



standard chartered

**AAA**

ISSUER RATING BY ICRA [NEPAL]

► Nepal's safest bank. Five times in a row. ◀



**20**

Outsource Your Non-Core Staff Through Suvridha Staffing

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

+977- 9851247213  
www.suvridhasewa.com.np

Suvridha Sewa

zen garden

Available at SalesBerry

New Orleans Cafe

THAMEL: 01-4700736

#1 in the world

eScan Anti-Virus

TOTAL PROTECTION for Computers, Mobiles & Tablets

An ISO 27001 Certified Company

Contact no.: 01-4330980

www.escanav.com

## Soon, monsoon

■ Anita Bhetwal in Mustang

The hallmark of climate breakdown in the Himalaya is that it does not rain when and where it is supposed to, but pours at the wrong time in areas it ought not to.

The trans-Himalayan Mustang region has had successive snowless winters, but has experienced heavy monsoon downpours most characteristic of the southern foothills. But local and national governments seem ill-prepared to deal with this anomaly.

The lack of readiness was seen in unprecedented wildfires in March-April, which was partly due to a long winter drought. Soon, the monsoon will be upon us and the government appears to be doing little more than quantifying the death and destruction from floods and landslides.

On 13 August 2023, Namyak Gurung of Kagbeni in Mustang saw a flash flood that he had never seen in his 50 years of life. Cloudbursts the day before set off landslides that dammed the Kag Khola, a tributary of the Kali Gandaki.

The lake burst, destroying 30 of the 125 houses in the village. Nearly a year later, Kagbeni still looks like a war zone and the people dread the coming rainy season (page 6-7).

"I couldn't leave the place of my ancestors," says Namyak who has relocated to his brother's place after his two-storied building was destroyed. "I'm now building my new house a long way above the river. But I keep getting nightmares of another flood."

Tenzing Gurung, 36, was rescued from the second floor of her lodge in Kagbeni. Grey sand and boulders still cover the yard and the river now runs through what used to be the gate to her lodge. "I had never thought something like this could happen here," says Tenzing. "We are scared, but where can we go?"

The flood also damaged Janashanti Secondary School where two of Tenzing's sons study. The school needs immediate relocation, but nothing has been done. "I just pray that the next flood doesn't happen when my sons are in school," adds Tenzing.

Mustang and Manang districts are supposed to be in the Himalayan rainshadow, but precipitation patterns are changing. Light



**WAR ZONE:** Nearly one year after the August 2023 flash flood, much of Kagbeni is still in ruins and is bracing for another rainy season.

WEN STEPHENSON

monsoon rains have turned into destructive torrents followed by long periods of drought.

In June 2021, Manang got all of its average annual rainfall of 300mm in just one week. A wall of water, mud, boulders and logs rushed down the Marsyangdi River, washing away the highway, bridges, settlements and other infrastructure in Taal and Chame villages.

"We have seen that the trans-Himalayan regions are now getting more rain than before," says meteorologist Rajendra Sharma of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA). "In the past, when it rained in Mustang, it happened gently over a period of time but now, we get everything in a day or two."

In the last 10 years, a total of

1,500 floods, 2,500 landslides, and 1,549 high rainfall events occurred across the country and killed 2,141 people. Yet the state appears ill-prepared to prevent the loss of life and damage — even though not all the destruction can be blamed solely on climate breakdown.

"From the Manang and Melamchi floods in 2021 to last year's Mustang, all of these are weather-related disasters, and the rate of these incidents has increased due to climate change," says climatologist Dharma Upreti.

The South Asian Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF) has projected above-normal rainfall for Nepal this monsoon. And with less than a month before the onset of the rains, the NDRRMA's primary focus is post-disaster humanitarian aid and relief, not so much on

preparedness.

"We do not have sufficient resources to manage damage caused by disasters year after year, the local government should step up," says NDRRMA chief Anil Pokhrel.

Local governments are first responders, but do not have the financial support or technical know-how to deal with disasters on their own. Says district administrator Hom Bahadur Thapa Magar in Kagbeni: "Another monsoon is coming, and given what happened last year, we urgently need to build embankments but we do not have the resources or manpower to do so." 🇳🇵

**What is lost cannot be repaid**

PAGE 6-7

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

## 71.3

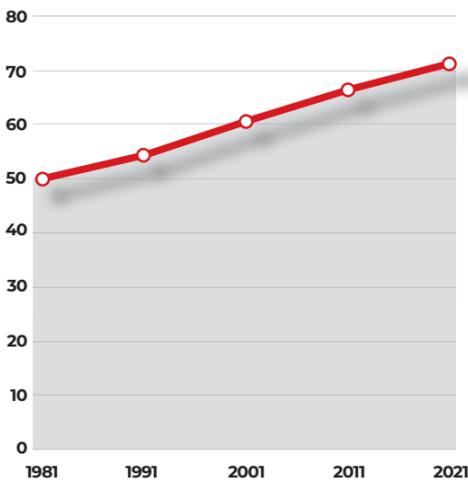
Sixty years ago, the average lifespan of Nepalis was only 28 years. It has now risen to 71.3.

How did this happen, despite poor governance, conflict and the upheavals of the past decade in the country?

Demographers cite a confluence of factors: a sharp decline in infant and child mortality rates, improvements in health care and nutrition because of a remittance-driven rise in household income from the four million or so Nepalis living and working abroad who send home Rs1 billion a month.

The new figure for average lifespan came from the 2021 census data, which also shows that women in Nepal live on average 5.6 years longer than men. Worldwide, women tend to live longer than men because of higher mortality among young men due to lifestyle reasons, disease, profession and accidents.

## Increased Life Expectancy



**Nepalis are living longer, women have longer lives than men and the population is ageing**

Three decades ago, the average life expectancy of Nepalis was 54.3. Going further back, to 1961, the average lifespan was only 28. These are average national statistics, and do not necessarily mean that the current generation of Nepalis are living longer — it just shows that many fewer babies are dying.

Meaning: if the mortality rate of children and adults goes down, the average lifespan goes up. And there has been a dramatic reduction in the infant mortality rate.

In 1991, 97 out of every 1,000 babies died before their first birthday. Today, the national average is down to 17. Similarly, while the child mortality rate in 1991 meant that 28 out of every 1,000 died before age five, today it has dropped to six.

Nepal's total mortality rate has also dropped by half from 13.3 per 1,000 in 1981

to 6.8 today. Education is a factor: Nepal's literacy rate was 14% in 1971, now there is almost 100% enrollment.

Literacy does not just mean being able to read and write, it is directly correlated with higher income, broader knowledge and lifestyle improvements, leading to greater awareness about health-related issues. All this adds up to longer life expectancy.

Although there are still problems with access and affordability of medical care, in general the health and nutrition status of Nepalis has improved. There is a drop in the prevalence of gastric infections caused by contaminated drinking water. The incidence of tuberculosis, pneumonia and other communicable diseases have also gone down.

Instead, the main cause of death now are chronic ailments like cardio-vascular diseases, stroke, respiratory complications and highway accidents.

Three decades ago, Nepal's total fertility rate was 5.3, today a Nepali mother on average gives birth to only 1.94 children - this is below replacement level. It is directly the result of the greater survival rate of babies — the higher the infant mortality, the greater the tendency of parents to have more children to ensure that at least some of them live.

The decrease in the poverty rate of Nepalis also means that their nutrition level in general has gone up, although there are still pockets in the Karnali and Madhes Province where wasting and stunting among children is dangerously high.

There seem to be anomalies in the census report because it shows that Karnali Province has the highest lifespan at 72.5 and very low infant and child mortality rates. This goes against the generally accepted belief that it is the province with the lowest human development ranking.

Demographers have put forward various explanations for this, including that the 2021 census was conducted towards the tail end of the pandemic when many elderly Nepali workers had come home from India. But it could also be that Karnali families under-reported deaths to census enumerators.

A longer average life expectancy is good news, but it has introduced the brand new problem of ageing. By 2021, the population of Nepalis older than 75 had grown to 640,000, making up 2.2% of the population.

Nepal has a demographic dividend window, but a rapidly ageing population is going to undermine that advantage in the coming decades. As in countries like Korea, Japan and parts of Europe, even in Nepal there will be fewer able-bodied citizens, leading to a reduction of tax revenue, higher insurance and health costs for the state in the coming decades.

Nepal's policy-makers must not just have a plan for the here and now, but also for the time our children themselves become senior citizens.

Hemraj Regmi of the National Statistics Office puts it this way: "In the 1960s, a few people lived long lives. Now more people are living longer."

**Ramesh Kumar**

## ONLINE PACKAGES



WAITING FOR LIBERATION

Most of the young in this downtrodden Dalit community in the rugged mountains of far west Nepal joined the Maoist war believing that they were fighting for liberation. They even renamed the village Muktikot from its original Dumkot. Eighteen years after the end of the conflict, the only thing that has changed for the nearly 2,300 Dalits in Muktikot is the name of their village. Watch the video and read the story on page 10-11.



STAYING HOME

Sita Pun started a homestay program with help from the local government, and six years later has gained not just financial independence but the confidence to lead community action. Take a tour of Torikhola Community Homestay in Baglung and watch Sita's story on our YouTube channel. Subscribe for more original multimedia content.

## JIM SIMONS

Jim Simons turned a family tragedy into transformative support for rural Nepal ('Jim Simons' gift to Nepal', Kunda Dixit, page 4). In 2009, they gave us a digital x-ray machine. I saw him 2 years later and he asked, "Is it still working?" He was a persistent partner who knew rural healthcare's challenges. Rest in peace, and thanks.

**Bibhav Acharya**

■ Nepal has lost a friend. This is a terrible loss but I will be forever grateful to him for what he and his family and foundation have done and have been doing for Nepal and Nepalis.

**Hima Bista**

■ This is very sad news. Tribute to a philanthropist. The Nick Simons Institute is supporting rural health institutions in Nepal. It has transformed the Primary Health Care (PHC) of Dodhara-Chandani into a hospital.

**Deepak Prakash Bhatt**

■ Heartfelt condolences, rest in peace. The Nick Simons Institute has a special place in Nepal's rural healthcare.

**Pradeep Sharma**

## GOVINDA RIJAL

Rest in eternal peace Dr Govinda Rijal bhai ('In transit to the Golden Land', Devendra Bhattarai, page 5). Your contributions to the Bhutanese movement for human rights and democracy will always be honoured and remembered. Thank you for everything. I will miss you forever.

**Ram Karki**

■ Rest in peace Dr Saab, you are an inspiration to many of us.

**Shivalal123**

## INDIAN ELECTIONS

'India-style Hindutva politics' may not be a vote mobiliser in Nepal yet, but the activities of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, Bajrang Dal, and Shiv Sena-like groups and their growing influence in the Tarai-Madhes tell a different story: Hindutva is gaining ground in Nepal's Madhes ('Southerly winds', Akhilesh Upadhyay, #1211).

**Mahesh Kushwaha**

## Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING



## Kalpana's auto autonomy

by Maheshwar Acharya  
Jumla's Kalpana Budha is the sole female auto driver in her hometown and proud of it. Many do a double take when they see her driving around, her sari waving behind her, and gaze at her in admiration. Visit nepalTIMES.com for the full story.

**f** Most reached and shared on Facebook

## In transit to the Golden Land

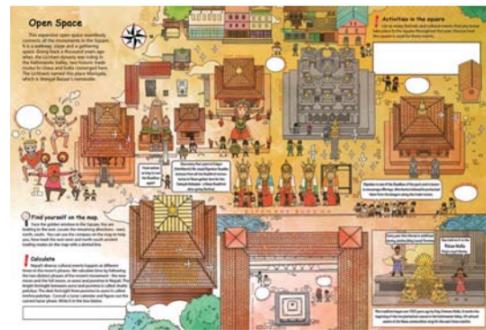
by Devendra Bhattarai  
Govinda Rijal, a refugee from Bhutan who refused to be resettled overseas, was killed in a freak accident in Kathmandu on 5 May. Rijal harboured a fierce fire for justice and human rights which he expressed in poetry and activism. Read about his life on page 5.

**X** Most popular on X

## Jim Simons' gift to Nepal

by Kunda Dixit  
Jim Simons, the mathematician and billionaire philanthropist who set up the Nick Simons Institute in memory of his late son to improve Nepal's healthcare system, died in New York on 10 May. Tribute on page 4.

**66** Most commented



## Patan for beginners

by Vishad Onta  
The Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) has launched a series of interactive maps with bilingual explanations meant for students on school excursions called 'Let's Discover Patan Durbar Square'. The maps prompt students to draw, or create something new. Join the online discussion.

**🔴** Most visited online page

## QUOTES

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
The Rato Machhindranath jatra, Kathmandu Valley's longest chariot festival, began in Lalitpur on Saturday. Rato Machhindranath is revered as the god of rain, and the festival is celebrated to ensure a timely monsoon.

**Helen Hardy @H\_Hardy**  
Pretty spectacular to see

**Ann-Marie Dodson RN @amd4\_ann**  
I've seen this once. What spectacle & potentially dangerous to on-lookers.

## 1,000 WORDS



**PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY:** Nepali Congress MPs surround the speaker's rostrum in Parliament to prevent Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane from speaking. They are demanding a committee investigation into Lamichhane's alleged role in the cooperatives scam.

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

## Migrant workers

One would think that the four million overseas Nepalis, who prop up our economy with remittances making up one-third of the GDP, would be treated as national heroes. But instead of finding them good, well-paying jobs, simplifying and streamlining procedures and cracking down on those who cheat them, the workers are hounded and tricked by fellow Nepalis every step of the way before suffering more exploitation and abuse in their destination countries.

This was the story then, this is the story now. Excerpt of the report published 20 years ago this week on issue #196 14-20 May 2004:

On 25 April, Birman was flying off to Doha without the necessary work permit from the Department of Labour. "We bribed the immigration official with Rs5,000 to get him through, so we don't expect any problem," said Birman's friend, Ramesh Bhatta.

The middlemen that fixed Birman's papers promised that he will earn Rs15,000 a month in Qatar. Even if he gets the full amount, it will take him a year to pay back the

## Handcuffed at home



Nepali labour agency's cut for finding him the job. He owes loan sharks in his village Rs.150,000. Birman managed to get through Kathmandu immigration with his forged permit, but his family hasn't heard from him yet.

Bhakta Bhattarai from Dhankuta flew to Dubai last July on the assurance of a labour agency, Kasturi Overseas, that he had a hotel job with Rs 14,000 a month waiting for him. Bhakta paid Gopal Adhikari, an agency worker, Rs 100,000, but after he arrived in

Dubai he found that he had been given a visitor visa instead of a work visa that allowed him to be legally employed. He had to return. Gopal Adhikari has disappeared.

Stories like these are common among the tens of thousands of Nepali overseas workers. They sell off ancestral property to pay labour agencies in Kathmandu, and often end up being cheated, almost never getting the salary promised, spend up to a year in as a bonded labourer to pay off the agent and are harassed by immigration officials at the airport in Kathmandu while leaving or returning.

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

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

# A PERFECT MOMENT TO RELAX

Connect to peace and have a rest on  
our fully reclining seats.



**TURKISH AIRLINES**

01-4538363 | 4538436 | [ktmsales@thy.com](mailto:ktmsales@thy.com)

Products and services are subject to change depending on flight duration and aircraft.

# Jim Simons' gift to Nepal

American billionaire philanthropist who helped support Nepal's hospitals dies at 86

■ Kunda Dixit

James Harris ('Jim') Simons, the mathematician and billionaire philanthropist who set up a foundation to improve Nepal's healthcare system, died in New York on 10 May, aged 86.

Jim Simons was an award-winning mathematician who pioneered quantitative investing and gave away much of his billions to support mathematics education, scientific research and various humanitarian causes.

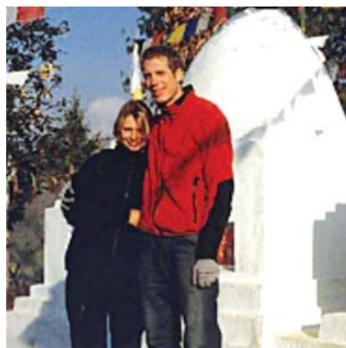
But his life was marked by family tragedies. His elder son, Paul, was killed in New York in 1996 in a traffic accident, and his younger son, Nick drowned in Bali in 2003 after a volunteering stint in Nepal.

Nick Simons had written letters home from Nepal about his experience in rural health posts, and was determined to become a physician so he could help the underprivileged in poorer parts of the world.

After Nick's tragic death, Jim Simons and his economist wife Marilyn travelled to Nepal several times to set up the Nick Simons Institute (NSI) to back up government hospitals in rural areas with training, equipment and budgetary support.

Since it was established in 2006, NSI has invested more than \$100 million in Nepal's health sector and now supports 45 district hospitals and health facilities. Most of the institute's work is behind-the-scenes and not visible to the public, like its help with training nurses and anaesthesiologists, maintaining biomedical equipment, and in retaining qualified medical staff in remote rural hospitals by topping up salaries.

Jim Simons once told Nepali



**FRIENDS OF NEPAL:** Nick Simons (above) with a friend in Nepal in 2003. He died soon after while swimming in Bali. Marilyn and Jim Simons (above, right) in Nepal in 2012.



KUNDA DIXIT

Times: "Rural health care is not a new problem in Nepal, and there are lots of people addressing the issue. What makes NSI unique is that it will do this job better than it has ever been done with an emphasis on quality and training."

Indeed, the Simons made several visits to Nepal in 2003 soon after their son died, talking

to health experts to see where support would be most catalytic and meaningful. They decided to do this not by running their own hospitals, but by working with the government in developing sustainable solutions in rural healthcare and scaling it up.

"With the establishment of the Nick Simons Institute in 2006, Jim

was clearly a game changer for the enhancement of rural health in Nepal. Also what is unforgettable about Jim was his amazing sense of humour in telling a story, his sharp intellect, and how he did not suffer fools lightly," says Buddha Basnyat, a physician who is in the executive committee of NSI.

The Simons often said they would probably never have been involved in Nepal's health sector had it not been for their son Nick, who had found fulfilment helping Nepalis and wanted to return to live and work here.

Jim Simons went through three phases in his life: as a mathematician, an investor and a philanthropist. As a maths professor, he found solutions that are still used to solve problems in physics and astronomy.

He then set up Renaissance Technologies that used his talent in mathematics to analyse complex financial data and forecast global share markets. That is how he made billions, much of which he re-invested in improving STEM education in American schools, in exploring the universe, or trying to find the causes of autism.

After the death of his sons, Jim Simons sought solace in solving mathematical puzzles in his head. One morning at the leafy Summit Hotel in Kathmandu, the proof came to him in a flash of a puzzle that had bedevilled him for a long time.

'Jim was an exceptional leader who did transformative work in mathematics and developed a world-leading investment company,' the Simons Foundation said in a statement announcing his death on Friday.

Besides NSI, the Nick Simons Foundation was involved in other health-related activities in Nepal, including building the new maternity wing at Patan Hospital and supporting Nyaya Health Nepal (NHN) that runs Balyapata Hospital in Achham District.

Jim Simons once said: "Nick opened up a whole new world to us. We have met so many wonderful people who otherwise we never would have known. Nepal is a gift that Nick gave us." 🇳🇵

**NMB BANK**  
एनएमबि बैंक

## Mourinho flies Turkish

Turkish Airlines is collaborating with football manager Jose Mourinho in an ad campaign. The Turkish flag carrier is an official sponsor of the UEFA Champions League, which Mourinho has won twice. In



the commercial, Mourinho experiences the unique in-flight services of Turkish Airlines, which holds the title of Europe's Best Airline. He emerges victorious in a challenging chess match, enjoys gourmet dishes and watches live UEFA Champions League matches with noise-cancelling headphones. Watch video: <https://youtu.be/o1T-FOLjPv4>



## Cheaper Tata parts

Sipradi has reduced the price of Tata spare parts, and estimates this will bring down the vehicle maintenance costs by 30%. Each Tata part comes with a warranty of 6 months or 50,000km.



## Ncell centre in Birganj

Ncell opened its second centre in Birganj in Ghanta Ghar on 9 May after the first one in Maisthan. At the centre, customers will be able to access all Ncell services such as upgrading SIMS to 4G and converting to an e-Sim.



## EU-Nepal business

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal said the government was reforming the legal landscape to ensure the ease of doing business and attract private investment at the EU-Nepal Business Forum 2024 this week. Myriam Ferran, Deputy Director General, International Partnerships, European Commission, said the EU was already helping in renewable energy and would further support investments in priority sectors for Nepal.

## MG4 EV on top

The MG4 EV was awarded 'The Overall Top Car of 2024' at the 'Top Cars 2024' ceremony organised by New Zealand auto magazine Stuff. The MG4 is an electric compact SUV with an independent suspension and rear wheel drive. It has a range of 520km and starts at Rs4,149,000.



## LMC-Hyundai plant

Laxmi Motor Corporation has opened the Hyundai Motor Assembly Plant in Ramgram in Parasi. Parts will be imported to the 65,000 square metre facility and assembled into cars. Compact petrol SUVs are already being assembled at the plant, although not EVs.



## EURO Cup tickets

Cinex, an authorised distributor of BYD cars in Nepal, has announced the results of the 'Nepali Aba Euro Cup Ma' lucky draw from its recent customers. The 11 winners have the chance to go to the 2024 Euro Cup, a European football tournament to be held in Germany in June and July.



## Peace Corps deputy

Peace Corps Deputy Director David E White Jr. is on a five-day trip to Nepal during which he will also discuss plans to expand Peace Corps programming in the country. With the new group being sworn in, there will be 50 volunteers serving in eight districts teaching English in government schools and working on food and nutrition security in rural communities

## Global IME Best Bank

Global IME bank has been awarded Best Bank in Nepal by the reputed Global Finance magazine. The award considers credit rating, strategic relationships, and resource mobilisation. IME has over 1,100 service points across Nepal, in every district.



## Korea-Nepal tie-up

Korean Ambassador Taeyoung Park and Finance Secretary Madhu Marasini signed an MoU this week to foster green economic practices. The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) will spend \$9.8 million to set up 30 recycling and upcycling enterprises in Pokhara and help generate jobs.

# In transit to the Golden Land

Govinda Rijal, a refugee from Bhutan who refused to be resettled overseas, killed in a freak accident in Kathmandu

■ Devendra Bhattarai

Unlike tens of thousands of refugees from Bhutan, Govinda Rijal (pictured) had no inclination to apply for third-country repatriation. Even when his parents Chandra Lal and Devi Maya decided to join the 90,000 refugees resettled in the United States 15 years ago, he remained behind in Nepal.

He excelled in studies, went to Kyoto and the Philippines to get a PhD in rice research, and was a professor at the Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science at Tribhuvan University.

Govinda's parents arrived on the Nepal border in Indian trucks after the Bhutan regime drove out nearly 100,000 Nepali-speaking citizens in 1992. The Lhotsampa, as the refugees were called, were consigned to eight refugee camps in eastern Nepal.

Govinda stayed on in Bhutan, determined not to abandon his beloved homeland. But the persecution and threats became untenable, and he himself left in February 1993 at age 22, tracking his parents down to a bamboo hut in Beldangi refugee camp of Jhapa district.

Outside his pleasant and relaxed exterior Govinda harboured a fierce fire for justice and human rights which he expressed in poetry and activism. He was involved in the Peace March in 1996 to walk to Thimphu, but was arrested by Indian police right after crossing the Mechi Bridge to be detained in Jalpaiguri Jail.

After Bhutan, Nepal was Govinda's second home — the land of his forebears. And it was here last week on 5 May that he was tragically killed at age 52 when a commuter bus overturned and careened into a sidewalk where he was standing.

Govinda had just taken a selfie with his long-lost former college classmate Suman Bandhu Koirala with whom he used to organise nationwide Mathematics Olympiads. The two had not seen each other for 20 years after Suman Bandhu went for his PhD in the United States.

Unlike other students who paid no heed to stateless classmates from Bhutan like Rijal, Koirala was different. The two had lost touch, but met again on Sunday, 5 May at the Tribhuvan University campus in Kirtipur.

"We hadn't met for such a long time, and chatted all day, reminiscing about our student days, and planned to spread awareness about the Bhutan refugee issue," Suman Bandhu recalls, his voice breaking with emotion.

It was just before 3PM and the two decided to take a selfie on the pavement in front of the Ayurved Hospital in Kirtipur. Just then, a scooter sped out of the parking lot into the main road, an approaching commuter



bus that swerved to avoid it overturned, slithering sideways on the asphalt into people on the sidewalk.

Govinda was seriously injured, and died later in Kirtipur Hospital. "He took out his phone and had just taken a couple of selfies when we heard this terrible sound and saw an overturned bus coming towards us. I managed to get out of the way but Govinda was not quick enough," Suman Bandhu recalls.

The photos are still in Govinda's mobile phone and perhaps one day we will be able to see the self-portrait he took an instant before he was hit. During the cremation at Pashupati the next day, Govinda's fellow refugees spoke of him as a generous friend who placed the interests of others before himself — a sensitive poet, committed activist, and an

accomplished agricultural scientist.

"He was one of the few among us refugees who was an intellectual and an academic," said Tilak Rai, another refugee who stayed behind in Beldangi. "He attended every Literature Society of Bhutan event at camp, or memorials to fellow refugees like the physician Bhampa Rai."

Govinda got married to classmate Shanta Karki who is now a joint secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture in Kathmandu, and he has written about her in his 2018 book, *A Pardesi in Paradise*. In it, he ruminates about the concept of 'homeland', especially after his parents and younger brother Shiva Lal opted for resettlement in the US.

"America has not been the homeland my family expected. I got news that my father

lost his job and started losing his memory. Other relatives are working day and night to pay car and house loans. Other refugees are so stressed and depressed that they are under medication and need pills to sleep," he wrote. "That is why my dream, my goal and future are tied up here. Wherever I am, wherever I go I am always an outsider, but that is my Golden Land."

Tara Lal Shrestha, who edited the book, said: "Govinda moved around everywhere on his bicycle (pictured left, below). He found Nepal to be unlike any other place because it was so welcoming of people seeking refuge. Nepal may have been his Golden Land, but it was not his final destination. He was in transit to heaven."

Govinda talked about Beldangi fondly, almost nostalgically, as a safe haven: "Despite its bamboo huts and clay plaster walls, the well water that smelled of iron, and the joy of getting hold of kerosene or rice after standing in line, Beldangi was a refuge. I want to write a book about this chapter in my life."

Last year, after Govinda heard that his parents were not well in America, he tried to get travel documents to see them for the last time. For six months he was given the run around by Nepali officialdom. As soon as those behind desks heard he was a refugee, they would ask "Real or fake?"

At the Home Ministry in Kathmandu, they did not even want to look at him after he said he was a refugee. After the fake refugee scandal broke last year, Nepal has stopped issuing travel documents to Bhutan citizens.

Govinda was still trying to get his papers to see his parents when he was killed last week. His ailing parents in America who were waiting to see him one last time are now performing funeral rituals.

Recently, he visited refugee leader Teknath Rijal while the Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience was still in detention after being framed for his involvement in the fake refugee scandal.

Govinda had arrived on his bicycle from his house in Tokha, and brought some avocado from his garden. He had started writing his book, *Beldangi: A Refuge*, and recited its beginning paragraphs in Nepali:

*"I arrived in a place called Beldangi after taking a bus from Damak Chok on the last day of February 1993, looking for the hut of my father Chandra Lal and mother Devi Maya. They had left Bhutan one year before me.*

*At the bus stop and all around, I met fellow refugees. I used to see them in Bhutan and had always regarded them as proud citizens. But here, they were stateless nobodies. I had only seen the word 'refugee' in books, now I was one myself.*

*People got on and off the bus as we travelled towards Beldangi camp. At the edge of a forest there was a row of bamboo and thatch huts. How do I find my parents here, I thought.'* 🇳🇵

## WORLDLINK

# खुशीयालीको बहार नयाँवर्षमा उपहार



**Dristi**  
Smart IP CCTV  
Camera

Rs. 7250



**HONOR X9b 5G**  
RAM 12GB / ROM 256GB  
Smartphone

Rs. 43999



**boat**  
Ultima Connect  
Smartwatch

Rs. 4499



**boat**  
Wireless  
Airodopes 170

Rs. 3299



**DELL Latitude 3440**  
Business Edition  
i5 12th Gen / 8GB RAM / 512GB SSD /  
14" FHD 60Hz Display

Rs. 90999

With every  
**New Subscription  
or Renewal, Get**

**Panasonic**  
Home Appliances

with upto **37% OFF**

Discount voucher redeemable  
for any 3 products

**BEST DEAL** Get 200Mbps for 3 months only at Rs. 3300.

9801523050 | worldlink.com.np

Rs. 3250\* | Rs. 34999\* | Rs. 2249\* | Rs. 1699\*



# What is lost cannot be repaired

Climate breakdown puts the very survival of a community in Nepal's Mustang region in question



Damage and debris from the August 2023 flood in Kagbeni, as seen in January 2024.



View of Lubrak village in the gorge below, looking west toward the Kali Gandaki valley.

■ **Wen Stephenson** in Mustang

**M**y first glimpse of Kagbeni in Mustang came with a mix of elation and a cold foreboding.

The elation came from the vista of Kagbeni's terraced fields and orchards appearing, like some miraculous oasis, at the foot of barren cliffs and snowless mountainsides. Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Kagbeni has been the 'gateway' to the ancient Kingdom of Lo, known today as Upper Mustang.

Yet today's Mustang is no idyllic Shangri-la, thanks to its mix of poverty, uneven development, government neglect, out-migration of the young, and, increasingly, symptoms of climate change like its snowless mountain sides during my January visit.

Indeed, the foreboding came when I remembered why I was there. Last August, Kagbeni suffered a devastating flood—brought on by extreme rainfall—the likes of which no one living there had ever experienced.

Kagbeni is built along both banks of the Kag Khola where it flows into the Kali Gandaki from the east. The original 12<sup>th</sup> century town, with its traditional flat-roofed mud houses and its medieval monastery and fort, lies on the north side, and the newer part of town to the south.

The confluence of the two rivers, sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists, has made Kagbeni an important stop on the age-old pilgrimage route to the ancient Muktinath temple complex farther up the Kag Khola Gorge. The area is now heavily touristed thanks to a road completed in 2008.

I made my way along the new town's main street until it opened suddenly onto what still looked, five months after the flood, like a war zone. The grey rubble of rock, sand, and dried-mud debris, a block wide and a story high, stretched a good 200 yards along both sides of the narrow river.

The floods that sweep down these rivers do not just carry water, they consist of a thick, heavy flow of cement-like silt, mud, and rock that levels everything in its path and raises the riverbed by many feet. Think of it not as sea-level rise but riverbed rise, putting homes, schools, stupas and temples, infrastructure, and fields in greater peril with each new flood, which comes more often as global

warming alters the South Asian monsoon.

Rinzin Namgyal Gurung, the Kagbeni Rural Municipality chair, laid out the extent of the flood damage for me in an email: eight buildings completely destroyed, including a hotel, a government ward office, a health centre, and a police station, and 19 that suffered partial damage, including the monastery and the secondary school.

This is a town of just 600 people. Gurung also listed the full extent of recovery funding and assistance the town received from Nepal's national government: Ministry of Home Affairs, 10 heavy tents and 15 blankets. Assistance received so far from international NGOs: none.

In the absence of such aid, the Mustang community in Nepal and abroad has stepped up with a grassroots fundraising campaign. As Mustang faces another monsoon season, the question of longer-term survival is on some people's minds.

★★★

Laxmi Gurung, 49, was born in Kagbeni, where her ancestors have lived for eons.

Laxmi and her brother, a former local government chairperson, own and run Kagbeni's Hotel Mustang Gateway and its iconic YacDonald's restaurant.

Together, they founded the Fama Foundation to help preserve Mustang's traditional culture as the region rapidly develops. Educated at universities in India and New Zealand, Laxmi attended COP28, the latest United Nations Climate Change Conference, in Dubai last December with Nepal's delegation to advocate for the establishment of a 'loss and damage' fund at the UN.

Last year's August flood had damaged the hotel and restaurant, sending a car through a wall.

Laxmi described that night in harrowing detail: the intensity of the rain, unlike anything Kagbeni had experienced in the past. The old town's mud houses, which have survived centuries in the region's arid climate, are now dissolving under the recent downpours. She recalled the warning calls from villages upriver which saved lives, and the unforgettable sound of heavy debris crashing into buildings in the darkness and of buildings collapsing.

"It was the longest night," Laxmi said. "The next day we see everywhere the heaps of mud. And we don't know what to do. Everybody is crying."

Houses and belongings were buried under the debris, while some items were carried down the Kali Gandaki as far as Lete, 25 miles away. "All the people, every village from Upper Mustang to Lower Mustang came with something in hand to help Kagbeni, to move the debris. They came personally to help us, and they also contributed financial help. Mustang is an example that community exists."

"From the government, we still have not got any relief funds," Laxmi said. Nepal's Home Ministry and a variety of NGOs "came and watched—they see, they study, and



are gone."

Pointing out that Kagbeni's carbon emissions, like Nepal's as a whole, are negligible, Laxmi asked, "Our memories, heritage, structures, landscapes: gone. And who is to blame for this? We should get compensation. But who will listen to us? We are a small community beyond the Himalaya. Even Nepal's government believes we are beyond the Himalaya, and we have been neglected."

When asked about her advocacy in Dubai for loss-and-damage funding, she said: "The financial help can establish new houses, infrastructures, but our heritage, our ancestors' properties, we cannot rebuild. The loss of memories, values, culture, customs cannot be repaid."

★★★

Yungdrung Tsewang Gurung, 36, is a freelance researcher, conservationist, and photographer from Lubrak, a tiny village a few miles south of Kagbeni dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. With 14 households, it is the last village in Mustang entirely following the pre-Buddhist Tibetan Bön religion.

Working with other researchers, Yungdrung has studied the effects of climate and social change in Mustang. In June 2021, his family's small ancestral home in Lubrak was destroyed by a major flood. They have since built a new house higher up the steep mountainside, and he has documented and reported for the Nepali Times on how Lubrak is shifting ground as the floods and rising riverbed overwhelm its ancestral fields and now threaten the heart of the village itself.

"Knowingly or not knowingly, local people are already struggling," Yungdrung said. "In Lubrak, when we see the snow melting and how the rain pattern is changing, and flood is one of the outcomes, we cannot do much. In our village, most of the old traditional things are already damaged, and we do not have many options for a livelihood."

The people of Lubrak are actively discussing whether, how, and where to relocate as a community, a prospect complicated by the fact that under recent national policy the community's ancestral land is now owned by the Nepal government. "We cannot build and claim that it belongs to us, like our parents and older

generations," Yungdrung said.

His family was the first in Lubrak to lose its home, and the plot on which they rebuilt was allocated through the village's traditional community decision-making process. But now their ownership, and the village's ability to relocate on ancestral land, is uncertain.

"We do not fit in the Nepal government's policy," Yungdrung said. "How can we survive here?"

Kagbeni now faces the same issue. Nepal's central government recently overruled a local decision to allocate community land to flood victims for building new homes.

★★★

Asked what would happen if there were suddenly a significant amount of loss-and-damage funding for Mustang, if it would make a difference or if there was a mechanism through which to use the money, Yungdrung did not sound confident.

"I don't see a way through, directly," he said. "The political situation is not stable. Many people at different political levels will benefit from it, and many NGOs are influenced by political parties. So for now, even if you say in 2024 there will be lots of grants for loss and damage, I don't think it will reach the ground level. It won't reach the people who actually suffer."

Full loss-and-damage funding for poor countries is a moral and geopolitical imperative. Debt cancellation for developing nations might be a start. But it is a naïve 'first world' fantasy to think that a government like Nepal's has the capacity to implement climate relief and adaptation measures at scale, however much money is sent, without deep political and structural reforms.

What the United States, Europe, and the world's other advanced economies truly owe the Global South goes well beyond compensation, especially when money itself cannot compensate for what is lost. We owe them nothing less than to break the grip of fossil fuels on our economic and political systems and end the use of coal, oil, and gas as fast, and as equitably as possible.

That will require a political mobilisation like nothing we've yet seen, one that is still, at this late date, nowhere in sight.

In Kathmandu, I asked Laxmi if she thinks her community will ever abandon Kagbeni or whether her people will stay and fight, come what may.

"The day we got the flood," she told me, emotion in her voice, "we became strong. We all are traumatised, we feel scared to stay in Kagbeni, but we thought, 'No, this is our place, this is our home. No matter what, we should fight.' So we all got together, and then the community all came. Then we began to say, 'Oh, if we stand, everybody is with us. Why not stand?'" 🇳🇵

*Wen Stephenson is an independent journalist and the author of What We're Fighting for Now Is Each Other: Dispatches From the Front Lines of Climate Justice.*

*A longer version of this article originally appeared in the May 2024 issue of The Nation magazine.*

id  
question



A view of Kagbeni, looking north up the Kali Gandaki valley.



Yungdrung Tsewang Gurung, of Lubrak village, at Paradise Trekkers Home in Kagbeni.

## EVENTS

**Community Market**

Get all Nepal made items at this local market hosted by Piano Piano South. Also join for pottery making, a painting workshop, and more activities.

24 May, 4pm-9pm, Piano Piano South, Jhamsikhel

**Deities of Nepal II**

The upcoming exhibition Deities of Nepal II will feature 235 artworks by 163 artists. Stop by the preview this Friday.

19 May, Nepal Art Council, Babermahal

**Shifting Perspectives**

This exhibition is the continued series of 'Melting Paradise' by Tashi R Ghale, and features abstract photographs showing simple harmonies found in nature.

Until 26 May, 11am-6pm, Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat

**Nepal Fashion Festival**

Celebrate the dynamic and flourishing fashion industry of Nepal at this three-day festival which will highlight fashion, beauty, art and lifestyle across the country.

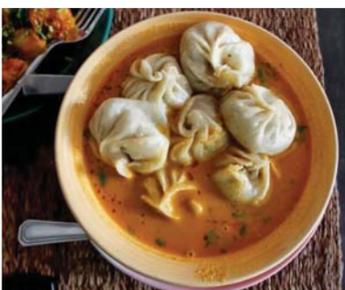
24-26 May, 11am onwards, Fee: Rs200-500, Heritage Garden, Sanepa

**Weekend hike**

Join Hike for Nepal and take the trail along Bardbhanjyang-Laglagya Paakha-Chandragiri-Godam this Saturday. Call and book the hike by 3pm on Friday.

18 May, 6:40am, Rs800, Bhirkutimandap, 9841178536, 9841657144

## DINING

**Le Trio**

The vintage-esque posters that line the walls and rustic wooden tables all give the impression that one has stepped into a 1960s Parisian café, but the menu at Le Trio is very much local in taste. Try the jhol momo for a rainy day.

Jhamsikhel, (01) 5421674

## MUSIC

**SEBS Sandhya 2024**

This cultural fundraiser by the Society of Ex-Budhanilkantha Students (SEBS) will involve an afternoon and evening full of music, nostalgia and unity. Swoopna Suman, Pahelo Batti Muni and Salil Maharjan will join.

25 May, 11am onwards, Ticket: Rs599, Budhanilkantha School

**Summer Splash 2.0**

Enjoy the weekend at this musical extravaganza that will feature musicians including Deepak Bajracharya and the Rhythm Band.

25 May, 1pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Matshya Narayan Recreational Centre, Machhegaur

**Shanti Fest**

If you're near Bhairawa, Butwal or Lumbini, be sure to join this event celebrated to mark the birth anniversary of Lord Buddha. Rachana Dahal, as well as local bands will join.

23 May, 6pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500-Rs1,000, Siddeshwari Higher Secondary School, Butwal

**Purna Rai & co.**

To those spending this weekend in Pokhara, get ready to groove to the beats as 'Purna Rai and Daju Bhai' takes over the mic at Kings Lounge.

18 May, 6pm onwards, Kings Lounge Pokhara (061) 457954

**Music Fest**

Indulge in live music, delicious food and cultural activities at the birthplace of the Buddha. Trishna Gurung and Rock heads will also be there.

22 May, 1pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500-Rs1,000, Bodhi Villa, Tilottama

**Bakehouse**

For the perfect dessert doughnuts and a place that will deliver it to doorsteps, Bakehouse has got it covered.. Also try out their cheesecake.

Kathmandu, order online: kitchencrew.net

**Anatolia**

Anatolia's Indian and Turkish dishes are packed with spices and an unforgettable assortment of flavours. From the Mutton Kofta Curry to the Baklava, the dishes will keep visitors wanting more. All the food is halal.

Thamel (01) 5358757

## GETAWAYS

**Himalayan Deurali**

Just 10km of aerial distance from the Machhapuchhre Himal, the mountain will feel like it is at touching distance at Himalayan Deurali. The expansive property offers services from a relaxing spa to continental food.

Nagdada, Kaski, 9846491889/ 9856000163

**Maruni Sanctuary Lodge**

Chitwan National Park is home to a wide range of flora and fauna. From the comfort of the cabins and cottages of this lodge, one can take a peek at the wandering wildlife and nature of the park.

Sauraha (01) 4700632

**Mount Princess**

Surrounded by mountains and forestry, Mount Princess is a haven for city-dwellers. Spend the morning sipping a warm cup of tea while taking in the breathtaking views.

Dhulikhel, 9808258214

**Yatri Suites and Spa**

Treat yourself to a relaxing spa treatment which includes full body massage, body scrub, sauna and steam.

Amrit Marg, Thamel, 9802063086

**Godavari Village Resort**

Spread over 14 lush green acres, the resort offers mountain views, traditionally-styled cottages and buildings overlooking rice fields.

Godavari (01) 5560675

**Kunga**

Kunga Hotel Restaurant & Bar is one of the most notable Chinese restaurants in Kathmandu. Grab some hot pot, peanut chicken and shredded potatoes in Kunga's cosy and casual setting.

Boudha (01) 4915117

**Weekend Brunch**

Go with family and friends and experience a fusion of dishes that elevate the brunch experience at Hotel Barahi, located in the heart of the city. Offer valid only for Nepali nationals.

Saturdays, 12pm-4pm, Adults: Rs2,499/Children: Rs1,199, Hotel Barahi, 985134687

## WEEKEND WEATHER

**Hot weekend**

The pre-monsoon showers are taking a break. The weekend will be hot in Kathmandu with some cloud buildup and perhaps even some isolated showers towards evening and night. The showers will pick up again with some thundery downpours on Monday, and especially on Tuesday. Some of the storms next week could come with quite a bit of wind from the west.

The mountains will likely see occasionally violent afternoon storms, especially midweek next week.



## OUR PICK

Director David Leitch's newest action comedy The Fall Guy follows Hollywood stunt performer Colt Seavers, who leaves his career and his girlfriend Jody behind when he is severely injured during a stunt gone wrong. One-and-a-half years later, Colt finds himself in the middle of a conspiracy when he is tasked to find the missing action star of Jody's directorial debut film. The movie, loosely based on a 1980's TV show about stunt performers, stars Ryan Gosling, Emily Blunt, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Hannah Waddingham, Stephaine Hsu, Winston Duke and Teresa Palmer. Out now in nearby theatres.

## 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

# Ice to water

Snow leopard researcher turns to photographic art to visualise the climate crisis in the Himalaya

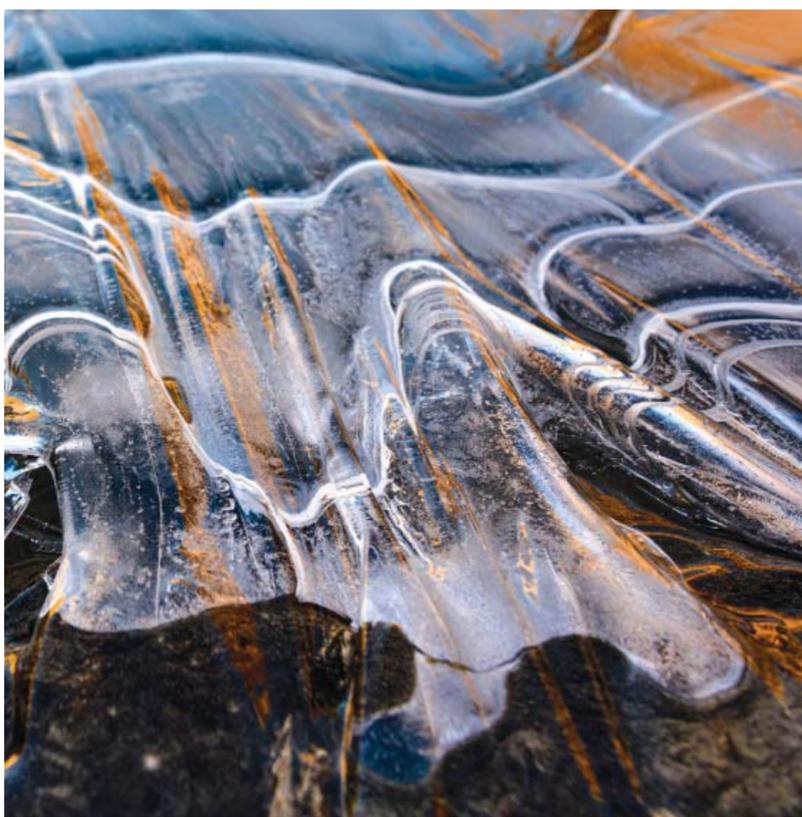
■ Vishad Raj Onta

Photographer Tashi R Ghale is known for his work in protecting snow leopards through which he won the Disney Conservation Hero Award in 2018. During his research he saw the impact of climate breakdown in the Himalaya with receding glaciers and melting ice that was affecting the traditional habitat of the snow leopard.

"I notice that global warming is bringing other species to snow leopard territory. Common leopards move up, and Himalayan grey wolves come down," says Ghale, known for his exquisite photographic documentation of the rare snow leopards in Manang.

Lowland leopards are now overlapping with snow leopards and competing for prey. But for his new photo exhibition 'Shifting Perspectives', Ghale has shifted gears — changing his focus from snow leopards to the impact of climate change.

But he uses his photographic skills, this time with more of an artistic eye than just for documentation purposes. He has captured some striking images of Gangapurna Lake in Manang to



Frozen I

TASHI R GHALE

convey the impact of the rising temperatures on the Himalayan ecology.

The images in Shifting Perspectives which are on exhibit at Takpa Gallery are close-ups of ice on the shores of Gangapurna Lake, which itself is expanding as the glacier recedes rapidly up the mountain.

Ghale has captured ephemeral bubbles, ripples, currents, shapes and textures of ice on the lake, and are separated into three categories: Illusion, Composition, and Frozen.

Ghale used powerful telephoto lenses to zoom in on snow leopards, but here he uses macro lenses for extreme closeups.

One of his pictures, 'Illusion VI,'

shows clusters of bubbles of various sizes entombed in ice just below the surface, casting small shadows on the lake floor.

'Illusion III,' has the dark blue, green and purple lake as the background while frozen ripples have formed in the ice that look like contour lines on a map.

Some of the most striking images in the exhibition feature a contrast between warm and cool colours. 'Frozen I' shows ice-bound waves that catch the golden rays of the sunrise sending streaks of light in the direction the water was moving before it froze.

'Composition I' shows sunrise on the north face of Gangapurna reflected in the icy surface of the



Composition I

TASHI R GHALE



Tashi R Ghale (right) with artist Tsherin Sherpa of Takpa gallery at the inauguration of the exhibition on 11 May.

@TSEDORJE

'Composition IV,' looks like a drone photograph of a big river flowing through jagged hills, but a leaf in the bottom right corner gives away the scale.

The exhibition truly presents shifting perspectives using closeups of the ice and water as a metaphor for the larger scale impact of global warming. 🇳🇵

Shifting Perspectives  
Until 26 May  
Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat  
<https://takpagallery.com>

[nepalitimes.com](https://nepalitimes.com)

More photos from exhibition online.

# FORTUNER

IT'S NO FUN WITHOUT KICKING UP SOME DUST



Move your world



# Muktikot still waiting for liberation

Two decades after Maoists promised prosperity, this Dalit village in Nepal has been forgotten

■ Dhanu Bishwakarma in Bajura

When he was a teenager 20 years ago during the war, the Maoists who held sway over the Dalit village of Muktikot in western Nepal promised Man Bahadur Bishwakarma liberation and prosperity.

Many like Man Bahadur believed in that utopia, and took up arms like others from the downtrodden Dalit community here. They even renamed the village Muktikot (Fort Freedom) from its original Dumkot. 'Dum' is a derogatory term used to address the Dalit community.

Muktikot is spread across a steep mountainside with unirrigated terrace farms. Most of the men migrate to India for seasonal work, others never come back. The women left behind had to walk hours for water, and since there were no roads then travelling to town for government subsidised rice took at least a week.

"The Maoists told us that we would find jobs right here in the village, that every household would have tap water, they promised an end to caste discrimination," recalls Man Bahadur. "That is why I joined the revolution in Grade 10."



ALL PHOTOS: DHANU BISHWAKARMA

He is talking while walking up a steep trail three hours from Muktikot, where his family has been living in a cattle shed after a landslide damaged his house in 2021.

Most of Muktikot's young population joined the Maoists, convinced that changing the name of the village was proof this was going to be a real revolution.

Eighteen years after the end of

the conflict, the only thing that has changed for the nearly 2,300 Dalits in Muktikot is the name of their village. Not that there has not been some progress. There are now motorable roads and residents do not have to walk as far as Kalikot or Dailekh to get a sack of rice. More essentials are available in local shops for those with cash.

Man Bahadur himself migrates to India to earn money, and had

just returned for a break when we talked to him. "I fought for the Maoists in the hope that I would not have to go to India for work, but there are still no jobs here," he says. "The Maoists promised a mirage."

#### Birth and death

Manbuja Bishwakarma has just turned 20, the minimum legal age of marriage in Nepal. But she has been married since age 13, giving

birth to five children, three of whom died.

"The babies just died one after the other," recalls Manbuja, who just had to have more babies in the hope that some would survive.

Her neighbour, 30-year-old Lalkala Bishwakarma, has given birth eight times, and only four babies survived. There are women in Muktikot who gave birth to as many as 14 children, and there is

## Who cares?

Amnesty International issues scathing report on caste-based discrimination in Nepal

Despite provisions in the Constitution, there is still systemic descent-based discrimination against Dalits, especially women, a new report by Amnesty International has said. The report states that there is a culture of impunity that puts Dalit women and girls at risk from an entrenched casteism in the police and the courts that perpetuates the prejudice.

'Authorities in Nepal are failing to protect Dalits, particularly women and girls, from systemic and widespread caste-based discrimination,' Amnesty International says in the report, No One Cares: Descent-Based Discrimination against Dalits which documents case studies of caste-based discrimination in Nepal. The report details just how pervasive the caste system still is in Nepal despite laws against exclusion of Dalits. This manifests itself in violence and discrimination in everyday life for many Dalit individuals, families and communities.

"The authorities in Nepal are not doing enough to counteract the culture of impunity for human rights violations related to descent-based discrimination in Nepal. Efforts made by the authorities are still inadequate and insufficient, and they seem to exist only on paper but do not translate into real changes in the lives and the human rights of Dalits, Dalit women and girls in particular," says Fernanda Doz Costa, Amnesty International's Director of Gender, Racial Justice, Refugees and Migrants Rights Programme.

Despite a reservation system for Dalits and the prohibition of caste-based discrimination, the report has documented many instances of impunity and lack of representation of Dalits in the justice system. There are also examples of institutional discrimination in the police and justice system, lack of effective oversight mechanisms and accountability.

"Dalits do not trust the police and the justice system in general, and the limited government level data and statistics available, and confirm their distrust is well-founded,



Water tap for Dalits only in Tikapur in Kailali.

JACOB CARLSEN

including for Dalit women confronting caste-based violence,' the report says.

When caste-based incidents are reported, Amnesty says, police frequently refuse to register cases of untouchability and gender-based violence or rape. Among the case-studies of caste-based crimes in the report is that of 18-year-old Ajit Dhakal Mijar, whose corpse has been in a hospital morgue in Kathmandu for the past eight years. Ajit was involved in a relationship with a non-Dalit girl, and was found dead. Police automatically recorded it as suicide and he was buried without informing the family.

Ajit's father had the body exhumed and said police were trying to cover up the murder of his son by burying him after a fake post-mortem report. The case is pending in the Supreme Court and Ajit's body is still in the morgue.

Another case in the report is of 12-year-old Angira Pasi who was found four years ago hanging from a tree. A 'higher' caste man was accused of raping her earlier, and the village authorities instead of punishing the man got him to marry her. But the girl was tormented by his family for being an 'untouchable' and she was found hanging.

Pressure from human rights groups forced a reluctant police to register a complaint and the accused, his mother, and his aunt were detained. The Rupandehi District Court then convicted the accused of murder and sentenced him to 18 years in prison.

Despite laws, the caste system continues to segregate

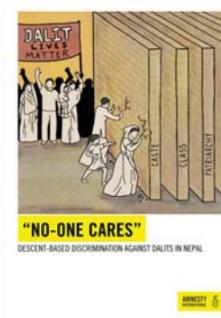
and oppress Dalits who make up about 14% of Nepal's population. The entrenched discrimination excludes Dalits from opportunities and discriminates against them in everything from using community water sources to education, livelihood, marriage, place of worship, security and health, and citizenship.

Descent-based discrimination covers caste and analogous systems of inherited status, and authorities have a legal obligation to address all forms of caste-based discrimination, including when committed by private individuals, in accordance with the international human rights law and standards, Amnesty says.

Parliament's Committee on Law, Justice and Human Rights ruled that every police station should have a Dalit unit, and 86 were created to report, investigate and coordinate with victims of discrimination. In preparing this report, Amnesty International's researchers visited three district police stations in Madhes Province and found that the Dalit desk was just a sign on the door.

Amnesty says the Nepal government must be more proactive in uprooting entrenched caste and gender-based violence and discrimination. It says special measures are needed to improve the situation of Dalit women and girls due to the inter-generational history of oppression and caste-bias, patriarchy and discrimination.

Says Fernanda Doz Costa, "Nepal must fulfil its obligation to provide effective, timely and meaningful access to justice and reparations for survivors. It must move away from merely paying lip service to the ideals of achieving equality for all but take a concrete human-rights centric approach to relegating descent-based discrimination to the dustbins of history." 🇳🇵



not a single mother in Muktikot who has not lost a baby.

Tilakhuni Bishwakarma, 40, had 10 children, and eight of them survived. Sitting outside her home, she is now surrounded by her grandchildren.

Despite Nepal's total fertility rate now dropping to near replacement level, here in Muktikot infant mortality is still high and this means women have more babies in the hope that some will survive. Child marriage and low female literacy contribute to the high rate of maternal and infant mortality.

Community health records show that even in 2021, eight out of 45 infants born in Muktikot died. While Nepal's average infant mortality rate dropped to 33 for every 1,000 babies born in 2022, the rate was 178 in Muktikot. "The most prominent among the many reasons for the high maternal deaths are early marriage and frequent pregnancy," says Janaki Neupane, a community nurse in Muktikot.

Four years ago, Bachchi Bishwakarma died of a hemorrhage while giving birth to her second child at home. Her husband Gorkha says she had barely survived giving birth to their first child.

"I was home alone that day, and I took care of her," Gorkha recounts. "Our child was born, but my wife bled to death."

Birthing centres were opened in Muktikot last year to address high infant and maternal deaths, but Nurse Neupane says they still lack basic equipment and budget.

Nirmala Bishwakarma got married when she was 13 and was pregnant soon after. She had her first baby, but soon got pregnant again. "Birth brings death here," Nirmala, now 20, says simply.

Nirmala and her children all look emaciated and she weighs only 33kg. Bajura's district headquarters



in Martadi provides nutritional allowance, but Nirmala cannot afford to travel that far to get it.

Nepal's development indicators, including lifespan (page 1) and poverty rate have shown dramatic improvements over the past three decades. But here in Muktikot, hunger stalks the land. In fact, a recent survey showed that 95% of women, children and young adults in Muktikot are undernourished. Most men, on the other hand, look well fed because they are mostly away in India for work.

Only 12% of the land in Bajura is arable, but even then there is lack of irrigation, frequent droughts, and now climate breakdown contributing to the lack of food. "The harvests are just not enough to sustain the families," says Bharat Bahadur Rokaya, chair of Swamikartik Khapar Rural Municipality where Muktikot is located.

Here in the rugged mountains of northern Bajura bordering Humla and Mugu, the families grow millet, maize, and wheat, but Nirmala

Bishwakarma says the harvests hardly last a month. "If it was not for the subsidised rice we would have empty stomachs," she says.

#### Hindrances to hygiene

Down the mountain from Muktikot, the green waters of the Karnali River are visible. But the 400 Dalit households here have to share just three community taps for drinking water. Half the households do not have toilets, and defecation in the open is common.

Donor agencies have helped build toilets, but these are mostly used to store fodder because there is no water. "How can we use water for the toilets where there isn't enough for drinking?" asks Ward chair Ajay Bishwakarma.

Families have to walk for four hours to bathe and do washing. "We do not wash our clothes for months on end," says Kushi Bishwakarma, 40.

The lack of water has compromised hygiene and sanitation in the village, resulting in diseases like diarrhoea, allergies,



and other health issues, especially among children.

Lack of water in the village has also led to uterine prolapse among the women in Muktikot since they primarily face the task of ferrying heavy jars of water from the communal taps to their houses.

The 'One house, one tap, one toilet' campaign introduced by the rural municipality this year hopes to solve water-related issues for Muktikot residents. But that is yet another election promise.

#### Testing times

This underserved village is not just affected by structural inequality and state neglect. In 2021, a landslide swept away 54 houses in Muktikot, and most families lost homes and what little arable land they had.

"Earlier, we at least had a house to live in, now we don't even have that," says Muktikot resident Asal Bishwakarma. "We have been living with relatives since. How will we survive?"

More than two years after the landslide, not a single house in the

village has been rebuilt. Each family was allocated Rs500,000 in relief on an instalment basis, with aid from all three tiers of government.

Asal has only received Rs35,000 so far, and has spent it all on buying food. No one knows where the promised money went.

Muktikot residents now want their entire village relocated somewhere safer. The local government agrees that resettlement is necessary, but it was unable to find a suitable alternative.

"It is not possible to resettle such a large number of people at one go," says Bajura MP Badri Pandey. "We also cannot create jobs for all of the population at once."

Muktikot might have been declared liberated on paper during a war fought in the name of Nepal's downtrodden, but this Dalit village is emblematic of promises not kept.

Looking around the landslide scarred village he has spent half a century of his life in, Muktikot's Dhanajay Bishwakarma laments, "We are not even considered humans by the state." 🇳🇵

**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**



# हार्दिक आभार



## GLOBAL FINANCE

यहाँहरुको साथ, सहयोग र विश्वासले आज हामी  
**GLOBAL FINANCE MAGAZINE** को  
**BEST BANK AWARD 2024** बाट नेपालको सर्वोत्कृष्ट  
बैंकको रुपमा सम्मानित भएका छौं ।