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NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

## Power to the People

■ Sonia Awale

Next week from 31 October-4 November is the festival of lights, and that is when domestic demand for electricity will surge as it does this time every year.

However, this year the the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) will be hard pressed to ensure adequate supply because of the damage to power plants and transmission

lines on 28 September. In a flash, Nepal lost nearly half its electricity generation capacity as a dozen power plants were knocked out.

Most of them are now back in operation, but the 456MW Upper Tama Kosi was damaged in a massive rock fall, and will take at least six months to return to full operation. The export of over 1,000MW of power to India has been slashed to meet in-country demand over the festival.

The flood was a warning that Nepal must not bunch up power plants on just one river basin. An Indian company is building a cascade of four plants on the Arun to cumulatively generate 3,000MW in the next five years -- half of Nepal's total. We should also not rely solely on hydro, but diversify to solar.

But how can Nepal increase domestic power consumption?

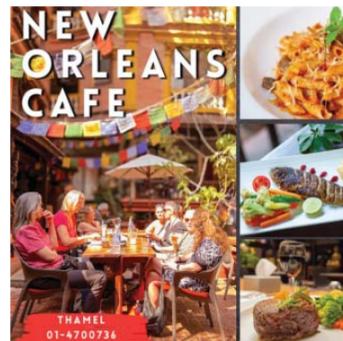
**MORE PAGE 6**

Nepali Times Wishes Readers Happy Tihar and Chhath

हृदय मित्रता ११४५



Because of the holidays there will be no print edition of the paper on Friday 1 November. The next hard copy issue of Nepali Times will be on 8 November 2024. Visit nepalitimes.com for daily updates and original multimedia content.



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# Rabi's rabble-rousers

Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) lawmaker Toshima Karki posted a live video of herself going door-to-door this week in Pokhara soliciting support for her boss: former Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane.

No, it was not an election campaign. Karki, a physician, was trying to muster support for the RSP's rallies supporting their locked-up leader. Other RSP cadres taunted and threatened the very victims who had lost all their savings in the cooperatives scam for which Lamichhane is detained.

The RSP chair and two-time home minister was remanded for six days starting October 18, as police investigated charges of his involvement in organised crime, syphoning off the savings of depositors in several cooperatives.



RSP / FACEBOOK

A cross-party Parliamentary investigation found evidence linking the transfer of nearly Rs650 million from two cooperatives, in Butwal and Pokhara, to Lamichhane's Gorkha Media Network where he was managing director and host of a populist talk show before he launched the RSP.

Lamichhane's supporters are convinced that the current NC-UML coalition is framing him in retaliation for pursuing investigations into two scandals in which the top leaders of both parties were implicated, when he was home minister.

In fact, Lamichhane has accused the UML and NC of conniving to overthrow the Maoist-NC coalition in June where the RSP was a member, because his investigation was getting close to senior NC and UML leaders.

If found guilty, Lamichhane will not just face a jail term of up to ten years, but also be suspended from his Parliament seat for the second time. He will not be allowed to contest the next election, cutting short his political career.

Lamichhane has not presented any facts to counter the mounting evidence of his involvement in the cooperatives scam, and instead politicised his victimhood accusing the NC and UML of vendetta. Now that he is in detention, he has rabble-roused supporters using anti-establishment slogans.

Lamichhane is no stranger to controversy. When he was home minister for the first time in the NC-Maoist coalition in early 2023, the

Supreme Court ruled that he was not eligible to hold political office because he had failed to reacquire Nepali citizenship after renouncing his American one.

Lamichhane subsequently got himself a new Nepali citizenship and contested by-elections from Chitwan, which he won by an even bigger margin than his first time at the polls. Later that year, the Office of the Attorney General exonerated him for possession of an active US passport.

RSP is the fourth largest party in the House, and Lamichhane has deftly used this to play a kingmaker role, bargaining for and getting home ministership twice in coalition governments. This time, such tactics will not work since the current governing alliance is made up of the two largest parties which

do not see any political advantage in supporting him.

Even though many in Nepal's cybersphere question Lamichhane's integrity, they see leaders of the three main parties as being no less corrupt. Last week Prime Minister K P Oli accepted supermarket tycoon Min Bahadur Gurung's donation of land and building to house the

headquarters of the UML. Gurung has been charged with tax evasion.

Even as the police investigate Lamichhane and former associates police DIG Chhabil Joshi, absconding Gorkha Media Network chair G B Rai and others, critics have pointed out that NC and UML leaders also involved in

similar scams have gotten away scot free.

RSP leaders have resorted to inflammatory and populist rhetoric to rile up supporters in the wake of Lamichhane's arrest. But the party leadership does not seem to have a fallback in case their leader goes to jail.

If the court finds Lamichhane guilty, the credibility of the members of his party with a reputation for integrity and competence, like Swarnim Wagle, Sumana Shrestha and others will also be questioned.

The RSP fashioned itself as an alternative to the three main parties that have taken turns to rule Nepal for the past 18 years, promising a future corruption-free Nepal.

The conduct of its second echelon leaders after Lamichhane's arrest has shown that the RSP is no different. With their blind loyalty to a tainted leader, they are resorting to political street theatre and intimidation to pile pressure for his release.

Instead of whataboutery, they should be calling for a fair investigation into the cooperatives scandal in which thousands of middle class Nepalis lost hard-earned investments.

**Shristi Karki**

**The RSP, supposed to be 'alternative' and 'independent,' resorted to political street theatre to absolve its tainted boss.**

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### America Watch

Back in November 2004 ahead of the American presidential race between George W Bush and John Kerry in which the former won in a controversial outcome, we wrote that non-Americans should also be allowed to vote given that foreign, economic, trade and environmental policies of the United States affects the whole world. Twenty years later and as we head into the 2024 race between Trump and Harris, the editorial might as well have been written today given the climate crisis and the US support for Israel's wars.

Excerpts from issue #219 29 October - 4 November 2004:

From America's unilateral global war on terror to global warming, we all end up paying for its greed, thirst, self-indulgence and supremacy. Why is it that powers, whether



global or regional, are so ham-handed? There is a serious lack of subtlety, a chronic reliance on arm-twisting, to get things done. Bullying is counter-productive, even to ultimately get your own way. Yet they never learn from mistakes and bamboozle their way with petty-minded insensitivity, alienating even friends.

We in Nepal have always felt insulated from the rest of the world. But in a globalised economy, who rules in Washington has a direct impact on our tourism, on how fast our glaciers melt, whether our garments get tariff-free entry into markets, and it becomes a matter of life or death for our citizens when they are slaughtered in Iraq to punish America.

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



DIASPORA DIARIES IS BACK

Our popular column Diaspora Diaries is back, and the 51<sup>st</sup> instalment is the story of Harka Lal Bishwakarma, an auto rickshaw driver in Mumbai originally from Achham. In his own words, he tells us, "I have lived a simple and perhaps even a boring life." It is anything but. Read his story on pages 14-15 and watch the video on our YouTube channel. Subscribe for more multimedia content.

### NEPAL FLOODS

Will we the citizens, our government, and even sand mining companies learn from such a bitter lesson? ('When it rains it pours', Editorial, #1232)?

**Rita Thapa**

■ Unplanned urbanisation will lead to similar devastation in the years to come. Two or three days of rains, however incessant, cannot be labelled a natural disaster. This is totally a human made one.

**Prabir Rana**

### SAFE MENSTRUATION

Chhaupadi is an evil practice since it is the cause of preventable deaths like asphyxiation as a result of poorly ventilated sheds, wild animal attacks and sexual assaults ('Banning banishment is not enough', Dhanu Bishwakarma #1131). Menstruation is an essential natural cycle. As such, superstition must be abolished from religion.

**Mingmar Sadhana**

### RSP LEADERSHIP

Two wrongs don't make a right. We are observing that the young and educated leaders are going the same way of the old and tired leadership they vowed to put an end to ('RSP's RSVP', Editorial, #1131). Ultimately, this only benefits the establishment.

**Karma Tamang**

### OLD NEPALI TOKYO

What an inspiring story ('A taste of old Nepal in Tokyo', Sonia Awale, #1232). Role models for young Nepali chefs and how they could take our cuisine to the next level by going out to the countryside and living with the people of different cultures, understanding their ingredients, way of cooking and respecting all of that and then bringing their food with culture for us. Hopefully more than a few will be inspired before the pandemic "fusion" cuisine makes a whole lot of confusion in the Nepali food world.

**lochan1211**

### KTM AIRPORT

Kathmandu airport is primarily a domestic airport with around 50 daily international flights compared to 450 domestic ('Kathmandu airport to cut flight hours', Vishad Raj Onta, page 4). Of this half the international flights serve labour markets which can be easily shifted to Bhairawa or Pokhara. Nijgad under the pretext of international flights makes no sense. Many other international airports also have a single runway but if used efficiently we can have better arrival and departure, and flight frequency can be increased. It is an issue of operational efficiency.

**Ravi Pratap Singh**

### POETRY

One of the most famous lines of poetry in Dutch is "only in my poems can I live" by Jan Slauerhoff ('Finding a permanent home in poetry', Pinki Sris Rana, nepalitimes.com). A century later poetry still works miracles and provides a safe haven for our thoughts.

**Martin Max Aart de Jong**

## Times.com

### WHAT'S TRENDING

#### Prosperous Gandaki is thriving

by Durga Rana Magar  
Gandaki is number one among Nepal's seven provinces in the Human Development Index, even higher than Bagmati, where Kathmandu is located. But even more surprising is that rural parts of the province are more prosperous than towns like Pokhara. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full story.

**f Most reached and shared on Facebook**



#### A taste of old Nepal in Tokyo

by Sonia Awale  
Ryo Honda is a Japanese chef who specialises in authentic but innovative Nepali cuisine using ingredients and spices that he has explored in Nepal, infusing it with local knowledge and nature. Read about his Nepali fine dining restaurant in Tokyo and watch the video on our YouTube channel.

**X Most popular on X**

#### Kathmandu airport to cut flight hours

by Vishad Raj Onta  
Nepal's only international aviation gateway, at Kathmandu airport, will cut night-time operation hours to allow construction of taxiways, and airlines have been told to curtail flights. Travellers should expect more than normal congestion November-March. Details on page 4.

**66 Most commented**

#### Metal Free

by Kunda Dixit  
"If tourists successfully negotiate the e-visa line, the visa payment line, the wrong immigration line, the metal-free gold smuggler detection line, the baggage carousel wait, the queue to have their baggage tag verified, and then the elevator line without blowing a gasket or two, then they are welcome to Naturally Nepal, where Guest is God and Once Is Not Enough." Follow us for the Publisher's weekly newsletter every Sunday.

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## QUOTES

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
The Great Flood of 28 September exposed how much trash Kathmandu residents were throwing into the Valley's rivers. The Bagmati, Vishnumati, Manohara, Nakkhu were getting back at city dwellers for treating the once sacred rivers as dumpsites.

**Hem Sagar Baral @WorshipNature**  
Mother nature has organised exhibition of trash we threw everywhere and especially the holy rivers of Kathmandu valley! Its a free show for all interested and possibly will be there till the next flooding season. Don't miss it

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Gandaki is number one among Nepal's seven provinces in the Human Development Index, even higher than Bagmati, where Kathmandu is located. Only 12% of the population here is below the poverty line, much lower than the national average of 21%.

**Baburam Bhattarai @brb1954**  
Hats off to the Gandaki Province, specially to the women entrepreneurs, for making the province number one among the seven provinces in Human Development Index!

## 1,000 WORDS



PMO / RSS

**SPLITTING HAIRS:** Smaller opposition parties presented an official memorandum to Prime Minister K P Oli to make him rethink a reported plan to use an ordinance to bypass a Constitution provision preventing parties from splitting. Oli reportedly backed down after his coalition partners in the NC and did not go along with the plan. Oli also does not seem to want to rock the boat at a time when the RSP is staging street demos in Pokhara against the arrest of Rabi Lamichhane, and the Maoists have planned a 'warning rally' in Kathmandu on Saturday.

## Times

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Editor: Sonia Awale | Special Correspondent: Shristi Karki

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Publisher: Kunda Dixit, Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu

editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: +977 1 5005601-08 Fax: +977 1 5005518



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KUNDA DIXIT

# Kathmandu airport to cut flight hours

Travellers should expect more than normal congestion between November-March due to airport expansion project

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Nepal's only international aviation gateway at Kathmandu airport, will cut night-time operations to allow construction, and airlines have been told to curtail flights.

This is expected to lead to more than normal chaos during the height of peak autumn and spring tourist seasons at an airport that is congested even at the best of times. The airport will close from 10PM to 8AM from 8 November-31 March 2025.

Taxiway extensions will now connect to the thresholds at both ends of the runway enabling the airport to handle higher frequencies of landings and takeoffs.

The parallel taxiway extension will allow international flights to land every 4 minutes instead of the current 7 minutes. At present planes have to hold in the air while a plane taking off backtracks along the runway.

Kathmandu is Nepal's single functioning airport with international operations, and it has only one runway that has only one way in from the south over the mountains. With the taxiway improvement, the airport will be able to handle 42 aircraft landings and takeoffs per hour — double the current capacity.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) has been trying to entice international airlines to also start flying to and from the other two international airports at Pokhara and Bhairawa (Lumbini) by slashing landing and handling charges. But so far only Nepal Airlines operates a weekly flight to Bhairawa from Kuala Lumpur.

CAAN has reportedly told international airlines to reduce flight frequency to Kathmandu citing the shorter operation hours, and has instructed budget airlines to shift some of their flights to Pokhara or Bhairawa, or face cuts.

Many airlines currently operate regular flights to and from Kathmandu between 10PM and 8AM: Air Arabia to Sharjah, Fly Dubai to Dubai, Jazeera Airways to Kuwait, Cathay Pacific to Hong Kong, Singapore Airlines, several Nepal Airlines flights, and one of four daily flights by Qatar Airways to Doha. Domestic airlines have also been flying till midnight.

Jazeera Airways, FlyDubai, and Thai AirAsia have got permission from CAAN to begin regular flights to Bhairawa's Gautam Buddha International Airport. Starting 9 November, FlyDubai will start making a stopover in Bhairawa before flying on to Kathmandu. Immigration, customs and security are all fully functional in Bhairawa.

In Kathmandu, the next phase of the airport upgrade includes converting the current international terminal for domestic operations, the construction of a new international terminal where the domestic departure area is now, as well as moving the hangars and the Nepal Army Air Wing to the eastern side of the runway. The apron area will also double its parking space for widebody jets.

This is part of a Airport Capacity Enhancement Project that was initially funded through a \$80 million loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the entire masterplan is expected to cost \$800 million over the next five years.

This project is the latest upgrade to Nepal's only international airport since it saw its first flight in 1949. The existing international and domestic terminals are too small to handle the current annual traffic volume of 8.5 million passengers a year that is growing at 20% a year. 🇳🇵



**NMB BANK**  
एनएमबी बैंक

## IME goes green

Global IME Bank which gives loans for renewable energy projects at affordable interest rates signed an agreement with Prime Power Ltd for a 30MW solar power project in Kapilvastu to be connected to the national grid, the



largest project by capacity of its kind. The project will be connected to the national grid. The bank is also partnering with the University of Innsbruck in Austria under the SWITCH Asia Grant Program to promote the construction of sustainable houses. IME has been providing a 'Green Home Loan' for customers looking to build, modify, or renovate buildings.

## Cathay Aria Suite



Cathay Pacific launched their new Business class, named Aria Suite, on its retrofitted Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, running a Hong Kong-Beijing

route. They also introduced a new Premium Economy cabin and a refreshed economy class. The airlines plans to invest HK\$100 billion into their fleet and services over the next 7 years.

## Hyundai Top 30

Hyundai reached a brand valuation of \$23 billion, bringing it to 30<sup>th</sup> on the Interbrand's list of best Global Brands in 2024. The company has seen a 63% increase in value over five years, and its IONIQ 5 model has been awarded globally.

## Nimbuzz e-SIM

Nepal-made messaging and multi-purpose app Nimbuzz launched a digital SIM with coverage in over 200 countries and a cheap roaming plan. Buying and topping up the SIM can be done in NPR, online through Nimbuzz Pay. The SIM can be purchased and set up through the Nimbuzz website or app.



## Tiago exchange

Sipradi Trading is holding a 'Tiago EV Dhanteras Exchange Dhamaka' until 26 October on the occasion of Tihar. Customers can exchange any car for a bonus if they buy the Tiago EV, and receive a gold coin or an iPhone 16 Pro on making a booking.

## Himalayan Odyssey

A group of nine motorcyclists riding Bajaj Dominar 400s are going on a 20-day expedition to the world's highest motorable road, Umling La (5,883m). The journey, dubbed 'The Great Himalayan Odyssey,' will cover over 6,000km and show the capacity of the motorcycle in high terrain.

## PM's disaster relief

The Cimex BYD Charity Foundation has made a contribution of Rs5,100,005 to the Prime Minister's Disaster Relief Fund to aid victims of last month's floods. NMB also contributed Rs5.1 million to support rehabilitation efforts.



Unilever Nepal has donated Rs5million to the Fund, and is working with the Ministry of Health and Population to provide hygiene products. Aloft held a 'Road to Give' walkathon to raise funds to help survivors, and the fund was donated to Pabitra Samaj Sewa, The Orphans Homes, and the Oxa Nepal Animal Welfare Society.

The Ncell Foundation is also supporting 200 families in Godavari impacted by the recent floods by distributing relief kits with rations, utensils, hygiene products, blankets and floor mats. Global IME Bank and IME Group contributed Rs50 million to help those impacted.



## Yamaha winner

Yamaha dealer MAW Rides announced Balkrishna Giri from Butwal as a winner of the Rs1 million prize under its 'Biggest 10shain' campaign. The ongoing scheme offers guaranteed cashback and iPhone 16 prizes to customers buying a Yamaha motorcycle or scooter.

## Galaxy S24 FE

Samsung has launched the Galaxy S24 FE smartphone in Nepal. It comes with a multi-camera setup, a 6.7-inch display, a 4700 mAh battery, an Exynos chipset, and a photography AI engine for night photos, optical-like zoom and generative editing. The model is available in blue and graphite and starts at Rs94,999 with financing options available.



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CLEAN COOKING ALLIANCE

# Increasing current demand

Nepal must push home appliances to increase domestic electricity consumption, and boost growth in manufacturing

Even without catastrophic floods like the one last month, the math is simple: unless domestic power consumption is increased and the distribution system upgraded, Nepal is on track to 'spill' millions of units of electricity worth billions of rupees.

"Domestic consumption of electricity is very much linked to GDP and economic growth," says Chandan Kumar Ghosh of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). "Expansion of our network doesn't necessarily mean increased consumption. What we are seeing right now is a worrying decline in electricity demand in rural areas due to outmigration."

Transportation has been seen as the low hanging fruit to increase domestic energy demand. The government's tax rebates on battery-operated vehicles has increased EV uptake (box). In fact, among Asian countries, Nepal has the highest annual sale of EVs in proportion of total vehicles sold.

However, the same subsidies and incentives to electrical appliances would have a bigger impact on electricity consumption. Only 3% of Nepali households own cars, jeeps, and vans but nearly all

households cook three meals a day.

The government did provide subsidies for induction stoves, but cultural factors because of the shape of cooking pots, lack of maintenance backup, and insufficient amperes in the current means there were few buyers.

"Use of electrical and electronic appliances in Nepali households was very low even by South Asian standards until 2010, but

it increased due to awareness, accessibility and availability of electricity," says Prabhakar Shumsher Thapa of Golchha Group which sells the Himstar brand.

He adds: "But the market is becoming more challenging mainly because a large portion of young Nepali consumers have migrated."

Sales figures show that demand for tvs, refrigerators and washing machines are still growing, while

rice cookers are best sellers.

Air conditioners in the Tarai and heaters in the mountains also have seasonal sales peaks. Chilling stations which use up significant energy have become a lifeline for farmers across the country to keep produce from going to waste.

"Induction stoves are popular but it is culturally more challenging, so many choose the infrared option which takes utensils

of various make or rice cookers which are always high on demand," explains Sefali Agrawal of the Triveni Group which has its own local brand Yasuda.

The NEA's Ghosh, speaking as the energy supplier, is not so keen on increasing domestic consumption of electricity with cooking appliances because of peaking demand. Nepal's existing transmission lines cannot handle a morning and evening spike. The higher investment on distribution may not be justified if there is low demand the rest of the day.

"The solution is balancing out such peaks with electrification of industries and the IT sector," Ghosh says. "And what would really help is day-ahead forecasts with a binding agreement of how much power the industries would need so that we can also provide quality supply. This helps when we import power from India during winter at a very high rate, so we won't buy what we don't need and waste money."

Captains of industry, however, say the government needs to have a pro-manufacturing policy in place to encourage local production of household appliances by reducing taxes on imported raw materials and even subsidies. That way Made in Nepal appliances can be competitive, and even exported.

However, Thapa of Golchha Group adds that while certain goods that are manufactured in Nepal are eligible for preferential treatment under the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement, not all countries reciprocate.

India has non-tariff barriers on appliance imports that have to meet its energy efficiency ratings and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) certification which protect its own manufacturing industry.

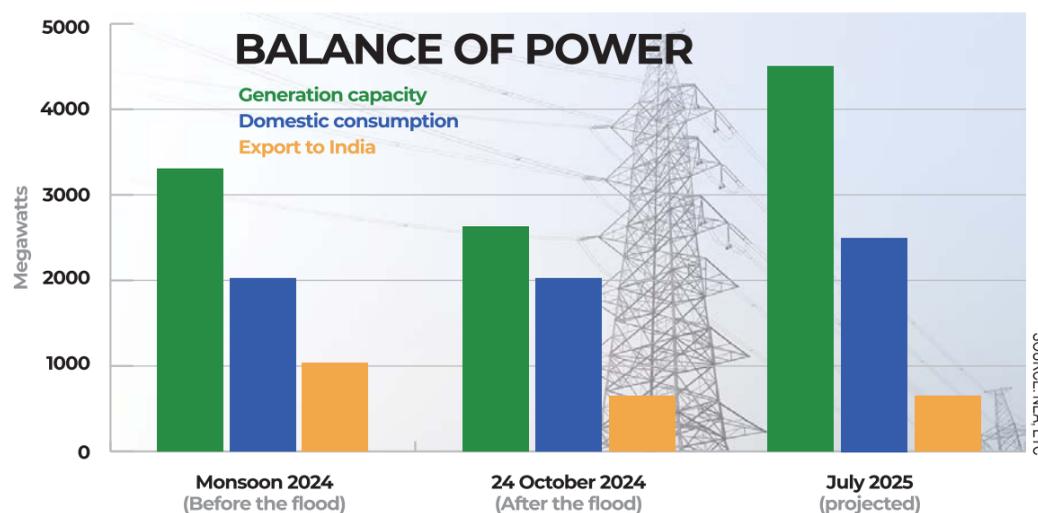
"The solution to increasing the domestic electricity consumption is by making larger customers pay less per unit," says Thapa.

Experts say that electricity tariffs should be as low as possible for consumers because Nepal risks wasting hydropower during monsoon. They recommend unbundling the NEA into a regulatory body and an operator, and deregulating the market.

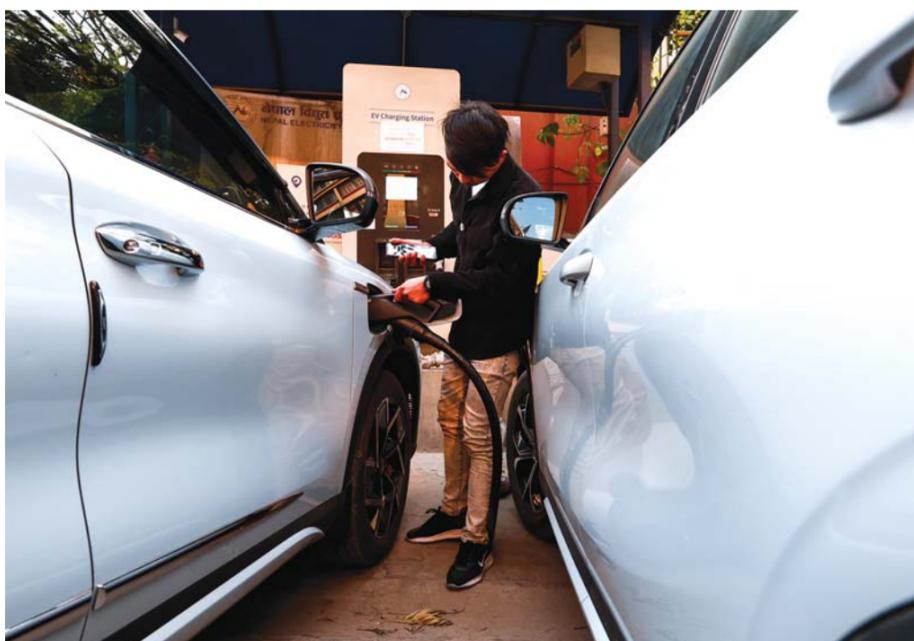
Other measures can be time-of-day metering as well as reverse metering so households and industries with solar arrays can export power to the grid.

And the warning from the floods last month was that Nepal should not have all its eggs in the hydropower basket, and look into utility-scale solar generation sites combined with pumped storage hydropower so that solar energy can be stored for evening and morning peak demand without using expensive batteries. ■

**Sonia Awale**



SOURCE: NEA, ETC



SUMAN NEPALI

## EV envy

The sales of electric vehicles in Nepal continue to rise, with the number of battery-powered cars, buses, vans, and tempos now totalling more than 50,000. Ten months into this year, nearly 80% of all private vehicles sold across the country are electric, the highest proportion among Asian countries.

Nearly 12,000 EVs were imported between June 2023 and June of this year, with Chinese EVs such as best-seller BYD now having overtaken Indian models. This is despite fluctuating tax policies, which are generally more favourable than those of their petrol and diesel counterparts. Smaller EVs are also well suited for Kathmandu, while the improved range of new e-SUVs and e-vans means they can travel from Kathmandu to Dharan or Pokhara on a single charge.

There is, however, still a gap in electric

buses that are five times as expensive as fossil variants of the same capacity, but do not get any subsidy or tax rebate. The real transformation in transport in Nepal will come when battery-powered buses get the same incentives.

There are over 1.2 million motorcycles and scooters just in Kathmandu. Replacing them with electric two-wheelers will open a bigger market while also cleaning up the air and improving public health. However, petrol two-wheeler sales have fallen by 30% in the past year, according to retailers.

There is a direct correlation between increased EV sales and Nepal's import of petrol and diesel from India which was down by 10% in July-August compared to the same months in 2023, although tight credit and an economic slump were also factors.

Reducing petroleum imports by just 10% and replacing it with domestically generated hydroelectricity would save Nepal at least Rs30 billion a year, while contributing to the need to increase domestic demand for power.

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 १० वर्ष टिक्छ**

चर्को घामबाट बचाउँछ

मुसलधारै वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ

१० वर्ष वारेन्टी

# Crocodile Chronicle

Nepal has rescued the gharial from extinction, but the rare reptile has a sex problem

■ **Shristi Karki** in Chitwan

The Gharial Breeding Centre in Chitwan National Park has for decades played a critical role in saving the endangered fish-eating crocodile from extinction. Now, the gharial faces a different set of challenges.

Climate breakdown is raising the temperature of Nepal's plains. The Narayani and Rapti Rivers that flow through Chitwan National Park are increasingly polluted. Gharials are often trapped in fishing nets and die. And the reptile has a sex problem.

In nature, the gharial's sex ratio is already skewed, with 8 females for every male gharial. Now, climate change may be widening this gender gap.

In fact, during a recent visit the breeding centre had only one male among 32 adult gharial. The male gharial has a distinct bulbous growth at the tip of its snout, which only develops when the reptile

reaches adulthood.

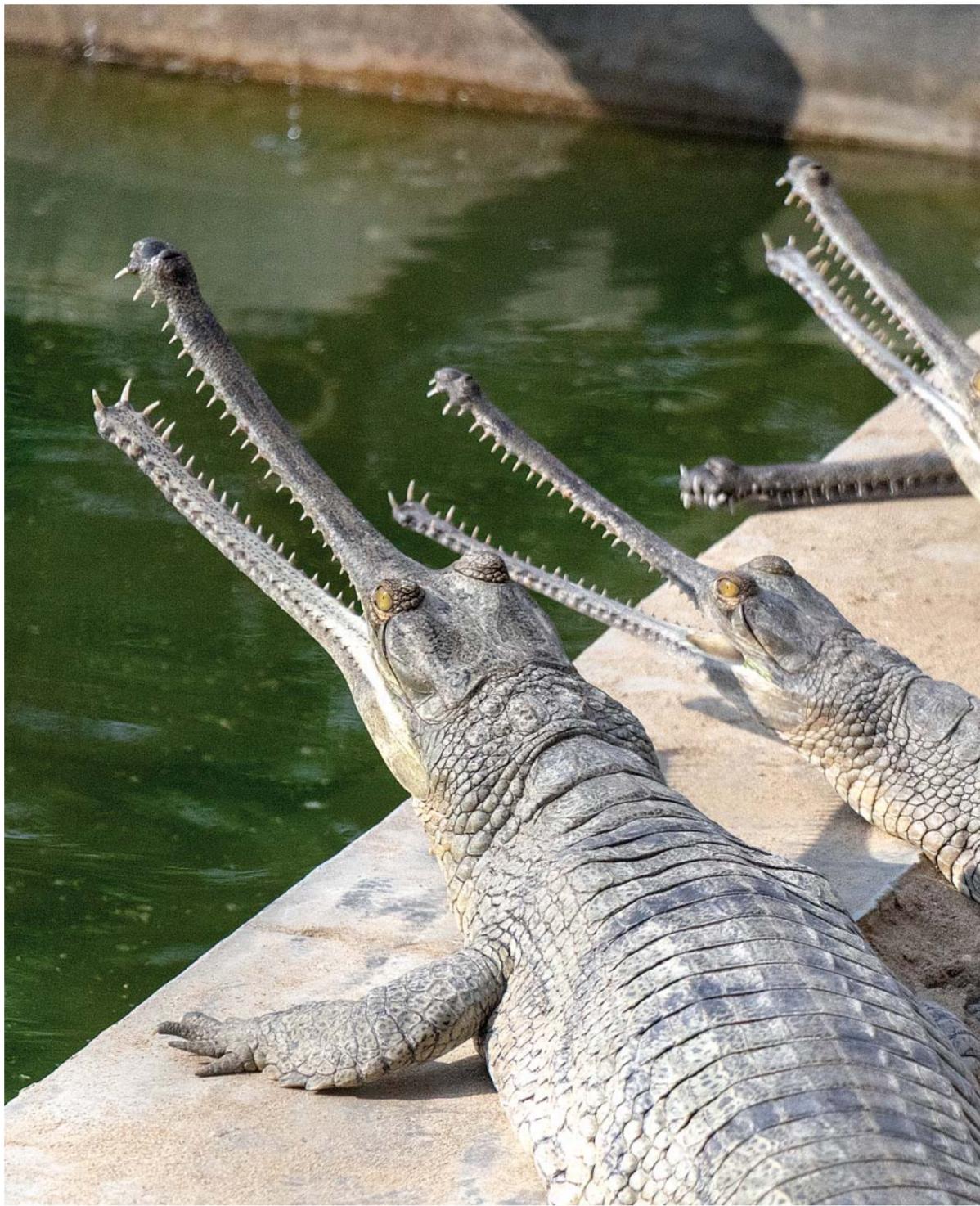
"It is as if the gharial as a species is predisposed to struggle in its natural habitat," says Prem Poudel of WWF Nepal, whose Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) program supports conservation in protected areas. "The eggs hatch in July, right in the middle of the flood season."

Gharials lay up to 90 eggs at a time in deep pits along the sandy banks of the Narayani and Rapti in spring. It is only later when growths appear on their snouts that breeders can confirm if they are male or female.

Research has shown that if gharial eggs are incubated at higher temperatures, more of them are female when they hatch. This is how global warming could be skewing the sex ratio even more towards female.

The breeding centre in Kasara hires Bote fisherfolk indigenous to the area as nest watchers to locate and collect eggs. The eggs are then incubated until they hatch.

This year, the breeding centre



## Buffering nature in Chitwan

As wildlife numbers increase, local communities balance human-wildlife coexistence

More than 300,000 tourists visited Chitwan National Park (CNP) in the past year, more than half of them from Nepal. In total, they injected Rs307 million in revenue to the park which also had income from timber sales and fines.

The park's buffer zone spreads across 729 sq km and includes 12 rural municipalities in Chitwan, Parsa, Nawalparasi, and Makwanpur districts. There are 21 Buffer Zone User Committees, and 73 community forest user groups.

Nepal's population of tigers has tripled, most of them in Chitwan National Park. Prey numbers are still adequate, but tigers, rhinos and wild elephants often venture into the buffer zone and nearby settlements.

"Despite high prey density there are still wildlife attacks," admits Dil Bahadur Purja Pun of CNP. Last year alone, there were 10 fatalities, mostly from tiger attacks.

Efforts are now underway among CNP rangers and staff, conservationists, as well as organisations like the WWF's crossborder Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) program to minimise human casualties.

Madi is inside the buffer zone surrounded by Chitwan National Park to the east, west, and north, and India's Valmiki Tiger Reserve to the south. Communities here have close and frequent encounters with wildlife.

Wounded tigers which cannot hunt usual prey venture out to attack livestock, wild elephants trample through farms that are on their traditional migration routes, and leopards stalk domestic animals.

The village of Pandav Nagar in Madi is one of the most impoverished. Outmigration is rife, and the young and elderly who are left behind are more vulnerable to predators.

Conservation organisations have erected a kilometre-long cement wall with mesh wire that keeps elephants out, but there are



SHRISTI KARKI

still gaps through which the animals can get through. The TAL program facilitates an awareness campaign called Behaviour Change Communication for Conservation.

One trainee is Poonam Pandey, a teacher who now instructs children in her community about how to avoid contact with wildlife.

"In the past, people here used to say that the wild animals are dangerous, but there has been a change in attitude," says Pandey. "Now, they are actively engaged in conservation."

Some older residents who have had close shaves with wildlife are still not convinced that coexisting with wildlife is possible.

In Madi's Chainpur, a group of women

plant turmeric which wild elephants do not like to eat (pictured). Other buffer zone communities grow lemon, which are less likely to be destroyed by wild elephants.

"In the past, we used to go into the forest for fodder and firewood," says one participant. "With these cash crops, we now earn money and the elephants leave us alone."

Conservation groups also help local communities with predator-proof pens to protect their goats.

Over in Meghauli, there are five community forests in the buffer zone where rhinos, tigers, elephants, and deer roam in abundance. Wetlands have been constructed

for watering holes, and grazing land increased.

With more prey and pasture, there is less likelihood of tigers and rhinos venturing out into settlements and farms.

Tourists on safari trips also enjoy more sightings. Eco-tourism possibilities in the Rapti Hariyali Community Forest have gone up just because there is more chance visitors can see tigers and rhinos in the wild.

"Although Sauraha and Kasara are the popular entry points for tourism, we want to spread the visitors out to Meghauli as well," says Yum Bahadur Thapa of Rapti Hariyali Community Forest. "It is proof that conservation, income generation, and tourism can go hand in hand."

"Our goal here is to reduce conflict and generate income through ecotourism," says Bal Kumar Basnet, chair of the Nirmal Thori Buffer Zone User Committee. "That includes jungle safaris, and homestays, and other tourism promoting activities."

However, local government must ensure that visitor numbers do not exceed the carrying capacity. Nepal's conservation success could be jeopardised if there is a rush to excessively monetise nature.

The federal government amended the National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act recently to allow private sector into protected areas. In theory, this is to ensure that local communities benefit more from conservation.

But this could kill the goose that lays golden eggs. While resorts and homestays can be opened in the buffer zones, many here say they should never be allowed inside the national park.

One conservation official told us: "Allowing private companies to build inside protected areas will spell disaster." 🇳🇵

Shristi Karki in Chitwan



**A FLOAT OF CROCS:** Five-year-old gharial bask in the sun before their release into the wild. There are fewer male gharial in nature, and they can only be distinguished by the bulbous growth on their snout (right).

ADITYA PAL / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



JUSTIN GRIFFITHS

collected 247 eggs, out of which 195 hatched. The gharial are released when they are five years old.

Over the years gharials have been released into Chitwan's rivers, but also in the Karnali and Babai that run through the Bardia National Park. In 2019, conservationists discovered the first nesting site of 100 gharials hatchlings in the Babai, and in 2022, 28 baby gharial were found in a tributary of the Karnali.

Besides the 32 adults at the breeding centre, there are currently 759 hatchlings, sub-adults and juvenile gharial. Meanwhile, 265 gharial were counted last December in their natural habitat inside Chitwan National Park, 152 in the Rapti and 113 in the Narayani. Of them, only six are male, three in each of the rivers.

"When we opened the national park, we directed our attention almost exclusively on Nepal's declining tiger and rhino populations," recalls Ram Prit Yadav, who was a ranger in the late 1960s even before Chitwan National Park was established, and became its first warden. "It was only later that we realised the wealth of the biodiversity here,

including the gharial."

Yadav subsequently led efforts to launch the Gharial Breeding Centre, which was established in 1978. Since then, the gharial population has rebounded but their numbers have declined in the Narayani River mainly due to upstream pollution.

Meanwhile, in the Rapti, the gharial population has been increasing because the river flows mostly inside the national park where illegal fishing and pollution is monitored. Translocated gharial have not fared as well in the Kosi and Kali Gandaki.

Despite this, Yadav, called 'the father of gharial conservation in Nepal,' considers Nepal's efforts to save this unique crocodile a success.

"The government has put a lot of effort into protecting the gharial, now it is up to us to help," says Yadav. "Gharials have now established a strong presence in the Rapti, and in Bardia, Banke and Suklaphanta. This is a testament to Nepal's conservation effort."

The Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and the Department

of Forests collaborated with conservation partners and local communities, to draw up the Gharial Conservation Action Plan (2018-2022) to further breeding research.

Even so, conservationists worry about Nepal's ability to maintain and increase the country's gharial numbers because of the accelerated destruction of riverine habitat from sand-mining, factory effluents, and competition with humans for fish.

Says WWF's Poudel: "There were gharials in all major river ecosystems in the past. Human settlement, river pollution, and dams contributed to them becoming critically endangered."

Gharial often get tangled in the traditional nylon fishing nets used illegally by locals. In 2023, a male gharial was found dead in a tributary of the Rapti River after it was snagged on one such net.

The construction of dams and barrages like the one on the Gandaki on the Indian border prevent gharials from swimming back upstream when they are swept down in the monsoon.

Says Yadav, "In the long run, we must ensure that these critically endangered animals have clean rivers to thrive in, plenty of fish to feed on, and are not at the risk of being swept downstream."

National park officials here worry that tigers and rhinos get all the media attention, overshadowing gharial conservation — which means the budget for the breeding centre does not get a priority.

"We are tasked with the responsibility of rearing and conserving these animals, but funds are decreasing," a conservation official told us. "We even have to ration meals for the gharial."

Even Yadav acknowledges that Nepal cannot go it alone to protect these rare reptiles for much longer: "Climate change is throwing the sex ratio out of balance, so our conservation effort must extend beyond Nepal's protected areas to the international stage." 🇳🇵

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## EVENTS

**Kag Tihar**

This day is dedicated to crows, considered to be the messengers of Yamaraj, the god of death. The birds are worshipped, and treats are left out for them.  
30 October

**Kukur Tihar/ Laxmi Puja**

Kukur Tihar and Laxmi Puja fall on the same day this year. Both dogs and cows will be garlanded and fed treats. Later in the evening, the goddess of wealth, Laxmi, is summoned.  
31 October

**Mha Puja/Nepa Era 1145**

On this day the Newa community marks their New Year 1145, and worships the self. Other ethnic communities pay homage to Govardhan, one of the ten avatars of Krishna.  
2 November

**Bhai-Bahini Tika**

This day is a celebration of the bond between brothers and sisters. Traditionally, sisters pray for the longevity of their brother's life.  
3 November

**Nepali History**

Shashi Bikram Shah's artwork will remind viewers of the 2001 Nepal Royal Massacre. If you are in/around London, check out this exhibition.  
Tate Museum, London, UK

## DINING

**Hankook Sarang**

Fed up eating festive food and need a break? Try popular Korean dishes: Banchan (Korean side-dishes) with Korean BBQ is a must.  
Tangal, Naxal (01) 4421711

## MUSIC

**Jazzmandu 2024**

The 20<sup>th</sup> edition of Jazzmandu has started. Plan ahead to choose between the events happening in this six-day long jazz fest.  
25 October, 6:30pm-9pm, Ticket: Rs800, Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat/ Electric Pagoda, Thamel/ Eden, Jhamsikhel/ La Terrasse, Chundevi/ Hard Rock Cafe, Durbar Marg  
26 October, 3pm-10pm, Ticket: Rs1,600, Gokarna Forest Resort  
28 October, 7pm-9pm, Rs2,000, Lawn by Nanglo, Jhamsikhel  
29 October, 7pm-9pm, Rs2,000, Dhokaima Cafe, Patan  
30 October, 5:30pm-10pm, Rs1,800, The Malla Hotel, Lainchaur

**Wind of Festival**

Kumar Sagar, Samir Shrestha and Trishna Gurung are performing live this Friday. Buy tickets through Ticket Sanjal.  
25 October, 2pm onwards, Ticket: Rs899, Skywalk Tower ground, Kathmandu

**God is a Woman**

Get ready to witness Nepal's first all female hip hop festival and listen to the likes of Amazumi, Suski, Gigi and others perform live.  
26 October, 12pm-9pm, The Wonderland, Bungamati

**Prateek Kuhad Live**

If you are a fan of mellow music, don't miss out on this performance by Prateek Kuhad who sings about the universal tales of love and heartbreak.  
26 October, 3pm onwards, Ticket: Rs4,000-Rs7,000, The Everest Hotel, Baneshwar

**TAZA Treats**

The softest pita breads, perfectly spiced shawarmas and an assortment of Middle Eastern dishes will have you yearning for more.  
Pulchok, 9860960177

**Piano Piano South**

Sip and savour the flavours of Italy at Piano Piano South, a cosy neighbourhood restaurant ideal at any time of the day.  
Sanepa, 9802302303

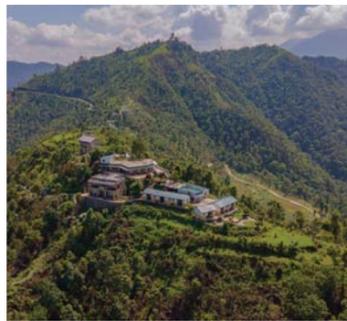
## GETAWAYS

**Chandragiri Hills Resort**

Celebrate Tihar at Chandragiri Hills Resort with a 2-night, 3-day package which includes delicious meals, a round-trip cable car ride, and activities including Rangoli creation.  
Chandragiri (01) 5970796/ 9802326541

**Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur**

Try the Newari-style boutique hotel that incorporates the rich art and architecture of the ancient city of Bhaktapur.  
Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur, (01) 6611628

**Raniban Retreat**

Located on a hillock of Raniban forest, this environmentally-friendly boutique hotel offers a spectacular view of the mountains.  
Pokhara (01) 5185435

**Bandipur Kaushi Inn**

A small, rustic place in the idyllic village of Bandipur, replete with cultural diversity and traditional architecture.  
Bandipur, Tanahu (065) 520083

**Bardia Gaida Camp**

For those who do not celebrate Tihar, this break might be a chance to reconnect with nature. Enjoy the scenic views of lush forests and the rare glimpses of elusive wildlife.  
Chitwan (01) 4215409/ 4215431

**Dhulikhel Mountain Resort**

Experience a perfect blend of culture and comfort with well-designed bungalows and Newa accents visible throughout the resort.  
Dhulikhel (01) 4420774

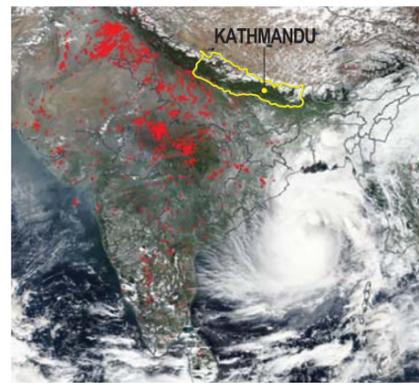
**The Village Cafe**

Get fresh, delicious, home-made food. Order selroti mix, frozen momo or khusu. Call the cafe for deliveries, or order through Kathmandu Organics.  
Jhamsikhel, 9842425127

**Cafe de Tukche**

Take a break from rice and try the Dhedo set at this authentic Thakali eatery.  
Lazimpat, 9828937500

## WEEKEND WEATHER

**Cyclone Clears the Air**

A low pressure circulation in the Bay of Bengal intensified into Tropical Cyclone Dana affecting the east coast of India. Winds associated with this system blew away some of the smoke from stubble burning in Pakistan and India that had reduced visibility here in Nepal (left). Clearer skies and slightly lower temperatures are in store for Kathmandu for the weekend. The cyclone will not affect Nepal directly except some passing light showers in the eastern mountains.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
☀️ 25° 🌧️ 14°	☀️ 26° 🌧️ 14°	☀️ 26° 🌧️ 14°

## OUR PICK



The 2024 Max original Caddo Lake is a genre-blending M. Night Shyamalan production written and directed by Celine Held and Logan George. 'When an 8-year-old girl disappears on Caddo Lake, a series of past deaths and disappearances begin to link together, altering a broken family's history,' reads the official synopsis, and adding anything else would be a spoiler. And trust us when we say you will enjoy it best going at it blind. Stars Dylan O'Brien, Eliza Scanlan, Lauren Ambrose, Caroline Falk, Sam Hennings, Eric Lange and Diana Hopper.

## MISS MOTI-VATION

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- 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 ।



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# The rivers threw our trash ri

It took the Great Flood of 28 September for the residents of Kathmandu to finally realise how much trash they were throwing into the Valley's sacred rivers.

A month later, plastic bags wave like flags high up on the branches of trees at Teku and Sankhamul, reminding us of just how high the water level rose on that fateful day. There are pieces of cloth, styrofoam, plastic bottles and other garbage still strewn along the ruins of embankments.

This was the revenge of the rivers. The Bagmati, Bishnumati, Manohara, Nakhu were getting back at city dwellers for treating the once holy rivers as dumpsites. The rivers threw the trash right back where it came from.

"If we do not want such garbage being washed away during the monsoon, we should prioritise waste management and focus on all aspects of waste generation," says Shilshila Acharya of Avni Ventures, a recycling company.

She adds, "Dumping sites are often near the riversides. We might also want to rethink their location."

Single-use plastic is the biggest source of trash in Kathmandu Valley which uses up an estimated



ALL PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

## Saving cities with trees

A team of passionate volunteers and sponsors breathe life back into Kathmandu's river banks

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Older residents of Kathmandu had not seen such floods in their lifetime. The Bagmati, Bishnumati and their tributaries broke through embankments and swept through built-up areas.

As the rivers rose, the flood eroded away the edges of rivers in many places. But here in Teku, a dense forest protected the banks.

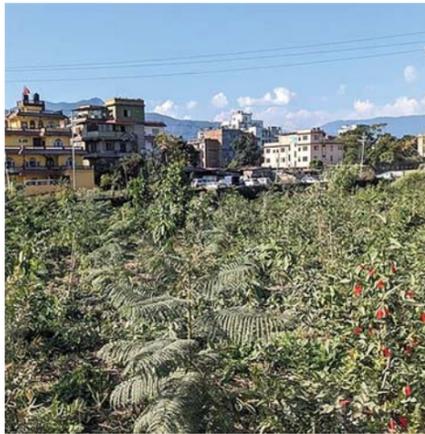
The forest patch was planted by Lily Leaves, a social enterprise that employs the Miyawaki Method to quickly create dense forest cover of native plants on degraded urban land. The technique was first developed by Japanese Botanist Akira Miyawaki in the early 1970s, and is used around the world.

The multilayer forest has a variety of plants growing to different heights on aerated soil fertilised by compost so the plants can root and grow faster.

The saplings are densely packed, which seems counterintuitive to quick growth. But the competition actually forces the plants to grow taller faster towards sunlight. Miyawaki forests also rapidly become biodiverse ecosystems of their own and need minimal maintenance.

"This used to be a dumpsite, with scavenging dogs and crows. It was full of flies," recalls Lily Katuwal KC of Lily Leaves. "Look, now there are butterflies, bees, and even squirrels." Such animals have become rare sights in crowded Kathmandu.

Katuwal was inspired by a Miyawaki forest in Dhanusha



**LUSH, LUSHER, LUSHEST:** The barren banks of the Bishnumati at Teku after the first saplings were planted last year and, right, a year later. The dense young forest helped protect the river bank from more serious erosion in last month's flood.

PHOTOS: LILY LEAVES

district planted by the Mithila Wildlife Trust, founded by forest and wildlife conservationist Dev Narayan Mandal.

Katuwal heads a small team, and does much of the work herself -- clearing and preparing the sites, planting and nurturing saplings. But the biggest challenge has been to navigate an apathetic local government bureaucracy.

Site 1 in Teku was started just a year ago on a landfill on the left bank of the Bishnumati, and has already grown into a lush forest (pictured). Site 2 was planted four months ago in Dallu, and Site 3 last month in Swayambhu.

The flood waters have now receded, and all three sites survived because the densely packed trees protected the banks.

Site 1 has 2,500 young trees in just a 1,200sq m area, with 38 native species including Rudraksha, Phirphire, Neem, Jasmine, Guava, and Hibiscus.

Sites 2 and 3 have even more variety and include Timur, Chestnut and Rhododendron.

Despite the benefits Katuwal and her team have had to battle the local ward. At Site 1, officials ripped out a border fence. When building a retaining wall, contractors mixed concrete right at the site and killed many of the trees. Bags of garbage were recently dumped in the river beside the forest.

At Site 1, seeing that the ground had been levelled, the local government arrived with a JCB excavator to build volleyball and basketball courts in the open space. "But we had all the necessary papers and permits, so we went ahead," Katuwal recalls.

What is most surprising about the work of Lily Leaves is that it has thrived in spite of obstacles from officialdom. This should have been the work of Kathmandu Municipality under Mayor Balen

Shah and elected ward councils, but the project proves that much can be achieved despite the hurdles they put along the way.

At Site 2 in Dallu, local strongmen who were using the government land as a lucrative bus park tried to sabotage the plantation. Members of Lily Leaves were threatened with violence.

And at Site 3, locals broke into the plantation and trampled the saplings to dry marijuana within sight of a police station nearby.

The flooding Bishnumati has dirtied Site 1 again. Plastic trash is everywhere, and pipes spew raw sewage right into the river. Dogs waded into the smelly water, and kites perch on the wires overhead looking for their next meal.

What makes this squalid sight slightly bearable to behold is the patch of greenery with trees swaying gently in the breeze. Amidst the roar of traffic on Teku Bridge one can make out the sound

of birds chirping from Site 1.

All this would not have been possible without the commitment of Lily Katuwal KC, her team of passionate volunteers, and sponsors.

Lily Leaves is gaining momentum. In the past year alone the social enterprise planted 6,500 saplings using the Miyawaki Technique of quick 'greenification' of neglected land.

Students from Kathmandu schools took part in some of the planting, and with so many native plants in the same place, the forest is now even an educational trip.

Government backing would speed up the process, but Lily Katuwal knows not to wait for it as she starts the search for Site 4. 🇳🇵

To donate to Lily Leaves, call: + 977 9851251545  
lilyleaves7@gmail.com

[nepalitem.com](http://nepalitem.com)

More photos online.

# ght back at us



**APRÈS LE DÉLUGE:** A damaged sign next to trash tangled on a tree by the Bagmati seems to sum it all up: 'Everything you get is a result of the rights and wrongs of your karma.' Plastic and other garbage in the river high on the branches of trees at Teku indicate the height of the flood water on 28 September.

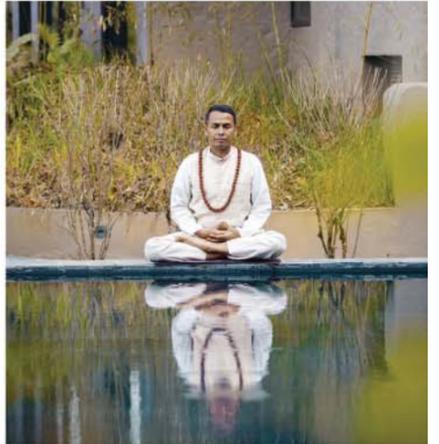
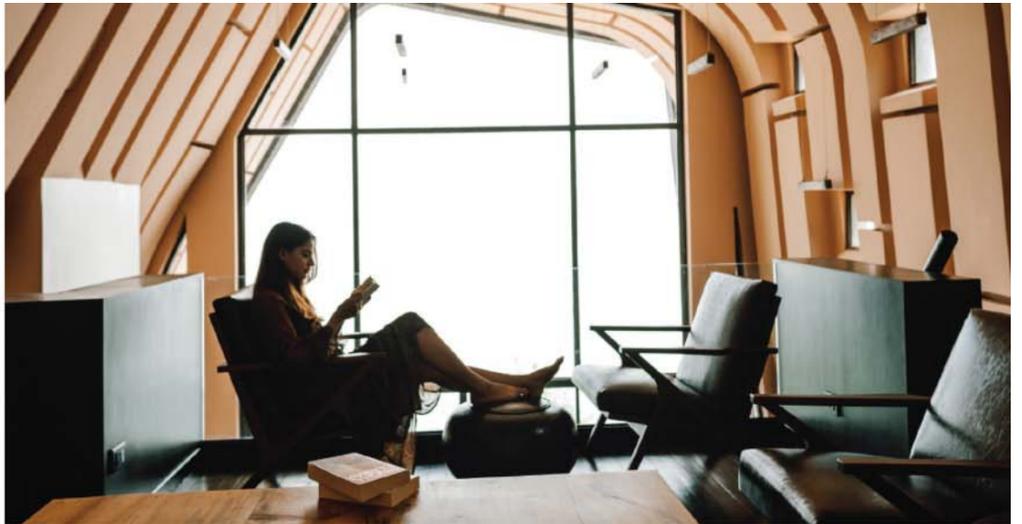
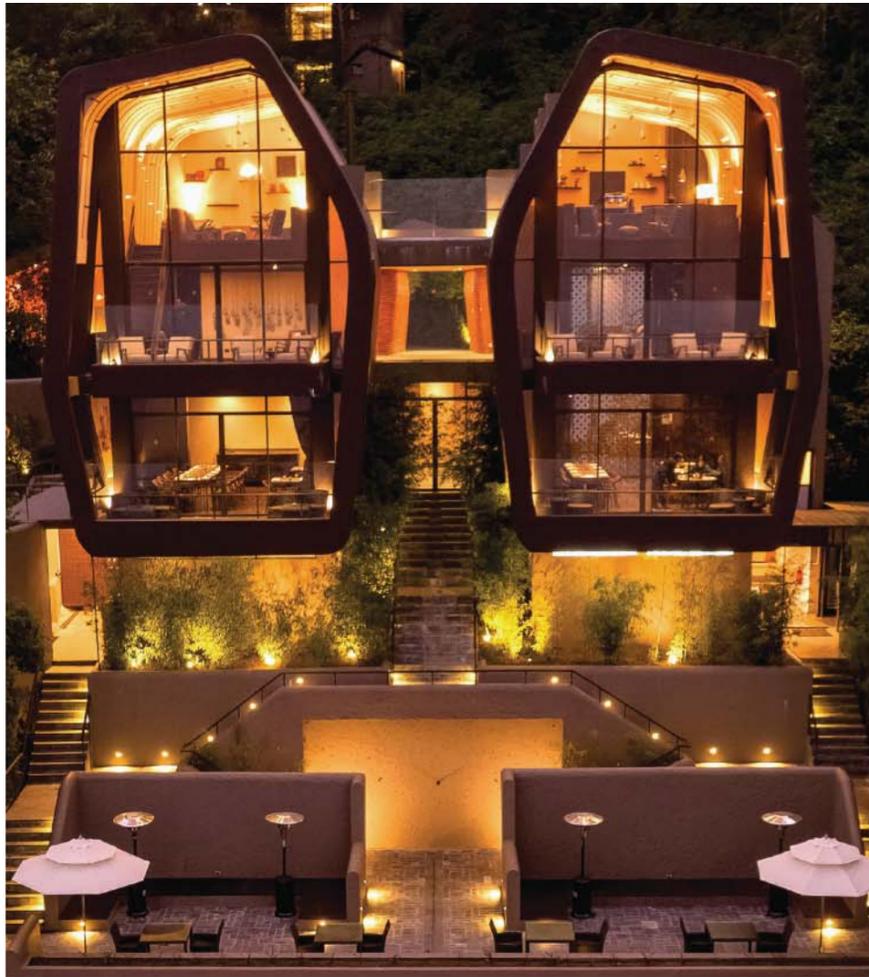
5,000,000 plastic bags a day. About 800 tons of this non-biodegradable material is dumped in the river, or in landfill sites every day. The thicker plastic of bottles and other discarded household items are collected by waste pickers for recycling, but plastic below 20 microns in thickness is thrown away after being used once to carry vegetables or other food purchases. One plastic bag takes 500 years to completely biodegrade, and microplastics contaminate drinking water and find their way into the human food chain.

harm the water cycle and poison aquatic species and wildlife. Waste collecting companies have realised that there is money in trash, and are doing good business recycling, but since thin plastic bags are not recycled they end up in the rivers. "Cleaning campaigns are not enough. When we clean, we pick up the waste from one site and throw it off in a landfill likely near the river," says Nabin Bikash Maharjan of Blue Waste to Value, which repurposes trash into useable items like cooking utensils. He adds: "What we can do instead is segregate the waste, reduce them to products and

sell them. That is how a circular economy works. Local governments should be involved." Nepal's governments have tried repeatedly in the past to ban polythene and single-use bags below 20 microns in thickness. But these regulations were hastily withdrawn after intense lobbying by importers of plastic pellets who have political connections. Hanging from railings on the Bagmati banks, and swinging from trees at its confluence with the Bishnumati in Teku are at least seven types of plastic. The lowest grade are single use thin plastic

bags which have to be banned at the source. But half-buried in the silt of the Bagmati's floodplain are PET (polyethylene terephthalate) bottles, which can easily be recycled. Waste collectors do remove most of these and other types before they are dumped, but many find their way into the river. Without extended producer responsibility, the Nepal government does not consider it mandatory to require manufacturers of multinational soft drink manufacturers and others to ensure recycling. "The first and foremost step

of waste management starts with segregation of biodegradable and non-biodegradable trash at source," Acharya points out. She adds, "Secondly, there should be more planned landfills within a community. While we prefer landfills to be away from the city, planned smaller landfills help better manage the waste of a local community." She continues: "Third is partnership between Kathmandu municipality with private organisations which are already working in waste management. This collaboration can help them better manage the waste." Kathmandu Valley produces an estimated 1,500 tons of waste every day, most of this ends up unsegregated at the landfill site at Banchara Danda of Nuwakot, after another site at Sisdoile got filled up in 2022. Nearly 65% of it is still organic household waste, and can easily be turned into compost and does not have to end up at the landfill at all. Much of the paper, plastic bottles, metal and glass can also be recycled easily if they are segregated at source — as Mayor Balen Shah promised in his election campaign. This could reduce the volume of garbage that has to be sent in fleets of tipper trucks every day to the landfill. Residents living near Banchara already suffer serious health risks from water contaminated with leachate from the dumpsite. Says Nabin Bikash Maharjan: "We have to start working on minimising the waste generation. Until waste prevention is not taken seriously, this cycle of people throwing waste and people cleaning it up will never end."  With reporting by Pinki Sris Rana



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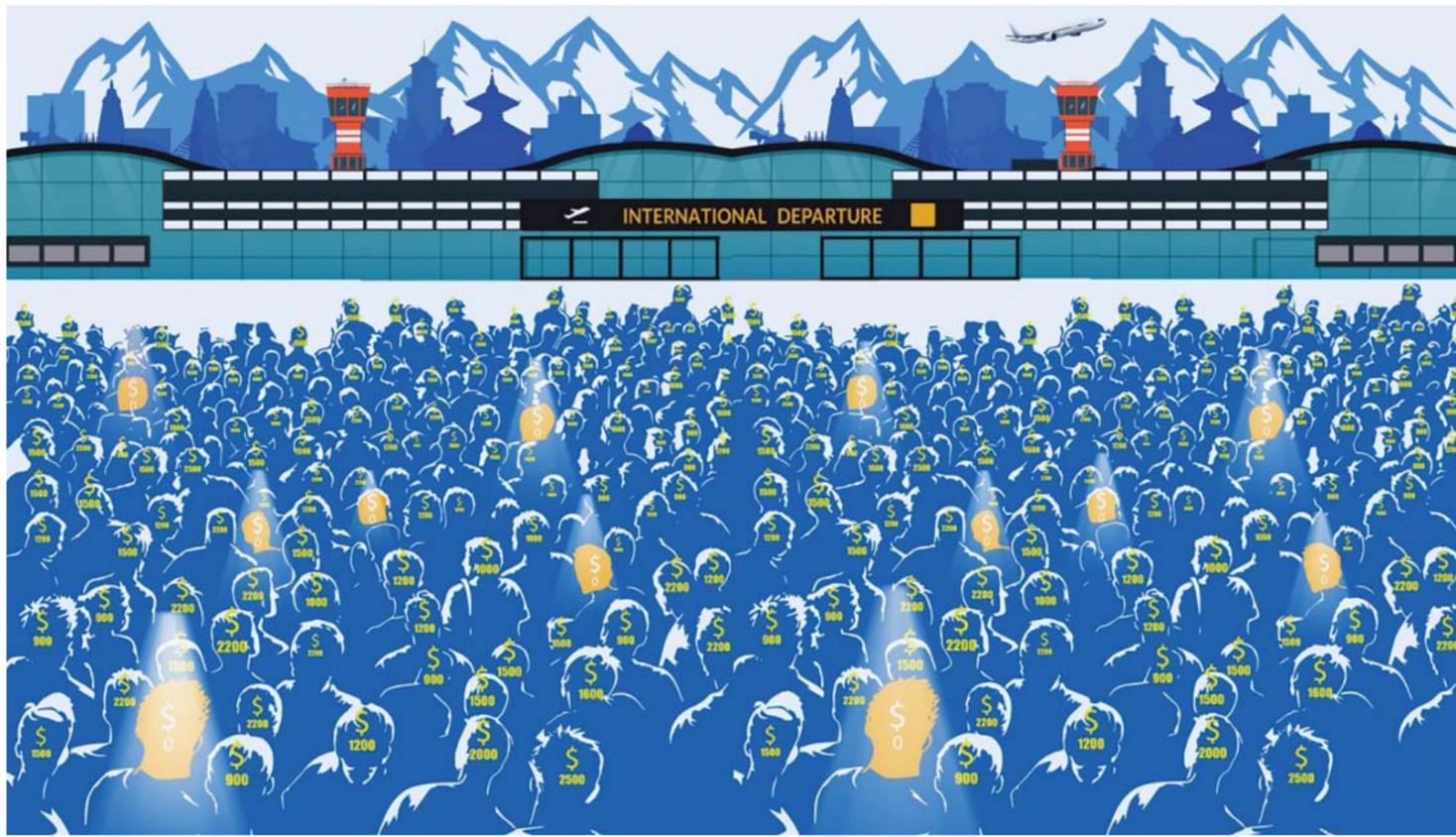
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# “I have



DIASPORA  
DIARIES 51

Nepali Times resumes its Diaspora Diaries column, of which this is the 51<sup>st</sup> instalment

■ Harka Lal Bishwokarma  
in Mumbai

## Fee-free migration is possible

Responsible recruitment can protect Nepalis headed for overseas jobs. Here is how.

‘Malaysia NPR 400,000. Dubai, Qatar NPR 200,000-250,000.’ These are prevailing under-the-table market rates listed for Nepalis to secure overseas jobs.



LABOUR MOBILITY  
Upasana Khadka

Low paid workers pay high recruitment fees equivalent to months of wages, while higher paid professionals get relocation and other benefits.

Yet, ongoing research by Migration Lab and International Manpower Recruitment (IMR) with ethically hired workers shows that aspirants and their communities still regard the employer-pays recruitment model with deep skepticism and disbelief.

And why would they believe it? Even when workers pay hefty fees, it is never guaranteed that they will land the promised job, or not be stranded abroad. Jobs that require zero payment are even considered scams, with concerns about the quality of the job, wage deductions or about being duped.

Some workers do not apply for jobs at all, or are dissuaded by their families. The good news is that perceptions change.

And all it takes is one successful migrant worker in a village to change perceptions. One worker who did not have to pay recruitment fees told us: “People from my village do not believe me.” Another said: “Four or five from my village have already migrated for free, so people believe it.”

Some workers passed up job offers requiring fees, waiting instead for ethical employers from whom close friends or family members had benefited.

Because not all aspirants know about workers who did not have to pay recruitment fees, social media messaging is critical. Online testimonies from workers who got jobs through ethical channels are helpful, but are also met with skepticism because it is widely known that workers are frequently coerced by fraudulent recruiters into speaking on camera about not paying fees despite having paid significant amounts.

Ethical recruiters like IMR conduct village campaigns to screen workers. This reduces the reliance on middlemen, and broadens the understanding of how ethical recruitment drives work.

Prior to departure, IMR wins the trust of workers and creates a safe space to admit if they have paid anyone fees. Middlemen can often mislead workers to believe that they have a say in influencing interview outcomes and charge workers.

The biggest obstacle is to assure workers that admitting they have paid will not cost them their job and that the recruiter will work with concerned authorities to ensure the agent returns the money and does not harass them or their families. Although Nepal’s laws consider such subagents illegal, ‘agents’ are often family members, villagers and friends.

These practical home-grown innovations in recruitment are products of testing to address years of exploitation and distrust in the system and the labour mobility industry. They also bring a nuanced understanding of the often complex aspects of the employer-pays principle.

Research shows that when workers do not have to pay recruitment fees, it has positive impact on their productivity and well-being. Responsible recruitment also allows innovation to make migration a transformational development tool to uplift the poorest.

### Ethical Examples

IMR and Migration Lab recently connected 70 youth from the Musahar community in Mahottari and survivors of the Jajarkot earthquake last year with factory jobs in Malaysia for which they did not have to pay anything.

Accessing overseas jobs, including those with high fees, is a challenge in these communities. Finding responsible recruitment opportunities is even more difficult. Good migration has the power to push families out of intergenerational poverty and discrimination as seen in the case of many migrant workers in the Diaspora Diaries series (overleaf).

For Jajarkot earthquake survivors, fee-free recruitment can also complement patchy post-

disaster recovery efforts by the government. Even without an earthquake, emigration from far-flung areas like Jajarkot is complex because of financial, information and network access issues.

It takes at least two days to travel to Kathmandu, costs are high, and workers may not even pass employer interviews after all the time and money invested.

The earthquake made overseas migration even more difficult in Jajarkot, further affecting access to informal loans, yet increasing the desire to migrate. Many were ready to borrow at 60% interest, while others said they would have migrated to India, a cheaper, less-risky alternative with lower returns.

The Musahar community also faced multiple challenges including passport confiscation by middlemen for months without any job placement. Moneylenders also do not trust them to pay back, and are wary of recent restrictions on meter interest lending.

Labour middlemen are strategic about snaring the vulnerable to manipulate and cheat. There are anecdotes about them identifying the most desperate women, including those that are victims of domestic violence or extreme poverty, to send them as domestic workers through irregular channels.

New York University Professor Natasha Iskander’s research documents how companies in Qatar reported targeting candidates from regions experiencing climate breakdown because the educated but newly poor make ideal recruits as they are now willing to accept lower wages.

This narrative can be flipped by good actors through ethical interventions. Sourcing areas can be redefined: not as preying grounds for fraudulent middlemen but where responsible recruiters can reach that last mile with transformative overseas opportunities.

The Musahar and Jajarkot candidates have modest goals: paying for their children’s education, household and medical expenses, buying land, rebuilding houses, and saving to start a small business.

To be sure, migration

outcomes are determined by more than just recruitment fees and it will take time to see how they fare. But the likelihood of achieving any goal is certainly higher under debt-free responsible recruitment schemes.

Beyond no costs, workers hired under ethical drives know exactly what jobs they have signed up for and employment terms from the onset, unlike traditional recruitment that is often characterised by false promises and exaggerated benefits.

Workers paying exorbitant fees for jobs will hopefully be an outdated concept one day, but for now the number of ethical recruitment drives is insignificant.

Workers interviewed said their peers paid up to Rs400,000 for comparable jobs, and they too would have been compelled to take the same route if the ethical option was not available. Repeat workers had paid up to \$2,259 in fees in earlier migrations.

Highly marginalised communities need even more support to overcome information, finance and networking barriers to connect them with rewarding and safe overseas opportunities.

Systemic disadvantages in education or skills training also limit their ability to secure worthwhile jobs abroad that have wages and better labour protection but higher barriers to entry such as language or skills.

Making ethical migration accessible to the most marginalised Nepalis would have the best impact. Perhaps these issues would come to the fore if we also saw emigration as people chasing their dreams and aspirations, and not just as a compulsion “बाध्यता” that is entrenched in Nepal’s public narrative.

But forced immobility also merits attention. It is an unfulfilled dream for many to also take social media photos at Kathmandu airport with teary-eyed relatives before departing. 📸

Upasana Khadka heads Migration Lab, a social enterprise aimed at making migration outcomes better for workers and their families. Labour Mobility is her fortnightly column in Nepali Times.

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

Watch videos online: Healing through Migration, Putting the Spotlight on Responsible Recruitment

I was born in Mumbai where my father worked as a watchman. I was four when my mother went back to our home district of Achham in Nepal to take care of our house and farm with my one-year-old brother.

In her absence, we lived close to my father’s workplace. He worked shifts, and was not always home when I returned from school. I learnt to cook for both of us at a young age, even though I do not consider myself a good cook.

From childhood, I had this innate sense of responsibility and completed my homework, or rote-learned for exams even when I was not under parental watch.

Growing up around Nepali families in the neighbourhood, I picked up Nepali. Not having a mother figure around, I did not really know what I was missing, as it had always been that way.

My mother and I wrote letters that were about a paragraph-long without much substance other than basic pleasantries and updates from school. I was closer to my father, with whom I shared a special bond.

I was married young at 15 to a 13-year old girl who was also born in Mumbai to migrants from Achham. My mother came to my wedding and it was the first time we met after she had left over a decade ago.

My mother returned with my wife to Achham where my city grown wife learnt how to do village household chores. Not surprisingly, she did not like it, but stayed on for two years. While she was trained by my mother in Achham, I was continuing my school in Mumbai.

After my wedding, I went to Achham for the first time ever. With no mental image of what it would look like, I did not know what to expect. Life in Nepal took some getting used to, but with the visits I grew attached to Nepal and I got familiar with Nepali songs and movies via YouTube.

My father eventually moved back to Nepal. My mother needed more help around the house to tend the fields. By then, I had settled down in Mumbai with my wife and four children and worked as a watchman, just like my father. My now-jobless father depended on me. This put more financial pressure on me.

I used to enjoy playing cricket growing up. But when household responsibilities start weighing on you from a young age, there is no space in life for hobbies and passions. By the time I was of age to discover and nurture my

# lived a simple, boring life”



**DRIVER'S DIARY:**  
Harka Lal Bishwokarma from Achham was born in Mumbai and now drives an autorickshaw in the city after working all his life to raise his three children.

He was married at 15 to a 13-year-old girl also from Achham (left) who, like him, was born and raised in Mumbai.

interests, I was already worrying about raising my children well.

Life in Mumbai is fast-paced. Everyone is busy running around. I lost my job after the company closed down, and I bought an auto rickshaw. My daily income varies between INR700-1,500. I prefer this to being a watchman, as there is more freedom.

It is self-paced, and there is time to rest. There is no boss to order me around. My three sons work as a vegetable vendor, a real estate agent and a cinematographer, and my daughter is a nurse. They take care of some

of the household expenses.

What I earn is just for my pocket money and to keep myself occupied. What would I do sitting around idly? If I had a normal job, I would be retiring in three years after turning 60. But as a driver, there is no end at sight. I will retire when my body demands it.

I don't interact much with my customers as I have to keep my eyes on the road. Mumbai traffic is bad. Sometimes, customers hail three-wheelers like mine when cars they book online do not arrive on time because of traffic. They have meetings to attend or flights to

catch, and they are thankful when I stop to pick them up.

Other than that, interactions are limited. Most customers are glued to their phones, some are on laptops. My job is to ensure they reach their destinations safely.

Three years ago, I received a call from Achham that my father suffered a heart attack. I was arranging my travel to Nepal, but he passed away that night. I still went to Achham for his last rites, and I cannot describe how difficult it was to make that long journey alone while grieving. As I changed buses and trains across India, all I could

think about was my father.

We moved my mother to Gujarat where my brother works as a watchman, as we did not want to leave her alone in Achham. Our house there is now empty.

Just like I was close to my father who raised me, my brother is close to our mother. My brother and I have never spent more than a few days together because we were separated as children.

Sometimes, I visit them in Gujarat. I have lived a simple and perhaps even a boring life. There have been hardships, but nothing that I have not been able to sort

out on my own. I have not had to depend on others.

God has been restrained in the way he sends me problems. We are all entangled in our own **भ्रमेला** troubles. 🇳🇵

*Translated from a conversation with the author. Diaspora Diary is a fortnightly column in Nepali Times in collaboration with Migration Lab, providing a platform to share experiences of living, working, studying abroad.*

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