

# The Himalayan

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

In a complex world, intelligence consists in ignoring things that are irrelevant  
— Nassim Nicholas Taleb

## White Jade Buddha

On her religious trips to Mukthinath and Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, President Bidhya Devi Bhandari unveiled the 'White Jade Buddha' statue on the premises of the under-construction Gautam Buddha International Airport (GBIA) amidst a function on Sunday. Addressing the function, Bhandari underlined the need to frame a masterplan for the development and protection of Lumbini, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The White Jade Buddha, worth Rs 2.5 million (US\$ 1.6 million), is studded with other precious stones and weighs 1,800 kilograms. The 1.9 metre high and 60 cm wide statue was gifted by the Myanmar government in coordination with Lumbini Garden Foundation, a non-governmental organisation founded in Spain four years ago with a view to disseminating information about the Buddha's birthplace all over the world. The Buddha statue, known as Mahakaruna Buddharmuti, which was carved by a Myanmar-based mining company Malvin Group, has been installed beside Chaitiya that lies between the Departure and Arrival buildings. Chairman of Extremadura Province, Spain Blanca Martin and her entourage as well as Nepali dignitaries were also present on the occasion. The Nepal government bore no financial burden while the Foundation spent US\$ 12,000 for its shipment from Myanmar.

Mahakaruna Buddharmuti, or White Jade Buddha, has added one more feather to the GBIA's cap, which functions as the gateway to Lumbini. This statue will be the centre of attraction for all visitors, especially Buddhist pilgrims. The international goal is to visit Buddha's birthplace in their lifetime. However, sad to say, the airport, a national pride project, has not started operation although it has already completed more than 97 per cent of its work that started in 2014 with financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank. The construction of the GBIA could not be finished on time initially due to a row between the Chinese contractor and a local agent, massive earthquake and border blockade for several months in 2015 and the outbreak of the coronavirus, which stalled works at the GBIA. Now, the authorities are waiting for the calibration flights before regular commercial flights can be started from various countries, mainly the nine Buddhist countries in South-East Asia, Sri Lanka, China and Japan.

One of the major problems the GBIA faces ahead is the non-availability of air routes to India. Nepal is seeking air routes to the GBIA from Jharkhand in the east and Kancharpur in the west. If these air routes are allowed by India, it would be cost effective to operate international flights from the GBIA. The Nepal government should not delay in holding meaningful talks with India to secure these routes to make this airport fully operational. India has already started international flights from Kushinagar, where the Buddha attained Mahaparinirvana after his death. We will not be able to reap benefits from this multi-billion rupee project if we further delay in carrying out the calibration flights within November, the deadline set by the project. At the same time, the concerned agencies should also come out with a robust business plan for its smooth operation.

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## Urban development

Urbanisation in Nepal is taking place at breakneck speed, with nearly two-thirds of the country's total population residing in 293 municipalities today. However, Nepal's urban areas are nothing more than a concentration of people and see nothing of the planning that needs to go into their development. Many of the municipalities would not qualify to be cities, lacking as they are in essential urban services such as drinking water, sewerage, reliable electricity and waste disposal system. They were proclaimed municipalities for political reasons that benefited the locals by the instant hike in land prices.

We cannot allow cities and towns to develop itself into a concrete jungle. Once a green valley with a rich cultural heritage, air and river pollution, unmanaged waste and slums have only added in marring its beauty. Thus, we need to build well-planned cities that are also environment-friendly. It's not that successive governments have not committed to building such towns, however, the political will has been lacking. Land pooling, introduction of clean transport and putting a stop to haphazard construction would go a long way in creating livable urban spaces.

## LETTERS

### Fishing and legends

Referring to 'Fishing in Nepal' (TH, November 1, Page 4), fishing is a vanishing sport in Nepal, has been so for a long time now. With rivers abound, the uninitiated would harbour a fantasy of fishing sports tourism in the country. But fishes can bring unimaginable misery, as a travel agent from Switzerland, Bob, found out in the early 1990s. Fantasising Nepal as a fishing paradise, he weaved a fishing itinerary at US\$2,000 for avid anglers, leading the premier tour himself. After returning to Kathmandu from his first 'catch and release fishing tour in Karnali, he let out frustration with 'glorious words.' The (expletives)



fishes were nowhere around, and the (expletive) clients put me to discomfort and shame by mocking 'Bob, where are the fishes you promised. You ruined our trip.' Bob returned, and the first thing he did was pull the itinerary out from the brochure. As for Indrawati, I

## DURGAPRASAD BHANDARI

Higher education with investment in global research and critical collaboration, student for countries' economic and social growth, has been badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. It is hard to say when life will return to normal once this phase is over. It has triggered a debate on two lines: Will the impact of COVID-19 only be temporary? Or will it change higher education and internationalisation forever?

These different opinions, on the one hand, express a sense of anxiety, fear, uncertainty and loss, while on the other, there is hope, excitement and possibilities. These two different perspectives and illusions on the said phenomenon possibly depend on how we define internationalisation and mobility. The purpose of internationalisation of higher education can be academic, socio-cultural, diplomatic and fiscal. But until now, the internationalisation of higher education has been regarded mostly as global mobility rather than as a means of connectivity through online research, teaching and learning. Prevailing policies, existing curricula and practices in higher education have

failed to integrate students' diverse international and intercultural experiences at home. For the conceivable future, if internationalisation is to remain a crucial feature of university life, we must re-imagine internationalisation during this pandemic.

Considerable research is already available to help us re-design internationalisation in a non-mobile world. Recently, a survey was conducted under a EU co-funded project 'A step forward in the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions in Nepal and India (InterNepInd)' to identify the best practices for the internationalisation of higher education in India and Nepal. The results showed that only around 40 per cent of the surveyed higher education institutions (HEIs) had initiated activities on their internationalisation of higher education.

The study findings also revealed that though most HEI considered internationalisation an essential strategy and had implemented it for the last two to three years, many HEIs did not have a formal policy. Most of the HEIs have given student mobility, with 58.1 per cent, as the most-valued activity for internationalisation. Simultaneously, strategic partner-

# Coronavirus pandemic

## A revolution for connectivity in higher education

ships (14.0%) and capacity-building programmes (11.6%) were the second and third respective priorities of HEIs across India and Nepal. These three priorities help present new challenges and interpretations for students and academic staff of institutions, helping them become more rounded. Interna-

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tional mobility is not only about academia and students, the other experiences and skills that accompany outward mobility often have the most significant impact on student development.

Many technical/structural impediments such as credit transfer problems, lack of support by universi-

ties/higher authority and inadequate financial resources need to be addressed. Apart from these, many HEIs were considering braindrain, difficulty in assessing organized quality of courses/programmes offered by foreign institutes and accessibility of international opportunities as a critical potential risk of in-

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ternationalisation. The term global learning provides universities with a way of developing a curriculum that engages all students in interdependent global systems for prosperity and the earth's sustainability. There have already been various attempts at global partnership to foster synergies across the globe

for global learning, research and innovations to help advance living standards in a sustainable way.

Institutions need to capitalise on their current investment in digital learning technologies, which has worked off-campus. This way of working provides an incredible opportunity to strengthen internationalisation through electronic linking of the global educational sector. Programmes such as Global Learning, Collaborative Online International Learning and Virtual Internships offer exciting potential to engage all students in intercultural learning on a global scale during the pandemic. However, the transition to online learning is provoking panic-gogy in many quarters, as faculty students need to adjust to online learning. In most cases, stakeholders in the country like Nepal have felt infra-structure barrier, from broadband internet access to device availability.

This crisis provoked by COVID-19 has radically changed the way we conduct the teaching-learning activities. Stakeholders in the academic field have felt the necessity of online resource sharing irrespective of the where they belong to in the world. But there is no answer to ques-

tions like: Where will these changes lead to? What might this new experience of global online learning be for internationalisation in the longer term? When can we travel once again? Will it lead in the long term to more inclusive approaches to global learning? Or will we simply slip back into the old ways of thinking in higher education, with primary focus on mobility for a minority of students?

Both mobility and global online learning are not exclusive approaches, and both are needed and equally powerful if done well. Just as travelling can be considered as elitism, 'at-home' pedagogies may risk the perception that those global problems can be solved in the comforts of one's home. We can conclude that the distant education is developing as a tool of globalisation, focused on reaching the entire university community and other stakeholders whereas international mobility of students, academic and staff members who support direct participants is a tool for internationalisation of higher education. Nevertheless, as with any crisis, the post-pandemic will offer a unique opportunity to future-proof the education of higher education and its internationalisation.

## TOPICS

### SAMRAT BARAL

Until a few days ago, my wife was suggesting we own a motorbike to add luxury to our daily commute. It was only after I told her about my climate commitment at the personal level that she readily gave up the idea. Though my small step may sound like a drop in the ocean, I reckon more drops coalesce to at least make a stream out of it. Though Nepalis have limited contribution to climate change thanks to us being less industrialised, we share the success the human being has so far attained through innovation and industrialisation. As Nepalis also climate vulnerable, we should show our commitment and seek others'.

## BLOG SURF

### Green recovery

#### HARTWIG SCHAFFER

High in the Hindu Kush Himalayas of northern Pakistan, the residents of Hassanabad kept a watch on a wall of black ice almost 700 feet high that perches menacingly above their tiny village. The 15-kilometer long Shishper glacier, which is melting at an alarming rate and advancing four meters a day, presents a constant threat of flash floods. Last year, people in the village noticed that the stream near their homes was rising fast. Not long after, a torrent of glacial melt water descended upon Hassanabad, submerging a local power plant, farms, orchards and damaging many homes. The residents of Hassanabad had enough time to flee the deluge.

More than half of all South Asians, or 750 million people in eight countries — Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — have been affected by one or more climate-related disasters in the last two decades. The people of South Asia are living through a 'new climate normal', where intensifying heat waves, cyclones, droughts, and floods are testing the limits of governments. — [long.elp.com/long](http://long.elp.com/long)

## Our climate commitments

Capped by the Himalayas and rich in biodiversity, Nepal will be at the receiving end of the worst of climate change. The recent incessant rains after the monsoon season ended, damaging ready-to-harvest paddy worth billions of rupees, underline our necessity to speak up about it.

Glasgow, Scotland, is hosting COP26 (Conference of Parties-26th) on November 1-2 this week. World leaders will disclose their commitment to limit global warming to 1.5-2 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrialisation period (1850-1900 AD) in line with the Paris Accord signed in 2015. While Nepal is set to be in search of a market to sell its renewable hydroelectricity, ironically, the big emitters

are struggling to find ways to replace fossil fuels with green energy to meet their climate commitments.

As global citizens, it's also our responsibility that we behave wisely so that we contribute in the global fight against temperature rise. While countries will make their commitment that will impact how their citizens go about their daily lives, a commitment of some sort in personal capacity is a must, too.

Our climate commitment should be translated into acts and guidelines to showcase our written commitment. Reforestation to restore our prized carbon sink while preventing wildfires in the dry season in the jungles should be a national agenda. Households must

switch to electric stoves from liquefied petroleum gas. Not burning household wastes and agricultural stubbles can be done on a personal level. An act of using renewable packaging materials, where possible, still needs to materialise. Of course, all these will come at a higher cost of living, but this is necessary. So, climate financing is needed from the richer countries to help the poor ones plan their mitigation strategies. Only through a collaborative approach can we tackle the climate crisis. Nepal should not only be a recipient of climate finance but should also be rewarded for being a green energy surplus country. Nepal should stake this claim at the summit.

## CARTOON



communication minister's Fedu, en route to Indrawati. I am sure the story is not so different in other rivers. Fortunately, Nepal has achieved self-sufficiency in fish from the farms. On other news, the picture on Page 2, November 1, shows the Nepali PM delegation enjoining the British by 7 to 2. And, the utterances of deputy PM that the government was ready to do anything to operate the GBIA points to the government commitment to getting the airport off the ground.

Manohar Shrestha, Kathmandu

## Fuel price

The state-owned Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) has in-

creased the prices of all petroleum products effective from Friday night. It has been very hard to bear such increased prices for the impoverished people. With the price increases, it would badly affect the life of the daily wage earners, and the market price of other commodities will also soar. The government has been indifferent to the woes of the underprivileged class. The NOC has been stating that it is often in a loss, however, it has always hiked the prices of petroleum products in line with the prices in the international market.

The concerned authorities should look into the working style of the NOC. The bus operators have also hiked their fares with the price hike of petrol and diesel. People are tired of bearing the cost of living at a

time when the coronavirus has made them jobless for the last one-and-a-half years. Sad to say, the NOC does not reduce the prices of petroleum products when their prices go down in the international market. The automated pricing system has now been also added. The Department of Transport Management has also increased the amount of road tax without improving the condition of the roads. There is no relief in any sector. The number of vehicles has been increasing across the nation.

Abhishek Kunwar, Pokhara

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## TH 10 YEARS AGO

### Breakthrough in peace process, finally

Himalayan News Service  
Kathmandu, November 1, 2011

In a seven-point landmark agreement, political parties today agreed to implement the peace process initiated nearly six years ago through the 12-point agreement between an alliance of seven parties and the CPN-Maoist in New Delhi on 22 November 2006. According to the deal, maximum 6,500 combatants will be integrated under a directorate of the Nepali Army on individual basis. The directorate will comprise 65 and 35 per cent individuals from government security bodies and Maoist combatants respectively. They will be assigned development construction, forest security, industrial security and rescue management works. The combatants will have to complete NA's bridge course and training before taking up their assigned roles. The parties agreed to maintain flexibility with regard to age, educational qualification and marital status while integrating combatants. Fighters over age by three years at the time of recruitment in the Maoist army can be eligible for integration into the NA. The parties have agreed to consider combatants whose educational qualification is a level lower than the NA-stipulated requirement as eligible for assimilation into the army. The ranks of combatants will be determined as per NA's standard norms and prevailing rules. The agreement said, the highest-ranking combatants are expected to land major's position in the army as per the agreed norms. Combatants opting for rehabilitation have two alternatives.

### Bank cops targeting banks

Himalayan News Service  
Nepalgunj, November 1, 2011

As if underground outfits were not enough to unleash extortion terror among banks and financial institutions here in Nepalgunj, the law enforcement agency has now joined the fray. The police force albeit has been using a different tactic, it is seeking money from the banks, saying it would be used for setting up a new security force. Bank Police has written to the banks seeking financial assistance, which it says will be used for providing security to them. 'But what is noteworthy is Bank Police has already been deploying Industrial Security Force for the protection of the banks, financial institutions and industrial sector. Last year, then Bank SP Mahesh Bikram Shah had deployed a separate security force for the security of the banks and the industries in Nepalgunj. It was a novel initiative taken by then police chief here. Then, as per Shah's request, industrialists, businessmen and bankers had collected Rs 5 lakh and handed the amount to the police, which the police had used in repairing an old vehicle for the purpose of security of banks, financial institutions and industries. But ironically, the vehicle is less used for security purpose most of the time the vehicle is at the disposal of one police official or other. And, despite the deployment of the security force, crime rate is yet to come down with BFs being the burnt.