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ART!OULATE



FREEDOM OF CHOICES

REFUGEES

#BLOODTEA

ELECTRONIC WASTE

SUSTAINABILITY

WOMEN'S RIGHTS



Konrad Adenauer, Turkey, 1954.
Photographed by Ara Güler.

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Media Programme Asia

Named after Germany's first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Media Programme Asia was established in 1996 to promote a free, responsible and ethical press in Asia. The KAS Media Programme Asia therefore connects leading journalists with one another, collaborating with colleagues and partners worldwide. The overarching goal of our work is to promote and support Asian media institutions and journalists in the development of professional journalistic standards in the region, to support young journalists as best as possible throughout their careers, and to advocate and promote the importance of media as an integral part of democratic and liberal societies.

The Adenauer Fellowship

The Adenauer Fellowship is a scholarship programme offered by the KAS Media Programme Asia to support journalism education in the region. The KAS Media Programme Asia partners with several educational institutions in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines. For more information about applications and application deadlines, please visit: <https://adenauer.careers>



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Foreword



Ansgar Graw

Ansgar Graw is the director of the Media Programme Asia at the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation Ltd. in Singapore. The journalist and former TV host has published numerous books on Donald Trump, international affairs and German politics, amongst others, and has a strong focus on business journalism through his work with the German media outlets Die Welt (e.g. as correspondent in Washington D.C.) and The European.



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Do you have a favourite word? Mine is 'freedom'.

Freedom is to me like a hymn of human life. Freedom is to me the most beautiful gift, the most enticing joy, the most precious promise. Freedom reveals paths and entrances and opportunities. Freedom is like a painting where I can find everything I am looking for. The broad horizon and the concrete detail. The shadow that protects and the light that illuminates. The sunset that is always also a sunrise, no matter where I am in the world.

Freedom is philosophical, because the term itself reminds us that we have free will. This is what makes us unique as human beings. Freedom is political, because we insist on choosing those who govern us. Freedom affects us daily, down to the smallest decisions we make about our day-to-day life: when we rely on the free market to choose between different products, whether it is the brand of rice for our meal, the destination of our next trip, or the type of media we choose to consume for information and news.

No, I am not as naive as I may sound. I am aware that not all paths will be accessible to everyone, not every entrance will prove to be open. You may choose a holiday destination which you later find to be too expensive. You may crave a certain food, but discover that it is not available in your grocery store. However, these are luxury problems; some don't even have the means to provide a simple meal for themselves and their family—unfortunately, freedom is also relative.

Nevertheless, as journalists, we should always insist on our freedom to disclose and comment on everything that is relevant, and to inform our readers with reporting that is as close to reality and as objective as possible. As journalists, we cannot turn our human-designed societies into utopian paradises—but we can report. About the positive, good things in our world. And, of course, about the dark sides of humanity. About politicians who invade neighbouring countries. About threats to the environment, justice, and freedom. About the aforementioned have-nots, who have to fight daily for a measly crumb of bread. When we report on such grievances, we open up the possibility of putting a stop to them.

'The secret of happiness is freedom, and the secret of freedom is courage,' wrote Thucydides, the great ancient Greek historian. Freedom opens cages, minds and hearts. I know why this is my favourite word. ■

Ansgar Graw

Director
KAS Media Programme Asia



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Love is Unbound

The poem is written with Open AI as per command
by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan

In a world of chrome and code,
Where technology has taken hold,
Love has evolved in ways untold,
A futuristic love, both bold and cold.

Gone are the days of candlelight,
Of handwritten letters, pure and bright,
Now love is found in screens and bites,
Of data and algorithms, pixel-bright.

But though the way may seem quite strange,
The love we feel is still the same,
For in this world of wires and wires,
Love burns as bright as any fire.

We may not hold hands in the park,
Or gaze into each other's eyes in the dark,
But with a touch of a button or a swipe,
Our love can blossom, free from strife.

So let the world evolve and change,
For love will always rearrange,
To fit the times, to fit the place,
A futuristic love with endless grace.

For even in a world of machines,
Where humanity sometimes seems to fleece,
Love will always find a way,
To thrive and grow each and every day.



Mohammad Rakibul Hasan

Why I Asked AI to Write a Poem About Love

As a journalist, I am always fascinated by the new tool of AI in writing. It has revolutionised how we write and research, making the process more efficient and accurate. One of the most exciting things about AI in writing is the text prompt generator, which can summarise and concatenate written content on a particular topic.

Writing software like ChatGPT can be useful to a journalist like me because it can potentially assist with tasks such as research, fact-checking, and even generating written content. For example, a journalist could use ChatGPT to quickly gather information on a topic they are reporting on or to help develop a rough draft of an article. This can save journalists valuable time and effort, allowing them to focus on the most critical aspects of their work.

AI's language ability to understand and respond to natural language input can make it a valuable tool for communication and conducting interviews with journalist sources. It can also generate news summaries or summaries of long articles, making it easier for readers to keep up with current events. Some AIs can automatically fact-check statements and provide sources, which could help reduce the risk of errors in reporting. This can significantly increase the accuracy of the information reported and help maintain readers' trust in the media.

I have been experimenting with collaborating with machine thought to write either an article or a poem. Many curious, organic minds are practising this concept. AI tools are also being used in creating realistic visuals and imaginative imagery. The future of AI will perhaps be one of the essential tools for humankind to accelerate human development.

Overall, AI in writing is an exciting new software that can significantly assist journalists in their work. It can save time and effort, increase accuracy and reduce errors, and even inspire new ideas and concepts. AI in writing will continue to evolve and improve and will soon become an essential tool for journalists and writers alike.

The Climate Conversation





Four families sitting with their remaining food storage. Due to high salinity, agricultural produce cannot flourish. Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2022 – 2023.

As a country that has struggled to cope with climate adaptation, Bangladesh has become one of the scapegoats of the climate crisis. Developed countries are often unwilling to take on significant emissions reductions or provide financial assistance to developing countries to help them adapt to the effects of climate change. This story focuses on Bangladesh, which is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to its location in a low-lying delta region and its consequent susceptibility to flooding and rising sea levels. The effects of climate change on Bangladesh include sea level rise, increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, and damage to homes and infrastructure as well as the country's agricultural sector. This story suggests that developed countries can help Bangladesh cope with climate change by providing financial and technical assistance and by reducing their emissions of greenhouse gases. It also highlights the vulnerability of the Sundarbans mangrove forest in Bangladesh to the impact of climate change.





The Gabura Union, a small island adjacent to the Sundarbans Forest, is predicted to be submerged in seawater by 2050.

Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2022 – 2023.

Climate change is a global problem that requires a global solution. However, negotiating one has been challenging due to several factors. One of the main reasons that the recent Conference of the Parties (COP) climate change summit and other international climate conferences have not been able to resolve climate change is that there is a lack of consensus among participating countries on how to address the issue. Developed countries, which have historically been the largest emitters of greenhouse gases, are often unwilling to reduce their emissions or provide financial assistance to developing countries to help them adapt to the effects of climate change.

Another significant barrier in tackling climate change is the need for more political will among global leaders. In some cases, heads of state do not see climate change as a priority, while others are reluctant to take on the economic and political costs of reducing emissions or investing in clean energy due to political purposes. Some countries may be influenced by powerful fossil fuel lobbies which go against climate action. There needs to be greater cooperation

and compromise across the globe. Developed countries need to be willing to take on more significant emissions reductions and provide financial support to developing countries which suffer from the effects of climate change. Developing countries, in turn, also need to implement measures to reduce emissions and invest in clean energy, among other climate mitigation initiatives. This can happen through more effective multilateral negotiations such as United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), where all countries agree to set emissions reduction targets and support developing countries. All countries must understand that climate change is a global problem for humankind.

Bangladesh is one of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The country is located in the low-lying delta region of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and the Meghna River, rendering it particularly susceptible to flooding and rising sea levels. Bangladesh is also prone to cyclones and other extreme weather events, which are becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change. One of the

main ways in which climate change is affecting Bangladesh is through sea level rise. The country has a long coastline, and as sea levels continue to rise, the risk of coastal flooding is also increasing, with potentially devastating consequences on the lives of the people in these areas. Many living near the coastline have lost their homes and livelihoods due to sea level rise and coastal flooding. They face food and water insecurity due to increased soil and water salinity.

In addition, Bangladesh is experiencing increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events such as cyclones, floods, and droughts. These events are causing widespread damage to homes and infrastructure and affecting the country's agricultural sector, a significant source of income for many people in Bangladesh.

Globally rich countries can help Bangladesh cope with climate change through several means. One crucial way is providing financial assistance to help the country adapt to the effects of climate change. This may include funding the construction of sea walls

and other flood protection infrastructure, and sponsoring programs to help people in coastal areas relocate to higher ground. Another option is to provide technical assistance to help Bangladesh develop and implement clean energy and other climate mitigation measures. This could include providing funding and expertise to help the country develop renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power, as well as to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions from the industrial and transportation sectors. With such support, Bangladesh can take steps to adapt to the impacts of climate change and build a more resilient and sustainable future for its people. Developed countries can also contribute to the race against climate change by reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. This will help slow the pace of climate change and ensure that these countries are taking responsibility for their role in the climate crisis.

The Sundarbans Reserve Forest, located in the coastal belt of Bangladesh, is one of the most vulnerable areas in the country. The forest spans over 10,000 square



Climate conversations worldwide involving world leaders have been taking place annually, but nothing is changing.

Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2022 – 2023.



Many indigenous communities across the Sundarbans Forest have been experiencing extreme weather conditions.

Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2022 – 2023.

kilometres and is home to various plant and animal species, including the Bengal tiger. However, the forest is threatened by climate change, including rising sea levels and increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events. Sea level rise is one of the most significant threats to the Sundarbans Forest. According to a study by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, sea levels in the Bay of Bengal are projected to increase by up to one metre by the end of the century. This would devastate the Sundarbans Forest, as large areas of the forest will be submerged by seawater.

Due to climate change, the Sundarbans Forest faces other consequences. For example, the forest is experiencing increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events such as cyclones and floods. Not only have these events caused widespread damage to the plant life and the biodiversity of the forest, the livelihoods of the people living in and around the forest have also been adversely affected. Many people have lost their homes and land to flooding, forcing them to relocate to higher ground. The impacts of climate change on the Sundarbans Forest are also likely to

have knock-on effects on the people living in the surrounding areas. Extreme weather events have caused widespread damage to homes and infrastructure, affecting the people's livelihoods in the region. For example, many people rely on fishing and cultivating land in and around the forest for their livelihoods, and extreme weather events can significantly impact these industries. As the forest is damaged by sea level rise and extreme weather events, these people are also becoming increasingly affected by climate change.

The impact of climate change on the health of people living around the Sundarbans is also significant. As a result of sea level rise and increased flooding, many people are at risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera and diarrhoea. Extreme weather events are increasing salinity across the coastal belt of Bangladesh. Women are experiencing uterine cancers, infertility, and skin diseases. Men, too, are suffering from fertility problems and other health issues. Due to the loss of livelihoods and displacement, many people face food insecurity and malnutrition. In addition to these immediate consequences, climate change



Fishing communities face extreme poverty due to the lack of fish available in the rivers.
Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2022 – 2023.



also exacerbates the region's existing social and economic inequalities. People in marginalised communities living in poverty are disproportionately affected by climate change, as they have fewer resources to cope with its effects and have less access to services and support.

Climate change has led to a growing number of people migrating from these areas, searching for better opportunities and escaping the adversities of climate change. Most climate migrants from coastal belt areas of Bangladesh are moving to urban areas, such as the capital city of Dhaka and other major cities. These migrants often seek better job opportunities and access to services and support. However, many migrants face challenges in their new locations, such as a lack of affordable housing and discrimination.

The future remains uncertain for those still living in coastal areas of Bangladesh and fighting the climate crisis. Many people living in these areas are among the country's most marginalised communities, making them particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Climate conversations worldwide involving world leaders and major international organisations have been taking place every year, but they fail to understand the severity of the problem, especially for the people suffering at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. These issues should not be mere topics of conversation housed in a conference room. Rather, immediate action is required to save the world and the future. ■

Climate conversations worldwide involving world leaders and major international organisations have been taking place every year, but they fail to understand the severity of the problem, especially for the people suffering at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder.





Climate change is accelerating the displacement of inhabitants across the coastal belt of Bangladesh.
Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2022 – 2023.



Women around coastline areas of Bangladesh face increased salinity, a major cause of uterine cancer.
Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2022 – 2023.

Due to climate change, extreme heat and salinity are causing a decline in birth rates across the coastal belt in Bangladesh.
Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2022 – 2023.













After travelling on foot for over 300 kilometres from Myanmar, where ethnic cleansing is taking place, a family member finally reunites with others in a mountainside field near the border of Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2017.



Mohammad Rakibul Hasan

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Mohammad Rakibul Hasan is a Dhaka, Bangladesh-based documentary photographer, filmmaker, visual artist, and art educator. His work explores human rights, social development, politics, the environment, and spirituality. Hasan was nominated for many international awards and has won hundreds of photography competitions worldwide, including the Lucie Award, One World Media Award, Human Rights Press Award, and Allard Prize. His photography projects have been exhibited in Photo Basel, Shanghai Photo Festival, NordArt Festival, Berlin Photo Festival, Belgrade Photo Month Festival, Indian Photo Festival, and many other galleries worldwide. He pursued a one-year certificate in creative practices at the International Centre of Photography. Hasan holds a postgraduate certificate in photography from Falmouth University and an undergraduate certificate in Art History and Philosophy from Oxford University. He also pursued a postgraduate diploma in photojournalism from Ateneo de Manila University and graduated in film and video production from UBS Film School at the University of Sydney and received a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in photography from Falmouth University. Hasan works as a visual journalist for ZUMA Press, Redux Pictures, Inter Press Service (IPS), and the Thomson Reuters Foundation. He is a consultant photographer and filmmaker for the World Health Organisation, UN Women, Oxfam, Red Cross, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, ActionAid, WaterAid, and many other international non-profit organisations. The °CLAIR Galerie in Switzerland exhibits his artworks. He is a Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Fellow and a former TEDx speaker. He is a 2022 Oxford Climate Journalism Network (OCJN) fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. Hasan is currently pursuing a master's degree in photography at Falmouth University via distance learning.

One Million Refugees

The Rohingya are a Muslim minority group who settled Myanmar centuries ago, but due to racism and many other sociopolitical issues among the ethnic majority in Myanmar, they have been declared a stateless Bengali community who migrated to Myanmar from Bangladesh.

Mohammad Rakibul Hasan

When God remains silent even as war or genocide rages on, when humans are in a terrible condition, we seek help, but no one can rescue us from the death of humanity. I have spent around 30 days covering the exile of Rohingya refugees from hundreds of kilometres away, barefoot and clutching the hands of their loved ones, tears in their eyes and fear in their hearts, hoping to save their own lives. Many children were half-naked; they didn't have time to get dressed, or their clothes were lost during the long journey to seek refuge in Bangladesh. I saw an older man named Ahmed, who carried his 90-year-old mother, walk endlessly under the hot sun, having lost his other family members during the attack by the Myanmar Army. Words are not enough to articulate the horrific experiences of people who have been through such devastation, when the state declares war to clean up their people, barely reserving any sympathy. However,

Myanmar is a country where Buddhists are the majority. How 'Himsa' (injury) has led them to kill and rape many Rohingyas as an attempt at genocide and ethnic cleansing is a burning question. I have spoken to many Rohingya people, and everyone has stories of losing one or more from their families; many are raped, and the Myanmar Army has killed countless others. There are reports of women being captured for sex slavery, and many more remain missing.

It was a near impossible task for a conscious photographer to listen to the stories and take the photographs to capture the best aesthetic. It was more like documenting the true horrors of human suffering. I went to the local hospitals several times to see the victims who entered Bangladesh with injuries inflicted by the Myanmar Army when they were fleeing. Or perhaps the army just wanted to loot the belongings of these people. ■



A Rohingya refugee carrying firewood for his camp. Many refugee camps such as these suffer from a lack of fuel for cooking. Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2017.

Shajeda Begum, 46, has travelled a great distance to seek shelter. A victim of the Myanmar Army's raid, she continues to live under the open sky in Bangladesh after losing her home, land, and loved ones.
Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2017.



Following the ethnic cleansing by the Myanmar Army, Lajja Khatun, 90, a Rohingya refugee, grieves the loss of her four deceased relatives.
Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2018.





A Rohingya refugee father watches as his son plays games inside the camp. The Rohingya community in Myanmar is recognised as one of the most persecuted ethnic groups in the world.

Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2018.





During the Rohingya exodus from Myanmar, over a million refugees were forced to build their homes in Reserve Mountains with aid from NGOs, the Bangladesh government, and the local community. Photograph by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, 2018.



Man during a demonstration in Darjeeling, India. The sign reads: 'It is the blood of the poor workers, Darjeeling tea is its name.'
Photograph by Gopashis Biswas G.Son, 2022.



को खुन है,
यसको

#bloodtea

Historically, the people of the hilly regions of Southeast Asia have been oppressed not only for being ethnic minorities, but also for being tea garden workers—a perpetual cycle of labour they cannot seem to break free from. The voices of these doubly oppressed communities can barely be heard over the grandeur of evening tea parties held by the lawmakers and policymakers of these respective countries.

Gopashis Biswas G.Son

While we have fully romanticised the idea of tea garden workers gleefully plucking tea leaves in tea plantations through the images and illustrations repeatedly posted on social media, the real picture is shockingly gloomy and far removed from the upbeat portrayal which these images lead us to believe. As we satisfy our colonial tea-drinking habit and enjoy the first sip of Earl Grey on a delightful Sunday morning, tea garden workers miles away are working tirelessly to fill our cups as the crooked system bars them from enjoying the fruits of their labour. These tea garden workers are severely underpaid and lack basic housing and sanitation facilities, let alone education, healthcare, and recreation. The voices of these doubly oppressed communities can barely be heard over the grandeur of evening tea parties held by the lawmakers and policymakers of these respective countries.

Since the beginning of tea production, the state of the tea garden workers has moved forward a little in comparison to the rapid economic developments in the Southeast Asian countries. The first record of tea gardening in this region dates back to 1836, when it was introduced by the British during the colonial era, primarily to compete with the Chinese tea trade. The tea plantation workers were brutally subjugated by the British rulers at that time. They were given a bare minimum wage with strict working hours and targets. In order to enact their harsh work regime, the British plantation owners utilised a type of contract known as indentured labour, an employment system that bears striking resemblance to slavery. Back then, there were two types of recruiting systems: Arkatti, under which new workers were recruited mostly from the nearby tribal villages; and Sardari, under

which new workers were recruited by existing employees. These workers had to stay on the plantation for a fixed period and were not even allowed to see their family members during the length of their contract. With various reforms over time, these contracts have become obsolete but the workers are given an extraordinary target which entraps them to work for a longer period at the plantation.

The colonial era ended, but sadly, its legacy has not. The tea industries in India and Bangladesh are built on the cheap, backbreaking labour of underpaid workers, most of whom are ethnic minorities. There are about 52,000 tea garden workers working across

87 tea estates in Darjeeling, India, while an estimated 100,000 workers toil away in the 167 tea gardens of Bangladesh. A 45-year-old unnamed woman tea-plucker from one of the renowned tea gardens of Darjeeling described her miserable day, which starts at four thirty to five in the morning as she prepares food for herself and her family. She has to be at the tea garden before 7 a.m., and if she is late, she is sent away. The work is non-stop until 4 p.m., sometimes even 5 p.m. Until the pickup van arrives to take them home from the garden or the supervisor calls it a day, they have to carry on plucking. The wage is not based solely on time; they are also fixed with a target, and

Women protestors in Darjeeling, India, holding up signs displaying the slogan #bloodtea.
Photograph by Gopashis Biswas G.Son, 2022.





A protester during the protest in Darjeeling, India. The full poster reads: 'Take a stand with tea garden workers. Fair Wages, Not Slave Wages. #bloodtea (H.H.T.D.C.S.S.)'. Hamro Hill Terai Dooars Chiyabari Shramik Sangh (H.H.T.D.C.S.S.) is the tea garden labour union in the north-east of India. Photograph by Gopashis Biswas G.Son, 2022.

if they fail to pluck the amount of tea leaves indicated on the target their wages are cut off. For extra leaves that the workers pluck, they receive INR 2–3 per kilogram. The daily wage, which was only INR 176 in 2021, increased by only INR 26 to INR 202 (USD 2.44) per day in 2022 to accommodate for inflation. But what can you really do with INR 202 when a kilogram of rice costs INR 40–60? Hence, the labour alliance party, Hamro Hill Terai Dooars Chiyabari Sramik Sangh, peacefully demonstrated against what they are calling a ‘slave wage.’

The picture is almost the same in Bangladesh as well. A worker has to pluck a minimum of 22 kilograms of tea leaves to escape a forced wage cut from the already meager daily salary of BDT 170 (USD 1.59). Even this BDT 170 is a newly increased rate from the previous wage of BDT 120 (USD 1.19), which the workers had to plea, strike, and march in processions for—their only means of catching the attention of the government. While they pleaded for a daily wage of BDT 300 (USD 2.81), the labour board and the tea estate owners did not go any higher than BDT 170. In an unstable market where a kilogram of rice costs BDT 70–100, what options does one have with a daily wage of BDT 170? The family of these workers can hardly taste fish or meat in a year.

The exploitative attitudes of the tea garden authorities and the failure of the government to negotiate and act accordingly are responsible for the outrageous meager wages and appalling living conditions of these oppressed workers. This sidelined community is easily ignored by the centre, even though they protest and hold peaceful processions to fight for their rights. A common scenario in a tea garden worker’s family is that their children go to school in their early years but as they grow up, their parents cannot support the cost of education. This results in a vicious, perpetual cycle of oppression as these children, with no other option, follow in the footsteps of their parents and start working in the tea estates. Achieving freedom of choice for this doubly-oppressed community may seem like boiling the ocean, but with a properly functioning democratic system, the fight against institutionalised exploitation within the crippled system is not impossible. ■



Gopashis Biswas G.Son

Gopashis Biswas G.Son is a visual storyteller based in Bangladesh. His works have been published in periodicals and showcased in over 10 countries around the globe, receiving several prestigious national and international awards. Besides his visual journey, G.Son teaches and examines media and literature at a public university. His present works focus on the symbiosis of new media and its data and how these elements become socioculturally invested with ideals of precision, reliability, objectivity and ‘truth’ in the politico-commercial nexus.



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The Search for Clean Water

Manila, Philippines: A child sits on abandoned furniture beside a destroyed house to rest after a basketball game. A basketball court is more visible and accessible around the Philippines than clean running water.

Photograph by Jilson Tiu, 2022.





What Environmental Justice Means for Indigenous Peoples of Nepal

For generations, the Tharu people have been fishing and collecting snails in the lake. It's their way of life and how they have celebrated their culture for centuries.

In Surkhet, a district located about 600 kilometres away from Kathmandu, 38-year-old Dilmaya Tharu's daily routine begins under the scorching sun by wading through Bulbule Lake, fishing and cultivating ghungi—water snails.

For generations, the Tharu people have been fishing and collecting snails from this lake. It's their way of life and how they have celebrated their culture for centuries. As Dilmaya recalls, the fish and ghungi population have declined over the years, and they now spend hours collecting a meagre handful of snails.

However, The Greater Bulbule Area Expansion Project, implemented to develop the lake as a tourist hub, has barred people from fishing. 'For now, we have restricted community people from conducting any activity in the lake,' says Ward-10 Chairperson Dil Bahadur Rakhali.

'Once the project is completed, we are planning to operate boats and restrict fishing or collecting ghungi as a move to foster tourism.'

For Dilmaya, this means a generational loss of culture and daily consumption. 'I grew up seeing my family living in close proximity with forests, lakes, and water sources, but if it happens it is unfortunate that the next generation will barely be able to live with this reality,' she said.

The Tharus are one of the 59 Indigenous communities in southern Nepal who have been socially, culturally and economically dependent on natural resources for generations. This article tells the story of the community in the Surkhet district who have been deprived of their right to self-determination as acknowledged by UNDRIP, which the country has ratified. The Tharus have historically depended on fishing and ghungi (water snails) for food, but newly introduced laws and policies intended to revive the lake in order to foster tourism in the region have barred them from entering Bulbule lake.

Sonam Lama Hyolmo

Bulbule Lake, which is set to be expanded to more than double its original size (12,000 square metres), is actually a wetland. Ecologists and researchers deem the project an unprogressive move to commercialise resources that are natural and required to foster biodiversity. Wetlands have an intricate in-built ecosystem that is both diverse and fragile.

‘In many expansion projects that we have seen in the past, it is common that the natural resource systems are invaded artificially, and in case of any degradation occurring, the concept of wetland restoration is completely neglected,’ says Lila Nath Sharma, ecologist and researcher at Forest Action Nepal. ‘This practice was evident in Halkhorja Daha of Bara district and Chimdi Lake of Sunsari.’

In 2021, a similar instance occurred in Ramechhap district. Protesters from the indigenous Majhi (fisherman) community took to the streets to campaign for the cancellation of the Sunkoshi 2 Hydropower Project. The project was estimated to submerge the majority of settlements along the banks of Sunkoshi and Tamakoshi rivers and displace close to 6000 households.

In all cases, indigenous communities who have traditionally depended on natural sources are highly impacted. A recent study conducted by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)

I grew up seeing my family living in close proximity with forests, lakes, and water sources, but if it happens it is unfortunate that the next generation will barely be able to live with this reality.

“

found that indigenous peoples have an important role within the local environment, serving as guardians of natural resources which contribute to climate action and mitigation. Even though Nepal has ratified International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) Outcome Document, there still remain major gaps in implementing these agreements.

Despite the sense of legal immunity provided by international conventions, Nepal's legal systems have not addressed the customary rights to lands and resources aligning with indigenous people's values, customs, and



In many expansion projects that we have seen in the past, it is common that the natural resource systems are invaded artificially, and in case of any degradation occurring, the concept of wetland restoration is completely neglected.

traditions. 'Nepal ratifying international laws with regards to indigenous rights is a progressive gesture, however, it is only limited to documents,' says advocate Shankar Limbu, Secretary at Lawyer's Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples.

'What value does community right hold when the means to exercise them are revolutionary?'

It is international talks and negotiations which help to mount pressure to implement legal instruments and amplify the voices of indigenous and climate-vulnerable groups. Last year, the Conference of Parties (COP26) summit was criticised for having minimal participation of indigenous groups, despite being heralded as the most inclusive COP ever.

Last year's flood in the Melamchi and Helambu region of Sindhupalchok District killed 25 people and displaced thousands. A majority of the people impacted by the disaster belonged to indigenous and marginalised communities of the upper region, who spent months in makeshift tents without receiving any compensation from the government.

Aligning with the demands made by developing countries, Nepal has also prioritised financial support for climate-induced loss and damage. The govern-

ment has submitted its second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) ahead of last year's summit and pledged to go net zero by 2045. In order to address climate risk and vulnerability in development, planning, and implementation, the National Adaptation Plan (NAP 2021–2050) was introduced to set out short-term, medium-term, and long-term priority action plans. Moreover, the Nepal government signed an agreement with the Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest Finance (LEAF) Coalition at the last summit, under which the country would stand to earn US\$30 million by 2025 for protecting its forests.

'For the next summit, we are planning to sum up the work updates since last year's negotiation. Among others, our priority shall remain on proposing finance for loss and damage to the climate-vulnerable communities,' says Raju Sapkota, Under Secretary, Climate Change Division at the Ministry of Forests and Environment.

Global climate talks and negotiations hold much significance for Nepal, a nation that is vulnerable to climate crises and hazards. Limbu believes that negotiations are necessary to put indigenous peoples and their issues at the forefront and hold the government responsible for the safeguarding of their rights. 'Moreover, it is deemed highly important for such communities to come at the forefront, share indigenous knowledge on natural resources and its utilisation, and seek nature-based solutions to major environmental crises that we are facing globally.' ■



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India's Electronic Waste Graveyard

Faisal Magray

India is the third largest electronic waste generator in the world after China and the USA.

Seelampur, a small locality in East Delhi, is one of the largest unorganised e-waste recycling hubs in the country. The unwanted computer monitors, motherboards, cathode ray tubes, printed circuit boards, mobile phones and chargers, compact discs, headphones, and white goods such as plasma televisions, air conditioners, and refrigerators which are discarded here constitute e-waste.

Seelampur has the distinction of having more than 3000 small and big shops for scrapping e-waste. It provides employment to more than 100,000 people.

E-waste is one of the largest, and yet most unorganised, environmental sectors in India. Gadgets discarded by India's 1.2 billion-strong population account for much of the e-waste processed in Delhi, but there are growing concerns surrounding the increasing amounts of e-waste arriving from other countries, particularly Western nations. In 2019, India's e-waste production rose almost 2.5 times to 3.23 million metric tonnes in six years, according to the Global E-Waste Monitor Report in 2020.

Hundreds of trucks carry around tonnes of e-waste which later enters into the Seelampur e-waste market. Most of the people working in the area are teenagers, majority of whom do not go to school, but work in the market and earn INR 200 (USD 2.45) per day.

The workers suggest that their work is limited to segregation of materials and poses no danger, but e-waste can contain some radioactive substances which may prove harmful to the workers. A study by KPMG and the Associated Chambers of Commerce & Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) revealed that discarded computer equipment accounts for almost 70% of e-waste in India, followed by telecom devices and phones (12%), electrical equipment (8%), and medical equipment (7%). Shockingly, there are no health precautions in this business. Workers don't have protective gear.

India is, however, the only country in the South Asian region with e-waste legislation. But e-waste management in the country is largely based on informal sector activities primarily concerned with collection, dismantling, and recycling, not the welfare of its workers. ■

Cover: A worker pictured with obsolete computer keyboards and other electrical accessories in a small e-waste shop in the Seelampur neighbourhood of New Delhi, India. In Seelampur's cramped alleyways, thousands of individuals, including children, handle various electronic waste like television sets, air conditioner units, computers, phones, and batteries. These workers dismantle the items and sort components without proper tools or safety gear, selling them to other traders for additional recycling.

Photograph by Faisal Magray, 2016-2018.

Left: Teenaged boys and women salvage metals like lead, copper, aluminum, brass, silver, and gold from computer components. Motherboards are treated with sulfuric acid to extract silver and gold, while circuit boards undergo high heat to recover copper. A range of other electronic waste is disassembled with various methods to obtain precious metals, including the lead used in both formal and informal battery industries.

Photograph by Faisal Magray, 2016 – 2018.



A young boy without any protective gear burns e-waste material inside a workshop to extract metals. Seelampur, New Delhi houses India's largest e-waste dismantling hub, where a large portion of the population earn a living by breaking down, extracting, and recycling electronic waste in pursuit of valuable metals. Photograph by Faisal Magray, 2016 – 2018.





A woman in Seelampur sorting through e-waste to find components like circuit boards, capacitors, and batteries. Caustic chemicals or burning are among the methods used to separate gold and copper from these parts, exposing workers to dangerous toxins.
Photograph by Faisal Magray, 2016 – 2018.



The residential building close to the Seelampur drainage system is adversely impacted by the build-up of electronic and plastic waste in this area of New Delhi, India. During dry periods, fires can break out, sometimes deliberately started by workers to remove excess waste.

Photograph by Faisal Magray, 2016 – 2018.



Workers in Seelampur, New Delhi diligently unload a truck brimming with discarded electronics such as computers, monitors, phones, and air conditioner units in the early hours of the day. Truckloads of e-waste is unloaded on a daily basis, while thousands of labourers employ rudimentary techniques to salvage valuable components and precious metals like copper, tin, silver, gold, titanium, and palladium. The extraction procedures include hazardous acid treatments and open-air incineration, which release noxious fumes that pose a serious health risk to the workers and has a catastrophic impact on the environment. These workers toil for up to twelve hours each day despite such hazardous conditions, which has led to respiratory issues and various other health complications.

Photograph by Faisal Magray, 2016 – 2018.







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Faisal Magray is a photojournalist based in India. His work revolves around documenting global and local issues—primarily focusing on human rights, health, conflict aftermath and socioeconomics.



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A young boy searches for valuable metals in discarded phones in Seelampur. Without any form of protective gear, he extracts motherboards and chips from telephones. E-waste workers' constant exposure to hazardous materials adversely impacts their health and living conditions.

Photograph by Faisal Magray, 2016 – 2018.







Making Do With Plastic

Philippines: Children from Dinagat Islands floating on a raft made out of plastic bottles. Floaters and fishermen use the rafts to sleep on at night. The island of Dinagat was adversely affected super typhoon Odette, and the town of Coring is still suffering from lack of electricity.

Photograph by Jilson Tiu, 2022.



What Does 'Sustainable' Mean for This Weaving Community?



Lilia Narca, 57, has been weaving since she was eight. Coming from a family of weavers, she lives in Argao, a municipality three hours away from Cebu City that has had a rich traditional heirloom weaving culture since the 19th century. For Narca, and for many women weavers, weaving extends beyond its economic function, forming an intrinsic part of her identity as a Filipino artisan and a woman.

Geela Garcia

Photograph by Geela Garcia, 2022.

Lilia Narca, 57, has been weaving since she was eight. Coming from a family of weavers, she lives in Argao, a municipality three hours away from Cebu City that has had a rich traditional heirloom weaving culture since the 19th century.

She is one of the community weavers of Anthill Fabric, a sustainable fashion enterprise that employs and trains weavers while celebrating Filipino cultural heritage. The company has been working with various weaving communities across the country for over 10 years now.

Narca's weaving has also woven her life, community, and family. While the craft provides her with a source of income, allows her to support her family, and increases her social mobility, weaving extends beyond its economic function and has formed a part of her identity as a Filipino artisan and a woman.

'Because of this craft, I was able to buy a refrigerator, which makes it easier for me to store pork and fish, and that makes me very happy. I'm a proud weaver because it helps me contribute to my family. I enjoy the process of weaving and the designs I learn along the way,' Narca said in Cebuano.



Lilia Narca weaves a textile for Anthill Fabric in Argao, Cebu. Photograph by Geela Garcia, 2022.

“

Nobody was weaving anymore; it had a thriving community of weavers before, but when we returned, everyone left weaving to become tour guides. To me, that's when the problem of cultural degradation felt urgent.

‘Nobody was weaving anymore’

Anthill Fabric co-founder Anya Lim was exposed to weaving communities in her childhood through her parents.

‘Growing up, my mom would tell me about the communities she visits, so when she finally brought me to Banaue, it was like Disneyland because the stories came to life,’ Lim said. ‘That’s how we travelled and learned, by visiting communities.’

‘We decided to come up with Anthill Fabric because one of the weaving communities we visited in Banaue back then turned into a ghost town. Nobody was weaving anymore; it had a thriving community of weavers before, but when we returned, everyone left weaving to become tour guides. To me, that’s when the problem of cultural degradation felt urgent,’ she added.

She noticed the same problem in different communities: weavers were becoming too old to continue the craft and the tradition was undervalued by younger generations. This motivated her to contribute to safekeeping the cultural heritage of her upbringing



Daisy Tolibas and Edita Borlasa upcycle old fabrics for Phinix Textile. Photograph by Geela Garcia, 2022.

because she wanted her future children to experience a similar childhood.

‘I didn’t want these fabrics to just be in coffee table books and museum walls,’ Lim said.

Meanwhile, in a small home studio in Pasig, seamstresses Daisy Tolibas and Edita Borlasa upcycle old Japanese kimonos to make laptop bags for the re-launch of Phinix Textile.

Pamela Mejia, Phinix Textile’s founder and a clothing technology graduate from the University of the Philippines, initially wanted to become a designer.

‘As part of my research class in the university, we had to read *Just Fashion: Critical Cases on Social Justice in Fashion*, where I read a lot of stories using fashion for good,’ said Mejia.

‘And that was such a novel idea. I took up clothing technology because I wanted to be a designer and I didn’t know that you could use fashion for good.’

A fashion enthusiast at a young age, Mejia has owned a small clothing business since she was 17. She eventually shifted her small fashion business into a social enterprise, leading her to work on textile waste.

**I didn’t want these fabrics
to just be in coffee table
books and museum walls.**

“



Lilia Narca weaving a four-harness loom for Anthill Fabric. Photograph by Geela Garcia, 2022.

Defining 'sustainable fashion'

Mejia recalled that back when she was still starting in 2014, only a number of people could understand what 'sustainable fashion' meant. Today, she defines it as an 'innovative solution for fashion needs' which intersects with people, the planet, and responsible profit.

'When people hear "sustainable fashion," they think it's a charity business model, but you have to be earning to keep the business afloat, that's why we also think about profit,' explained Mejia.

'There are also brands who say they would donate a percentage of their sales to causes and then brand that as sustainability, but that's not it,' added Lim.

For the Anthill Fabric co-founder, sustainable fashion means integrating sustainability in different aspects of the business. Since they care about cultural sustainability, their goal is to preserve handloom traditions.

Anthill Fabric also believes that this means empowering women weavers and providing them with sustainable livelihoods. Since sustainability is connected to the environment, they also started looking through circularity, upcycling, and producing zero-waste weaves.

It was not easy maintaining a business of this nature. Mejia said that growing up as the eldest, she had to be very 'madiskarte [resourceful]' to support herself and her family. She admitted that she juggles a day job, and constantly applies for grants and opportunities to support Phinix Textile. She also recalled a time when she was challenged due to being vocal about her political views.

'Our brand went viral because I spoke of injustice in government agencies working with social enterprises, and that meant a lot of decision-making as a leader,' said Mejia.

Lim, on the other hand, was on the brink of closing down Anthill Fabric due to the effects of the pandemic. The co-founder said that they had huge plans for celebrating their 10th year in the industry in 2020, and had planned for pop-up stores across the United States, Australia, and Dubai. Since everything was handmade, they had to prepare everything a year in advance, which ultimately did not materialise because of the pandemic.

'By 2021, I reached decision fatigue. I was exhausted at that time, having to juggle mental health, leading

the business, and thinking of the cash flow while everything was changing every minute.’

Building women-centred communities

What made Lim and Mejia power through the hardship was the community of women they work with and meet through their advocacy. Both were cohorts of Deepening Impact of Women Activators, or DIWA, a program of non-profit Ashoka, a network of leading social innovators all over the world in collaboration with S&P Global Foundation.

Lim said that joining the program gave her a safe space and a sense of support with fellow women innovators undergoing the same struggle during the pandemic; while for Mejia, it was an opportunity to bring Phinix Textile to the global scene as she met women and leaders from different Southeast Asian countries.

Beyond the programs, what motivated Lim to persist was the resilience and the stories of their artisans. She recalled that when they first met 10 years ago, most of their women partners were either drowning in debt or had no means of livelihood.

According to her, in the past, women did not see any potential in weaving as a profession. Some even undervalued their talent and capabilities because they did not contribute to household income. However, these notions changed as their relationships as partners grew and their understanding of the craft deepened.

‘They felt so empowered to be able to save money, pay off their debts, and invest in things that would give them a better life,’ said Lim. ‘They would tell me stories about how they can enjoy meat and fish now because they were able to afford a refrigerator.’

‘One even said that she bought a mattress and felt like a princess because she could finally sleep comfortably,’ she added. ‘So it may be a little thing, but they’re very empowering for these women. They’re able to support their husbands through their work, and that also meant their husbands honouring their capacity to make decisions.’

She even noted that the women grew to be more confident about themselves, which was reflected in the way they carried themselves.

‘Now they put on lipstick, smile more, and laugh more,’ said Lim. ‘They are more confident in front of the camera and are proud of the work that they do. They gained that sense of pride and ownership about what they do.’

For Anthill Fabric, fashion is just a means to an end or an ingredient of positive change and sustainability. After all, their main goals are livelihood sustainability and cultural preservation that put social and development work at the centre.

State support for the local fashion industry

Despite the challenges brought by the pandemic, both women are optimistic about the local fashion industry because of growing support from intimate market platforms such as Artefino, MaArte, and HABI Fair.

Mejia recently organised the THREAD Summit, a conference held in October 2022. The summit promotes social and environmental impact through the convergence of creativity, design, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

The conference received over 100 applications across the Philippines, which for her is an indicator of the growing interest in fashion and sustainability.

Mejia, however, emphasised the local industry’s need for more government support. She compared the situation in the Philippines to Thailand’s booming sustainable fashion industry that is financed and supported by government programmes.

‘They have a more flourishing fashion industry because their government supports their talents,’ said Mejia. ‘A lot of the initiatives for sustainable fashion in the Philippines are privately organised, so I wish we could have more coming from the State.’

Mejia said that while the handcraft and garment industries employ a lot of people, there are limited funding opportunities available to local communities

For Anthill Fabric, fashion is just a means to an end or an ingredient of positive change and sustainability. After all, their main goals are livelihood sustainability and cultural preservation that put social and development work at the centre.






Inside Anthill Fabric's studio in Cebu. Photograph by Geela Garcia, 2022.

that support their initiatives. These are often centred in places like Metro Manila, Davao, and Cebu.

Still, both said that this should not discourage aspiring sustainable fashion entrepreneurs from starting their businesses. However, they emphasised the importance of an entrepreneur's intention when starting.

Lim said, 'Ask yourself, why do you want to do what you want to do? Why in fashion? Why in textiles? Why is this important for you?' ■



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Geela Garcia

Geela Garcia (b. 1998) is a Filipino freelance multimedia journalist based in Manila, Philippines. Her photographic work, which documents stories of women, food sovereignty, and the environment, aims to write history from the experience of its makers. Her writing and photography have appeared in the South China Morning Post, The Philippine Star and Thomson Reuters Foundation, among others. She is a Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung Media Programme Asia fellow with a Diploma in Visual Journalism at the Asian Center for Journalism in the Ateneo de Manila University.

‘My Body My Choice’ The Slogan That Divides a Nation

Wara Irfan

Aurat March (Women’s March) is an annual march that takes place in all major cities in Pakistan on 8 March, International Women’s Day. The year 2022 saw the fifth Aurat March where women and allies of all ages, from all socioeconomic classes, took the streets across the country to demand gender equality, bodily autonomy, and individual rights. This article outlines the events of the 2022 Aurat March in Karachi and how it came to be despite the backlash leading up to the event, including hindrances and threats from fringe groups and conservative communities in the country.

To mark International Women’s Day on 8 March 2022, women and their allies took part in Aurat Marches across the country.

The first Aurat March took place in 2018 in Karachi. The following year, it was held in many more cities, including Lahore, Multan, Faisalabad, Larkana, and Hyderabad. Similarly, in 2022 women and allies marched across different cities in a display of feminist resistance to call for equal rights for women and other marginalised communities.

Despite numerous obstacles and threats, the organisers managed to continue the feminist tradition and hold the fifth march to campaign for gender equality. One of the challenges faced by the march involved Abdul Majeed Hazarawi, a leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), one of the leading political parties in Pakistan, who threatened to stop the march in the country’s capital with sticks. The Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Noor-ul-Haq Qadri also condemned the march, calling it an aberration to the religious and cultural values of Pakistani society. Additionally, the organisers faced police reports made against them, alleging that they had used defamatory language against Islam. More than the march itself, conservative and fringe groups had a problem with the slogans and placards held by the participants. In particular, the slogan ‘Mera Jism Meri Marzi [My Body My Choice]’ faced staunch backlash throughout the country. The slogan, which aimed to highlight the need for bodily autonomy and individual liberty for all groups of society, was deemed controversial. Nevertheless, the Aurat March did not compromise on any of its slogans and encouraged attendees to bring creative and innovative placards to fight the patriarchy.



Participants of the Aurat March in Pakistan holding up placards. Photograph by Wara Irfan, 2022.

For its first four years, the Aurat March was held at Frere Hall in Karachi. For the most recent march, organisers chose to hold the march at Jinnah Park, opposite Mazar-e-Quaid (Jinnah Mausoleum). Women and men of all ages and backgrounds marched down Muhammad Ali Jinnah Road.

The theme of the march was labour, with the main slogan being 'Ujarat Tahafaz aur Sukoon [Wage, Security, Rest]'. The march targeted various issues, including minimum wage, social security, and the right for women to rest and be at leisure. The first demand was for the implementation of minimum wage across all sectors. The second demand was for the provision of social security to women and the Khwaja Sira (trans-

gender) community in the form of monthly stipends to recognise the caregiving and emotional labour provided by these groups. The third demand was for immediate measures against child and bondage labour. The march called for the government to establish child protection centres across Karachi, and to provide child support services in the rest of the province. The fourth demand was for a living pension for all, and for single mothers, older women, as well as widows to receive tax cuts to increase their disposable income. The fifth demand called for health insurance, maternity leave, prenatal confinement, nursing breaks, childcare facilities, and postnatal care in workplaces. They also demanded unemployment support.

In Karachi, feminists and allies started gathering at Jinnah Park around 3 p.m. At 4:30 p.m., the area was bustling with people. Carpets were laid down in front of the stage on one side of the ground for people to sit on. On the other side, there were rows of chairs. On stage, a sign language interpreter was present to ensure accessibility and participation of people with hearing difficulties. Many communities were represented on the stage through their speeches, poems, and even rap songs. This included a member of the Midwifery Association of Pakistan who articulated their struggles through a rap performance. A group of female students also took to the stage to speak about the need for harassment committees in educational institutions to ensure transparency and female representation. Furthermore, polio workers voiced the upheavals they face while campaigning for polio vaccines, and Khwaja Siras called for the destigmatisation of HIV. The issue of Gujjar Nala was also raised, as displaced female residents narrated how their homes were being taken away from them.

A great number of young students participated in the 2022 march. One female student present, Safina Aslam, attended her first Aurat March in Karachi. She emphasised the significance this march holds for her: 'The Aurat March to me means liberation; it means freedom of mobility, of speech, of my attire, it means to me that one day out of the 365 days I can be out on the street in the middle of a sea of women and undoubtedly feel protected by them.' About her participation in the march, she added, 'I feel like this is my small contribution to dismantling this very large-scale problem of patriarchy that will exist for years to come.'

Another student, declining to adhere to any gender, Ali Bashir, said, 'The march literally means the act of movement, so for me, the Aurat March is by definition a movement. In the past four or five years, the move-

I feel like this is my small contribution to dismantling this very large-scale problem of patriarchy that will exist for years to come.

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ment itself has been evolving.' They further commented about their experience, 'This year I am here with my younger sisters for the first time and it is a fascinating experience. I am sure they are confused right now since it's their first exposure to this space.'

Regarding the change of location to Jinnah Park, Bashir added, 'This choice of place is very radical, this is happening in front of Quaid-e-Azam ke mazaar (Jinnah Mausoleum), it is a strategic move in terms of visibility . . . legitimacy. Ap main MA Jinnah road band kardo [When one blocks MA Jinnah Road], that itself is very significant because this road is one of the oldest roads of Karachi.'

Bashir's comments hinted at the progress the feminist movement has achieved in the last decade in Pakistan. A road that is mostly used by major political parties to protest and demonstrate their popularity has now become a part of the gender discourse, and this itself is no less than a triumph and marks significant progress in the right direction. ■



I am a media scholar and journalist based in Karachi, Pakistan who works at the intersection of media, gender, and culture. I work for DAWN as an Adenauer Fellow and like researching and writing about postcolonial media and visual cultures in the city. I love documenting and historicising the indigenous resistance movements that emerge and take place in Pakistan.

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A Woman's Place is in the Revolution

An activist holds up a placard during the long march organised by the Progressive Women's Association. The organisation campaigns against rape and violence against women and children in Shahbag, a neighbourhood in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Photograph by Monon Muntaka, 2020.



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A WOMAN'S
PLACE
is in the
~~KITCHEN~~
REVOLUTION



Against the Odds:

LGBT Couple's Holy Union Despite Drawbacks

A Filipino transgender woman and a Belgian man enter into a civil partnership after meeting on social media despite their 47-year age difference.

Alec Corpuz

The couple posing with Reverend Agbayani while showing off their certificate. Marc doubts the Belgian government will honour the certificate and allow him to bring Dimple to his home country as his wife.

Photograph by Alec Corpuz, 2018.

The buzz inside the function room was festive, chirpy with gayspeak.

But when the ceremony began in earnest, all that remained was the hum of the air-conditioner and the reassuring tones of Rev. Crescencio 'Ceejay' Agbayani of LGBTS Christian Church Inc. as he presided over the union of Marc and Dimple.

'Sexuality is not a choice, but love is,' Agbayani said, blessing the couple—a Belgian man and a Filipino transgender woman 47 years his junior—at the gathering held at a resort in Hermosa, Bataan in the Philippines.

Couples that make that 'choice,' however, find themselves facing a lot of barriers in a predominantly Roman Catholic country that forbids same-sex marriage.

The Family Code of the Philippines maintains that 'marriage is a special contract of permanent union between a man and a woman.'

As such, while same-sex couples can undergo religious ceremonies like Marc and Dimple, these rites are not legally binding.

They won't enjoy the same legal and civil rights and privileges of heterosexual couples, such as receiving a partner's employment benefits, the security of owning communal property, insurance benefits, and being eligible to adopt.





Dimple getting ready hours before the holy union on 11 April 2018, where she will meet Marc for the first time.

Photograph by Alec Corpuz, 2018.

Love via Facebook, Skype

There are no official statistics on the number of Filipinos who identify themselves as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), but a survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations in 2015 found that 85% of Filipinos believe that the LGBT community should be protected from discrimination.

An expression of such support was exhibited on a summer day in April, when about 50 friends and relatives of the bride gathered to celebrate the union between 30-year-old Dimple and 77-year-old Marc.

The two met on a Facebook group for ladyboys and, according to Dimple, since then they have ‘had an on-and-off relationship for the past two years,’ talking on Skype ‘all the time.’

Dimple said their conversations usually revolved around what she was doing in the Philippines.

Marc, a retired info-tech professional, often spoke about his three children from his two previous marriages.

The resort ceremony on 11 April was actually their first time seeing each other in the flesh.

Dimple said it was Marc who proposed that they have a church union. She recalled that a friend of hers

had undergone such rites in Manila, with Agbayani also officiating.

Asked if she was nervous about opening a new, deeper chapter in their relationship, she said, ‘It’s not the length of the relationship. It’s how you feel for each other.’

Their age gap, language barrier and cultural differences don’t matter now, she said. ‘Sometimes it’s difficult for us to understand each other because we aren’t that fluent in English, but we do understand each other’s actions.’

‘Most accepting’

While the Philippines is considered one of the ‘most accepting’ countries in Asia with regard to attitudes toward the LGBT community, the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics, or SOGIESC, Equality bill has yet to be passed.

The proposed bill mandates the State to address all forms of discrimination and violence targeting SOGIESC.

As of 7 December 2022, the bill has found traction, with 19 out of 24 senators signing the committee report recommending it.



Dimple adding the final touches to her appearance a few moments before the ceremony.
Photograph by Alec Corpuz, 2018.



Marc, a twice-divorced father of three, takes a moment for himself before the union at a small resort in Hermosa, Bataan. In a country without marriage-equality laws, unions such as these performed by Reverend Agbayani are wholly ceremonial and are not legally recognised, but regarded as a declaration of the couple's love for each other.
Photograph by Alec Corpuz, 2018.

‘Love is love’

Belgium, Marc’s home country, was the second country in the world after the Netherlands to legalise same-sex marriage. ‘If you love someone, then [it’s] okay! Boy or girl [it’s] okay,’ the two-time divorcee said. ‘Man, woman, it’s the same. Love is love.’

Despite the Certificate of Holy Union that he and Dimple obtained from their Bataan wedding, he doubts that the Belgian government would honour the document and allow him to bring her there as his wife.

Because of this, Marc said he would have to fly to

the Philippines every year to see Dimple. It will be expensive, but he declares, ‘I will find a solution. I always find [a] solution.’

For her part, Dimple clarifies she did not marry Marc for financial security, and expresses her hope the Philippines would finally recognise same-sex marriage. This way, she says, such couples can receive the same benefits as heterosexual couples.

According to her, ‘I’m just happy I finally found someone who accepts me for who I am and I can spend the rest of my life with.’ ■

Since starting my career as a photojournalist in 2013, I have worked for two major broadsheets based in Manila before transitioning to my current position as a photo editor for news.abs-cbn.com. I am also a college lecturer in photojournalism, guiding the next generation in developing their visual literacy.

During my time in the field, I felt that visuals were not given equal importance in the newsroom, usually playing second fiddle to text stories. However, even as a photojournalist I know that there are times when images are not enough to tell the story. As such, I firmly believe that images and text should be complementary as opposed to complimentary to each other.

This led me to pursue a master’s degree in journalism at the Ateneo de Manila University. The things I learned in the program, combined with the skills I previously acquired during my Diploma in photojournalism at the Asian Center for Journalism, have helped tremendously in my career and aided my development as a storyteller.

I believe that the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent national elections in the Philippines have thrust the importance of images and visual literacy to the forefront, especially for media practitioners. In this day and age, disinformation and misinformation are growing threats and I firmly believe that elevating a community’s visual literacy is one way of combating these threats.

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No Right Turn in the Education System

Manila, Philippines: A child wearing a tattered school uniform begging at an intersection under the skyway. The Philippines is facing numerous challenges in the education system that have yet to be addressed. These include high dropout rates, subpar student performance, underqualified teachers, outdated curriculum, excessive bureaucracy, and inadequate funding.

Photograph by Jilson Tiu, 2022.

From Private to Public: The Exodus of Students and Teachers Amid the Pandemic

In the Philippines, a quarter of a million students moved from private to public schools in 2020 and 2021 as many parents lost their jobs during the COVID public health crisis.

Arjay L. Balinbin

Nadine Chantalle V. Ponce, 22, was an up-and-coming third-year broadcasting student at the Colegio de San Lorenzo near the Philippine capital when it suddenly shut down amid the coronavirus pandemic.

‘We were all caught off guard,’ she said by telephone. ‘My brothers and I grew up in that school. Teachers there were like family, so it was tough for me to accept that it had to end that way.’

The institute was among the 425 private schools that have permanently closed since 2020. About half of their 21,000 private school students have transferred to public schools, where tuition is free.

St. Joseph Academy of San Jose, Northern Samar, Inc. in the Eastern Visayas Region has also shut down its kindergarten department due to lack of enrolment.

A quarter-million students moved from private to public schools in 2020 and 2021, according to the Department of Education (DepEd), as many parents lost their jobs.

This seems to be the opposite of what's happening in western countries like the United States, where many parents increasingly sought out, regardless of the price tag, independent schools that offered physical rather than remote classes as the coronavirus crisis raged on, CNBC reported last year.

Reports of significant academic learning loss in school districts underscored concerns about the toll that virtual learning has taken on education at every level. Private schools, which generally have larger campuses, smaller class sizes, and greater student autonomy, often demonstrated more flexibility when it came to reopening.

As a result, children in private education were able to attend school in person, alleviating the burden on their parents and, in many cases, allowing them to go to work or pursue employment opportunities from home.

Filipino students who enrolled this year rose to 28.04 million from 27.23 million last year, when physical classes were still disallowed.

The exodus of teachers from private to public schools, where the pay is said to be higher, has also spurred the closure of many independent schools, education specialist and school owner Elna Leah L. Fonacier commented.

'A large number of private school teachers have transferred to public schools because of the attractive salary offer, which is triple the price offered by small private schools,' she said in a Facebook Messenger chat.

According to her, large private schools offer an average monthly salary of PHP 18,000 (USD 325), while the smaller institutions pay PHP 8,000 (USD 143) to 12,000 (USD 215), compared with a starting salary of PHP 25,000 (USD 450) offered by government schools.

Private school closures could well have worsened the country's unemployment rate during the pandemic.

Almost 2.7 million Filipinos were jobless in August 2022, 79,000 more than in July, though 1.2 million down from a year earlier, according to the local statistics agency.

Fonacier said private schools have also found it hard to comply with the safety requirements for face-to-face classes stipulated by the DepEd.

The DepEd said it would allow private schools to continue offering online classes beyond 2 November 2022, revising the earlier announcement that all

schools are required to enforce five days of face-to-face classes by next month.

'DepEd is cognizant of the current situation of the private sector due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic—the amount of investment in online learning technologies, the development and institutionalisation of best practices on blended learning, and the unfortunate closure of small private schools because of losses,' the department said in a statement.

School closures affect communities socially and economically, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Such disruptions worsen disparities within the education system and result in interrupted learning, poor nutrition, gaps in childcare, a rise in dropout rates and high economic costs, the organisation added.

According to a 2022 report by the World Bank, the Philippines has a learning poverty rate of 91% and a learning deprivation rate of 90.4%, among the highest in Southeast Asia.

Private school closures have also limited parents and students' access to the 'distinct education services that they provide,' University of the Philippines Diliman College of Education Dean Jerome T. Buenviaje said via email when questioned.

He pointed out that there were 47,144 public schools and 14,425 private schools before the pandemic. As of 2021, out of 2,418 higher education institutions, 1,734 were private, with 684 institutions under the Commission on Higher Education, he added.

The figures show that the quality of graduates joining the Philippine labour force is highly dependent on the private school sector, he said.

'The closure of private schools means fewer graduates that can join the labour sector,' Buenviaje said. 'If this trend goes on, the government will have to establish more schools or further strengthen their existing programs, which would mean additional funding.'

Learning 'trap'

Buenviaje also said it would take time for such changes to take place 'while the demand for quality graduates joining the labour force continues.'

The government should work with stakeholders to save private schools from collapse because they play a vital role in the country's education system, he said.

Private school closures could well have worsened the country's unemployment rate during the pandemic.

Similarly, Fonacier commented that increasing teachers' salaries could persuade them to stay. The state could also grant wage subsidies to private institutions.

According to Buenviaje, 'Tax relief for private schools will never be enough, though it's an initial reform to consider.'

By law, private schools are eligible for a temporary 1% tax from July 2020 to June 2023, after which the rate will return to 10%.

'To save private schools from collapse, there are existing policies abroad that support the sustainability of the private education sector through government funding,' Buenviaje said. 'These models can be reviewed and adopted if they are suitable in our context and existing laws.'

'Congress can also pass a bill expanding the coverage of voucher programs for primary education and increase the voucher allocations for the tertiary level under the tertiary education subsidy fund or through other programs,' Anthony Jose M. Tamayo, Chairman of the Coordinating Council of Private Educational Associations of the Philippines, said in an email.

'Students will have the chance to go to their private schools of choice if the voucher system is expanded to the tertiary level,' he said. It is also better if the college voucher system has fewer restrictions so that more students can go to private schools.

More students going to private schools could also mean savings for the state, Tamayo said. 'They don't have to build additional classrooms and private schools can help in decongesting public schools.'

'Expanding productive engagement between the government and private education sector can help in getting the country out of the low learning proficiency trap.'

Ponce, the third-year broadcasting student, said schools should be more transparent with parents and students about their financial situation.

'Maybe we could have done something,' she said. 'For us, it's not just about the education, it's the family that we've built inside the school.' ■

**For us, it's not just about
the education, it's the
family that we've built
inside the school.**

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Arjay L. Balinbin

Arjay L. Balinbin is a business journalist based in Manila, Philippines. He graduated with a master's degree in journalism as a Konrad Adenauer Stiftung fellow at the Asian Center for Journalism, Ateneo de Manila University. He is a senior business reporter for the Philippines' oldest business newspaper, BusinessWorld Publishing Corporation. He reports on publicly listed companies, startups, and government agencies related to technology, telecommunications, and transportation in the Philippines and beyond, covering events in Spain, Germany, and Malaysia.

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Close-Up: Being a Photographer in Rural Nepal

Nani Maya photographs a customer outside her studio in Gothiyula, Nepal.
Photograph by Monika Deupala, 2021.



She may not know how to read or write,
but she makes a living taking pictures.

Monika Deupala





Nani Maya displays her Nikon D80 camera in her studio. Photograph by Monika Deupala, 2021.

There is a wedding in progress in Jumla's remote Sinja Valley, and even here guests with smartphones are filming videos for TikTok and taking photos of the ceremony.

Even though everyone has a camera phone, the services of Nani Maya Buda are in high demand in the village of Gothijyula. She is attending the ceremony with her Nikon D80 digital camera as the official wedding photographer. Nani Maya never went to school, and cannot or read or write, but she is a self-taught professional photographer.

In this culturally conservative society, women are usually seen at home, tending livestock, or toiling in the fields. But Nani Maya stands out for her entrepreneurship and self-assurance in her freelance job.



A customer's passport-sized photographs, taken by Nani Maya in her home studio. Photograph by Monika Deupala, 2021.

'Could you please tilt your head a bit? Look at the camera. And we are done,' she tells a customer in her makeshift studio behind her electrical shop. She then takes the memory card to her laptop, edits the photos and prints them out.

It is a busy day at the studio, and customers are lining up outside for their turn. Some of them can be quite demanding, but Nani Maya is patient and tries to meet their requests.

Gothijyula village is a local hub in Sinja Valley with government offices, banks, and a rural market. Residents of many surrounding villages travel there for official documents, to deposit money, and to do some shopping.

‘I want sindoor on my forehead,’ says one. ‘Make my skin look smooth and less dark,’ demands another. And finally, ‘Can you get rid of the moles in my face?’

Nani Maya replies, ‘I will make you look like a heroine in a Bollywood movie.’ There are peals of laughter from the women.

Positioning a customer for a portrait photograph. Photograph by Monika Deupala, 2021.



Nani Maya Buda has been running her small shop selling electrical goods for ten years. The shelves are filled with mobile phones, batteries, watches, flashlights, and other appliances. Seeing the demand for mugshots for citizenship certificates, bank forms and school admissions, her husband started the small photo studio.

After he found a salaried job, he got his wife to take over the shop, and also trained her to take and edit pictures in a rudimentary studio, which is just a white cloth hanging on the wall outside the shop where there is more sunlight. Customers sit on an empty oil drum, while Nani Maya tilts their heads just right.

‘I learned quickly, but made mistakes at first,’ Nani Maya recalls. ‘Once, I accidentally formatted the entire drive and lost all data, and sometimes I waste too much paper while printing photographs.’

Nani Maya presents memory cards on her palm which are sold in her studio. Photograph by Monika Deupala, 2021.



Nani Maya's daughter died in an accident, and she now lives in a rented room with her husband and their younger son. The older son goes to school in Surkhet.

She is now well-known in the village, and the shop is usually crowded, especially at school admission time when she takes pictures back-to-back of young students. She is thrilled that they have a chance at education, something that she never had herself.

During festivals and religious functions, people in this region join hands and dance the Deuda. Earlier, Nani Maya would have joined them, but these days she is too busy taking pictures and videos. Some of the dancers give her their phones to take pictures of them.

After a day at work in her small studio when her husband comes home from his job, Nani Maya turns to her household chores: collecting firewood to cook dinner.

'I am still learning to take better photos for my customers,' she says as she inspects a visitor's Canon EOS. 'I want to save and buy a better camera like this someday.' ■



My name is Monika Deupala. After working for four years for a weekly English newspaper, I am currently working as a freelance journalist specialising in text and visual mediums.

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Nani Maya prepares dinner for the family in her house. Photograph by Monika Deupala, 2021.

Dystopia

Manila, Philippines: A cluster of high-rise buildings as seen from the perspective of a destroyed and blighted property in Guadalupe Makati City. The socioeconomic disparity in Metropolitan Manila is very stark, and the different standards of living are evident as you walk through the city.

Photograph by Jilson Tiu, 2023.



Jilson Tiu is a freelance photographer and photojournalist. He contributes to various corporations and NGOs in both print and online platforms, local and abroad. His personal work revolves around environmental and social issues. He loves black coffee.



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About *ArtIQulate*

ArtIQulate was born from the idea of giving Adenauer Fellowship alumni and scholarship holders a stage to publish their work. During the pandemic, we at the KAS Media Programme Asia felt compelled to provide the creative thinkers and writers of the Adenauer Fellowship with an opportunity to participate in a project that could be organised online, without the endless online meetings prevalent at the time.

The content our fellows and journalists have submitted for the magazine is of outstanding quality which reflects the international network of the Adenauer Fellowship. Our fellows are open-minded media practitioners brimming with fresh ideas, and are equipped with a wide-ranging journalistic and multimedia-centered skillset which the KAS Media Programme Asia aims to nurture.

This edition of *ArtIQulate* features two AI-assisted articles by Adenauer Fellowship alumnus Mohammad Rakibul Hasan. While the photographs in his articles have not been created or edited with AI, the author has used an AI program to support the text in his articles, a technological feature that we will no doubt witness more of in future.

The magazine opens with an AI-written poem by MD Rakibul Hasan. AI-written poetry is a hotly contested topic in the debate about AI-created content within the media landscape. Poetry has always been seen as a form of art, and the creation and expression of art is largely considered the defining feature which distinguishes human creativity from machine-made mass production. Is it actually the author who created the poem, merely utilising AI as the tool of his expression? Or can AI technology truly create art that expresses and touches human emotion? This is just one of many questions brought to the fore by our authors in *ArtIQulate*.

The articles in this second issue of *ArtIQulate* have

been collated to explore the topic 'Freedom of Choice', as Ansgar Graw, the director of the Media Programme Asia, describes in his foreword. What can be seen among the chosen articles for *ArtIQulate* are three sub-topics regarding Freedom of Choice: A female-centered approach regarding possible life choices and business opportunities for women, environmental as well as waste issues which impact and limit daily choices for the people living in climate-affected regions, and location-based freedom that determines personal liberties such as education and love matches.

The single photos and photo series in *ArtIQulate* serve to break the text and guide the reader through the magazine through a visual medium that complements the flow of written information. All photographs have been taken by the authors themselves and have not been purchased from outside sources.

Even before the first edition of *ArtIQulate* was published, young journalists from all over Asia expressed interest in working with us on the magazine. We have therefore opened the gates of the publication to journalists across Asia.

Please allow me to end on a personal note. Never have I felt so much joy from working with a group of students and young media practitioners. The fellows in the Adenauer Fellowship identify as journalists, visual journalists, photographers, videographers, multi-media journalists, writers and storytellers. Our fellows, many of whom have studied in institutions all over the globe, work mainly in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, the Philippines and Pakistan, among other countries. The passion that is reciprocated by the fellows in the Adenauer Fellowship is greatly appreciated and I would like to thank all our contributors for their hard work during and after the course of their fellowship which made this edition of *ArtIQulate* possible.

ART!QULATE
is brought to you by



Lisa Wlaschek

Lisa Wlaschek holds a Master of Arts in Photography Studies and Research, a curatorial degree, from the Folkwang University of the Arts in Germany, and a Bachelor of Arts in Asia Studies with a minor in Japanese. She is currently working as a Project Manager at the KAS Media Programme Asia in Singapore.



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A full-page photograph of a person standing in a desert landscape, holding a camera with a long lens to their eye. The person is wearing a grey jacket and light-colored pants. The background features a large, gnarled, leafless tree on the left and a rocky, eroded hillside in the distance under a clear sky. The ground is sandy and covered with dry, tangled branches.

Art!QULATE

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