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COOL IT: Visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri with Prime Minister K P Oli on Sunday at Singha Darbar.



PMO

The geopolitics of politics

■ Shristi Karki

When Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to India earlier in August after violent protests, pundits asked: 'Is Nepal Next?'

The narrative in Nepal focused on similar public discontent with overstaying leaders who disregard public welfare while neck-deep in corruption. Many said the NC-UML coalition government was 'India-aligned', just as Sheikh Hasina was.

There is a long history of regional upheavals impacting Nepali politics. After Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was executed by the military in 1979, student protests erupted in Kathmandu and quickly turned into mass rallies against the Panchayat. King Birendra finally agreed to a referendum on the monarchy.

When street protests in Sri Lanka forced out the Rajapaksa government and the economy went into freefall in 2022, Nepali commentators again asked: 'Is Nepal Next?' Nepal's macroeconomic position was in a

much sounder footing, but editors needed catchy headlines.

Bangladesh's unrest was initially triggered by students protesting quotas, and parallels were drawn with Nepal's own reservations for women as well as ethnic and caste minorities – even though in Bangladesh the anger was over the increased job quotas for Awami League cadre.

If all this is not convoluted enough, add geopolitics to the mix. India and China are now in overt competition for influence in the Subcontinent, a region New Delhi regards as being in its sphere of influence. While Sri Lanka and the Maldives are strategic because of their location astride Indian Ocean maritime routes, Nepal, Bangladesh and to a certain extent Bhutan, are important buffers.

India was fully backing the secular Awami League despite Sheikh Hasina's growing authoritarianism, and her close trade and economic ties with China.

In July, Hasina returned to Dhaka earlier than scheduled from Beijing after being unable to secure a \$5 billion loan from China. New

Delhi had earlier leaned on Hasina to cancel China's bid on the Teesta project, and award it to India.

In Sri Lanka, Chinese 'debt trap diplomacy' contributed to its economic collapse, pushing President Ranil Wickremesinghe closer to India and the West to support an IMF bailout. Defence and maritime cooperation followed.

The China's Exim Bank did sign a \$4.2 billion debt restructuring agreement with Sri Lanka in June, showing Wickremesinghe's deft balancing act.

In the Maldives, relations with New Delhi soured after Mohamed Muizzu won elections earlier this year. But Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar's was in Malé this week to 'rectify' Muizzu's pro-Beijing tilt.

In Nepal, China has made no secret of its wish to unite various Communist parties, while India and the West try to wreck that plan. The coalition switch in July was a manifestation of this geopolitical jostling.

India's new Foreign Secretary

Vikram Misri made a courtesy visit to Kathmandu this week (above) and officials were careful not to push contentious issues like Kalapani, new air routes, or lift restrictions on hydropower exports from plants with Chinese involvement. Misri was formerly India's ambassador in Beijing.

The Chinese never commented publicly on Nepal's internal affairs, but are of late more vocal. On the other hand, the Indians who used to be very outspoken now have a hands-off approach.

Chinese Ambassador Chen Song posted crude criticism last month of a media report on the Pokhara airport loan, and used undiplomatic language about the unsuccessful search for two buses that fell into the Trisuli, killing 59.

The recent regime change in Dhaka is a warning to Nepal's leaders not to take electoral mandate for granted, and to regional powers not to prop up unpopular leaders. 🇳🇵

The Evolution of Empire

PAGE 10-11

Transitory justice

EDITORIAL

PAGE 2



20th

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Transitory justice

Eighteen years after the end of the Maoist war, the former enemies have finally come together to push through the Enforced Disappearances Inquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act of 2014.

This is the culmination of a two-decade long peace process that finally allowed the Maoists and the leaders they were trying to overthrow to agree on truth, justice and reparations for war crimes their forces were both involved in.

Yet, there are still some contentious provisions in the bill and serious doubts persist about its honest implementation.

That Maoist supremo Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) and Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress stood side by side to receive the report of a special committee last week was hugely symbolic — not just because till 2006 they were trying to kill each other, but also that both have been prime minister multiple times since then. Time is supposed to heal.



RSS

The UML was less of a target during the conflict, and it fell upon Prime Minister K P Oli to steer this consensus. On Wednesday in Parliament, he hailed Nepal's peace process as "a model of transitional justice for the world". Let's see about that.

Civil society activists are not convinced the bill will fully address truth and justice issues. They find the definition and classification of wartime excesses still vague and designed deliberately to reduce punishment and prosecution.

'Any amendment to institutionalise impunity in the name of party consensus is unacceptable,' said the Accountability Watch Committee in a statement earlier this week. Some conflict victims have also said the bill interferes with the right of the court to define, classify and determine serious violations of human rights.

The bill was relatively easy for Prime Minister Oli to push through because the Maoist party is weaker. And once the three leaders of the Maoists, NC and UML agreed, they got victims' groups affiliated to their parties to sign up. Many victims are weary and after 18 years they want to move on.

Western liberal democracies and the United Nations that had in the past pushed Nepal hard on transitional justice are also more muted now. US and EU ambassadors to Nepal, the UN Resident Coordinator all posted on social media welcoming the bill despite the inadequacies cited by some

Nepal's cross-party consensus on transitional justice leaves doubts about some provisions and implementation.

victims' groups.

Last year, former Minister for Law and Constitutional Affairs Govinda Prasad Sharma Koirala 'Bandi' in the Maoist government tried to fast-track this bill with provisions that made a distinction between 'political murder' and 'wartime killing', and even classified torture into 'humane' and 'inhumane' categories. It also did not give the right for appeal on special court verdicts.

Bandi's bill was met with a public outcry, and a cross-party working group was set up to come up with a new draft defining serious violations of human rights, unresolved cases of reparations, and compensation for security personnel who died or were disabled.

The final bill now defines coercive or serious sexual violence, deliberate or arbitrary killings of unarmed people, acts of disappearance and inhuman or cruel torture as 'violations of human rights'. Families of those killed, those who were injured or became disabled by landmines or war-era explosives are also eligible for compensation. There is no mention of child soldiers in the bill, however.

But punishment can now be reduced 'to 25%' as per prevailing law for serious human rights violations except rape and serious sexual violence. How 25% is going to be applied is open to political pressure.

Proponents of the bill argue that transitional justice should not be viewed from the perspective of criminal justice system alone because the violence was committed during an armed conflict.

More than 60,000 complaints have been filed with the Commission for the Investigation of the Disappeared and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There is a provision for the commissions to call for renewed complaints for a period of three months.

Prime Minister Oli wants to form the commissions by September before he goes to New York to speak at the UN General Assembly. The term of office of the chair and members of the commission will be four years, which means the transitional justice process should be complete by September 2028.

But that is easier said than done. Both commissions have underperformed spectacularly in the past because of lack of political will to face war crimes. There is no guarantee that the next commissioners will be more independent. Their persona and party loyalties will have a significant impact regardless of how good the law is.

So far, Nepal has spent Rs21 billion on reparations for families of the estimated 17,000 people killed or disappeared, and payouts to tens of thousands injured. The ghosts of those who died will continue to haunt the peace process until there is full truth and justice for war crimes.

Santa Gaha Magar

ONLINE PACKAGES



LIFE IN A PICKLE

What started as a last-ditch attempt at financial independence has now grown into a booming business, for Parbati and Bhes Giri. Parbati's special recipe for homemade pickles provide steady income for the family, and even convinced her husband to return from the UAE. Watch the video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel.



NEW LIFE FOR CLAY

Hari Chandra Prajapati was only 14 when he started learning how to mould a lump of clay into a work of art just like his forebears did. Today, he has a successful enterprise and is also training a new batch of artists. Subscribe for more multimedia content.

BRAIN DRAIN

Migration is not only the drain and the expense, it's also the prizing away and the loss, often long-term if not permanent, of young people from the homeland who otherwise would be ready to further the very promising prospects of tomorrow's Nepal ('Brain gain into brain drain', Sonia Awale, #1224).

Tony Jones

■ The brain gain or brain drain debate is timely. A certain section of Nepali society has complete negative mindset when it comes to remaining in the country. We should act together to transform our economy to create more decent jobs. We cannot afford to delay our effort.

Youb Raj Basnet

■ A growing diaspora changes a nation.

David Seddon

■ This is what happens when uneducated people who run the country invest in ships for a landlocked nation.

Jay Dee

JAGAN TIMILSINA

Kudos to Jagan Nath Timilsina on his remarkable achievement ('Juggernaut Timilsina' Vishad Raj Onta, #1224).

Abhaya Katwal

■ This is a great article. You're now a celebrity.

Larry Ashery

BUDDHI MAYA GHALE

That's a powerful initiative, empowering women economically opens up so many opportunities for communities ('Weaving dreams for women', Sarita Dahal, #1223). How do they plan to train more women in handicrafts?

Riz M

FATALISM

The article puts many vital cultural aspects in the spotlight ('Fatalism and fatalities', Sonia Awale, #1223).

Ben-Erik Ness

STREET DOGS

My salute and respects to Nashir Khan who cares for Kathmandu street dogs despite challenges ('Must love dogs', Benjamin Zimmerman, #1223).

ART

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Juggernaut Timilsina

by Vishad Raj Onta

Jagan Nath Timilsina has summited Mt Everest, won the Great Himalayan Race, climbed rock faces. He now runs multiple tourism businesses and spends summers training climbers in Alaska. Read his profile at nepalitimes.com.



Most reached and shared on Facebook

"I made it"

by Pinki Sris Rana

Hem Bahadur Moktan was a child worker at age 10 in a carpet factory in Lalitpur, 26 years ago. Today, he is the face of Nepal GoodWeave Foundation and helps children like himself providing them a chance to better their lives. Read the full story on our website.



Most popular on X

Brain gain into brain drain

by Sonia Awale

Just like migrant workers are a safety valve that lets the government off the hook from providing jobs at home, students going abroad allow the state to dodge its responsibility to improve higher education quality here. Join the discussion online.



Most commented



Helping farmers who help themselves

by Benjamin Zimmerman

Himalayan farmers are at the forefront of the climate crisis, having to deal with extreme heat or cold, prolonged droughts or excessive rain, landslides and floods. But they are also resilient, and have struggled on their own to grow enough food on fragile geography. Go online for details.



Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

If mountain trail running was an Olympic sport, Nepali athletes may have won some medals by now. Nepali trail running champions | Preeti Khattri



Biplav Gautam @biplav

Unfortunately, that's not how it works. When a sport gets into the Olympics then countries (publicly or privately) start funding their development, thus any natural advantage a country like Nepal might have would quickly disappear.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

#20YearsAgoThisWeek, we wrote about how Kathmandu Valley and Lumbini could be delisted by UNESCO if destruction was not stopped. Today, instead of saving what is left, urbanisation and encroachment are undermining the cultural value of both places.



Mahavir Sherpa @SherpaMahavir01

It's disheartening to see Kathmandu's and Lumbini's heritage sites at risk due to unregulated development. We need a revival of our commitment to heritage conservation and a collective effort to safeguard these invaluable treasures.



1,000 WORDS

MENAKA CHAUDHARY / RSS

VISIT NEPAL 2024: Cement statues of pigeons in Parewa Danda in Lamjung and an elephant in Thakurbaba Municipality in Bardia, indicate an increasing trend of local governments erecting larger than life figures symbolising their uniqueness.

JANAK SHRESTHA / RSS

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

10,000+

20 years ago this week, the death toll in the Maoist War crossed 10,000. This week, nearly two decades after the end of the conflict, the Enforced Disappearances Inquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act of 2014 was finally passed in Parliament (See Editorial, above).

The final bill still has contentious provisions and many rights activists are not convinced it will fully address truth and justice issues. The new commission for transitional justice must be independent and above party interest. Until then, Nepal's decades long peace process would not be truly complete.

Excerpts of the page 1 report published in issue #209 13 - 19 August 2004:

This month, the number of Nepalis killed by fellow-Nepalis since the Maoist war began eight years ago crossed the 10,000 mark. The human rights organisation, INSEC, is the only independent group counting. But it lists only verified deaths, and there are thousands more undocumented cases.



In 1996, when a total of 81 people were killed, the nation was shocked. The death toll rose exponentially after the army entered the fray in November 2001, as the Maoists started using heavy weapons they captured. Non-combatant casualties soared as counter-insurgency operations resulted in disappearances, extra-judicial killings and deaths in crossfire.

The worst total was in 2002, when 4,648 people were killed, nearly one-fourth of them in the bloody month of May alone.

The Maoists targeted civilians, grassroots politicians, social workers, businessmen and those accused of spying. INSEC says the Maoists have killed 3,469 people, while 6,643 have died at the hands of the security forces. Of the total, 4,141 were civilians, 1,478 were security personnel, about 400 were political workers and over 4,000 were Maoists.

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



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Wildlife at risk from drug resistance

Nepal must act to save protected species and ecosystems from antimicrobial resistance

■ Siddhant Pandey

Every year antimicrobial resistance (AMR) contributes to the death of around 5 million people around the world. Resistance to antibiotics, once considered 'miracle drugs', is one of the biggest threats to health and development in Nepal as well.

AMR empowers harmful microbes to withstand the very medications designed to stop them from spreading. This means microbes such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites can survive even when we treat them with medicine.

Underuse, overuse or indiscriminate use of antibiotics to treat common infections among humans or livestock induces resistance.

Introducing medicinal drugs to microorganisms without diagnostic trials helps them build resistance and get stronger. As a result, many antibiotics are already ineffective because they do not kill 'superbugs'.

AMR is not just a problem for humans, it can affect wildlife as well as the whole ecosystem. Microorganisms resistant to drugs can reach forests and wildlife through air and water. Human-animal interactions can also expose them to these drug-resistant organisms.

Numerous wild mammals like elephants, rhinos and wild boars often venture outside Nepal's protected areas into farmlands to feed. In buffer zones in Chitwan or Bardia, it is common for domestic and wild animals to graze in the same area and use the same water source, and this can transfer harmful



KUMAR PAUDEL

pathogens to new hosts – the wild animals.

Once livestock is infected with antibiotic resistant microbes, their shared food chain in the forest will create a pathway for transmission of diseases among wild animals.

Even when dealing with known infections, providing medical treatment and care to wild animals poses formidable challenges. This is exacerbated in infections caused by superbugs.

The more advanced the infection, the easier it spreads, and lower the chances for it to be treated successfully. The drugs

available to treat such diseases will be more limited, and the only option will be to stand back helplessly as wildlife die en masse. By the time new antidotes are tested and delivered, it will be too late, and entire species may be wiped out of their habitats.

Nepal's forests are home to many globally endangered and rare species, and they are now at risk of AMR. Geographical variations means that different animal species share the same habitat, creating opportunities for close encounters. Infections can spread swiftly, afflicting entire wildlife populations in the area.

Some habitats in the Tarai are connected to India, allowing animals to freely cross the border and potentially carry harmful pathogens back and forth, harming the country's tourism and economy.

It is important to recognise the looming dangers of AMR on Nepal's wildlife. The first thing is to evaluate the degree of damage drug resistance has inflicted on wildlife populations thus far by conducting nationwide surveys to evaluate the current status of AMR in wildlife. Based on the findings, plans and policies can be developed and implemented.

Monitoring of healthcare, medication practices, and overall public health ecosystem is necessary as these are the root causes of AMR.

Education and raising awareness play a huge role in mitigating the risks of AMR. In Nepal, only a small section of the population, mainly those in medical or clinical fields, are familiar with AMR. This lack of awareness results in careless misuse of antimicrobials.

A common example would be the use of pesticides by farmers to boost crop yields without considering their detrimental effects on the environment and ecosystem. Similar practices are also common in other sectors such as poultry, fisheries, and animal husbandry.

Increased public awareness about the dangers of AMR among communities and individuals would help mitigate the threat. Achieving this will not be simple, and it cannot be accomplished by one agency alone. It needs a coordinated plan to tackle a huge challenge. Government agencies, lawmakers, research persons, medical personnel, farmers, and grassroots workers must take ownership.

A unified commitment to curb increasing AMR will not just save human lives, but also preserve Nepal's success in nature conservation. 🇳🇵

Siddhant Pandey is a MSc Biotechnology student at Tribhuvan University and a research affiliate at Greenhood Nepal.

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Tata's early Dasain

Sipradi held 'Dashain in Shrawan' event 9-11 August, where customers swapped any car for an exchange bonus towards the Tiago EV. A year of transport tax, three years of servicing, autoplus insurance, and accessories were part of the deal.



Sipradi has opened pre-bookings for the Tata Punch for priority delivery after the NADA auto show this month. The Punch is an electric compact SUV with 190mm clearance, 380 litres of boot space and more than 400km range.

Sipradi has also announced a financing plan for its multipurpose commercial Winger vans with 20% down and finance the vehicle over 6 years at a monthly payment of Rs60,000.



Subaru hybrids

Vijay Motors launched the Subaru Crosstrek Hybrid, and Outback models in Kathmandu this week. The Crosstrek has both an electric and gasoline engine with regenerative charging, as well as safety and driver assistance features. The Outback is an SUV suited for all types of roads. Both models have EyeSight technology which uses cameras to give the driver better awareness of the car's surroundings.

Test and Win

Laxmi Intercontinental launched 'Test Drive and Win', in which participants can test drive Hyundai cars such as Creta and Venue and win merchandise, microwaves, and refrigerators. The Creta is a mid-sized SUV priced at Rs5,596,000. The Venue, assembled in Nepal, starts at Rs4,496,000.



Kuwait via Himalaya

Himalaya Airlines is resuming direct weekly flights to Kuwait starting 20 August. The flights leave Kathmandu at 00:40 and land at Kuwait time 03:15. The flight back lands at 11:15AM in Kathmandu.

Aloft turns 5

Aloft Kathmandu Thamel marked its 5th anniversary on 8 August this week. General Manager Vikram Singh and Chair Prithivi B Pande thanked the Aloft team, guests and stakeholders on the occasion.

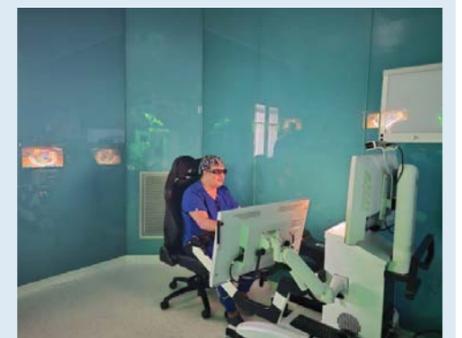


MG financing

Paramount is partnering with Nepal Investment Bank on financing plans for MG EVs. Customers can get loans approved for the ZS, the MG4, and the Comet models within three days. The loans will have a base interest rate with a 1% premium per annum, and a 20% down payment.

Yeti IATA certified

Yeti Airlines earned a certification for undergoing a Standard Safety Assessment by IATA (International Air Transport Association). The assessment scrutinises all steps of the airlines' security management processes as the carrier expands its fleet.

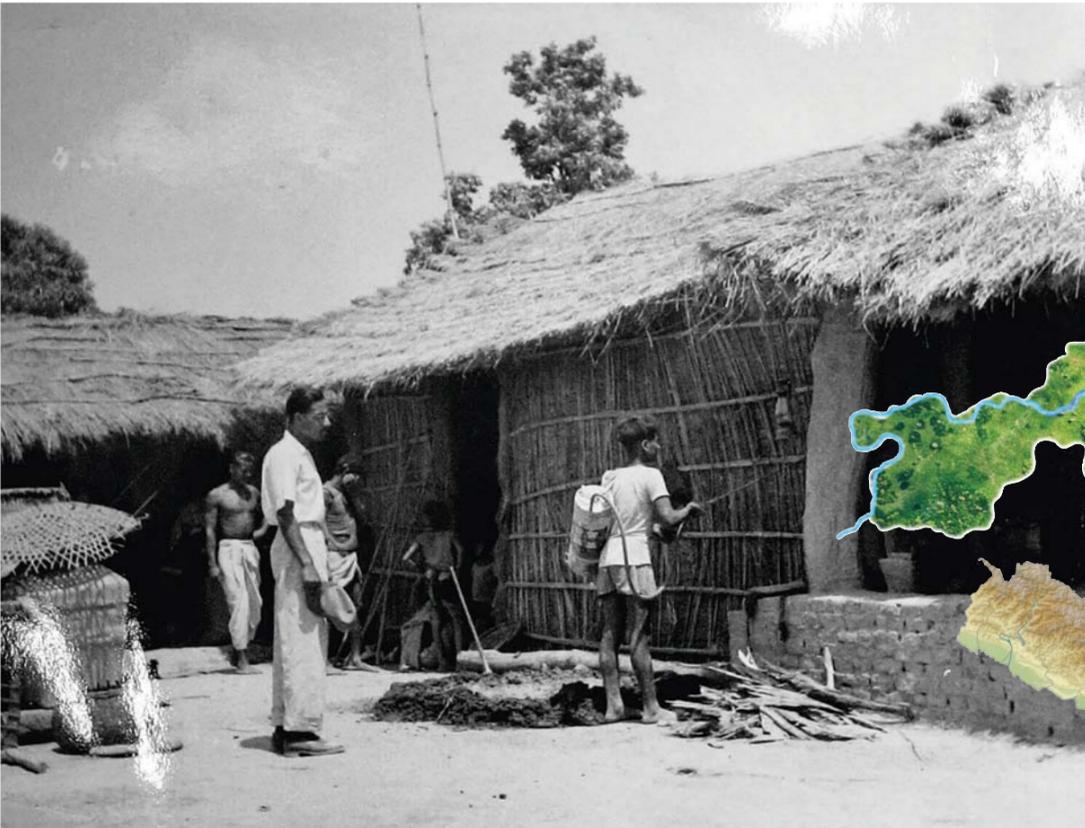


Robot surgery B&B

B and B Hospital has started robotic surgery, the first of its kind in Nepal which allows minimally invasive procedures which improve success rates of operations and reduce recovery times.

Ncell roaming

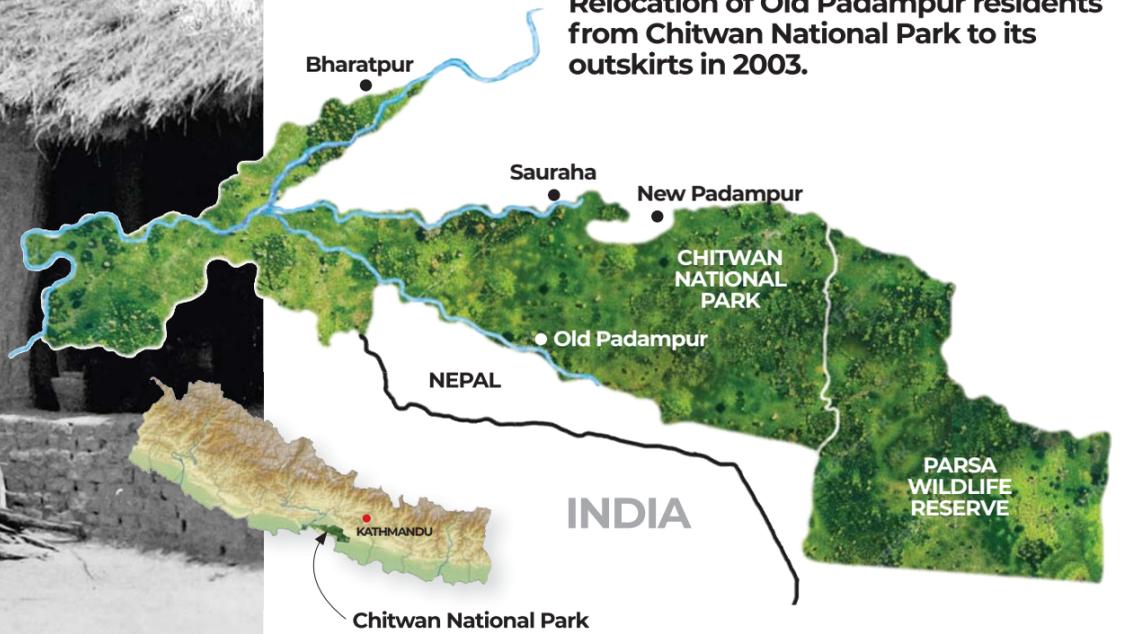
All Ncell customers will now receive one-time passwords and other Application to Person messages in Nepal and on international roaming. The telecom provider was facing issues in its 970 number range, with an increase in messages.



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PRE-PARK: A US-supported DDT spraying campaign against malaria in Chitwan in the 1950s that opened the valley to trans-migration of farmers from the hills. The Tharu people were immune to malaria.

Relocation of Old Padampur residents from Chitwan National Park to its outskirts in 2003.



Parks plus people

Recognising the contribution of the Tharu community in the conservation of Chitwan National park

■ **Birendra Mahato** in Chitwan

Ramprit Yadav was a ranger in the late 1960s before Chitwan National Park was even established. He later became the first warden of Nepal's first national park in 1973, one that he helped survey.

Those were the days when national parks were defined as wilderness areas with no human settlements, but Chitwan's jungles were the home of the Tharu and other indigenous groups. The village of Padampur with 10,000 people, mostly Tharu, was relocated. The very people who had relied on the forest and protected it for generations were kept out.

Ramprit Yadav remembers that when his team surveyed the Chitwan National Park 55 years ago, he did so without consulting the Tharu. "That was a mistake," he says now. "I was 22 years old and had a theoretical knowledge of plants from college, but everything else about biodiversity I learnt later from the Tharu of Chitwan."

The Tharu had over generations learnt to sustainably manage their jungle, grassland and wetland habitat, taking only what they needed and allowing nature sufficient time to regenerate. When they were removed from the national park, it was not just the Tharu who suffered but also the nature they had helped preserve.

The Tharu of Old Padampur had been farming on the flatlands for generations by creating a canal from the Chure Hills to the south. The traditional irrigation system brought down not just water but vegetation that fertilised their fields. After using the water they needed, they let the rest flow out, replenishing the wetlands

that was an important habitat for rhinos and birds.

In spring, the Tharu dug small ponds inside the forest to capture rainwater and raise fish. This practice also helped recharge the groundwater. But after 1973, the park put a stop to this, and ponds dried up.

The number of rhinos dropped dramatically after Padampur was evacuated primarily because of the deterioration of the wetlands, and later after 2003 when the park was expanded to the east and there was an increase in poaching.

Bal Singh Chaudhary, 84, remembers that the ponds themselves were a favourite wallow for rhinos. "I used to see between 15-20 rhinos in one pond, but after we stopped using the ponds the rhinos were gone." Today, park nature guide Ram Giri Chaudhary says it is difficult to even find one or two rhinos in what used to be the ponds.

Paugi Chaudhary, a 70-year-old resident of Old Padampur, remembers as a boy bringing in up to 15kg of fish and 25kg of snail (ghonghi) from the family paddy fields. "All that came to an end after our relocation," he says.

Before being evicted, Tharu villages used to have up to 400 cattle that grazed in the grasslands along the Rapti floodplain. Grasslands made up 20% of the park area in 1973, but today it is down to 6%.

The reason is that the Tharu had a sustainable way of using the grasslands for grazing and harvesting reed and thatch to maintain their homes and the temporary huts they built by the Rapti River. In winter, they set fire to the reed which allowed green shoots to sprout, fertilised by the nutrient rich ash.

The park allowed the Tharu and resettled farmers from the mountains to cut and burn the grass for 15 days every year, but this practice was stopped during the Maoist conflict.

"The condition of the grasslands in the national park was better where the grass used to be burnt rather than when it is cut by machine," explains Aashis

Gurung of the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC).

The decline in grasslands has affected the population of native and migratory birds like the Bengal Florican, Lesser Florican, Slender-bellied Babbler, and Jerdon's Babbler. When the

grassland area fell, so did the insect population. The ban on grazing removed the dung that used to fertilise the soil and allowed insects to proliferate in the siru grasslands. And with the insects gone, the birds had nothing to eat.

Park officials at the time did not grasp this cycle of sustainability in which the Tharu people were a crucial part. Chitwan's wetlands and grasslands are now much reduced, affecting the population of rhino, deer and other wildlife.

Part of the credit for Nepal's success in tripling its wild tiger population goes to the indigenous people of Chitwan, whose descendants now suffer disproportionately from wildlife attacks and crop damage in the fringes of the park where they were resettled in 1973. ■

Birendra Mahato is an elected member of the Ratnanagar Municipality Ward 6 and Founder Chair of the Tharu Culture Museum Research Centre in Sauraha.



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Pokhara is now a yoga tourism hub, but needs more international promotion

■ **Durga Rana Magar**
in Pokhara

Tired of working a desk job that left her physically and mentally drained, Dutch citizen Hana planned a trekking trip to Nepal in 2021. As soon as she reached Pokhara, all her tiredness seemed to slip away, and she felt as though her life had changed.

"I was drawn to Pokhara's mountains, the nature, and the climate," says Hana (pictured, below) who was in Nepal to do the Annapurna trek. "But once here, I discovered the healing benefits of yoga and meditation."

Hana is back in Pokhara for the third time in three years, and spends time in daily meditation and yoga. She says, "Pokhara is so peaceful and beautiful, it is the perfect yoga destination."

Like Hana, there are thousands of 'meditation tourists' visiting Pokhara during what used to be the monsoon off-season for visitors. Many yoga retreats have sprung up in and around this scenic city, and instructors advertise private meditation classes in hotels.

One instructor is Maheswar Man Shrestha, who grew up as a sickly child in Kathmandu and was often hospitalised, missing school for months at a time. When modern medicine did not work, his father, himself a doctor, sought ayurvedic treatment and combined it with yoga and meditation. Shrestha soon got miraculously better.

Now in his fifties, Shrestha is a true believer in the power of yogic healing. "I went from medication to meditation, I am living proof that yoga ensures physical and mental wellbeing," says Shrestha (pictured, below) who teaches yoga to overseas tourists at his Purna Yoga Retreat.

Being both the start and end point for treks makes Pokhara perfect for tourists to combine physically taxing Himalayan hikes with a soothing recovery. But even outside the trekking season, its lush monsoon greenery, the lakes and cloudscape make Pokhara the ideal place to decompress from the material world.

"Pokhara's proximity to nature and relatively clean environment makes it great for tourists to come

here to learn yoga," Shrestha says.

Indeed, Nepal's travel industry has lately discovered that blending mountains and meditation is a popular combination. After all, the Buddha was born in Lumbini, a seven hour drive to the south of Pokhara, and for many a trek in Nepal is already also a pilgrimage.

Rishi Raj Lamsal worked for a travel agency outfitting and guiding trekking groups. Once, on a hike to Poon Hill, his clients gasped at the panorama of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna at sunrise, and they promptly took out yoga mats and started doing asana and pranayam.

It was there and then that Lamsal (pictured) realised that tourism had a spiritual aspect that Nepal's travel industry had largely ignored. As soon as he returned to Kathmandu, he started designing meditation tourism packages.

Lamsal also learnt yoga and has been an instructor based in Pokhara for many years, teaching not just foreign visitors but also Nepalis from all over the country.

"I have been to 42 districts, but there is no place like Pokhara, its geography is ideal to mixing tourism with spiritualism. It is natural beauty that draws people initially, but once here they also find inner peace," Lamsal says.

Deepa Basnet initially took up yoga to reduce weight, but is now pursuing a degree in yoga and is also an instructor on the side. "I wanted to increase my knowledge of yoga beyond the basic asana to ayurveda," she explains.

Pokhara's fame as a yoga city has been boosted by the Indian



Medication to Meditation



Hana



Raj Karmayogi



Manohar Shrestha



Maheswar Man Shrestha



Rishi Raj Lamsal





ALL PHOTOS: PURNA YOGA RETREAT CENTRE, POKHARA

Embassy holding the International Day of Yoga on 21 June every year in partnership with local organisations. The city's strategic location between sacred Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage sites of Muktinath and Lumbini also help.

Ekraj Rokaya used to be a migrant worker in the Gulf, and while there he began to ruminate on impermanence, suffering and human existence. He returned to Nepal a changed person, and began to practice and teach yoga and meditation, changing his name to Raj Karmayogi.

Seeing the benefits of meditation, he wanted to share its value with others and set up a yoga school in Pokhara six years ago. "Pokhara is a yoga city just like Rishikesh in India, it can be associated internationally with

yoga," he believes.

Indeed, with better road connectivity yoga centres are no longer concentrated in Pokhara city, but have been established in the surrounding mountains which command a stunning panorama of the Annapurnas.

Pokhara was the venue for the International Yoga Festival in March last year with 50 overseas participants, and a four-day repeat of the festival is planned for October in which renowned instructors will be taking part.

While individuals and instructors are promoting Pokhara on their own, they lament the lack of interest on the part of the government and the Nepal Tourism Board in marketing the city as a yoga hub internationally.

"There is zero interest from

the government to promote yoga tourism," states Manohar Shrestha, of Purna Yoga Retreat Centre which takes tourists on hikes in the nearby mountains with yoga and meditation sessions in the mornings and evenings.

Since India has branded the International Day of Yoga, Shrestha and Lamsal suggest Pokhara could be promoted as an International Meditation City, and the Nepal government could set aside an annual commemorative day for it, which the provincial and municipal government can then peg events on.

"Nepal and the Himalaya are where the Buddha and numerous Hindu sages meditated, these mountains are the spiritual home of both religions. There is no better place to honour them by rediscovering yoga," says Lamsal.

But like all other sectors in Nepal, there is a lack of regulation, and fly-by-night yoga retreat operators are giving the city a bad reputation. It is not only Nepalis involved, foreign trainers also bring clients and take private classes without paying taxes, local retreat owners say.

Only certified instructors should be allowed to train and proper protocols should be in place for yoga tourism, they add.

Krishna Prasad Bhandari of the Pokhara Tourism Council adds: "Yoga and meditation must be developed such that it becomes synonymous with Pokhara, but we should not kill the goose that lays the golden eggs in the process." 🇳🇵



Yoga in the Mountains



Spiritual scams

Katherine is an American yoga teacher and practitioner who signed up for a 300-hour training course at a yoga centre in Pokhara. It was a two-month course specifically tailored for trainers and instructors, and Katherine paid \$2,800 after arriving in Nepal.

She was deeply disappointed. Nothing was what was promised on the website, and she filed a complaint with the Nepal Tourism Board.

"The trainer was not qualified and the training lacked international standard. I feel cheated," said Katherine (name

changed). "I wasted the flight cost and course fee, it all went down the drain." As Pokhara gains popularity as a destination for yoga tourism, there are also reports of others like Katherine being scammed.

Spiritual 'wellness' centres have sprouted like mushroom along Pokhara's Lakeside. Some promise 200-hour teacher training, others have 300 hours sessions and some are 21 days long.

The lack of regulation and strict enforcement of guidelines for instructors and certification of ashrams is the main reason for the increase in fraud in the business.

"Some individuals and organisations offer training and classes without understanding the depth and importance of yoga and meditation," says instructor Maheswar Man Shrestha. "There are instructors in hotels who are responding to demand but lack knowledge and training to teach others."

It should be up to the Nepal

Tourism Board and Gandaki Province Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment to prevent Pokhara from getting a bad name for cheating foreign yoga students.

Pokhara Mayor Dhana Raj Acharya admits there are some unscrupulous establishments, and says his municipality is coordinating with the Gandaki Province government to crackdown. He adds, "The reason is that the spiritual wellness sector is relatively new and we have not been able to play catchup with regulatory mechanisms."

Nepal Tourism Board's Nabin Pokharel says he understands the need to standardise yoga and meditation centres with some regulatory guidelines. He admits: "If we don't do something about it, it can give a negative impression of Pokhara."

If Katherine's experience is any indication, that is already happening.



EVENTS

**Mithila Art**

Drop by the exhibition in Nepal Art Council which will feature mithila artwork from renowned Nepali and Indian women artists. *Until 19 September, 11am-5pm (Sundays to Fridays), Nepal Art Council, Babar Mall, 9863790910*

Art Exhibition

'I am Here, Where are You?' is a solo exhibition by Dutch artist Marianne Venderbosch, who is this year's recipient of the Mcube International Residency. *Until 20 August, 10am-5pm, Gallery Mcube, 9860028387*

**Dhaakar**

Set against the backdrop of late 1990s Nepal, the play Dhaakar chronicles the tale of subaltern history. It showcases the theme of marginalisation and exclusion. *Until 19 August, 5:30pm, Ticket: Rs300, Rs200 (For students with ID card), Sadhana Natak Ghar, Oscar College, Sukehdhara*

Stand Up Comedy

Don't miss out on the chance to laugh out loud with India's stand up comedian Abhishek Upmanyu as he performs live in Nepal for the first time. *17 August, 8pm onwards, Ticket: Rs2,700-Rs3,500, Pragna Pratishthan, Kamaladi*

**Robotics**

Tech aficionados interested in the latest technological advancements will be able to get live demonstrations of advanced robotics and hands-on experience this week. *17 August, 9am onwards, MIT College, Bag Bazar*

MUSIC

Sweet Harmony

Enjoy live music sessions and jam sessions while tasting Himalayan mad honey this week. *16 August, 2pm onwards, Chaa:Ta Pub, Saatghumti, Thamel, 9806715611*

**Mukti and Revival**

Grab the chance to listen to Mukti and Revival live this weekend. DJ Palden will take over after the band's performance. *17 August, 7pm onwards, Uptown Lounge, Jhamsikhel*

**Jugal and the Co-Pilots**

Experience live music with the band Jugal and the Co-pilots. Pair up the music with mouth-watering burgers and savoury entrees. *18 August, 7pm onwards, Hard Rock Cafe, Darbar Marg, 9801986771*

**Live in Pokhara**

If you are planning a trip next weekend, you might want to fit this musical event happening in Pokhara in your schedule. *24 August, 8pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Catwalk, Lakeside*

Friday Night Party

Enjoy this live musical night with Anil & The Surbs band and stay for an after party with DJ Umesh. *16 August, 7pm onwards, Ai-La Lounge, Kumaripati, 9801118683*

GETAWAYS

**Dollu Villa**

The newly-opened A-frame Dollu Villa is modern and classy with a traditional touch to it, and is an ideal getaway to unwind with friends and family. *Pharping, 9812986686*

Namo Buddha Resort

Constructed in traditional Newari style and surrounded by lush greenery, Namu Buddha Resort is an oasis of peace and tranquillity. *Namo Buddha, Phulbari, 9851106802*

**Club Himalaya**

Amidst the gloomy monsoon, take a refreshing weekend escape to Nagarkot. Enjoy indoor activities like swimming in this luxurious hotel. *Nagarkot, 9749326175*

Godavari Village Resort

Godavari Village Resort, built amidst a lush green terrace valley and secluded from the hustle and bustle of the city, is the place to be for a lazy weekend mini-vacation. *Godavari (01) 5560675*

**Chandragiri Hills**

This luxury property nestled at an elevation of 2,551 metres in the serene surrounding of Chandragiri is the perfect retreat to temporarily put the stresses of modern life on the back burner. *Chandragiri, 9802343150*

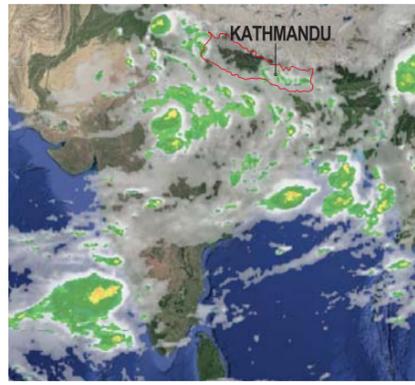
Tamarind

Stop by on Tuesday evenings if you're in the mood to Salsa dance or just marvel at the moves of the regulars with food and drink at your side.. *Jhamsikhel, (01) 5522626*

**Pho 99**

As the rain lashes outside, nothing sounds better than a piping hot bowl of Vietnamese pho, a soup filled with noodles, vegetables, meats and sauces. *Jhamsikhel, 9803203119*

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Still More Rain**

Mid-August, and the monsoon is going strong into its last lap. Pulse after pulse are lining up from the Bay of Bengal and they will bring rain into the weekend and early next week. In Kathmandu Valley, the mornings are expected to start bright, with cloud build up and rain by evening and into the night. Rain will be lighter on Saturday-Sunday, but may pick up in intensity next week with some of the showers turning thundery. Lumbini and Gandaki Provinces will get the most rain as a deep trough lingers, meaning highways will continue to be muddy and landslide-prone.

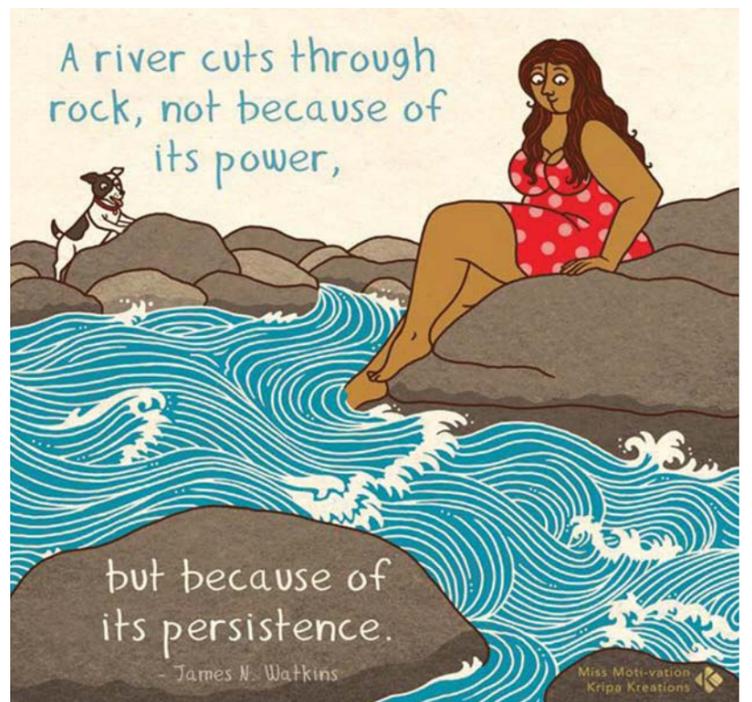
FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
28° 20°	28° 20°	27° 20°

**OUR PICK**

Following the events of the 2018 critically and commercially successful film Stree, the sequel is set yet again in Chanderi of Madhya Pradesh in India but unlike last time, women are now mysteriously disappearing from the town. The film follows Vicky and his friends as they try to figure out the culprit behind the abductions. Directed by Amar Kuashik, the 2024 Hindi-language comedy-horror Stree 2 stars Rajkumar Rao, Shraddha Kapoor, Pankaj Tripathi, Aparshakti Khurana and Abhishek Banerjee. Watch it in cinemas near you.

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

DINING

**The Chocolate Room**

At The Chocolate Room, enter a world of hot chocolate cupcakes, brownies and chocolates of every size and shape. Between the chocolate, try the Peri Peri fries and milkshake. *Jhamsikhel, 9851056096*

**Haopin Hotpot**

Try Haopin Hotpot with friends and family this rainy season because hotpot is best served with a side of good, and hungry company. *Narayan Chaur, 9808064999*

Dragon Momo

Gloomy weather demands a soupy treat. Try the pork momo from Dragon Momo and get complimentary soups to cope with the chilly monsoon wind. *Pulchowk (01) 5409088*

Taking the longcut

Trying to understand the female body is like staring into an abyss

One evening last month, four women ambled up the winding road below Shivapuri. Four women, three in their thirties, the fourth in her forties. They chatted, laughed, stopped once as one of them kneeled down to tie her shoelace. Stopped again to see if the gelato place was still offering to sell. But it was 10:30PM and lights were out.



SUBURBAN TALES
Pratibha Tuladhar

So in the dimness of the night, partially guided by the moon, the women walked uphill, following the grey path, snaking upward towards their accommodation. Their conversation, in fragments, continued to bear the cheerful tone from dinner time. They had met after work, eaten together and then walked past the Panther Crossing and then up and up.

This is lovely, the 40-something-year-old said, recalling that for her 30th birthday she booked herself a table at a pizzeria in town next to a dreamy garden. She had ordered a paesana vegetarian, some wine and a salad, and eaten her meal slowly, in silence, except when interacting with the servers.

Some guests on neighbouring tables had wondered what a Nepali woman was doing, eating by herself. Had she been stood up? But what had actually happened was,



SUMAN NEPALI

the woman had put on her favourite sandals and left home at 6PM so she could enjoy a lone meal.

Between eating, she smiled to herself, satisfied with her own ability to make a point. 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. And much harder perhaps, for those who identify beyond the gender binary.

So as the four women climbed uphill, the 40-something woman shared that the evening was four fold more joyous from what she had experienced on her birthday

a decade ago, eating by herself. She was now celebrating not one, but four women, mostly single but not unhappy. Four women paying their own bills, chatting unabashedly about their Tinder preferences, discussing work interests, trees, architecture and food.

They wondered what meeting each other earlier in their lives would have meant -- how and if that would have shaped their personalities, thoughts, life events differently. Perhaps they would have salvaged each other from some of the worst days of their lives.

That is what female friendships are -- they are who see you through

heartbreaks and hard times, who hear you out when no one else in the world will. Sometimes, female friendships are merely about sitting across each other stuffing your cheeks with food while tears run down your face and you come away a bit more stronger to cope with the circumstances, better prepared to cradle a broken heart.

Female friends are who you go to to discuss your periods, heavy periods, missed periods, pregnancy tests, PMS and cramps. As you age, you go to them to discuss stretch marks and they will say tigresses are gorgeous. You also discuss imminent perimenopause.

Trying to understand the female body is like staring into an abyss. The result of mood swings, brain fogs, hot flushes, and irritability are not part of your personality, but what you go through biologically as your body starts to become a conundrum, and they affect who you become.

Trying to understand your own reproductive system can be confounding, making you anxious about what lies ahead. It is possible to miss the feeling of having periods when they do not come.

And if you are a woman without child, and have arrived at menopause, something has been lost forever, regardless of your take on motherhood. You will be seen by the world as a woman who is

“barren” and cold, and perhaps frigid. But girlfriends will continue to hold you, even as you flounder.

Female friends are like the world holding up a mirror at you. The person in the reflection is a woman thorough with her work. She pays attention to details, loves fiercely, tenderly. She takes care of others and goes through life laughing, sharing, and growing in work even when life is a chase. She keeps their own space, maintains boundaries and opens up when guards must be let down.

The 40-something woman watched her younger companions with a full heart. She laughed when one of them laughed as the dog nudged her awake in the morning. Later, as they sat at breakfast, she watched in admiration as one of them drew fine dark lines around her eyes with an eyeliner, between sipping her coffee.

She noticed her young friends revel at the sight of the light between the trees and sunlight on flowers. She noticed they were not at all scared to take chances, to open up their hearts to love, even if love must eventually be lost.

Many years ago, one of the three young women had said to her that she wanted to grow up to be like her -- to work, to travel and write. And quietly, she had hoped the young girl would never have to be like her, for her own path had been dotted with steeples.

But over the years she had learned all paths are lined with steeples, and we all fly over them when we get there. And as she observed her young friends, hope brimmed inside her. She started hoping that she would become a little bit like each one of them -- unapologetic, thus free. 🇳🇵

Suburban Tales is a monthly column in Nepali Times based on real people (with some names changed) in Pratibha's life.

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THE EVOLUTION OF EMPIRE

Empires are like living organisms, they grow, mature, and die

■ John Andrews

The five permanent members of the Security Council (the United States, China, Russia, France, and the United Kingdom) reign supreme, each wielding a veto over whatever the other 192 members might want. That is why Israel, owing to US support, can blithely ignore countless UN resolutions, and why Syria, owing to Russian and Chinese support, handily escaped sanctions for its use of chemical weapons.

Owing to the disproportionate power they wield, the Permanent Five share an old, decidedly British sense of empire. The authors of two recent books on empire, Lawrence

James and Nandini Das, offer no thoughts on how the UN might, or indeed should, be reformed, would agree.

In *The Lion and the Dragon*, James, a prolific historian of the UK's role in world affairs, follows Britain's relations with China from the nineteenth-century Opium War until the return of Hong Kong and today's tensions over Taiwan. And in *Courting India*, Das, a professor at the University of Oxford, concentrates on the very beginnings of the British Empire and its covetous reach into what was then the Mughal Empire in India.

What this history shows is

that empire is still very much with us. Though Americans, proud of throwing off the rule of King George III, tend to bristle at the idea, their own military, technological, and commercial power is as imperial and pervasive as Britain's territorial dominance ever was. As James notes, we can thank the post-World War II Pax Americana for the mostly stable international relations that prevailed during the aptly named Cold War with the Soviets and their own empire.

A perennial question, especially during periods of geopolitical upheaval, is not just how empires emerge, but how they fade. Though Britain and France still indulge their memories of empire, they have long since accepted being 'middle powers' at best. Ever since the Suez crisis of 1956, when the threat of US sanctions forced Britain, France, and Israel to withdraw from Egypt's Suez Canal, Britain has supinely followed America's lead in international relations. (UK Prime Minister Harold Wilson's refusal to send troops to Vietnam in the 1960s is the exception that proves the rule.) At the same time, France has sought comfort in the collective embrace of what became the European Union.

Vladimir Putin's Russia is on a hopeless quest to reverse the collapse of the Soviet Union and recreate the empire of Peter the Great. And China already sees itself, with some justification, as wielding global influence to rival that of the American empire.

China's pursuit of superpower status is born of not just current economic and political realities, but also its deep-seated resentment over the 'century of humiliation' (1839-1949) that it suffered at the hands of European (and Japanese) imperial powers. Of course, similar sentiments also animate Putin's revanchism, as well as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dismissiveness of diplomatic overtures from post-Brexit Britain. In William Faulkner's oft-quoted words, 'The past is never dead. It isn't even past.'

Passage To India

The trite answer to the question of why empires fall is that they become victims of their own success, growing too large, too corrupt, too exhausted to fend off energetic newcomers. As the Arab philosopher and historian Ibn Khaldun argued in the 14th century, empires are like living organisms: they grow, mature, and die.

As Das's wonderfully researched book shows, the Mughal Empire was almost mature when the British arrived in the 1600s. Its Muslim rulers, with their roots in Central Asia, are fascinating figures. Emperor Jahangir, a generous patron of the arts, was addicted to opium and wine, whereas his wife, Nur Jahan, wielded significant political influence. The emperor's son, Shah Jahan, was a 'king of the world', whose love for his wife, Mumtaz Mahal, is permanently commemorated in the Taj Mahal. Mughal India was both a place of immense wealth and a bastion of

religious tolerance (unlike Europe, with its centuries-long Inquisition against Muslims, Jews, and heretics).

By contrast, the British Empire was barely in its infancy when its clash with Mughal India began. In *Courting India*, Das paints a vivid picture of the experiences – mostly endured, rather than enjoyed – of King James's ambassador, Thomas Roe, at the Mughal court. But more than that, she also offers a rich description of Jacobean England as it was emerging from the first Elizabethan age and jostling for power with Portugal, Spain, France, and Holland.

Roe's own journals are a major primary source, but so, too, are the cultural interpreters of the period, from William Shakespeare to the poet John Donne (a friend of Roe). There's was an England full of energy, seeking its fortune in the Americas and the Indies. However, it was nowhere close to as sophisticated as courtiers like Roe seemed to believe.

Indeed, Roe was almost a caricature of the Englishman abroad. He refused to learn any language that might have helped his mission (be it Farsi or Turkish), and he insisted that he and his staff wear English wool and silk, even through the Indian summer. While he eventually came to admire the pragmatic tolerance of Mughal society, he remained convinced of England and Protestant Christianity's superiority. Never would he have allowed himself to 'go native'.

Roe was answerable not only to



PHOTOS: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



WAR OF THE WORLDS: (left) East India Company iron steam warship Nemesis with other boats destroying the Chinese war chuan 船 at Anson's Bay on 7 January 1841. The painting by Edward Duncan in 1843 pictorialised the battle.

A painting by Benjamin West (above) of the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II conveying the Treaty of Allahabad to Robert Clive in August 1765 after the Battle of Buxar that gave the Company the right to collect taxes -- marking the beginning of British India rule.

King James but also to his financial backer, the East India Company, which had been granted its charter by Elizabeth I in 1600. This meant he was constantly tussling with the miserly company for money (its traders were always jealous), as well as struggling to quell, or at least make excuses for, the riotous behavior of English sailors.

Century of Humiliation

Two centuries later, the East India Company, as it appears in James's book, would still be clinging to the same assumptions that Roe had held. The superiority and integrity of Christian Britain went unquestioned, and still stood in stark contrast to "Asian greed and despotism." The biggest change, in the meantime, had been the collapse of the Mughal Empire.

Mughal India, the wealthiest place in the world at the end of the 17th century, was steadily enfeebled by internal dissent and Persian and Afghan invasions. In 1857, the East India Company formally dissolved the empire, setting the stage for Queen Victoria to establish the "British Raj" and direct rule over the Indian subcontinent the following year.

To paraphrase Ibn Khaldun, 19th Britain was no longer an infant with imperial ambitions; it was now an adult with all the energy and ruthlessness needed to extend its reach around the world. As such, the British lion had no misgivings about disgracing the Chinese dragon. Looking back on this period, it is easy to see why Chinese President Xi Jinping is so

determined to expunge the century of humiliation from the national memory.

That century began in 1839 with the First Opium War. When China tried to block imports of East India Company opium from Bengal, Britain responded with all its (industrialised) military might. By 1842, British warships and soldiers had crushed all opposition and compelled China's Qing emperor to sign the Nanjing Treaty.

That opened China to international trade and ensured that British citizens in 'treaty ports' would be subject to British, not Chinese, law. Another consequence of the war was that Britain took possession of Hong Kong, which it would hold until 1997.

Whereas Das describes India principally through Roe's eyes, James is keen to present a balance between British actions and Chinese reactions. In doing so, he stresses that China was not reacting only to British imperialism. After all, this was a time when 'a spirit of predatory imperialism ... pervaded the foreign ministries of Russia, France, Germany and China's near-neighbour, the newly industrialized Japan'. Seized by their own commercial ambitions, all four 'regarded China as a land mass to be partitioned and shared out in the same way as contemporary Africa'.

But these other imperial projects hardly give Britain a pass. In arguing that 'Britain was reluctantly sucked into the complex geopolitics of great-power empire building in the Far East', James simply is not convincing. Britain, the world's

leading naval power and the home of the Industrial Revolution, was already adept at the game of geopolitics and quite prepared to protect its interests in China, not least because that would also protect its interests in India.

By the 18th century, the Qing Dynasty had expanded from its Manchu roots and established an empire extending from Mongolia and Tibet to the Pacific. But by the 19th century, it was too exhausted to withstand the pressure not only from the other imperial powers but also from its own people.

The century of humiliation always refers to foreign interventions, but equally important were domestic embarrassments such as the 1850-64 Taiping Rebellion – in which some 30 million people died – and the 1899-1901 Boxer Rebellion.

The dynasty's 'Mandate of Heaven' was clearly slipping from its grasp. It finally came to an end in 1912, when the Western-educated Sun Yat-sen, following a brief revolution, established the 'Republic of China'.

Remember Thucydides

Today, that title applies only to the island of Taiwan, whereas Xi presides over the 'People's Republic of China', which was established in 1949 with the victory of Mao Zedong's Communist Party over Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces. Since the 1970s, most countries – including both rival Chinas – have embraced the fiction that the ROC and the PRC refer to a single country.

But there is a constant fear that Taiwan could formally declare its independence and destroy the fiction, thus provoking an invasion from the mainland. If President Joe Biden is to be believed, the US would then come to Taiwan's rescue and the South China Sea would witness a Sino-American war with far-reaching regional and global consequences.

Given his focus on Britain and China, James understandably devotes only a handful of his final paragraphs to US analysts' 'bleak' prognosis of a future war over Taiwan. Moreover, throughout the preceding chapters, he deals deftly with other instances when conflict erupted between rival regional

powers. These include the Sino-Japanese war of 1894, which led to Japanese occupation of Taiwan, the Russo-Japanese war of 1904, Japan's bloody expansionism in the 1930s, and Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, which brought America into World War II.

The big risk today is that China and America could end up at war as much by accident as by design. Graham Allison of Harvard University has famously warned of the 'Thucydides trap', an allusion to the Peloponnesian War, in which Sparta, the incumbent hegemon, was 'destined for war' with the rising power, Athens.

It is tempting to dismiss Allison's argument as alarmism. But over the past 500 years, there have been 16 instances of an incumbent power facing off with a rising power, and war was avoided in only four of them, the most famous being America's rise to replace Britain as the leading world power in the early twentieth century.

Notably, James recalls that China was 'stunned' by Britain's 2016 vote to leave the European Union. The message pushed by Chinese state-controlled media was that the UK had surrendered to 'a losing mindset'. Clearly, the current Chinese leadership has no intention of showing weakness.

The good news is that political and military leaders on both sides of the Pacific are aware of the risks. As Xi said in 2015, on his first state visit to America, "There is no such thing as the so-called Thucydides Trap in the world. But should major countries time and again make the mistakes of strategic miscalculation, they might create such traps for themselves." The bad news, however, is that all countries are prone to 'miscalculation'.

Tick-Tock

Almost a half-century ago, John Bagot Glubb, a British general who commanded the Jordanian army from 1939 until 1956, published a book entitled *The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival*. His thesis was essentially the same as Ibn Khaldun's, only with the added claim that almost all empires rise

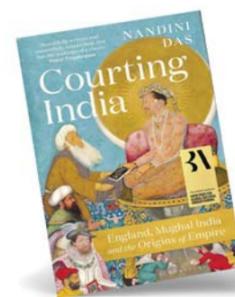
and fall over a period of roughly 250 years.

Putting aside the obvious flaws in Glubb's arithmetic (the Ottoman Empire certainly did not 'end' in 1570), the core idea should not be dismissed. After all, historians now give the Qing Dynasty a lifespan of 267 years, and the Mughal Empire of Das's book began to lose territory after only two centuries.

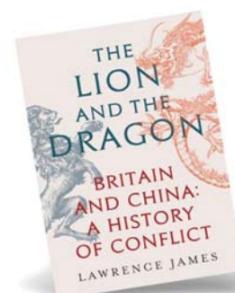
A pessimist might say today's China began with Communist victory in 1949, and that America's quasi-imperial power began 201 years ago with the Monroe Doctrine. Time may not be on the side of those who place their trust in America to protect democracy and 'liberal Western values'.

John Andrews, a former editor and foreign correspondent for The Economist, is the author of The World in Conflict: Understanding the World's Troublespots.

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Courting India: England, Mughal India and the Origins of Empire by Nandini Das
Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023
Paperback £11.60 Hardcover: £30

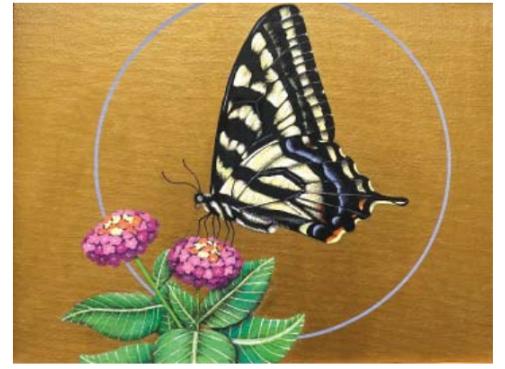


The Lion and the Dragon: Britain and China: A History of Conflict by Lawrence James
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2023
Hardcover £22



Artistic prayer for our common future

California artist's exhibition in Kathmandu reminds us that nature is our shared home



PINKI SRIS RANA

Allegiance Lie' exhibition at Takpa Gallery, Grace brings California's Napa Valley to Kathmandu through depictions of living organisms in vivid detail. The artworks are precise, albeit repetitive, and create a "sense of buzz" like she experienced as a dyslexic child.

Growing up in the Grace Family Vineyards founded by her grandfather Dick Grace, she learnt early on about sustainable agriculture and "compassionate animal husbandry" from her parents. This upbringing later turned into passion as she pursued environmental science in college.

Even then, something was missing, and Grace decided to take on studio art. "Science helps me understand where I fit in the world and art and to explore and showcase the interaction I have with nature," the 25-year-old says.

colours. Upon closer look, viewers find a grasshopper in the right corner. The insect is a misfit, yet seems to belong there. Grace tells us she sees herself as the grasshopper.

Kafka's Gregor metamorphosing into a bug symbolises his alienation from society resulting from the exploitation he faced all his life. Grace's paintings, on the other hand, explore human exploitation of the natural world to a point where both are in irreversible decline.

In her 'Where My Home and

Interestingly, in a painting titled 'A Place Called Home', Grace puts together a diagram of an ecosystem which has an uncanny resemblance to a Buddhist mandala.

"Buddhist paintings were part of my childhood. It felt natural to do that," says Grace, recalling how her grandparents visited Nepal to support disabled children, abuse survivors, and children with cancer.

"For me, the circular expression of the mandala represents the cyclic nature of the ecosystem," she adds.

In 2016, Grace came to Nepal herself, volunteering in a monastery, teaching English, mathematics and art to young monks. Eight years later, Nepal is also where she chose to exhibit her art for the first time.

Most of the paintings are acrylic, but Grace experiments with techniques for texture and feel. In 'Fantom Flowers', she used her fingers to paint the background,

while for 'Rainbow Trout and the Rainbow' and 'Salmonberry Thorn', she used beads.

"I have always liked mixing and matching colours, and trying out different tools which give me different sensory inputs. It is exciting and calming at the same time," says Grace of her methods.

All 15 artworks at the exhibit are bright, colourful and vibrant even as the artist portrays a grim future brought on by anthropocentric 'development'.

Grace says it is a strategic move: "This is a prayer for the future. I want to remind people of the beautiful things coexisting with us in nature and to do our part to preserve them." 🇳🇵

Where My Home and Allegiance Lies
11AM-7PM (Fridays to Sundays)
11AM-6PM (Tuesdays to Thursdays)
Till 25 August
Takpa Gallery

■ Pinki Sris Rana

Gregor Samsa wakes up from his bed one day and realises he has changed into an insect. This is the opening act of Franz Kafka's novella 'The Metamorphosis'. Gregor now has to navigate life as an insect and sees a change in how the world including his family views him, and also how he regards the world and himself.

One of the opening paintings of Hannah Grace's solo exhibition has amoeba-like patterns in vibrant

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