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## Collateral Cruelty

● Priti Thapa

When Govinda finished his shift in a courier company and returned to his room in Kyiv on 24 February, he found many missed calls on his phone from family in Nepal.

Russia had occupied parts of Ukraine, but he was too busy to notice that a full-scale war had broken out. "My family back home knew what was going on in Ukraine even before I had," Govinda said.

Initially, like many of the 4,000 Nepalis in Ukraine, Govinda and his friends decided to wait it out. But as the air raid sirens started going off near their hostel close to Kyiv's Sikorsky airport, they knew it was time to get out.

"We heard the borders were open, so we ran for our lives," Govinda recalls, but little did they know what awaited them there.

They left Kyiv in a crowded train at 7PM, got to Lviv, took a bus and then a taxi that dropped them 25km from the border because of a traffic jam. They trekked for seven hours in the freezing cold, abandoned their heavy bags, and reached the border only at 6PM.

Script if it is disabled in your browser.

In an ordeal repeated many thousands of times in this crisis, Govinda and other Nepalis had to wait another 24 hours in the unbearable cold for their turn to cross the border. Women, children and elderly were processed first. Then it was the turn of EU and other foreigners, and only then African and Asian students and workers.

"We experienced quite a lot of racism," Govinda says. "Everyone was tired, hungry and irritable, desperate to get out. But we were relatively lucky, it has been much worse for others."

The Polish border checkpoint of Przemysl on the other side at first did not allow people without visas, but they started letting them through with a 1-month entry stamp.

At the time Govinda and other Nepalis were stuck at the border, Ishwor Devkota of the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) got a call from stranded Nepalis and drove seven hours to the border. It was utter chaos, and all attempts to convince the Polish guards to allow the Nepalis through were in vain. "There was nothing we could



PARVATHI BINDU BENU/ TWITTER

do at that time, so we drove back empty handed," says Devkota, who runs a restaurant in Wroclaw.

In the week since the invasion began, more than 200 Nepalis have arrived in Warsaw where the NRNA is looking after them. There are another 100 who have crossed into Slovakia, Romania and Hungary.

In Bratislava, Jaya Prasad Siwakoti of the Europe-wide NRNA Rescue Committee, closed his restaurant to feed and house Nepalis who fled Ukraine.

"We rented a hostel, and used donations to

take care of our people, but this war could drag on and we need a longer term strategy," Devkota said, urging the government in Kathmandu to step in. Nepal's ambassador at the Berlin embassy Ram Kaji Khadka is said to be on his way to the Ukraine's border with Poland to use his diplomatic status to get out Nepalis stuck at the checkpoint.

Responding to criticism in social media about mistreatment of Africans and Asians trying to flee his country, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba posted a video on Twitter

assuring all foreigners quick processing at the western border on a 'first come first serve' basis. He urged all stranded foreigners to call the +380934185684 hotline.

On Thursday, Nepal requested India to include Nepali students in its safe passage deal with Russia for students stranded in Kharkiv and other battle-torn cities. Nepal was among 141 countries that supported a United Nations General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian invasion. Bhutan and the Maldives also voted for, while other SAARC members abstained.

Within Ukraine itself, remaining Nepalis speak of the fear of a full-scale Russian assault on the cities. One Nepali posted in social media saying he was joining the Ukrainian resistance to the Russian invasion.

"I managed to get out to safety, but the future is very uncertain for me," Govinda told *Nepali Times* over the phone from Warsaw on Wednesday. "I don't see returning to Nepal as an immediate option. Besides, the embassy said we had to buy our own tickets back. We will see if we can work while we wait it out here."

Govinda paid Rs800,000 to an agent to get him to Europe, but found himself in Ukraine. "I had never heard of Ukraine before, and it did not look too bad when I googled it. Europe was Europe and that is what mattered to me," he recalls.

He entered Ukraine on a student visa for language classes, but that was just an excuse to get into the country. He quit school, and started working at a shawarma restaurant, later switching to a courier company that paid him \$500 a month.

Prakash also made it out to Warsaw, and says that for the moment he is just happy to have escaped the war zone. "Right now we are just taking it one day at a time, and trying to gauge the situation, and work if they allow us," he said.

Prakash paid Rs1.4 million to a recruiter to get him to Europe, thinking he was going to Portugal. In Ukraine he was earning \$800 a month, and still paying back his loans.

He adds, "Now, even if I go back to Nepal, I will need to migrate again to earn money to pay back."

Some names are changed.

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HYUNDAI

# Male-stream politics

When we had a baby in 2020, my husband and I had to make some difficult decisions about how to manage childcare and work. A few things, including the pandemic and the fact that we were able to work part-time, permitted us to spend our child's first year primarily as his caregivers.



**GUEST EDITORIAL**  
Aditi Adhikari

When I went back to work a year after giving birth, my husband continued to stay home as the primary caregiver. Which made me think, what if everyone had that opportunity?

Issues like family leave and equal pay are reasons why we need more women in leadership and policy-making roles. Research and real-life situations have shown that the participation of women in legislative bodies improves deliberation and decision-making. This is because people of diverse backgrounds are likely to have different life experiences, be affected by different problems, and see the same social issues from unique standpoints.

But the participation of women in politics improves decision-making not just regarding women's issues, but also in matters that affect men and children. Women parliamentarians are also known to work more effectively across party lines, push through agendas and make decisions that reflect the priorities of ethnic/racial minorities.

Good news is that we have representatives from diverse backgrounds in all three levels of governments. Over 40% of the members of the local government assemblies are women. But this is because the Local Level Election Act 2017 mandates that each political party must field one man and one woman candidate for the positions of chair and deputy. Most political parties, however, fulfilled the requirement by nominating women for deputy positions.

The patriarchal biases that we hold and our male-stream political parties mean that women, especially those from minority groups, are seen as less capable of leadership than men from high caste groups. We can see a snapshot of these biases in the chairs of Nepal's 753 local governments. Only 18 of them are women. Just 7 of 293 municipalities (2.39%) have female mayors and only 11 of 460 Rural Municipalities have female chairs (also 2.39%).

Women also are underrepresented in the upper ranks of the bureaucracy, only four

Chief District Officers and three District Coordination Officers are women (out of 77). Very few are in the decision-making positions of the security forces, in the higher levels of the judiciary, in non-governmental organisations and the media. It is no surprise then, that our problems and their solutions are seen from the male gaze.

There are also biases against women leaders within the legislative bodies/local governments, especially those who are elected through the proportional election system. They are seen as token representatives who are elected because of their demographic characteristics, as members who represent special interests because of their gender. They are subjected to discrimination within their workplaces and their authority is often questioned.

Part of the skepticism regarding women leaders comes from the fact that we see them as representing only the issues of women, but that is not true. On the other hand, it shows just how biased we are that we have that kind of discourse only in the case of women leaders. No one questions a male politician working only for the welfare of men, because men's issues, we have been conditioned to think, are our common issues. But the moment you bring up family leave and equal wages, you are a 'women's parliamentarian'.

Nonetheless, the voice of women must be raised and heard in local, provincial, and federal decision-making. As more women and candidates from minority groups are elected into decision-making bodies, their presence in the governments and their participation in deliberation and decision-making will start to feel more and more normal.

At this important moment in Nepal's history, it is up to us whether or not we decide to have more inclusive governments. There is no evidence that highly educated, well-spoken parliamentarians make better decisions for people's welfare. Having more diverse and representative parliaments and local governments will add dimensions to the deliberations that happen in our legislative bodies, and result in better decision-making.

Come May, we will have to decide whether our elected bodies should resemble a little bit more like our society, or whether the same Ram, Shyam and Hari Uncles continue making decisions for the whole lot of us, even though our problems and priorities are widely variable. This is our chance to make our local governments look more inclusive and less tokenistic.

The longer version of the guest editorial is online at [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

Aditi Adhikari is an educator and education policy researcher/consultant based in Kathmandu



BIKRAM RAI NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

**This May, vote for women leaders and minority groups and make our local governments more inclusive and less tokenistic**

## ONLINE PACKAGES



ON THE EDGE

There are some 4,000 Nepalis in Ukraine, most of them labour migrants and students. With the Russians advancing, a few hundred have made it across the border to safety. But their future is uncertain. Go online to watch videos. Story: [page 7](#).



IN THE DRIVING SEAT

Kathmandu Valley's Safa Tempo is one of the success stories that helped clean up the city by phasing out more polluting Vikram three-wheelers. That was nearly 25 years ago. Meet some of the leading female Safa Tempo operators of Nepal and listen to their stories. Watch video on our YouTube channel and read story on [page 9](#).

### MCC

I think the best aspect of this grant is the assertion of the fund to be used only and only for economic development, and not to further the self-serving interests of our corrupt politicians ('MCC gets green light in Nepal', Shristi Karki, [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)).

Shreya Soni

- Well, I hope the US treaty doesn't have any hazardous results for Nepal. People of Nepal have rejected this offer but our politicians have passed it forcefully. Don't know what the consequences will be.

Swasti Bindukar

### STROKES

Congratulations, hope the emergency care for strokes is affordable to the general public ('New cure for stroke, but prevention is key', Sonia Awale, #1110).

Atul Dhital

- It will be great to have similar facilities in Pokhara and Dharan too.

Naran Klyphree

### PAUL FARMER

Nice tribute to a great man ('Paul Farmer on my mind', Bibhav Acharya, #1100). We watched Bending the Curve on Netflix last night, a lovely documentary made in 2017.

Steve Van Beek

### NEPAL AND NEPALIS

Nepalis are lovely, kind, warm and generous people ('Right at home with Nepalis', Anjana Rajbhandari, [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)). Nepal is the most exciting country in the world, with the highest mountains to the wonderful wildlife in the south, and it is truly wild, unequalled.

Alan Roadnight

### WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

This was very well-written ('Can Nepal elections change its male-stream politics?', Aditi Adhikari, [page 2](#)). You've made such great points.

Jennifer House

- This election, vote for the best candidate regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, etc. Try to find out as much about your candidates, and vote for who you think is the best. Don't go by party lines either. Too radical?

Unpopular opinion

### UKRAINE INVASION

If anything, the lesson to learn here is to get along and work together with our neighbours ('Ukraine's lesson for sandwiched nations like Nepal', Bhaskar Koirala, [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)). Peace in the neighbourhood equals prosperity. Nepal, India, China, Pakistan and Bangladesh should learn from this.

Rustum Shrestha

### KHUMBU DOGS

Interesting reporting on feral dogs. ('Khumbu dogs go wild after tourism decline', Abhyu Ghimire, [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)) Never thought how decline in tourism would affect dogs.

Kathmandu Guest House

### STATE OF THE STATE

Kathmandu and Nepal is hopelessly unable and unwilling to deal with the decades-long problems caused by urbanisation ('Things are up in the air in Nepal', Sonia Awale, #1099). The so called leaders spend all their time jockeying for power holding election after pointless election, the polls have no incentive to institute even minor fixes as they are all tied to industries. As someone who really loves Nepal and has spent years there, it is hard to say this, but Kathmandu and many other parts of the country are now just big, dangerous, health-deteriorating sewers. I keep wondering, and have been for decades, when will the people rise up and demand more?

Roger Ray

## Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Khumbu dogs go wild

by Abhyu Ghimire

With the drop in tourism following the Covid-19 pandemic in the past two years, previously friendly community mastiffs in the Khumbu region have become more aggressive. Incidents of dog-attacks have increased, and the cases are more serious. Read story and watch video, on [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

Most reached and shared on Facebook

### MCC gets green light in Nepal

by Shristi Karki

Nearly five years after Nepal signed the US-funded Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact in 2017, Parliament on 27 February finally ratified the \$500 million grant for much-needed transmission lines to distribute and export power. Follow us on our social media platforms for latest developments.

Most popular on Twitter



### Decision Time

by Haang Chu

The MCC might have been ratified but Nepal's leaders have damaged the country's international reputation by playing political ping-pong with the infrastructure grant and have come across as being untrustworthy, prone to playing petty party politics to undermine national interest. Join the online discussion.

Most commented



### New cure for stroke, but prevention is key

by Sonia Awale

Strokes are the third leading cause of premature deaths in Nepal, a person somewhere in the country suffers a stroke every 20 seconds with an increasing trend among younger patients. But a state-of-the-art treatment is now available in Kathmandu which can cure 90% of cases. Read the report on our website for details.

Most visited online page

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
There is a #geopolitical thread running through the seemingly disparate events in #Nepal and #Ukraine. Ukraine's lessons for sandwiched nations like Nepal by @BhaskarKoirala8 in #Bucharest.

**Sadeep Shrestha PhD MHS MS @Sadeep1970**  
Quite thought-provoking

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Paul Farmer on my mind  
Tribute from Nepali doctor @BibhavAcharya to a visionary who served the poorest people in the poorest countries.

**Shirley Blair @himlayanchildrn**  
Paul Farmer gave me reason to hope

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Sonam Tashi Lama, a Nepali grassroots conservationist working to protect the country's endangered red panda is among 15 activists shortlisted for the prestigious Whitley Award 2022.

**Keshav Kafle @KafleKeshav**  
That would be a great platform to appreciate the hard work of this gentleman! My best wishes!

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Still a cashless cow



Royal Nepal Airlines was once a reputable company before successive political parties in the government used it as an employment agency, and pocketed kickbacks on aircraft leases. Mired in controversy and mismanagement, it is no wonder the carrier has racked up a debt of at least Rs47 billion, and never

registered a profitable year in its 64 years of existence.

Now, the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic has left Nepal Airlines with no other option but privatisation. Excerpt from the report 20 years ago this week from #83 1-7 March 2002:

A high-level committee to look into the rot at Royal Nepal Airlines has just submitted its report. There is bad news and worse news. The bad news is that the airline is losing Rs 200 million a year and is on the verge of collapse. Worse news: the government has no more money to bail it out.

Royal Nepal Airlines has always been a barometer for the state of the nation, so it is no great surprise that a perfectly good

airline has in the past 12 years been brought down to its knees through political interference, mismanagement and corruption. That in a nutshell is also the high-level committee's findings, and in that sense it is nothing new. But the report has sent a clear message to the government that it better divest, and fast.

"There has been just too much political interference, it has problems with ownership and there is widespread mismanagement," says Narayan Singh Pun, member of parliament and member of the committee. "Reorganising it as a company and inviting private partners is the only way to change all that." Royal Nepal Airlines has not had an audit since 1998, but you don't need an auditor to hear the stall warnings going off. Senior executives at the airlines tell you privately they have never seen it so bad: losses averaging Rs 500,000 a day, incredible tales of loot, political intervention, and corruption. Palms are greased every time the airline has hired jets, sent engines for overhauling, or appointed sales agents.

"Privatise RNAC?" asks one disgruntled employee sarcastically, "this is already a private airline of politicians." The most glaring example of graft was the hiring of a General Sales Agent for Europe in 1995 under pressure from politicians which caused the airline losses worth nearly Rs 400 million.

From archives material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)



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# Mountain women on the climate frontlines

Women in a Nepali village become change agents to adapt to the impact of the climate crisis

● **Torun Dramdal**  
and **Pema Gyamtsho**

Climate change impacts all of us, but this burden is not evenly spread out. Our experiences, our privileges, our support systems, our ability to cope – these dictate how the very real consequences of today's climate crisis impact us.

We know that women face exclusion and unequal burdens. Their access to resources, rights, assets, and power remains fettered. Climate change only deepens these inequalities – manifold.

Take the women from the Hindu Kush Himalaya region, which straddles eight countries and is one of the poorest and most neglected regions in the world. Women here have had to contend with men migrating in search of employment by shouldering more responsibilities: welfare and community work, agricultural labour, and natural resource use and management, among many other duties.

To add to this feminisation of responsibilities, women from the Himalaya have had to navigate through climate change-related uncertainty and hardships. Climate change impacts are felt more severely and rapidly in these mountains than anywhere else.

These disruptions to lives and livelihoods are very real and very serious. Domestic drudgery is compounded by climate change, which leaves little room for growth and other opportunities. And Himalayan women farmers have to deal with growing water scarcity, unpredictable and extreme weather events, falling productivity, and poor access to financial resources and market linkages. They also have to carve out alternative sources of livelihoods as traditional subsistence becomes harder by the day.

As farmers, as entrepreneurs, as caretakers, and in the host of other roles thrust upon them, women now have to adapt to these



Women from Kuikel Thumka talk about how simple, climate-resilient, and water-efficient technologies such as poly house, drip irrigation, mulching and digital services including mobile app have helped them adapt to climate change.

ICIMOD

disruptions of climate change. We can learn a great deal from the important contributions and adaptations women make towards climate action.

Recognising this, the Government of Norway and ICIMOD have been working together with Nepal's women to address the sharp gendered inequalities in climate change adaptation. We recently visited different municipalities in Kavre district where we have been piloting a package of solutions that are gender responsive, simple, and affordable. We were inspired by how women are leading the way with innovative, climate-resilient solutions and approaches.

Women are at the forefront of climate change impacts, and in Kavre they have been active and effective agents and promoters of adaptation and mitigation. For instance, we are working to develop a green, resilient, and

inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem for economic and environmental sustainability in Khawa village.

Women's groups have formed a home-based enterprise that processes milk and sells value-added dairy products at local markets in and around the Kathmandu Valley. Although the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the supply chain, these women's groups worked with government line agencies and the private sector to get back on track.

During the pandemic, we also trained women entrepreneurs in Khawa to produce off-farm products like face masks and PPE sets, and they used digital platforms for financial transactions to access prevailing market prices and technical advice linked to crop management. While the market for these specific items may change over time, the women have developed some e-commerce

skills and have combined private sector actor networking with their own sales in local markets, aiding overall sustainability into the future for these women entrepreneurs.

In Kuikel Thumka village, our work is largely focused on nature-based solutions and we witnessed how women have increased access to climate and market information via mobile apps and SMS advisories and better networking with municipalities and government line departments. This has led to women's growing leadership roles and decision making regarding farming, marketing of agricultural products, natural resource management, and financial investments and savings.

Our vision for Nepal, and the Himalaya-Hindu Kush region, is for women to become change agents for collective climate

action. As custodians of natural resources, women are repositories of traditional knowledge on how life with changing, finite natural systems can co-exist, and how benefits from such natural resources can be equitably distributed.

Seeing how deeply interwoven gender and climate change are, we need to relieve the burden on women who are already feeling its disproportionate impact. Women cannot be victims and champions at the same time. Women should not be silent beneficiaries, but they cannot be fixers of all problems either.

Women are and can be change agents, but we need targeted solutions that match their realities, and integrated policies and programmes that consider the intersections of gender and climate change. Only with the right environment and the proper incentives and capacity building can women really lead the charge for nature-based solutions, sustainable development, and effective climate action.

We are optimistic that this can happen and believe it is important to amplify voices of mountain women through examples of their leadership in climate action. During the high-level Ministerial Mountain Summit, the eight Himalaya-Hindu Kush countries supported collective climate action and investments in climate adaptation, low carbon development pathways, and resilience building.

This can help deliver nationally prioritised climate action and scale up solutions at speed and space. On the ground, we emphasise climate-adapted agricultural practices and nature-based solutions.

If we are to adapt to climate change, women will need to be at the heart of the climate-resilient solutions we promote across the Himalaya. 🇳🇵

*Torun Dramdal is the Norwegian Ambassador to Nepal, and Pema Gyamtsho is the Director General of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development.*



## Turkish-Siddhartha tie-up

Turkish Airlines and Siddhartha Arts Foundation have tied up for the Kathmandu Triennale, one of Nepal's biggest art festivals. Kathmandu Triennale 2022, organised by Siddhartha Arts Foundation is being held simultaneously in Patan, Kathmandu and Boudha with over 300 artworks by national and international artists, collectives and groups from over 40 other nations, including the Philippines, Haiti, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Myanmar and France. The festival will run till the end of March.

The collaboration between Turkish Airlines and Siddhartha Arts Foundation aims to promote Nepali art and culture. The artworks displayed by the Nepali and international artists during the festival focus on inclusivity, diversity and local identity and explore the impact of arts on society.

Abdullah Tuncer Kececi of Turkish Airlines and Siddhartha Arts Foundation's Sangeeta Thapa signed the collaboration agreement this week (pictured above).

## prabhu BANK

### NMB Savings

NMB Bank has launched 'YouWah! Digi Savings' to encourage youth to save and invest. People between 18-40 years can open this account which also comes with zero balance requirement as well as the highest interest rate. NMB is also offering free Mero Share, Demat and ASBA, facilities on the NMB credit cards.

### Samsung refrigerators

Samsung has introduced 3-Door Convertible French Door refrigerators featuring twin cooling plus technology that allows the separate cooling temperature in the fridge and



cooler. The refrigerator also has a convertible option allowing customers to turn their freezer into a fridge and store goods. The appliance comes with a ten-year warranty on the compressor and digital inverter technology that helps save up to 50% energy.

### Maruti Celerio

Maruti Suzuki has launched the new Celerio model in Nepal. First launched in 2014, Celerio is bigger, has new design, and mileage of 26.68kmpl, and safety features including an airbag and ABS with EBD and brake assist system. Available in red, silver and grey.

### Ncell all time data

Ncell has introduced 5GB all-time data for its customers at just Rs125 including taxes for 7 days. Similarly, at Rs147 users can now avail 4GB all-time data, 500MB for Viber messaging, and non-stop YouTube for a week.

### Vianet Mini Pack

Vianet has launched a new 'Mini Pack' offer under which customers can subscribe to 75 Mbps internet at Rs800 a month and get free ViaTV service which includes over 175 channels, movies and TV series.

### Coca-Cola Kanchu

Coca-Cola Nepal has introduced a 175ml returnable Kanchu glass pack at Rs25. The bottle comes with the Coca-Cola logo printed in Nepali.

### MG Vehicle launch

Paramount Motors has launched the MG ZS EV in Nepal. The car is available in two variants, Standard



and long range, with extensive security systems, interior and exterior features.



### DishHome in Inaruwa

DishHome fibernet has inaugurated a new showroom in Inaruwa with Khushbu Enterprises that has been working with the DTH service providers to expand its services across the country including fibernet.

### Kumari Leprosy

Kumari Job and The Leprosy Mission Nepal's FOUND project have partnered to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities who cannot access formal jobs.



### Nepal-India G2G

Nepal and India signed a G2G agreement under which Nepal will be ensured chemical fertiliser supply for the next five years. India will provide 100,000 tonnes of urea and 50,000 tonnes of DAP fertiliser this year. This will be followed by 170,000 tonnes, 195,000, and 210,000 tonnes of urea in the next few years. Fertiliser shortage has adversely affected harvests in recent years and Nepal needs more imports to meet the annual demand of 700,000 tonnes.

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# Girls just want to have fun

Project to train young Nepali girls to be sports coaches paves the way for future leaders

● **Aria Parasai**

Lhakpa Bhuti Lama has been into sports since she was four years old. She was part of India's Tibetan Women Soccer Team, received her formal training in Dehradun, and is qualified to participate in the Vancouver International Soccer Festival in Canada.

When the WE United Project called for applications to its coach program in 2021, she immediately applied. She had been playing in WE United's futsal tournaments for some years and now wanted to be a coach to help change people's perception of girls and women in sports.

"I want to empower girls from the Himalayan region through sports," says Lhakpa. "And help them be good examples for future generations."

Lhakpa, who faced discrimination in and on the field from an early age, recalls that the school grounds were occupied mostly by senior male teams. And when she and her friends used the basketball court, the boys would run away instead of joining them.

Even when she took her



coaching initiative to a Tibetan school, eyebrows were raised. Teachers insisted that studies were of utmost priority, and sports was a distraction. They could not understand why she wanted to coach girls anyway, despite the interest from female students.

"Even my own elder brother would discourage me from playing, saying it would affect my studies," says Lhakpa. "But my academics only improved as I continued to participate in sports."

Punam Regmi from Dhangadi has a similar story. A go-getter from birth, she held eclectic interests from academics to dancing. A

student of environmental science, she had started her own menstrual awareness campaign when she came upon the WE Coach program on Facebook.

"I am new to football, I hadn't really got the opportunity to learn about it until I joined the program," she says, "Now I want the girls in my village to play, too. That is why I decided to become a coach."

After the training, she reached out to schools to see if they would let her coach their female students but there was some resistance. They



eventually gave in after learning that Regmi would coach for free.

"Most schools didn't want to involve their female students in sports. They thought the girls would be unwilling to participate, but everyone came," says Regmi, who wants to join the Nepal Army and maybe even become the Army Chief one day.

Only half the students were coached at first, but the initially skeptical teachers were soon in awe when they saw the girls play.

There are fewer than five ANFA certified female

coaches in Nepal. Even the Nepal women football team is led by a male coach. This is why the WE Coach Nepal program was launched in 2018. The program completed its third edition in 2021, training twelve young women from Dhangadi, Surkhet and Kathmandu to be football coaches.

WE United Project was started in 2014 by American expats Amanda Cats-Baril and Anne McGuinness to address the lack of playing grounds and women participation in sports in Kathmandu. This was back when there was only one futsal at the



# Planet of the pangolins

One woman's decade-long campaign to save Nepal's endangered scaly anteaters

● **Maheshwar Acharya**

3 May 2009 has a special significance for Tulsi Laxmi Suwal, as it was the day she found a mother pangolin with her new-born pup inside the community forest area in Bhaktapur.

Suwal, who is a researcher of pangolins and a conservation activist, took the shy and harmless little creatures to the Central Zoo in Jawalakhel where she began to study them. Co-incidentally, her own child was five years of age then, and watching the mother pangolin feed, cuddle and take care of her pup, Suwal felt a growing emotional attachment with the pair.

"For 15 days I would go to the zoo every morning," Suwal recalls. "Then I would observe them all day and return home in the evening."

This experience, Suwal adds, helped her gain a more holistic knowledge of the scaly mammals. Later the mother and the pup were released back to the Bhaktapur community forest.

Pangolins are small mammals, between 30 to 100cm in size, with large, protective keratin scales



TULSI LAXMI SUWAL

covering their skin. There are eight extant species found in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, all of which are currently considered threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). They are the most trafficked mammals in the world because of illicit demand for their meat and scales in China.

Nepal is home to two species: the Chinese and Indian varieties.

Both species are in Nepal's protected list and the killing, poaching, transporting, selling or buying of the scaly anteater is punishable with Rs1 million fine and/or up to 15 years in jail.

However, 100,000 pangolins are smuggled live from Southeast Asia and Africa into China every year where its scales are believed to have therapeutic value and its meat is considered a delicacy. Some ethnic

groups in Nepal also consume pangolins for their supposed health benefits.

Save Pangolins, a global organisation that supports conservation actions in Africa and Asia, and raises awareness of pangolins around the world, estimates that one million of the animals have been killed worldwide in the last decade alone.

Suwal was first introduced to pangolins in 2007 when she came upon a picture of the animal in a book. She was at the time a post-graduate student at the Central Zoology department in Tribhuvan University.

Curious, she looked for more information on pangolins and discovered the works of conservationists Juddha Gurung and Daniel Challender. As her interest grew, so did her affection for the animals, which appear to her like new-born babies. Then in 2009, along with her studies, Suwal also began her conservation work, joining Nepal's Small Mammals Conservation and Research Foundation (SMCRF).

For her dissertation on pangolins, Suwal chose to work in Balthali in Kavre district where the private forest is a good habitat for the animals, studying them for months. This was almost 12

years ago when female students of Zoology would usually choose parasitology as their field of study.

"When we were studying, even botany and environment were more popular choices among girls," says Suwal. "But I picked zoology and focused on ecology."

Her passion for pangolins has taken Suwal all over the country, often to identify the different species found in the community and national forests. However, she feels that many people are still unfamiliar with the animal and its significance.

She would inform people, wherever she went, about the role of pangolins in our ecology and biodiversity. She even started a campaign to impart relevant news and information about the animal through the social network.

Gradually the interest took on momentum and more people have come to join the conservation efforts in recent years. Suwal works with the local people, media, community forest groups, security forces, the Ministry of Forests and Environment, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, and also conducts discussions and talks in communities, schools, colleges and universities on pangolins to raise awareness.



PHOTOS: WE UNITED

in sports, even an hour of futsal means restructuring one's family and home priorities. There are babies to take care of, in-laws to look after, children to bathe and clothe, and guests to serve.

But gradually, the number picked up. In 2017, WE United organised the first annual futsal league for women, the Mahila Premier League. However, while everyone involved (referees and players, organisers) the coach was still male.

Enter the WE Coach program. The objective was not just to train coaches, but also to foster an environment where transformative change-makers can thrive. The girls are taught about gender equality and equity, women empowerment, and creating safe spaces.

Lhakpa recounts the annual Lhosar football tournament in her village where, originally, only male football teams were allowed to play. When she took the issue up with the organisers, they finally allowed her and the girls to form two teams after much demurral.

"It started with two teams," she adds. "But every year the number only grows, and more girls participate."

Lhakpa feels proud to see the girls passionate about playing sports. "Their attitude has changed," she says. "And they have learnt to prioritise playing, enjoying and learning over the outcome of the game."

Punam says perceptions are changing and her father has learnt to cook and no longer asks her to stay back to take care of the chores when she goes out to play.

Program director at WE United, Silika Shakya, adds: "If my daughter grows up seeing me play, she will learn that she can too. A woman playing sports should not be something out of the ordinary, it should happen in every household."

Adds Arpana Pradhan: "We are not competing with men, but with ourselves. If they have the right to play, why not us? We are also playing to have fun. Women playing and coaching creates positive role models across many careers. All women can be leaders, sports is just a tool." 📌

Godavari Alumni Association in Thamel, but that too was exclusively used by men.

"Initially the project looked to foster a sports culture amongst women," says the project's Arpana Pradhan. "Now the focus is also on building leadership and skills development. We want to change the way women view themselves and each other."

The project began as a weekly friendly futsal session every Saturday, welcoming players from all levels of skill and backgrounds. Only a few women participated at first. On top of the stigma attached to women

By 2012, there was already a growing interest among locals as well as post-graduate students. So far, the number of studies done by the university on pangolins is 35, which includes the participation of government institutions involved in conservation and habitat protection. Suwal, who is currently pursuing PhD in Taiwan, is nearing the completion of her research, which will make her the first female zoologist from Nepal with a doctorate on pangolins.

Taiwan has the highest population density of pangolins in the world. "Taiwan is proof that China can also reduce its demand for pangolins through education, stricter laws, transboundary collaboration and enforcement," adds Suwal.

"I wanted to study," she says thinking back on her journey. "All of this has been possible because of the support from various people in my life." Her husband Manoj Bakhunche who is an engineering officer with the Armed Police has been her strongest supporter.

Born in Chochhe of Bhaktapur, Suwal wanted to be a teacher like her father when she was a child. She began to teach at Dipendra Police School in Sankhu when she was 19 after her mother passed away, and continued to teach until she completed her Bachelor eight years later.

Even as she took evening post-graduate Sociology classes at Tri-Chandra College, her true interest was Zoology, and promptly returned to it after taking two year's unpaid leave of absence from teaching.

Through her expertise and involvement in pangolin conservation, she was made a member of the IUCN's pangolin specialist group in 2012. She is among seven Nepalis in the group and this network brings her together with 148 experts from 37 countries. Further, her dissertation is aided by Save Pangolins, which recently recognised and honoured her conservation work.

"Pangolins are critically endangered in the world," says Suwal: "But the growing concern for its conservation is promising. It is important that we all work together to keep the mammal from going extinct."

An example of such work is the observation of the World Pangolin Day on the third Saturday in February annually across the world. Another is also the 'pangolin pavement' in the Bagh Bhairab Community Forest in Kathmandu's Machhegaun – a first in Nepal. As conservation institutions expand their work, they are also beginning to include pangolins in their scope and programs.

However, Suwal believes that while community and organisations are now taking pangolins seriously, current efforts are not enough. A major concern is that there is no budget allocated especially for pangolin conservation, and nor have regular programs for long-term study and research been decided.

She adds: "Conservation work need to be expanded across the country systemically to save more pangolin lives." 📌



BICKY SHAHI

## Going under the scalpel in Nepal

Nepal's first female facial plastic surgeon demystifies the beauty procedure and recommends caution

'Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder.' In spite of this or because of it, the global beauty industry at \$511 billion is one of the fastest-growing businesses and is expected to reach over \$716 billion by 2025.



LIFE TIME  
Anjana Rajbhandari

Changing standards about what is supposed to 'look good', and often unrealistic beauty goals dictated by influencers and celebrities on social media like Instagram and TikTok have only accelerated the trend. It is no surprise Nepal is also fast catching up.

Which is why, despite the pandemic, beauty clinics and skin treatment centres in Kathmandu have seen an increased demand for nose reconstruction/rhinoplasty, double eyelid surgery/blepharoplasty, dimple creation, hair removal, breast reduction, brow lift, lip fillers and scar removal.

"The most common cosmetic surgery is blepharoplasty where double eyelid folds are created for monolids, or for dermatochalasis where upper eyelid skin sag due to aging," says surgeon Sarina Rajbhandari, who was surprised to find a lot of people coming for rhinoplasty in Nepal when she first started the practice.

After learning about the prevalence of rhinoplasty, Rajbhandari decided to pursue further facial plastic surgery while continuing to practice ENT. She completed her Master's in Otolaryngology and worked at Kirtipur Cleft & Burn Center.

Facial reconstruction was a relatively new field filled with challenges in Nepal's medical scene, but the young doctor saw

potential, eventually leading her on the path to becoming Nepal's first female facial plastic surgeon.

Rajbhandari did her fellowship from Tri-Service General Hospital in Taiwan in 2019 under Chuan Hsiang Kao, who trained at the University of California in San Diego.

She also worked under Kwon Taek Keun at AONE Clinic in South Korea, which is the new capital for facial plastic surgery in the world. She also underwent a month-long facial plastic surgery training at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok.

Even as people opt to go under the knife to change or improve their look, the procedure is riddled with common myths, the biggest being the cost factor.

"The general public tends to think that only the rich can afford plastic surgery. That is not true," says Rajbhandari, adding that it is the question of want vs. need. "There is no set price for a type of surgery because everyone is different, but it is much more affordable to get the quality procedures done in Nepal than abroad."



SUKRITI DHAKAL

It is also important to distinguish between reconstructive and cosmetic surgeries. Facial plastic surgery has two categories. First is reconstruction, which includes trauma cases, burns, scar revision, and surgeries for congenital birth defects. The second is cosmetic, where you can change your appearance because you want to reinvent yourself.

Another common misconception about facial plastic surgery is that it lasts forever, gives unrealistic results, and the recovery process is swift.

A scar can be minimised but cannot be eliminated. The skin is constantly aging, so if you choose to have a facelift now, it may last just 10-15 years. It is not a one-and-done procedure. It is essential you have realistic expectations, explains Rajbhandari.

It is recommended to meet with medical professionals a few times to discuss options and possibilities rather than rushing for any cosmetic treatment. It is essential that patients and clients make an informed decision before moving forward because they are essentially altering their appearance.

Rajbhandari has performed an astonishing number of 'revision' surgeries after their procedures were botched. She also suggests meeting with different surgeons to see who you feel most comfortable with.

"People value marketing on social media over qualifications of the doctor, so it is important to check their credentials before trusting your face with one," she says. Rajbhandari herself does not perform immediate surgery, preferring to first discuss what the procedure entails, the risks, and how to take care of things afterward.

She adds: "We are dealing with people's appearance that affects their self-esteem and mental health. We make sure they understand what they are doing before they go under the knife."

Given the importance society places on women's beauty and the cosmetic products that primarily target them, one may think only women come for plastic surgery. A significant portion of Rajbhandari's patients is male.

Despite her experience and qualifications, Rajbhandari still faces the challenges of being a young female doctor in Nepal. A lot of people still prefer to go to a male doctor for surgery. "I have had consultations with patients and clients who meet with me to talk but choose to go to a male doctor for the actual surgery," she reveals.

Rajbhandari has also been judged on her own appearance. She has been called vain for putting on makeup but also called out for not making an effort despite being a facial plastic surgeon. She does not let the opinion of others affect her work, however.

"But having a supportive work environment, coworkers, and a good team makes a difference in both your professional and personal life," adds the surgeon who divides her time between Grande Hospital and Healthy Choice Clinic in Kathmandu.

The Omicron surge is already subsiding in Nepal and the region, but Rajbhandari's work schedule was not much different even during the peak of the pandemic. She typically works 7-8 hours a day, but there have also been days where she worked from 6AM to 9PM and performed surgeries even on Saturdays. A supportive family is her backbone.

Having said that, doctors themselves need to be healthy. She prioritises her physical and mental being. Her diet is healthy, and she eats on time. She walks regularly and religiously follows her skincare routine before bed.

Sarina Rajbhandari's best recommendation as a doctor: "Invest time in yourself." 📌

*Anjana Rajbhandari writes this fortnightly Nepali Times column Life Time about mental health, physical health and socio-cultural issues.*

# About Town

## EVENTS



### Women Haat Bazaar

Celebrate women entrepreneurs by being a part of the women-led Haat bazaar, and enjoy products from companies founded by women.  
5-6 March, 1pm-6pm, Maya Manor Boutique Hotel

### Trave-Yeller

Attend the Girls Empowered by Travel Nepal's annual fundraising event, listen to inspirational stories from women change-makers and activists, and participate in the cycling activity around the Bungamati trail.  
8 March, 7am onwards, 9818458964

### Heal yourself

Attend the meditation session by Swami Anand Arun and be part of a healing and liberating experience. Register online for the session.  
6 March, 7.45pm-10.45pm, 9847807082



### Young Artist show

Attend the collateral art exhibition which is part of the Kathmandu Triennale 2022 demonstrating the works of young artists.  
4 March, 4pm onwards, Gallery MCube, Chakupat

### Women with Vision

The award ceremony will honour top women influencers of Nepal in fields of education, media, business, politics and more. Book tickets now.  
19 March, 4pm onwards, Hotel Aloft, Thamel

## DINING



### Bricks Café

Try out the wood-fired pizza Bricks Café is known for, and enjoy a variety of other cuisine in warm and pleasant atmosphere.  
Kupondole, 9801179333

## ONLINE ARCHIVES

### Coolmath games

Find fun games and puzzle-based activities on Cool Math games. Perfect for children.

### Revisionist History

In Revisionist History, *The New Yorker's* Malcolm Gladwell re-examines overlooked and misunderstood elements, events, people, ideas and even songs of the past. Find the podcast on Stitcher and Apple Podcast.



### World Press Photo

Browse through the World Press Photo's archive of powerful award-winning press photographs and photo stories from around the world.

### Audio Bites

Audio Bites by Shutter Corp films offers discussions with Nepali public figures on social issues including mental health, motherhood, social media, the environment and more. Find Audio Bites on YouTube.



### Herne Katha

The web series depicts untold stories of ordinary people in the form of short documentaries. Check out their YouTube channel.

### Chez Caroline

Best place in town for authentic French and continental cuisine. Try the Profiteroles au Chocolat and Choux pastry filled with vanilla ice cream and hot chocolate sauce.  
Baber Mahal Revisited (01) 4263070



### Dwarika's

Enjoy a Friday night dinner with a nine course meal at Dwarika's or special Nepali BBQ and drinks with live cooking stations. Call for reservations.  
The Dwarika's Hotel, Battispatali (01) 4479488

## GETAWAY



### Tiger Palace

Tiger Palace Resort offers a wide range of recreational facilities, six different restaurants and an international Casino for entertainment. A must visit place for those venturing South.  
Bhairawa (071) 512000

### Namo Buddha Resort

The traditional Newa-style resort perched on a hilltop with magnificent views of the Himalayas also serves the most delicious vegetarian meals in a peaceful, tranquil environment.  
Namo Buddha, Phulbari, 9851106802



### Buddha Maya Garden Hotel

Stroll along the Lumbini World Heritage Garden and visit the historical Maya Devi Temple during your stay at this beautiful establishment.  
Lumbini (71) 580219

### Kathmandu Guest House

A rejuvenating stay for trekkers, Kathmandu Guest House offers hospitable, comfortable accommodation, serene gardens and a short walk away from Hanumandhoka Darbar Square.  
Thamel (01) 4700632

### Bandipur Safari Lodge

Book your rooms for a weekend retreat, and explore the rich cultural heritage and wildlife that Bandipur has to offer.  
Bandipur, 9449597880



### DanRan Restaurant

Enjoy a Japanese meal at DanRan. Don't miss out on the soft tofu, pork cutlets and don varieties offered.  
Jhamsikhel Road (01) 5521027

### Belgian Waffles

Belgian Waffles has the best, sweetest, scrumptious waffles. Pick any option from Strawberry cream-cheese to butterscotch crunch. Drop by the nearest outlet or just order online.  
9849636013

## WEEKEND WEATHER



Shivaratri is the cut-off for the transition from spring to early summer, and right on schedule we see temperature climbing to the mid-20s this weekend. Even better, the minimum temperature will also go up into the double digits for the first time this year. Along with this, there is a large high pressure system sitting over northern India – so, plenty of sunshine. There will be some clouds drifting through early next week, but the days will be balmy.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
23° 9°	23° 9°	24° 11°

## AIR QUALITY INDEX



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The good news is that with winter finally over, there is more air circulation and the pollution is not trapped as much at ground level in the mornings. Afternoon breeze also blows off the particulates collected from emissions and brick kilns during the day. However, this is also the season of dust being blown in all the way from the Afghan-Iran desert, and there is already some of that happening.

## OUR PICK

Yūsuke Kafuku is a renowned stage actor and director, who two years after his wife's death receives an offer to direct Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* for stage in Hiroshima. Enter Misaki Watari, a young woman assigned to chauffeur him in his beloved red Saab 900. As tensions mount amongst the cast and crew, Yūsuke is forced to confront haunting truths from his past, not least his wife's connection to another young actor, the painful memories, and grapple with self-acceptance – all with the help of his driver. *Drive My Car* is a visually stunning experience spanning three beautiful hours, patiently telling a complex and well-crafted narrative about love, loss and peace. Adapted from Haruki Murakami's story of the same name from his collection *Men Without Women*, the film is directed by Ryūsuke Hamaguchi and stars Hidetoshi Nishijima, Toko Miura, Reika Kirishima and Masaki Okada.



## कोमिड-१९ विरुद्धको खोप सरकारले निःशुल्क लगाइरहेको छ ।


अबैध रुपमा खोप बेच्ने र किनेर लगाउने दुवैलाई प्रचलित कानून बमोजिम कडा कारवाही हुनेछ । कोरोना विरुद्धको खोप बेचबिखन भएको थाहा पाउने जो कोहीले स्थानीय प्रशासन, प्रहरी कार्यालय, पालिका वा स्वास्थ्य कार्यालयमा यथार्थ जानकारी गराउनु हुन अनुरोध छ ।




बजारमा लुकिछिपी बेच्न राखिएका खोपहरु नक्कली हुन सक्छन् ।



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# Women in the driving seat

Driving three-wheelers allows women to stand on their own two feet

● Shristi Karki

Indra Maya Shrestha was raised in a village in Kavre by a sick mother and a father who could not afford to send her to school. She was always fascinated seeing people driving cars in the movies, and came to Kathmandu aged 17 with a dream of driving a car herself.

But city life was not what she imagined, jobs were hard to come by, and getting a license was not so easy twenty years ago. One day, she rode a Safa Tempo electric three-wheeler and was surprised to see a woman driving it.

"That is when I thought, if those women can do it, so can I," Shrestha recalls.

It took her a year to get a driving license and become a Safa operator. Today, she owns her own three-wheeler and runs a charging station in Mahankal which can charge 35 battery-powered vehicles at one go.

Shrestha drives along four routes in the Sankhamul-Chabahil-Boudha-Kapan area with fellow female tempo operators Sunshang Ghising and Saraswati Moktan. There were at most 20 female Safa Tempo drivers 20 years ago. Today there are 500.

Saraswati Moktan (pictured) came to Kathmandu from Hetauda as a newly married woman in 2002. Her husband took a job as a tempo operator, and when she found out that women drove the tempos too, she learned to drive as well.



SHRISTI KARKI

"My husband taught me to drive but when it was time to get a license, he stopped me," recalls Moktan, who spent the next few years raising her son. "But in 2011, I put her foot down, this time he didn't stop me."

Sunshang Ghising grew up in a family of five siblings in Dolakha. "My family had to wait for Dasain to wear nice clothes. How could my parents have afforded to send five kids to school?" she says.

Ghising came to Kathmandu as a young

mother 10 years ago, and initially worked as a seamstress. After the 2015 earthquake, she bought a Safa Tempo, at first not intending to drive it herself but after meeting other operators, changed her mind. She failed the licence test a few times, but got one eventually.

For Shrestha, Ghising and Moktan, operating electric three-wheelers has been a path to financial independence, supporting their families, and putting children through school.

"We are self-sufficient business operators," says Ghising proudly.

Adds Moktan, "We did not get

the chance to be educated, and that is always a regret. But we have worked hard to educate our children."

Shrestha points to the jewellery Ghising is wearing, and laughs, "She bought that driving a Safa Tempo."

Other women Safa Tempo drivers have moved on. Chanmaya Tamang drove three-wheelers in Kathmandu for ten years, and now owns a car in which she gives driving lessons for women.

It has not been easy for the women drivers. Women drivers are frequently harassed by traffic police and face constant discrimination.

"Imagine, the police still ask us why we are out on the roads instead of at home cooking," says Tamang. "If we attempt to talk back, they issue a fine on the spot."

Shrestha says she has been sexually harassed as well. Policemen often pull her over and initiate unwanted conversation. "They ask for our phone numbers, and if we refuse they give us tickets. Some women have actually quit driving because of this."

Meanwhile, the response from the passengers is markedly different, many are still surprised to find women behind the wheels. Some express their respect and appreciation when they get off at their stops, others do not ask for change or even pay five times the fare amount.

"We know we have worked very hard, and we don't need validation," says Moktan. "But it still feels good to get such responses every once in a while."

Because they operate

electric vehicles, these female entrepreneurs are also helping Nepal reduce fossil fuel use and meet its goal of net-zero emissions.

Sonika Manandhar's fin-tech company Aloj has been helping Safa Tempo entrepreneurs get affordable financing since 2018, and says the 700 electric three-wheelers are an important component of Kathmandu Valley's public transport network, and have contributed to reducing Nepal's climate impact in the past 30 years.

"I call them climate ninjas," Manandhar says.

Safa Tempos started out in 1993 as a USAID project to convert polluting diesel Vikram three-wheelers into battery powered ones.

Safa's lithium-ion batteries need to be replaced every five years, while the lead-acid batteries are replaced every six months. At present, there are more than 700 Safa Tempos in Kathmandu Valley.

But the government's ban on 20-year old vehicles extends to the Safa tempos too. Even though operators successfully lobbied to extend it to 30 years, they have to constantly convince bureaucrats about the utility of these vehicles.

Safa Tempos have also dissuaded many Nepali women from migrating overseas for work by providing a well-paying alternative job at home.

"We earn as much here comfortably, and double that if we own our own vehicle," says Shrestha.

The chat with this reporter is over, and the women get out of the office into the sun and talk business for a while.

Then Saraswati Moktan gets into Chanmaya Tamang's Maruti. They say goodbye and leave, Tamang's toddler seated in Moktan's lap. Indra Maya Shrestha and Sunshang Ghising make their way to a teashop on their Shivaratri off day. 🇳🇵



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# Sky is the limit for Nepal's

Five pioneering researchers prove that women scientists can perform on par with, if not outshine, their male counterparts

● Anita Shrestha



## Tista Prasai Joshi

Nepal has one of the lowest figures for access to safe drinking water among developing nations, with some 71% of all water sources contaminated with Escherichia coli, a leading cause of gastric infections among children.

Tista Prasai Joshi's proposal in 2019 aimed to purify water using organic arsenic which was the subject of her PhD in China's University of Science and Technology. Her research into arsenic (which can be a poison if it is of a different chemical composition) to see if it could be a water purifying compound is unique and could have implications for other developing countries.

With the grant money, Joshi bought a nanoparticle analysing equipment 'Zeta Potential,' which came in handy also for fellow researchers who previously did not have access to such a tool to help with their studies.

"Science has never been prioritised by our government," says Joshi who is currently with the NAST. "In fact, when I came back I had few pieces of equipment that I could use for my study."

Such blatant disregard for the field has meant that Nepal has not been able to retain young and promising researchers who have left for the US or Europe in search of better opportunities.

There are many examples to prove that, given the right opportunities, Nepali women can perform as well as, if not better than, their male counterparts.

Nepali women professionals have proven this time and again despite a persisting gender gap in all the fields. And it is in science and technology that the representation of women has been low.

However, Nepal's women scientists have been making their mark in fields as diverse as medical

research, engineering, genetics and even astrophysics.

On International Women's Day on 8 March, we bring you five women

scientists who between them have pioneered in forecasting droughts, developing climate-friendly agriculture, research in medicinal herbs and plants, and water purification methods.

These Nepali researchers were internationally recognised with the 'Early Career Fellowship' award worth \$50,000 by UNESCO's Organisation for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) between 2018-2020.

OWSD was set up in 1987 to encourage women in developing countries in the field of science and research so that their work can create an impact at the regional and international levels.



## Prativa Pandey

Prativa Pandey always dreamt of one day becoming a biological engineer. She fulfilled it by getting a degree in chemistry and mathematics from Northwestern University in the United States before doing her PhD in nanotechnology chemistry.

By 2015 she was working as a semiconductor scientist, and she decided to return to Nepal after the earthquake. But she had no idea what she would do next and she travelled all over the country trying to identify her next venture.

"I saw potential in medicinal herbs and plants. Although it had nothing to do with my studies, it is an important area but with little to no research," says Pandey, who then started researching plants.

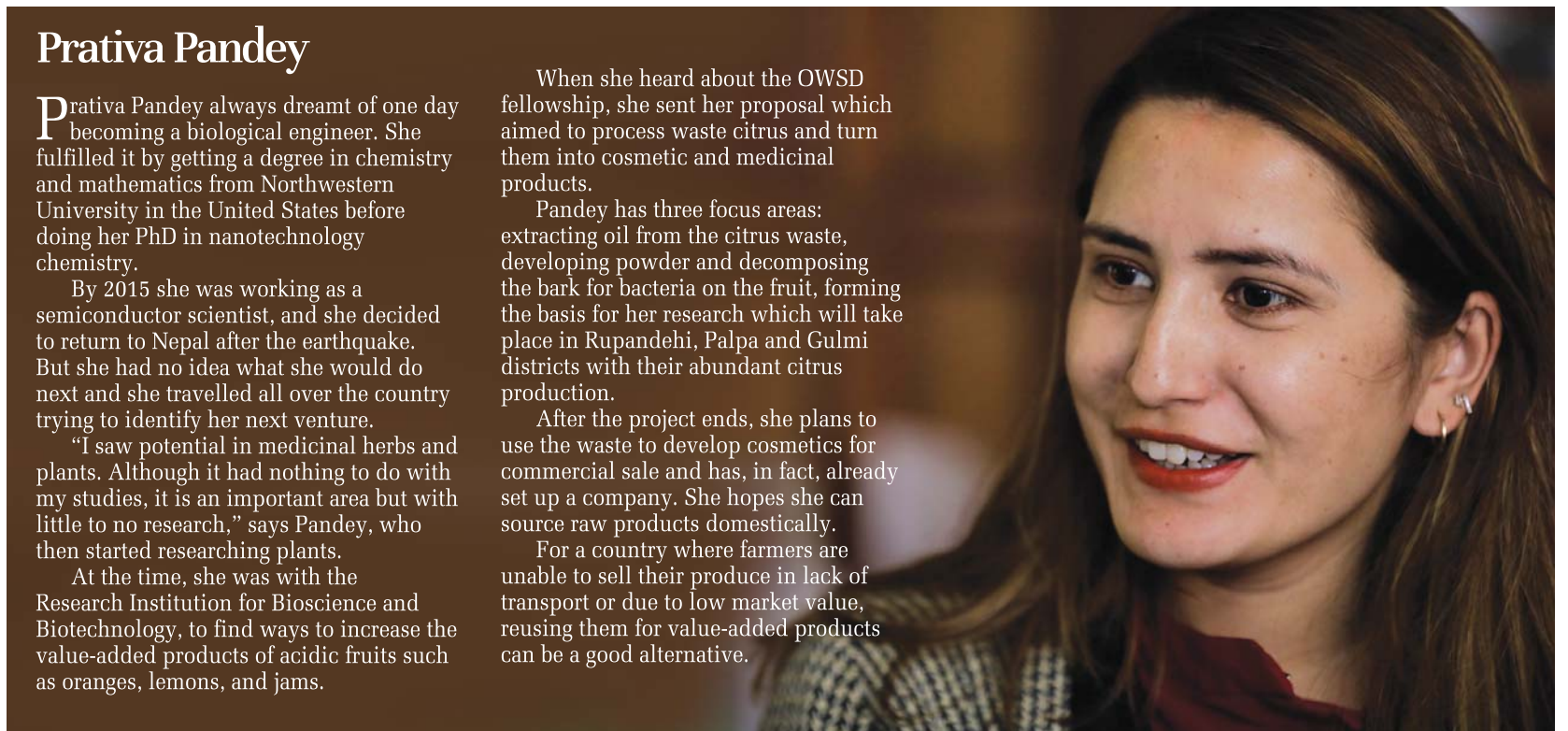
At the time, she was with the Research Institution for Bioscience and Biotechnology, to find ways to increase the value-added products of acidic fruits such as oranges, lemons, and jams.

When she heard about the OWSD fellowship, she sent her proposal which aimed to process waste citrus and turn them into cosmetic and medicinal products.

Pandey has three focus areas: extracting oil from the citrus waste, developing powder and decomposing the bark for bacteria on the fruit, forming the basis for her research which will take place in Rupandehi, Palpa and Gulmi districts with their abundant citrus production.

After the project ends, she plans to use the waste to develop cosmetics for commercial sale and has, in fact, already set up a company. She hopes she can source raw products domestically.

For a country where farmers are unable to sell their produce in lack of transport or due to low market value, reusing them for value-added products can be a good alternative.



## Jyoti Bhandari

Jyoti Bhandari is an associate professor at the Institute of Forest Studies in Pokhara and has been involved in the conservation of bats since her time at China Agricultural University as a PhD student.

During this time, she got an opportunity to tour grasslands and forests across Nepal, and came to a swift realisation that the country lacks proper documentation of its plants and herbs.

Which is why for her 2020 OWSD proposal, she decided to extend her research work into Nepal's traditional herbs to conserve them and also find ways to farm them sustainably so that

it can raise living standards of farmers.

This meant training local farmers in the scientific commercial farming of herbs, and this is exactly what Bhandari has been doing since receiving the grant in 2020.

She has also concentrated her study in the Annapurna region and she frequently visits Sikles, Ghandurk, Lamjung and Lower Mustang to document the herbs found in the region, what they are used for, and whether they are commercially produced.

Bhandari had previously received the Plant Conservation Fellowship, the Rufford Small Grant and the WWF Russell Eton Fellowship.

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# women scientists

## Shobha Paudel

Unseasonal downpours last October decimated much of Nepal's paddy fields and reduced harvest. This was one of the impacts of the climate crisis on food productivity. Agriculture is also one of the most energy intensive sectors of the economy, thus contributing to global warming.

Which is why 'Smart Agriculture' is the new buzzword and researchers around the world are working to develop technologies that allow for crop production that does not add to climate change. One such researcher from Nepal is Shobha Paudel.

Born to a family of farmers in Chitwan, it was only fitting that Paudel would continue her ancestral profession, but at an entirely different level. Following the completion of her PhD from Kyoto University, she has been looking into advancing environment-friendly agriculture practices in Nepal.

First, she closely studied a village in Nawalpur declared as climate-friendly and its farming methods that produced less carbon



but increased productivity, and in turn, income for the farming families.

She picked eight research areas including organic fertilisers, solar-powered irrigation, jab planter for corn, and other zero-emission technologies. She then proposed to analyse environment-friendly farming systems in the Gandaki Watershed region.

Her research showed that solar-irrigated crops were more

expensive but the use of organic fertilisers and jab planters led to higher yield as well as reduced emissions. She also identified systems applicable to places with similar topography like Nepal.

Paudel has now opened an online platform and an app for farmers to reach consumers directly with their products and in the future, she aims to scale up Nepal's smart agriculture system in other Asian countries.

## Hemu Kafle

Last year, the mountains of Nepal suffered one of the longest droughts of recent times. Since the majority of farmers in Nepal depend on rain-fed agriculture, information on precipitation patterns and forecast of impending drought can help prepare farmers. This is where Hemu Kafle's research can prove useful.

Kafle obtained a Master's degree from the Ben Gurion University in Israel and her PhD in remote sensing from Nagoya University in Japan. After returning to Nepal, she joined NAST but soon after that in 2014, she set out to open the 'Kathmandu Institute of Research Sciences'.

For her OWSD proposal, Kafle decided to continue her research on drought estimation in Israel and Japan, using photos taken by remote sensing satellites in Nepal. Kafle was unable to continue her study in Nepal due to relatively fewer ground stations in the country.

"Nepal has varying geography and climates which make it difficult to set up meteorological stations in remote areas," says Kafle. But with her grant money, she built her own low-cost mobile meteorological station in a van to study drought patterns in remote Nepal by analysing satellite imagery.

Kafle's study also records air pressure and humidity which can help predict weather, estimate farming capacity and drought patterns in the area. She has found that most of Nepal will experience drier March and April in the coming decades.



For now, Kafle is trying to secure a patent for her meteorological station and find a way to set up a fleet of similar stations across the country. "The government does not support researchers financially and it is costly to buy equipment on your own, so we have to find ways around it," she adds.

## Nepalis win two investigative journalism awards



Two Nepali reporters are winners in top investigative journalism awards announced on 2 March, and have been recognised for their exposés of injustice.

Namrata Sharma was awarded for her collaborative investigation with Luc Caregari from *Reporter.lu* and *Finance Uncovered*, of the human trafficking of Nepali workers by Nepali-owned restaurants in Luxembourg.

Bhrikuti Rai's investigative report exposed illegal sand-mining in Nepal and the murder of environmental activist Dilip Mahato three years ago. She got the Fetisov Journalism Award 2021 in the category Excellence in Environmental Reporting.

Namrata Sharma is the former Chair of the Centre for Investigative Journalism Nepal (CIJ-N), while Bhrikuti Rai reported for *Nepali Times* and *The Kathmandu Post*. Both the award-winning investigative reports had been carried in *Nepali Times* in 2021.



Sharma's investigation built on a previous story involving human trafficking and modern slavery in the Nepali restaurant trade in Finland. She used her extensive contacts in the South Asian migrant community across Europe to expose the crime in her collaborative story 'Nepalis abused by Nepalis in Luxembourg'.

Workers at a popular Nepali restaurant in the Grand Duchy told her of serial beatings and other human rights abuses by the owner. The workers themselves had been trafficked from Nepal, and lured after paying money to the owners for their work permits.

Although initially fearful of speaking out, the workers told Sharma about how they were barred from going out, their passports were confiscated, and their bank accounts controlled. The owners withdrew their employees' wages, and made them work for free for a year.

Sharma is working with other European whistleblowers on cross-border investigations of abuse and human trafficking by other Nepalis.

Bhrikuti Rai's story, 'Drawing a line in the sand', was published in *Nepali Times* last year, and used the first anniversary of the murder by the sand mafia of activist Dilip Mahato to show how illegal sand-mining continued unabated and his family still sought justice for the crime.

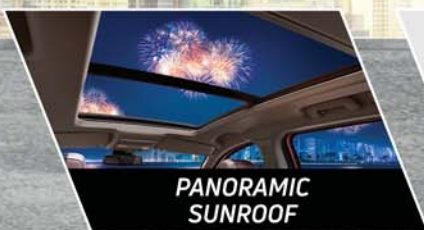
Winners in other categories include Corinne Redfern and Ali Hsana for their joint Italy-Bangladesh investigation of sex trafficking, an expose of how the caste system persists in India's prison system by Sukanya Shantha of *The Wire* website, and an international investigation of the Asian connection of the Mexican drug cartels.

*Finance Uncovered* is an international investigative journalism training organisation that aims to improve the quantity and quality of investigative stories that are rooted in illicit finance or exploitation. The Fetisov Journalism Award was founded by Gleb Fetisov, a businessman, producer, scientist and philanthropist.

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## Unfair Sex

After celebrating World Wildlife Day which coincided with Global Day of Baristas on Thursday, the world as we know it is now getting ready to mark the International Women's Day (IWD) on Tuesday.

After fulfilling the onerous responsibility of holding up all the sky for most of human history, we men can now safely bequeath to the womenfolk the duty of holding up not just the rightful half of the sky, but our half as well.

This will mean more free time for men so that we can indulge in various hygienic pursuits that we have previously neglected because of our busy schedules — like burping loudly in public and excavating our ear wax.

IWD is a special occasion to celebrate the empowerment and self-reliance of women, and their rejection of expensive beauty products that were being foisted on them through clever advertising for the sole purpose of appealing to hunter gatherer men.

The time has therefore come for us men and boys to take up the cudgels, and put in some effort ourselves to look fair and lovely. (Editor's note: Google 'cudgel' to check if it is a rude word.)

A recent survey showed that 80% of the men in the Subcontinent secretly break into the cosmetic drawers of their wives to steal beauty products. The other 20% dressed up as women and bought fairness cream from their neighbourhood drug store, according to unusually reliable sources.

(This week's column is a Special Advertorial Supplement proudly sponsored by Pale Face™ brand fairness cream for men. Registered TradeMark, Copy-cats Will Be Persecuted. Patent Pending.)

Thankfully, it is the private sector that has come to the rescue by launching a risky and pioneering venture to announce new products designed for men. After achieving astounding KPI and sales in parts of the Turd World, the companies have discovered a vast untapped market in Nepal among male consumers for a range of fairness lotions and potions under the brand name White Elephant™.

The fact that cosmetics conglomerates these days do not discriminate between the needs of men and women is a sign that we are finally edging towards gender parity in everyday life. Card-carrying members of the male persuasion will now have the same access to beauty products that women have.

This was not easy, since he-men like us tend to be more thick-skinned and hirsute. The new oinkment therefore had to be an industrial grade mixture of bleach, exfoliator, concentrated white enamel paint with a paraffin-based emulsion fixer. Directions for use: Apply liberally on the affected dark areas twice a day after meals. And, voila, within just two days you won't be dark and ugly anymore, you will be fair and handsome like Michael Jackson.

The product range also has the popular Albino Crème de la Crème™ designed for high society men. So, this March 8 all men of drinking age and above should symbolically demonstrate their solidarity for gender equality by using products designed for women, and take up the cudgels to be fair to the unfair sex.

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## Of anger and love

Mothers and daughters are each other, without ever wanting to be.

PRATIBHA TULADHAR

Tara wanted to understand why she had been so angry all the time. But she could make no sense of her anger — anger that burst from within like an inferno.



**SUBURBAN TALES**  
Pratibha Tuladhar

Most days, she would wake up in the morning and go back to sleep. She could not comprehend what made getting out of bed so hard. Maybe the fear of having to face the world. Or just having to step out of bed — the act of moving her feet from underneath the layers of bedclothes to the floor. Just the act. She would sometimes replay it in her head on repeat before actually doing it.

Most days, she had zero courage to move her feet. But by mid-morning, she would usually make do.

Some days Tara worried about having to talk to Ama. Ama was constantly angry too. Either angry or afraid. When she wasn't one of the two, she would only talk about her grief.

Ama saw the strangest details in everything around her. Even in pigeons shitting. She would say they must be having a bad stomach. Now, how on earth could she know what was going inside a pigeon's belly! But she vouched for it. The pigeon. Diarrhetic.

She would scoop out details in everything.

Whenever Ama met some new fabric for the first time, she would pull the garment up to her eyes, looking through her glasses like they would bleed into the details. Even as she was going blind. Ama!

Ama is stuck in between times. She has her ideals, and little else. Most of all, she has no money. Without money, ideals aren't easy to sell to others. You can only use it as dinner table rants with Tara, who was brought up to be just like her: moralistic, semi-arrogant, awkward and afraid at the same time. Yet, every day, Tara promised herself she would never allow herself to become anything like Ama!

But every day, Tara felt a part of her slide through the loophole of her promise. She was gradually turning out to be just like Ama. She had even started laughing like Ama and wheezing like her during asthmatic attacks.

The change was so gradual, it did not escape either of them. Tara, now Ama's spitting copy — not in image: but in doing. That is who mothers and daughters are. They are each other. Without ever wanting to be.

Some days, Tara is not so angry. And on those days, she reaches out with her hands to warm up Ama's hands. Ama's hands are a prettier, older version of Tara's. But they are firm — calloused from years of caring.

"Not a rupee for all the care work we do, us housewives!" yells Ama sometimes, after reading an

article in the women's column. After flinging the newspaper aside, off she goes and bends over the kitchen sink again.

Ama.

Some nights, when it rains, Tara is really cold. And she thinks it is the perfect excuse for her insomnia. In the morning, she will tell Ama she did not sleep because it was too cold.

Last night was cold. It rained like mad, like the rain would sweep away all of Kathmandu. Tara regretted not having enough bedclothes. Tara reminded herself that she must get her quilt out in the morning.

When she woke up this morning, timorous rays of the sun had begun to steal into the house. Tara asked Ama where her quilt was. She said she had put it away.

It irritated Tara to think she would have to go through the ordeal of digging up through a pile of bedclothes to find her quilt. Because Ama had the habit of stowing everything within sight, away. She thought of it as a way of cleaning up the house. And memory. It was a while before Tara dug up her quilt.

"I hate the sight of that thing," Ama said, when her daughter finally managed to pull it out.

The quilt, you see, was among the things Ama had bought Tara as her wedding presents. In those days, she was still young and strong so the two had walked through nooks and gullies of

Asan, finally deciding on the quilt and then lugging it home all the way to Siuchatar, jumping on and off public vehicles.

The cover had massive red and green floral prints. While Tara was married, it had kept her warm — in matrimony and in her loneliness. Marriage can mean many things. It can be a trail of sighs, hours of tears, punctuated by laughter. Who knows what stays with one when trials are actually over. Not the words, but the essence of experiences.

So, when Tara's marriage ended, bundles of things that belonged to her were sent back to Ama's home. The quilt was one of the things.

Tara wanted to carry it to the terrace and spread it out, so it could soak in the sun. But when she carried it up to the terrace, Ama was already there.

"I hate the sight of it," Ama murmured.

"It's alright. It's mine. You don't need to deal with hating it."

Tara walked past Ama to the corner of the terrace where pansies and petunias were still in bloom. So unlike this time of the year, Tara thought. Ama's flowers, just as mad as her. The overnight rain had tampered with them. But they were still there. Withering away, but swaying gently every time the softest, post-rain breeze gathered at their stems.

And Tara thought, "We are in spring." 🌸

*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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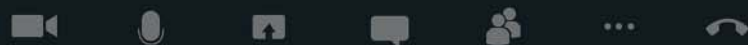
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