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GOPEN RAI

SPECTACLE: The Prasai camp in Balkhu (above) and the UML gathering in Tinkune (below) on Thursday was a show of force between two former allies.



SUMAN NEPALI

Street politics

■ Shristi Karki

As soon as Nepal's festival season ended, two opposing political groups took to the streets of Kathmandu in a brewing struggle between pluralism and populism.

People bused in by business tycoon and alleged bank defaulter Durga Prasai gathered in Balkhu Thursday for what he called a "citizen's movement to protect the nation, nationalism, religion and culture".

Prasai has latched on to a political line calling for a return of the monarchy and re-establishing

Nepal as a Hindu state.

Meanwhile, in Tinkune the UML's youth wing, the National Youth Federation and former parliamentarian Mahesh Basnet, a close confidante of UML chair K P Oli, gathered to protest what it called the incompetence of the current coalition government.

But beneath the surface the simultaneous rallies represented a major falling out between Prasai and the UML, especially Basnet.

Prasai, who is significantly in debt after having borrowed to start the B&C hospital in eastern Nepal, has also been leading a public campaign urging bank debtors not to repay loans. Many have seen

his anti-establishment pivot from party politics as a ploy to get out of paying back the money he owes.

Until press time on Thursday, UML protestors were pelted with stones by the Prasai camp. Protesters in Balkhu also clashed with police. Meanwhile in Tinkune, the designated zone for the UML gathering, the rally was relatively peaceful.

"Disenfranchised Nepalis who are not entirely politically aware are frustrated with elected leaders and are looking for reliable leadership," says political analyst Indra Adhikari. "That is why some are trying to cash in on that frustration and helplessness."

The UML framed its own protest as an attempt to get back in charge of the government, with chair K P Oli seemingly placing the cause of the anti-establishment,

pro-monarchy protest on the NC-Maoist led coalition.

"The incompetence of this government is unacceptable," said Oli ahead of the planned rally. "If the government cannot function efficiently, those who are leading it must step down."

Oli's full backing of his youth wing's attempt to engage with the Prasai-led rally has baffled many. Oli may be worried that his soured relationship with Prasai could mean some of his skeletons in the closet may come out. Prasai has accused the UML chair of having massive amounts of properties and investments in Cambodia and elsewhere.

Adds Adhikari, "Why K P Oli has declared a figure like Prasai an equal opponent worthy of giving space, and why the UML has not questioned it, is mind-boggling."

The pro-monarchy movement has also brought to light burgeoning divisions within the royalist-right RPP. While chair Rajendra Lingden publicly distanced himself from Prasai's platform, Prakash Chandra Lohani and Rabindra Mishra have been more open towards the businessman's attempt to engage.

Nepal's other mainstream political parties also seem to be keyed into the pulse of increasingly anti-secularist as well as pro-monarchist public opinion. NC chair Sher Bahadur Deuba is said to have spoken out against secularism during a recent party meeting.

The coalition's response to the two rallies, meanwhile, has been to further constrict physical as well as digital spaces to protest and dissent, declaring the area between Maitighar Mandala and New Baneswor prohibited to protests for 30 days. Lalitpur also banned a gathering of more than five people in the Pulchok area for six months.

Analysts say that the restrictions adds to the infringement of free speech already affected by the recent TikTok ban in Nepal.

Already, there are concerns about censorship. On Wednesday, anchor Bhusan Dahal claimed the AP1 tv had refused to air his interview with Durga Prasai, alarming many and leading the presenter to release the interview on YouTube.

Meanwhile, Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah sent a four-point bulletin to the Censor Board, urging it to 'stop broadcasting content that harms Nepal's independence and self-respect.'

Says Tripathi: "The remedy to any problem should not be worse than a disease in a democracy—any step taken by the government must be in line with the Constitution, and must not constrict democratic space." 🇳🇵

Too hot to work
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



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Too hot to work

Between mid-June and mid-October alone, almost 37,500 Nepalis left for the UAE for jobs, placing it among the top destination countries.

Many of these workers will likely be engaged in the delivery of the COP28 Climate Summit that will ironically be held in the UAE, the world's fifth biggest exporter of refined petroleum, with the head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) as conference president. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal will lead the Nepali delegation.

Migrant workers form 88% of the UAE population, so one cannot talk about COP28 or the UAE by ignoring migration. For Nepal, too, the climate crisis and the migration economy are linked.

New research by Human Rights Watch (HRW) states that the COP28 host's role in climate injustice goes beyond it being one of the largest fossil fuel producers and among the highest per capita emitters. It also relates to its treatment of migrant workers.



HRW interviewed 151 current and former migrant workers and their families from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal. Despite negligible per capita greenhouse gas emissions, the three countries are among the most climate vulnerable and have suffered extreme weather and slow-onset events linked to climate change.

The climate impact countries like Nepal face should also be considered from the perspective of their mobile populations in the UAE and other countries. Migrant workers are exposed to extreme heat with inadequate protection, and because widespread abuse like wage theft and exorbitant recruitment fees limit the ability of workers to send home remittances, including during climate-linked emergencies.

Dubai's maximum temperature on some days exceeded 50°C this summer, and the UAE itself is vulnerable to heat stress due to atmospheric warming.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has said that the Gulf states' wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT) is 'expected to approach, and possibly exceed, the physiological threshold for human adaptability (35°C) by the end of the century'. Migrant workers, including Nepalis, are disproportionately exposed.

The most common heat mitigation strategy used in the Gulf including the UAE are 'summer midday bans' that stop outdoor work in the afternoons for a few hours.

But a study in Kuwait found that despite the ban there was a substantial increase in the risk of occupational injuries associated with extremely hot temperatures.

Another study found that the highest heat intensity for workers in Saudi Arabia was from 9AM to noon, while the ban is in effect between noon and 3PM.

HRW's research recommends that the UAE move away from arbitrary, calendar-based midday bans towards risk-based measures such as the WBGT.

Heat is a health hazard. It can exacerbate pre-existing conditions, impair cognitive function, and increase the risk of workplace injuries and long-term illnesses like end-stage renal failures. Dialysis rooms across Nepal that are filled with Gulf returnees.

HRW's research follows three dialysis patients who are all UAE returnees describing how they did not get support from the UAE.

The Nepal government provides dialysis for free, but cost of medicines, injections, transportation add up.

Chitrakala, the wife of a dialysis patient, Til, who accompanies him to the hospital multiple times a week for his dialysis says, "In some ways, I find it comforting to be at the hospital because in the waiting room, I realise I am not alone. It is not just my family that is facing this."

Good migration can be transformative, but bad migration can be devastating for families. To be sure, remittances have been critical for economies of Nepal and other South Asian countries, but they do not substitute their responsibility. Historical and major greenhouse gas emitters also have a duty to support communities heavily impacted by the climate crisis.

The July 2021 Melamchi flood was a climate-induced disaster in Nepal, and one of its victims told HRW researchers: "During the flood, all we wanted was to save our lives. We survived, but we lost everything. The flood finished us."

His wife is headed to the UAE for a waitressing job which cost her Rs200,000, borrowed at 24% annual interest. If all goes well, her first year's salary of a mere \$262 a month will just go to repay the loan.

Another Sindhupalchok returnee from the UAE said, "Climate change or not, we have to migrate. We used to be self-sufficient but now have to buy food. Yields are lower. Insects and diseases are more common."

Climate change can be a compounding factor for longstanding emigration such as from Nepal to the Gulf, and adds to the burden of past, present and future migrant workers.

At the COP28 in Dubai, Prime Minister Dahal would do well to dwell on the links between the host country and increasing climate vulnerability that Nepalis face both at home from weather extremes and heat stress at their workplaces in the UAE.

The COP28 Climate Summit in Dubai spotlights working conditions for Nepali migrant workers

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Maoism and tourism

During the decade-long Maoist war, tourists were mostly spared even though the tourism industry was severely affected by the insurgency. Many Nepal lovers ignored travel warnings and took off to remote parts of the country to trek. But the Maoists did charge them donation money and they even handed out receipts.

A long-time Himalayan trekker Joel Schone wrote about one such experience in Nepali Times 20 years ago this week in issue #170 14-20 November 2003. Excerpts:

Sherpa who had worked on a trek with me had come for his salary, and unwisely, I had paid him in view of the hotel staff. After he had gone, one of them approached me: "Why do you give this man money? He is a dirty peasant. I am educated, give me some money also." It is hard to explain to someone when logic goes that way.

That was 15 years ago. In October, our trekking group was held up by Maoists in the stunningly beautiful Manaslu trekking circuit. The rebels told us we would not be allowed to proceed unless we paid a 'war tax' of \$100. In conversation, the young man was forthright, telling us the money was being used to equip his comrades for their



struggle. Around us villagers were in the middle of their own struggle: harvesting millet and down the hill we could see children in the school playground, their struggle for education about to begin

for the day. Like most Nepali children, they got up early to finish their tasks on the farm before walking uphill to school.

It was obvious that none of the money we were forced to donate would go to local education, agriculture or health care. It was obvious that, unlike what Mao Zedong taught, they were not interested in the people of this mountain village above the Budi Gandaki. This man sat in his office, well fed, healthy, waiting for the next group of trekkers to take money from. We paid, of course. We had come from around the world to see Nepal and \$100 was not a lot of money.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



The April 2015 earthquake had just hit Kathmandu, and a patient was admitted to Alka Hospital. His small black pet puppy had followed the man to his cabin C18. The patient died during treatment, and his body was taken away without the pooch knowing. But for the past eight years, the dog has waited for her owner outside the room. Read the story on page 12 and watch the video online.



Growing up in Rupendehi, Keshar Kala Thapa was fascinated by the dresses in fashion magazines. After completing high school, she enrolled in a fashion designing course and then did a Master's in Business Studies. She opened a business and training centre for women. Visit Saffron Boutique and Training Centre and watch Keshar Kala at work on the Nepali Times YouTube channel. Story on page 9.

KALI

This story warms my heart ('Hachiko reincarnated in Nepal', Anita Bhetwal, Page 12). Dogs have been gifted with a sense of true love, and they always live up to the standards of lifelong companionship, all the more reason to embrace this beautiful animal.

Eliza Sthapit

My dog would do that. Your dog would do that. That's how much they love us. Please love a street dog today.

Jigs Gaton

Wow, Hachiko was my favourite movie, and now Kali indeed reminds me of Hachiko. Both are great dogs.

Kapil Silwal

God bless Kali, I wish that she stays healthy.

Sanjog Rana

TIKTOK BAN

Not for the first time has the Nepal government shown its intolerance to criticism ('Rattled by criticism, Nepal bans TikTok', nepalitimes.com). Past governments led by various other prime ministers also attempted to muzzle free expression.

Damakant

Our leaders have always believed in a knee-jerk reaction because they lack the intellect or vision to develop a nuanced reaction backed by rational thinking.

Bimal Rawal

TENJEN SHERPA

Tenjen Sherpa is the unsung hero of mountaineering ('Tenjen Sherpa, a tribute', Bhadra Shrama, nepalitimes.com). His life was an antithesis to the adrenaline charged 'conquer the mountain' approach of most western climbers. May his soul rest in peace.

Aastha Dahal

NEPAL HYDROPOWER

I look forward to having Mark Liechty's book in my hand ('Small is bountiful', Bikash Pandey, #1186). It was great to be involved for some years in the Anzhi Khola and Jhimruk projects.

Dorothea Vestøl

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Khumbu since 1950

by Jack D Ives
Alton C Byers and Lhakpa Sonam Sherpa teamed up to expand, update, and improve the first edition of Khumbu Since 1950, published six years ago. The result is a first-rate photographic time travel showing the dramatic changes in the villages, forests, and glaciers of the Mt Everest region over 73 years. Review on our website.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



Nepal bans TikTok

by Nepali Times
Rattled by the rise of right-wing, religious, and pro-monarchy groups, Nepal's government banned TikTok, saying the platform was spreading social discord. Critics saw the move as the first step in a government design to muzzle freedom of expression and independent media. Join the discussion online.

Most popular on Twitter

Hachiko reincarnated

by Anita Bhetwal
When a patient was admitted to Alka Hospital in Patan in 2015, his small black puppy followed him. The patient died during treatment, but the dog, named Kali by hospital staff, has waited for her owner outside his cabin ever since. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full story and the video.

Most commented

Small is bountiful

by Bikash Pandey
Mark Liechty's new book narrates the inspirational story of Nepal's alternative hydropower development, and shows that building hydropower capacity was more important than building infrastructure. Details on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The 2015 earthquake had just hit Kathmandu, and a patient was admitted to Alka Hospital. His small black pet puppy had followed the man. The patient died during treatment. But for the past eight years, the dog has waited for her owner outside the room.



Uttam Babu Shrestha @uttambabu
Absolutely unbelievable! Just finished reading this incredible story. It made me happy and sad at the same time. Kudos to Kali.



Deeksha @Curlinoodle
Oh my god I think I've seen this dog there but didn't know the back story



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Rattled by criticism, Nepal bans TikTok. Government says popular platform is spreading social disharmony.



Kashish Das Shrestha कशिश दास श्रेष्ठ @kashishds
TikTok ban by Nepal govt is dangerous precedent, flawed knee jerk reaction. Has nothing to do with data privacy etc. @NepaliTimes provides a nuanced context for decision. Its terrible, too, for many Nepali entrepreneurs who spent years building their brand on the platform.

1,000 WORDS



CLIMATE FOR CHANGE: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal at the National Climate Summit on Tuesday where Nepal's Nationally Determined Contribution was made public. Dahal is leading Nepal's delegation to COP28 climate summit to be held from 30 November to 12 December in Dubai.



PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI

Learning from Jajarkot what we didn't after 2015

Every earthquake throws up lessons so we can be better prepared next time. This month's quake is another chance.

■ Sushil Gyewali

The 2015 earthquakes in Central Nepal that killed over 9,000 people had many lessons for us, most important of which was the need to be prepared for future disasters. After all, it was not a question of if there would be another quake, but when.

And sure enough, it came with the 6.4 Jajarkot earthquake of 3 November. At least 160 people were killed outright, buried under the rubble of their fragile homes. Dozens more have died of cold and diseases since.

After the 2015 disaster, there was a general consensus about putting safety measures into place: building seismic-resistant structures, retrofitting public buildings, and the need for emergency preparedness. Prior to this, there was no such understanding at the political level, within government or the public.

Another big lesson learned was how a separate institution, independent from the regular government structure, can more effectively carry out reconstruction, post-disaster.

Reconstruction was fraught with challenges, political interference being the foremost. But the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) coordinated effectively between internal and external assistance, and helped to carry out the process successfully.

The NRA was also crucial in managing resources, setting guidelines, and developing a single goal-oriented approach that would incorporate everyone from the public to the Prime Minister.

But we did more than rebuild the houses. What was achieved was technology transfer on a massive scale, including knowledge about safe building even for mud-mortar, stone and wooden structures. It also showed us how to make cash



distribution transparent and take it directly to the people with zero-tolerance for corruption.

We created a National Consultative Council for all the political parties to work together as well as the bureaucracy, private sector, and civil society. At the district level, a mechanism was put in place for MPs and representatives from all three levels to collaborate. There were vertical and horizontal links between all levels.

The NRA was superseded by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) in 2019 which has since put forward plans to make Nepal a disaster resilient country by 2030. Blueprints, frameworks and maps have been created for earthquake and flood preparedness and relief.

They were submitted to the government, but it has been filed away with no action taken.

As soon as the reconstruction work was complete, it seems we forgot about disaster preparedness. And so, when the Jajarkot earthquake struck, we were unprepared again.

We cannot prevent or predict earthquakes, but we sure can

prepare. Even so, all we seem to be capable of is to react after a disaster hits. More than 60,000 houses were partially or completely damaged in the Bajhang, Doti, and Jajarkot earthquakes that have struck in the past year. Most of the partially damaged houses have to be demolished.

The NDRRMA allocates Rs400,000 in subsidy for houses to be rebuilt in the mountains. This adds up to Rs24 billion, and if we add other expenses including technical assistance, technology transfer and others, the total comes to Rs30 billion.

But if we had followed the preparedness plan, we could have retrofitted and made houses across Nepal safer at a lower cost. They could have withstood a moderate earthquake like the one in Jajarkot and the casualties would have been much lighter.

What we had proposed was a safety steel rod in every mud-mortar house, retrofitting and Rs100,000 to the owner so that the structure is safe from earthquakes as well as water and fire disasters.

In fact, 300,000 houses across the country could have been retrofitted with just Rs30 billion

with the government providing the initial Rs100,000 in subsidy for people to reinforce their concrete homes. The World Bank was ready to invest \$10 million to survey the state of houses across the country for retrofitting, but it never took off.

Reconstruction of the structures damaged by the Jajarkot earthquake will now proceed. The good news is that after the 2015 earthquake, we now have experience and expertise in doing that. We also have local governments, unlike the last time. They will be at the frontlines of reconstruction and resettlement.

NDRRMA can provide strategic guidelines, gather resources, coordinate and train human resources, monitor the reconstruction work carried out through the local and state levels, and give policy directions.

This exercise in turn will capacitate all three structures of government, and in the long term, all three levels of the government will be better equipped to deal with disasters.

It is an opportunity to put our federal structure to good use, empower local leaders, resolve doubts about the system, coordinate the three levels of government and mobilise the support of the international community.

Shelter is the topmost priority following any disaster, especially now that winter has set in on the western mountains. Survivors need relief materials including money for temporary housing. We need to identify beneficiaries, distribute grants by establishing a banking system, develop human resources and other frameworks. Only after that do we start reconstruction.

Experts, government agencies and local representatives should coordinate with all levels of government to determine the role and share the work. Initiatives should be taken now in terms of raising resources.

We have created a framework for dealing with disasters at the national level in the form of the Disaster Resilience Framework. Similarly, provinces and local levels should also create theirs.

The framework has five elements:

1. Provide financial and technical support to make homes and schools safer through local governments.
2. Assess the damage and estimate the amount needed.
3. Put the Disaster Management Act into operation at all three levels of government.
4. Look at disaster insurance instead of just doling out money to people to rebuild. The government can pay the premium for the poorest families
5. Establish emergency centres with relief stockpiles at the federal, provincial and local levels.

The Far West and Karnali provinces are underserved. Reconstruction, if done intelligently, is also an opportunity to uplift these areas economically.

Disaster preparedness should be integrated into the education system so young Nepalis know that the country is disaster-prone and it is best to be prepared.

Disasters do not kill people but poorly built structures do—local levels should carry out risk assessment while developing land use plans. Most of all, what is needed now is the readiness to implement the blueprints, frameworks, experience and knowledge that we gleaned after 2015. Otherwise this tragedy will also be in vain. 🇳🇵



Sushil Gyewali is the former CEO of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA).

Nepali chef's French connection

Bringing French dishes to Kathmandu and incorporating techniques and flavours of both cuisines



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

■ Aisha MacDougall

Few cuisines in the world could be as poles apart as French and Nepali. While the French place great emphasis on complex techniques, Nepali food is characterised by familial cooking and a diverse range of spices.

But Rajeev Shrestha, executive chef at Aloft Hotel in Thamel, is all set to bridge this gap and introduce Kathmandu to fine dining, while incorporating the techniques and flavours of both cuisines.

"Traditional Nepali ingredients are brought to a new plane via French culinary technology," says Chef Shrestha, who has had a lifelong infatuation with French food. "But I also want to blend French culinary elements into Nepali cuisine by incorporating wine pairings and creating ornate tasting menus."



Born in Kathmandu, Shrestha began his career in hotels in Bangalore and Goa as a management trainee, gaining exposure to fine dining. Inspired by the epicurean delights, Chef Shrestha made the switch from management to gastronomy, seeking experiences and education that would enable him to realise his culinary dreams.

Starting out as a Chef de Partie, he gradually rose up through the ranks, gaining the experience and confidence to become a chef in his own right before returning home to Nepal.

Today, Shrestha is one of the leading figures in Neo-Nepali cuisine. And to mark the 75th year of the Nepal-France friendship in October, he was invited to the prestigious Toques en Chablais International Gastronomy Festival in France to demonstrate Nepali cuisine, making him the first Nepali chef to have done so.

The visit was a collaboration between Aloft Kathmandu, the

Charles Baudelaire Institute, and the Nepal Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management. Shrestha not only presented the wonders of Nepali cuisine but also showed the extraordinary power of food to allow people to connect and bridge cultural differences.

The trip's highlight was an interactive workshop led by Shrestha and attended by distinguished diplomats, French culinary students, and Michelin-starred chefs who were introduced to the intricacies of Nepali cooking techniques.

"A stand-out dish for both the European audience and myself was Yomari," recalls Shrestha about the Newari delicacy filled with sweet molasses often shaped like a fish or a conch shell.

He adds: "There in France, Yomari became more than a dish but a gateway into not only Nepali cuisine but culture. The French were enthralled." 🇳🇵

NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक



Udaya project

The government of Nepal and Switzerland have signed an MOU for Udaya project which seeks to empower Nepali small and medium-sized enterprises and elevate business development.

Turkish now to Detroit

Turkish Airlines has launched flights to Detroit, its 13th destination in the US starting 15 November. The carrier will fly three times a week between



Istanbul Airport and Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, increasing to four times a week after 25 December. Turkish Airlines now serves 345 destinations worldwide, including 13 in the US.

Laxmi-Sunrise Utsav

Laxmi Sunrise Bank launched the 'Laxmi Sunrise Utsav' campaign during Tihar and Chhath to celebrate daughters as the embodiment of the goddess Laxmi, aiming to challenge traditional gender bias in Nepali society. The bank will be creating three videos where daughters are celebrated as Laxmi and is also inviting stories honoring the female family members as the goddess. The campaign includes cash prizes of Rs50,000, Rs30,000, and Rs15,000 for the top three submissions tagged with #Laxmisunriseutsav.



Worldlink awarded

Worldlink Communications, Nepal's largest internet service provider, received the Digital Transformation Award from the Asian-Ocean Computing Industry Organization in Seoul. Laxman Yadav of Worldlink accepted the award which was recognition for Worldlink's contribution to Nepal's digital transformation, particularly in extending high-speed internet infrastructure to remote areas such as the Karnali.

Foodmandu turns 13

Foodmandu, Nepal's premier food delivery service, marks 13 years of operation. Founder Manohar Adhikari announced the 'Teen Year Magic' offer, featuring discounts up to 51% on Combo Meals, Buy 1 Get 1 Free offers, and more. The company's growth includes substantial fundraising, app-based orders surging to 95%, partnerships with 1400+ restaurants, and a fleet of 250+ riders.



Quake aid

Sipradi provided aid worth Rs5.5 million to earthquake-affected families in Jajarkot and Rukum West. In partnership with Sipradi Aid Society, Tata Trust India, and Sipradi Trading it collaborated with the districts to distribute tarp, mattresses, food, soap, warm clothes, pillows, and caps to families in need benefiting 4,800 survivors from 1,200 families. Meanwhile, Unilever Nepal contributed Rs10 million to the Prime Minister's Disaster Relief Fund for rebuilding and rehabilitation and handed a cheque to Prime Minister Dahal.

Daraz Bhintuna

Daraz, Nepal's prominent e-commerce brand, sponsored the Bhintuna rally in Kathmandu. Amul Vaidya of Daraz highlighted the company's enthusiasm for participating in cultural events like the rally. The company launched the 'Spot the Flag' contest on social media, offering discount vouchers up to Rs. 500 to winners spotting the Daraz flag in the rally.

Study in Canada

Twenty-five Canadian universities and colleges will showcase educational opportunities during the EduCanada delegation in Kathmandu on 27-28 November. Participants can learn about student experiences, affordability, and career paths. The program includes seminars, roundtables, and meetings, aiming to connect Nepali students with globally recognized Canadian institutions.

Galaxy S23 FE

Samsung Nepal has unveiled the Galaxy S23 FE in Nepal available for pre-order from 20 November. The device offers features including a camera system with 3X optical zoom and Nightography, a 6.4-inch dynamic AMOLED 2X display with a 120 Hz adaptive refresh rate for an immersive viewing experience. Available in a single variant offering 8 GB of RAM and 256 GB of storage, the phone will retail at Rs85,999.



Dominican at Marriott

The Kathmandu Marriott Hotel is hosting the Dominican Republic Food Festival from 21-27 November. Attendees can savor vibrant flavours while celebrating cultural ties



between the Dominican Republic and Nepal. The festival includes an exclusive Dominican Master Class led by Chef Addys Jacquez on 26 November at Fairfield by Marriott Kathmandu.

TikTok ban won't stop Nepali netizens

Why TikTok was different and what next after the platform was blocked by the government

■ Saniaa Shah

Nepal's netizens received an unwelcome gift from the government this Tihar: a blanket ban on TikTok, the only Asian-born major global social media platform that has 1.5 billion users globally.

In Nepal, Gen Z audiences and digital natives from small towns and villages are expected to miss it the most, as it was their most preferred social media channel for creative self-expression and self-promotion. It was the online outlet that offered emotional empowerment with a convenient editing setup and easy upload process.

With AI-generated audio narration and simple templates, TikTok keeps itself uncomplicated enough to appeal to all kinds of users, ranging from casual creators to brand-focused influencers. No wonder, its use among Nepalis is an estimated 80% of all net users.

TikTok is a beast like no other. A catchy trending song with a synchronised dance video of lip-syncing twins plays on full-screen for 20 seconds, and without a moment's pause. This means no video ad to interrupt the experience.

The feed throws up another short, bite-sized comedic video of a young Nepali girl pretending to be her dad, ending with a silly punchline and a cackling SFX laugh track. Next appears an elaborate but sped up tutorial on how to apply fuller lips, coupled with pleasant pop music.

Another, and another, and another. An endless scroll, much like the home feed of any other social media platform, with a powerful algorithm that gobbles up hours without discrimination.

TikTok feeds the brain with shots of dopamine, with every swipe making way for more freshly uploaded videos. The Chinese-owned mega app easily rivals cigarettes and alcohol brands with easy access, little to no physical traces of addiction, and the fact that it is completely free for unlimited usage. TikTok's rise prompted competing apps to imitate its addictive, easy-to-consume content format by launching products with copycat features such as Instagram



PLANNTTHAT.COM

Reels and YouTube Shorts. These features use the same psychological strategy on humans to keep fingers swiping and keep eyes on the app for longer.

But there is something that makes TikTok much bigger, more special, or more dangerous depending on how you look at it: its secret algorithm.

Upon closer inspection, TikTok is not all light-hearted LOLs and difficult dance challenges. It claims to regularly take down inappropriate, harmful and violent content, but it has been accused of pushing questionable clips to teenagers, such as videos promoting eating disorders, self-harm or depression.

Vulgar comments seen by underage users should make parents wary of the platform. It only takes a few hours for TikTok to capture how a user is feeling, whether they are happy or sad, and even whether they are sad because of a romantic breakup or perhaps depression by sneakily feeding related videos at regular intervals.

The algorithm pinpoints the user's emotional state by tracking how long they linger over a video, whether they watch it until it ends or whether they drop off (and if they do, at what point), how they

engage with it (do they like, follow or repost) and so on.

In economics, this could be called demand forecasting. But the algorithm has a voracious appetite for data and learns fast, using everything it learns to give back the user relevant content that, in turn, feeds the user's appetite.

The wild side of TikTok's secret algorithm is also what makes it attractive for those seeking fame and following. A singer with raw talent from Baglung, a professional dancer from Bhairawa, a content creator from Parbat, a home cook from Kathmandu – these are all real personas who have leveraged the app to promote their talent, gain online popularity or push their small businesses to new audiences by spending lots of time and zero money.

For many, including disaster victims and women stuck in domestic working environments, TikTok was a bright, beaming bridge to the outside world. For them, the ban is particularly brutal. TikTok is a place of excitement, entertainment, and yes, escapism from the daily grind.

The cherry on top is TikTok's ability to help a random video gain traction, without an easily identifiable pattern, making it

tough to crack the algorithm unlike Instagram or YouTube.

The TikTok ban has raised valid concerns about citizens' right to information and freedom of expression, and it is typical of the government to ban the app instead of introducing regulatory policies or imposing taxes.

This 'ban what you don't understand' approach is familiar, and the reason why cryptocurrency never really took off in Nepal. There was a puzzling lack of credible justification for the ban, only that it 'endangered Nepal's social harmony'. Nepal has yet to run an effective digital media literacy campaign or social media health program to encourage users to be discerning content consumers, and make them aware of app settings like one-hour time limits to combat addiction.

The TikTok ban is a threat to Nepal's internet freedom and freedom of expression, but that is not the only danger. Everything is forever on the internet, yet nothing is. Content is available for permanent viewing unless deleted by the original uploader (plus, copies and screenshots may prove removal redundant).

But people's attention spans and habits keep shifting and user

behaviour trends are just that, trends. Platforms keep changing and audiences keep moving, but the quest to find one's own digital space to proudly curate and to connect with strangers over common values remains.

Humans are social animals that enjoy validation and forming communities, no matter the medium. If a road is blocked, people will either find a different route or build a new one. Netizens will find ways around the TikTok ban to fulfil their emotional needs, find a different app to latch onto, or maybe even create a new one.

India survived the TikTok ban, and unless the ban is revoked in a sudden, positive turn of events, so will Nepal. Every social media giant has its day, as we saw with Facebook's 18-year reign before it started declining in popularity in 2022. When their parents joined Facebook, millennials swiftly moved to Instagram, where they could create private accounts and share their authentic lives, or curate their alternate personas.

Now, Instagram is also populated with family and relatives, and Meta has equipped the app with features that makes it the closest competition to TikTok.

Meanwhile, Snap, the Gen Z favourite, is still around, quietly thriving without making too much noise, which perfectly suits its features. Snapchat's content is ephemeral in nature – it was the first of many apps to allow 'disappearing' content, a feature Facebook and Instagram have copied with the Stories feature.

This makes it the ideal platform for Gen Z, especially young teenagers with secret social lives and a priority to stay low-key, to avoid getting caught by their family.

Somewhere in Nepal, as we speak, developers could be working on the next TikTok, similar to Moj, Josh, MX Takatak and many apps that came up in India soon after TikTok's exit. Homegrown TikTok alternatives could potentially enjoy the added advantage of no geopolitical data privacy concerns or propaganda suspicions.

And if the app makers are creative about it, culturally relevant touches can tempt the average Nepali into welcoming the new obsession into their home screen with open thumbs. 🇳🇵

Talking about TikTok

Baburam Aryal, Advocate, Digital Freedom Coalition

The Nepal government's decision to ban TikTok is irresponsible and unlawful. Nepal's Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and the right to information, both for print and online. So this ban is against the spirit of the Constitution.

Kamal Dev Bhattarai, Editor, Annapurna Express

TikTok has good things going on too and one of them is how small entrepreneurs have found success using this platform. This ban has had a damaging impact on these businesses.

TikTok has also provided space to up-and-coming youth who have been ignored by the mainstream media. The platform has allowed them to unlock their talents and they have gained popularity nationally and internationally.

Smriti Shrestha, Founder, Akarsan Skin and Hair Clinic

Any business requires marketing tools and ours is social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Google, TikTok and Youtube. But unlike other platforms that require you to spend dollars to boost or advertise your

business, TikTok doesn't cost you money. I make content that could go viral and lead to an increase in business without me being required to spend any money.

TikTok has a viral reach like no other. Earlier this year, Gosainkunda was busy like Asan bazaar because clips of the place were going viral on TikTok and trekkers were visiting in droves as a result. So this ban will also hamper the tourism sector.

Tanka Aryal, Chair, Digital Rights Nepal

The government seems to have taken it as just banning a private company. But it is against the right to information and freedom of speech enshrined by our Constitution. At the same time, people were using TikTok to promote their businesses, the platform has been crucial for the tourism industry and for entrepreneurship.

As such, this is an ad hoc ban with a very weak excuse that TikTok was creating social disharmony. Is TikTok the only one doing so? Even then, as per our Constitution, we cannot shut down any media platform but we can regulate the content, given that hate speech, mis- and disinformation are quite prevalent these days. The state can also work on digital literacy instead of taking this easy route which is a regressive step.

The ban therefore is against the prevalent law

and Constitution of the land. This is also impractical in today's world where technology is an integral part of everyday life.

Santosh Sigdel, Advocate, Digital Rights Nepal

The TikTok ban has a direct impact on digital rights. The most important thing when it comes to digital rights is access to the internet, and for most of the Nepalis that was TikTok. And the ban has curtailed their right.

TikTok is very user-friendly and doesn't need a whole lot of technical know-how, which was why its users were increasing exponentially, in turn leading to a huge reach.

The ban has also directly impacted freedom of speech and the right to information online.

Then there is the right to employment. A lot of small entrepreneurs were using TikTok for their business. Much of their digital content is lost and so is their means of livelihood. In a nutshell, the TikTok ban curtails a whole lot of basic rights.

Chiranjivi Adhikari, General Secretary, CAAN Federation

The decision to ban TikTok because of security reasons is not scientific. Expecting privacy from social media sites

we consume for free doesn't really make sense, our content on these platforms is at the very least on their servers.

More worryingly, with free DNS and VPN we are seeing a massive increase in TikTok users. Free DNS and VPN are not secure and run malicious codes. If these get installed on our phones and laptops, and especially if we use the same devices for offices, they could destroy the whole network in our workplaces. These devices can also access our banking details and can easily cause monetary losses for us.

Dinesh Tripathi, Senior advocate

If we are to ban TikTok, we will have to ban the whole of social media. We know that Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter have all been misused and more so. As such, the government will have to ban the internet. People also get vulgar, harassing messages on their mobile phones. This means the ban is not the solution. In a democratic society, a remedy shouldn't be worse than a disease. Any step that the government takes should be based on the Constitution, and not constrict the democratic space like they have done by banning the platform in Nepal.



Song of Himalaya (SOLD), Oil on canvas

Bangdel utilises abstraction to capture a moment where the Himalaya emerge out of dense fog. The painting aims to provoke the viewers imagination sonically, to query the sounds from the atmosphere, lending the artwork its name.



Moon Over Kathmandu, Oil on canvas

Bangdel paints a copper full moon beaming over the fragrant urban tapestry of Kathmandu at dusk. The moon glows over twin peaks and reflects on the cityscape below, encouraging a sense of intrigue as to what the following day holds.



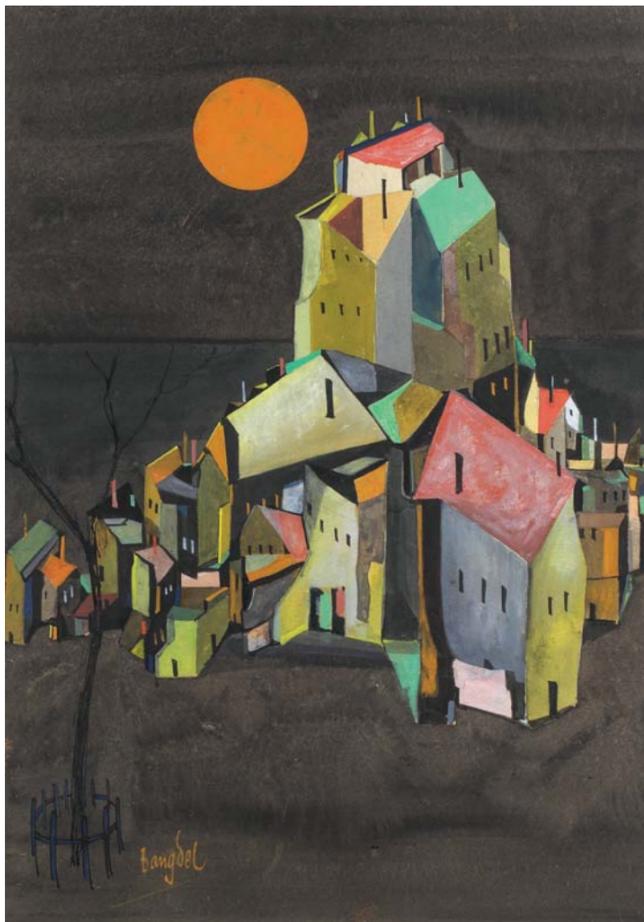
Kathmandu Valley, Oil on canvas

Bangdel highlights the Kathmandu Valley, an



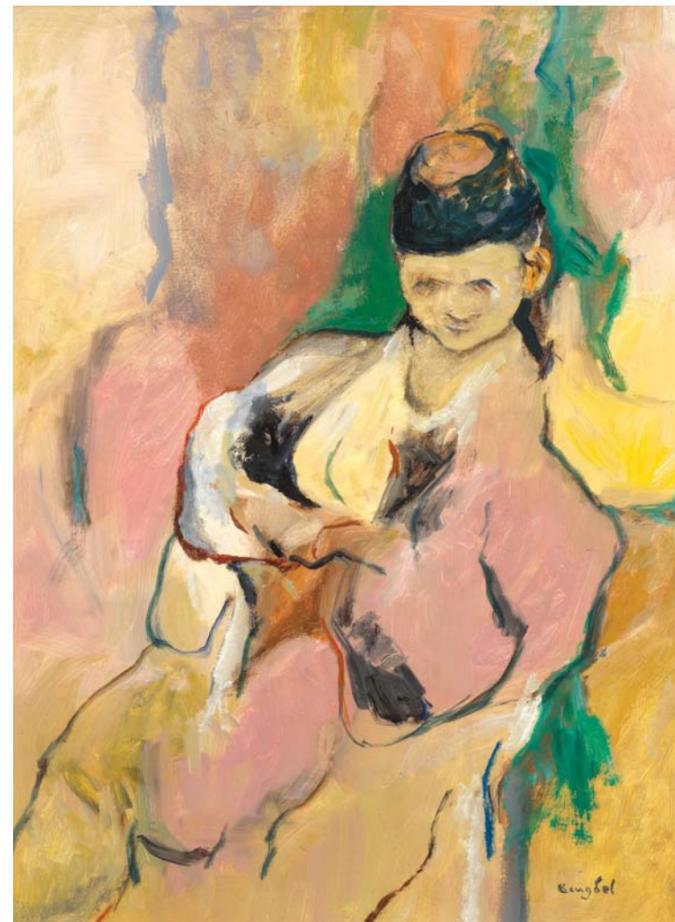
Lady in Blue, Oil on canvas

The utilisation of a blue palette in this painting nods to Picasso's renowned Blue Period. With a brooding subject at its centre, the strategic use of colour seeks to evoke a specific emotional response from the observer — a sense of melancholy.



Full Moon Night, Gouache on paper

Painted during Bangdel's time in Paris, this artwork employs distorted scales and non-linear angles to represent the nocturnal modern cityscape — empty yet awaiting exploration.



Lady, Oil on canvas

The artwork seeks to represent a recurrent theme in Bangdel's work: melancholy. The subject is purposefully hunched to address the suffering experienced by an impoverished society. Bangdel wanted to bring awareness to broader social issues.

Lain Singh Bandgel lives on

The works of Nepal's foremost artist at an exhibit in London this week

■ **Uma Dhital**

As part of a broader series of international displays, 'Lain Singh Bandgel: Mountains and Migration' was put up at the fine arts auction house and valuer, Bonhams, London till Tuesday this week.

The exhibition turned auction was held from 11-21 November, and featured twenty-four selected paintings by Bangdel, an acclaimed author, art preservationist, and art historian who died in Kathmandu in 2002 at age 83. His daughter, Dina Bangdel, who was also a scholar of Asian art, died in 2017.

The artist's son-in-law and Dina's husband Bibhakar Shakya says he is seeking to immortalise

the Bangdel family influence, keeping their passion for art alive in the art scene in Nepal and internationally.

"The opening night at Bonhams was a huge success and garnered significant attention with a considerable turnout, a testament to Owen Duffy, the curator and the extremely supportive team at Bonhams," Shakya told Nepali Times over the phone from London.

He added: "I was truly delighted at how well the exhibition was received and I know my late father-in-law and late wife would have been proud."

Initially intended for viewing only, the exhibition became an auction in an effort to test the market. One painting, Song of Himalaya, sold to a private

buyer for a significant amount, vindicating Shakya's value of his father-in-law's works.

"Now that we have a record," he said, of what an original Bangdel is worth, "we can only go up from here".

Born in Darjeeling, Lain Singh Bandgel (1919-2002) lived a multifaceted life, embarking on a dynamic journey across continents and cultures. He was a friend of Indian film director Satyajit Ray whom he knew in Calcutta. In the 1960s he was invited to Nepal under King Mahendra's initiative to bring creative Nepali intellectuals home, and this marked a watershed in Bangdel's career.

He was General Secretary of the Nepal Art Council and fronted a Nepali artistic renaissance, writing

many books, one of which, Stolen Images from Nepal (1989), served to return stolen artefacts back to their rightful home.

The various socio-cultural influences that surrounded Bangdel's upbringing shaped him into not only a prominent artist, but also an acclaimed author, art preservationist, and art historian.

In his early years in art, Bangdel graduated top of his class from the Government College of Art & Craft in Kolkata and continued to pursue his passion at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. The dynamic artistic atmosphere of Europe at the time meant Bangdel encountered and developed connections with celebrated contemporaries like Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque.

"These artists had an influence

on Bangdel's works in the 50s, one can discern the essence of Picasso's Blue Period, evident in the 'Lady in Blue' that employs the palette to evoke a sense of melancholy in the viewer," explained Shakya.

He added: "Bangdel conveyed traditional Nepali concepts through the medium of modern art. This unique harmonious fusion of traditional and modern themes, represent the structures and landscapes that shaped his formative years and highlight inspiration he drew from peoples and culture in Nepal."

Dina Bangdel was a respected expert of Asian art and had her father's passion for Nepali art as well as a commitment to championing emerging Nepali artists. Her early demise in 2017



...as
...lley, and in doing so captures the juxtaposition between the bustling inner city and the calm surrounding landscape.



Lain Singh Bangdel (1919-2002) paints a portrait of Balkrishna Sama in 1975.

PHOTOS: AGAINST THE CURRENT



Dina Bangdel (1963-2017) with husband Bibhakar Shakya, who supervised the auction at Bonhams.

created a significant void in the South Asian art scene.

Dina had a strong wish to continue the legacy woven by her father and wanted to hold exhibitions of her father's art. "Tragically, that could not happen," recalls Shakya.

Shakya is an economist turned art curator, and says he underwent a transformative shift and immersed himself in the art scene after his wife's death, assuming the responsibility to complete her vision. Shakya acknowledges that Bangdel is not as well-known as his contemporaries in Paris. Through the Bonhams auction and future exhibitions he seeks to broaden Bangdel's recognition while simultaneously challenging the prevailing belief that one cannot make a living as an artist in Nepal today.

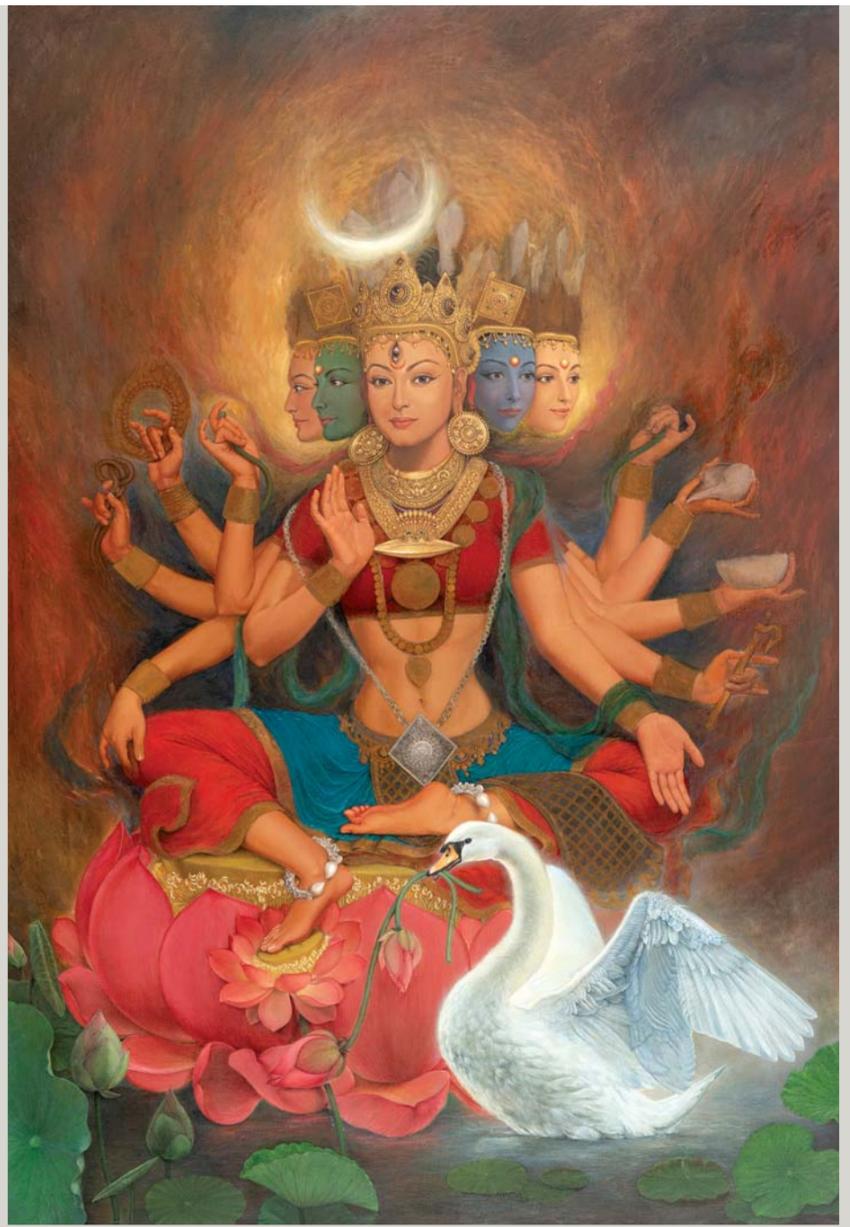
"This perception has hindered the relationship between Bangdel and the modern Nepali, particularly

those in the diaspora," he said. "I'm inspired by the responses of young Nepali professionals in London to the exhibition, and their excitement at having a Nepali artist being exhibited here. I believe that this is what Dina and Lain would have wanted as well."

Shakya says he now wants to fulfill Dina's vision to trace the artistic journey from Lain Singh Bangdel till the present day art scene, and will be bringing some emerging Nepali artists to Baltimore for an exhibition in 2026.

Shakya's extensive collection holds up to 770 original Bangdel artworks, with another 60 or so in public institutions. Some of them will be displayed in exhibitions over the next two years in the United States, Hong Kong, and Kathmandu.

There is more: Shakya hopes to adapt one of Bangdel's novels, *Langadako Sathi* into a movie to be released in early 2024. 🇳🇵



SIMON WATKINSON

Giving faces to a deity

Artist depicts on canvas Gayatri Devi, the goddess of the most revered mantra

■ Shaguni Singh Sakya

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्

Most Hindus wake up to this mantra in the morning as it is chanted over the tv, radio or in a neighbourhood temple. It is the most popular and powerful Vedic chant, the Gayatri Mantra.

But most have never even visualised the face that goes with the goddess. Gayatri Devi is the wife of Brahma, the mother of the Vedas, the female deity who encompasses the divine trinity - creator, sustainer and destroyer.

Hindus have been worshipping Gayatri Devi for millennia. Now, through his devotional art, Uday Charan Shrestha has depicted this powerful deity and her mantra that calls to invoke the divine energy in us. The work itself took 20 years to complete, and is a masterpiece of Nepali neo-traditional paubha, a labour of love and life-long devotion.

The immaculate beauty of Nepal's gods and goddesses has been depicted and enhanced in every period of the country's cultural history. But in the 1990s, Shrestha attempted something groundbreaking. He introduced a genre of paubha art that was three-dimensional, energetic, vibrant and filled with emotion and passion.

For centuries, we have seen the divinity of our deities with straight faces and no emotive expressions. Paubha art evolved in Kathmandu Valley over the centuries with stylistic changes in techniques, motifs, background, and colour, but it took a while for a revolutionised look depicting goddesses with feminine beauty to come about.

At first, the change caused

some uproar in traditional sects because the new genre focused more on sensuality than saintliness. But Shrestha was eventually applauded for daring to embark on a non-traditional depiction of female beauty, and proving that exquisiteness is next to godliness.

Besides the humanly expressive looks, Shrestha also added further value to paubha highlighting the jewellery with meticulous detail. Sacred jewellery is a captivating feature of many paubhas and Shrestha magnified its importance by painting it intricately.

The jewellery of Gayatri Devi is considered to be one of the most elaborate ever in Nepali paubha art history. Goddess Gayatri has five faces representing the five fundamental elements, ten hands carrying several attributes of cosmic and spiritual powers, but it is the central face that is overwhelming in its sheer mesmerising perfection.

Many have drawn comparisons with Bollywood actresses like Madhuri Dixit, Aishwarya Rai, Rekha, or Hema Malini. But perhaps it is Bollywood actresses who try to look like our goddesses.

Shrestha explains that he was inspired by women with the perfect features, and let his subconscious guide him to create these divine faces. "For me, it was a spiritual calling that made me craft faces that would be etched in people's minds forever," he says.

On closer inspection, Gayatri Devi has a soul-piercing spark in her eye that hints at a mysterious smirk. The artist has actually managed to instill an emotion in her eyes which in turn makes viewers feel her existence.

Over two decades, Shrestha has nurtured this sacred portraiture, raising it like a child, and is so immensely attached to it that he does not want to ever totally complete it. He fears that completing it would mean he would have to let it go. Like the journey of parenthood

is never complete, Shrestha feels he wants to be attached to his artistic work for the rest of his life.

When an artist has such immense attachment to their art, the devotion deserves even greater value and respect. In a world of superficiality, impermanence and ever-changing social media trends, genuine art in any form is becoming rarer.

Shrestha's personal and professional struggle is no less than some of the European masters who worked for decades on their art. He carefully studied religious texts of Gayatri Devi to understand and capture the true essence of what made her such a powerful female deity.

Documentation that explained her physical aspects was not available. An old Indian poster gave him some reference to the five faces and colours, but he kept re-reading religious scripts to be inspired by her greatness.

The final work emanates from the artist's devout subconscious state, evolving from his learnings and inner awakenings that came from worshipping the goddess. We have the faces of many deities etched in our minds, the Buddha, Shiva, Krishna, Ram, Sita. But finding a visual portrayal of Gayatri Devi is rare.

Shrestha says he wishes his painting would put a face to the hymn that so many Hindus the world over chant every day. When devotees close their eyes in prayer while chanting the Gayatri mantra, this may be the divine face that will bless them. Art lives, if we give it life. 🇳🇵

The painting is on public display at the Museum of Nepali Arts during the solo exhibition of Uday Charan Shrestha from 18 November 2023 to 1 January 2024.

Shaguni Singh Sakya is the director of the Kathmandu Guest House Group and Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA).

EVENTS

**Hike for Nepal**

Hike for Nepal is organising Gurjy gaun-Phedi gaun-Soonkhani-Thanabhanjyang hike this weekend. Book by 3PM 24 November. Reporting time is 6:40PM.
25 November, Rs800, Bhirkutimandap, 9851014616, 9841657144

South Asia Book Fair

The South Asia International Book Fair 2023 features 180 stalls with publishers and distributors from over 15 countries including Nepal, India, China, Bangladesh, the United States and Egypt.
Until 25 November, Bhrikuti Mandap

**Compassion & Wisdom**

Tibetan Thangka master and contemporary artist Anay Ngawang Chodak is presenting his exhibition Compassion & Wisdom in a Contemporary World.
Until 22 December, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

Smoke-Kissed

Starting this week Dalai-La Art Space in Thamel is open for Smoke-Kissed, a diverse ceramic exhibition for your viewing. Explore unique art by multiple artists in this captivating showcase.
Chaksibari Marg, Thamel

Yoga Retreat

A unique blend of yoga, meditation and sound healing sessions amidst the beautiful vistas of Pokhara for a week-long retreat by Reconnect Yoga Retreat Nepal might just be what you need to de-stress.
25 November-2 December, Pokhara



MUSIC

Robots & Animals

Kathmandu hosts Robots & Animals, a four-day arts, music, and tech festival in Thamel featuring global and local artists showcasing experimental creations and performances. Get tickets at the counter.
22-24 November, Hotel Acme Inn and Courtyard, Thamel

**Robin Tamang tribute**

Robin & the New Revolution pay tribute to the late singer Robin Tamang, joined by The Axi band for a live performance at Club Platinum, Durbar Marg.
24 November, Ticket: Rs800- Rs1500, Club Platinum, Durbar Marg

**Arijit Singh concert**

Experience an evening serenading Arijit Singh's iconic Bollywood hits including Channa Meriya, Tum Hi Ho, Enna Sonna, and more this Saturday.
24 November, Ticket: Rs6,000-Rs50,000, Hyatt Regency, Boudha

**Gypsy Jazz**

After a hiatus, Gypsy Jazz shows return this Friday featuring Hot Club Patan Ensemble and The Bohemians, an accordion & guitar duo, performing in Patan.
24 November, Gypsy Swing Patan

Katjazz Sessions

Prepare for Katjazz Sessions' 8th Edition. Join them monthly for an ode to jazz, leading to the grand Katjazz Festival in April 2024. This month's lineup promises an international fusion with ten artists.
28 November, 7 pm onwards, Ticket: Rs800, Moksh

**Tamarind**

If you're looking for a restaurant with great drinks and food, Tamarind is the place to go. And if you're in the mood to Salsa dance or just marvel at the moves of the regulars, stop by on Tuesday evenings!
Jhamsikhel (01) 5522626

Utopia

Located away from the clamour of Jawalakhel's noisy streets, Utopia features Newari dishes, as well as French, Italian and other continental cuisines.
Ekantakuna, 9808068576

GETAWAY

**Mystic Mountain**

Amid the forest of Nagarkot is a resort exquisitely built using ultra-modern designs and world-class comfort.
Nagarkot (01) 5913206

Lake View Resort

Lake View Resort's private huts, featuring hand crafted wooden furniture, local stone exterior and a private veranda, offer a great weekend escape.
Lakeside, Pokhara (061) 451477

**Milla Guesthouse**

If one prefers the quiet and admires a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Milla Guesthouse is not too far from the city, yet worlds apart.
Bhaktapur, 9851024137

Bandipur Safari Lodge

Bandipur is famous for its rich cultural heritage but it is also home to a wide variety of wildlife. Go beyond the temples and explore the jungles with Bandipur Safari Lodge.
Bandipur, 9449597880

**Kasara Resort**

Experience the wilderness this Thanksgiving at Kasara Resort. Enjoy a tailored holiday package for 2 nights and 3 days. Call for details.
Rs40,000- 50,000, until 26 November, 9801249337

Yala Cafe

Grab a stack of fluffy pancakes, well-seasoned eggs benedict or a country breakfast at Yala Cafe. With a cosy ambience and soul-warming food, Yala is the best way to kick start the day.
Thamel, 9801169212

**Sapporo Japanese**

Experience typical Japanese food and drinks at the restaurant known for homemade fresh noodles, ramen, udon, soba and more.
Anamika Marg, Baluwatar, 4512355

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
23° 8°	23° 8°	24° 10°	23° 10°	23° 9°

Chilly but sunny

The temperature in Kathmandu Valley is settling to more normal single-digit levels for this time of year. The wind direction is still favourable to keep some of the trans-boundary pollution away, but the lower temperature means the city's own emission is trapped in a surface inversion layer, keeping air quality bad in the mornings. There is a slight chance of a drizzle on Friday due to a narrow, fast-moving westerly system.

OUR PICK

In Showtime's eight-episode limited series Fellow Travelers, political staffers Hawkins Fuller and Timothy Laughlin have a chance encounter in Washington D.C. during the height of McCarthyism in the 1950s. What follows is a volatile romance between the two that spans the Vietnam War protests of the 1960s, the drug-fueled disco culture of the 1970s and the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, while both men face obstacles from the world and from themselves. Based on the 2007 novel of the same name by Thomas Mallon, the American historical romance political thriller stars Matt Bomer and Jonathan Bailey in lead roles.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउ र बचाऔं

- गर्मी मौसममा मलेरिया, कालाजार, डेंगी, हैजालगायतका विभिन्न संक्रामक रोगहरू फैलिन सक्छन् ।
- संक्रामक रोग फैलाउने झिँगा, लामखुट्टे, भुसुना आदिको नियन्त्रण गरौं ।
- संक्रामक रोगबाट बच्न शुद्ध र उमालेको पानी पिऔं ।
- बासी तथा सडेगलेका खाना नखाऔं ।
- घरभित्र र वरपरको सरसफाइमा ध्यान दिऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

DINING

**Emilio's Pizza**

Come try mouth watering Neapolitan style pizza and homemade pastas, raviolis with a unique selection of wines in Emilio's waterproof garden.
Bansbari, Kathmandu, 9823711002

A designer by design

Small town entrepreneur making fashion accessible to every woman

■ Sahina Shrestha in Rupandehi

A small Tarai town is not the first place one would expect a fashion designer establishing a thriving business. But Keshar Kala Thapa is a proof that with determination all Nepalis can design their own successful careers.

Growing up in Rupandehi district in the central plains of Nepal, Keshar Kala was obsessed with clothing and fabrics from a young age. She turned the pages of fashion magazines, fascinated by what the models wore.

In a household with five children, Keshar Kala's mother purposely did not buy a television set because it would hamper their studies. But for Keshar Kala, this meant more time to devour the fashion magazines.

After her mother finally relented and brought a tv when she was in the tenth grade, the program that Keshar Kala would be glued to would be the Miss Nepal contest.

"On magazines and on tv, I was spellbound by the clothes people wore, the ramp they walked on. I did not want to dress like them, but wanted to create something even more elegant for others to wear," recalls Keshar Kala.

The family had a small sewing machine in which her mother sewed shirts and skirts, tailoring all their school uniforms herself. Sometimes all five siblings would have to wear the same matching clothes that their mother stitched.

"I did not like our matching outfits, I felt like I was a sheep in



GOPEN RAI

a flock and yearned to wear more original clothing," remembers Keshar Kala.

After high school, Keshar Kala found out that fashion designing could actually be a viable profession. She begged her mother to enroll her in an institute in Butwal, and even attended classes for a month but had to discontinue due to financial constraints.

She went back to school and graduated with a business degree. Then she gave fashion one more try. She went to fashion school, trained as an apprentice, and then branched out to open her own boutique. Four

years ago she registered her training institute.

"My friends and family were a bit wary about my decision at first. They couldn't understand why I would sew clothes when I have a college degree," says Keshar Kala. "People still do not understand that this can be a viable profession."

Keshar Kala now wants to use her skills to train other women to make them financially independent so that fashion is more accessible to Nepali women. She owns and operates Saffron Boutique and Training Center with her husband, Tej Bahadur Kala in Tilottama.

"Every designer wants celebrities to wear their clothes and that would always be an honour, but what I find really fulfilling is designing for everyday women," she says.

At the training center, students enroll for six months at a fraction of the price of many other institutes in the area. The couple makes sure each student has their own sewing machine so that they do not have to waste time waiting for their turn working on fabric.

"The environment here is different," says Aashu Thakurjee, who completed her training from

Saffron two years ago and has been working with Keshar Kala. "I like the way she approaches teaching. She creates a comfortable environment for students."

While Keshar Kala is busy instructing the students, Tej Bahadur takes care of their son, picking him up from school and preparing dinner. He is also in charge of all the social media handles of the business and coordinates all the client orders and deliveries.

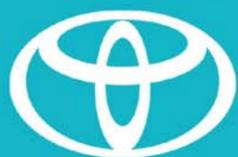
Tej Bahadur went to South Korea in 2015 as a migrant worker and saw how people of all ages embraced fashion and how quickly the trends changed. He recognised the opportunity in Nepal and when his contract was up in 2020, instead of looking for ways to stay on in Korea, he returned to help his wife in the business.

Keshar Kala's business degree has been helpful in managing the venture, she makes calculated risks when investing in fabrics and sourcing them, keeping track of inventory and accounting. The couple go to Sunauli in India, source locally in Butwal or make a trip to Kathmandu to buy their own cloth, but Keshar Kala says that finding good quality materials are still difficult.

The couple now wants to expand the business and create clothes that can compete with the imports from other countries. They also want to ensure employment for trainees who cannot afford to set up their own business and make designer wears available for women locally.

Says Keshar Kala, "Fashion enhances the inner beauty of people. And everyone from housewives to professionals deserve to feel beautiful." ■

STRIKING
ROOTS



TOYOTA RAIZE

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Sky is the limit for Nepali



DIASPORA
DIARIES 47

■ Sanjay Lama Tamang

This is the 47th instalment of Diaspora Diaries, a regular series in Nepali Times with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.

When I first went overseas in 2005 as a kitchen help to Bahrain, I had just one goal: to save Rs200,000 so I could return to Nepal and start a small business like a cold store.

Nearly 20 years later, I am still overseas. The years have just flown by.

When I had first started applying to migrate for work, I got rejected in many interviews because of my poor English. I was close to giving up, but instead enrolled myself for language training.

And it paid off. I was the last interviewee in a recruitment drive for a Bahrain-based job, but got selected.

When I first saw the vacancy in the newspaper, I did not know

where Bahrain was. I had heard of Dubai, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, but not Bahrain.

After a few years there, I did manage to save my first two lakhs, but then I wanted the next two. And so it went on. As we work and earn, our dreams grow. And there are no limits to our dreams.

You buy land back in Nepal, and after some time overseas, manage to build a one-storied house. You build the first storey, and then think why not add another floor. Once the house is done, it's time to start thinking about the children's future. There is no end, really.

My starting salary in Bahrain was Rs12,000. Now I am a chef earning over 33 times the amount. My specialisation is in French and Italian cuisine at a high end restaurant but with an Arabic twist for the palate of our customers. I manage over 35 kitchen staff from Asia and Africa.

At peak hours, the kitchen can get quite chaotic and loud, but I am also at my best under pressure and try to create a fun environment for my team.

My base is in Bahrain, but I am currently in Saudi Arabia temporarily setting up a new outlet for the same employer. One of the reasons for my involvement in the Saudi outlet is that many of the new staff are from Nepal so my employer figured it would be easier for me to train and motivate them.

Before leaving Nepal, I dreamed of joining the army but it got complicated when I used to get

questioned in my village, including from my friends who had joined the Maoists. They gave me a hard time.

I lied at a canteen that I had prior experience working in restaurants. I kept making mistakes and did not even know how to cut vegetables the right way. I used to say "this is how we used to do it at my old restaurant" and cut carrots without peeling them or putting random spices in noodles. I got away with it. My first mentor in one of the restaurants was a Dubai returnee who trained me.

In my years away, I have come home twice intending to stay. My sacrifices and effort working night and day has earned me the trust of my employers so I could tell them that I will go home, try out something and if it does not work out, I will return.

And I did return, and they welcomed me back. When you prove yourself at work and build good relationships, doors remain open.

Switching jobs also improves your bargaining power and employment benefits, either by your original employer who will match the new offer or the new employer who will try to attract you with better benefits. I have jumped from Bahrain to Qatar and back to Bahrain over the years, and these added to the benefits.

Despite what I have achieved, I know that I have missed out a lot in life by being away. True happiness is at home, where my family is. That will never change, no matter how much time I spend away.



I first left Nepal when my wife was pregnant with my eldest daughter. It was a time when photos were exchanged over letters

and phone calls were expensive and difficult to arrange. I wasn't there to hold my wife's hand during those months.

Nepali women flee abuse for

Foreign employment gives survivors of domestic violence an escape route to independence and dignity

■ Sujata Dhungana

Muna Acharya was married off by her family when she was barely 14 to a man who physically and emotionally abused her for years.

He beat her, threw her out of the house in the middle of the night, and constantly hurled insults. Muna's own family was no help. After 19 long years of this, she had enough and left her husband.

"It hurts me to think about all those years of trauma, I don't know how I could bear it for so long," says Muna who became a migrant worker in Malaysia in 2010.

It was an escape from abuse, but also a chance to earn enough to support her two children who were 16 and 12 at the time in Jhapa.

"Far away from Nepal, I could breathe easy for the first time in my life," recalls Acharya who was encouraged to seek foreign employment by her relative Gita Katuwal, who had also gone to Malaysia a year before to escape harrowing circumstances at home.

Like Muna, Gita was abused so severely by her husband that she would often have to ask her family and neighbours to cover up the dark bruises on her skin.

"It was not as easy to get a divorce back then as it is now. Usually the village elders and police would mediate and force



Muna Acharya

reconciliation with the husband," Gita recalls. "They would behave themselves for a few days and the beatings would start again."

Being homemakers meant that both Muna and Gita did not have the time and opportunity to get jobs that would give them financial independence. Moreover, their own families, neighbours would refuse to get involved.

When it became clear that they would not get help from anyone at home, both women saw no other way out than to opt for self-imposed exile from Nepal.

Gita ultimately ended up spending 13 years in Malaysia, and says it turned her life around, giving her confidence and

independence as well as allowed her to give her children a secure life.

"I could not make my children happy when I stayed with them, but I was able to give them the things they deserved while being far from them," she says. "Going abroad gave me my life back."

There are many Nepali women like Muna and Gita who survived domestic violence and spousal abuse and neglect, and unable to bear it any longer, have abandoned not just their abusive households but also their own country. Foreign employment has empowered the women, giving them financial independence and self-respect.

Back from Malaysia, Muna Acharya



Gita Katuwal

has invested her savings in a convenience store. "Foreign employment has given me everything. I no longer have to worry about where my next meal is going to come from, and I don't have to live in constant fear of physical abuse," she says.

Buddha Maya Limbu's abusive husband left her 15 years ago when she was three months pregnant. As the reality of raising a child on her own sank in, Buddha Maya promised herself she would not let her child's life be touched by the pain and hardship that she herself had experienced.

Over the next couple of years, Buddha Maya worked first at a clothing facility that eventually went under, and then raised

chef in Bahrain

"I've come a long way since my days as a kitchen help but mine is a story about separation and sacrifices."



I made up for it partially when my son was born eight years later. I could at least go home for the delivery. My daughter will go abroad for her education when she finishes high school next year. By the time I return to Nepal, she will have left to pursue her own dreams. Once she is abroad, I will pass on the baton to her and she will help bring her younger brother to wherever she is.

That a family like mine can dream of sending children for overseas education is a testament of our sacrifices. But then you miss all important milestones in life.

I could have brought my family to Bahrain but my work schedule is so busy that I would not be able to give them enough time.

I have come a long way since my days as a kitchen help. But if someone were to make a movie of my life, it wouldn't be of my professional journey but rather a story about separation and sacrifices. About not being able to give my family the quality time they deserved.

Ours is a generation of sacrifices. And we were born at a time and in a country where it feels impossible to balance time

with family with earning money. There are festivals that you miss because you are away from home. But there are also times when work keeps you so busy that you even forget that it is Dasain back home.

Many Nepalis have done well across the Gulf including in the hospitality sector by proving themselves with their hard work and loyalty despite not having formal education or language skills.

Youth these days have it a lot easier, young Nepalis are better educated and have English. But it is your skills, work experience and performance at work that matters

most. As an interviewer who is involved in recruitment drives now, I have learnt to look beyond English skills or CVs to identify genuinely hard working people eager to learn and grow.

Many newcomers these days are in a rush for overnight success and promotions and get easily disheartened, but it is a process, a journey. With luck, hard work, and patience success will come.

I do not think my story is that remarkable. I am a simple Nepali who worked hard and made personal sacrifices, and things fell into place. I was good at grabbing

opportunities that came my way. I think that most people who stick to their craft continuously for years will eventually get good at it.

Everything might not work out as we plan or hope, but something or other inevitably will. That is my mantra, to give it my all without worrying too much about results. In fact, I try not to worry about anything at all. 🇳🇵

Translated from a conversation with the author. Diaspora Diaries is a regular column in Nepali Times providing a platform to share experiences of living, working, studying abroad. Authentic and original entries can be sent to editors@nepalitimes.com

overseas work



Kumari Chemjong



Buddha Maya Limbu

chicken until they all died in a bird flu epidemic.

Realising that her only hope was to find work abroad, Buddha Maya left her home in Jhapa for Kuwait in 2009, leaving her two-year-old son in the care of her parents. She returned to Nepal three years later, immediately began to pay off the interest on loans and invested the rest on a property.

She left Nepal once again in 2014, this time for Malaysia. By the time she returned in 2021, she had wired enough money back home to send her son to school, and to build a house.

"Now I don't have to worry about renting rooms again," Buddha Maya says,

"I built this house with my own money. It has a strong foundation, and so does my son because of the education I could give him."

Her mother Ranmaya is overjoyed at her daughter's success and that Buddha Maya has bigger dreams to get her son recruited into the British Army.

"My daughter means everything to me," says Ranmaya. "But how can I stop her from leaving again when I have seen the life she has built by going abroad?"

Kumari Chemjong had dreamt of becoming a dance instructor ever since she was a schoolgirl, never missing a dance event in the village. "My grandmother always told me that dancing was not a job," she says. "It

took me many years to understand what she meant."

Kumari got married, and it was not easy. She left behind her toddler son and escaped to Kuwait in 2017 via backchannel routes through India because female migrant workers were banned from going abroad at the time because of reports of abuse by employers overseas.

"I knew I should not have gone illegally," Kumari admits, "but there were countless reasons for me to escape from troubles at home."

For two years in Kuwait she cleaned houses, and this made her realise the value of work, taught her the importance of being

with family and loved ones, and made her realise her attachment to Nepal.

"I understand why Nepali migrant workers feel the need to kiss the ground when they get off the plane at Kathmandu airport," she says.

Now back home in Jhapa, Kumari has finally fulfilled her childhood dream and teaches dance at two private schools in Haldibari. She also makes and sells beaded necklaces, and has written and recorded two gazals.

She is also the vice president of the Jhapa chapter of the Center for the Protection of Migrant Workers' Rights, and says that women tend to save more and send more money home than men. Safe working conditions and financial literacy are crucial for women seeking foreign employment, she adds.

"Foreign employment has helped women who experience domestic violence, abuse, ostracisation, and economic deprivation to turn their own and their children's lives for the better," says activist Renu Adhikari. "The remittance they send is also contributing to Nepal's economy."

But even if women overcome the stigma of abandoning their families to go abroad, many women who end up working as household help face abuse and unsafe working conditions from employers overseas as well. Domestic abuse is often replaced by overseas abuse.

Gita Katuwal was forced to leave her home and country to escape her abusive husband and in-laws, but says overseas migration is an opportunity for Nepali women.

"People who didn't believe I would make it in life now ask to borrow money from me," she says. "I am now able to speak my mind confidently in my community without fear or doubt that my opinions matter." 🇳🇵



Hachiko reincarnated in Nepal

A tribute to Kali who has waited eight years outside the hospital cabin where her owner died

■ Anita Bhetwal

The April 2015 earthquake had just hit Kathmandu, and a patient was admitted to Alka Hospital. His small black pet puppy had followed the man to his cabin C18.

The patient died during treatment, and his body was taken away without the pooch knowing. But for the past eight years, the dog has waited for her owner outside the room.

She is grown up now, her silky black coat is dirty and scraggly. But every night since 2015 she has kept vigil outside room C18 at Alka Hospital. In the daytime, she takes the stairs down to the hospital courtyard.

"She just sits there waiting for him to show up," says Alka Hospital administrator Bhagwan KC. "She has never gone anywhere else but this hospital, and at night she is always on the mat outside C18."

The hospital tried to take the dog back to the patient's family. She refused to go, and when his family came she got very agitated and used to hide and bark. The administration then tried to chase the dog away, but she always came back.

"After a while, we just gave up, and have adopted her," says Goma Thapa, who is a janitor at Alka. The dog has been given the name Kali because of her colour, and she has become a permanent fixture at the hospital.



Kali asleep outside cabin C18 at Alka Hospital.

PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI



When we visited Alka just before midnight, there was Kali sleeping outside C18. Even after eight years, she remembers her best friend and is still waiting for him. Hospital staff feed her, and she does not bother anyone.

"She stays here all the time, she eats here, sleeps here, she never leaves, she is like a member of the staff," Thapa says. "She is an amazing dog. The owner must have loved her a lot."

When she sees someone unfamiliar she still wags her tail, sniffs the person curiously, but then dejectedly goes back to sleep when she finds out it is not her owner.

Kali reminds veterinary specialist Bishal Chaudhary of Hachiko, the Japanese Akita which waited outside Shibuya train station in Tokyo for his owner for nine years in the 1920s.

"The human mind is episodic, but a dog's brain is associative, it links its sense of smell with memory of space and time," explains Chaudhary, who thinks the owner must have taken the puppy to hospital with him several times for checkups before he had died, and she associated the place with him.

Hospital administrator KC says Kali is now a part of the Alka family, and there is no question of sending the dog anywhere. Kali is now getting older, she is slower, but she has never given up waiting for her owner. Says KC: "She will live the rest of her life here, right outside cabin C18." 🇳🇵

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