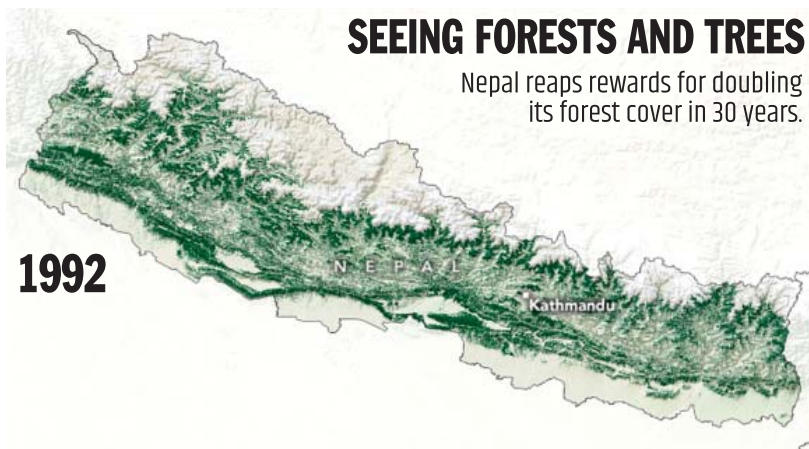


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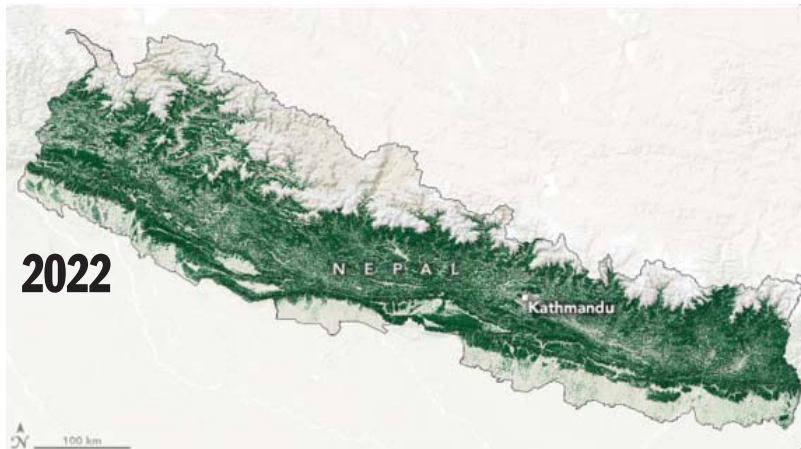
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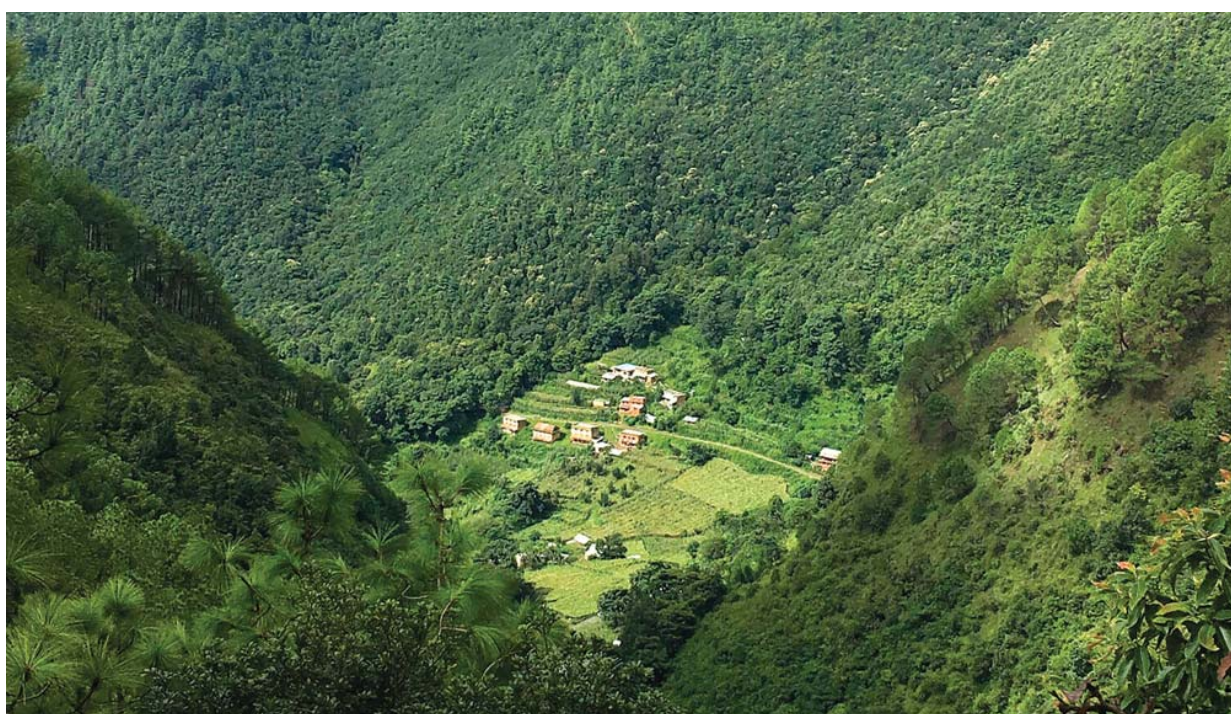


SEEING FORESTS AND TREES

Nepal reaps rewards for doubling its forest cover in 30 years.



NASA EARTH OBSERVATORY



KUNDA DIXIT

GREENBACKS\$ FOR GREENERY

■ Ramesh Kumar

Earlier this month, Nepal received Rs1.6 billion from the World Bank as part of its Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), rewarding the country for expanding carbon sink.

Nepal is first in South Asia to benefit from this facility, and was recompensed for increasing forest cover in 13 Tarai districts between 2018-2024.

"We are trying to get another Rs13 billion from the facility while preparing for free market-based carbon trading," says Nabaraj Pudasaini of the REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) Implementation Centre.

Big emitters of greenhouse gases are under pressure to reduce their carbon emissions, and many have signed agreements to do so

by investing in decarbonisation projects in developing countries, despite reports of greenwashing.

Nepal's community forestry program is credited for helping increase tree cover to over 45% in less than three decades (maps). But this had not so far been recognised or rewarded internationally before.

Preventing deforestation and increasing canopy cover is considered an important part of efforts to limit global average temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

In 2015, a mechanism was created to help developing countries sustainably manage forests (called REDD+).

Under this new mechanism, countries receive aid based on their efforts to prevent forest degradation and increase carbon sink, and in 2021 the World Bank was entrusted

with implementing it.

Nepal's FCPF receipt this month was calculated on the basis of 2.4 million tons of carbon stored at a rate of \$5 per ton. In the second phase, Nepal will receive more than Rs4 billion within the next year for storing an additional 7 million tons of carbon. Eighty per cent of this amount obtained from carbon trading needs to be spent on local beneficiaries and indigenous communities.

But carbon trading is not easy, Nepal needs to prove that protected forests will not be destroyed in the future.

"Forests should be handed over to the community and shown that they are managed sustainably. Proving this will be particularly challenging since forest encroachment and degradation is rife in the Tarai," explains carbon

trading expert Ugan Manandhar.

Forest fires have made it more difficult to meet the commitment. Nepal is signing another carbon trading agreement during the Baku climate conference that ends on Friday. The Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest finance (LEAF Coalition) proposes to cash in on carbon stored in Bagmati, Gandaki and Lumbini forests.

Nepal signed a letter of intent three years ago at COP26 in Glasgow. The target is to store 70 million tons of carbon in 32 million hectares of forest in the three provinces for which Nepal will receive Rs13 billion over four years at \$10 per ton.

Nepal can also benefit from carbon trading for having offset fossil fuel use by introducing 30,000 electric vehicles in past years. Nepal has been selected for the first round to receive \$40 million within one and a half years through the Clean Air System of the World Bank.

"Nepal's goal now is to sell carbon in the free market in an open and transparent manner," adds Pudasaini. "Nepal can now set its own price and bargain with interested buyer countries and organisations."

Nepal has exported Rs12.72 billion worth of electricity to India so far this fiscal year, which can be traded under Nepal's carbon market (page 10-11).

Says Manandhar: "Now, we must prioritise sustainable management of forests, cutting older trees and allowing regrowth, and promote electric stoves and EVs." ■

Right climate for Nepal's energy transition

PAGE 10-11

Nepal can level up tourism with electricity

PAGE 10

28th November Thursday

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The world can act on climate without Trump

The nation which more than any other caused the climate crisis will leave it to the rest of the world to sort out the mess. That is a takeaway from the US election, and the COP29 happening in Baku.



GUEST EDITORIAL
Erik Solheim

US emissions are higher than China or India, but America will leave it to the victims of climate change to save the planet.

The UN's climate summit in Baku that ends on Friday is happening in a year with the highest average global temperature in the past 900 years. The meeting took place a week after a flood which took more than 200 lives in one of the world's most developed states, Spain.

Another 250 people died in floods in Nepal in September. Floods last year caused massive damage in Pakistan and China. Northern India experienced 52°C last summer in areas where very few people have access to air conditioners.

The bad news is that the world's most powerful leader believes we should carry on with business as usual. The good news is that this matters much less than we tend to think.

Of course Trump's victory will make it more challenging to find compromises on financing and other issues in future climate talks. Leaders will ask why their nation shall act or indeed pay, if the US does not.

Global climate diplomacy will be in jeopardy. We will probably also see a rollback of the financial support for domestic climate action in the US introduced by Biden. Trump will withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement, maybe even from the UN Climate Convention.

But still there is hope. China, India and Europe are leading on climate, not the US even under Biden. China is the indispensable nation for climate action, not the US.

Last year, China contributed two-thirds of all global renewable energy. It produced 60% or more of everything green – electric cars, buses and batteries, solar panels and windmills, hydropower and high speed rail. China is also the world's largest tree planter, by far.

India is aiming for 500 gigawatt of solar, wind and hydro by 2030. Prime Minister Modi is launching 'green missions', like a program for 10 million homes with solar

panels. Indian states like Gujarat have massive green ambitions.

Indonesia, the second largest rainforest nation, has drastically reduced deforestation. Brazil is following. Europe is now surpassed by Asia as a climate leader.

China, India, Europe and many more do not act on climate to please America. They act because climate breakdown is a threat to them, and climate action is an opportunity for green jobs, profits and prosperity.

The world can do well without the US. Secondly, powerful American states support climate action. California, New York and others will not abandon their green efforts, and fight Trump tooth and nail.

Business is leading the charge, not the government. No major US business saluted when Trump last time took the US out of the Paris Agreement. American companies see opportunities for growth and jobs in the green economy.

Trump has portrayed the shift to electric cars as 'a win for Beijing'. The opposite is the case. If Detroit does not start turning out electric cars, China will capture the entire global market. The Chinese domestic car market is already bigger than America's and it is battery-powered.

US businesses are wary about leaving the market for electric cars or green energy totally in the hands of China.

It may be that the global anger and America's falling out with Trump in the coming years will be exactly what the docile global green movement needs. Environmentalists will be forced to be even more people-centered.

A second Trump term may paradoxically create a climate for more activism. He strongly argued in his campaign that the US should focus on its own borders, not on everyone else's.

The time of the Neocons, both democratic and Republican, who could not see a war they did not like, may be over. Trump may focus US resources on real American foreign policy needs, not believing as the Neocons do that every square metre of planet Earth is a security risk.

Trump's re-election will accelerate US decline as the dominant world power. His protectionist economic policy will make US businesses less competitive. Decreased migration will reduce economic growth.

The global trend towards a multipolar world dominated by the Global South will speed up. After a century of US dominance in world affairs, the ascent of Asia is not necessarily bad for the planet. (IPS)

Erik Solheim is a Norwegian former Minister of International Development and Minister of the Environment, and served as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme from 2016-2018.



FLICKR

After a century of US dominance in world affairs, the ascent of Asia may not necessarily be bad for the planet.

ONLINE PACKAGES



IN CONVERSATION WITH KABIR KHAN

Indian filmmaker Kabir Khan transitioned from documentaries to mainstream Bollywood. He is in Kathmandu this week for Film Southasia—where he won his first award in 1999— as keynote speaker. Watch video of Khan's conversation with Kanak Mani Dixit on Thursday kicking off the festival on YouTube. Read profile on page 9.



PASSION FOR PASHMINA

Kathmandu-based Nature Knit exports 90% of its pashmina products across Europe, the United States, and Japan. In seven steps, experts demonstrate how balls of yarn are weaved into some of the finest luxury garments. Watch the video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel, and subscribe for multimedia content.

POKHARA TOURISM

Why has the Nepal government chosen to disrupt flights during tourism season ('Pokhara's tourism woes', Vishad Raj Onta, #1235), which is a time when employment opportunities are created and foreign currency comes into the country?

Rajendra Dhami

■ I will be skipping Nepal this season. Kathmandu airport is terrible.

Patrick Kirchoff

■ I would be more than happy to fly to Bhairawa or Pokhara. There are too many thugs at Kathmandu airport.

Yuroj Gurung

SECURITY FORCES JOBS

Nepal's security forces need to import manpower from the same source that recruit workers for construction and other labour-related jobs ('Job insecurity in security forces', Man Bahadur Basnet, #1235).

Krishna Joshi

■ This is good news about the security forces. What Nepal needs is a small government, and for that, scaled-back security forces is a way to go.

Indraraj Giri

■ Does Nepal really need an army? Why not opt for a voluntary but paid community service instead?

David Seddon

SUNMAYA BUDHA

Sunmaya Budha has achieved incredible things despite the state ('Sunmaya Budha stays in the running', Vishad Raj Onta, nepalitimes.com). She is an example for us all, and her determination is a force to be reckoned with. We should support her all the way.

Bhumi Ninglekhu

K P OLI

The lack of invitation for a state visit to Oli by India seems to signal a rejection by Modi, and create a perception of a fragile Nepali PM ('Oli's oscillations', Shristi Karki, #1235).

Forester

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

19 days in Russia

by Marty Logan
Khagendra Khatri, a Nepali conscript into the Russian Army, talks about how he escaped after he saw his name on a roster of those going to the Ukrainian front. More @nepalitimes.com

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Job insecurity in security forces

by Man Bahadur Basnet
Young, physically fit Nepalis emigrating in search of better opportunities, as well as low salaries has impacted recruitment into Nepal's security forces. Read the full report on our website.

X Most popular on X

Pokhara's tourism woes

by Vishad Raj Onta
Pokhara is feeling the brunt of Kathmandu airport's partial closure during peak tourism season with hotels reporting last-minute cancellations for November. Some trekking agencies report cancellations into spring next year. Join the discussion online.

66 Most commented



Sunmaya Budha stays in the running

by Vishad Raj Onta
Nepal's ultra-marathoner Sunmaya Budha has been racking up stellar performances around the world. The professional trail endurance runner recently won two races in China, setting course records in both competitions. Details on www.nepalitimes.com

🔥 Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Many of Nepal's derelict airports have returned to being grazing grounds for cattle, there is housing encroachment into some airfields, and roads slice across what used to be runways. Yet, CAAN still allocated a budget for many of these airfields.

AirlineGuy @GuyAirline
If we had an effective chief of @hello_CAANepal or @ciaa_nepal, this wouldn't happen. Hopefully @hello_CAANepal will soon be split into more manageable units.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
"I wish that our education system would instill in our children the values of humanity, equality, diversity, and not consider someone 'civilised' just because they can rattle off some English."

Mahavir Sherpa @SherpaMahavir01
I believe, fluency in English doesn't define intelligence; true wisdom lies in understanding and critical thinking, no matter the language

1,000 WORDS



COP29

LIVING FOSSILS

COP28 President Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology of the UAE, formally handed over the presidency to Azerbaijan's Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources Mukhtar Babayev on the first day of COP29 in Baku on 11 November. The climate summit ends on Friday.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Maina's Story

One of the highest-profile cases of extrajudicial killing during the conflict was of 15-year-old Maina Sunar of Kavre, who was taken in by the Army and tortured for being a Maoist suspect. The case represents the true horror and tragedy of the insurgency, regardless of which side committed the war crimes.

Excerpt of the report published in Nepali Times this week 20 years ago in issue #222 19 – 25 November 2004:

Purna Bahadur Sunuwar and his wife Debi had just hit another dead end in the search of their 15-year-old daughter, Maina, who had been taken away by soldiers eight months ago. An army patrol from the Lamidanda barrack in Kabhre had arrested Maina from her home on 17 February 2004 for being a suspected Maoist.

Purna Bahadur and Debi had gone to the army base the next day only to be told that their daughter was not there. After a story about Maina's disappearance came out



in Himal Khabarpatrika in April, human rights organisations and the military's legal department finally took notice. Even at that time, the Royal Nepali Army's legal officers told us: "We are investigating, we can't say anything at the moment." At the same time, the family and neighbours also told human rights groups they were being harassed by local soldiers.

In September, after Maina's trail in Kathmandu went cold, we accompanied her parents to Kabhre. The Sunuwar live relatively well by rural Nepali standards in a two-storey rato mato house. Rats scamper away as we open the door to an upstairs room

where Maina used to sleep. There is a battered tin trunk and Maina's hand bag and slippers. Debi begins to sob as she sees them. Neighbours told us they had seen Maina being taken into the barracks on the day she disappeared.

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



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English is not the be-all and end-all

When will Nepalis learn that just speaking English does not a wise person make?

For a long time, I believed that being able to speak, read, and understand English meant having the power of knowledge. In hindsight, I also realise that if learning English was simply like picking up another language, my journey would have been much smoother and definitely more enjoyable.



ANGREZI
Anbika Giri

I took pride in learning Maithili from my mother and Tharu from my father's workplace, and those experiences were both fun and fulfilling.

Previous episodes of this column, Angrezi, explain how I struggled with self-doubt, feelings of inferiority, and low self-esteem because of my deficient English language. When I came to the capital, I realised that English held a different significance in this city.

In my village in Sunsari, it was often seen as a way to show off. In Kathmandu, it represented much more than that: it was a source of power, a means of access, and a gateway to opportunities.

During my first visit to Kathmandu in the late 1990s, I listened to a relative unleashing every possible curse word she knew in English at her sister-in-law. That outburst was triggered by the sister-in-law reporting her brother for domestic violence.

I found the sister-in-law to be incredibly courageous in taking that stand. It was also the first time I heard English being spoken among family members within a home, which surprised me. But this family was considered intelligent simply because its members could speak English. Even though I was



only 13 at the time, I couldn't help but question how someone who believed that domestic violence should be hushed up could be considered smart.

When I came to Kathmandu for my Bachelor's, I encountered a few individuals who enjoyed discussing English films, books, and music. I didn't fit in and felt like I had little to contribute to their conversations.

At times, I would pretend to engage, while other times I would make excuses to leave early. I also attempted to learn more about the books and films being discussed, but it was exhausting. Despite my silence, I realised that they had information, but lacked deeper

understanding.

They seemed captivated by popular music and literature, yet did not grasp the underlying messages those songs and books conveyed. Throughout my nearly year-long work experience at a school library, not a single parent inquired about the types of books their children were reading or what genres excited their interest.

Their primary concern revolved around their child's English proficiency. Many expressed frustration over their children's struggle with the language, feeling embarrassed when they could not communicate effectively in front of relatives and friends.

I recall Wangdi Sir saying that a school is not a language institute. A child may struggle with English, but they may excel in other subjects like science or maths. He tried to persuade parents that fluency in English was not that important.

I encountered similar attitudes among parents across the country over the years. Many had moved from rural areas to cities, working tirelessly abroad to afford to send their children to English medium schools. There was also a noticeable bias, as families often prioritised sending sons to these more expensive schools and not their girls.

To be sure, mastery of the

English language can unlock a wealth of knowledge and provide opportunities for employment worldwide. But society considers those who can speak English intelligent, smart, or even genius. English proficiency does not equal intelligence. Ultimately, it is an individual's upbringing, socialisation, choices, and the guidance they receive that plays a crucial role in knowledge and wisdom through English.

Ramesh Kumar, an economic journalist with himalkhabar.com, recently shared on X that Nepali press releases from the World Bank and UN agencies in Kathmandu read like they were Google translated. He noted that hiring communications officers should not solely depend on their proficiency in English, they should also be skilled in the local language. Ultimately, all languages serve as tools for expression, but the messages conveyed can vary greatly.

My 5-year-old niece was already speaking English fluently even before she started pre-school. She lives in the village with my parents, where English is rarely spoken unless absolutely necessary. Yet, she picked up the language as if she had grown up in an English-speaking environment.

How did this happen? The secret was her love for cartoons, which she only watches in English. She has been learning both Nepali and English simultaneously, much like I did with Nepali and Maithili. I often wonder how her understanding of being a person, a woman, and a citizen will develop.

Language alone will not shape those identities. I hope we, as Nepalis, can grasp this concept. I also wish that our education system would instil in our children the values of humanity, equality, diversity, and not consider someone 'civilised' just because they can rattle off some English. 🇳🇵



NMB BANK
एनएमबि बैंक



Turkish amenity kit

Turkish Airlines has introduced a new amenity kit collection designed in collaboration with French fashion house Lanvin for international business class passengers on flights more than five hours. It consists of five pieces designed for sustainability and elegance. Bags are reusable and will consist of Lanvin cosmetic products like hand and body lotions and lip balm. Eye masks and socks are made from recycled materials, earplugs are packaged in paper and the toothbrush is bamboo.

Cake mixing

With Christmas around the corner, Kathmandu's hotels have been holding cake mixing events. Hyatt Place recently held its own such event, Soaltee organised one for guests who mixed dried fruits, nuts, and spices in rum and brandy for the hotel's signature Christmas cakes. The Marriott held its own Mixing Cake marking 50 days until the New Year in which Kathmandu-based ambassadors, business leaders and media took part.

Highest taxpayer

On the occasion of Tax Day, Nabil Bank was recognised as the highest taxpayer in the banking, financial, and insurance category in the fiscal year 2022/23. This is the eighth time Nabil has received this distinction.

SBL + NPL

Siddhartha Bank will be the main sponsor of the Nepal Premier League T20 tournament until 2029. The first edition features eight teams and will be held from 30 November to 1 December at the Kirtipur TU ground. International cricket veterans like Shikhar Dhawan and Martin Guptill are taking part.



Ncell + NPL

Ncell has reached an agreement with CAN to be the 'powered by' partner for the NPL. Ncell will also enable on-the-go viewership of the matches through live screening, and offers on data while the tournament PLAYS OUT. The telecom giant also sponsored the first domestic Nepal Premier League in 2014 and has been supporting various sporting events and players in the country.



Shikhar is 20

Shikhar Insurance marked its 20th anniversary by honouring 11 original employees with gold coins. The company has a 14% market share and has paid over 100,000 claims, totalling more than Rs20 billion. It has opened over 100 branches, paid up to 295% dividend, and has been recognised as Nepal's best insurance company six times.

Emergency exits

A spate of recent incidents in which domestic passengers have tried to open emergency exit doors has caused disruptions and safety risks for domestic airlines. The latest incident occurred on an ATR72 from Kathmandu to Janakpur when a passenger opened the hatch while the aircraft was taxiing toward the runway. This was the third such occurrence in weeks. The other two were on a flight from Biratnagar to Kathmandu on 2 October and from Nepalganj to Kathmandu on 7 October, both on Buddha Air. "This not only poses significant safety risks to passengers, but also disrupts flight schedules," said Pradip Katuwal of Buddha Air's security.

Rs407B in 3 months

Nepal has received Rs407 billion in remittance in the first three months of the current fiscal year, an increase of 11.5% in comparison to the same period last year. This is down from last year's growth of 25.8% compared to the same period two years ago. Meanwhile, 110,654 Nepali workers have received first-time approvals for foreign employment in the last three months and 59,939 renewed theirs. Exports decreased by 6.1% and imports by 4.2%. The total trade deficit decreased by 4% to Rs352 billion.



BYD 30

BYD marked 30 years by rolling off its 10 millionth EV at its Xiamo production base in China. Chairman Wang Chuanfu attributed the company's success to a 'deeply embedded engineering culture'. BYD started as a 20-person start-up and is now a multinational corporation with nearly 1 million employees.

Khukri goes premium with new rum

Distillery launches smoked finish of its limited edition Cask Series mainly for export

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Khukri Rum is one of Nepal's most iconic brands, and is now launching a new Cask Series premium product to sell in Nepal and abroad.

The Cask Series Smoked Finish Khukri Rum is a limited edition sipping rum with only about 5,200 bottles made for export and rum connoisseurs in Nepal. Each bottle is numbered and will mention the cask from which it is derived.

"We are taking a classic Nepali liquor to a premium, luxury rum category. Each Cask Series flavour line will only be produced once," explains Shuvash Lamichhane, General Manager of The Nepal Distilleries that first started making Khukri rum in 1959 in Balaju and has never stopped.

Fermented from molasses in the Tarai after the annual sugarcane harvest, the rum is matured for at least eight months during distillation. The distillery bottles the classic Khukri XXX, Coronation Khukri XXX, Khukri White Rum and Khukri Spiced Rum.

It is now adding this limited edition of the Cask Series. While the original rum is stored in huge wooden vats, the rum used for this more exclusive line is in smaller casks made from oak or sal, with charred insides that give the rum a smoky, smoother flavour.

The Cask Series rum is indeed smokier than the classic, while the spiced rum tastes toasty and mostly of cardamom. These flavours are carefully crafted by blenders and



THE NEPAL DISTILLERIES

tasters who have to pass regular palate tests.

The packaging for the Cask Series is as special as the process. A sturdy patterned box that opens up to a black glass bottle with gold lettering, and an indication of which cask the rum is from. These are then shipped to premium customers around the world.

One of the reasons this is the more expensive premium line

is because the casks are smaller than the vats and the blenders reject more than half of the rum in the casks when the aging period is complete. The trick for the blender is also to decide when to take the rum out of the cask. Says Lamichhane: "If we have 25 casks, only ten might match the flavour profile for a certain series."

Over the decades, The Nepal Distilleries has created and

maintained a brand that feels quintessentially Nepali, and serves as Nepal's 'ambassador' with exports to Germany, Korea, Belgium, Finland, the Czech Republic, besides the existing markets among Nepalis in the US, UK, Hong Kong and Australia.

Its unique khukri shaped bottle first introduced for King Birendra's coronation in 1975 has been a collector's item. The bottle and rum

have been a staple for Nepalis and visitors to take as gifts when they leave the country, and is used as decoration on bar tables around the world. Now, nearly 40 years later, even that bottle will soon be getting a makeover with a sharper design and sleeker handle.

"Our bottle design has always been instantly recognisable," says Lamichhane.

The Himalayan restaurant at The Hague, for example, has a Khukri Coronation bottle adorning its bar (page 6-7). In Washington DC, Himalayan Heritage Restaurant & Bar offers a 'Nepalese Khukri Rum' mojito with fresh mint, soda water, lime juice and sugar syrup, for \$12.

A distinct element of the award-winning classic Khukri rum is its 'modern auburn' colour from caramel sourced from cooking sugar and blended with the raw rum. The spirits are then stored in a warehouse with floor-to-ceiling vats which are not just for storage, as the wood imparts flavour into the rum, and removes a lot of the harshness.

On a visit this week, the bottling room was just about to begin for the day and the production line was churning out different shapes and sizes of Khukri bottles. Most of the process is automated, including screwing bottle caps, sticking labels, placing the government seal, and packaging. The only manual intervention is quality control where bottles are held against the light to check for sediment and colour. 🇳🇵

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BARAHI
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From the Himalaya to Holland

15 years after resettlement in Th

■ Lucia de Vries at The Hague

For two decades, more than 100,000 refugees driven out of Bhutan lived in camps in Morang and Jhapa districts of Nepal. Bhutan's Lhotshampa Nepali-speaking ethnic community faced an uncertain future after Thimphu refused to take them back, and Nepal struggled with the growing responsibility of hosting such a large refugee population.

In 2008, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) launched its largest-ever resettlement program to address this humanitarian need, relocating the refugees across eight nations. The United States took 85% of the total, while much smaller numbers went to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Norway, Denmark, and 355 found a new home here in The Netherlands.

From countries with the highest mountains in the world, they had



PHOTOS: UTTAM KAFLE

Lalit and Mamta

Diners had filled up the terrace of Mamta Indian Tandoori & Curry Restaurant on the lakeside of Harderwijk one recent unusually warm evening. A group of young Dutch guests were celebrating a bachelors' party with drinks and snacks. A family visiting the City Museum ordered curry, rice and nan. An elderly couple asked for wine and a plate of samosa. Restaurant owners Lalit and Mamta Basnet were busy preparing the orders.

Visitors checking out the menu could be excused for thinking Mamta is a typical Indian tandoori restaurant. But Lalit and Mamta are refugees from Bhutan who spent 15 years in camps in Nepal before being resettled in The Netherlands two decades ago.

They have built a successful business in a popular lakeside area of Gelderland province, and they are not the only successful refugees from Bhutan based here.

Lalit was 12 years old when his family was evicted from Bhutan, and taken in Indian lorries to the Nepal border and dumped there.

"My dad came to fetch me from the hostel I was staying in," Lalit

Ram Karki

Running a restaurant by day, campaigning by night. That pretty much sums up the life of Ram Karki from Bhutan in his new home at The Hague.

Last August, the human rights activist addressed high-ranking officials from Bhutan at a United Nations meeting in Geneva. It was the first time a former refugee from Bhutan had confronted an official from the home country directly at the UN.

Karki urged his former government to grant "immediate and unconditional amnesty to all political prisoners", and called for the repatriation of Bhutan's exiles wishing to return home. He also demanded that former citizens be allowed to visit Bhutan on tourist visas.

A few months before the Geneva event, Karki had stood outside the International Court of Justice at The Hague (pictured above), holding a sign that read, 'There is no Gross National Happiness in Bhutan'. He was joined by members of the Global Campaign for the Release of Political Prisoners in Bhutan, an organisation he co-founded.

When not campaigning, 54-year-old Karki is busy managing the Himalayan restaurant, a cosy nook nestled in a narrow alleyway of the Dutch capital.

"When my wife Jamuna and I opened this place in 2006, we were the only Indian restaurant around. Now there are over 50, and competition is fierce," says

Karki, a father of two. The restaurant was mostly closed during the Covid pandemic, but he used the time well to obtain a Master's in Sociology.

The Himalayan offers a mix of Indian, Nepali and Bhutanese cuisine. Karki's day often extends well past midnight, as he prepares for virtual meetings to coordinate human rights advocacy efforts across different time zones.

"It's not an easy business," admits the activist/restaurateur, crediting his wife and dedicated staff for helping him keep it afloat. "But I need to provide for my family and fund my human rights campaign."

Karki's journey began in 1990 when he fled Bhutan after friends were arrested for opposing the Druk regime's discriminatory laws. From India, he helped organise peaceful protests, including a demonstration where 25,000 protesters were met with gunfire from the Royal Bhutan Army.

When Lhotshampa refugees began arriving in Nepal, Karki helped establish the first refugee camp in Maidhar of Jhapa district. In 2002, Karki came to The Netherlands, where he attended a human rights conference and sought asylum.

"I chose The Netherlands because of its commitment to human rights, being home to the International Court of Justice and a voice in the EU and UN," he explains. Learning Dutch was difficult at first, and getting his citizenship documents, Karki together with his wife opened the Himalayan restaurant in 2007.

As the Bhutan refugee resettlement program gained momentum, Karki played a vital role in helping 355 exiled compatriots



The Netherlands, refugees from Bhutan thrive in their new home



come to the lowest-lying country, and the resettlement has been considered a success, thanks partly to the tailored cultural and skills training offered, easing both cultural adaptation and economic integration.

The people from Bhutan in The Netherlands are well-integrated, with many contributing actively to the Dutch economy. Ten entrepreneurs from Bhutan have opened or franchised 'I Love Sushi' restaurants, while

others moved on to set up their own establishments.

At least seven run Indian restaurants across the country (below). Industrial cities like Zaandam and Raalte have become a hub for those from Bhutan resettled here. Some youngsters are engineers, others are pursuing higher studies at Dutch universities.

Despite the success of the resettlement program, challenges remain. Roughly 7,000 of the

refugees, mostly the elderly, still live in Nepal, hoping one day to go back to their homeland.

The corruption scandal in Nepal in 2023 in which senior government officials and human traffickers were convicted for trying to smuggle Nepalis to the United States on fake refugee certificates in return for up to Rs5 million each, cast a heavy shadow over the community.

"The impact of this scandal on genuine Bhutanese refugees is profound," human rights activist

Ram Karki told us (see profile below). "It further eroded their trust in the host government and hope for a better future."

Due to ongoing legal proceedings against those involved, refugees still left in the camps do not have access to relief supplies.

Karki adds, "Their 5-year refugee identity cards have yet to be renewed, and their travel abroad has been halted as the Nepal government has stopped issuing travel documents." 🇳🇵

recalls. "We were packed into trucks with other villagers and taken across the Nepal border to Kakarbhita. I had no clue what was going on, and actually enjoyed the adventure."

But soon Lalit's excitement turned into anxiety, he was among tens of thousands Lhotshampa forcibly removed from Bhutan in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and housed in refugee camps in Nepal's Jhapa and Morang districts.

"I first stayed in Maidhar camp. Many people died there from disease," Lalit relates. "We would see dead bodies being carried away to the river for cremation. We felt we could all die at any time – I still feel traumatised by that."

Lalit's family was later moved to Beldangi III camp where conditions improved because of aid from agencies like Caritas, LWF Nepal, Nepal Red Cross Society, Save the Children, and UNHCR.

Lalit and Mamta met in Class 8 at a refugee school. They fell in love, but she was going through a hard time because both her parents had died from lack of medical care.

Mamta says, "My siblings and I were raised by our aunt and grandmother. We had no idea what our future would be like."

Thanks to a scholarship from LWF Nepal, Lalit received a good

education. Most other refugees could not go to school outside the camps because they needed citizenship papers.

Lalit ended up as an asylum seeker in The Netherlands in 2004, and started out in Zwolle with a good support network and free language classes.

When Mamta joined a year later, he worked as a cook at an Indian restaurant. Their two sons are also in Holland, one has now started a company for kitchen renovations and the other is in medical school.

Once their language skills improved, the couple registered their own company. At that time refugees could apply for an interest-free loan of €35,000, to be paid back in five years.

Lalit did some market research and found that Harderwijk, a historical Hanseatic town with an impressive waterfront, would be their best option.

The entrepreneurial couple started out in 2008 with their first small place, and quickly learned that the local clientele had little interest in momo and noodles.

With the help of an Indian cook, the menu expanded to tandoori and curry dishes ("without beef"). A few years later the Basnets were able to buy the current property on the recently renovated waterfront.

They survived the Covid crisis and soon found that apart from locals, many people from surrounding towns were travelling to find their restaurant which stocks Kingfisher beer from India and Khukri rum from Nepal (right).

"It's mostly word of mouth publicity," says a modest Lalit. Mamta adds, "If you like this line of work, it's great. Talking to people, making them happy. It has to come from the heart, it shouldn't be about making money. Dutch people are kindhearted. Our guests are happy."

It is no surprise then that Mamta Indian Tandoori & Curry Restaurant scores an 8.8 on Tripadvisor from over 500 reviews.

The Basnets have little time for socialising. Most of their free time is used to travel to the United States where Mamta's ex-refugee siblings from Bhutan were resettled. As much as possible, Dasain and Tihar are celebrated together with others from Bhutan now based in The Netherlands.

Do they still dream of one day returning to their homeland? "That hope has vanished," admits Lalit, "most of us from Bhutan now dream of staying in the West."

Mamta nods: "I would love to go for a visit, but this is the place we want to be. Our life actually started here."



find a new home in The Netherlands. Not one to rest on his laurels, Karki organised the newcomers into the Bhutanese Community in the Netherlands (BCN), becoming a mentor to aspiring restaurant owners.

"Some call me their guru," he smiles. "Yes, a few of them worked here before starting their own restaurants. But we all share what we know, and sometimes small loans."

One of Karki's ongoing battles is for fair treatment of elderly refugees in the Dutch 'inburgering' process, a mandatory integration course for citizenship. Refugees who fail the language test cannot apply for full citizenship, with few exemptions granted for those with documented medical conditions.

"Twenty elderly Bhutanese, including my illiterate parents-in-law, haven't passed the test and are still without citizenship. This limits their ability to travel to places where visas are required," Karki explains.

The campaigner led a delegation of elderly refugees from Bhutan to the Dutch Parliament to push for change. "Many have family in the US and they are unable to visit. There's a psychological aspect, too—they want to die as full citizens of their new country. Since the Dutch government invited them, they should grant elderly from Bhutan full citizenship rights."

What keeps Karki going? "Some of the friends I campaigned with in 1990 are still in prison back home. That pain drives me every day. I am leading a good life here in Holland, while they continue to suffer."

EVENTS

**WOW 2024**

Participate in the 7th edition of Women of the World being held in Kathmandu. The festival is free and has parallel activities and sessions. Check out the schedule online. 23-24 November, Nandi Keshwor Bagaicha, Narayanachaur, Naxal

Film South Asia

The celebration of South Asian films is back with the 14th edition of Film South Asia. There is a schedule on their website for those who want to plan accordingly. 21-24 November, 10am onwards, Yala Maya Kendra

**Transitioning Tradition**

The exhibition Transition in Tradition features paintings by Martin Travers which document evolving cultural heritage within the chaos of urbanisation.

Until 30 November, 10am-6pm, Nepal Art House, Thamel

Sadhana

Stop by Siddhartha Art Gallery and see the ongoing exhibition featuring solo artwork from Sundar Sinkhwal.

Until 25 November, Sunday to Friday: 11am-5pm, Saturday: 12pm-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal

**Stand Up Comedy**

Noted Indian stand up comedian and actor Sunil Grover is set to perform in Nepal. Don't miss out on the chance to see him live.

29 November, 6pm onwards, Ticket: Rs2,000-Rs5,000, Everest Hotel, Baneshwar

DINING

**Prazada**

Enjoy Prazada's selection of chilled draught beers in the restaurant's lush garden with special pizzas accompanied by relaxing music on Fridays.

Baluwatar (01) 4410473

MUSIC

Acoustic Friday

Join acoustic night at Ai-La lounge this Friday. Ladies drink for free after 11pm—take your friends.

22 November, 6pm onwards, Ai-La Lounge, Kumharipati

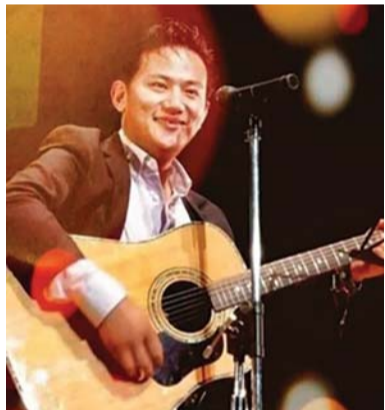
**Chitwan Music Carnival**

If you are in Chitwan, this weekend, don't miss out on the Chitwan Music Carnival. The artist line-up for the festival includes John & The Locals and Purna Rai and Daju Vai Haru. 23 November, 3pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Campachaur, Chitwan

Jamesy Live

For Nephop listeners, emerging rapper Jamesy will be in town to hype up the city next week. Plan ahead to join to see the artist live.

30 November, 8pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, Omnia club, Thamel

**Mongolian Heart**

Keep an eye out for the band Mongolian Heart, who will perform live next week in Chitwan.

29 November, 4pm onwards, Ticket: Rs350, Sauraha Chowk, Chitwan

**Sarangi Sessions**

Aspiring Sarangi players can join Project Sarangi lessons either virtually or physically. Call for more details.

Arun Thapa Chowk, Jhamsikhel, 9841364367

About Town

GETAWAYS

**Chandragiri Resort**

Above the verdant pine forests, the picturesque cable car ride sets the tone for a truly unforgettable experience that awaits you at the resort.

Thankot (01) 5970796

Hotel Mountain Top

With one of the best vantage points in Pokhara, Hotel Mountain Top offers views of Fewa Lake and snow-capped mountain ranges.

Lakeside Road, Pokhara (61) 461779

**Jal Mahal**

Hotel Jal Mahal lives up to its name as it boasts three large swimming pools. Take a dip in one of the pools in sunny afternoons before peak winter starts.

Gharipatan, Pokhara, 9851054404

**Maruni Sanctuary Lodge**

From the comfort of the cabins and cottages of this lodge, visitors can take a peek at the wandering wildlife and nature of Chitwan National Park.

Sauraha (01) 4700632

Kinjjala Spa

Kinjjala Spa was established as a healing centre in Nepal 15 years ago. Now, it offers a variety of spa treatments like massages and facials alongside other therapeutic treatments.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5532630

**Haadi Biryani**

Haadi biryani's slow-cooked biryanis are seasoned with a secret spice blend, and the clay pots that they come in enhances the culinary experience.

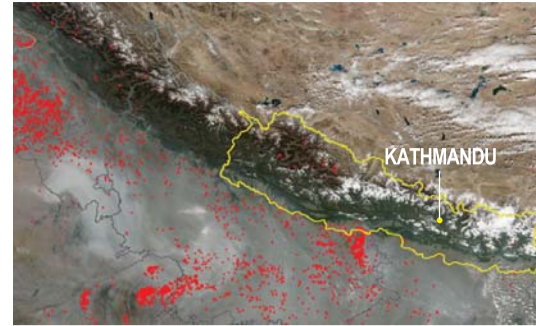
Kumharipati (01) 5422197

**The Patisserie**

Taste the rich taste and flavour of cakes, sweets and all kinds of baked items at the Patisserie. Try their mousse jars that offer intense flavour in every spoon.

Kathmandu, 9803368875

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
20° 10°	20° 9°	20° 9°	20° 9°	20° 9°

Enjoy the Clean Air While It Lasts

Here in central Nepal we have been lucky because a slight change in wind direction blew away the worst of the pollution that has shrouded the north Indian plains away from us this week. However, as readers may have seen in the news, Delhi and other cities in India and Pakistan have an ongoing health emergency with AQI exceeding 1000 in places as the smoke mixes with winter fog. Fingers crossed the winds will stay favourable.

OUR PICK



Alice Rohrwacher's period-comedy drama La Chimera, set in the 1980s, follows British archaeologist Arthur who is released from prison and reconciles with his ragtag crew of Italian grave-robbers. As he slips back into his old habits with his gang to pull off the job of a lifetime, he grapples with the loss of his former lover, Beniamina, who has been missing for some time. The 2023 film stars Josh O'Connor, Carol Duarte, Vincenzo Nemolato, Alba Rohrwacher and Isabella Rossellini.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिठ्ठा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

From The Forgotten Army to Bajrangi Bhaijaan

Interview with Kabir Khan on the fringes of Film Southasia 2024 festival in Kathmandu

■ **Abishek Budhathoki**

Indian film director Kabir Khan is a storyteller who started out as a journalist, made documentaries, then transitioned to a director of Bollywood mainstream cinema.

Khan is in Kathmandu this week for Film Southasia (FSA), the documentary film festival where he won his first award in 1999. Twenty-five years later, he is back at FSA, as keynote speaker.

That Grand Jury Award was for one of his earliest works, *The Forgotten Army*, a compelling narrative about the Indian National Army's fight for independence from Britain during World War II.

"It was the first award I ever got, it really got me into serious filmmaking," Khan told *Nepali Times*.

An encounter in 2001 with a Pakistani guerrilla fighting for the Taliban influenced his debut feature film, *Kabul Express*.

Khan says documentary filmmaking shaped his approach to cinema: "Documentaries teach you that what you hear on the news is not gospel, it's someone's perspective."

This influenced his cinematic language, focusing on the gaps between the evening news and real-life stories.

Entering Bollywood to make *The Forgotten Army*, *Kabul Express*, *New York* and the blockbuster *Ek Tha Tiger* was a deliberate move to get deeper into the politics of everything at a time when Indian cinema in general avoided politics.

"When I started, politics was



taboo in mainstream cinema," he explains. "But coming from a documentary background, I couldn't separate stories from their inherent politics."

Whether crafting documentaries or mainstream dramas, Kabir Khan remains, at his core, a storyteller. His films are inspired by personal experiences and perspectives, and bridge divides in present day India.

"Storytelling is about honesty, staying true to your own voice. If you can connect with your own story, chances are the audience will too," he says.

Kabir Khan movies balance between humanistic narratives and larger socio-political contexts, but the director says he does not intentionally look to balance them.

"A lot of it is instinct," says

Khan. "I feel this is the right thing to say and hope people agree with me. It's not about over-analysing or over-constructing."

This was evident in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, where the film defied expectations, not only politically but also in the character of action superstar Salman Khan.

The movie looked into India-Pakistan relations through the lens of love and innocence. Despite its release while tensions were running high between the two countries in 2015, the film resonated with audiences on both sides of the border, becoming one of Bollywood's highest-grossing films.

"The fact that people embraced it showed they connected with its message," Kabir Khan says.

His sports biopic *83*, was based on India's historic 1983 Cricket World Cup victory where Kapil Dev scored a record 175 not out. "It's not just a cricket story, it's about a country coming of age, gaining recognition on the global stage," he says. Khan worked as an investigative journalist to dig up anecdotes about the players and fans. The result was not just a sports movie, but one that celebrated individual will and collective triumph.

"Cinema is a reflection of its audience, and as our stories gain more visibility, so does our culture," says Khan, who sees his role almost as a cultural ambassador for the South Asian region.

Post-Covid, people have been streaming movies at home rather than going to cinemas, leading to declining theatre footfalls. While Khan acknowledges the challenges

this poses for traditional cinema, he remains hopeful because "the communal experience of watching a film in a dark theatre is irreplaceable".

The content of Kabir Khan's work is also ever-evolving because filmmaking is dynamic. Each film is a reaction and portrayal of the time in which it is made.

He says, "I'm not the same person who made *New York* or *Ek Tha Tiger*. With every film, my worldview and approach changes."

His new film *Chandu Champion* about Paralympic boxing gold medalist Murlikant Petkar reflects an affinity for real-life stories that stems from his documentary days.

He says, "The film's message is one of resilience and perseverance. It's a story of the triumph of the human spirit."

How about Nepal as a location for his next film? Khan says he would not just come to Nepal to shoot a song in the stunning landscape here because the connection between the story and location is inseparable.

Kabul Express could only have been shot in Afghanistan, *New York* could only work in New York, and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* needed the two sides of Kashmir.

Says Khan: "If I ever find a story that needs to be set in Nepal and can truly bring out its character, I would love to shoot here." 🇳🇵

Film Southasia 2024

Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka

21-24 November

Tickets Rs50 per film

Go online to read full story and watch Khan in conversation with Kanak Mani Dixit on YouTube.




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SIPRADI

Right climate for Nepal's energy

The country's ambition to boost the economy through clean energy is itself affected by climate risk

■ Ramesh Kumar

Nepal now generates surplus electricity, all from hydropower. Nearly half the country is now under forest cover. Despite meeting these decarbonisation goals, Nepal's hydropower plants are threatened by increased climate hazards.

Nepal was exporting just over 1,000MW of electricity to power-hungry India. But floods in September damaged over 30 hydropower plants across the country, temporarily slashing nearly half the power generation.

The 456MW Upper Tamakosi in Dolakha (pictured, right) was the hardest hit and will take six months and Rs2 billion to repair. This has reduced exports as well as domestic generation.

Nepal sold Rs12.72 billion worth of electricity to India during the first four months of this fiscal year, but it is now paying a Rs100 million fine to India for not fully keeping its export commitment.

Thirty-seven existing and under construction projects of the Independent Power Producers' Association Nepal (IPPAN) suffered Rs2.5 billion in damage in September. One of them is the 22MW Bagmati project in Makwanpur which was almost completely buried in flood debris (map, overleaf). Last year, heavy localised rain damaged 28 plants in eastern Nepal.

As world governments end their COP29 summit in Baku to discuss the Loss & Damage Fund and the Adaptation Fund, for countries like



UTKHPL



RSS



RSS

BIBLICAL RAIN: Photo taken during catastrophic rain on 27-28 September at the Upper Tamakosi project site (above) that destroyed the control room, killing four staff and burying the sedimentation tanks.

The 456MW Upper Tamakosi Hydroelectric Project just after it came into operation in 2021. (top)

Nepal's national grid has now reached Tilicho Base Camp in Manang (left), boosting tourism along the popular trekking trail, and reducing the use of LPG and firewood for energy (see column below).

Nepal can level up tourism with electricity

Extending the national grid to remote tourism areas will have a multiplier effect on the economy. Here is how.

As a micro-hydro engineer working in rural Nepal in the mid-1980s, I struggled to find money to build power plants that could meet the energy demand along the Everest and Annapurna trekking trails.

Communities in Lukla, Namche, Jomsom and Ghandruk needed energy to meet basic needs of trekkers, and provide value-added



PEOPLE POWER
Bikash Pandey

services for additional income. Tourists were prepared to pay for hot showers, cold beer, clean beds, and a varied menu.

But resource limitation meant there were fewer and smaller power plants. The national electricity grid was then limited to urban areas and the country's electrification rate was low and stayed below 20%.

Following the 1984 delicensing of generation from power plants of less than 100kW capacity, Nepal saw a dramatic surge in interest from rural communities to invest in micro-hydropower.

While smaller systems could meet the needs for power for home lighting and tv sets in non-tourist areas, communities along tourist trails wanted larger power plants to cook and heat with electricity and run refrigerators.

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) provided a grant to cover 70% of the cost of the 50kW Ghandruk project. Completed in 1990, it was designed to supply 250 households and 20 hotels. However, to make sure there was sufficient power to connect the whole community,

each hotel was limited to a subscription of one kW of power — not enough to meet cooking needs.

The hotels were encouraged to turn on immersion water heaters at night to speed up cooking in the morning.

The 600kW Thame project in the Everest region was completed in 1995 with a grant from the Austrian government to supply 629 homes and tourism businesses. For the first time in Nepal, it was able to demonstrate how much value an abundant supply of electricity could add to mountain tourism.

Electricity reduced pressure on scarce, high altitude biomass and provided an alternative for families that were caught between strict rules prohibiting firewood collection from the Sagarmatha National Park, and for increasing numbers of trekkers, guides, and porters. The electricity supply also opened up new livelihood opportunities.

Another early benefit from Namche's electrification was the improvement in water supply because it could now be pumped up from a spring to a reservoir with slow-sand filtration at the top of the village.

Since the earliest days of trekking tourism, the environmental carrying capacity of the local ecosystem has been limited by the availability of energy. Without access to commercial energy from the outside, the number of trekkers, and their accompanying support teams, that any region can host depends on the rate at which trees can regenerate there.

High altitude areas like the Khumbu face a natural limit based on the slow rates at which trees can grow. Arid trans-Himalayan regions like Upper Mustang and Dolpo can sustainably harvest even less biomass. The government continues to restrict tourism areas in the trans-Himalaya, with fragile

ecosystems, requiring foreign visitors to pay for permits.

Trekking groups are required to carry their own fuel to avoid strain on the local ecosystem. In Upper Mustang the number of visitors is limited to 1,000 annually and requires each visitor to pay a \$500 fee for a ten day visit. Other restricted areas include border communities in Humla, Gorkha, Dolpo, Manang, and Manaslu.

Since then, Nepal's electricity generation landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation. The country currently has a surplus from hydropower and solar energy. Harnessing this to boost tourism can enhance livelihoods and reduce outmigration of youth.

The tourism sector employs 1 million people and contributes 8% to Nepal's GDP. In comparison, more than 3.5 million Nepalis work abroad and their remittances make up 27% of GDP.

Growth in the tourism sector could significantly expand employment opportunities at home.

Namche Bazar is proof that electricity can take tourism to the next level both by increasing the carrying capacity of high Himalayan regions by substituting for biomass fuel, and increasing employment through value-added services and infrastructure.

Given that Nepal's electricity is from renewable resources, any tourism it powers can also be marketed as producing minimal greenhouse gases. If tourists could be transported in electric vehicles to and from the airport and to the roadhead leading to their trekking destinations, it would further lower emissions. This is an additional selling point at a time when many environmentally conscious tourists are looking to lower their carbon footprint.

The NEA can play an important role by increasing the supply, capacity, and reliability of electricity along existing, popular trekking trails. The extension of the national grid to Tilicho Base Camp last week (pictured, above) is the right step.

Even though the country's electrification rate has now reached 99%, supply challenges remain. The task is made easier for NEA since practically all regions with tourism potential have hydropower projects either operating or under construction within their own districts. This makes it much easier to ensure a reliable supply with good voltage.

In light of the damage caused by the glacial lake outburst flood that hit Thame in August, the power supply for Namche and the region would be much more resilient if it was connected to the national grid. NEA also needs to extend transmission lines to Upper Mustang and other restricted areas that aspire to host higher tourist numbers than they are currently allowed.

Investment in extending power supply along the 16 districts traversed by the Great Himalayan Trail would accelerate the development of green and sustainable tourism in those areas. For other tourism sites where NEA does not plan to extend the grid in the next five years, micro-hydro and solar energy will remain important solutions.

The two 900kW mini-hydro projects under construction to supply the villages of Ama Dablam and Monjo, both in the Everest region, are good examples of the support the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre needs to continue to provide for off-grid power to support the tourism sector. ■

Bikash Pandey is Director of Clean Energy and Circular Economy at Winrock International. People Power is his regular column in Nepali Times on global energy issues relevant to Nepal.

transition

Nepal the commas and brackets are meaningless until they are turned into \$ and €. The likelihood of adequate compensation for climate-related damage is slim.

Nepal's national strategy is to use its vast hydropower resource as clean energy to spur economic growth, job creation, and boost export revenue. But the plants are located in valleys prone to landslides and floods even at the best of times. Now, those risks are heightened by weather extremes due to climate breakdown.

At present, Nepal generates over 3,300MW of clean hydropower, and the target is to reach 12,700MW in the next five years. Projects totalling 6,000MW are under construction or ready to start. The Ministry of Energy and Water Resources targets 28,500MW generation by 2035, half of which will be exported.

"The climate crisis will further change rainfall patterns, making hydropower generation a big question mark in the future," says Manjeet Dhakal, who is in Baku as adviser to the LDC Chair at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). "We need to reconsider building hydropower projects on rivers without evaluating risk."

A National Adaptation Plan report by the Ministry of Forest and Environment last year warned hydropower production, transmission and distribution are at risk from flash floods, debris flows, glacial lake outbursts and rising temperatures. The Himalayan mountains are warming faster than the global average by 0.7°C because of elevation-

dependent warming.

Department of Hydrology and Meteorology data shows that the average temperature in Nepal has increased in the last four decades. Scientists say this is leading to extreme weather, unleashing floods and landslides on slopes already destabilised by seismicity.

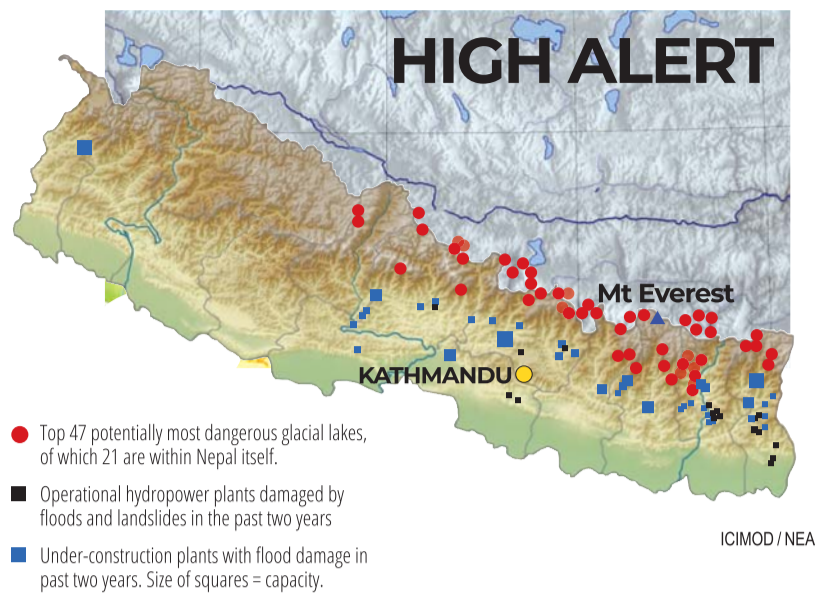
Higher temperatures have made monsoon rains more erratic. It does not rain when it is supposed to, and it comes down in unseasonal torrents. The September floods happened two weeks after the monsoon retreat from central Nepal, dumping half the average annual rainfall in just over a day.

Winter precipitation has also failed, especially in the high mountains, with 13 of the past 19 years experiencing winter drought. This impacts on the dry season flow of the rivers, reducing hydropower generation when demand peaks.

Nepal's power capacity normally goes down by one-fourth during winter, but the gap is widening. The Kabeli corridor could only generate 20MW from November-March even though plants there have an installed capacity of 200MW. Similarly, Upper Tamakosi only produced 65MW at most against its 456MW capacity last winter.

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) pays producers double the price for winter electricity, Rs8.40 per unit. Even though winter operation is highly profitable, the rivers run low at the time and NEA has to rely on coal-powered imports from India to meet winter demand.

"This is not just a weather problem but a serious challenge for the country's energy future,



we need climate-friendly design with effective implementation," says Subarna Das Shrestha, CEO of Sanima Mai Hydropower, adding that insurance premiums have gone up and payments are not timely.

Hydropower investment at one time was regarded as having a high rate of return. Now, some investors have become wary of the risks involved. Says IPPAN's Uttam Blon Lama: "Hydropower projects are now looking downright risky. Not only is climate adaptation design expensive, repair and maintenance costs will also skyrocket."

Nepal has only one storage type dam in Kulekhani and another one is being built in Tanahu, but they are also at risk. In September, the sluice gates of Kulekhani Dam had to be opened after heavy rains, causing loss of life and destruction downstream.

Nepal has to learn lessons from the deadly collapse of the \$1 billion Chungthang Dam in Sikkim in October 2023 caused by a supraglacial lake burst.

Glacial Lake Outburst Floods

(GLOFs) in Nepal pose potentially catastrophic risk to infrastructure. The Thame flood in August was a relatively minor debris flow that damaged half of this village in the Everest region when two glacial lakes at 4,760m burst. Luckily, there was no loss of life.

Of the 47 high-risk glacial lakes in the eastern Nepal Himalaya, 21 are in Nepal and the rest are in rivers in China that are tributaries of the Arun and Bhoté Kosi where Nepal has hydropower plants under construction (map, above).

Global temperature rise is accelerating the melting of Himalayan snow and ice, increasing the number and size of glacial lakes such that many do not even have names. Imja Tso did not exist in trekking maps 25 years ago, but is now a 2km long lake.

"Natural moraine dams are weak, and projects downstream can face major destruction if they burst, the risk will only increase in future," warns climatologist Arun Bhakta Shrestha at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain

Development (ICIMOD).

An ICIMOD assessment in 2019 projected that if present heating trends continue, as it probably will, the Himalaya will lose two-thirds of its glaciers during this century.

"Hydropower developers usually hand over projects to the government after 30 years but by that time, given the climate risks, they may not be an asset anymore," says Manjeet Dhakal.

Indeed, the cascade of expensive projects India is building on the Arun River are supposed to be handed back to Nepal in 25 years, but there is a big 'if' about whether they will survive that long.

Planning of hydropower projects is still based on historical hydrological data, and does not take into account future temperature rise and its consequences. Investors, on the other hand, say that planning energy plants on rivers taking into account climate hazard would make them even more expensive.

"It's not that we aren't preparing for climate risk, we design keeping in mind the once-in-a-100-years flood," says Blon of IPPAN. "But if we start designing based on once in a 1,000 years flood, the cost would be so high that we won't be able to build them at all."

Nonetheless, Subarna Das Shrestha of Sanima Mai says that there is no option but to go for climate smart infrastructure, despite the higher cost. Its powerhouse, for example, is completely underground. The strategy could also be to spread the risk by building less expensive plants on rivers all over the country.

Nepal is also diversifying away from its sole reliance on hydroelectricity, which at present supplies 92% of the power in the grid. Much of the rest comes from solar plants, where the total potential has not even been scratched. 🇳🇵



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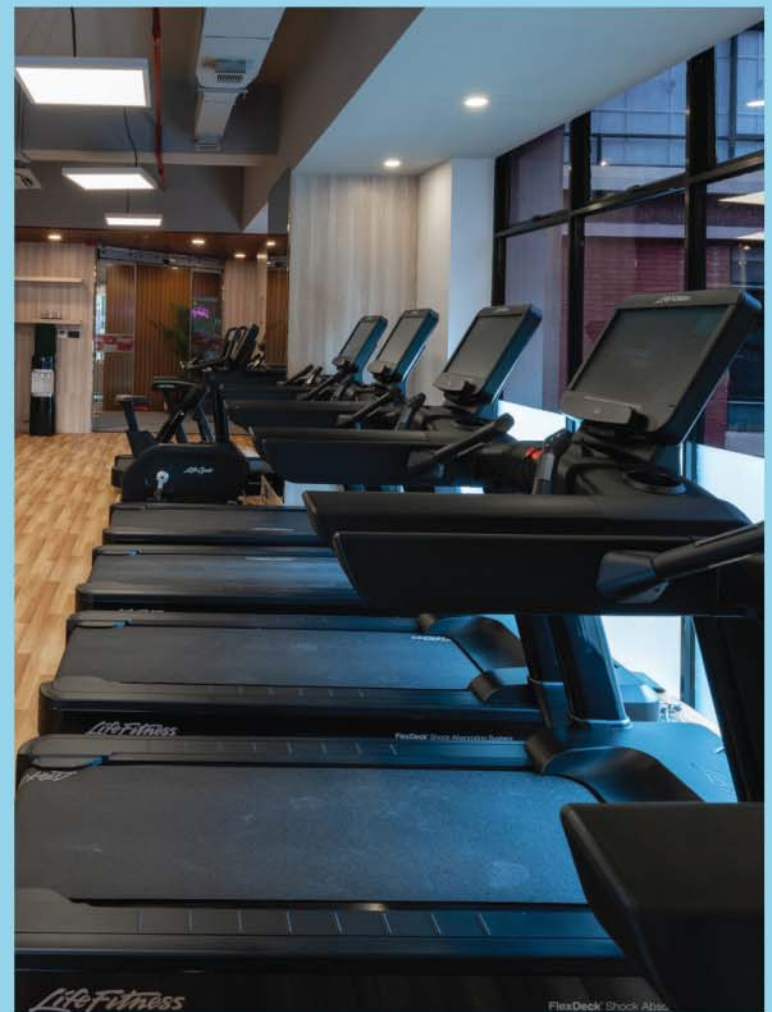
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