

Selfies on the prime minister's bed

The scenes from Dhaka on Monday were eerily similar to the ransacking of the residences of Ferdinand Marcos or Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Protesters took selfies lying on Sheikh Hasina's bed, they lounged on her sofas, feasted on biryani, and looted whatever was portable.



GUEST EDITORIAL
Guna Raj Luitel

As is usually the case, all it takes is a spark to light a revolution when a people's fury at ruthless rulers reaches the tipping point. Hasina's regime cracked down brutally on demonstrators, killing more than 300.

After another day of bloodshed on 4 August, Hasina lost support of the security forces. Jubilant protesters watched as their prime minister of 15 years fly off to India. Grameen bank's Nobel Prize winning social entrepreneur Muhammad Yunus who was hounded by Hasina, has returned to Dhaka to head an interim government to supervise elections.

There is a vital lesson from Bangladesh for the rest of South Asia and beyond. Rulers cannot rest on their laurels just because they were freedom fighters. If citizens do not benefit from regime change, they will sweep them into the dustbin of history.

History is replete with examples of despots who plunder, torture and kill opponents, but are sooner or later overthrown. Sheikh Hasina, was elected for the fifth time in a rigged election in January that was boycotted by the opposition BNP, and accepted only by India.

Hasina's fate is also a lesson for regional powers who back tyrants for geopolitical reasons: what they gain from such support can be tenuous and short-lived.

Nepal is presently not ruled by an elected despot, our press is the freest in the region, and the check and balance of democracy here function relatively well. Yet, the events in Bangladesh have an important lesson for our elderly rulers and the mass media.

Are we in the media also partly to blame for increasing public frustration with politics as usual that is making Nepalis cynical and apathetic?

Nepal's new politicians have exploited the fecklessness of old rulers, using social media to magnify populist support. Journalists in the legacy media are seen to be comrades-in-arms of legacy leaders, and are collectively held responsible for Nepal's decline.

In the age of citizen journalism, there is a misconception that the mass media has become redundant. However, in-depth journalism is more essential than ever to

help citizens navigate information overload, disinformation and deep fakes.

The mobile phone and its algorithm-driven networking platforms are more for entertainment than information. And if information is a major part of content, then more often than not it is fake news and toxic trolling. Readership has not decreased, it has just migrated, and the sources of information have changed.

The main reason Nepal's mainstream politicians and journalists find themselves targeted is because they played active roles together in the people power movements of 1990 and 2006.

Indeed, journalists have been at the forefront of the restoration and protection of democracy and in upholding press freedom — through the conflict years, and after King Gyanendra's coup in 2005.

But when democracy fails to deliver, the public and populists tend to blame not just elected politicians, but also us messengers.

The irony is that Nepal's leadership is reluctant to credit the mass media for helping defend democracy and making it possible for them to get to power. Instead, many politicians would like to muzzle the media because of its role in holding their power to account, and frequently exposing corruption in high places.

The press is playing its mandated adversarial role in Nepal's democracy, but click-bait media and populist politicians see public-interest journalism as competition for public attention.

We in the legacy media therefore find ourselves being distrusted by old guard politicians, and are seen as rivals by YouTubers and TikTokers.

The state itself refuses thus far to recognise the communication enterprise as an industry, and successive governments have tried to weaken the traditional mass media by laws and policies. The ban on alcohol ads on grounds of public health, even though such goods can be openly bought and consumed, is part of that strategy.

New leaders like Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah were propelled to power by new media. The RSP's Rabi Lamichhane also fanned cyber-populism to get elected, which is why he is so dismissive of the 'Dirty Dozen' (१२-भद्र एडिटर) of the mainstream press that exposed his wrongdoings.

The lesson from the Bangladesh upheaval for Nepal's rulers who have been at the helm now for decades is this: clean up your act and start delivering, or else face a similar fate.

Sheikh Hasina persecuted the press, allowing social pressure to build up until it all exploded in her face. A free press is democracy's safety valve, and it is in the self-interest of Nepal's political parties to defend it.

Gunaraj Luitel is the Chief Editor of Nagarik Daily in Kathmandu. @gunaraj

If citizens do not benefit from regime change, they will sweep rulers into the dustbin of history



MAHMUD HOSSAIN OPU/DHAKA TRIBUNE

ONLINE PACKAGES



SKYRACE

Watch the highlights video of Skyrace Pikey Peak 2023 which was Nepal's first one-day race completing a loop in Solukhumbu from Phaplu and reaching Pikey Peak at 4,046m. The race is listed in the International Trail Running Association, and International Skyrunning Federation and qualified for the prestigious UTMB Index. Read package on Nepali trail runners on page 6-7.



CLIMATE CHANGE HITS HIMALAYAN RICE

Across Nepal, erratic monsoon due to the climate crisis has meant that farmers are unable to plant paddy on time, and native rice breeds are disappearing. In Kaski, locals have set up a community seed bank to preserve seeds of local rice varieties. Watch this video on our YouTube channel. Read story on page 10-11.

STREET DOGS

Hats off to this compassionate hero Nashir Khan ('Must love dogs', Benjamin Zimmerman, #1223). May he be blessed with all happiness.

Prema Khatiwoda

■ It was easy for you to care for these dogs because you were born with golden heart.

Narendra Pratap Sah Ove

■ Nashir Khan is doing highly appreciable work based on pure love for our four-legged friends.

Des Man

■ Feeding stray dogs is only short term care, but eventually we should curb the increasing population of street dogs ('One dog at a time', Urmila Gamwa Tharu, #1223)

Supriya Shrestha Karmacharya

BANGLADESH

Every dictatorial regime has an end sooner or later ('People power removes Bangladesh leader', nepalitimes.com)

Amrit Kumar Dhakal

■ Thank you to Nepali civil society and activists who gathered at the Bangladesh Embassy in Kathmandu in solidarity with the student protests in Bangladesh. Your actions are deeply appreciated.

LR Utsho

FATALISTIC NEPAL

There is surely something of a link in Nepali culture ('Fatalism and Fatalities', Sonia Awale, #1223). If at each level of a process even mere trace-elements of non-interventionist values can have a nuanced but active influence on the causes of accidents, it is no wonder it can be described as endemic.

Tony Jones

KATHMANDU FLOODS

May the damage done by floods across Nepal by monsoon rains this year be minimal ('Monsoon deluge in Nepal', nepalitimes.com).

Stefano Tsukamoto

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

One dog at a time

by Urmila Gamwa Tharu

For the past few years, musician Sunita Pradhan Limbu's has been feeding and caring for 60 community dogs in Gongabu, so much so her dedication has turned her street in Gongabu into a canine-friendly neighbourhood. Visit nepalitimes.com and watch the video.



Most reached and shared on Facebook

People power in Bangladesh

Nepali Times

Fast-moving developments in Bangladesh that removed leader Sheikh Hasina from power is a lesson for political leaders in Nepal and the region that lack of accountability and violent suppression of dissent cannot contain popular anger. More in the Guest Editorial by Guna Raj Luitel (left). Follow nepalitimes.com for latest updates.



Most popular on X



Must love dogs

by Benjamin Zimmerman

Despite obstacles, Nashir Khan has dedicated his life to care for Kathmandu's neglected street dogs, administering medicine, taking them to the vet, advocacy through radio, and confrontation with those abusing dogs. Go to our website for the full story.



Most commented

Shyam's Shangrila

by Lisa Choeygal

Shyam Bahadur Panday, creator of the successful Shangrila hotel group, died late July after a long illness. Panday had a pioneering vision for hotels that reflected the spirit of Nepal. Read Lisa Choeygal's tribute to the renowned tourism veteran.



Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Travel safety in Nepal cannot be an island of efficiency when the entire political machinery is dysfunctional



santosh aryal @santosharyal9

Well said! The fatalistic attitude shown by the whole of society is so demoralising. No one thinks that road accidents can be minimised and prevented to a large degree and they do not bother even to try.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Nepal turns on the electric switch
The country is very close to generating enough electricity to replace petroleum imports, writes Bikash Pandey in the first instalment of People Power, his new column in Nepali Times on energy issues relevant to Nepal.



Kul Chandra Gautam @KulCGautam

Encouraging article on Nepal's electric future by Bikash Pandey. Good to know we R close to generating enough electricity to replace petroleum imports. Given economic, environmental & social benefits, hope GoN & pvt banks will facilitate this transition.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Heritage Destruction

Twenty years ago this week, Nepali Times published an article about how Kathmandu Valley and Lumbini could be delisted by UNESCO if destruction was not stopped. Today, instead of saving what is left, urbanisation, unregulated construction and encroachment are undermining the cultural value of both places. Kathmandu Valley's historical cores are facing threats, and Lumbini is set on turning Buddha's nativity site into a commercial complex.

Excerpt of the report published on issue #208 6-12 August 2004:



the temples of Pashupati and Changu Narayan. Outside the Valley, Unesco also declared Lumbini a sacred site that needed protection.

Despite warnings, however, migration pressure and the effects of modernisation are just too relentless for government conservation agencies and the municipality to stop the erosion of Kathmandu Valley's architectural heritage. Saving Kathmandu's heritage needs more than just enforcing existing zoning laws and building parameters. It needs a revival of the ancient guthis and a new consciousness among individuals to value their heritage.

As a warning, Unesco last year put Kathmandu Valley's monument zones on the 'endangered list', which was a major embarrassment for the government. Now, it looks like Lumbini may follow suit for unchecked construction around the Maya Debi temple.

Kathmandu Valley's precious architectural heritage has been in danger ever since urban sprawl intruded upon its sacred spaces.

The Valley was recognised as a World Heritage Site in 1979 by Unesco (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and it set aside seven sites: the three Durbar Squares at Hanuman Dhoka, Mangal Bazar and Bhaktapur, the stupas of Boudha and Swoyambhu and

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



RATNA SHRESTHA/RSS

1,000 WORDS

JUSTICE IN TRANSITION:

(from left to right) Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba, Prime Minister K P Oli and Maoist Centre Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal receiving the report of the working group formed to amend the Transitional Justice Bill on Wednesday.



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From humiliation to humility

With a little help from a sympathetic colleague, a young librarian overcomes her lack of confidence in English

“Did you know this interview was supposed to be in English?” he asked with a smile. I reciprocated, although it was clear that his smile conveyed a sense of pity towards me. My smile, on the other hand, was more an expression of private shame.



ANGREZI
Anbika Giri

I was being interviewed for the position of librarian at a residential English-medium school by the Managing Director. His personality was domineering: tall, well-built, and a pony tail.

I knew some of the questions he asked would be in English, but did not realise that I had to respond entirely in English too. I had some basic English language communication skills, but I was not fluent at the time.

“How are you planning to get by here? You clearly cannot speak the language, and our working language is English,” he said looking me directly in the eye. This interview was starting to scare me.

“म कथा भन्न सक्छु,” I blurted out in Nepali, trying to salvage my job prospect by highlighting my storytelling skills.

“Okay. एउटा कथा सुनाउ,” he replied, as if to put me at ease. I immediately launched into a children’s story that had recently been published in Kopila, Kanitpur’s school supplement.

The story was about a letter that transformed the life of a girl with low self-esteem. She had felt unappreciated by everyone until the letter arrived from a dentist whom she had earlier helped by giving



ROOM TO READ

directions. The letter thanked her for being so helpful, and expressed how proud her mother must be for having such a smart daughter.

Despite my lack of English, the Managing Director must have found the story and my narration compelling. I got the job, but on probation and with conditions attached: “You’re on your own. If you can’t connect with the students within a month, you’ll be let go.”

I started my job at the school library in 2006 just as the students were getting ready for their three-week summer break. Excitement and English chatter filled the air, but I could not quite follow what they were saying. They were too preoccupied with their vacation to notice me.

The library itself was a disaster zone. Books were scattered everywhere. And even though I had no prior knowledge of library management, I tried to bring some order into the chaos.

I was a voracious reader, but most of the books were in English

and I felt overwhelmed. I dedicated long hours to the library, sometimes working late into the night. My goal was to familiarise myself with every single book in the stacks before the school year began, hoping to impress the students.

The holidays were coming to an end, and I felt the pressure mounting. Searching for a solution to ensure a smooth start, I came up with what I figured was a brilliant plan to convene a meeting with class captains before opening the library for all students. My reasoning was that if they were on board with enforcing library rules, the rest of the students would follow.

I was working late, and the Managing Director looked in, noticing the lights were still on. He seemed pleased to find the library in perfect condition, the books all organised.

“Don’t work late, a leopard may show up,” he said.

“Really? A लियोपार्ड?” I gasped, pronouncing it ‘Leo-Pard’.

“Yes, तर लियोपार्ड हैन लेपर्ड चाहिँ आउँछ and they will chew you up,” he said, chuckling, and pronouncing the word leopard properly.

Embarrassed, I corrected myself, silently repeating the correct pronunciation of लेपर्ड. I only understood later that he was jokingly referring to children chewing me out, not an actual leopard. This humiliation destroyed my confidence, and I lost the confidence to engage in conversation, even in Nepali.

The students returned and were informed about their meeting with the new Library Miss. There were two captains each from Class 4-10, and one school captain, totaling 13. I thought I was fully prepared, and it all began well.

But the assertiveness of the students and their fluency in English caught me completely off guard, and I fumbled for English words as my vocabulary vanished. Till this day, I feel the sweat on my forehead.

At first the class captains were taken aback, some attempted to correct my pronunciation, and then their giggling erupted into uncontrollable laughter. I could not bear the failure, and switched to Nepali but my confidence was shattered. I was not getting through at all. They walked away, making fun of my English pronunciation in a loud voice just to make sure I heard them.

Deflated, I also felt embarrassed in front of the teachers, fearing that the students may have mocked me. They insisted I speak to them in English. I avoided making eye contact and interacting with the students, I hardly spoke to the teachers, and if I did it was in Nepali.

After two months, Wangdi Sir noticed my silence. He was an English teacher from Kalimpong and was rigorous yet popular among students. He stood out among his colleagues as one of the few who preferred to spend time in the library, engrossed in reading.

One day, he asked me why I was so quiet. I shared my story, unburdening myself. He chuckled initially, but offered practical tutorials about handling students in English with sentences like “Why don’t you try the fiction section?” or “May I help you find your book?”

Before Wangdi Sir’s help, whenever a student requested a book I would simply get it and hand it over to them without uttering a single word. Wangdi Sir taught me that recognising weakness was the first step in overcoming it. Steadily, my confidence level improved, and I started to build a rapport with students. Whenever I mispronounced something, I would politely ask them to correct me.

My eight-month tenure transitioned from a state of humiliation to a one of humility. This was when my interest in children’s literature blossomed, and the library gave me a deeper understanding of the students’ perspectives and interests. 🇳🇵

Anbika Giri is a novelist and author of children’s books in Nepali. Angrezi is her monthly column in Nepali Times about learning English in Nepal. Find her previous columns online.



NMB BANK
एनएमबि बैंक



Hilton Kathmandu

The Hilton Kathmandu has officially opened in Kathmandu’s Naxal neighbourhood, a 10-minute drive



from the airport as well as Thamel and Darbar Marg. The 16-floor, 172-room property features all-day dining at five different restaurants, a large range of suites, EV charging, and a heated rooftop pool.

WiFi on Turkish

Turkish Airlines is introducing free, fast and unlimited WiFi for all passengers starting end of 2025. Most of Turkish’s fleet already has the latest in-flight connectivity technology, and the airline plans to eventually retrofit the rest of them. The carrier has signed agreements with TCI Aircraft Interiors and satellite tech company Turksat. The upgrade coincides with Turkish’s unveiling of its new Business Class design for its 777 and A350s at the Farnborough Air Show last week.



Dhulikhel Hospital

A new Rs 43 million ward building supported by the Government of India and Dhulikhel Municipality was inaugurated at the Dhulikhel Hospital in Kavre this week.



Erasmus scholarships

The EU has awarded scholarships to 33 Nepali students to pursue two year Erasmus+ Master’s programs. The programs are offered jointly by universities across Europe and include tuition, travel, and a monthly allowance.

All-new Creta

Hyundai dealer Laxmi Intercontinental has launched a new version of the Creta, a mid-sized SUV that has features including a Bose sound system, a sunroof, and ventilated seats. It also comes with safety features like blind-spot monitors and collision avoidance. The Creta comes in petrol or diesel variants and starts at Rs5,596,000.



Sipradi and NIMB

Official Tata dealer Sipradi and Nepal Investment Mega Bank are collaborating to provide loans at 8.82% interest to buy the popular Tata EV models Tiago, Nexon, and Tigor. The bank will arrange loans up to 80% of the total value of the vehicle within three business days. NIMB Ace Capital



Limited, a subsidiary of Nepal Investment Mega Bank, also recently marked 12 years of operation. The Bank manages five mutual funds with over Rs10 billion in assets.

bO2 impact

Nepal’s private equity fund Business Oxygen, bO2, made a UK Financial Times’ list of 100+ impact investors. The firm helps entrepreneurs running small and medium enterprises to scale their businesses through capital and technical assistance. The company focuses its investment on eco-friendly companies that also create jobs.

MG Windsor CUV

JSW MG Motors India has announced that its new ‘Crossover Utility Vehicle’ model will be named ‘Windsor,’ after the castle in England known for its long association with British royalty and classic architecture. The model is slated to be released in September this year.

Agri-Digi-Tech

Bed Management and Tangent Waves has launched the Agri-Digi-Tech Challenge with support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). It aims to promote digital innovation in agriculture.



EV charging

Tata’s Express T electric taxis have come into operation in Sindhupalchok’s Khadichaur. There are also Express T charging stations in Balkumari, Bhaktapur, Gongabu, and Kapan. Dudhauri and Katari will be added soon.

Brain gain into brain drain

Invest in quality higher education to deter youth out-migration and revive the economy

■ Sonia Awale

Till recently, Nepalis were the largest number of foreign students in Australia. They were number three in Canada. Nepalis were among the top ten in the US.

It is no secret that many young Nepalis leaving on student visas intend to emigrate permanently.

Countries in the Global North experiencing declining populations know this, but find it a convenient way to allow controlled entry for much-needed workers in the service or tech sectors.

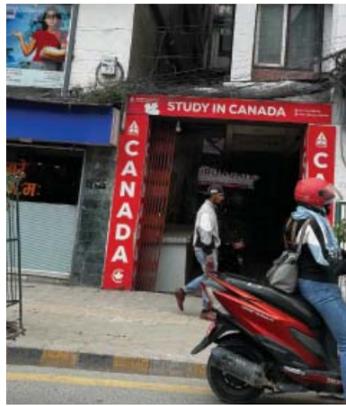
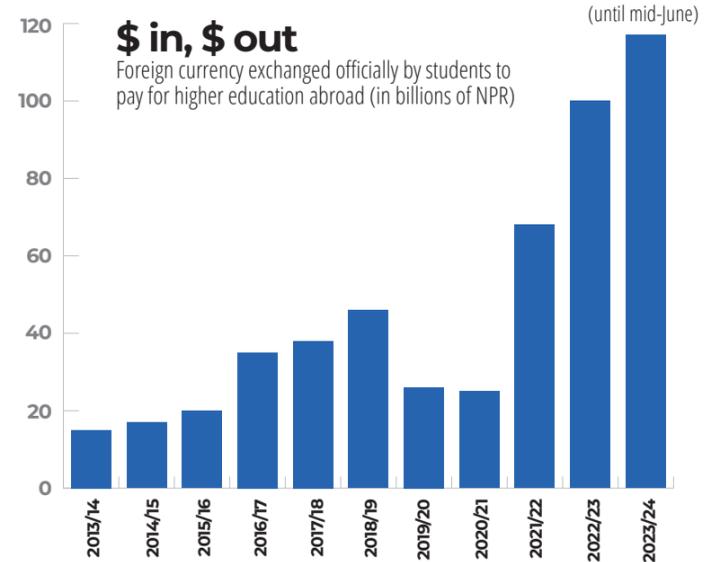
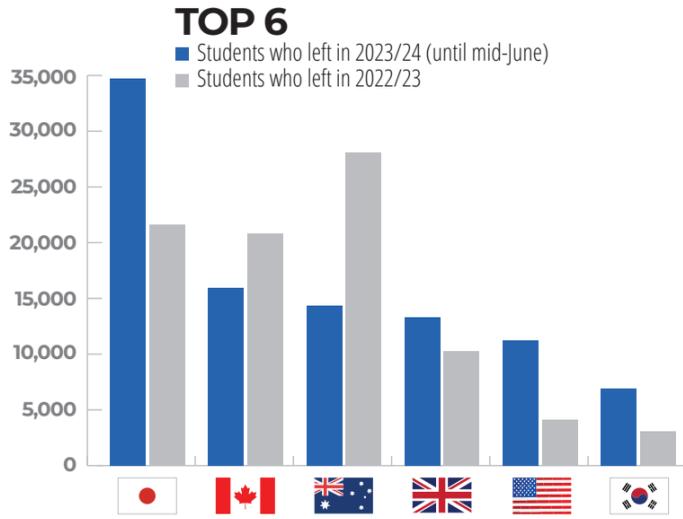
"Many young Nepalis plan to settle in first-world countries eventually, or to return only after 10-20 years," affirms migration expert Ganesh Gurung.

"Destination countries benefit too, they are getting a new generation of cheap labour without having spent anything on raising or educating them. What's more, they also earn university fees. It's a way for them to allow calibrated migration," he adds.

Nearly half the students coming out of 10+2 schools opt to go abroad for higher education, leading to a significant drop in college enrolment across Nepal.

Just like migrant workers are a safety valve that lets the government off the hook from providing jobs at home, students going abroad allows the state to dodge its responsibility to improve higher education quality here.

Indeed, some argue that better universities and colleges in Nepal would not lessen the exodus of young Nepalis, because many of



them intend to emigrate for good.

"Yes, student visas have become a means to an end, the goal is to work and settle," says Narottam Aryal of King's College

in Kathmandu. "But more alarming than the figures of students leaving is that we are taking it so casually, calling it normal."

He adds: "Let us not worry about people who will leave anyway, but focus on the students who will stay if Nepal's higher education system is redesigned, repurposed and reformed to foster an entrepreneurial mindset so they benefit the country."

The method of education in state-run colleges and universities are still stuck in the era of rote learning taught by under-motivated teachers using outdated curricula, regurgitating memorised answers at exam time. The university environment is politicised and there are frequent disruptions with delayed exam results.

One way to change this is twinning with international universities, but for this there has to be a less xenophobic and transparent government machinery that is open to new methods.

"Accreditations, partnerships and exchanges with institutions around the world will open up opportunities for students," says Aryal. "The government should welcome foreign universities, they will force us to raise the standard of our education."

Information technology and medicine are among the most lucrative options for Nepali students abroad. Institutions of higher learning in Nepal itself could specialise in inter-disciplinary liberal arts, social studies, agriculture and the environment,

public health, hospitality, or heritage studies.

Youth are also leaving because there is no guarantee of jobs even when they get a higher degree here. The informal sector is still the biggest employer, and job options in private companies and civil service are limited.

Ganesh Gurung says the education sector must adapt to the changing labour market such that Nepal produces skilled human resources in the areas with high demand like nursing.

He adds, "The focus must be on our strengths. The economy can be revived by making the best use of Nepal's natural beauty to generate jobs in the hospitality industry, and turn it into a destination for international retirees." ■

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NEPAL'S HIGHEST SELLING COMPLETE EV HATCHBACK



Sunmaya Budha hit record timing in China's Wenling 70km race this year.

Nepali trail running champions



Suman Kulung flying in Austria. He ranks top in Nepal in the ITRA chart.

If mountain trail running was an Olympic sport, Nepali athletes may have won some medals by now

■ Preeti Khattri

Nepali athletes have not won any medals in the ongoing Olympics in France, but their participation in judo, shooting, swimming and taekwondo, is seen as a source of national pride.

If breakdancing can be an Olympic sport, why isn't trail running? If it was, Nepali runners would have a good chance of podium finishes on the Olympic stage.

Nepal's performance in international football has been inconsistent, with some regional successes but limited impact on the larger Asian stage. The men and women's cricket teams have performed well, achieving ODI status and competing in the ICC T20 World Cup qualifiers.

But it is Nepal's trail and ultra-athletes who have gained significant recognition in international mountain and trail running races. Better acclimatised because of our natural high-altitude training, trail runners like Dawa

Dachhiri Sherpa, Sangé Sherpa, Sunmaya Budha, Bhim Gurung, Tirtha Tamang, Mira Rai have won at prestigious events and set records. Mira Rai has become an international icon, and was named National Geographic Adventurer of the Year in 2017.

Nepal's topography provides an excellent training ground, enhancing the performance of athletes in this field. The sport was unrecognised even in Nepal despite Nepali runners making headlines internationally, and it was only in 2023 that the National

Sports Council paved the way for its national recognition.

The Adventure Running Federation was set up to encourage trail running which has more of a niche audience compared to cricket or football. Still, it would be pity if Nepal did not invest in its athletes who can make the country proud, just as Kenyan and Ethiopian marathoners have.

Globally, the popularity of mountain and trail running has surged in the past two decades, driven by a growing interest in

RUN SUNMAYA, RUN

Nepal's Sunmaya Budha takes long strides in the international trail running circuit

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Ranked 8th in the world in the 100km race, Nepal's Sunmaya Budha is taking long strides in the international trail running circuit.

In March, the 24-year old from Jumla was at the Wenling 70km road race in China. On her first time, she set a record for the course, beating the number two ranked female trail runner in the world.

It was a 70km road race all on a road surface, something Budha is less used to, since almost all of her training is on trails. Budha hit a roadblock at 30km, when her leg started cramping up, but she fought through it.

Soon after winning Wenling, she traveled with her manager to Spain to race again at the La Palma Island 2024, a 100K ultramarathon.

Budha was apprehensive about her chances, because she was coming back from an injury and the field was strong. In a

pre-race interview, she thought she could not even finish in the top ten. She ended up third. Now, she is eyeing the world trail running championship in Spain in September.

Sunmaya started running while in Grade 7 in Jumla, and did well at school tournaments. She came to Kathmandu to take part in 3 and 5Ks.

"My very first race was 1,600m, and I came in second only because I had no clue that the finish line was a little further than where we had started from," she recalls, laughing. The next year, she won the race.

"There was no tv, no internet in my village. The only way to get any kind of news or information was the radio," remembers Budha of her childhood. Her parents (pictured, right) were not educated and initially did not understand this passion for running, insisting instead on an arranged marriage for her.

"They weren't too persistent about marriage, but were a little concerned with how thin I was getting from all the training," she says, "they let me know that they could

not support me financially."

She moved to Khalanga and started training at the Karnali Sports Club under Hari Bahadur Rokaya who was Nepal's Olympic marathoner in 1988 and 1992, and the fastest in the Everest Marathaon. Throughout it all, her parents thought she was in school. Budha benefited from Rokaya's mentorship as she could train for free and he took her to races.

"My parents only figured out I was running when they heard that I came third in a national-level race in Dharan," recalls Budha. She won a cash prize of Rs15,000.

Budha kept improving and was invited to her first trail race, a 12km course organised by British trail runner Richard Bull, who co-founded trailrunningnepal.org. In July 2021, Sunmaya was signed to Asian Pacific Athlete's The North Face Adventure Team and she had professional management, coaching, financial support, and equipment.

Budha's first win came in December 2021, when she won the Doi Inthanon UTMB in Thailand, finishing ahead of other renowned Nepali female trail runner Mira Rai.





ALL PHOTOS: NEPAL TRAIL SERIES



Runner Rankings

The ranking database of the International Trail Running Association (ITRA) is handy in keeping track of international mountain and trail runners, and we can compare them with Nepal's top 5 male and female athletes (table, right).

The ITRA performance scoring system is designed to evaluate and standardise the performance of trail runners across various events globally. Introduced to enhance fairness and transparency in trail running, the scoring system assigns scores based on runners' results in qualifying races. The Elite level has been redefined by raising the entry level to above 825 for men whereas previously it was above 800. For women it is considered to be above 700.

The categories have been refined. A new category, Top Elite, has been created for men with scores of 900 and above, and women with a scores of 775 and above. As expected, there are very few Top Elite runners, and they are the best in the world.

Nepal's past trail runners are working to get back into form, while others have left the country in search of better job. The state's investment in selection of new talent and training could help Nepal win more medals in international events in a sport that seems to be designed for a Himalayan nation like ours.

Top 5 International Men

	Scores	Best Race Score
Remi Bonnet	956	970
Kilian Jornet	946	964
Jim Walmsley	945	966
Patrick Kipngeno	945	951
Philemon Ombogo Kiriago	937	952

Top 5 Nepali Men

	Scores	Best Race Score
Suman Kulung	835	909
Tirtha Tamang	816	841
Arjun Rai Kulung	801	822
Bed B. Sunuwar	793	875
Dhiraj Budha	773	791

Top 5 International Women

	Scores	Best Race Score
Courtney Dauwalter	860	875
Katie Schide	844	863
Yngvild Kaspersen	826	841
Furzhao Xiang	812	833
Clementine Geoffroy	808	833

Top 5 Nepali Women

	Scores	Best Race Score
Sunmaya Budha	774	796
Priya Rai	685	739
Manju Rawat	665	686
Anita Rai	638	661
Rashila Tamang	631	641

Top Nepali Men from the past

	Scores	Best Race Score
Bhim Bahadur Gurung	659	921
Purna Tamang	0	869
Uendra Sunuwar	0	795

Top Nepali Women from the past

	Scores	Best Race Score
Mira Rai	623	805
Chhechi Sherpa Rai	0	645



Arjun Rai Kulung galloping in the Skyrace Pikey Peak 2023 at 4,046m elevation. He is third on ITRA Top Nepali Male.

outdoor and adventure sports. Endurance sports like the Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc (UTMB) and Western States Endurance Run in the US have gained prominence, inspiring athletes worldwide.

The US market for trail running gear, including shoes, apparel, and accessories, is valued at approximately \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion.

The European market for trail running gear is as high as \$1 billion as major trail running events in the Alps of France, Italy, and Switzerland support its growth. 🇨🇭



Watch highlights video of Skyrace Pikey Peak 2023, Nepal's first one-day race completing a loop in Solukhumbu from Phaplu and reaching Pikey Peak at 4,046m. The race is listed in ITRA and the International Skyrunning Federation, and qualified for the prestigious UTMB Index.

RUNNING FROM JUMLA:

Sunmaya Budha in China's Wenling 70km race in spring 2024. She currently holds the top ITRA female rank in Nepal. Sunmaya back home in Jumla (right) in t-shirt with her family.



TRAIL RUNNING NEPAL

Sunmaya has since left the team and signed with Kailas, a Chinese company that produces climbing and trail running gear. "Sponsorship is vital because it is enough for me to live, eat and train. And I can get all the equipment, shoes, clothes that I need from them, as long as I only wear their clothes during races" says Budha.

In Hong Kong, Budha heard about Andy DuBois, an Australian trail running coach that she wanted to work with. She messaged him on Facebook, and after DuBois grilled her meticulously about her previous training, nutrition, and coaching, took her on.

DuBois is still Budha's coach, and meets with her once a week online to check in and give weekly training plans for times and distances to run.

"Three days a week I do speed work and two days I run uphill. On Wednesdays I do a long run, and one day a week I'm at the track doing many sets of 200s, 400s, 800s," details Budha. "Full body strength training is very important for athletes too, I hit the weights about four times a week."

Sunmaya currently lives a nomadic running lifestyle, living and training wherever the next race is, although she is often in

Kathmandu or Hong Kong. She stresses the importance of being flexible and mobile, as trail running can lead to a stiff, locked up, injured athlete very easily because of the amount of stress on the body, especially on a downhill.

"Every trail runner is a serial ankle sprainer," says Budha, who loves yoga and follows the Olympics avidly. She keeps her diet organic, avoiding 'bazar' foods.

The International Trail Running Association (ITRA) recently released a statement with a commitment to making trail running a part of the Brisbane Olympics and Paralympics in 2032. There is a chance that Budha will get to participate in future Olympics.

What Budha likes most about trail running is that it puts her in nature, where the focus is always on how the route will change next, allowing her to remain completely in the present. She likes Europe the best.

"The landscape there seems like it was built for trail running," she says.

Budha was also impressed by the development of the sport when she raced in China. She contrasts that with Nepal where she says the few races we have are not promoted well.

"Nepalis just don't want to pay to run in a race," she adds.

Budha is not very optimistic, nor does she expect support from her government. She says, "Of course it would be nice to have them care, but at the end of the day what can I tell them? You have to take control of your own life." 🇨🇭

EVENTS



Art Exhibition

Hannah Grace's exhibition Where My Home and Allegiance Lies reflects her fascination with the intricate biology and vibrant forms of Earth's organisms.

Until 25 August, 11am-7pm (Fridays to Sundays), 11am-6pm (Tuesday to Thursdays), Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat

Mekhi Danda

Set during the Rana regime, the play Mekhi Danda depicts the historical and cultural transformation of a village called Rapcha, highlighting their linguistic journey.

Until 11 August, 5:45pm (except Mondays), 1:30pm (also on Saturdays), Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun (01) 5245147



Stand-up show

Plan something different for the coming weekend. Laugh along with India's stand-up comedian Abhishek Upmanyu as he performs live in Nepal for the first time.

17 August, 8pm onwards, Ticket: Rs2,700-Rs3,500, Pragna Pratishan, Kamaladi

KU Prints

Enjoy this varied display of prints put together by second year students of Kathmandu University's Art and Design department.

Until 11 August, 11am to 5pm (Sunday to Friday), 12pm-5pm (Saturdays), Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal



Pottery Workshop

Join a traditional pottery-making class and get your hands dirty learning a new skill, and creating art.

Every day, 9am to 6pm, The Pottery Training Centre, Bhaktapur

DINING



Baker's Den

Is a loved one's birthday coming up, or need a just-because cake? Order from Baker's Den. They also have fresh doughnuts, muffins, bread, and other baked goods.

Baluwatar (01) 4416560

MUSIC

Sabin Rai & co.

The ultimate Friday night awaits audiences as Sabin Rai and The Pharaoh perform live. The opening act will be performed by Earhead.

9 August, 6pm onwards, Club Fahrenheit, Thamel, 9841726830



Salsa Night

Spice up your nights with sizzling salsa dancing sessions - all skill levels welcome. Live music will follow if you don't want to shake a leg.

11 August, 7pm onwards, Hard Rock Cafe, Darbar Marg



Livewire Original Session

Get ready for a night filled with experimental rock music as Pahleno Batti Muni performs live at Titos. Take your friends to share the experience.

9 August, 9pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, Titos Pub, Thamel



Hetauda Music Festival

If you are in and around next week, check out the Hetauda Music Festival. The line-up includes Satish Ghalan, Purna Rai, The Elements, and more.

17 August, 4pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500- Rs1,000, Bhuntadevi ground, Hetauda

Sundown Party

The Sundown Party this week will be a DJ session with panoramic views of the Kathmandu Valley. The Ai-La Lounge is also offering a 15% discount on prior reservation.

10 August, 2pm-8pm, The Ai-La Lounge, Kumaripati, 9801018681



Cafe de Tukche

Tired of trying to figure out what to cook for lunch day after day? Order the Thakali khana set, or try the dhindo set if you want a break from the bhaat.

Lazimpat (01) 4536990

Gangnam Galbi Barbeque

Get an authentic taste of Korea at Gangnam Galbi Barbeque. The Korean barbecue, and grill and stick food, a.k.a. galbi, will tantalise your taste buds.

Baluwatar (01) 4434780

GETAWAYS



Bodhi Suites

This boutique hotel is modern, classy and offers a wide range of luxury amenities. It is the perfect place to unwind after a long day of exploring Pokhara and its Lakeside.

Lakeside, 9802832112

Heritage Hotel

Discover your sense of wonder amidst an oasis that brings alive Nepal's cultural history. Enjoy a new dimension of comfort, style and adventure.

Lakeside (61) 452125



Barahi Jungle Lodge

The Barahi Jungle Lodge overlooks Chitwan National Park, and has a spa, boutique guest rooms, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.

Meghauri, Chitwan (01) 4429820

Shivapuri Heights Cottage

Nestled amidst serene surroundings, this place offers a delightful home-away-from-home experience with a panoramic view of the Kathmandu valley.

Budhanilkantha, 9846232271



Buddha Maya Garden

Wake up to the sounds of birds in the mornings and relax in the beautiful garden at Buddha Maya Garden Hotel. As the name might suggest, Maya Devi Temple is within walking distance.

Lumbini (071) 580219/220

Le Trio

Step into a 1960s Parisian café but get local flavours on the menu. Try the Grilled Chicken Cheese Burger for a happy lunch or their rich jhol momo for a rainy day.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5421674

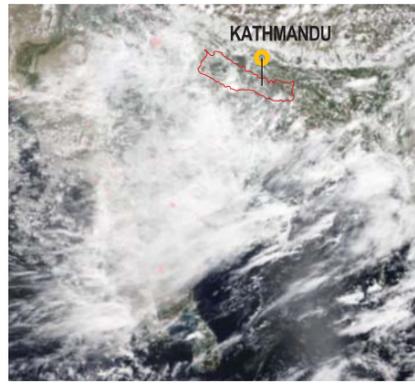


Little Tibet

Taste all kinds of food from the Himalayas at Little Tibet restaurant and Bar. Escape the monsoon rain with a piping hot bowl of noodles, da-pao and a variety of Tibetan, Bhutanese and Nepali food.

Thamel (01) 5342656

WEEKEND WEATHER



More Rainy Days Ahead

A slow-moving monsoon trough brought 150mm of rain in 10 hours in Kathmandu, when the total average for August is about 340mm. As this weather satellite image on Thursday morning shows (left), thick clouds blanket the whole Subcontinent. There are more monsoon pulses heading up from the Bay, and these will likely bring about 20mm of rain to Kathmandu daily into next week. We may see a repeat of floods if there are concentrated downpours in the catchment.



OUR PICK



In 2000, Lhakpa Sherpa became the first Nepali woman to summit and survive Mount Everest. In the years that followed, she moved to the US and eventually worked at a grocery chain to support her young children as a single mother who had survived intimate partner violence — all the while continuing to summit Everest multiple times. The documentary Mountain Queen: The Summits of Lhakpa Sherpa traces her remarkable life from being a young girl in the mountains of Nepal to coming back to her birthplace with her daughter to climb the world's tallest peak for the 10th time.

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

■ Pinki Sris Rana

‘Tell them I made it.’ That is the title of an advertisement in a recent issue of The Economist magazine (picture, inset) placed by GoodWeave International, which works on eliminating child labour around the world.

The ad profiles Hem Bahadur Moktan, who at age 10 was a child worker himself in a carpet factory in Lalitpur 26 years ago, when Nepal’s woolen carpet exports were booming and weavers preferred the cheap and nimble fingers of children to work the looms.

Today, Moktan is the face of Nepal GoodWeave Foundation, the organisation that rescued him when he was 13. As a Child Development Officer he now helps children like himself in workplaces, providing them a chance to better their lives.

“As a boy, I did not know there was a life beyond the four walls of that weaving room in Bungmati,” remembers Moktan, now 36. But there was a thread of hope as he worked the loom all day in that dark and dank room.

Moktan was the second child in a family of subsistence farmers in Kharling village that clings precariously to a mountain slope in Makwanpur district. When a landslide took away their home, the family migrated down to Chitwan.



Photo credit: The Studio_M - thestudiom.com

THE STUDIO M

“I made it.”

Former carpet factory child worker grows up to be an activist protecting other Nepali children

A labour broker who was also from Moktan’s village paid an advance to Moktan’s father, and the young boy came to Kathmandu. He was made to work 16 hours a day, and older co-workers bullied him, calling him फुच्चे माइला.

“Although I came to Kathmandu to earn money for my family, deep down my real aim was to search for a better opportunity,” recalls Moktan. “And that, I ultimately got.”

In the 1990s many children from districts surrounding Kathmandu were moving to Kathmandu’s carpet factories. The industry was booming, employing 300,000 workers, and since child labour laws were lax, many were children. Carpet dyes polluted the rivers.

Handwoven carpets

made up nearly 70% of Nepal’s total exports, and even the rugs at the White House were said to be from Nepal.

But the industry soon went into decline with cheaper machine made Chinese carpets, recession in the West, as well as undercutting by rival Nepali exporters.

Despite the struggle, Moktan is not bitter about his past: “If I hadn’t come to Kathmandu then, I may be toiling away today as a migrant worker in the Gulf.”

After three years of hard labour, one day in 2000 he was rescued by the GoodWeave Foundation which had already rescued 5,000 other Nepali children from carpet factories.

At 13, Moktan was taken to the organisation’s transit home in Kathmandu where he spent the rest of his childhood studying. He



CHILD FRIENDLY: Hem Moktan at a transit home for child workers in Kathmandu and in 2001 (circled) with other child workers and Goodweave staff.

later completed a Bachelors in law and prepared for the civil service exam.

All through this, he supported the education of his younger siblings, and Moktan is proud that his family is the most educated in the whole neighbourhood.

He applied for a vacancy for a Child Development Officer at Nepal GoodWeave Foundation, and he got the job because of his academic qualifications as well as his personal history of being a child worker himself.

“I am now giving back to the organisation that gave me a future, and helping other children like me,” says Moktan, who is now

Program Manager at Goodweave. Many rescued children joined another carpet factory, or even ended up on the streets. Moktan is among a handful who escaped that fate out of sheer determination.

Carpets are still the country’s third biggest export item, making up 7.32% of total earnings. Today, child labour in the carpet industry is not on the scale that it was in the 1990s, although there are still children working in other sectors.

Says Moktan: “I understand the push factors driving children to work, and I want to inspire child labour survivors by my own example to show that there is a life outside the factory.”



Experience Luxury

SILK Finish

Helping farmers who help themselves

Nepal's mountain farmers are already adapting to the impacts of climate change on their own

■ Benjamin Zimmerman in Pokhara

Himalayan farmers are at the forefront of the climate crisis, having to deal with extreme heat or cold, prolonged droughts or excessive rain, landslides and floods.

But they are also the most resilient farmers, who have struggled on their own for generations to grow enough food on terraces meticulously carved into the fragile top soils of the slopes.

"The government did not know or care about us farmers up here," says Surya Adhikari, 70. "We have to adapt to climate change on our own, just like all the other problems we have dealt with in the past."

Indeed, the problems of Himalayan mountain agriculture predate climate change, and for farmers like Adhikari it is just the latest crisis they have to deal with.

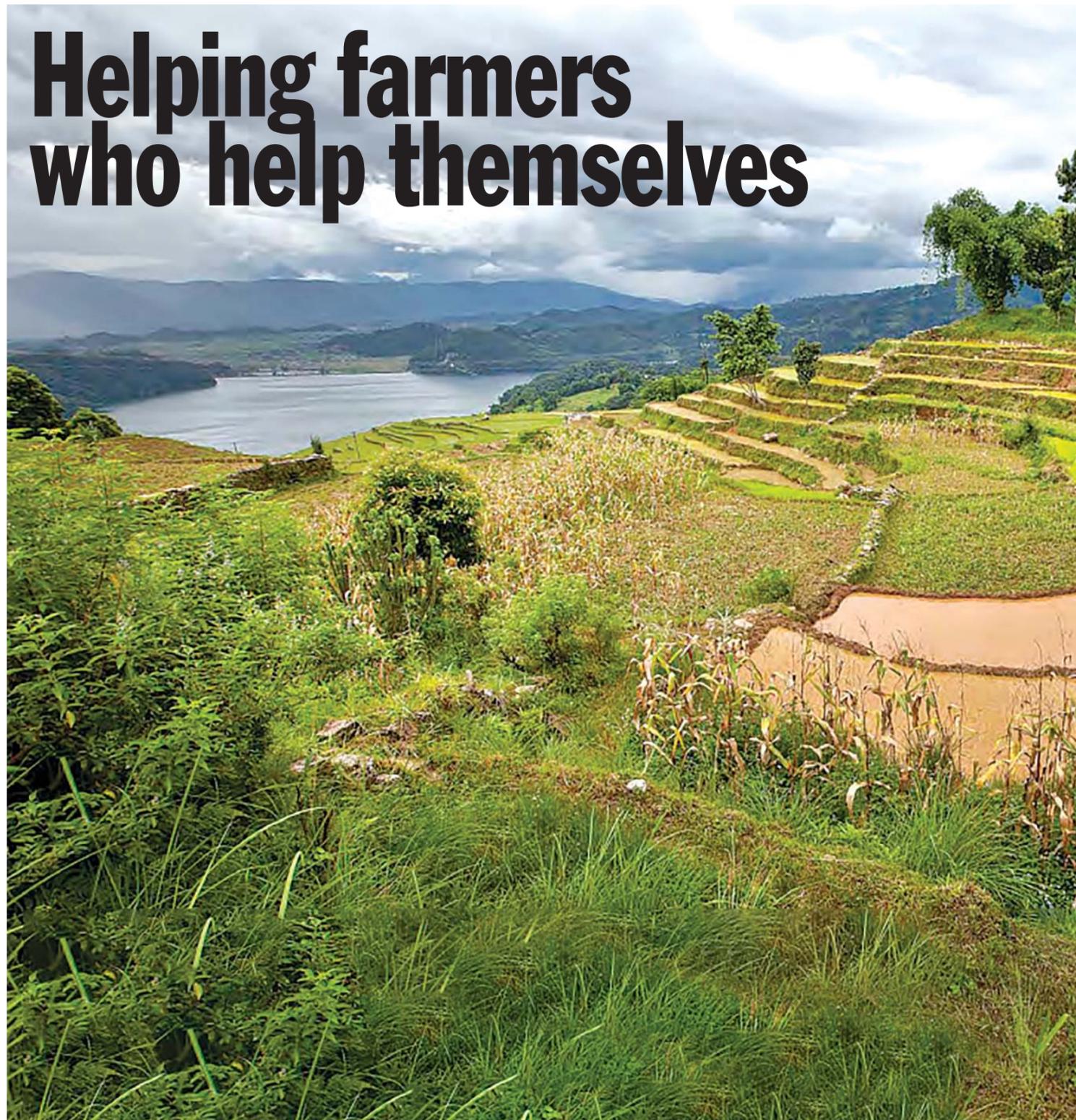
In his own lifetime, Adhikari has seen the snowline recede up the Annapurna range that towers over his village of Sundari Danda near Pokhara, and once predictable weather patterns have become erratic. Adhikari has responded by diversifying crops, ensuring irrigation, and protecting indigenous seeds (sidebar, overleaf).

Climate scientists say the Himalayan mountains are warming up to 0.7°C more than the global average due a phenomenon called 'altitude effect'. In 2023, global average temperature rose by 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, and this means in these mountains the increase was 2.2°C.

Part of the impact is record-breaking heat even at a 1,500m elevation in these villages near Pokhara (main picture, right), and there have been successive years of dry winters. This spring saw record-breaking wildfires that raged for months nationwide, and many of the surrounding slopes around Begnas and Rupa lakes still bear the scars of fires.

These changes combined with economic factors have intensified out-migration with some districts like Kaski seeing a 17% drop in population since 2011.

Even though rural youth are migrating out,



Nepal is still a predominantly agricultural country with two-thirds of the population dependent on farming, and 33% of the GDP coming from agriculture.

Thus, when late monsoons delay the planting of rice or when droughts destroy crops, it is not just the agricultural sector that suffers but the country's economy as a whole. Nepal is already a net importer of food products, and imports have grown most

noticeably in the last 10 years.

This year's monsoon so far has been higher than normal, and paddy planting is supposed to be nearly 100% nationwide. But cloudbursts have also set off landslides and flashfloods. This week, 12 more people were killed in landslides in Gulmi and Baglung, bringing the total death toll since June to at least 175.

The trend over the past decade has been

that monsoon rains start later than usual. There are extended dry spells followed by destructive local downpours. Groundwater levels have fallen due to insufficient recharge and over-extraction, making springs go dry.

Without adequate government investment in building and maintaining irrigation systems, farmers in many rural areas are entirely at the mercy of the rains.

Delayed planting leaves fields barren and

FOCUS ON FARMS

Indigenous paddy, wheat, millet and buckwheat seeds are hardier than imported hybrids, and better able to adapt to a hotter climate. They have evolved to local soils and the micro-climate, and are genetically better suited to deal with changes.

This is what the Pokhara-based action research organisation LI-BIRD is trying to do: preserve indigenous crop varieties through its seed banks, and distribute them through farmer-owned cooperatives.

"When working to improve agriculture, we have to keep farmers at the front and centre, particularly their traditional knowledge," says Bishnu Bhusal of LI-BIRD. "Bringing outside knowledge is not going to work here."

LI-BIRD's Participatory Plant Breeding initiative gathers a variety of seed samples



PHOTOS: LI-BIRD

Local seeds on display at the Pingdanda Community Seed Bank in Sindhupalchok.

of local crops from farmers and plants them side-by-side (pictured, right). Those samples deemed most fit by farmers in terms of yield, weather and pest resistance are then distributed across the country by the Community Seed Bank Association.

Local seed banks, collections of region-specific seeds made available to farmers, allow for what Bhusal says is "conservation through use". This ensures that indigenous crops have a chance to evolve, and do not face extinction from natural disasters or



climate change.

While imported high-yielding seed varieties are tempting, they also require expensive chemical fertiliser and pesticide inputs, which also end up destroying the soil. Indigenous seeds are significantly more resilient and reliable.

"Even with minimal care and inputs, local varieties survive," explains Jenny Shrestha of LI-BIRD. "This means less fertiliser, pesticide,



JANA AŠENBRENEROVA

susceptible to erosion of nutritious top soil, while also pushing back the harvest cycle. When the rains do come, intense storms damage or destroy crops.

Similarly, pests previously found only in the Tarai or those entirely foreign to Nepal such as the American fall armyworm, which targets maize, are moving up the mountains. Agriculture in Nepal is mostly subsistence to begin with, but the climate crisis has pushed

them off the edge, forcing many to abandon their fields and migrate to the cities or abroad.

Pokhara-based LI-BIRD (Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development) works in 23 districts to improve livelihoods of small farmers while conserving biodiversity. It has proven answers to help farmers adapt to the impact climate crisis, and just needs the government to scale up the measures nationwide. 🇳🇵

which in tests in 2022 gave higher yield than imported wheat despite a winter drought.

While crop dependability is important, so is sustainable income. Landscape Branding, whereby agro products are marketed for being endemic to a certain region demanding high market value, has become an incentive for farmers to return to local indigenous crops.

Two such crops are Pokhareli Jethobudho, a rice native to Pokhara and admired for its aroma, and Setho Kaguno, the foxtail millet native to the fields near Begnas and Rupa Lakes. Both products are branded and marketed by the social enterprise Annapaat, guaranteeing farmers a set minimum rate. In coordination with local governments, farmers are reimbursed if they are unable to sell their products at or above that rate, which for Setho Kaguno is Rs120 per kg.

LI-BIRD's success with seeds are now being upscaled by the government. The Crop Development and Agricultural Biodiversity Conservation Centre of the Ministry of Agriculture is helping farmers across 30 districts with money to preserve local crops.

Government subsidy on organic pesticides is also encouraging sustainable farming methods, although there is skepticism whether it is the government or non-profits driving this initiative. 🇳🇵

and water are needed.”

Indigenous seeds are naturally adapted to local environmental conditions and thus are more resistant to pests, droughts, and other disasters, she adds.

“When the climate changes, harvest reduction is much greater in imported seed varieties than local indigenous varieties,” Shrestha says, pointing to the performance of Setho Dabdi wheat variety native to Doti



A Farmers Field School in Kanchanpur observing a plot with diverse varieties of rice with help from LI-BIRD.

Alternative cash crops

Resilience to the impact of the climate crisis can also come from diversifying to cash crops that raise household incomes, allowing farmers more breathing space.

Surya Adhikari (pictured below) is a well-known plant breeder in Begnas, and has begun noticing troubling environmental changes after more than 40 years working in agriculture.

drought resistant, and Adhikari was a pioneer in introducing the tree to Nepal, but wishes the government was more proactive in helping market this unique product.

Government inaction is a given, Adhikari reckons, and this means farmers like him have to find innovative ways to adapt to the climate crisis on their own.



JANA AŠENBRENEROVA

“In the last five years, it has become so hot that it is hard to stay in the village and the crops won't grow because there are so many bugs and pests,” he says.

So, Adhikari has taken to coffee and fruits, which have proven to be more resistant to heat stress compared to traditional crops such as rice, which he used to grow. Coffee takes up minimal space and enriches soil quality, while also allowing other crops to be grown in between.

But with pests and erratic rainfall becoming even bigger threats of late, Adhikari is diversifying further to moringa, nicknamed ‘Miracle Tree’ for its myriad medicinal benefits.

Moringa leaves are used in dietary supplements, are rich in vitamins, have antioxidant properties and fetch a high market price.

Moringa is fast-growing and

He says, “The government makes a policy but it is often short-sighted, and on-the-ground implementation never really happens.”

Whether it is seed preservation or climate-change education, rural farmers are therefore on their own. This means climate impact, on top of lack of jobs and opportunities, is driving increased outmigration.

“The government is happy to neglect farmers because there is enough money coming from overseas remittances,” says Adhikari, “We have to bring changes on our own.”

Which is why Adhikari is organising farmers so there is strength in numbers, and adaptation ideas can be shared more widely. The National Farmers Group Federation is playing this role as an umbrella organisation for advocacy organisations at the village, district, and central levels.



Farmers harvesting Proso Millet in Humla.

LI-BIRD

Mighty Millet

Although she may not have an official title, Ambika Bhandari is a leader in her village. Five years ago, she began piloting the Setho Kaguno variety of local millet on her farm, previously having grown maize like many locals.

Seeing Bhandari's strong yield and the higher market value for her millet, neighbouring farmers in the village of Kafalghari in Kaski followed in her footsteps.

Changing weather patterns and heat stress convinced farmers to switch from maize to millet. Five years later, Kafalghari today is the biggest Setho Kaguno producing village in the country, harvesting more than 2.56 tonnes last year.

Bhandari gets her seeds from LI-BIRD's seed bank and sells her crop

to the non-profit Merit Pokhara, which is run by students also inspired by LI-BIRD's work with seed preservation.

Merit provides farmers like Bhandari with instruction on using phone apps to track rain and temperature patterns so as to ensure planting, harvesting, and drying are carried out at optimal periods.

Based on Merit Pokhara's model, the local government adopted a compensatory scheme to ensure farmers are paid fairly for their produce. Says Bhandari: “This public-private cooperation has been truly helpful. It also proves that we carve out our own destiny even without outside help.”



Juggernaut Timilsina

Trail runner, mountaineer, outdoor instructor, rock climber, paraglider, entrepreneur

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Jagan Nath Timilsina has summited Mt Everest, won the Great Himalayan Race, climbed rock faces. He now runs multiple tourism businesses and spends his summers teaching in Alaska.

Born and raised in Sarangkot, surrounded by the spectacular panorama of the Annapurnas, Timilsina would hike for hours to school every day.

Timilsina wanted to start working as early as possible. At age 13, he went to India to look for a job but was too young to work security. So he came back to Nepal and became a trekking porter at age 14.

Ambitious and resourceful, he took advantage of the government's English language and training programs for trekking guides. Timilsina started out as a guide at Himalayan Encounters in 2004, and covered more than 100 trails in Nepal and Tibet over the next 11 years.

"Many porters become guides and stop," notes Timilsina.

"But I always want to take the next step. So I set my sights on mountaineering and climbing."

He completed courses offered by the Nepal Mountaineering Association and the Khumbu Climbing Center (KCC), learning about avalanche safety, ice climbing and rescue training. Soon after, Timilsina summited



Mt Everest. Since then he has scaled 25 other peaks, often leading expeditions.

Timilsina wanted to take his education further, so on the recommendation of teachers he met at the KCC, applied to the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), a non-profit outdoor education school founded in Wyoming. On his second attempt, he got into a 15-person course for instructors.

Timilsina's acceptance into the



program was conditional: NOLS were stricter with candidates from Nepal, given the country's poor reputation regarding safety. He was surprised with a test about Wilderness First Aid, which Timilsina had passed in Nepal. This time, he failed.

According to protocol, Timilsina should have been sent home, but the instructors decided to give him a second chance: he could go on with the course, but

would be retested after. "The course kept me busy from 6AM to PM, so I would study at night by headlamp, getting by on three hours of sleep," recalls Timilsina.

The second the course finished, Timilsina was whisked away to give his retake. He needed at least a 75 to pass - he got a 99.

The deal was that the best-performing student in the course was offered employment at the institute. Timilsina had a job

starting the very next day, and he has kept it, teaching in Alaska every summer.

He uses his experience to run outdoor education courses in Nepal too, including teaching wilderness skills to children with disabilities.

"Once, the children were caught in a heavy downpour and I was worried," recalls Timilsina, "but they assured me that it was nothing compared to what they deal with on the daily basis."

In 2017, Timilsina won the first edition of the Great Himalayan Race, covering 1,600km in 46 days.

"Much of the race was very easy for me. I would get done with the day's racing early, and spent the rest of the day taking in the beauty of the untouched valleys and cultures along the route."

Timilsina now splits his time between Pokhara and Kathmandu, running his travel company Freedom Adventures, his non-profit Freedom Social Foundation, and organising races and training through Himalayan Trail Running.

Harder than juggling all these ventures is navigating Nepal's labyrinthine bureaucracy. Timilsina says: "It is frustrating to work in Nepal. To trek to Manang, for example, you need permits from four different entities."

Outdated laws and arbitrary regulations have made things worse. Adding to the challenge is the phenomenon of outmigration of the young Nepalis, who are often only holding jobs as they wait for visas to be approved.

Despite all this, Timilsina is still optimistic about the future of Nepal's tourism. He says: "There is endless potential here, but our attitudes around discipline and hard work need to match our ambitions." 🇳🇵



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