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It's Cricket !

■ Vishad Raj Onta

For the past month, Kathmandu's notorious traffic has been lighter. Colleges have reported absenteeism. Cheers have resounded in inner city neighbourhoods.

'Tis the season to be jolly. And the season to watch cricket. Nepal Premier League's 32 games were all played at the Tribhuvan University between November 30 and till 21 December, Saturday.

The tournament has given a boost to the game, a nationwide fever matched by the rise in popularity of cricket with satellite dishes in the 1990s.

Children are hooked, including those batting on improvised wickets outside the stadium in Kirtipur last week (pictured, right).

Nepalis across the country and abroad watched broadcasts on TV, while some fans of teams with names like Chitwan Rhinos, Karnali Yaks and Lumbini Lions came to Kathmandu to see them play.

"This is only the second match I've been to, but I watch a livestream on YouTube. It is high quality," says a Janakpur fan from Mahottari, studying in Kathmandu. "Mostly it is people from our region living in the Valley who are here."

Despite steep ticket prices, fans splurged to witness a historic moment in Nepali sports. Others did not just come to watch the game. One spectator told this reporter: "We're here to have fun, watch cricket, look at girls, although all the cute ones are in VIP."

Cricket came of age in Nepal this past week. The quality of the game and the live broadcasts have set the NPL apart from any other sporting event in history. Even cricket legend Brian Lara, the West Indian with the only test quadruple century, is here.

In future NPLs, decisions have to be made about venues. The Kirtipur ground needs an upgrade, better crowd control and attention to safety. And although playing all matches in one site made logistics simpler, in the future they will have to be spread out across the country, closer to the locations of the franchises and fans.

After all, one of the main goals of the NPL is to discover Nepali cricket talent, and give them a platform to show their skills.

"The national team of Nepal is at a decent level, but it lacks strength in its bench," Unmukt Chand, former U-19 World Cup winning captain of India, who played for the Lumbini Lions in the NPL, told



KIRAN KRISHNA SHRESTHA

Nepali Times. "A good bench raises the level of the whole team."

The Karnali Yaks beat the Chitwan Rhinos by 21 runs in the first of the two playoff games on Wednesday. Three of the Yaks' foreign players delivered with the bat. Indian Jaykishan Kolsawala and Australian William Bosisto had

similar knocks of 53 and 52 each off 39 balls. West Indian Chadwick Walton had a rapid 46 off 23, helping the Yaks post 175, which the Rhinos failed to chase.

The Rhinos are out, but the Yaks must fight further for their place in the finals against Janakpur Bolts, who lost the qualifier against

Sudurpaschim Royals.

That game ended in a strolling victory for the Royals, who held the Bolts to only 139. They started strong in the powerplay overs, anchoring their chase around Binod Bhandari's patient 58, never letting the required run rate get away.

The Royals are favourites in the finals, with six wins out of seven in the group stages and dominance in the qualifier. They will also be better rested than the Bolts or the Yaks, who were facing off as Nepali Times went to press on Thursday.

The Royals have a psychological edge, too. If Janakpur gets through, it has already beaten them recently. If Karnali does, the Yaks will have had to win three matches in a row.

The stadium has been packed and raucous in the best sense. With on-site tickets sold out, many look disheartened outside the box office.

Others found ways to get in anyway, brandishing dubious ID cards. Some burst through the cordons, chased half-heartedly by riot police who were soon watching the game themselves. Do not climb signs are posted on tree trunks. The police patrol the perimeter with megaphones, warning people to get down from their perches.

In the standing section, supporters of both teams mix, but everyone has been getting along just fine. Unlike continuous action at football games, cricket is stop-start with frequent pauses, allowing time for crowd engagement.

English, Nepali and songs local to the teams blast through the stadium. There are cheerleaders, dance circles, KFC, and Red Bull. Sometimes a broadcast drone flies overhead, and people try to knock it out of the sky.

Nepal's cricket carnival is almost over, and Nepalis can't wait for the next one. 🇳🇵



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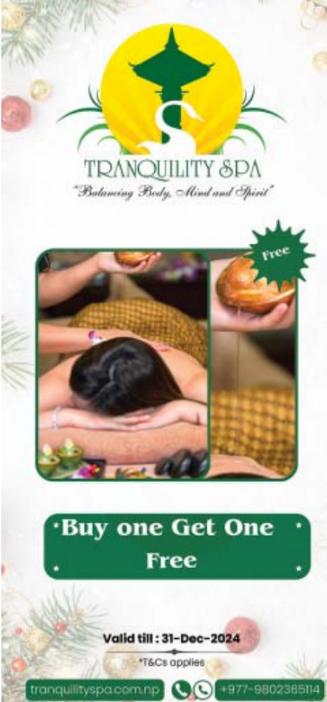
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Why Nepal is stuck

If you were raised in Nepal, you must have picked up its unique set of vocabulary: आन्दोलन, चक्का जाम, बन्द, रोकै जुलुस, आफ्नो मान्छे, हाम्रो दल, कर्फु and many more words connoting political protest.

We became familiar with the acrid smell of burning tyres, and eyes smarting from tear



GUEST EDITORIAL
Sumana Shrestha

gas. And yet, everyone speaks of another revolution in the making. Not by desire, but by suffocation.

We heard speeches about नयाँ नेपाल, but the New Nepal never arrived. The governance system changed, but it did not reflect on people's lives — except for those close to centres of power. The state is still unreachable, not bothered about victims of loan sharks, cooperative scams and other injustices.

Politicians continue to speak in sound bites, but fail to deliver. They have mastered the game of pointing fingers towards an external enemy and convincing people that they are never at fault. The political narrative is disconnected from the actual analysis of the problem.

No genuine effort has been made to deliver at all, which is why there is a palpable sense of disillusionment in the air forcing some to seek another revolution, even if Nepal may not be able to afford it.

How has the current system successfully held power, even if the public is so deeply frustrated? How is it that for three decades we continue to be led by the same faces?

My experience at the epicentre of politics made me identify three cultures enabling political parties to keep a tight hold on power: acceptance, silence and dependency.

We accept things the way they are. We use fatalistic phrases like “नेपालमा यस्तै हो” or “नेपालका कानून दैब जानुन”. While resilience enables us to rise back up from devastating calamities, it is also a reason for our compliance with the status quo.

Despite ‘revolutions’ that have led to significant reforms, these phrases keep getting reinforced, to the point that the upcoming generations have made it their lingo.

This acceptance is not a sign of law-abiding citizens, but people living in fear of those in power, unable to ask the whys and why-nots.

Innovation suffocates in this culture of acceptance of the status quo. This is manifested in remarks like “but we don't have any laws for this”, or “we don't have the capacity to implement this”. An innovator or entrepreneur therefore has to spend that energy to become a political lobbyist.

Remember when locally assembled Yatri motorbikes, despite having willing customers, had to suffer to secure license numbers because of a lack of regulations? Instead of creating new laws, the government kept chanting the “We will promote Nepal-made goods” mantra, leaving entrepreneurs in a labyrinth of bureaucracy.

The weight of acceptance of the law lies heavily on innovators. Fatalism is a tactic used by those in power to generate mass fear in society. When we accept, we become silent. We are trained to keep quiet, lest we ruffle feathers, burn bridges, or not get the help we need in future. We know, yet we don't speak.

Here is one example: the 2021 census shows that the number of baby boys born for every 100 baby girls is 112. This is a clear indication of female foeticide because of boy preference in society.

Despite such horrifying realities, there is finger-pointing within the government between the Ministry of Health and

Population and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

When we accept and keep quiet, we become dependent on those who yield power. From getting our government procedure completed on time to getting transfers, to accessing any of our legally protected rights as well, we are forced

to depend on our networks of चिनेका मान्छे people we know by blood, village, relations, political affiliation.

The culture of dependency has been the established way in Nepal. It becomes a competition of who knows who.

Recently there were calls from the Ministry of Health and Population and another from the Prime Minister's Office for just one medical position in a private hospital. Each was pushing its own candidate. Guess which candidate got the job.

The dependency of people is not on the laws or the state, it is with people in power, a reliance on the network of somebody who knows somebody, including those not officially in power.

These cultures are deeply ingrained in our heads, and in society. Collectively they help those in power to retain power. This is not the society we want to live in.

Then, what do we do as a collective to break away from the culture of acceptance and silence that have created this dependency? What can we do to ensure that our children do not have to learn the jargon of आन्दोलन before they learn about the state?

These are cultures political parties need to shed rather than use to perpetuate power. And that is what alternative politics needs to be about.

Sumana Shrestha is a member of Parliament's Education, Health and Information Technology parliamentary committee and represents the Rastriya Swatantra Party.



Alternative politics should fight against the culture of acceptance, silence and dependency.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Rebelling against rebels

Fed up with Maoist brutality and violence, women in Dailekh district in western Nepal led a revolt against the rebels back in 2004. They chased out many Maoists while others were caught and handed over to the army. But only a month later, the rebels started retaliating, and villagers were in fear for their lives.

Excerpts of the story published 20 years ago this week on issue #226 17-23 December 2004:

Returning to Dullu in Dailekh after last month's women-led revolt, it is clear anti-Maoist feelings are still running high.

The spontaneous outrage has spread even to outlying VDCs and the rebels have either been chased out or caught and handed over to the army. The Maoist western command in-charge, Diwakar, has been in damage-control mode after issuing a self-critical statement. But his district-level leaders have taken the uprising as an affront to their prestige and retaliated against unarmed civilians wherever they could.

In the latest incident on Sunday, a group of armed



Maoists surrounded the village of Khadkawada, beat up locals and abducted four of the women leaders who had been leading the anti-Maoist movement. Earlier, on 7 December, when villagers had gathered at nearby Chiudi to discuss the recovery of property that the rebels had looted, a local

Maoist cadre threw a socket bomb at the group. Khadga Bahadur Khadka, a farmer, died and 16 others including a woman and a child, were injured. In two previous incidents, Maoists have killed five Dailekh resistors. In Chhiudi itself, Maoists hurled a socket bomb at a group of women who had led the anti-Maoist movement two weeks ago. Luckily, the bomb didn't explode.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



Considered national dress for men until 2021, daura suruwal is back in fashion. Most senior politicians and bureaucrats wear it with a grey Western-style jacket and black topi to work. It is worn at social gatherings. Watch tailoring video on our YouTube channel.



Watch video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel of the production of High Mountain tea, and see a tea tasting ceremony that illustrates how orthodox tea is different from ordinary tea — and why Nepali tea is gaining international acclaim. Subscribe for multimedia content.

DEBT

People knew in the 70s that the bilateral grant aid was shrinking, and that we had had to rely on multilateral and bilateral loans ('Near-debt experience', Ramesh Kumar, #1239). By the 80s, officials at the Finance Ministry knew that we will have to set aside a large part of the budget to repay loans and interest in the future. That future has now come. This is a failure of economic planning.

Madhukar Upadhya

SOCIOPOLITICS

This is spot on ('Why Nepal is stuck', Sumana Shrestha, nepalitimes.com, and also at left). And as someone having followed politics and development, or lack thereof, since I first came to live in the country in 1976, the fact that the 'Nepali' way of doing things, the fatalistic behaviour, and mistrust in leadership continues is saddening.

Ben-Erik Ness

DIASPORA DIARIES

These are very interesting stories, rarely if ever seen in the media in Nepal ('Migrating with the music of Nepal', Kumar BK and Deepak Darji, #1239).

Bharat Koirala

OLD ROPEWAYS

I, along with many others, have been wondering about the leftover ropeways, taking photos, and trying to follow the history of ropeways in Nepal ('Rust in peace', Daniel W Edwards, nepalitimes.com). It is a pity I cannot add photos of the ropeway station in Hetauda's Bhimphe, and the caretaker there who is still in charge.

Tom Van Groeningen

CHINA-INDIA

It has been at least a minority view for some time that Nepal need not have serious strategic fears about optimising input from both China and India ('CHINDIA', Shashi Tharoor, nepalitimes.com). We can be at the same table or at separate tables with both our neighbours.

Tony Jones

RABI LAMICHHANE

So did he get a frequent flyer membership card yet from Buddha Air or Yeti? It would definitely help him in coming years ('Frequent flier', 1000 Words, #1239).

Joes Ktm

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Why Nepal is stuck

by Sumana Shrestha
Politicians continue to speak in sound bites, but fail to deliver. They have mastered the game of pointing fingers towards an external enemy and convincing people that they are never at fault. Alternative politics should fight against the culture of acceptance, silence and dependency. Read Guest Editorial, left.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Nepal makes farming viable again

by Pinki Sris Rana
As a perishable product, the dairy business is challenging because it needs investment and technical support to diversify into value-added milk products. But international support lifts farmers in Chitwan from subsistence, providing cash income. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full story.

X Most popular on X



Near-debt experience

by Ramesh Kumar
Nepal's national debt servicing now exceeds its capital expenditure for development. The government must carry out major structural reforms in laws, the tax system, and clean up the administration to ensure financial stability and push growth. Join the discussion online.

ff Most commented

Migrating with the music of Nepal

by Kumar BK and Deepak Darji
Kumar BK, a self-taught flautist, and Deepak Darji, a shehnai player who is part a पञ्चे बान्ना troupe, are both headed to Qatar for work. Both will take their instruments overseas with them to practice in their free time, or play when they are bored. This and more of the Diaspora Diaries on our website.

🔗 Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepal's national debt servicing now exceeds its capital expenditure for development. This year's budget allocated Rs352 billion for capital expenditure and Rs367 billion for loan repayment. Loan repayment will increase, meaning less money for development.

Hem Sagar Baral @WorshipNature
Looks like a very bad state of the economy...there was already too much of admin and very little budget for development and maintenance! Hope some experts close to the powerful people mend it soon!

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The Adani Green Energy project got clearance from Sri Lanka's previous government to produce wind power in two facilities, and invest more than US\$442 million over 20 years. The new government is now reconsidering the approval, writes Sasanka Perera.

Normie @JohanKok1
Good for Sri Lanka. Wind power is a pipe dream.

1,000 WORDS



KULDEEP NEUPANE / RSS

EX-MONARCH OF EX-KINGDOM:

Former King Gyanendra Shah, 77, performing a puja at Pandeshwor temple in Dang's Ghorahi this week.

The pro-monarchist RPP lost ground in this month's local by-elections, but royalists hope that disenchantment with Nepal's current rulers will translate into support in 2027 federal polls.

Times

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Editor: Sonia Awale | Special Correspondent: Shristi Karki
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Publisher: Kunda Dixit, Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
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Upper Arun question mark

Indian displeasure makes World Bank and ADB to go quiet on what could be Nepal's largest hydro project

Thirty years after it abruptly pulled out of the Arun III project, the World Bank appears to have developed cold feet about an even larger project on the river in eastern Nepal.

After opposition by civil society in Nepal, Japan and Europe, the Bank's new president James Wolfensohn exited from Arun III. The project's generation capacity has been doubled to 900MW and it is being developed by India's state-owned SJVN Limited.

Whereas in 1995, the opposition to Arun III was mainly from activists, this time it is said to be India's displeasure with the Bank's involvement in the 1,061MW Upper Arun that is the reason. Delhi is so sensitive to the issue that sources said it even leaned on Indian-born American President of the World Bank, Ajaya Banga, to cancel his trip to Kathmandu for the IDA21 Replenishment Meeting in June.

When it gets the green light, Upper Arun will be the most expensive hydroelectric project in Nepal so far with a price tag of \$1.6 billion. The semi-storage scheme is located on the transboundary Arun River 15km from the Chinese border after it cuts through the Himalaya between Mt Everest and Kangchenjunga.

Beijing reportedly has no objections to the project, but India's silence is said to stem from its strategic interest in not allowing anyone else to build large storage projects on the tributaries of the Ganga in Nepal. India's SJVN is also currently constructing three large projects downstream, including Arun III and Lower Arun with a total generation capacity of nearly 2,000MW.

Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) set up Upper Arun Hydro-



UAHEL

electric Limited (UAHEL) as a subsidiary and in May signed up the French firm Tractebel for detailed design of the scheme. Experts say the design will have to take into account future climate-induced glacial lake outbursts like the one that swept away the 1,600MW Chungthang Teesta III in Sikkim last year that was built for \$1.7 billion.

Upper Arun's financing will be 70% loans and 30% equity. The World Bank had already earmarked \$750 million with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan's JICA also joining. But UAHEL Managing Director Fanendra Raj Joshi said there was no word either way from the World Bank, which meant there was no financial closure yet.

All this is in stark contrast to the optimism last year after Finance Minister Prakash Mahat returned from an IMF meeting in Morocco

and announced that the World Bank would be the main lender in Upper Arun.

In November 2024, Mahat even took a helicopter with World Bank Managing Director Anna Bjørde and ADB Director Ramesh Subramaniam to the Upper Arun site and it looked like the loans were in the bag. It would also be the first large project in Nepal in which both big multilateral lenders would be involved.

In April this year, an 'agreement in principle' was even reached between Mahat's successor Barsaman Pun and World Bank Vice President for South Asia Martin Raiser to develop Upper Arun. But the loan meeting planned for June was cancelled.

A Finance Ministry official told Nepali Times: "The World Bank told us categorically in November in Washington DC that India was



opposed to its involvement in Upper Arun."

When Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal visited Delhi in June, Indian officials reportedly said they were interested in developing Upper Arun and evacuating its power through an extension of the 400kV transmission line it is building. Although Beijing had given the go ahead to the World Bank and ADB involvement in

Upper Arun, it may not be as happy about an Indian company so close to its border.

As a semi-reservoir project, Upper Arun can generate electricity at full capacity for up to six hours a day even in winter, unlike the schemes downstream which are run-of-the-river in which generation depends on water flow.

India is involved in projects in Nepal's rivers that will generate a total of 8,000MW when complete. SJVN Limited is also taking over from the Chinese the 769MW Tamor project in the Arun Basin.

Says Fanendra Raj Joshi of Upper Arun Hydro-electric Limited: "Nepal can find alternative sources of funding and we will go ahead with this project even if the World Bank decides not to provide the loan."

Joshi and the NEA's Kulman Ghising attended a hearing with indigenous communities at the project site in Sankhuwasabha this week. Ghising told the gathering that if the World Bank pulled out, Nepal would carry on with Upper Arun through "domestic and diaspora investment with the same financial package as Upper Tama Kosi". The 546MW Upper Tama Kosi was knocked by a massive landslide in September and will not be fully operational for at least a year.

"This is a project that can transform the local economy and Nepal's economy as well," Ghising added. "We will go ahead with blended financing from all levels of government."

Despite the lack of financial closure, construction of the project proper is expected to get underway in 2026 for completion in six years. A 21km access road connecting the power house to the dam site along the Kosi Corridor highway is in full swing through difficult terrain. 🇳🇵

NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक



Turkish IELTS

Turkish Airlines and British Council Nepal announced the winners of the second IELTS Upahaar Campaign. Takers of the IELTS English language test from September onwards had been entered into a lucky draw. Two lucky test-takers, Kaniska Poudel and Pranay Shakya, won one-way tickets to the UK and the USA respectively.

"We hope to contribute to the dreams of many Nepalese students and professionals aiming to reach international destinations," said Serkan Basar, General Manager of Turkish Airlines Nepal. Rustom Mody, Country Director at British Council Nepal, also congratulated the lucky students and said: "Best wishes as you embark on your journey towards quality education."

Nepali Americans

There are now more than 200,000 Nepalis studying, working and living in America, and over 60% of them went to the US after 2010, according to a survey by the Institute of Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) titled Nepali Migrant Dreams in the American Landscape.

The survey does not have a figure for undocumented Nepalis, and it is not clear if the total number includes them. There is uncertainty about their future after threats by president-elect Donald Trump of mass deportations of 11 million 'aliens' after his inauguration next month. The IIDS Survey also showed that the Nepali diaspora in America sent home \$1.28 billion annually, which is 11.6% of Nepal's total official income from the diaspora. The average amount they send home every year is \$8,663, and this is up to twice as much as what Nepali workers in the Gulf or Malaysia remit annually.

Most Nepalis surveyed said they had gone to America for career advancement (42%) while 38% said it was for a better quality of life for their families.



Aloft ISO

Aloft Kathmandu Thamel has achieved the ISO 14001:2015 Certification for Environmental Management Excellence, after having implemented several practices aimed at improving sustainability, waste-management and energy efficiency.



BYD M6

Cimex has opened bookings for the BYD M6, a 7-seater electric minivan with a range of 440km and a full-charge in 37.4 minutes. It starts at Rs6.015 million, with a Rs150,000 discount available until 24 December.



Hero bikes

Hero MotoCorp is launching the Xtreme 160R 4V and the Xtreme 125R motorcycles in Nepal. Assembled in Nawalparasi, the models are aimed at both urban commuters and adventure bikers. The 160R starts at Rs384,900 and the 125R at Rs289,900.

Dwarika's Best

Dwarika's Hotel has won the Best International Luxury Boutique Hotel at the Travel + Leisure India's Best Awards 2024. "This award inspires us to continue crafting meaningful guest experiences rooted in Nepali tradition and excellence," says CEO Rene Vijay Shrestha Einhaus.

Padma Jyoti Group



The Jyoti Group has rebranded as the Padma Jyoti group, and revealed a new logo at a function on 15 December. The group has interests in manufacturing, automobiles and hydropower.

Ncell kits

Ncell Foundation is distributing four educational kits for every 4 hits at the ongoing NPL cricket tournament. As of 11 December, 375 boundaries have been scored which comes out to 1500 kits, each of which contains schoolbags, notebooks, and other stationery. Rohit Paudel of the Lumbini Lions has the most 4s so far, with 24.

Ncell Foundation is supporting the inDrive Information and Communication Technology (ICT) awards, to be held on 20 Dec, as well as sponsoring the Ncell Women Icon ICT Award with a Rs300,000 prize.



JMEV GSE EV

Shaurya Automobiles launched the JMEV GSE EV, an electric sedan manufactured by Jiangxi Jiangling. The GSE has a range of 420km, 171mm ground clearance, and 410 liter boot space. It starts at Rs5,399,000 at the company's Darbar Marg showroom.

Flavors of Peru

The Marriott held a Taste of Peru event in Kathmandu curated by Chef Julio Castillo and cocktails made from Pisco, a Peruvian brandy. The Ambassador of Peru and Nepal's Honorary Consul to Peru were present.

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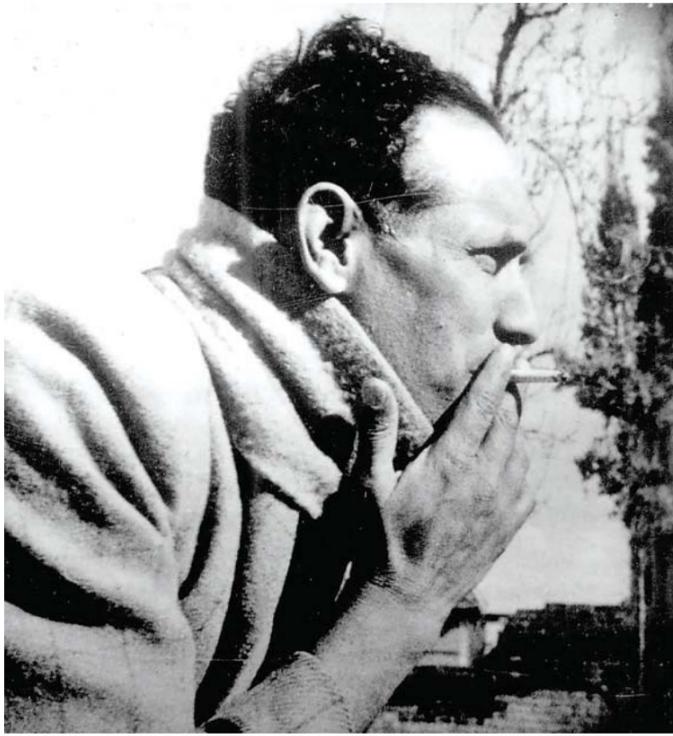


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KAMAL MANI DIXIT

Laxmi Prasad Devkota in English

■ Vishad Raj Onta

'Romans might not feel so proud of their Caesar.'

That is a sentence from Laxmi Prasad Devkota's essay describing King Mahendra's 1956 crowning ceremony in his book, *Coronation Day in Kathmandu and Other Essays*.

Devkota is honoured as Nepal's Great Poet (महाकवि) and mostly wrote essays, epics and poetry in Nepali language. His English was elaborate, effusive, and followed the grandiose style of the day.

'I felt that if this delicate golden thread snapped, a long trail of woes and confusions would ensue,' he wrote in fulsome praise of the monarchy. Devkota died of lung cancer three years after Mahendra's coronation.

The book has 27 other essays in English on various subjects and they range from tirades, odes, satires, to experiments of the imagination where Devkota invents a situation to make a point. His writings are characterised by an unrelenting barrage of metaphor.

'But it is his type that have on the strength of mustard leaves, maize pulp or nettle lifted our nation into military glory!' gushes Devkota about the miserable yet enduring lives of 'The Wood Cutters of Nepal'. Although he was appointed Minister of Education in 1957, Devkota himself was used to hard times -- he writes about ducking creditors and how 12 pay days in a year are all he lives for.

Devkota had a deep understanding of and love for Nepal, yet he is brutal in his criticism. 'The Electric Bulb' was written out of deep frustration about a feeble light bulb so dim he could not work at night.

These lines could be written about contemporary Nepal: 'Dependence is a national virtue, with a verbal swagger about age-long independence. As a nation we have no vision and no attempt at self-sufficiency. We have no contribution to an advancing globe.'

He makes similar acidic observations about Indians: 'The Benarasi is a true gentleman or political scoundrel whose god is pelf and creed. He intellectualises goondaism till it becomes a fine social art.'

Devkota understands the importance of tradition, pointing out how religious rituals bring with them discipline and exercise. Yet, in 'The Joint Family and the Mother-in-Law,' he describes how it is untenable for the whole clan to live under the same roof. Mother and wife fight for attention from the husband or son and play nasty tricks of jealousy on each other.

In 'A Dream in Politics' Devkota conjures up himself dreaming that his wife has become a powerful politician. He then details how a candidate might start out with the best intentions, but would eventually see how impossibly corrupt it all was and resort to greed and unkept promises.

Devkota's literary achievements would have been great no matter what language he had been born into. The essays provide intimate details of his life as a writer, father, husband, and political adviser. They also are historical accounts of Nepal and Kathmandu at the time, and what stands out is how much Hinduism and the caste system seem to be a part of everyday life.

In 'Pleasure in Humiliation' Devkota details his cash-poor student days when he had to borrow textbooks from friends because he could not afford his own. He tutored English six hours a day to get by. He struggles in science subjects, but seems to have an aptitude and memory for the English language.

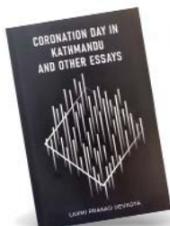
In one exam, after only two days of study, Devkota scores 75%, while his Rana classmates score much less. He tutors his classmates and is once summoned by a grandfather who complains about his higher scores in English. But he is vindicated when another tutor verifies his marks.

There are parts of essays that are so dense and verbose that they are hard to read. In 'Against Literature' Devkota tries to make the point that a lot of contemporary writing had become insincere and removed from original experience.

'If the beat of our heart must be rendered artificial or unnatural by the very intrusion of special attention upon its function, we may reasonably ask whether literature which is its expression as an over-conscious business may not be an abnormal expression in mechanical terms of the spiritual life of man, so often felt as the elusive quality of inner emotion harped upon with such frequency by the masters of the literary trade.'

See what I mean? All he is trying to say is that one should write how one feels, not how you think you should feel.

The book was reprinted recently by FinePrint, and we do not know if the typos and mistakes in grammar were in the original. Nevertheless: a good way to be introduced to Nepal's greatest poet via the English language. 🇳🇵



Coronation Day in Kathmandu and Other Essays
Laxmi Prasad Devkota
Reprinted by FinePrint, 2024
222 pages Rs 498

Nepal's crony-Communi

Investigative reporter's book exposes corruption and cronyism in high places in Nepal

■ Shristi Karki

'Do you want people to have access to telephony or do you want to fight corruption? If you want to fight corruption, these people will be completely cut off from information highway for the rest of their lives, okay, full stop. Make up your mind.'

British businessman and self-proclaimed 'thought leader' Mohamed Amersi sits across from The Guardian journalist Tom Burgis at his lawyer's offices in London as he makes this matter-of-fact statement.

Amersi was referring to the dealings of Nepali businessman and fixer Ajeya Sumargi, one of the many subjects of his 2024 book *Cuckooland: Where the Rich Own the Truth*. This is Burgis' third book, and he weaves a fast-paced tale with investigative reporting to chart the deal-making career of Amersi in the global telecommunication industry.

The investigation traces Amersi's backroom deals with associates of Russian president Vladimir Putin to Gulnara Karimova, the daughter of an Uzbek dictator. Inevitably, Burgis follows the trail to Nepal where a former Maoist commander turned prime minister wants to strike a deal with Lars Nyberg of the Swedish-Finnish firm TeliaSonera to break into the emerging market.

Burgis' account of Amersi's dealings in Nepal begins with the royal massacre in 2001 and

Gyanendra's ascension to power. The new king stages a coup in 2005 and reimposes absolute monarchy, and on this new stage enters Ajeya Sumargi.

Sumargi starts out a smalltime businessman in Hetauda but soon climbs into the circle of movers and shakers in Kathmandu. He is self-made and has made a vocation out of knowing the right people in right places.

And the right person to know in Nepal's new political landscape was Gyanendra's son-in-law, for whom Sumargi becomes a fixer, ensuring he becomes indispensable. Eventually this leads into his foray into telecoms just as mobile telephony was making inroads in Nepal.

But Nepalis are sick of the conflict that had claimed 17,000 lives and of an authoritarian king. A people's movement in April 2006 forced Gyanendra out, and the Maoists were subsequently elected to a Constituent Assembly.

By then Sumargi had switched sides and sidled up to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal (aka Prachanda, the Fierce One) Both are pictured, right. He is soon cleaning up illicit funds the Maoists allegedly purloined from stipends meant for former guerrillas in UN-supervised demobilisation camps.

Sumargi arranges luxury lodgings in Lazimpat for Dahal in a house purchased in the name of his sister-in-law. Sumargi's proximity



to power earns him a license for Hello Nepal.

Enter: TeliaSonera, which at the time also owns and operates Kcell in Kazakhstan and Ucell in Uzbekistan, and Ncell which it acquired in 2008 in Nepal. At a meeting with TeliaSonera boss Lars Nyberg, Prime Minister Dahal suggests purchasing Hello Nepal to make the pesky issue of license renewal go away.

Sumargi opens the doors.



In a posthumously published book, Chandra Gurung documents the conservation-with-development model he pioneered

■ Kunda Dixit

Chandra Prasad Gurung grew up in the village of Sikles below the Annapurnas where he was steeped at a young age in the rhythms of the seasons that determined planting, harvesting, herding livestock to high pasture, and sustainable natural resource management.

These were indigenous practices of the Gurung community passed down through generations: collective decision-making to take just enough from nature to allow it to recover. That was how the seed of a new conservation ethos was planted in Chandra Gurung's mind, later to flower when he went on to complete two masters degrees and a PhD in geography from the University of Hawaii.

On return to Nepal, the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation included him in a task force to design a national park for the Annapurnas with Mingma Sherpa and Broughton Coburn. The team crisscrossed the entire region in 1985 for two months on foot from Sikles to Ghorepani, from Manang to Lo Manthang just

Chandra's Anna



as trekker numbers on the circuit were increasing.

What the team heard from people in tea shops and verandahs was almost unanimous: we do not want a national park here. Locals had heard about Chitwan, Sagarmatha and Rara where residents were either evicted or restricted from taking part in traditional activities by national park authorities.

So, the team methodically

planned interventions to allow a balance between lifting living standards with environmental protection. What if conservation itself paid for development and improved the lives of residents?

Their findings were presented to the government, and approved. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) was a departure from the western-inspired model of complete wilderness protection by resettling people out of their

inism exposed



Telia Sonera opens its wallet. And Sumargi, says the book, coolly pockets \$74 million from TeliaSonera's acquisition of Hello Nepal. He greases the right palms, makes TeliaSonera's problems go away, and prepares to become an additional \$200 million richer.

TeliaSonera's operations in Uzbekistan unravelled after Swedish investigators found it had negotiated with the Uzbek president's daughter Karimova to obtain licenses and

frequencies in return for millions in bribes. Nyberg resigned, and the new management debated whether to pull out of Nepal too.

Amersi is unhappy, Sumargi is livid and threatens to sue. Burgis writes that in the end 'friendship prevails'-- Sumargi is compensated and TeliaSonera's new directors bury the findings of the investigation into their Nepal operation. After the scandal, TeliaSonera rebranded itself as Telia and divested from Ncell, selling its majority stake to Malaysian conglomerate Axiata for \$1.36 billion in 2016.

Was Sumargi able to channel the ill-gotten wealth of Maoist leaders through his dealings with Amersi and Co, and if so, how much? Burgis is not able to tell: 'Whether any of the riches Mohamed Amersi helped to guide towards Sumargi were shared with the Fierce One and the other Maoist leaders, I cannot definitively say.'

In any case, Sumargi offloaded the millions he made from the TeliaSonera deal to his offshore accounts, adding to his considerable wealth, as documented in a 2019 investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and Centre for Investigative Journalists Nepal (CIJ-N).

Amersi, meanwhile, went on to speak at a University of Oxford event about tackling corruption. The irony is not lost. He is now among the major donors to the British Conservative Party, and rubs shoulders with the likes of Boris Johnson and King Charles.

Much of the book is based on the author's conversation with Amersi in 2023 at his lawyer's offices, where he was invited by Amersi

himself in order to 'set the record straight' after an ex-Conservative Party MP questioned his iffy financial dealings.

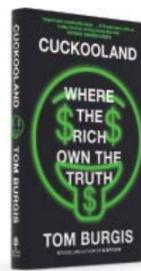
In words that would prove to be more relevant than ever, Burgis writes . 'Everywhere, the powerful are making a renewed claim to the greatest prize of all: to own the truth. The power to choose what you want reality to be and impose that reality on the world.'

The footnotes in Cuckooland contain Burgis' often derisive, wry commentary on Amersi's indignant, expletive-laden interjections during his interviews. The footnotes are as interesting as the book's revelations about Nepal's crony communism.

'Your agenda is biased against me, and so you are looking for skeletons,' Amersi insists to Burgis during one of his tirades. 'Write your book and you'll see what happens to it,' he says during another.

The underworld that Burgis has shined his light on is bleak. The lines between kleptocracy and democracy are blurred, corruption runs rampant, and accountability and truth are lost to the wheeling-dealings that enrich oligarchs.

Given the apathy and silence that has greeted the explosive revelations in Cuckooland, perhaps Nepalis would rather have access to telephony than fight corruption. 🇳🇵



Cuckooland: Where the Rich Own the Truth
Tom Burgis
William Collins, 2024
307 pages Rs959
Amazon: INR1,670

napurna



CHANDRA GURUNG FOUNDATION

of the 2,000 sq km Kangchenjunga Conservation Area to local communities in Ghunsa.

Chandra's manuscript had been lost, but was fortuitously located at the Blue Mountains National Park in the garage of an Australian academic by Hum Gurung, a student of Chandra. Hum then worked with the Chandra Gurung Conservation Foundation to posthumously publish the book, *Caring for the Annapurna*, which was launched last week in Kathmandu.

"It was Chandra Gurung's dream to document the history and evolution of ACAP, which was the first program that integrated conservation and human development," says Hum Gurung, who is now with BirdLife International. "It was a paradigm shift in how to protect nature while ensuring community development."

Indeed, the belief in the conservation academia at the time was that Nepal's poorest were responsible for deforestation and people had to be evicted from national parks which needed to be guarded by the army. This meant indigenous communities were resettled outside nature preserves, and their traditional conservation practices were gradually lost.

Chandra Gurung was the Nepal representative of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) when he died, and this book has to be read in conjunction with *A Boy from Sikles: The Life and Times of Chandra Gurung* by Manjushree Thapa that reveals more of Chandra's personal life, his efforts to appease Nepal's royalty, and the struggles he waged as an outsider against the Kathmandu bureaucracy.

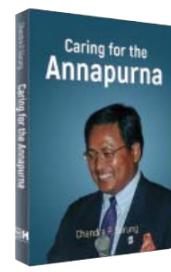
The book *Caring for the Annapurna* encapsulates Chandra Gurung's ethos that biodiversity is threatened because responsibility for its protection has been taken away from local communities who

know best how to live in harmony with nature, and national parks were fenced off to be managed by civil servants in Kathmandu.

'It became obvious to us that unless the local people's basic needs are addressed, the conservation program, no matter how carefully designed, would not succeed,' Chandra writes. Such thinking may sound like development cliché today, but was a revolutionary new way to look at conservation in the 1980s.

Forty years later, Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) and other reserves are being threatened by a centralised structure despite Nepal's 2015 Constitution having theoretically devolved decision-making to local governments. The Ministry of Forests seems to think trees are a resource to be monetised rather than protected.

One of Chandra Gurung's close conservation comrade was Hemanta Mishra, a tiger conservationist who was instrumental in getting Chitwan declared a national park in 1967. Mishra writes in the Foreword to the book, 'Chandra was a key member of the band of brothers in our battle to save the natural and cultural heritage of our motherland. His mantra was: hard-working, networking and team working ... and that was the secret of his successful model of balancing human needs with nature conservation.' 🇳🇵



Caring for the Annapurna
Chandra P Gurung
Books Himalaya, 2024
Rs 700 190 pages
ISBN: 9789937175517

ancestral lands. The Conservation Area concept was later replicated in Manaslu, Rolwaling, Kangchenjunga and Api Saipal.

Chandra was working on a book documenting details of the step-by-step approach to establishing ACAP and other protected areas. At age 56, Gurung and Mingma Sherpa along with Nepal's top conservationists were among the 24 people killed in a helicopter crash in 2006 after a handover ceremony



GÉRARD TOFFIN

PANAUTI PEOPLE

A communist returned from the Soviet Union to set up a local library, and a fisherman watched his river die

■ Sonia Awale

The Rosi River today flows serenely through the sacred 13th century town of Panauti, nestled amidst green hills east of Kathmandu. But on 28 September it was a disaster zone.

Rainfall of biblical proportions lashed the valley for three straight days, and the angry brown water of the Rosi bulldozed through the town. Climate breakdown played a part, but the destruction was magnified by unregulated stone and sand mining upstream that fed Kathmandu's demand for construction material. Across central Nepal, 250 were killed, 25 in Panauti alone.

Encroachment of rivers here in Panauti and elsewhere is not new. Gwancha Deula, 70, would know. He used to catch up to 15kg of fish in a single day from the Rosi. He proudly remembers once lifting a Bam Macha nearly a metre long. But garbage dumping and contamination with insecticides has killed the river.

'Let alone those cold water trout, even the insects have disappeared,' Deula tells photographer Prashant Shrestha in his new book *10 People's Stories* -- a compilation of photo stories and archival images of inspirational Panauti people.

Shrestha's own grandfather, Narayandas Shrestha, ran a local watermill when he was 16 and served the community. Then, the construction of a Soviet-aid hydropower plant generating electricity for Kathmandu, urban encroachment, and availability of processed food made his profession obsolete.

'The stream died,' Shrestha writes, "and traditional watermills evolved into the modern mills.'

Two chapters about local political activists speak of a bygone era when idealism was still held in high esteem. One is a lifelong Kangresi and the other a Soviet-returnee Communist.

'Physically, he limps, but his spirit has never faltered in his 78 years of life,' writes Sunil Sainju, who wrote the text for the book, of Madhav Narayan Pasache, who started his political activism during the Rana regime and remains dedicated to the Nepali Congress.

Pasache played a crucial role in an anti-government movement 70 years ago, and was jailed five times, and tortured. Once, he was left to die after being tied up and thrown into a deep well. He managed to live and was

thrown back into jail. He worked in the prison's kitchen, but was not allowed to eat what he cooked.

Thakur Bhakta Karmacharya has been a life-long Communist, and became a card-carrying member soon after the party was established 70 years ago. He was invited to the Soviet Union, and spent much of his time in what is now Uzbekistan. He is pictured above, arriving at Moscow airport.

'I travelled to Russia via Delhi and then Kabul,' he calls. 'I got to see progress in Russia and attended many political meetings, but what impressed me the most was their love for books. That inspired me to start a library in Panauti...'

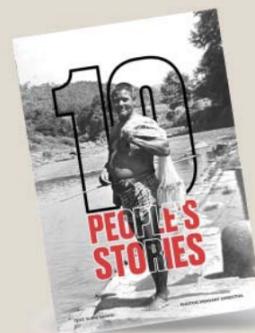
A book about Paunati or its people cannot be complete without touching on its French connection. One chapter looks into an unlikely friendship between Ananta Madhikarmi and French ethnologist Gérard Toffin in 1974.

The two explored the valley together, and their research was published. The book generating much interest in France, leading to the French government's involvement in the restoration and urban renewal of Panauti from 1979-1989.

The slim volume also has profiles of a photographer, a musician, the once-in-12-year Makar Mela and a month-long Swasthani ritual. Each chapter could be much longer, there is so much more we would like to know about the person profiled.

10 People's Stories is a tribute to the spirit of the people of Panauti who have worked tirelessly to uplift their community while keeping a low national profile.

Published by Panauti Municipality, the volume is proof that despite the doom and gloom among Nepalis about their future, the past holds lessons in resilience and determination. Because nothing is quite as uplifting and inspirational as growing up with local heroes one can look up to. 🇳🇵



10 People's Stories
Panauti Municipality, 2024
Text: Sunil Sainju
Photos: Prashant Shrestha, Gérard Toffin
21 pages

EVENTS

**Nepal Premier League**

The NPL T20 tournament has captivated the nation. Catch the final this weekend, and read the story on page 1.

21 December, 12:15pm, Tickets: Rs500++, TU Cricket Ground, Kirtipur

Orange Fest

This week at Orange Fest, sample varieties of Nepal's new national fruit, and talk to the farmers who grow them.

20-22 December, 10am-5pm, Utpala Cafe, Boudha

**Hot Air Balloon Festival**

Soar above Pokhara in hot air balloons at this international festival. Also included: fireworks, food and a DJ.

24 December-1 January, 10am onwards
Tickets: Rs1000++, Pame Phat, Pokhara

Christmas Market

Support local businesses at this upcoming Christmas market, which will have more than fifty product stalls, cookies, cake, and the biggest Christmas tree in town.

20-22 December, 12pm-6pm, International Club, Sanepa

**Spirits in Transition**

Tsherin Sherpa's Spirits are going through changes at his latest exhibition. Sherpa draws on decades of training in traditional Thangka as he experiments contemporarily.

Until 29 December, 11am-7pm (Friday to Sunday), 11am-6pm (Tuesday to Thursday), Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat

DINING

**Christmas Eve at Chimney**

Take your loved ones to a five course Christmas Eve Dinner, with mulled wine, at The Chimney.

24 December, 6:30pm-10:30pm, Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbarmarg (01) 4248999

MUSIC

Bartika Eam Rai

Catch singer-songwriter Bartika Eam Rai in Pokhara on her Aandhi, Ityadi album tour. 21 December, 6pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1,200, Paradiso, Pokhara

**Sonu Nigam**

Groove out to the legendary Sonu Nigam, who is in town on Christmas Day, as he performs some of his timeless hits.

25 December, 3pm onwards, Tickets: Rs5,000, Hyatt Ground, Boudha

Chill Music Festival

Axix, Kuma Sagar and The Khowpa and Jhilkey and The Company are all performing at Chill Music Fest this weekend in Butwal — what a lineup.

24 December, 5pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1,000, Bodhi Villa, Butwal

**Rajesh Nepali**

Emerging artist Rajesh Nepali blends gospel, soul and rock in the first chapter of the Tag Sessions. Get tickets now.

25 December, 6:30pm onwards, Tickets: Rs400, Eden, Sanepa

**Aastha Band**

Naren Limbu and Sudip Gurung reunite to perform as AASTHA this winter in a series of concerts.

24 December, 8pm, Tickets: Rs1000, Rolling Stones Rock Bar, Pokhara

**Chaat Mela**

If you're in the mood for vegetarianism, get authentic and fusion chaats and beverages at Annapurna Sweets.

Patan Dhoka (01) 5005500

Soaltee Christmas Brunch

Have Christmas Brunch at the Garden Terrace, followed by the signature Soaltee Christmas Cake for dessert.

25 December, 12:30pm-3pm, Tahachal, 9820113483

GETAWAYS

**Chandragiri Hills**

Enjoy a scenic ride on the Chandragiri Hills cable car that offers stunning views of the valley and Himalaya. Visit the peaceful temple, thrilling amusement park, and delicious food court, and relax at the luxurious resort for an unforgettable experience.

Chandragiri (01) 5970796/9802326541

Marriott Staycation

Christmas and New Year Staycation Bliss at Marriott: includes breakfast, beer buckets, and discounts on food and beverages and spa services.

18 December - 12 January 12, Naxal (01) 5970300

**The Old Inn**

A quaint, historic hotel on Bandipur Main Street, The Old Inn offers rooms with balconies and views of the town and the Himalaya.

Bandipur (065) 520110

**Sarangkot Mountain Lodge**

Every room at the Sarangkot Mountain Lodge opens up to stunning mile-high panoramas of the Annapurna range.

Sarangkot, 9856067928

Pataleban Vineyard Resort

Stay in peaceful bedrooms, garden apartments, or tents surrounded by hills, vineyards, and orchid groves.

Chisapani (01) 4316377

Christmas Dinner Party

Celebrate Christmas in style at New Orleans Cafe with a Dinner Party filled with joy, delicious food and live music. Dinner speciality: Roast Turkey.

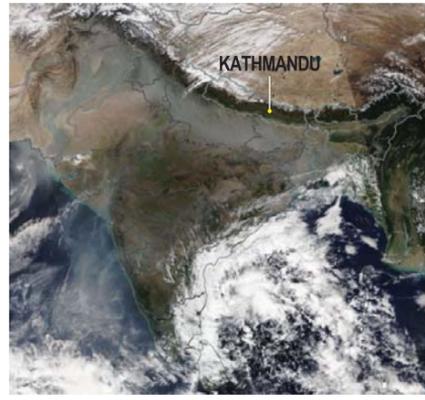
24-25 December, 7pm onwards, Thamel (01) 4700736

**Fables of Punjab**

Indulge in spice-infused marinades, slow-cooked delicacies, and iconic flavors from the heart of Punjab this weekend at Nook in Aloft Kathmandu.

Until 21 December, Thamel, RSVP: 9801976054

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Cool and Clear**

Nepal is experiencing a change in wind-direction due to a deep depression in the Bay of Bengal, which cleared the air of smoke and pollution, as well as kept the temperature low. Some moisture infusion will bring snow to the eastern mountains. There is no big aberration from average temperature this time of year for Kathmandu, although there are no signs of any rain-making system on the western horizon any time into next week.



OUR PICK

In Sean Baker's 2024 drama *Anora*, 23-year-old Ani, who is a sex worker, is introduced to 21-year-old Vanya, the son of a Russian oligarch. Vanya pays Ani to spend a week with him in Vegas, and once there, asks her to marry him so that he can obtain a green card. Although unsure at first, Ani agrees to Vanya's proposal, and the two elope. Meanwhile, news of their marriage soon reaches Russia, and Vanya's parents head to New York to put an end to the relationship. The film—which won the Palme d'Or at the 77th Cannes Film Festival—stars Milkey Madison, Paul Weissman, Yura Borisov, and Lindsey Normington.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिठ्ठा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Lionel Messi the goat

My daughter teaches me English while offering straightforward life lessons and keeping me grounded

Before the US presidential election last month, my 17-year-old daughter asked, "Who do you think will win? How will it affect the world?" Just as I was about to respond, she jumped in with her own insights.



ANGREZI
Anbika Giri

"I don't believe American economic and foreign policies will change much, but the global perception of the US election will shift," and she continued, "if Kamala wins, she'll be the first woman president and the first woman of colour to hold that office. On the other hand, if Trump wins, it could hurt American's pride."

My follow-up question led to a new word that I was about to be introduced to in my life-long quest to master the English language: 'felony'. She said: "How can Americans take pride in having a president with a felony conviction?"

I nodded vaguely, trying to figure out what 'felony' meant. What has Trump done now? My daughter simplified it for me, and explained that he has been convicted of numerous criminal offenses.

Since that conversation, the word 'felony' has popped up often both online and in my conversations with people. Does some human algorithm also exist,



that has a way of figuring out what you are talking about?

My daughter has become my most steadfast English language teacher. And the best thing is, I do not have to pay her. And I do not have to feel embarrassed about asking questions. It helps that she is incredibly patient with me, and is usually available whenever I need her help.

She has also worked hard to help me improve my unusual pronunciation of the word 'available' which for some reason I could never say properly. She attended an English medium school from a young age, and this helped her to learn the language naturally.

Back when she was in Grade 1, she asked me why I seemed uncomfortable speaking English.

Had I struggled in school, or I had failed English? As she grew older, she realised that in Nepal there are two distinct educational paths: one in which students struggle to speak and read in English, and another in which they face similar challenges with Nepali.

Sometimes, my daughter takes advantage of my unfamiliarity with certain words. A few Dasains ago, we went out for lunch together. She had a full pocket of cash, and when the bill arrived, she suggested we either split it or "go Dutch".

I wasn't sure what Holland had to do with it, so I opted to split the bill. She had ordered more items than I did, and in the end, I ended up paying more than my fair share. After we settled the bill, she explained what "going Dutch"

meant. I knew the concept, but did not know how it was referred to in English. I still joke that she took linguistic advantage of me.

It is not just the English language, my daughter has been instrumental in helping me grasp the global discourse on sexuality. She encouraged me to approach the topic with curiosity instead of judgment, especially when I do not know enough about the subject. It was through her insights that I learned about the evolution of the term "gay" which originally described a sense of carefree joy and happiness before it came to signify homosexuality, particularly among men.

Together, we explore new words that have entered the language and their context,

deepening my understanding. She continually shares the latest Gen Z slang like IDK, fr, sus, and iykyk, etc. Sometimes I ask her for clarification, and other times I google them before responding.

During a conversation about my friends, she candidly told me that I was being "salty". At first, I struggled to understand, thinking it had to do with my feelings being hurt. Noticing my confusion, she took the time to explain that I was upset over trivial matters, which I really shouldn't be.

I had heard the Argentinian football legend Lionel Messi was referred to as 'the GOAT' and often wondered why. He is such an incredible player and always so kind in public. So, whenever I heard or saw the term GOAT, I would picture an actual goat in my mind.

During one of our casual conversations, I asked my daughter why people refer to Messi as a goat, is it because he is so incredibly agile? At first, she burst out laughing, but then she explained that the acronym meant 'greatest of all time'. Nowadays, whenever Messi is playing my daughter points to the monitor, and explains: "Look, Ama, Messi the goat."

My daughter has become like a life coach, teaching me English while offering straightforward life lessons and helping keep me grounded. When she showed curiosity about my English abilities, we both agreed to help each other grow and my daughter has truly embraced that commitment with heartfelt sincerity and love. 🇳🇵




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Forgotten international

■ **Anne Feenstra**
and **Varun S Bapu**

Four world-famous architects who struggled to leave an inspiring contemporary footprint in Nepal

Four international names in architecture, Shigeru Ban, Rem Koolhaas, Tadao Ando and Louis Isadore Kahn, all left their mark in Nepal. But despite their best intentions, the ambitious designs fizzled out.

Ban, Koolhaas and Ando won Pritzkers, the best known international award for architecture, and Kahn could have won it had the prize been given in his lifetime. But their designs fell short of transforming Nepali architecture and did not help inspire local architects.

Why were these four 'starchitects' unable to pull off their Nepal projects and enrich the country with exemplary contemporary designs? The failure, especially the violation of Kahn's design, also raises larger questions about how much contemporary architecture is valued in Nepal.

Whereas Sri Lanka had Geoffrey Bawa and Bangladesh had Mazharul Islam, the pioneers of contemporary architecture in Nepal have had far less public appreciation. One wonders if Nepali architecture only refers to the monuments and heritage of the past.

Nepal does have examples of

outstanding modern architecture such as the पाङ्गे घर 'Wheel House' and खुट्टे घर 'House on Legs' by Shankar Nath Rimal in the 1960s. These are the best examples of how some Nepali designers successfully tailored modern architecture to the Nepali context.

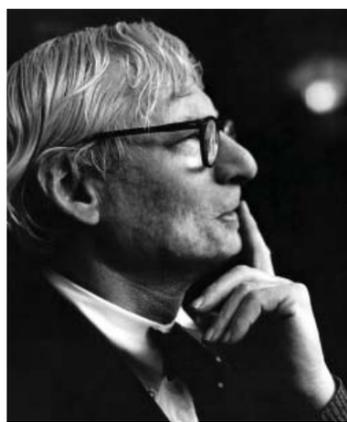
Ten years ago, Nepal had three architecture magazines, SPACES, praXis and Business Architecture, but none of these survived. This newspaper has prominently covered contemporary architecture, and the built environment, but these are exceptions in Nepal's media.

There have been a few encouraging signs. The 2024 exhibition Modern Encounters

in Architecture in Kathmandu Valley (1945-1985) at the Taragon Museum had many visitors and its accompanying book is a seminal document.

In 2023, the Mountain Architecture Dialogue (MAD) that focused on examples of good-practice sustainable contemporary architecture for the mountainous terrains of Nepal was a packed event with over 300 young architects, engineers, environmentalists and architecture students.

A version of this article was first published in HIMAL Southasian. Illustrations by Varun S Bapu. Go to www.nepaltimes.com for more.



Louis I Kahn

American architect Louis I Kahn had experience of projects in South Asia, and several were under construction when he died suddenly in 1974. Amongst these were the National

Assembly complex in Dhaka, the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad and the Family Planning and Maternal Child Welfare Centre in Kathmandu.

Kahn had started the USAID funded project in Nepal by developing a master plan for the government institutional zone in Kathmandu, which included a building for the Health Ministry. The building's façade in exposed brick has deeply recessed vertical windows for shading.

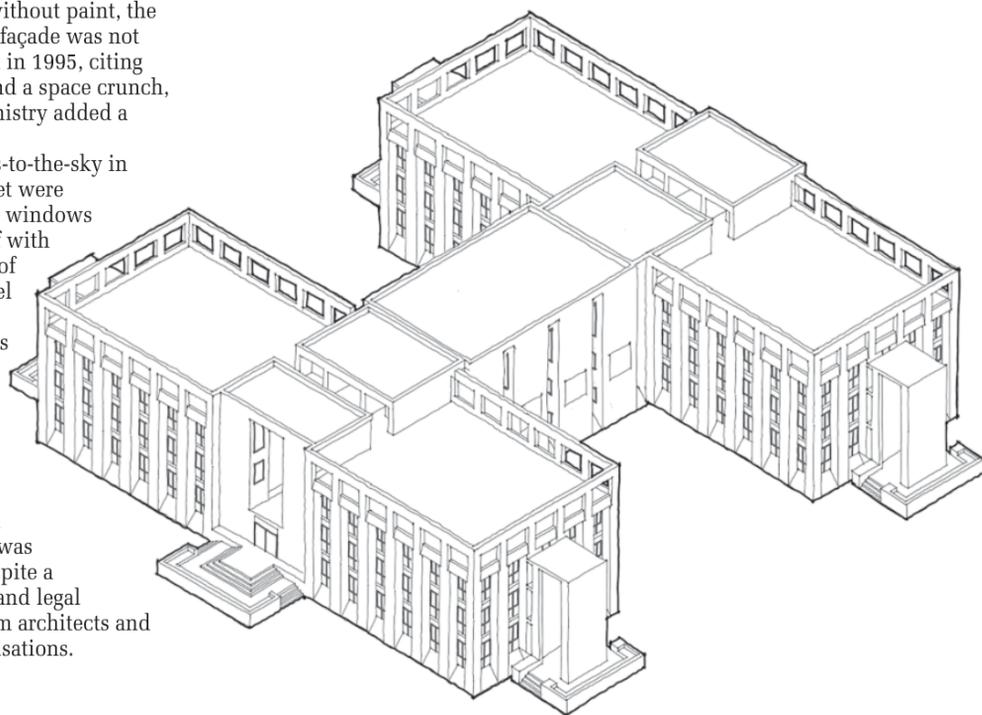
The balancing of accentuated horizontal lines in the brickwork with the verticality of the larger composition is the work of a master. The brick walls rise up into punctured parapet walls at the roof level. These square apertures 'frame the sky'.

When Kahn died, only the eastern half of the building was finished. The Western part was never built and Nepal's bureaucrats

decided that without paint, the exposed brick façade was not finished. Then in 1995, citing roof leakage and a space crunch, the Health Ministry added a floor.

The frames-to-the-sky in the roof parapet were converted into windows and topped off with a sloping roof of corrugated steel sheets, whose only virtue was that it was cost-effective.

Kahn's orthogonal composition, which clean horizontal and vertical lines, was desecrated despite a public outcry and legal challenges from architects and cultural organisations.

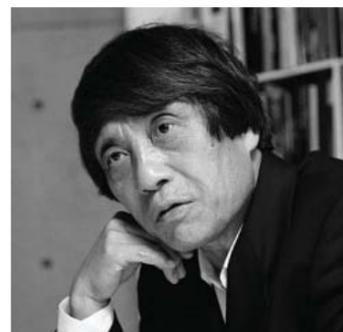


Tadao Ando

Doctors providing aid to victims of the Great Hanshin earthquake in 1995 in Japan requested Tadao Ando, who had donated his Pritzker money to the victims, to also make a design for a hospital in Butwal.

Ando's contribution would be pro-bono and the construction was funded by the Hanshin Earthquake victims and by the popular Japanese newspaper Mainichi, as a tribute to Nepali doctors.

The first block that Ando designed for the Siddhartha Children and Women's Hospital (SCWH) was the out-patient



department. He quickly realised that he would not be able to pull off structures with his typical style of smooth-finished, high-quality concrete.

Ando wrote in the online

architectural catalog Architectuur, that the two main problems with the project were costs and the availability of local technology.

'It became a facility that has a slightly different expression from the buildings I have completed so far,' he wrote. He designed a colonnade for the west façade that would provide shelter from harsh sunlight, and the exposed brick walls were locally manufactured bricks.

The hospital is characterised by modernist cuboidal massing, but the outer brick façades now appear unintentionally badly weathered by monsoons. The interiors lack both sufficient natural light and natural ventilation.



Kenzō Tange

As Secretary-General of the United Nations, U Thant made a pilgrimage to Lumbini in 1967. He was a devout Buddhist from Burma, and wept on seeing the condition of the nativity site.

He got King Mahendra to turn Lumbini into an international peace centre, and on return to New York set in motion an initiative to restore the sanctity of the site. Kenzō Tange, another Pritzker Prize-winning Japanese architect who designed the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, was tasked to draw up a masterplan. But Tange died in 2005 before the Lumbini plan was fully implemented.

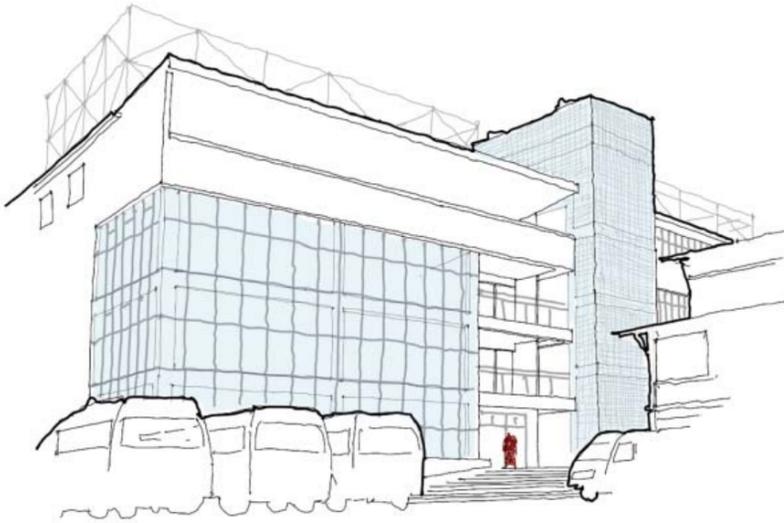
Kenzō Tange belonged to the 'Metabolism Movement', a modern design style inspired by French architect and urban planner Le Corbusier, and did not adhere to traditional Japanese design elements. Tange was renowned in post-war Japan, and also

built the Tokyo Metropolitan Government towers.

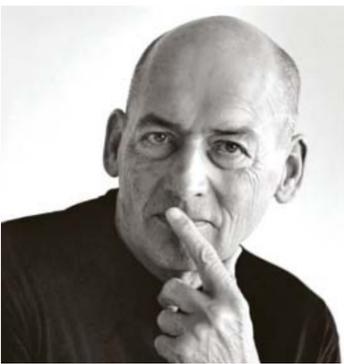
Today Lumbini adheres to Tange's rectangular masterplan, with concentric circles around the inner sanctum of the Mayadevi Temple. The eastern side is set aside for the Hinayana school and the west for Mahayana Buddhism. Some have criticised the masterplan for being too geometric, and later monuments by various sects have spoilt the natural tranquility of the space.

The site also houses The Lumbini Museum which is being renovated and conserved with a recent grant from the US Embassy in Kathmandu. 🇺🇸

starchitects in Nepal

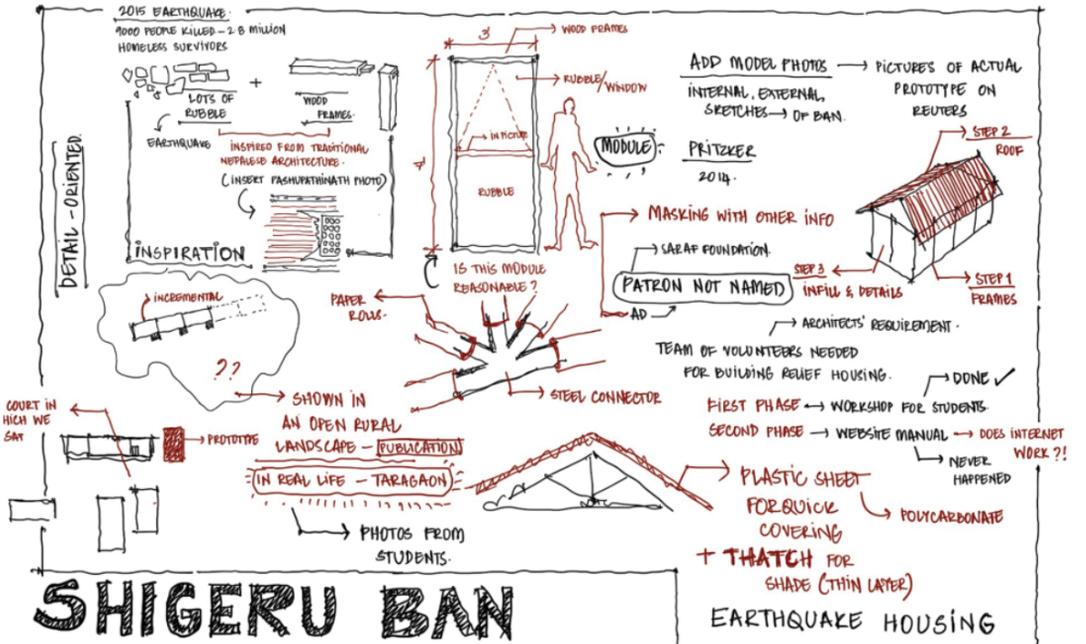


Rem Koolhaas



The designs of Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas have a specific signature: bold shapes and an intriguing architectural typology that challenges standard building blocks. Some designs even seem to defy gravity, like the CCTV headquarters in Beijing: an angular, continuous geometry of glass and steel.

Koolhaas was commissioned by Belgian billionaire Guy Ullens to design a new building for Ullens School in Khumaltar. The most prominent feature is its vertical glass block staircase. Some interior spaces have lowered windowsills, which provide ample views and daylight. But the school building has gone unremarked in Nepal.



Shigeru Ban



Shigeru Ban had already built a name for himself in post-disaster construction when he came to Nepal following the 2015 earthquakes in which 500,000 people lost their homes. The basic design and its 3D-rendered images were reviewed in upbeat articles on DOMUS, Architectural Review, Dezeen, and Arch Daily.

But his signature cardboard tubes could not handle the monsoon and the roof structure had to be re-designed with timber. Only two shelters were completed in Sindupalchok, and only one of them still stands at the Hyatt Regency grounds today, as Ban's souvenir to Nepal.



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The nature of Nepal

Humans create stories so life can make sense

■ Pratibha Tuladhar

Tamar river in Tom's book, is it the same as Tamor River?" I texted my editor. "Yes, the Limbu pronounce it Tamar," he wrote back. "You have a lot of catching up to do!"

And I did. The fact revealed itself to me even more as I buried my nose in Thomas Bell's new book, *Human Nature*. The book takes the reader on a journey as the narrative spans across four different regions in Nepal's mountains that Bell covered in 2016-2018.

The years are not directly mentioned in the narrative, but marked by relating them to major events such as the earthquake and indicated vaguely as 'two months later, in the monsoon'.

The first chapter, Migration, takes the readers through Panchthar-Solu in eastern Nepal. The second walk is a chapter called Agriculture, which covers Chautara to Gorkha or the central hills. The third, Architecture, is all the way to upper Dolpo. The last chapter, Conservation, cuts across Jumla to Rara Lake.

As a teenager, the first I saw of Nepal's hills was the east, so the book immediately had me. It also took me back to my own travels to Dolpo and Jumla, constantly revealing everything I had not noticed during my own travels, fetching me names of places, laying before me a new map of Nepal.

In the first chapter, we come across Bell's companion Rajendra, who becomes a conduit to exploring the complexity of



KRIPA SHAKYA

Nepal, including the obsession with casteness. The travesty of small talk in Nepali conversations is never lost even as the author records intriguing ideas connected to indigenous knowledge, myth, folklore, rivers, history, anthropology, science, literature, and art.

The book also takes heavily from research, evoking Shanker Lamichhane's literature to Rousseau's walks. The walks and the research proceeded 'hand in hand'.

"I'd do a bit of reading, then a walk or two, then a load more reading and writing, and so on," says Bell. "There was a year between the first two walks and the

last two, during which I spent a lot of time reading up and made an early draft of part 1."

Little incidents that occur along the way help build a narrative. In some instances, we experience harsh Nepal truths. Near Salpa, a boy beats a snake to death, saying "it bites". There are conversations about death and hardships with people along the trail, spoken about as though they were the same thing as 'someone making you wait till the morning'. It broaches on Nepali stoicism or maybe bravado.

The narrative is replete not just with people's stories, but the stories they tell and those that have been passed down. The story of Miyapma launches one into a

world of myth and fantasy. There are stories lost to us, like that of Tunilu who learned the trick of dying from a lizard.

Then the stories of Nidhini the siren and the Banjhankri. The same stories get told in many communities across the world in different ways, converging stories that represent human nature.

Humans create stories so life can make sense.

The writing is fast paced because of its mostly journalistic style. The quotes bear the tone

of individual speakers, something only good journalists can do. The narrative is frank and honest, alternating between serious scholarship and banter. The mood often slips from profound to jocular. For instance: "नुन खुसानी पियो, खाने मान्छे हिरो," rhymes a jhankri shaman in the fourth chapter.

"The first job for a book like this is giving pleasure and entertainment. People should read it for fun," Bell tells us. And he makes a serious read, a fun one with anecdotes, hand-drawn maps, photographs, a glossary of 30 words on landscape.

The book is an environmental history of Nepal. It details the conquest of Prithvi Narayan Shah, explaining how it hinged on establishing an agriculture system that thrived on rice-plantation, which in turn allowed him to create a land-military system and introduce taxation. There are stories about Prithvi Narayan that get told with some discrepancy as they rove across the mountains, the destiny of all oral history.

"I hope the book provides an

accessible and attractive telling of some aspects of Nepali history for readers who might not know about all of these things, or who hadn't thought about them in this way before," Bell says.

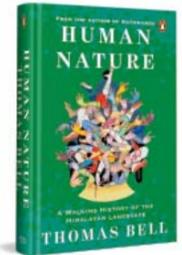
About Dolpa, Bell goes into the intricacies of its trans-Himalayan architecture. There are lengthy, art review-like sections on thangkas, where he delves into the history of the sacred style, its relation with the community the work takes inspiration from, and how the visualisation of it continues to impact the people.

Art is often woven into religious myths, such as the saga of the heroic Milarepa, where we stumble upon philosophy: "This body, so hard to obtain and easily broken..." Also a reminder that we are each a leader with our own set of disciples. Each of us, our own Milarepa.

The fourth section is the strongest in rhetoric as it takes on Nepal's conservation history. Like in Tom Bell's first book, Kathmandu, there is sharp, forthright criticism of the system. The chapter points at the flawed conservation approach that has hurt indigenous science and peoples.

While there is the seriousness of a heavy topic, the narrative also bears occasional eccentricities, such as: the old man in Jumla has dogs, cats, fleas, hens, rabbits, goats and bees.

"I hope that the book has enough layers that different readers find different things in there that interest and entertain them," Bell says. Me, I came away with history. Told. Forgotten. 🇳🇵



Human Nature
Thomas Bell
Penguin Viking, 2024
Rs 1,280. 256 pages
ISBN-13 978-0143467120



A tale of resistance

Kanchhi catches you unawares. It leads you to a crescendo, then abandons you, unprepared and heartbroken

Kanchhi, Weena Pun's debut novel, was delivered to me by a rider on a very rainy afternoon, as Kathmandu Valley and the nation was pummeled by violent rainfall.

The book revealed itself in big bold letters: KANCHHI, like someone hollering the name.

The letters flank the cover bearing an illustration in shades of grey, showing a hamlet in the mountains. The cover sets the tone for the novel, as Kanchhi's disappearance is revealed to the readers in the prologue.

The story opens with 16-year-old Kanchhi leaving her home. The novel then becomes a journey the reader makes with the writer, as conduit. The narrative toggles between times tracing the days of Kanchhi's presence and leaping ten years forward into 13 November 2005, a day in the life of Kanchhi's mother, Maiju, as she waits for her daughter's return. As the plot makes progress, the readers get to know Kanchhi, first as a child and then as a teenager.

The novel is set in the mid-western mountains of Nepal, the language landing it firmly. The storytelling takes us through descriptions of villages and villagers. Pun weaves in the political background of the Maoist insurgency into the narrative, signposting the timeline.

Weena Pun describes the writing process for the novel as "ridiculously slow". She tells me, "I struggled to understand Maiju, the mother character. But once I had her and the village down, Kanchhi just took off."



KRIPA SHAKYA

There is also plenty of humour brought out through small moments. Kanchhi, as a child and later as a teenager, is a "no-nonsense" kind of person. So when there are funny moments around her, they become even more pronounced-- in some scenes they work as comic relief.

Sentences are frugal, a reminder of Pun's journalism background. There is no meandering, the writer cuts to the chase. She uses "f***" instead of "sex" or even "love-making". The narrative is not lyrical, but rather deliberate, with extensive details of moments and events, including those that

have no direct connection to furthering the plot. There is also the thorough description of how a girl goes through menstruation, as rarely seen before.

If you are looking for ornate reading, this is not where you will find it. The story is told simply, smoothly, without frill or fluff. The writing is terse. The narrative softens into poetic manoeuvre every other chapter, gathering forgotten songs for the readers. And occasionally, imagery wins:

"The disappeared do not disappear. Their memories drape the yard like a fog."

Kanchhi, is a story of defiance. Kanchhi is a rebel. When told to put aside a spoon that has just ladled ghee, Kanchhi will lick it instead. When told to stay back, she chooses to go. She is the curious explorer every girl is. She knows the lyrics of filmy songs, by heart. But she also understands the poetry of Bhupi Sherchan.

She attempts to tell her own stories, write her own poems. The chapters are strewn with Nepali songs and poetry, a respite from the heaviness of the story in some instances. The writing is replete with italicised Nepali words. The text wraps them in for meaning. A glossary is supplied at the end of the book, which serves as a fun addition, even if not entirely accurate.

One word that appears on repeat is chadar, brought to the mountains by the men who migrate to India for work, another theme that runs high in the book. In the prologue, Kanchhi wraps a chadar around herself as she leaves home. Kanchhi's mother, Maiju, throws a chadar around herself, to go speak to a woman who has been battered and tied to a pole by the

Maoists, and left to die. It serves as a motif.

Kanchhi, the novel, doesn't try too hard to be something, and in doing so it becomes. The story brings to attention the themes of love, loyalty, friendship, familial ties, sexuality, and a woman's worth in Nepali society. Who is a woman besides an object of desire and a womb? Where do her own desires, aspirations, dreams, passions, figure? The book raises the question of abortion rights, by showing without telling.

Gender double standards come across through many anecdotes. Even when both man and woman engage in a sexual activity, and if and when found illicit, the man is only superficially reprimanded. It is the woman who really pays. And not just in cash.

Kanchhi is not a frail girl. She is whole. She is flawed, but she is also good. Like we all are, which is why she is endearing as a character. The plot catches you unawares. It leads you to a crescendo, then abandons you, unprepared and heartbroken. Kanchhi is an ache that lingers, long after you've put the book away. 🇳🇵

Pratibha Tuladhar



Kanchhi
Weena Pun
Hatchett, 2024
352 pages Hardcover
Rs 1,120

Protecting children from anti-social media

Australia's new ban is a critical step toward protecting children in the 21st century

■ Peter G. Kirchschräger

Australia has just banned children under the age of 16 from using social media. The move has met with some criticism, particularly from companies like Meta (which owns Facebook and Instagram) and TikTok, which will face fines of up to \$32 million if they fail to keep young people off their platforms. But Australia's new policy represents a critical step toward protecting children in the 21st century.

All societies – and the states that serve them – have a responsibility to protect their children from harmful addictions. And addiction is exactly what social-media companies are trying to cultivate. As Facebook's founding president, Sean Parker, revealed in 2017, the process of building the platform was guided by a simple question: "How do we consume as much of users' time and conscious attention as possible?" The answer these firms reached lay in "exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology": the desire for social validation.

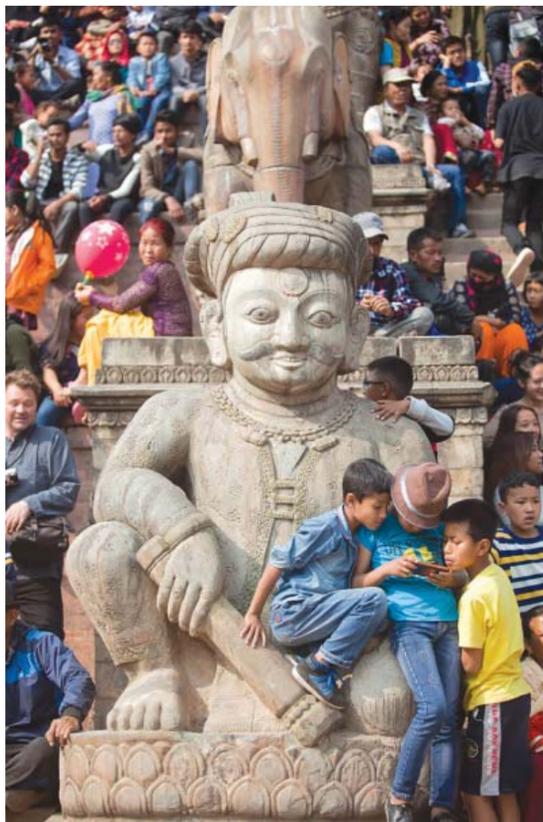
Essentially, Parker explained, social-media platforms were designed to deliver hits of dopamine – a neurotransmitter that plays a role in addiction – through socially-validating likes, comments, views, and shares. The more people engage with the platform, the more dopamine hits they receive. The

result is a "social-validation feedback loop" that keeps users hooked. "God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains," the regretful Parker lamented.

Chamath Palihapitiya – another former Facebook executive whose "tremendous guilt" spurred him to speak out against social media – has an idea. "You don't realize it," he told an audience at Stanford in 2017, "but you are being programmed." Deciding how and how much to use social media is tantamount to deciding how much "intellectual independence" one is "willing to give up."

But many users – particularly children – are not equipped to make informed or healthy choices about social media, not least owing to those addictive feedback loops. According to the World Health Organisation's Regional Office for Europe, problematic social-media use – characterised by addiction-like symptoms, such as an inability to control usage and feelings of withdrawal when not using – has risen sharply among adolescents, from 7% of users in 2018 to 11% in 2022. In the United States, the average teenager spends 4.8 hours per day on social media.

These figures imply serious risks. Adolescents who spend more than three hours per day on social



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media are twice as likely as their peers to experience anxiety and depression. Social-media use is also associated with low self-esteem, bullying, and poor academic performance. Evidence suggests that social media has been a key contributor to the uptick in suicide rates among US teens over the last decade.

The WHO has called for "immediate and sustained action to help adolescents turn the tide on potentially damaging social-media use." Even young people themselves are sounding the alarm. In early November, the youth parliament of the canton of Lucerne, Switzerland, petitioned the Cantonal Council of Lucerne to strengthen protections of social-media users – not least "addiction prevention" – through "targeted awareness-raising among parents and the public."

Have children ever before petitioned adults to protect them from addictive habits? When rules on access to tobacco were debated, did young people step up to demand that their parents be informed of the risks of letting their children smoke? The fact that social media is sparking such requests shows just how acute the harm is.

The consequences of social media extend beyond children. According to Palihapitiya, the "short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops" these companies have created are "destroying how society works" by propagating misinformation and "mistruth." As Parker put it, social media "literally changes

your relationship with society, with each other." This is not mere speculation: social media has proven to be a "polarization engine" and a powerful tool for inciting violence.

Parker knew he was working to cultivate addiction, and so did Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg, Instagram Co-Founder Kevin Systrom, and others like them. According to Palihapitiya, while he and his colleagues told themselves nothing bad would happen, they knew "in the back of their minds" that it would. But the rewards were apparently too great to give up: the more addicted people were to their platforms, the more user data their firms could collect, and the more money they would make selling highly targeted and personalised ads.

The idea that social-media companies would police themselves was always wishful thinking: these firms' business models are built on violating basic rights. That is why all countries that are serious about fulfilling their responsibility to protect their people – and the international community at large – must work together to build and enforce a new regulatory framework for these platforms. The first step is to follow Australia's lead and raise age limits on their use. 🇨🇭

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Peter G. Kirchschräger, Professor of Ethics and Director of the Institute of Social Ethics at the University of Lucerne, is a visiting professor at ETH Zurich.

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