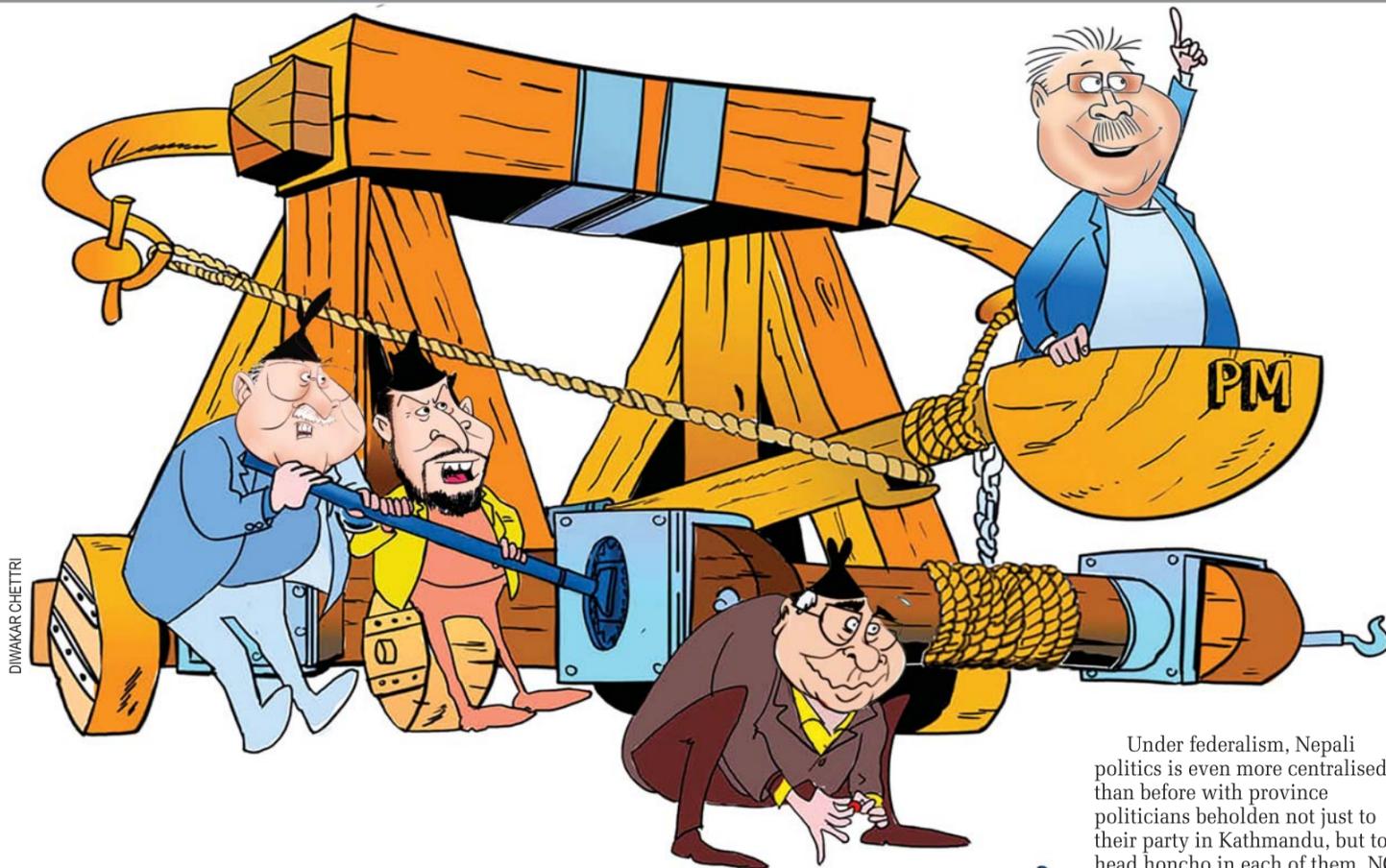




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## Catapulting to Singha Darbar

We are now on Season 3 Episode 2 of Nepal's serial saga. And in the unfolding love triangle between the Nepali Congress (NC), Maoist Centre and UML, one leader has just dumped his partner to get back with his ex.

The Maoists and the UML have joined hands for the second time in a year to form a new leftist-led coalition. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal ditched the NC for the UML.

Dahal says the NC double crossed him, but it was all about prolonging his tenure as Prime Minister by another year. He now just has to hand over premiership to Oli. This is all déjà vu. Dahal and Oli had a 'gentlemen's agreement' on rotating premiership after the 2017 election, and the Maoists merged with the UML to form the NCP. But both ended up stabbing each other in the back, and Oli had to step down. Will it be any different this time?

The more things change in Nepali politics, the more they remain the same. The three men of the three main parties are still playing musical chairs 18 years after the end of the conflict.

This week's cartoon by Diwakar

Chhetri (above) was used in Nepali Times in 2020 when K P Oli was being catapulted to Singha Darbar. For this edition, we exchanged him for Dahal, added Rabi Lamichhane of the RSP and changed the guy playing marbles to Deuba.

Till press time Thursday, the new coalition included the Maoists, UML, RSP, CPN (US) and the JSP. In Nepal's cybersphere, there is little excitement, mostly ridicule.

Barsaman Pun of the Maoists was appointed Finance Minister despite his shady past. The JSP's Upendra Yadav who got the Health Ministry was bargaining for Foreign Minister, but the portfolio went to Narayan Kaji Shrestha.

Everyone is angling for the powerful ministries with the biggest discretionary funds. The UML's Padam Giri is Law Minister after serving just 40 days as Health Minister during the previous Maoist-UML coalition last year.

The RSP's Dol Prasad Aryal returns to the Labour Ministry despite conflict of interest allegations during his last stint because of his involvement in recruitment and remittance firms.

Deuba met with Unified Socialist chair Madhav Kumar Nepal to unsuccessfully talk him out of joining the government. Nepal's CPN (US) got the Ministry of Federal Affairs and the Urban Development Ministry.

Even a new party like the RSP under Lamichhane is behaving like an old party because he is in a tearing hurry to get on the fast-track to Singha Darbar. He angled for and got the Home Ministry, and his insistence on the portfolio stems from a desire to

exculpate himself from multiple controversies about citizenship and investment in a cooperative that cheated depositors.

The only silver lining are the RSP's Sumana Shrestha as Education Minister and Biraj Bhakta Shrestha in the Ministry for Youth and Sports.

Monday's political earthquake in Kathmandu sent aftershocks to all seven provincial governments. The provinces all have their own party arithmetics, yet are unduly impacted by what happens to the federal government. This is not how devolution is supposed to work.

**What difference does it make?**

EDITORIAL PAGE 2

Under federalism, Nepali politics is even more centralised than before with province politicians beholden not just to their party in Kathmandu, but to the head honcho in each of them. NC ministers resigned in Karnali and Bagmati, while the NC controlled Lumbini, Gandaki and Sudur Paschim sacked Maoist ministers.

Unlike parties with opposing ideologies in the previous coalition, the main parties in the new one have similar names: Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist). This could be a formidable leftist front in the 2027 election.

All this is music to the ears of the Chinese, who have made no secret of their wish that Nepal's Communist parties should all merge. And if the Chinese want that, automatically the US-India bloc is not going to be too pleased.

The Maoist-NC coalition was seen to be better suited to India, but while this week's change would have surprised New Delhi, it may not be too shocked since it is confident PM Dahal will also do their bidding. 

Kunda Dixit



Women on the move

PAGE 6

The Great

Himalayan trial

PAGE 7

Weaving nature

into craft

PAGE 12



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# What difference does it make?

Nepal's rulers have been suffering from an affliction called Serial Coalition Syndrome. Symptoms include: inability to see beyond personal greed and ambition, amnesia about the national interest, serious addiction to personal power, OCD about money, and wanton political promiscuity.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal once again pulled the rug from under his main coalition partner to go off with a former ally whom he has ditched twice before. With this, Nepal has had eight governments in seven years.

The Maoists and the UML had an electoral alliance ahead of the 2017 election, after which they merged their parties. Then they divorced, and now are once more joined in holy matrimony. The country, meanwhile, is back to square one, not that it was faring all that well anyway.



The Nepali Congress (NC), its patriarch and five-time prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba got blindsided once more by Dahal's checkmate, just as he had been twice before by King Gyanendra.

Dahal and Oli now have a new deal of two years each as premier before the 2027 elections. In all likelihood, there will be another coalition shakeup when it is time for Dahal to hand over power to Oli. But this coalition has just 138 votes in Parliament, only enough to win a confidence vote and may not last that long.

However, the crux of the matter is that these coalition reshuffles are of no real concern or significance to ordinary Nepalis, and adds to public disillusionment with the mainstream parties. The RPP and independent mayor Balen Shah have been saying, "Didn't we tell you there is no hope from these clowns?"

Even the RSP has squandered much of its goodwill because of its leader Rabi Lamichhane's impatience to be Home Minister again so he can launder his tainted image. Dol Prasad Acharya has also been reinstated as Labour Minister despite allegations of conflict of interest over his involvement in a migrant recruiting agency. The only saving grace for the RSP is that MIT-graduate Sumana Shrestha is now Education Minister.

Nepalis will have to continue trying to

survive on the brink. Inequity in healthcare will persist, thousands of young Nepalis will migrate overseas every day, only to be fleeced by recruiters and state agencies.

The new alliance just ensures that Dahal will continue to be prime minister a bit longer. He also gets to put the blame for his government's failures, underperformance, and major corruption scandals on the NC.

There are only four female ministers in the new Cabinet as coalition partners keep powerful portfolios for the men. It is even worse in the provinces: of the 67 chief ministers and ministers in the seven provinces before the coalition reshuffle, only 16% were women, mostly state ministers.

Women and minorities continue to be useful only to fill quotas. Even so, there are no Dalits in the Cabinet. Token women are handy like this week in the run up to International Women's Day on 8 March.

**Most Nepalis are convinced these main men of the new coalition will bring little positive change to their lives.**

And why must provincial governments have to mirror what happens at the centre? Just because there is regime change in Kathmandu, there is no reason why it has to change in Dhangadi. Why does the NC have to sack Maoist ministers from provinces it governs?

The provinces have been given neither the authority nor revenue to govern properly, while corruption has been decentralised. Federalism so far has been a colossal waste of precious resources, where the centre's inefficiency, incompetence, poor governance is multiplied by seven.

Top leaders are loath to decentralise, and as this week demonstrated, are more power-hungry than ever before. This is against the spirit of federalism and devolution.

Fortunately, many local governments of municipalities have shown accountability and are trying to improve services. If provinces are just going to be rubber stamps of the centre, then we might as well have a two-tier government with the federal government and local municipalities.

Anything goes in Nepali politics, and in power struggles, all is fair. Governance, transparency and accountability are of no consequence. The lives of ordinary Nepalis do not matter. Prime Minister Dahal and his comrades, new and old, could not have made it clearer with the coalition reshuffle.

**Sonia Awale**

## ONLINE PACKAGES



VILLAGE OF THE CLIMBERS

Karchung Futi and Tsering Dorje are one of the few people left in the Sherpa village of Gautala in eastern Nepal. Most of the young men are high altitude guides, and there is no sound of children in the village. Follow the QR code and watch on the Nepali Times YouTube channel.



KINSHIP AND KUNG FU

The Kung fu nuns based in Nepal practise the martial art form at the Druk Amitabha Nunnery near Kathmandu, wielding swords, sticks and paper fans. The nuns work and live at the nunnery, better known as Seto Gumba, and belong to the centuries-old Drukpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Watch this 2021 video on YouTube.

### NEW COALITION

This is embarrassing ('What just happened in Nepali politics?', Nepali Times, nepalitimes.com). Like a mouse in a perpetually spinning wheel, we see perseverance through confusion and the formation of quite obviously transactional alliances for the sole purpose of remaining in power. Alliances, per se, can be legitimate, but decidedly questionable when made by parties with historically and severely divergent philosophies. It is also frustrating that there are no—or there seem to be no—other competent cadres capable of assuming leadership in each of the main parties.

**Iván G. Somlai**

■ This coalition of convenience will not last either, and the country will have to go for snap polls before 2027. Political instability will hurt economic growth, foster corruption and impunity and weaken national sovereignty. This was expected as the current Constitution itself is flawed and does not have domestic ownership. High time for Nepal's mainstream media to go to the root causes of frequent constitutional crises after 2015 and see the big picture.

**Shyamal Krishna Shrestha**

■ The only positive outcome of this political change is the improvement in the stock exchange.

**Amrit Singh Karki**

■ The question to ask always, in relation to the yam, is where do the boulders come into this?

**Ashok**

■ Nepali politics is a joke.

**Leif Bjellin**

■ It was another routine day in Nepali politics.

**Forester**

■ It is 'yes, please' when it comes to the perks and privileges of duty, and 'no, thanks' when it comes to accountability of responsible power ('Coalition collision', Shristi Karki, #1201)

**Tony Jones**

### MOUNTAINEERING

True mountaineers would not trash a mountain like climbers do ('Mt Everest (Pvt) Ltd', Vishad Onta, #1200). Shame. It is a garbage dump.

**68Timmy**

## Times.com

### WHAT'S TRENDING



#### West is west

by Alisha Sijapati  
Toni Hagen's photographs of remote western Nepal from the 1950s show how much it has changed, and how much is the same. Travelling exhibition of photographs for the next two months. More on [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

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#### More equal than others

Editorial  
Hunger, inequality, exclusion, landlessness, accountability and governance are all connected. As they say in development parlance: inequality is intersectional, and Nepal is lagging in meeting 2030 targets on eliminating hunger and reducing inequality. Visit [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com) for details.

**X Most popular on X**



#### What just happened in Nepali politics?

Nepali Times  
In yet another chapter of Nepal's promiscuous political love triangle between the NC, the Maoists and UML, the Maoists this week broke up with the NC and eloped with the UML for the third time since 2017 to form a new left-led coalition. Follow us for the latest developments.

**46 79 Most commented**

#### Neither side lost, both sides won

by Axel Michaels  
The question of who won the Sino-Gorkha War of 1791-92 has been subject to debate. A hitherto unknown war report of 1793 sheds new light not only on this question but may also offer insights into contemporary global peace challenges. Go online for this exclusive longread.

**Most visited online page**

## QUOTES

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
"Coalitions in countries like ours are at risk of falling apart from the moment they are formed, they do not work without compromise between parties that have different ideologies."

**ART @AmulyaSir**  
Nothing for the country; everything for the rulers in rotational musical chairs

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
#Hunger, inequality, exclusion, landlessness, accountability and #governance are all connected. As they say in #development parlance: #inequality is intersectional. #editorial

**Helen Hardy @H\_Hardy**  
Living in Nepal is a huge reality check

## 1,000 WORDS



RATNA SHRESTHA / RSS

**MEN-STREAM PARTIES:** Three out of the four women appointed to the Council of Ministers pose on the margins in this photo-op, after being sworn in by President Ramchandra Paudel on Wednesday. Men in the mainstream parties still dominate powerful ministries.

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### The ethnic card

20 years ago this week, Nepali Times published a report warning about the Maoists using ethnicity for recruitment. Following Mao Zedong's example, they declared autonomous regions named after ethnicities. This laid the seed to subsequent tumult over provincial demarcation post federalism.

Till today, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal pays lip service to ethnicity when it behoves him politically as with his support for the renaming of Kosi Province.

Excerpts of the report published 20 years ago this week in issue #186 5-11 March 2004:

There are examples of revolutions through history that start as freedom struggles, but soon degenerate into religious or ethno-separatist wars. The nine-year-old Maoist 'People's War' could be headed the same way. The slew of ethnic and regional autonomous regions that the Maoists have launched in recent months makes this a legitimate concern.

In addition to their 'central government', the Maoists



have set up seven ethnic and two regional autonomous regions. There are several tiers of district and town-village local government units with their own 'people's assemblies.' However, it does not look like the selection procedures for who gets to be in these assemblies is going to be done under democratic principles of adult franchise. There are provisions to ensure that at every level of government there will be more nominated members than elected ones.

The present series of announcements of autonomous regions started with the declaration of autonomy for the Magarat Region in Rolpa's Thawang on 9 January. Within two weeks, the Maoists had declared the Tamsaling Autonomous Region for the Tamangs, Bheri-Karnali Region, the Madhes Region, the Tharuwan Region, the Seti-Mahakali, Tamubuwan and Kirant Autonomous Regions. They have left the declaration of the Newar Region in the capital for a later date.

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



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# Pokhara epicentre of Sino-Indian

The Great Game between China and India is being played out in this scenic tourism capital

■ **Durga Rana Magar** in Pokhara

Nowhere is Nepal's delicate balancing act between its giant neighbours India and China as evident as it is in this tourism capital.

The Chinese have cultivated a special relationship with Pokhara ever since they built the 200km Prithvi Highway connecting it to Kathmandu in 1974, right up to the inauguration of Pokhara International Airport last year.

India has not been far behind: it financed the 181km Siddhartha Highway connecting Pokhara to Bhairawa in 1971, and a dam that raised the level of Phewa Lake.

There are strategic reasons for India and China to eye Pokhara. Most Gorkha soldiers in the Indian Army are sourced from these mountains, and there is an Indian military pension centre here.

For China, it is important to keep an eye on refugee centres here with thousands who fled Tibet after the Chinese annexation.

Both India and China have an interest in who governs Nepal, and have followed (often meddled) with political developments in Kathmandu. A Nepali Congress-Maoist coalition that was seen by many to be India-leaning was suddenly replaced on Monday with a Communist-led coalition more amicable to China.

However, it is Pokhara that is on the main geostrategic fault line between India and China, where the rivalry is openly played out.

Pokhara's mayor Dhana Raj Acharya is from the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist) and has earned the moniker 'Chinese mayor' for pushing direct flights to Pokhara from Chinese cities, and activities like the Dragon



Boat Festival on Phewa Lake, the China International Crosscountry Championship, and a full-scale celebration of Chinese New Year last month.

The Indians have been looking at this flurry of Chinese activity with some concern, and have organised their own events.

The first international flight at Pokhara's new airport was a Sichuan Airlines jet from Chengdu in June flying in the Dragon Boat Festival crew. India has been dragging its feet on allowing direct flights between Pokhara and Indian cities because the airport was built by the Chinese.

To make its point, the Indian Embassy organised a Yoga Day function on the same day as the inaugural Chinese flight. It was not a coincidence that both the Chinese and Indian ambassadors to Nepal

were in Pokhara on the same day.

On another recent visit to Pokhara, Indian Ambassador Naveen Srivastava made a pointed reference to the fact that Pokhara was connected to the Indian border (by the Indian built road in 1971) before it was linked to Kathmandu (by the Chinese-built road in 1974). He added that although Indian visitors liked to drive to Pokhara, they were facing difficulties because of the poor state of the Prithvi Highway.

"I don't know who is repairing that highway," Ambassador Srivastava continued, referring obliquely to Chinese contractors, "but India has set a record in highway construction. Next time, also remember Indian companies."

Srivastava made no mention of India's reluctance to allow flights to Pokhara, adding that most Indian

visitors came by road anyway.

Chinese Ambassador Chen Song also appeared concerned about the slow progress on the expansion of the Prithvi Highway, and drove along a part of it during a recent visit, posting drone footage of the upgrading work on social media.

While in Pokhara, Ambassador Song also publicly criticised the Indian policy of not importing electricity from Nepali hydropower plants built by the Chinese. And to drive that point home, two Chinese Air Force Y-20 transport aircraft landed at Pokhara airport in November with 50 tonnes of relief for Jajarkot earthquake survivors.

New Delhi insisted that the India-Nepal Bilateral Consultative Group on Security Issues be held in



Pokhara in October.

"The great game between India and China is being played out in Nepal, and Pokhara is where it is most visible," explains geopolitics expert Indra Adhikari.

She adds, "India is concerned about an increase in Chinese activity around Pokhara, and competition between Nepal's neighbours is heating up."

India's main sensitivity appears to be over the fact that Kaski and neighbouring districts of central Nepal are major recruitment centres

**NMB BANK**  
एनएमबी बैंक

## Turkish to Melbourne

Turkish Airlines has launched its Istanbul-Melbourne flights, expanding its global reach to 6 continents by adding Australia. With 346 destinations in 130 countries, the thrice weekly Melbourne connection is via



Singapore. Special introductory prices between Istanbul and Melbourne start from \$1,199, with returns costing from \$999. Said Turkish Airlines Chair Ahmet Bolat: "This is a monumental milestone for Turkish Airlines, as we celebrate the realisation of a long-held ambition to extend our reach to the Australian continent."

## Viber folders

Rakuten Viber has introduced customisable chat folders, enhancing organisation and accessibility for users to categorise chats based on topics, groups, or individuals. The feature allows the creation of up to five custom folders, in addition to an 'All' tab. The feature is gradually being rolled out globally and will be available to users with Rakuten Viber version 22.0 and above in the coming months.

## Tata Exchange

Sipradi Trading organised a Tata Tipper Exchange Camp for exchange of Tata SK tippers with any brand and Tata LPK 2523 tippers at its Service Centre in Dharke last week. Tata Guru Fit & Hit Double Dhamaka offer now extends to all Tata Genuine Parts, Tata Motors Genuine Oil, and Durafit Parts.

The Tata Tiago EV has also become the top choice for Nepali women due to its ease of driving, comfort, and lack of clutch and gear complications. Features such as a large screen for easy parking and reversing, adjustable seat height for uphill driving, and cost-effectiveness contribute to its popularity.

## USAID support

USAID has pledged \$85 million over five years to improve education in Nepal, targeting marginalised youth and



early grade students by enhanced learning outcomes for children in Grades 1-3, support students in Grades 1-10, and promoting equity and inclusion in schools. The fun will benefit out-of-school children and reduce dropouts.



## Coke promo

Coca-Cola in Nepal has launched a promotional campaign offering a free 250ml pack with every purchase of 1.5 litre and 2.25 litre packs of Coca-Cola, Sprite, and Fanta with the theme 'joy and togetherness'.

## Ncell in sports

Ncell and e& International have signed an MoU to enhance digital services and customer experiences in Nepal. This collaboration aims to optimise advanced analytics, customer value management, and digital transformation, as well as drive revenue growth, introduce innovative services, and improve network efficiency. Ncell is also continuing its support for sports events like the Triangular T20 Series 2024 and the Nepal-Canada ODI Series, the Birganj and Jhapa Gold Cups, and collaborates with ANFA and CAN.

## Seven years

Fairfield Kathmandu is celebrating its seventh anniversary this March. Varun Kamara, Cluster Director of Sales and Marketing, expressed his gratitude for the community's support and emphasised the hotel's commitment to further enhancing its services and facilities in the future.

## BYD in top three

BYD's models, the BYD SEAL and BYD DOLPHIN, secured top three spots in the "World Car of the Year" and "World Urban Car" categories at the Geneva Motor



Show, becoming the first Chinese carmaker to do so. The two models, with their distinctive design, cutting-edge technology, and robust safety features, captured the interest of over 100 automotive media experts from 29 countries.

# rivalry

**TOMATO BETWIXT TWO BOULDERS:** Two Chinese Air Force Y-20 transport aircraft at Pokhara airport in November (left) that brought 50 tonnes of relief for Jajarkot earthquake survivors.

A Sichuan Airlines Airbus 319 was the first international flight to the new Chinese-built Pokhara airport in June last year (right). It landed on the same day that the Indian Embassy organised Yoga Day at the nearby Pokhara Stadium (far right).

Pokhara Mayor Dhana Raj Acharya with Chinese Ambassador Chen Song (right, below).



XINHUA



DHANA RAJ ACHARYA/FACEBOOK



DHANA RAJ ACHARYA/FACEBOOK

for the Gorkha regiments of the Indian Army. The Gorkha Pension Camp was opened as far back as 1955 in Pokhara, and in 1987 it established a school for the children of Gorkha soldiers in its military.

Similarly, China's touchiness concerns the presence of British Gurkha veterans and their families living in Hong Kong, and Tibetans in four refugee camps in and around Pokhara.

Pokhara was also the staging post for American and Indian military support for Khampa guerrillas who were fighting the Chinese Army in Tibet till they were disarmed or driven out in 1976. Explains analyst Ananda Raj Mulmi: "Beijing does not want Pokhara to once more become a base for anti-Chinese activities."

After opening the China-Nepal border at Korala in Mustang, the Chinese are keen to make Pokhara a trading hub in central Nepal.

"The Chinese had a long term time horizon to link the Prithvi Highway to Korala, and wanted to

extend the road from Pokhara to Jomsom but King Mahendra did not approve, so they just built it up to Baglung," adds Mulmi.

Pokhara's sister city relations with eight Chinese cities is a source of soft power, and means there are frequent cultural exchanges.

Pokhara is a household word in China because of the popular television serial Deng Feng Lai which was filmed on location here, and the main characters took a paragliding flight. Chinese visitors used to be the mainstay of Pokhara's tourism till Covid.

More than a year after the inauguration of Pokhara Airport, there are no regular international flights. India may be preventing flights to its cities, but it is Nepal's failure that it has not been able to attract airlines to connect Pokhara to Chinese destinations.

"This is because we went ahead and built an expensive airport without factoring in geopolitical sensitivities," says foreign policy expert Krishna KC. "We have to convince the Indians that it is also in their interest to allow flights."

Chinese Ambassador Song announced at Pokhara Airport's inauguration that it was a BRI project even though it predated the concept, and this ticked India off even more. Nepal's unclear flip-flopping over the issue aggravated both sides, diplomatic sources say.

Even so, most people here blame India for being petty-minded about not allowing new air routes making Pokhara operations feasible, as well as permitting connections to Indian cities.

Professor of geostrategic studies Bhim Nath Baral says it is natural for both powerful countries to be concerned that Pokhara will be used against its national interest.

"But it is up to Nepal to deploy diplomatic skills to understand and reassure both sides," he adds. "That can only come with a mature and self-confident foreign policy." 🇳🇵

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**REGISTRATION OPEN**



DIVYA DHAKAL

PHOTO COURTESY: DIVYA DHAKAL

Divya Dhakal has woken up to mountain sunrises all her life in her hometown of Pokhara. At 27, she has a Master's in adventure tourism, and works in the travel sector while hiking and creating content in her downtime.

"Having grown up surrounded by peaks, it was natural to have the urge to travel and explore," says Divya, who hiked to Poon Hill for the first time in 2015 and then travelled to Rara Lake in 2019.

While some content creators prefer to produce longer vlogs on YouTube, many more post shorter content on Instagram and TikTok.

And unlike more spontaneous digital creators, Divya plans her travel carefully, researching places and communities beforehand.

She posts short clips on Instagram, providing context on her travels through narration and text-on videos.

Divya thinks it is better to have financial stability before becoming a full time travel vlogger since there is not much money coming in from the posts.

"Instagram is more convenient for me, because it takes less time, while YouTube would take more dedication and effort," explains

Divya who has 32,000 followers on the platform.

And while her family was initially concerned about her decision to travel to remote places, Divya says now that she has established herself in the field, the worries have diminished.

Divya recalls staying in a cowshed with nomadic herders in meadows abloom with wildflowers in Dhorpatan in 2022 as her most meaningful travel experience.

She adds, "The narratives, culture, and ways of life of such far flung communities, especially in western Nepal, are entirely different from the rest of the country."



PHOTO COURTESY: PRATIKCHA KARKI

## PRATIKCHA KARKI

Pratikcha Karki was born and raised in Sikkim and had been to Nepal only a few times previously, once as a toddler, and later on to visit relatives in eastern Nepal.

"I was never keen on travelling," says the 27-year-old chemistry graduate who is currently pursuing an MA in English. "My family insisted I get to know the world, so I thought why not establish my independence through travel."

Everything changed after she visited Nepal in 2019, and trekked to Tilicho Lake in Manang. The hike and scenery were so exciting that she decided to focus on Nepal and has been coming here every other month since 2022.

Pratikcha documents her travels primarily on Instagram, preferring

to let viewers come across her videos organically rather than actively promoting her channel. She now has more than 114,000 followers.

"I was quite camera-shy initially, which is evident in my earlier videos in which I preferred to point the camera outwards rather than on myself," says Pratikcha.

She has been in Kathmandu since November, and was planning her next trip to Kakani when Nepali Times got in touch for this story.

Pratikcha remembers standing on the edge of Tilicho Lake and looking out into its ink blue expanse below immense icy cliffs, feeling the urge to explore more of the world around her. She says, "No other place has awakened my need for travel like Tilicho has."

# WOMEN ON THE MOVE

The Nepali women who venture off the beaten trek, and vlog about their adventures

■ Shristi Karki



Vedica Gajurel in Ilam.

PHOTO COURTESY: VEDICA GAJUREL

## VEDICA GAJUREL

Vedica Gajurel set out alone towards Tadapani from Khopra along a trail less travelled in the Annapurna region last October. Her phone speaker was on full volume to scare off wild animals, when she heard noises in the steep undergrowth.

Vedica called the owner of the nearest teahouse and told him what was going on. He told her to stay put, he was coming to get her. The noises got louder and closer.

It turned out to be a bear. The teahouse owner escorted her to Tadapani, telling her it was a good thing she had not encountered it.

The 30-year-old posts vlogs of her domestic and international travels on YouTube. She completed high school in Hetauda and did her chartered accountant degree in New Delhi. But even during her internship, she had begun to feel claustrophobic in narrow office cubicles.

"I soon realised that corporate life was not for me," says Vedica, who returned to Nepal in 2018 and worked in banks before calling it

quits. "I did not know what I was going to do after I left my job, but I knew I needed to explore."

Vedica did her first journey in Bandipur, and since then has been on the Mardi Trek, to Janakpur and Swargadwari, as well as beyond to Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. She has more than 11,000 subscribers on YouTube.

For Vedica, this is more a hobby than a source of income, and she pays for her travels through occasional freelance jobs and investments in the stock market.

"Earning through content creation is still not sustainable in Nepal," she says.

Travel content creators like Vedica do not let doubts and worry hold them back, and have learned to manage everything themselves, from planning, filming, editing to posting.

Vedica's early memories of travelling are of visiting a village of the Lepcha people near Nepal's eastern border, where villagers organised a welcome program just for her, which put her at ease.



Sirjana Sizzu in Chhyachhung, in Humla's Dojam Village.

PHOTO COURTESY: SIRJANA SIZZU

## SIRJANA SIZZU

Sirjana Sizzu does not recall having stayed in any one place for any length of time since she left her home in West Rukum to travel to Upper Dolpo in 2020.

Sirjana had an affinity for the great outdoors from a young age, and graduated in forestry from a college in Kathmandu. She wanted to get a government job, but was unsuccessful twice.

We reached Sirjana on the phone one recent afternoon. She was in Bardia, having just returned from a safari. Months earlier, she was 4,100m high at Panch Pokhari in Sindhupalchok.

"I go where my whim takes me, I might be in one district today and another tomorrow, home is wherever I happen to be," says the 27-year-old travel

content creator. "I did not see a tiger in Bardia but I definitely heard one, so I think it must have seen me."

One of the lowest moments in Sirjana's life became a turning point because she had gone off to explore the mountains near her home. Filming and posting videos on YouTube seemed like a natural next step, which was easy because she had posted clips during her forestry field trips.

Sirjana began documenting her journeys to little-known destinations in Karnali Province, filming and editing on her phone and posting on YouTube — learning as she went along.

Her YouTube channel has amassed more than 100,000 subscribers, placing her among the

top Nepali travel vloggers. But the life of a content creator is not easy. Monetisation is complicated, and the lack of connectivity in remote areas is a hindrance. Navigating being a content creator in Nepal is an adventure in itself.

Sirjana remembers passing through remote villages in Karnali where people were initially wary of outsiders, but who welcomed her into their homes, and even helped her film.

She says, "When a person takes the very first step to unexplored places, it is easier for others to follow because Nepalis always make space after initial apprehension. Even though I travel solo, I am never alone. The people I meet become my companions and my friends."

mar  
International Women's Movement

# The great Himalayan trial

A Filipina and Nepali have set out to trek right across Nepal to challenge notions of what Asian women can do

■ Pinki Sris Rana

When Marinel de Jesus was growing up in her first-gen Filipino family in the United States, parents wanted her to become a doctor or a lawyer because it meant financial stability and respect.

She chose law, and went on to be a successful public prosecutor in Washington DC. She had it all: a career, a house, and proud parents.

"It was the American dream," recalled de Jesus, now 47. "But something felt missing."

Seven years ago, de Jesus decided that a seemingly perfect life that made her parents proud was not what she truly wanted. This epiphany came during a hike in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

For Mingmar Dolma Sherpa, following her passion was easier since some of her relatives are mountain guides.

It was on Pikey Peak in Solukhumbu, looking out to a sweeping panorama from Annapurna to Kangchenjunga that she saw her future in the profession.

Now 25, Sherpa has a trekking guide licence, but her challenge has not been in climbing up and down mountains so much as overcoming the male hierarchy in her line of work. She says, "Female guides really have to struggle to get jobs during the trekking season."

Marinel and Mingmar met ahead of the GHT to trek the Tsum Valley, and they hit it off. They shared not just a love for nature,



Marinel de Jesus (left), with Mingmar Dolma Sherpa trekked the Tsum Valley last December ahead of the GHT.

PHOTO COURTESY: MARINEL DE JESUS



but a desire to prove themselves as women. Which is when they decided to walk the Great Himalayan Trail (GHT) which is not just a distance of 1,700km but requires constant ascending and descending steep mountain paths.

The two women started their trek from Kangchenjunga Base Camp last month, and were immediately hit by blizzards. Suffering long-Covid, Marinel had difficulty on steeper sections.

They decided to do the Makalu section later, and are now backtracking from Rolwaling to Khumbu, hoping to make it to Everest Base Camp on International Women's Day on Friday 8 March.

This is just the beginning of the GHT. The two will now continue through Langtang, Ganesh Himal, Annapurna, Dolpo, Mugu, ending up in Simkot of Humla in May.

They are doing a hybrid route that combines a high passes with lower valleys (map, left) and hope to complete it in 140 days.

"It is rare for clients to ask us about doing the Great Himalayan Trail, and it is even rarer to find people who actually complete it," says Santosh Adhikari at Nepal Trekking Company, who himself has never done the GHT.

Marinel de Jesus calls herself the 'Brown Gal Trekker', and her transition from lawyer to full-time trekker has not been an easy one – especially since after overcoming one challenge she keeps giving herself an even more difficult one.

She admitted in a Facebook post after the Kangchenjunga section that the cold and difficulty was tougher than she anticipated.

"Being a lawyer is a high stress job," de Jesus told us before setting off last month. "But despite the physical strain, trekking in the Himalaya puts your mind at ease."

For Mingmar, this is a chance to prove herself and her endurance, and highlight the role and status of female Nepali mountain guides who are rarely recognised in a male-dominated industry.

She says: "Nepali women have to work twice as hard to be taken seriously and to prove our worth."

As a US public prosecutor, de Jesus was tired of the competitive nature of the job, arguing all the time on matters of child protection and human rights law. Hiking was a way to de-stress. She felt nurtured and healed by the natural world.

"I resigned from my job as a lawyer and went on a 5-day trek at Kings Canyon National Park in California. If I regretted quitting, I would know that very week but I came back happy," de Jesus recalls.

Marinel now owns a travel company called Peak Explorations, and one of her projects is Equity Global Treks, that aims to make tourism responsible and socially just so locals have a say in the way the industry is run.

"At 13, it was my parent's decision to leave the Philippines. I had to leave my home and friends," she says. "Today, I have given up my lucrative career and left home. But it is my decision, and mine alone."

On Day 18 of 140 on Tuesday, de Jesus described her trekking experience so far as "raw, rugged, and real". She added, "This is the longest I will be with mountains and nature. What else can I ask for?"

To support the GHT Women Leaders Campaign: <https://www.browngaltrekker.com/nepal/ghtwomenleaders2024>



arch  
al Women's Day

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## EVENTS



## Photo Exhibition

Don't miss the opportunity to explore Toni Hagen's photographic odyssey through Western Nepal at Patan's Yalamaya Kendra and Patan Museum. Experience the journey captured through Hagen's lens, offering a unique perspective on the region's landscapes and culture.  
Until 13 March, Patan Museum

## Comical evening

Join the comedy fundraiser हँस-मन्दु for laughs with Nepali comedian Sandip Chhetri and more. Get tickets now.  
22 March, 6pm, Rastriya Sabha Griha



## The Sovereign Forest

Experience The Sovereign Forest, an exhibition presented in collaboration with Sudhir Pattnaik/Samadrusti and Sherna Dastur alongside photo.circle.  
Until 31 March, Nepal Art Council

## Nurture your child

Nurture your child's creativity with Sonam Chidden's storytelling and meditation sessions, designed and organised by Abiding Heart's Kid's Fun Club.  
9 March, 12:30-2pm, Abiding Heart's Centre Tinchuli, Boudha



## Photography workshop

Dia Creatives invites aspiring women photographers to join a workshop to refine their craft and build a substantial body of work over three days.  
Until 10 March, 10am-4pm, Fee: Rs5,000, Birendra Marg

## DINING



## Octave

One of Kathmandu's most vibrant spots, Octave features live musical performances and serves some of the finest sushi in town.  
Darbar Marg, 9801988333

## MUSIC

## Anniversary gig

Celebrate the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Namaste Band this Friday on the occasion of Shivaratri. Also enjoy a live performance by Earhead with DJ sessions.  
8 March, 6pm onwards, Club Fahrenheit



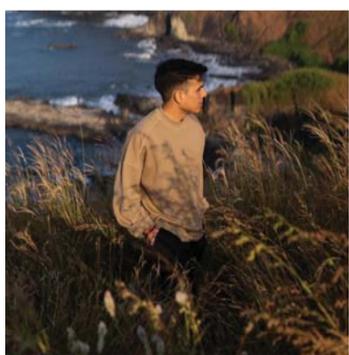
## Rock Tandav II

The two-day musical extravaganza Rock Tandav II with its theme of 'Rocking gender norms with music' promises a lineup of artists including Bipul Chettri and The Travelling Band, The Act, Kush, Jai Faak, Underside, Shree 3, Space, and many more.  
8-9 March, 11am onwards, Rs1,500, Bhrikutimandap



## Atif Aslam

After the success of Arijit Singh's live concert, MN Entertainment along with Tarish Entertainment is set to bring Pakistani singer Atif Aslam to the Nepali stage.  
12 April, Rs5,000-Rs15,000, Hyatt Regency Ground



## Anuv Jain

Get ready to be serenaded by Indian singer Anuv Jain and welcome the Nepali New Year in style.  
13 April, Rs3,000 -Rs8,000

## Fridays at Moksh

The Birds Five perform music from genres including pop, RnB, Soul, and Nepali songs every Friday this March.  
Fridays, Moksh, Jhamsikhel



## Le Trio

Le Trio offers a local taste experience. Indulge in the spicy jhol momos and savour their grilled Chicken Cheese Burger  
Jhamsikhel (01) 5421674

## Mechung

Experience the essence of Tibet at this authentic Tibetan restaurant. Don't miss out on must-try dishes including sha phaley, thukpa, and gyuma.  
Boudha (01) 4577759

## GETAWAYS



## Chandragiri Hills

Perched atop verdant hills with a commanding view of Kathmandu Valley, Chandragiri Resort offers a breathtaking panorama. Here, visitors can catch glimpses of snow-capped mountains, marvel at stunning sunsets, and unwind with a refreshing dip in the infinity pool.  
Thankot, 9801988333

## Soaltee Crowne Plaza

Escape to Soaltee Crowne Plaza for a weekend or holiday getaway within the city, where tranquillity awaits amidst urban surroundings.  
Tahachal Marg (01) 4273999



## Akama Hotel

Akama Hotel blends the rich heritage of Local Newa and Himalayan cultures with contemporary luxury amenities. Indulge in a soothing jacuzzi session, and rejuvenate in the sauna room—a perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu.  
Dhumbarahi (01) 4377298

## Soaltee Westend Premier

Located in the green plains of Nepalganj, the expansive Soaltee Westend Premier is one of Nepal's more energy-efficient and eco-friendly getaways.  
Nepalganj (081) 551145



## Hotel Country Villa

Hotel Country Villa offers breathtaking vistas of lush greenery, mesmerising sunrises and sunsets, and stunning mountain ranges on clear days. Head out for the weekend.  
Nagarkot (01) 6680127

## Krishnarpan

The restaurant at Dwarika's has become a must-visit for expats and tourists alike. Even locals, accustomed to homemade dal bhat, are drawn by the cuisine and the service.  
The Dwarika's Hotel, Battisputali (01) 4579488



## Aloft

WXYZ Bar at Aloft is hosting Wonder Women every Wednesday this March. Get two cocktails and a snack for Rs2,000 between 3-10:30pm.  
Thamel (01) 5252000

## WEEKEND WEATHER



## Sunnier and Hotter

After that much-awaited rain and snow on 4 March, we can say winter is finally over and we are now officially in spring. There is no major frontal system for the coming week, and the maximum temperature in Kathmandu will rise to the mid-twenties by early next week. But the minimum temperature may remain in the single digits for a while longer. This means quite a big daily variation between night and day temperatures. The wildfire season has also started, but may be delayed slightly because forest undergrowth was watered by the weekend's rain.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
23° 9°	23° 9°	23° 11°	24° 12°	26° 12°

## OUR PICK

Maestro, the 2023 biographical romantic drama, revolves around the relationship between celebrated American composer Leonard Bernstein and his wife, actress Felicia Montealegre. Directed by and starring Bradley Cooper as Leonard Bernstein, the film follows Leonard's life and career from being a 25-year-old assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic who is thrust suddenly to the spotlight to meeting and marrying Felicia and achieving great professional acclaim. The two have a tumultuous life together, marked by Leonard's relationships with various men during his marriage to Felicia. Also stars Carey Mulligan and Matt Bomer.



## MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI

भूकम्पको जोखिमबाट  
बच्ने उपाय

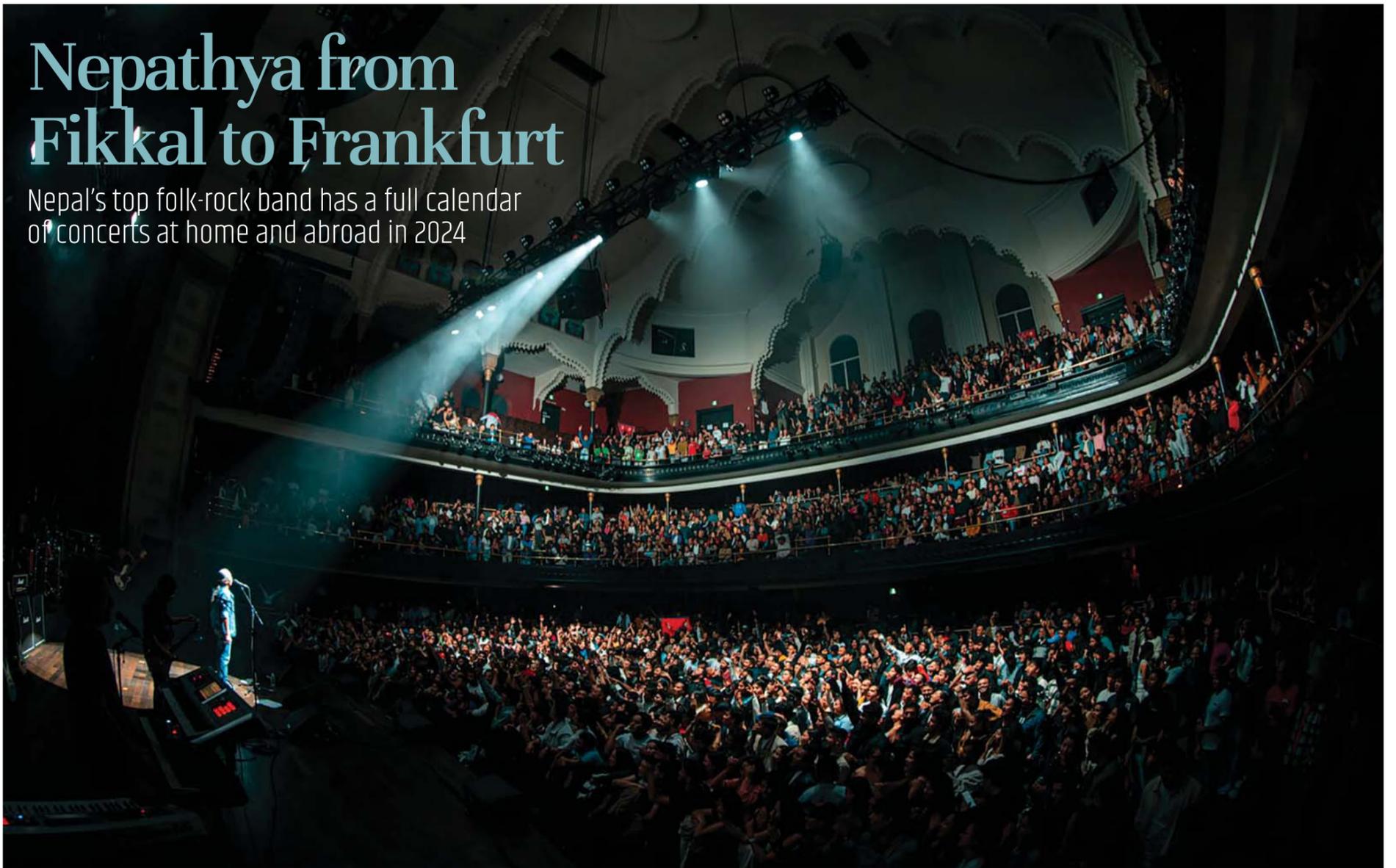
- भूकम्पको जोखिम र त्यसबाट बच्ने उपायबारे जानकारी आदानप्रदान गरौं,
- घरभित्रका फर्निचर, सजावटका सामान, पानी ट्याङ्की नहल्लने र नखस्ने गरी बलियोसँग राखौं,
- घर, स्कूल तथा कार्यालयमा भूकम्पको समयमा सुरक्षित रहन सकिने स्थानको पहिचान गरौं,
- भूकम्पको समयमा आत्तिएर भाग्ने वा दगुर्ने नगरौं,
- भूकम्पको बेला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



नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

# Nepathya from Fikkal to Frankfurt

Nepal's top folk-rock band has a full calendar of concerts at home and abroad in 2024



PHOTOS: NEPATHYA

After performing next week in Birtamode and Fikkal, Nepal's most popular folk-rock band Nepathya is headed for a Europe tour in April.

The Fikkal concert on 16 March at Karfok School of Ilam is expected to draw thousands of fans from all over eastern Nepal and Darjeeling.

Lead vocalist Amrit Gurung and his band will then leave on 17 April for a three-week Nepali New Year concert tour with gigs in Frankfurt, Lisbon, Antwerp and Valletta.

Besides nearly 120 performances within Nepal, Nepathya has done more than 80 concerts in 41 cities of 17 countries around the world.

"In recent times there is a growing demand from the Nepali diaspora for performances," says Nepathya co-manager Arpan Sharma. "Amrit Gurung's rousing

lyrics, all time favourite hits and his call on Nepalis to contribute to the motherland has always been extremely well-received."

Amrit Gurung has been called 'Nepal's Bob Dylan' by some, and at age 56 when he is not on a concert tour, he likes to farm in his ancestral home in Kaski. Being close to the land, forest and mountains inspires his new compositions, and helps prepare for forthcoming international tours.

Gurung's core message in songs and interludes is always peace and tolerance. He says, "We have no choice but to build our country ourselves. And the reaction of Nepalis, especially those abroad, is very encouraging."

Indeed, when Nepathya plays its vibrant favourite hits like रातो र चन्द्रसुर्य or गाउँगाउँबाट उठ, Nepalis overseas are on their feet, swaying and stomping to the rhythm. Some weep openly when they hear madal



accompaniment in स कर्णाली, तालको पानी, or the always-new hit रेसम.

What most fans do not realise is the amount of logistics and

planning necessary for modern concert tours with managers and sound technicians accompanying the performers. Last year alone,

Nepathya's 14-member team toured Canada, Australia, Japan--arranging nearly 30 concerts. In 2016, Nepathya performed in Hamburg and Copenhagen.

Nepathya's hallmark sound ever since the band was formed in 1990 is its rock arrangements of Nepali folk music with traditional instruments. Many band members have moved on, but Amrit Gurung is still the voice that spans a whole generation of Nepalis.

During the conflict, Nepathya toured the country with peace concerts and raised money for underserved schools.

Amrit Gurung told Nepali Times in an interview that he has increasingly noticed non-Nepalis also dancing in the aisles to songs like भेडाको ऊनजस्तो.

He says, "Even if people do not understand the words, they feel the songs. Music has no boundaries." 🇳🇵

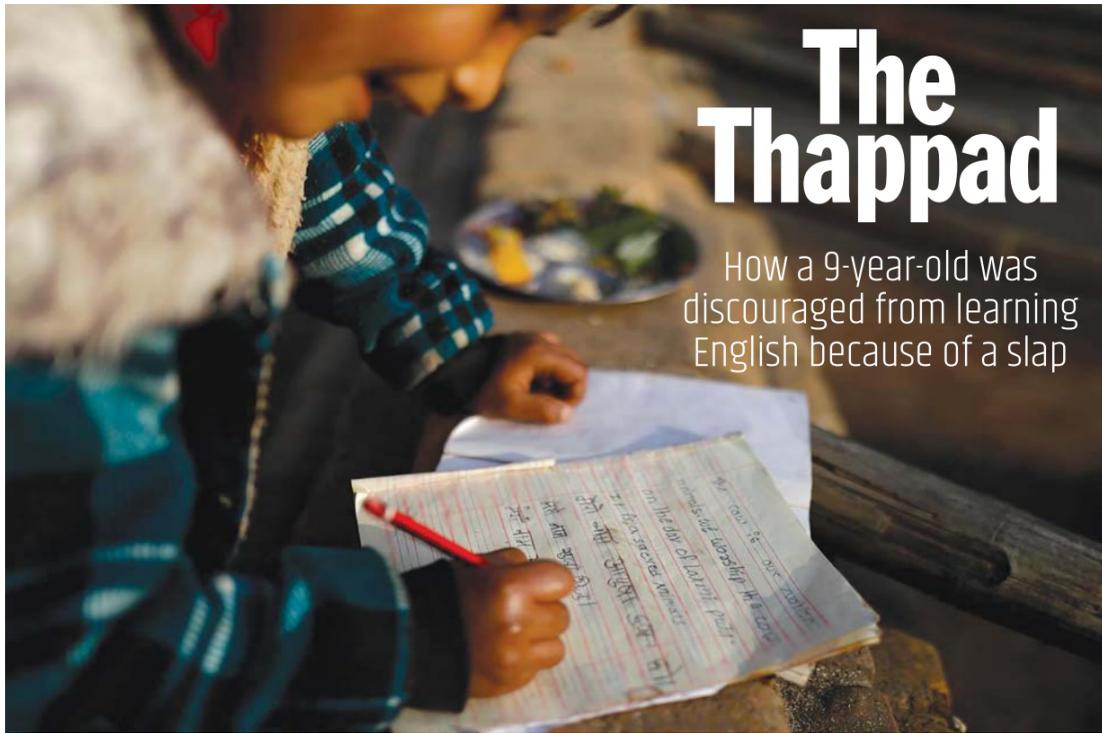
# SILK GLAMOR

Glamor that lasts



# The Thappad

How a 9-year-old was discouraged from learning English because of a slap



MONIKA DEUPALA / NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

This piece is not about Taapsee Pannu's Bollywood movie, Thappad. But the stinging slap from childhood still echoes in my ear.

It was the first and only time my father ever laid his hand on me. It



**ANGREZI**  
Anbika Giri

could happen again, since Nepali parents have a tendency to believe that no matter how old you are, you are always a child. They can hit you even in your 30s.

My father, a retired high school principal, seldom raised his voice at us while we were growing up. His silence and stern gaze were nevertheless frightening to us youngsters, and struck fear in our hearts.

As children, we never dared speak to him directly. Our mother acted as an intermediary, even in trivial matters like buying a ballpoint pen for Rs4.

This was the 1990s, and we all excelled in studies. We were disciplined children who never uttered a curse word. We respected our elders. We were the epitome of well-behaved children.

So imagine our shock when I was subjected to physical

punishment from my father for the first time. And it all had to do with my use, or misuse, of the English language.

We started learning English in Grade 4. I had topped not only my class, but the entire school. I could recite what was on any page in my text book. I had a photographic memory.

I excelled not only in academics, but also in General Knowledge, and could rattle off all the countries of South Asia and their capitals and heads of state.

My sister and I were the only two students in our class who had mastered the multiplication table up to 20. One day, our primary school principal announced that

only students who knew the table up to 20 could go home, while the rest had to stay back and keep learning until they did. My sister and I had to wait until evening for our classmates to catch up.

I was 9, and also starting to learn to spell simple English words. I took immense pride in my progress because my grandfather did as well. However, this was not enough for my father.

That day, I was doing my English homework, while my father and his colleagues were engrossed in a political conversation. One of his friends asked me, "Which grade are you in?"

"Fourth," I replied proudly.

He continued, "What is your roll number?" (Ah, the roll number, a prestigious measure of talent in those times.)

"One," I answered confidently.

Impressed, he asked me to recite the multiplication tables for 7, 9, 13, 17, and 19. Which I did, and I noticed my father's eyes gleaming with pride.

My father's other friend then asked me what I was writing. When I responded "English", he asked me to write out the lowercase alphabet — widely regarded as the more challenging aspect of English writing. I guess he was trying to confirm if I truly deserved the Roll Number 1 position.

To everyone's surprise, I swiftly wrote out the lower case alphabets from a-z. Satisfied, he was about to return to the political conversation when my father abruptly asked me, "Can you spell 'dog' for Uncle?"

"I can," I said. "D-O-G."

"And how about 'god'?" my father pressed on. I spelled god, and everyone was impressed.

Then my father asked me to spell 'bag'. In those days, children attending government schools in rural Madhes had to carry our books cradled in our left hands. Sometimes, we held our books tightly against the chest with both hands, like parents carrying a child.

School bags were fancy and rare. Only private school students had bags. You could be sure a student carrying a school bag, wearing shoes and a tie would be attending a private school.

I had never carried a school bag, and did not know how to spell it. I looked up at the ceiling and squirmed, and my father's eyes widened. The lines on his forehead showed disappointment.

It must have been less than a minute, but it felt like eternity. The more time I took, the more they saw me as unworthy of having Roll Number 1. To escape my predicament, I blurted out: "B-O-G."

That was it. My father rose from his stool and slapped me on my face. No one stopped him. His colleagues tried to console me by urging me to study harder.

I was in shock. I had never imagined that my father would ever hit me. The slap did not just hurt me physically, but left a deep emotional scar. I fell ill with fever that evening, and everyone knew the reason.

No one said a word to my father. My grandfather consoled me, but said that I needed to be even more diligent. As if I had not been diligent before.

I have hated the English language ever since. I never dedicated myself to learning English properly in class. And I hated English even more after we had Thoo (ठू) Sir. But that is a story for next time. 🇳🇵

Anbika Giri is a novelist and author of children's books in Nepali. This is the first of her monthly English language column, Angrezi, about learning English in Nepal.

# Writing

Linda Sue Park is an American children's book author of Korean heritage. Her book A Single Shard, about an orphaned boy in 12<sup>th</sup> century Korea who wants to become a potter, was awarded the John Newberry medal in 2002. She was recently in Kathmandu for Bal Sahitya Mahotsav at Rato Bangala School, and spoke with Nepali Times about reading, writing -- specifically for children -- and learning English. Excerpts:

**Nepali Times: What are the things to keep in mind when writing children's books, as opposed to books for adults?**

**Linda Sue Park:** This has changed and evolved over the years. Children's books used to be instructive, like how to be a good little girl or boy. When I broke in more than twenty years ago, the emphasis was on stories. It was sort of very amorphous, we just want exciting stories, adventure stories, happy stories, sad stories. The current phase in the US is activism. Mostly how you're going to save our planet. This is something that kids are going to have to deal with.

I have a book called A Single Shard. Young people come up to me and tell me that this book is about perseverance. Other people will say no, this is about family. Then there are those who say it is about how our lives would be a bleak misery without art. Am I going to say that any of those are wrong? No. So the message or the theme of the book is what that individual reader most needs at that time in their minds.

If it's a really good book you can read it when you're ten years old and get one message and then read it when you are fifteen and get another, and read it when you're 50 and still get a third.

**It has been said that all great literature is one of two stories; a man goes on a journey or a stranger comes to town. A Single Shard has elements of both. Do you think that the journey Tree-ear goes through to learn pottery has parallels in learning how to write?** Absolutely, and I was not conscious of that, it was a young reader who pointed that out to me. He heard me talk about revision. I've talked a lot about revising, and this little kid said to me, that's just how Min makes a pot.

**Do you start with an outline and then flesh it in?**

My fiction is a character with an external and an internal quest. The character has something they want, that's the external quest, or what other people call the plot. They also have an internal plot, the emotional growth they need to experience, sometimes that's called the theme. Often the character does not know their internal quest. That's how I start a story.

I'd say the first month of thinking about the story, I write them each down on a post-it, and I stick them on either side of my trackpad, so that everything I write, it's got to be this or that.

**In writing A Single Shard, how much of it was first-hand personal experience that influenced the story, and how much of it was external research?**

I traveled to Korea and visited some of the sites that are in the story. When I would come across something in Korean that I thought

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# for young minds

“It is important for children to see themselves or someone who looks like them in books they read”

teachers. Where it really has to happen, is at home, which is also really difficult.

Kids who have parents who support their reading at home, are far ahead by the time they get just to kindergarten.

#### What is the importance of having diverse stories for kids?

I do a lot of work around this as it pertains to children's books. We need to see everyone in their full humanity. We need to realise that they are people just like we are, because if you don't, that means that you feel you can treat them as lesser than you are.

I grew up in an era of children's books where there were very few Asian portrayals. I never saw one Korean character. It does terrible things to a child's self-image. It is important for kids to see themselves or someone who looks like them in books.

Those of us who do this sort of work are very fortunate to have that experience. Little girls running up to you and saying, “She looks like me!” It's just really heartwarming.

But to me, even more important is the dominant culture, to say, “Oh, they want to do whatever it is just like I do. They're like me.” And that second

part especially is what still needs so much work.

#### What advice do you have for budding writers out there who want to make it their career?

As a writer just starting out you don't make a living. Many people have a vision of either being a great novelist or biographer, or a Hollywood screenwriter. That is a reality for very few people. Many of us who do writing do other things that are less glamorous. A lot of writers teach writing. They teach in university programs and so forth.

The rest of us do what we call writing-adjacent jobs, such as school visits. I'm one of the fortunate ones, I'm not J K Rowling, but I can live off what my books make. But I love to travel, so I do very, very few school visits now in the United States. I accept invitations from schools abroad, like now in Nepal, because I want to see the country.

#### What was your first impression of Nepal after coming out of the airport last week?

I have only been in Kathmandu, and it's very lively, a lot of people, a lot of life, and Nepalis are very friendly, very helpful, smiling, they've got their own thing going on. We've really enjoyed it.

was important, my parents would translate it.

So how am I going to write this book because it is so much trouble to find out about 12<sup>th</sup> century Korea? Well, because Korean pottery at the time was so famous, pottery experts had done a lot of work on it. Every piece mentioned in the book is real.

I am not an expert on Korea or Korean history, I grew up

in America, I have done some research on Korean pottery of this era, just enough to write this story.

#### One of your parents cut out the phonics of the English language into a notebook and another parent took you to the library.

My son learned with phonics. My daughter had no patience for it. She learned what is called 'whole language', she would just hear the

book over and over and read it. So their development as readers was quite different. He can figure out an unfamiliar word quicker and easier than she can. She comprehends a whole story much better than him.

What you have to have is a wonderful teacher who is trained in many different systems, and that teacher says, “Okay, this child is a phonics kid. But this child, maybe not so much.” It's so difficult for

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PHOTOS: VIOLA BORDON

## Weaving nature into craft

Creating jobs and finding markets for products using invasive species clogging waterways

■ Viola Bordon

**W**ater hyacinth is an invasive Amazonian species that clogs Nepal's waterways, suffocating indigenous plants, and blocking nutrients needed by fish and aquatic birds. Now, a Nepali handicraft group has found a way to use its fibre to weave everyday household items.

Water hyacinths make ideal material for ecologically conscious consumers, and the plant's removal makes way for the regeneration of native aquatic species.

Taking a lead in harvesting it is Nepal Knotcraft Centre (NKC) which markets handicrafts through women's entrepreneurship.

"I am no pioneer, I am building off of a legacy of weaving, empowerment, and eco-friendly production," says Maya Rai, CEO of NKC. "Using water hyacinths provides

a sustainable and ecological source of fibre."

NKC was established in 1984 by Shyam Badan Shrestha to encourage women groups to seek innovative and sustainable uses of local material to weave products for sale in Nepal and abroad.

Maya Rai (pictured above) is the daughter of a weaver from Dhankuta, and spent her early childhood on a farm before moving to Kathmandu. Rai's passion for weaving propelled her education in business. She now works with indigenous communities across

Nepal, elevating traditional knowledge systems and linking products to the global market.

Not only is harvesting water hyacinth difficult, but Rai has to navigate a web of stakeholders to source the plant from wetlands including the



Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. Waterways are clogged by hyacinth, so removing them to weave products is a win-win.

After over a decade of work, Rai is close with community leaders at Kosi Tappu Community Forest which backed her proposal. Her ability to make room for innovations within traditional systems of craft stem from her own personal experience. By obtaining permission from the Reserve, she cuts the distance between material sourcing and processing, making weaving profitable.

Rai's group, primarily made of women, began to harvest, process,

and ship water hyacinth to the weaving hub in Kathmandu where the weed is now made into mats, baskets and decorative items.

Maya Rai combines two simple ideas: use organic wovens as an alternative to plastic and remove invasive species to do so. Purchasing a water hyacinth basket gives consumers a biodegradable option while promoting restorative production that cleans up natural waterways in Nepal. 🇳🇵

*Viola Bordon is a Fulbright Researcher studying materials through sculpture with Kathmandu University School of Art. A weaving installation will be exhibited at Taragaon Next throughout April.*

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