhelmed with



SOURCE: REVIEW OF MYOPIA MANAGEMENT

YUGESHWOR KOIRALA

children needing new prescription glasses."

While myopia is often said to be an affliction of city-dwellers, the pandemic lockdowns led to a surge even in rural areas. Children who did not have access to phones and laptops got the devices for online study. Even in Karnali Province, the proportion of students aged 3-24 using mobile phones is 92% — and that is the lowest among all provinces.

Research in far-western Nepal also shows that only half the public

school children, who likely start school later and have a less of an academic burden, are myopic compared to students of the same age enrolled in private schools.

Myopia is only present in 8.7% of school-age children who are not attending formal schools in Nepal. A 2023 study in the Madhes Province, which has the highest number of out-of-school children, found myopia in only 3.1% of children. That number was 9.4% in Kathmandu Valley that year.

Experts say that while there

is not much that can be done to actively reduce myopia, slowing its progression is possible. Vision screening should begin at age 3-4 when children start pre-school. Regular eye checkups are necessary because children that young cannot voice problems with eyesight.

"Many cases of myopia progress in children because parents are too late to catch symptoms," Adhikari tells us. "This is not just a matter of children requiring glasses. It is a public health concern that must be recognised and addressed."



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