



Experience

our 24x7 Client Care Centre at +977 1 4791800/5424198

#1210

9 May 2024

12 pages

Rs 50



PRESS UNDER PRESSURE

■ Sonia Awale

Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. When the other pillars of democracy fail to act as check and balance, the press has to step in to hold power to account.

Which is why authoritarian and elected autocrats around the world who have co-opted the judiciary, legislature and executive are now targeting the media. Journalists are surveilled, threatened and even murdered for doing their job.

The ill-gotten wealth of demagogues is mostly derived from licensing the exploitation of natural resources. Often, it is only investigative journalists who stand in the way of greed and ambition.

UNESCO's theme for World Press Freedom Day this year is 'Press for the Planet'. Climate breakdown, mining, or illegal logging are no longer just 'environmental' features — they are stories of political crime.

Nepal is one of the most open societies in Asia at present. But it was not always like this. Nepal has had its dark periods: 1960-90, 2005, 2016. Even at present, it is not smooth sailing for the mass media here.

Successive governments in the eight years since the new Constitution have tried to squeeze the press. People posting on Facebook have been arrested, YouTubers taken to court, and last year the government banned TikTok.

Censorship in instalments is a way to test the waters to see if the backlash from freedom activists can be handled before imposing stricter restrictions.

Local reporters, who do not have the protection enjoyed by more high-profile journalists in the capital, are threatened and gagged from reporting on activities that harm nature and livelihoods.

Rabi Lamichhane has been under a

cloud ever since he was Home Minister last year. A former tv anchor, Lamichhane is open about his contempt for the mainstream press, which he calls the 'Dirty Dozen'.

Soon after becoming minister this time, he directed local officials to monitor news and social media posts in all 77 districts to keep track of content critical of the government.

He was forced to withdraw this daft idea after a backlash, but is now employing other channels to hit at Big Media mainly through portals, police and the investigation bureau he commands. The man obviously has much to hide, and is blaming the messenger. Mayors Balen Shah in Kathmandu and Harka Sampang in Dharan who were propelled to office by social media propagation of their populist personas have shown thin skins, and a disdain for journalists critical of their methods.

The draft Media Council Bill will allow a government secretary to select its chair and members. The Council is supposed to 'advise' the government in formulating media policies and code of conduct, much like a fox guarding the chicken coop.

Journalism in Nepal is already in crisis because of the collapse of the business model of legacy media. Just when we need an independent press to safeguard freedoms, it is more exposed to corporate and political pressure. There is a steady erosion of democracy in South Asia with varying degrees of censorship. Nepal has flourished as a place for the meeting of the minds, where nationals of neighbouring countries come for free and open discussion. But that space could close if journalists here do not fully defend our constitutionally-guaranteed freedom of expression.

Some of our neighbours have decided that democracy and a free press keep them economically backward, and have adopted the East Asian authoritarian model. We in Nepal have tried strongman rule before, and it

failed quite spectacularly.

Media has an agenda-setting role in a democracy. It amplifies the public voice so people are empowered to demand action from elected officials against wrongdoing. Lack of accountability lies at the root of everyday problems like underdevelopment, lack of jobs, air pollution, or environmental degradation.

The current wildfire emergency in this country is a result of decades of official neglect, political apathy and fatalism (page 2).

Journalists reporting on the climate crisis, natural resource exploitation or biodiversity loss have shown great courage and sacrifice to get the truth out. Many have been killed. Others have been threatened and silenced. Climate deniers troll science journalists.

Here in Nepal, illegal sand mining, quarrying and logging have destroyed ecosystems. The climate emergency is now magnifying the impact of such wanton destruction on Nepal's economy.

Disasters like Melamchi and Sikkim could hit cascade projects along the Marsyangdi, Sun Kosi and Arun rivers. Journalists cannot just wait for disasters to strike any more, they must warn of them.

This week, even as smoke from wildfires blanketed the country, the Tarai is reeling under a heat wave. Jhapa was 43°C with 40% humidity, that is very near the lethal wet bulb temperature.

What media chooses not to report, what to report on and how much prominence is given to it determines whether action is taken in time to mitigate danger.

These 'environmental' stories are political stories:

- The government banned plastic bags three times but had to lift it because of lobbying by powerful pellet importers.
- Air pollution can be reduced by incentivising electric transport, but there are vested interests in the fossil lobby.
- Nijgad is not an airport project, it is a logging concession controlled by political cronies.

The job of a free press is not just to name and shame crooks, but also to restore the people's faith in democracy and pluralism. It is the democratic system with freedom of speech and fair elections to reward performance that makes this system work.

We may have no expectations from our tried, tested and failed politicians, but let us not blame the system that they have abused. 🇳🇵



Smoke Screen
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

Breakfast @ Dhokaima

DHOKAIMA Cafe
Patandhoka, Lalitpur, Nepal
01-5422113

20th Anniversary

Outsource Your Non-Core Staff Through **Suvidha Staffing**

Licensed Company by DOL, MOLESS
ISO 9001:2015 Certified
100% Statutory Compliance

+977- 9851247213
www.suvidhasewa.com.np

zen garden

Available at **SalesBerry**

New Orleans Cafe

THAMEL: 01-4700736

eScan
Anti-Virus

#1 Digital World

TOTAL PROTECTION
for Computers, Mobiles & Tablets

An ISO 27001 Certified Company

Contact no.: 01-4330980
www.escanav.com

summer solstice

As summer arrives, it beckons the perfect moment to indulge in the elegance of lightweight Natureknit cashmere and silk. Envelop yourself in the unparalleled softness and luxury of our finest garments, meticulously crafted to enhance your experience.

NATUREKNIT
CASHMERE REDEFINED

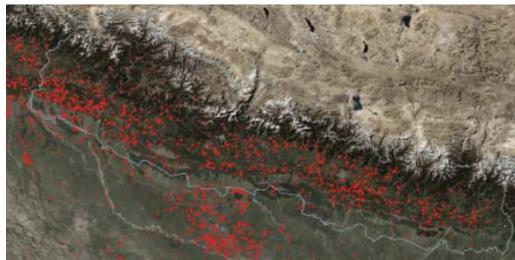
Smoke Screen

Anyone following Nepal's mainstream press this week to find out what is happening would conclude that there was: a) an investment summit going on, b) a couple of by-elections were held, and c) Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane got tangled in another scandal.

But there is a full scale national emergency that has got scant coverage: thousands of forest fires have been raging across Nepal for more than a month. They have done incalculable damage to the economy, the ecology, and reduced the average lifespan of Nepalis due to dangerous levels of air pollution.

Any other accountable government would set aside everything else and go into fire-fighting mode on a war footing. Not here. State agencies have neither understood nor responded to the sheer extent of this disaster.

The media should have sent alarm bells ringing. But its gatekeepers and owners in Kathmandu decide what is important, they select what to report and what not to report. They decide which items of news should get due prominence.



Normalising this fire calamity by treating it like just another annual event is burying our head in the sand. Not recognising the urgency of this year's prolonged fire season is a disastrous failure.

The spring of 2009 and 2021 were bad, but the fires then were not as widespread and long-lasting as this year. Since early March, there have been tens of thousands of fires, many of which are still burning out of control across the country, consuming entire mountainsides, incinerating villages and killing dozens.

There are many reasons why this year has been particularly bad, but putting the blame solely on climate change misses the bigger picture. In spring, villagers deliberately set fire to grasslands so new shoots will grow out of the ashes for livestock to graze on once the rains come.

Poachers have also been known to set fire to forests to trap deer as they flee. In the Tarai, fringes of the jungles are intentionally torched by the real estate mafia.

This spring, the countryside was tinder dry due to a prolonged winter drought. Nepal's forest cover has doubled in the past three decades to nearly 45% of the country's area. Mass outmigration from the rural mountains means there are fewer people foraging for fuel and fodder in the forests.

The undergrowth was therefore loaded with highly combustible dried-out biomass

waiting for a spark.

A record-breaking early summer heat wave this year desiccated the soil, already dry because of over-extraction of groundwater for agriculture, and neglect of traditional ponds. All it took was a match to light the dry grass.

Another source of smoke, as this paper reported recently, is the growing trend of farmers in the Tarai burning wheat stalk in the fields after harvest because of lack of labour due to outmigration.

Nepal's air pollution has been at dangerous levels for months, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) at 250-300 for prolonged periods. All this smoke and vehicular emissions made Kathmandu the world's most polluted city for weeks. COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) is the most common ailment in hospitals.

Besides reducing lifespans of citizens, the smoke is doing great damage to the economy. Pokhara and Lukla airports have been mostly closed this week due to poor visibility during the peak tourist season. Hundreds of tourists who come to Nepal to

Climate breakdown is not the only reason for this year's unprecedented wildfires across Nepal.

see the mountains have not seen any.

The smoke and ash from the unprecedented fires are transported up the mountains to be deposited on already-receding glaciers, melting them even faster because of the reduced reflectivity of dirty ice.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) should pay as much attention to wildfires as it does to earthquakes and floods.

Pre-monsoon showers are forecast next week, and will douse the fires. Our fatalistic society will then forget about wildfires for another year. The season of 'natural disasters' like floods and landslides will be upon us, and we are not adequately prepared for those either.

It is too late to do anything about this year's disaster, but here is a checklist for the 2025 wildfire season:

- Ward-level awareness campaign and punitive measures against pyromaniacs.
- Train security agencies and equip them with firefighting equipment.
- Fit Nepal Army helicopters with water bombing gear to fight fires in difficult terrain.
- Firelines and forest management to reduce combustible undergrowth.

Kunda Dixit

ONLINE PACKAGES



WHO BUILDS KATHMANDU?

Not all of Nepal's migrant workers go abroad, many are day labourers on construction sites in Kathmandu. Kathmandu sits atop a foundation of the blood, sweat and tears of these workers. Watch this video of a day in the life of day labourer Buddha Pache Magar on Nepali Times' YouTube channel. Subscribe for more original multimedia content.



LAKE RISK

As Nepal's glacial lakes expand, there is a danger of them bursting due to water pressure, or because of earthquakes and avalanches falling into them. As the average temperature in the mountains rises every year, the threat of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) will only grow. Watch video on our YouTube channel.

EASTERN NEPAL

Lack of rain has been a problem in this region for a long time ('Either too little, or too much water', Mohan Mainali, #1209). The story of my village is the same.

Binod Neupane

■ My forefathers also moved down from the hills to the plains almost eight decades ago for better access to water and other services.

Kamal Rijal

■ People generally migrate due to natural disasters including landslides and floods, but there are other socio-political factors as well.

Balkrishna Mabuhang

INVESTMENT SUMMIT

You can buy ministers, you can corrupt citizens, and there are no laws in the country ('Why invest in Nepal?', Shristi Karki, #1209).

Ishwor Karki

■ Are foreigners allowed to own land in Nepal ('Nepal looks at alternative investments', Siddhant Raj Pandey, #1209)? I don't think they were back in the 80s when we lived there. People in the US are looking for less expensive places to retire.

Sigmund Stengel

MIGRANT RIGHTS

Hopefully, our so-called leaders raised the rightful and necessary agenda regarding poor working conditions, fair payment, and proper health insurance for Nepali workers in Qatar ('Qatari leader in Nepal reminded of workers' rights', nepalitimes.com). These issues require immediate action.

Suda Shahi

CROP BURNING

This phenomenon first reported in South East Asia is now affecting South Asian countries including Sri Lanka ('Going up in smoke', Chandra Kishore, #1208).

Kusum Athukorala

FOREST FIRES

Something needs to be done urgently. The fires seem to be getting worse and some days we can barely breathe here in Kathmandu. ('Smoke Screen', Editorial, left).

TTeacher

1,000 WORDS



INVEST-MEN SUMMIT: The inaugural plenary of the Nepal Investment Summit 2024 on 28 April in Kathmandu. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Sher Bahadur Deuba of the NC and Finance Minister Barsaman Pun held centre stage in this plenary panel.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The Water Crisis

Kathmandu is perpetually parched, especially in dry summer months. The Melamchi is finally starting to supply water but the population of the capital has increased by several fold since the project was first planned over 30 years ago.

Melamchi is still undergoing repairs following the 2021 flash floods that nearly wiped out the \$800 million project, and is not working in full capacity. What we are left with are ancient wells and stone spouts built by Mallas four centuries ago, but even these have dried up.

Excerpts of the report published 20 years ago this week on Nepali Times issue #194 30 April - 6 May 2004:

It is the peak dry season, and Kathmandu Valley's water shortage is acute. In many parts of the capital, water hasn't flowed through the mains for months.

The only public water supply systems that still work are the ones built by Malla kings 400 years ago. If it wasn't for the wells and ornate stone spouts in inner city Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, the Valley's urbanites



wouldn't have a drop to drink.

At a time when the government has admitted defeat in ever getting water supply to meet rising demand, and the Melamchi project is struck because of the insurgency, it looks like Kathmandu's 1.3 million people will have to depend on traditional water systems for the foreseeable future...

...Kathmandu Valley's population is increasing, but supply remains stagnant because of a lack of investment in new storage systems. Furthermore, leakage and wastage in the ageing network of underground pipes mean that the capital's water situation is bound to worsen...

...Because of a rising population and over-extraction, the Valley's water table was receding at an average of 40cm a year even back in 1998. The ancient wells are starting to go dry and in some parts of Patan, old ponds have been filled over and turned into parks, thus removing an important element in recharging groundwater.



**TURKISH
AIRLINES**

WORLD GOLF CUP

AMATEUR SERIES

A golfer in a white shirt and dark pants is captured in a dynamic mid-swing pose. The golfer is wearing a cap and is positioned on the left side of the frame. The background features a dark, abstract design with diagonal stripes and a glowing circular light effect around the golfer's club.

Kathmandu Tournament Coming Soon !

Date - Sunday 5th May
Venue - Gokarna Forest Resort

Sponsors

GLORIA
HOTELS & RESORTS



Turkish Golf Cup

The 2024 Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup Kathmandu qualifier is being held at Gokarna Resort on 5 May. Since 2013, this global amateur golf series is now played in more countries worldwide than any other corporate amateur event. The 2024 Qualifying Series will feature events in 118 destinations across 67 countries worldwide.



Samsung M55 5G

Samsung has launched the Galaxy M55 5G phone with a 6.7 inch AMOLED screen, a 5000mAh battery and a 50MP camera. The 8/256gb model will start at Rs48,999 or an interest-free EMI of Rs2,449 per month.



Gogoro battery swap

Gogoro has launched the CrossOver GX250 electric scooter and a battery swapping station in Lazimpat. Owners will not have to wait while their vehicle charges, or get range anxiety. Depleted batteries can be quickly swapped for charged ones.

EV Financing

Siprati and Nabil Bank are partnering to make it easy to finance the purchase of Tata Tiago, Nepal's best selling electric hatchback. Loans of upto 80% of the value of the car are available at an interest rate of 9.99%, with a down payment of Rs529,000.



Tata has also announced the Maxchange Mela in which customers can swap any brand of car with the Tata Nexon Max EV. The deal includes a free fast charger, 1 year autoplus insurance, 1 year transport tax, and other prizes. Test drives are available at the Thapathali showroom.

Ncell Roaming

Ncell is offering data roaming packs for travelers to India, China, and Bangladesh that costs Rs100 for 3 days and offers 500mb of data, as well as discounts on pay-as-you-go mobile services.

Foodmandu in Chitwan

Foodmandu is now operating in Chitwan, expanding from Kathmandu and Pokhara. Chitwan residents can now order through the website or the app. A 30% discount of upto Rs500 is available with code 'FOODSAFARI'.



Goa at Nook

Nook Restaurant at Aloft in Thamel is hosting a Goan Food Festival from 3-5 May and 10-12 May. It features Chef Rhea Aaron from Bangalore and Aloft Executive Chef Rajeev Shrestha. Goan cuisine is known for its seafood and spices, and a unique blend of Indian and Portuguese influences.

Dim Sum at Bao Xuan

Bao Xuan at Soaltee is hosting a Dim Sum festival until 5 May from 7pm-10:30pm, offering boiled, steamed, bao, and pan-fried Dim Sum in a variety of styles and flavours.



Songkran at Radisson

The Fun Cafe at Radisson together with the Royal Thai Embassy is hosting a Thai Food Festival until 3 May on the occasion of Songkran, the Thai new year. The festival features Chef Yao from Thailand.



Turkish+Rolls Royce

Turkish Airlines, Airbus and Rolls-Royce signed a historic order for 150 A321neo and 80 A350 aircraft in Istanbul. This positioned the carrier as the world's largest operator of Rolls-Royce Trent XWB engine. As part of the partnership with Rolls-Royce, the manufacturer is exploring various industrial initiatives in Türkiye. This includes the potential establishment of a competitive Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) capability and further supply chain sourcing.



Viber government

Rakuten Viber is working with the Nepal government to create channels for public communication of official notices and vital information. One program with the Ministry of Health is 'Swastha Suchana' delivering critical health-related content.

Green IME Global

IME bank has launched the Global Green Home Loan offering customers loans of Rs12,000,000 over 7 years at 8.99% interest to buy or build eco-friendly houses. Modifying or renovating houses to meet environmental standards is also eligible.

TATA MOTORS
Connecting Aspirations



NEXON EV MAX

MOVES YOU TO THE MAX

Now at Rs.

45.99

Lakhs*



For online booking



SIPRADI TRADING PVT. LTD.,

An ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 45001:2018 Certified Company

Toll Free No.: 16600155777, 9801575777

SIPRADI

Old is still gold in Nepali politics

By-election results in Ilam and Bajhang show establishment parties are still the voter's choice

■ Santa Gaha Magar

The two by-elections in Ilam-2 and Bajhang were in effect public opinion polls on the people's political preferences. Of the people who cast their ballots in the two districts, 40% voted for the UML, while over 30% voted for the Nepali Congress (NC).

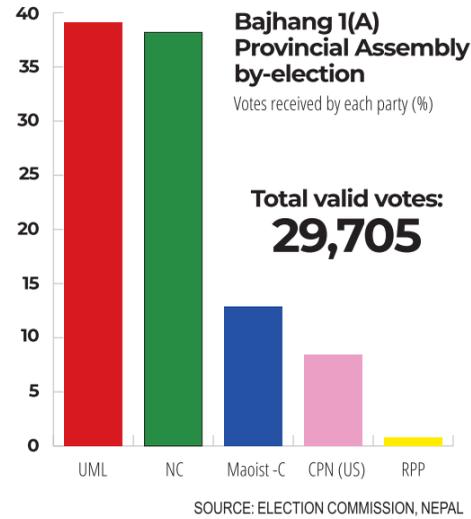
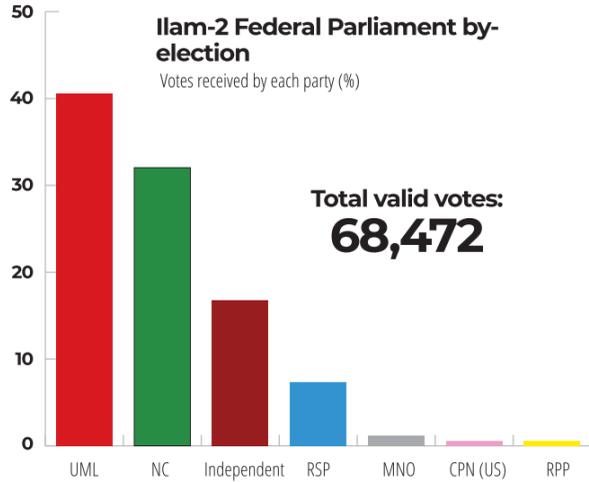
The Maoist-Centre was nowhere in the picture. The RSP's bubble seems to have burst. The Hindu monarchist RPP was wiped out.

If this was a mini-referendum, the results were clear: the legacy parties are still strong, voters rejected both identity politics as well as a return to monarchy and a Hindu state. But it is the sad fate of the Maoists in Bajhang, whose leader is the current Prime Minister, that is most remarkable.

Voter turnout was almost 60% in Ilam and 49% in Bajhang, probably more a reflection of anti-establishment absentee voters than a lack of interest in the elections. Traditional vote banks, electoral alliances and ethnic-caste identity played a part.

In Ilam-2, UML candidate Suhang Nembang won the seat held by his father Subhas Chandra Nembang, who died last September. He received 27,772 votes, while Dambar Bahadur Khadka of the NC got 21,942.

Independent candidate Dakendra Singh Limbu, who ran an identity-based campaign representing Ilam's indigenous communities, came third with 11,457 votes. The fact that a



candidate with no party affiliation championing the Kirat cause got so many votes shows identity politics is a potent force in Kosi Province.

The RSP, which branded itself as an anti-legacy party, fell short of its own expectations. Candidate Milan Limbu received only 5,050 votes to finish fourth in Ilam-2. RSP's popularity seems to be focused on a few of its personalities, but scandals involving Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane undermined support.

Both by-elections showed negligible support for a return to Hindu monarchy. The RPP's Laxmi Gurung received just 404 votes in Ilam-2, and the party's candidate in Bajhang got only 242.

In the Bajhang 1(A) provincial assembly by-election, UML

candidate Dambar Bahadur Bhandari defeated his closest rival Abhishek Bahadur Singh of the NC by less than 300 votes. Abhishek Bahadur Singh is the son of Prithvi Bahadur Singh, Sudurpaschim Province's Home Minister who died in a car accident last June.

Bhandari received 11,613 votes, while Singh obtained 11,346. Meanwhile, Maoist Centre candidate Janak Bahadur Budha got just 3,831 votes and Dil Bahadur Singh of the Unified Socialist got 2,514 votes.

Bhandari's win has increased the number of UML MPs in the Sudurpaschim parliament by one but has not made a fundamental difference in the provincial government, where the NC still has a majority.

In early March, the Maoist Centre broke from its alliance with the NC to once again join hands with the UML in a new coalition. Krishna Pokharel, a professor of political science, says that the new coalition was crucial to the election.

"Nepali Congress lost a seat in Bajhang that it had won by a margin of more than 3,000 votes in 2022," notes Pokharel, "This makes it clear that the NC's win in 2022 was due to its alliance with the Maoists and the Unified Socialists, and that it is otherwise not the preferred party in the constituency."

In Ilam, Khadka of the NC had previously also run against Subhas Nembang during the 2022 elections in alliance with the

Maoists and other parties. He lost that time by just 114 votes. This time, since the NC contested the election alone, the difference of votes was more than five thousand.

Alliance with the Maoists has turned out to be crucial to both NC and UML during the election. "The UML must understand that the performance of the party during the election depends upon whether or not it is part of a coalition," says Pokharel.

There is soul searching within the NC about the line taken by party dissidents including Gagan Thapa to go it alone. The Maoists still command the swing votes.

Political scientist Krishna Khanal says that the wins of the UML in both districts show that voters have accepted the latest Maoist-UML coalition: "The results show that the majority of voters are still with old, established parties."

While these polls were important to the parties to gauge their popularity, it will not have any earth-shaking consequences on national politics. There is also little public interest among Nepalis bearing the brunt of unemployment, inflation, and pollution.

Dhana Kumari Sunar, formerly of the National Women's Commission Nepal, says that the millions spent on elections have not translated into meaningful impact on the lives of constituents.

She adds, "What is more important than who won and who lost is keeping track of what difference it will make on the quality of education, health care and employment in these constituencies." 🇳🇵



162 YEARS OF CHANGAN

TOUCH THE FUTURE



15+ NEW FEATURES FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEPAL IN THE SEGMENT



RWD
REAR WHEEL DRIVE



15.6-INCH SUNFLOWER TOUCHSCREEN
LARGEST & INNOVATIVE



WELCOME SEAT
AUTOMATICALLY ADJUSTS ON ITS OWN



14 SONY SPEAKERS
BEST AUDIO EXPERIENCE



AR-HUD
REAL-WORLD NAVIGATION



20-INCH TYRE
AESTHETIC APPEAL & PERFORMANCE CAPABILITIES



GESTURE CONTROL FEATURE
FOR SAFE DRIVING



WLTP-410KM
FOR LONGER DRIVES

Designed in Turin, Italy

Introductory Price: **S07 | NPR. 71,99,000/-**



Scan to learn more




MAW Vridhhi Autocorp Pvt. Ltd.
Showroom: Naxal, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-4547365, 9820022222, 9704541777, 9802887708, 9802887709

CHANGAN NEPAL



Kah Phu Che

Where ice tumbles down to a pasture
which has now turned into a lake

■ Hum Gurung in Kaski

Kapuche used to be a meadow where herders from the valley below brought buffaloes and goats to graze in summer.

The name itself is derived from the Gurung words 'kah' (ice), 'phu' (tumbling), and 'che' (flat land), perfectly describing what happens here: ice avalanches tumble 5,000m from the peaks of Annapurna directly down to the pasture.

In 2001, small ponds started forming on the accumulated ice. Global warming has now melted the ice, and Kapuche is a turquoise lake shimmering like a jewel below Lamjung Himal, Annapurna II and IV and Sikles Peak.

The lake is situated at 2,450m, and is tucked away in such a deep valley that none of those peaks are visible from its shore. A two hour walk below the lake is Hugu Goth, a cattle shed where herders used to stay summers as livestock grazed in the succulent grass.

As a boy 42 years ago, I used to walk here barefoot from Sikles on

school excursions to learn about the mountain ecosystem. Global warming had not yet melted the ice, so buffaloes and goats could cross over to the other side to graze.

The winter snow used to come like clockwork in January when families in Sikles celebrated Maghe Sankranti. Monsoons were regular with three months of relentless rain and mist. Winters are now dry, and the monsoons have become erratic.

I did my master's in national parks and tourism in New Zealand and a doctorate in conservation tourism in Australia, and am interested in how climate change impacts the Himalaya, especially my home region below the Annapurnas.

I next travelled to Kapuche in 2015. By then, the lake was constantly fed by avalanches and glacial melt flowing down from the cliffs above.

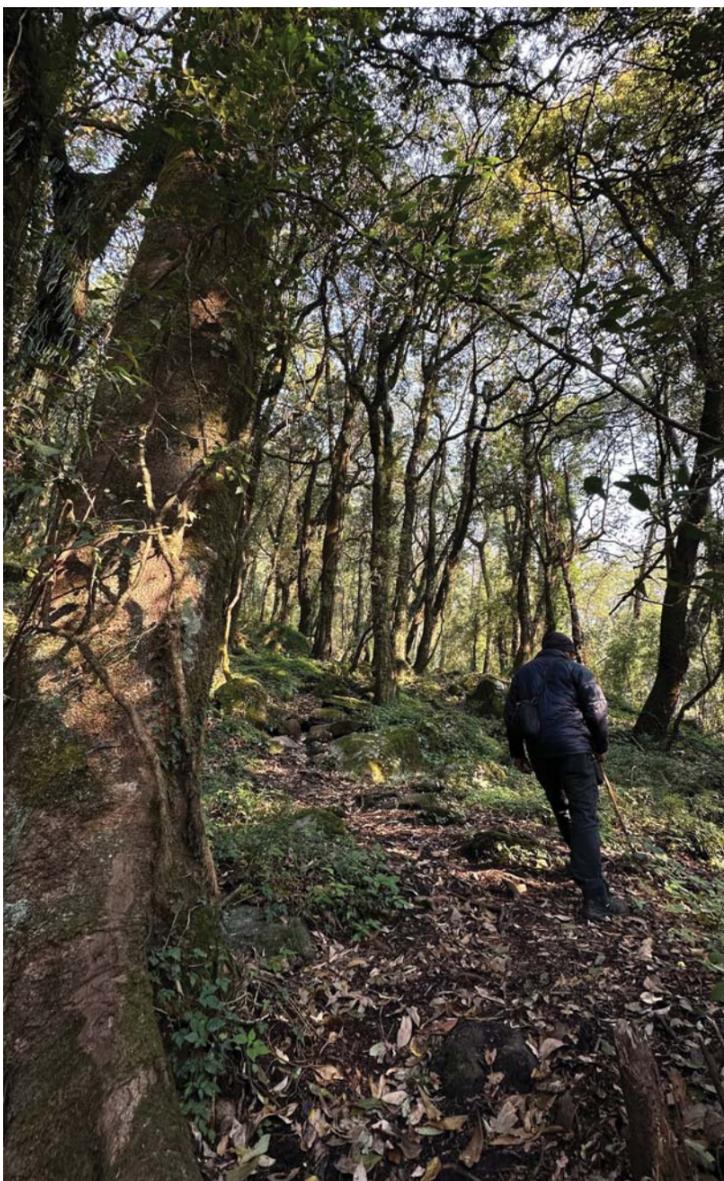
Nearly 10 years later, we visited Kapuche again last week, and noticed that the lake had grown dramatically bigger with icebergs floating on the surface. Above, the escarpments of Annapurna IV appear to have much less ice than

in 2015. With us was the Chair of the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) Management Committee of Parche Village and MP Man Bahadur Gurung who has also noticed many changes here over the years.

Hugu Goth used to have half a dozen families growing maize, beans and potatoes, and tending to their animals. It was here that French filmmaker Eric Valli and Diane Summers captured the portraits of the two herders and hunters, Bhim Bahadur Gurung and Mej Bahadur Gurung in their classic 1988 book *Honey Hunters of Nepal* which also became a documentary.

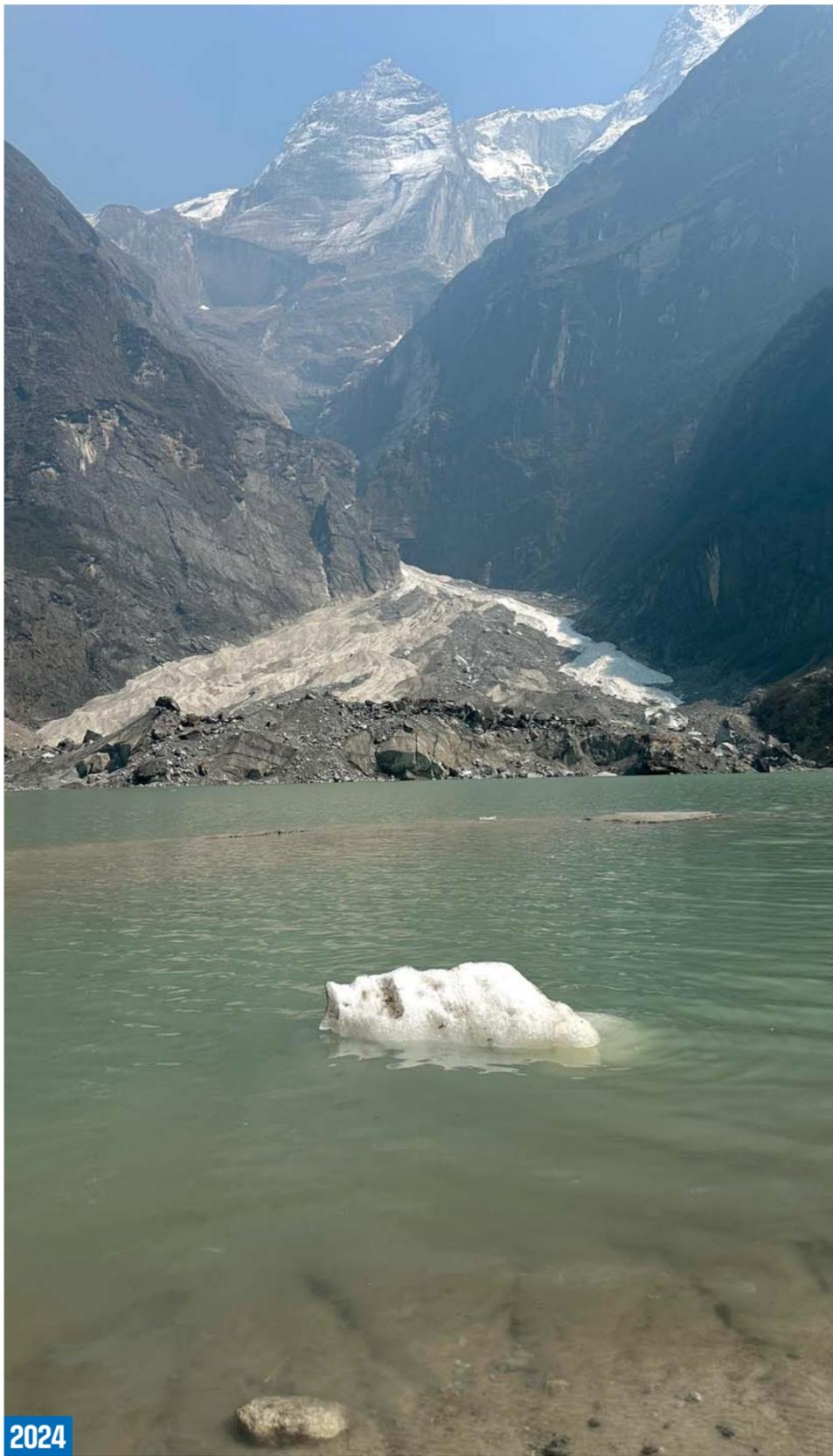
With outmigration and as trekking took off, some herders converted their buffalo sheds into lodges, and there are now six inns in Kapuche and three in Hugu. Footfalls have also increased because of the 45MW hydropower plant under construction nearby along the headwaters of the Madi River.

Locals here recall that avalanches used to be more frequent in the past, probably because there was more snow. Boating is prohibited due to the danger





2015



2024

ALL PHOTOS: HUM GURUNG

Kapuche, here we come

Nowhere in Nepal is there such an accessible place to observe first-hand the impact of climate breakdown, while also being a popular trekking destination.

Kapuche Lake, only an 8-hour hike from Sikles which itself is three hours up by jeep from Pokhara, is the lowest glacial lake in the Nepal and offers a vivid demonstration of just how rapidly the Himalayan ice-cap is melting.

Selfies and videos posted by visitors on social media platforms in recent years have popularised the trek and lake, bringing ever more domestic and foreign tourists to the site.

Most glacial lakes in the Himalaya are at elevations between 4,500-5,500m and need a week of trekking to get to, but Kapuche is located at only 2,450m at the bottom of a deep avalanche funnel directly below Annapurna II.

Some scientists say Kapuche cannot even be called a glacial lake because it just collects water from frequent avalanches that thunder down from the vast snowfield at 7,500m between Annapurna II and IV.

Most Himalayan lakes are moraine-dammed proglacial lakes, or are supra-glacial ponds that started forming after the Little Ice Age 700 years ago, a natural process that was accelerated by anthropogenic greenhouse gas buildup in the atmosphere after the Industrial Era.

Kapuche was only an avalanche fan till a Landsat image in 2001 showed that small ponds had formed in the debris field. Since then, the ponds have merged into a lake that has grown tenfold in size to measure 15 hectares and is now more than 32m deep in some sections.

A video posted on YouTube in January 2021 of a massive powder snow avalanche preceded by an air blast that swept down to the lake went viral. Since then, tourists flocked to Kapuche hoping to be lucky enough to take selfies of another avalanche, with some even venturing into the dangerous debris fan on the other side of the lake.

So many visitors visit Kapuche now that there are lodges by the shore, as well as some canine guides who came here with trekkers (below) and never went back because they enjoy the fresh mountain air.



of falling ice, but some trekkers bring rafts anyway. The water is ice-cold, still this does not deter adventurous ones to swim out to the middle of the lake to celebrate reaching their destination.

The forests are lush due to the heavy rainfall as well as moisture from powder snow avalanches. The thick woods teem with wildlife, and are alive with birdcalls. The Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) is the largest protected area in Nepal and an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area, as well as a Key Biodiversity Area.

ACA has designed a survey form for visitors to monitor avalanches that they may witness. The ACA Management Committee keeps track of the lake's shape and size with the help of citizen scientists Prakash Gurung and Dhan Bahadur Gurung who run lodges on the shore.

The colour of the lake changes constantly, from crystal blue in winter to green as the snow starts to melt, and turns a turbid grey during the monsoon.

Just three hours by car from Pokhara, Sikles is drawing domestic and international visitors to experience its rich Gurung heritage, as well as enjoy the scenery of this relatively less crowded trekking area. Sikles also inspired the concept of sustainable ecotourism for Nepal's conservation areas. The village was awarded UNDP's Equator Initiative Prize in 2014.

After the wilderness trek to Kapuche, Sikles is a good place to immerse in the culture and learn about indigenous conservation practices of the Gurung people. 🇳🇵



AVIA CLUB NEPAL

HIMALAYAN MELTDOWN:

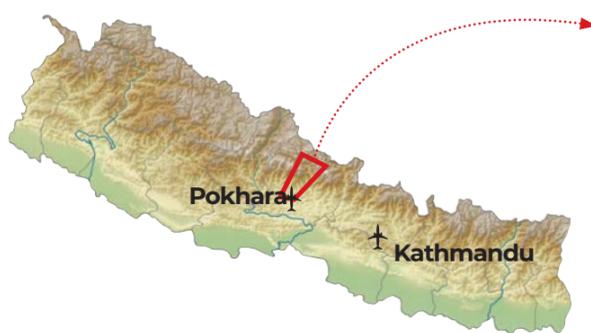
(Clockwise from main picture top left)

Kapuche Lake in 2015 and last week, showing changes in the avalanche fan, icebergs and snow cover on the mountains.

Dogs are a constant companions during the Sikles-Kapuche trek and lounge on the shores of the lake. The hike is increasingly popular with international trekkers.

A Google 3D map of the region, and an aerial view of Kapuche from a sightseeing aircraft of Avia Club Nepal.

Lush forest trails along the way from Sikles to Kapuche.

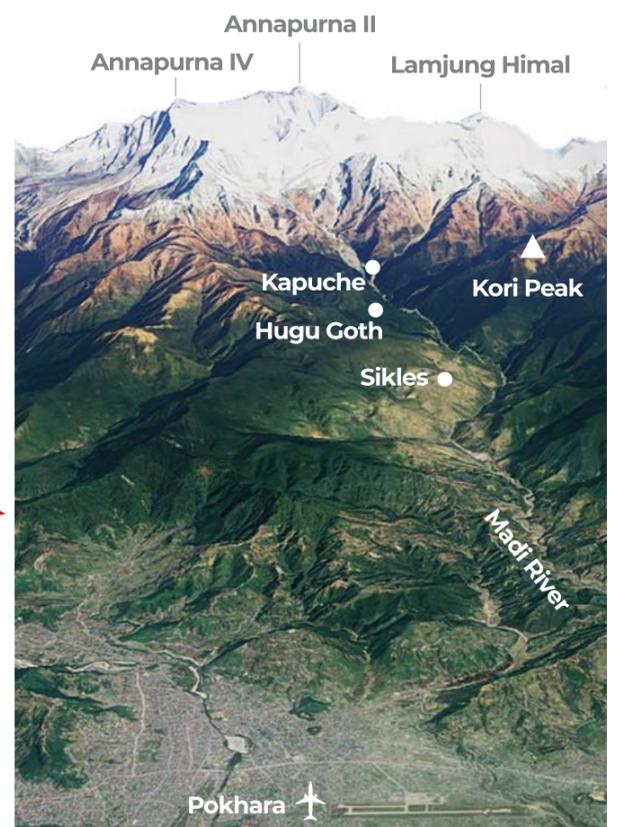


How to get there

- ▲ Fly or drive to Pokhara, and take the turnoff to Sikles for a 3 hour ride over a newly paved road. Only the last section after Khilang is still rough.
- ▲ Spend a night in one of the many lodges in Sikles, and explore this well-preserved Gurung village and birthplace of conservationist Chandra Gurung.
- ▲ Start scenic hike with spectacular views of Annapurna II and Lamjung Himal.
- ▲ The trail follows the Madi Khola which drains Kapuche Lake.
- ▲ A 5 hour walk brings you to Hugu Goth for the night stop at the cattle shed-turned-lodge.
- ▲ It is a 2 hour hike to Kapuche Lake past construction site of a 25MW hydropower plant.
- ▲ Camp by the shore or stay in one of the lodges, or hike back to Hugu.
- ▲ Back to Sikles for ride down to Pokhara.

Side trip on return: At Hugu, cross the Madi and climb up to Kori Peak (3,800m) with its high meadows for a magnificent view of Lamjung Himal. Need camping gear. Descend to Sikles.

Cost: Rs5,000 per day for meals and room. Foreigners charged \$50 for ACA and Trekking Permits. Transport from Kathmandu or Pokhara extra.



EVENTS

**Himal Media Mela 2024**

Himal Media's annual event is back with the theme of 'Journalism for the Planet'.

Keynote Address: Former President of the Maldives Mohamed Nasheed (9:30am)

Workshops:

All in the Newsroom (11:15am-12:45pm)
Data Mining (11:15am-12:45pm)
Media as Early Warning (1:45pm-3pm)
Climate Finance for Beginners (1:45pm-3pm)

Discussion:

Economics of Ecology (3:15pm-4:15pm)
Press and the Planet (3:15pm-4:15pm)

Ending presentation:

Politics of Environment and the Media (4:30pm-5:30pm)

3 May, Registration fee: Rs500, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur

Meaning within Meaning

Featuring Bhuwan Thapa's sculpture, the exhibition Meaning within Meaning will leave viewers wanting to soul-search and look for meaning in the smaller things.

Until 5 May, 11am-7pm, Takpa Galley, Lazimpat

**Motogirls @ Ring Road**

Dui Pangre Queens are organising a motor rally on the occasion of the 18th International Female Ride day. The rally will start from Nepal Tourism Board and end at 7 Wheels Restro, Sorakhutte.

4 May, 7am, Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap

Baakhaama

The play Baakhaama: Man in Mundhumis is based on the eponymous Mundhumi character Baakhaama, and expresses the philosophy of life of the Kirati Community.

Until 26 May, 5:30pm (except Mondays), Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun, (01)5245147

Game Night

Learn a range of board games like Carcassonne, Keflower, Azul, Wingspan and more, or have a fun evening with well-known board games like Chess, Ludo, Jenga and UNO.

Thursdays, 5:30pm onwards, Hostel Nextdoor, Kupondole, 9801879445

DINING

**Piano Piano South**

Sip and savour the flavours of Italy at Piano Piano South, a cosy neighbourhood restaurant to visit at any time of the day.

Sanepa, 9802302303

MUSIC

Musical Journey

If you are planning on a getaway for the weekend, Water Kingdom Park Musical Journey is the place to be. The Elements and Purna Rai Dajuvaiharu are performing, among others.

10 May, 5pm onwards, Water Kingdom Park, Jhijhile, Jhapa

**Didgeridoo experience**

Experience the sound of Didgeridoo, an ancient wind instrument of the aboriginal people of Australia, played by Nepali artist Salil Subedi.

3 May, 6:30-8:30pm, Rs300-500, Patan Museum Courtyard, 9862790677

**Women in Concert**

Initiated by singer Abhaya Subba, this annual concert promotes women empowerment and gender equality through music.

3 May, 7pm onwards, Rs1500-5000, GAA Hall, Thamel

**Rota Prom Night**

Be a part of a night filled with music, dance and games. Panhelo Batti Muni will also join the party.

10 May, 8pm onwards, Fee: Rs500 (General)/Rs900 (Couple), Fahrenheit Club, Thamel

Kathmandu Chorale

Kathmandu Chorale will bring Broadway to the stage at the Spring Concert 2024, organised by The British School. The entry is free but you might want to donate to a charitable cause.

4 May, 5:30pm onwards, The British School, Lalitpur

**Sapporo Japanese**

Experience classic Japanese food and drink at Sapporo Japanese, including homemade noodles, ramen, udon, and soba.

Anamika Marg, Baluwatar, (01)4512355

Goan Food Festival

Taste the flavours of Goa with Chef Rhea Aaron from India and Executive chef Rajeev Shrestha of Aloft Kathmandu's Nook.

3-5 May (Chef Aaron), 10-12 May (Chef Shrestha), 6:30pm-10:30pm, Nook, Aloft Kathmandu

GETAWAYS

**Borderlands Eco Resort**

Just three hours north of Kathmandu, eco-adventures await visitors amidst the wilderness at Borderlands Eco Resort.

Sindhupalchok, 9802025666

Buddha Maya Garden Hotel

Wake up in beautiful rooms to the sounds of birds, and relax in the garden. The Maya Devi Temple is within walking distance.

Lumbini, 9801033114

**Mirabel Resort**

Perfect for families, Mirabel Resort offers comfort, continental cuisines and views of the Valley. Take a walk around Dhulikhel before tucking into a Nepali thali, or some barbecue.

Dhulikhel, (01)490972

Karma Hotel

Karma Boutique Hotel, located in the vibrant heart of Thamel, is an amalgamation of Tibetan and Nepali culture, with brightly-decorated rooms and plentiful artwork.

Thamel, (01)4246131

**Raniban Retreat**

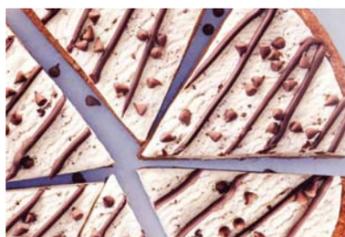
Located on a hillock in the Raniban forest, this environmentally-friendly boutique hotel offers guests spectacular views of the mountains.

Pokhara, 9841218466

La Casita

With a direct view of Boudhanath, La Casita is the ideal place to chase nirvana as you enjoy tacos, burgers and tapas.

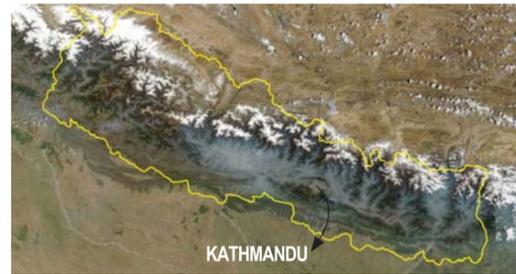
Boudhanath, 9802399197

**Baskin-Robbins**

Escape the sweltering summer heat with exciting ice-cream flavours at Baskin-Robbins. Also get the chance to indulge in the fusion of Ice Cream and Roll Cake and Arctic Ice cream Pizza.

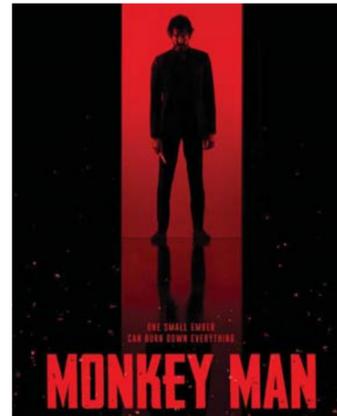
Maharajanji, 9801151597

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Pre-monsoon rains**

Good news: a low pressure system is being pushed into Nepal and will mean cloud buildup on Saturday. The moisture infusion will bring pre-monsoon showers into Sunday and next week. Most of the rain is expected in the afternoons and evenings, and some of the showers could be thundery with gusty wind whipping up dust. We are expecting some 5mm of rain per day in Central Nepal and mountain snow. Hopefully this will douse the wildfires (seen in satellite image, left taken on Thursday morning), especially in Gulmi, Syangja and Parbat that have decimated community forests. (Editorial, page 2).

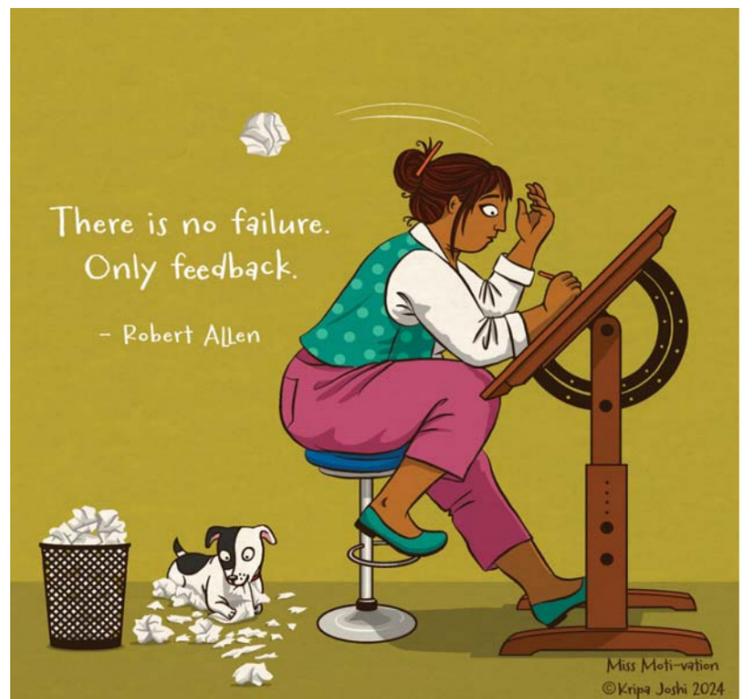
OUR PICK



In the 2024 neo-noir action thriller *Monkey Man*, a young man reminisces about hearing tales of Hanuman from his mother as a boy living in a forest village in India. But he is also haunted by images of his mother's death and the destruction of his home at the hands of a corrupt police officer working under orders from a merciless spiritual guru. Now living in the city of Yatana, the man plots and executes a gruesome revenge against those responsible for his mother's murder. *Monkey Man* is the directorial debut for British actor Dev Patel, and stars Patel himself, along with Vipin Sharma, Sikandar Kher, Ashwini Kalsekar, Makarand Deshpande, and Sobhita Dhulipala.

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

Nepal's 'Owl Sir' awarded

Raju Acharya wins a 2024 Whitley Award to protect the endangered nocturnal birds in central Nepal

Raju Acharya from Nepal is one of the winners of the Whitley Award to protect owls in central Nepal after spearheading a government-backed ten-year plan to safeguard the birds overlooked by conservation efforts.

Acharya is the founder of Friends of Nature, a Kathmandu-based environmental group and was instrumental in driving The Owl Conservation Action Plan in 2020 which addresses threats to owls from hunting, illegal trade, and habitat loss.

The Whitley Award funding will help boost initiatives in central Nepal, home to the greatest density of birds and which has 19 of the country's 23 owl species.

Acharya received the award on 1 May at the Royal Geographical Society in a ceremony from Britain's Princess Royal (pictured, right).

Sir David Attenborough, the Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) Ambassador said: "Whitley Award winners respond to crises and bring communities with them."

Acharya spent decades shoring up support for Nepal's owls which include the jungle owl, rock eagle owl and Eurasian eagle owl – all listed as Least Concern or Data Deficient under the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List.

His work addresses the danger of focusing conservation efforts solely on highly threatened flagship species. Threats to the owls are significant: the birds are the subject of an illicit trade with 1,500 owls hunted or traded each year in Nepal.



ROSHAN GIRI



Owls represent good or bad omens in central Nepal, with some people associating them with death, while in other areas, owl feathers are regarded as sacred objects that can ward off evil.

Hunting by teenagers using catapults and habitat loss are other threats to the owls amid the felling of old trees whose cavities are crucial nesting sites for the birds. Forest makes up one-third of this region. Older trees also act as roosting, den or hibernation sites for owls which struggle to find nesting locations in semi-urban areas.

Acharya's project aims to build on Nepal's success in conservation which has harnessed the proactive

participation of communities. He aims to foster collaboration between the ethnic groups to foster a broader understanding of owls to reduce the use of catapults, discourage the consumption of owl meat and advocate for adherence to government regulations which protect the birds.

His Whitley Award project will conduct training events to increase the capacity of law enforcement agencies, policymakers and Owl Envoys with a goal of reducing hunting and trade by 25%.

Acharya will also create five catapult-free zones. He aims to raise awareness among students and the public by creating 100 conservation

camp. The abundance of birds significantly increases in those areas with larger numbers of old trees. His team will restore and rehabilitate 1,200 hectares of owl habitat by protecting 500 old trees and installing 100 artificial nests in semi-urban areas.

"The appreciation from local people and colleagues serves as constant inspiration for me to continue my work," Acharya said.

At the forefront of owl research in Nepal and known locally as 'Owl Sir' for his efforts to draw attention to the plight of owls, Acharya hopes to engage career scientists to join him on his mission.

He also brings out a digital owl

newsletter called Hapsilo, Raju set up the Nepal Owl Festival eleven years ago. The festival has boosted ecotourism to the region and become one of the country's biggest conservation events despite owls being lower priority species than tigers and snow leopards.

The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) is a UK charity supporting grassroots conservation leaders in the Global South. Over 30 years it has channelled £23 million to more than 200 conservationists across 80 countries.

Earlier Nepali winners include red panda activist Sonam Tashi Lama and Tulshi Laxmi Suwal for protecting pangolins. 🇳🇵

ALL NEW HYBRID ELECTRIC

YARIS CROSS



Choose your path and electrify your style! Check out the stunning exteriors of the All-New Toyota Yaris Cross!



“Survival”



Mohamed Nasheed is the former president of the Maldives, an ex-journalist and a climate campaigner. He is Secretary-General of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, a group of 68 countries most at risk from climate breakdown. He is delivering the keynote address to the Himal Media Mela 2024 in Kathmandu on World Press Freedom Day on 3 May.

■ Mohamed Nasheed

All countries in South Asia stand to be severely impacted by climate change. Bangladesh is threatened by rising sea levels which will cause ever more catastrophic flooding and an exodus of refugees. India, Nepal and Sri Lanka face severe droughts, flooding and heat waves. The loss of Himalayan glaciers could see the Ganges run dry.



ALTON BYERS (TOP) AND KUNDA DIXIT

Like all South Asian countries, the Maldives is also threatened. The coral reefs that protect our islands and provide food face extinction by ever-higher ocean temperatures that bleach and kill corals. And we face the threat of submersion by the rising seas.

But we have no intention of being one of the first victims of the climate crisis. We are going to do everything in our power to keep our coral reefs intact, and our heads above the water.

For the Maldives, climate change is not an environmental issue, it is a national security threat. The recent IPCC report is clear: emissions must be reduced by 45% in 12 years to stabilise global warming at 1.5 degrees.

That is a daunting task, especially if you consider that after a few years, global emissions are rising again and temperatures are soaring. All around us we see the terrible impacts of climate systems gone wrong: terrible heat waves, super typhoons leaving trails of destruction in their wake.

But amid all the doom and gloom, we find hope. For me, one of the biggest rays of hope is India. Back at the climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009, India along with other big developing countries like China were blocking progress. They were hiding behind this illogical argument that the West brought us to the climate edge, and developing countries have the right to burn coal and push us over that edge. This position was mad because it led to mutually assured destruction.

In recent years, India's position on climate change has shifted. It was supportive of the IPCC report and India cares about safeguarding its neighbours in South Asia and the planet.

When we see India engaging constructively in climate talks, and investing billions in clean energy, then we know that India is taking our security seriously.

Even if the world stopped producing all carbon emissions tomorrow, we would still need to adapt to climate change because there is future warming already trapped into the system. Of course, we cannot adapt forever as the world gets hotter. All nations big or small, rich or poor, are in this together whether they like it or not. If we don't work together, we will all have hell to pay.

I am heartened that like the Maldives, many other countries in the Climate Vulnerable Forum and industrialised countries have also committed to drive fossil fuels out of their economies.

There are still problems with the way the UNFCCC talks are set up. I have been watching climate negotiations

since 2009, but haven't been to all of them because I was in jail in the Maldives and you don't get prison leave to attend climate conferences. But over the past 10 years, nothing much has changed.

We are still using the same old dinosaur language, making the same tedious points and have the same diplomats who do not seem to agree on anything but the need to have another round of talks 12 months later. Emissions are rising and rising, and all we are doing is talking and talking.

Countries still equate making cuts in fossil fuels to making sacrifices which no political leader likes to make. Perhaps instead of asking for cuts we should be demanding increases in investments in clean energy.

In UN talks, waiting for consensus means you sail to the speed of the slowest ship in the convoy. But we don't have time to fix this problem before it spirals out of control.

We need to allow countries that want to move more quickly to do so. People lagging behind should not be allowed to veto things and slow the whole process down.

I have spent much of my time to bring freedom and democracy to the Maldives. I was elected president in 2008, and started fighting climate change. When I was ousted in a coup in 2012, it was clear that the fight for democracy and climate change are one and the same.

How many autocrats are dependent on oil revenues to prop up their violent regimes? We will only survive as nations if we also survive as a planet. So let us all join together, make investments in clean energy -- our blueprint for survival. 🇨🇵



Balancing free expression with t



Guilherme Canela (right) is Chief of the Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists Section of UNESCO in Paris. He recently visited Nepal to discuss freedom of expression in the digital media with legislators. Nepali Times spoke to him about emerging challenges to free media around the world. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: How did the interaction with lawmakers go?

Guilherme Canela: My visit was to have an open discussion with them about international standards on freedom of expression. It was very enriching to learn the key

concerns of MPs about challenges Nepal faces regarding existing legal framework regulating the media and digital ecosystem vis a vis the changes related to the technological revolution, and how these challenges can be aligned with International Human Rights Law.

Tell us about UNESCO's own study on balancing free expression with hate speech, and governance of digital platforms?

Digital platforms have become a new front in the pursuit of peace and human rights. They democratised access to knowledge, enabled new voices to be heard, and fostered global connections. But, as you say, they have also become ecosystems of

misinformation, disinformation, ideological polarisation, and incitement to violence, discrimination, and hate.

This has undermined democratic values and threatened human rights. Our job, therefore, is to foster the positive side of this equation to counter the negatives.

Digital companies don't operate with transparency, accountability and due diligence, so many countries have embarked on regulatory processes without keeping a human rights approach, thus shrinking the civic space and leading to restrictions infringing on International Human Rights Law.

UNESCO's proposal, which was debated worldwide for 2 years, and received 10,000 comments from 134



KUNDA DIXIT

People vs Monsters

■ Gleb Fetisov in Istanbul

The Fetisov Journalism Awards is in its fifth year, and it is with a sense of considerable pride that we can reflect on the global recognition and respect it has achieved,

earning a name in the journalism community worldwide.

Regrettably, in those five years we have not seen an improvement in politics and the media across the world.

Politicians, corporations and state institutions have reverted to the rhetoric of war and aggression. Yet, it was only 35 years ago that the world was celebrating the fall of the Berlin Wall and the promise of a future free of ideological strife, bloody revolutions and wars.

The hope was that by dismantling barriers between nations and people, the

world would see a new era of humanitarian values and justice. Now, however, new walls have emerged. Injustice, cruelty and violence proliferate. Previously accepted 'red lines' are being erased, and what was unthinkable and intolerable yesterday has become acceptable today.

The Fetisov Journalism Award shortlist this year is aptly titled 'People vs Monsters' – a precise description of the faultline that runs through modern civilisation.

On one side are the interests of the global and regional elite, on the other are the interests of people whose survival depends on fairness, equality and the possibility of reaching their full potential on competitive entrepreneurship and the protection of the environment.

To give priority to such an agenda threatens the dominance of monsters. But the shortlisted journalists this year have defied these monsters, unafraid to take a path fraught with difficulty and danger. Yet, it is the honourable

and righteous path.

The largely artificial phenomenon of information noise leads to an overwhelming surplus of information, blurring the lines between fact and fiction, preventing accurate information from taking root in our limited short-term memory. Truth, after all, is a threat to monsters.

Mahatma Gandhi, before rising as a national leader, was also a journalist. Anticipating an era of information noise, he declared: 'False news is a crime against humanity.' He believed that a journalist's sole purpose was service to society.

The cacophony of information noise cannot silence the voices of journalists. The stories of this year's nominees resonate powerfully, they have had impact and have compelled those in power to reconsider their decisions.

The stories provide compelling evidence to show that the golden age of investigative journalism has not ended, but is alive and as vigorous as ever. People depend on it, and the truth it reveals.

Investigative journalists expose wrongdoing, hold power to account and give voice to victims deprived of it. They reveal the devastation, disregard for dignity and neglect of humanity exhibited by monsters-- be they politicians, corporations, dictators, terrorists or criminals.

Sometimes it seems people triumph over monsters only in fantasy films. But truth-telling journalism instils the belief that evil will be punished, good will prevail, and once again the walls between people will crumble, ensuring there is room under the sun for everyone. 🇨🇵

Gleb Fetisov (pictured above) is a Cyprus-based businessman, producer, scientist and philanthropist who has a PhD in Economics. He is the founder of the annual Fetisov Journalism Awards. Go online for links to this year's awardees.

fake news on social media



the Articles 19 (3) and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights or the Three-Part Test which means any interference must be: provided for by the law, pursue a legitimate aim, and be necessary and proportional to secure one of those aims. Restrictions must be subject to oversight to uphold transparency, accountability and prevent abuse of power. They must be circumscribed to protect the fundamental rights of individuals and uphold the principles of democracy, pluralism, and open discourse in the digital age.

Is there not a danger, then, that states can justify banning digital platforms for "social harmony"?

Measures applied by both companies and states should always be proportional to the harm that is intended to prevent. From companies, removal and blocking of content and account suspension should only be used as a last resort in the most serious cases. Banning a digital platform should be proportionate to the level of harm it causes and should be accompanied by transparent processes, due diligence and consideration of alternatives to mitigate risks.

There are two scenarios where banning digital platforms might be proportionate: First, systemic violation of international human rights standards despite warnings and sanctions. Second, when platforms engage in exploitative and illegal practices like child pornography or trafficking.

Our Guidelines do not call on the government to establish a department to moderate content. Digital platforms should not be held liable when they act in good faith

and with due diligence, carry out voluntary investigations, or take other measures aimed at detecting, identifying, and removing or disabling access to content.

How can journalists protect freedoms when democracy itself is threatened?

Journalists can protect their freedom by keeping on doing their job and holding power to account. But they cannot do it alone. They should not be left alone to deal with safety and viability challenges.

Journalism should be valued as a fundamental public good with citizens putting their trust in it also through teaching and encouraging media and information literacy. It demands the State protect media viability, the rule of law institutions defending media freedom from all attacks, including by elected officials, and for politicians committing to respect the fundamentals of democracy, including the role of the press as a watchdog. There is an urgent need to further demonstrate to our societies the value of journalism and all fundamental freedoms. When someone is protesting to have better education or better health, ultimately what they want is to protect the rights of education and a healthy life, but they can't do that if they don't have freedom of expression in the first place and if watchdogs, like journalists, are being silenced.

Your report also cites the need to protect electoral integrity.

In UNESCO Guidelines for

the Governance of the Digital Platforms, we highlight the need for digital platforms to recognise their role in supporting democratic institutions by preserving electoral

integrity. Their acceptance of the role is not trivial as it implies an engagement regarding democracies. It also recommends assessing the integrity of the electoral cycle. Proactive

measures based on the identified risks are essential to prevent potential threats to the integrity of the electoral process.

UNESCO urges digital platforms to ensure that users have access to a diverse range of information and ideas. Attention should be given to automated tools to prevent any hindrances in accessing election-related content and diverse viewpoints. Additionally, digital platforms should review political advertising, and the promotion of independent fact-checking, advertisement archives, and public alerts are highlighted as crucial to uphold electoral integrity.

Transparency, including the use and impact of automated tools, engagement with governance systems, and the identification of political advertisements must also be looked into. Digital platforms are responsible for disclosing funding details, applying equal content moderation rules, and tracking monetisation of political posts. The retention of advertisements in a publicly accessible online library, along with information on funding and targeted demographics, contributes to an accountable and transparent digital environment during electoral cycles. If put

in place by the platforms, these measures will collectively reinforce the commitment to preserving electoral integrity in the digital age.

How can digital platforms be held more responsible when Big Tech is controlled from outside national jurisdictions whereas the impact of their content is domestic?

The UNESCO Guidelines aim to enhance the responsibility of digital platforms worldwide by Building a Network of Networks through international collaboration among regulatory authorities and civil society to develop common standards for digital platforms. This can help ensure that platforms adhere to responsible practices regardless of the location of ownership.

Collaboration between governments, industry stakeholders, and civil society can facilitate the development of effective governance frameworks. Transparency and accountability of independent regulatory authorities and of digital platforms can also be implemented. Human rights, due diligence and content moderation and curation based on international human rights standards must be upheld. The governance system itself must have independent oversight mechanisms to monitor the activities of digital platforms within national jurisdictions.

We must also empower users by providing them with tools and resources to understand and manage their online experiences through media and information literacy. This includes features for content control, privacy protection, and mechanisms for reporting harmful content or behaviour.

Lastly, there must be ethical guidelines for digital platforms that prioritise transparency, fairness, and respect for human rights. These guidelines can serve as a foundation for responsible platform governance.



BEACON ON
Wi-Fi FULL ON

चल्छ INTERNET सररर

Full ON
Speed

Full ON
Coverage

Full ON
Experience

UPGRADE ↑

to the best secondary router

NOKIA Beacon 1.1

For More Information

Dial: 01-5970050 | 9801523050

www.worldlink.com.np | facebook.com/wlink.np



Taste the true flavors of
Goan Seafood

nook

Time:
6:30 - 10:30 PM

Adult	Children
Rs. 4444	Rs. 2222
<small>net per person</small>	<small>net per child</small>

For RSVP & Enquiries:
+977-9801976054




KLAA POP UP

Chet Rhea

May 3rd, 4th & 5th



Chet Rajeev

May 10th, 11th & 12th



*T&C Applies

