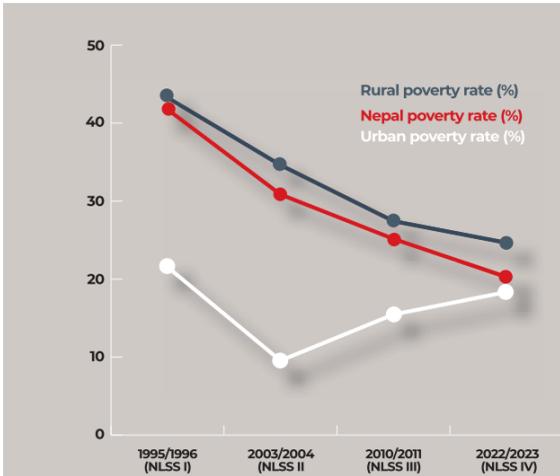




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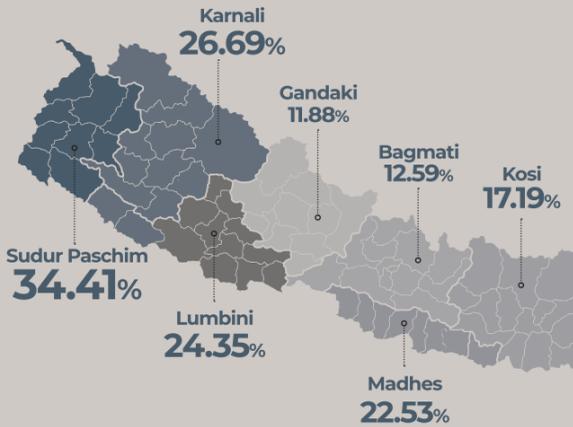


### Centre-Periphery

One-fifth of Nepal's 30 million people live below the poverty line, down from 41.76% when the survey was first conducted in 1995. Nepalis living in urban areas are more prosperous than those who live in rural Nepal, but while the rural poverty rate has declined over the years, the proportion of city-dwellers who are poor has been increasing since 2004. Sixty-six percent of Nepalis now live in urban or peri-urban areas.

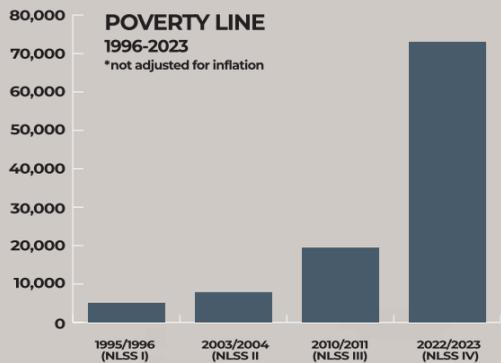
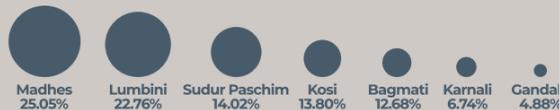
### Decentralised poverty

As expected, the poverty rate is highest in Sudur Paschim (34%) and Karnali (27%). But because of their lower population, Sudur Paschim has 14% of Nepal's total poor, while Karnali has only 6.7%. Twelve percent of the people in Gandaki Province are below the poverty line, and this represents only 4.8% of the country's poor. Over 22% of the people in Madhes Province live below the poverty line, but a quarter of Nepal's poorest people live there.



### Distribution of the poor

(in % of total population below poverty line)



### Could be better

Nepal's poverty line, which is the minimum expenditure needed by an individual to fulfil their basic food and non-food needs, has been revised to Rs72,908. The poverty line in 2011 was Rs19,261 per person annually, which when adjusted for inflation in 2023 is Rs42,845. The poverty line was then calibrated as per international standards, improved consumption patterns, and monetisation of the economy.

## POOR NEPAL

The new Nepal Living Standard Survey shows that the quality of life has improved for most in the last decade, mainly due to remittances, but almost 6 million Nepalis still live below the poverty line. The survey puts the new cutoff at an annual income of Rs72,908 which is adjusted for inflation, and deemed necessary to pay for everyday needs.

Still, compared to 2011 Nepalis have better access to phones, electricity, education and health facilities. Today, 25% of households have motorcycles, compared to just 10% a decade ago, 93% have mobile phones. Nearly half of those in the 5-16 age group are now enrolled in secondary schools, it was less than one-third in 2011.

Not rising Nepal  
EDITORIAL  
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# Not rising Nepal

Figures tell one story, the reality is something different. Nepal's macroeconomic indicators are rosy: foreign exchange reserves can sustain 1 year and 3 months of imports, remittances are up, and inflation is manageable. But on the streets, shutters are down, and newspapers are full of bank notices for collateral auctions.

This week, the National Statistics Office published findings of the fourth Nepal Living Standards Survey and it showed that the proportion of Nepalis living below the poverty line had dropped from 25.16% in 2011 to 20.27% in 2023.

The Office hastened to clarify that the poverty rate would have been only 3.57% if the annual income threshold was kept at the level of the 2011 survey, which was Rs19,261. That cutoff was adjusted for inflation to Rs42,845 and

revised further to Rs72,908 taking into account international standards for poverty, and improvements in consumption patterns.

That the poverty rate has gone down is no surprise.

What is a surprise is that it has not gone down further. Despite the lofty preamble of the 2015 Constitution for inclusion, political devolution and guarantees that basic needs would be met, political malfunction is still keeping almost 6 million Nepalis in grinding poverty.

When the first Nepal Living Standards Survey was conducted between 1995-1996 (five years after the end of the Panchayat) 41.76% of the country's population lived below the poverty line. By the time the second survey was carried out seven years later, the country was in the throes of a violent conflict. Even so, the poverty rate had declined to 30.85%.

Statisticians said they were expecting the poverty rate to be 15%. The National Planning Commission's Min Bahadur Shrestha attributed the results to the 2015 earthquake, the pandemic and other disasters.

Interestingly, while the rural poverty rate has been declining severely since 1996, and is at 24.66% in the current survey, urban poverty has been on the rise since 2004 and is at 18.34% now.

Among the provinces, Sudur Pashchim has the highest poverty rate at 34.16%, but because of its sparse population, the total number of poor is lower than in Madhes and Lumbini. Still, rural Sudur Paschim has the highest proportion of poor at 40%.

Gandaki Province has the highest living

standard, with only 11.88% of the population below the poverty line, and has only 5% of the poor people in Nepal. Madhes Province has 25% of poor Nepalis.

Still, it does not seem to matter whether a district is poor or less-poor — people are leaving anyway. Six out of nine districts in Karnali Province and eight out of 11 districts in Gandaki Province now have substantially fewer people than there were in 2011.

By 2021, 34 of Nepal's 77 districts (mostly in the mountains) had seen sharp population declines, with mostly young males moving down to the Tarai, the cities or overseas.

This massive outmigration brings in remittances which sustain Nepal's economy, and that in turn raises household income and is the main reason the poverty rate has gone down.

However, experts have warned that this dependency is unsustainable, and is not a long-term guarantee of prosperity. But Kathmandu has treated migration as a safety valve to cover up chronic governance failure, and inability to create jobs at home.

Even so, this remittance-driven reduction in poverty has given households more purchasing power. Nepalis are eating better, and can spend more than before on other basic needs. Almost 94% of Nepali

households now have access to electricity, up from 70% in 2011.

Telephones and mobile device ownership increased from 62% 12 years ago to 94%. One in every four households has

a motorbike, while the average distance to the closest paved road has decreased since 2011.

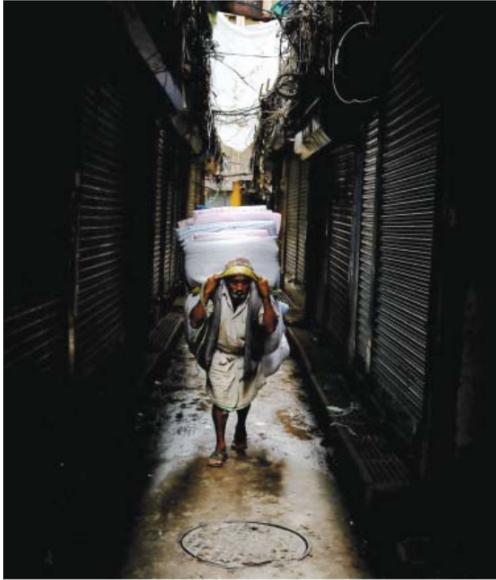
More than 80% of Nepalis live within half an hour of a secondary school. But more than half of the population still lives more than 30 minutes away from government hospitals.

The reality is that people who still live in Nepal's increasingly deserted villages are not just families of those who have member(s) working abroad who send money home, but also those who do not have the means to go anywhere.

These are the poorest of the poor, who do not get enough to eat, cannot afford proper medical care, whose children do not get quality education, and still do not have access to electricity and safe water.

That the national poverty rate has gone down is no consolation to one in every five Nepalis who earns less than Rs72,908 annually.

*Shristi Karki*



SUMAN NEPALI

**Statistics tell us the poverty rate has declined, the reality is different for the poorest Nepalis.**

## ONLINE PACKAGES



COUNTING SHEEP

The Magar people make up the majority of the Rukum East population where sheep rearing was a way of life. But shepherds are now leaving their ancestral occupation due to climate change and outmigration. Join us on a trip to the rugged mountains of western Nepal and listen to the last remaining shepherds. Watch video and read the story on page 10-11.



ANALOGUE PHOTOGRAPHY

Before photos went digital, there were film reels, darkrooms and prints — technology that had not changed since photography was first invented 150 years ago. Analogue photography is staging a comeback worldwide, and there are aficionados in Nepal also trying to keep the technique alive. Subscribe to Nepali Times' YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.

### NAGMATI

This issue needs to be discussed and the intention of those who benefit from ADB and the projects it funds must be questioned ('Nagmati won't clean Bagmati', Editorial, #1198). How was Nagmati given the green light after the disaster in Melamchi? Is there no accountability for those who were involved with designing and approving the Melamchi project?

*Jaw Knock*

■ The risks and rewards of the Nagmati dam will depend on the quality of its construction ('Dam Dangerous', Ramesh Kumar, #1197)

*Sunil Sakya*

### USMLE

We need to get to the bottom of whether or not there was any cheating involved by Nepali test takers in the American medical exams. ('Cheated out of the American Dream', Sonia Awale, #1198).

*Forester*

### NEPAL DEBT

Public debt will balloon as long as Nepal has a federal structure and the economy is aid-dependent ('Soaring Debt', Ramesh Kumar, #1197). Taking loans to implement federalism is plain suicidal and will enhance Nepal's dependency.

*Shyamal Krishna Shrestha*

■ This is a good cautionary write-up, and an eye opener for people suggesting indiscriminate borrowing.

*Prithvi Ligi*

### INVESTMENT IN NEPAL

Fortunately there are entities that in themselves clearly represent the fact that it is exceptions that prove the rule ('Killing investment in Nepal in 10 easy steps, Dibesh Karmacharya, nepalimes.com).

*Tony Jones*

### FUNERAL SPACE

Encroachment for minorities aside, the deteriorating aesthetic, as well as a serene and holy environment for all has been progressively degrading at most funeral sites ('Life after death', Alisha Sijapati, #1197).

*Ivan G Somlai*

## Times.com

### WHAT'S TRENDING

#### Rebirth and rebuilding in the ruins

by Nareesh Newar

Three months after the earthquake in western Nepal, survivors are grappling with the harsh reality of rebuilding their lives. Visit nepalimes.com for the full story.

**f** Most reached and shared on Facebook



#### The godhead of Pharping

by Alisha Sijapati

In 1984 devotees were shocked to see that the carved figure of goddess Saraswati housed in a temple in Pharping had been beheaded. The Saraswati head was eventually returned to Nepal in 1999 by an American collector, and has been in the National Museum in Chhauni ever since. Details on our website.

**X** Most popular on X



#### Killing investment in 10 easy steps

by Dibesh Karmacharya

The odds are stacked against innovation and invention in Nepal, which has become a land of rent-seekers and traders. Read this sobering account of the country's anti-investment culture by a biotech entrepreneur, and join the online discussion.

**66** Most commented

#### Nagmati won't clean Bagmati

Editorial

The Nagmati Dam exposes the inequity of yet another expensive and risky Kathmandu-centric project when less than 25% of Nepalis have clean drinking water, and much of the Karnali suffers chronic food insecurity. Follow us for the latest updates.

**🔥** Most visited online page

### QUOTES

#### Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Ever since I returned to Nepal from the US 16 years ago, I have seen a gradual breakdown of governance. Scientists and innovators are valued even less, which is why there is an exodus of our best and brightest, writes Dibesh Karmacharya.

#### ART @AmulyaSir

Bad governance in Nepal has always been there... it is misleading to hint that it has worsened in the last few decades as if the earlier decades were cleaner: in fact it was much worse and we could not even talk about it or complain due to tyrannical monarchy

#### Hem Sagar Baral @WorshipNature

Very true...pls do listen to what @DibeshKarmacha1 has to say. Ease of doing business in Nepal needs drastic improvement- to ensure FDI and have thriving & responsible business community. Encourage those who wish to stay in /return to Nepal to do good things.

## 1,000 WORDS



**FLOWER POWER:** Opposition leader K P Oli of the UML is welcomed with a 101kg marigold garland at the 10<sup>th</sup> conference of the party's Rautahat district committee on 8 February.

UTTAM KUMAR UPADHYAYA/RSS

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### 28 years since the War

It has been 28 years since the Maoists launched their armed struggle. Maoist-ruled municipalities have defied a court order to mark 13 February as 'People's War Day'. Maoist supremo Pushpa Kamal Dahal is prime minister for the third time since 2008.

But the absence of war is not peace. Equity and prosperity are still a mirage. The transitional justice process is a sham and former guerrillas have denounced their commanders for manipulating them to sacrifice their lives for the cause.

Excerpt from the page 1 report on 8 years of war published 20 years ago this week on issue #183 13-19 February 2004:

Nepalis caught in the middle have fled their villages by the hundreds of thousands. The country's military budget has increased at least three times more than peacetime levels. Most of the money has been diverted from development projects. Weapons are getting more sophisticated: the latest purchases are two Indian-made light attack helicopters that cost Rs500 million apiece.

The Maoists have suffered military setbacks and desertions, but have benefitted from reports of human



rights abuses by the forces as well as fighting between the palace and the parties, and between hawks and doves among Nepal's donors. However, the biggest blow to the Maoists has been the dramatic extradition by India of senior Maoist leaders Matrika Yadav and Suresh Ale this week. An Indian embassy official confirmed the handover. Maoist leader Prachanda lashed back, saying in an online statement: "By kidnapping a popular tarai leader and a member of a downtrodden janjati group, India's

rulers have distanced themselves even further from the hearts of the Nepalis." These are the harshest words the Maoists have used against India in the recent past...

...With the government maintaining a hawkish line, the Maoists are commemorating their anniversary with a series of strikes and sabotage attacks as the palace-party polarisation gets worse, it looks like the country is heading into another spring of turmoil and instability.

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

## Times

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# The role of rituals in royalty

How rituals were used to legitimise Gyanendra's reign after the palace massacre and in Nepal's transition to republic

■ Sahina Shrestha

The 240 year reign of the Shah dynasty in Nepal that ended in 2008 saw palace intrigues, coups, a revolution and massacres. And 16 years after it was abolished, there are calls to reinstate the monarchy.

After Nepal's founding king Prithvi Narayan Shah died in 1775, there were a series of infant and/or weak kings with little to no involvement in government. The country was run by power brokers either from the royal family or its retainers. After Jang Bahadur's coup in 1847, the kings were just puppets.

It was not until 1951 when the Rana regime ended that the Shah kings became more involved. Too involved, in fact. In 1960 King Mahendra staged a coup and dissolved an elected parliament for a 30-year experiment with the partyless system.

After the 1990 democracy movement, King Birendra gave up absolute powers to be a constitutional monarch, but the Maoists immediately launched their armed struggle to end the Hindu monarchy. However, the royal family itself imploded in the 2001 royal massacre, and it took just seven more years for Nepal to become a secular republic.

The political aspects of Nepal's transition from monarchy to republic has been written about extensively, but Anne Taylor Mocko in her book *Unraveling the Crown: Rituals, Politics and the*



NEPALI TIMES #46, 6-14 JUNE 2001

Fall of Kingship in Nepal takes a more historical and anthropological approach. She examines the rituals that make a king a king, and why and how taking away those rituals interrupts the process.

Mocko, who is professor of religion at Concordia College in Minnesota, draws connections between ritual, politics and kingship.

She distinguishes between succession rituals ('those which mark the end of one office-holder's

tenure and the beginning of a new office-holder's tenure') and reinforcement rituals ('that permit the constant reproduction of a social office throughout the duration of the office holder's tenure'). The reinforcement rituals appear to reflect rather than produce a social status.

Mocko expands on this by analysing the rituals following the royal massacre. The massacre left Gyanendra, King Birendra's brother, as the only surviving royal family member eligible to rule.

The book delves into the government handling of the murder investigation. The two-member team was given three days to investigate. The investigation did not include any forensics and the final report did not have the results of the ballistics test. It then looks into the cremations and coronation of two kings (Dipendra was crowned in a coma).

Mocko concludes that the rituals were either highly problematic or incomplete, given the unusual circumstances. She draws from Ronald Grimes' 'ritual infelicity', a concept that accounts for the many ways that a ritual can go wrong.

Given the loopholes in the massacre report, many shocked Nepalis concluded that Gyanendra himself was to be blamed for the killings. The response to his enthronement ritual was therefore unenthusiastic and controversial.

Mocko also brings up the incomplete ritual of katto for both Birendra and Dipendra, as both the brahmins who volunteered for the rituals did not leave the Valley as they were supposed to, given their dissatisfaction with the compensation and offerings, hence leaving the ritual unfinished.

With these and other shortcomings in the succession rituals, the book points out that the reinforcement rituals were more important for Gyanendra to solidify his kingship.

The bulk of the book deals with three annual events where the king plays a public role: the Bhoto Jatra, the Indra Jatra and the Dasain festival. The writer examines these rituals in the aftermath of 2006 people's movement and 2007 when the political parties made moves to strip the palace of reinforcement rituals even though the king was still living in Narayanhiti.

Gyanendra at first tried to continue being involved: he attended Bhoto Jatra, received the blessings of the Kumari at the end of Indra Jatra and continued to put tika on the public at the palace in 2006. But by 2008, an elected Constituent Assembly voted to abolish the monarchy and Gyanendra left the palace.

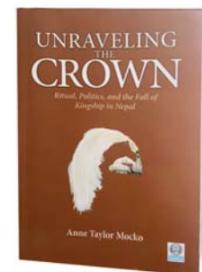
When the Prime Minister took over these ex-royal rituals, the

king ended up being just a regular citizen. The gradual demotion of the king showed how important these rituals were in giving the king legitimacy.

Mocko makes us wonder whether Gyanendra would have remained king even without any connection to the government if he had retained his royal ritualistic role.

This South Asian version of the book is slightly updated from its 2016 version *Demoting Vishnu: Ritual, Politics and the Unraveling of Nepal's Hindu Monarchy* published by Oxford University Press in Europe and North America, and has new photographs and a new title.

This is a recommended resource for anyone interested in Nepal and its monarchy at a time when Gyanendra is once more in the political arena. 🇳🇵



*Unraveling the Crown: Rituals, Politics and the Fall of Kingship in Nepal* by Anne Taylor Mocko  
Adarsh Books, 2023  
306 pages Rs1,440

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# The destroyer of worlds

Relevance of Oppenheimer's biography in the age of global wars and the climate crisis

■ **Sonia Awale**

A lot has happened since American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin was first published in 2005. The book set off ripples after it won a Pulitzer, but created a tidal wave of interest after Christopher Nolan adapted it for his 2023 blockbuster movie Oppenheimer which is dominating this award season.

American Prometheus is a nuanced portrait of a scientist 'whose brilliance was matched only by his internal conflicts', and by retelling its protagonist's life and times the book is a call for rationality in the nuclear age to contain the fearful threat posed by weapons of mass destruction and terror.

The book took 25 years to research and write and is a sobering reminder that the doomsday clock is closer to midnight today than at any time since the end of the Cold War. It has been ticking ever since the world's greatest scientific minds got together in Los Alamos in New Mexico in 1943 to build an atom bomb before the Germans did.

Germany surrendered, but that did not stop hawks in the US military to use it to kill 200,000 people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The Americans justified this by saying that a long-drawn assault on the Japanese mainland would have cost a lot more lives. And Oppenheimer himself felt that the first military use of atomic weapons should be so spectacular and destructive that its ferocity would deter future use. The book reminds us that he opposed the detonation of the second bomb over Nagasaki, and the development of the hydrogen bomb.

The fact that nuclear weapons have not been used in war for the

past 80 years shows the reasoning could have some merit. But it has not stopped nuclear proliferation, and countries like Pakistan, India and North Korea now own atomic warheads as well.

Speaking with Nepali Times (page 5) ahead of his session at the Nepal Literature Festival in Pokhara on 17 February, Kai Bird emphasised that the nuclear story is not over, and it could still end very badly: Vladimir Putin's threat to use tactical nuclear weapons against Ukraine, Israel's strategic ambiguity, and Iran's impending nuclear arsenal.

Closer to home, Nepal is surrounded by nuclear-armed countries which are not exactly friendly with each other. India has frequent border skirmishes with Pakistan and China, and Nepali soldiers serve in the Indian Army.

Amitav Ghosh in his 1999 book Countdown following the Indian nuclear test wrote that even tactical use of nuclear weapons could result in fallout carried by prevailing winds to Himalaya glaciers that could turn Asia's rivers radioactive and contaminate aquifers.

If Middle East tensions escalate into a nuclear confrontation, it will endanger 2 million Nepalis who work there and most will have to return home for safety. Nepali students were killed by Hamas in Israel, and continue to die for Russia in Ukraine.

The staunchest critic of nuclear weapons was the architect of the first atomic bomb himself. The book recounts how after the Japanese surrender, Oppenheimer met President Truman and said he felt he had "blood in his hands". Truman told aides later he never again wanted to see that "son of a bitch ... cry-baby scientist".

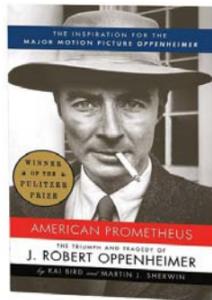
Oppenheimer used his newfound fame as a celebrity scientist to slow the nuclear arms race. 'He tried valiantly to divert

us from the bomb culture by containing the nuclear threat he helped to set loose,' the authors write in Prometheus.

But at the height of the anti-Communist McCarthy purges in the 1950s, Oppenheimer was singled out for his peace initiatives in hearings designed to silence and humiliate the scientist.

"Oppenheimer became the chief celebrity victim of the McCarthyite witch-hunts. And today around the globe we seem to be experiencing similar xenophobia about immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities and workers disrupted by technology and globalisation," Bird says in his interview (overleaf).

The dense 700-page biography reads like a political thriller



American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin  
Alfred A. Knopf, Penguin Random House, 2005  
721 pages Rs1,440 / £12.99 (Atlantic Books)

that starts with Oppenheimer's precocious childhood. He is so fascinated by rocks and minerals that the New York Mineralogical Club invites him to deliver a lecture not knowing he is only a 12-year-old boy.

He is miserable at Harvard and Cambridge, his mental well-being is put to a test and he is diagnosed with schizophrenia. But he flourishes in Göttingen in Germany where he learns quantum physics.

Back in America, his Berkeley department becomes the centre of fundamental research into atomic physics. He supports leftist causes but never joins the Communist Party.

Today, there is a theoretical debate about which is worse: all out nuclear war, or climate breakdown. One has more immediate and irreversible implications than the other, but the fact is that both are manmade threats and we have it in our power to remove them.

Harnessing atomic energy was always a double edged sword. Besides the bomb, many energy planners are pushing for nuclear reactors to be climate-friendly. But atomic reactors have a problem with radioactive waste disposal, and the dangers of Chernobyl or Fukushima type meltdowns.

The future may be in fusion reactors, the same physics that drove the thermonuclear bomb that Oppenheimer so staunchly opposed. Fusion is cleaner energy with water as the only by-product.

"It is becoming increasingly likely that the problem will not be resolved with renewable energy – which is growing too slowly to make a significant difference – or expensive technologies like carbon capture and sequestration and green hydrogen," says Nouriel Roubini of New York University's Stern School of Business. "Instead, we may see a fusion energy revolution, provided that a commercial reactor can be built in the next 15 years."

Oppenheimer said that the only defense against nuclear terrorism was the elimination of nuclear weapons, and in the age of nuclear arms race he was also worried about mankind's moral survival. His friend, a fellow theoretical physicist Isidor Isaac Rabi said, 'You drop a bomb and it falls on the just and the unjust.'

In Japan, surviving hibakusha and their descendants continue

to suffer genetic defects. In the South Pacific, Kazakhstan and other nuclear test sites, many still suffer devastating health consequences from fallout. The Los Alamos site itself led to inter-generational sickness from radioactive fallout for 15,000 Navajo people living downwind. They were not warned before the test, and they have been forgotten since.

American Prometheus reminds us of the urgent need for nuclear arms control in a volatile world. Bird and Sherwin have narrated the moral dilemma and persecution of the inventor of a fearful weapon, coming generations will have to grapple with ways to keep prevent its use. 🇺🇸

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## Terai ARC honour

Local efforts in Nepal to restore 66,800 hectares of forest have been honoured by the UN as one of seven World Restoration Flagships. The Terai Arc Landscape initiative was launched in 2001 to safeguard the biodiversity hotspot shared by India and Nepal that faced threats from poaching and habitat loss. The



initiative has revitalised the area with Nepal's tiger population nearly tripling to 355. It has engaged 40,000 community members in conservation activities and has also improved livelihoods for 500,000 households. This recognition unlocks UN support to extend restoration efforts across 350,000 hectares more in India and Nepal.

## Australia-Nepal deal

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Nepal's Foreign Minister N P Saud oversaw the signing of the Australia-Nepal Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement (TIFA) during the Seventh Indian Ocean Conference in Perth. The goal is to boost trade between the two nations. Australia is Nepal's sixth largest foreign investor and a popular destination for Nepali students. Australia is Nepal's fifth largest source of foreign tourists. The deal marks a milestone as Australia and Nepal celebrate 64 years of bilateral relations.

## Solve with Protein

Right To Protein, an awareness initiative by the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC), has unveiled Solve With Protein as the theme for Protein Day 2024. The initiative, which is on its fifth year, calls on individuals, businesses, and industry leaders to unite in addressing the surging demand for protein-rich foods, and delivering protein solutions that are accessible to citizens across Nepal and the larger South Asia region.

## Home loans

Global IME Bank Limited has introduced the Nischint Awas Yojana offering home loans at a fixed interest rate of 9.99% for up to 10 years, with a maximum loan amount of Rs120 million. The scheme aims to provide affordable housing and provide easy instalment options for house construction and purchase. Loans up to Rs 120 million at 9.99% interest for up to 10 years are available.



## Toyota Hybrid

United Traders Syndicate has launched the Yaris Cross Hybrid, an electric motor, regenerative braking system, and E-CVT gearbox. The model offers a 1500cc engine, 210mm ground clearance, and a Li-Ion battery. It includes a panoramic glass roof, 10.1-inch infotainment system, 7-inch multi-information display, 6 speakers, and a panoramic 360-degree camera. Safety features include 6 airbags. It is priced at Rs 12,200,000.

## Ncell 4G

Ncell has enhanced its 4G service in over 30 locations across Madhes and Gandaki Provinces. Ncell has also introduced three Double Majja Packs, priced from Rs 150 upwards, allowing double data bonus at renewal. Ncell has also implemented projects such as Adopt A School and Modern Digital Lab.



## Tourism Hero

Global Tourism Promotion Council is organising the first ever Tourism Hero Awards 2024, whereby individuals and organisations working in the tourism sector will be awarded in 31 categories. Nominations are open and can be filed at tourismhero.org.



## Best Dealer

Morang Auto Works JCB has been awarded the Best South Asia Dealer for 2023 at the JCB Annual Dealer Conference in Lisbon. Chairman Vishnu Kumar Agarwal thanked customers, stakeholders, and the JCB team for support.

## AI Fellowships

Fusemachines Inc has opened Registration for AI Fellowship 2024 - Nepal cohort. The program aims to produce high-quality AI and data science talent through an accelerated learning course designed by US university faculties and AI experts. It offers advanced expertise and hands-on experience, targeting IT students and professionals with programming, mathematics, computer science, and software development backgrounds. Full scholarships are available for qualifying candidates.

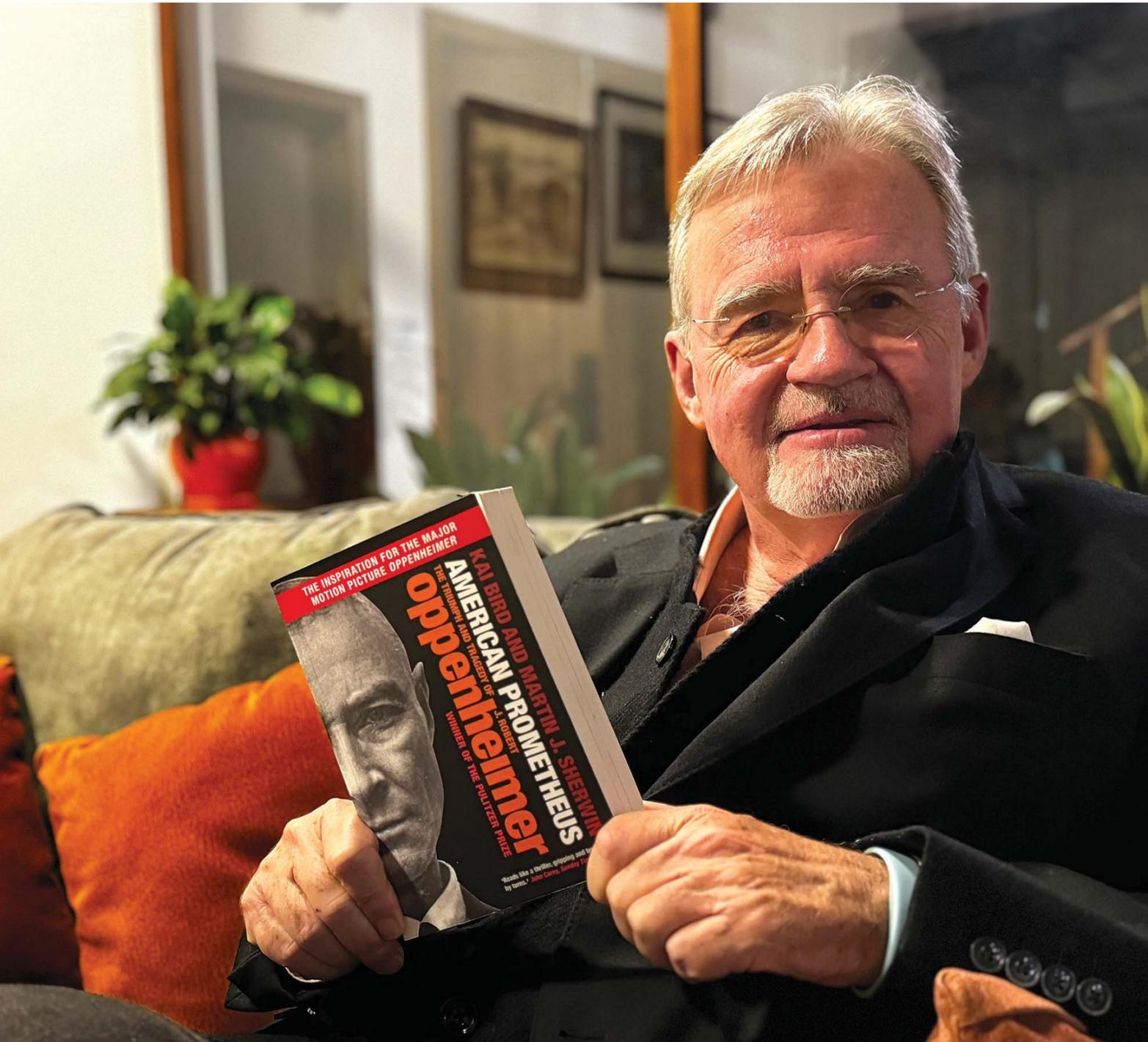
## Football win

The Nepal U-23 Football Team won the BYD Chinese New Year Cup held on 10 February at Dasrath Stadium playing against Qinghai Youth. The event was organised by Cimex Inc, distributor of BYD Auto Industry in Nepal, and was attended by Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Chen Song.



# The nuclear weapons story is not over

Oppenheimer co-biographer Kai Bird speaks with Nepali Times ahead of Nepal Literature Festival



KUNDA DIXIT

Kai Bird's father was a US Foreign Service officer, and spent his childhood in various postings. After boarding school in India, he graduated in journalism and went on to write books, including *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy, Brothers in Arms* (1998), *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (2005), *The Chairman: John J. McCloy and the Making of the American Establishment*, *Crossing Mandelbaum Gate: Coming of Age Between the Arabs and Israelis* (2010), *The Good Spy: The Life and Death of Robert Ames* (2014), *The Outlier: The Unfinished Presidency of Jimmy Carter* (2021). Bird has visited Nepal many times, and lived here from 2007-2011. He spoke to Nepali Times in Kathmandu this week:

**Nepali Times: You went to school in Kodaikanal, started out in journalism in the Subcontinent, and ended up spending a few years in Nepal. What keeps bringing you back to the region?**

**Kai Bird:** I have an affinity for South Asia, and Nepal in particular, because of my youthful experiences here, studying at Kodai, taking third class trains all over India and starting out as a freelance journalist with my wife Susan Goldmark. I love the complexity of the region, the chaos, the uncertainty and the constant surprises. But I also love the food, the colours, the smells and the continuous conversation between the ancient and the modern.

**You wrote books about the Bundy brothers, Robert Ames, Jimmy Carter, Oppenheimer. What draws you to biographies and how is it different than researching and writing other non-fiction?**

I stumbled into biography by accident when, as a 30-year-old journalist, I decided I wanted to try writing a book. The subject became John J. McCloy, a powerful Wall Street lawyer — and while I initially thought it would take me two years, it eventually took me ten years to write this 800 page biography. I fell in love with the archives and the treasure hunt aspect of the research. It was much more difficult than

weekly magazine journalism — but much more rewarding. Biography is, I believe, the best vehicle to convey complicated history. It is story-telling, almost novelistic — because no one can truly tell the story of another human being's life. But if it be a novel, it is a novel with hundreds and thousands of footnotes. And because it is a story about another life, it becomes quite personal and accessible. And along the way, you learn much more intimate history than from a history textbook.

**Some of your biographies are co-written, how does that work? How do you divide up the work?**

Co-authorship is difficult. My first biography started out that way — and after eight years my co-author and I parted ways. Biographers have big egos like any other writer. So actually, when Marty Sherwin invited me to join him on his Oppenheimer project, already 20 years in the making, I hesitated. I initially told Marty that I liked him too much to risk our friendship over a biography. He laughed and eventually persuaded me to join him. It turned out to be a very successful partnership and a lot of fun. He did most of the research — and when I started writing, this stimulated him to finally start writing. We went back and forth, trading edits and rewriting each other's material. It became pretty seamless.

**What was the main reason you chose to co-write Oppenheimer in American Prometheus?**

Oppenheimer is such an essential story to understanding the atomic age — an era we will always be grappling with ... Oppenheimer gave us the atomic fire and changed the world forever. I fear that we have become too complacent after so many decades of living with the Bomb. The story is not over and it could still end very badly. But Oppenheimer's life also resonates with us today because of his role as a scientist who became a public intellectual. Our world is now drenched in science and technology. With AI we are confronting yet another "Oppenheimer moment." And we need expert scientists, thoughtful, articulate scientists who can explain the choices we face in adapting to all this new technology.

**Do you feel that there is a replay of the McCarthyist witch-hunt of the kind that Oppenheimer was subjected in democracies around the world today?**

Yes, absolutely. The Oppenheimer story explains the rise of the divisive politics of Donald Trump. Oppenheimer became the chief celebrity victim of the McCarthyite witch-hunts. And today around the globe we seem to be experiencing a similar xenophobia about immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities and workers disrupted

by technology and globalisation. It is a politics of paranoia, fueled by insecurities — and it feeds on anti-intellectualism. Maybe the world is changing too fast for most people. The pace of change makes them retreat into their own narrow-mindedness. Instead of venerating scientific expertise some people want to demonise scientists and intellectuals, undermining the notion of a collective humanity.

**Oppenheimer's dilemma of balancing a nuclear arms race with the monstrosity of the weapon seems more relevant today than ever before.**

It is important to recall that just three months after Hiroshima, Oppenheimer warned everyone that these new weapons were "evil" and were "weapons for aggressors, and weapons of terror". He also predicted that any nation anywhere, however poor, would be able to develop atomic armaments. So now we have not only America and Britain and France but China, North Korea, and India and Pakistan, and Israel — and perhaps tomorrow Iran — all armed with nuclear weapons. Deplorably, Russia's Vladimir Putin has threatened the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine. So we live in a very dangerous world.

**Has there been a renewed interest in your book after the movie since it coincided with conflicts flaring up around the world?**

Well, it was only a coincidence that Christopher Nolan began filming Oppenheimer in February 2022 — the same month that Russia invaded Ukraine. But I think the story just resonates with people everywhere, and particularly with the younger generation who have not really been thinking about the danger of nuclear weapons.

**Oppenheimer the movie will finally be released in Japan this year. But how was the book itself received in Japan in 2005?**

There was a two volume Japanese edition of *American Prometheus* (published in 2005 in the US) but it sold modestly, until the film was released worldwide. As you say, the film is being released for the first time in Japan only this month.

**You have returned to speak at the Literature Festival in Pokhara. What are your impressions of the country?**

I first visited Nepal in 1969 for a short week as a tourist. I was not even 18 years old — and on my way back to America to attend college. I then came back for several months in 1973, and again in 1976, and again in 1980. And then I returned to live here from 2007 to 2011 when my wife was posted in Nepal as country director for the World Bank. I also visited Kathmandu for a few weeks in 2015, shortly before the earthquake. And now I am back again for a week. So I have seen a lot of change in Nepal over the decades. It is still a chaotic place, but a beautiful country — and I am astonished at the changes that have taken place in just the last nine years.



*Kai Bird will be in conversation with Nepali Times publisher Kunda Dixit at the Nepal Literature Festival in Pokhara on 17 February.*

# NEPAL COOK BOOK

A gastronomic tour of Nepali cuisines

There has been a feast of new books covering Nepali cuisine and recipes in recent years: *A Taste of Nepal*, *The Rana Cookbook*, *Nepali Home Cooking & Healthy Living*, *Timmur*. The list goes on.

Rohini "Dolly" Rana, the author of *The Rana Cookbook: Recipes from the Palaces of Nepal*, has now come out with yet another book, *The Nepal Cook Book: 108 Regional Recipes*. And unlike her previous collection which focused on the royal cuisine of her Rana clan, this one spreads across Nepal to extol the country's culinary diversity.

Rana's second book is not just a sequel to Rana recipes, but also a sort of supplement to *Timmur*, Prashant Khanal's food tour of 12 of Nepal's main ethnic groups. *The Nepal Cook Book* divides up the world of Nepali cuisine into chapters: Sherpa, Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Thakuri-Brahmin-Chhetri, Thakali and Newar, and sticks to the more iconic dishes of each.

The book is lavishly designed and mouth-wateringly illustrated, reminding us that Nepal's natural and ethnic diversity is also reflected in its cuisine,



## Other Annapurnas in the lives of

A bigger challenge than mountaineering for Arlene Blum was overcoming gender discrimination

■ Kunda Dixit

The last sentence in French climber Maurice Herzog's mountaineering classic, *Annapurna*, after his first ever ascent of an eight-thousand metre peak in 1950 was: "There are other Annapurnas in the lives of men."

To this, Arlene Blum would add: "... and women."

Blum led the first all-women expedition to the world's tenth highest mountain in 1978, and as she recounted in two books, *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* and *Breaking Trail: A Climbing Life*, getting to the top was only a small part of the challenges women still face in life as well as in mountaineering.

*Breaking Trail* was Blum's frank and introspective memoir in which she weaved circumstances of growing up in a Russian Jewish émigré family in Chicago with experiences of her mountaineering career. A bigger challenge than climbing was overcoming sexism.

Blum was accepted for a PhD at Harvard, but dropped out after its mountaineering club said it did not accept women members. She went to MIT instead, where her first research adviser in molecular structure refused to admit her because he did not "take girls".

She finally ended up at a Berkeley lab, and escaped frequently to climb in the Sierras, the Andes and Mexico. But when she wanted to join a trek to Nepal, the professor leading it said no because they did



Arlene Blum last month at Vajra in Kathmandu where both her books are available.



with influences from north, south, east and west that have also evolved within Nepal into homegrown dishes.

Like Timmur, *The Nepal Cook Book* is an important effort to document the diversity of Nepal's cuisine, which is being eroded steadily by Dal Bhat hegemony. Each chapter is visually rich, showing not just professional food photography but also the fabric, utensils and even jewelry of the ethnic groups featured.

Ethnic cuisine tends to be difficult to replicate because ingredients are not available or its preparation needs practice. But Dolly Rana has simplified the process so that the preparation of Tamang Batuk, Sherpa Thukpa, Tharu Dhikari, for example, seem to be a piece of cake, as it were.

When Nepalis stop at 'Thakali' restaurants along the highway in Mugling, they are usually looking for a Dal Bhat eatery that is just

cleaner and the food tastier than other places. But it is from the Thakali chapter in *The Nepal Cook Book* that we find out how inaccurate this stereotype is. Original Thakali recipes from Mustang have buckwheat Dhindo, Kanchemba Fried Buckwheat Fingers, Yak Sukuti, and Timur Choep. And Dolly Rana gives us step-by-step instructions to prepare them so that the amateur chef will not be intimidated.

Few know that the most popular dish among the Magar community is the Sutkeri Kukhura Ko Jhol. Unlike what its name suggests, this is not a dish made of the mother hen, but a nutritious broth especially prepared for nursing mothers. The Gurung have gone a step further and marinated their chicken into a pickle so that it does not spoil on long journeys in the days before refrigeration. And the closest Nepal's cuisine comes to preparing crustaceans is the Tharu Ghoongi snail dish.

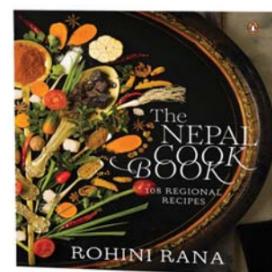
The most elaborate chapter is on more mainstream Thakuri-Brahmin-Chhetri food, but even here we find speciality dishes that some of us may not be familiar with: Koiralo Ko Achar (nothing to do with the clan of Nepal's former prime ministers) is a pickle made of ebony buds, or Bhang Ko Achar made from hemp seeds, roasted so they are not narcotic.

Besides the chapters on ethnic cuisines, *The Nepal Cook Book* also has helpful sections on indigenous spices (jimbu and timur), and Nepali fermented foods (kinema, gundruk, tama, yangben). And there is even an explanation about the significance of the number 108 in Vedic cosmology which is why Dolly has chosen that many recipes for her book.

She explains in her foreword: 'I hope that with this auspicious number, my book will succeed in offering a higher level of insight into Nepalese cuisine and culture.'  **Kunda Dixit**



ALL PHOTOS: THE NEPAL COOK BOOK



*The Nepal Cook Book*  
108 Regional Recipes  
by Rohini Rana  
Penguin Viking, 2024  
Hardcover 298 pages Rs3,200

# of women

nation

not have a separate tent for a woman. Another expedition to Afghanistan turned her down because a female climber would create 'excretory' complications at high altitude.

The American Alpine Club (AAC) denied her all-women expedition to Denali. ("Chicks? Climb Denali? No way dames could ever make it up that bitch.") But Blum went anyway, and also joined women climbers in British Columbia, the Pamirs and Kashmir.

The first ever female ascent of Denali was ignored by America's climbing community. It was not enough for women climbers to be as skilled as men, they had to be stronger and more experienced to be accepted. Travelling in India on an expedition to Trisul, Blum was shocked by the poverty and decided to change the trajectory of her research away from theoretical science to 'help solve the planet's problems'.

After joining the American Bicentennial Everest Expedition in 1976, Blum returned in the autumn of 1978 with a group of 12 female climbers to take the route up the same face as Maurice Herzog had 28 years earlier on Annapurna I.

But first, again, she had to fight an AAC decision not to endorse an all-women team, and one led by her. Finally, the American women reached the north base of Annapurna I. The peak is 800m lower than Everest, but sections are more technical and avalanche prone. Four in every 10 do not make it back alive from Annapurna.

The expedition was as much an adventure as a statement highlighted in its cheeky t-shirts: 'A Woman's Place Is On Top'.

In her 1980 book *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*, Blum admits that had she known of the post-monsoon avalanches on Annapurna she would have gone to another mountain. As leader, she also had to constantly balance the need to be decisive, while being democratic. The expedition faced a strike by Sherpas, who perhaps did not like taking orders from a woman leader.

Eventually, after more storms, avalanches and personality clashes, four members made it to the summit: two women and two Nepali male guides. Two other women climbers tried to make a second summit bid, but were killed near Camp IV.

The deaths marred the expedition's triumph, and there were naysayers dismissing the women's achievement because Nepali male guides helped them reach the top.

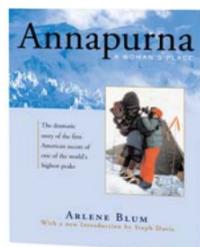
After *Annapurna*, Blum returned to do the Great Himalayan Traverse from Bhutan to Ladakh in 1982. She has since lived in Nepal for a year and visits often to hike.

"Nepal has changed a lot, it is more prosperous with farmers talking on mobiles," she said last month after doing the Millennium Trek south of Pokhara.

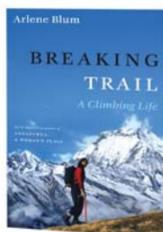
Blum has gone back to research that will make a difference to people and the planet, and heads the Green Science Policy Institute.

Her findings made California ban harmful fire retardant chemicals from children's clothing. Her activism also led to 30 countries banning toxic compounds in the electronics industry.

Says Blum, "There are indeed other Annapurnas in the lives of women. There are now more female-led expeditions, half the students at MIT are women now. And you have women running your newspaper." 



*Annapurna: A Woman's Place*  
by Arlene Blum  
Counterpoint, 2015  
Sierra Club Books, 1980  
238 pages \$19.95



*Breaking Trail: A Climbing Life*  
by Arlene Blum  
Lisa Drew Books, 2019  
Mariner Books, 2007  
313 pages Rs3,000

## The Shépa lexicon

Many browsing the shelf of a bookstore or library may see Shépa written in bold all caps on the cover of this book, and misread it as 'Sherpa' and think it is yet another book on the ethnic group from the Khumbu.

That happened to this reviewer when a copy arrived by mail. But Shépa in Tibetan actually means 'explanation' and is a unique form of oral poetry sung in the question-answer style and the intangible heritage of Tibetan-speaking people in danger of dying out.

The book contains Shépa poetry that has been passed down from one generation of the Choné people of Amdo to the next.

The original Tibetan verse is translated into English and Mandarin, and includes animistic beliefs before Buddhism got to the plateau. There are Bon Po legends, explanations of various Mahayana traditions, as well as the shared memory of the ebb and flow of history.

The Shépa has a wide range of subjects and has been recited and shared for hundreds of years, and the book is a result of contributions from researchers, monks, and devotees. It is thus a valuable undertaking to document this oral tradition before it disappears forever. The book is part of the World Literature Series and the ebook version is available for free

from OpenBook Publishers.

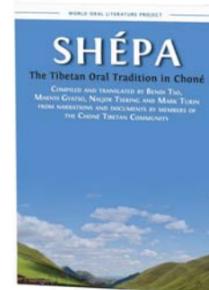
"This trilingual publication is a landmark in Tibetan studies, making research findings accessible to the community for whom Shépa is a living practice," says Tsering Shakya of the University of British Columbia.

Why the Choné people came to embrace the Shépa oral tradition is buried in history, but it does resemble the recited verse of the Himalayan rimlands. Shépa performances can be religious or secular, sing about the Tibetan cosmology, history and recite chants at weddings. The verses are rendered by elderly men and are performed somewhat like the back-and-forth dohori in Nepal.

Shépa orature is varied and constantly revised, its mutability giving it relevance as Tibet is swept by change. The book may be a bit too detailed for the lay reader, but will be valuable

for students and researchers of Himalayan linguistics, ethnicity, and even for those studying Nepal's indigenous groups.

More importantly, the book is an invaluable documentation of an oral tradition that is hanging by its thread, made accessible because of the translation of the stanzas into English and Mandarin. 



*Shépa*  
The Tibetan Oral Tradition in Choné  
by Bendi Tso, Marnyi Gyatso, Naljor Tsering, Mark Turin, and Members of the Choné Tibetan Community  
Open Book Publishers, 2023  
804 pages ebook available for free download

## EVENTS

**Poetry and music**

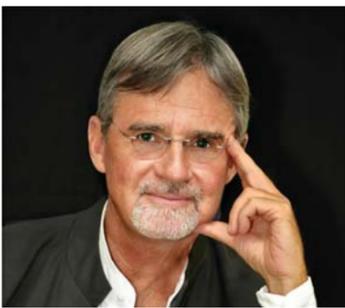
Alok Vaid-Menon takes the stage in Kathmandu with their blend of poetry and musical comedy. Joining them is an opening act by Queer Hony-Tonk, with Parakram Rana as the host.

16 February, 4pm-7 pm, Park Village Resort

**Virtual Museum Tour**

The organisers of Kathmandu Art Biennale have launched a 360 degree virtual tour powered by Galli Maps for those who are not able to attend in person.

Museum of Nepali Art, Thamel

**Lit fest**

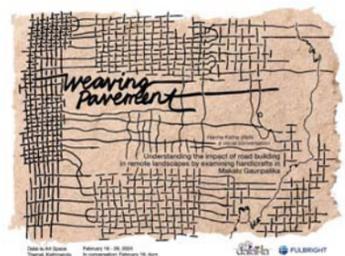
Head to lakeside Pokhara this weekend to attend the Nepal Literature Festival featuring literary figures including Kai Bird, co-biographer of J. Robert Oppenheimer.

Till 19 February, Lakeside Pokhara

**Climate Fresk**

Join Climate Fresk, the interactive workshop on climate change, facilitated by Jeanne Allard. More than 1,450,000 people took part in the workshops around the world.

17 February, 10 am-1 pm, Kar.Ma Coffee, Jhamsikhel

**Weaving Pavement**

Researcher Hanna Katria Wells' collection of works titled Weaving Pavement will be on display for the next month.

Till 15 March, Dalai-La Art Space, Taragaon Next, Boudha Road

## DINING

**Grill Durbar**

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

Jawlakhel, 9849777410

## MUSIC

**Rock Tandav II**

Rock Tandav II, Rocking gender norms with music, is a two-day musical fest with a line-up of artists that includes Bipul Chettri and The Travelling Band, The Act, Kush, Jai Faak, Underside, Shree 3, Space, and others.

8-9 March, 11 am onwards, Ticket: Rs1,500, Bhrikutimandap

**Reggae Tuesdays**

Groove to the rhythm of Reggae music with Riddim Sons every Tuesday this February

Tuesdays, 7:30 pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

**Changu Music**

Listen to Nabin K Bhattarai and his band Atripta perform their music during the Changu Music Festival.

24 February, 1pm onwards, Bhaktapur

**Atif Aslam**

Pakistani singer Atif Aslam is ready to take the Nepali stage soon. Don't miss out on the concert.

12 April, Hyatt Regency Ground

**Friends of festival**

Enjoy the literature festival during the day and head to the Khukri Friends of Festival to listen to some notable Nepali artists in the evening.

Till 19 February, Lakeside, Pokhara

**Koto**

Take a gastronomic tour of Japan at Koto. Try the Maki sushi, cold or fried tofu, tempura, fried chicken, miso soup, and chicken karage.

Darbar Marg (01) 4220346

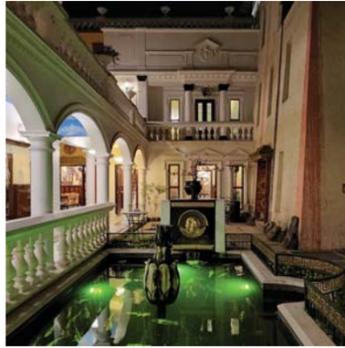
**Jatra Cafe**

Jatra Cafe & Bar has an extensive menu that spans sandwiches, pasta and curry. But the Samaya Baji Newari khaajaset on the menu is a must-have

Thamel (01) 4256622

## About Town

## GETAWAY

**Baber Mahal Vilas**

A neoclassical architectural marvel, the historic Baber Mahal Vilas is a quaint boutique hotel with Newa accents, Mustang designs and Tarai influences.

Tanka Prasad Ghumti Sadak (01) 4257655/4248747

**Hotel Vajra**

With an august painted Tibetan ceiling, wood and terracotta carvings, pagoda style building and brick accents, Hotel Vajra is the pinnacle of traditional designs.

Swayambhu (01) 4271545

**Summit River Lodge**

The Summit River Lodge is an expansive 16-lodge property that boasts an infinity pool, semi-tropical vegetation and authentic Nepali cuisine made from local organic produce. The rustic lodge incorporates traditional wood designs with minimalistic accents.

Kurintar (01) 4371397

**The Last Resort**

Explore Nepal's adventure tourism with bungee jumping, tandem swinging or white water rafting at The Last Resort

Bhatekoshi, Sindhupalchok (01) 4700525

**Gorkha Gaun Resort**

There is much to do in Gorkha, but once one settles into the homey rooms of the lush Gorkha Gaun Resort, they might not want to head outside.

Gorkha, 9801010557

**Mamagoto Nepal**

A Pan-Asian restaurant that serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes, Mamagoto is the place to visit to explore the continent's cuisines.

Panipokhari (01) 4446299

**Le Sherpa**

With a focus on seasonal and local vegetables and fruits, Le Sherpa's chef creates seasonal menu that suits diners. Taste the fresh homemade ravioli with Dolpa morels.

Maharajgunj (01) 4428604

## WEEKEND WEATHER

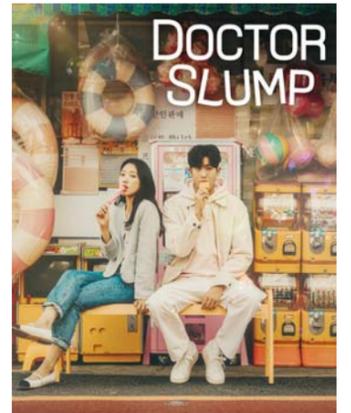
**Dry and Warmer**

This week's westerly also did not deliver. Lots of clouds and overcast skies, but except for parts of central western mountains there was no precipitation. The drought continues and the forests are tinder dry. Kathmandu will remain dusty and smoggy over the weekend, although the daytime temperature will climb to 21-22°C. There is still a chance of late winter rain and snow midweek next week as a system moves in from the west. Cross fingers.



## OUR PICK

In the 2024 Korean tv show Doctor Slump, Nam Ha-neul and Yeo Jeong-woo have been academic rivals ever since they met in high school as two of the best-performing students in their year, both on the track to become doctors. Their paths eventually diverge to different med schools, but Ha-neul and Jeong-woo meet again as adults when they are at the lowest point in their lives and careers, both having had to quit the jobs that they love so much. Starring Park Shin-hye and Park Hyung-sik, this new romcom series is a fitting watch for the remaining winter weeks.



## MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI

Start each day with a grateful heart.

- Unknown



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 ।

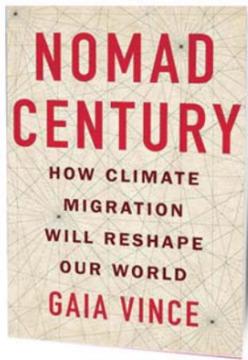


नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

# Titles to grab in 2024

Books recently read by Nepali Times journalists

## ■ Sonia Awale



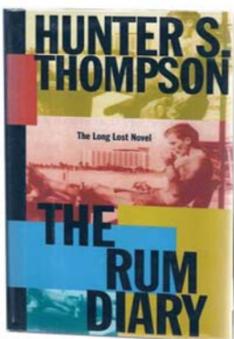
Nomad Century  
by Gaia Vince  
Flatiron Books, 2022  
288 pages \$16.69

Award-winning journalist Gaia Vince's latest book *Nomad Century* reads like science fiction with early chapters outlining a dystopian world that is 4°C warmer by the end of the century.

Given the unprecedented heat waves in 2023 in India, China, Europe and North America, Vince's assumption that large swathes of the globe will be uninhabitable, leading to the next big mass migration to higher latitudes or altitudes, is not far off. Already, people are moving to escape droughts, flash floods, rising sea levels, tropical storms and wildfires.

*Nomad Century* is a call for planned mass migration to deal with climate refugees in the new Anthropocene epoch. But how will this reshape humanity, our food systems, our cities and most importantly, our politics? Find out.

## ■ Vishad Onta

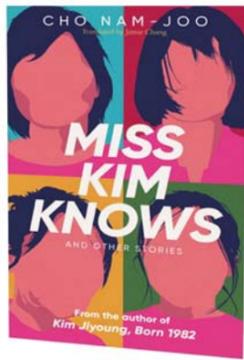


The Rum Diary: A Novel  
by Hunter S. Thompson  
Simon & Schuster, 1998  
224 pages \$9.99

Hunter S. Thompson's *The Rum Diary* follows a competent, crazy young journalist as he moves to Puerto Rico and adventures his way through life on the island. He works at the *Daily Star* in San Juan alongside other Americans who all seem to be out of their minds, fueling themselves with many bottles of Rum and food from Al's, the local burger joint. Set in the 1950s, the novel touches on themes such as the image of the obnoxious American abroad, the self-made man who buries his rural roots, and the interaction of locals with capitalistic development.

The narrator tussles with life in Puerto Rico, dealing with shaky working and living conditions and getting into trouble with the law. Underpinning all of this is a tale of loyal friendship and sinful characters, and the unfolding of a subtle yet nasty love story. A 2011 movie adaptation starring Johnny Depp and Amber Heard exists, but the only thing good about it is its soundtrack.

## ■ Sahina Shrestha

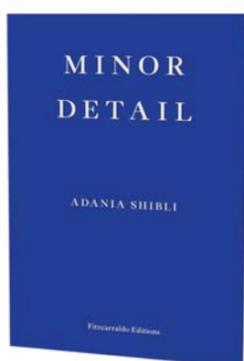


Miss Kim Knows and Other Stories  
by Cho Nam-joo  
Scribner UK, 2023  
233 pages \$14.36

In this short story collection, author Cho Nam-joo returns to tales of everyday women navigating the pressures of familial expectations and societal norms. The protagonists in the eight stories give an intimate portrait of women who have faced gender-based violence, harassment, or discrimination in the household, workplace, or society.

In the title story, the narrator replaces Miss Kim, whose work title and duties seem hazy. She did everything at the ad agency and was so good that she was fired. In *Under the Plum Tree*, the writer explores the bond between sisters as one of them suffers from Alzheimer's.

Throughout the book, the characters grapple with expectations that often hinder their aspirations, but some also manage to find small areas of defiance. The strength of the book, translated by Jamie Chang, lies in the universality of the experiences that make the stories not just about Korean women, but women all over.

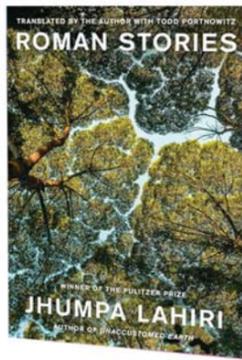


Minor Detail  
by Adania Shibli, Elisabeth Jaquette  
New Directions, 2020  
144 pages \$15.95

In Adania Shibli's novel, a young Bedouin woman is gang raped and murdered by Israeli troops in 1949. Decades later, a woman in Ramallah stumbles upon the story in a newspaper and becomes obsessed by one minor detail – that the assault happened 25 years ago to the day she was born. She then sets out to gather information about the crime, charting prohibited territories carrying maps that no longer show the geography she was once familiar with.

*Minor Detail* is a novel where the arc might feel familiar, where people are displaced, identity and borders are erased, and extraordinary becomes every day. There are no names for the characters, but Shibli lists the changing names of the places. Translated by Elisabeth Jaquette, Shibli's writing is subtle, calm, and sparse: an example of how when armed with a powerful narrative one does not need to shout, just whisper.

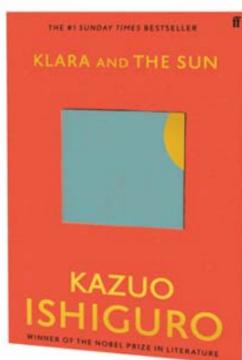
## ■ Shristi Karki



Roman Stories  
by Jhumpa Lahiri, Todd Portnowitz  
Knopf, 2023  
224 pages Rs799

A girl and her father look after a vacation house and those who come to stay in it. Two friends, one grieving the loss of a loved one and the other fulfilled in her life, catch up with each other after a year. A man who escaped war in his country as a young boy finally obtains a house for his wife and children. A young woman sets off to the post office to collect a parcel for her injured employer. A married man confronts his attraction to another woman at a party hosted by his wife's friend.

In Jhumpa Lahiri's collection of short stories in Italian, nine nameless protagonists are bound by the fact that they are foreigners to Italy, all grappling with their identities and what home means to each of them. In *Roman Stories*, the characters' quiet reflections of going about their daily lives are interwoven with casual violence, discrimination and isolation: familiar to immigrants across the world. They are outsiders in lands that they will never quite be allowed to become familiar with.



Klara and the Sun  
by Kazuo Ishiguro  
Faber & Faber, 2021  
320 pages Rs960

In Kazuo Ishiguro's 2021 novel *Klara and the Sun*, the narrator Klara, an android designed to be an Artificial Friend (AF) to children, forms a one-sided relationship with the sun as she looks out of the window of the store where she is for sale. When she is eventually bought as a companion for a teenage girl, Klara finds out that the 14-year old is gravely sick. In search of a solution, Klara looks towards her imagined connection with the sun in hopes that it can help heal her charge from her illness.

Through the eyes of a humanoid machine, Ishiguro's novel--which was longlisted for the 2021 Booker Prize--examines what it means to be human while exploring the connection between technology and humanity in a world where much of the function of people has been replaced by AI. And all the while, the dystopian world that Ishiguro has created begins to feel uncomfortably similar to the times we are living in.

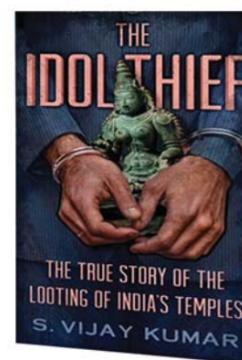
## ■ Alisha Sijapati



James and the Giant Peach  
by Roald Dahl  
Puffin Books, 2000  
151 pages Rs640

Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach*, published in 1961, remains a significant work in his repertoire. The book's enduring popularity and adaptation into a movie directed by Tim Burton reflect Dahl's continued relevance long after his passing. Notably personal to him, the story draws from Dahl's own life, particularly his experiences living with relatives.

Discussions around Dahl's controversial remarks on sexism, body shaming, and other sensitive topics have led to revisions in new editions. Dahl's book remains relevant not only for children but also for adults, serving as a reminder that there is always hope at the end of challenging times. It emphasises the importance of empathy and understanding, virtues much needed in today's world. In a world full of negative news, taking a step back to immerse oneself in the world of childhood imagination can provide a comforting escape.



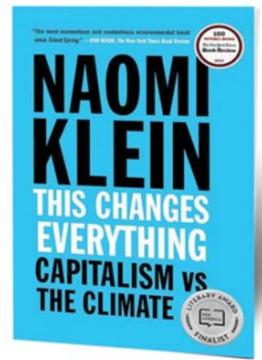
The Idol Thief  
by S. Vijay Kumar  
Juggernaut, 2018  
248 pages \$21.22

Amidst the growing global movement for heritage repatriation, nations like Greece, Cambodia, Mexico, Vietnam, and increasingly India are working to reclaim their stolen cultural treasures housed in museums abroad.

In *The Idol Thief*, Vijay Kumar shares insights into the investigation of Subhash Kapoor, a notorious art dealer based in New York. The book documents the collaborative efforts between US authorities, India, and the India Pride Project, which Kumar co-founded, to recover stolen cultural artifacts not only from India but also from other nations.

*The Idol Thief* offers lessons about the depth of investigations that goes into the repatriation of stolen cultural heritage. Nepal, with its rich cultural legacy, has much to learn from Vijay Kumar's book.

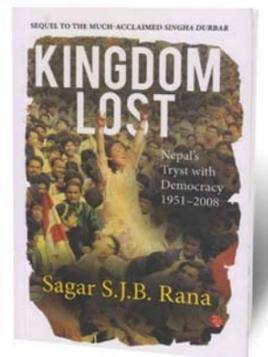
## ■ Kunda Dixit



This Changes Everything  
by Naomi Klein  
Simon & Schuster, 2014  
576 pages \$11.99

Canadian activist Naomi Klein's book *Doppelganger* that was published last year is written for our times. The pervasiveness of the social web has not given us greater clarity--facts do not matter when conspiratorial ideas have more traction and the toxic sludge of e-platforms make rational debate futile.

*Doppelganger* led this reader to discover Klein's 2014 book, *This Changes Everything*, published when times were innocent and the following year the Paris Agreement optimistically put a target of 1.5 degree threshold by 2050. 2023 has broken all records, and last November we hit an average global temperature increase of 1.4°C. It is demoralising to think Klein had been warning us nine years ago that globalised market capitalism cannot solve the climate breakdown because it is the cause of this crisis. Look no further than COP28 in Dubai. *This Changes Everything* has not aged, if anything it is a sobering reminder that nothing has changed.



Kingdom Lost  
by Sagar S.J.B. Rana  
Rupa Publications, 2023  
416 pages Rs952

Who better than Sagar Rana, the grandson of Chandra Shumsher, to write the 100-year history of the Rana reign in the 2018 book *Singha Durbar*? And in the 2023 sequel, *Kingdom Lost*, he traces the 70-year trajectory of Nepal's democracy from the very first Rana-Shah-Congress coalition of the fifties right up to the abolition of monarchy in 2008.

*Kingdom Lost* is more relevant than ever today with royalist parties gaining support for reviving the Hindu monarchy. The book gives us the historical context: BP Koirala becoming the first elected Prime Minister, Mahendra's coup of 1961, three decades of Panchayat, a decade of conflict, the massacre of royals in 2001 and the last 15 years of a democratic federal and secular republic. India looms large in the book, and today we miss Mahendra and BP who, despite being autocratic and democratic leaders, demonstrated genuine nationalism at a time of geopolitical upheaval. We miss that calibre of statesmanship today.

# Climate crisis ruins Himalayan

Nepal's shepherds leave their ancestral occupation due to climate change and outmigration

● **Rabin Pun Magar**  
in Rukum East

The rugged mountains of Rukum East are all covered in late snow. After a prolonged drought, it has finally snowed, but it is too late for the high altitude meadows to grow again. They have all dried up.

At 3,720m, visitors rarely make it to the high pasture at Ma Kharka. But even until 20 years ago, every family in the village of Lugum brought its sheep and mountain goats for grazing up here. Shepherds with their flocks spent half a year in what used to be cool, green patches of grasslands. Very few do so now.

Rassa Gurung, 65, is one the last few shepherds carrying on their ancestral occupation. "I started coming here as a baby, slung over my mother's back. We didn't read and write back then, we all helped our parents tend the sheep," he says.

Gurung (pictured right, below) knows every corner of this pasture like the back of his hand. His sheep used to graze freely, but now he has to watch out that they do not wander into someone's farm or enter the nearby community forest.

Mt Dhaulagiri looms in the distance, and even that high up there is little snow this year. It looks like a giant dark rock.

The sheep are also dying from mysterious causes. "Some 40-50 sheep die every year now, I myself have only 150 sheep now, down from 300 four years ago," says Gurung. "Most of them die because they eat poisonous grass, as the



edible grass does not grow in time. Some are eaten by leopards and bears."

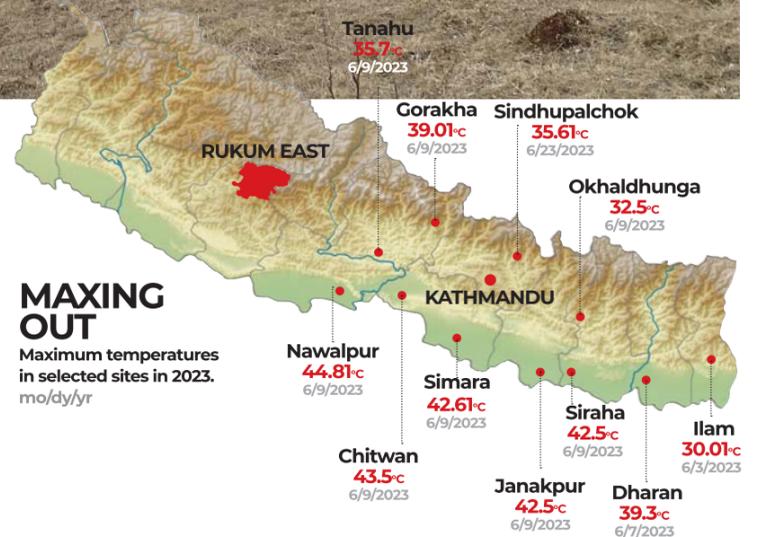
He adds: "It rains when it is not supposed to and it does not snow when it is supposed to. Sometimes it does not snow till March, and other times it does not rain until June, so there is no grass to graze on."

High mountain communities are disproportionately affected by

the climate crisis. This year was one of the hottest ones Nepal has experienced.

"Farmers are affected directly by the increase in the average temperature. Unpredictable seasonal changes can lead to the growth of new species, and native indigenous plants disappear," explains climate scientist Ngamindra Dahal.

He adds: "Rainfall patterns have



## Warmer, drier winters in

Even in a warmer than usual decade, this year's Himalayan winter has been warmer and drier than average

This year's winter has been warmer and drier in Nepal than any in the previous decade, with temperatures climbing higher than the winter average while precipitation was lower than average.

Climatic data for two months in November and December 2023 published by the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology shows that the temperature in post-monsoon in Nepal did not drop like it did in previous winters, which were themselves warmer and drier than previous ones.

This has also been a dry winter. Nepal receives an average of 60mm of rain during the three coldest months. However, the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology recorded just 2.7mm of rain in Kathmandu so far this winter – although eastern Nepal and the far-western mountains did get some late snow.



**HIGH AND DRY:** Mt Kangtega (6,782m) and Mt Thamserku (6,608m) looking south from the moraine of the Ngozumba Glacier in Gokyo. At present rates of temperature increase, climate scientists say these mountains will lose two-thirds of their remaining ice during this century.

# pastoralists



ALL PHOTOS: RABIN PUN MAGAR



Shepherd Jore Pun (pictured left, top), 43, used to have 350 sheep a few years ago, but now has only 250.

Lugum used to be a large sheep farming village in Rukum East. Half of the 400 households here used to herd sheep and goats. Today, there are 500 households but only 35 are pastoralists.

The Magar people make up the majority of the Rukum East population. To them, sheep rearing used to be a way of life here. The sheep are sacrificed during their festivals and women make clothing from their wool. With the sheep gone, these traditions are now in decline.

“Our grasslands are depleting and sheep rearing has become unfeasible,” says ward chair Mankaji Pun. “Moreover, young men are moving out for jobs in the cities or overseas. They are abandoning their ancestral occupation.”

Many men from here have left

for the Gulf, Malaysia or India. Youth here are also increasingly taking the backdoor to America. Only the women, the elderly and children are left.

Every household here has at least one member in the USA. These families spend as high as Rs6 million to make their way there, borrowed from local lenders at high interest. The ones who remain are averse to hard work.

Dilchan Pun Magar of Lugum was rearing sheep until three years ago. He had 200 of them. Unable to make a living, he also kept side jobs. He has now completely given up on sheep rearing and operates a hotel.

“We couldn’t modernise sheep farming. It was a lot of work and we barely made any money, so I ended up leaving it altogether,” says Pun Magar.

Rassa Gurung is still supporting his family by selling sheep. He says he makes

Rs400,000 a year, and the income goes to paying for his children’s education. “But my children are not interested in taking after me, they think it is too much work,” he adds.

Jore Pun also cites the new generation’s lack of interest as a reason for the decline of sheep farming. He says, “People started going to school. Now everyone is migrating. Sheep farming is a lot of work, after all.”

There are still about 22,000 sheep in Rukum East, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development. Two years ago, there were nearly 800,000 sheep across the country. It is now down to 770,000.

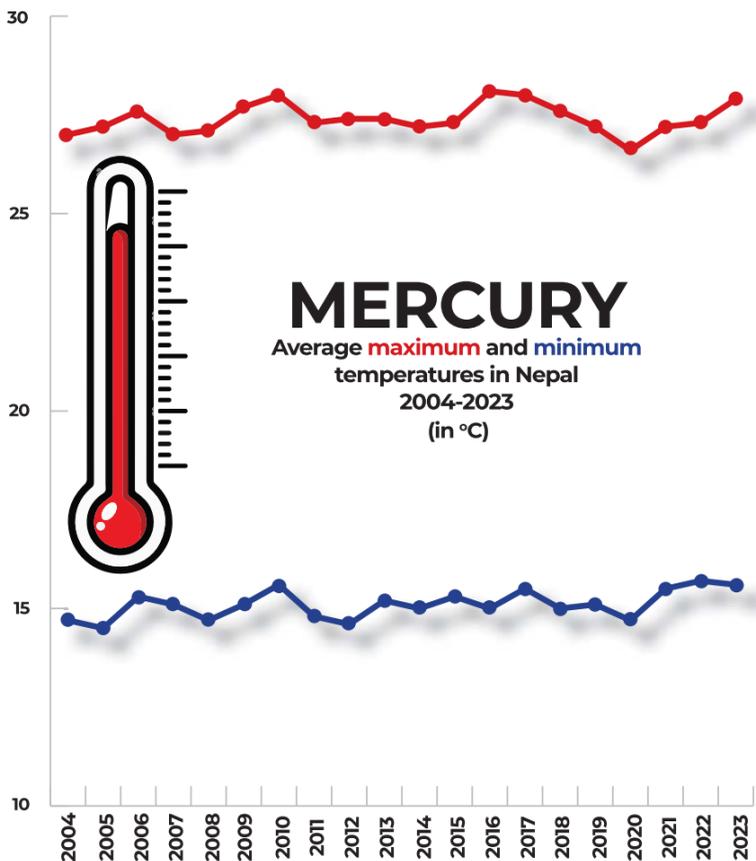
This decrease in sheep numbers has similarly affected the production of meat, down from 2,964 metric tons last year to 2,880 this year. Wool production has also decreased, from 584,000kg two years ago to 567,412 this year. 🇳🇵

also changed. At times we have unseasonal cloudbursts, other times there is no winter rain and we get droughts. The absence of snow has affected sheep herders.”

Indeed, new kinds of grasses have started growing and for shepherds like Gurung, there is no way to know if they are edible.

Botanist Bhakta Bahadur Raskoti agrees that climate change has affected the growth of edible grass for sheep and goats in high mountain areas. “Because of climate change, grass species from the Tarai are now found in the mountains, while mountain grasses have moved up,” he adds.

# Nepal



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. Even compared to those years, the 2023-24 winter has been drier and warmer.

Farmers across Nepal rely on winter rain more than they do on irrigation systems. The production of wheat, barley, mustard, lentils, citrus and vegetables is significantly affected when there is an inappropriate amount of winter rain.

The lack of winter rain also means that Nepal’s rivers are all running low, leading to a decline in the country’s hydropower generation capacity, and the consequent shortfall has to be met by power imports from India.

Average temperatures in the two months were higher in the eastern Tarai compared to the western plains. Indeed, the average maximum temperature reached as high as 27°C in parts of Kosi and Madhes Provinces in December.

But while nighttime temperatures in the Tarai and most of the mid-hills were also warmer than usual, the temperature in the mountains dropped to lower than average during the evenings. Similarly, the minimum temperature in November and December was higher than the average in the plains and lower than the average in the high mountains as well.

Bardia’s Gulariya, Sankhuasabha’s Khandbari, Kavre’s Panchkhal, Ilam’s Kanyam, and Baitadi’s Patan municipalities as well as Janakpur Airport broke

records for the highest maximum temperatures recorded during November and December. (See map)

Gulariya recorded a maximum temperature of 29°C on 3 December, surpassing the previous maximum temperature of 28.5°C recorded in 5 December 2019. Similarly, the maximum temperature in December at Janakpur Airport hit 32.2°C, beating the previous maximum of 30.5°C recorded 12 years ago.

As it stands, 57 out of 113 weather stations across the country recorded a higher maximum temperature than in previous years during December. Meanwhile, nine weather stations had lower-than-average maximum temperatures for the same timeframe.

Similarly, 60 stations recorded higher-than-average minimum temperatures in December while six stations recorded lower minimum temperatures than average. We get warmer winters when both the maximum and minimum temperatures are higher than average.

The mean maximum temperature nationwide in 2023 was one of the highest in the last four decades at 27.9°C, a full 0.6°C higher than average. Higher average maximum temperatures were recorded only in 2010, 2016 and 2017.

In 2023, the minimum temperature also climbed to the second highest recorded at 15.6°C, 0.5°C higher than usual. The record was 15.7°C, in 2022.

A further analysis of the data released by the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology for the past 40 years shows a new trend. While the maximum temperature is declining between March-May, the

monsoon months of June-July are seeing an increase. In June 2023, the average maximum temperature rose by a scorching 2°C, which has been attributed to a delayed onset of the monsoon, with no rain to cool things down.

Maximum temperatures recorded nationwide in September, October, November and December are higher than past averages too. Minimum temperatures were higher than previous means in all months except for April and May.

“Days are getting significantly hotter every year,” says Tribhuvan University professor Madan Sigdel. “The data confirms that Nepal is seeing the impact of climate change.”

The average annual maximum temperature during the 1980s was 26.4°C. It rose to 27.5°C degrees in the 2010s.

A study in 2017 showed that the rate of increase of maximum temperature in the mountains and high Himalaya was higher in the winter while the Tarai and mid-hills noted an increase during the monsoon. Of the mountain districts, the highest increase was seen in Manang.

Temperature records are being shattered throughout Nepal: last year, 12 districts recorded the highest temperatures ever. Dumkali in Nawalpur recorded a high of 44.8°C in June 2023, with the previous record being 43.7°C in June 1979. Dharan also recorded a maximum high last June at 39.3°C, up from 38.8°C 10 years ago.

Sunsari, Janakpur, Okhaldhunga, Chitwan, Bara and Siraha also recorded the highest ever maximum temperatures last year. 🇳🇵  
Ramesh Kumar



# The most controversial pronoun is 'we', not 'they'

Alok Vaid-Menon, the gender non-conforming poet, is performing live in Kathmandu this week

■ **Ranjita Ganesan** in Park City, Utah

"I'm standing by the post office. You won't miss me," promised Alok Vaid-Menon over the phone. Sure enough, there Alok was.

At the Sundance Film Festival in Utah — where temperatures dip so low even the red carpet is sometimes a parade of cosy sweaters — the US-based gender non-conforming performer was dressed in cold-defying femme fashion. Indigo pumps, a blue-and-yellow frock ending in a cloud-shaped skirt, swirls of the same colours lining the eyes.

"I want to show that it is possible to look good here," said Alok cheekily.

Words from one of Alok's own verses seemed apt for the moment: "They will say that femininity is not powerful, but I have stopped traffic simply by going outside."

On the day we met, the 32-year-old stopped traffic for another reason too. They were the face of a short documentary ALOK, directed by Alexandra Hedison and produced by Jodie Foster, which had just premiered at the festival.

For over a decade, Alok has combined art and activism. They tour the world with poems about queer and trans experiences, self-acceptance, and love.

They will be in Kathmandu on Friday, presenting a blend of poetry and comedy at the Spoken Fest. "I haven't been to Kathmandu since 2017, so shout out to Nepal," Alok shared, with a beam.

The film ALOK spent two years in the making, after photographer Hedison chanced upon Alok's work online and asked if she could trail them — as a "professional groupie" or "consensual stalker".

The deep dive that followed, she said, "didn't just inspire me intellectually, it moved me emotionally". The 18-minute film,



Alok Vaid-Menon appears in ALOK by Alex Hedison.

SUNDANCE INSTITUTE

Hedison's first, features Alok's questioning of the gender binary, their imaginative force, and glimpses of their family and friends.

Quoting Greta Lee, star of the Oscar-nominated Past Lives, Alok said: "For so long I've been cast as the best friend but this is my first time as the main character and now I don't know if I can go back."

"The mainstream needs to move beyond token diversity. We deserve to have our stories be centred."

Alok was born into a family of thinkers and academics, with roots in Kerala, Delhi, Malaysia, and the US. Although the Texas milieu they grew up in was conservative, the film shows their home was conducive to queer expression.

The poet's aunt Urvashi Vaid, a noted

LGBTQ activist in the US, became their protector: "Because of that I was able to articulate myself and be taken seriously from a very young age."

Where most media representations of South Asian families tend to be opposed to queer and trans kids, Alok noted their South Asian family grew up and transitioned with them. Approaches to queer rights on the eastern side of the globe are quite progressive, in the poet's view. "LGBTQ rights are often framed as just recognition in the US, but in India, for instance, there is actually an acknowledgement that there needs to be reparations, there needs to be economic support."

What is their creative process like? "Procrastination is my process," Alok

chuckled. "It starts out like I'm writing for the first time every time and that's so daunting. But if it was easy, it wouldn't be as rewarding."

As a performing poet, the writing is woven with sound, considering the music that lives within individual words. "Poetry is a kind of spell-making, you have to think about how to pitch and tune each word."

Language is constantly evolving, Alok reflected, but people get upset when LGBTQ communities evolve it.

Many object to the use of non-binary pronouns. "It is interesting when people say 'Oh this stuff is all so new', then why have you always had slurs for us in your languages? So there's always been a context with which you acknowledge us, it's just been pejorative."

In several US states, disapproval of trans people is at risk of being written into the law. Our conversation took place in Utah where the House recently passed a bill seeking to criminalise trans adults for using bathrooms inconsistent with the sex on their birth certificate.

"Hopefully it's not going to pass the Senate and get approved into law but the fact that they're even indulging it is obscene."

Through art, Alok would like to loosen the hold people have over gender. "Me and my friends are finding a way of looking at each other as individuals, not as categories. So this is not some idealistic future, it's something that's being lived right now."

Equity will depend on people's willingness to feel a sense of community with everyone around them. That is why Alok opened the film saying: "The most controversial pronoun I have is 'we'. It's not 'they', it's 'we'." 🇺🇸

Alok Vaid-Menon will perform live at Park Village Resort on 16 February.

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