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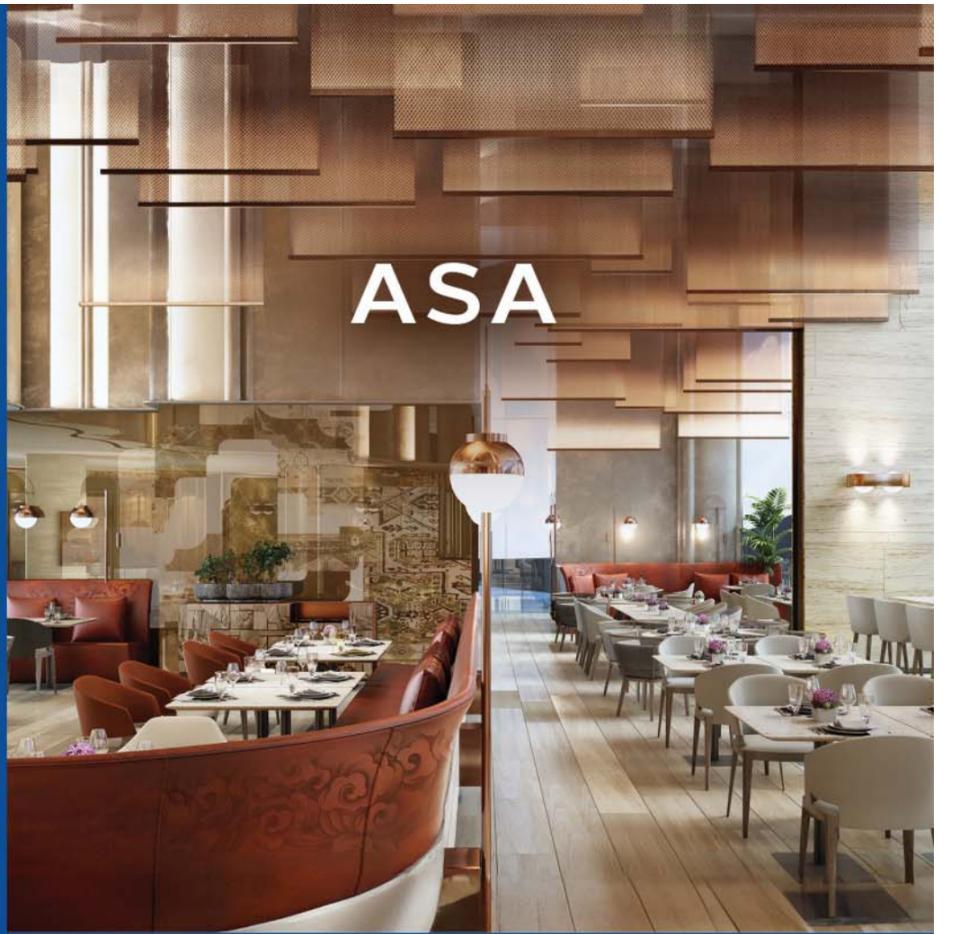
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DEMOCRACY'S SIDEKICKS



■ Shristi Karki

KP Oli and his coalition partner Sher Bahadur Deuba have been prime ministers of Nepal a total of nine times between them. This gives them the joint responsibility of allaying widespread public perception that it is time to pass on the baton.

The fact that Nepal's two biggest parties, the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), are in government together has made some hopeful that this coalition will be more stable.

However, the two have their work cut out to a) prove that it is indeed a more stable partnership, and b) that it will govern better. The sole criteria on which this government and its leaders will be judged before the next election will be if it improves the economy.

During his address to Parliament before his floor test last week, Prime Minister Oli acknowledged that the Nepali people were "in deep despair" about the current direction of the country's politics and economy.

"Our politics must ensure development and prosperity, which is impossible without a strong government," Oli said.

However, the circumstances that led to the UML pulling away from its partnership with the Maoist Centre was in part propelled by the two biggest parties trying to thwart investigations of their top leaders in

two scandals.

That, and the lack of inclusiveness in the new cabinet populated by tainted public figures hints that it is going to be pretty much business as usual. There are only two women in the Council of Ministers, and no ministers from the Dalit community.

If the NC-UML leaders wanted to show that amending the Constitution (the coalition's major agenda) would strengthen inclusion in government, they are not off to a very good start.

The Cabinet's decision this week to override the Nepal Electricity Authority and resume power supply to industries that had not paid their dues just proved everyone's worst suspicions.

Oli's Cabinet must heed his own words in Parliament that his government would discontinue the culture of leaving development half-finished, and not dismantle some meaningful work done by previous governments.

And even as Deuba places his trust in Oli for the time being, not everyone within the coalition partnership is in the mood to coddle Oli. Leaders of the rival faction within the Nepali Congress which includes NC General Secretaries Gagan Thapa and Shekhar Koirala have made it clear to Oli that their votes of confidence given to Oli does not mean carte blanche support.

But because of its size and influence, this coalition has more responsibility and reason to be stable and deliver the goods in the next three years before elections.

If the biggest two parties coming together cannot successfully address the country's stagnant economy, kickstart development and create jobs and address widespread public disillusionment and apathy, voters are going to turn to untested populist leaders in 2027.

The Maoists and the RSP are now in the opposition and licking their wounds, and their check and balance role in questioning the NC-UML establishment will be crucial for a functioning democracy in the coming months.

But while a main opposition party with a strong presence is supported by its numbers in Parliament, that is not the case now. The Maoists and the RSP, which are the third and fourth largest parties, together do not have the numbers equal to either the NC or UML in Parliament. Furthermore, both the Maoists and RSP have internal problems of tarnished leadership and disunity.

Maoist chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal must now address discontent within his own party and answer criticism about handling things better with the NC to prevent the UML 'coup' last month. He must also analyse what his ouster

means for his party's diminishing popularity at the polls.

Meanwhile, the RSP's reputation, popularity and support which have taken a major hit, mainly because of party leader and former Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane being embroiled in multiple scandals, is now at the centre of another allegation of corruption and abuse of authority.

The RSP's Deputy Speaker Indira Rana Magar is facing calls to resign after a letter she allegedly wrote to the US embassy to expedite visa dates for herself and five others earlier this year. Visa-related correspondence for members of the House is usually handled by the Parliament Secretariat, but this instance involved five people who are not MPs and Rana Magar is facing allegations of trafficking.

The RSP was quick to call the letter being made public an attempt by the new governing coalition to tarnish the reputation of the Deputy Speaker and the party. But even though her party is backing her for now, Rana Magar's changing statements have not helped.

The RSP's unique selling point to the public is that it is not like the old parties, and given to old practices of corruption and nepotism. Now, the question being asked is: how are the RSP and its leaders any different?

Perhaps it is too early to write the new coalition off, but the signs so far are not encouraging. 🇳🇵

Managing the monsoon
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



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Managing the monsoon

Our ancestors knew how to manage monsoons: they did not settle permanently along river banks, infrastructure was built above the high water mark, and in the plains farmers did not fear floods but learnt to benefit from the nutrient-rich silt that they brought down.



GUEST EDITORIAL
Ngamindra Dahal

Monsoons were not a time for disaster, but a time to adapt. It was and is a natural process that makes agricultural surplus possible, revives the hydrological cycle, and allows forests to regenerate.

Today, cities have expanded and encroached into flood plains, wetlands that absorbed excess water are built over, natural drainage of rivers are blocked by highway embankments, levees meant to protect settlements make floods worse, haphazard road construction in the mountains have destabilised slopes.

What the media calls a 'natural disaster' is actually human induced. The mudslide on the Mugling highway this month that swept away two buses with more than 60 people was partly caused by a road higher up the mountain that had disturbed the slope and deposited loose debris in the catchment area. Like most monsoon 'disasters', this was not an 'accident' but manslaughter.

The seeds of monsoon disasters are laid in the eight dry months that precede the rainy season. But the media waits till the calamities hit to make it to the news lineup. Poor engineering, bad planning and corruption in construction contracts that cause them are rarely 'breaking news'.

Actually, the monsoon is a boon not a bane. Springs that had gone dry flow again, undergrowth destroyed by wildfires have a chance to grow back, plants and animals rejoice with every drop of rain, it is the time to grow food to last the whole year.

Nepal's festivals revolve around rain, the anticipation of the monsoon, and celebration of its bounty. The monsoon has always enriched the South Asian civilisation with 80 days during which 80% of the annual rain falls.

The media is complicit in helping government agencies blame nature for the destruction during the monsoon. They deliberately dub the monsoon a 'season of disasters'. As if government neglect, inaction, poor planning and inadequate preparation were not factors at all.

Extreme weather due to climate breakdown has made landslides, floods, cloudbursts and blizzards more frequent. And that has added another convenient layer

of blame for manmade disasters that are supposedly beyond our control. The risk from monsoon calamities can be reduced since all man made problems have manmade solutions.

As argued in this paper last week, 'Rivers be dammed', the solution lies in balancing four months of plentiful water with eight months of scarcity. The climate crisis can be averted by ensuring adequate and more equitable supply of water to all Nepalis.

Addressing monsoon or climate-induced disasters in the Himalayan watershed is neither simple nor straightforward. It is a dynamic and evolving challenge that requires sustained efforts and investments over decades. Wrong solutions can be even deadlier for mountain peoples.

Maladaptation and maldevelopment due to poor and unaccountable governance underscores the importance of holistic and integrated approaches. Maladaptation occurs when

efforts to cope with climate breakdown unintentionally increase vulnerability, while maldevelopment includes infrastructure that reflects development practices that harm the environment and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities.

Both scenarios highlight the need for comprehensive planning that considers the unique socio-economic and environmental contexts of mountain communities.

Effective solutions must be multifaceted, addressing

immediate risks while building long-term resilience. Achieving human development goals in the face of climate breakdown for people of the mountains, valleys and plains requires acknowledging the intricate interplay between various factors and committing to inclusive strategies that balance development with environmental sustainability.

Recently, I conducted an informal social media multi-response survey asking "What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word 'monsoon'?"

The choice of answers were: 1. Season of landslides and floods, 2. Time for intensified agriculture, 3. Time not to travel except in emergencies.

Most ticked answer 1, meaning most see the monsoon as a time of disaster.

In fact it is an annual alarm bell to remind us to take care of our mountains, rivers and plains so they can cope with the rainy season. It is time to ensure proper water management and improved agriculture.

The monsoon keeps getting bad press. We even tell tourists not to come to Nepal during the rainy season when we should be promoting the monsoon as an attraction.

But more than that it is an annual miracle that is not a time of death and destruction, but a season that makes all life possible.

Ngamindra Dahal is a water and climate analyst with the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation.



The seeds of monsoon disasters are laid in the eight dry months that precede the rainy season.

RSS

ONLINE PACKAGES



SKY FALL

Watch video of the Saurya Airlines crash at Kathmandu airport on 24 July and its aftermath that killed 18 of the 19 people on board. The plane rolled over to the right seconds after takeoff from runway 02, and exploded in a fireball in an empty space east of the runway, narrowly missing settlements. Subscribe to Nepali Times YouTube channel for more multimedia content. Read the analysis on page 10-11.



MADE IN NEPAL

An up-and-coming business led by a Japanese entrepreneur is set to put a remote district in eastern Nepal on the world map for its premium natural peanut butter. The company has set up a factory in Khotang District, training impoverished women farmers, providing them with skills and income. Visit nepalitimes.com and watch the full video.

RESERVOIRS

We now have enough scientific and forceful anecdotal evidence to tell us we simply don't know all there is to know of climate change - let alone of its consequences ('Rivers be damned', Pinki Sris Rana, #1221). The modern trend is to move faster than our experience would advise.

Tony Jones

AMBICA SHRESTHA

What a fabulous woman, always dedicated to restoration and preservation, huge loss for Nepal ('Ambica Shrestha', #1221).

Stephanie Huray

■ A fighter, a doer, inspiring and helping many to do better at each step, she was a true guru to many of us, who shall forever cherish her memory, celebrate her life and work towards her vision of making this world a better place.

Neil Pande

■ Hearty tribute to the departed soul and heartfelt condolence to the bereaved family. Her unmatched deeds to Nepali society will always be alive for generations to come.

Samip Shrestha

PHASING OUT LPG

Most rural areas are only just making the transition towards LPG instead of firewood and dung, let alone phasing out the latter ('What is cooking in Nepal besides politics', Sonia Awale, #1220). It's therefore a long time before transition to non fossil fuels can begin.

Fraser Sugden

LADAKH AND NEPAL

It is more than friendship, we always consider Nepalis to be our brothers ('Ladakh's Nepal links', Dirgha Raj Upadhyay, #1220).

Ashok

YAKS

Unfortunately this trend of declining yak population will continue ('When yaks go, so does culture', Tanka Dhakal, #1216). It is the same story all over Nepal, Himalaya and the world. Outmigration is a crisis.

Gyurme Dondrup

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Those were the days

Archival images by photojournalist Bikas Rauniar show the political journey of some of the prominent figures in the current coalition. In their faces we see the passage of time and are also reminded that the more things change, the more they remain the same. Visit nepalitimes.com for the photo story.



Most reached and shared on Facebook

Mustang farmer

by Kunda Dixit
Improving on the knowledge about apple farming that he learnt from his father, Saroj Tulachan, a migrant returnee from Japan uses innovative farming methods to grow apples in his native Tukuhe. Read the profile on our website.



Most popular on X



Ambica Shrestha, 92

by Nepali Times
Heritage champion, exponent of women's empowerment, philanthropist and founder of Dwarika's Hotel, Ambica Shrestha, passed away in hospital last week after a brief illness. Also read a tribute on page 9.



Most commented

Textbook case of bad textbooks

by Chandrakishore
Instead of establishing a narrative that an open border is the ultimate symbol of strong and close ties between countries, Nepali textbooks give it an unhelpful negative connotation, writes Birganj-based media commentator.



Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Heritage champion, exponent of women's empowerment, philanthropist and founder of Dwarika's Hotel, Ambica Shrestha, passed away in hospital on Thursday after a brief illness. She was 92.



Sadhguru @SadhguruJV

Ambica Shrestha - a woman of substance who embraced life with a deep sense of involvement. She will be ever remembered as a leader, a passionate ambassador of Newari culture in Nepal, and a wonderful human being. She will be missed by many, the lives she touched with her love & warmth. Blessings. -Sg



Navita Srikant @NavitaSrikant

#Nepal-#India Deeply saddened by demise of Smt Ambica Shrestha jyu. There are no words when the legends go albeit only in physical existence and not in spirit. Her immense contributions to #Nepal's Hospitality and Tourism Industry and preservation of cultural heritage are...

1,000 WORDS

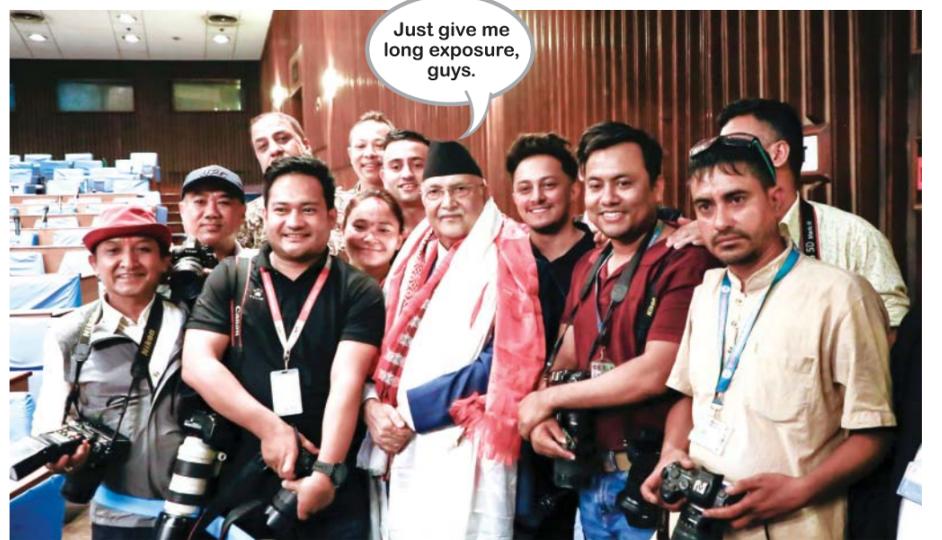


PHOTO OP: Prime Minister K P Oli poses with photojournalists inside Parliament after winning his vote of confidence making him PM for the fourth time on 21 July, Sunday.

KIRAN RAJ BISTA / RSS

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Birganj is the prize

This week we feature two thriving cities in Madhes: Janakpur and Birganj (page 6-7). While Janakpur has established itself as the capital of Madhes Province, Birganj now has a new vibrancy in culture, the arts and cuisine.

Coincidentally, exactly 20 years ago this week we featured Birganj and how its status as the commercial hub of the country made it a target of the Maoists during the peak of the insurgency in the 2000s. Excerpts of the story published in issue #206 23-29 July 2004:

The central Tarai and Birganj used to be known as the least Maoist-affected area of the country. But since the collapse of the ceasefire last August, there has been a dramatic increase in Maoist control in the region. This is not due to the Maoist's own strengths, but rather the vacuum left by the dissolution

Birganj is the prize



of elected local bodies, the pullback of police and the lack of political will to deploy security forces.

The Maoists have now made Birganj their prize. A border town and an affluent trading city, it is not only a safe transit point for Maoists crossing over into India but also an ideal place to extort money from businesses, shops and factories along the Birganj-Simara highway.

The assassination of Birganj's popular mayor Gopal Giri in April was the final proof that the rebels have made the control of Birganj an important priority because this would not only give them access to 'donations' but also controlling Birganj will mean control over what goes in and out of Kathmandu.

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



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Reporters: Pinki Sris Rana, Vishad Raj Onta | Layout: Kiran Maharjan
Publisher: Kunda Dixit, Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: +977 1 5005601-08 Fax: +977 1 5005518



A gallery full of Ganeshes

Exhibitions of paintings from a private collection depicting the elephant god

■ Vishad Raj Onta

The Kalā Salon at the Chhaya Centre in Thamel is now four shows old, and currently is running an exhibition of paintings by South Asian artists of the elephant-headed deity, Ganesh.

Also known as Binayak, Ganesh is worshipped as a remover of obstacles and is honoured before starting new ventures.

Titled 'Hamsadhvani: Depictions of Ganesh', the exhibit showcases paintings from the private collection of the Pratima and Prithvi Pandé family. It is curated by Chakshita R who is also the archivist of the gallery.

"My parents have always supported the arts in Nepal, often sponsoring artists and musicians," says Sophia L Pandé, founding director of The Kalā Salon. The Gallery is continuing this support, sponsoring residencies for two artists a year, one male and one female under the age of 30.

Some of the paintings depict Ganesh traditionally with his official vehicle, the mouse, and laddoos, while others show the God more abstractly.

"The title 'Hamsadhvani,' referring to a serene raga in Hindustani classical music, reflects the many ways in which Ganesha is celebrated and worshipped, across disciplines," writes Chakshita R in her



introduction to the exhibit.

The paintings are in the second, attic-like floor of the gallery, a rectangular space where every painting can be seen from anywhere in the room.

A painting by Daya Ram Palpali shows Ganesh as he may be seen in a temple around Kathmandu: lights are lit, bells are hanging, and the statue is golden and garlanded. The entire picture is in warm colors that make sections of green leaves stand out. Batsa Gopal Vaidya paints a blue Ganesh dancing

on a background of green hills, mountains and a red sky. The tusks and the outlines of the mountains are done in a reflective silver underlay on the paint.

A series of three paintings by Shankar Raj Singh Suwal show Ganesh in a celestial, heavenly form, engulfed in murky clouds. One of the three shows him with blue-skin just like his father, Shiva.

Suwal paints a winged mouse, perhaps pointing out the irony of an elephant-headed God riding around on a rodent.



Then there are two prints by Seema Sharma Shah: of a temple glowing gold and a Ganesh standing up in a reddish-orange lotus with blue bells hanging above him.

"These are very sophisticated to make, and need to be etched out on metal first, and then treated with acid to create places for the paint to go into. Then they are printed layer by layer, blue first, then red, and then black," explains Chakshita R.

S C Suman's work is influenced by Mithila art and his piece looks like a pen drawing on a background

of red, yellow and orange. The outline is then filled in concentrically, and some parts look like fingerprints.

One abstract Ganesh, by Kiran Manandhar (left) looks like it was finished in a hurry. Another in black and white uses stippling to create illusions of light and shadow. Yet another one shows a Ganesh with his usual gadgets and mouse but also with tattoos and posture that makes him look feminine. The mouse is smiling at him from below.

Another Ganesh signed 'Jizza' (far left) features a cartoony, round Ganesh with a peacock feather on his head and ornaments in gold and weapons in silver, apparently a style found in South India.

Going clockwise around the room, the depictions of Ganesh get more and more abstract and humanlike. This culminates in a series of prints by noted Indian painter M F Hussein where the deity is drawn with animals such as an elephant, a bird, a horse and a bull.

The paintings are often in a single primary colour, with Ganesh as a fighter, a dancer and a toddler, just hanging out drinking water, or in a hammock.

"All these paintings were collected by my parents, who never acquired paintings for their name but only if they liked them," says Sophia Pandé about the exhibition. "The Kalā Salon is a non-profit space for artists to see works by Nepali masters collected over the past 40 years, as well as a place to support current Nepali talent." 🇳🇵

Hamsadhvani: Depictions of Ganesh
The Kala Salon
Chhaya Centre, Thamel
11AM-8PM, until 10 August

Deity, devotion, and divine dance

A multimedia art exhibition at the Nepal Art Council brings the story of Krishna to life

In the middle of the first floor of the Rasa Lila exhibition at the Nepal Art Council is a model of Patan's Krishna Temple made of Jenga blocks (far right). Inside the temple is a red holographic Radha, dancing.

The temple here represents Vraja, a realm that lies far away from the universe in the heights of paradise. This mystical place is the setting of the Rasa Lila: a long lyric poem in the 10th book of the Bhagavata Purana that describes Krishna's circular dance of love with his female devotees.

So the choice of material makes sense: Vraja, much like buildings made out of Jenga, is more an impermanent zone where players dance with focus and balance.

Rasa Lila is put together by Priyam Pradhan and team and is made up of various media, including paintings, sculptures, songs, and films.

The exhibit spans two floors of the Bagmati Art Gallery atop the Nepal Art Council in Baber Mahal. The first floor is about the Rasa Lila (Rasa: divine dance, Lila: divine play). The start of the exhibit plays with the story of Shiva being stopped from entering the Rasa Lila, because he is nine feet tall and not a woman. So he takes a dip into the Yamuna River and emerges a beautiful lass ready to take part.

Referring to this story is Gopeshwar Mahadev, a sculpture made out of concrete hands and feet joined by rods of carbon steel. The pre-dip hands are masculine, and the post-dip feet, adorned with ghungroo beads, are feminine.

Next is a river of letters that represents the Yamuna River and contains the initials of the team who worked on the project. Explains Pradhan: "I want visitors to the exhibit to feel like Mahadev, crossing the river into Vraja." A description reads, "The Yamuna is a bridge spanning the celestial and physical realms, and bathing in its waters is the final act after which the Gopis return to everyday life."

Next to this piece are two large wiry



structures of Gopis in dance. They have black metal rod skeletons and wire bodies: one red, and one yellow.

Inside an alcove in the gallery is a five minute film on loop titled 'There is no perfection, only life' made by Urza Acharya. It depicts the life of a Gopi after participating in the Rasa Lila. She is initially struck by depression and lethargy, but slowly finds the motivation to dance and be creative again.

The short movie describes the fleeting nature of transcendental moments of pure creativity, and how most other moments are boring and mundane. Reads the description: "The banality of everyday, in fact, is what fuels those exceptional moments."

While the first floor was about the Rasa Lila, the second floor depicts scenes from the Mahabharata, especially ones where Krishna features heavily. Vastraharan (top, left) is a striking piece of a female figure in

a white dress in the middle of a gambling board. Rectangular dice lie on the board and instead of a head the sculpture has a red light.

The story depicted is from the Mahabharata of a game of chance between the Pandavas and the Kauravas where Duryodhana cheats the Pandavas out of all that they have, to the point where Yudhishtira puts up the Pandavas' wife Draupadi, promptly losing her too.

Duryodhana orders his Kaurava brother to disrobe Draupadi in the court, and although the game has clearly gone too far, nobody in the court, not even Bhishma and Drona, intervene. The clear identical masks represent their shared passivity.

As her sari is being unravelled, Draupadi has no other option but to pray to Krishna, who saves her by extending her sari infinitely. Yet she is still ashamed and angry, represented by the red light.

In the next room is a blue angular metal



sculpture of Krishna waking up on a bed of coins.

"Coins represent Lakshmi, who is present wherever Krishna is," explains Pradhan. "To make the sculpture we first 3-D printed a mould, then laser cut metal sheets and welded them together."

The last piece in the exhibit is a large painting of Krishna's mother Devaki, a divine, pure figure who kept giving birth to divine incarnations even when locked up in a dark murky jail by her brother Kansa.

The exhibition follows a cohesive theme overall and is well timed for the upcoming Krishnashtami festival which this year falls on 27 August. 🇳🇵

Vishad Raj Onta

Rasa Lila
Nepal Art Council
Baber Mahal
10AM-5PM, until 3 August



but it is quaint with 'Yah chhai hamar Janakpur...Janak k gaam Janakpur...Sita k Janakpur...' playing in the background.

Janak has rebranded itself as a cultural hub that transcends Mithila and aims to encompass a new, inclusive Nepal. The local media and social media play an important role in disseminating this identity.

There are six other federal provinces in Nepal, but only Madhes is a broadly ethnic enclave, and Janakpur stands only second to Kathmandu in the national discourse. Part of the reason for this could be Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi making it a point in 2018 to make a special visit to Janakpur.

Janakpur's geopolitical status is now higher and many Kathmandu-based ambassadors make it a point to visit, adding to its reputation and importance. Madhes Province can showcase its development since the first federal elections in 2017 with greater women's empowerment in a traditional patriarchal society.

Government offices now have more women faces, there are more women shopkeepers in the market and banks, female participation in schools and colleges are higher. Some of this could be due to male outmigration, but there is no denying that the women of Madhes now have a stronger voice.

Janakpur has become more liberal in accepting other languages of the province besides Maithali, like Bhojpur, Bajjika, Tharu, Urdu and Nepali. Unlike during the Madhes Movement of 2015, there is a new acceptance and assimilation of other communities.

There is now a proclivity in the public and government to demonstrate inclusion, both in principle and practice. 🇳🇵

TALE 2 CIT

The metamorphosis
and a new cultural p

■ Abhishek

While the rest of Nepal has gone it has opened doors here in Jan Province. Its Mithila culture has global exposure, footfalls have new visible presence of develop

Some of this has come at a which was always the commer Tarai and a gateway to Nepal v Birganj and Janakpur were rival which city would be the capita Birganj also has a new vibrancy cuisine.

Abhishek Jha is a lawyer and researcher from

JANAKPUR

There used to be a time when Janakpur was synonymous with the Janaki Temple, dedicated to the birthplace of Sita. The temple is still a draw, but Janakpur now has a new set of footfalls, and there is a certain order to the chaos of this border city.

As the capital of Madhes Province, there are government agencies, new institutions and a heavy presence of the

development sector. There are now at least a dozen flights to and from Kathmandu every day, propelling the city's socio-cultural dynamic.

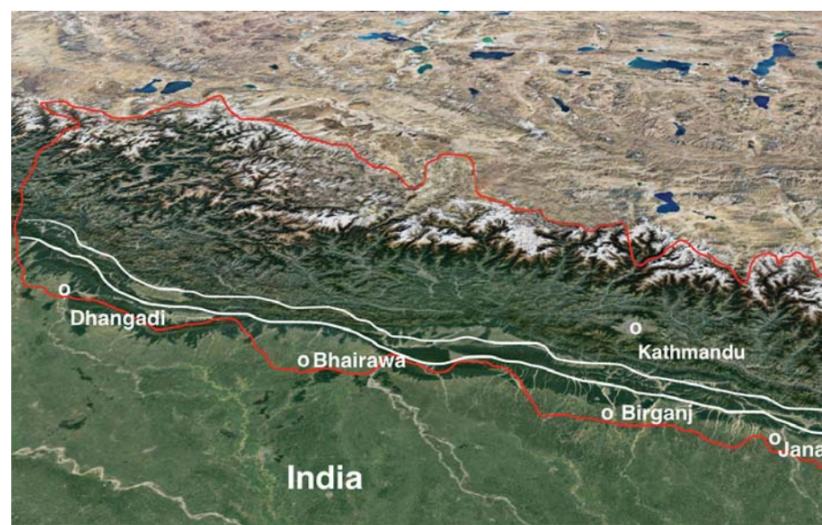
There is a pursuit for 'uniqueness' and at the heart of this is an active effort to make Mithila art more palatable to the pan-Nepali public: with paintings, merchandise, cutlery, apparel, stationery items and other paraphernalia.

A pioneer in this revival are the artists of Janakpur Women's Development Center. The 800 year old Maithali folk-dance form called Jhijhiya has found new platforms and audiences at cultural

events like the annual literature and theatre festivals held here. There is an attempt to make it more contemporary and address progressive issues like gender empowerment.

The Mithila Thali has found fans, largely due to the culinary curation of Master Chef Santosh Shah and his popular new restaurant at Ramananda Chok. A trip to Janakpur nowadays is perceived as incomplete without a stop here.

The choreographed spectacle of offering evening prayers at Gangasagar may not be as impressive as the one in Banaras,



White lines show the width of the Siwalik Range

To save the Tarai, save

Degradation of the most fragile fold of the Himalaya threatens the plains where half of Nepalis live

■ Kamal Maden

I was born and raised near Sanguri Danda in eastern Nepal, and it was only later that I found out that the hills were called the Chure.

And it was still later that I learnt that the Chure is also known as the Siwalik Range, the southernmost and lowest fold in

the Himalaya bordering the Tarai plains — the geologically and ecologically fragile hills made up of uplifted sediments with only a thin layer of topsoil.

I have walked in the Siwalik in eastern Nepal, and have often wondered where the name comes from. And no one else seemed to know either, so I did my own research.

The term Siwalik appears to have been first used in a paper published in 1836 in the 19th Volume of Asiatic Researches, Calcutta with its Latin title, Sivatherium giganteum. The authors asked a holy man in Haridwar the native name for the hills directly to the north, and he replied that it was Shivalaya, Shiva's abode.

The researchers rendered that

as Sewalik, and a component of the sub-Himalaya. Later, the spelling changed to Shivalik, and Siwalik today. The Siwalik ridge forms the Nepal-India border wherever there are Inner Tarai valleys like Chitwan and Dang, but elsewhere is the watershed for cities like Janakpur, Birganj, Biratnagar, Bhairawa, Nepalganj and Dhangadi.

The orogenesis of the Siwalik range is closely tied with the collision of the Indian and Eurasian plates that began more than 50 million years ago. Rivers flowed down to the Tethys Sea separating the two converging landmasses, and as the Himalayan mountains were uplifted, these rivers which later became the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Indus cut passages through them.



ES OF TIES

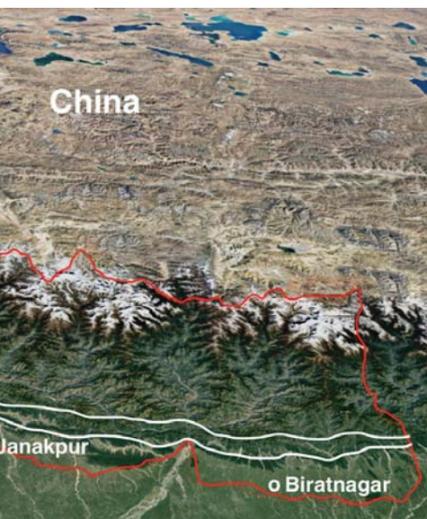
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BIRGANJ

As a commercial hub and the road gateway to Nepal, Birgunj is brash. Its people seem to be in a perpetual hurry to get somewhere, and as a city through which 80% of Nepal's exports and imports pass through, it also has a strategic importance. Proof of that were the many road blockages during the 2015 Madhes Movement here.

Unlike Janakpur, Birgunj seems quite content not to have too much to do with politics. In fact, some of the statues of Bhanubhakta and G P Koirala have been reinstated, along with the Maithili poet Vidyapati.

Along with Bhojpuri, the city is equally fluent in Nepali, Maithili, Nepal Bhasa, Bajjika, Bangla, Punjabi, Marwari and Hindi. Inclusion, it seems, is good for business. But it also means by trying to be everything for everyone, it lacks a cultural identity of its own.

Birgunj is astride the ancient kingdom of Simraungad which one time ruled over Kathmandu Valley before it was razed and pillaged by the Tughlaq ruler of Delhi in 1326. Today it is better known as the 'Land of Astavakra' and 'Gateway to Nepal'. The faux-Newari Sankracharya Pravesh Dwar gate at the border across from Raxaul marks this attempt to straddle both cultures.

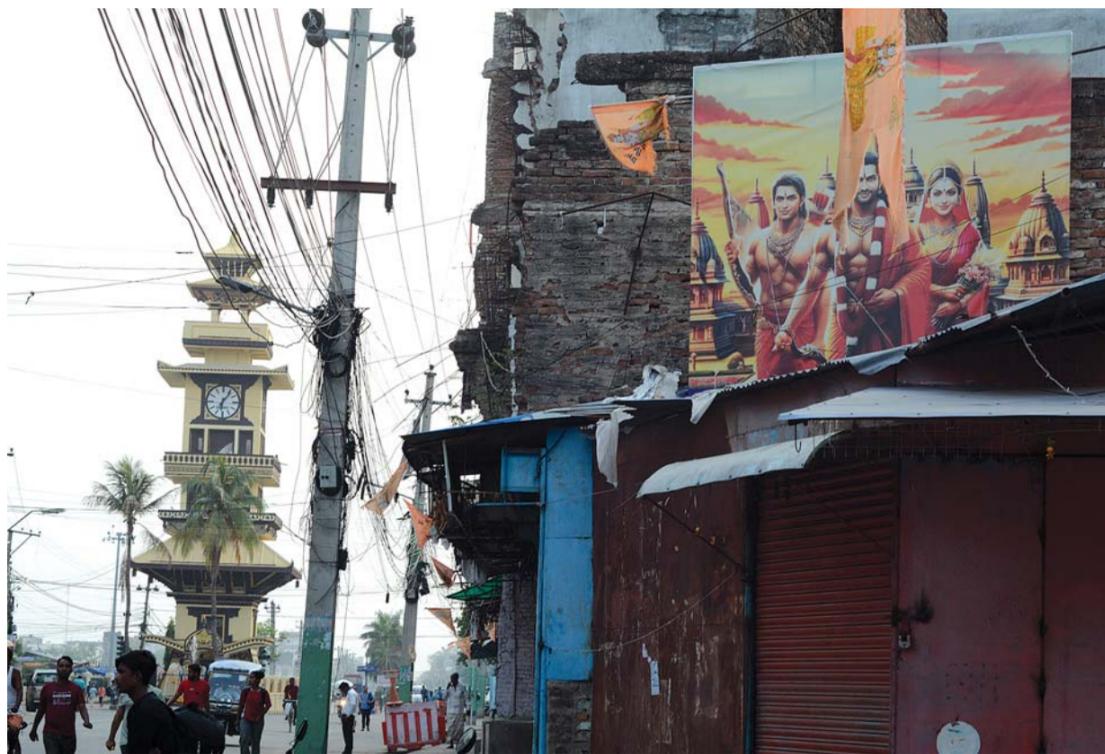
Birgunj was a hub of political dissidence during the Rana regime and late in the pro-democracy movement because of the culture of questioning in public and private discussions.

As befitting a city that serves as a connector and the gateway to the industrial corridor to the north, Birgunj has a new cosmopolitan ambience. The people of Birgunj are now better travelled, and interested in eating out with family and are in search for diverse cuisines.

Although the city has a variety of restaurants, new age cafes, pizza and burger eateries offer a variety in Adarshnagar, Gawaha Mai and Ranighat. Mouth-watering chaats, bhujia-pakora, dahi-chiura, sattus, lassi, kachori-tarkari-jilebi can be found here. Chiya pasal are the public sphere, with vibrant places for socio-political discussions and hangout spots for college goers.

Try the Bhojpuria Thali. Starters (Mahi, bel sarbat, anandichawal bhujia, litti-chokha, pakora), Main Course (Manshuli/basmati bhaat, rahri daal, danauri-tilauri, sukhwat, chokha, tarkari, papad, machhari, dahi, mitha), Desserts (Dudh-puwa, bagiya, haluwa).

The art scene has been made vibrant by the likes of local



ALL PHOTOS: BIKAS RAUNIAR

artists like Azmat Ali and Mukesh Mahato. Bhojpuri art is at a stage where Mithila art was probably five-six years ago. Further there is lack of synchrony in blaring horns, whistles and DJs. There is no single sound to identify with the city.

'Lollipop laagelu' has transcended national boundaries and seeped into Nepali pop-culture. But this has created a limited understanding of Bhojpuri music. A large music space, besides few good attempts, awaits virtuous artists to build a different image of Nepali Bhojpuri Music. The music and art has to struggle and evolve in its ideation, identity and commerce.

The Maha Aarati at Sano Pashupatinath Temple in Pipara tries to do what Janakpur has done

with Gangasagar Arati. Indian Bhojpuri music still dominates over Chaiti, Sohar and Purbi of literary giants like Bhikhari Thakur and Mahendar Misir.

Cities have a persona of their own, they have character, visual traits, distinct taste buds and utility. They get embroiled in symbolism derived from primary activities or major significance it holds. There is also history in Birgunj with Sugauli, where the 1815 treaty with the East India Company was signed, 30km from here.

Today, most people from north India, west and east Nepal have been travelling by train to pass Sugauli station. The route became so prominent that India

constructed the Raxaul Junction adjacent to Birgunj border. On our side, we had Raxaul-Amlekhganj railway, Nepal's first, as early as 1927.

Birgunj was where Nepal's first university, Nepal Rashtriya Vidyapeeth, was established with Ganesh Man Singh as Chancellor and Laxmi Prasad Devkota as Vice-Chancellor at one point. Furthermore, Thakur Ram Multiple Campus in Adarshnagar is a six decade old college and alma mater of many of Nepal's who's who.

Littérateurs like Pandit Deep Narayan Mishra, Gopal Ask, Uma Shankar Dwiwedi, Dinesh Gupta, Mukund Acharya, Purshottam Sharma and Anita Shah are Birgunj's literary torch-bearers. 🇳🇵

ve the Siwalik



There was a lot of volcanic activity due to the subduction of the Indian plate, and remnants of these can be seen in Mt Kailash and other mountains. At different periods after that, the greater Himalaya was uplifted, and the Mahabharat foothills after that.

About 15 million years ago, some Himalayan rivers were blocked by upliftment and the sediments deposited there turned into sandstone, claystone, conglomerate or shale. Then the most recent tectonic activity in the Himalaya uplifted these sediments to form the Chure-Siwalik range.

The Siwalik is only about 120m elevation in the east, but rises to 1,970m in the west, extending parallel to the main Himalayan chain. The Siwalik

ecosystem's services to the plains downstream is vital to the Tarai's rivers and water supply. But the degradation of the Siwalik due to unregulated mining, deforestation, and road construction increases risk of disastrous floods in the Tarai as well as districts downstream in India.

There have been government programs including the Presidential Chure Tarai-Madhes Conservation and Development Board, but these have been inadequate or ineffective in slowing the destruction.

Most of the government's efforts at restoring the Chure ecosystem concerns forestry and not holistic watershed management. There are some 48 rivers that originate in the Siwalik, but most are dry for 9 months in a year and flow only during the monsoon.

The 2021 census records show that 53% of Nepal's population now lives in the Tarai, and the populations of the 21 districts bordering the Siwalik are also rising. This translates into increased deforestation to make way for agriculture or new settlements, and unmanaged road construction.

Women from Saptari district in Madhes Province (pictured) marched 25 days to Kathmandu, and have been demonstrating at Mandala in Kathmandu against the degradation of the Siwalik. They held a rally last week, with slogans like "Give us water", "Stop wildfires".

Bijaya Singh Danuwar, who did a PhD on the Chure watershed, Members of Parliament Pradip Paudel who

is now Health Minister in the new government and Amresh Kumar Singh, former minister Julie Mahato, as well as former minister Prabhu Sah have all raised the destruction of the Siwalik and its impact on the Tarai in Parliament.

There has been scant attention in the media about the rallies, and the federal, provincial and municipal governments are not showing much concern about the wanton destruction.

The provinces and municipalities directly downstream from the Siwalik are the ones which should be most concerned because they will be the ones more directly affected. Or is there just too much vested interest with contractors? 🇳🇵

Kamal Maden is a botanist and biodiversity researcher.

EVENTS

**Railway to Nowhere**

This theatre drama depicts the poignant rebellion led by ordinary citizens that are deemed insane by the state. Don't miss the last chance to watch.

Until 28 July, 4pm (except Monday), 12pm (also on Saturdays), Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun (01) 5245147

Art exhibition

Echoes from the Land of Memories by Nabina Sunuwar blends nostalgia with the reality of changing landscapes. Through woodcut printmaking, the artist brings life to forgotten corners.

Until 28 July, 11am-6pm (Tuesday to Thursday), 11am-7pm (Friday & Sunday), Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat

**Rasa Lila**

Featuring contemporary narratives on the Mahabharata, this exhibition connects the ancient Hindu text to today's modern life (Read review on Page 5).

Until 3 August, 10am-5pm, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal

Yugko Sancho

An adaptation of Roald Dahl's 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' takes some liberty to change Mr Willy Wonka to Ms Moon and the chocolate factory to textile factory.

Until 3 August, 5:30pm (except Tuesdays)/ 1pm (on Saturdays), Ticket: Rs300-Rs 1000, Shilpee Theatre, Battisputali

**Creators मेला 2024**

Designed to sharpen and develop the skills of digital content creators and influencers, this two-day US Embassy event will have 19 interactive workshop sessions. To participate, register at: usembassynepal.events.

26 July (11am onwards) / 27 July (8:30am onwards), Aloft Hotel, Thamel

DINING

**Dhokaima**

Experience the magic of dining in an open garden area. Chicken quesadilla, Nepali eggplant chicken, and club sandwich are a must try. Don't forget their baked goods either.

Patan Dhoka, 9849215624

MUSIC

Sabin Rai and The Pharaoh
Renowned band Sabin Rai and The Pharaoh is joining Lavie Garden's fourth anniversary. You can book your tickets at Khalti app.
26 July, 4pm onwards, Tickets: Rs999, Lavie Garden, Boudha

**Up close with Cobweb**

Don't miss out on this exclusive chance to attend an intimate performance by the band Cobweb.

2 August, 9pm onwards, Ticket: Rs499, Mirage by Escobar, Gairidhara

**Samir Shrestha Live**

A melodious night with Samir Shrestha and Good Boyz gracing the stage with their contemporary pop music.

27 July, 9pm onwards, Ticket:Rs1,000, Club 10x, Thamel

**Girl's Night Out**

Buckle up for an unforgettable night with your girlfriends. Enjoy unlimited happy hour drinks, entertaining live music, and food.

26 July, 6:30pm onwards, Hard Rock Cafe, Durbar Marg, 9801986771

The Melodies and Munchies

A charity event aimed at supporting HIV/AIDS initiatives. Enjoy live music by the band Rockheads Nepal. Also comes with dinner.

26 July, 12pm onwards, Ticket: Rs200-399, Himalayan Whitehouse International College, Putalisadak

**Bricks Café**

A multi cuisine restaurant in the heart of Kathmandu offering flavourful dishes in a pleasant surrounding. Their lasagna is a must-try.

Kupondole (01) 5181156

Fryday's

Frydays' fish and chips are the crispiest and most perfectly seasoned in all of Kathmandu. Their homemade sauces and tartar sauce deserve an award of their own.

Jhamsikhel

GETAWAYS

**Glacier Hotel**

A new favourite of frequent Pokhara visitors, this boutique hotel has boho-inspired spacious rooms, and fantastic in-house restaurant to keep you going back for more.
Lakeside (061) 453164

Atithi Resort & Spa

A quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities. Spend a night or two for a remarkable experience.

Lakeside, Pokhara, 9851160080

**Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge**

Immerse yourself into the local Tharu culture, experience village life, the beauty of the jungle and the diverse wildlife.

Kawasoti, Nawalparasi, 9851030275

Yatri

Treat yourself to a relaxing spa including a full body massage, body scrub, sauna and steam at Yatri Suites and Spa.

Amrit Marg, Thamel, 9818312805

**Milla Guesthouse**

A quaint stay that combines both the old and the new, Milla Guesthouse is the perfect getaway for people who don't want to get way too far from the city.

Bhaktapur, 9851024137

House of Eggs

Have a savoury Amritsari Egg Chole, Potato Egg Rosti or even an Egg Sizzler at this unique egg-themed restaurant

Gahanapokhari (01) 4545330

**Bota Momo**

Thinking about making momo one of these rainy days? Save time and get frozen momo from Bota. Discover your favourite variety of dumplings and dips.

Anamnagar/ Kumaripati/ Kamalpokhari, 9801116403, 9802055040

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Healthy monsoon**

Kathmandu Valley has already got 620mm of rain so far in July, whereas the average rainfall for the month is about 800mm. It is not just the total that is important, but how much of it falls in a limited time period. For example, on Tuesday from midnight till 5am, Kathmandu got 80mm of rain. Other parts of Nepal have been experiencing even higher intensity rain, and the showers will continue into the weekend with occasional spells of sunshine.



OUR PICK



A historical black comedy drama based on Viet Thanh Nguyen's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Sympathizer* is an espionage thriller and cross-culture satire that follows the Captain, a half-French, half-Vietnamese communist spy during the final days of the Vietnam War. The Captain flees to the United States but struggles between his original loyalties and his new life as he continues to spy for the Viet Cong. Directed by Park Chan-wook, the 2024 miniseries stars Hoa Xuande, Robert Downey Jr, Fred Nguyen Khan, Toan Le and Sandra Oh.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउ र बचाऔं

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



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Ambica Shrestha (1933-2024)

The long and fearless life of a crusader for cultural preservation and women's rights in Nepal

■ Lisa Choegyol

It is no exaggeration to say that the vision and drive of Ambica Shrestha has changed the face of modern Nepal.

Tourism leader, businesswoman, philanthropist, and a tireless fighter for women's rights, equitable entrepreneurship and cultural conservation, Ambica showed us how to do it by creating Dwarika's, one of the most celebrated heritage hotels in Asia.

Although soft-spoken, gracious, always quietly elegant, Ambica's literacy, education and empowerment movements radically improved the status of women that we enjoy today. The benefits of her unyielding determination and implacable resolve will live with us for years to come.

Ambica's 92-year lifetime spanned some of the nation's most turbulent decades and dramatic changes. Nepal was hurtled into the modern era from its centuries of 'medieval' isolation under a succession of regimes.

Born into a distinguished Newar family in the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim, Ambica was the eldest daughter of Khadga Bahadur Pradhan and Padhma Kesari. Her parents sent her to the elite British Indian convent of Loreto in Darjeeling.

"It was a sharp learning curve," she told me not long before her death, a twinkle in her eye. We were sitting in her habitual spot in the sunny hotel courtyard, the timbre of her distinctive voice still rings in my ears.

Ambica is survived by her two daughters Sangita and Vinita and their families which total five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren, as well as extensive tentacles of Himalayan relatives.

"At school, myself and an Indian princess were the only brown faces amongst the sea of pale English and European girls at Loreto," she said. "Early on, I recognised the need to exert myself and denounce the evils of discrimination, but of course I ended up really appreciating the education I received at that school."

Ambica studied in Patna University and taught in St Joseph's convent in Kalimpong before moving to Kathmandu in 1955 to marry businessman Dwarika Das Shrestha.

When foreign visitors started to trickle into Nepal in the early 1950s, the innovative and open-minded Dwarika foresaw the potential of tourism. He opened Kathmandu's first hotel, the Paras Inn, in a family house at the top of New Road, adopting the adage 'guest is god'.

The well-told story goes that Dwarika encountered exquisitely carved house struts and columns being chopped for kindling whilst out jogging, and was shocked into rescuing these treasures to preserve for future generations. He hastened to buy wood-carved windows and columns from any historic home that he heard was being dismantled to make way for modern concrete constructions.

A young widower, Dwarika fell deeply in love with the photograph of Ambica that arrived as a prospective bride. The eldest of ten children of a conservative Makhan Tole clan, Dwarika was attracted by her educated background as well as her looks.

With their liberated views, Ambica's marriage to Dwarika was considered controversial by his orthodox Newar family who did not approve of educated 'outsiders'.



Ambica was energised by helping women farmers in remote Nuwakot villages in 2019.



Ambica Shrestha in 2023. LISA CHOEGYOL

The Valley was a different world and Ambica remembered those early days: "Women were treated as enslaved people. My husband used to support me as he was against such systems. We were even ostracised for revolting against traditional family norms."

Ambica recalls the time the family were lined up to admonish them on return from a spin around town on Dwarika's new motorbike, furious because she had left the house without their permission.

With Dwarika by her side, Ambica persisted in her subtle insurrections, such as wearing provocatively sleeveless clothes. Her excellent English language skills also set her apart.

Ambica completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in Kathmandu, taught English at the Kanti Ishwori girl's school in the late 1950s, ran language training at the British Council and programmes for the American Library. She was the first public affairs officer of the United States Information Service, at a salary of Rs80 per month. In 1969 she became the first woman president of the Nepal Jaycees youth movement of any country in the world.

Dwarika's younger sister Bina Pradhan recalls: "It was a successful marriage of two extraordinary people, both ahead of their time. He gave her enormous freedom, and she was a tremendous asset to his clever business ideas. They worked as partners, hand-in-glove, together."

Dwarika and Ambica had one son and two daughters, but tragedy struck when their boy was killed in

a motorcycle accident near the tree that used to stand in the middle of Lazimpat.

Stuck in an unusual jam in those days of very little road traffic, they walked forward to investigate the cause, only to realise the crash involved their own son Pawan Das Shrestha, aged 24 years. I never heard Ambica ever mention this personal catastrophe.

In 1964 Dwarika created a building in his garden, incorporating the many antique pieces he had collected, using authentic building methods and vernacular styles. I remember the 10-room wedge-brick guest house decorated with sculptures and handicrafts, with the fiercely efficient Swiss manager, Anne Marie Spaar and Hari Ram, the cook-housekeeper.

Ambica's growing family lived in a converted cow barn at the back of the current site. Officially registered in 1977 as a hotel, it was Sangita who suggested the name, Dwarika's, to honour her father's incomparable legacy of architectural preservation.

Their travel agency Travels and Tours opened in 1969 with offices in Basantapur, and was followed by Nepal Trek and Natural History Expeditions in 1970. As tourism grew, Dwarika and Ambica were perfectly placed to propel Nepal into the limelight as a high-quality cultural tourism destination.

With her flair for promotion, Ambica was always helpful when we found ourselves together as the only women delegates marketing Nepal at international industry conferences and our marketing alliance has lasted to this day.

After Dwarika's death in 1992, of jaundice following a botched blood transfusion, Ambica was unafraid to develop his heritage hotel concept to its current splendour, and to expand Dwarika's resort in Dhulikhel. Ambica had to diligently make her own path, performing her way in, patiently circumventing obstacles, breaking barriers, pioneering tangible 'firsts' such as negotiating bank loans for women.

Ambica had a global perspective and cosmopolitan candour that refused to be bound by the confines of Nepal's lingering historical tendencies towards xenophobia. Always a voracious reader, Ambica clearly saw the value of Nepal

embracing the international community to ensure the highest standards of tourism and engage the most effective development expertise. She founded Transparency International Nepal.

Ambica and her family had sure instincts when it came to positioning Dwarika's as the most desirable hotel in the Valley for discerning visitors, an architectural jewel that not only showcased superb examples of saved Malla Newar wood, stone and brick artistry, but kept the ancient skills alive by employing a cadre of craftsmen to supplement the woodcarvings and stonework, mould the dachi-apa bricks and lay the jhingati tiled roofs.

Stylish local handicrafts, wool carpets, artworks, dhaka cloth and hand weaving decorated the interiors, hailed as 'the more beautiful hotel rooms in Asia'. The Krishnarpan restaurant was the first to serve Nepali cuisine reinvented and re-presented on handmade pottery with fresh organic ingredients from the farm, a must-visit dinner for royals and visiting VIPs.

Dwarika's became the perfect stage for Ambica to host leaders and celebrities, to hold meetings of her many not-for-profit organisations, to indulge her enthusiasm for art and literature, and to feature exhibitions, speakers and memorial events for her departed friends. Amongst others we farewelled were Toni Hagen and Elizabeth Hawley.

Lively book club discussions raged over lunch behind the pool, and many book launch events, including several of mine, took place in Dwarika's courtyards thanks to Ambica's generosity.

Last month I handed her grandson, Dwarika's manager René Vijay Shrestha, her final Rotary trophy which I had received on her behalf. He politely received the engraved glass plaque with his trademark irresistible smile: "Oh no, not another one, she has dozens of medals and awards!"

From King Birendra, Ambica received the prestigious Prakhyaat Trishakti Patta, Gorkha Dakshin Bahu 4th and Birendra-Aishwarya Sewa Padak medals. King Juan Carlos I had granted her the Spanish Cross of the Order of Civil Merit, and last year she received the Royal Order of Isabella the

Catholic for services to Spain, which she served as Honorary Consul since 1992.

Recognised with the highest Rotary International accolade in 2013, the Service Above Self Award, Ambica was an enthusiastic and committed Rotarian, the first woman president of any Rotary Club in Nepal and a charter member of Rotary Club of Kathmandu Mid-Town.

For many years she chaired the Rotary District Advisory Council. But Rotary was only one of many glass ceilings that Ambica shattered. Often as the first woman she founded, led, chaired or was elected to boards of many of Nepal's key tourism institutions: the Nepal Tourism Board, Nepal Airlines, Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal, Nepal Association of Travel Agents, Pacific and Asia Travel Association.

The easy laughter, compassionate and ever-gracious demeanour concealed Ambica's steely passion for justice and her lifelong battle for the rights of women. In 1975 with her sister-in-law Bina Pradhan, she founded the Federation of Business Professional Women—Nepal, the platform for many of her pioneering partnerships and project achievements. Both Ambica and I were founding members of the Nepal Heritage Society in 1983 with Prabhakar SJB Rana.

As chair of Himalmedia since the beginning, Ambica deftly juggled the conflicting pressures of journalism, tourism and public life. Her colleague Kanak Mani Dixit is an admirer: "She never objected to any piece of writing, she was never intimidated by events and Nepal suffered successive crises over the years. She staunchly supported even some of our more outspoken views in the interests of freedom of the press. There have been times in Nepal when media work has been risky or even outright dangerous. Ambica Didi's unwavering conviction about right and wrong brought comfort to our team through some dark days."

Despite her privileged background, Ambica was renowned for 'walking the talk'. Seldom assertive, always ready to listen and generous with her encouragement of others, she passionately believed in her mantra of 'leave no one behind'.

On a post-earthquake Rotary project field trip to remote and badly damaged Nuwakot villages, we observed this firsthand. Ambica was visibly energised to see the directly positive effects of her coffee-growing initiative.

Ambica's work ethic never flagged right up until the end, ensuring that her legacy will endure into the future. As founding adviser, alongside the indefatigable Bina Pradhan, she recently registered Business, Enterprise and Employment Services (BEES) for women in South Asia, with the aim of influencing regional policy for those still sidelined in the care economy.

It is a daunting task to summarise a life so well lived and so fearlessly dedicated to helping others. But the outpouring of grief at her passing has testified to Ambica's enormous reach, and the love and respect of those countless people whose lives have been touched by her special energy, kindness and commitment.

Accolades have highlighted her tenacity, grace, sound judgment, and the pivotal role she played in thrusting Nepal into the realities of today's world to make it a better place. 🇳🇵

■ Shristi Karki

When a deadly debris flow on the night of 12 July swept two intercity buses into the Trisuli River along the Mugling highway, it took more than an hour for rescue to arrive as shocked survivors groped in the darkness.

One bus had left Kathmandu for Gaur with 36 passengers the previous evening. The other was heading to the capital from Birganj, carrying 26 passengers.

Three passengers managed to escape from broken windows and climb back up to the road in pouring rain. They then sought help from vehicles stuck on either side of the landslide to get themselves to the hospital.

Security forces and the Chitwan District Administration Office reached the site soon after they were notified. A team from the Armed Police Force's Disaster Management Training School (DMTS) in Kurintar arrived soon after. The Nepal Army division in Bharatpur was notified at 4:30AM, and a Quick Response Team (QRT) was immediately dispatched. Nepal Army divers arrived in the morning.

In the fortnight since the tragedy, up to 500 trained rescuers have been working to find the buses (pictured). So far, the bodies of 25 passengers have been recovered, two from downstream in India. A 12-member team from the Indian National Disaster Response Force also arrived to help in the search.

"Search and rescue operations in an accident like this typically last for 10 days," says Khimananda Bhushal of the District



PHOTOS: RSS

100, 101, 102

Nepal's emergency services must be adequately staffed, equipped and integrated to save lives

Administration Office in Chitwan. "But we have to keep going until we locate the buses."

Rescuers have used rafts, anchors, air and water drones, as well as magnets to search for the missing buses and the remaining passengers. The Indian team is said to have sonar for the underwater search.

"We have dedicated units for disaster response in our security forces, we have enough trained manpower to respond to

most disasters," says Bharat Mani Pandey, former joint secretary of the NDRRMA (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority).

The Nepal Police has 1,250 personnel while the Nepal Army has more than 1,200 members assigned for disaster risk reduction and management. There are 2,500 others in the APF with disaster management training. All districts have District Disaster Management Committees.

WATER

So far this monsoon, 133 people have died in floods, landslides and drownings and 147 others people have sustained injuries. Seven people across the country are missing.

Many of the highway fatalities are a combination of bad roads that are not built to be safe during monsoon rains. The road network has expanded, there are more hospitals with trauma care and ambulances, but Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) are

still not available in much of Nepal. Most ambulances are actually just ordinary vans to transport the injured to hospitals, with no specialised emergency care equipment.

Much of Nepal's pre-hospital emergency care is dependent on bystanders and passersby who self-mobilise to get injured people to hospital after accidents, especially on Nepal's rural highways where ambulances and EMTs cannot reach on time. But even though well-intentioned, such first responders are rarely trained in emergency care and protocols. In many cases, improper handling of the injured does more harm than good.

Unsafe skies

The air crash at Kathmandu airport further corrodes Nepal's poor aviation safety track record



SOCIAL MEDIA

Another deadly air crash in Nepal has once more made headlines around the world, further corroding the country's poor aviation safety track record, and prompting questions about why these tragedies keep happening.

A Saurya Airlines Bombardier CRJ200 on a maintenance ferry flight to Pokhara crashed on takeoff at Kathmandu airport shortly before noon on 24 July, killing 18 of the 19 people on board.

The tragedy raised immediate questions about why a plane on a routine C Check ferry flight was carrying staff, including some with families.

Initial reports, including videos of the crash show the plane bank steeply to the right after takeoff from runway 02, descend rapidly and just starting to level off before impact on an open space east of the runway.

The captain Manish Ratna Shakya appears to have survived because the plane broke in two throwing the front of the plane away from the main cabin which exploded in a fireball. The actual reason why the plane spun out of control immediately after takeoff will only be known once Capt Shakya gives

his account, and after an investigation.

Aviation experts say that despite the horrendous loss of life, Wednesday's crash could have been much worse had the plane veered to the left instead, and hit the international terminal building or the apron which was full of big jets preparing for departure.

It was also fortuitous that the plane fell within the airport perimeter in an area where the ground is being levelled for a new international terminal building, and not in the densely populated suburb of Thapagaun east of the runway.

The Canadian-built Bombardier CRJ200 of Saurya Airlines with call sign 9N-AME was 21 years old, and the only one flying in the domestic carrier's fleet. The carrier mainly served trunk routes to Biratnagar and Bhadrapur in eastern Nepal. Among the dead in Wednesday's crash were most of Saurya's senior management, and its technical crew, including a Yemeni national.

The CRJ200 has a proven safety record with over 1,000 of various variants built, and the model was purchased by Mitsubishi in 2020.

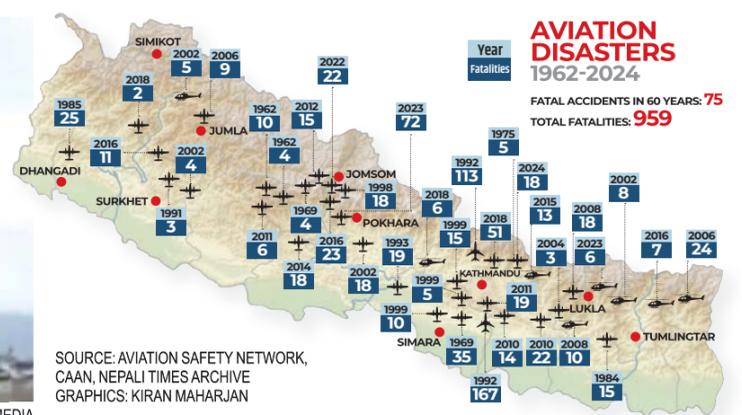
The Saurya Air crash is an outlier in Nepal's air crash history where most disasters have been blamed on CFIT (Controlled Flight Into Terrain, in which a plane hits a mountain hidden in cloud) or pilot error. Nepal's high terrain, extreme weather and basic navigation facilities make it a challenging place to fly.

An analysis by Nepali Times of 74 fatal crashes in Nepal in the past 60 years with data from various sources shows that a total of 960 have been killed. Some domestic carriers have lost most of their fleet of aircraft.

The crash was similar to a Bangladesh airliner that crashed near the runway at Kathmandu airport in 2018, killing 49 and injuring 22. An investigation concluded that the captain of the US Bangla Bombardier Q400 was having an emotional breakdown.

A Sita Air Dornier 228 flight to Lukla also crashed soon after takeoff from Kathmandu in 2012, killing 19 mainly foreign trekkers. A probe into that crash showed that one of the causes was that the plane was overloaded.

The deadliest international crashes



involved Thai and PIA Airbuses on approach to Kathmandu airport within two months of each other in 1992, killing a total of 280 people.

Records show that 201 people have been killed in crashes in Nepal since 2016, 79 of them in three crashes in just the past two years, the most serious being the Yeti Airlines disaster on 15 January 2022 at Pokhara airport which had been inaugurated just two weeks previously.

The Saurya jet was flying to Pokhara for routine check after leasing the hangar there. Saurya used to maintain its aircraft at Buddha Air's facilities in Kathmandu, but its hangar was not free.

The last fatal accident in Nepal was a Manang Air helicopter that went down near Lukla last year which killed six.

Nepal's domestic air travel has seen a boom in the past two years because of the poor state of highways. Most roads have been blocked by landslides and floods during the current monsoon, and there have been a spate of bad highway crashes including a debris flow that swept two intercity buses into the swollen Trisuli River on the Mugling highway carrying 62 passengers. The buses have not yet been found. 🇳🇵



ROADS

Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs) take more lives annually in Nepal than floods, landslides, plane crashes, and other accidents and 'natural' disasters put together. There have been 21,287 road mishaps in Nepal so far in 2024, resulting in 2,198 fatalities and 5,713 serious injuries.

The Nepal Ambulance Guidelines 2021 defines an ambulance as 'a vehicle to transport patients that include ambulance equipment, sirens, GPS, a trained driver and an EMT'.

But there are only 705 ambulances equipped with GPS across the country, and only 81 officially approved. Ambulances have to be certified as Type A Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulances, or Type B Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulances.

There are 119 trained EMTs and 929 trained ambulance drivers certified by Nepal's National Health Training Center. Meanwhile, there are 30 trained dispatchers who work out of 11 ambulance dispatch centres across the country. These dispatchers respond to 102, the emergency number for ambulance services in Nepal.

The Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) operates 242 Type A, 60 Type, and 182 Type C ambulances

across Nepal. Type C is essentially a normal transport vehicle.

And while accessibility, technology, and skilled human resources were always a challenge for Nepal and its relatively basic pre-hospital services, this was made glaringly obvious during the 2015 earthquake, says Bal Krishna Sedai, deputy director of the NRCS.

"We realised that Nepal's pre-hospital care system was in no way prepared to handle mass casualty events," Sedai explains.

Ambulances are a 24-hour service, but Nepal's laws state that no individual can work for more than eight hours. This means each ambulance would need three EMTs and three drivers and that is near impossible because of budget constraints.

"The government has been unable to allocate enough human resources to sustain pre-hospital care," adds Sedai.

Nepal's topography hinders first responders from getting to accident or disaster sites on time, even though they are ideally supposed to be there within 15 minutes in the Tarai, and within 30 minutes in the mountains.

Says Sedai: "We urgently need to map where ambulances need to be stationed across the country in order to provide effective service, and this must take into account Nepal's geography and population density."

FIRE

Fire support services are in an even woeful state, especially given the record-breaking wildfires threatening settlements this year. There are only 211 fire brigades in Nepal, which means one fire engine per 110,254 people across the country. More than 1,100 people have died in forest fires and household fires in the last decade.

"Our fire response system is very weak to put it bluntly," admits Sundar Sharma at the NDRRMA. "211 fire brigades is not nearly enough, and we do not have enough trained firefighters and first responders."



BIJAYABAR PRADHAN

QUAKES

Disaster response and management is perhaps most critical in times of mega-disasters like earthquakes that Nepal is prone to. Himalayan seismologists have warned that 2015 was not the Big One, and neither was the Jajarkot earthquake last November.

Yet, the country remains unprepared. Among others, it lacks modern equipment for search and rescue from reinforced concrete buildings.

In the aftermath of the Jajarkot earthquake, 915 Nepal Army, 853 Nepal Police, and 35 APF personnel had been deployed for search, rescue, and relief by the 10th day after the disaster.

"A mega quake in western Nepal will impact the whole country, including northern India. This is a level of disaster the whole country needs to be prepared for, not just western Nepal," Surya Narayan Shrestha of the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) wrote in Nepali Times last year. "Given how disaster-prone we know Nepal is, we must seriously

put our efforts and money into reducing the risks." While ambulance services have been integrated to operate under the 102-dispatch system across Nepal following the National Ambulance Guidelines 2021, experts say that Nepal needs an integrated emergency response system. At present, emergency numbers 100, 101, 102, and 103 puts people in touch with the police, fire services, ambulance services, and traffic police respectively.

Former NDRRMA Joint Secretary Bharat Mani Pandey coordinated an 11-member task force earlier this year that included members from key ministries as well as security forces to develop an integrated emergency information system so they do not have to dial different numbers for police, ambulance, or fire.

"We found that police is the most contacted agency even when people are in need of ambulance or fire rescue services," says Pandey. "We must have a command centre that incorporates different emergency service providers into an integrated response system."

As it is, trauma care and

infrastructure are inaccessible to a large number of Nepalis. Tertiary hospitals that specialise in trauma and critical care are largely centralised in urban areas, and the rescue, ambulance, and medevac fees are unaffordable for most.

There is also limited clarity and knowledge of which hospitals and health institutions are primary, secondary, or tertiary, which is crucial for emergency responders and medical professionals to direct trauma patients to relevant hospitals on a case-by-case basis. That way, first responders can triage survivors of accidents and disasters.

"There is a weak link in our life-saving mechanisms between accident sites and hospitals, and we do not have enough trained emergency responders," Raju Dhakal of the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre in Sanga told Nepali Times, citing a spate of highway mishaps killed more than two dozen people and injured many more within a week last year.

He added: "Even not-critical injuries become life-threatening because police and rescuers do not reach accident sites on time, or are not trained in handling spine or head injuries." 🇳🇵

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Going global to retain local talent

An IT academy in eastern Nepal trains students to earn as internet freelancers, reducing outmigration

■ Marty Logan in Taplejung

After graduation Danber Maden was working as an accountant and in his spare time practising his passion for sketching. Wanting to adapt his talent to digital design, he joined a new course at Shree Bhanu Jana Secondary School here.

Today, Maden is a mentor for new students at what has become the IT Academy, Taplejung. The 24-year-old is now juggling various online design gigs with companies worldwide, and earning much more than he did as an accountant.

"I'm learning 3D design and motion graphics, animation from YouTube," says Maden, sitting in the spacious academy on the grounds of the secondary school.

Nearby is a group working area fronting the wood-panelled Pernille's Coffee Bar. It is named after Pernille Madsen, founder of Human Practice Foundation (HPF), a Danish NGO that has been supporting schools and their communities in Taplejung since 2017.

Launched in 2014, HPF also runs programmes in Denmark and Kenya. Donor Waldemar Schmidt says he and his Academy co-founders wanted to give students at HPF-supported schools in the district another option after graduating. "Some years ago I started thinking, 'what happens to the children when they leave the school? Have we done the job of giving the children a better future?' The simple answer was 'no, I don't think we have—we need to do more'," he says in a Zoom interview from Denmark.

The Academy opened in November 2023. To date, 61 students have graduated and 14 are working online, says Shree Bhanu Jana's head teacher Kishor Kumar Rai. Some are working for companies in Singapore, Denmark and South Korea.

"They are earning more money here than doing other work so they are happy to stay in Taplejung," adds Rai. "The Academy will stop migration and also the brain drain of youth."



IT ACADEMY

A new, six-month session on graphic design and digital marketing started in June. Besides the technical component, students also learn the skills needed to become successful online freelancers, such as writing offers and negotiating contracts.

By 2028, HPF aims to have graduated up to 800 digital workers in courses that include web development and cyber-security in Levels 2 and 3. Graduates of Level 1 will need to pay tuition for advanced courses and prove that they are already earning as freelancers, explains Schmidt.

Schmidt estimates that after graduating from Level 1 students will have the potential to earn \$500 a month, compared to the \$200 locals make working in banks and other offices. After taking Level 2 and 3 courses in graphic design and cyber security, earnings will rise to \$1,000-2,000 monthly, he predicts.

HPF now subsidises tuition, leaving students to pay 15%, or about Rs 5,000, of the cost of the courses. Schmidt says donors in his personal network have covered the remaining amount (about \$500 per student) for the first 100 students this year. For the next session he hopes sponsors will chip in \$1,500 per student, enough to also buy each one a laptop.

An enthusiastic, well-connected former CEO, the 84-year-old Schmidt has also called on his network to take on graduates in their firms as interns, and convinced WorldLink to provide the Academy with fibre-optic Internet at no cost.

Developing students' skills so that they are competitive globally will also happen gradually, says Schmidt, in part because of English-language skills. In the beginning, the Academy will focus on work experience in Asia. Already it has

arranged virtual internships in companies in Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia.

The Academy's 10-point manifesto is also training women students who can continue working as freelancers while raising families. Women make up 60% of students, and head of the Academy Basanta Palungwa says female students design more creatively, in part because they are more patient.

The Academy also aims to digitise and engage the community in this remote corner of north-eastern Nepal. Plans include a course for the general public on using smartphones and tablets, and Wi-Fi hotspots will soon to be installed by WorldLink. Also in the planning stage is vocational training for those who are not inclined to IT.

HPF supported secondary schools in Taplejung are graduating about 1,000 students a year, but the IT Academy will be able to

accommodate less than half of them. Says Schmidt: "They may be frustrated because they've been to a good school and they see no future after graduating, so we need to make sure that there's a link to the labour market."

After graduating, Danber Maden's freelance work now includes four hours daily for Bookmundi, a Denmark based travel agency. After interning there for one year he was recently promoted to Junior Graphic Designer.

For the past year he has also been designing social media posts for GenX Pharmacy, an online business based in Kathmandu. And he has local clients, including candidates who ran in the last elections.

The local boy seems to have found his niche online. Asked what he sees himself doing in 10 years, Maden responds confidently: "Senior designer or art director." 🇳🇵

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