



SUMAN NEPALI

RISE OF HIGH-RISES

■ Sonia Awale

After the 25 April 2015 earthquake, Kathmandu residents were terrified to return to their high-rise flats. None of the apartment blocks collapsed in the 7.8M disaster, but many sustained structural damage.

Nine years later, most have all but forgotten that frightful day. Kathmandu is back to building standard structures.

With no more space to spread horizontally, Kathmandu is going vertical. But structural engineers say most high-rises do not take into account seismicity, soil condition, construction methods, quality of

raw materials, fire hazard, and search and rescue.

"Much focus since 2015 has been on buildings, but not much on where we are building," warns Sangeeta Singh of the Centre for Disaster Studies at the Institute of Engineering. "Kathmandu is not suited for high-rises. Permits are issued without soil tests."

Kathmandu Valley is a former lakebed with soft topsoil prone to liquefaction and shaking.

"Building anything five storeys or higher in Kathmandu needs special design and structural considerations," says Surya Narayan Shrestha at the National Society for Earthquake Technology - Nepal (NSET).

Technologies exist to reduce seismic risk in high-rises, as in quake-prone cities like Tokyo, Los Angeles, Jakarta or Mexico City.

Base isolation, for example, separates the vibration of the land and the building reducing damage from soil-building resonance. Seismic dampers change the pattern of vibration altogether, dissipating energy as vibrations move across a structure. But these are all expensive technologies.

Nepali engineers who can help with technology transfer are working in the field in Nepal and overseas. Kathmandu's high-rises are already very expensive to build, and making them seismic resistant would be an incremental cost.

The shape of high-rises also matter. Reinforced concrete buildings with asymmetric design of the kind that are seen in newer structures in Kathmandu experience more torsion and shear during quakes. High-rises with regular geometry are stronger.

An even bigger concern is that of emergency evacuation and rescue in case of fire or earthquake. Kathmandu fire services do not have ladders that reach the higher floors of most new structures.

"High-rises have potentially higher casualties," says Shrestha. "But our safety features are voluntary, not mandatory."

Street access, shelters, open spaces, and evacuation routes are integral to disaster preparedness and safety of neighbourhoods. Most new high-rises in Kathmandu have narrow access roads.

Most of the buildings that survived the 2015 disaster were reinforced concrete structures, and this fed the misconception that they are safer. But seismologists say that if the intensity and duration of the shaking had been a little more, many substandard concrete structures would have collapsed.

Nepal also lacks expertise and equipment for search and rescue in collapsed concrete structures. "Structural safety and design were priorities after 2015, and we revised building codes. We need to monitor construction as much as design," says Sangeeta Singh.

Shrestha at NSET agrees there have been improvements in building practices in the past nine years, but adds, "We have both learnt and unlearnt lessons from 2015. The awareness hasn't yet translated into action on safety."

Disastrous preparedness
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



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Disastrous preparedness

The 7.2M Taiwan earthquake on 3 April was a reminder for us here in Nepal about the importance of preparation with up to code infrastructure, earthquake early warning sensors hooked to mobile networks, seismic risk education in schools, and swift emergency response.

Although 13 people were killed, readiness saved lives. Skyscrapers shook and swayed but did not fall, high-rises tilted but did not collapse. A similar intensity earthquake in Taiwan in 1999 had killed 2,400 people.

This week marks nine years since Nepal's 2015 earthquakes that killed nearly 9,000 people. It has been four months since a 6.4M quake struck Jajarkot and West Rukum near midnight on 3 November, claiming 153 lives.

In the immediate aftermath of 2015, building codes, earthquake-resistant designs and retrofitting became high priority. But as memories fade, so does the fear. Nine years on, buildings including high-rises (page 1) that flout zoning and building codes have come up in Kathmandu while open spaces have further shrunk.



KUNDA DIXIT

Himalayan seismologists have warned that 2015 was not the Big One, the kind of quake that hits central Nepal every 80 or so years. Neither was Jajarkot the megaquake scientists had expected in western Nepal's seismic gap. As we have been saying in this paper for the last 24 years, the next big earthquake is 'not a matter of if, but when'.

While the 14 districts affected by the 2015 disaster have now mostly been rebuilt, and are better prepared, the rest of the country is not. A >8M megaquake in Western Nepal would be a trans-boundary disaster of unthinkable proportions.

In Jajarkot and West Rukum, many survivors spent the winter without a roof over their heads, and they still await relief to rebuild. The National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) might have taken nine months to set up after the 2015 earthquake, but that disaster should have been a lesson for timely assessment for earthquake relief at the very least.

Nepal is a landmine of disasters. Nearly 350 people have died just in the past year in floods, landslides, lightning, and forest fires, and not including Jajarkot. We are now in the thick of wildfire season. Hundreds of forest fires are burning across the country, some for

weeks. Three fire-fighting soldiers and three children picking mushrooms were killed by wind-fanned flames just in the past week.

The prolonged winter drought should have warned us that this year, the fires would be much worse. But adding fuel to the fires, as it were, is the new trend of burning wheat straw after harvest by farmers (page 4-5).

Fire is always followed by flood, and this year, weather models predict above-normal monsoon precipitation. As it is, monsoons have become erratic with extreme downpours followed by weeks without rain. Mohan Mainali's ongoing series in Nepali Times analysing meteorological, hydrological and demographic data from eastern Nepal shows that Nepal has always suffered from either too little or too much water, and this has contributed to outmigration.

Landslides triggered by heavy rainfall along Nepal's poorly designed roads in never-ending states of construction magnify the risk. Landslides can also frequently block rivers, which raises the need for early warning systems.

And if all this was not bad enough, we have the threat of GLOFs from glacial lakes swollen with ice melted by climate breakdown. The water level in the Tso Rolpa glacial lake in Rolwaling was reduced by 3m in 2002, and the water level of Imja Lake was lowered after the 2015 earthquake to mitigate the risk of GLOFs. But these lakes continue to expand as the Himalaya warms 0.7°C faster than the global average.

Thulagi glacial lake below Himalchuli is another one in danger of bursting, and would wash away four hydropower projects downstream on the Marsyangdi River. A GLOF from the precariously situated Lake 464 in the Hinku Valley would race down the Dudh Kosi Valley, into the Sun Kosi and right down to the Tarai.

While these lakes are all dangerous by themselves, they could burst simultaneously during a major earthquake. Which means Nepal must be prepared not just for earthquakes, but the co-seismic risk of catastrophic debris flows along its rivers.

Disaster preparedness means knowing and acknowledging potential without spreading panic and crying wolf. And:

- Stockpiling and pre-positioning food and other relief materials
- Investing in search and rescue equipment and training
- Safety drills and earthquake education in schools
- Decentralised first responders with aerial medevac

Shristi Karki

Nine years after the 2015 earthquake is a good time to begin preparing to be prepared for multi-hazards.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Not Child's Play

The Maoist militia was made up of children, women and even the elderly. Across western Nepal, 10-year-olds in combat fatigues, carrying guns, socket bombs or grenades was a common sight. Maoist child soldiers now have their own children.

Many of them have since the end of the war spoken against their recruitment and how they were discarded once the rebels joined mainstream politics and attained power. Excerpt of the report from Jumla published 20 years ago this week on issue #192 16-22 April 2004:

Rajukala Rawat of Jumla is only 10-years-old but she already has a nom de guerre: Comrade Samjhana. When we spoke to her, she was carrying two grenades and told us her job was to sit by the trail and fling them at any army patrol passing by. "If the enemy come, we are supposed to throw it and run away," she told us matter-of-factly.

Her friend Serena Buda is known as Comrade Sirjana, and she is 11-years-old. The two form part of a six-member sentry, all armed with grenades. Serena tells us defiantly: "Today we are carrying grenades, but when we grow up we



will take part in attacks on Royal Nepali Army bases."

Neither Serena nor Rajukala seem to know what or why they are fighting. When asked they reply: "To defeat imperialism." But they don't seem to know what imperialism is and just repeat what they were

taught in their training camp.

The head of the 'people's government' of Jumla, Gajendra Mahat has a bodyguard: 14-year-old Comrade Bimarsha. He was studying in grade eight in the Raralihi Secondary School last year when the Maoists forced him and 25 other classmates to join the 'people's army'. "In the beginning I was reluctant, I wanted to study, but later I went along," Bimarsha told us. Twelve of those abducted managed to get away, but there is no escape for Bimarsha. He knows the Maoists will come after him or his family if he does.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



SAYING CHEESE

In the high pastures, Dipak Shrestha spends three months a year in summer grazing and milking yaks to make the famous Langtang cheese. Destroyed in the 2015 earthquake, the cheese plant was rebuilt with new equipment, a storage facility, and a lab. Watch this video on the Nepali Times' YouTube channel and subscribe for more multimedia content.



FOOTBALL VS FOOD

A Nepali footballer's lifestyle is not lavish, players do not get the opportunity to train, and the games are not played all year round. Only a handful of Nepali players have got the opportunity to play football outside Nepal, the rest have migrated, possibly for good. Watch the 2023 video on our YouTube channel.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Kathmandu is choking on fumes. Remove import tax on all EVs. Electric bikes are the future in Kathmandu ('EV year २०२४', Sonia Awale, #1207).

Slow Trekking

■ EVs should not be the future of transportation in Nepal. Build an electric rail network and trolley for city transit, only then can we think about battery-powered electric vehicles.

Nirjiv Pawan

■ Sajha buses are a really good decision for the health of people in the valley ('Sajha's green buses go greener', Vishad Onta, #1207)

Alan Roadnight

■ What's the point of bringing so many buses, to create more traffic congestion? Will only be justified if the bus fare is lesser than fossil fuel ones.

Nikki Thapa

■ The smaller, less bulky vehicles are lighter and more efficient ('EVs, Hybrids, and Plug-ins', Vishad Onta, #1207). They are more practical especially in city areas as it is easier to park a small car and to maneuver through heavy traffic. Small cars are also cheaper and cooler.

Martin Max Aart de Jong

WATER SCARCITY

Perhaps, the issue of drying springs may be better explained by taking specific cases from diverse eco-social contexts ('People and mountains are thirsty in eastern Nepal', Mohan Mainali, #1207). This is mainly because of rapidly changing drivers in multiple directions. The irony is that the key players, like local units, aren't doing the bare minimum to conserve them.

Namindra Dahal

■ Such a good and concise writeup summarising views and situations. Hope other issues are also tackled as this has been done in our East.

Netashwa

LESS MOUNTAINEERS

This is good news for the mountain and the environment ('Where have all the mountaineers gone?', Vishad Onta, #1206).

Anne Allen

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

One night in Bhadgaon

by Vishad Onta
It is at night that Bhaktapur brings out the best of itself, radiating art and culture. The red brick roads give the town elegance and character different from other tourist haunts. Visit nepalintimes.com for photo story.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



People and mountains are thirsty

by Mohan Mainali
One of the reasons Nepalis are migrating out is because of the lack of drinking water. Governments are investing in pumping water up from rivers to convince farmers not to leave. Second of our 3-part series from eastern Nepal.

Most popular on X

EV year २०२४

by Sonia Awale
Petroleum imports account for one-fourth of Nepal's imports and is more than all exports combined. The next budget must promote battery-powered vehicles to slash the petroleum import bill and improve air quality. Join the discussion online.

Most commented

New year, same difference

Editorial
There are major changes coming in the upcoming decades but most leaders do not recognise the urgency of global crises, and are haggling over who gets to sit in the best chair on the tilting deck of the Titanic. Read more at nepalintimes.com

Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The next budget must proactively promote battery-powered vehicles to slash Nepal's petroleum import and improve air quality.

Ed Douglas @calmandfearless
A country with hydro and a ma-hoo-ive air pollution problem can do no other.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Springs are going dry across Nepal's mid-mountains from east to west, partly due to erratic rainfall caused by the climate crisis but also because of over-extraction.

Dipak Gyawali @dipak_gyawali
Only very, very partially by erratic rainfall! Misuse of pumping technology is still the overwhelmingly principal driver followed by others such as changing social mores about "chokho pani", hydropower tunnelling etc! @NWCFC_NepaSaFa @ngamindra1 @GOVINDASHARMAP @pakanajole

1,000 WORDS



This gives new meaning to our tunnel war strategy.

BREAKTHROUGH
BREAKING NEWS: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Physical Infrastructure Minister Raghuraj Mahaseth and Japanese Ambassador Kikuta Yutaka at a ceremony marking the end of drilling of the 2.6km Nagdhunga Tunnel that is expected to cut driving time to Mugling from Kathmandu by 1 hour. There were strong objections on social media from Nepalis posing fun at the use of sofas and carpet at the ceremony inside the tunnel.

RSS

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Going up in smoke

Smoke blanketing Nepal is not just from forest fires but also burning wheat stalk after harvest



CHANDRA KISHORE

The natural world does not respect manmade boundaries. We demarcate rivers as the frontiers between nation states, but they change their course in open defiance of cartographers and politicians.



BORDERLINES
Chandra Kishore

Air pollution also travels across national boundaries with impunity. Industrial and vehicular emissions from the Gangetic plains are carried by prevailing winds to Nepal and the Himalaya. In November, north India and the Nepal Tarai was

shrouded in a thick blanket of smoke from crop-residue burning on both sides of Punjab and other Indian states.

These past weeks, the sky over Nepal has been thick with haze from wildfires fanned by winds, burning out of control on mountain slopes and along the East-West Highway. But travelling along that highway this week, we saw another source of smoke — acres upon acres of wheat stalks set on fire after harvest in the fields.

Those fires we photographed in Simraungadh on Monday correspond to red dots at that exact spot in the NASA infrared satellite image taken from space that very morning. There is another very large patch of red in

Uttar Pradesh across the border in India.

Nepal is vulnerable to climate breakdown, and a part of the reason for the wildfires is the long winter drought and deficient rainfall this month that failed to moisten the soil enough. No major rainfall is forecast for the coming week, and the temperature in the Tarai is reaching the upper 30° Celsius.

With an average per capita carbon footprint of 0.03 tons per year, whatever energy Nepalis use will not reduce the global impact of the climate crisis.

However, there are some things governments on both sides of the border can act on — air pollution.

It poisons the air we breathe and affects everyone: rich and

poor, with the elderly and young most at risk. In the past three weeks, the AQI that measures the concentration of hazardous suspended particles in the air in the Nepal Tarai has remained above 200 micrograms per cubic metre. The WHO's threshold for air safe to breathe is 10 µg/m³.

All across the fertile Tarai plains of Nepal, farmers have just finished harvesting the winter wheat crop. Many farms are now mechanised with threshers, but while reducing the drudgery for farmers, these machines have created another problem.

The stalks of the wheat that emerge from the threshers remain in the fields. Because most young men have migrated, farmers find it easier to just burn the stubble.

This is a widespread practice in northern India, and now stubble burning has become common on the Nepal side as well.

Instead of feeding the straw to livestock or burning it to cook, farmers set fire to their fields because the population of livestock has also decreased with the rise in migration.

Another reason Nepal's farmers started burning the stubble is because of stricter border controls which has made it difficult for Indian traders to come over to buy straw from Nepali farmers, who now have no other option but to burn what is left in the fields, hoping the ash fertilises the soil for the paddy season.

"We are no longer burning straw and dung for domestic fuel,

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Turkish to Denver

Starting 11 June, Turkish Airlines will be flying nonstop to Denver from Istanbul with three flights a week. Denver is the 14th North American destination that the carrier has added to its route map. From 9 July, the frequency of the flight will increase to four a week.

Helping hand

The Indian Embassy this week gifted 35 ambulances and 66 school buses to various hospitals and schools across Nepal. Two ambulances were given to the



November 2023 earthquake-hit districts of Jajarkot and West Rukum. The Embassy has donated a total of 1,009 ambulances and 300 school buses to Nepal since 1994. However, a new government rule about ambulances having to be four-wheel drives has complicated the registration of some of them.

Reducing EV accidents

Sipradi, dealers for Tata Motors that produce Nexon Tigor and Tiago brands, organised a training program on



accidents involving electric vehicles and safety measures for 60 traffic officers in Kathmandu to equip them to deal with mishaps including corrosive acid in an EV battery.

Hydro Expo

The fourth Himalayan Hydro Expo organised by the Independent Power Producers' Association Nepal (IPPAN) is being held in Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Ground from 25-26 April and will feature an electric vehicle rally. The business-to-business platform aims to educate and inspire advancing hydropower, spotlighting its myriad benefits.



Chocofun Joy

Sujal Foods is launching Chocofun Joy, an individually packed bite-sized chocolate square at Rs10 per piece. It will also be available in jars of 70. Sujal Foods, popular for wafer bars, also produces a variety of candy including lollipops, toffees and jellies.

Galaxy S24 Ultra

Samsung has launched its flagship Galaxy S24 Ultra phone in a new Titanium Yellow colour. The phone features a stylus, and AI that enhances the user experience. Customers will also get a free silicon cover until 31 May. The phone is also available on EMI starting at Rs10,000 per month and comes with one-time breakage insurance.



JCB warranty

JCB has announced a warranty on a select range of its Tracked Excavators for up to 5 years or 10,000 hours, whichever comes first. JCB operates in Nepal through



MAW Earthmovers, and has 32 outlets and three operator training institutes. MAW Earthmovers employs 500 people, has trained over 5,000 operators, and is involved in the construction of the Namkha Khyung Dzong Monastery in Humla.

Dish Home Mission 81

As part of Dish Home's new year scheme Mission 81, users can subscribe to a year of tv for Rs3,000. Visit any Dish Home dealer or pay digitally.

Global IME cashback

Global IME is providing a cashback of up to Rs500 upon international transfer of Rs100,000 or more using Global Remit as part of their Paisa Auney, Thapera Pauney offer until 10 June. There will be smaller cashback for transfers less than Rs100,000. Global IME is also partnering with IME Travels such that credit card holders will be able to travel domestically and internationally to destinations like Annapurna Base Camp, Muktinath, Thailand, Bali, and Dubai with EMLs ranging from Rs3,210- Rs6,000. Customers will get a discount of 50% on card fees.

Pasqualino Barbasso

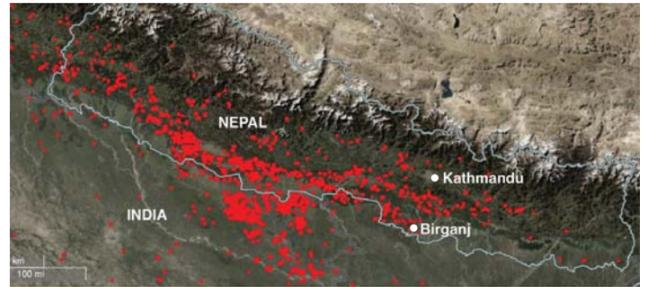
Marriott Kathmandu in Naxal is hosting world-renowned Italian Acrobatic chef Pasqualino Barbasso from 17-24 April to celebrate their fifth anniversary. Chef Barbasso is known for his expertise in acrobatically spinning pizza dough. He will also take cooking classes, demonstrations, and curated dining experiences.



FuAsian

FuAsian Restaurant has opened on top of the Holiday Inn Express in Bagh Bazar, offering dishes from across Asia including sushi and dim sum. The restaurant has both indoor and outdoor seating, and can accommodate large gatherings. A wide selection of wines, spirits and cocktails are also available.





A NASA FIRMS infrared satellite image of Nepal and adjoining parts of India on 16 April. Each red dot is a wildfire, or farms burning stubble after wheat harvest.



DILSAD ALAM

The whole of Nepal was covered in thick smoke on 16 April up to an elevation of 2,500m.

FLAME THROWERS: Ground view of stubble burning in Simraungadh near Birganj on Tuesday (left). Sparks from burning stubble in one farm ignited a wheat field that was being prepared for harvest in Karaiyamai Municipality of Bara (above).

we have fewer livestock, so we do not really need the straw, and that is why the farmers are burning them in the fields," explains Rameswar Mehta of Simraungadh Municipality.

Contrary to some who think the ash is a fertiliser, farmers say the fires actually blacken and

destroy the soil by killing nutrients and beneficial microorganisms, reducing harvests. A Facebook post this week shows a wheat field ready of harvest on fire after sparks from nearby stubble burning ignited the field.

It is obvious that unless farmers see alternative uses for their crop

residue, like in industrial-scale composting or biogas generation, they will keep burning stubble.

Manual harvesting used to leave only a few inches of stubble off the ground which the cattle fed on, now with the threshers there is just stubble lying around, which is too much trouble to pick.

The Madhes Province government has no record of the area of wheat fields that are being put to the torch. It must come up with a strategy to make farmers aware of the impact from crop residue burning on public health through pollution and the fall in productivity due to decline in

fertility of the soil.

There needs to be more intense public debate about the harmful effects of stubble burning and its trans-boundary impact. 🇳🇵

Chandra Kishore is a Birganj-based commentator who writes this monthly column Borderlines for Nepali Times.

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KATHMANDU'S GRAVITY-DEFYING CHARIOT FESTIVAL

The procession of Karunāmaya this week is full of hidden pragmatism and teachings of the Buddha

■ Alok Siddhi Tuladhar

Midway along the stretch of the ancient trade route between Tibet and India lies the Kel Tol neighbourhood. The name is derived from the original Koligrām, and it is believed the Koli people driven out of their homeland in northern India some 2,400 years settled here. The Koli were the maternal ancestors of none other than the Buddha.

Kel Tol is famous for the Buddhist monastic complex of Kanak Chaitya Mahāvihar, featuring the majestic two-tiered gilded temple of the white god Karunāmaya.

This elaborately decorated courtyard is a bustling centre of the Vajrayāna sect of Buddhism, practised widely by the indigenous Newā people of Kathmandu Valley.

Karunāmaya, also known as Ārya Avalokiteshwar, is defined in great detail in the 1st century CE Buddhist text Sadharmapundarikā where he liberates all sentient beings from suffering. He helps rid the eight external fears metaphorically equated with their equivalent internal states of mind: lions (pride), wild elephants (ignorance), fire (anger), snakes (jealousy), floods (attachment), imprisonment (miserliness), thieves (wrong views) and cannibals (doubt).

In the Pancha Rakshyā Sutra, a Buddhist scripture from 200 CE, Ārya Avalokiteshwar was counted among the eight major deities.

Followers of the Brāhminical god Shiva worship Ārya Avalokiteshwar as Seto Machhindranāth. For Shaivites, Machhindranāth is the Indian saint who founded the Nāth cult in the 10th century CE. He is the guru of saint Gorakhnāth.

During the reign of Yakshya

Malla (1428–1482 CE), a beautiful image of Ārya Avalokiteshwar was dug up by a farmer in present-day Jamal, which was then a cultivated area outside the city. The farmer, known as a Jamamī (meaning the one from Jamal) took the image home for safekeeping. That night, Ārya Avalokiteshwar appeared in the farmer's dream and told him that the proper place for him to reside is at the confluence of two rivers.

The nearest confluence was at present-day Wongha (Indrachok) and the image was installed in the Kanak Chaitya Mahāvihar complex in Kel Tol near Wongha. This made it easier for city residents to pay homage to Ārya Avalokiteshwar and spread compassion.

Soon, the deity came to be revered highly as Jamaleshwar, the one found in Jamal. Eventually, the name got corrupted, as happens often in Nepāl Bhāsā, to Janabahā Dyo. The courtyard where his temple is located is now popularly known as Janabahā.

The gilded temple of Janabahā Dyo, first built in the early 16th century CE, is adorned with wooden and metal artefacts that symbolise 108 forms of Ārya Avalokiteshwar. It stands out as the most decorated temple of its kind in Kathmandu.

Today, Janabahā is a living heritage site where many ancient customs and rituals are widely practised as per Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition. Devotees throng the Janabahā Dyo shrine for daily worship and to receive Karunāmaya's blessings.

Being the compassionate one, Ārya Avalokiteshwar goes around town every year in his tall wooden chariot to allow sick and physically disabled devotees to pay homage to him from the comfort of their homes. One could say it is a door-to-door visit by the Compassionate One.

For the pragmatic minded, the chariot festival is an annual renewal of communal harmony, validation of our ancient mathematical supremacy and demonstration of the need to keep practical skills alive, including the craft of building earthquake resilient houses.

The Janabahā Dyo chariot is pulled from Jamal, where his image was found by the farmer, through the historic heart of Kathmandu in a gala parade every year. The procession, accompanied by folk music ensembles and revellers, starts on the eighth day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra, and lasts up to a week (ending on Saturday this year). Hundreds of devotees pull the chariot along the streets as a way of expressing their gratitude to lord Karunāmaya for blessing them with compassion and well-being.

Purna Ratna Vajrāchārya is an ordained priest who belongs to the clan responsible for taking care of Janabahā Dyo. He has been studying the design and architecture of the chariot for the past 40 years, and overseeing its construction for the past 15. He has learnt that the engineering principles of building the chariot are based on the mathematical system in which Buddhism is taught.

For example, 365 pieces of wood are used in the chariot, each representing a day of the year. Each of the four wheels consist of 25 pieces of wood, totalling 100, representing completeness or fulfilment. The chariot is vertically divided into 13 sections, a parallel to the Buddhist concept of Trayodashi Bhuvana that describes the 13 steps that one must take to achieve the state of Nirvana.

Exactly nine types of wood are used, which is the sum of the four base elements that make up the universe (earth, water, fire and air) and the five human senses.

The height and length of the





chariot is 32 arm's length (hāt in Sanskrit), 14.8m. The number 32 represents the maximum number of auspicious and physical qualities one could possess to be considered an outstanding human being.

Says Vajrācharya, "Observing how the chariot is built helps one learn the fundamental pillars of the Buddha's teachings, and find an easier path to Nirvana."

The structural design of the nearly 15m wooden chariot is not only awe-inspiring but also gravity-defying. It leverages the pliancy of the materials used in its construction -- flexible joints tied with cane soaked in water for several days.

The precise proportions of the chariot ensure great manoeuvrability in the narrow streets along the route of the chariot procession that include some 90° bends, without colliding into houses.

Driving and steering the chariot with brute muscle power of the mirthful crowd is a seemingly impossible task. But this has been achieved year after year, despite the fact that the devotees who tug wildly at the ropes lassoed to the two front wheels, are most likely in high-spirits (pun intended).

Sanjay Manandhar, a US-based technology entrepreneur, recounts how his high school physics teacher from Canada asked his students to go observe the locals build the chariots of Karunāmaya if they were interested in becoming engineers in the future.

"That made no sense to me then, but, after all these decades, I now see clearly how the structural design of the chariot, adopted early on by our ancestors is full of earthquake-resilient properties that need to be applied in building houses in an earthquake-prone zone like Nepal," says Manandhar.

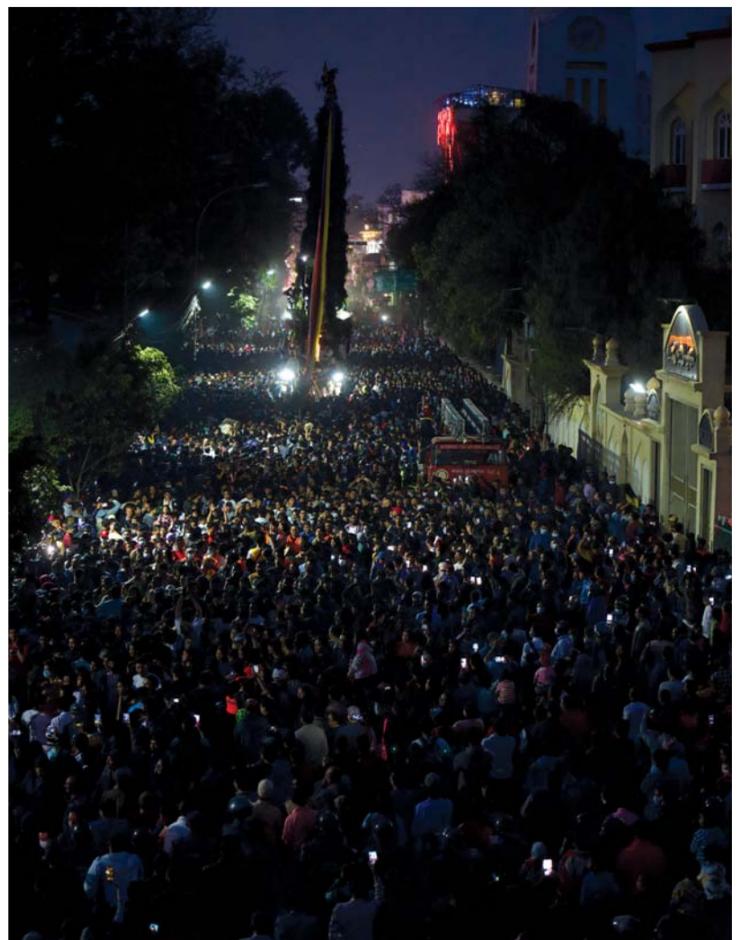
A highlight of the chariot festival is that human goddess Kumari makes an appearance at the final destination in Lagan, usually on the third day. This is only one of the 13 times that people get to see the Kumari outside her temple abode.

On the last day of the festival (Saturday), the image of lord Karunāmaya is carried on a palanquin by priests from Janabaha in a gala procession and brought back to his permanent residence at the temple in Kel Tol.

The chariot festival is thought to have started during the reign of King Pratap Malla of Kantipur in the 17th century CE. For close to four centuries, the construction of the chariot and its operation has proven to be a phenomenal engineering feat, and the people's faith in divinity means the tradition is alive.

The essence of the colourful rituals and the religious beliefs of this ancient chariot festival is now all but lost. The logic, technology and practicality must be brought back to light, as they reflect the high civilisation and wisdom of our ancestors that we can leverage in modern times and into the future. 

Alok Tuladhar is a culture and heritage documentarian.



EVENTS

**Woodcarving exhibition**

The Revival of Newari Woodcarving 2024 will showcase the works of Nepal's noted contemporary woodcarving artists, alongside photography by Kishor Kayastha.

19-21 April, 10am-6pm, Patan Museum

Yatra 2 Happiness

Celebrate diversity with the LGBTQIA+ communities and allies at the first rainbow tourism international conference.

20-21 April, 9am onwards, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel

**Toyota Women's Rally**

Register now to participate in the Toyota Women's Rally, open to all the women. Visit <https://www.toyota.com.np/en.html> for additional details.

20 April

Seto Machhindranath Jatra

Seto Machhindranath is worshipped as the deity of rain by Hindus and Buddhists alike. Watch the procession and bear witness to this ancient tradition of Kathmandu.

20 April, Pulchok

David Breashears, 68

Five-time Everest summiter and climate activist David Breashears died on 14 March, aged 68. A lifelong friend of Nepal, Breashears used repeat photography to document the impact of climate change on the Himalaya. Join his memorial service this Friday.

19 April, 2:30pm, Nepal Tourism Board



MUSIC

KatJazz 2024

Get ready to jazz up your evenings with global music from a range of musicians across the world.

22-30 April, 7pm onwards, Rs800-1200

**Music at Pauline's**

Head to Pauline's for the perfect blend of beats, mojito and BBQ. This Saturday, Sunny J joins to play a set of Afro House.

20 April, 4pm, Jhamsikhel

**Trishala Gurung**

Watch singer-songwriter Trishala Gurung live this weekend, with an opening performance by Aarakshan Band.

19 April, Club Platinum, Darbar Marg

**BNC Live**

Catch live performances from a lineup of artists including Haaku, Space, Sonagi Blues, Harip Tatwa, and Kids and Heroes this Saturday.

20 April, 3pm onwards, Pre-sales: Rs500/ Door sales: Rs1,000, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel

Karaoke @ Octave

Sing your heart out to your favorite songs with friends and loved ones at Octave's karaoke.

Octave Kathmandu, Darbar Marg, 9801988333

GETAWAYS

**Hotel Jal Mahal**

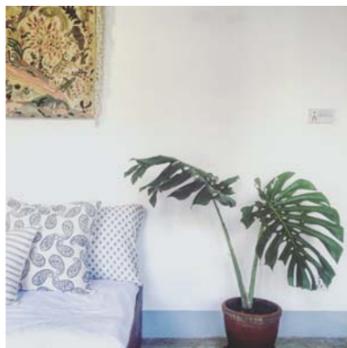
Hotel Jal Mahal lives up to its name, boasting three large swimming pools in its sprawling property. Take a dip to ward off the spring afternoon heat.

Gharipatan, Pokhara, 9856087031

Evergreen Eco-Lodge

Unwind in one of the rustic wooden tree-house cabins with thatched straw roofs at Evergreen Eco-lodge and enjoy the tranquility of the dense surrounding forestry.

Chitwan National Park, Sauraha, 9845693879

**Cora Nepal**

With its modern, minimalistic design, Cora is a sanctuary for guests, and is the perfect guesthouse for anyone looking for a quiet getaway.

Sanepa, 9818988152

Balthali Village Resort

A simple and cosy retreat just beyond Kathmandu Valley, Balthali Village Resort is ideal for anyone seeking to get away somewhere that is not too far from the city.

Panauti, Kavre, 9851087772

**Grand Norling**

Grand Norling offers guests spacious bedrooms with adjoining bathrooms, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer herds, and the garden.

Gokarna (01) 4910193

**Empire Restaurant & Bar**

Try the Stuffed Potato Croquette, a classic French dish, for lunch or dinner at Empire Restaurant & Bar. The menu includes vegan as well as non-vegetarian food.

Kupondole Heights, Bakhundole, 9801112311

**Baker's Den**

Is a loved one's birthday coming up, or need a just-because cake? Order from Baker's Den. Also get freshly baked doughnuts, muffins, bread and more.

Naxal (01) 4416560 / (01) 4411886

WEEKEND WEATHER

**30°C this weekend in Kathmandu**

Looks like the cloudburst over Dubai this week took away all the moisture from the westerly clouds that would have headed our way. Moral of the story: don't seed clouds. Meanwhile, Nepal's sky is still obscured by smoke from hundreds of wildfires and the burning of wheat harvest stubble in the Tarai and in India (page 4-5). The little hope that localised storms would put out some of these flames did not materialise. Meanwhile, the temperature in Kathmandu valley this weekend will touch 30°C for the first time this year. In Chitwan and the Tarai, it is already in the mid-30s.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
29° 14°	30° 14°	30° 14°	30° 12°	30° 13°

OUR PICK



In director-screenwriter Rose Glass' 2024 movie *Love lies Bleeding*, gym manager Lou meets Jackie in 1989 when Jackie joins the gym to work out. Jackie, a rising bodybuilder, is passing through Lou's town on the way to a competition in Las Vegas. Lou begins to develop feelings for Jackie, unaware that the bodybuilder is involved with Lou's abusive brother-in-law JJ. The two women get together, but soon become embroiled in a violent series of events. The acclaimed romantic thriller stars Kristen Stewart, Katy O'Brian, Ed Harris, Jena Malone, Anna Baryshnikov and Dave Franco.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउ र बचाऔं

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



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

DINING

**Alev Kebab Sultanate**

Taste the unique flavours of middle eastern cuisine including meat kebab prepared in an open kitchen. An expansive vegetarian course and desserts are additional highlights.

Tangalwood, 9802322125

**The Gardens**

If you are looking for an outdoor setting for breakfast, brunch or dinner, The Garden is the perfect place with soothing aesthetics and a wide, flavoursome menu.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5921133

Chu-La

Chu-La might just be the very first place in Nepal to serve a good Philly Cheesesteak. With freshly baked bread, local cheeses and high quality meat, the sandwich is a must-eat.

New Baneswor (01) 4105200

Jazzing up Kathmandu again

KatJazz returns to Kathmandu for a sixth time

Kathmandu's other jazz festival, KatJazz, returns for its sixth iteration this month, blending contemporary tunes with the rich traditional music of Nepal and beyond. This eight-day music fest starts on 22 April and concludes with a grand celebration of a finale on the UNESCO recognised International Jazz Day on 30 April.

The very first KatJazz in 2017 had jazz education as its objective. The festival has come a long way since and has been integral in further lifting Nepal's jazz scene, perfectly aligning with the theme this year "The Jazz

Trail to Kathmandu: Past Voices. Global Sounds. Future Harmonies.'

"This festival is a two-way thing. It brings Western jazz music to Nepal but it simultaneously puts Nepal's music to world music," says Abhisek Bhadra, academic director of Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (KJC), co-organiser of the festival.

This year's lineup features 15 international and 12 Nepali musicians as well as 11 women musicians of KJC Rajamati Choir. "Our emphasis has been on local artists and the collaboration that will take place

between the ensemble," adds Bhadra.

The 'Taking the Lead: The Diverse Voices of Women in Jazz' session scheduled for 27 April is set to be the highlight of the entire festival. The session will celebrate female musicians in the jazz scene with performances from Juliana Rodrigues, Enji and Maria Fajardo.

The artists have all worked extensively, blending jazz with the traditional and folk music of their homelands. Says Abhisek Bhadra: "We are celebrating contemporary jazz music while acknowledging and appreciating traditional music of Nepal and elsewhere." 🇳🇵



Ben van den Dungen Quartet (The Netherlands)

Ben van den Dungen is an acclaimed Dutch jazz saxophonist who started his concert career in the early 1980s and has since performed in 6,000 concerts in 70 different countries. His band, Ben van den Dungen Quartet, has regularly toured South America, Russia, Indonesia, South Korea, China, India and Europe.

At KatJazz, the quartet is paying tribute to the legendary saxophonist John Coltrane, one of the most influential saxophonists of all time. In this dazzling ode, they present a contemporary interpretation of a repertoire that has rightly been labelled as 'classics'.

Ben van den Dungen – Saxophone | Miguel Rodríguez – Piano | Steve Zwanink – Bass | Mitchel Damen – Drums

Gyan Residency

The Gyan-KJC Residency, a crucial part of the KatJazz festivals, has been providing a space for collaborative dialogue through music. This year, it brings together Nepali maestros Shree KC (dhrupad vocals), Santosh Bhakta Shrestha (esraj), and Jagannath Dhaugoda (tabla), alongside international artists from Chile (Tomas Carrasco, Moe Edmunds), Brazil (Juliana Rodrigues), Spain (Javier Galiana, Javi Delgado, Guillermo Martín-Viana, Pedro Cortejosa), Mongolia (Enji Erkhem), and Nepali folk musicians, including Pushpa Palanchoke.



Before 22 April, these participating artists will discuss Hindustani music, Nepali folk, and Western music in workshops aimed at deepening the understanding of Hindustani music among Western performers and vice-versa, fostering cross-cultural learning.

In the next phase from 23-25 April, all the artists will collaborate and put together a blended music piece which will be showcased at the Gyan-KJC Residency concert on 30 April at Moksh in Jhamsikhel.



Enji (Mongolia/Germany)

Enkhjargal Erkhembayar 'Enji' is a Mongolian-born Jazz singer and songwriter. As such, there is a touch of Mongolian folk to her music. Enji's previous album, 'Ursгал,' received acclaim from The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Guardian, making it to the Best Jazz Albums of 2023. She was also invited to perform for COLORS in Berlin.

For this year's lineup, she is joined by Martin Zenker on double bass and Paul Brandle on guitar, adding new dimensions to her already extraordinary sound.

Enji - Voice | Martin Zenker - Bass | Paul Brandle - Guitar

Versados Despiastados Quartet (Spain)



The four Andalusian (south of Spain) musicians that make up Versados Despiastados Quartet have been in the national and international scene for years. With their own voice and classic jazz instrumentation, this quartet explores the fusion between different forms of Andalusian and Afro-American music.

Featuring Pedro Cortejosa on saxophone, Javier Galiana on piano, Javier Delgado on double bass, and Guillermo Martín-Viana on drums, Versados Despiastados, which translates to 'versed scatterbrains' takes the audience on a dynamic journey of sound with freshness and a sense of humor that catches one by surprise.

Pedro Cortejosa - Tenor saxophone | Javier Galiana - Piano | Javier Delgado - Double Bass | Guillermo Martín-Viana - Drums



Jhuma Limbu and Raitane Music (Nepal)

With over two decades of experience in the Nepali music industry, Jhuma Limbu is a highly skilled folk singer renowned for her performances across diverse genres including cultural, folk, playback, patriotic, and modern music. Limbu is dedicated to preserving and promoting Nepal's rich indigenous musical traditions. This concert is a fundraiser for her ongoing album-recording project in collaboration with Chilean musicians Tomás Carrasco and Moe Edmunds, and Nepali producer, keyboardist and arranger Abhisek Bhadra.

Jhuma Limbu - Voice | Manice Gandarva - Sarangi | Tomás Carrasco - Flutes | Moe Edmunds - Guitar | Abhisek Bhadra - Piano | Sudhir Acharya - Percussion | Javier Delgado - Upright Bass

SCHEDULE

Piano Explorations with Javi Galiana and Juliana Rodrigues

Monday, 22 April
7PM onwards
Rs800
Alliance Française, Pulchok

Samyog Regmi and Co.

Tuesday, 23 April
7PM onwards
Rs800
Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat

A Tribute to Coltrane by Ben Van Den Dungen Quartet

Wednesday, 24 April
7PM onwards
Rs800
Dhokaima Cafe, Patandhoka



Enji (Enkhjargal Erkhembayar)

Thursday, 25 April
7PM onwards
Rs800
Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Versados Despiastados

Friday, 26 April
7PM onwards
Rs800
EDN Sanepa

Taking the Lead: The Diverse Voices of Women in Jazz with Juliana Rodrigues, Enji, Maria Fajardo

Saturday, 27 April
6PM onwards
Rs1000
Yellow House, Sanepa

Jhuma Limbu and Raitane Music

Monday, 29 April
7PM onwards
Rs1000
Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun

International Jazz Day Concert

Tuesday, 30 April
7PM onwards
Rs1200
Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Samyog Regmi and Co. (Nepal/Spain)



Samyog Regmi, born in Nepal, was immersed in diverse musical influences from an early age, including local traditional music, jazz, and Eastern classical music. An alumni of the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (KJC), Regmi pursued musical studies in the Netherlands. His compositions span various ensembles, including his quintet (a group of five playing music/singing together), septet (a group of seven playing music/singing together), and the Conservatory of Amsterdam Big Band.

Recently, Samyog released his album Unpopular Opinion. At KatJazz 2024, get ready to witness his musical craft accompanied by international artists from Chile and Spain.

Guillermo Martín-Viana (Spain) - Drums | Tomás Carrasco (Chile) - Flute/Sax | Pedro Cortejosa (Spain) - Saxophone | Javi Delgado (Spain) - Upright Bass

Juliana Rodrigues (Brazil)

Pianist and composer from Sao Paulo, Juliana Rodrigues has released two albums, Vive and Mnemosine, showcasing her unique and diverse musical background. Her team of three performs with excellent cohesion, bringing her compositions to life with a repertoire of rhythms, phrasing, and collective improvisation.

Rodrigues is also a member of the women-only samba group Dona da Rua, which recently released singles Filha da Luta and Que Venha em Mim. She has performed at Sala São Paulo, Festival Jazz al Este, Instrumental SESC Brasil, Savassi Festival, and Sonamos Latinoamérica.

Juliana Rodrigues - Piano | Rajat Rai - Bass | Prajwal B.K. (Punku) - Drums





HEALTH IS WEALTH: Belmaya Nepali who mortgaged her house to pay off her hospital bills.

Pandemic of drugs

Indiscriminate prescriptions of steroids and antibiotics cause irreversible side effects in Nepal's children

■ Sagar Budhathoki

A new mother in Kathmandu took her two-month-old baby to hospital to treat an infection. The doctor diagnosed upper respiratory infection (URI) and prescribed half a dozen medications, including the cough syrup Dextromethorphan.

Dextromethorphan is not recommended for children under four by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) since 2008 after studies showed it to be ineffective for colds and causes damage to the central nervous system.

In Saptari, a 14-month-old boy with chronic cough was taken to a private clinic multiple times. In each visit, the doctor there prescribed Dextromethorphan and Beclomethasone, a corticosteroid.

The child's skin became swollen and sore, and was brought to Om Hospital in Kathmandu. Doctors concluded that his nervous system was affected by overdose of Dextromethorphan, and referred the baby to AIIMS Hospital in New Delhi. The baby died during treatment.

A paper titled Adverse Events Associated with Pediatric Exposure to Dextromethorphan published in the medical journal Clinical Toxicology had already concluded that the cough syrup should only be given to children above four, and only for the most serious cases.

Sixty percent of the 1,716 children under four in this study who were prescribed Dextromethorphan were found to have side effects ranging from vomiting, breathing problems, and effects on the nervous system. Other studies have noted that the drug can

cause the respiratory system of children to slow down severely, leading to suffocation.

A four-year-old boy in Bhaktapur suffering from cough and constipation was taken to a nearby private hospital. The doctor diagnosed common cold and prescribed six types of medicines including a nasal drug with the generic name Oxymetazoline, commonly used to treat nasal polyps.

Oxymetazoline has also been prohibited for use in children under six by the FDA and other regulatory bodies. Doctors at the Bhaktapur hospital have been found to be prescribing this medicine to children to treat colds. Overuse of oxymetazoline can eventually cause inflammation of the nasal cavity, affecting breathing.

As more and more Nepalis, especially children and the elderly, suffer from respiratory infections due to increasing air pollution, the misuse and overuse of drugs by an over-commercialised medical and pharmaceutical sector is also increasing.

Doctors have also been found to be prescribing Montelukast, usually given only to patients with complications like asthma and rhinitis, to treat the common cold, sore throat, rashes or arthritis in children.

FDA studies have shown that Montelukast in children and adolescents can cause behavioural and psychological side effects, including suicidal ideation. The drug has a black box warning, the FDA's strictest alert to warn the public about its side effects and to be used only in cases where its benefit outweighs its harm.

The Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA) guidelines also mention that parents must be made fully aware of the possible side effects of Montelukast before it is prescribed to children with asthma.

A taste of our own medicine

■ Yugeshwor Koirala

In the ten years since Krishna Bahadur Magar opened his pharmaceutical store opposite Teaching Hospital his shelves have more Made in Nepal drugs.

Domestically manufactured medicines now contribute half the sales of medicines in Nepal. Although this has made Nepal more self-reliant, problems with quality, commercialisation and over-prescription persist.

Says Magar: "When I first set up shop, the drugs I bought used to be entirely imported from India. Today, about a half come from factories in Nepal."

There are now 128 companies manufacturing drugs in Nepal, up from 87 a decade ago. Their drugs are the mainstay of Nepal's pharmaceuticals because they do not require research into new molecules and formulae.

Called generic formulations, they have been around in the market long enough that they are no longer protected by patents, allowing virtually any company to manufacture them.

Drugs like painkillers, syrups, calcium supplements, vitamins are now being produced in Nepal.

"Say if the patent on an Indian company's drug expires, a Nepali company can start producing it by retaining the same active ingredients, but altering other aspects like colour, and packaging," explains Prayas Acharya of Deurali-Janta Pharmaceuticals. This ability to tweak and rebrand drugs has allowed Nepali companies to push a wide range of products.

Krishna Bahadur Magar has

witnessed this market growth firsthand. He says, "Nowadays customers refer to most medications by their Nepali brand names. They don't often ask for paracetamol, they ask for Niko."

But even as Nepali brands are becoming household names, customers believe Nepali makes of medication are inferior in quality. Glancing at the doctor's prescription a customer has just handed him, Nischal KC who also owns a pharmacy says none of them are Nepali brands.

"There are no laws to limit the import of drugs that can be readily manufactured inside Nepal", explains Acharya, adding that this has allowed foreign companies to aggressively push drugs into Nepal and doctors to prescribe them even when cheaper Nepal-made alternatives are available.

"Prescribers play a huge role in shaping the demand of specific drug brands because they are the 'advertisers' of medicines, so to speak, and the most persuasive ones at that," says Mahesh Shahi, pharmacy chief at Bayalpatha Hospital in Achham.

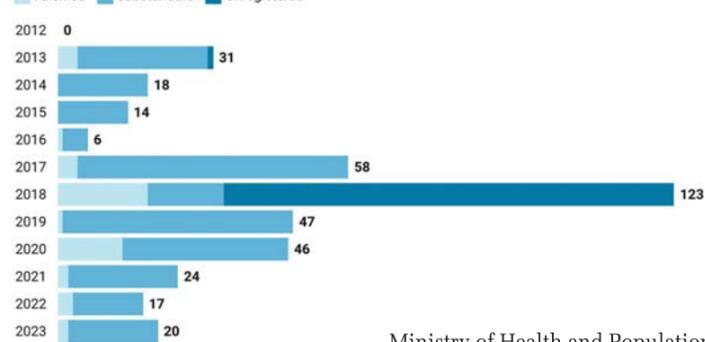
In a 2018 study, hospital pharmacies from across the country conceded that doctor prescriptions indeed influenced which medicines they bought for retail, as did established business relationships with wholesalers and pharmaceutical companies' marketing strategies, creating undeclared conflicts of interest.

"When doctors prescribe brands instead of generic medication names, ethics are called into question," reveals Shahi. "It may be that they are under monetary influence and

Recalled Pharmaceutical Products in Nepal

2012 to 2023

Falsified Substandard Unregistered



SOURCE: BMJ OPEN

are prescribing certain foreign brands over Nepali ones, and then blaming it on the fact that Nepali medications are poorly made. It is a false assumption that quality is necessarily affected by where a drug is made."

The WHO has outlined detailed guidelines for good manufacturing practices (GMPs) to ensure quality is maintained in each step of the production process. As of 2023, 34 pharmaceutical manufacturers in Nepal are WHO GMP certified.

"Even though access to testing machinery still relies on imports, many Nepali factories today have the technology to carry out quality checks in a semi-automated manner," says Prayas Acharya.

Before products are launched into the market, their chemical composition is tested at the National Medicines Laboratory, and the Department of Drug Administration (DDA) under the

Ministry of Health and Population evaluates the quality of medical products before licensing them.

But despite regulations, there are still cases of counterfeit drugs. While the DDA orders recalls of such medications, patient safety is at risk when pharmaceutical demands shoot up unexpectedly, as was seen during the pandemic.

In the past decade, 404 substandard, falsified or unregistered pharmaceutical products were recalled by the DDA. Interestingly, a higher proportion of these were imported medicines.

"Counterfeit drugs are a global problem, not just a Nepal problem," says Acharya.

Privately owned pharmacies sell prescription medications over the counter, and even operate without registration under the DDA. Acharya is worried that pharmaceuticals are rapidly turning into a push-market, allowing retailers to cash in on unsuspecting customers. Which is why community pharmacy practices need to be incorporated into the health system.

"Here at Bayalpatha, we have a Drug and Therapeutics Committee to oversee all pharmaceutical activities," adds Mahesh Shahi.

The DDA's National Essential Medicines List has 398 medicines deemed necessary to address the priority health needs of Nepalis. Sticking to these and minimising the number of medicines in the hospital formulary has helped the Bayalpatha pharmacy to prevent over-commercialisation.

Having these essential medications available means that access is not compromised, and limiting brand options means prescribers are kept from being swayed in their decision and from favouring certain companies.

This strategy also reduces the possibility of antimicrobial resistance, which is when certain antibiotics no longer function against target pathogens because they are overused. Limiting the number of antibiotics sold keeps options open for patients if the commonly available medicines stop having their intended effects.

In urban areas like Kathmandu, unhindered access to medications has made drug misuse easier, leading to increasing cases of antimicrobial resistance, and hazards due to self-medication. With more Made in Nepal brands, commercialisation is a growing concern.

"It is a good thing that access to domestically produced medications is increasing," says Shahi. "But we still need regulations to ensure that the drugs patients receive are correctly prescribed and properly functioning, and have response mechanisms in place if they are not." 🇳🇵

overuse

Medical Sector on Steroids

Doctors in Nepal also over-prescribe steroids, usually recommended to treat cancer, arthritis, vasculitis, asthma, muscular dystrophy, and arrhythmia, for children suffering colds and coughs. Steroids suppress the body's immune system, which is why doctors might prescribe them to address short-term health problems. The random prescription of such powerful medication can have long-term effects on health.

At a clinic in Jhapa, doctors prescribed a one-year-old with a common cold, the steroid Prednisolone. When the cold persisted, the boy's parents eventually began to buy the medicine over the counter whenever their son got sick. This went on for three and a half years until the child was unable to walk.

When he was brought to a hospital in Kathmandu, doctors discovered that he had cataracts in both eyes as well as myopathy, a rare condition that causes the muscles of the legs to deteriorate. The child had to undergo cataract surgery, usually performed on elderly patients over 60. But there was no treatment for his myopathy.

A study published in the British Medical Journal found that the prescription of steroids in children causes complications including obesity, diabetes, increased blood pressure, cataracts, weakened bones and muscles, as well as excessive body hair growth.

Immunology and paediatric rheumatologist Dharmagat Bhattarai has seen many patients with disabilities and other lifelong health complications caused by the prescription of steroids to treat common colds. "Steroids should be used according to guidelines only in cases of serious diseases, to prevent amputations and in lifesaving situations," says Bhattarai. "It cannot be used for general health problems."

Children under five are more susceptible to viral infections such as the common cold and diarrhoea, for which there is no specific medication. With proper care, such infections



YUGESHWOR KOIRALA

clear up on their own within a few days.

An investigation by this paper of prescriptions by doctors in Kathmandu Valley showed that at least 8 out of 10 children who had been diagnosed with cold and cough had been prescribed unnecessary medication.

Molecular microbiologist Guna Raj Dhungana says: "Uncontrolled use of antibiotics cause pathogens to evolve, and develop the ability to fight the drug."

Physicians we showed the prescriptions to found that even in cases of viral infections, doctors in various hospitals in Kathmandu had recommended antibiotics like Amoxicillin, Azithromycin, Cefixime, Metronidazole, and Ofloxacin to children.

Antibiotics are designed to fight bacterial infections, and they do not work for viral conditions. Excessive use of antibiotics causes antimicrobial resistance (AMR) which means the drugs will not work against more serious infections. The WHO has identified AMR as one of the top global public health threats, warning of as many as 10 million deaths each year by 2050 due to prescription drug failure.

Infectious disease specialist Prabhat Adhikari estimates that even the stronger antibiotics have stopped working in 80% of

patients with bacterial infections at ICUs of major hospitals in Kathmandu.

"Patients who have had surgery are likely to develop infections, and people with heart failure are at risk of developing pneumonia when intubated," explains Adhikari. "Antibiotics can be ineffective in treating such infections, causing premature deaths."

Most parents do not realise that minor conditions like the common cold can clear up in a week and do not require treatment and there is no need to take them to hospital.

Some doctors take advantage of worried parents to make a quick buck on commissions from pharmaceutical companies. "We can require prescriptions for certain drugs, but it all depends on the doctor's conduct," says healthcare expert Kiran Raj Pandey.

International regulatory bodies have medical guidelines which are regularly updated. Once there is evidence that a certain drug has negative side effects, its use is restricted. Some doctors have not read those guidelines, and continue to prescribe discontinued medicines.

Just as alarming is the nexus between

the drug manufacturers and healthcare institutions in Nepal. Pharmaceutical companies pay as much as 60% of their profit to hospitals and doctors for prescribing their brands. Doctors therefore prescribe expensive and strong antibiotics to patients who can be treated with more affordable alternatives. For instance, European countries prescribe patients cheap penicillin-based antibiotics to treat pneumonia, whereas Nepali doctors prescribe expensive and last-resort antibiotics like Linezolid, Vancomycin, Meropenem, and Colistin.

"Pharmaceutical companies have incentivised doctors to prescribe more drugs with commissions and gifts," says infectious disease specialist Anup Subedee. "Many doctors do not think whether their patient will get better but what will earn them more."

Misuse of prescription drugs is also driving many Nepalis, already overburdened with out of pocket medical costs, into poverty. Medicine makes up for nearly 75% of the total health expenditure of Nepalis.

"Studies have shown that drug purchases can cause three to four percent of people to fall into poverty, and cause financial stress in up to 15% of families of patients," says health economist Shiva Raj Adhikari.

The mushrooming of private health institutions in Nepal has also created competition in the health sector such that hospitals and clinics try to make money through unnecessary medications and laboratory tests as well as other redundant administrative fees.

In Nepal, the Nepal Medical Council (NMC) administers the licensing examination of doctors and regulates their medical practice. However, it does not monitor the conduct of individual doctors without a complaint. "It is not possible to check on the type and dosage of medication prescribed by an individual doctor, but we will review any complaints," says NMC's Satish Kumar Deo.

Infectious disease specialist Subedee says that the NMC should audit prescriptions of doctors to check whether they follow relevant guidelines: "If the council has the professional skills, leadership and sense of accountability to do what is right, this problem can be solved overnight." 🇳🇵

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The return of the natives

Global Nepali chefs return to take Nepali cuisine international at Tusa in Bhaktapur

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Born in Khandbari in eastern Nepal, Parashuram Pathak helped his family in the farm, sold produce in the market and helped out in the kitchen.

After working as a chef in Dubai, San Francisco, Denmark, Australia, and in cruise ships, Pathak has now brought back what he has learnt to the Tusa restaurant in Bhaktapur that opened on Nepali New Year on 13 April.

Pathak left an executive chef job to intern at three-Michelin starred Noma in Denmark, named the best restaurant in the world five times, and has a philosophy of foraging to rediscover wild local ingredients.

Tusa's mission is similarly noble: preparing dishes with Nepali ingredients using modern techniques and equipment.

"We are taking Nepali food beyond dal-bhat and momo, we are taking it international," Pathak said on the phone from Sydney. Indeed, Pathak (pictured, right) is a global Nepali introducing global Nepali cuisine to his homeland.

Pathak's team in Nepal includes chefs Rupesh Bohara and Sagar Shrestha (pictured) who worked extensively in Dubai, the US and Australia, and share his vision.

The three shared the same dream, and over the past five years have travelled across Nepal to research the menu, collecting ingredients and ideas from homes and nature.



PARASHURAM PATHAK / FACEBOOK

The team then scouted for Nepal's best architect, and zeroed in on Bhaktapur-based heritage conservationist Rabindra Puri, who designed the Malla-era house for Tusa. Bohara and Shrestha have moved back to Nepal for good, and Pathak arrives in September.

"I made dishes from all over the world, but when someone asked what Nepali food is like, I had no answer," says Bohara, "so, I came back to find out."

"You can get citizenship, a green card, a big house and cars, but where is the self-satisfaction?" asks Shrestha, who has a red-and-blue chef's knife with the sun and moon of the Nepal flag tattooed on



TUSA

his right forearm.

Bohara and Shrestha recount stories of trips across Nepal, and families who generously introduced them to local ingredients.

Tusa can seat 28, and dining here is a sensory experience with a live kitchen. The chefs cook and place dishes on a granite countertop with induction sections built in.

Everything that can be made in Nepal is locally sourced. The kitchen downstairs is spacious, spotless, and contains appliances rarely seen in restaurants here: a sous vide machine that cooks vacuum-sealed packets at

consistent temperatures, and a dehydrator for sisnu nettles. A fresh batch of deep purple kimbu (mulberry) muffins have just come out of the oven. Fridges have dried fish and marigold kombucha.

Fermentation seems to be the theme at Tusa, and Pathak explained: "Fermentation takes away the natural sugars in food, leaving behind a true, umami taste."

Tusa can mean 'bamboo shoot' in Nepali, and the restaurant serves a tasting menu with six courses, plus surprises. The chefs do not overdo it: dishes are tastefully simple and faithful.

It starts with a fermented potato and millet roti with green garlic

and tomato chutney. The bread tastes like a mix of alu paratha and kodoko roti with a mild flavour.

The second course is a filet of fish charred on one side and placed on a broth. It is delicate and smokey, and does not mask the character of the fish.

The next is batuk chukauni, a Magar dish with a lentil snack and a yoghurt based potato achar. Next is a skewer of jackfruit with a tamarind and mustard glaze that has the texture of a slice of sausage and melts in the mouth.

Off-menu is a palate cleanser sorbet made with laligurans syrup adorned with a frozen candied rhododendron petal.

Barbeque chicken and chyakla coarse corn grits is the main course. The chicken is brined, marinated, cooked sous-vide and seared on the grill for a delicate consistency.

Desert is a smooth, creamy cheesecake that uses the local jujudhau yoghurt. And the last course is a moist, moss-green sisnu cake laced with mulberry jam and cream.

There is nothing gimmicky about Tusa. It brings together skilled Nepalis with international exposure who mix what they have learnt abroad with the flavours of home.

The menu is Rs3,500, and it may take some time before Nepalis develop a taste for some of its items. The chefs are excited, vindicated, and relieved. Coming back to Nepal, uprooting successful careers abroad to take a chance on Nepal must not have been easy.

Tusa had a soft launch on new year's day with Kathmandu-based diplomats. Australian Ambassador Felicity Volk was one of them, and wrote on a Facebook post: 'Chefs who honed their skills in Australia and returned to Nepal to give back. We call it fine dining, they call it #cominghome.' 🇳🇵

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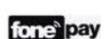
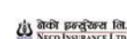
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