



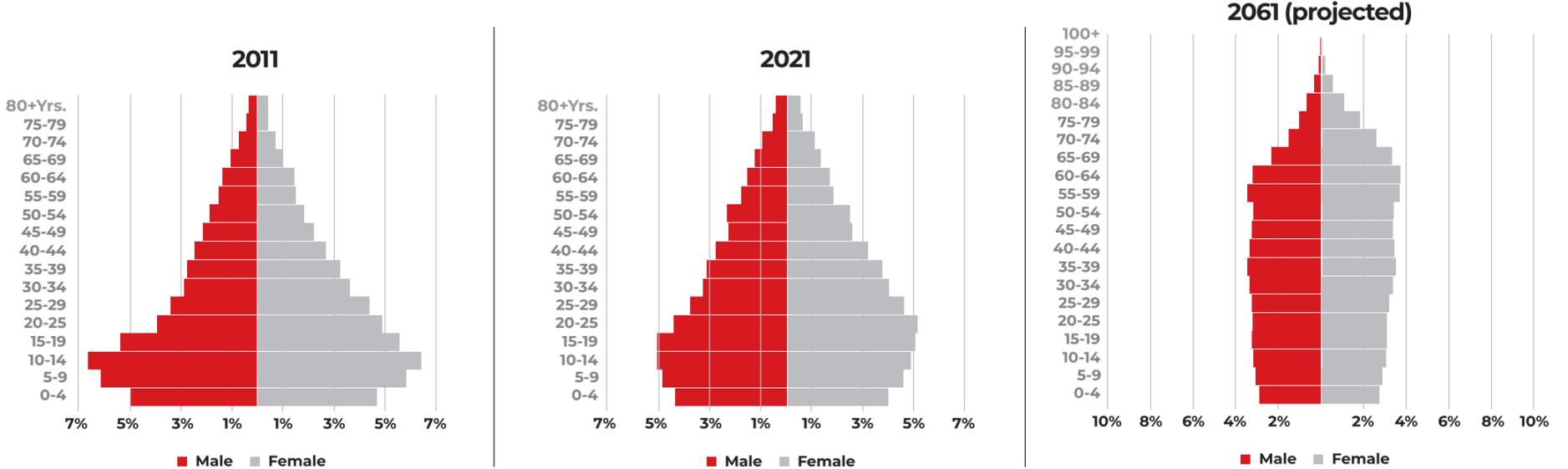
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### Nepal's population pyramid by five-year age group



## Nepal in numbers

Demographically speaking, we are currently living in the most important period in Nepal's history.

Nearly 20% of the population is in the 15-24 age group. Two in every three Nepali is of working age which means the country has a demographic window to take advantage of an enormous potential for accelerated economic growth and development.

But this cohort is also getting older, and this means the window of demographic dividend is closing fast. With 3 million elderly, the proportion of senior citizens is already 10% of the population. In 35 years, one in five Nepalis will be older than 60.

Nepal has about 30 years to fully employ this youth bulge for growth. But the number of young Nepalis migrating temporarily for work, or emigrating overseas permanently is increasing. The remittance they send home is propping up the economy, but it is

a temporary solution.

Nepal can learn from the experiences of East Asian countries with low birth rates and rapidly ageing populations like Japan and South Korea. This means an immediate policy course correction since the results will be evident only in a decade or more.

On World Population Day, 11 July, we spoke to some experts and here are their recommendations to reap the demographic dividend:

- Expand industries, manufacturing, and green infrastructure to create jobs
- Increase economic activity to boost domestic consumption
- Investment in quality education with focus on higher studies
- Girl child education with help in career development
- Improve access to healthcare, raise quality of care in health posts
- Empower women for meaningful employment
- Eliminate gender imbalance not only by law but by cultural practice

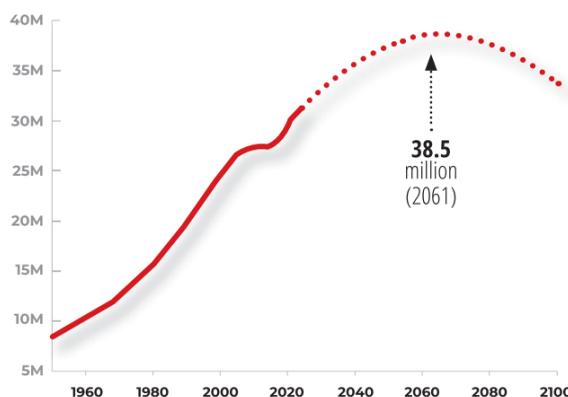


SPECIAL COVERAGE

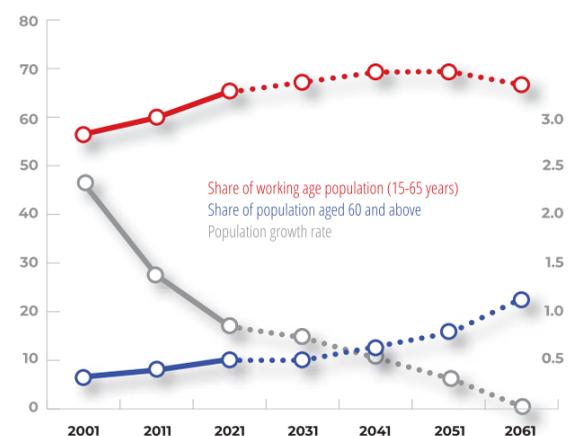
Nepal's demographic window is closing  
PAGE 5

Interview with Won Young Hong, UNFPA Country Director  
PAGE 9

Nepal's total population and projection (in millions)



Share of youth, elderly and population growth rate (in %)



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# The more things change, the more they stay the same

Ask random pedestrians on Kathmandu's sidewalks to name the current prime minister and prominent party leaders, and there is a high chance they will scratch their heads. It is probably worse in Kosi, where the provincial chief minister has changed six times in two years.

It is a foregone conclusion that K P Oli will become Nepal's Prime Minister for the fourth time on Friday after he dumped Dahal and his four-month-old coalition following a clandestine midnight power-sharing deal with Sher Bahadur of the Nepali Congress (NC).

Oli promised to be in Baluwatar for the next one-and-half years, hand over to Deuba who will head the government for the sixth time till the next elections in 2027.



## Vehicles mired in the mud on Nepal's highways are a fitting metaphor of the nation's politics.

That the NC and UML double crossed Dahal, whose Maoist Centre had taken advantage of being a 'kingmaker' party in Parliament to swap parties just to gain and remain in power. But Oli and Deuba seemed to think enough was enough, especially since Dahal was letting his Home Minister from the RSP to go after the top leaders in the NC and UML on corruption charges.

The two leaders also said constitutional amendments on electoral laws are necessary to "ensure political stability." This would mean scrapping proportional representation, making it more difficult for smaller parties to gain seats in the House.

These amendments will be easier said than done because even the NC and UML cannot muster the two-third majority required to revise the Constitution without support from the Maoists and the Unified Socialists in the National Assembly. Both are now seething against Oli or Deuba.

On Friday, national attention will focus on who gets which ministry in the new government. Oli and Deuba cut a deal for the NC to have 10 ministries, and the UML getting 9. They already decided that the home ministry should go to NC and finance the UML. Deuba's wife, Arzu, is said to be eyeing the Foreign Ministry.

Like we wrote in this space last month, Nepal's international diplomacy is just an extension of power sharing that rewards party loyalists. The decision of the UML-Maoist

government in June to recall 11 NC-appointed ambassadors and propose eight new ambassadors under the UML, Maoist, and Unified Socialist quota now hangs in the balance.

It is likely that the Maoist and Unified Socialist ambassador nominees will miss out. It will be interesting to see who gets the critical missions to India, China, and the US.

This was in essence a joint power grab to stop investigations into scandals that both their top leaders are implicated in: the NC in the fake Bhutanese refugee scam, and the UML in a land grab of a state-owned tea estate in Jhapa. And most Nepalis seem to be aware that this is a marriage of

convenience that will not make their lives better.

Some experts have argued that a NC-UML alliance would be the best bet for relative political stability. Deuba and Oli, now have to prove that to be true.

The NC has been demanding that RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane be investigated for his alleged involvement in misappropriating funds from co-operatives he was involved in.

The two parties in power must now ensure that ongoing probes into corruption scandals are fully looked into and the perpetrators held accountable, whichever parties they may belong to. Given the premise that

this coalition was the result of the NC and UML trying to prevent probes, there is little chance of that happening.

The Maoists and the RSP must now be an effective opposition front. Given the tit-for-tat nature of Nepali politics, it is a no-brainer that the RSP will keep going after the NC and UML leaders implicated in scandals.

The RSP will also have to clean up its own image before the next election, but that will be hard when it is imitating the political culture of the same parties it vowed to be an alternative to.

This week, the party stripped General Secretary Mukul Dhakal of all responsibilities after he leaked a scathing report accusing Lamichhane of putting himself above party interests.

Nepal's politics has been dominated by the whims of the same three ageing politicians and their parties since 2006.

While they have been engaged in political theatre and trading barbs, 80 people have died across Nepal in floods and landslides.

Vehicles mired in the mud on Nepal's highways this week are a fitting metaphor of the nation's politics.

**Shristi Karki**

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### We Told You So

Even in the early 2000s, we were writing about the risks of global heating in the Himalaya, particularly the glacial melting, and the need to adapt to the water crisis.

Twenty years later, things are getting much worse much faster. Two-thirds of glaciers are on track to disappear by 2100, melting into precarious glacial lakes that cause downstream devastation when they burst.

Excerpts of the report published in 2004 in issue #204 9-15 July 2004:

Global climate change is melting Himalayan glaciers at an unprecedented rate, yet field research into this potentially catastrophic trend is lagging.

There are 3,250 glaciers in the Nepal Himalaya and 2,315 of them contain glacial lakes that are increasing in size at varying rates. But no one really knows how many of them are in danger of bursting, and without that information, steps can't be taken to drain the lakes or install early-warning systems for villages downstream.

British geologist John Reynolds was involved in the project to siphon water off the Tso Rolpa glacial lake in the

Rolwaling valley a decade ago, but says the inventory of hazardous glacial lakes is outdated. "There has to be a fresh look at the entire issue because we may be running a high magnitude risk," Reynolds says.

As glaciers shrink, the melting ice causes lakes to grow. The lakes can then breach the loose moraine walls, sending huge floods of water, mud and boulders downstream. Scientists call this GLOF (Glacial Lake Outburst Flood)

and these have been occurring with increasing regularity in recent years.

A glacial lake burst in Khumbu in 1985 killed at least 20 people, washed away a hydropower station, the trekking trail to Namche and numerous bridges. The town of Pokhara is situated on the debris field of a gigantic 700-year-old flood from below Annapurna. The worst-case scenario is a major Himalayan earthquake causing several dozen glacial lakes to burst simultaneously.

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



**CYCLE OF LIFE**  
Makhumaya Tamang is one of over 1,200 women in Patan who have learnt to bicycle as part of an initiative by Women for Women, a local social media group. The women have gained mobility, freedom, economic opportunity and a sense of belonging. Watch this video on the Nepali Times' YouTube channel, and subscribe for more multimedia content.



**CLIMATE AND CHILD MARRIAGE**  
Already stricken by poverty and caste discrimination, the impact of the climate crisis means that more parents now marry off their young daughters early. They then end up risking their lives due to early pregnancies and poor diet. Watch this video from Bajura on our YouTube channel.

### NEPALI STUDENTS IN DENMARK

The stories of Nepali students in Denmark sound much less harsh than the reality I have seen in Copenhagen ('Looking for the Nepali Dream', Aseem Banstola, #1218). Most study a low quality American bachelor degrees at the Niels Brock business school paying DKK76,000 per year (€10,000). They are allowed to earn DKK90,000 before tax per year. So as Danish tax is high this means that everyone has to work outside the regulated labour market. There is no insurance. Nepali students work 24/7 and very few are able to concentrate on their studies. Who would under those conditions? Many end up quitting and moving to Southern Europe to pay their loans/earn money for their families. Anyone should pursue his or her own dream. But I wish the youth of Nepal were better informed. Nepali Times, I wish you would try to investigate and dig deeper into the realities for youth in Denmark and other western countries. Moreover, there is a future in Nepal. If the families would invest the same amount of money in local education and in entrepreneurship and be active citizens, There is no easy way - here or there.

**Anne Mette Nordfalk**

### KHUMJUNG SCHOOL

A good school does not always depend on the location or other physical facilities but on the sincerity and dedication of the school's teachers and administrators ('Hillary school attains Himalayan heights', Lisa Choegyol, #1219). The school in Khumjung has proven this.

**Bharat Dutta Koirala**

■ I have also visited this school, having walked from Solu.

**Laxmi Neupane**

### RUSSIAN ARMY

This was a horrific read ('Recruiters of Nepalis into Russian Army identified', Bhadra Sharma, #1219). We need to do more to ensure people aren't so desperate that they take these risks.

**T Teacher**

### SAARC

SAARC is just a waste of scarce money, it is better to disband it ('Retrofitting SAARC', Shristi Karki, #1217).

**Lal Bahadur**

## Times.com

### WHAT'S TRENDING

#### Nowhere and everywhere

by Vishad Raj Onta  
Ranjan Adiga's debut short story collection, 'Leech and Other Stories', is set where he lives and works, and is a bold and honest exploration of a wide variety of modern experiences of Nepalis at home and abroad. Read a review on our website.

**f Most reached and shared on Facebook**

#### दौरा सुरुवाल

by Pinki Sris Rana  
Daura Suruwal is back in fashion. Senior Nepali politicians and bureaucrats wear it to work while for the public, the dress is a go-to fit for weddings and other functions. Read about the evolution of Nepal's official dress online and watch a video on our YouTube channel.

**X Most popular on X**



#### Hillary school

by Lisa Choegyol  
Khumjung Secondary School, built by Edmund Hillary in 1961, became the top-performer in Solukhumbu district in the 2024 SEE, achieving a 100% pass rate with exceptionally high personal scores. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full story.

**“” Most commented**

#### Recruiters of Nepalis into Russian Army Identified

by Bhadra Sharma  
Mohan Oli and his brother Raj have been identified as recruiters luring fellow Nepalis to be conscripted into the Russian Army by promising them huge salaries and citizenship in exchange for exorbitant fees. Join the discussion online.

**🔍 Most visited online page**

### QUOTES

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Regardless of winners and losers in the fast-paced political developments last week, in the public's eye, all three mainstream parties are the same, and citizens do not have faith in the new NC-UML alliance improving their living conditions.

**ART @AmulyaSir**  
yah no faith in two old parties; in fact they'll make the country worse but will fatten up their supporters and free their crooks

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Khumjung Secondary School, built by Edmund Hillary in 1961, became the top-performing school in Solukhumbu district in the 2024 SEE, achieving a 100% pass rate with exceptionally high personal scores. Details in the story.

**Archana Thapa @archana\_thapa**  
We need more stories like this one

## 1,000 WORDS



KIRAN RAJ BISTA / RSS

**CITY COUNCIL:** Deputy Mayor Sunita Dangol, Mayor Balen Shah and Chief Administrator Pradeep Pariyar at the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Kathmandu City Council on Tuesday attended by Ward chairs.

## Times

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# Eurasian stayover in Istanbul

Transit passengers can now break their journey in Istanbul with a free stopover of this historic city

Many passengers flying west from Kathmandu have to change planes in Istanbul. This usually means a transit at the city's busy airport, but a new deal now allows passengers a free stopover to experience this historic city that straddles Asia and Europe.

Passengers with 6-24 hour transit can now opt for free daytime Istanbul sightseeing, and those with longer overnight layovers enjoy free accommodation while waiting for onward flights on Turkish Airlines.

Turkish Airlines has four flights a week leaving Kathmandu on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, and the summer schedule means a pleasant early morning departure when Kathmandu airport is relatively less congested.

In addition, the carrier has announced special fares to and from Kathmandu for the rest of the year till 24 December. Inbound passengers can also avail themselves of the free stopover offer, and sample Istanbul's architecture, culture, food, shopping and the mandatory Bosphorus cruise. The USD exchange rate makes Türkiye quite affordable.

Most nationals do not need a visa for Türkiye, Nepalis with Schengen, British or US visas can apply for Turkish e-visa, which is an easy online process that just takes a few minutes and costs \$35. Nepalis without onward visas can apply for Turkish visa through VFS centre.

Passengers with a connection of at least 20 hours are eligible for the free Stopover program with partner hotels of Turkish Airlines. Reservations have to be made at least 72 hours before the flight by sending name, PNR reservation code and ticket number as well as the preferred accommodation dates.

Economy Class passengers can stay one night in a 4-star hotel



GALATA TOWER TICKETS

while those in Business Class can stay two nights in a 5-star hotel free of charge. It is even better for Economy Class passengers starting their journey from the United States who get two nights free accommodation, while Business Class passengers can opt for 3 nights.

Turkish is the only European airline flying regularly to Kathmandu, and connects Nepal to 266 international destinations in 130 countries — the largest network in the world.

“Global Nepalis have discovered

that the Istanbul Stopover gives them a unique opportunity to enjoy the culture and shopping that Istanbul and Türkiye have to offer,” says Turkish Airlines Country Manager for Nepal Serkan Başar. “And the Stopover offer comes with free accommodation.”

The free stopover initially sounds too good to be true, but it is becoming a popular option for Turkish Airlines passengers to and from Kathmandu. Türkiye also offers other adventures beyond Istanbul for those who want to stay longer.

There are some terms and conditions: passengers can check eligibility for the stopovers on the Turkish Airlines website, but for passengers from Nepal most final destinations including the US, UK, rest of Europe, Australia, and most countries in Africa are entitled to the stopover package.

Passengers can use the free accommodation only once during a roundtrip on Turkish Airlines, and the trip must start and end in Nepal. Passengers have to bear the cost of visa fees, transport between city and airport and other expenses.

Aside from the free stopover, Turkish Airlines also offers the free Touristanbul service for transit passengers with long layovers to tour the city's highlights. There are several options available from three hour sightseeing tours, half-day excursions, full day tours and a 6-hour Turkish history outing.

Passengers can take in the Dolmabahçe Palace, Taksim Square, Galata Bridge and Tower (pictured), the Golden Horn, the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, and other highlights. Passengers can make their bookings online. 🇹🇷

## NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक

### Tata Monsoon Mela

Tata has launched its 'Monsoon Exchange Mela' offering gifts and bonuses when swapping any brand of vehicle for the Tiago EV. The offer was valid from 5-7 July. As a part of the deal, customers got two years of free autoplus insurance and road tax, three years of free servicing, and deals on accessories.



### Samsung Camp

Samsung ran an Innovation Campus at the TU Institute of Engineering in Pulchok where participants learned contemporary tech skills in areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and Big Data.

### Express-T e-taxi

The Express-T electric taxi service and charging centre in Balkumari will now open from 6:30AM to 9:30PM. On the purchase of Express-T, customers get one year of free road tax and three years of free servicing as well as warranties on the battery and motor of up to 160,000km. There are other charging stations in Bhaktapur, Gongabu, and Kapan.



### BYD price increase

Owing to the new budget, BYD distributor Cimex has announced new prices for various models. Customs and excise duties increase is based on motor capacity. Price hikes range from a Rs91,000 change for the BYD ATTO 3 to Rs1 million for the BYD Seal Performance Variant.

### Ncell with Meta

Ncell and Meta have partnered to enable customers to surf a text-and-images version of Facebook even with zero balance. Ncell also launched 'Discover', an Android app to browse a simplified form of the internet at zero cost. Both products are in line with Ncell's 'Sadhain On' philosophy.

### Nabil donates vehicles

Nabil Bank donated two vehicles to the Manavsewa Ashram which provides food, shelter and healthcare to the homeless. The non-profit set up 12 years ago currently supports more than 7,000 individuals.

### IME Pacific

Global IME Bank has reached agreements with Bhoomi and Pacific Developers to arrange loans within three business days for customers wanting to buy, build, convert into, renovate or repair eco-friendly houses. The bank will approve loans up to Rs10.2 million for seven years at 8.99% interest, and 30 years at 9.75%. Global IME bank also signed an agreement with the Nepal Association of Software and IT (NAS-IT) to invest in the development, distribution, and commercialisation of information services. IME too has a large digital presence through its mobile and internet banking, and plans to support start-ups, IT research, and training programs.

### Hyundai INSTER

Hyundai has launched INSTER, a sub-compact EV made with sustainable materials that comes in a two-tone exterior with a range of 355km. Inside is a 10.25 inch touchscreen and wireless charging docks. The car charges from 10% to 80% in 30 minutes, and has Surround View Monitor and Parking Assistance to help the driver.



Hyundai dealer Laxmi Intercontinental has also announced 'Zero Emission, Zero Interest' for customers buying the KONA EV at 0% interest. The deal is applicable for five years with a down payment of 50%. The KONA EV has a 39.2kWh battery that charges to 80% in 54 minutes and provides a range of 305km. Prices start at Rs5,996,000.

### Rakura eco-teabags

Rakura has launched the Magic Knot Teabags with a non heat-sealed design free of plastic or glue. The bags use unbleached filter paper and are compostable, with the thread and tags also made from sustainable materials. The company has added 21 new flavours of tea, which will be available across Kathmandu between Rs179-279 per pack.

### TikTok Q1

In its Community Guidelines Enforcement Report for 2024 Q1, TikTok has detailed its largely automated removal of 167 million videos and 976 million comments for violating community guidelines. The social media platform says it is committed to finding and addressing videos that may flout its rules, especially the sharing of underage sexual content.

### Fastest Bowler



WorldLink has completed a two-month-long 'Beat the Speed' campaign to find Nepal's fastest bowler. Across 18 cities, seven individuals were selected to get exclusive training from national coaches in Kathmandu. Pradeep Jaiswal won with a 125kmph delivery, earning

a cash prize and an opportunity to train at the MRF Pace Foundation in Chennai.

# Nepal's demographic window is closing

The country must make the most of its youth surge to prepare for tomorrow's ageing society

■ Sonia Awale

The working-age group in Nepal makes up two-thirds of the total population, the highest it has ever been. However, most young people are abroad, reducing the country's productivity and slowing its growth.

While about 20% of the population is between 15-24 years old, there are now nearly 3 million Nepalis above age 60, 10% of the population. Average life expectancy of Nepalis has risen to 71.3 years, the total fertility rate is 2.1, near the replacement level. However, there are gender and geographical discrepancies.

"Advances in healthcare and increased literacy means our infant mortality rate has dropped, this is a consolidated indicator for any country's socio-economic status," explains demographer Yogendra B Gurung. "As child survival increases, the fertility rate automatically goes down, which is why we have the new age structure."

These are global trends, but countries like Nepal have a wide youth bulge (page 1) giving the country a demographic dividend, a window of opportunity to achieve high economic growth before the young population also starts ageing and the ratio of dependent population also rises.

Won Young Hong, Country Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), says Nepal must learn from the mistakes of many East Asian countries including her native South Korea.

"Policies that only focus on the reproductive function of women is an antiquated view. It is not only about giving birth anymore but how we are to respond and be prepared for the future, and this needs more socioeconomic discussions to take place," says Hong (full interview, page 9).

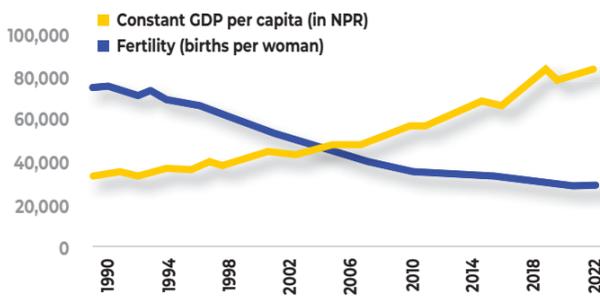
Nepal has a narrow window to make full use of the big number of working age people below 30. Experts say we have 30 years before we are faced with another demographic transition and become an ageing society. As today's young grow older, one in five Nepalis will be elderly by 2061.

But Gurung, who also heads the Central Department of Population Studies at Tribhuvan University, thinks Nepal may have more time



SUMAN NEPALI

Births per Nepali woman / GDP per capita in NPR



than previously thought to prepare for the time when its dependent elderly population crosses 60%.

"Regardless of how many years we've left, it won't make any difference if our politics and the bureaucracy continue the way they do, we need a radical shift to make the most of our youth bulge by training and educating them, prime businesses to use their skills and not hinder them with red tape, invest in health and infrastructure," cautions Gurung.

A major roadblock to mobilising the youth for Nepal's economic growth is that most young people are away. There are at least 2 million Nepalis in West Asia and

an estimated 3 million in India. Just last year, nearly 900,000 Nepalis left the country.

While the money they send back is the main factor in the sharp fall in the poverty rate in the past 30 years, remittances account for 22.7% of Nepal's GDP, higher than most other migrant labour dependent economies. Most remittance money is spent on household expenses, and not invested in creating jobs.

Nepal's labour migration pattern is also changing: while the first generation went to the Gulf and Malaysia and returned, their children seek to study in Australia, Canada, the US, or Europe, and

migrate permanently. This will eventually reduce remittance, and seriously impact the economy.

Nepal's economy is also going through a dramatic transformation with agriculture now contributing less than 25% to the economy, down from 81% three decades ago. But while hospitality, trade, finance and the IT sectors have expanded, the quality of education has not kept pace with the needs. The literacy rate may now be 76%, but the figure for women is much lower. Only 4.6% of Nepalis are graduates, and the postgraduate rate is 2.2% — figures considered too low for Nepal's new needs.

Increased quality of education also has obvious links to the health of women, female literacy is inversely proportional to the number of children they birth. Although female literacy rate has risen, child marriage is still prevalent, leading to teenage pregnancies. One of the targets Nepal will likely miss in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030 is in promoting gender equality and empowering women.

Nepal is second only to Bangladesh in South Asia in the rate of child marriage. One in every three women marry while they are children while half of all women marry before they are 20. Surveys show that 13% of Nepali teenagers aged 15-19 years are already childbearing, and 9.6% are mothers.

"Teenage pregnancy is extending poverty from one generation to another, it is an absolute poverty generation method," UNFPA's Hong told us. "If one-third of girls are marrying young, it means one-third of the population will remain in poverty."

Entrenched gender discrimination is seen most starkly in Nepal's male-female ratio at birth, which is 112:100 and similar to China and more than India and Bangladesh. The normal range is 102 to 107 males per 100 females, and points to high prevalence of sex-selective abortion.

Despite this, Nepal's Maternal Mortality Rate is on track to meet the SDG target because of better access to institutional delivery, but even then the progress has plateaued off mainly because of the high child marriage rate. Further improvements need better quality of care at hospitals and health centres. Families should also seek institutional delivery on time, and this means women having greater autonomy over their bodies.

There is urgency in advancing women's sexual and reproductive agency as a key strategy to address the population dynamic effectively as well as empowering them through education, healthcare and economic opportunities. This will be instrumental to also achieving Nepal's middle income developing country status by 2026.

The Ministry of Health and Population is currently drafting a new population policy, but experts say population should not be seen merely as a health issue but a cross-cutting socioeconomic and political challenge. Says Yogendra B Gurung: "Our government hasn't yet understood its demography nor they wish to, it is a non-issue for politicians. How can we make plans and policies with such crucial information missing?"



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# LADAKH'S NEPAL LINKS

For 400 years, Nepalis have built, worked and died fighting in India's strategic region

■ Dirgha Raj Upadhyay in Ladakh

For a moment after landing at Leh airport, Nepalis can be forgiven for thinking they have just arrived in Jomsom.

The drive into the capital of India's Union Territory of Ladakh situated at 3,500m offers many other similarities: the arid terrain, surrounding snow-capped peaks, prayer flags fluttering everywhere, chortens and stupas.

Although situated on the western edge of the Himalaya, it is as if the geology, culture, language and religion of Mustang leapfrogged 15,000km over northern India to transplant itself here.

Pangong Tso stretches 160km to the east into China, and could be mistaken for Phoksundo in Dolpo, except that at 4,300m it is the world's highest salt-water lake.

A 30 minute drive south of Leh is Shey Gomba, a namesake of a similar-looking monastery in Dolpo. This ancient palace and shrine has two gilded copper statues of the sitting Buddha which were crafted by Nepali artisans that Ladakh's King Delden Namgyal brought over from Nepal 400 years ago.

One of the statues is 8m tall and has the name of the Nepali sculptor, Sanga Zargar Wanduk, inscribed on it. Legend has it that 8kg of gold and 120kg of copper were used and the statue took 20 years to make.

"As far as we know, in 1655 Deldan Namgyal asked the King of Kathmandu to send the artisans to build the two statues to honour his father, King Sengge Namgyal," head monk Jigden told us.

Thirty Nepali metalsmiths were brought to Ladakh, and after completion of the work they settled down near the Shey monastery after King Deldan gave them property. Others were offered farmlands 35km away in Chiling, and some in Chemde.

We tracked down one of the descendants of the original Nepali

artisans. Phunchuk Dorje, 52, is a goldsmith with a shop inside a warren of narrow alleys in Leh.

"Yes, my ancestor was the chief artisan who was brought from Nepal by the King of Ladakh to make the Buddha statues, but he and others stayed here," says Dorje, who went to Nepal with his grandfather and father in 1990 to trace his forebear's family and home village, and thinks they came from Solu.

But Dorje did manage to find old ledgers where his grandfather's name was still entered as 'Pambar Sunar'. Sunar is a Nepali occupational surname for a goldsmith. It was his father who took up the name Dorje, and he adopted a local Tibetan name.

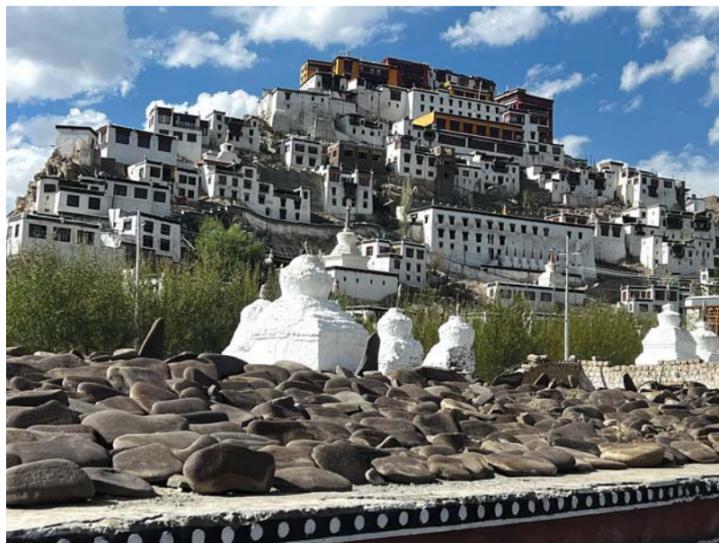
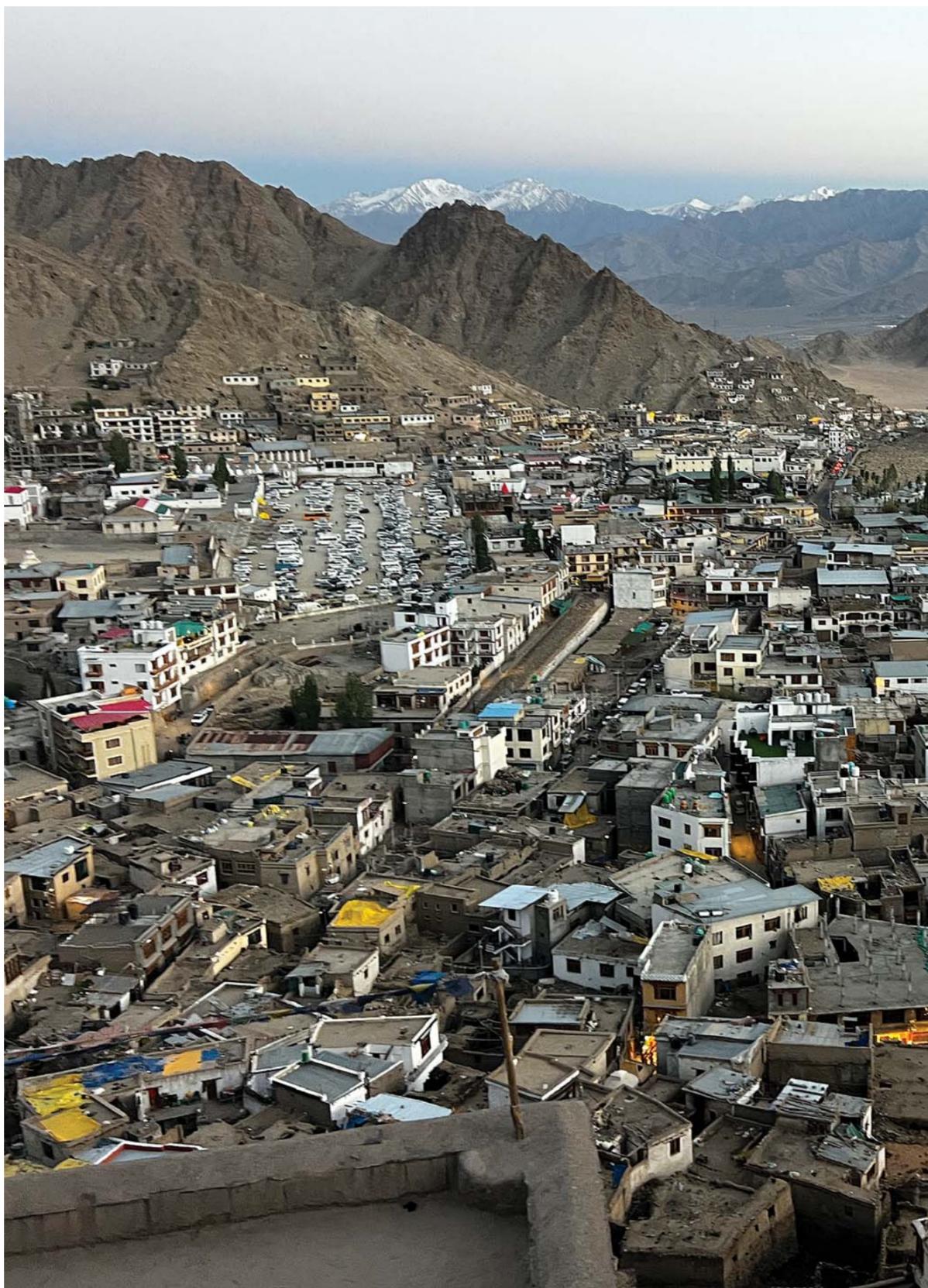
In Ladakh, the descendants of Nepali craftsmen are still called 'Shergar', which also means goldsmith, and the craft seems to have been passed down over the generations to Dorje.

Dorje says he is both a Hindu and Buddhist, worshipping Ganesh, the Buddha and revering the Dalai Lama. In his altar at home, Dorje has a small bronze Ganesh that his grandfather brought from Nepal, and he now regards it as his family's patron deity.

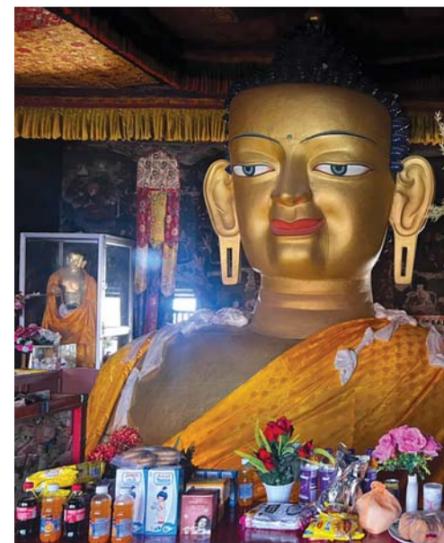
Dorje's father worked for the Indian Army, and once, after he became very ill, doctors gave up on saving his life and asked the family to take him home. Dorje prayed fervently to Ganesh, and says that within a week his father got well.

Five hundred years after his forefather came to Ladakh, Dorje says he still has a strong attachment to the land of his ancestors, and has married a Nepali-speaking woman.

Fascinated that Nepali visitors have come to see him, he confesses: "I have this strange fixation on finding out where exactly in Nepal my ancestors came from. If I had more money I would go to Nepal again on a search mission." 🇳🇵



Thiksey Monastery near Leh that is also called the 'Mini Potala'.



Head monk Jigden of Shey Gomba with the 500-year-old gilded



Chandra Ghising from Sindhuli has been working in Leh for 15 years.



Gyan Pun Magar, Nepali manager of The Tibetan Kitchen.

## "It will be difficult to

The Tibetan Kitchen in Leh is open from noon till midnight, but is so busy that entry is only allowed with table reservation. The restaurant is run entirely by 36 Nepalis from managers and chefs to waiters.

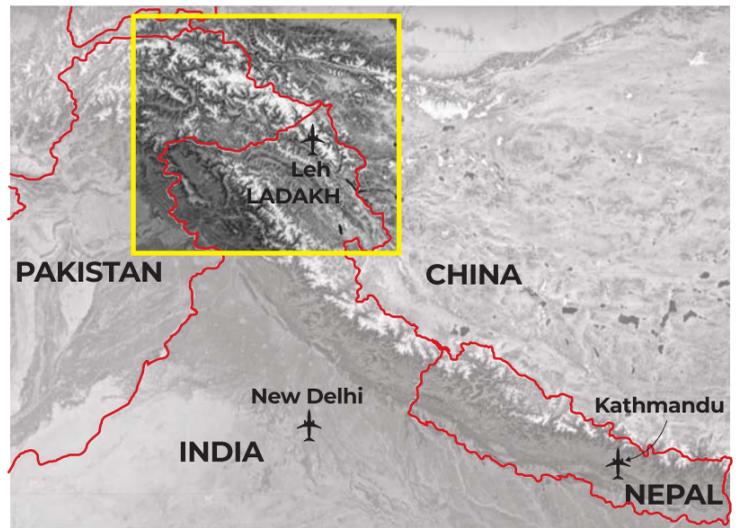
"There is no other reason we are so popular, we have the best food," says manager Gyan Pun Magar (pictured, left) simply. "Just look at that line outside."

In the town of Merak near the Chinese border, the Grand Himalayan Hotel is also run entirely by Nepalis.

"Ladakh would still be here without Nepalis, but it would be difficult to run businesses here without us. From soldiers to



PHOTOS: DIRGHA RAJ UPADHYAY



## History and geography

Like Mustang, Ladakh is in the Trans-Himalayan plateau. Only one third of the territory is today under Indian administration after the Aksai Chin region was annexed by China in the 1962 war. Pakistan controls the western half of Kashmir that includes parts of Ladakh.

These are still volatile borders, which is why there is a strong Indian military presence in the strategic mountainous territory. At least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers were killed in clashes in 2020-21 between Indian and Chinese troops in Galwan, north of Leh.

The 3-month battle in Kargil in July-September 1999 between India and Pakistan was serious enough to be called the Kargil War in which more than 1,000 soldiers were killed on both sides.

Many of those who died in various wars against Pakistan and China were Gorkha soldiers from Nepal well acclimated for mountain warfare in high terrain. They were posthumously honoured with gallantry medals, and their names and photos are displayed in the Hall of Fame, 10km from Leh. Some of them:



A gilded Buddha made by Nepali artisans.



Punchuk Dorje, left, whose artisan ancestors were brought from Nepal to make the Shey Buddha.

## Dying away from home

Major Hari Chand engaged Pakistani troops at elevations of 5,500m in 1948 and helped India gain control of Leh. He was awarded the Mahavir Chakra medal for gallantry.

Lt Col Dhan Singh Thapa fought till the end against Chinese troops in October 1962.

Second Lieutenant Min Bahadur Gurung fought alongside Lt Col Thapa and charged a Chinese mortar position, destroying it before being killed. He was posthumously promoted to Lt Col, awarded India's highest medal for valour, the Param Vir Chakra. A border post on the western shore of Pangong Tso was named after him.

Lance Corporal Rabi Lal Thapa was awarded the Mahavir Chakra for saving an Indian unit

from Chinese attacks in Ladakh in October 1962.

Capt Manoj Pandey was awarded the Param Vir Chakra. He was killed in Kargil in July 1999.



Other Nepalis were awarded Mahavir Chakra for bravery in various other battles since 1948 against Pakistani and Chinese troops: Maj Rajesh Adhikari, Lance Corporals Prem Gurung and Nara Bahadur Ale.

But today, it almost seems as if there are more tourist vehicles and more tourists than soldiers in Ladakh. Indian visitors 'discovered' Ladakh after the 2009 Bollywood hit *The Three Idiots* was filmed at Pangong Tso, and in 2012 *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* was shot on location in Ladakh.

## ...to run Ladakh's businesses without Nepalis."

cooks to rafting guides, we run everything," says Rana Bahadur Pandey, who runs a bakery and migrated here from Nuwakot 25 years ago.

Indeed, a new Buddhist stupa being constructed on the outskirts of Leh is being built almost entirely by Nepalis, just like their ancestors who sculpted the gilded Buddhas of Shey Monastery 400 years ago.

Along the highway from Leh to Pangong, Siddhi and Sujit Pariyar from Jumla are selling herbs and aromatic oils to tourists. There are 15 others from Jumla selling Nepali herbal products who spend summers here, and return home to their families for Dasain

with their earnings.

"When the monsoon off-season stops trekking, mountaineering and rafting in Nepal, we move to Ladakh," says Milan Pathak, a rafting guide (right). Like others, Pathak runs white water on the Kali Gandaki, Bhote Kosi and Trisuli back home, and comes here for three months to raft on the Zaskar River, a tributary of the Indus. They head back in September at the start of the autumn rafting season in Nepal.

The Zaskar River (map, above) runs about 200km before it joins the Indus and the Nepali guides offer day trips of 35km, or half-day packages of 14km.



Milan Pathak (in orange) and fellow rafting guides from Nepal on the Zaskar River.

## EVENTS



## Play द सिस्टम

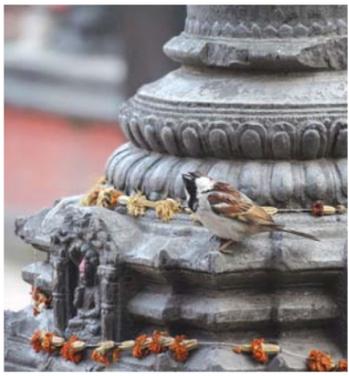
An adaptation of Theresa Rebeck's What We Are Up Against, this play satirizes the battle of the sexes in the workplace.

Until 15 July, 5:15pm (except Tuesdays) / 1pm also (on Saturdays), Kausi Theatre, Teku, 9861315317

## The Lost-Wax Technique

Be part of a day-workshop to learn the craft of moulding and sculpting. Anil Shakya, Suman Shakya and Sunny Shakya will instruct participants.

13-14 July, 1pm-4pm, Registration fee: Rs1,500, KGH Dream Garden, Thamel



## Rhizomes

Rhizomes is an exhibition by graduating MFA students from Kathmandu University that features themes of memory, tradition and innovation.

Until 14 July, 10am-5pm (Sundays to Thursdays), 10am-4pm (Fridays), Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal

## Kara: A Tale of Agony

Mark your calendars to watch the feature film Kara: A Tale of Agony next weekend. The screening is also a charity show supporting Mahabir Pun's Nepal Innovation Centre (NIC).

20 July, 3pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500-Rs2,500, QFX Cinemas, Civil Mall, Kathmandu

## Rear View Mirror

Be part of a talk session on political philosophy by Dilip Simeon who is an author, labour historian and intellectual based in India.

12 July, 2:30pm-4pm, photo.circle, Patan



## MUSIC

## Friday Party Night

The party starts off with live music by The Rewind Band til 11pm. Then DJ Praize will join with some groovy music to open up the dance floor.

12 July, 6:30pm onwards, Ai-La Lounge, Kumariapati



## Fundraising Concert

Join in for a musical night with Jazz. This Katjazz session will feature Samyog Regmi, Abhisek Bhadra, Prajwal Sunar and Rajat Rai.

13 July, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Rs800 (Presale)/Rs1,000 (Door sale), Moksh, Jhamsikhel



## Trishala Gurung Unplugged

Indulge in Trishala Gurung's soulful melodies and release the week-long stress. After the performance, join an after-party with sets from DJ Black and DJ Rupesh.

19 July, 9pm onwards, Ticket: Rs499, Mirage by Escobar, Gairidhara



## Open House Carnival

Experience the unique fusion of rock and contemporary Nepali music with delicious food and fun carnival games at IIMS Open House Carnival. VEK and Sushant Ra Rāga also join.

19 July, 11pm onwards, Annapurna Hotel, Durbar Marg, 9820104279

## Godless

Get ready for thrash-laced death metal music as Godless take the stage after a long gap of five years. They will be playing alongside Shannon Scam, Discord, Sharabha & Six Coffins.

13 July, 1pm-6pm, Ticket: Rs500, Reggae Bar, Thamel

## GETAWAYS



## Himalayan Golf Course

The Himalayan Golf Course is one of the most unique greens in the world, featuring 16 holes in a vertical course. It is built in a Bijaypur Khola valley, a 21 minute drive from Pokhara.

Majeri Patan, Pokhara (061) 521882

## Green Valley Resort

A short drive from Kathmandu, Green Valley Resort is a perfect getaway for urbanites. The first rays of sun complement the cool monsoon, setting the mood for a perfect stroll around the Tamang Valley.

Shivapuri National Park (01) 5248091



## Rupakot Resort

Only a 45-minute drive from Lakeside Pokhara, surround yourself with the breathtaking views of lakes and mountains. Embrace the ambiance of Nepali rural life while enjoying exceptional luxury and ultimate comfort.

Rupakot, Pokhara, 980-2832457

## Karma Hotel

Karma Boutique Hotel, located in the heart of vibrant Thamel, has decor inspired by the Tibetan and Nepali cultures. The hotel has brightly decorated rooms and art hanging throughout.

Thamel (01) 4246131



## Shivapuri Heights Cottage

Shivapuri Heights cottage is an ideal retreat for nature enthusiasts. Surrounded by lush greenery, it offers fresh monsoon air, a cool breeze, and stunning views of Kathmandu.

Budhanilkantha, 9846232271

## Kyubi's Kitchen

For customisable bowls of noodles, platters filled to the brim with dumplings, spicy noodles, kimbap, corn dogs, da-pow and more, Kyubi's Kitchen is the place to go.

Jhamsikhel, 9810298050



## Grill Durbar

At Grill Durbar, there isn't anything that you can't grill. Try everything from slow-grilled chicken to grilled vegetable shawarmas.

Jawalakhel and Kathmandu, 9849777410

## WEEKEND WEATHER



## More rain

Kathmandu got more than half the average July precipitation in just the first six days. Kanchanpur district received more than 600mm in 24 hours this week, a record since measurements started in Nepal. And it looks like it is not done yet. Friday will see particularly heavy rainfall all day in Kathmandu. Things may ease off into the weekend, but only slightly. It will be wet wet, and muddy. Early next week we may start seeing brief spells of sunshine, mainly before noon.



## OUR PICK



The 2024 post-apocalyptic film Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga is the prequel to the acclaimed 2015 hit Mad Max: Fury Road. Furiosa is the story of the titular protagonist as she is kidnapped by the forces of the warlord Dementus and adopted against her will as his daughter. The film follows her growth from young orphan to the high rank of Imperator. All the while, the young warrior is still trying to find her way back to the home she was taken from. Stars Anya Taylor-Joy, Chris Hemsworth, Tom Burke, and Ayla Browne.

## MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI

Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.

- Helen Keller



Miss Moti-vation  
©Kripa Joshi 2023

## गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउ र बचाऔं

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



नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

## DINING



## Dip In Donuts

At Dip In Donuts, let your eyes fall in love with the fried tori, and then let the flavours leave you craving for some more.

Pimbahal, 9702600112/ 9851115976



## Doko Deli

Enjoy the atmosphere of an open garden and take a pick from a variety of appetisers, pizzas, and pasta. Also try out newly added dishes in their menu.

Jhamsikhel, 9801046708

## Octave

Octave in Darbar Marg has live musical performances and some of the best sushi in town.

Darbar Marg, 9801988333

# Future-proofing Nepal's population strategy

UNFPA Country Representative Won Young Hong talks to Nepali Times about Nepal's Population dynamics

**Nepali Times: What are the main demographic trends that will affect Nepal in the next 30 years?**

**Won Young Hong:** There are two major demographic trends we see on the horizon in Nepal in the next 30 years.

The first of these is the age of the population. We expect fertility rates to continue to decline, as in many other countries in the region. It dropped from 4.6 children per woman in 1996 to 2.1 in 2022. This indicates a shift towards smaller family sizes in Nepal.

The working-age population between 15-64 years is 64.6%, and this will peak in 2051 at 69.4% before starting to decline to 66.7% in 2061. At the same time, the proportion of people aged 60 and above increased from 7.6% in 2011 to 9.0% in 2021.

The UN projections estimate that the share of the elderly population will continue to grow in the next few decades until one in five people (22.4%) are elderly in 2061.

The second major demographic trend relates to migration, both within Nepal and overseas. According to the 2021 census, around 2.2 million Nepalis were living abroad in 2021. This trend is likely to continue as most young people seek opportunities abroad. Internal migration is also a major trend.

Between 2011 and 2021, the population share in the Tarai increased from 50.3% to 53.6%, while in the hills, it decreased from 43% to 40.3%, and in the mountain region, it declined from 6.7% to 6.1%.

There is significant internal migration from rural to urban areas in search of better job opportunities and improved living conditions, leading to rapid urbanisation. By 2021, about 27.1% of the population resided in urban areas, up from 22.3% in 2011, while the share of the population living in peri-urban areas remained similar at around 39%.

The share of the rural population declined from 38.5% to 33.2% during the same period. Urban areas, especially the Kathmandu Valley, have seen significant population growth, while over half of rural municipalities have seen negative growth. Provincial capitals like Biratnagar and Janakpur have seen population surges. Current trends indicate a rising share of the urban population and a shrinking rural population in the future.

**How can Nepal avoid the mistakes of some other Asian countries in responding to low fertility?**

It is an important question, and there are no fixed answers because each country is unique in many ways. Low fertility levels are a global trend, and no single country has managed to reverse this through policies despite a variety of initiatives being introduced. There are many lessons to be learned.

It is clear that policies with an exclusive focus on the reproductive function of women with cost-based financial support without addressing structural issues affecting reproductive decisions made by men and women are largely unsuccessful.

It is important for Nepal to analyse the issues and develop a context-driven and evidence-based approach to responding to the needs of people. Generally, policy is most effective in supporting people's choices when it responds to the diverse needs of individuals.

For example, it is crucial to recognise the impact of the disparities between paid employment and raising children and close that gap with financial support for families with limited incomes.

At the same time, employment needs to support women and men with children so they can balance family life and activities with work. Less rigid 9-5 working hours and accessible and high-quality childcare support are just a few of the measures that can help.

Employers need to be encouraged to recognise that people with children in the workplace have needs and that there are systemic barriers for parents that have wider social impacts. These can be broken down



UNFPA

with greater accommodation of the diversity of preferences of adults as to their choices of when and how many children they want to have.

Policies need to create family and child-friendly societies focused on the health, education, and well-being of children and families at large to be successful. Public spending is another such tool, with levels of public funding for families closely linked with period fertility rates as well as cohort family size. There also needs to be individual choices available including in relation to sexual and reproductive health and rights and family planning.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. UNFPA is encouraging this kind of learning and knowledge sharing across countries because there is a huge increase in countries with declining populations, and we believe there are important lessons to be shared across the region and the wider globe. And it is imperative that policies be developed now rather than in a reactive manner.

**How serious is the anomaly in male: female ratio in Nepal?**

I would say any population anomaly has serious impacts. Nepal exhibits a skewed sex ratio at birth, with 112 boys born for every 100 girls, according to the 2021 census. This is higher than the biologically normal range of 102 to 107 males per 100 females, indicating potential sex selection practices. The disparity is particularly pronounced in Madhes province, where the sex ratio at birth is 118, compared to the lowest ratio of 106 in Kosi province.

This imbalance is concerning as it mirrors trends seen in countries like China (112) and India (108), where cultural preferences for male children have led to significant gender imbalances. The preference for male children can have long-

term social impacts, including an imbalance in the population structure related to gender disparity and discrimination.

This might include a decline in marriages and partnerships, which can further increase the risks of human trafficking, gender-based violence, and other forms of harm. Nepal needs to identify the underlying drivers and address them with appropriate policy measures. In countries where over the long term there was this kind of imbalance, we see challenges, including a shortage of domestic labour in the workforce, a rapid reduction of fertility levels, and very few tools to reverse these trends.

**How are population dynamics, gender relations, migration and dropping fertility rate impacting Nepal's population?**

The large proportion of the population that is young can potentially bring an enormous demographic dividend with investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure. There is, however, a limited time window to seize this opportunity of about 30 years, when the population dynamic momentum will reverse as the lower rates of fertility start to impact working age groups and the percentage of the elderly will continue to increase.

As the population ages and the proportion of young to old reverses, profound policy-level challenges arise. To take advantage of the window of a demographic dividend, targeted investments that directly benefit young people, including girls, need to be made now while fully implementing a wider range of socio-economic initiatives at all levels in line with the national development vision.

We are seeing some really key results

in Nepal's legal framework and policies, including special measures to promote women in public life. At the same time, gender inequality remains a significant challenge, with persistent disparities in public and private spaces.

Such persistent gaps, combined with social and economic factors like rising living costs, education costs for children, and childcare costs, will continue to discourage young women and men from having children.

For that to happen, there needs to be a family-friendly environment for young people, women and men, to pursue a family life that includes raising children at home and being balanced with the workplace.

This brings me on to the second part of your question on migration. The impact is, of course, profound. As people move abroad or to cities, the population landscape changes. If the large numbers of people overseas decide not to return, it will definitely contribute to the low fertility trends in the medium to long term. Equally, as people move to cities from rural or remote areas, there is a huge risk of leaving these areas barren and depopulated, leaving only an ageing population.

These population flows require careful policy intervention and incentives to encourage people to invest in Nepal. It is welcome that the government is discussing ways to allow migrants to vote so their preferences can be reflected in the legislature and policymaking and future opportunities that encourage them to return to the country.

**UNFPA has been involved in helping the Nepal government plan for the demographic window? What have some of your main suggestions been?**

We do support the Government of Nepal in the area of the demographic window, and the first part of this relates to generating data and evidence that take into account demographic shifts and other megatrends in development policies and plans, as we recognise that without disaggregated, high-quality data and evidence, it will not be possible to achieve inclusive and sustainable development, including economic growth.

Evidence is key to good decision-making, and the decisions made today can profoundly impact population dynamics in the future. As such, we support timely, high-quality, and disaggregated data generation that is essential for identifying those furthest behind.

A second and related part supports the strategic use of evidence, including data, to improve understanding of the population and demographic structure of Nepal in actual policy decisions. We work with government decision-makers at all levels and civil society to translate data and evidence into pragmatic policies, such as the population policy, that respond to existing and future needs, including the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and men.

Population policy is very important to Nepal, and our experience across the globe shows that to future-proof population policy, it needs to respond in a holistic manner to the socio-economic changes we are witnessing and respond to the diverse needs of young people.

To do this, it needs to examine a wide range of issues, including budgetary ones, affecting family decisions, and gender inequality. It is critical for Nepal to expand its understanding of population issues and build an integrated planning framework to respond to the new population trends.



11 JULY

# What's cooking in Nepal besides

Over-reliance on hydroelectricity at the cost of solar power is high-risk and high-cost

■ Sonia Awale

Nearly 95% of Nepalis now have access to electricity, and the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) aims to achieve 100% this year.

All the electricity will come from hydropower plants, but it is mostly used for lighting. A mere 0.5% of the power is used by households for cooking (see chart, below).

The share of electricity to charge battery-powered vehicles is increasing, but not fast enough to use up the 4,000MW of hydropower that will be generated in the coming year.

Nepal can export only about 600MW to India because it refuses to buy electricity from hydropower plants with Chinese involvement. This means a lot of expensively generated electricity will be 'spilled' (wasted) unless power demand is raised.

"We need to promote electric vehicles, but not everyone drives. However, all 30 million Nepalis have to eat, so subsidising rice cookers and electric stoves can reduce LPG use," reasons environmentalist Anil Chitrakar.

But induction stoves and rice cookers might not be affordable to all, and electricity tariffs would have to come down with time-of-the-day metering. Spare parts and repair services for electric appliances are not readily available. Transmission lines need to be upgraded and supply made more reliable. Most major hydropower plants had to be shut down this week because of high sediment load on flooded rivers.

Biomass (straw, dried dung, firewood) still makes up 59% of energy consumption for cooking, but imported Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) is catching up with nearly 45% of households using cylinders.

Household biogas, of which Nepal was a pioneer with 400,000 digesters built in the 1980s, has fallen to just 1.2% of households because of fewer families keeping livestock and LPG (chart, right).

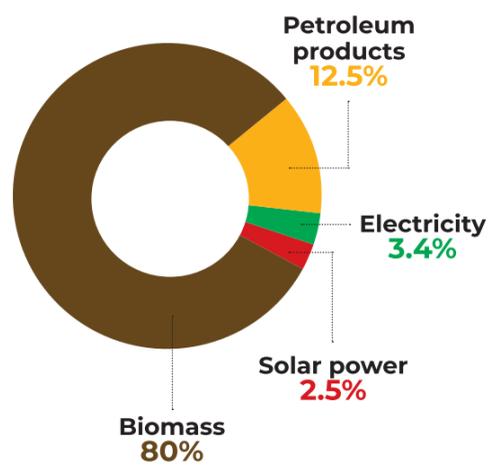
LPG is heavily subsidised, making it both affordable and convenient. It has also helped reduce indoor air pollution and respiratory ailments among mothers and children, and contributed to the regeneration of forests.

To meet its 2045 net zero target, Nepal has committed to

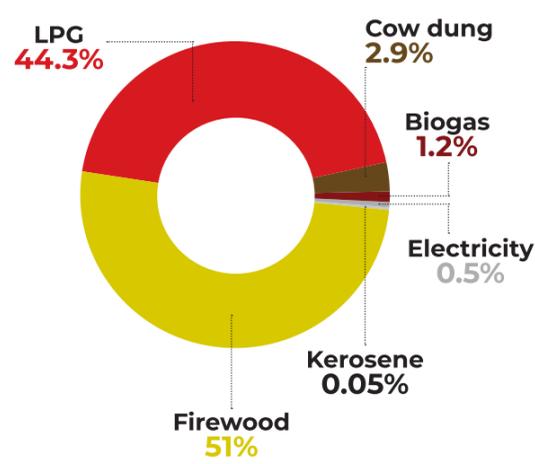


ADAM STERN

## NEPAL'S TOTAL ENERGY MIX



## MAIN SOURCES OF HOUSEHOLD COOKING FUEL



reducing LPG use to 40% or below by 2030. But that will be difficult without cheaper alternatives, considering that in urban centres like Kathmandu and Pokhara, household LPG use is nearly 100%.

Gandaki Urja, Nepal's biggest industrial-scale biogas plant near Pokhara, was built to process municipal and farm waste into bio-Compressed Natural Gas (bio-CNG), but is finding it difficult to compete with state-subsidised LPG.

"The operational cost of CNG means LPG is cheaper," explains Kushal Gurung of Gandaki Urja. "Waste to energy projects simply cannot compete with subsidised fossil fuels."

Piping gas directly to homes is not available. This means installing expensive liquefaction plants, and deposits for CNG cylinders is



## What cost hydro?



SHIVA BASKOTA

With an installed capacity of nearly 3,000MW and an additional 1,000MW on the way by the end of the year, Nepal's planners now need to think of the environmental cost of hydroelectricity. Dams change the hydrology of rivers, and with the climate crisis, expensive infrastructure are also at the mercy of destructive floods.

The Melamchi disaster in 2021 and the Chungthang dam collapse in Sikkim last year were signs of things to come. Also in 2023, nearly 30 hydropower projects along rivers in eastern Nepal were damaged by monsoon floods.

"Large infrastructure in the Himalaya is a big no-no, especially with weaker mountains and warming climate. They will lead to big losses, we do not want a repeat of Melamchi," warns water expert Madhukar Upadhyay.

He adds: "A much better option is to go for smaller infrastructure and spread them out and not put all our eggs in one basket."

Infrastructure projects in Nepal need Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) but these are often copy-pasted formalities. Climate risk is not even factored in.

One of the most prominent examples of this is Kulekhani Hydropower Station, Nepal's only running storage-type project. It was designed to last 100 years when it was commissioned in 1982 but by the 1990s, a flash flood reduced its lifespan to just 30 years.

"There are global studies but they do not provide local context. We have rain forecasts but we don't yet know how the climate is changing the geometry of our rivers, vegetation, or soil moisture," says Upadhyay. "Without these, we have no roadmap for infrastructure development."

Energy expert Manjeet Dhakal agrees. "We talk about how heavy rains will affect our hydropower plants, but we haven't even begun to think about increasing temperature affecting water availability,

making the case for energy diversification beyond hydropower that much stronger."

The last Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in 2020 set Nepal's target to increase its share of clean energy to 15% by 2030 from only 9% today.

"Our dependency on hydropower makes us vulnerable to climate risk. While there has been some progress when it comes to clean energy in Nepal, we must leapfrog to diversify energy sources," adds Dhakal, who advocates exploring the feasibility of hydrogen.

The Ministry of Environment has started the process to set the next NDC which must be submitted by February 2025. The new NDC will have targets for until 2035.

Dhakal, who advises Least Developed Countries (LDCs) at the UNFCCC, says: "We must analyse our energy mix to promote solar, wind and other clean energy sources, especially if we are to meet our energy and climate targets."

# Politics?

Rs27,000, while an LPG cylinder is only Rs2,100.

Gurung has a checklist for making urban-scale biogas viable in Nepal: involve municipalities in waste management under public-private partnership, segregate waste, burn biogas to recycle plastic, sell fertiliser as a byproduct, and earn carbon credit for methane produced by biogas.

In Dharan, a bio-CNG plant run by Venture Waste to Energy (Vw2E) takes 30 metric tons of mixed solid waste daily from the municipality to produce methane and fertiliser through anaerobic digestion (box, below). Vw2E's Bipul Raj Pandey says: "Bio-CNG is a very versatile fuel and can be used to generate electricity, or as cooking gas. We had the choice of competing with LPG or petrol and we chose to sell it to transporters."

The company produces 1,600 cubic metres of gas daily and could supply some 3,000 households in Dharan. But without piped gas, compressing the fuel into cylinders is expensive. It sells the gas as biofuel for three wheelers, and it can also be used to run cars.

In another success story, Ghorahi in Dang turns municipal

## Energy generation in Nepal



**Total**  
2,873MW

waste into methane, and supplies 32 households with piped gas. This project is supported by a Rs22 million grant from the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPCC) and Nepal Energy Development Company which hopes to eventually distribute piped cooking gas to 1,500 households.

Siddhant Raj Pandey of Business

Oxygen (BO<sub>2</sub>), a private equity fund with a climate focus, says that unless the government subsidises renewable energy schemes, fossil fuels will win.

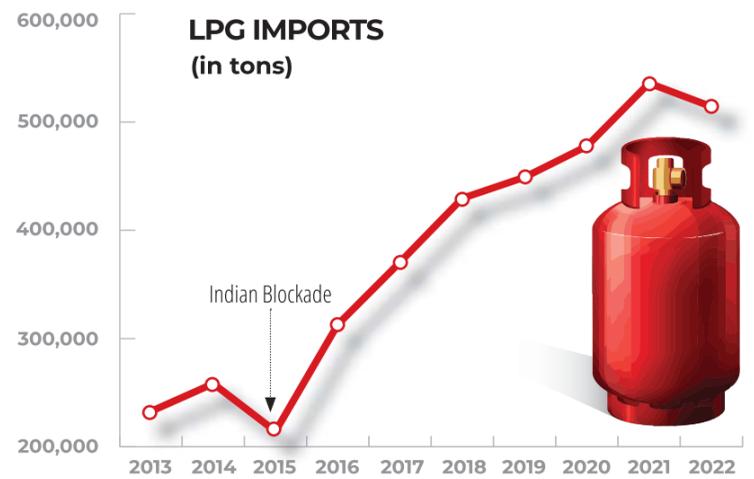
BO<sub>2</sub> invested in Gandaki Urja but it just could not match cheaper and more easily available LPG. The company tried to offset the cost by selling fertiliser from digester effluent, but uptake was slow.

"How can anyone compete when fossil fuels are subsidised and not renewables like biogas?" argues Pandey. "If the government is really serious about net zero by 2045, it needs to start thinking about viable alternatives but for that you need patient capital, viability gap funding, blended finance."

One fuel that Pandey says is already viable is bio-pellet sourced from forest biomass. That is because the tax on imported coal for industrial use was increased. A government-mandated bio-pellet mix like in India could help reduce the coal import bill. A BO<sub>2</sub> partner supplies brick kilns and cement factories with fuel bio-pellets.

Biomass still makes up nearly 80% of Nepal's overall energy consumption while electricity and solar account for less than 5% each (chart, left). Petroleum products, which make up 25% of all imports and totals more than all exports combined, make up 12.5% of energy use.

Energy generation on the other hand is entirely focused on hydroelectricity, which requires higher investment and is also at higher risk, as shown by climate-



induced disasters like Melamchi in 2021 and Teesta in Sikkim last year.

While the government has committed to ambitious climate targets in its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to reduce carbon emissions, and prioritises the promotion of renewable alternative energy sources, contradictory policies have discouraged investors. For example, it has capped non-hydro electricity in its energy mix at 10%.

Solar power plants are cheaper and faster to build and operate, but there are no subsidies for solar farm investors on the purchase of land. NEA has also been quoting a lower power purchase rate for solar electricity, and most recently capped it at Rs5.94 per unit. With

added taxes and VAT starting this year on solar equipment, many investors are turning away (box, overleaf). "NEA is not enthusiastic about solar even though it does not compete with hydro and can even complement it during the dry season when run-of-river projects cannot meet demand," says Raj Kumar Thapa of Solar Solutions, which is setting up 10 DC and 8 AC solar plants in Kapilvastu. "Given our current over-reliance on hydroelectricity, there is no way we can meet our net zero targets."

Kushal Gurung of Gandaki Urja has also dabbled in wind energy in Nepal and found it to be less economically viable than solar.

He warns: "Our lack of diversification in energy sources is a recipe for disaster." 🚩



VENTURE WASTE TO ENERGY

## Dung-powered cars

Biogas is mostly used as cooking fuel, but in Dharan a company is generating bio-Compressed Natural Gas (bio-CNG) from municipal waste to run auto rickshaws (left).

Venture Waste to Energy (Vw2E) is a private company that has for the past two and a half years been processing 30 metric tons of municipal waste to generate 1,600 cubic metres of gas every day, and distributing farmers the valuable fertiliser byproduct for free.

The bio-CNG is sold at Rs130 per kg to three-wheeler taxis that

run up to 40km on one 1kg of gas. This translates into Rs4.77 per km with CNG, while the running cost of regular petrol auto rickshaw is Rs9.22 per km.

The three-wheelers do need a one-time Rs35,000 CNG kit but this cost is easily recovered from savings on petrol.

"We can reduce urban waste by at least half and cut petroleum use by up to 17% with bio-CNG," says Bipul Raj Pandey of Vw2E. Replicating this could save Nepal some of the Rs60 billion it spent on

importing LPG from India last year.

Vw2E had the option of selling bio-CNG as household cooking fuel, but it was not economically viable because of state-subsidised LPG and the higher cost of CNG cylinders.

"If only our policies on investment were in place, bio-CNG could entirely replace LPG," Pandey says. "It's a win-win: we reduce urban waste by using it to generate cheap clean energy and also slash the petroleum import bill."

## Punishing the sun

Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has called for bids to install 800MW of solar energy to the national grid but there is not much excitement among investors because of the low buying rate of Rs5.94 per unit.

The new budget in June also introduced VAT and customs duty on solar equipment. Even though the cost of solar panels has declined globally, a weaker NPR vis-à-vis the USD and new taxes keep prices for panels and batteries high.

"The PPA of solar is so low that if it wasn't for the price of panels coming down, it wouldn't have been viable," says Siddhant Raj Pandey of BO<sub>2</sub>. "The government's argument that India can produce at the same rate doesn't apply, there are subsidies for solar in India which we don't have."

Every 5MW of solar energy requires 5.09 hectares of land but Nepal's land ceiling does not allow individuals to own more than 3.82 hectares without additional documentation. There is no subsidy on land purchase for solar projects, either. Moreover, land once bought for solar power cannot be used for other purposes even if operators do not get a renewal for solar generation.

Unlike licensing hydroelectric projects on a first come first served basis, solar producers need to bid first, and the lowest

bidders are granted the project. Usually by the time of implementation, there are other cost hikes.

Like the last time, NEA called for tenders for a 64MW of solar power in 2007, first at the rate of Rs9.61, later reduced to Rs7.30 by the time of implementation, discouraging investors. So far, only 20MW plants have been installed.

"NEA has been reluctant to push for large-scale utility solar. Their reasoning is always that while peak demand is between 6-10PM, solar generates energy only between 9AM-3PM," says Raj Kumar Thapa of Solar Solutions, which is setting up 10 DC and 8 AC solar plants in Kapilvastu.

He adds: "The new 800MW bid is a positive development but the PPA (Power Purchase Agreement) rate is too low to be attractive for investors, even banks do not think the bids are viable. At the very least we need viability gap funding. We should also remove VAT and cap duty at 1%."

Solar is a daytime power source, but the price of large battery storage is coming down and solar power can be used to pump water to hydropower reservoirs in the daytime when demand is low so that electricity can be generated at peak morning and evening hours. Kushal Gurung likens the NEA's reluctance to promote solar to that of preventing the latest model imported cars on the road because they have not been locally



NEA

tested. The policy on non-hydro electricity mix should increase to 30% so it can buy more of the cheaper energy, he says.

Nepal gets abundant sunlight nearly 300 days a year. This is about 2,100 hours of sunshine a year with 6.8 hours on average per day, much higher than northern hemisphere countries. Nepal has an estimated potential solar generation of 50,000TWhs annually, which is 7,000 times more electricity than what the country consumes at present. Besides, the sunniest parts of Nepal are trans-Himalayan districts like Humla, Dolpo, Mustang and Manang where solar

photovoltaic panels are more efficient because of the cold.

"Realising Nepal's solar energy potential will depend on us building high quality solar projects in areas close to demand centers, industrial corridors and rooftops in the short term," says Anjal Niraula of Gham Power. "But our long-term future will involve pairing solar with battery technology across all levels of the grid i.e. transmission, distribution and also behind the meter. This will allow us to use renewable solar power that is both reliable and cost effective."



## Autism awareness with art

Nepalis with autism take to art and craft to live their lives to the best of their abilities

Text and photos by  
**Suman Nepali**

Orange, yellow and brown. Sama Bajracharya (right) fills the canvas with colours, her forehead creased in concentration, and a smile playing at her lips.

Sama is 47 and has autism, a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave. It took years for Sama's parents to come to terms with her challenges.

It was not until a teacher identified her inability to follow lessons, recognise letters and play with other students that she was diagnosed. She often withdrew and remained isolated. Not much was known about the condition at the time, and her parents held onto the hope that she would be cured.

For 18 years, her mother Ratna Shova Bajracharya (far right) took her to traditional healers, dya majus and ayurvedic hospitals. "I did everything I could, I just wanted to see her live like everyone else, happy," says Ratna Shova.

Upon learning there was no cure from a specialist, Ratna had to adjust their lives to accommodate Sama's needs. This was not easy as sometimes Sama would exhibit aggressive behaviour including self-harm, throwing objects, breaking mirrors



and threatening to jump out the window.

A turning point came in 2005 when Sama met artist Sarita Dangol during an art event for people with autism. Dongol started mentoring Sama and art became a form of therapy, promoting her mental and physical stability.

Seeing the impact art had on her, Sarita along with Sunila Bajracharya co-founded Mikha in 2022 to help empower others like Sama by providing a platform to explore and grow through art.

Mikha has become a source of joy for Sama. She excitedly attends classes with classmates Sabha and Ritu (left) who have been diagnosed with down syndrome. In 2023, Sama participated in the International Disability Dance and Art Festival in Delhi and showcased her artistic and dancing talents.

According to the 2021 Census, there were 4,886 individuals with autism in Nepal, out of 647,744 people surveyed. This is 0.8% of the sample population. In 2019, the Autism Care Nepal Society (ACNS) estimated that some 300,000 children are living with autism in Nepal.

There has been a worrying rise in autism cases among younger Nepalis, partly due to increased awareness and diagnosis. Management and support systems, however, are not keeping pace. 🇳🇵

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2024 жылғы 4 шілде

President Xi Jinping poses for a group photo on July 4 with other leaders attending the 24th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization at the Independence Palace in Astana, Kazakhstan.  
JU PENG / XINHUA

# Xi calls for bolstering SCO unity, co-operation

Belarus formally accepted as member; China takes over rotating presidency. **Xu Wei** reports

President Xi Jinping stressed on July 4 the necessity for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to bolster unity and co-operation, saying that the grouping must safeguard its security baseline, defend the right to development and build up its unity.

In a speech delivered at the 24th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO in Astana, Kazakhstan, the Chinese president said it is critically important for the world that the grouping always stands on the right side of history and upholds justice and fairness.

The SCO formally approved the accession of Belarus to the grouping during the summit, and decided that China will hold the rotating presidency of the 10-member organisation for 2024-25. The other members of the grouping are India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Xi noted that the SCO, which was founded 23 years ago, has seen its family, including observer states and dialogue partners, expand to 26 countries, spanning three continents.

With more partners, the foundation of co-operation is more solid, he said. The organisation must ensure the bot-

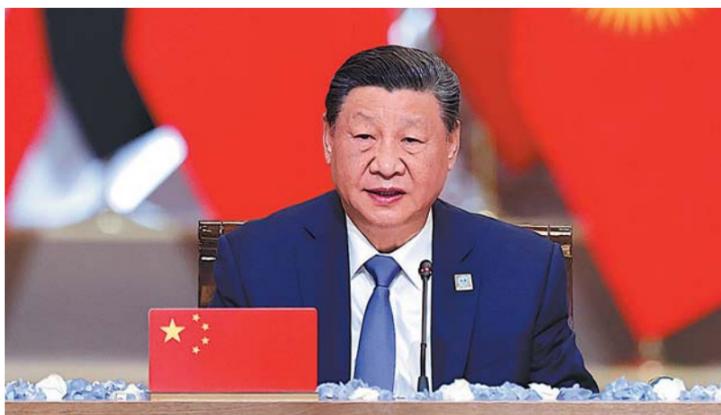
tom line of security “in the face of real threats of the Cold War mentality”, he said, highlighting the need for member states to practice the vision of common, comprehensive, co-operative and sustainable security.

The SCO must address complex and intertwined security challenges through dialogue and co-ordination, respond to the profoundly changing international landscape with a win-win approach, and endeavour to build a world of lasting peace and universal security, he stressed.

Faced with the real risks of the “small yard, high fences” approach, Xi called on member states to safeguard their right to development, saying that joint efforts must be made to advance sci-tech innovation, ensure stable and unimpeded industrial and supply chains, and stimulate regional economic vitality to achieve common development goals.

The Chinese president also appealed for enhanced unity and strength inside the grouping in facing the real challenges of interference and division.

SCO members should jointly resist external interference, firmly support each other, accommodate each other’s concerns, and peacefully resolve internal differences, he said.



President Xi Jinping delivers a speech on July 4 during the 24th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Astana, Kazakhstan.  
FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Xi underlined the importance of peaceful solutions in resolving internal differences, and pooling strength to address difficulties in co-operation, so that the destiny of SCO member nations and regional peace and development can be firmly grasped in their own hands.

The SCO has been able to withstand the tests of changing international

dynamics thanks to its steadfast commitment to the traditions of unity and co-operation, the path of equal and mutually beneficial collaboration, the pursuit of fairness and justice, and a broad-minded embrace of inclusiveness and mutual learning, he pointed out.

Xi reiterated the importance of the SCO remaining true to its original aspiration, upholding the “Shanghai

Spirit”, enhancing mutual support, and building the organisation into a reliable backbone for the common prosperity and revitalisation of its member states.

Addressing the summit, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev noted that the SCO has become an effective mechanism of friendship, good-neighbourliness, equality and mutual support, based on the “Shanghai Spirit”.

“The SCO has established itself as a unique platform, where the interests and arguments of the member states are equally taken into account,” he said.

He highlighted the strengthening of mutual trust and co-operation in security as the priority for the organisation, saying that the SCO has unique capacities to ensure security in the Eurasian region.

Tokayev also identified strengthening transportation network through the creation of efficient corridors and reliable transportation chains as the next direction for co-operation, saying “we place great emphasis on the further development” of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative.

The leaders of the member states also adopted the Astana Declaration and an initiative calling for solidarity among countries to promote world justice, harmony and development.

## Nepal ready to foster closer ties with China: Envoy

By Liu Jianqiao and Yang Ran

China and Nepal are drawing ever closer together, producing numerous opportunities for both to prosper, says Nepal’s Ambassador to China, Bishnu Pukar Shrestha.

The friendship will continue to thrive as they prepare to celebrate the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations next year, Shrestha said.

“China and Nepal have maintained multifaceted relations based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, established 70 years ago. Both have con-

sistently committed to respecting each other’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, while remaining sensitive to each other’s concerns and interests.”

He reiterated Nepal’s commitment to the one-China principle, saying that matters concerning Xizang and Taiwan are China’s internal affairs.

“We give the assurance that we will not allow any anti-China activities on our soil.”

Narayan Kaji Shrestha, deputy prime minister and foreign minister of Nepal, visited China from March 25 to April 1,

when the two sides agreed to reinforce mutual political support, promote collaboration on the Belt and Road Initiative and improve people-to-people links.

“This visit marks another milestone in our bilateral relationship, showcasing tangible and fruitful results for our peoples,” Bishnu Pukar Shrestha said. Following the visit, China and Nepal reopened their traditional border trade points in Xizang autonomous region on May 25.

In recent years China and Nepal have worked more closely together in fields

including science, technology, education, tourism and health, with the Belt and Road Initiative central to building links.

“The BRI serves as an important platform for all countries involved to strengthen trade and commercial exchanges and facilitate technology transfer, which is a high priority for Nepal,” Bishnu Pukar Shrestha said.

The BRI has transformed Nepal from a landlocked country to a land-linked one, attracting investment in roads, railways, aviation and communications within the framework of the Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network.

“The China-Nepal railway project carries huge expectations of the two

peoples,” said Bishnu Pukar Shrestha, who has been ambassador to China since 2022.

“I believe it will help bring excellent Nepali goods such as cashmere fabrics, wood products, handicrafts, and organic alpine agricultural products to China while transferring China’s technological development to Nepal upon its completion.

“China has had unparalleled success in the past 75 years under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. The achievement that stands out in my mind is the ending of absolute poverty, which sets a historic example for the whole of humanity.”

Xinhua contributed to this story.

# Living with elephants, bees and mangoes

Rural folk in Yunnan province learn how to cope with and benefit from their changing surroundings. **Chen Liang** reports

Most of the China's wild Asian elephants, more than 280 of them, are distributed in Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture in the southernmost part of Yunnan province.

Attracted by the abundance of food such as corn and bananas, and growing accustomed to a human presence, these majestic animals often venture into areas inhabited by people.

The increasing proximity between humans and elephants has led to a rise in conflicts, presenting challenges for many communities that previously had little to no experience with elephant activities.

To deal with the conflicts, local governments and conservation organisations have implemented various strategies.

In Xishuangbanna, both the governments of Jinghong city and Mengla county have established the Asian Elephant Safety Warning Monitoring Team.

Teams of elephant watchers use drones to monitor the movements of wild elephants, providing crucial information to local communities and residents.

By offering timely updates on the whereabouts of elephants, the aim is to minimise the risks associated with human-elephant encounters.

Since the International Fund for Animal Welfare China set up its Asian Elephant Protection programme in 2000 it has focused its efforts on helping local communities and residents, said Ma Chenyue, programme manager of IFAW China.

"Local communities and people are at the forefront of human-elephant conflicts. They are experiencing direct pressures from the expansion of wild elephants into their living spaces.

"Their crops are destroyed; their safety is jeopardised while tending to rubber plantations or foraging for mushrooms in the forests; and they actually have made sacrifices in their economic development for the conservation of wild elephants. So we feel obliged to help them find sustainable ways to live harmoniously alongside wild elephants."

In June 2020 IFAW China, in collaboration with the Mengyang Protection Station of Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve and the Rainforest Foundation of Xishuangbanna, a local nonprofit group, the Community Livelihood Development to Promote Asian Elephant Protection project was set up in Daotangqing village of Mengyang township, Jinghong.

This community, comprising 34 households and 150 residents of the Yi ethnic group, had relocated from the core area of the national nature reserve



A group of Asian elephants forage for food at a rice field in Jiangcheng county, Yunnan province, last July. CHEN XINBO / XINHUA



**Top:** Villagers harvest tea leaves in the Konggeliudui community in Jinghong, Yunnan province. **Above:** A villager harvests honey at Daotangqing in Jinghong. PHOTOS BY CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

in the late 1990s to aid in the conservation of Asian elephants, a species under national first-class protection, said Cao Dafan, programme officer of the Asian Elephant Protection programme.

However, following their relocation wild elephants also ventured into the area surrounding the village. Once, in 2022, Cao said, the villagers witnessed a visit of a herd of 22 wild elephants. On May 10, Zhang Jiangmei, a villager, said that an elephant visited a stream near the hamlet in the evening to have a drink and a bath.

Cao said that the primary source of income for villagers is derived from cultivating rubber trees. However, due to a decline in rubber prices over the past few years, their incomes have also fallen.

"So we worked to help the community explore some alternative sources of income to reduce their dependency on rubber trees."

At first Cao and his colleagues decided to promote beekeeping in the village. "Beekeeping is eco-friendly, good for crop cultivation and easy for villagers to learn and master," he said.

In 2020 the project invested 75,000 yuan (\$10,600) to buy 100 hives of the Chinese bee and an additional 100 empty beehives and distributed them to 10 families in Daotangqing.

In addition to providing training on beekeeping techniques, Cao and his team helped the beekeepers establish management rules.

One of these rules includes prohibit-

ing the introduction of wild swarms of bees into the hives, Cao said. It helps maintain the health and productivity of the bee colonies, he said.

Between 2020 and last year, he said, beekeeping generated income of about 200,000 yuan for the participants in the project.

However, there was an unexpected setback.

Between September and October last year bee numbers in Daotangqing fell significantly, with half of the bees perishing, Cao said. The villagers soon found the cause: a species of hornet that was being cultivated in a nearby village attacked the Chinese bees at Daotangqing, feeding on their pupa.

"In Xishuangbanna, hornet pupa is considered a delicacy," Cao said. "So some people have cultivated the aggressive species to meet market demand."

After negotiations between the two communities, the hornet cultivators agreed to cease their practice. Because of what happened, Cao said, the number of bees at Daotangqing needs time to be restored.

In addition to beekeeping, the international NGO also introduced the cultivation of cash crops such as mangoes and macadamia nuts to villagers.

In 2021, Cao said, villagers cleared more than 15 hectares of rubber trees surrounding the village because of the plummeting price of rubber.

"So we grabbed the opportunity to recommend planting mango and

macadamia nut trees to them."

Cao and his team invited agricultural experts from the Yunnan Institute of Tropical Crops in Jinghong to Daotangqing and trained villagers on how to manage their orchards.

Nineteen families took part in the project, he said, employing sustainable management practices to reduce pesticide and fertilizer use, management costs, and raise ground cover vegetation. "The experts told us that the undergrowth in their orchards can be good for the growth of fruit trees, and they also showed us how to accurately use pesticide and fertilizer," Zhang said.

Through environmentally friendly management and planting practices, it is forecast that carbon dioxide emissions can be cut by as much as 1,256 metric tonnes over 15 years, with annual reduction of up to 84 tonnes, Cao said.

"Mango cultivation started to yield profits for the villagers last year, and the nuts will start generating profits this year. In the long term we hope that rubber plantations can be replaced with ecologically friendly, carbon-efficient crops, and the overall quality of the local ecosystem can be enhanced."

Moreover, IFAW China provided assistance to a family of six by installing a 16-kilowatt photovoltaic panel system in their courtyard.

"In 2021 we aimed to initiate a pilot project to increase the use of clean energy in local residents' daily lives," Cao said.

Following a field survey, it was found that the 130-square-metre courtyard of one villager and his family was sufficient for installing a system comprising 30 photovoltaic panels.

The villager, a patrolman for the nature reserve for many years, was happy to try something new.

So Cao's project allocated 80,000 yuan for the construction of the system in July 2021, which started generating electricity in April 2022. Once the system fulfilled the family's daily electricity needs, any surplus electricity can be transferred back into the local grid.

From April 2022 to November last year, the photovoltaic system produced revenue of more than 8,000 yuan, Cao said.

"The family kept half the revenue, and the other half was given to the village for community development."

In December, IFAW China, the protection station and the rainforest foundation expanded their project to the Konggeliudui community in Jinghong.

"So our project is set to combine beekeeping with empowering residents, enhancing their skills and income while reducing their forest activities to minimise human-elephant conflicts," Cao said.

## Scientists unravel mysteries of the wandering Tibetan antelope

By Yan Dongjie

Few people in the world possess the specialist expertise of Wu Xiaomin, who over the past 10 years has travelled to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau many times, gradually unravelling the mystery of Tibetan antelope migration.

The animal is listed as first-class protected wild animal in China and was classified as near threatened in the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species in 2016. Excessive hunting, human activity and habitat changes have posed threats to the birthing and migration of Tibetan antelopes, and their numbers had rapidly declined, something that over the past few years has changed.

As a result of conservation measures implemented for Tibetan antelope habitats, their number has steadily increased, Wu said, and by last year there were more than 300,000 Tibetan antelope in China, 200,000 of them in the Changtang area.

On the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the area where Tibetan antelopes live spans 1,600 kilometres from east to west, and seasonal migration is an important reproductive characteristic. The migration of Tibetan antelopes is one of the world's most spectacular migrations among hoofed animals.

The natural environment in the uninhabited areas of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, an average altitude of 4,500 metres above sea level, is complex and hard to access for humans, making the migration patterns of Tibetan antelope a long-standing mystery in zoological research.

In 2003 Wu's team conducted scientific research into the unique wildlife on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, especially monitoring the activity patterns of wildlife when the Qinghai-Xizang Railway was being built. Over the past 20 years it has gained a clearer understanding of the migration routes of Tibetan antelopes by using traditional tracking and

monitoring methods, as well as the latest technology, including satellite navigation, solar-powered aerial surveying and intelligent camera systems.

"These new technologies, and the infrared cameras we have used for the past 10 years, have enabled us to build an integrated monitoring system covering the activity of wildlife, mainly Tibetan antelopes, in the Changtang Nature Reserve, spanning 298,000 square kilometres," Wu said. In the future it will be possible to directly upload this monitoring data to the cloud, allowing researchers to remotely share on-site data.

"This provides great convenience for domestic and international experts and animal enthusiasts to understand and research Tibetan antelopes," Wu said.

Observations indicate that female Tibetan antelopes exhibit seasonal reproductive migration behaviour. Mating occurs from mid-November to mid-December, and birth occurs from

mid-June to early July the following year.

In the Changtang region, female Tibetan antelope gradually gather and migrate to the summer birthing areas in June. After giving birth, the females return in early July and then go back to their wintering habitats in August.

Tibetan antelope in the western Changtang region mostly gather at the southern foot of the Kunlun Mountains, and some even cross them to give birth in the Altun Mountains in Xinjiang. Those in the eastern region migrate northward towards Hoh Xil, while those in the southern region migrate short distances to secluded river valleys to wait for birthing.

"Tibetan antelope need to spend three-quarters of the year in their wintering areas, which are mostly grasslands or river and lake beaches that are close to water sources, have high vegetation coverage, abundant edible plants, and are warm and humid," Wu said.

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# Trade zones give firms huge lift with pioneering initiatives

Trailblazing Hainan port among nation's models of high-quality growth. **Xu Wei, Zhao Ruixue and Chen Bowen** report

In 2018, Zeeshan Qasim Khan, a Pakistani student who had just graduated from Hainan Medical University, was planning to start an international trade venture in Guangdong province, China's leading economic powerhouse.

Khan's initial plans, which focused on importing Pakistani rice, carpets and handicrafts to China, and exporting Chinese electronics, medical equipment and marbles to global markets, changed course following a pivotal announcement by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

During the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of Hainan province and the Hainan Special Economic Zone in April 2018, Xi unveiled ambitious plans to transform the entire island into a pilot free trade zone and eventually establish a free trade port with unique Chinese characteristics.

This announcement convinced Khan that he should remain in Hainan and capitalise on the emerging opportunities.

Six years later, the decision was fully vindicated, Khan said, highlighting the preferential corporate and individual income tax policies as primary advantages of the Hainan Free Trade Port.

"The tax benefits are substantial, and we get more benefits in our businesses," Khan noted, referring to the 15% corporate income tax rate for enterprises in encouraged industries within the FTP, which is significantly lower than the usual 20% to 25%.

Khan's company, located in the Haikou Fulling Internet Industrial Park, is among the numerous foreign businesses that have benefited from China's growing openness to the global market and from sound supply and industrial chains, as the nation develops a network of free trade zones.

In September 2013, China launched its first FTZ in Shanghai, marking a significant milestone in the country's reform and opening-up.

The Shanghai FTZ introduced the first negative list for foreign investment, which was a radical departure from the previous method of listing sectors where foreign investment was encouraged. A negative list indicates the areas in which investment is prohibited or restricted; all other areas are presumed to be open.

President Xi, who has been at the helm of these reforms, emphasised the importance of FTZs in driving the nation's economic agenda.

"On this new journey, we must build higher-level free trade zones based on a comprehensive summary of the past decade's experience," he said in an instruction in September, urging continued innovation and exploration in broader and deeper areas.

During the annual session of the National People's Congress, the nation's top legislature, in 2014, Xi stressed the need for FTZs to align with international investment and trade rules, enhance the institutional system and regulatory model, and balance market-driven resource allocation with effective government intervention.

He called for boldness and innovation, aiming to develop replicable and scalable new systems to facilitate investment and trade, ensure efficient regulation and establish a standardised legal environment.



A bird's eye view of the Xinhai roll-on/roll-off passenger terminal in Haikou, Hainan province. GUO CHENG / XINHUA



Shoppers buy cosmetics at a duty-free shop in Haikou in May. LUO YUNFEI / XINHUA

**“The achievements of the past decade in the pilot FTZs prove that these zones have become pioneering forces of high-level openness, trailblazers of deep-seated reforms, models of high-quality development, and important platforms for serving national strategies.”**

**Gu Xueming,**  
President of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation

China has so far established 22 FTZs, which contributed to about 18.4% of the nation's total import and export volume in 2023. The Hainan Free Trade Port has introduced over 120 innovative policies to date.

Some analysts underlined Xi's vision for the FTZs, which served as a springboard for bold experimentation and systemic reform.

Gu Xueming, president of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, wrote in a co-authored report in November, "The achievements of the past decade in the pilot FTZs prove that these zones have become pioneering forces of high-level openness, trailblazers of deep-seated reforms, models of high-quality devel-

opment, and important platforms for serving national strategies."

He explained that the FTZs in China have come up with pioneering initiatives making them bold leaders in the country's reform and opening-up, including the implementation of negative lists for market entry and cross-border trade in services.

The FTZs were also home to China's first wholly foreign-owned public fund management company and its first wholly foreign-owned automobile manufacturing enterprise.

In the realm of deepening reforms, China's FTZs have consistently embraced bold experimentation and innovation, achieving significant breakthroughs in trade, investment, finance and government functions, he said.

In Shandong province, the establishment of an FTZ has significantly spurred the inflow of foreign investment and boosted efforts to improve the business environment.

Cui Linxian, an executive with SITC International Holdings Co, a shipping logistics company in Hong Kong, highlighted the alignment of the zone's innovative spirit with the company's entrepreneurial ethos.

The robust port infrastructure in Qingdao, the second-largest foreign trade port in China, provides an ideal environment for business growth, he said.

He added that the Shandong FTZ aims to establish a world-class business environment, which has underpinned the company's efforts to enhance its core competitive edge.

"The authorities in the FTZ have continually simplified procedures and improved efficiency, adhering to

a proactive service approach that shortens the path for enterprises to conduct their business," Cui said.

"By focusing on the needs of businesses as both the starting point and ultimate goal, multiple departments have collaborated to promote the integration of services into a unified one-stop."

Khan, the Pakistani businessman, also praised the introduction of favourable policies and one-stop services designed to attract and support foreigners living and working in Hainan, particularly those eager to engage in business activities despite language barriers.

"These measures simplify crucial processes such as work permits, visas and residency requirements, enhancing overall convenience and efficiency."

Khan said he believes that, as one of the world's largest free trade ports, the Hainan FTP will attract more young talent to the island province, promoting local economic and trade development.

He has shared information about the preferential policies and vast opportunities in the Hainan FTP with friends in Pakistan and other countries, many of whom are considering relocating to Hainan to work and invest.

Wang Ying, a researcher at the University of International Business and Economics' Academy of China Open Economy Studies in Beijing, underscored the importance of the FTZ strategy in China's high-level opening-up agenda going forward.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said in his report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC in October 2022 that the nation will work faster to develop the Hainan Free Trade Port, upgrade pilot FTZs, and expand the globally oriented network of high-standard free trade areas.

Wang said the nation's FTZs will take on an even greater historical mission by co-ordinating deep reforms and high-level openness. "The focus of FTZs should be on exploring deeper and broader reforms in key areas such as trade, investment, finance and cross-border data flows," she said.

By expanding the scope and depth of pioneering reforms, the FTZs will enrich the application of free trade policies and amplify their benefits, Wang added.

## GDP forecast for country revised up

By Ouyang Shijiang and Liu Zhihua

Foreign institutions have raised their forecasts for China's economic growth this year amid its better-than-expected first-quarter performance, strong policy stimulus and resilience in exports.

Barclays recently revised its China GDP forecast from 4.4% to 5%, and the World Bank changed its forecast from 4.5% to 4.8%.

China is on track for a steady economic rebound and is poised to meet its preset annual growth target of about 5%, experts said.

As the broader economy continues to face pressures from lackluster demand and mounting external uncertainties, they called for stepped-up fiscal support to boost domestic demand. Deepening reform further is imperative in dealing with some structural issues, they said.

Zhang Xiaoyan, associate dean of the PBC School of Finance at Tsinghua University in Beijing, said the country's annual GDP target of about 5% is highly achievable.

The country still has huge growth potential and favourable conditions, given its huge domestic market, a complete industrial system and abundant talent, Zhang said.

"We're slowly coming out of the negative shock (of the pandemic), and the economy is slowly recovering."

Technological innovations, such as artificial intelligence, and green industries will serve as new growth drivers, Zhang said.

Yao Yang, director of the China Center for Economic Research at Peking University, said the annual growth target of about 5% is feasible.

"The Chinese government needs to take a bigger step to boost demand," he said, suggesting an increase in government spending.

China has already announced measures to boost demand, including issuing 1 trillion yuan (\$138 billion) worth of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds this year as well as driving large-scale equipment renewal and trade-in deals for consumer goods.

Late last month the National Development and Reform Commission and four central departments jointly published a document setting out measures to promote new consumption in areas such as tourism, motor vehicles and electronics.

Daniel Zipsper, senior partner with the management consultancy McKinsey & Co, said China's consumption market "has seen a moderate recovery so far, and we anticipate this trend to continue".

Zipsper, who is also head of McKinsey's consumer and retail practice in Asia, said China's growth over the past 20 years has come from the rise of the middle-income group, and "there is still substantial potential ... for more urbanisation, more income increases". He expressed confidence regarding the country's long-term prospects, saying the rise of the middle-income group will continue to drive consumption.

Experts said China is on the right track in dealing with its real estate troubles, with policy easing measures recently announced for the industry. They expect to see more forceful efforts to digest housing inventories and further deepening of reform to tackle issues hindering the economy's healthy growth, they said.

Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley, said China's policies are moving in the right direction.

"Nominal growth is likely to remain steady in 2024 and improve modestly in 2025."

A housing buyback initiative, if implemented smoothly, could improve developers' liquidity for housing completion and also effectively increase public housing provision, Xing said.

Zhou Lanxu contributed to the story.



A 20-metre-long embroidered scroll painting at Lhamo Yudron's workshop.

Lhamo Yudron's Tibetan embroidery workshop looks as if it is wrapped by a tapestry of polychromatic paintings. Items are neatly arranged on the walls and feature elements like Tibetan mastiffs, antelopes, girls carrying water on their backs, as well as the eight auspicious symbols of Tibetan Buddhism, including the conch shell, the treasure vase and the golden fish.

Tibetan embroidery originated in the 9th century and is regarded as one of the three major arts of Tibetan Buddhism, alongside *thangka* painting and pile needlework (fabrics being trimmed, pasted and sewn back together to deliver a deep visual impact). Tibetan embroidery is also one of the most distinctive traditional embroidery styles among China's ethnic cultures, known for its vibrant colours, smooth lines, lifelike characters and exquisite craftsmanship.

It features *dieceng* stitching, the layered technique that involves patterns upon patterns to create a three-dimensional effect. The stitching gives the embroidery depth and texture.

Lhamo Yudron was born into a family of embroiderers in the Hainan Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Qinghai province, and from a young age, she was exposed to Tibetan artistic techniques simply by being around her elders.

"Almost all Tibetan women know how to embroider, and the tradition is mainly passed down within families," she said. "In the past, Tibetan embroidery only appeared on the clothes and braided hairbands worn by women."

Her childhood pursuit turned into a passion after she saw embroidery from across the country at the Sichuan Museum in Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan province.

"It blew my mind and led me to realise that embroidery can be really exquisite," she said, adding that the experience



Tibetan embroiderer Lhamo Yudron checks a traditional embroidered hair braid accessory for Tibetan women at her workshop in Shagou township, Hainan Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Qinghai province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Embroidery shows vibrant Tibetan techniques

The ancient craft deeply rooted in culture is now being given modern appeal.

Yang Feiyue reports

inspired her to carry on the heritage of Tibetan embroidery in her hometown on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

In 2006, Lhamo Yudron started working at a Tibetan embroidery company her father had founded, and began to research ways of innovating traditional techniques to appeal to more people outside the plateau.

"Good Tibetan embroidery should not only meet the aesthetic preferences of modern people, but also integrate our traditional skills and ethnic culture in a way that delivers better expression," she said.

However, she found that most local crafts were passed down by the older generation. Driven by an ambition to carve out a new path for the art, she



Lhamo Yudron explains to guests the 260-metre-long King Gesar work.

woke up at 4 am every day to study embroidery theory, and spent a great deal of time digging into books at libraries. With the help of the local government and senior embroiderers, she participated in training and cultural exchange activities and in the process, her mindset gradually opened up.

"After learning about sewing techniques and colour matching elsewhere, I increasingly understood what the outside world wants," she said.

She came to better appreciate the characteristics of Tibetan embroidery and techniques after looking into the four famous Chinese embroidery styles, namely Su embroidery (with *su* as abbreviation for Jiangsu province, and Suzhou specifically), Xiang embroi-



Lhamo Yudron offers guidance to local villagers on how to make Tibetan embroidery at her workshop.

dery (Hunan province), Yue embroidery (Guangdong province), and Shu embroidery (Sichuan province).

"To put it simply, we needed to add some dimension to it, and vivid colours, and to highlight the layered stitching," she said. "When innovating, we must follow our own feelings and tell our own cultural stories."

In 2009, Lhamo Yudron set up an embroidery company in her hometown and transferred the patterns from Tibetan costumes onto canvas, showcasing natural landscapes and wildlife through the art, enriching its forms of expression.

In 2011, some of her works were added to the collection of the Hainan prefecture museum.

Born of the belief that she needed to produce something that would create a brand for Tibetan embroidery, Lhamo Yudron has been working with her father since 2018 on a massive piece that is a metre wide and approximately 260 metres in length featuring the legendary ancient hero, King Gesar.

To guarantee the quality of the artwork, she and her father hired domestic experts and scholars to offer guidance to the painters, helping them draw over 200 sketches, before contracting 50 embroiderers to participate in the project.

The piece's dimensions make it a challenge and so Lhamo Yudron and her team developed a seamless embedding technique and came up with a way to upgrade the embroidery racks. "We have already embroidered more than 200 metres, and hopefully we can finish it by the end of this year," she said.

Today, her products have made their way to Beijing, and Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, and products such as embroidered Tibetan sachets and pendants have become popular at local tourism markets.

## For ancient caves, 21st century technology acts like a time tunnel

By Fang Aiqing

Gaming technology is beginning to play an ever bigger role in popularising ancient culture. The latest examples of this are English and French versions of a Digital Library Cave that enable users to go on a virtual tour of the celebrated Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Gansu province.

The two versions, available on the Digital Dunhuang website since April 8, save users the long and arduous journey to the grottoes and enable them to see with their own eyes the rise and fall of the Library Cave that spanned more than a millennium.

The Library Cave, or Cave 17, is a wonder not only because of the precious ancient documents found inside it, but also because of the mysteries that were shrouded in it for almost 1,000 years and the twists and turns it went through after being accidentally discovered by the Taoist priest Wang Yuanlu in 1900.

The once sand-buried treasure trove of more than 60,000 Buddhist manuscripts, government and socioeconomic documents, silk paintings, embroidery and sacred articles is among the most important archaeological discoveries of the 20th century.

By playing the role of a time-travelling explorer, users of the new programmes get to experience 1,000 years of history, from the time when the caves were built in the mid-ninth century to when they were sealed and rediscovered. They can also experience how the relics were lost



or scattered, many now kept overseas.

In a project undertaken by the Dunhuang Academy and the technology company Tencent, the Digital Library Cave has reproduced, with millimetre-level accuracy, the external cliff face of the Mogao Caves, its 16th and 17th caves, as well as the murals, statues and relics within.

It applies three-dimensional laser scanning, modelling and reconstruction technologies, as well as technology and visual styles frequently used in digital games, such as physically based rendering and global dynamic lighting.

Users can interact with eight real historical figures appearing as non-player characters and can zoom in on 21 documents discovered in the Library Cave in a 3D exhibition hall.

Tencent says that in the week after the Digital Library Cave was unveiled

in April last year, 14 million users visited it via the WeChat mini-programme Cloud Museum of Dunhuang Caves.

In September the project won the Star of Outstanding title at the Global Awards for World Heritage Education Innovative Cases, organised by the World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO.

Xue Xiaoli, product designer of the Digital Library Cave, said the project's global editions aim to provide scholars of Dunhuang studies and aficionados of Dunhuang culture worldwide with alternative digital access to the artefacts found in the Library Cave.

The programme tells Dunhuang's history in a direct, vivid and immersive way to audiences with many different cultural backgrounds and of all ages, Xue said.



From left: In the Digital Library Cave programme, users can interact with eight non-player characters, all based on real historical figures. Snapshots of the English version of the gamelike Digital Library Cave programme. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

programme is a great way to learn. She would be intrigued to have such technology for museums and cultures to get to know what is inside the many pyramids in her home country, she said, including the Kukulcan Pyramid in the city of Chichen Itza that is well-protected but inaccessible.

She tested the interactive programme for a video by YChina, or Foreigner Research Institute, which looks at how non-Chinese understand and appreciate Chinese culture, entertainment and technology through short videos.

Su Bomin, director of the Dunhuang Academy, said that the Digital Library Cave reunites, reshapes and re-presents unearthed cultural relics at home and abroad and brings them to life in a fresh way. This opens up a new model for presenting traditional culture, he said.

The academy has been digitalising the frescoes, murals and painted sculptures for more than 30 years, and has done a lot to promote the culture worldwide in recent years, he said.

"We're adapting to the way people are obtaining information as a result of internet technologies, such as increased time spent on phones."

With programmes such as the Digital Library Cave, or other virtual tours and multimedia products, as well as a database featuring Dunhuang's arts and literature, the popularisation of Dunhuang culture is progressing well, he said.

Diego Monteiro, senior lecturer of computer science at the Ecole Supérieure d'Informatique, Electronique, Automatique in Paris, said: "Gaming technology is now extending into many more fields. As technology continues to evolve, the increasingly refined audiovisual effects, more immersive storytelling experiences and convenience across multiple platforms and devices are progressively altering how people perceive the world."

The Digital Library Cave, an application of gaming technology for cultural promotion, showcases these capabilities at an impressive level, allowing more people to appreciate Chinese culture, he said. Monteiro said he is looking forward to seeing more such works that will enable people everywhere to experience the allure of each other's cultures.

A young historian from Mexico who gave her name as Diana said the pro-