



ROAD KILL

SHANKAR SHRESTHA / RSS

NO ACCIDENT: This Beni-bound bus veered off the road and fell into the Trisuli River on 23 August last year, killing 8 passengers and injuring dozens. Like in most other highway mishaps, there was no investigation and no lessons learnt.

engineering and absence of safety features, the other factors in road fatalities include driver negligence, carelessness, over-speeding, overloading, and lack of maintenance of vehicles.

Two-wheelers, which used to be confined to cities, have now added a new challenge to highway safety. Motorcycles are involved in 68% of road traffic accidents in Nepal.

“Young people over-speeding in their heavy 600cc bikes are a danger to themselves and others. Moreover, we have found a notable increase in youths driving under substance abuse,” says DIG of Police Bhim Prasad Dhakal, explaining that strict monitoring of drinking and driving has led to an increase in drug use.

Highway deaths make news, but injuries are a major cause of physical disability in Nepal. The numbers are shocking: just last year more than 30,000 people were injured in road crashes. Nearly 6,000 of them had severe spinal or brain trauma needing complicated surgery, rehabilitation and lifelong care.

As Nepal's road network expands, and with inadequate attention to highway safety as well as lack of timely treatment of trauma victims and rehabilitation, it will be the poorest Nepalis who will pay the price.

“Road crashes perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty,” says Raju Dhakal of the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre in Sanga. “From expensive medical bills to rehabilitation to lost years of productivity, it represents a huge loss for the nation. Our health system needs to be revamped, and investment is needed for preventive, curative, palliative and rehabilitative care.”

SEE PAGE 3

■ Sonia Awale

Nearly 24,000 people died on Nepal's roads in the last 10 years. In comparison, 17,000 people were killed in the 10 years of the Maoist armed conflict. Covid killed about 12,000 Nepalis.

Nepal's highways are deadlier than war or pestilence.

Numbers are numbing. But although this epidemic of fatalities is now one of the biggest causes of death nationwide, it gets scant attention from governments, the public and media.

Nepalis have come to accept death on roads as a part of life. All three levels of government shirk

from responsibility, calling them 'accidents'. And road mortality has become so commonplace that the mainstream press buries the news.

The relentless slaughter on our roads is the result of political disinterest, governance malfunction, and public apathy. Nepalis are not dying on roads, they are being killed.

“Road traffic accidents are getting more frequent and there is a direct correlation with the failure of national governance,” says transport expert Chandra B Shrestha. “Local and provincial governments have neither the capacity, nor clarity of their roles. Budgets are poured into building substandard roads.”

Shrestha analysed the tragedy this month on the Chandragiri road that killed a doctor, his parents and two children. Only his wife, a physician, survived because she got out of the car to put a rock behind the wheel of their hatchback that stalled on a steep section.

He says the incline was too steep, the rough surface did not allow it to gather enough speed for the gradient, and the thick dust did not provide adequate traction for the tyres.

Most of the euphemistically called 'roads' in Nepal are similar death traps. They are not wide enough, do not have the required radius on excessively steep curves, no attention is paid to drainage,

and houses are allowed to be built without the required set-back.

“There is no design or planning to begin with, there is a total absence of any engineering,” says Shrestha. “This should be criminal. These are not accidents, but almost deliberate deaths.”

And like all crimes, the perpetrators can be tracked by following the money. Inevitably, it leads to corruption linked to infrastructure budgets to build roads regardless of priority or quality for kickbacks or votes. And when a bus falls off a road, there is no political will to investigate the root cause in the political economy and lack of accountability.

Apart from faulty highway

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At home and abroad

In late December, as police arrested a protester at Mandala into a police van with some force, a tv camera caught a voice from the crowd yelling at the van as it drove away: "Don't kill him!"

This was not an exaggerated exclamation but one from genuine fear of harm because it followed the killing of two protesters outside a Korean labour recruitment office the previous day.

The Mandala is like Kathmandu's Hyde Park, and has over the years been the epicentre for all victims of the state machinery who have been denied justice. But after fears that pro-monarchy rallies would escalate, the government designated this and other areas restricted.



Since the ban, police have also arrested health and justice activist Govinda KC as well as human rights activists demanding transparency into the Ncell share acquisition case.

Then on Tuesday, protesters from the National Student Union were arrested for demanding that the ban on assembly at the Mandala be repealed and Nepalis "be given back their civic space". Interestingly, the student union is affiliated to the ruling Nepali Congress, the largest party in Parliament and a coalition partner to the Maoist Centre.

The other gathering place for mass rallies used to be Khula Manch, which Kathmandu's Mayor Balen Shah had been trying to turn into a three storey underground parking. After public outrage, he backed down but is now trying to turn it into an astroturfed football ground.

The current coalition is squeezing the right to freedom of assembly and expression in installments. It throttled social media with a ban on TikTok last year. A slew of corruption scandals, impunity and lack of delivery has made the ruling coalition insecure, and its knee-jerk reaction has been to muzzle the messenger(s).

If only the coalition partners learnt from history that freedom of expression is a safety valve that lets the citizens let off steam. But that would be expecting too much wisdom from them. Clamping down can build up the pressure allowing civic outrage to take a dangerous and violent turn.

Even as Nepal's leadership makes public

spaces out of bounds, the opposition UML is preparing to take to the streets in a movement from February onwards to try to topple the fragile coalition.

C K Raut's Janamat Party this week withdrew support for the Madhes Province government following a power struggle with Upendra Yadav of the JSP. The coalition at the centre is now shakier because Raut has been dissatisfied at his party not being given any National Assembly seats. Elections for 19 seats of the Upper House took place on Thursday.

But while Nepal's leadership alienates itself further from its citizens at home, it has been tilting southwards on the geopolitical front. Nepal's recent hydropower and investment agreements with India are emblematic of a significant shift in foreign policy. It seems Nepal's traditional foreign policy of equidistance between India and China is askew.

Nepal and India signed a 25-year energy trade deal during Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to Nepal in early January for 'Nepal's electricity to get a market in India'. But it is clear to just about everyone in Nepal (except, it seems the government which is trying its best to keep everything hush-hush) that India's intentions lie not so much in importing electricity from Nepal as getting free regulated water.

India also increased its assistance through High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP) from Rs50 million to Rs200 million. Grants

like this can help spur Nepal's development, but there are loud misgivings that the funds will not be channeled through the Finance Ministry, as it should, but via the Indian Embassy. It will be entirely up to India to choose who and what to fund, which actually is against the Constitution and federal policy on international cooperation.

Unlike India-baiters in Nepal, we are not blaming New Delhi for flexing its muscle. Any large country will do the same to secure its long-term national interest. The blame lies in Nepal's feckless leadership that is shamelessly kowtowing and selling our national interest down the river.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal seems either unaware or indifferent to the long-term consequences of the decisions he has acquiesced to – so focused is he on keeping his coalition intact so that he can remain in the Prime Minister's seat beyond the term limit he agreed with the NC's Sher Bahadur Deuba.

Nepal's foreign policy must not be seasonal, or be determined by domestic political survival considerations. It must not be beholden to the whims of who is leading the country at a particular period of time.

Shristi Karki

Nepal's foreign policy must not be seasonal, or be determined by domestic political survival considerations.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Reforestation Story

Nepal doubled its forest cover to 40% in 25 years, making it a success story of the community forestry program which has since become an international model. But part of the credit for this success goes as much to outmigration that started with the Maoist armed conflict and has accelerated since. This has reduced pressure on forests in the mountains.

Excerpt of the report published 20 years ago this week in issue #180 23-29 January 2004:

Located just outside the Valley rim, the villages to the south of Lele show the effects of eight years of Maoist insurgency: settlements devoid of young men, fallow terraces, deserted bazars.

But there is another unintended side effect: a dramatic rejuvenation of the once denuded mountains surrounding this rugged and picturesque region on the outskirts of Kathmandu. The conflict and violence has depopulated Nepal's midhills, reducing pressure on the land, and villagers are afraid of going into the forest for fear of running into



Why the insurgency has protected forests

Maoists. The two factors combined have given the forests a chance to grow back.

"We don't enter the forest much these days to cut fodder leaves or to graze goats and cattle, that is why the trees are so thick," says Sumitra Godar, who is a forest guard with the all-women Sallaghari Community Forest User Group in the village of Mahat. "There are now a lot more birds and wildlife."

There has been some fighting in the mountains to the south and east of Lele, and the frequent checks along the highways have restricted the mobility of the villagers. This too has helped forest regeneration, and because of the trees the women say they have noticed many more birds and wild animals such as leopards, bears and pheasants. Regeneration has been so rapid that leopards and other wild animals have actually become the number one concern of many farmers who have suffered increasing livestock losses.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



1921 RENDEZVOUS

Mangalins are women who sing auspicious songs for religious rituals. This tradition was once widespread among Nepal's Hindu communities, but is declining today. Listen to this podcast that discusses the royal Mangalins, their songs, and includes an interview with ethnomusicologist Carol Tingey who researched the community. Also watch the video. Read story on page 6-7.



BIENNALE

The Kathmandu Art Biennale has kicked off with over 80 participating artists and 100 paintings, sculptures and installations. Read about artists Udaya Charan Shrestha, Meena Kayastha, Manish Dhwoju, and their noteworthy creations on Page 12. Watch the video on Himal Khabar's YouTube channel.

TUNDIKHEL

This is a wonderful and very informative article ('The occupation of Tundikhel', Sahina Shrestha, #1195). It seems the priority has constantly been the enforcement of laws and to keep people in line, and that the mayor only represents a certain class of people. They can afford to buy big property and have their own Tinkhya in their backyards. Meanwhile, others are devoid of any open space.

Moksheda Thapa

■ Indeed, everyone must join hands against KMC to stop misusing public land. Why doesn't the KMC use available funds to develop playgrounds and more green parks?

Bishow Parajuli

TOURISM PIONEERS

I met the charismatic Jim Edwards around 1998 when I was working for Traveller's Nepal ('British Pioneers of Tourism in Nepal', Kirtijai K Pahari, Keshya R L Rana and British Embassy Nepal, #1195). His friendly demeanour and his fascinating insights into conservation and tourism left a lasting impression on me as a young reporter.

Binita Shah

■ It is nice to read about the history of tourism. The bond between Nepal and the UK has always been great. I hope more Brits come to Nepal to explore.

Jey Bohora

CHOLUNG PARK

This is an insightful article on Nepal's Limbu community ('Let's go to Cholong Park', Arjun Babu Mabuhand, nepalitimes.com). The museum houses very interesting artefacts.

The Himalaya Dispatch

■ Cholong Park is a one-of-a-kind facility envisioned by the one-of-a-kind mayor that is Arjun Babu Mabuhand.

Om Astha Rai

■ Hopefully, Nepal can come up with a housing solution that maintains culture while safely and inexpensively serving the need for multifamily and multigenerational dwellings.

Sigmund Stengel

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

No winter holiday in Dhorpatan

by Pinki Sris Rana

An award-winning documentary portrays two Nepali grandmothers and the banality and loneliness of aging. Full review on our website.



Most reached and shared on Facebook



Nepal suffers another winter drought

by Ramesh Kumar

Despite forecasters predicting above average winter rain, many parts of the country have not received a single drop for four months. With climate breakdown, weather patterns have become so unpredictable that most long-term forecasts tend to be inaccurate. Read more at nepalitimes.com



Most popular on X

British pioneers of tourism in Nepal

by Kirtijai K Pahari, Keshya R L Rana and British Embassy Nepal Tourism and its contribution to the economy, jobs and conservation are parts of the century-old Nepal-UK friendship. Many British pioneers played a part in developing Nepal's tourism. Go online for more details.



Most commented

The occupation of Tundikhel

by Sahina Shrestha

Over the years Tundikhel has been fragmented and encroached upon, reducing it to not even 15% of its original expanse. Now, residents and activists have protested KMC's decision to further constrict the last of Kathmandu's open space by building football fields at Khula Manch. Join the online discussion.



Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

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.



Hem Sagar Baral @WorshipNature

Weather forecasters have a long way to go especially in a world where we have broken the regular climate patterns



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

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



कमल राहा मगर @kamalKThapa

The same South which established secularism in #Nepal & wanted to abolish the Monarchy.

1,000 WORDS



LISTICLE: Opposition UML leader K P Oli hands over to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal a document with 751 suggestions that it collected during its Prosperity March across the country in December.

The main cause of highway deaths: corruption

The epidemic of fatalities and injuries on Nepal's highways are no accident, they are a criminal offence

■ Sonia Awale

It is ironic that for something that is considered a vote bank, there is no accountability when it comes to the maintenance of roads to ensure their safety. All 77 districts in Nepal are now connected to the road network but bad roads are a given in this country.

Under federalism, true devolution of power is yet to be exercised but heavy earth-movers are clawing through the mountains in a misguided notion of 'development'. A fatalistic society accepts road 'accidents' as a price to be paid.

This is one case where corruption kills, yet rarely is power held to account, or wrongdoing punished.

"Road maintenance is not sexy or attractive enough, there is no political or monetary incentive, and there is no budget allocated either for road maintenance," says transport expert Chandra B Shrestha, now a consultant with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Shrestha was a district transport planning adviser in the 1990s, and says Nepal expanded its road network but left sustainability out of the equation. "Asset maintenance is not even an afterthought," he says. "What this means is that our roads are non-functional and not cost-effective, among other things."

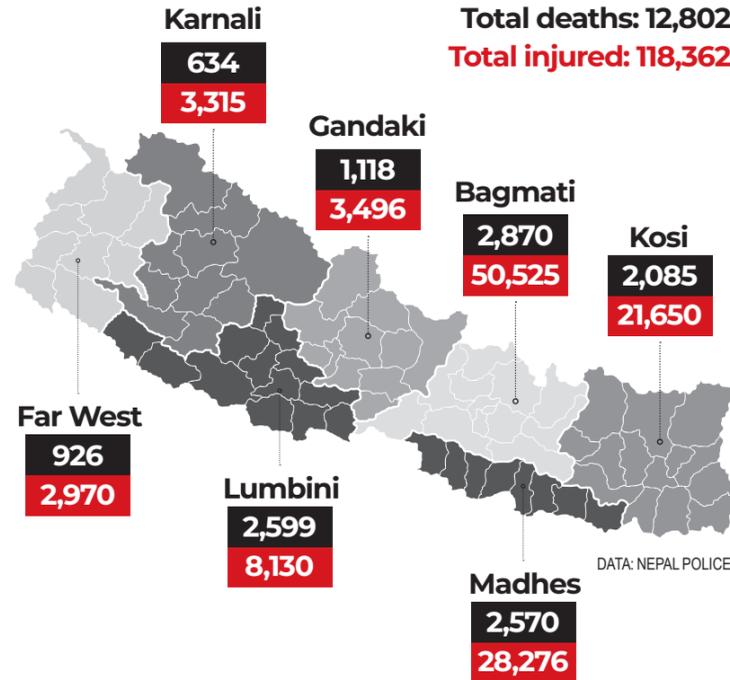
Every 14 deaths per 100,000 are caused by road fatalities, which is now the third biggest cause of death in the 15-29 age group. Three times more men die on the roads than women.

Last year alone, there were nearly 2,500 fatalities on the country's highways and streets. Yet, the 79 who died in two tragic aviation mishaps in 2023 got vastly more attention in the public sphere.

Every year in Nepal, highways take more lives than floods, landslides, lightning strikes and other disasters put together. An average of 7 people die every day on the roads, and 19 were killed in three separate bus and car crashes in a 24-hour period last week.

As per the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, Nepal was committed to halving road traffic deaths and injuries by 2020

Road fatalities and injuries July 2018 - July 2023



and providing safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable transport systems by 2030. We missed the first target. The second is not likely to be met.

Twelve people lost their lives when an over-speeding bus plunged into the Rapti River in Dang in the evening of 12 January. The very next day, a jeep travelling to Dhorpatan in Baglung overturned and killed two. This was followed

by the private car that fell 500m from the road on Chandragiri, killing five passengers including two children.

And this is not even the peak season for highway fatalities, which sees a spike during the Dasain-Tihar festival or during the monsoon. In the last 10 years, there have been a total of 137,395 highway and road crashes in Nepal. A majority of these took place in Kathmandu,

and in the Tarai where straighter stretches of road tend to lead to overspeeding. Gandaki and Kosi Provinces are next because of their wider network of mountain roads.

Nepal's topography and weather are contributory factors, making roads difficult to build and maintain. In addition to being substandard, switchbacks wrap around mountain or roads that follow narrow gorges, traverse treacherous cliffs. During the monsoon, entire sections of arterial highways such as Mugling-Narayanghat are in a permanent state of disrepair.

The fact that vehicles are regularly falling down mountains on the same section of highways over and over means lessons are never learnt, no one is accountable. We do not take corrective actions when there are cost-effective solutions readily available.

"Driver carelessness on poorly built and maintained roads is the biggest cause of accidents. So our licensing system must be improved to allow only the qualified people to drive, even then we have to differentiate between heavy and light vehicle licensing," says DIG Bhim Prasad Dhakal.

He adds: "Equally important are regular tests of public vehicles, better signage, as well as monitoring and patrolling where even the traffic police have areas to improve on." Traffic police has introduced time card for long-distance drivers and vehicle owners need to employ two drivers on such routes. New roads like the Midhill Highway are better engineered, have improved signage and guardrails.

Still, because roads with poor safety features are being built all over Nepal, the country needs trauma centres along every stretch of highway and ambulances with emergency equipment pre-positioned at health posts. The government has mandated one trauma centre in each province, and even though more are required even that target has not been met.

"Management of crash sites is of utmost importance, but first responders are often untrained locals who add to the severity of the injuries or even cause the wounded to die during rescue due to mishandling," says Raju Dhakal of the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre (SIRC) in Sanga.

Trained trauma teams are often too late to arrive, and most victims and their families cannot afford long-term rehabilitation.

A four-month pregnant 20-year-old woman sustained brain injury after a motorbike hit her on the Sindhuli Highway last year. She lost her baby, and her husband had to quit his job to look after her 24/7 after being trained at the Sanga centre.

Many patients that receive rehabilitation therapy at SIRC after highway mishaps are paralysed and require a caretaker round-the-clock. If the person is the sole support, their families become destitute as well. Many children drop out of school, and end up in the streets.

The public must refuse to accept Nepal's poor road safety record. There should be rallies and sit-in's outside government offices just like there are for other crimes to push the government to take this life-or-death issue more seriously.

Given that road accidents are the biggest killers of children in the 9-15 age group, traffic rules and discipline should be taught in school. Pillion riders should refuse to get on two-wheelers if there is no helmet available for them, cars and bikes should be restricted on pedestrian streets.

Some surveys have also found that using local vehicles reduces accidents. But more often than not, the older less conditioned buses and jeeps operate on rural roads.

The use of CCTVs on highways and major junctions as well as dashcams on public vehicles can help in post-accident investigation and deter reckless driving in the very first place.

"Most of all, it is the government that has the biggest responsibility here," says Raju Dhakal of the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre in Sanga. "It must seriously revamp everything from licensing, making vehicle tests mandatory, stricter traffic patrolling and actually holding culprits accountable."

He adds: "The fact that most of the cost for treatment and rehabilitation of road traffic accidents is borne out of pocket by patients' families has left the government off the hook. The public should refuse to accept this anymore." 📌

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Hong Kong is happening

The territory's Nepal connection offers possibilities, as Nepalis travel overseas for leisure

Nepal has a long history with Hong Kong because of Nepalis in the British Gurkha battalion stationed there when the territory was still a British colony. It was handed over to China in 1997, and it is now classified as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China.

Former Gurkhas and their families are eligible for permanent residence, and a majority of Nepalis in the city are the children and grandchildren of former Gurkha servicemen. This makes for a thriving community of Nepalis in the territory with most working in food and beverage, security as well as the community, social and educational sectors.

Some Nepalis are employed in professional and executive positions, and still others have migrated on to the UK which also offers permanent residence to former Gurkha families.

The estimated 50,000 Nepalis with families in Hong Kong and their relatives in Nepal are often the ones who fly frequently back and forth to and from Kathmandu.

Yet even as Nepalis begin to travel for leisure beyond Nepal's borders to popular destinations like Bangkok, Bali and beyond, their presence in Hong Kong as tourists has so far been negligible. One of the reasons is that Nepalis who want to travel to Hong Kong for leisure must apply for a visit visa which could take between three to six weeks to process.

Cathay Pacific, as Hong Kong's largest carrier, says it is seeking to attract more Nepali travellers -- both those with Hong Kong as a tourism destination as well as transit passengers flying on to the US, Canada, Japan, or Korea.

"Hong Kong's strategic geographical location means Hong Kong International Airport is a



CATHAY PACIFIC

gateway to other Asian destinations, including other cities of the Greater Bay Area, the Chinese Mainland, Japan, and Korea. It also provides easy connections to the South West Pacific, the USA and Canada," says Junu Malekhu, Cathay Country Lead for Nepal.

She adds that outbound travel has seen an increase as Nepalis seek to explore culture, cuisine, and sights of countries in the region. Cathay also caters to a significant number of Nepali students travelling to Australia, Japan, the US, and Canada, says Malekhu.

On a recent December night at Kathmandu Airport, the journey from the unheated ramp bus to the Airbus A330 was short but freezing. Stepping into the aircraft offered warm relief. Once

passengers settled down, the cabin crew handed out immigration slips to present at Hong Kong immigration.

Cathay Pacific currently offers four flights per week from Kathmandu to Hong Kong, with the red-eye flights departing before midnight and arriving in the territory conveniently at 6AM local time after a four-and-a-half hours.

In the Premium Economy cabin, a Nepali father whose young son spoke to him in English helped his child fill out the Hong Kong arrival form. It was clear that a large number of Nepalis on board were flying back to homes in Hong Kong.

Cathay Pacific itself is one of the oldest airlines in Asia and traces its history to the early British days. Today, its aircraft offer the largest

entertainment library among the region's airlines, and it received the Skytrax World's Best Inflight Entertainment award in 2023.

Cathay's inflight dining features a range of Cantonese as well as international dishes suited to the Nepali palate.

Cathay's 317-seater A330s on the Kathmandu route also have the Premium Economy cabin which offers priority boarding, and once inside the aircraft, expanded seating, legroom as well as working, dining and storage space.

Effective from 3 April 2024 Cathay will increase its flights to five per week from Kathmandu to Hong Kong.

Since the flight from Kathmandu lands in Hong Kong early in the morning and most

hotel check-ins begin only in the afternoon, visitors can begin exploring the city right after they land as they wait for accommodations to be ready. Options include the mandatory Peak Tram to Victoria Peak for a panorama view of the Victoria Harbour. Nearby, the Hong Kong Botanical Garden in the heart of the city's business district is the world's oldest in the region.

Lantau Island is another destination, and visitors can take the Ngong Ping 360 ropeway to see the Tian Tan Buddha, a 34m tall bronze statue of the Buddha. The stairway to Tian Tan Buddha rivals that in Swayambhu.

Hong Kong Disneyland is the smallest of the resorts in the world, but is packed with young visitors year-round and is a must-stop for Nepali families with children.

The tradition British-era ferry across the Victoria Harbour to Kowloon is not just a commute but also a cheap way to sightsee. With its vibrant multi-ethnic population, Kowloon is also where most of Hong Kong's Nepali population live and work, specifically in the Jordan neighbourhood which has Nepali restaurants, jewellery shops, and other businesses.

For shopping, Mong Kok in Kowloon might be the best fit, with its lower priced shopping areas and bustling night markets.

The flight back to Kathmandu departs more conveniently in the evening, and those who want to splurge can upgrade to Cathay Pacific's Business Class which gives them access to three lounges at the Hong Kong International Airport—The Pier, which is the largest, The Deck, and The Wing. The noodle bar in all three lounges offer regional and Asian food and is particularly popular. 🇳🇵

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German support

The Government of Nepal and the Federal Republic of Germany have signed financial and technical cooperation agreements for a grant assistance of €56 million. The Financial Cooperation Agreement will support the private and public sector to expand energy transmission lines, promote solar energy, gender equality and improve maternal care and childcare in remote areas in Nepal. The Technical Cooperation Agreement focuses to support gender equality and social inclusion, and local and provincial economic development - especially in Western Nepal (together with the European Union and Finland).



Turkish to Melbourne

Turkish Airlines has added Australia to its flight network. Starting 15 March, the airlines will schedule 3 flights a week to Melbourne with a layover in Singapore.

Fusemachine Nasdaq

Fusemachines Inc, a Nepali-origin company that provides AI products for enterprise use is merging with CSLM Acquisition Corp in a \$200 million deal to begin trading on the Nasdaq. Upon the closing of the transaction, subject to approvals by CSLM's stockholders and Fusemachines stockholders and other customary closing conditions, the combined company is expected to list on Nasdaq under the ticker symbol "FUSE".

DishHome HD

Dishhome's Action Sports HD One will live telecast the 23rd Aaha Rara Gold Cup in Pokhara and DishHome Go App. Featuring 12 teams, including 9 'A' Division clubs and Bhutan's Paro, the opening match is between host Sahara and Three Star Club. The tournament concludes with finals on 3 February.

BYD Seal

Cimex Inc is launching the BYD SEAL with its sedan features a dynamic design, Cell-to-Body technology, and an 8-in-1 electric powertrain. It offers a range of



up to 570km, fast charging in 30 minutes, and various driving modes. BYD SEAL is available in three trims with different specifications and comes in four colors.

Samsung S24

Samsung Nepal has announced pre-orders for the Galaxy S24 series. Equipped with the Snapdragon 8 Gen 3 Mobile Platform, the Galaxy S24 Ultra features a Quad Tele System, improved Nightography, and AI editing tools. The series features advanced security measures, and privacy features. Pre-booking offers include gifts such as Double Memory, Buds FE, and Tab A8 LTE. The first 500 pre-order customers also receive an Ncell Premium number with additional benefits.

The Galaxy S24 series is available from Rs119,999 to Rs199,999, with EMI options and additional services such as Insta Finance, breakage insurance, and smartphone exchange.



Ather Experience

Vaidya Energy has opened its second Ather Experience Centre in Jhamsikhel where customers can explore Ather Electric Scooters in an immersive environment. Vaidya Energy plans further expansions with upcoming Experience Centers in Pokhara, Chitwan, Butwal, and Itahari.

Recharge system

Coca-Cola Beverages Nepal, Centre for Integrated Urban Development and WaterAid Nepal jointly handed over the groundwater recharge system installed at Balaju Park to Sunita Dangol, the deputy mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. The recharge system consists of 21 filter chambers, 21 recharge wells, two distilling chambers, recharge trenches of 75 feet and seven bamboo check dams.

Smart Combo

Worldlink has introduced Smart Combo Deal where customers can enjoy up to a 50% discount on Boat Brand Ultima Smartwatch and Boat Airdopes 170. Customers taking three- and 12-month subscriptions can get the smartwatch at Rs2,249, while the Airdopes 170 can be obtained at Rs1,699 with one-, three-, and 12-month subscriptions. Annual subscribers receive a free dual band and Nokia Beacon 1.1 router.

“Yo Man Ta Mero Nepali Ho”

Republic of Korea Ambassador Taeyoung Park talks about five decades of bilateral cooperation, tourism, trade and labour

“Yesterday I heard a song called Yo Man Ta Mero Nepali Ho by the band 1974AD. Do you know what happened in the year 1974?” asks South Korean Ambassador Taeyoung Park as he sits for an interview with Nepali Times. “It was the year Nepal and the Republic of Korea established diplomatic ties.”

South Korea is one of the most sought-after labour destinations among Nepalis. Salaries are higher, labour rights are guaranteed and working conditions are much better than elsewhere. There are now nearly 100,000 Nepalis in Korea, working primarily in agriculture and manufacturing.

At the same time, Korean pop culture, food and fashion have increasingly taken over the lifestyle of urban youth in Nepal. Korea’s soft power has become a powerful draw for young Nepalis.

As Nepal and Korea prepare to mark 50 years of diplomatic relations, Park spoke to Nepali Times, reflecting on five decades of bilateral cooperation as well as the potential for tourism, trade, and better-paying jobs for Nepalis in Korea.

Excerpts of the interview:



KUNDA DIXIT

Nepali Times: How have the past 50 years been for Nepal and Korea?

Taeyoung Park: It has been a journey of solidarity. We have been sharing prosperity between the two countries especially after we started taking migrant workers from Nepal through the Employment Permit System (EPS) in 2007. Nepali migrant workers have been helping the Korean economy prosper and Korea has shared its skills and knowledge. That exchange, I believe, solidified the foundation of friendship between the two countries. It was through this exchange that we started to understand each other better and share prosperity.

Tens of thousands of Nepalis spend 5-10 years of their life in Korea gaining skills and knowledge. Just last year, 20,000 Nepalis went to Korea for foreign employment, the record highest annual number to date. For 2024, there is a national quota of 165,000 foreign workers, and we hope to increase the number of Nepali workers.

Nepal is also the biggest contributor among 16 EPS partner countries in Asia. Korea has a labour shortage due to its low birth

rate, so we will continue to draw migrant workers from Nepal and prioritise labour rights, providing the same conditions and protection that domestic workers enjoy.

As of now, our need is for low-skilled Nepali workers, but bilateral relations between the two countries have also opened a wider window for skilled labourers. We would be happy to have more talented Nepali workers, they are known in Korea to be hardworking and reliable.

Last month, two Nepalis were killed during an EPS protest in Kathmandu. How can the system be better regulated?

We were very saddened by the incident. I would like to convey my sincere condolences to the families of Mr Rawat and Mr Shah who lost their lives. We have a separate EPS office that has been working closely with the Nepal government trying to sort out the problem. We will continue the practice of working closely.

That being said, what we also have to understand is that there is a huge demand and supply gap. We are working with headquarters to increase the quota for Nepali

workers, but the demand for jobs is much higher than supply of labour in Korea. When the demand and supply do not match, managing human resources does become an issue. The problem arises when there is too much demand, there has to be measures to calm down the demand.

What do you think is the potential for closer Nepal-Korea bilateral ties?

There are 3Ps in diplomacy: peace, people and prosperity. In terms of peace, our two countries have had no problems. There has always been a cooperative relationship between Korea and Nepal. Second is the people. Through the EPS system for labour and with tourism, people from both countries have had the chance for cultural and economic exchange. Citizens of both our countries have an affinity with each other. As for prosperity, there are many ways to prosper. Korea’s post-war prosperity rested on private-sector led growth. Investment by the private sector can be the new arena that can help Nepal’s economy flourish. Nepal is a priority country for Korean development cooperation.

Foreign investors are entirely business people, not so much NGOs

or philanthropists. Korea is the fourth largest investor in Nepal, and I see much potential for foreign investors. It might be too early to say but we are working on drawing up a bilateral investment treaty. Meanwhile, the Nepal government can also work on building a base to attract more Korean investors.

What sectors have been of interest to the Korean government and private sector investors?

We believe in the power of human resources, it is what our country is built on. Our initiatives in capacity building and vocational training in provinces like Bagmati, Gandaki and Lumbini is a reflection of our focus on human resources. We intend to have at least one vocational training centre in each province.

Nepal’s energy sector is also something Korea is interested in. Korea has already invested in three hydropower plants: Modi Khola which was completed in 2000 and the Chameliya in 2018. The most recent investment was on the Upper Trisuli-1 hydropower plant which is to be completed in 2027, and this is the biggest project so far with 216 megawatt generation capacity.

Samsung Electronics has been operating a tv factory here in Nepal for almost a year now. Hyundai Motors of Korea and Nepal’s Laxmi Group have collaborated to assemble up to 5,000 automobiles a year from a factory in Nawalparasi district. Hi-mo’s Nepal Mandumo is a Korean wig company which has opened a factory here creating job opportunities for 680 Nepali women. Nepali herbs, tea, organic coffee and pashmina also have a potential market in Korea.

How can Nepal be made more attractive for Korean tourists?

Statistics show that Korea is 9th in terms of tourist arrivals. Last year the number was around 24,000, and it is likely that we can reach the pre-pandemic number of 40,000. The spiritual link that connects Korean Buddhists to Nepal increases the prospect of Korean pilgrims. Lumbini has importance for Korean Buddhists. The other link can be hiking and trekking in the Everest region which is a dream for Korean enthusiasts. Civil aviation authorities of the two countries are working to increase flights between Seoul and Kathmandu, including for Nepal Airlines.

How can Nepal and Nepalis benefit more from Korea’s labour market in future?

Two-thirds of the migrants from Nepal in Korea work in manufacturing and the rest in agriculture. They are contributing to Korea’s economy. But we do not want the benefits of their labour limited to our country, we want the returnees to utilise the skills and knowledge they gained over the years for their own entrepreneurial ventures when they return to Nepal.

That is why, apart from fostering education, entrepreneurship has also been our area of interest. It is education that will pay off in the long run. Nepalis deserve better opportunities and high quality education. Our KOICA office is also helping with the Returnee Integration Program to assist Nepali workers coming back from Korea get a new start.

In the near future, we want to see Nepal as a country with a self-sustained economy. I would love to see Nepal where Korea is today.

SILK GLAMOR

Glamor that lasts



Sacred female singers of Nepal

A unique tradition of devotional songs performed by women needs continuity

It is normal for male priests to officiate at Hindu rituals in Nepal, but there was a time when it was considered more auspicious for women to conduct such worship.



ON THE MARGINS
Sewa Bhattarai

While the tradition of female priesthood is waning, there is still a remnant of this tradition in Kathmandu's Hanuman Dhoka with the Mangalini tradition of priestesses.

The Mangalini sing auspicious songs during important rituals, and used to be employed by Nepal's royals to sing at daily prayers, birthdays, weddings, thread ceremonies and marriages. When not officiating these days, Mangalini priestesses are on the payroll of the Hanuman Dhoka Museum in Kathmandu as guards.

The songs are half-forgotten, although some in praise of the goddess Durga are still rendered during Dasain. Their repertoire is uniquely Nepali and represents the role of women as creators, but their lives, songs, and roles of the Mangalini are hardly documented.

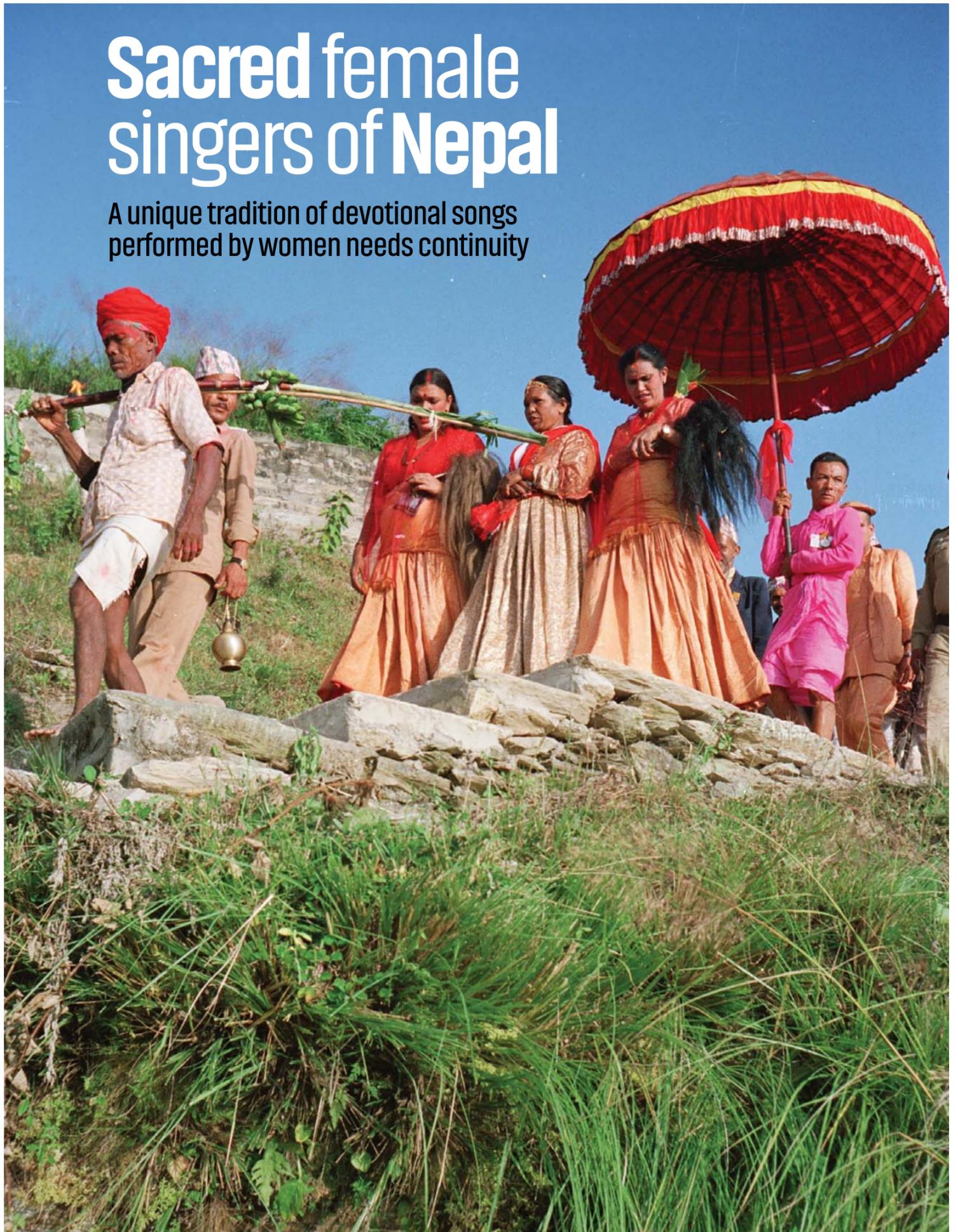
Rohita Suwal and Dhan Kumari Dangol were recruited especially for the thread ceremony of Prince Dipendra in 1988. They saw an ad for singers and applied for this job like any other government position, and were selected.

"We had no prior experience in singing," admits Dangol. "We only found out that we had to sing after we got the appointment letter."

The 16 Mangalini were then trained to sing sacred hymns to Ganesh and other deities by renowned classical musicians Nararaj Dhakal and Shambhu Prasad Mishra, with the lyrics revised by poet Nir Bikram Pyasi.

Legend has it that the Mangalini tradition started with Lord Ram and continued in Nepal through the Lichhavi and Malla era. Some of its songs like the Malashri have been documented since Malla rule in Kathmandu Valley.

Apart from Kathmandu, Mangalini sang at the Gorkha



PHOTOS: CAROL TINGEY

THE SOUND OF MUSIC



Ethnomusicologist Carol Tingey came to Nepal in the 1980s and researched the Panche Baja from Gorkha to Jumla, publishing *Heartbeat of Nepal: The Pancai Baja*. She accidentally came across the Mangalini during her research, and Tingey's papers are the only in-depth study of the tradition.

Tingey recorded over 100 hours of music in Nepal, which have been digitised by the British Library. The collection is the largest ethnomusicological collection of Nepali music available online, containing over 900 tracks including genres like Panche Baja, Nagara Bana, Mangalini, Ratyauli, Bisket Jatra, Ghintang Ghisi, Ghatu, and many others.

Tingey has been absent from Nepal's ethnomusicology scene, but Sewa Bhattarai recently interviewed her over zoom. Excerpts:

Sewa Bhattarai: How did you come to be interested in Nepal's ethnomusicology?

Carol Tingey: It began after I completed my Bachelor's of Music, which was focused on western classical music. And then I started travelling for the first time outside Europe, and realised that there was a whole world of other music out there. So that piqued my interest. I travelled overland to Kathmandu, just fell in love with the place, and decided that that would be the focus for research for my Master's degree in ethnomusicology. I came across recordings of Nepali music made by Arnold Bake in the 1930s.

And Panche Baja?

I found out about it from an article written by Mireille Helffer. This was at a time when I was exploring the possibility of looking at Nepali music but had no idea what genres there were, or anything about it. I found that there was so little research done. Panche Baja was the only type of music about which anything substantial had been written. So initially, that pointed me in that direction for my Master's.

Why did you choose to go to Gorkha?

Gorkha was an ideal base for the bulk of my research because there was still a very strong tradition of Panche Baja for the community, for weddings and so on, but also, the Nagara



THE SINGING PRIESTESSES: The Phulpati procession of Mangalini at Gorkha Darbar (left).

Ciniachamba and Kamala, household Mangalini of the late Brigadier General Aditya Shumsher Rana (above).

Mangalini sing for Dasain rituals at Hanumandhoka (far right).



stronger the further westward. Women in many Tarai communities sing auspicious songs for life-cycle rites and worship.

Courtesans also sang romantic songs and danced in the palaces but were not a part of rituals. The Mangalini of Nepal are closer to the Nepali folk tradition of married women singing life-cycle songs rather than courtesan traditions, and are themselves married women with children.

One point that sets singers of devotional songs apart from others is that the singers themselves are harnessing the auspiciousness inherent in women with their life-giving powers. In Nepal's Hindu society, a married woman with her fertility channeled into patriarchy is considered auspicious.

'The auspicious state ... is the quintessence of normal life in society. It is most fully realised in the state of marriage, and most clearly symbolised in the emblems which the married woman is allowed and expected to wear,' Tingey writes, explaining the colour red and vermilion in the hair.

When singing, the Mangalini wear red depicting fertility, and during the Phagu festival in spring, vermilion powder (abir) symbolises the menstrual blood of the goddess, a potent symbol of fertility.

'The Mangalini become the Mother Goddess's handmaidens in a rite which bestows fertility and life,' Tingey writes.

Menstrual blood is considered impure by Hindus, but it is a powerful symbol of the power of regeneration. Tingey further elaborates on this paradox, noting that what is 'auspicious' and what

is 'pure' are not always the same in Hindu society. For example, Damai musicians are 'impure', but auspicious. In contrast, a Brahmin widow is 'pure', but inauspicious.

Virgin worship of kanya is sacred during most auspicious occasions, but women fall from the status of goddesses when they get married. For example, women are barred from worshipping the Goddess Durga in Nepal's Dasain rituals, women are not allowed to be priests and officiators of rituals, and several bhajan groups of Kathmandu restrict women.

Women of menstruating age were not always sidelined from religious roles and at one time, fertile women were the creators of auspiciousness, venerated of deities, and sanctifiers of religious rituals. The role of women who sing auspicious songs is therefore a unique one in Nepal's Hindu society, which gives religious roles to women of childbearing age.

But as patriarchy got more entrenched, women were replaced by male priests who cemented their role as 'pure'. The Mangalini repertoire is unique in Nepal's folk tradition, says Tingey, describing it as a distinct genre of music, different from other folk songs in rhythm, pitch and structure.

Already, in the late 1980s, Tingey wrote that the Mangalini tradition was in decline, so much so that a new cohort had to be hired, the lyrics had to be revised and the women retrained by classical musicians.

From the cohort of 16 Mangalini active in the 1980s, only six survive today. Three new singers have been hired on a contract basis to supplement the singing on Dasain, and on other days, the Mangalini serve as palace guards at Hanuman Dhoka museum.

"We used to sing for daily worship and rituals. We met the royals, and that was an unforgettable experience," recalls an emotional Rohita Suwal.

Dhankumari Dangol also tears up at the memory: "The royals were always so kind, asking us to eat, rest, while we were singing. We feel like we lost a guardian."

Outside of the Shah palace, Tingey knew of only two Mangalini, in the household of General Aditya Shumsher Rana, one in her 40s and her aunt in the 60s. It is doubtful that the tradition survives in any former royal household today.

The Narayanhiti Mangalini are a living, but endangered, legacy of a unique intangible Nepali heritage that involved women in the religious sphere. 🇳🇵

Sewa Bhattarai is a freelance journalist. Her series, On The Margins, will focus on folk music, folklore, and mythology of Nepal's marginalised communities.

Song of the Mangalini

On Phulpati, the seventh day of Dasain, the Hanuman Dhoka courtyard is a hive of activity. Although Nepal's erstwhile royal family lived at Narayanhiti palace, rituals involving the royal family were held here, the seat of Prithvi Narayan Shah after his defeat of the Malla kingdom.

A military band in white coats plays western horn and drums, and another group wearing black daura suruwal plays traditional Nepali musical instruments. Upstairs, the Mangalini sing a hymn to Ganesh to mark the beginning of the ceremony, later descending into the courtyard.

by poet Nir Bikram Pyasi. The language of classical songs in the court changed drastically after King Mahendra implemented a one-language policy in the 1960s, and directed that all classical songs be sung in Nepali. The pure Nepali language of the Mangalini songs is obviously in keeping with this edict.

It is possible that there were more songs in the Mangalini repertoire which are forgotten today. One such song was recorded by Carol Tingey at the home of Aditya Shumsher Rana, which the Mangalini of Hanuman Dhoka do not sing:



SEWA BHATTARAI

Dhan Kumari Dangol leads the group of nine women, dressed in a gold brocade top and skirt, a big gold and red velvet umbrella held over her head (pictured).

As the bands leave the courtyard in a procession to Jamal, the Mangalini join them. The bands play some western and some traditional Nepali music with rifles firing salutes along the way. At Jamal, the Mangalini first honour the goddess Durga with a devotional song.

Because they are not using instruments, the Mangalini songs are often drowned out by the other bands. But their presence is central to the Dasain rituals. Only when they create an auspicious ambience with their voices will the men take up the Phulpati palanquin and return to Hanuman Dhoka for the Vedic rituals.

When the worship of the goddess Durga commences next, the Mangalini sing hymns to her in the popular Malashri tune that depicts Durga as a warrior. A goat is sacrificed to chants and music.

Versions of the songs exist in other parts of South Asia, but these have Nepali lyrics revised

*O goddess Bhairavi, Gorkhanath, give us darshan
The first goddess was born in Kailash
Light shines in all four directions, sixty four yoginis accompany the goddess
Gorkhanath gave a dream, to worship Bhairavi...*

*He conquered his penance and appeared, and Nepal became his royal seat
On his head the sindur and crown shine, on his ear the earring shines
The divine complexioned Rana Bahadur, performed many penances*

It tells the story of the Shah family's relationship with Gorakhnath and goddess Durga. The song contains the essence of the folktale that a Shah King conquered Nepal after receiving boons from Gorakhnath and Bhairavi. The song also mentions Shah King Rana Bahadur, believed to be its creator.

The Mangalini repertoire is thus also a valuable historical record but it is possible that more of these songs have been lost as the tradition declined elsewhere.

Bana tradition of Gorkha Darbar was still fully operational at that time. So I had a wonderful opportunity of hearing all the temple music, as well as the general repertoire throughout the seasons.

I was very fortunate when I started my PhD research to meet Ramsharan Darnal of the Royal Nepal Academy. And he pointed me to apply for funding for a research fellowship. This gave me a small stipend, but more importantly, gave me a one year visa to stay in the country and freedom to travel where I wanted to. And that was absolutely amazing because it enabled me not only to base myself in Gorkha for the majority of the research, but to travel far and wide out to Jumla and Kalikot, and to east Nepal. It was just a wonderful opportunity to hear Panche Baja from a whole range of different regions and to compare regional variations in the tradition.

Then I met Gopal Pariyar at one of the weddings, the first one I went to. He became my research assistant and was just worth his weight in gold. He introduced me to so many people, took me to various festivals, and was the perfect assistant. Just the local knowledge on the ground, so that worked really well. I found out about the amazing repertoire that Panche Baja musicians have. I also found that like musicians elsewhere around the world, the musicians are not well paid, and occupy a

low status in society. Their level of expertise and dedication to the music is not recognised.

How did you come across the Mangalini?

I had no knowledge at all of the Mangalini tradition until I was involved in the Dasain celebrations in Gorkha. During the Phulpati procession, there were three Mangalini accompanying the Kalash, they were singing at intervals along the route, with the Panche Baja and the Nagara Bana all playing as well. I found out what their role was, and was minded then to find out more and carry out some post-doctoral research into that tradition.

I couldn't find any recent resources relating to the Nepali tradition, but read around parallel traditions in India. And then I went to Nuwakot for Dasain, and spent my time with five Mangalini. They were very willing to share their knowledge and their beautiful singing, and I made some lovely recordings.

What was your experience of working in Nepal?

I learnt Nepali and in Gorkha, my language gradually improved so that I was able to communicate more and more effectively, and understand more of my specialist area. But when I went back to Kathmandu, I couldn't then have intellectual conversations about

politics or literature or anything else, I didn't have the vocabulary for that sort of Nepali conversation. But for everything else, my vocabulary was sufficient.

I found it much harder to settle back into western life than to take up a Nepali lifestyle. That took me by surprise. But there are still things that I've learnt. Like how valuable water is. And we mustn't take it for granted to just turn on the tap and get fresh clean drinking water. That lesson has remained with me even till today.

I used to take a bus from Kathmandu to Khairanitar. It would be full, and there would be goats on the roof. I changed buses to go to Gorkha, where I rented a little two-room flat. That included the delivery of a jar of water every day. There was a toilet out at the back that I shared with the other occupants of the building. I had my little paraffin stove, and went to the market every day, and cooked dal bhat.

I often walked to the weddings to record the Panche Baja, carrying a big and heavy tape recorder and a Sony Walkman. The reel to reel tapes recorded 90 minutes on each side. I used up maybe 8 sets of cassettes in Dasain and 3-4 in a wedding.

Back then, Gorkha was not on a tourist route and I was a novelty there. People were curious, and I was never on my own. I'd have people dropping in for a chat, and children

on their way to school. People just took me to their heart, and it was lovely, a very very nice time. It was a simple and very happy existence there because I was made to feel so welcome by all the local people.

You sort of disappeared from Nepal's ethnomusicology scene, what have you been up to?

When I was working on the Mangalini research, I was already pregnant with my daughter. And that, then, gave me a new direction in life. I completed the post-doctoral research that I was involved in, but then thought it wasn't viable to be travelling back and forth to Nepal with a small child. I re-trained and became a teacher and stayed in Britain. My life took a new direction. I always intended to pick up the research again, but other things happened and I haven't done so.

How do you look back on your work today?

I look back on my research with fondness. It continues to add to my life even today. For years my recordings sat in a box in my room. Then they were digitised and uploaded by the British Library, where they found new audiences. Even today, people continue to find me and tell me about the work they are doing around my research. That is a very fulfilling feeling.

EVENTS

**It's lit**

Prepare for the upcoming February edition of the Nepal Literature Festival, an annual international literary event in Pokhara. 15 February, Pokhara

Mountains and oceans

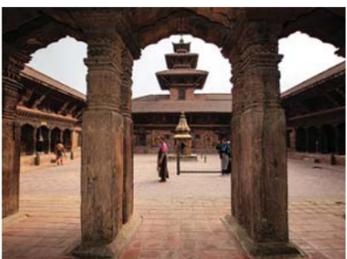
The Harmony of Mountains and Oceans, a collaborative showcase by Nepali and Korean artists promoting cultural creativity opens its doors this weekend. 5pm, Gallery M Cube, Patan

**Art for life**

The Kathmandu Art Biennale: Spiritual edition is now officially open, featuring 80 artists and 100 creations. Till April, Museum of Nepali Art, Thamel

Glitz and glamour

Queer Honky-Tonk invites you to "Drag Expressions," a sensational drag show that promises an evening of glitter, glamour, and boundless self-expression. 3 February, Kaalo Ko Gupha, Patan

**Patan walk**

Experience the rich cultural tapestry of Patan in a unique and meaningful way with a Newa dinner, all while contributing to a good cause. 17 February, Patan

DINING

**Baker's Den**

Celebrate birthdays or treat yourself with a just-because with Baker's Den. Also enjoy fresh doughnuts, muffins, and bread. Bhatbhateni (01) 4416560

MUSIC

All that jazz

Immerse in an afternoon of wines, live music, and culinary delights at All That Jazz. Call for info on tickets. 27 January, 1:30pm onwards, Roadhouse, Bhatbhateni, Tickets: Rs1500

**Beatles fever**

Dinesh Rai and the Heartbreakers, joined by Upendra Lal Singh, are set to elevate the weekend mood with classic Beatles tunes. 27 January, 6pm onwards, GAA Hall, Thamel

**Axix time**

Axix makes its debut performance in Bhaktapur Music Festival, joined by Surmount Nepal for an unforgettable experience. 10 February, 2pm onwards, Imperial Banquet, Bhaktapur

**Punk sounds**

Save the date for an epic night of diverse metal and punk sounds from musicians from India and Nepal. 10 February, Namaste Pub, Thamel

Hiphop love

Catch R DEN in a live, unforgettable hip-hop performance on Valentine's Day. 14 February, Hidden Club and Lounge, Thamel

**Cafe Soma**

Savour brunch and desserts at Soma's Baluwater spot or find a quiet workspace at the Jawalakhel location. Baluwater (01) 4415792

Embassy

Dine in the centrally located restaurant with a lively atmosphere and diverse menu. Lazimpat, 9802024040

About Town

GETAWAY

**Jagatpur Lodge**

Jagatpur Lodge's five-star tents and rooms provide two unique experiences: proximity to nature in the former, and breathtaking views from private decks in the latter. Jagatpur, Chitwan (01) 4221711

Raniban Retreat

Explore a unique eco-friendly boutique hotel atop Raniban forest, a serene escape offering tailored tranquility and stunning Himalayan views. Pokhara (01) 5185435

**Peacock Guest House**

Peacock Guest House is a 700-year-old UNESCO guest house in Bhaktapur's Old City featuring Newa architecture. Enjoy local cuisine and join the Himalayan Wood Carving Workshop. Tachupal Tole, Dattatreya Square, Bhaktapur (01) 6611829

Dalai-La Boutique Hotel

Escape Kathmandu's chaos at Dalai-La Boutique Hotel, which offers serenity and historic charm with artefacts over 50 years old. Thamel (01) 4701436

**Fish Tail Lodge**

Nestled by the tranquil side of Phewa Lake, this must-visit lodge, surrounded by blue waters, boasts innovative architecture and breathtaking mountain views. Phewa Lake, Pokhara (61) 465071

Jatra Cafe

Enjoy diverse options like sandwiches and pasta, but don't miss the authentic Samaya Baji Newari khaaja set at Jatra Cafe. Thamel (01) 4256622

**Gangnam Galbi Barbeque**

Go on a gastronomic tour of Korea. Indulge in tempting Korean barbecue, galbi, and flavorful stick food that will tantalise taste buds. Naxal (01) 4434780

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Cold and Dry**

The winter dry spell continues, although there will be some snow and sleet in the higher elevations. The mountains of western Nepal will get slightly more precipitation, but the westerlies are mostly dry. There is a weather anomaly because the maximum temperature will be 3°C below normal, and the minimum dipping down to 2-3°C in Kathmandu over the weekend. The cold means prolonged fog in the Tarai (Thursday satellite image, left).

| FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 16° 1° | 16° 2° | 17° 3° |

OUR PICK

Award-winning young chef Carmy Berzatto, who works in a Michelin star restaurant in New York, returns home to Chicago after he inherits his family's sandwich shop following the death of his brother. Once home, Carmy finds himself having to deal with his brother's unresolved debts, as he navigates his family's and his own grief. All the while, he is faced with a decrepit, failing workplace—a far cry from the world of fine dining that he has become used to. The critically-acclaimed series stars Jeremy Allen White, Ebon Moss-Bachrach, Ayo Edebiri, Abby Elliot and more.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI

Make your heart like a lake
with a calm, still surface



and great depths of kindness.

- Lao Tzu

Miss Moti-vation
Kripa KreaTions

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

Not a nation of villages anymore

New publication says the rural-urban divide is blurring as the two feed on each other

■ Chaitanya Mishra

Nepal's history of urbanisation is 500 years old with the conglomeration of Kathmandu Valley. But even till recently, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala called Nepal a country of villages (गाउँले गरिएको देश).

But villages were never separate from cities, the two existing in a symbiotic relationship. And, sorry, but Nepal is not a nation of villages anymore.

The proportion of Nepalis living in urban areas grew from 23% (2011) to 66% (2017) using criteria such as land use, population density, services, and infrastructure.

Income source diversification has taken place among village dwellers if not villages all across Asia, including in Nepal. The nature and size of household and nature of social relations in villages have also changed rapidly. Access to media for information, the nature of imagination, and the village dwellers' hopes and fears have also changed.

The rise of the urban culture has brought out the previously circumscribed sense of personal, political, economic possibilities and imagination among rural dwellers, but in particular to Nepal's women, Dalits and other identity-marginalised. It is a different matter that not all can realise what they imagine.

At the heart of the rural-urban categorisation is the nature of social relations – whether they are durable, intense, narrow-yet-sharp, and shared within a kinship network and the neighborhood.

With urban decay, there is an over-romanticisation of the rural in Nepal as being natural, pure, clean, or honest. There is surely a lightness of being while visiting villages and a tourist enjoys the destination not so much for the nature of the destination itself, but because the visitor is able to briefly forget the city's struggles.

There are those who have permanently moved to rural areas or their ancestral villages, and tried to go native as journalists Kedar Sharma and Narayan Wagle have done and recount in a conversation in the Nepali language volume *संकथन* (Discourse) on Nepal's rural world published by Niraj Bhari and edited by Rabin Giri. This reverse trend to urban drift is unique enough to be remarked upon.

The longstanding discourse of a self-sufficient and even subsistent village families is passé as the idea of Nepal being somehow unique in relation to the rest of the world.

Rural and urban are not opposites but mutually connected, and one feeds on the other. Globalisation and capitalism have entered the interior and caught the most valuable resource there, labour power, by the scruff of the neck and yanked it out.

Migrants from villages of Nepal are in diverse occupations in cities in Nepal, India, East and West Asia, Europe, Australia and North America. Within a hierarchically globalised system, 'sovereignty' is often nominal. World-scale international flows and not merely internal structures and processes today shape the ship of state.

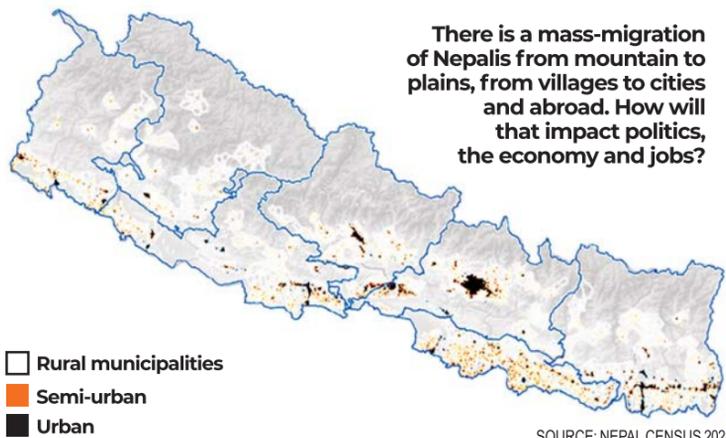
A village is no longer what it was. It is still small, but it has changed, as Sujata Tamang, Basanta Basnet, and Basanta Thapa observe in their contributions.



ABHUSHAN GAUTAM SHAKYA

URBAN NEPAL

There is a mass-migration of Nepalis from mountain to plains, from villages to cities and abroad. How will that impact politics, the economy and jobs?



The people who live there are also not the same. This historical hastening was slow to arrive in Nepal, but picked up in the 1980s.

In addition, the rural has not been the opposite of the urban. The changing village comes up in many of the chapters in this book, among them by Mohan Mainali and Nabin Poudel of the 'lonely village' which gave life to many stalwarts but are forsaken.

The change that takes place in rural settings is often not something that people there prioritise, as Indu Tharu writes. In the larger scheme of things, all of us are the Raute described and exquisitely photographed by Kishor Sharma for the volume. We are all unrecognised and feared in some way or other, and share their powerlessness and predicament.

Rakesh Chaudhari writes that villages of Nepal now suffer the same blight as the cities. The city is supposed to be an artificial space that is somehow impure, dark, sly, immoral. Cities certainly need improvement, and we aspire to live in a livable city in which a minimum stable and relaxed social relations can be built.

I doubt if the notion of a village-within-a-city can be realised, as proposed by Abani Adhikari. On the other hand, cities like Kathmandu can indeed be improved with the idea of regenerating social relations.

Kunda Dixit's composition in *संकथन* tells us about both the need to reimagine cities as also about the unlikelihood of such re-imagining. Instead, he draws our attention to a powerful pull of historical reversal in which city dwellers, given the nearly overwhelming dynamics of pollution and climate-induced heat stress, willingly desert the urban heat bubble to return to the village. This is a warning we should all think over and possibly act upon as citizens, authors, journalists, politicians, policymakers.

In his essay in this collection, former Prime Minister and urban planner Baburam Bhattarai, PhD, posits that a 'rural revolution' is no longer necessary in Nepal. It depends on how we define 'revolution', but we should still try to empower rural areas and the people there to become far more assertive vis-à-vis the centre, its inhabitants and governments.

Part of this, of course, has to do with the handover of the constitutionally mandated power to local governments, as pointed out by Parvati Sunuwar and Rabin Giri in his editorial in *संकथन*. So, there is indeed a need to revive the "गाउँ गाउँबाट उठ" chant.

The rising up, however, must not be of the Maoist variety. It has to be built up by realising the potential political strength of the agricultural labourers, the peasantry

as well as larger farmers.

It is also needed because much of the popular struggles will be waged in the city or, as Hari Sharma reminds us, in the immediate periphery of the larger cities, affecting national politics.

The political basis of rural decline globally is the flow of natural resources, labour, and capital. We must also recognise that it is a historically change-prone routine. The Siwalik/Chure and the lower Mahabharat were key sites of prehistoric human migration and habitation.

Despite the Maoist armed struggle and a new Constitution, the state has remained completely unresponsive to the agricultural and employment needs of rural peoples. Politicians have neglected concerns of the rural areas they were elected from. The puny state investment in agriculture could do with the feminisation of farming. Dalit, Madhesi and subsistence farmers fall between the cracks because of their feeble political voice. The village is therefore politically poor.

And when the poor migrate to the cities, the Nepali word पलायन has come to have a negative connotation. The nationalist over boil has also contributed to the discourse of the coffins that arrive everyday with bodies of migrant workers from the Gulf or Malaysia – even when we know that the death rate in that age cohort among similar demographic groups within Nepal may not be that different.

Finally, this rural cultural feebleness has also found coinage in the discourse of 'fatalism' – especially among illiterate village dwellers. Between 25-30% of farms in Nepal are estimated to have been abandoned in the past two decades. This is a huge figure with major consequences.

It is outrageous that there is an absolute absence of political and policy initiatives to reverse this trend with ownership, taxation, rent-fixing interventions.

It should also lead to the formation of mid-size and larger farms, competent government,

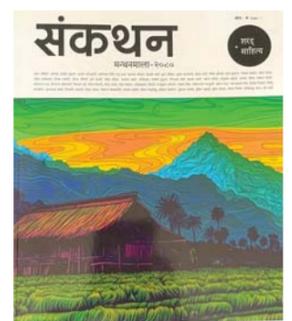
private extension agents and researchers, a system of subsidies. A techno-economic framework for dis-fallowing and cropping must be undertaken.

Seasonal high-value low-labour farms that grow trees, fruit, tea and coffee, herbs, vegetables and other 'opportunistic' crops can be grown on fallow terraces. Processing centres, integrated cropping and marketing systems can add values to what is grown.

Denser roadside settlements with transportation facilities and formation of market centers would prevent urban encroachment of farmlands. These centres should have quality public health and education systems that are affordable and accessible.

Many of these initiatives have to be implemented by and through local governments with support from the other two tiers. This will also have the benefit that political parties will be forced to grow from local grassroots upwards. Unaccountable leaders and parties will then risk withering away.

We need a new discourse of governance that germinates at the grassroots. Not through old and rootless ideologies, but political and policy practice at the level of workers, producers, sellers, consumers. 🇳🇵



गाउँ-सहर

Adapted from Chaitanya Mishra's address at the launch of the collection, *संकथन* on 23 December. Professor Mishra teaches Sociology to MPhil/PhD students at Tribhuvan University. His research focuses on macrosociology, politics, social change, and social stratification.

GRASS IS GREENER OVERSEAS FOR NEPAL'S DOCTORS

Migration of physicians leads to a shortage of specialists, weakening a precarious medical system

■ Sagar Budathoki

In 2009, Samir Lama completed his MBBS and then passed all three stages of the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE), making him eligible to practice in the US. However, he returned to Nepal in a year, opting to serve his own people instead.

Lama pursued a three-year residency in General Medical Practice at the Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu sponsored by the Nick Simons Institute and was later placed at the District Hospital in Piuthan under a three-year contract.

Eventually, at a medical college in Chitwan, Lama's monthly salary was Rs80,000, a relatively meagre sum for someone with three years of post-MD work experience. Dissatisfied, he established his own polyclinic in Chitwan.

But today, he is based in Britain, working as a resident physician in general practice.

"There are difficulties living and working in Nepal," Lama tells us by phone. "Becoming a doctor through civil service is difficult, and a physician's life is financially challenging even in private practice."

In 2017, Murari Barakoti completed a one-year fellowship in Interventional Cardiology, and preferred to work in Singapore and the Maldives rather than stay in Nepal. He blames the lack of expertise-based remuneration in

Nepal for his decision.

"In the Maldives, doctors get ten to twenty times the pay they would normally get in Nepal," says Barakoti, who is among 1,100 Nepali doctors working in the Maldives today. Ironically, many students from Maldives come to Nepal's medical colleges for their education.

Sandesh Parajuli, a government scholarship recipient for MBBS in Pakistan, worked for two years at Gandaki Provincial Hospital after he returned. In 2020, he took the medical officer exam at Lumbini Provincial Hospital, and the results are still pending.

Tired of waiting, Parajuli completed his USMLE online and is now in the US. He says, "There is a sense of fulfilment serving patients in my own country, but the working environment in Nepal for doctors is not conducive. Of my 20 closest friends, only one is still working in Nepal."

It is generally known that young Nepalis are leaving the country by the tens of thousands every year for undergraduate studies in Australia, Canada or Japan. Less well known is this haemorrhage of doctors and nurses.

The depletion of medical personnel has further weakened the country's already fragile healthcare system, and added to the shortage of specialists. Despite an annual

turnover of 2,000 to 2,500 MBBS graduates, Nepal faces a severe shortage of doctors, especially in remote parts of the country.

The Nepal Medical Council (NMC) has nearly 35,000 registered doctors, including 10,588 specialists. But there is no exact figure for working professionals. A 2015 study by the Council reported that approximately 36% of doctors are working abroad, but the actual proportion is estimated to be much higher.

Doctors planning to leave are mandatorily required to present a Good Standing Certificate (GSC), and the Medical Education Commission issued 1,025 GSCs just between April to December 2023. Commission sources say the demand for GSCs has surged in the past four years.

The majority of Nepali doctors

have chosen to migrate to the UK, with 1,578 physicians acquiring certificates since 2020. The US is the second most popular destination, with 888 Nepali doctors moving there to practice in the same period. Opportunities in Australia, UAE, Canada, and Qatar are also on the rise.

Sanjeev Sapkota, president of the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA), estimates that of its total membership, 5,000 are doctors and medical specialists. Many others who have migrated have not bothered to become NRNA members. Worryingly, government scholarship recipients make up a rising number of migrant physicians — depriving state-run hospitals in the country of specialists.

Some doctors seek improved working conditions, while others, frustrated with unemployment or exploitation in Nepal's private hospitals, choose to start anew. They are attracted by the promise of higher earnings, and a better future for their families.

1:150,000

Completing an MBBS degree generally takes six years, and those studying on government scholarships are obligated to work in a rural hospital for an additional two years. During this period, they have no time for further study or to sit for civil service exams. However, once the commitment is fulfilled, they are left without a paying job.

"Despite some incentives for further studies after MBBS, many graduates struggle because of low salaries and uncertain future prospects," says Shambu Khanal of the Lumbini Provincial Hospital.

Postgraduate study opportunities are also hard to get due to limited annual seats of around 2,000. Additionally, a small number of subject-specific seats further complicates matters, particularly for those candidates below the top 500, barring them

from pursuing preferred medical disciplines. Without government support, individuals must bear all expenses themselves, discouraging many more aspiring Nepali doctors from pursuing MD/MS degrees.

This in turn is leading to a chronic shortage of specialists in Nepal. The 'Human Resources for Health (HRH) Projection in Nepal, 2079-2087' reveals a deficit of 5,779 specialists, with the annual production growth rate falling short at 6.41%, thus widening the gap in the doctor-to-population ratio.

At present, there is only 1 doctor for every 850 people in the Kathmandu Valley which is better than the WHO-recommended 1 per 1,000. But this ratio goes down to 1 per 150,000 in remote districts. Despite depopulation of the mountain districts, there is a dire need to retain qualified medical staff in rural Nepal.

The absence of diverse medical expertise, coupled with government oversight of emerging disciplines, leaves returning professionals with no acknowledgment or motivation. The country therefore faces a critical shortage of specialised doctors, particularly in cardiology, surgery, gynaecology, and neurology.

A recent study by the Medical Education Commission showed a shortfall in surgeons: there are only 660 when the country needs a minimum of 808. Medical generalists face a similar deficit, with just 349 working actively against the 1,115 required. The study also foresees a demand for 1,223 medical generalists in 7 years, factoring in population growth.

Doctors in specialised services in new fields face challenges due to inadequate infrastructure and equipment. Even those willing to work in government hospitals struggle to secure positions.

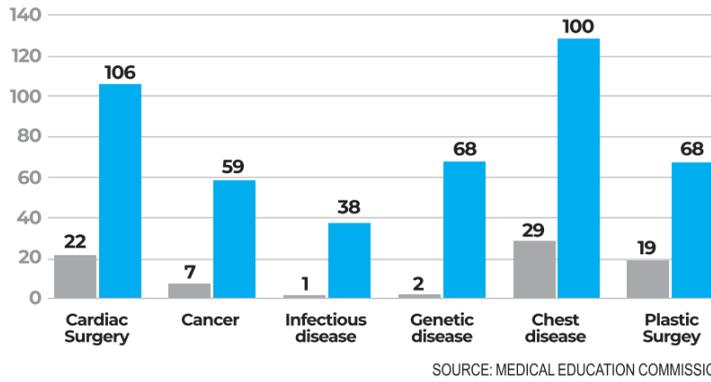
Dharmagat Bhattarai, who is specialising in paediatric clinical immunology and rheumatology,



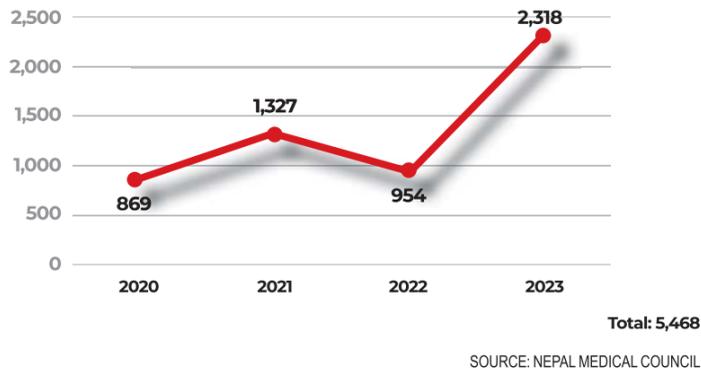


PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI

SPECIALISTS
Availability vs Need



Total 'Good Standing' certificates from NMC
(required by emigrating doctors)



says there is an urgent need for specialised doctors, especially for diagnosing and treating rare diseases in children.

“After MBBS, graduates work as interns in hospitals for a year. Although hospital administrators assign them duties, they do not get adequate compensation,” says Bijay Parajuli, who specialises in pediatric critical care, rheumatology, congenital heart diseases, and neurosurgery.

He adds: “In Pakistan, I received

a monthly stipend of Rs44,000 after MBBS while interns in Nepal are getting only Rs9,000.”

Resident doctors pursuing MD/MS face a similar fate. Overworked doing hospital health check-ups, filling prescriptions, and handling ward responsibilities, their studies are often hampered—and all this for poor pay. While countries like the USA, UK, and Canada waive tuition fees for MD/MS programs, resident doctors in Nepal have to struggle for better remuneration.

A government hospital resident earns an average of Rs48,000 monthly. However, those working in private medical colleges are compelled to work for less than Rs20,000.

Some doctors say residents in private hospitals often have to work for 36 hours straight, multiple times a month. Vishad Dahal, an internal medicine student at Kathmandu Medical College, faced suspension for questioning a 20 extra-curricular health camp. His suspension has now been revoked.

NMC’s ‘Regulations for Postgraduate Medical Education (MD-MS Programs) 2017’ states that postgraduate residents should not be assigned duty for more than 24 hours per week.

Typically, it takes an average of 12 years to complete MD, even after graduation. This means most doctors would not have finished their studies even in their early 30s. Moreover, the cost of private medical education is expensive and often exceeds Rs10 million.

And after all that, there is still no job security, not to mention the years it takes to recover the investment. This prompts many to consider working or studying abroad.

“The rise in Nepali doctors moving abroad demands urgent attention. While it may seem routine at first glance, the trend can potentially cause a scarcity of experts,” admits Shri Krishna Giri, past president of the Medical Education Commission.

He adds: “Restricting doctors from seeking opportunities overseas may not be a practical solution. The challenge lies in finding a nuanced approach that recognises and addresses the multifaceted factors contributing to this exodus.”

With additional reporting by Yugottam Koirala.

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Kathmandu Art Biennale begins

The once in two years pageant builds on Nepal's artistic heritage with contemporary works

■ Anita Bhetwal

With over 80 participating artists and 100 exhibits, the Kathmandu Art Biennale has kicked off and will be showcasing contemporary works till 18 April. The Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA) in

Thamel has grown into a hub for artists and the public through landmark exhibitions and workshops. Now, the museum and gallery has launched its inaugural Biennale.

"Nepali visual arts breathe life into the country's culture, traditions, and way of life," says MoNA's founder Rajan Shakya. "Despite the recent impact of technology

and the rise of artificial intelligence, these exhibitions remain crucial for recognising and expanding the artistic capabilities of individuals."

Despite state neglect of the arts and artists, private galleries have been building on Nepal's artistic heritage to promote contemporary creations.

"We need a concerted effort to safeguard art and support artists, which is why the Biennale has an important function," Shakya adds.

Here we feature three artists Udaya Charan Shrestha, Meena Kayastha, Manish Dhwoju, and their noteworthy creations. 🇳🇵



PHOTO COURTESY: MANISH DHOJU

Patan in pencil

Manish Dhwoju, 23, depicts the iconic golden window of the Patan Darbar Square in 'Hyperrealistic Drawing' meticulously crafted using pencils. He has an intricate fusion of wood and gold on the window to represent Hindu and Buddhist gods and goddesses. The golden window is one of the first things that visitors to the old palace square notice, and at the Biennale too, the artwork gets special prominence on

the second floor.

For artists like Dhwoju who spent months or years creating art, the opportunity to showcase their work is a dream come true.

Says Dhwoju: "New artists need a platform more than those who are already established. Exhibitions are not held that frequently, and even when they are, established artists dominate, making it difficult for new artists to find space."



Giving faces to a deity

Titled Gayatri, this masterpiece in devotional art by Udaya Charan Shrestha took over 20 years to complete and is the first time an artist has given a face to the goddess of the revered Gayatri Mantra.

The goddess, crowned with a crescent moon, gracefully holds various objects in her ten hands, including a conch, discus, mace, skull, and lotus flower. She is portrayed in a state of

deep meditation and has a serene disposition.

"I started working on this during my studies at Lalitkala College, and I was initially inspired by a postcard of Gayatri," says Shrestha. "I am rather pleased with the outcome, if I may say so myself." The artist researched sacred texts, tantric literature, periodicals, and other references to authentically represent the goddess.



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

A wedding for the ages

Meena Kayastha invested nine months in crafting this relief titled Gham Pani Gham Pani Syal Ko Bihe that takes off from a Nepali ditty about the sun shining through the rain. The work is a playful take on a wedding with a Brahmin cat officiating the matrimony of a fox couple. A dog, donkey, lion, frog, monkey are also frolicking in this whimsical scene.

Kayastha worked on childhood memories from

Bhaktapur when she got home from school drenched in the rain. Her grandparents were worried about her catching a cold. "In retrospect, those days feel like a spiritual journey and meditation," she explains.

"Seeing everything come together was a good feeling, and the joy of the creative process was profound," says Kayastha. "If it sells, that will be an encouragement to create another."

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