

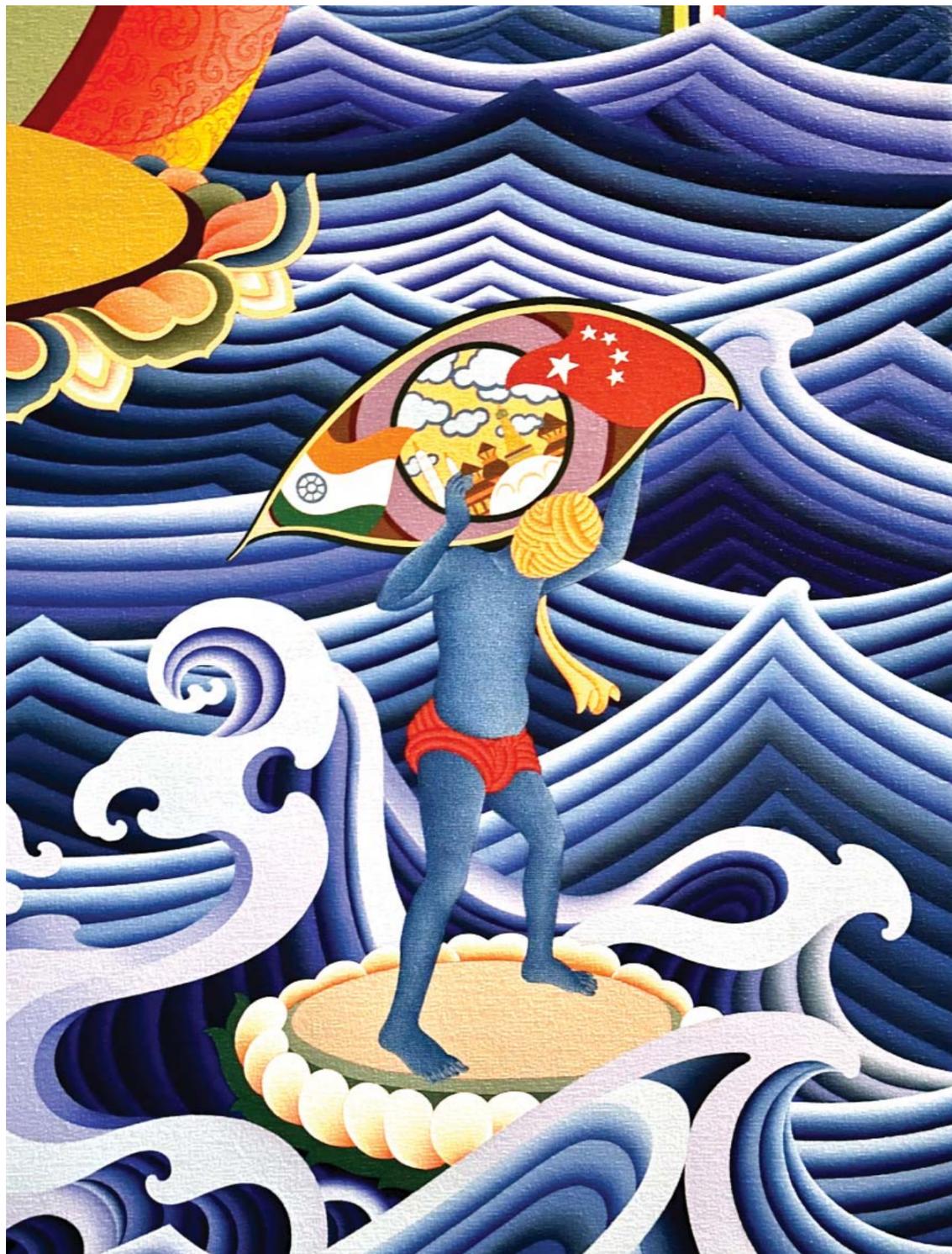


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## Himalayan art at The Met

The Himalaya has become a climate and geopolitical hotspot. Just as global warming melts its ice cap more and more rapidly, international rivalry over spheres of influence are also being played out along the lofty borderlands with some of the highest battlefields in the world. Nepal is caught up in the middle of it all.

Kathmandu-born artist Tenzing Rigdol's mandala installation depicting the tension and tumult of his native Himalayan region is the focus of a new exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York for the next three months, till 12 January.

Titled 'Biography of a Thought', the paintings are adapted from the traditional thangka style, and force us to contemplate the realities of the present world and how it affects our individual beings. (Pictured)

A churning ocean merges with roiling clouds and transforms into mountain peaks, evoking our inner turmoil. A foetus holds an assault rifle, an illusion of a melting dye on a thangka canvas evokes the apocalyptic destruction of life on the planet.

The art explores climate breakdown, wars, disharmony, but contrasts these against innate human values of compassion, virtue and peace. All these forces and emotions are played out today in the physical world of face-to-face relationships, as well as in the parallel virtual reality of the digital realm.

The artist forces us to take a moment of quiet thoughtfulness by looking at iconographic

clouds, while contemplating how modern interventions disrupt the harmony and affect all sentient beings in the natural world through the visual imagery of stormy ocean waves.

Rigdol himself makes a cameo appearance, his head wrapped in a yellow cloth that symbolises his attempt to comprehend it all.

"I am in the painting with my head wrapped," Rigdol explains. "I am not celebrating ignorance, but showing that I am ignorant. I don't know everything, but the little that I know, I want to share with you in these images."

Kashish Das Shrestha visits the exhibition at The Met and speaks to Rigdol about his life and art (page 8-9) and the interconnectedness of our actions and their consequences.



Scan this QR code to listen to Tenzing Rigdol and take a video tour of the exhibit on nepalitimes.com

**MORE PAGE 8-9**

### TV or not TV

PAGE 12

### Banning banishment is not enough

PAGE 14-15

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## RSP's RSVP

Following the release of the report by the Parliamentary Special Investigation Committee on the cooperatives fraud, RSP member Shisir Khanal made a rather bizarre statement to the media.

While defending the alleged involvement of his boss Rabi Lamichhane and his tv venture partner G B Rai in diverting the savings of depositors of multiple cooperatives, he said: "G B Rai was already so rich, why would Rabiji investigate the source of his investment? Would you ask Binod Chaudhary where he got his money if he wanted to invest in your media?"

Khanal was a former RSP education minister and co-chair of the reputed Teach for Nepal. For someone who claims to have joined politics to reform Nepal's education sector, this was woefully underwhelming.



Lamichhane is innocent until proven guilty by the courts. But there is no smoke without fire, and the man's political career so far during several tenures as home minister has been, to put it politely, questionable.

Other RSP technocrats like economist Swarnim Wagle, IT entrepreneur Sumana Shrestha and physician Toshima Karki joined the party because they believed in nurturing an ethical political ecosystem in Nepal. We understand that they have to toe the party line, but they all say the committee gave Lamichhane a clean chit. Which it did not.

To be sure, there is evidence that the NC and UML connived in June to topple the Maoist-led coalition in which Lamichhane was home minister because his investigation into the fake refugee and Jhapa tea estate land scam were getting close to the top leaders of both parties.

Besides that, Nepal's two biggest parties in the current coalition also want to prevent the RSP from getting too popular before the next elections in 2027. The RSP vs NC-UML prize fight therefore is looking like the pot calling the kettle black.

For the RSP's own sake, and to bolster its original image of a new alternative party that stands for good governance, integrity and delivery, it needs to purge itself of a leader who is always neck deep in serial scandals.

Lamichhane is behaving exactly like the elderly alpha males of the other established parties that he was promising he was different from. We have seen all this before: a party leader who does not want to let go and expects all-out loyalty from cadres even when there are moral questions.

Communist parties believe in 'democratic centralism' and actively suppress criticism of their supreme leaders. But in Nepal it is SOP even in parties that have fought long and hard

for democracy and pluralism to do so.

Those who dare criticise the Great Leader are sidelined, framed, or driven into oblivion. Party bosses consider their own colleagues as more of a threat to their power than those in an opposition party. Political parties have factions within factions.

All this is nothing new. But we had all hoped that for the country's sake the RSP was different. That it would be more transparent and exercise more internal democracy, that policy would take precedence over politicking, discretion would prevail over discord, top leaders would make good governance the goal rather than personal gain.

The RSP cannot hope to be an alternative party, if singing hymns of a tainted Dear Leader is the condition for membership. Lamichhane's ex-comrade Mukul Dhakal has quit, but other technocrats are falling over each other to demonstrate their loyalty to him. The fear seems to be that opposing the leadership will end one's political career. (Sound familiar? Trump's GOP.)

Most politicians make the mistake of believing that power is the ultimate truth. They believe that power, authority, and right are one and the same, and everything else is secondary. But in politics, one is expected to uphold higher moral standards and be accountable to the public.

Lamichhane was elected on a populist platform, turbocharged by his fiery tv anchor role. But ever since he entered politics, he has defied and deflected allegations about his passport and citizenship by wiggling his way into any available coalition and bargaining hard for the home ministry post. He tried to do the same in the previous government to launder the cooperative scam.

He played hardball, and the current coalition is also playing hardball. That is politics, but Lamichhane has failed to grasp that patriotism is not proof of honesty. Instead, he has consistently resorted to fear-mongering, using vengeful language and spewing threats (including against the media) when in power and out of it.

He could have used legal means to defend allegations, or even stepped aside to facilitate the investigation. Instead, he has fallen back on social media-driven populism to foment public sympathy. The established parties are so discredited themselves that his supporters are willing to believe that the NC and UML are out to get him for exposing skeletons in their closet. By dismissing allegations against its chair, the RSP's aspiring technocrats have undermined their own futures. The Greek philosopher Erasmus is supposed to have said that a fish rots from the head down.

That could very well apply to the RSP if its honest and competent second echelon do not follow their conscience, and continue to parrot a compromised leader.

*This has been adapted with permission from an Editorial in Nagarik Daily published on 22 September 2024.*

**Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around them: Plato**

## ONLINE PACKAGES



BIOGRAPHY OF A THOUGHT

Tenzing Rigdol's installation 'Biography of a Thought' is a powerful centrepiece at The Met in New York, and a historic moment for Himalayan art. While drawing on Buddhist ideas, practices, and artistic formats seen in the surrounding galleries, the installation presents our world from a secular perspective. Watch video by The Met. Review on page 8-9.



PAD POWER

Menstruation remains taboo in Nepal. Follow Nepali Times to the scenic village of Patlekhet in Kavre, where local women in the Dharti Mata Sustainable Workshop produce eco-friendly, sustainable cotton pads while also spreading menstruation knowledge around the village. Watch the video on our YouTube channel.

## UPPER ARUN

India will not allow any big economic achievement in Nepal unless it is to its own benefit (World Bank flip-flop on Upper Arun', Ramesh Kumar, #1230). Furthermore, Nepali leaders will not discuss topics that India does not want discussions on.

Matrika Poudel

As long as the agreement to export 10,000MW of electricity to India in 10 years remains, investment will not come into Nepal. The Nepal-India long-term trade has killed the environment for investment outside of India, and our rivers are only considered important in relation to electricity, which is against our national interest.

Anamol

## NT NEWSLETTER

I enjoyed the humour in this week's newsletter, but if we were to allow a system that legalises corruption, we don't know where the country's economy would land.

Bharat Koirala

## IT SECTOR

This must-read article from Nepali Times emphasises that self-learning is key before we can fully embrace machine learning and AI ('Self-learning comes before machine learning', Vishad Raj Onta, nepalitime.com). While AI offers huge opportunities, barriers like restrictive policies and skill gaps are holding us back. Companies like Wiseyak and Fusemachines are leading the way, but the government needs to do more to support the sector. Self-learning, innovation, and better policies are the building blocks for Nepal's tech revolution.

Naresh Newar

## PROTECTED AREAS

I suspect animals would make better politicians than humans ('State vs Nature', #1228).

Stephen Scott Fawcett

## ROMANIA AMBASSADOR

It was lovely to read this interview of Romanian ambassador Daniela-Mariana Sezonov Jane ('The most amazing thing about Nepal are its people', #1228). My congratulations and best wishes on coming out with this book.

Krishna Chalisey

## Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING



## Yem Yāh

by Alok Siddhi Tuladhar  
Kathmandu's Great Autumnal Festival that celebrates the rain god for a bountiful rice harvest, has many popular myths associated with it. We dig deeper to uncover the layers through which its history has evolved. Visit nepalitime.com for details.

**f** Most reached and shared on Facebook

## Decentralising power in Nepal

by Bikash Pandey  
The well-known cancellation of Arun III in 1995 and the availability of alternative models led to Nepal's decentralised power development. It matters that this distributed generation and storage of electricity is close to the point of use. Join the discussion online.

**X** Most popular on X

## World Bank flip-flop on Upper Arun

by Ramesh Kumar  
Thirty years after pulling out of Arun III, the World Bank has gone quiet on investing in the Upper Arun hydropower project. This would be Nepal's largest hydropower project so far with an estimated cost of \$1.8 billion. Follow us for the latest developments.

**66** Most commented

## Japan-born struggle to 'be Nepali'

by Pinki Sris Rana  
In several Nepali families in Japan, it is the children who are having to adjust to being caught in between two worlds. Many have to cope with the double adjustment of first arriving in Nepal, and then returning to school in Nepal. Read story on our website and watch the video.

**🔥** Most visited online page

## QUOTES

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Nepal's social media platforms are bursting with anger against the main parties. There are signs that Prime Minister Oli and other senior coalition figures are aware that newer political entrants could ride the wave of public outrage against incumbents.

**Forester @kuenvmgt504**  
The proposed amendment to the Constitution is seen by many as a gerrymandering strategy for the 2027 election by abolishing inclusion provisions. Stingy incompetent intolerant rulers and majoritarian political parties the MAJOR PROBLEMS not the Constitution.

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
"Nepal will always remain in my heart as one of the most beautiful places I have visited, with warm people and an amazing culture," says outgoing Romanian Ambassador Daniela-Mariana Sezonov Jane.

**Josep Prat @jprat**  
My first solo trip outside of Europe was to Nepal. An experience that marked me from the moment I arrived at Kathmandu airport. In love with temples and their fantastic 'momos'.

## 1,000 WORDS



Between us we have been prime minister 10 times.

Wait. It would be 13 if Oli-ji was also here.

## PM ALUMNI CLUB:

Ex-prime ministers (from left to right) Madhav Kumar Nepal (2009-11), Sher Bahadur Deuba (1995-97, 2001-02, 2004-05, 2017-18, 2021-22), Pushpa Kamal Dahal (2008-09, 2016-17, 2022-24), Baburam Bhattarai (2011-13) at the Constitution Day event at the President's Office.

RATNA SHRESTHA / RSS

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

## Nowhere like Namche

If there was one place that was relatively unaffected by the Maoist war even at the height of insurgency, it was Namche in the Everest region. Foreign trekkers were left to explore on their own, security guards were at their most relaxed, local businesses were flourishing. According to the locals, this was because Maoists weren't expert climbers unlike Sherpa people, and Sherpas are no Maoists.

Excerpt of the report published 20 years ago this week on issue #215 24 - 30 September 2004:

At the entrance to Namche Bajar, a group of armed soldiers relax, chat and greet this season's first batch of European tourists.

Nowhere else in Nepal do security forces seem so friendly and at peace, and for good reason. The Sherpas laugh when asked about the Maoist militants. "It's too much hard work. They'd have to be expert climbers to cross the passes and come all the way down to Namche," says Mingma Sherpa, who runs a trekking inn at Phakding, a four-hour walk from Lukla airport. "Only Sherpas can do that. None of the Maoists are Sherpas," adds her husband.

Mingma invested over Rs 800,000 to renovate her hotel



Namche looks forward

during the last couple of months, and is confident that with tourist arrivals looking healthy, it will be worthwhile. "The investment will attract more tourists to my hotel. Besides, we never worry about tourists. This is Everest and everyone's full of hope," says Mingma.

Preparations for the tourist season are in full swing right up the trail from Lukla. Up to 15 flights from Kathmandu landed in Lukla's famous inclined runway during a break in the weather last week. Porters and yak trains can be seen carrying tons of supplies like kerosene, gas cylinders, mattresses, beverages, and chickens.

Many hotels are being renovated and redecorated to welcome even bigger crowds of Europeans expected next week. In Kathmandu, trekking agencies report only minimal cancellations, and those who had booked treks in other parts of Nepal have shifted to the Everest area.

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

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# Unlocking India's AI potential

India needs AI, India is ready for AI, and India will do AI, writes Infosys co-founder

■ Nandan Nilekani

India is on the brink of a transformation that could change its economic and social future.

Before the end of this decade, more Indians will use AI every day than in any other country in the world. What's more, people in advanced economies will be surprised by the ways Indians will adapt to AI applications.

India is on the cusp of a technological revolution that could alter the trajectory of its social and economic future, and in this revolution there are lessons for the rest of the world.

Our prediction hinges on three facts: India needs it, India is ready for it, and India will do it.

**India Needs It:** There is growing wariness among global companies about depending inordinately on China for their manufacturing and software needs.

India, with its growing infrastructure investments, favorable policies, and young working population, is the most likely beneficiary of this shift.

With 1.4 billion people, India is closer to a continent than a country. The average age in India is 28, compared with Europe's 44, which means a higher share of the population is of working age.

This demographic dividend, favorable global trends, and the unlocking of decades of suppressed potential are starting to show returns. Young Indians are aspirational and motivated to use every opportunity to better lives.

What really sets India apart from the West is its diverse population. AI is not just about developing cutting-edge technology, it is about finding innovative solutions to address health care, education, agriculture.

Indians are often bi- or multilingual. Two Indians selected at random have only a 36% chance of speaking a common language.

This language barrier is



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complicated by the fact that the official literacy rate in the country hovers near 77%, varying vastly between states. It is therefore hard to spread awareness about the service and reach the last mile.

Filling out a simple form to access welfare can be daunting for someone who is illiterate. AI can help bridge this gap.

AI enables people to access services directly with their voice using natural language, empowering them to help themselves. As Canadian writer William Gibson said, "The future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed."

**India is ready for it:** India's population is not just young, it is connected. It has more than 790 million mobile broadband users. This has created a massive user base for AI and services.

But where India has surpassed all others is in its digital public infrastructure. Today, nearly every Indian has a digital identity under the Aadhaar system, a 12-digit unique identity number with an

option for users to authenticate themselves digitally.

Further, India set up a low-cost, real-time, interoperable payment system. This means any user of any bank can pay any other person or merchant using any other bank instantly and at no cost.

This Unified Payments Interface handles more than 10 billion transactions a month. It is the largest real-time payment system in the world and represents 60% of real-time payment transactions worldwide.

Namma Yatri, a ride-hailing network built in collaboration with the union of auto-rickshaw drivers in Bangalore was launched in November 2022. Drivers have their own app, with a flat fee to use it, no percentage commission and no middleman. The app has facilitated close to 90,000 rides a day, almost as many as ride-hailing companies in the city.

Unlike Western countries, which have legacy systems to overhaul, India's tabula rasa

means that AI-first systems can be built from the ground up. The quick adoption of digital public infrastructure is the bedrock for these technologies.

Such infrastructure generates enormous amounts of data, and thanks to India's Account Aggregator framework, the data remains under the citizens' control, further encouraging public trust and utilization. With this solid footing, India is well positioned to lead the charge in AI adoption.

**India will do it:** In September 2023, the Indian government, in collaboration with the EkStep foundation, launched the PM-Kisan chatbot which works with PM-Kisan, India's direct benefit transfer program for farmers initiated in 2019.

Access to the program, getting relevant information, and resolving grievances was always a problem for farmers, now the chatbot gives farmers the ability to know their eligibility and the status of their application and payments using

just their voice. On launch day more than 500,000 users chatted with the bot, and features are being released slowly to ensure a safe and risk-managed rollout.

India's vibrant tech ecosystem has also taken off, a direct offshoot of its booming IT exports, currently at nearly \$250 billion a year.

The largest number of developers after the US on GitHub, a cloud-based service for software development, are from India. This sector not only innovates but also widely adopts digital public infrastructure.

The effect is cyclical: start-ups feed the growing tech culture and, in turn, leverage the data to build more precise and beneficial AI tools. India's dynamic start-up ecosystem, moreover, is actively working on AI solutions to address various challenges.

AI can be a game changer in education as well, helping close the literacy gap. AI technologies are uniquely positioned to help students learn in their native languages, as well as in English. AI applications also extend to teachers, who are often overwhelmed by administrative tasks.

As AI takes over routine chores in government and start-ups, the roles of teachers and students evolve, and they form dynamic partnerships focused on deep learning and meaningful human interaction.

What India needs is a strategic plan to chase down the most important opportunities for AI to help. The trick is not to look too hard at the technology, but at the problems people face that existing technology has been unable to solve.

And organisations such as EkStep have stepped up with a mission called People+AI headed by Tanuj Bhojwani. Instead of putting AI first, they focus on the problems of people leading to surprising new uses unique to India.

From streamlining education to aiding in social protection programs, AI has the potential to deeply penetrate Indian society, effecting broad and meaningful change. (IPS)

Nandan Nilekani is the chairman and cofounder of Infosys and founding chairman of UIDAI (Aadhaar).

## NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक

### Turkish to Santiago

Starting 18 December, Turkish Airlines will fly to Santiago in Chile, the tenth country and 26<sup>th</sup> destination in the Americas for the carrier with four weekly flights from Istanbul to Santiago with stops in Sao Paulo.



The Airlines also secured financing for two Airbus A321NEO eco-friendly airplanes. The terms of the loan are connected to how well Turkish does on its targets for lowering its carbon emissions. Turkish aims to be carbon-neutral by 2050.

The carrier will now also serve 'The Oldest Bread' to its intercontinental business class passengers. The bread originates from the Anatolia region in Turkey and is made from two ancient grains: Einkorn and Emmer Wheats.

### BYD Valley Slam tennis

The first BYD Valley Slam tennis tournament organised by Himalmedia is underway at Satdobato Tennis Complex with a total of 120 participants competing in various categories. The finals will take place on Saturday.



### Aloft SATA awards

Aloft Kathmandu Thamel has won the Leading Business Hotel, best CSR program, and best GM for Excellence awards at the South Asian Travel Awards 2024 in Kathmandu. General Manager Vikram Singh credited the Aloft team's hard work and promised further success.

### NMB + Buddha

NMB Buddha Visa Debit Card holders get 10% cashback, upto Rs500, on flights booked on Buddha Air website, the scheme targeted at festive travel is valid till 5 November.

Farmers in Bagmati Municipality can now get digital loans from NMB Bank through the Kheti App with financial literacy. The bank is taking this program nationwide after testing it in Bagmati and Gandaki Provinces.

### StanChart CEO

Global Banking & Finance awarded Standard Chartered CEO Anirvan Ghosh the 'Banking CEO of the Year Nepal 2024'. The Bank has been maintaining a AAA rating with ICRA Nepal for the last five years.

### Paras for Deepal

Changan Nepal has roped in former Nepal cricket captain Paras Khadka as brand ambassador for its Deepal EVs. The Chinese car company launched its Deepal S07 model and has already delivered over 500 units in Nepal.



### USAID Agro aid

USAID launched the US government's five year Global Food Security Storage Nepal Country Plan 2024-2028 and the USAID Agricultural Direct Financing Activity, a government to government agreement to advance agricultural development in Nepal.

### Bella Vita in Nepal

Indian organic perfume brand Bella Vita has launched in Nepal, partnering with distributor Consumer Access to place their products in over 5000 retailers, including Bhat Bhateni and online stores Daraz and Jeevee.



### Hult Prize at KU

The 9<sup>th</sup> iteration of the Hult Prize was inaugurated at Kathmandu University, with a theme of 'Unlimited,' challenging teams of 2-4 students to create business solutions that align with at least one SDG. The two best ideas at KU will move on to further regional and global stages, with the final winning idea receiving \$1 million for implementation.

### DishHome +3 months

Under DishHome's 'Khushiko Celebration' scheme for the coming festive period, new internet customers will get an extra three months when subscribing to a year-long 200/300 mbps internet plan.



### Ncell para honors

Ncell honoured para taekwondo athlete Palisha Goverdhan, bronze medalist at the Paris Paralympics 2024, with Rs1 million cash prize.

Ncell Foundation also carried out early detection cancer screening of 120 women at an event in Birtamod.



### Royal at Rally

Deepa Kumar Sah will represent Nepal on a Royal Enfield Himalayan 411 at the fourth Rally in India from 2-6 Oct. The Rally has a steep, rocky route and attracts riders from around the world. Sah has been riding Enfield motorcycles since he was young.

### Cathay to DFW

Cathay Pacific will start non-stop flights between Hong Kong and Dallas Fort Worth in April 2025, one of the busiest airports in the world, and the Hong Kong-based carrier's sixth destination in the US.



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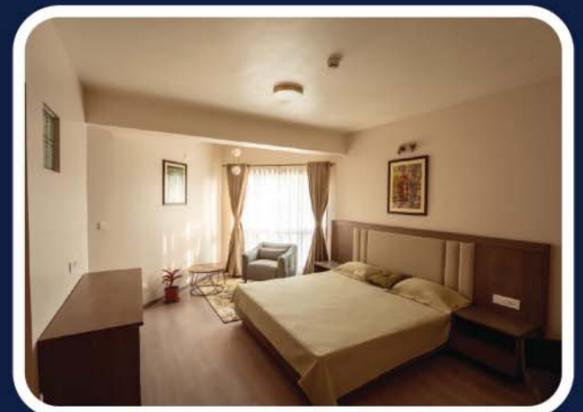
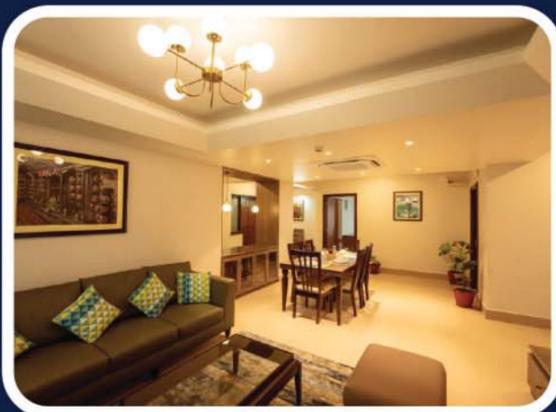
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# The snake bite emergency

Which gets more media attention: the 10 people killed by tigers every year, or 3,000 who die from snake bites?

It was a rainy night in August, 50 years ago, in our ancestral village of Balara near the Indian border. Because of the monsoon, our village was surrounded by flood waters.

I vividly remember my grandmother Sharada Devi picking me up, and putting me to sleep on the bed. Waking up the next



**BORDERLINES**  
Chandrakishore

morning, I learnt that she had been bitten by a snake, and a porter had carried her in a bamboo basket across the Bagmati to a shaman.

She died on the way.

That bereavement at a young age left a wound that is still fresh. Even after half-a-century, the trauma of snakes has not left me. Many thousands of Nepalis die every year because of lack of timely treatment for snake bites.

The Tarai presents an ideal habitat for venomous snakes, and during the monsoon they come out of their flooded hideouts to enter homes and fields. The monsoon is also when there are more farmers out and about for planting, exposing them to the danger.

Snake bite has been such a clear and present danger to life in Nepal's southern borderlands that during the many festivals this season, stories are told of people who have survived snake bites because of their devotion.

There are Maithili folk songs (नाग बढ्यु, नागिन बढ्यु, पाँच बहिन बिसहरा बढ्यु, साँभ सूती प्रात उठी) that pray for the welfare of snakes, but also plead for divine protection from snake bites at night, so they can wake up alive in the morning.

The traditional occupation of the Natuwa people is of snake charmers. They used to travel from village to village blowing on a flute-like instrument making a captive cobra sway and dance.

The Natuwa can be Hindu or Muslim, and are also called upon when a venomous snake is found inside the house. Some earned the reputation for being quacks because of their ineffective and fake treatment of snakebites.

Mobarak Miya (right) lives near Simara, and shows a round wooden box in which he used to keep his dancing cobra.

"Nowadays snakes are protected species and the law does not allow us to keep them, but we had a charmed life as snake charmers," recalls Miya, who now does day jobs to earn a living.

For a hazard that claims thousands of lives every year in Nepal, there are no reliable estimates of fatalities from snake bites. Awareness is lacking about distinguishing between venomous



PHOTOS: CHANDRAKISHORE



and non-venomous snakes, or what to do if bitten. Snake bites are treatable, but health posts lack adequate anti-venom vials.

About 10 people every year are killed by tiger or wildlife attacks, but those get much more media attention than the estimated 40,000 snake bite cases a year in Nepal and 3,000 fatalities resulting from them.

As with everything else, it is the marginalised communities which are most exposed to the risk. Tarai Dalits, who spend more time outdoors in the fields and live in flimsy mud and thatch houses, suffer disproportionately.

With federalism, rural municipalities should be taking a more proactive approach to supplying antidotes to their health posts and spreading awareness. But this is not happening.

Statistics from existing health posts that administer anti-venom show that many victims are from across the border in India. This proves that northern Bihar also suffers from the same risk and lacks treatment. The role of local FM radio in spreading awareness has transboundary importance because these stations have a considerable listenership in India.

Tarai families are more exposed to the risk because most of Nepal's venomous species are found in the plains. But in addition, unsafe housing, flooding, paddy plantation and harvest,

grazing livestock, open defecation, and sleeping on the floor are added risk factors.

Researchers at BPKIHS in Dharan showed in a pilot in four Tarai villages that a Motorcycle Volunteer Program to rush snake bite victims to health posts saved lives. There used to be about 500 snake bites per 100,000 population with a 10% fatality rate in the sites, but after the experiment, only 0.5% of the 315 cases were fatal.

Snakes kill and maim the poorest Nepalis, which may be why the state is not so bothered, and there is a direct correlation with unsafe housing, lack of education, and quality health services.

The snake bite emergency is as serious as ever. It could be that agriculture, pesticide use, urbanisation, infrastructure has forced snakes out of their habitat. Climate breakdown, heat stress, and floods could be making human-snake contact more probable.

Whatever the cause, I lost my grandmother and many Tarai households lose family members every year. Nepal has had multiple governments in the past three decades, and two elections under the federal system that were supposed to provide accountable local government.

But the menace of snake bites remains an emergency. 🇳🇵

Chandrakishore is a Birganj-based commentator who writes this monthly column Borderlines for Nepali Times.



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# Human sp in a digital

Tenzing Rigdol's installation is a powerful centrepiece at The Met in New York, and a historic moment for Himalayan art

■ **Kashish Das Shrestha**  
in New York

On 16 September, the iconic grand steps of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) in New York had all the signs of closing time: hot dog vendors were packing up for the day, visitors were taking their final selfies, and Museum security had informed the skateboarders to wrap up using the steps as a ramp.

The Met was in fact preparing for a special after-hours occasion: the pre-opening reception of its exhibition 'MANDALAS: Mapping The Buddhist Art of Tibet' curated by Kurt Behrendt, the museum's Associate Curator of South Asian Art. Anchoring the show is the installation 'Biography of a Thought', by 42-year-old Kathmandu-born artist Tenzing Rigdol.

As the world hunkered down in 2020 due to Covid, Rigdol spent the lockdowns traversing history, philosophy, Buddhist teachings and art, letting it all seep into the innermost corners of his mind and allowing it to shape what would be one of his largest and most important undertakings. Two years ago he was still working out his final processes in Kathmandu before putting acrylic on canvas, testing over 30 shades of blue. In his studio in Boudha, he had said: "I am finally happy with a couple of the colours, it is very important that I get it right."

Earlier this year, the artworks arrived at The Met. In August, the artist posted an announcement of his upcoming exhibition on his social media platforms.



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# Spiritual existence al ecosystem



Upon entering The MET's Gallery 963, the Robert Lehman Wing in an atrium, visitors have multiple vantage points for an overhead view of the exhibition. Awash in natural light from the soaring glass ceiling above, guests are greeted with a panoramic view of Rigdol's Biography of a Thought.

It is bold in both scale and concept. The 21 canvases add up to nearly 95sq m of painted work. An additional 100sq m of handwoven Tibetan carpet is part of the installation, for which Rigdol collaborated with Mt Refuge as the fabricators.

Rigdol's 2014 body of

work, 'My World Is Your Blind Spot', consisted of five 1m panels using silk, Buddhist scriptures, photographs, and focused on the issue of self-immolation. In 2011, after covertly transporting over twenty tons of soil from Tibet to Dharamshala, India, he created a three-day site specific installation work titled Our Land, Our People so visitors could walk on Tibetan soil again and later take home small packets of it.

In 2008, for his performance art titled Scripture Noodles, Rigdol went to a Chinese restaurant where he chopped up Tibetan scriptures like thin noodles and stir fried them

like chow mein in a wok before proceeding to plate it and finally eat it with a plastic fork.

To enter this exhibition is to enter Tenzing Rigdol's mind. It is a large mandala and the only way to view it is to look at it from above or actually enter and walk through it.

Art came to Rigdol early in life after he was awarded at age six by Queen Aishwarya. His artwork were bought for carpet designs when he was still a young boy. As a teenager, he grew up admiring the works of contemporary Nepali artists.

"I can't begin to express the love and respect I have for Nepal's artists," he tells us in New York. "But Indra Pradhan holds a special place in my heart. The first art exhibition I ever went to was his."

At age 15 in 1997, Rigdol actually won the Indra Pradhan Memorial Inter-School Painting Competition in Kathmandu. He earned a BFA at the University of Colorado Denver in art history of the world, but realised in college that there was so much to first learn about art in Tibet and Nepal.

Rigdol was using a book of Tibetan art for show and tell in class, when his professor asked him about some of the work. He was unable to satisfactorily answer them, and found the gap in his own knowledge and skill unacceptable to himself. He returned to Kathmandu to the Tibetan Thangka Art School, and learnt about sand painting and butter sculpture at Shekar Chorten Monastery.

In the last two decades, Rigdol has emerged as one of the world's top contemporary Tibetan artists and thinkers, helping redefine contemporary Tibetan art. He also mentored many of the movement's well known artists early in their careers, connecting them with international representatives, curators and collectors alike.

His work has been exhibited in museums and galleries around the world and are in private and museum collections. In 2014, he became the first Tibetan artist whose 'Pin drop silence: Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara' (Ink, pencil, acrylic, and pastel on paper) was added to the Permanent Collection of The MET. It was his layered and intricate work 233x125cm. Last year the University of Colorado awarded Tenzing Rigdol an honorary doctorate.

Rigdol's art is a seamless combination of the masterful skill of a thangka artist, the mind of a scholar, a philosophical provocateur, with the instinct and courage of a rebel and the fierce vision of a creative force. Even if one were to not dive into the depths of his art, the powerful visual aesthetics and hints of their deeper meaning can leave viewers impressed and overwhelmed.

Biography of a Thought marks



PHOTOS: KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

an unprecedented historic moment for artists from Nepal and the Himalayan region and places Rigdol as one of the most important and thought provoking contemporary artists from Asia of this time.

At the pre-opening reception, Rigdol's mother Dolma Tsering (pictured above) wandered through her son's installation. "I knew it would be good," she exclaimed. "But this is beyond even my expectations." 🇳🇵

MANDALAS: Mapping The Buddhist Art of Tibet The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Till 12 January, 2025



Click QR code to watch artist Tenzing Rigdol discuss his installation Biography Of A Thought: <https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/videos/2024/9/rigdol-interview>

## Overview from The Met

While drawing on Buddhist ideas, practices, and artistic formats seen in the surrounding galleries, Tenzing Rigdol's installation presents our world from a secular perspective. Moving clockwise the paintings address the ecosystem and human behaviour, conflict and aggression, and virtue juxtaposed with the illusory world and the digital age. On the final wall, the waves quiet, and we are invited to consider our relationship to the whole. Lines running through the sky speak to the underlying structure of Tibetan Buddhist paintings, while clouds represent thoughts and the churning ocean emotion. The repeated figure of the artist, with a cloth-wrapped head symbolising the limits of his own understanding, guides us through the work. A carpet woven by hand, a tradition that Rigdol's family participated in as refugees, leads to a composition at the atrium's centre that explores interdependency.



## EVENTS

**Karmarong**

Dorjee Karmarong's paintings take you deep into life in a hidden valley high in the Himalayas.

Until 21 October, 11am-5pm (Sundays to Fridays), 12pm-5pm (Saturdays), Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal

**K-Culture**

Marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between Korea and Nepal, this exhibition features digital art reflecting the things the two countries have in common.

Until 1 October, 10am-5pm, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal

**Nepal's Past**

Journey into Nepal's past at Patan Museum through photographs captured by French anthropologist Cornielle Jest between 1960 and 1975.

Until 18 October, 8am-6:30pm, Patan Museum, Patan

**Adventure Expo**

Mingle with enthusiasts and experts from the world of outdoor and adventure sports this weekend.

28 September, 10am-6pm, Aranya Boutique Hotel, Nagpokhari

**Labim Bazaar**

Stop by Labim Mall this weekend to taste mouth watering flavours and shop local handicraft.

Every Saturday, 10am-4pm, Labim Mall, Pulchok

## DINING

**Haopin Hotpot**

With the monsoon winding down, it is the perfect time to visit this Chinese restaurant. They offer a wide variety of meats and vegetables to dip in their specialty hotpot.

Narayan Chaur, 9808064999

## MUSIC

**Wind of Festival**

If you haven't been at the Skywalk tower yet, this might be the perfect time to finally visit. Your experience will be enhanced by live musical performances.

27 September, 4pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, Skywalk Nepal, Kamaladi

**Mohaniya Nakha**

Plan ahead for this cultural event happening next week. Indulge in local Newa foods and buy handicrafts. Kuma Sagar and the Khwopa Band are performing live.

3 October, 11am onwards, Ticket: Rs500- Rs1,000, Sasa Twa, Naya Bazar, Kirtipur

**LIL PUMP**

For the first time ever, American Hip Hop Artist Lil Pump is performing in Kathmandu. Don't miss this chance to hear him mumble rap live.

2 October, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Rs2,500- Rs3,500, LOD, Thamel

**Dashain Fest**

Organised by SAIM College, this event is a celebration of the festive season, offering a lively atmosphere with music and food. Rockheads will play live.

29 September, 11am onwards, Ticket: Rs150, SAIM College, Old Baneshwar

**Red September**

Shephalika Dhakal will be performing her song Red, released a month ago, in Jhamsikhel. Book your tickets through Ticketsansar.

29 September, 8pm onwards, Ticket: Rs200- Rs500, Beers n Cheers, Jhamsikhel

**Le Trio**

Step into a 1960s Parisian café with a great selection of Nepali food. Their Jhol momo is perfect if you are craving something soupy during this drizzly weather.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5521674

**Sekuwa By Kilo**

Taste authentic eastern Dharane flavours of seasoned sekuwa right here in Kathmandu. They also have a lunch menu that is available for Rs99 from 12pm to 3pm.

Jhamsikhel, 9801464630

## GETAWAYS

**Fish Tail Lodge**

Located on the quieter side of Phewa Lake, this lodge is an oasis surrounded by blue waters. Coupled with an innovative architectural design and breathtaking panoramic views of mountains, this place is a must-visit.

Phewa Lake, Pokhara (061) 450258

**Heritage Hotel Suites**

This museum-like hotel sets itself apart from the rest. Enjoy a new dimension of comfort, style and adventure under the magical Himalayas.

Lakeside, Pokhara (061) 462125

**Riverside Springs Resort**

This resort, about 100km from Kathmandu, offers a vast swimming pool, cosy rooms and attentive service with exciting activities like horse-back riding and rafting.

Kurintar, Chitwan (01) 5544263

**Mystic Mountain**

Situated amid the forests of Nagarkot, this resort is exquisitely built using ultra modern designs for world-class comfort.

Nagarkot (01) 6200646

**Akama Hotel**

Akama Hotel is a fusion of Local Newari and Himalayan cultures with modern luxury amenities. Relax by the infinity pool to prepare for the festivities.

Dhumbarahi (01) 4377298

**Jatra Cafe**

Jatra Cafe & Bar has an extensive menu that spans sandwiches, pasta and curry. But their Samaya Baji Newari khaja set is as authentic as it gets.

Thamel (01) 4256622

**Dip In Donuts**

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Pimbahal, 9702600112/ 9851115976

## WEEKEND WEATHER

**Not Over Yet**

The monsoon is taking its time to exit this year, and as expected a late pulse from the Bay is injecting moisture into Nepal. Meeting cooler autumnal air will bring moderate to heavy showers all over the country. Since the soil is already saturated, this increases the risks of landslides and rockfalls – especially along highways. The Meteorological Forecasting Department expects the monsoon to end five days later than normal, which is 30 September. Friday and Saturday will be especially wet in Kathmandu which will also see the maximum temperature drop to 22 Celsius.

**OUR PICK**

Based on the 2018 novel by Elin Hilderbrand, this mystery drama starts off with a wedding setting. Amelia, played by Eve Hewson, is marrying into the Winbury family—one of the wealthiest families in Nantucket. But the wedding quickly derails when a murder takes place, turning everyone into a suspect. An investigation gradually disentangles the illusions of the characters' seemingly perfect lives. This six episode-long series, directed by Sussane Bier, is available on Netflix. It stars Nicole Kidman, Liev Schreiber, Eve Hewson and Dakota Fanning.

## 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

# The musical bridge between past and present

The sarangi is suddenly 'cool' again, the music spreading awareness about conservation and discrimination

■ Emma Kieran Schaefer

One of the better known names in the Nepali music scene today, as the founder of Project Sarangi and part of Kutumba, is Kiran Nepali.

He breathes new life into the traditional string instrument, inspiring younger Nepalis to find a sense of pride in their roots, inviting listeners not just to the sound but also to think about persistent caste discrimination.

Nepali is steeped in the cultural heritage of the Gandharva community, who were traditionally minstrels travelling from village to village, singing the news of the land through their lyrics.

Modern media replaced this communication system in Nepali society, and the cultural value of Gandharva storytelling disappeared. People stopped associating themselves with the music. Gandharvas experienced caste discrimination, and the sarangi itself became untouchable.

Growing up in Kathmandu to a lineage of sarangi players, Nepali's parents discouraged him from learning the instrument. So he learned the guitar. Later, he went back to the sarangi, and that changed everything.

"Don't chase what you don't have. Take what you do have and make it great," says Nepali, reflecting on discarded tradition.

Since 2012, the Project has offered educational opportunities to those who want to play the sarangi. They also developed a locally-made



PHOTOS: EMMA KIERAN SCHAEFER

redesign of the instrument so it can be incorporated with technology like loop pedals and amps.

Nepali's love for the sarangi is palpable, as he blends the new amplified sound with the traditional melodies he has perfected, with the instrument serving as a musical bridge between the past and present.

As a result of the instrument's newly acquired modern appeal, he has witnessed a dramatic increase in people wanting to learn sarangi, notably those outside the Gandharva community. Many Nepalis are attracted to learning it as a way of connecting to their roots.

But is something lost in modernising the playing? Nepali

thinks not, having the opinion that traditional instruments must evolve with the times to stay relevant.

"Do we want to see this instrument being played or in a museum?" he asks. "Music must go on, because it has a life, it has a soul, and to preserve it means that it's already dead."

#### Sarangi for conservation

Gandharva music is also being used by Greenhood Nepal for its anti-poaching anthem. Greenhood's Kumar Paudel interviewed over 100 people arrested for illegal wildlife trade. Faced with fines and prison sentences of up to 15 years, the interviewees expressed regret, many stating that they had not realised the scale of the penalty, and the toll

it would take on their families.

Paudel then wrote the lyrics for a collection of songs drawn from the interviews. Collaborating with singer and sarangi player Prakash Gandharva, the songs communicate the impact of illegal wildlife trade on ecosystems and communities, and were performed across Nepal in the traditional Gandharva storytelling style.

"In communities with high rates of illiteracy and limited access to the internet, music is the most effective way of communicating these messages," says Paudel.

Amrit Gandhari is a music therapist and owner of Abira Music Shop in Thamel, which he opened after the pandemic. While modern technology may



threaten Gandharva music, through social media it also provides a large platform to share the music, broadly.

Most sarangi sales from Gandhari's shop are to tourists, who can learn how to play from his YouTube tutorials. He even wrote a song during lockdown to spread awareness about Covid in the traditional Gandharva style.

Sarangi has traditionally been a male-dominated instrument but more women are now learning it too. Gandhari is especially proud that his college-age daughter, Anu, has learnt to play.

Now, the father-daughter duo perform every evening at 6PM in the Kathmandu Guest House courtyard.

Says Anu Gandhari: "I want to be the best sarangi player in the world." 🇳🇵

*Emma Kieran Schaefer is a Thomas J Watson fellow who was in Nepal for a month to research about Gandharva music.*

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KEVIN BUBRISKI



SURESH PAUDYAL

# TV OR NOT TV

As television sets become smarter, Nepalis are buying more of them

## ■ Vishad Raj Onta

One are the days where a television set was a hefty cathode ray tube apparatus in the living room hooked up to an antenna on the roof: a sign of prosperity, a cherished investment to outlast youngsters watching cartoons.

TVs today are thinner, sleeker, bigger, and smarter. And although Nepalis are buying more of them, their screen time is also being increasingly shared with mobile phones.

"A decade ago our best sellers were 24 or 32-inch TVs, but there was a drastic change around the 2018 Football World Cup," recalls Alok K Gupta, General Manager at Samsung Electronics in Nepal.

exposure to bigger television sets, and an increased ability to afford them. Returning Nepalis are also bringing TVs back with them, a trend that might increase after the current budget removed duty on tellys regardless of screen size.

"People are now more savvy about the tech they buy," explains Gupta. "They want new things faster. In the past, people bought a TV to last a generation, but now much of our sales are people looking to replace or upgrade their sets."

But are buyers doing their homework, or are TV companies getting better at advertising? From consumer habits it looks like middle class Nepalis are buying a new set just to shift the TV they already have into the bedroom.

Consumer electronics is also about planned obsolescence, with companies intentionally making products with short life cycles that need software upgrades, or that are superseded by sets that have better picture quality and other features.

Samsung's CE-Biz first tapped into the replacement market by building arkostore.com for customers who were curious about how much money they could get back for returning their current set. CE also runs its own financing on all Samsung devices, allowing monthly payment at 0% interest.

Samsung has a killswitch that will turn off a customer's TV or smartphone if they fail to make their instalment payment, although the company has not put a similar feature (out of mercy?) on its washing machines or fridges.

The popularity of home theatres with wide flat screens indicates that Nepalis who can afford it are tired of watching videos on tiny mobile screens. 🇳🇵



"Nepalis are buying more 43 or 55-inch models right now."

Gupta notes that big sporting events like the World Cup, the recent T20 World Cup and the Euros, cause up to 30% spikes in TV sales in Nepal. There is also a surge in demand during the festive season like the upcoming Dasain, with sales almost doubling because of salary bonuses.

New TVs do not just have larger, sharper screens but also have more intelligent software, and can connect to the internet making it possible to watch streaming videos on YouTube or Netflix.

With more than 3 million Nepalis working overseas, and sending money home, there is more



SURESH PAUDYAL

## Content is king

With TV sets now capable of streaming, and the spread of broadband internet, Nepalis are watching more international programs on their tellys than domestically-produced fare.

"The content of Nepali TV has always been pretty weak," admits Prashant Aryal, formerly with Kantipur TV. "Nepal started late to begin with in 1984 and did not reach maturity before social media took over. Nepali TV never evolved from he-said, she-said content."

NTV and Kantipur TV still have the highest ratings for news and current affairs, but for entertainment most Nepalis used TVs to tune into Indian channels with entertainment serials. And although Nepali films have started being accepted into international festivals and even winning awards, non-news domestic TV content has always been mediocre.

One reason for the poor quality of TV programs is that there were relatively few people with TV skills. Television channels have had to bring in journalists from print, and

plunk them in front of a camera. Since entertainment content costs money, journalists all ended up doing studio talk shows.

No wonder, the content that has thrived and become a Nepali TV trend are fiery talk shows like Rishi Dhamala's Janata Janna Chahanchha or Rabi Lamichhane's populist Sida Kura Janata Sanga before he established the RSP as an alternative political party in 2022.

Other established TV channel talk show hosts like Bhusan Dahal, Dil Bhusan Pathak, Vijay Kumar Pandey, or Tika Ram Yatri have all moved to YouTube.

A particularly good TV show may be approached by sponsors just on the quality of the content. Sometimes producers tie up with sponsors to make shows. Sometimes the company might do it out of its own pocket. The main source of revenue is advertising, which has largely moved to the net.

"When I was at Kantipur TV, it was three years before we broke even," recalls Suresh Paudyal at AP1 TV and 28 years in the television sector. Paudyal

adds, "Everybody wants to put three chairs in a studio and do a talk show, while Nepal is brimming with stories that could make great documentaries."

Paudyal is currently also director of the singing franchise show Nepal Idol, which is in its fifth edition. The show is a rare instance in which investors did decide to chip in big time, even paying a heavy franchise fee.

"I even went to see an episode of Indian Idol and they had such a big production that it seemed impossible to execute a Nepali version," he says. "But even the Maldives were doing it, so we went ahead."

Nepal Idol was able to secure a good title sponsorship, and ratings have held, although what Paudyal really wants is the show to grow bigger every year.

All in all, the content side of linear Nepali TV channels is bleak. But, Nepali entrepreneurs are starting up streaming services like Paradygm TV, and there are producers with better video skills both home and abroad.

Perhaps the lack of quality is the perfect starting place for young, talented, and driven professionals who are passionate about TV. There is nowhere to go but up. 🇳🇵

# Nepali band raises money for Swiss charity

Solidarity concerts by Nepali classical music trio repays Switzerland for help after 2015 earthquake

After the devastating earthquake in 2015, the Nepali classical musical band Sukarma travelled to Switzerland to perform concerts to raise money for reconstruction back home.

This time, the folk-classical musical trio went back to southern Switzerland to raise money for relief and reconstruction for the damage caused by massive storms and floods there in June — possibly the first time Nepalis have reciprocated for Swiss assistance over the past six decades.

“It was truly an honour, and a proud moment for us as Nepalis that we could give back to the Swiss people in their own time of need,” said Dhrubesh Chandra Regmi, the renowned Nepali sitarist and founder of Sukarma, on returning to Kathmandu after his concert tour.

As the name of the band itself implies, it is all about earning good karma points, and proof that help does not always have to be one-sided. Sukarma’s renowned tabla maestro Atul Gautam died in 2005 of brain haemorrhage. Flautist and Grammy award nominee Manose Singh was also a part of Sukarma at one time.

Sukarma was founded in 1997, and has performed often in Europe and several times in the southern part of Switzerland on behalf of Kam For Sud, the Swiss non-profit working on education, health and ecology projects in Nepal, especially after the 2015 earthquake.

This time, Sukarma’s Europe tour included two concerts on 6-7 September in Maggia and Mesocco in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland that was devastated by storms and landslides in late June. Four people were killed when rivers burst their banks on the southern side of the Alps.

The concerts were held at the church



PHOTOS: SUKARMA



of S. Maria delle Grazie in Maggia and S. Maria del Castello in Mesocco, and Sukarma performed together with the four-member choir Vocalia known for its Romanesque diphonic singing.

“Sukarma has always stood for using music as a source of harmony, compassion and togetherness,” Regmi told Nepali Times. “So it was natural for us to return the generosity the Swiss people showed Nepal after the earthquake. The concerts were a symbol of solidarity and mutual help.”

The concerts were organised by Kam

For Sud, which had invited Sukarma several times to Switzerland to raise money for its activities in Nepal. But after hearing about the storms that ravaged Ticino, Regmi expressed the desire to perform for Switzerland in return.

“All three of us in the band felt a strong urge to share our music in solidarity with the Swiss people who had in the past shown tremendous support for Nepal during our disaster,” Regmi noted.

Sukarma is made up of Regmi on sitar, Yatiraj Adhikari on violin and Jagannath Dhaugoda on tabla and madal (pictured). The band has performed in Nepal and around the world to spread its message of harmony and peace through music.

Both concerts at the Swiss churches served as a moving demonstration of the deep ties between Nepal and Switzerland, with Sukarma’s music symbolising unity and support across borders. The Alps and the Himalayan are both at risk from the impacts of climate breakdown and the extreme weather events as a result.

Glaciers are shrinking and receding in both mountain ranges, affecting water supply in the two countries as well as downstream. There have been unseasonal heat waves melting the ice cap on the Alps and unleashing severe storms like the one in June, while the Himalaya have suffered successive winter droughts and record-breaking rainfall. Says Regmi: “Our music is also a call for humanity to live in harmony with nature, so that the ecological balance of Mother Earth can be restored.”

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**SIPRADI**

# Banning banishment is not

Menstrual discrimination has been harder to demolish than chhau sheds

■ **Dhanu Bishwakarma**  
in Achham

- On 20 December 2016, 45-year old Dammara Upadhya of Achham's Timilsain village suffocated to death from a fire to keep away the cold in a windowless shed where she was banished during menstruation.
- That same day in the same district, Roshni Tiruwa, 15, of Gajara village died of asphyxiation in a menstrual hut, called 'chhau.'
- On 11 January 2018, Gauri Budha of Turmakhad of Achham died of suffocation in a chhau shed.
- On 10 June 2018, 22-year old Parvati Buda died of a snakebite in a chhau shed
- Amba Bohara, 35, along with her young sons Suresh and Ramit, died on 18 June 2018 when their chhau shed burned down in Agaupani village of Bajura.
- Parvati Buda Raut, 22, died of asphyxiation inside a menstrual hut on 1 December 2019. Police arrested her brother-in-law for forcing her into the shed, and the court sentenced him to 45 days in prison.

After that tragic death of Parvati Buda Raut, national outrage forced the Home Ministry in Kathmandu to launch a menstrual hut demolition drive across the Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces.

The Ministry directed the 19 districts in the two provinces to search-and-destroy all sheds used for menstrual banishment. Over 10,000 huts were reportedly razed, most of them in Achham, and 100 local governments declared themselves 'Chhau Free'.

However, after the pandemic many sheds have been rebuilt by locals who believe that women are unclean during menstruation, and keeping them at home will invite divine wrath with failed harvests,



PHOTOS: DHANU BISHWAKARMA

**DETENTION CELL:** Tuli Saud of Selpakha village in Achham next to the menstrual shed her family rebuilt after it was demolished by the local government in 2019 (above). A typical chhau hut from the outside.

illness and livestock deaths.

Tuli Saud, 40, lives in the Selpakha village of Achham and has been spending her periods inside a chhau hut for decades. Now, she has two daughters and two daughters-in-law, all of whom stay in the same shed in her backyard for five days every month during their menstruation.

The small shed is windowless. The mud floor is constantly damp during monsoon and covered in straw. When they get their periods at the same time, which happens often, Tuli and the other women in the family have to share the cramped, dark space.

During the district-wide campaign to demolish sheds in Achham, Tuli's menstrual hut was also torn down. She even helped destroy other huts in her village.

But the practice of chhaupadi, and the stigma around menstruation has been harder to destroy than huts. When Tuli had her periods, she spent five days in a tent where the old hut used to be.

Eventually, the family built another mud and thatch shed

because the tent was uncomfortable. Tuli fears that no one in the family will come into the house or eat what she cooks if she does not banish herself to the hut.

Indeed, peer pressure to conform comes not just from society at large but from elder women in the village who believe the superstition about menstrual impurity.

"If the rest of the women in the village stop going to chhau sheds, I am ready to do the same," says Tuli. "I cannot wait for my menopause."

Tuli Saud's neighbour Deusari Auji, 40, also rebuilt her shed and spends her periods there. She lived in the hut for weeks at a time after the birth of each of her five children. Mothers who have just given birth are also banished to these huts.

"This is our custom, it will anger the goddess Kali in the nearby temple if we stop practicing it," says Auji with conviction.

Deusari shares the tiny shed with her mother and sister-in-laws when they get their periods at the same time. "It is difficult to breathe and sleep," she admits. "But we

have to endure that hardship."

Many deaths have occurred due to asphyxiation because the women light fires in the confined windowless spaces during bitterly cold winters in the mountains.

Ram Bahadur Saud's wife and daughter started spending their periods inside their home after the family chhau hut was demolished four years ago. But his family was ostracised by villagers, so he rebuilt the demolished hut.

Nisha Nepali, 14, of nearby Kamalbazar has learnt about reproductive health at school and the risks of spending her periods in a hut. Yet, she is banished to the shed by her family for five days every month during her periods, when she cannot attend school.

"I cannot even do my homework because there is no light in the hut," says Nisha, who grew up in India before her family moved back to Nepal.

Khadga KC in the Achham district capital of Mangalsen angrily made a new hut for his two daughters-in-law after the old one was demolished by the government.

KC is a shaman and believes that ill-health will befall those who touch a woman during her periods, and attributes his own chronic illness to having once been touched by a menstruating woman.

"I do not care what anyone says, the chhau hut in my house is here to stay," he states. "Why should I listen to what other people have to say instead of listening to my god?"

Even locally elected officials like female ward member of Chaurpati village Basanti Saud spend their periods inside the family shed, and actually believe that things are better than before.

Saud tells us why: "The sheds used to be far away before ours was demolished, but that is not the case anymore. Every family now has their own hut."

Achham's Chief District Officer Shiva Prasad Lamsal admits that laws and demolition drives will not be enough to change deeply held beliefs. His office is therefore concentrating on raising awareness against the superstition.

Activists point out that even if they are not banished to huts, many women across Nepal suffer ostracisation and stigma in one form or other, even in educated families. Menstrual discrimination is not only a crime, but also a serious health risk to women.

Nutritionist Aruna Upreti says forcing girls and women to live in cowsheds after childbirth or during their periods makes them prone to accidents, infections and undernourishment at a time when they need a balanced diet.

Entrenched cultural beliefs are hard to eradicate, and provincial and local governments are also reluctant to push for radical reform because of societal backlash. The region where oppressive menstrual discrimination is most prevalent is in the constituencies of powerful politicians like Sher Bahadur Deuba, who has become Nepal's prime minister five times.

Radha Paudel, a dignified menstruation activist, agrees that

## Menstruation is normal, period

Anthology of stories of stigma from around the world by women who overcame discrimination

Nepali activist Radha Paudel who works on dignified menstruation through her foundation shows in her new book just how pervasive menstrual discrimination is around the world.

Menstrual Stories: An Anthology from Global South is replete with tales of stigma, taboo, mockery, disrespect, shame, teasing, bullying by boys that persists.

Radha Paudel is a nurse who has worked in government hospitals across Nepal, and wrote an harrowing account about being caught up in the Maoist attack on Jumla in 2002. She turned into a dignified menstruation activist because of the discrimination and ostracisation she herself faced while growing up in Chitwan.

She established the Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation and Radha Paudel Foundation which hosted a six-month virtual fellowship in 2023 with participants from Austria, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Malawi, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and the UK.

The book is an outcome of those interactions where campaigners across the world spoke about their own experiences of having their first periods, the reaction of their families, school mates and peers.

A thread running through all the stories



is that no matter where in the world women are, rich countries or poor, North or South, educated or uneducated, menstrual taboos persist to a greater or lesser degree.

There are stories of girls not telling their

parents because the first bleeding was "too sensitive", the restrictions on the freedom of young women by family members, schools not teaching reproductive health with accuracy and the right values.

In one school in Dhaka, biology text books had the chapter on sexual reproduction stapled shut. Many young men in Colombia's conservative Catholic families even refused to answer questions in a survey about menstruation, and some confused menstruation with masturbation.

In Nepal, the lack of separate restrooms for girls in schools and shame about menstruation has contributed to the high female dropout rate after Grade 5. The practice of chhaupadi in western Nepal is an extreme form of menstrual banishment.

Paudel does not like the word chhaupadi because it is "too neutral", and does not convey the discrimination.

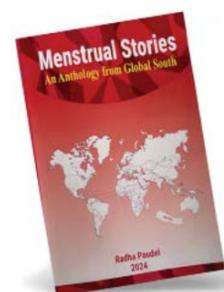
The books also has examples of women across the world resisting the stigma and taboos, and spreading awareness.

A marathon runner in the UK recently ran without pads and 'let the blood flow freely'. A Chinese athlete who won a medal at an international sports event was frank in her answer to a question from the media about her performance: she said she was

having her periods.

Writes Laura Contreras-Aristizabal from Colombia: "It is ironic that despite the fact that more than half of the world's population is made up of women and menstruating individuals, menstruation is still stigmatized and a taboo subject."

We know there are even more serious problems of female genital mutilation in some parts of the world. But for the more pervasive and persistent occurrence of menstrual discrimination, this slim volume offers practical solutions in schools and society to ensure a more dignified approach to accepting the monthly biological cycle in women without stigma. 📖



Menstrual Stories  
An Anthology from Global South  
Radha Paudel  
Global South Coalition for  
Dignified Menstruation, 2024  
ISBN: 97989937972307

# enough

Local governments must mobilise to end the practice (box, page 14).

“Menstrual discrimination is like caste discrimination, and besides laws it must be a dedicated part of school curricula,” says Paudel. “Our pad distribution campaigns try to convince women that banishment to menstrual huts is a dangerous superstition.”



## Raped in the hut

Of the 16 women in Sudurpaschim Province who were killed in the last 17 years in menstrual huts, 14 died in Achham district. Aside from fatalities from asphyxiation or snakebites, menstruating women have also been victims of rape and molestation.

In June, a young girl in Achham was raped by a relative as she slept inside the shed to which she was evicted during her periods. Neighbours found her unconscious and took her to the District Hospital in Mangalsen.

A police complaint was filed, but that was 19 days after the assault. The Grade nine girl had been raised with her brother by their maternal grandmother after their mother died, and her father remarried.

“He began to follow me six months ago, and had on one occasion come into my house when I was alone and forced himself on me,” the girl told us in a recent interview. The police have demolished the shed where the rape took place, and the case is pending in court.

## The Law

Chhaupadi was banned in 2005 by Nepal's Supreme Court, and three years later the Ministry of Women, Child and Social Welfare set guidelines to banish the practice.

Sub-section 3 of section 168 of the National penal Code 2017 stipulates that ‘Banishing a woman to a shed (chhaupadi) during menstruation or delivery, or subjecting, causing to be subjected, her to similar other discrimination, untouchability or inhumane treatment of any kind is prohibited.’ Anyone who commits such an offence is liable to a three-month prison sentence, a Rs3,000 fine, or both.

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# CHINA WATCH

CHINA DAILY 中國日報



**POWERING AHEAD**  
GLOBAL FIRMS MAKE MOST  
OF REFORM PUSH, P3

# Global quest where peace is the winner

Country committed to mediating conflicts, promoting dialogue, fostering shared future. **Cao Desheng** reports

The 75-year journey of the People's Republic of China has witnessed the relentless efforts of the Chinese people to pursue development and progress, creating a miracle of long-term economic growth and social stability.

As it embarks on the journey of Chinese modernisation in the new era, the country strives to realise its dream of national rejuvenation through modernisation and peaceful development. With a vision for human progress, it remains committed to providing new opportunities for world peace and development through its own prosperity.

At the Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing in September, Chinese President Xi Jinping called on China and African countries, with a total of 2.8 billion inhabitants, almost one-third of the world's population, to join hands in advancing modernisation.

"China and Africa's joint pursuit of modernisation will set off a wave of modernisation in the Global South and open a new chapter in our drive for a community with a shared future for mankind," he said.

China, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, is intent on pursuing a path of peaceful development, working closely with all countries. Since 1950, the Tian'anmen Rostrum at the centre of Beijing has been adorned with the inscription "Long Live the Great Unity of the Peoples of the World."

Yasir Habib Khan, president of the Institute of International Relations and Media Research in Pakistan, said China has made strenuous efforts to advance peace and stability in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere.

During the Cold War in the 1950s, Chinese wisdom, rooted in centuries of a peaceful civilisation, came up with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Khan said.

"Today the Chinese leadership has reinvigorated these values at a defining moment when a new Cold War is rearing its ugly head.

"The vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind is the most effective move to sustain, promote and upgrade the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in the new circumstances."

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which have been incorporated into the country's Constitution, offer insight into how developed and developing countries can live together. Among the world's major countries, China has the best record with respect to peace and security.

With a Chinese approach to resolving difficult issues, the path of impartiality and peaceful diplomacy that China

pursues stands out in today's world as Beijing mediates in conflicts and promotes dialogue to achieve peace.

It has played a constructive role in the Ukraine crisis, the Palestine-Israel conflict, and issues relating to the Korean Peninsula, Iran, Myanmar and Afghanistan.

With regard to the Palestinian question, the Beijing Declaration signed by 14 Palestinian factions in Beijing in July that calls for an end to division and strengthen unity has made China a focal point of global diplomacy.

The signing of the declaration was a crucial step towards resolving the Palestinian question and achieving peace and stability in the Middle East. It was

also the first time that an internal Palestinian reconciliation document has been agreed with the decisive help of a country outside the Arab world.

In March, after years of open hostility, Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to restore diplomatic ties following talks facilitated by China, a boon to the security and stability of the Middle East.

Analysts praised China for its role as a peace broker and its efforts to facilitate dialogue. This also showed that China's diplomatic philosophy that aims to promote peace and development is much more appealing than some other countries' tactics of fueling confrontation to expand their own

interests in the Gulf region, they said.

"China's impartial stance, free from selfish motives or interests, has garnered increasing trust from the international community," Khan said.

In April 2022 Xi proposed the Global Security Initiative, which advocates a vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, with the philosophy that humanity is an indivisible security community, and aims to create a new path to security that features dialogue over confrontation, partnership over alliance and win-win over zero-sum.

China is a major troop contributor and the second-largest financial contributor

to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and has set up an 8,000-strong peacekeeping standby force.

In the Report to the 20th CPC National Congress in October 2022, Xi said that as China pursues modernisation, it will not tread the old paths of war, colonisation and plunder.

"Dedicated to peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit, we will strive to safeguard world peace and development as we pursue our own development, and we will make greater contributions to world peace and development through our own development," he said.

Since China embarked on reform and opening-up in 1978 it has made tremendous contributions to world peace and development through its own growth. The country's contribution to global economic growth averaged 24.8% from 1979 to 2023, ranking top in the world, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

China has become the world's largest manufacturer, the largest country in terms of trade in goods and the largest holder of foreign exchange reserves.

The burgeoning Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013 to promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, has shown how China translates its words into deeds and how the concept helps change the world.

A series of landmark Belt and Road projects have come to fruition. Among them, the China-Europe Railway Express comprises a network of rail lines spanning Europe and Asia, with 86 operational routes running to more than 200 cities in 25 European countries.

The China-Laos Railway is helping the people of Laos realise their dream of turning their country into a land-linked one, opening up a new route to development and prosperity.

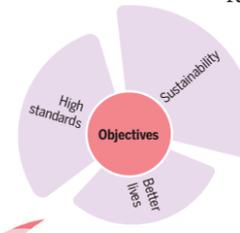
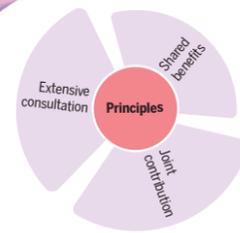
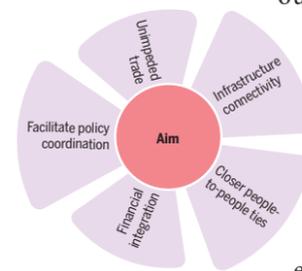
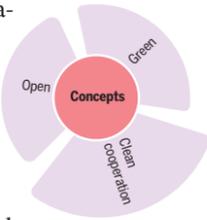
China's journey from a planned economy to a market economy through market-oriented reforms has been of immense significance not only for China itself but also offers valuable lessons for other countries, analysts said.

The Chinese path towards modernisation is not self-centred, said Yu Yunquan, a senior research fellow at the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies in Beijing.

"The goal of the Chinese path to modernisation is not monolithic, but multifaceted, including China's peaceful development, creating opportunities for the world, common prosperity and win-win cooperation."



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY



## Landmark events

**1949:** On October 1, the People's Republic of China was founded. This landmark event fundamentally changed the tragic fate of poverty and weakness that had plagued China for over a century, leading the Chinese nation onto the grand path of realising national rejuvenation.

**1954:** The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were officially announced, becoming a fundamental principle of international relations and international law, and making an indelible historical

contribution to the progress of humanity.

**1971:** On October 25, the 26th session of the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 2758 by an overwhelming majority, deciding to restore the legitimate seat of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations.

**1978:** The third plenary session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China was held in December. It marked the beginning of China's socialist reform and opening-up.

**2001:** China joined the World Trade Organisation.

**2013:** President Xi Jinping proposed the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, a global vision aimed at addressing the common challenges facing humanity.

**2013:** President Xi proposed the major initiatives of jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, aiming to

use the historical symbol of the ancient Silk Road to hold high the banner of peace, development and cooperation.

**2021:** On September 21, during the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly, President Xi proposed the Global Development Initiative with an aim to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**2022:** On April 21, President Xi proposed the Global Security Initiative in a

speech at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference, providing a Chinese solution to address global security challenges.

**2023:** On March 15, President Xi proposed the Global Civilisation Initiative at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting, responding to the common need of the international community to enhance dialogue and exchanges among civilisations and promote cultural prosperity and development.



A family who have been relocated from their remote home in the mountains to a modern community in Anshun, Guizhou province.

YANG WENBIN / XINHUA

# Fight that has routed poverty

Mighty efforts in raising living standards of tens of millions can be seen in country's bridges and roads. **Li Lei and Li Yingqing** report

When TV cameras captured Yu Yanqia, 8, dragging herself upside down along a steel rope strung above the raging Nujiang River on her daily journey to school, no bridges spanned the Nujiang, in rural Fugong county, Yunnan province. So the only way anyone could cross the river was the primitive and precarious steel rope and pulley system that Yu used that day in 2007.

Since then things have vastly improved for Yu and the area in which she lives.

Yu, now a doctor at a hospital in Nujiang Lisu autonomous prefecture, in which Fugong county is situated, remembers how her heart raced with the howling wind each time she crossed the river.

"I'd never been far from my village, so I just thought everyone used pulley bridges to cross rivers," she told Chinese media in July.

The images seen nationally of her crossing the river spurred action to build a bridge across the Nujiang, and when it was completed the following year Yu was chosen as the first person to cross it.

Yu's story encapsulates the rapid progress that has been made in China in improving infrastructure and lifting people out of poverty, especially in remote parts of the country.

Twenty years ago Fugong had some of the most entrenched poverty in the country, with more than half of its people being impoverished. Yunnan had the highest number of poverty-stricken counties in the country, totalling 88.

Today villages are linked by paved roads, and bridges span rivers, meaning that communication, the flow of people and commerce have greatly improved. Access to education, healthcare, work and daily necessities has also improved.

Since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949 the battle against poverty has been a top priority for the Communist Party of China. Following the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, central authorities stepped up efforts to eliminate rural poverty, setting a goal of eradicating poverty before the Party's centenary in 2021.

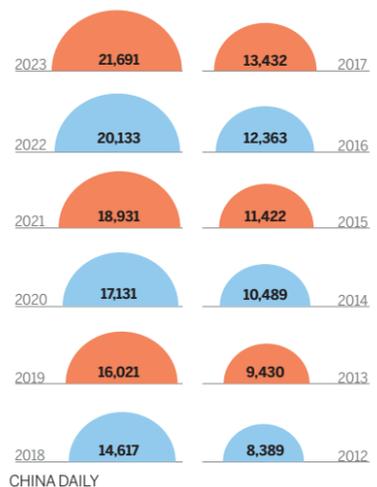
A key aspect of this campaign has been improving rural connectivity.

By 2016 all pulley bridges in Nujiang prefecture had been replaced by modern bridges. Today these bridges along the Nujiang River, rather than just being transportation channels, have also



A farmer tends to cherry tomato vines in a greenhouse in a village in Pingshan, Hebei province. CHEN YEHUDA / XINHUA

Per capita disposable income in rural areas (Unit: yuan)



CHINA DAILY

become tourist attractions.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has built or rebuilt more than 2.53 million kilometres of rural roads and built paved roads in 1,040 townships and 105,000 villages, according to official figures.

More than 50,000 villages have also been connected by passenger bus services.

Nearly 100 million rural poor escaped poverty between 2012 and 2021, ending domestic poverty on the Chinese mainland.

This achievement is all the more remarkable given the global trend of rising poverty.

The World Bank said 712 million people worldwide were living in extreme poverty in 2022, 23 million more than in 2019.

The pandemic significantly hampered global poverty reduction efforts, leading to three years of setbacks, between 2020 and 2022, affecting low-income countries in particular.

Before National Poverty Relief Day on October 17 four years ago, Guy Ryder, then director-general of the International Labour Organisation, said China's decision to stick to the goal of eradicating rural poverty by the end of 2020 amid a "complex economic environment" set a benchmark in meeting the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which include eliminating extreme poverty worldwide in a decade.

On February 25, 2021, at a conference in Beijing, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced that China had achieved complete victory over absolute poverty, with a total of 98.99 million rural poor having been lifted out of poverty.

"China has completed the task of eradicating absolute poverty, which is truly a miracle of human society," said Zhang Jun, then China's permanent representative to the UN, in 2021.

The country's achievement in eliminating poverty was an important contribution to global human rights, Zhang said.

The number of Chinese who escaped poverty over the past 40 years has accounted for more than 70% of the world's impoverished people during that period, measured by the poverty threshold set by the World Bank.

Du Shuangqing, who lives in Gansu province, once home to some of the country's poorest families, is one of the beneficiaries of the improvements.

Du was born into a poor farming family in mountainous Longnan city in 1988. When he was 9, he lost his right arm in a rockslide, which resulted in medical expenses his family were unable to meet.

Du, now 36, who works for the local disabled people's federation, said he would have dropped out of school had it not been for government allowances designed to help poor students.

"Our grain harvest was usually small, and my parents had too many children to support. Back then, life was really hard."

In recent years local authorities have invested tens of millions of yuan to build a road linking his secluded village with the outside world, even though it is home to only about 40 families, he said.

# From little seedlings grow large profits

By Li Lei

At a small plantation on the northern edge of the Himalayan Mountains range in the Xizang autonomous region, *lingzhi* mushrooms are being cultivated to increase the local income.

A medicinal fungus, *lingzhi*, also known as reishi mushrooms, is traditionally foraged from the wild.

In a row of dim, humid single-storey outbuildings, *lingzhi* spores are carefully grown into seedlings to be planted in nearby greenhouses. Close by, freshly harvested *lingzhi* mushrooms are neatly arranged on shelves to be dried for market.

This process has become all too common at the Red Sun Family Farm in Manling in the city of Nyingchi, Xizang, where efforts to grow medicinal herbs and fungi are changing lives for the better.

Cheng Pan, a local Party official, said the farm has become a cornerstone of local agriculture.

The farm, which yielded 15 metric tonnes of dried *lingzhi* last year, is supplying seedlings and technical support to about 400 *lingzhi*-growing families in Manling to increase output.

"The growth is exponential," Cheng said, emphasising that *lingzhi* cultivated in Manling are superior to those grown in lower-altitude regions, making them highly sought-after in the market.

The fungi are believed to improve the immune system, helping the body fight off infections and illnesses, and have been used in traditional Chinese medicine for thousands of years.

*Lingzhi* mushrooms are being mass-produced in greenhouses as part of a growing medicinal farming industry in Manling. Just a few kilometres from the farm the local government has collaborated with pharmaceutical companies from wealthier regions to cultivate *beimu*, or *Fritillaria cirrhosa* bulbs, a herb related to lilies, traditionally used for cough relief.

In a nearby pine forest workers are excavating pits to sow seedlings of *huangjing*, also known as King Solomon's seal, which produces a herb known for its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and immune-modulating properties.

Mass-producing such herbs can relieve pressure on the natural environment, Cheng said.

"Based on our current estimates, if we want to meet the high demand

by having people dig wild *beimu* in the mountains, it is highly probable that within just two to three years this species will be driven to extinction."

Red Sun Family Farm is owned by Nyima, a once-impooverished farmer who has not only transformed his own life but also uplifted many within his ethnic Tibetan community. He is considered a local "pioneer in prosperity".

The term is widely used by authorities to refer to individuals who lead by example in creating wealth or achieving financial success, often inspiring others to follow suit.

His journey to prosperity began 14 years ago when he cultivated *lingzhi*.

Before that there had been twists and turns in his business endeavours. In 2007 Nyima and his family of four were living in a modest 23-square-metre prefabricated home, struggling to make ends meet.

Seeking a change, he ventured into agricultural entrepreneurship. In 2008 he took out a loan of 150,000 yuan (\$21,000) to establish a pig and chicken farm in his village. However, his business suffered due to a lack of knowledge about breeding techniques and an unfavourable market.

In 2010 authorities adopted policies aimed at developing Manling into a centre for medicinal herbs.

Sensing the business potential, Nyima shifted gears and founded a medicinal farm focusing on raising *tianma*, or *Gastrodia elata*, a herb related to orchids. The decision proved a big success, and he turned a profit in the first year.

Aided by the local government, in 2012 Nyima renamed the company Red Sun Family Farm, and expanded its range of medicinal plants, and the business took off.

With a better financial standing, he thought about helping others. In 2016, at the height of China's fight against absolute poverty, he gave *lingzhi* seedlings to poor farmers to grow and offered to buy what they grew.

In 2021 at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing Nyima was honoured with a national award for his contribution to alleviating poverty.

"We have established a sales network on the popular messaging app WeChat so that our herbs and fungi can be sold farther afield," he said.



Freshly harvested *lingzhi* mushrooms are neatly arranged on shelves to be dried for market in Manling, Xizang autonomous region, in September. LI LEI / CHINA DAILY

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# Opening-up continues to pay huge for all

International firms help power innovation and growth. **Zhong Nan and Wang Keju report**

Foreign companies once used to send their managers, sales experts and engineers, along with product samples, to big Chinese cities such as Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai to set up representative offices and test the viability of the Chinese market.

This was particularly so during the 1980s, and by the 1990s many of these companies began building factories in China, their number surging after the country joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001.

With products made in China being supplied to both domestic and international markets, foreign companies such as Schneider Electric of France and Bosch Group of Germany increasingly appointed Chinese executives to head their operations in the country. This move was part of broader localisation efforts that included setting up research and development centres in China.

As the People's Republic of China celebrates the 75th anniversary of its founding this year, senior executives of multinational companies said the country's recent economic reforms are poised to bolster the global supply chain network and deepen the integration of foreign investment with the country's economic growth.

For global firms that produce and distribute countless products and services, China has evolved into a place for promoting growth and innovation.

Anna An, president for the China unit of Henkel AG & Co, a German industrial and consumer goods manufacturer, said that since entering China more than 50 years ago her company has grown with the country, continuing to invest so as to promote talent and industry growth.

"We will continue investing in China to further support our customers with innovative and sustainable solutions and products in sectors where we see strong future demand, such as consumer electronics, new energy vehicles, advanced manufacturing, packaging and consumer goods."

Nat Madarang, president for Asia Pacific with Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co of the United States, said China is crucial to the company's global business strategy, and that China's new reform initiatives, aimed at expanding opening-up and fostering industrial upgrades and technological innovation, align well with his company's objectives.

"We see substantial opportunities in China's reform and opening-up initiatives and remain dedicated to deepening our presence and investment in China and the broader Asia-Pacific region."



A Nio electric vehicle is assembled at an automated assembly line in Hefei, the capital city of East China's Anhui province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

centres to meet local demand in China, she said.

From January to August China's actual use of the foreign direct investment reached 580.2 billion yuan (\$81.8 billion). Affected by a high base in the corresponding period last year, the scale of such investment fell year-on-year but remained relatively high in the context of the past decade, the Ministry of Commerce said.

In particular, nearly 37,000 foreign-funded companies were newly established in China in this period, 11.5% more than in the corresponding period last year.

Between January and August the foreign trade value of foreign-invested businesses was 8.4 trillion yuan in China, 1.5% more than in the corresponding period last year, accounting for 29.4% of the country's total foreign trade value, the General Administration of Customs said.

In the 75 years since the People's Republic of China was founded, particularly during the era of reform and opening-up from 1978, the country's foreign trade, a key driver of economic growth, has rapidly expanded, experts said.

Underpinned by the country's efforts to expand high-level openness and commitment to promoting trade, as well as a better trading structure increasingly driven by high-tech and green products, China's foreign trade is not only growing, but is also shifting towards higher quality growth along the way, they said.

China's merchandise trade volume rose from \$1.13 billion in 1950 to \$5.9 trillion last year. That rise has been accompanied by a proportional increase in China's share of the international market, less than 1% in 1978 and 12.4% last year, the Ministry of Commerce said.

China has retained its position as the world's top trading nation for the seventh consecutive year and solidified its status as a major trading partner with more than 150 countries and regions, the General Administration of Customs said in July.

The country's stable share of the export market underlines its prowess in delivering quality products highly sought after globally, said Sang Baichuan, dean of the Institute of International Economy at the University of International Business and Economics.

China, making the most of its integrated production and supply chain advantages in addition to a culture of sustained innovation, has been lauded for its diverse range of high-quality and high-tech offerings, Sang said.

## China's major moves to boost investment and trade activities (2012-24)

**2012:** Negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership begin.

**2013:** China proposes the Belt and Road Initiative and establishes its first pilot free trade zone (FTZ) in Shanghai.

**2014:** China issues a strategic plan on construction of Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

**2015:** Shanghai FTZ expands, while three new FTZs in Guangdong province, Tianjin and Fujian province start operations.

**2016:** China adopts negative list management system on foreign investment access.

**2017:** China sets up seven more FTZs in Liaoning, Zhejiang, Henan, Hubei,

Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces and Chongqing.

**2018:** China announces it will develop a free trade port in Hainan province.

**2019:** Shanghai FTZ expands to include Lin-gang New Area; the country unveils a plan to establish six new FTZs in Shandong, Jiangsu, Hebei, Yunnan and Heilongjiang provinces, and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

**2020:** China starts implementing the Foreign Investment Law, issues the construction plan for the Hainan free trade port, and releases plans for Beijing, Hunan and Anhui FTZs and the expansion of the Zhejiang FTZ.

**2021:** China releases its first negative list for cross-border trade in services in Hainan free trade port.

**2022:** China issues a guideline on the high-quality implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The trade pact takes effect on January 1.

**2023:** China introduces 24-point action plan to attract foreign investment, facilitate data flows and business travel, providing more opportunities for multinational corporations to enter and participate in the Chinese market through expanded access and cut their operating costs.

**2024:** China released the new negative list in early September, which will take effect on November 1, reduces the number of restrictions from 31 to 29, achieving zero restrictions on the manufacturing sector.

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REFORM COMMISSION

Goodyear said it has benefitted from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, shipping tires made in China to Japan and a number of Southeast Asian countries.

Driven by factors such as rapid

industrial upgrading, shifting business models and growing demand for personalised products, many multinational companies have recognised that Chinese consumers and the business environment are continuing to evolve,

said Tang Yihong, a professor specialising in cross-border investment at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

In response, these companies have established more innovation and service

## Smart thinking, agility and speed a winning formula for companies

By Cheng Yu

On a narrow one-way street in Guangzhou, South China's Guangdong province, a company with just 45 skilled workers provides 300,000 electrical adapters every day to big electronics companies.

In fact among the customers of Yihong Precision Technology Co Ltd, which makes type-C adapters, is the smartphone maker Xiaomi as well as Sony and Nintendo of Japan.

Despite a global downturn in consumer electronics over the past year, Yihong continues to enjoy a steady increase in sales thanks to its well-rounded and flexible supply chains.

Powered by improvements in manufacturing and the strength of supply chains over the past decade, China is no longer just the world's factory, but has become critical in shaping global manufacturing.

That is evident in the agile manufacturing supply chains that are powering the rise of e-commerce companies such

as Shein and Temu, and in the country's new energy vehicles industry and its 5G factories.

In an interview with China Daily, Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, said his company's Chinese suppliers now have the most advanced manufacturing in the world.

"If you look at the automation level, it's not just off-the-shelf automation. It's customised automation. They have robotics, automatic guided vehicles and very precise vision systems. There's no supply chain in the world more critical to Apple than that of China. We've been building up and investing more and more here."

China's manufacturing prowess can largely be attributed to its mastery of flexible, data-driven supply chains, line the ones that power Shein and Temu, over the past decade.

Shein, a name now synonymous with ultra-fast fashion, has revolutionised the way garments are produced and distributed. Its innovative supply chain model allows it to identify global fashion trends and get new designs from the design

stage to the customer's doorstep in as little as three weeks.

With factories in China operating around the clock and using AI to monitor changes in consumer demand, Shein produces in small batches, reducing waste and keeping inventories flexible.

Temu, a rising e-commerce star, operates in a similar way, enabling on-demand manufacturing of consumer goods. Temu's use of big data enables its suppliers to react instantly to consumer preferences, with factories producing exactly what customers want.

Li Mingtao, chief researcher of e-commerce at the China International Electronic Commerce Centre in Beijing, said: "These companies are not just fast in terms of manufacturing. They are smart, demonstrating the future of global supply chains. China's momentum in digitalising the manufacturing process is likely to minimise overproduction and maximise manufacturing efficiency."

When talking of China's manufacturing prowess, the country has well posi-

tioned it at the forefront of the global green revolution, powered by electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar cells over the past decade.

Yu Xiangrong, a Citigroup economist, said: "China's exports have changed, with household appliances, furniture and clothing giving way to EVs, lithium-ion batteries and solar cells. The shifting export drivers demonstrate progress in China's industrial upgrading. China has clearly risen up the value chain and remains competitive amid a reconfiguration of the global supply chain."

"This ability to manufacture a range of products from low-value consumer goods to high-tech innovative products provides resilience for China's exports, and continuous upgrades to manufacturing capabilities, R&D investment and emphasis on cost controls should help sustain its competitiveness in trade."

Over the past 10 years the country has become the world's largest market for new energy vehicles. Last year China exported 4.91 million automobiles,

of which 1.2 million were new energy vehicles, 77.6% more than in 2022, the ninth year in a row of such production and sales ranking first, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said.

China's dominance in NEVs isn't just about vehicles. It's also powered by its prowess in a critical component — lithium-ion batteries. According to global consulting firm SNE Research, in 2023, Chinese companies occupied six of the top 10 positions in global power battery installations, with a market share of 63.5%.

Nevertheless, the foundation of China's future industrial landscape also lies in its leadership in 5G technology, which is transforming everything from factories to city infrastructure.

Over the past decade, China had nearly 3.65 million 5G base stations and the penetration rate of 5G users exceeded 60%. This massive infrastructure rollout has allowed the country to implement cutting-edge smart manufacturing processes, where factories operate with near-zero latency, machines communicate seamlessly and real-time data analytics drive efficiency.

# To the point



The view of White Dagoba Temple in Beijing.

In downtown Beijing, people living in *hutong* are treated to a game that gives them an insight into the past and the amity between two peoples.

Hou Chenchen reports

On a stroll down an alley in central Beijing a distinctive white cone slowly emerges on the horizon, towering above the brownish-red sea of traditional Chinese walls in which it stands.

For centuries this religious monument, a dagoba, part of the Miaoying temple, has tantalised the eyes of those who come across it, whether they knew anything about its meaning or not.

"Ni hao," a young man, who turns out to be a Nepalese volunteer in the temple, shouts out cheerily. "Feel free to go inside the White Dagoba Temple and find out what's within."

Garbed in a *daura suruwal*, he brims with enthusiasm about the dagoba, intent on encouraging others to learn about this age-old emblem of friendship between two civilisations.

The Beijing White Dagoba Temple, the biggest and oldest Tibetan-style Buddhist dagoba in China, is a vibrant testament to cultural exchanges and shared knowledge between China and Nepal. It was designed by the Nepalese architect Arniko at the behest of the founder of the Yuan Dynasty Kublai Khan in the late 13th century. The dagoba is the sole complete historical site of the Great Yuan Capital City that remains to this day.

"Cultural exchanges between China and Nepal are rich and profound, and the dagoba one sees today is the best example of that," said Gao Jianqin, who works at the China-Nepal Culture Exchange Centre in Beijing.

About 750 years ago Arniko, a highly skilled artisan, helped build a dagoba in the Sakya region of Tibet and he made a name for himself across Tibet and North China. When Kublai Khan decreed that a Buddhist dagoba be erected on the historical site of the Yong'an Monastery, which had been destroyed, Arniko was assigned to design the white dagoba and to oversee its construction.

A few months ago Beijingers and anyone else with an ounce of interest were invited through a game called *Finding Arniko* to learn a little about the man and to view what has become one of his most celebrated architectural accomplishments.

Gao, who devised the game, chose the five most crucial moments in the history of Arniko's odyssey and incorporated these into the five main buildings of the White Dagoba Temple, he said. Visitors were able to immerse themselves in an adventure through interactive non-player character encounters, stepping into Arniko's world.

For the game Nepalese students in Beijing assume the various roles encountered by Arniko on his journey from Nepal to China. These roles included: Arniko himself; the king of the Malla Dynasty; Nepalese citi-



**From top:** A visitor walks into the White Dagoba Temple in Beijing. Anish Kumar Kuikel, playing the role of Nepalese architect Arniko, poses with participants in the immersive cultural game, *Finding Arniko*, at the White Dagoba Temple. Shrestha Shrijana, a Nepalese student at Beijing International Studies University, visits Guangji Temple in Beijing in May.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

zens; Phags-pa, the first "Guru for the Emperor" in the history of the Yuan Dynasty; and Kublai Khan, founder of the Yuan Dynasty.

"I love the heart-warming joy of people from different countries coming together, something you can't experience any other way," Gao said. "I would jump at the chance to promote cultural exchanges between China and Nepal in some other way."

"We wanted the public to be able to appreciate how deep the friendship between China and Nepal is, and to do so in an interesting way."

Liang Yuxuan, 21, a college student from Hong Kong who was a keen participant in the game, said: "When I talk to Nepalese it's like a cultural exchange through time and space, friendship between the two countries down the ages. It's very touching."

Strolling along Beijing's fabled *hutong* and its streets, a sense of history and culture seeps from every brick, she said.

"Chinese are aware of the white dagoba, but they're unaware of its origins and who built it," said Anish Kumar Kuikel, 24, who played the role of Arniko in the game, and who was studying for a master's degree in the international education of Chinese at Beijing Language and Culture University.

"Chinese people show great respect for Buddhism. When I explain that Nepal is where Buddhism originated, the birthplace of Gautama Buddha, they show huge interest in travelling to Nepal to know more about our culture."

Bidur K.C., 23, a Nepalese studying Chinese philosophy at Beijing Normal University, and who played the Malla King in *Finding Arniko*, said: "I was curious about how tourists would react when they came across my character, dressed in Nepalese traditional clothes and speaking Chinese to them."

"In the event, people were very excited to see me and asked a lot about culture and traditions such as marriage in Nepal. My Chinese is not that good, but I did my best to present my homeland to them and showed them what Nepal is really like."

Shrestha Shrijana, 26, studying for a master's degree of international education in the Chinese language at Beijing International Studies University, said she viewed the dagoba as the "largest symbol of civil and cultural communications between the two countries". Wearing Nepalese dress at the gate of the dagoba, presenting her country's culture to people filled her with pride, she said.

The Nepalese actors expressed their interest and pride in building a new bridge between the two countries and their cultures.

Another of the actors, Shrestha, said she had arrived in China a year earlier, and as someone who appreciates different cultures hoped that eventually she would don traditional Chinese dress.

"For me, the best part of Chinese culture is the traditional attire. There are so many ethnic groups with their unique dresses. I've tried Tibetan dress, and I plan eventually to try *hanfu*."

Bidur said his fascination with China began at a Chinese temple in Lumbini, where Gautama Buddha is said to have been born.

"As a child I visited that temple frequently. Its architecture bears a striking resemblance to Chinese architecture, which sparked my interest in Chinese culture, people and language. Although China and Nepal have distinct cultures, both have rich histories. Coming from Nepalese society to China, I equally respect both cultures."

# Plateau regions' textiles stretch into luxury sector

By Wang Xin

With a pasture turning into a natural runway, about 40 Tibetan models showcased more than 100 pieces of clothing primarily made of locally featured yak wool during a fashion show staged in Madoi county, Golog Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Qinghai province.

Guo Xiuling, 53, is the founder of the Shanghai luxury fashion brand Sandriver, and she organised the fashion show in June. As a native of the Alashan Plateau, Guo had come a long way for the show, committed to bringing the featured fabrics and unique artisanship from China's plateaus to the world.

The brand has been invited to Paris Fashion Week 10 years in a row and to the Maison & Objet, a renowned home decor expo in Paris, several times, she said.

"We are committed to pursuing excellence and high quality, and strive to build the world's top Chinese brand. We want to speak out for China and to showcase quality Chinese product-making."

Guo's life is a story of pursuing excellence, aiming for the top and transcending boundaries.

She studied philosophy and economics and eventually became a teacher, but then worked in a textile factory.

"I see no boundaries and am devoted to every single thing I do. I knew nothing when I entered the industry but I worked hard to stand out and succeed in the textile sector."

After becoming a technical expert in the first factory in which she worked, Guo was invited to work in Germany in 2000 and became a technical expert in a textile programme with more than 200 technical patents.

After returning to China and leading a big team as a supplier for top international luxury brands, Guo founded Sandriver in Shanghai 12 years ago.

"The quality of Chinese manufacturing is top-notch," she said. "However, there are very few Chinese brands that showcase the spirit of Chinese artisanship and can compete with foreign luxury names internationally." That is exactly what Sandriver aims to do.

Positioned as an international brand, it has been focusing on restoring and innovating with traditional fabrics and unique artisanship rooted in the Inner Mongolia and Qinghai-Xizang plateaus.

"If we want to build a world-class Chinese brand we must dig deep into traditional Chinese cultures, raw materials and crafts, especially those

less-known from ethnic minority groups in which we have seen enormous potential to make our brands stand out globally," Guo said.

The Madoi show demonstrated Sandriver's ambitions, efforts and what it has achieved.

During the down season a yak produces an average of no more than 300 grammes of down. After cleaning and post-processing, the output of wool is significantly reduced. The wool produced is thus highly valuable commercially and culturally.

"We have revolutionised and integrated textile techniques relating to yak wool," Guo said. "The Inner Mongolia autonomous region is home to the best cashmere, and Xizang autonomous region boasts the best crafts from cashmere processing. To make the scratchy yak wool skin-friendly, we integrated our traditional artisanship of Inner Mongolian handmade felting and the hand-woven Tibetan *pulu* (a kind of woolen fabric) in processing the yak wool."

Reviving the dying traditional craft was not easy. Before the Madoi show Guo spent about 10 years restoring Inner Mongolian handmade felting and another two years conserving and improving hand-woven Tibetan *pulu*.

"As society and the economy develop, declining use in residents' daily lives has led to the demise of traditional crafts," Guo said. "Some intangible cultural heritages are dying."

Fortunately, Guo's efforts have reaped returns.

With the restored craft of Inner Mongolian handmade felting, Sandriver became the first and only Chinese brand invited to be sold at Le Bon Marche, a department store of the luxury brand LVMH in Paris.

With traditional crafts being revived in fashion and art pieces, residents in remote plateau areas are expected to pass on the precious cultural heritages while gaining a better quality of life.

Wang Qiyang, deputy head of Madoi county, said: "In the process of development and production of Sandriver's yak wool products, local herders and others are empowered to find jobs and gain income in places close to their homes, boosting local economic development."

Guo was recently planning to visit Yunnan province and Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

"As a Chinese brand, we are committed to making our voice heard and showing the world Chinese materials and production. Sandriver embodies the spirit of Chinese people, which is the integration of profound Chinese cultures regardless of ethnic group or region."



Guo Xiuling, founder of Shanghai-based luxury fashion brand Sandriver, discusses yak wool with a herdsman in Madoi county, Golog Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Qinghai province.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Models in yak wool clothing display its style in the natural environment in Madoi county.