

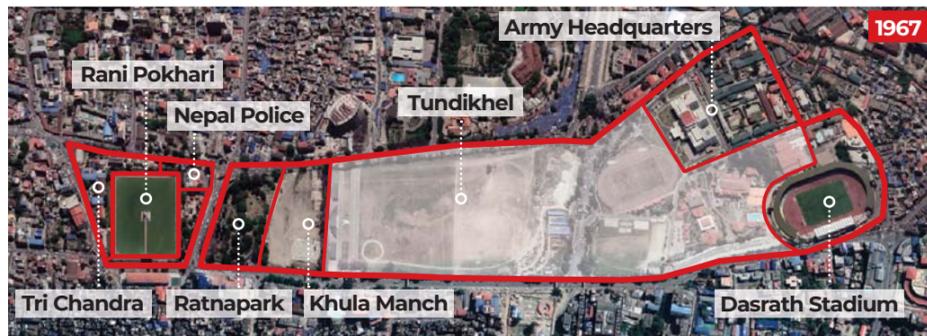


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GRAPHICS: KIRAN MAHARJAN / SOURCES: GOOGLE EARTH, SUNIBHAKAYASTHA

SAVE TINKHYA

SEE PAGE 4

Tinkhya (Tundikhel) was a vast open space set aside by Kathmandu's ancient rulers and indigenous people for social and cultural events. It originally stretched from where the Dasrath Stadium is today to Rani Pokhari in the north. Over the centuries, successive rulers and government agencies fragmented the space.

1671: King Pratap Malla constructed Rani Pokhari on the northern end of Tundikhel.

1956: The southern section of Tundikhel was turned into a stadium to mark the coronation of King Mahendra.

1961: Shahid Gate was built with a road that bifurcated Tundikhel into two halves. The Royal Nepal Army then occupied the northern end for a parade pavilion.

1962: Ratna Park, dedicated to Queen Ratna, was carved out of Tundikhel, and in 1973 the Khula Manch open-air theatre was added.

2010s: The Army took over the southern half of Tundikhel and captured the Thapathali-Bhadrakali road.

2016: The bus park was shifted to Khula Manch and parts were rented out to vendors.

2022: KMC proposed a three-storey underground parking at Khula Manch, but abandoned the idea after public outrage.

2024: KMC now plans to build two football fields at Khula Manch.

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The International Order Is Dying in Gaza

Many, if not all, of the pillars of the post-World War II global order seem to be crumbling. Violent conflict has become the default method to settle disagreements between countries (Russia and Ukraine) and within countries (Yemen, Sudan), while the multilateral security system, headed by the United Nations Security Council, is sliding into irrelevance.



GUEST EDITORIAL
Mohamed ElBaradei

Moreover, the inequality gap between the Global North and the Global South has widened, and more of the latter countries are suffering from debilitating debt burdens. This, in turn, has exacerbated poverty, fuelled migration, and sown distrust. With populism and authoritarianism on the rise, attacks on human rights and democratic values have intensified and, in some cases, the veneer of elections has given these attacks spurious legitimacy. And the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China is fast becoming an end in itself.



UN / SHAREEF SARHAN

But the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas has dealt a particularly crushing blow to the system. The gross violations of international humanitarian law to protect civilians beggar belief. In fact, the atrocities committed against civilians, first in Israel and now in Gaza, are evil in its purest form. These acts should be at the top of the priority list for the International Criminal Court prosecutor and addressed in International Court of Justice proceedings. We must halt this descent into the abyss.

The cavalier disregard for the principles and norms of international law, such as limitations on the right to self-defense, and the willful blocking of the Security Council from fulfilling its 'primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security', have been unconscionable. Senior UN humanitarian officials on the ground in Gaza have used phrases like "hell on earth"

The Gaza war has dealt a crushing blow to the multilateral security system.

and "humanity giving up" to express their desperation. Few seem to be listening. There is now a looming rupture between the West and the Arab and Muslim world, even as Western and Arab populations are directing anger toward their leaders. The Arab and Muslim world has lost faith in perceived Western norms: international law and institutions, human rights, and democratic values. In their view, the West itself is showing that brute force trumps all else. Of course, the increasing belief that democracy and human rights – the liberal values that once inspired the Arab Spring – are simply tools for Western domination is music to the ears of autocrats and despots. The war underscores two lessons. First, conflicts don't resolve themselves, and allowing them to fester is shortsighted and dangerous. UN Secretary-General António Guterres was viciously attacked by Israel after saying that Hamas's 7 October attack "did not happen in a vacuum". But he was acknowledging a truth – the pent-up humiliation and sense of injustice among the Palestinians.

The conflict has elicited calls for the revival of the ill-fated 'peace process' that has been limping along for decades. But the same leaders now promoting a two-state solution silently looked on as Israel devoured (through annexation and settlement expansion) most of the land that was meant for a Palestinian state. Today's violence may very well offer the last opportunity to reach a just and lasting peace before the entire region goes up in flames.

© Project Syndicate

Mohamed ElBaradei, Director General Emeritus of the International Atomic Energy Agency, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005, jointly with the IAEA.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The beginning of the end for the monarchy

By January 2004, anti-monarchy rhetoric had started to pressure king Gyanendra to retract his decision to take over executive power and sack the government.

A page 1 Nepali Times report published 20 years ago this week had warned that if the king continued, he would push the parties and the Maoists closer and turn the country into a republic. And that is exactly what happened.

Excerpts of the article from issue #179 16-22 January 2004:

One month after the student unions affiliated to the political parties launched their agitation, the protests have taken a dramatic and radical republican tone.

The students appear to have the green light from their mentors in the parties to step up the rhetoric in a last-ditch attempt to pressure King Gyanendra to agree to retract his



October Fourth move, and restore power to the peoples' representatives. Student leaders who began their campaign by demanding that the king restore democracy are now openly calling for him to step down from the throne...

...The palace for its part doesn't seem too worried about the street agitation or the insurgency escalating out of control. Does it know something we don't? It could be pleased about recent military gains in the see-saw war as well as old rifts opening up between the NC and the UML...

Neither a republic nor a return to absolute monarchy are feasible at present, so the palace and the parties have to meet halfway. If the king decides to go it alone, it is sure to push the parties and the Maoists closer and rush us towards a republic.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



DOMESTIC TOURISM

Sita Pun started a homestay program with help from the local government, and six years later has gained not just financial independence but the confidence to lead community action. Take a tour of Torikhola Community Homestay in Baglung and watch Sita's story on our YouTube channel.



PRESERVING PADDY

Across Nepal, erratic rainfall due to the climate crisis has meant that farmers are unable to plant paddy on time, and native rice breeds are disappearing. In Kaski, locals have set up a community seed bank to preserve seeds of local rice varieties. Subscribe to Nepali Times' YouTube channel for multimedia content.

OLD KATHMANDU

I discovered the Instagram profile of the cousins by chance and have been an avid follower since then ('Ode to old', Sahina Shrestha, #1194). Thank you for all the posts, the hidden gems of Kathmandu valley, the lost and forgotten architecture of the city.

Manjima Sharma

I read the whole article here and saw the YouTube video as well. Aabhushan and Pranidhi are really doing some commendable work. Your effort will help to preserve the architectural heritage of Kathmandu.

Pravin Tuladhar

FEDERALISM

The central government is holding back on issuing the rules to operationalise the legislation already in place ('The F word', Editorial, #1193). The alternative was to include everything in the Constitution and go the judicial route to enforce them.

Balveer Arora

One cannot develop any 'ism', no matter how good, without first understanding its financial feasibility. Our leaders are only concerned with sycophancy.

Bimal Rawal

NEPALIS IN RUSSIA

This is desperation for a better pay and for some - even a means of making earning ('10 Nepalis from one town fighting in Ukraine, Sujata Dhungana', nepalitimes.com). Nepal has a very weak economic base, though we keep hearing—mostly in Kathmandu—that Nepal is doing fine.

Sanjay Lamsal

BRIDGES

Some of my greatest adventure memories of our time in Nepal were river crossing: bridges, assisted walking, ferries and a 'twin' ('10,000 bridges', #1193).

Sigmund Stengel

JAJARKOT

A sad and harsh story about conditions in Nepal ('Poverty killed a mother, not the quake', Marty Logan, #1194). Most are poor and live a hard life with their children. It gives some food for thought in relation to how we feel in Denmark, even though we are not always satisfied with what we have.

Annette Gallaus

1,000 WORDS



AJIT KUMAR JHA / RSS

TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY: Chief District Officer of Sunsari, Jaya Narayan Archaya, inspecting the Nepal-India border on Thursday this week.

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Memories of the Great Earthquake

by Sonia Awale
Survivors of the Great Earthquake of 1934 recalled the terror and grief when the 8.3 magnitude earthquake hit Nepal, exactly 90 years ago this week. Read about their experiences at nepalitimes.com and watch the video.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

No state for women

by Neha Gurung
The adoption of the Nepal Citizenship (First Amendment) Act 2023 followed by the amendment to the Citizenship Regulation were positive steps. But although Nepali mothers can now confer citizenship to their children, conditions still apply. Follow us for the latest updates.

Most popular on X

Ode to old

by Sahina Shrestha
Two cousins run a page on Instagram called The Last of Kathmandu Valley, where they capture and share the slowly disappearing old architecture of Kathmandu Valley. Started in 2022, the page is an ode to old. More on our website.

Most commented

90 Years after '90

by Sonia Awale
Seismic events after the 1934 mega earthquake, including the 2015 and 2023 earthquakes, showed that Nepal is still not prepared for these disasters. Join the discussion online.

Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Kathmandu is still holding on to most of those powers and resources, not allowing provinces and local governments to actually function as per their mandate.



सुरेश तामाङ Sur Esh Tamang, PhD @mailalama

It's not the system, but our attitudes and behaviors are against the spirit of the federalism!
@PM_nepal_ @sudankiranti @mofaganepal @brb1954 @belakoboli @shisir @SumanaShrestha @dambarkhatiwoda



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

For earthquake survivors in Jajarkot, there is a sense of community, resilience, and a collective struggle for recovery. Neighbours are helping each other by sharing food, blankets, firewood, and other essentials.



TTeacher @TaraTeacher1

This is great but where is government support? Why isn't aid funding being given to rebuild their homes?

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

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TURKISH AIRLINES

ENGLAND

The occupation of Tundikhel

Residents and activists protest Kathmandu mayor's decision to further constrict the last of Kathmandu's open space

■ Sahina Shrestha

On Monday, 16 people were injured in a crowd crush at a Maghi festival in Tundikhel. The crowd was too dense for the last remaining grounds of what was once a vast open space in Kathmandu's centre.

Over the years Tundikhel has been fragmented and encroached upon by the military and other institutions, reducing it to not even 15% of its original expanse (see maps on page 1).

Even as it has shrunk, new projects have been proposed for Tundikhel. The latest plan by Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) under Mayor Balen Shah is to build two football fields at Khula Manch, the part of Tundikhel where historic pro-democracy rallies have been held.

"The idea for a football ground came up because local clubs found it difficult to get a field for practice," says KMC spokesperson Nabin Manandhar, adding that a project report had been prepared.

"This will also help to build future athletes," added Manandhar, who said Machhindra, Sankata, and New Road Team would use it for training, but it would also be accessible to the public. He admits that KMC did not look for alternatives.

Shirish Shrestha of Machhindra Football Club said having the field nearby would help build local talent since Kathmandu's urban sprawl and population density has meant that there are very few open spaces left for them to practice.



POLITICAL FOOTBALL: Khula Manch on Thursday, where KMC plans to build two new football fields.

SUMAN NEPALI

But that is precisely why activists are also against turning one of the last remaining bits of Tundikhel into a football ground.

They are worried that ultimately the football fields will be out of bounds for the public.

"KMC is merely a trustee of Khula Manch. It does not have the right to build over public land," says Sanjay Adhikari, advocate and spokesperson of Occupy Tundikhel, a citizen-led movement to reclaim Kathmandu's open spaces. "Its role should be to protect and manage the site, not build it over."

Occupy Tundikhel wants KMC to stop the plan since it will erase the identity of the space. Biren Maharjan of Ward 28 where Khula Manch lies says KMC did not consult local stakeholders before moving ahead with the plan.

Says Maharjan: "Khula Manch is public land and it should be accessible for everyone and not just the football clubs." Activists say clubs can easily use the stadium or Sano Gauchar for training and Khula Manch can be utilised for the purpose it is actually meant for.

Business consultant Ashutosh

Tiwari of SAFAL Partners posted on Facebook: 'Khula Manch as the name suggests is a stage and has a history just like London's Hyde Park. It is an open space, civic space and a citizen space. Not a private space. Trying to convert it into a football field is a narrow and useless way of thinking.'

This is not the first time the KMC has proposed a development plan at Khula Manch. Last year, it wanted to build a three-storey underground parking at the site but had to cancel it after public uproar.

Khula Manch is located behind

the Army pavilion which itself is an encroachment on Tundikhel. And as its name suggests, was a Panchayat-era open air theatre. It has since been the scene for the 1990 and 2006 People's Movements and political rallies.

It is also culturally important as to its northwest is Dui Maju, the goddess of grain which is considered the unseen energy linked to Goddess Taleju. The Newa people of Kathmandu called the open space Tinkhya, which later became Tundikhel.

The Nepal Indigenous Legal Society in a letter to the KMC says that the Newa people left the area open for cultural and religious activities, and that encroaching on it is against the United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People as well as ILO Convention 169, Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989.

"It is deplorable that Khula Manch is being turned into a football field without conducting research on alternatives.

Moreover, setting aside a budget for a task that shouldn't even be taken up is similar to committing corruption," the letter read.

Former Defence Minister and MP Bhimsen Das Shrestha who represented Kathmandu-6 says that historically Khula Manch has always belonged to the public and remained open even during the Panchayat.

Says Shrestha, "The people of Kathmandu elected Balen as mayor with a lot of expectations but he is going against people's sentiments. Khula Manch is an integral part of Nepal's socio-cultural and political history. As before, the people will rise up against turning this into a football ground. If they don't back down we will take them to court." 🇳🇵

NMB BANK
एनएमबी बैंक



6.1 million Turkish pax

In December 2023, Turkish Airlines transported 6.1 million passengers, a 10.1% increase compared to the previous year, and available seat kilometres (ASK) saw a 19.4% rise. The international load factor for the month was 80%. There was also a 19% increase in international-to-international passengers, reaching 2.6 million, and a cargo/mail volume growth of 15.8% to 159.7 thousand tons. For the entire 2023, the airlines reported a 16.1% rise in the total passengers to 83.4 million.



Soaltee AGM

Soaltee Hotel conducted its 49th AGM on 11 January under the leadership of its Executive Chair Dinesh Bahadur Bista. The meeting of shareholders approved the directors' report, audit report, financial statement, as well as the total dividend and bonus shares.

OMODA records

OMODA achieved record-high sales in 2023, selling 13,677 vehicles in December. The year saw notable events, including the global launch of OMODA E5 in April,



an expansive user conference in October, and global recognition. Amidst intense competition, OMODA reached a milestone of over 147,000 cumulative export sales in 2023.

Hyatt Centric

Hyatt Hotels and City Hotel have agreed to transform Hyatt Place Kathmandu into the first Hyatt Centric hotel in Nepal. The renovation will include a revamped entrance and lobby, a unique sky bar, and enhanced amenities, aligning with the Hyatt Centric brand. The hotel will cater to contemporary travelers seeking adventure in a picturesque valley rich in historic sites.

New BYD showroom

Eco Drive Automobile Pvt. Ltd, the authorised distributor of BYD vehicles, brought into operation a new showroom in Lalitpur on Wednesday that was inaugurated by Lalitpur Mayor Chiri Babu Maharjan. The showroom will feature BYD's electric vehicle lineup including the SUV BYD ATTO 3 and the BYD Dolphin, and will provide customers exchange and financing services as well as a fast charging station.



Ncell Bonus

Ncell Axiata Limited has increased the data bonus on recharges of Rs 50 and above under the 'Jhatta Recharge Fyatta Bonus' scheme. Effective from 9 January, customers now receive up to 1000MB bonus data on each recharge of Rs50 or more. The bonus data can be either all-time or time-based, valid from 11-6PM, and is valid for 24 hours from activation. The offer is applicable for all recharge methods, except Ncell Saapati and balance transfer.

Ather Showroom

The first service centre for Ather electric scooters in Nepal has been established in Kathmandu by Vaidya Energy. The service center offers facilities such as spare parts, fast charging, customer lounge, and washing area. On Saturday, 20 people including Ather's customers and



company representatives participated in a community ride from its newly-opened showroom to Dhulikhel. Meanwhile, preparations are underway to open a second showroom in Jhamsikhel, and make chargers available at all the branches of BhatBhateni superstore.



NMB AGM

NMB Bank held its 28th Annual General Meeting on 11 January 2024, chaired by Pawan Kumar Golyan and elected key officials, including Manoj Kumar Goyal as Chair. Net profit grew to Rs3.22 billion, with deposits over Rs213 billion and loans exceeding Rs197 billion as of July 2023.

Global Discounts

Global IME Bank credit card holders can receive a 10% discount, up to a maximum of Rs300, on purchases at Bigmart throughout January. This collaboration between the bank and Bigmart offers discounts and attractive prizes at over 81 stores. On its 17th anniversary, the bank organised a free health camp in Kosi province, treating over 160 women at Malate basic health post in Ilam.

Thought for food

A town below Annapurna produces and preserves native crops, makes farming profitable

■ Maheshwor Acharya

Farmers in Sundari Danda village were barely interested when proposed planting foxtail millet in their land. They had not even heard about the crop. Nevertheless, they brought foxtail millet, locally known as Kaguno to preserve native crops.

"Kaguna was historically a staple crop for families, especially to raise children, in Nepal's villages," explains Pushpa Subedi of the Bioresources Conservation Movement, a local partner of the Pokhara based non-profit Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD).

The grain along with other indigenous crops has been used as a remedy for ailments ranging from back pain to broken limbs to anaemia.

Foxtail millet production flourished in Sundari Danda, with the 2kg initially brought to from Lamjung having yielded a harvest of 72kg so far, consequently fetching good prices in the market. Locals have since become active participants in the conservation of indigenous crops.

In the last 18 years, farmers here have planted and preserved 53 varieties of rice, 16 varieties of millet, eight varieties of yam, as well as gourd and cucumber. But the supply, especially of highly-demand varieties of rice, is insufficient.



Twenty-two agricultural groups are involved in the Bioresources Conservation Movement's agricultural biodiversity conservation campaign in the watersheds of Rupa and Begnas lakes. They are involved in the protection of crops, fruits, herbs and plants native to the wetlands.

In the same period, farmers in the Rupa-Begnas wetlands have planted and preserved 53 varieties of rice, 16 varieties of millet, eight varieties of yam, as well as gourd and cucumber, cultivating them in 'conservation blocks' -- fields where endangered crops are planted exclusively.

Millet-based indigenous crops are more difficult to harvest, and yield lower profit compared to production costs, which is why farmers are not too keen to put the work in to plant them. And while paddy-based crops are associated with luxury, native millet-based grains are synonymous with the poor, says Subedi, leading to crops being branded सुअन्न (good grain) and कुअन्न (bad grain).

On the other hand, Nepal has yet to prioritise research and development into indigenous crops. Government services and subsidies have also been more focused on increasing the production of crops such as rice, maize, and wheat, while millet-based crops are put on the back burner.

Until about 30 years ago, native varieties of millet, buckwheat, barley, amaranth leaves were staples to food security in Nepal's villages. But road connectivity and access

to markets eventually made rice-based food grains readily available across the country, leading to a decline in indigenous crops.

In recent times, indigenous crop production has increased with the increase in demand for organic products in the market. While rice, maize, and wheat are the most cultivated crops in terms of area and volume, millet, buckwheat, barley, and amaranth leaves are grown across the country in more than 860,000 acres of land.

"Initially, it was difficult to explain that organic products are better, but once that fact was appropriately conveyed, there have not been any problems in the market," Subedi says.

The Bioresources Conservation Movement has been distributing native seeds to farmers across all districts of Gandaki Province. The movement now supports 22 farmers' groups across Pokhara.

Indigenous crop production has become popular enough that the campaign is struggling to meet the farmers' demands for seeds. The practice of native crop farming has increased also because such crops can withstand extreme weather conditions, and are receptive to different kinds of fertilisers.

"Farmers were initially unwilling to plant indigenous crops because they were skeptical of its benefits," Subedi notes. "Now, it has come to a point that we are not able to meet their demands for native seeds."

The campaign has also been marketing

the crops produced by the farmers and keeps 2% of the profits. Products are supplied to Pokhara and Kathmandu.

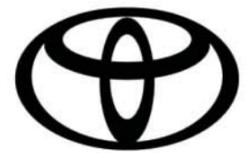
The Bioresources Conservation Movement began in 2008 and runs on income gained through its information centre and organic gift shop, as well as a view tower built with support from LI-BIRD. Earnings are put back into the campaign and the view tower committee, while funds are also distributed to the Biodiversity Conservation Fund and a local primary school.

The Movement operates conservation campaigns to protect six kinds of biodiversity in Nepal, including crops, grass crops, livestock, aquatic animals, insects of agricultural importance, and micro-organisms.

"Studies have shown that about 50,000 species go extinct every year due to habitat destruction alone, and about 1 million more species are at risk of extinction," says Ram Krishna Shrestha, former head of the crop development division of the Ministry of Agriculture. "Which is why grassroots-level conservation efforts are crucial."

It is estimated that 75% of the world's biological diversity has been lost in the last 100 years. Nepal has 3.2% of the world's flora and 1.1% of fauna.

Shrestha adds: "Cheaper products have negatively impacted Nepal's indigenous crops as well as the farmers. The promotion of indigenous crops needs to be addressed seriously and immediately." 🇳🇵



SUSTAINABILITY MOBILITY DOESN'T ALWAYS REQUIRED TO PLUG IN

TOYOTA HYBRID ELECTRIC





AV Jim Edwards greets King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya at Tiger Tops Lodge in May 1988.



Then-prince Gyanendra, AV Jim Edwards and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh in February 1986 in Chitwan.



Col JOM Roberts, Lisa Choegyal and AV Jim Edwards with Queen Elizabeth at the British Embassy Kathmandu in 1986.



King Charles III in 1980 setting off on the Royal Trek with Prince Dhirendra (left) and Prabal SJB Rana.

Times

19 - 25 JANUARY 2024 #1195

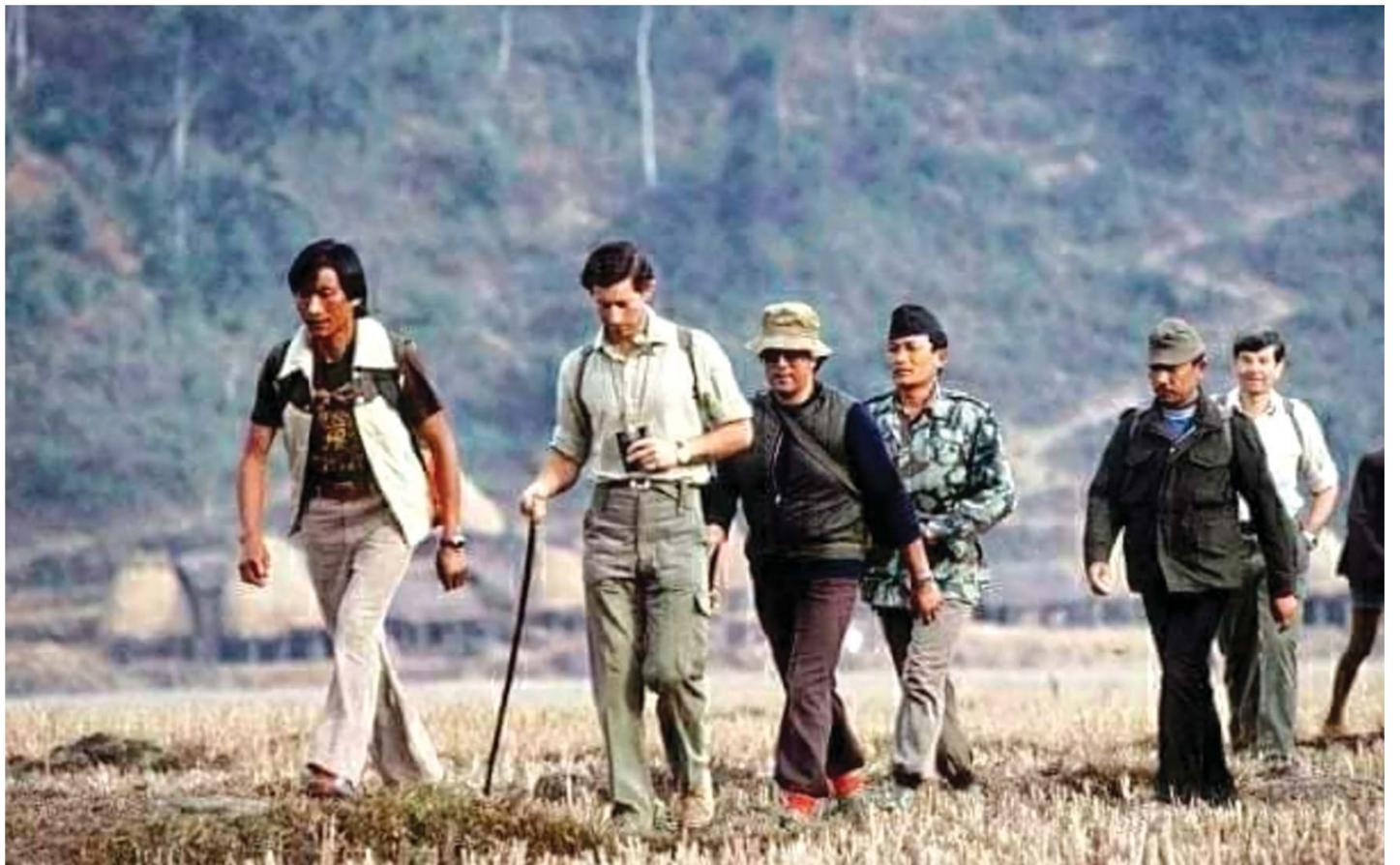
British pioneers of tourism in Nepal

From Jim Edwards to Jimmy Roberts, Nepal-UK share more than 100 years of friendship

■ Kirtijai K Pahari, Keshya R L Rana and British Embassy Nepal



British Residency at Kathmandu in 1912.



Pertemba Sherpa, Prince Charles, and Prince Dhirendra set off on the Royal Trek near Pokhara.

in Kathmandu continued to draw in the English as the terminus of the Hippie Trail that started on the other side of the world in London.

As pioneers in the mountaineering field, the British were always drawn to the Himalaya, making Nepal a destination at the top of many British travel lists, something that continues today. Nepal became the first country to introduce trekking and white river-rafting, and was the first Asian country to have jungle lodges.

It was not long before they fell in love with the country, with its beauty and people. Some were entrepreneurs, others simply found themselves in the right place at the right time. Many have left a mark on what is today a growing industry, one vital to Nepal's economy, and one that continues to grow as generations of Brits and Nepalis build new opportunities together. Some of those pioneers are featured here:

AV Jim Edwards found himself at a diplomatic party in New Delhi where an introduction to Prince Basundhara led to a year exploring the jungles of the Tarai. Captivated, Jim returned in 1964 and subsequently established Nepal's first wildlife tourism company, Nepal Wildlife Adventure, offering jungle treks, fishing and hunting expeditions.

Taking over Tiger Tops in 1972, Jim played his part in Nepal's early moves towards wildlife conservation, contributing to the efforts to convert the former Royal hunting reserve into Chitwan National Park. Today Chitwan is a global icon of nature conservation that Nepal is rightly proud of. Alongside Jimmy Roberts, Charles 'Chuck' McDougal, John R Edwards, John Blashford-Snell, Lisa Choegy, Robin Marston, Marcus Cotton and Steve Webster, Jim contributed much to Nepali tourism.

Col JOM Roberts arrived in Nepal in 1958 as Defence Attaché at the British Embassy. By 1964 he had registered Nepal's first trekking agency, Mountain Travel. Known as the father of trekking, Roberts was another pioneering figure in the early days of mountaineering, trekking and Nepali tourism.

Credited with opening up some of Nepal's extensive network of historic and ancient trading trails and high mountain villages, he apparently told Princess Anne that his bathroom in Pokhara had "the best view in the world".

Jimmy's talents led him and colleague Robin Marston to craft 'The Royal Trek' for the then Prince Charles. What started as a curated experience for the now King is still in the itinerary of many travel agents.

Lisa Choegy, a self-declared 'restless traveller' arrived here in 1974, after a year in South East Asia, to trek in Jomsom. A chance meeting in Freak Street led her to Tiger Tops in Chitwan: she did not want to leave and would thus convince Jim Edwards to employ her in his business model combining adventure tourism with conservation.

Looking back, Lisa feels proud of having helped put Nepal on the map and is known for promoting Nepal as a premier destination for responsible, sustainable and eco-friendly tourism, as well as for her contributions to this paper.

Born during the Blitz in London, Anthony L Jones of Encounter Overland was one of the first to operate overland tourism along the hippie trail and pioneered rural heritage tourism.

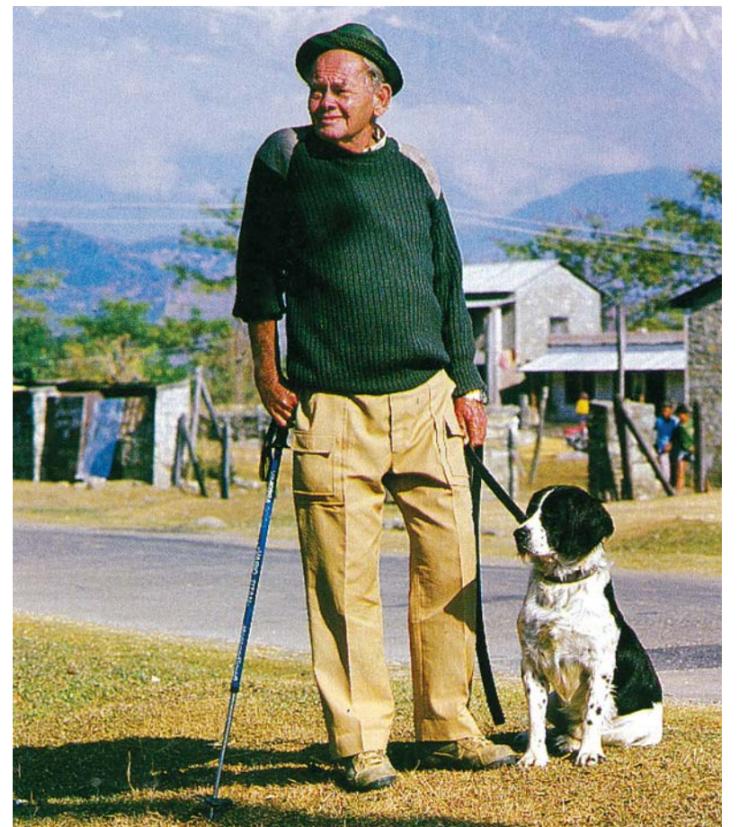
His company, Himalayan Encounters, has prioritised the link between business and protecting rural heritage, leading to the restoration of buildings such as The Old Inn in Bandipur and the Famous Farm in Nuwakot. Tony has helped showcase the skill of local artisans, salvaging and incorporating many pieces in his buildings to give them a new life.

These are just a few of the many Brits who have helped build tourism here. As we celebrate 100 years of UK-Nepal friendship, we're proud of the partnership, and the role played by many extraordinary Britishers in developing tourism and conservation in Nepal.

Nepal has dubbed 2023-32 'Visit Nepal Decade' and as part of this we will look to the next generation of young Nepalis and Brits, the future pioneers in this important industry.

We will also continue to celebrate the part tourism plays; providing sustainable livelihoods, enabling people to maintain and protect the resources upon which their businesses depend, and the huge potential of high value tourism over high volume tourism. 🇬🇧

This piece is a collaboration between the Britain Nepal Society (UK) and British Embassy – based on a wider piece of research conducted on the history of British contributions to Nepali tourism.



Col Jimmy Roberts, the pioneer of trekking, in his beloved Pokhara.



Jim Edwards and Chuck McDougal when they first took over Tiger Tops in 1972.

December 2023 marked two moments of significance for Nepal: tourist numbers passed the one million mark for the first time since 2019 and we celebrated the centenary of the Britain-Nepal Treaty of Friendship. That treaty helped establish what Nepal and the UK knew already: that Nepal was a proud independent nation.

One hundred years on from 1923, we're glad of the history the UK and Nepal share and where we are going together. Tourism and its contribution to the economy, jobs and conservation is part of that friendship and we have to thank many Nepali and British pioneers who played and continue to play a part.

Tourism wasn't always part of the UK-Nepal Friendship though. When that treaty was inked in 1923, Nepal was relatively unknown to tourists. Early British expeditions to climb Everest, including the famous one in 1924, had to approach the mountain from the north.

Nepal was a 'forbidden country' for westerners until the early 1950s. The first steps of the successful expedition 70 years ago approached the mountain by unfamiliar paths, 'starting' in the garden of the British Embassy. Fast-forward to 2023 and nearly 53,000 Brits have visited Nepal since. Tourists can reach Base Camp in days instead of weeks.

After World War II and the opening up of Nepal to foreigners, British travellers among others came to Nepal to enjoy trekking, mountaineering, and the growing hippie culture in Kathmandu. Throughout the 1960s 'Freak Street'

EVENTS

**The Sovereign Forest**

Join photo.circle for 'The Sovereign Forest', an exhibition by filmmaker Amar Kanwar at Babermahal. Free guided tours by Niranjana Kunwar, Nayantara Gurung Kakshapati, and Shristi Shrestha.

7-27 January, 11am - 6pm, Nepal Art Gallery

MANI

After a month-long hiatus, Siddhartha Art Gallery is opening its door for the first exhibition of 2024 titled MANI by artist Priyam Pradhan.

17 January-6 February, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babermahal Revisited

**Laugh out loud**

This weekend, take a seat back and enjoy a lineup of comedians, including Aadarsh Mishra, Pujan Adhikari, and Sushant Basyal. 20 January, 6pm onwards, The Hibachi Place, Lazimpat

Evening bike ride

Join Cycle Connect Bhaktapur and other cyclists for fresh fRIDEy, an evening ride around the historic Bhaktapur city and its heritages. The monthly riding event is open enthusiasts of all ages. Get tickets at Ticket Sansar.

19 January, 4:30pm onwards, Suryamadhi

**Film festival**

The seventh iteration of the Nepal International Film Festival will feature 88 films from 40 countries, screened over five days.

14 - 18 March

DINING

**Tasneem's Kings Kitchen**

Take a gastronomic tour of India at Tasneem's Kings Kitchen. Call and book before going. Jhamsikhel, 9801121212

MUSIC

Music and movements

Introduce kids aged 5 to 10 to music and movements at a class that introduces them to music theories, games, group classes and vocal training.

Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Chababil

**Open mic**

Take friends along and perform voluntarily every Wednesday at an open mic session. Book a spot at the restaurant's counter.

Wednesdays, Calm, Tangalwood

**Goreto sessions**

At Goreto Session, experience an evening with the soulful melodies of Satish Ghalan's complemented by his acoustic tunes.

27 January, 5pm, EDN, Sanepa

**Gypsy jazz**

Get immersed in the world of Gypsy Jazz presented by The Hot Club Patan Ensemble. 19 January, 6:30pm, Pauline's, Jhamsikhel

Acoustic Night

Catch live performances by Lisson Acharya and Human Acharya this weekend accompanied by a DJ session.

20 January, 7pm onwards, Annapurna Arcade, Darbar Marg

**New Orleans Café**

Offering a wide variety of western dishes that are tasty yet healthy. The rosemary chicken and hamburgers will make one come back for more.

Thamel, 9813057100

Grill Durbar

At Grill Durbar, there isn't anything that cannot be grilled. Have anything from the slow-grilled chicken to grilled vegetable shawarmas.

Sorakhutte, 9849777410

GETAWAY

**Atithi Resort & Spa**

Atithi Resort in Pokhara offers a serene ambience and a range of services, including Ayurvedic massages, steam, and sauna. Lakeside, Pokhara, 9851160080

Dhulikhel Lodge Resort

Nestled in Dhulikhel's terraced hills, the lodge offers a rooftop Stupa Restaurant serving Nepali, Continental, Chinese, and Indian cuisine. Services include a spa, excursions, and a lounge and bar.

Dhulikhel (011) 490114

**Riverside Springs Resort**

Located 100km from Kathmandu en route to Pokhara and Chitwan, this resort features a large pool, horse-back riding, rafting, cozy rooms, and attentive service.

Kurintar, 9801801336

Balthali Village Resort

A small, cozy retreat with a bird's eye view of green terrace fields dotted with ochre painted houses.

Panauti, Kavre, 9851087772

**Himalayan Front Hotel**

Atop Sarangkot Hill, this modern hotel offers breathtaking views of mountains and Pheva Lake. Whether staying or just stopping by, savor Nepali tea on the viewing deck.

Sarangkot, Pokhara, 9801166350

Imago Dei Café

The menu at Imago Dei features a limited option for each weekday, yet is created with a balance of nutrition and taste.

Pani Pokhari (01) 4442464

**Red Mud Coffee**

Red Mud, a casual eatery in Jhamsikhel, is the perfect place to grab some coffee, sandwiches and one of the best chicken sizzlers with friends.

Jhamsikhel (01) 4583697

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Colder, No Rain**

Kathmandu Valley is likely seeing a drop in temperature to levels more normal for this time of year. The minimum is going to be near-freezing by Sunday, with frost on the upper outskirts. The westerly this week threatened rain which never materialised, but it did provide a sprinkling of snow down to 4,000m up in the mountains. The colder air means there is thick fog in the Gangetic plains and the Nepal Tarai.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
16° 3°	17° 3°	17° 2°

OUR PICK

In Filmmaker Raine Allen-Miller's 2023 British romantic comedy Rye Lane, strangers Yas and Dom meet at an art exhibition in South London when Yas finds Dom crying in a restroom after having been cheated on by his girlfriend. Yas has also recently broken up with her boyfriend, so the two quickly bond over their similar circumstances. Deciding to spend the day getting to know each other, Yas and Dom attempt to help each other move on from their previous relationships, developing a deeper connection in the process—but their journey is not without mishaps. Stars David Jonsson and Vivian Oparah.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI

If everything around you seems dark,
look again, you may be the light.

- Rumi



Miss Moti-variation
©Kripa Joshi 2023

भूकम्पको जोखिमबाट बच्ने उपाय

- भूकम्पको जोखिम र त्यसबाट बच्ने उपायबारे जानकारी आदानप्रदान गरौं,
- घरभित्रका फर्निचर, सजावटका सामान, पानी ट्याङ्की नहल्लने र नखस्ने गरी बलियोसँग राखौं,
- घर, स्कूल तथा कार्यालयमा भूकम्पको समयमा सुरक्षित रहन सकिने स्थानको पहिचान गरौं,
- भूकम्पको समयमा आत्तिएर भाग्ने वा दगुर्ने नगरौं,
- भूकम्पको बेला खुल्ला र सुरक्षित स्थानमा जाऔं,
- प्राथमिक स्वास्थ्य उपचारको विषयमा जानकारी राखौं,
- आफू सुरक्षित भई अरुको सुरक्षामा ध्यान दिऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड



People circumambulate the statue of Prithvi Narayan Shah at Singha Darbar during a rally held to mark Prithvi Jayanti on 12 January.

NABIN POUDEL / RSS

their failed careers. They do not understand that this can lead to a fluid situation with unintended consequences as we have seen with recent communal tension along the Tarai.

The same social media symbols and tropes that are being pushed in India are also being spread in Nepal. In India, there is just the BJP that is the locomotive of Hindutva, but in Nepal it is every opportunistic party either in the fringes or mainstream. And they are all competing with each other to be more saffron. Even the RPP and king Gyanendra have not been able to prove themselves as the main driving force. Which is why the secular parties are sanguine that Hindutva ideology does not have widespread support.

But it is essential to sort out whether Hindutva is just using Nepal's open and pluralistic politics, or if it really has a larger following. There is an attempt at historical revisionism, and to a certain extent it is impacted by regional political alignments in India.

Whatever happens during India's election year, Nepal's politics has its own dynamics even if it may echo slogans heard from across the border. But this is a train they are climbing on to without knowing which way it is headed. 🇳🇵

Chandra Kishore is a Birganj-based media commentator and writes this monthly column *Borderlines for Nepali Times*. @kishore_chandra

THE SOUTH WIND BLOWS

Nepal's Hindu right is climbing on to a train without knowing which way it is headed

We all knew that the populist surge in India would impact on Nepali politics at some point, especially as the great neighbour across the open border to the south nears elections this year.



BORDERLINES
Chandra Kishore

But the saffron that has begun to pigment the Nepal Tarai is different from India's saffron wave. Events in India do colour Nepali politics, but it is important to make a distinction between India's Hindu-tva and Nepal's Hindu-ism.

India and Nepal both have Constitutions that guarantee the separation of politics and religion. However, at least in India, that has become a relic of the dim past. The lines between faith and ideology are becoming blurred.

Is the attraction to faith-based politics in Nepal affected by religious-cultural needs, or is it the political agenda of some political parties? There are different strands of Hindu right politics in Nepal, and we have to see the distinction.

The Shah dynasty that was removed after the abolition of monarchy in 2008 is attempting to ride India's saffron wave. The

irony is that it was a Centre-Left government in India at the time that pushed for Nepal to adopt a federal republican structure.

But at the people's level, Hinduism transcends religion--it is a way of life and its concepts of tolerance (बसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्) or equity (सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिन) touch the everyday lives of communities on both sides of the border.

Hindutva politics in India is not new; it has a long history that goes back to the independence struggle against the British. But today, it has become a part of mainstream politics. It has latched on to many contradictions and regressive ideas, but has become a political ideology of the ruling party, sidelining other secular and regional parties.

However, in Nepal, Hindutva as a political ideology is still nascent. Its seeds have been planted on a soil fertilised by democratic decay. There was an attempt to push the Hindutva agenda during the 2006 People's Movement, but it did not take root in the desiccated post-war polity.

But today, mainstream parties (even avowed Communist ones) are competing with each other to cloak themselves in saffron. Old, new, democratic, communist, reactionary--all kinds of parties are on the bandwagon.

Even though Nepal was till recently a Hindu monarchy, religion was never overtly the basis for politics in democratic Nepal. But because the political parties post-2006 have failed so miserably to address the people's basic needs, they wave the saffron flag to maintain their base.

To the south, Hindutva ideologues have already identified who the 'Others' are. India's minorities feel they are being targeted, and those who believe in secularism have been declared enemies of the state.

Some of Nepal's parties want to use faith-based politics to turn the clock back on republicanism and inclusion while others just want to delete secularism from the Constitution. Others want federalism scrapped. It is not just domestic disillusionment that is driving this--the wind is also blowing from the south.

India's Hindutva forces have been involved in a decades-long strategy to influence literature,

Bollywood, think tanks, the mass media, and other sectors of national life. However, in Nepal, the parties that espouse Hindutva have borrowed it for political expediency, not because they actually believe in its relevance or have a clear plan.

Simmering discontent with secularism was fanned by India's

Hindutva forces over time to turn it into a raging blaze. The Indian Congress and regional parties appear powerless to challenge this juggernaut at the national level. Some of them have gone soft, while others have also fallen into the trap of communalism.

In Nepal, reactionaries are using faith-based politics to jumpstart

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Nepal suffers another

Climate impact: 8 of last 12 winters had prolonged drought affecting agriculture and sparking wildfires

■ Ramesh Kumar

In December, forecasters predicted that Nepal would receive more rain than the three decade average rainfall this winter. We are halfway through winter, and many parts of the country have not received a single drop of rain for four months.

Terrace fields in the mountains are dry, and in the plains winter wheat is drying up. Many Himalayan mountains are snowless.

"Mukut Himal and many mountains are just bare rock when they should be white with new snow this time of year," says Madan Sigdel of Tribhuvan University who returned from Upper Dolpo district last week.

Nepal receives an average of 60mm of rain during the three coldest months. However, the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology has recorded just 1.9mm of rain so far this winter. So far, at least, the forecasters have been dead wrong. The 2023-24 winter is turning out to be driest in recent years.

Bibhuti Pokharel of the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology says that it is too



Walking the talk on

COP28 made strong progress on highlands and islands. Here is what to expect in 2024 and beyond

■ Manjeet Dhakal

Accelerated warming in the Himalaya is a threat to the billion or so people living downstream, and ongoing ice loss could seriously affect the world's freshwater supply and drive up sea levels.

Climate change and mountains is therefore an issue of critical importance not just for the Himalaya but also for the rest of the world. COP28 in Dubai was the first of climate conferences to explicitly recognise the issue in an outcome text.

This lays the ground for further progress this year, yet faster action on global emissions and climate finance remains key to safeguarding the future of these culturally diverse, highly vulnerable regions.

Rapid ice sheet melt poses the threat of catastrophic sea-level rise, with global mean sea levels already up 20cm. Ice sheet and glacier mass loss contributed 42% to global mean sea level rise between 2006 and 2018.

If mountains continue to lose ice, it's not just local habitats and economies that will suffer, the resulting rising seas will also threaten small islands around the world.

Ice sheet loss is also accelerating climate change in a deadly loop. Thawing



Soot and dust particles from pollution that settle on the Khumbu Glacier makes it melt faster.

EELUM DIXIT

permafrost release planet-heating gases.

Meanwhile particles of pollution that darken snow are altering the earth's reflective quality (albedo). Areas that once bounced the sun's radiation into space are starting to absorb that energy.

As a result, warming intensifies, melting

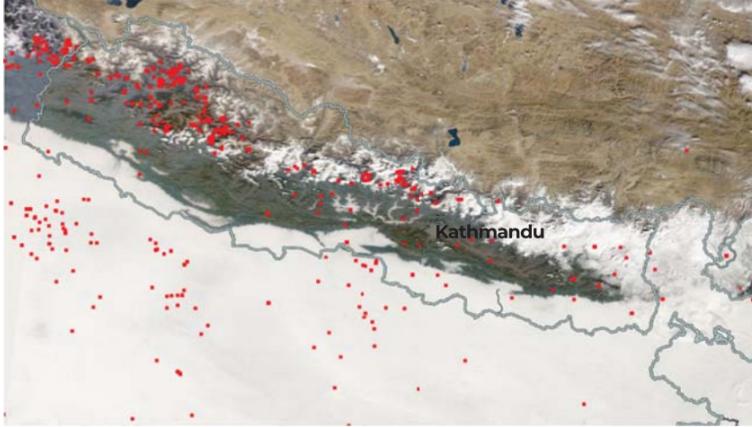
speeds up, and more dark areas are exposed in a continuous cycle. Think Machapuchre or even Everest.

As the impacts from these changes are felt broadly around the world, this must unite climate-vulnerable nations spanning highlands to islands in a call for more urgent

climate action. The 2030 climate targets set by countries lead to a 2.5°C rise in global temperatures by the end of the century. Such levels of warming would be devastating to the mountains and the world.

As countries prepare to announce new 2035 climate targets in their updated NDCs,

winter drought



TINDER DRY: This NASA image (above) of wildfires burning in Nepal in the past week due to prolonged drought. Each dot represents a major fire detected by infrared sensors on the satellite. The picture also shows dense fog blanketing the Indian plains and the Tarai.

Lake Phoksundo and Mt Kanjiroba in Dolpo (left) has seen several years of winter drought.

early to declare her office's weather models wrong. She adds, "Ours was a long-term forecast, it may not have rained yet, but it might rain more than the average during the remaining winter."

Indeed, extreme weather events induced by the climate crisis may not see a change in seasonal precipitation totals, but the rain or snow may fall all at once with destructive force.

Winter weather systems in Nepal are dominated by westerly fronts riding the jetstream that travel all the way from the

Mediterranean, passing through Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, in recent years, the moisture is mostly spent by the time the westerlies reach Nepal.

"Studies have shown that the increase in sea surface temperature in the Mediterranean has made the whole region warmer and drier," explains Binod Pokharel, another hydrology and meteorology professor at Tribhuvan University. "This has meant that the winter wind from the west carries less moisture."

Climate is also greatly influenced by the El Niño and La Niña systems that develop in the Pacific Ocean. El Niño occurs when there are above-average sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean while cooling of the ocean there triggers the La Niña.

During the La Niña

phenomenon, cooler sea surface temperatures in the Pacific change wind patterns, disrupting the westerlies and leading to less rainfall. Last winter the La Niña system was active when there was no rainfall in Nepal.

However, the El Niño system replaced La Niña during the first half of 2023, and the Department of Meteorology has estimated that the El Niño system in the Pacific Ocean will persist right through this winter. Nepal has previously had more rain than average when the El Niño system was active.

An active El Niño system means there will be more than average rainfall, confirms Sudarshan Humagain of the Meteorology Department. "However, it must be noted that in some years, there has been less than average rain when El Niño is active," he adds.

What this means is that with climate change, weather patterns have become so unpredictable that most long-term forecasts tend to be inaccurate. Indeed, even with an active El Niño, winter rain-bearing westerlies have not been as active as before in Nepal.

Periods without rainfall are classified as drought when the total rainfall is less than 75% of the annual average. The trend so far indicates that Nepal is heading for another winter drought.

Last year's winter was similarly dry with just 12.9mm of rain, the lowest precipitation recorded in the last 15 years.

Data shows that 12 out of the last 18 winters had less than

average rainfall, and eight out of those 12 winters had droughts. The trend is that winter rainfall is pushed towards the end of the season, and then it falls all at once.

About 80% of the annual rainfall in Nepal occurs during monsoon, and winter generally sees only up to 4% of average yearly rain.

"This means that two or three instances of heavy rain are normal for winter months," says Humagain of the Meteorology Department.

The 2023 Synthesis Report by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) pointed out that Asia would experience the effects of extreme rainfall variability and drought in the short term as well as long term. The report also noted that winter temperatures are going up across South Asia and 2023 was the hottest year on record.

"It is certain that winter rainfall is declining while winter temperatures are increasing," explains Professor Pokharel at Tribhuvan University. "Globally, there has been a trend towards more intense rainfall in the monsoon and falling winter precipitation, and this trend could be the norm in coming years."

The lack of winter rain and the fact that it is still too early for the winter thaw means that Nepal's rivers are all running low. As such, the country's total hydropower generation capacity has dropped by 20%, and the shortfall has to be met by power imports from India.

At present, Nepal consumes 1,305MW of electricity on average per day, and nearly one-fourth of it is being imported from India this winter. The figure is higher for morning and evening peak hours.

"Power generation has declined drastically, and is expected to go down further as chances of rainfall look slim," says Prakash Chandra Dulal of the Independent Power

Producers' Association, Nepal (IPPAN). "The output of private sector projects usually drops by to 25-28% in winter."

The reason is that all private power plants are run of the river type and not reservoirs that would store monsoon rainfall. Nepal's only reservoir project, Kulekhani, was built in 1982. The second one is finally under construction on the Seti River in Tanahu.

Generating more electricity in winter is more profitable to hydropower producers because the state-run utility Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) buys the power for almost twice the price per unit in winter compared to the monsoon standard rate.

"The lack of rainfall and decreased river flow costs us around Rs4 million per megawatt," says Sura Prasad Adhikari of Barahi Hydro Limited.

Farmers across Nepal also rely on winter rain more than they do on irrigation systems.

Ravi Kiran Adhikari of the Department of Agriculture, says that the production of wheat, barley, mustard, lentils, citrus and vegetables is significantly reduced because of winter drought.

"There is still time for the crops to revive if it rains during the remaining months of the winter," says Adhikari, "But if there is no rain, then our crop output will be seriously affected."

Meanwhile, lack of rain in winter increases the chance of wildfire as happened in the winter of 2021-22 when the Air Quality Index in Kathmandu soared to record-breaking at nearly 700.

Air pollution in Nepal gets worse during winter in the Tarai and Kathmandu due to temperature inversion and industrial pollutants from north India.

This year's winter drought is already sparking wildfires, with 48 major fires detected by the NASA FIRMS satellite in the past week. 📺

mountain climate



A farmer in Dolpo harvests buckwheat in a neighbour's field. Her own farm was washed away by a flood.

SONAM CHOEKYI LAMA

these must align with the 1.5°C target. Countries should also ensure their ambitions are supported by stronger 2030 targets, creating a credible path to 2035.

COP28's renewed call to update targets by the end of 2024 in line with the Paris Agreement's temperature goal was an essential lifeline for mountain countries.

The voice of mountainous regions rang through more strongly at COP28 than at any other climate talks. UN Secretary-General António Guterres' decision to visit the Nepal Himalaya on his way to COP28 and witness first-hand the impact of climate change on mountains brought global attention to specific vulnerabilities of a region predicted to lose 36% of its glaciers by the end of the

century even in a 1.5°C warming scenario.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal also convened a high-level event on mountains at COP28, which drew commitments and urgent calls for action. Experts and senior officials highlighted the critical need for immediate measures to reduce emissions, mobilise resources and implement suitable adaptation strategies in mountains.

Inside the negotiation rooms, the coordination between three key climate leaders in particular stood out. Kyrgyz Republic (the only country to enshrine its net-zero target into law), Bhutan (the world's only carbon-negative country), and Nepal (with exemplary initiatives on clean energy, forest conservation, and electric mobility)

featured prominently in formal meetings to address upstream-downstream impacts, with support from downstream countries like Bangladesh.

The various interventions and meetings between these countries and the host UAE team, coupled with submissions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), led to strong outcomes at the talks:

- ▲ Specific references to mountains were included in the Global Stocktake, the Summit's main outcome text, for the first time. The text recognises the crucial role of ecosystems, including mountains, in addressing climate change, and encourages integrated solutions, including land-use management and conservation with a focus on mountains and one that offers economic, social and environmental benefits. The Stocktake also urges greater ambition and support for adaptation, emphasising the protection of ecosystems, including mountains.
- ▲ There was an agreement to hold an expert dialogue on mountains at the UNFCCC's midway climate talks in Bonn this June. This dialogue shouldn't be considered a one-time event, but rather a continuous platform for understanding how mountains connect with other areas, including small islands. It needs to fill the climate knowledge gap, specifically looking at data availability and sharing in mountainous regions due to their complex geography. It should also focus on the adaptation actions needed in the mountains, such as early warning systems for glacial lakes and rivers and the potential of hydroelectricity.

- ▲ Mountains were featured in another formal decision text – the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA). The GGA outcome, which defined 2030 targets under the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, underscored the need for increased ambition and support for adaptation with a focus on mountains. The unpacking of adaptation targets within the global goal was in general a noteworthy outcome of the talks. Elsewhere, the Nairobi Work Programme – an adaptation workstream under the UNFCCC – declared mountains, high-latitude areas and the cryosphere a priority theme for 2024.
- ▲ The historic decision to operationalise the Loss and Damage Fund and progress towards its capitalisation was a positive outcome for mountainous regions. Despite a record number of pledges made during COP28, climate finance commitments fall far short of what vulnerable countries need to deliver their climate ambitions. Finance will be a significant issue over the coming year, as the post-2025 climate finance target is decided in Baku at COP29.

The significant acknowledgment of the mountain agenda at COP28, both in high-level events and formal decisions, is not a conclusion but a promising start to reinforce priorities of mountain nations and guide future processes.

Given the wide-reaching impact of mountains, it's crucial to unite progressive nations across regions to champion the call for a sustainable planet, ensuring that countries with varied geographies – mountainous, landlocked, or island – have a secure and healthy future. 📺

Manjeet Dhakal is Head of LDC Support Team at Climate Analytics (CA) and Director for Climate Analytics South Asia.



No winter vacation in Dhorpatan

An award-winning documentary portrays two Nepali grandmothers and the loneliness of aging

■ Pinki Sris Rana

Everything in Dhorpatan comes to a halt in winter when the temperature drops, and this plateau at 4,000m in western Nepal is snowbound.

Schools are closed, houses are padlocked. The contours of fallow terraces are etched in the snow, and naked trees add to the desolation. Most families have moved down to warmer lowlands in their annual winter migration.

But not for two women: Ratima and Kalima Biswakarma. They stay behind and since they are the only ones, guard the village during the long cold winter.

Rajan Kathet and Sunir Pandey's (pictured) feature documentary *No Winter Holidays* is the story of these two women with no particular liking for one another, but who only have each other to rely on.

The film had its world premiere at the Sheffield Documentary Festival 2023, and was screened in Korea, Japan, India, and Serbia. It was the talk of the town in documentary circles even before it was screened in Nepal.

"Nepal has always been known for Mt Everest and its natural beauty among the international audience, but to hear that our documentary presented a different aspect of Nepal, it felt good," says Pandey.

Having bagged 'Alternativa Awards' in Kazakhstan and 'Best Feature Documentary' at the Nepal



BABIN DULAL



ALTERNATIVE FILM AWARDS

Human Rights International Film Festival (NHRIF), the filmmakers are taking it up a notch by releasing it in cinemas, similar to how Eric Valli's *Caravan* was also shown in commercial theatres.

Says Kathet: "We always thought there was no audience for indie films. But we were proven wrong, the audience turned up at the theatres to watch our documentary, even though most of them were arts and literature enthusiasts

and cinephiles."

The work on *No Winter Holidays* began five years ago with script writing. The next year was spent travelling to Dhorpatan three times. By March 2020, the team had finished shooting.

The 79-minute-long documentary moves slowly, much like the pace of life for the two women in their seventies in cold and dreary Dhorpatan.

Ratima and Kalika are co-wives and widows of the same man — the very thing that binds them

together and also pits them against each other. Moreover, they have completely different personalities.

Ratima is the first wife with weak knees that easily gives up on her. She cannot even collect firewood by herself. Kalima, on the other hand, is healthier and loves taking her cow for a walk.

A mother of three, Kalima's whole world revolves around her daughters. Ratima, on the other hand, has no children and enjoys singing and drinking. Despite their differences, their lives overlap with the banality of aging and loneliness.

The filmmakers use muted tones and faded colours, evoking the physical emptiness of Dhorpatan, as well as the protagonists. And yet, each shot is aesthetically pleasing and is a visual treat to the eyes.

They also use metaphors to show conflict between the two women. There are also moments of genuine laughter.

Aging is often thought of as a decline since the elderly can no longer actively contribute to the family or the economy. But Kathet and Pandey do not portray it as a weakness.

What comes across instead are two individuals empowered by lived experiences spanning seven decades, adapting to change.

Most in audiences will be much younger than these grannies, but the portrayal is bound to leave them inspired. 🇳🇵

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