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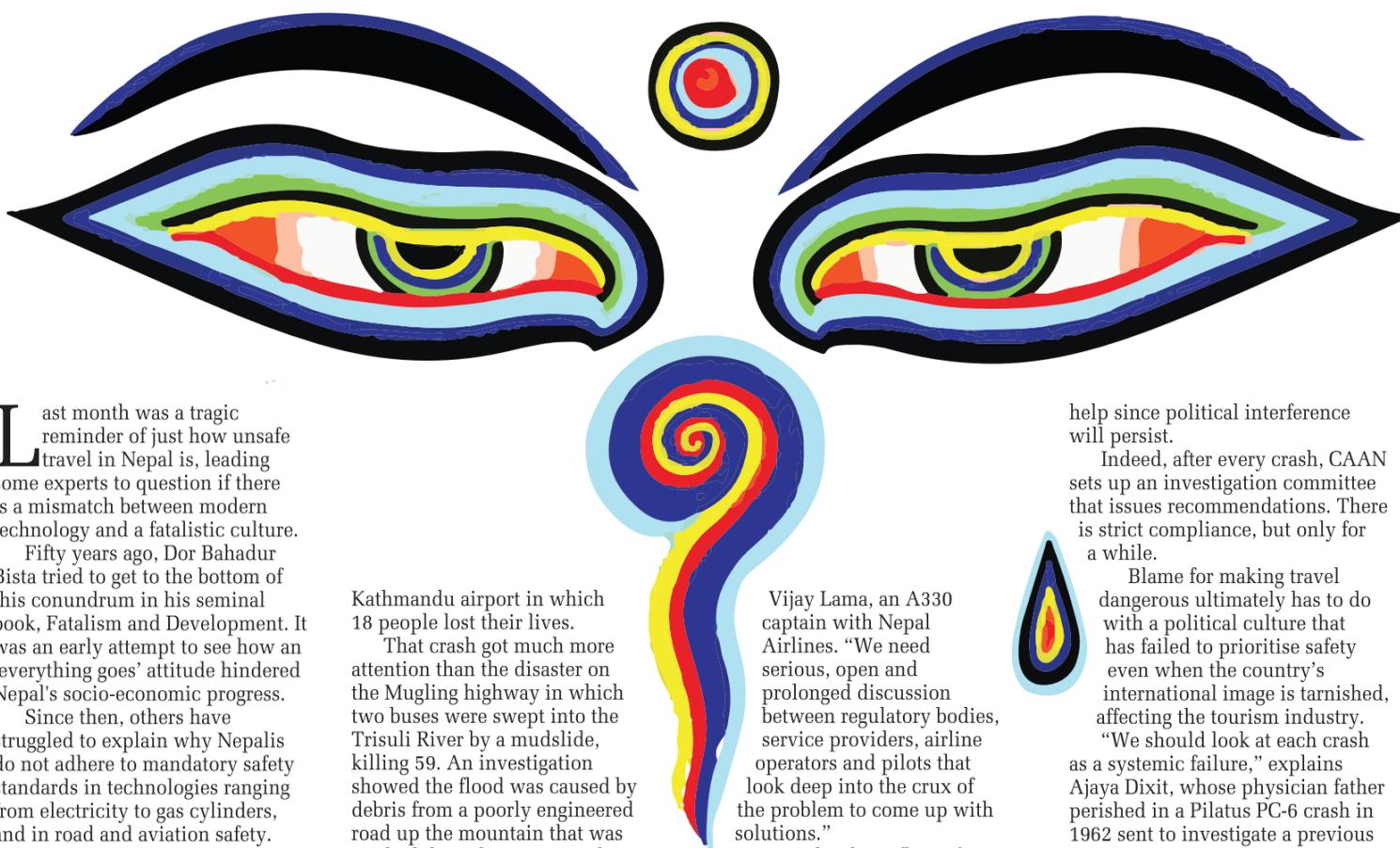
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Fatalism and Fatalities

■ Sonia Awale



Last month was a tragic reminder of just how unsafe travel in Nepal is, leading some experts to question if there is a mismatch between modern technology and a fatalistic culture.

Fifty years ago, Dor Bahadur Bista tried to get to the bottom of this conundrum in his seminal book, *Fatalism and Development*. It was an early attempt to see how an 'everything goes' attitude hindered Nepal's socio-economic progress.

Since then, others have struggled to explain why Nepalis do not adhere to mandatory safety standards in technologies ranging from electricity to gas cylinders, and in road and aviation safety.

It has been 30 years since author Kedar Sharma published his book *आधुनिकतासँग सावधान* (Beware of Modernity) in which he warned that Nepalis had not kept pace with advanced technology.

"It gives me no pleasure to say that, tragically, this is still the case," says Sharma, referring to the loss of life in recurring highway and aviation disasters.

"We are careless about following rules in all spheres of life," adds Sharma. "And this is made worse by our faith in fate which lends to our tendency to be reckless. Roads were supposed to be synonymous with development, but are now synonymous with death. The quality of roads plays a big role in accidents, but we are culturally, administratively and legally negligent about safety."

There has been much debate about regulatory failure in aviation that underlies frequent air crashes, and this was brought to the fore in last week's Saurya Airlines crash at

Kathmandu airport in which 18 people lost their lives.

That crash got much more attention than the disaster on the Mugling highway in which two buses were swept into the Trisuli River by a mudslide, killing 59. An investigation showed the flood was caused by debris from a poorly engineered road up the mountain that was washed down by a torrential downpour at night.

It is easy to blame accidents on Nepal's terrain and weather, but there are deeper socio-cultural underpinnings that magnify these dangers. And the buck stops at the gate of government. There are other soft states like Nepal that also have harsh conditions, but do not suffer such frequent disasters.

The interface between technology and safety is not properly understood by most Nepalis: electric shocks and cooking gas disasters kill hundreds every year. There were 2,267 reported electrical accidents in the past five years, 60% of them fatal.

More than 2,000 people died on Nepal's roads and highways in the past year, many times more than all natural disasters combined.

"Accidents aren't just accidents, they are linked to the governance of the country and reflect political failure," says

Vijay Lama, an A330 captain with Nepal Airlines. "We need serious, open and prolonged discussion between regulatory bodies, service providers, airline operators and pilots that look deep into the crux of the problem to come up with solutions."

Lama has been flying for nearly 40 years, logging 30,000 hours on various aircraft from Twin Otters and Boeing 757s to Airbuses.

He says, "If flying is unsafe, I would be the first one to say so, but it is still the safest and most efficient mode of travel. Air crashes just get more media attention but after the news fades, we go back to doing what we did before."

The international community has taken note, mainly because their nationals are often involved. The European Commission (EC) has put all Nepal-based airlines on its Air Safety List, and the Saurya crash will surely hurt the chance of being taken off the list.

One of the measures the EC has pushed is to separate the regulatory and operational functions of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN). Successive governments have not shown the political will to do so, and some doubt bifurcating CAAN will

help since political interference will persist.

Indeed, after every crash, CAAN sets up an investigation committee that issues recommendations. There is strict compliance, but only for a while.

Blame for making travel dangerous ultimately has to do with a political culture that has failed to prioritise safety even when the country's international image is tarnished, affecting the tourism industry.

"We should look at each crash as a systemic failure," explains Ajaya Dixit, whose physician father perished in a Pilatus PC-6 crash in 1962 sent to investigate a previous crash in Dhorpatan of a DC-3 flying to New Delhi from Kathmandu. Nepal's ambassador to India and two high ranking US officials were among the 10 victims.

He adds: "Modern technologies are all imported, they didn't evolve in our society. We lack a larger technological ethos in their operation, management, maintenance. Our commitment to technological discipline is low, cutting corners is accepted."

Indeed, travel safety cannot be an island of efficiency when the entire political machinery of the country is dysfunctional. And like other sectors, there is a culture of impunity here too.

Human rights campaigner Sushil Pyakurel sums it up: "No one is suspended after crashes. The bus accident is no one's responsibility because a landslide caused it. Unless those responsible are held to account, accidents will keep happening, people will continue to die." 🇳🇵

Monetary
politics
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



20th

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NATUREKNIT

Monetary politics

Late last week, under pressure from banks and big business, Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) Governor Maha Prasad Adhikari unveiled a new monetary policy.

The policy expands credit of banks and credit sector, relaxing several regulatory provisions. But the Rastra Bank is careful not to allow banks to resume reckless lending.

"A cautiously accommodative monetary policy," is how Adhikari described it.

The private sector has welcomed the policy, and the NEPSE soared steeply into two circuit breaks on Sunday, the first trading day after the policy was announced.

NRB has set a target for credit expansion to 12.5%, up from 11.5% last year. Excluding the last two fiscal years, credit has expanded at an annual rate of 20% in the last three decades, against an economic growth rate of about 4%.

This is proof that Nepal's economy has not benefited from private sector credit expansion.

NRB tried to ease interest on loans

following the pandemic but revised it to slow credit expansion due to economic turbulence.

The IMF (International Monetary Fund) also blamed an anaemic economy on the post-pandemic monetary policy, and its effects linger.

NRB's decision to signals that it wants to further reduce the lending rates of banks. However, Nepal's banks and financial institutions at present are flush with cash, and do not need to borrow from the central bank.

The policy change therefore will not affect the market interest rate. The deposit collection rate, which is unchanged at 3%, will ensure that the interest rate on bank deposits will not go down.

The central bank has chosen to make the monetary policy more liberal through regulatory arrangements rather than monetary instruments to ease the pressure on the capital funds of financial institutions.

The existing loan loss provision of 1.2% on good loans has been reduced to 1.1%, which is estimated to increase the profits of the banking and financial institutions by up to Rs5 billion.

Similarly, the regulatory retail portfolio limit has been increased to Rs25 million lessening the strain on bank capital and making it easier for them to provide loans.

In addition, the new policy includes concessions to the construction sector with struggling businesses after builders complained about being blacklisted for not paying billions owed to the government.

Contractors will not be blacklisted for bounced cheques. The deadline for the loan interest payment has also been extended till mid-December.

But while NRB says it will review existing credit notice and blacklisting directives, a no-penalty policy for dishonouring checks would increase the risk for businesses.

All this is proof that the new NC-UML coalition is beholden to business. This week, the prime minister ordered NEA to resume electricity supply to industries which have not paid power bills worth millions.

NRB also stated that it would ease the current working capital loan guidance, as well as revise the working capital limit (short-term financing extended to businesses to cover its day-to-day expenses) for micro, domestic, small and medium enterprises.

The bank also announced that Nepalis who had obtained overseas work permits would be able to obtain loans without collateral, increasing the possibility for such people to borrow at a cheaper rate.

The IMF has also suggested that Nepal amend the 2002 Rastra Bank Act to guarantee its independence. It is neither theoretically nor morally appropriate for every change in government to interfere with NRB policies.

Under pressure from big business, Prime Minister Oli, as soon as he assumed office, made direct comments about changing the monetary policy to make it more flexible.

Governor Adhikari had no choice but to give in to that pressure, but he has

been equally careful not to repeat the mistakes of the past. He opened the door to credit expansion through his first monetary policy as governor enabling borrowers to obtain billions in refinance and working capital loans.

Although he has increased the target for credit expansion, Adhikari has been more prudent than before.

The governor has emphasised that seeking economic growth through monetary policy will not work as long as jobs, investment, and productivity do not improve.

"Seeking short-term solutions through a flexible monetary policy poses a challenge to achieving long-term economic stability," Adhikari said.

In recent years, Nepal's government and the private sector have pushed for economic revival through monetary policy. But that has allowed real estate and share market speculators a free rein.

The positive impact of such directives have been short-lived, and point to structural problems with the economy.

Economic opportunities in the country are limited because little has been done to create jobs, increase production, and encourage investment — factors that would contribute directly to long-term economic stability.

More than 850,000 Nepali youth left the country for foreign employment and further education in the past year alone.

The biggest problem in Nepal's financial system is credit abuse. And although NRB has accepted this it has not done much to curb it. The new monetary policy therefore may be 'flexible', but does not fix the economy's old problems.

Ramesh Kumar



Nepal Rastra Bank eased monetary policy under corporate pressure, but that does not fix structural woes

ONLINE PACKAGES



MUST LOVE DOGS

For the past few years, Sunita Pradhan Limbu's daily routine has involved feeding the community dogs in her Gongabu neighbourhood. The 50-year-old musician buys food on her own. Sunita does not expect anything in return except love. Watch the video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel, and read the story on page 6-7.



CRUSHING THE CHURE

The seasonal river that starts in the Chure Range has been mined for sand and boulders by contractors, so there is nothing to check the velocity of the water during the monsoon. The illegal sand has displaced farmers, and decimated a fragile landscape. Watch video on our YouTube channel and subscribe for more multimedia content.

PLANE CRASH

Whatever detailed explanations are arrived at for Nepal's air-accident history, the word that resonates is 'endemic' ('Unsafe skies', Nepali Times, #1222). Things are not likely to improve until and unless there is a change in the culture that justifies excuses.

Tony Jones

While studying human resources management, my lecturer once told us that major companies never allow their top employees to fly together. After this crash, I thought about why Saurya Airlines took such a heavy risk by sending their human assets on an unfit plane.

Luxmi Prasad Sharma

The service provider and the regulator need to be two different bodies. There are no ifs and buts.

Subodh Shumsher Rana

A root and branch review of airline regulation and enforcement is long overdue.

Marcus Cotton

In Nepal, neither road travel or air travel is safe.

Pradeep Bhandari

NEPALI POLITICS

The lack of fresh and dynamic leadership has stifled innovation and progress, leaving Nepal mired in economic challenges and social issues ('Democracy's sidekicks', Shristi Karki, #1222). The public's growing frustration is palpable, yet the entrenched political elite continue to dominate, exploiting the weaknesses of the electoral system and their established networks. For Nepal to break free from this cycle, it is imperative to foster a new generation of leaders committed to genuine change and national development. Political reforms that encourage transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness are crucial.

Aashma Neupane

MONSOON MANAGEMENT

If policymakers, inventors, investors, workers, visionaries would work together, what a harvest that would bring to Nepal ('Managing the monsoon', Guest Editorial, #1222).

Renate Schwarz

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Managing monsoons

Guest Editorial

The seeds of monsoon disasters are laid in the eight dry months that precede the rainy season. But time to shift our perspective and embrace the monsoon as a vital time for agriculture and environmental renewal. The real disaster lies in poor planning and human actions, not the monsoon itself. Ngamindra Dahal's Guest Editorial.



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To save Tarai, save Siwalik

by Kamal Maden

The Siwalik's services to the plains downstream is vital and its degradation due to unregulated mining, deforestation, and road construction increases risk of disastrous floods in the Tarai. Go online to read the full story.



Most popular on X



Unsafe skies

Nepali Times

Last week's deadly air crash in Nepal has once more made headlines around the world, further corroding the country's poor aviation safety track record, and prompting questions about why these tragedies keep happening. Join the discussion online.



Most commented

Tales of 2 cities

by Abhishek Jha

While the rest of Nepal has gone cynical about federalism, it has opened doors in Janakpur, the seat of Madhes Province. Birganj, 70km away, also has a new vibrancy in culture, the arts and cuisine. Read more at nepalitimes.com.



Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

The Saurya Air crash is an outlier in Nepal's air crash history where most disasters have been blamed on CFIT (Controlled flight into Terrain, in which a plane hits a mountain hidden in cloud) or pilot error.



Airlines Guy @GuyAirline

Yes, looks like it might have been a technical problem that caused the crash. However until the CVR & FDR are read out and analyzed, can't be 100% sure.



TTeacher @TaraTeacher1

Surely this just highlights the issues with the aircraft that are often ignored when crashes happen in more remote places?

1,000 WORDS



DICTIONATION: Prime Minister K P Oli issuing on-the-spot guidance to note-taking government secretaries (nearly all male) at Singha Darbar on Tuesday.

KIRAN RAJ BISTA / RSS

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Capture Kathmandu

In July 2004, Maoists were showing off guns including M-16 A2s, SLRs and even a belt-ammo Belgian Minimi that they had captured from the royal Army in Achham. The display was interrupted by an army helicopter firing warning shots.

In the immediate aftermath, Janardan Sharma who has since gone on to become a finance minister grandiosely announced that the Maoists would soon be capturing Kathmandu, then the world.

Excerpts of the report published 20 years ago this week in issue #207 30 July – 5 August 2004:

Maoist leader let off a short burst from a captured M-16 and had just started on his speech at a school compound in Achham's Binayak village on 21 July when there was the sound of an approaching helicopter.

The leaders ran for cover, and so did the hundreds of people assembled at the school. From high above, the



army's Indian-built Lancer attack helicopter let off a burst of machinegun fire. The farmers remember all too well a chopper attack on a similar meeting at the exact same spot on 12 April when six villagers were killed.

A Maoist aimed at the helicopter with his machinegun, but it was out of range. As the meeting resumed, politburo member of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), Janardan Sharma (alias Prabhakar) spoke into a loudspeaker: "We are in our final preparations to make an attack on the centre...we will capture Kathmandu, and then move on to seize New Delhi and Washington."

All present applauded and if there was disbelief, no one showed it. Later, some villagers told us, "Even the stones here are Maoist, so how can we defy them?"

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



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TURKISH AIRLINES

Nepal turns on the electric switch

The country is very close to generating enough electricity to replace petroleum imports

Nepal has had an impressive growth in hydropower development over the past decade from 734MW in 2014 to a combined capacity of 2,625MW from solar and hydropower stations, with 95% of households connected to the grid.



PEOPLE POWER
Bikash Pandey

Investment to the tune of \$5 billion, predominantly in domestic NPR, is estimated to have gone into new generation projects in this time to complete construction and invest in some 8,000MW of new power plants that are at various stages of design and construction.

It is certainly reassuring to a population still suffering PTSD from years of brutal load-shedding to realise that Nepal is headed for long term power surplus, with prospects in 2024 for the first time to export more power than import from India, if the monsoon cooperates.

One important question in a lot of people's minds, however, is how Nepal's generation of clean energy compares with the fossil fuel Nepal continues to import at an annual cost of almost \$3 billion, and growing.

Are we anywhere close to generating the hydropower and solar energy needed to replace the petroleum fuel that Nepal imports?

At first glance it looks like the gap is discouragingly large. NEA sold just over 10 billion kWh or 10 TWh of electricity in 2023. In the same year, all the petroleum-based fuels the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) imported had a total energy content of 40TWh.

It would seem that NEA and Independent Power Producers



ERGON ENERGY NETWORK

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

EVs convert up to **85%** of their energy into locomotion, compared to **20%** in internal combustion engines, in which much of the energy heats the engine that needs to be water-cooled.

(IPPs) would need to complete construction of the full pipeline of 8,000MW on top of what they are already generating to match even the petroleum fuel we use today.

Fortunately, electricity can be used more efficiently than fossil fuels. An LPG stove has a thermal efficiency of around 50%, reflecting the percentage of heat from burning the mix of propane and butane that is transferred to the pot. The rest goes into heating the burner, the counter-top, and the rest of the kitchen.

An induction cooker on the other hand is able to transfer around 90% of the energy directly to the pot since the cooking surface does not even get hot itself. So, cooking with electricity can be accomplished with 45% less energy compared to LPG with the use of an efficient appliance.

The end-use efficiency advantage is even more impressive when it comes to transportation. A petrol burning internal combustion engine converts only 20% of the energy the fuel produces into motion. The remaining 80% of the

energy content of the petrol is lost as heat in the engine, requiring a radiator to keep the engine from overheating.

An electric vehicle on the other hand uses high efficiency motors that have conversion efficiencies in the range of 80-85%. Even with the 20% 'round trip' losses in charging and discharging the battery, an EV uses less than a third of the energy to drive a kilometre than an equivalent petroleum fuel vehicle does.

Since close to 95% of the petroleum fuel imported into Nepal is used to meet either road transportation or cooking needs, it is very encouraging that appliances already exist in the market for Nepal to transition away from petroleum fuel.

Similar efficiencies exist for switching away from diesel irrigation to electric pumps and for a range of industrial processes to switch from using different fossil fuels to electricity.

For the consumer to switch over to electric cooking and electricity-fueled transportation,

the relative prices of each energy type are important, along with the improved efficiency.

Here too the news is promising: NEA's applicable domestic electricity tariff for users wanting to cook with electricity for cooking or charging EVs at home is a maximum of Rs11 per kWh. This compares with Rs18.5 per kWh of petrol and Rs9.83 per kWh of LPG.

Once the thermal efficiency is taken into account, however, the effective price of petrol and LPG go up to Rs55.50 and Rs17.87 respectively for driving the same distance or cooking the same volume of food as one kWh of electricity.

Two final barriers must be removed before consumers will be able to make the switch to efficient electric vehicles and cooking appliances. First: NEA must invest in strengthening transmission and distribution networks. It is not enough for there to be sufficient hydropower and solar energy generated if the power lines and transformers are not sufficiently sized to distribute the additional

electricity needed for switching to electricity.

Second: end-users must be able to afford EVs and cooking appliances. The government and banks have an important role to play in making this transition happen. The government needs to appreciate the tradeoff: provide tax incentives for people to purchase EVs and high efficiency electric appliances that can replace petroleum. Banks need to provide financing for users to be able to purchase EVs and appliances and pay for them from the savings in fuel.

The good news is Nepal is very close to generating enough electricity to replace petroleum imports. Making up for 40TWh of petroleum fuel will likely require less than 20TWh of electricity. Extrapolating from the rate of growth of hydropower and solar generation over the past decade, Nepal could have sufficient clean energy projects online to be generating 30TWh as early as 2028. 🇳🇵

Bikash Pandey is Director of Clean Energy and Circular Economy at Winrock International. People Power is his new regular column in Nepali Times on global energy issues relevant to Nepal.

NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक



Turkish Biz Class

Turkish Airlines has revealed details of its new Crystal Business Class suite featuring cubicles with 23-inch wide seats, an adjustable door and privacy panel, more legroom, power outlets, wireless charging, and a 22-inch monitor. The suites will come in lighter, warmer colours with a rose-gold finish. The carrier will install the seats on its A350s and then Boeing 777s.

IME execs

Global IME Bank has appointed Bhagirathi Bhattarai Gnyawali as its director and Surendra Raj Regmi as CEO. Gnyawali has worked extensively in management roles at several organisations, while Regmi, who has a Masters in Economics and an MBA from the University of Wales, has worked in banking for 30 years and at IME for sixteen.

Samsung preorders

Samsung Nepal has received record preorders for their sixth-gen foldable phones, the Z Fold 6 and Flip 6. The latest models are the slimmest and lightest foldables yet. The phones come in Silver Shadow, Navy, and Blue. The Flip 6 starts at Rs154,999 and the Fold 6 at Rs234,999. Interest-free servicing is available.

Laxmi film

Laxmi Sunrise released Hamro Bachat ko Samman ra Sahi Lagani, a video encouraging customers to bank with them by showing how they invest in development projects. The video follows a young girl depositing coins from a piggy bank, which helps the bank invest in hydropower projects and bring electricity to students in rural Nepal.

Cathay video

Cathay Pacific released a new airplane safety video in collaboration with the Hong Kong Tourism Board on 1 August. The six-minute clip makes flyers aware of safety procedures through Hong Kong classics. For example, a scene featuring dai pai dong open air dining in Hong Kong reminds travellers that smoking is not allowed.

Ncell partnerships

Ncell and Nabil have agreed for the bank to provide digital business services to the telecom company. Ncell subscribers can now use VISA or Mastercards to buy SIM cards or data through Nabil's payment gateway, or nBank app. Meanwhile, in line with its ongoing Sadhain On campaign, Ncell is



also partnering with streaming service Lionsgate Play to offer access to any subscribers who have bought a Biz Sadhain ON plan above Rs499. The service's content includes movies, TV series, documentaries, and original shows.

BYD services

Official BYD Nepal dealer Cimex inaugurated two new service centers in Kathmandu Valley. The central service centre, established in Gaurighat in 2022, has reopened following extensive renovation, and is now a facility with eight service bays, staffed by 50 employees. The second centre is in Kupondole. Cimex also planted 550 trees to create pocket forests

in Kalimati in collaboration with the KMC, The Hidden Treasure, and Revolution Project. The company aims to contribute to urban greening and reducing air pollution through its Building Dreams and Forest campaign.

Visas for Cambodia

The Honorary Consulate of Cambodia in Nepal has launched visa services to make travel and collaboration between the two countries easier. Honorary Consul Cabinet Shrestha held an event at its office in Panipokhari about the application process. A tourist Visa will cost \$36 and be valid for three months.

WorldLink offers

WorldLink is offering discounts to customers who make long term commitments to the service, which includes providing 200mbps connections for Rs750 a month when making a payment for two years—a discount of 29%. Customers will also receive Nokia routers and a Set-Top Box gratis. The company has other deals for different speeds and durations too.



IME-Radisson discounts

IME and Radisson will allow cardholders to get 15% discounts at the hotel and its services. The discount can be used for a stay at Radisson, its restaurant, pastry shop, Tranquility Spa, and the airport restaurants that it runs.

Marriott Shika Jika

Fairfield by Marriott Kathmandu is hosting Shika Jika Sessions, where singers, painters and poets perform. Some of the performers this week included rapper CB, singer Aabhiskar KC, as well as poets Kohinoor Bharati and Aayushma Khatri. Artist Saugat Tamang painted live. The hotel will hold the event every Friday to support local art and artists.

V-Chitra ad award

Nepali ad agency V-Chitra received awards at the FLAME Award ceremony 2024 held by the Rural Marketing Association of India. The company was recognised for its long-standing Hami Sabaiko Mann Ma WaiWai ads and LivOn professional serum campaign that featured Nepali beauty stylists.

People, tigers, trees and rivers

A look at Nepal's intricate web of biodiversity and conservation

■ **Shashank Poudel**

Tigers roam Nepal's dense Tarai forests through which mighty rivers carve floodplains through the landscape, sustaining both wildlife and human communities.

This intricate relationship between people, tigers, trees, and rivers forms the backbone of Nepal's natural heritage. However, this delicate balance faces increasing pressures from human activities and climate change. Understanding and preserving these connections are essential for the survival of wildlife and the well-being of human communities.

The Bengal tiger, a symbol of strength and beauty, is a keystone species in Nepal's ecosystems. The big cats play a critical role in maintaining the health of forests by regulating prey populations, which in turn influences vegetation dynamics and biodiversity. Their presence is an indicator of a healthy, functioning ecosystem.

Nepal's tiger population nearly tripled over the past decade to about 355 tigers, a testament to effective policies, law enforcement, habitat expansion, and most importantly community involvement in partnership with frontline staff. However, this success brings new challenges, including the need for well-managed habitats, and more innovative and robust measures to mitigate human-tiger conflict.

Forests are the lifeblood of Nepal's landscapes, providing



DOFSCI/WWF NEPAL

essential ecosystem services such as storing carbon, making the soil most productive, and regulating both quantity and the flow of water. They are also the primary habitat for tigers, offering shelter and much needed wild species of deer and other animals as food sources. The dense forests of the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) are critical refuges for these big cats embedded in the human-dominated landscape of low land Nepal.

Deforestation, agricultural expansion, encroachment, illegal logging, and unplanned linear infrastructure development, pose a threat to these habitats. The loss of trees exacerbates soil erosion, increases the risk of landslides, and diminishes the forest's capacity to store carbon, contributing to the climate crisis. Nepal's rivers, originating from

the glaciers of the Himalaya, are also critical for both wildlife and human populations providing water for drinking, irrigation, and clean energy, supporting agriculture and livelihoods. For wildlife, rivers and their riparian zones are crucial habitats, offering water, food, and migration corridors. Perennial rivers like the Narayani, Rapti, and Karnali flow through key tiger habitats, their status determines the agricultural productivity as well as impact the plants and animals that depend on them for habitat and food.

Pollution from industrial and agricultural runoff, along with unsustainable water and sand-gravel extraction, threatens these waterways, reducing their ability to support diverse ecosystems from terrestrial animals like tigers, rhinos, and elephants to aquatic species like gharials and otters. Thus, if

rivers lose their ecological function it will hamper ecological, social, and economic process and most importantly the tourism sector.

The relationships between tigers, trees, and rivers are deeply intertwined. Tigers rely on forests for habitat and prey, while healthy forests depend on the presence of top predators like tigers to maintain ecological balance. Rivers, in turn, sustain both forests and wildlife by providing necessary water resources. Disruption in any one of these elements can have cascading effects on the entire system. For instance, deforestation can lead to decreased water quality and increased sedimentation in rivers, affecting aquatic life and reducing water availability for both humans and wildlife. Similarly, the decline in tiger populations can lead to overpopulation of herbivores,

resulting in overgrazing and forest degradation. Additionally, human-tiger conflict is an important challenge and is connected to water scarcity. As water becomes increasingly scarce due to climate change, over-extraction, and pollution, wild ungulates that tigers rely on as prey are forced to compete for water with humans and livestock. This competition can potentially lead to conflicts, as tigers prey species may venture closer to human settlements in search of water, and as such fatal encounters with humans are highly likely to occur. The destruction and fragmentation of habitats to access water resources further exacerbate the situation, intensifying the struggle for survival for many species and creating a cycle of conflict that affects biodiversity, human livelihoods, and the sustainability of natural resources.

Nepal now needs to reconcile our success in tiger conservation with human safety and economic gains while maintaining a healthy ecosystem. By recognising the interconnectedness of nature and adopting integrated conservation strategies, Nepal can continue to safeguard its natural heritage for future generations.

The ongoing sixteenth 5-year periodic plan should make bold efforts to safeguard biodiversity and meet development goals. Policy instruments to ensure sustainable financing for conservation of charismatic species like tigers should also be built into the national plan. The success of these efforts will not only benefit wildlife but also enhance the well-being and resilience of human communities, demonstrating that the fates of nature and humanity are inextricably linked. 🇳🇵

Shashank Poudel is a wildlife Biologist at WWF Nepal.

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Despite obstacles, Nashir Khan has dedicated his life to care for Kathmandu's neglected street dogs



PHOTOS: SHYAM KARKI

MUST LOVE DOGS

■ Benjamin Zimmerman

Every morning at dawn, Nashir Khan (pictured) wakes up to the ruckus of dogs he shelters at his home in Chobhar, all hankering to be fed.

As he goes about his day, providing meals for countless community dogs across Kathmandu, he will likely make some ruckus of his own, outraged by those who mistreat the animals.

Khan's dedication to the wellbeing of Kathmandu's dogs spans many years, administering

medicine, taking them to the vet, advocacy through radio, and confrontation with those abusing dogs.

Khan has been engaged in charity work most of his life, beginning at age 7 carrying food to imprisoned or hospitalised members of his community.

"I don't think about what I might gain. I don't even like the word 'gain,'" he tells us.

He was drawn to the plight of dogs after he started caring for a dog a neighbour had neglected. That was where his lifelong commitment to dog care began.

"More than people, dogs have many hardships," he explains. "I needed to help them."

Although city residents are increasingly accommodating of pets, the same affection is not afforded to street dogs who face much mistreatment and neglect, including from local governments which have used poison to control the stray population.

However, the growth of dog-care organisations and social media attention has promoted more humane methods like neutering. The Kathmandu Metropolitan City funded Manumitra project began

in 2016, focusing on community awareness and population control.

While official records indicate declining numbers and healthier dogs, animal organisations are skeptical.

Sneha Shrestha of the Federation for Animal Welfare Nepal, says that the street dog population exceeds 100,000. "On World Rabies Day there are programs publicising vaccination of 40 or 50 dogs, but after that there is very little done," adds Shrestha who works with a network of street dog organisations.

Despite increased advocacy and awareness, the perception of menacing, unclean creatures persists. Between 2022-23 the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division reported 106,993 dog bites, the majority in Kathmandu.

To mitigate the risk of diseases such as rabies, organisations working in dog welfare and veterinary services must shoulder the cost of vaccines themselves.

Khan was previously involved with animal hospital projects and street dog programs, and has since developed mistrust for the organisations, believing

ONE DOG AT A TIME

A musician's care for dogs on her street turns it into a canine-friendly neighbourhood

■ Urmila Gamwa Tharu



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI



It is like any other evening in Kathmandu's Gongabu neighbourhood. But at seven every day as the market starts to shut down, Sunita Pradhan Limbu steps out with a heavy bucket in one hand and a packet of plates in the other.

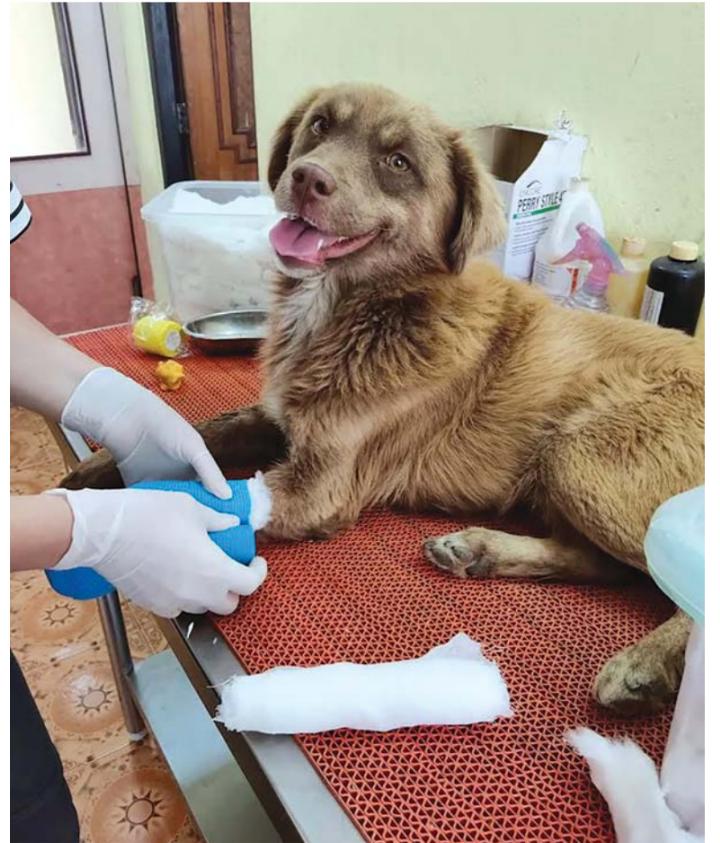
Some 30 dogs wait outside, tails wagging furiously. They are used to Sunita appearing every evening, and encircle her. Sunita pours out the meal of rice and meat on each plate and the dogs gobble it all up.

This has been Sunita's routine for the past few years. She does



Kalle's cross-continental journey

Injured Kathmandu street dog finds new home in Belgium with volunteer who nursed him back to health



Kalle was rescued and treated by the KAT centre after being run over by a vehicle in the streets of Tokha. He was later adopted by Belgian volunteer Antonia, who nursed him back to health after his surgery.



PHOTOS COURTESY: KAT CENTRE

their primary goals are recognition and financial gain. Khan's work is entirely self-funded, as he patrols the city in a motorbike that serves as a dog ambulance.

But he often faces public opposition, and he has been beaten up, once the injuries kept him in bed for more than two weeks. Angry locals challenged his care of dogs when there were so many people in need of help.

Still, he remains unfazed, claiming: "When they curse at me I either laugh or just ignore it."

Encountering canine abuse has spurred Khan into aggression

himself. Recently, when a cyclist ran over a dog sleeping on the road, the initial verbal confrontation escalated into Khan threatening the man with a hacksaw. "I just cannot watch dogs being harmed," he says.

Independent filmmaker Shyam Karki is producing a documentary on Khan titled 'Unholy Love'. The filmmaker first met Khan in 2015 while he was feeding dogs on the streets of Chhetrapati.

The documentary explores how a part of the reason for Khan's ostracisation is that he is a Muslim.

"In other countries Muslims are very strict about don't do this and

don't do that, but whether I go to heaven or hell is of little relevance to me," says Khan who is married to a Hindu Newar person.

Both faced social exclusion from their communities because of their marriage, but Khan credits his wife for transforming his wayward ways into passion for social work.

Lately, Khan has added collective mobilisation to his work, decrying injustices on Facebook and uniting the efforts of other street dog carers. With or without support, his work continues. 🇳🇵

be cared for. So she became their guardian.

Sunita's maternal grandfather was a veterinarian, and she had grown up sharing his affection for animals, which left a mark on young Sunita. As a child, she grew up with a pet dog named Johnny.

After her marriage in 1998, Sunita lived in Hong Kong with her husband. She came back to Nepal in 2014 to release her solo album Arohi. During that time, as she was running errands for the album launch, she came across a mother dog who was lying lifelessly, surrounded by her young pups.

She did not do anything that day, but two days later when she went back to rescue the pups, it was too late. They were nowhere to be found. That day, Sunita made a promise to herself that she would care for other dogs in distress.

"I remembered my childhood and was determined to revive my love for dogs and care for them," she recalls. But caring for the neighbourhood dogs has forced her to drastically change her lifestyle.

Sunita was an outgoing person, candid and lively with friends. Now she hardly has time to meet friends or go on a holiday. "I can no longer enjoy overnight stays or meet up with friends because I can't stop thinking about my kids," she says of her strays.

Her love for music has taken a hit too. She has had to invest in recording her songs, but cannot think of doing that now when the same money will buy food for the 60 or so dogs in her neighbourhood.

Sunita also always has the door on the first floor of her house open in case the dogs need shelter. It is particularly useful on rainy nights and in winter. Dogs know where to go, and there is always a soft sack to sleep on.

Apart from the stray dogs, Sunita also has nine pet dogs of her own that she rescued from the street after she found them injured.

The first one was rescued by her daughter, much like young Sunita used to do with stray pups and kittens. Seeing Sunita spend her day and night caring for the dogs has also made her mother and family support her wholeheartedly.

Initially, her neighbours complained that the dogs were littering their sidewalks. But her selfless love for the dogs has won them over too, so much so that her neighbours now also help keep a bowl of water and food for the strays. Everyday is now Kukur Tihar in this Gongabu neighbourhood.

Says Sunita: "If you can, love and care for them. If you cannot do that, at least do not hate or beat them." 🇳🇵



not collect funds from anyone and buys food on her own to feed the community dogs out of affection for the animals, expecting nothing in return except love.

"I've gotten back from them more than I could ever give them," says Sunita, who started feeding the dogs during the Covid-19 lockdowns when she saw many pets abandoned on the streets by owners who returned to their hometowns.

Sunita, 50, is a musician, and could not allow the dogs that were used to home and family not to

The call came from Tokha one morning last autumn. A dog had been hit by a vehicle, his leg seriously injured.

The Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre (KAT) emergency team quickly mobilised to rescue the dog, and brought him in for surgery to its clinic in Mandikhatar. His left front leg was injured so severely that it had to be amputated.

Since the dog could not be released back on the street, he would spend his days recovering among other rescue animals at the shelter. He was named Kalle, but his battles were not over.

As he healed from surgery, Kalle battled other infections. With sheer will power and a positive mental attitude, the dog did not just survive but thrived.

Working at KAT Centre at the time was a Belgian volunteer named Antonia (pictured), who had come to Nepal on a holiday. Antonia and Kalle became best friends as she nursed him back to health, feeding and caring for him every day. Kalle loved her back. And despite his difficult life

on the streets, Kalle healed to become a spirited, determined dog, bonding with the people who had come to his aid. Antonia's time in Nepal was coming to an end, and she returned to Belgium to complete her studies. But she missed Kalle terribly, and worried about his well-being.

She decided to try to adopt Kalle and got back in touch with the Centre in Kathmandu. The adoption process was almost as complicated as the surgery. Samir Thapa, the doctor who had performed Kalle's operation, worked through the complexities of international adoption and the logistical challenges of getting Kalle to Europe.

Then, just as all the paperwork was in order, Kalle fell ill again with an infection. Antonia was determined to nurse him back to health, and returned to Kathmandu in June to take Kalle to his forever home.

Kalle is adjusting well to his new family in a new country on the other side of the world, far away from the teeming streets of Kathmandu. 🇳🇵

EVENTS

**Kitab jatra 2081**

Get ready to celebrate the power of words with an exciting line-up of panel discussions, book exhibitions, poetry readings, and calligraphy sessions.

2-3 August, 9:15 onwards, Army Officer's Club, Sundhara

Yugko Sancho

An adaptation of Roald Dahl's 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory', this play takes some liberty to change Mr Willy Wonka to Ms Moon and the chocolate factory to textile factory.

Until 3 August, 5:30pm (except Tuesdays)/ 1pm (on Saturdays), Ticket: Rs300- Rs 1000, Shilpee Theatre, Battispatali

**Mekhi Danda**

Set during the Rana regime, this play depicts the historical and cultural transformation of a village called Rapcha, explicitly highlighting their linguistic journey.

Until 11 August, 5:45pm (except Mondays), 1:30pm (also on Saturdays), Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun (01) 5245147

Mitrata

Celebrating EU and Nepal's 50 years long friendship, this exhibition features work from four photographers.

Until 16 August, 10am-5pm, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal

**Imprints**

Enjoy this varied display of prints put together by second year students of Kathmandu University's Art and Design department.

Until 11 August, 11am to 5pm (Sunday to Friday), 12pm-5pm (Saturdays), Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal

DINING

**Kairos Cafe**

With a customisable breakfast, a variety of juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine, Kairos Cafe is a must for foodies.

Jawalakhel, 9813493902

MUSIC

GBOB: Live

To celebrate his birthday, GBOB is performing live this Friday. His live performance will be followed by some groovy music by DJ Kabin, DJ Loop and others.

2 August, 6pm onwards, Club Fahrenheit, Thamel, 9841726830

**Cobweb**

Don't miss out on this exclusive chance to be an audience to an intimate performance by the Patan hard rock band Cobweb. The setting will be cosy and personal.

2 August, 9pm onwards, Ticket: Rs499, Mirage by Escobar, Gairidhara

**Journey to Transcendence**

Indulge in some musical magic and watch live performances by Purna Rai & Dajuvaiharu, and Tribal Rain.

3 August, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, LOD, Thamel

**Sound and Silence**

Want to try a new way to destress this weekend? A sound bath session could be just the move - book your place before spots run out.

3 August, 6pm-7:30pm, Fee: Rs1,800, Calm Sutra Studio, Maharajganj, 9843120022

Friday Night Party

Plan for a musical night this Friday with The Fire and Sound band. And for the ladies, don't forget to get some free drinks after 11pm.

2 August, 7pm onwards, Ai-La Lounge, Kumaripati, 9801118683

**Fire And Ice**

Fire And Ice Pizzeria is beloved by Nepalis and tourists alike. Check out the unsung heroes of their menu: the Lasagna and Penne Al Forno

Thamel, 9823052640

Red Mud Coffee

Red Mud is a casual eatery in Jhamsikhel that is the perfect place to grab coffee and sandwiches with friends. They have one of the best chicken sizzlers in the valley.

Jhamsikhel, 9861665829

GETAWAYS

**Hotel Barahi**

Enjoy great views of the Phewa lake and cultural shows at Hotel Barahi. Indulge in the scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery on the hotel premises.

Lakeside, Pokhara, 9851354455

Himalaya Lodge

Located away from the concentration of guesthouses in Ghandruk, guests can dine in the presence of scenic views, and experience the idyllic quaintness of village life.

Ghandruk (01) 4435686

**Fish Tail Lodge**

This lodge is an oasis surrounded by blue waters, coupled with an innovative architectural design and breathtaking panoramic views of the mountains.

Phewa Lake, Pokhara (061) 455071

Meghauri Serai

Leave the worries behind and enter this luxurious safari lodge at the heart of Chitwan National Park. Overlooking the Rapti river, this lodge not only offers scenic views but accommodation that integrates local culture and art.

Chitwan National Park, 9851218500

**Dwarika's Resort**

A holistic retreat, drawing on ancient Himalayan knowledge and philosophy of care for nature and for oneself, set in magnificent natural surroundings.

Dhulikhel, (01) 490612

Choila

Shyam Dai Ko Haas Ko Choila is not for the faint of heart: you better be able to handle your spice. This authentic Newari delicacy is a must-try.

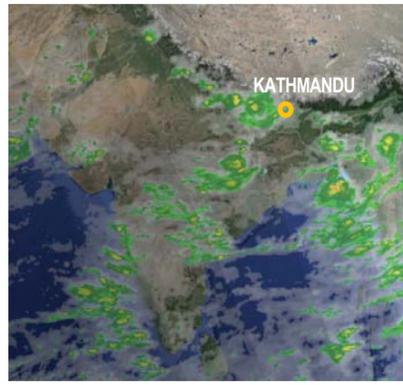
Dhobighat, 9841869332

**Akari & Koko**

Vivanta Hotel's Asian-inspired fusion restaurant and bar serves an impressive assortment of East Asian dishes with modern twists. Try their sushi and pad thai.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5425002

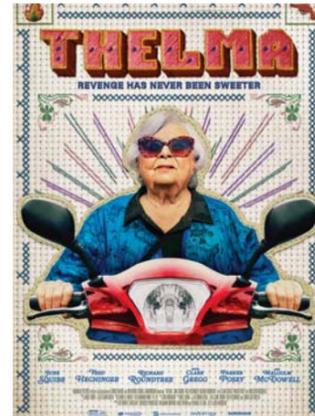
WEEKEND WEATHER

**Rain Record in July**

Kathmandu got a record 700mm of rain in July which is more than double the monthly average. We are likely heading into more of the same in August if the long-term forecasts are to be believed. Precipitation has been above average for most parts of the country except the southeastern plains. Kathmandu Valley will see more rain showers on the weekend, mostly late in the day and at night. When the sun does come out it will be hot and humid.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
28° 20°	28° 20°	28° 20°

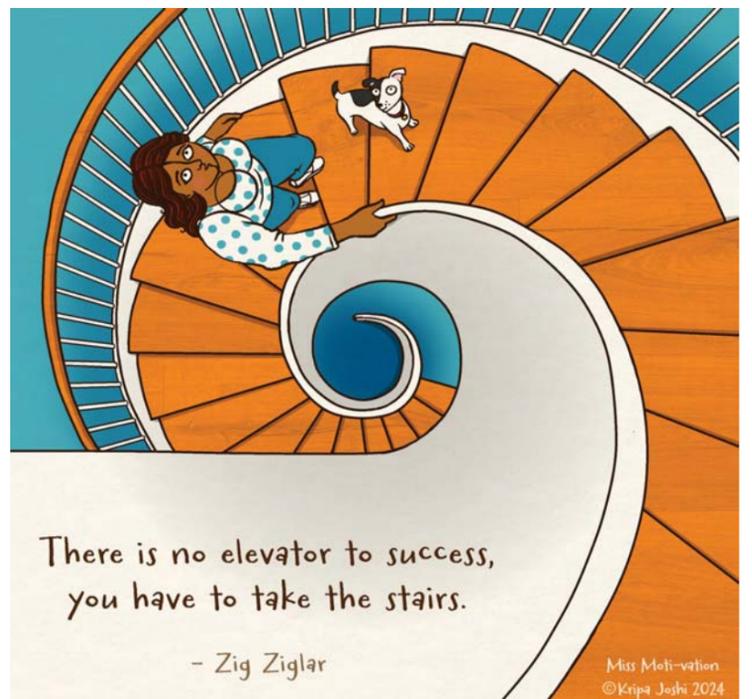
OUR PICK



Thelma Post, 93, lives by herself in Los Angeles. Her grandson Danny visits her often but she finds his continued assistance patronising. One day, she gets a call from a scammer pretending to be Danny who claims that he has been arrested and needs \$10,000, which Thelma sends. Before long, she find out she has been conned and sets out on a treacherous journey to retrieve what is stolen from her all the while learning some important life lessons. The 2024 American comedy drama stars June Squibb, Fred Hechinger, Richard Roundtree, Clark Gregg, Parker Posey and Malcolm McDowell.

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

Shyam's Shangri-La

Shyam Bahadur Panday's hotel was a favourite haunt of the early expatriates in Nepal

■ Lisa Choegyal

Creator of the successful Shangri-La hotel group, with properties in Kathmandu, Pokhara, and soon in Chitwan and Begnas, renowned tourism veteran Shyam Bahadur Panday died last week after a long illness.

In a double hit for the tourism industry, we lost Ambica Shrestha earlier this week, another giant of first wave tourism entrepreneurs. Next generations of their families carry their legacies into the future.

Shyam had a pioneering vision for hotels that reflected the spirit of Nepal, and had the foresight to hire many of Kathmandu Valley's best expatriate artists and designers to realise his dream.

Cleverly spotting a space in the market between Kathmandu's five-star properties and budget lodges that were moving from Freak Street to Thamel, he procured a license during King Birendra's coronation. Shyam charged his friend Desmond Doig to design the perfect mid-level hotel. It opened on 1 July 1979.

Desmond was an editor, author, painter, designer, photographer, expeditioner and conservationist, a Renaissance man who delighted in the Valley's vibrant living artistry. Retiring to Nepal in the 1970s after a lifetime in journalism in Kolkata, 'Des-la' adapted his talents to architecture and landscape design.

Utpal Sengupta, the curly haired member of Desmond's original entourage, managed the hotel with flair and imagination for 20 years. Former employees who



cut their teeth at the Shangri-La can still be found running travel agencies, resorts and restaurants in Kathmandu and beyond.

Writer Dubby Bhagat, artist Robert Powell and designer Chino Ronchoroni were amongst those who contributed their special style in upgrades and additions. Shyam, and later his sons Prasadha and Prabin, maintained a watchful eye over the decades.

Shyam's 'Shang' became a fixture for many of us residents, as well as a friendly base for tourists,

trekkers, journalists, consultants and film crews. We would often encounter Shyam lurking in the lobby, a gentle smiling presence always with time for a chat or a laugh, usually on his way to a government or industry meeting.

Following a career in the civil service and a Masters' degree from University of Southern California, Shyam realised his talent for business. He was instrumental in developing responsible tourism policies with the government, HAN and PATA.

Hotelier Yogendra Shakya recalls Shyam's devotion to high class hospitality as "unparalleled".

Lingering in the Shangri-La's al fresco restaurant, lounging at the hiti pool, or enjoying a hot rum punch by the roaring fire in the lobby bar, one might have run into Tony Hagen, Dudley Spain, Gordon 'Golden' Temple, Jim Edwards or Col Jimmy Roberts with his floppy-eared spaniels.

Boris Lissanevitch regularly graced the kitchens as a special guest chef, bearing bottles of flavoured vodka and bones to make his famous borscht.

Dame Freya Stark, Arabist explorer and British eccentric, was one of the first to stay at the Shangri-La. Already in her 80s and rather forgetful, she declared on arrival: "I feel we must be somewhere east of the Euphrates."

We arranged two treks for her in the early 1980s with her favourite hill pony named Red Balls. Freya wrote in the Shangri-La guest book: "This is the finest hotel I have ever stayed in with the nicest people in it."

Sir Edmund Hillary, an ardent Shangri-La fan, was feted with a garden dinner by his Sherpa friends to mark the Everest Golden Jubilee 50th in 2003. Suites were named after him and Tenzing Norgay.

Reinhold Messner stopped by between 8,000m peaks. David Breashears used the garden as a quiet haven to shoot interviews, including with British film director Stephen Daldry (The Crown and Billy Elliot).

Writer and nomadic traveller

Bruce Chatwin came as one of a long line of yeti-hunters en route to the mountains. American Mikel Dunham visited annually, author of Buddha's Warriors and my co-editor of Elizabeth Hawley's diaries The Nepal Scene, which covered the turbulent political and social history of Nepal from 1988-2007.

Over the years Shyam's Shangri-La Hotel hosted local weddings, rites of passage and some remarkable celebrations. Desmond arranged Utpal's marriage to Caroline (of Chez Caroline) in 1981 amidst the terraces, fountains and newly planted marigolds in that soothing garden.

The Prime Minister attended the 1994 reception honouring Elizabeth Hawley, with 35 years of service to Reuters. Always a stickler for accuracy, to our embarrassment she kept interrupting the regional boss' laudatory speech with factual corrections.

Kunda Dixit survived as Miss Hawley's youthful journalist intern, and chose the Shangri-La garden to mark the twentieth year and one thousandth issue of Nepali Times in July 2020. As befitted a celebration in the time of Covid, numbers were limited, the party was muted, and hugs and handshakes were replaced by knuckle taps, elbow embraces and namastes. It would be one of the last events held there.

Today the old Shangri-La Hotel is a gaping hole in Lazimpat's landscape, an empty space echoing with memories. Under the direction of Shyam's two sons and their offspring, Kathmandu, Pokhara, Chitwan and Begnas are in preparation to launch under the prestigious Intercontinental (and Indigo) brands.

Whilst the family hotel properties are reincarnated to meet the changing times, founder of the dynasty late Shyam Bahadur Panday's inheritance will continue to set benchmarks for the future. 🇳🇵

TATA MOTORS
Connecting Aspirations

TATA

go.ev with **Tiago.ev**

NEPAL'S HIGHEST SELLING COMPLETE EV HATCHBACK



PHOTOS: URMILA GAMWA THARU

Opening their homes to others

Former bonded labourers open homestays to gain entrepreneurship experience and income

■ **Urmila Gamwa Tharu**
in Kanchanpur

Pradeshani Chaudhary sits inside her mud plastered thatch house and looks out at the half-raised brick wall of her new home some distance away, dreaming about the day she and her family will move into the structure.

The front yard is piled with bricks, iron rods, and other construction material and tell the story of how Chaudhary's life has changed since she was a slave bonded to a landlord under western Nepal's Kamaiya system.

Chaudhary is now chair of the Bijayasal Community Homestay in the village of Bani in this district in the plains of Nepal's southwestern corner.

Pradeshani was born into a Kamaiya family and grew up working alongside them in the farm of her landlord, planting paddy, tending to the crop and harvesting it in return for rice that was never enough to sustain the household.

"We went to the forest to pick sal flowers to sell, and with that we bought rice, but we still did not have enough," recalls Pradeshani, now 50.

In 1996, Pradeshani married Bhagiram Chaudhary, who was also from a Kamaiya family which lived on undocumented ancestral

land on the banks of the Mohana River which was ravaged by floods every year.

Bhagiram's family then had to borrow money from their landlord, and unable to pay interest or capital, he and his two brothers went to India to find work to pay back the loan. Pradeshani and her father-in-law continued working as bonded labourers back home.

This was when Nepal's Maoist conflict spread to Kanchanpur, and Kamaiya families in Kanchanpur decided to also fight their own non-violent struggle for liberation from landlords with support from the non-profit Backward Society Education (BASE), established by young activists from the Tharu community.

Many more bonded labourers, who had been conditioned into believing that it was their fate to be enslaved, joined the movement after they became aware of their circumstances.

Pradeshani's father-in-law was among those who joined the movement.

On 17 July 2000, Nepal officially eliminated the Kamaiya system, liberating over 18,000 bonded labourers. Those emancipated now needed a place to live, but they had received neither reparations nor rehabilitation.

Like many others, Pradeshani's family did not have a paisa to their name, and saw no alternative but to protest. This time, Pradeshani joined the demonstrations herself,

and after a year-long struggle the family got a plot of land in Bani village.

"It was a time of war, and the army threatened protesters, accusing us of being Maoists," Pradeshani remembers, "So we had to be satisfied with what we were given."

A total of 558 former bonded labourers including Pradeshani and her family were resettled at the Mukta Kamaiya Basti in Bani. This was where Pradeshani and her husband Bhagiram arrived, with just a blanket and the clothes on their backs. There, they built their first mud house.

They now had a roof over their head, but no income. Bhagiram returned to India to work as a labourer and when he returned four years later was trained to install hand-pumps. Pradeshani trained in cultivating watermelons, cucumbers and vegetables by the river.

But the 2007 flood washed away the farm. "It took everything from us, and the sand made the land unsuitable for cultivation, we were back to where we started," Pradeshani recalls.

In 2011, the Janahit Mahakali Community Forest launched a homestay program and Pradeshani, together with five other former bonded labourers, enrolled. They were ineligible for a bank loan because they did not have land titles for collateral, but managed to borrow money from a microfinance.

Initially unaware of how to run such a business, they had to navigate operational and bureaucratic hurdles. Meanwhile, the interest on the loan was adding up. But today, the homestay is doing well, and the partners have paid off their loan. They make a net profit of Rs700,000 a year.

"I have never been happier," says Pradeshani. "In the peak season, I earn more than my husband does."

Pradeshani says the work required to operate their homestay is the skill they know best, and it has also allowed mothers to look after their children as they work. "I have not once regretted opening the homestay," adds Pradeshani. "It has brought many positive changes to my life." 🇳🇵

Weaving dreams for women

Activist turned entrepreneur finds economic independence and empowers other women

■ **Sarita Dahal** in Chitwan

Eight years ago, Buddhimaya Ghale opened a handicraft shop in Chitwan with Rs300,000. The venture is now worth Rs30 million.

Ghale had less than a modest start, her family could not afford schooling and she had to drop out after Grade 7. But then she joined a group in her village organised by Maiti Nepal to spread awareness about women trafficking.

Before long, Ghale was even travelling to India to rescue young Nepali women sold to brothels there. She became deeply involved in not just rescue, but also to bring justice to victims of trafficking, domestic violence and abuse.

"I would spend all my time hounding the police and going to the courts," recalls Ghale, now 37. "Seeing and listening to the women every day, both older and younger than me, used to cause me great pain. I even wished I was in a different line of work."

Back in 2000, the National Trust for Nature Conservation was training people to use spinning wheels for woollen thread. Ghale enrolled and learnt handicraft.

Starting in 2005, she began selling her products but soon realised that access to the market was limited and that local women needed training in refining their products and in sales. So in 2016, Ghale set up a centre to train women in handicrafts.

She registered the centre at Kalika Municipality as a cottage industry and named it BM Hastakala Prashichyan Udhyog (BM Handicraft Training Industry).

After training over 600 women (and five men), most have found work as Dhaka fabric weavers or in the carpet industry. Others are involved in the eco-friendly business of turning waste material like chicken feathers and plastic bottles into gifts and handicrafts.

"We started from 10 people, now we have 600, many of them from underprivileged families," says Ghale.

Previously, the women used to gather firewood from the forest and sell it in the nearby market. If they were lucky, they could sell it in the market to buy food for the day. Now the women make as much as Rs30,000 a month after being trained at the centre.

Initially, women faced resistance from their families for leaving to work outside the home, and the women themselves were skeptical. Now, Ghale has women as old as 70 at the centre, supplementing their families' income.

"Even women from well-off households are treated as subordinates and are entirely dependent on their husbands or in-laws," adds Ghale. "They are



PHOTOS: SARITA DAHAL

beaten if they assert themselves. When women have no money of their own, they get no respect. Income makes all the difference, and gives women power."

BM Hastakala provides women with raw materials and machines to make woollen goods, Dhaka clothing, shopping bags and more. The products are then exported to more than 10 countries including Japan, India and China.

Having left school at such a young age, Ghale had thought she would not get to complete her education. But following financial and social success, she has enrolled in school again.

After a ten-year hiatus, Ghale joined eighth grade and just passed high school. "I was never more satisfied than when I completed school," she says.

Ghale was honoured with the Women Entrepreneur Award from Bagmati Provincial Government in 2019, and in 2021 the best cottage industry entrepreneur in the Bagmati Province by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies.

Headquartered in Chitwan, BM Hastakala has a branch in Kathmandu. And now, this self-made entrepreneur wants to train more women so that they have economic independence to become their own person. She says: "The target is to increase the number of skilled women to 2,000 every year so the income empowers them." 🇳🇵





Swarup Chaudhary



Srijana Chaudhary



Sunita Chaudhary

From slavery to salvation

Children of Nepal's former bonded labourers now carve out a new identity with professional careers

■ Santosh Dahit in Dang

The past can hold nostalgic memories for many, but for Man Bahadur Chaudhary there are no fond recollections of being a slave bonded to his landowner.

In 2000, Man Bahadur was one of thousands of bonded labourers across the country who were liberated after the Kamaiya system of bonded labour was abolished. The Kamaiya spent their entire lives working for zamindar landowners for no pay, and just got a portion of the food they grew.

"I don't want to ruin my present by remembering my past," Man Bahadur tells us in the town of Ghorahi. "I have a good life now and I'm happy with that."

Man Bahadur's children have taken over running the household. His eldest son, Santu, is a contractor and even provides jobs for

others. Of Man Bahadur's three other sons, one works abroad while the two are bus drivers.

"I couldn't afford to pay for their higher studies but they are doing their best to make a living," says Man Bahadur, "But at least they do not have to work as slaves like I did."

Man Bahadur's neighbour, Sabina Chaudhary, was also a bonded labourer and had never imagined that her son, Swarup, would be a police officer one day. "We worked for someone else with no pay, there was no way we could dream so big," says Sabina.

Swarup was selected on his first attempt, and the whole village came out to celebrate when he came home in his uniform.

"Like many children of former bonded labourers, I saw my parents work tirelessly in someone else's house," he says. "Today, we work tirelessly to stand on our own feet."

Many of the children of former slaves are now in the Nepal Police, Armed Police

Force and Nepal Army, as well as in other government jobs and they have made their parents proud. Many former Kamaiya communities here in the western Tarai are seeing this transformation.

But it has not been easy. Even after they were freed, the former bonded labourers found it difficult to make a living. Sontali Chaudhary had started working as a day-wage labourer to educate her daughter Srijana, but does not need to work as hard anymore after Srijana got a job as a teacher in a government school.

"Back then, I was always in a rush to go to work, now I am in a rush to see her off to work," Sontali says with pride.

Apart from government jobs, many children of former Kamaiya have opted for technical and vocational education and often work as nurses, agriculture technicians, or survey engineers.

Working in the health centre of the village,

Sunita Chaudhary is an inspiration to many. Her patients are her biggest fans. She says, "Education has brought about real changes, it has given our community hope."

The five districts of the western Tarai, which includes Dang, Banke, Bardia, Kailali and Kanchanpur have 42,000 liberated bonded labourers, most of whom have received identity cards that give them access to government services. But there are still about 10,000 former Kamaiya who do not have the cards, and are deprived of access to jobs and state facilities.

"If only the government could extend the identification to everyone in our community, all former bonded labourers could have a better life," says Harish Chandra Chaudhary, chair of Mukta Kamaiya Samaj. "The older generation's life went by fighting for liberation. At least the new generation has a chance to forge a new identity." 🇳🇵

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