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## China syndrome

■ Shristi Karki

Prime Minister K P Oli's visit to China this week was proof that Nepal suffers self-inflicted geopolitical harm. Let's call it the 'China syndrome'.

Weeks before the visit, opposition politicians, coalition partners, op-ed influencers all started ringing alarm bells about backlash from India about Oli not going to Delhi first. Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal even internationalised a domestic issue by telling an Indian newspaper what it wanted to hear about Oli using 'the China card'.

The acronym BRI was in every

page 1 headline for a month before the visit. It was almost like this was payback time for how the American MCC deal was nearly cancelled two years ago. The governing UML's main coalition partner maintained that Nepal should accept only grants, and no more loans from China.

In the end, after much last-minute backroom haggling in Beijing, a compromise formula was found for Nepal to finally sign the BRI on Wednesday. The trick was in semantics: calling the BRI a 'Belt and Road Initiative Framework Cooperation Agreement'. Not that this was going to make much of a difference.

The grant vs loan dispute was

also tidily bypassed by using the oxymoronic term 'aid-assistance'. This should make way for both grants and soft loans from China to fund infrastructure and development projects under the BRI, which was what it was going to be anyway. And that was enough to prove that Oli's visit to China was not just a junket.

Ten out of the 12 projects proposed by Nepal were 'accepted' by the Chinese side as part of the BRI deal: the Hilsa-Simikot Road, Kimathanka-Khandbari Road and Kimathanka Bridge, the Tokha-Chhahare tunnel, the trans-border Kerung-Kathmandu railway and a 220kV

Kerung-Rasuwadadi transmission line among them.

But given how past bilateral agreement since President Xi Jinping's visit to Kathmandu in 2019 have languished, there is likely to be the usual inertia on the Nepal side. Tellingly, there was no agreement on Nepal's wish for the cancellation of the \$220 million loan from China's Exim Bank for Pokhara airport. The most tangible outcome seemed to be water buffalo meat export, China sending Mandarin teachers to Nepal, a future 'friendship park' in Oli's home constituency of Jhapa and a city hall in Sher Bahadur Deuba's constituency of Dadeldhura.

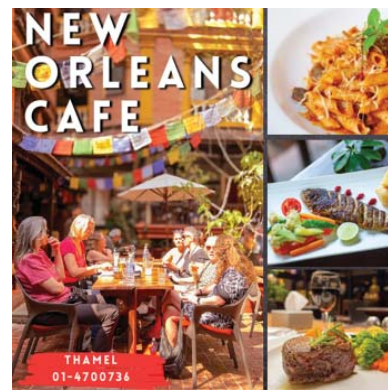
Nepal signed the framework agreement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with China in 2017, initially proposing 35 development projects which came down to nine. In 2020, China sent Nepal a BRI implementation plan, but progress was mired in politicisation and red tape. This time, a joint task force involving members of the UML and NC drafted the BRI Framework agreement prior to PM Oli's visit to China.

"Although some of the funding is in the form of grants, the BRI's financial modality is usually commercial and concessional loans anyway," says Mahesh Maskey, Nepal's former ambassador to China. "While commercial loans are expensive, BRI concessional loan interest rates have been as low as 0.3%. If we only seek grants, we could have chosen to do that through normal bilateral agreements like we do at present. Why choose to pursue grants under the BRI?"

China-watchers in Kathmandu say Beijing has stopped taking Kathmandu seriously because Nepali leaders never do what they say, are tangled up in power struggles and do not implement agreements. Instead of begging China to forgive the Pokhara airport loan, they say Nepal has not done anything to promote it as an alternative tourism gateway. Not even Nepal's own carriers like Nepal Airlines and Himalaya Airlines fly there from Chinese cities.

In fact, the last minute deal-making on the BRI Framework Agreement is a classic example of how not to conduct bilateral negotiations. It did provide Oli with a fig leaf, but a lot now will depend on how Nepal's leaders stop being distracted by external geopolitics, and pay urgent attention to internal delivery. 🇳🇵

**Gadimai Again**  
GUEST EDITORIAL  
PAGE 2



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# Gadimai Again

Every five years, the Gadimai Festival puts Nepal in the international spotlight for all the wrong reasons. Tens of thousands of buffalos, goats, fowl and rodents are slaughtered inside a temple enclosure in the village of Bariyapur of Bara district.



**BORDERLINES**  
Chandrakishore

Devotees believe the goddess will fulfil their wishes, and unlike other festivals in Nepal the sacrificial animals are usually not eaten. In 2009 an estimated 400,000 water buffalos, goats, chicken, ducks and even white mice were said to have been killed over a two-day period. The 250-year-old Gadimai Mela has therefore been called 'Gadimai Massacre' by animal rights activists.

The killings polarise Nepali society every five years. The temple trust discouraged devotees to bring animals and announced that it would discontinue killings starting with the festival in 2019, but the sacrifices continued unabated.

Because of the intense international media glare, the mass sacrifice has tarnished Nepal's compassionate image as the birthplace of the Buddha. Celebrities like actresses Brigitte Bardot and Joanna Lumley and India's Menaka Gandhi have staged demonstrations, and even the European Union (EU) wrote to the Nepal government.

However, here in the Tarai and across the border in India, the sacrifices are driven by a strongly-held belief that it will appease the goddess. Local groups have invoked right to religious freedom and point to the tradition of ritual sacrifices in other religions.

The Gadimai Mela coincides with the Thanksgiving Festival in the United States in which tens of millions of turkeys are slaughtered, and supporters say that is also a mass killing. Sacrifices on a similar scale are held across the Muslim world during Bakr Id.

Rabi Thapa, in his 2014 column 'Kalam' in this newspaper wrote: 'It is the fact of the slaughter, more than anything else, that attracts or repulses. The imagery employed by those speaking out against the mass sacrifice -- drunken men hacking away at 20,000 hapless young buffalos, a marshland of blood and gore -- betrays a horror of industrial scale barbarism that is anathema to (western) notions of sanitised, civilised progress. At root, the global protests against Gadimai can be applied to all individual sacrifices in the name of religion that are conducted within the premises of the household, the temple, or the street.'

Pitted against each other are those who oppose mass cruelty to animals not

primarily killed for eating, and the people of the borderlands who celebrate that very sacrifice. This year, the voices against the sacrifices have been amplified in social media platforms.

But however strong the voices within Nepal and abroad against Gadimai, faith seems more powerful – that the sacrifices will mollify the gods during trying times. The arguments (and laws) about unnecessary mass killing of innocent animals does not seem to work against a deeply-held belief system.

The ritual killings at Gadimai temple premises are on 8-10 December, and all 16 municipalities in Bara district have declared a three-day holiday. Upendra Prasad Yadav, mayor of Gadimai Municipality heads a coordination committee, and the main priest of the temple Mangal Chaudhary is from the indigenous Tharu community, as is the custom.

Buffalos used to be decapitated in an open ground near the temple, but after animal rights activists started protesting, it is now done inside a barbed-walled enclosure. The goats and chicken are sacrificed in a post-harvest paddy field across the Pasaha River.

Although the Gadimai Festival has earned a dubious reputation, it is also an opportunity for clans from both sides of the India-Nepal border to get together. Even the Muslim community here takes part, and Gadimai is also a celebration of religious harmony.

In recent years, what used to be a small gathering with a few hundred

people has become massive and heavily commercialised. The sheer scale of the event overwhelms local authorities, and traders exploit visitors to maximise profits.

It has been more than 10 years since I have been writing about the lack of regulation, and preparedness for potential emergencies at Bariyapur. There are no veterinarians on site, no plans for post-festival cleanup of the blood and carcasses, and no oversight of the food for both animals and visitors. Sanitation standards are abysmal, and there is the risk of stampede.

The festival is also an occasion to see how society in the Madhes and in Bihar is changing: tractors have replaced bullock cart caravans. The Chamar community from India and Nepal still retrieve the buffalo carcasses, but rather than consume it themselves, the meat and skin are sold.

Since there are so many people who come together at one time, the festival is an opportunity for the Madhes Province government to use it to spread cultural awareness and information about public health issues.

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



Every five years, the mass animal sacrifice in a tiny village in Nepal pits activists against devotees

## ONLINE PACKAGES



Watch video on our YouTube channel of the Tanahu Hydropower Project site, 150km west of Kathmandu, which is only the second dam project in Nepal in 40 years. The reservoir will increase dry season power supply while also regulating the river. Subscribe for multimedia content.



A venture led by a Japanese entrepreneur is set to put a remote district in eastern Nepal on the world map for its premium natural peanut butter. Its factory in Khotang district trains women farmers, providing them with skills and income. Watch the video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel.

### OPINION POLL

I always think that the people I meet in various parts of Nepal are very nice, respectful and very happy ('Nepalis not so unhappy', #1237). A few are materialistic. However, those who study to attain a certain position and extra qualifications, need to go to countries that suit those qualifications where they can achieve their goal. Sadly some may not return but this is a story played out across the world.

Alan Roadnight

A necessary part of the contentment levels in Nepal is the nation's circumspect expectations, unlike elsewhere.

Tony Jones

### ELECTRIFYING TOURISM

This is wishful thinking ('Nepal can level up tourism with electricity', Bikash Pandey, #1236), and it is dangerous to be so reliant on tourism.

David Seddon

### HYDROPOWER

This proves that hydro industry has a short life and is a risk for shareholders ('Right climate for Nepal's energy transition', Ramesh Kumar, #1237).

Hem Sagar Baral

### CARBON TRADING

Let us see how this money will be used by leaders ('Greenbacks for greenery', Ramesh Kumar, #1236). Will it be used for development, or be lost among the corrupt.

Kamal Thapa

### GANDAKI PROSPERITY

I just drove the length and breadth of Gandaki and thought this must be not only the most prosperous but also the most beautiful province in the country ('Prosperous Gandaki is thriving', Durga Rana Magar, nepalitimes.com). I can testify that the natural and human diversity is just phenomenal.

Krishna Joshi

### GADIMAI

In a country where people killed humans to get to power and acquire wealth, killing animals is a no-brainer ('Gadimai Again', Chandrakishore, page 2).

Sujeev Shakya

## Times.com

### WHAT'S TRENDING

#### Women in sports in 2024

by Shristi Karki  
While sports in general gets the short end of the stick in Nepal, female athletes are even more left out. But what is surprising is how well females in sports have been performing in 2024 despite the lack of state backing. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full story.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



#### "The first migrant worker"

by Ram Dhani Yadav  
Ram Dhani Yadav was the first migrant to leave for the Gulf from his Dhanusha village in 1992. Times were different then: there were no mobiles, calls were expensive, and those overseas communicated families in Nepal through cassette tapes sent back and forth. Read the story and watch video clip on the site.

Most popular on X

#### Nepalis not so unhappy

by Nepali Times  
Despite contemporary narrative that Nepalis are giving up on their country and are migrating in droves, a recent public opinion poll shows that nearly half of Nepalis are still positive about the direction the country has been going since the 2022 election. Join the discussion online.

Most commented

#### Social remittances

by Upasana Khadka  
Nepal's migrant workers need better guidance to make the most of their time overseas for career growth. Setting up migrants for success abroad also means preparing them for success upon return. More on our website.

Most visited online page

### QUOTES

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Despite the narrative that Nepalis are giving up on their country and are migrating in droves, a recent public opinion poll shows that nearly half the Nepalis are still positive about the direction the country has been going since the last poll in 2022.

**Kul Chandra Gautam @KulCGautam**  
Is the cup half full or half empty? It's encouraging to know that Nepalis generally feel cup is half-full. Net positive progress in gender equality & greater inclusion in local politics. Worrisome: violence against women in homes & lack of jobs for youth.

**M.E. Smaeker @Mesmaeker**  
Why does Nepal not have a retirement arrangement for foreigners, like Vietnam does. I'd bring my own money....

## 1,000 WORDS



**SMOKE-FREE ZONE:** Kathmandu Valley had rare clean air days this week as the wind direction changed and blew away smog from the south. The city's own pollution was usually blown off by a westerly afternoon breeze.

KUNDA DIXIT

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Kyoto Protocol

Twenty years ago this week, we wrote why Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba (in his third term in office) should ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Nepal stood to lose millions of dollars under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) for carbon offset.

Nepal has made progress in cutting emissions and increasing forest cover but action is still not adequate. Uncaring politicians at home as well as big emitting countries -- it's still the same old story. Excerpts of the piece published on issue #224 3-9 December 2004:

Himalayan snows are melting, glaciers are receding and glacial lakes are threatening to burst their banks. Even if global average temperatures increase by half the projected scenario, sometime in the middle of this century our Himalayan water towers will have started melting.

You don't expect politicians to have time horizons to worry about what will happen in 2055. The American administration is certainly not worried and our politicians



are wont to argue that if the Americans aren't budging why should we bother? Besides, it looks like the planet's surface will continue to warm well into the 2100s even if the emission cuts under Kyoto are implemented.

But the reason Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba should move urgently this week to get Kyoto ratified (by ordinance because there is no parliament) is because we stand to lose millions of dollars under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) trading the carbon we have not emitted by promoting renewable energy.

In the next 20 years, Nepal could be rewarded for not pumping 50 million tons of carbon into the atmosphere and collect up to \$200 million just from its biogas program alone. Additionally, as fossil fuels get scarce and more expensive our own hydropower will be a much more competitive export.

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



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**TURKISH AIRLINES**





and digital authoritarianism, explore open knowledge initiatives in a fragmenting internet," says Georgia Popplewell, a journalist from Trinidad and Tobago who is Managing Director of Global Voices.

Since 2006, Global Voices Summits have brought together innovative digital activists and citizen media networks from around the world. Past Summits were held in London, New Delhi, Budapest, Santiago de Chile, Nairobi, Cebu City, and Colombo. Nepali Times has partnered with Global Voices for the Kathmandu Summit.

"For each Summit, we seek a location that is of strategic importance for citizen media, and consider the country's press freedom record and ease of access for visitors of different nationalities," Popplewell added. "Nepal is home to a



dynamic and diverse media landscape, which has managed to grow in the context of a fraught transition to democracy. The rest of the world has much to learn from the opportunities and challenges that Nepal's many online communities have experienced."

The packed Summit agenda will kick off on Thursday with a plenary panel on The Past, Present and Future of Digital Conversations in Nepal with Ujjwal Acharya of Journalism Academy and Nepali Times publisher Kunda Dixit. Other conversations will be on topics like blogging, digital connectivity, AI and deep fakes, state control of internet content and multilingual media.

News stories from Nepal are regularly translated across the languages of Global Voices, and the service also carries off-beat stories from Nepal. Recent ones include why Esperanto is so popular in Nepal, the vanishing craft of bamboo baskets, and Nepalis tricked into joining the Russian Army.

Summit sessions will be available online and highlights posted on X, Instagram, Facebook and Mastodon. 📺

# Global Voices Summit in Kathmandu

Two-day international conference will discuss digital media freedom and multilingual journalism

More than 300 media practitioners from 40 countries will be in Kathmandu this week for the Global Voices Summit 2024 for two days of deliberations on challenges and opportunities in the new digital media space.

This is the ninth Summit of Global Voices on 6-7 December in which journalists, translators, activists, technologists,

policymakers and development experts discuss issues related to free expression and language diversity.

Global Voices was founded 20 years ago as an international multilingual community of editors and journalists, translators and human rights activists to use the Internet to tell stories that build understanding across borders.

Its content is translated and shared in the media across the world in 52 languages, including Nepali. Participants will also examine threats to media freedom in authoritarian regimes, including those with elected autocrats, and also discuss political activism and climate justice.

"Throughout the two days we will examine threats like transnational repression



## Turkish Inner Portrait

Turkish Airlines worked with media artist Refik Anadol on an art project titled 'Inner Portrait' that explores the human desire to travel, by following four individuals on their first journeys to a new place. The piece premiered at Art Basel in Switzerland and will be shown at the Istanbul Ataturk Cultural Center.

## US official visiting

US assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Donald Lu, is visiting Nepal, Sri Lanka and India, meeting with senior leaders to advance collaboration on issues such as the environment.

## Ncell Lions

Lumbini Lions announced Ncell as their main sponsor for the Nepal Premier League (NPL). Ncell has also pledged, through its foundation, to donate four educational kits to students in rural Nepal for every four hit in the NPL. Ncell is also 'powering' the NPL.

## Digital Safety

TikTok and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology hosted a Digital Safety Summit this week where the safety of children and youth was highlighted.

## IME Startup Contest

Global IME bank with Nepalese Young Entrepreneurs' Forum is organising a contest for startups. Over 170 companies are competing for a Rs500,000 cash prize.

## €10M for WorldLink

WorldLink has received a €10 million investment from the Finnish government company FinnFund. The ISP plans to use the capital to build data centres and expand its fibre network to make rural connectivity faster, cheaper, and more reliable.

## Fairfield Christmas

Fairfield by Marriott Kathmandu collaborated with nonprofit Artbeat to organise underprivileged children to paint Christmas-themed drawings on the hotel windows and decorated a Christmas tree. The hotel also donated laptops to a school for the blind.



## MAW Group awarded

MAW Group, official dealer of Foton EVs in Nepal, won two awards at the Foton Global Awards. Managing Director Vishnu Kumar Agarwal received a leadership award, and CEO Tushar Gupta was recognised for excellence in sales of electric vans.

## IME discounts at Sigma

Global IME customers can now get discounts at the Sigma Diagnostic Lab in Bhaktapur. In-house tests will be marked down 40% and outsourced services 20%.



## Citizen Forum

Citizen Life Insurance held a forum on inclusive workplace and ending gender violence on its 7th anniversary. Parvati Aryal of the National Women's Commission led training attended by 178 participants.

## 2PM Snacks awarded

2PM Snacks and Noodles received the 'Future Forward Star Brand' award from Reliance Retail at a ceremony in Mumbai. The award recognises the most promising brands launched in India in the past year.

## Youth in Politics

Global Shapers Kathmandu held an event aimed at increasing youth participation in Nepali politics. Young Members of Parliament including Brinda Kathayat and Smriti Baral were present.

## EU in Karnali

European Union Ambassador Veronique Lorenzo is on a 5-day trip to Western Nepal where she is meeting with local and provincial officials and visiting EU-funded earthquake resilience and urban preparedness projects.

## Laxmi December

Laxmi Sunrise Bank has started its sixth annual #DigitalDecember to promote digital banking and financial literacy including easy payment of bills and approval for credit cards.

## ADB 50

Asian Development Bank is commemorating 50 years of partnership with the Nepal on energy projects, by holding an art exhibition until 9 December at Nepal Art Council and 12-28 December in Janakpur.

## DishHome NPL

Official digital streamer for the NPL DishHome is offering a 3-month bonus on internet subscriptions on its 200 and 300 Mbps annual plans. Also part of the deal is a 5g router, free.



## SAARC SecGen

SAARC Secretary General Golam Sarwar participated in a roundtable discussion at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), examining challenges and the way forward for the organisation.

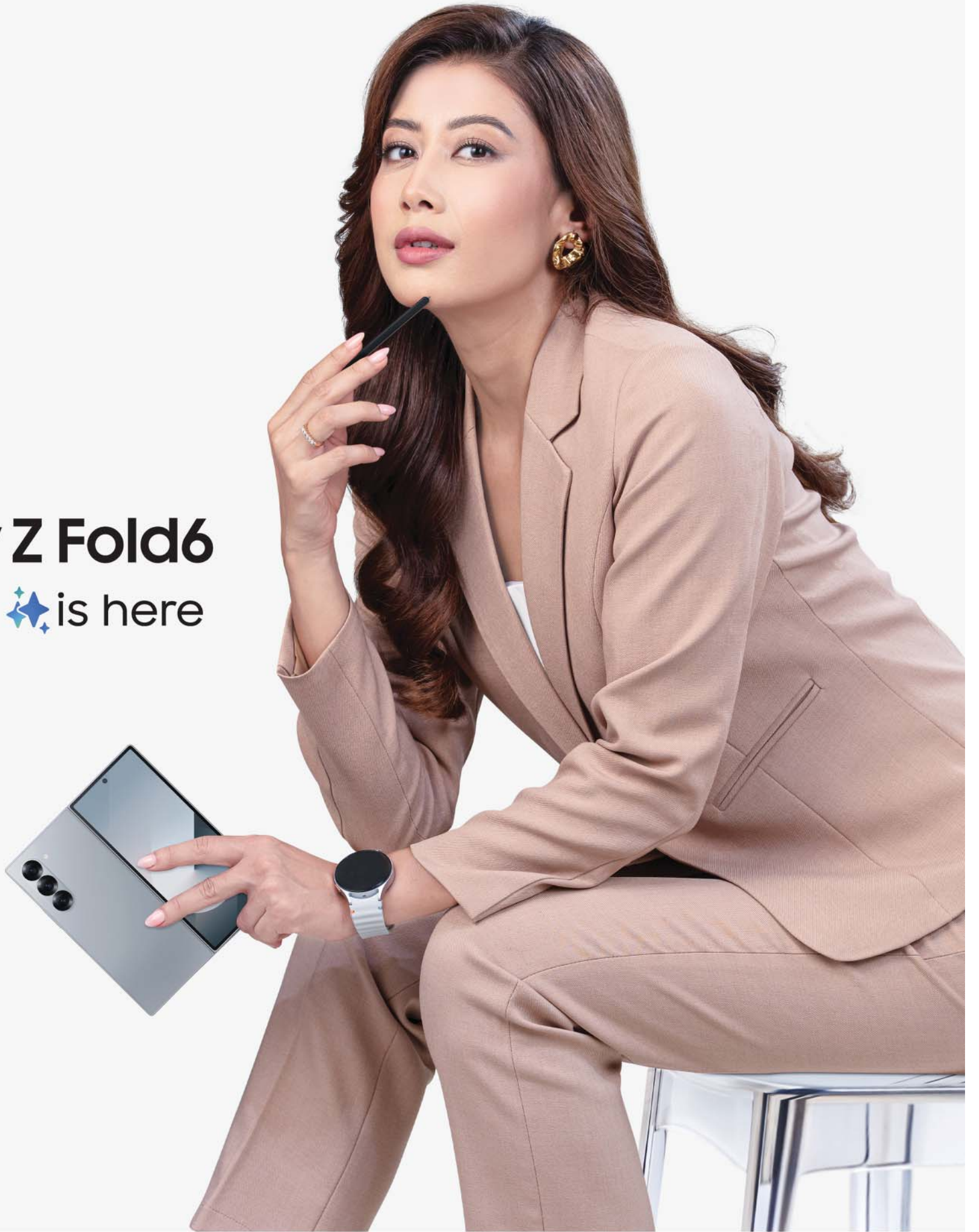
## Holiday Inn is 1

Holiday Inn Express marked its first anniversary. The hotel, located in Naxal, was recognised with the title of Best New Business Hotel last year.



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# THOSE WHO STAY

Weathering the consequences of climate breakdown at the top of the world

Text and photos by **Lauren Fox** in Manang

A wet crunch broke the silence. Damp snow became sharp shards of ice that crumbled under their own weight, falling onto the teahouse deck. The smell of wet wood sat stale in the air. The window reflected the snow outside.

Amar Gurung's gaze remained locked on the snow that arrived a month and a half early in September this year. Too early for the apples and buckwheat to be harvested. Too early for the 21 climbers who left Gurung's teahouse to summit Chulu West Peak the day before. Too early for the trekkers who Gurung hoped would have been his guests. "This is not normal," he says.

When record rain fell in central Nepal killing at least 250 people on 27-28 September, communities along the Annapurna Circuit in Manang also experienced unseasonal storms that disrupted climbing routes and agriculture.

Climate change is causing snow and rain to fall at the

wrong times, in the wrong places, and with unparalleled ferocity. Younger inhabitants in Manang are leaving to pursue careers that do not depend on tourism, or an unpredictable environment.

"The new generation doesn't want to stay here," adds Gurung. "They don't want to follow their parents, they see how hard it is."

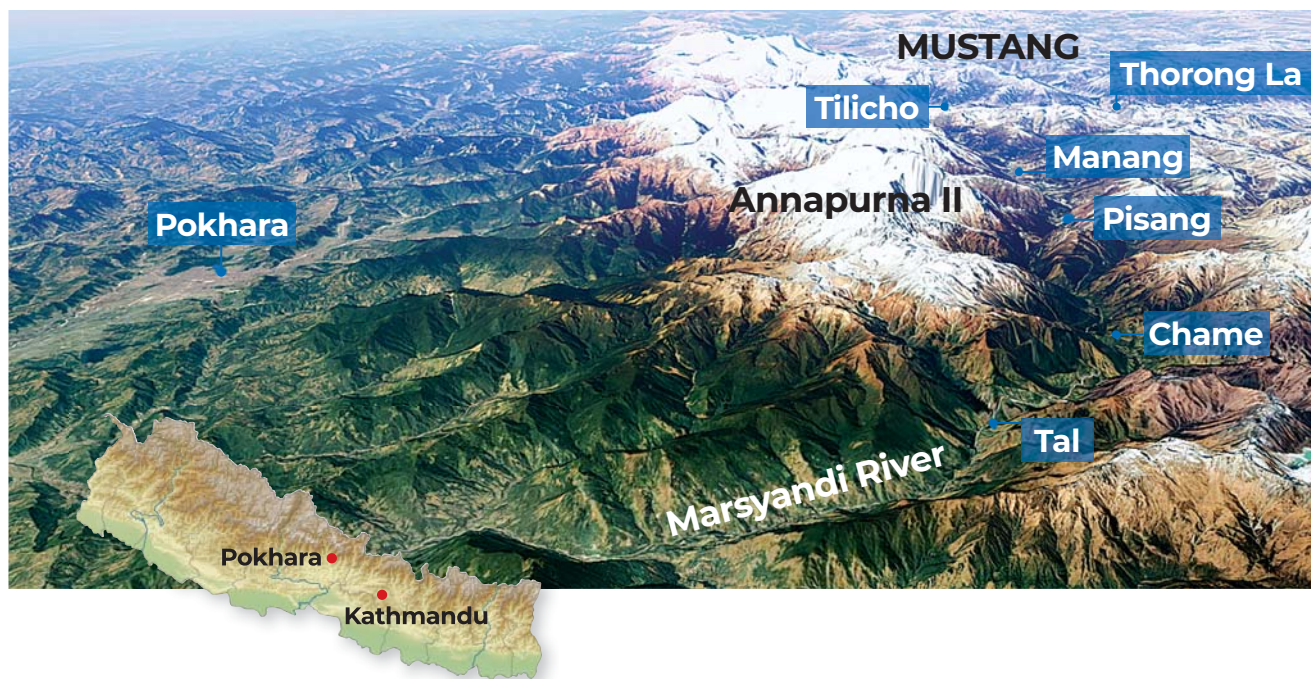
Amar Gurung and his wife Santi have sent their children to Pokhara for schooling. And like many others, they do not plan to return. Climate breakdown has added to the outmigration from this trans-Himalayan district.

The deep wrinkles on Amar Gurung's face resemble the rugged terrain of this semi-arid valley beyond the Annapurnas. They tell stories of decades spent working outdoors at 3,500m in the village of Ngawal. Nature does its own thing among these mountains, and its behaviour is increasingly erratic.

Shyam Krishna Panta was home in 2021 when a muddy flashflood raced through the village of Tal at 1,669m. The local school where he was principal was swept away, and classes are still held in a nearby monastery.



**BAD TO WORSE:** Amar Gurung gazes out of the window at his crops for the year, now covered under unseasonal September snow. The storm also worried him because his guests were attempting to climb Chulu West.



**ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH:** Leaders and trainee guides watch the sunrise over Machapuchre. Dicky Chhetri, a founder of the EWN, says this final overnight of the month-long training highlights both teamwork and leadership.



**TEAMWORK:** Sushmita Gurung, Amita Rana, Usha Pariyar, and Supriya Gurung. They didn't know each other before the course started, but they are now close friends.



**GOOD GIRL GUIDES:** Palti Gurung (left) builds a makeshift backpack to keep trekkers' bags dry during the September storm. She warns hikers to be careful because of rockfall danger. Tila Roka (right) cleans her glasses on the way up to Tilicho Lake. Her group started before dawn to avoid rockslides and avalanches.

## Moving mountains and women

Women guides who fought gender stereotypes now struggle against the climate crisis





**LOSS & DAMAGE:** Principal Shyam Panta at his temporary school after the original building was washed away in the 2021 flood. That disaster also damaged this house in Yak Kharka where flat roofs have given way to sloped tin ones to adapt to the changing climate.

“We give free food, accommodation, and studies to encourage students to come back to school, but parents are still hesitant,” says Panta. He admits that safety cannot be guaranteed because no one knows when another flood might come tumbling down the surrounding mountains. Tal sits by the Marsyangdi River before it enters a long series of narrow gorges.

“People ran to higher ground for safety,” recalls Tilkashi Gurung of the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) mother’s group in Tal. Lifelong residents Pemba and Bugima Gurung could not walk without assistance and crawled up the slope. Others had to be rescued by helicopter.

Tal locals wanted to leave after the flood, Tilkashi tells us, but without money, they could not. They are also scared to rebuild near the river as the land continues to erode and there are frequent rock slides. Farming is difficult in the stony debris left by the flood.

Every monsoon, new hiking trails for tourists are washed off as unseasonal post-monsoon floods like that of 2021 and now in 2024 increasingly become the norm.

For now, Tal plays the waiting game. Students, like Sumi Gurung, wait for her new school to be finished. Teahouses wait for guests. A whole village waits to be told

what to do.

“We were born here, our whole lives are attached here. We don’t want to leave,” says Tilakshi.

The road from Besisahar constructed in 2008 allowed visitors and goods to travel higher up the valley to Manang. Trekkers can now skip Tal, and begin their hikes to Tilicho or Thorong La from further up. The circuit that used to take 23 days to complete can now be done in just a few days.

There are trekking trails on the other side of the river for those who do not want to hike along the road, but the budget to maintain the trekking trail is not enough.

In Upper Pisang village at 3,300m, Norbu Chhiring ‘Japs’ runs a guesthouse with a view of the north face of Annapurna II from its windows. But this September, the view was blocked by angry clouds.

In Spring 2019, an avalanche from Annapurna II buried Nepali guide Ajay Dhakal and his Dutch client Vincend Jan Bloen. Rescuers needed metal detectors to reach the bodies clutching a tree.

“Landslides make sounds,” says Japs. “Avalanches, you don’t always hear until you are in it.”

As snow softens because of a warming Himalaya, there is more instability in the snowpack that triggers avalanches, making tragedies like this more common in the mountains. Even Pisang Peak

above the village, which rarely had avalanches, now has them.

Local architecture has also had to adapt to the erratic weather. As average annual rainfall has doubled in the last 14 years, the mud roofs common in Manang have converted to sloping tin ones.

Norbu feels safer in Upper Pisang, high above the Marsyangdi. Those in Chame and Tal, closer to the river, are vulnerable to floods. He says, “I can’t say if it’s three years or 20, but it will not always be safe to live down there.”

Umakant Sapkota is seen as an outsider in Manang village. He is from the Chitwan district and is posted here as secretary at the ACA office and says it has not been easy to balance ACA conservation interests with local needs.

“We have two choices, the people’s choice and the environment’s choice,” Sapkota explains. ACA urges locals not to cut down trees, but there is a demand for timber for guesthouses.

“Their interest is to earn money, ours is to protect,” adds Sapkota, acknowledging that locals know a lot about changes to the Himalayan environment, “but local people also want to earn money. Tourism is a seasonal business... but nature is here 365 days a year.”

On the trail to Tilicho Lake at 4,918m, a group of guides sat huddled by a small fire that

lit up the otherwise dark room. They included the owner of the guesthouse Bijay Gurung, who listened to a hiker describe his third attempt to get up to the lake.

The man wore rain boots dripping with melted snow. The storm had dumped hip-deep snow. He once again did not make it to the lake that day because of the risk of avalanches as the wet snow melted.

In the 12 years he has run the guesthouse, Bijay says this is only the second time it has snowed in September. Volunteers leave early next morning to clear the trails for the next set of trekkers headed up to Tilicho. They will be the first to make it since the start of the storm.

On the next valley, Ang Kami Sherpa stood tall, beaming with pride among the scattered orange tents below Thorong La at 5,415m. Up here, the flood in Kathmandu feels distant.

Dark blue skies and low winds allow for a good weather window when students from the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) summit cross Thorong on 3 October. The students are training for their Bachelor’s in Mountaineering, preparing to be the next generation of Nepali climbers and guides.

Sherpa is a support climber, and tells us that global warming can make mountaineering easier because there is less ice on the slopes.

“Every year, there are new changes to adapt to, especially early in the season, we need more and more ladders and rope-team support,” he says, adding that the biggest change is that melting snow means that there are more crevasses.

Suk Bahadur Gurung worked in the mountaineering industry for 16 years until the Covid pandemic. He now owns the Prasanna Hotel and Lodge near Chame. He has led clients up Mera Peak and other 7,000-metre peaks, but feels that the industry is becoming too competitive and unpredictable.

“The weather is harder and harder to predict with climate change,” says Suk, adding that clients who spend a lot of money to scale the highest mountains get angry when they cannot summit.

NMA’s Gandaki president

Shes Kanta Sharma spent 35 years guiding and climbing in the mountains. He says, “We are struggling to find how we can earn money and protect our mountains.”

Uncertain weather has also made Nepal’s trekking industry more unpredictable. Tila Roka has trekked the Annapurna Circuit more than 50 times in her 13 years as a guide.

More often recently, guides cannot determine how much money they will make in a season and whether it will provide for them for the rest of the year.

“This is a seasonal job, and we can’t predict how the weather and conditions will be during the guiding season,” she tells us. “Every season, something happens. But each year, it gets worse.”

As of early October, Roka had multiple trekking trips for the season cancelled as news of the Nepal floods went out to the world. She is unsure when her next trek will be.

The mountaineering industry is no longer the economic saving grace that it once was, says Tenzing Chogyal Sherpa, a glaciologist at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

His grandfather was a member of the first Everest Expedition in 1953 but has banned his grandchildren from climbing. So Tenzing was sent to school in Kathmandu.

“Mountaineering is not a sport here,” says Tenzing. “It’s a way of living. But now that education is more accessible, people don’t need to be in the mountains anymore.”

While the September storm has cleared and the floods have subsided, there is an understanding among Nepalis that this devastation will not be the last. The lives of those living in the Himalaya continue to exist in a symbiotic relationship with the environment.

It is unseasonably warm now in Manang after the snow. Most here feel that there are many more disasters in store in the future. They can tell that nature is restless. 🇳🇵

*Lauren Fox is a documentary filmmaker and journalist currently working as a Reporting Fellow with the Pulitzer Center, which supported this story.*



Triya Gurung, (left to right) of the EWN training camp. None of these friends.



**SISTERHOOD TRAVELLERS:** Lucky (left) and Dicky Chhetri (right) at their home in Pokhara. Dicky, Lucky, and Nicky opened 3 Sisters Trekking in 1996. Dicky runs the non-profit Empowering Women of Nepal (EWN), Lucky handles the 3 Sisters Guesthouse in Pokhara, and Nicky manages the trekking company.

Nepalis define mountains differently than most of the world. A mountain only graduates from the term ‘hill’ to ‘peak’ if it is above 7,000m. The word ‘mountain’ is saved only for those above 7,000m. Even then, it is not a mountain if there is no snow.

By these definitions, when the snowline moves up every year due to global warming, the notion of what is and is not a mountain in Nepal changes as well.

“Our profession exists because of the mountains,” says trekking guide and 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking Company co-founder Lucky Chhetri, “So we need to respect them.”

The 3 Sisters Adventure

Trekking was founded in 1996 partly to engage grieving widows by having them participate. Three years later in 1999, it started the non-profit Empowering Women of Nepal (EWN) female trekking guide training at a time when women were not considered fit for the mountains.

“It took time to convince people here that women could guide,” says Chhetri, adding that there was also a need among female travellers for female guides.

Today, the program attracts more women from the cities. But 3 Sisters still leads by the founding principle to bring Nepali women into the male-dominated trekking industry and promote gender equality in the tourism sector. 🇳🇵



**SNOWED IN:** Santi and Amar Gurung in their guesthouse kitchen in Nagwal as the storm rages outside. They are concerned about the safety of a mountaineering group attempting Chulu West Peak.



## EVENTS



## Queer Film Festival

Nepal's first Queer film festival includes a line-up of national and international documentaries, feature films, shorts, and multimedia projects.

6-9 December, 10am onwards, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka and Docskool, Thapathali

## Visual Melodies

Indulge in the immersive world of colours, forms, and emotions brought to life through Sagar Manandhar's artistry.

Until 12 December, 10am-7pm, Gallery Mcube, Chakupat



## Baking session

Think of taking up baking Christmas? Be part of Alliance Française Kathmandu's baking session. Check Facebook for more information and registration details.

6 December, 2pm-4pm, Fee: Rs400, Alliance Française Kathmandu

## Dhukdhuki 72 Megahertz

Dhukdhuki 72 Megahertz explores how our emotions shape our choices, relationships, and inner landscapes. The play has been extended, so catch shows before it closes.

Until 8 December, 5:30pm (except on Mondays), 1pm (also on Saturdays), Ticket: Rs300 (For students), Rs500-1,000, Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun



## Bollywood &amp; Beyond

Be ready for 'Jash-E-Lavie', the Bollywood themed event happening this weekend. Includes cocktails, food stalls, themed photo booths and related activities.

6-7 December, 12pm onwards, Lavie Garden, Kathmandu

## DINING



## Queens Eatery

Craving some good burgers? Queens' Burger, known for their signature American food, might be just the place.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5434260

## MUSIC

## Winter Carnival

Spend your weekend listening to live music, engaging in fun-filled activities, and eating delicious food with family and friends.

7 December, 10am onwards, Ticket: Rs300-Rs600, Bhrikutimandap Ground



## Karma in Kirtipur

Karma band and Kutumba band bring together traditional folk and rock music at Ekkai Swor ma Kirtipur to turn up the heat this winter.

7 December, 5pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500-Rs1,000, Laboratory School Ground, Kirtipur

## Rockmania

The Rockmania rock concert happening in Bhaktapur will feature Mt 8848, Mantra Band and The Surmount Nepal.

7 December, 12pm onwards, Sallaghari Ground, Bhaktapur



## The Big 3

Sabin Rai and The Pharaoh along with contemporary band John & the Locals and Purna Rai and Dajuvai Haru perform live this weekend. Don't miss out.

11 December, 6pm onwards, Tickets: Rs2,000-Rs3,000, LOD, Thamel



## Cult Music

Join Kuma Sagar and the Khwopa Band and Barsha Karmacharya for a musical afternoon in Kirtipur.

12 December, 3pm onwards, Ticket: Rs350-Rs600, Indrayani Multipurpose Hall, Kirtipur

## GETAWAYS



## Tuki Resort

With modern structures, dedicated service and comfortable rooms, Tuki Resort offers great accommodations at an affordable price.

Lakeside, Pokhara (061) 456037

## Barahi Jungle Lodge

This eco-jungle lodge in Chitwan directly overlooks Chitwan National Park and is the perfect respite to rejuvenate on weekends amid the wilderness.

Megauli, Chitwan (01) 4429820



## Pataleban Vineyard

Take a stroll through the vineyards of Pataleban, watch the panoramic view of Kathmandu Valley and sip aromatic wines during a winter getaway to Pataleban Vineyard Resort.

Chisapani (01) 4316377



## Marriott Kathmandu

Escape the hectic schedule without venturing beyond the valley at this five-star deluxe hotel. Don't forget to try their Thamel Kitchen, Edamame or Raksi Music Bar.

Naxal (01) 5970300

## Yeti Mountain Home

Venture beyond the city and right at the foothills of the Himalayas at Namche Bazaar, and get an up-close view of the mountains.

Namche Bazar, Solukhumbu, 9801249331

## Kaiser Cafe

A very quaint restaurant with a nice menu and an attentive service hidden in the corner of Garden of Dreams. Enjoy fine dining after a relaxing walk around the serene garden.

Kaiser Café, Thamel (01) 4413217

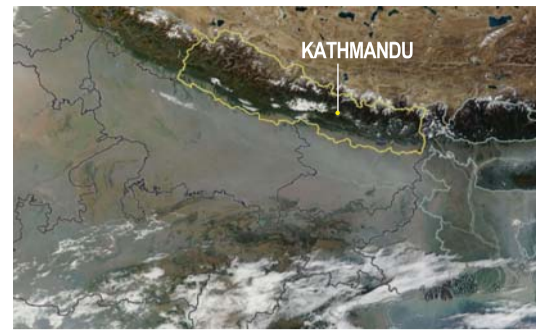


## Kharayo Bakes

This online bakery shop delivers gourmet brownies and other baked items at your doorstep. Their fudgy brownies are a must-try.

9851132172

## WEEKEND WEATHER



## Chillier Nights

As forecast last week, Cyclone Fengal switched prevailing wind direction over Nepal, blowing away the thick Indo-Gangetic smog. The Tarai and Chitwan, however, were still affected with poor air quality. But the Himalayan foothills and higher valleys experienced cleaner air and cooler temperatures. This is expected to persist into the weekend and next week when the minimum temperature will drop to 4°C in Kathmandu Valley. It will be frosty in towns above 2,000m. Afternoons will be warmer, but breezy. A westerly front will bring the first snow of the season to western Nepal, and some cloud cover Sunday and Monday to Kathmandu.

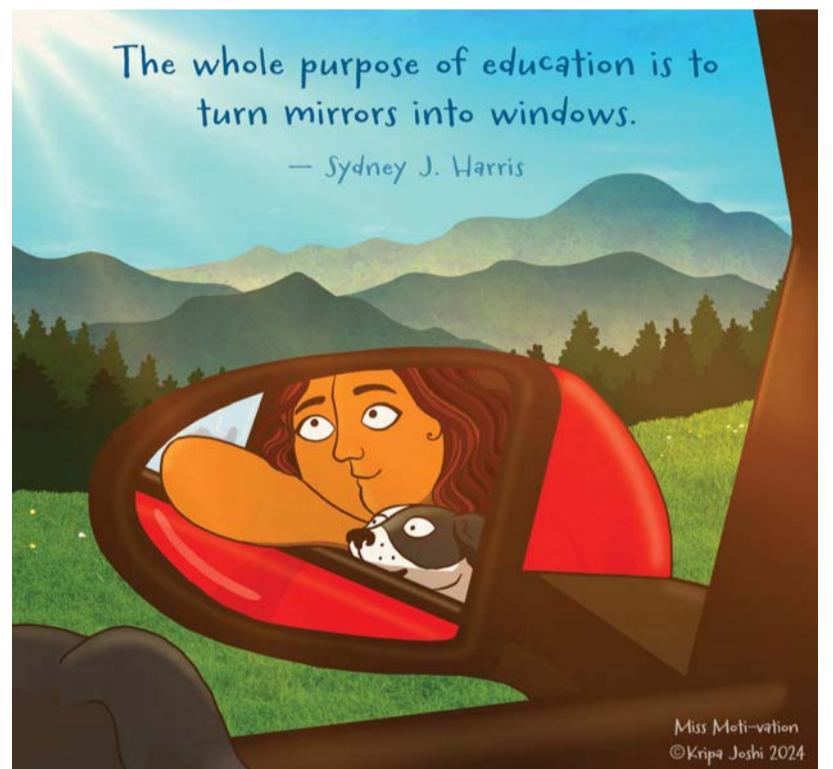
## OUR PICK



The 2019 film Art of Racing in the Rain starts with an elderly Golden Retriever Enzo as he waits for his owner, professional race car driver Denny Swift. Enzo doesn't have many days left but hopes to find Danny again in another life as he recalls hearing a Mongolian belief that the best dogs get to reincarnate into men. The movie is a tale of an exceptional bond between the two, and how the racetrack fits into it all. Based on the 2008 New York Times best-selling novel by Garth Stein, it stars Milo Ventimiglia, Amanda Seyfried, Kevin Costner as the voice of Enzo and Parker as Enzo, the golden retriever.

## 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



# Nepal's success in typhoid vaccine trial

International conference in Kathmandu to showcase path-breaking research in prevention and treatment of the disease

■ Sonia Awale

Just as Nepal was recovering from the Covid pandemic in 2022, the government with GAVI, the vaccine Alliance, inoculated almost 8 million school-children against typhoid.

What was even more remarkable was that this vaccine was earlier trialled among 20,000 people in Lalitpur, showing a significant reduction in typhoid incidence with efficacy rate of an impressive 80%, and was the subject of a research paper in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2019.

This kind of Typhoid Conjugate Vaccine (TCV) has also been used in Malawi and Pakistan where there has been a drop in typhoid cases.

The trial was undertaken by the Oxford University Clinical Research Unit (OUCRU) Nepal which was set up in Lalitpur in 2003 to control endemic typhoid fever in Nepal and the region.

Besides vaccines, OUCRU-Nepal has also carried out ground breaking randomised controlled trials in the treatment of typhoid fever. Its seminal paper in the journal Lancet Infectious Disease in 2016 influenced WHO to suggest that the fluoroquinolone drugs which was chosen at the time for typhoid fever should not be used in the empirical treatment of typhoid fever in South Asia.

Nepal's successes both in the prevention and treatment of typhoid fever will be showcased at the 17<sup>th</sup> Asian Conference on



UNICEF NEPAL

Diarrhoeal Diseases and Nutrition (ASCODD) in Kathmandu 8-11 December titled Emerging Enteric Infections and Impact of Climate Change.

Over 300 experts will attend the conference (box), including Andrew Pollard who helped develop the Oxford AstraZeneca Covid vaccine and Edward Thomas Ryan, immunologist at Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital, among others. Buddha Basnyat and Andrew Pollard were the two principal investigators for the typhoid conjugate vaccine trial in Lalitpur.

"The conference is a one of a kind platform bringing together researchers, policymakers, and public health professionals from across Asia and beyond to address critical challenges in diarrhoeal

diseases, nutrition, and public health," says Abhilasha Karkey, medical microbiologist and director of OUCRU Nepal.

Typhoid fever is prevalent in countries with poor hygiene and is transmitted through the faecal-oral route. If untreated, it can cause complications leading to death. Treatment is straightforward, but antibiotic resistance is a growing problem.

"Typhoid, much like tuberculosis, is a biblical disease," explains Buddha Basnyat, chair at the OUCRU Nepal. "It is hardly heard of in developed countries, except in travelers from our part of the world."

Indeed, South Asia including Nepal has an incidence of about 500 cases per 100,000 population. Anything over 100 per 100,000 is

regarded as 'alarming'. Hotspots include cities like Kathmandu, Karachi, New Delhi, Dhaka and Kolkata.

It goes without saying that the best antidote to diseases like typhoid fever and cholera is safe drinking water and better hygiene, which can only be guaranteed with political accountability and education.

"Careful study of typhoid burden, and performance of typhoid vaccines in children, led by OUCRU-Nepal based at the time in Patan Hospital in Nepal in collaboration with the Oxford Vaccine Group, has been central to the development of policy by the World Health Organisation," Andrew Pollard told Nepali Times.

He added: "As a result of the contribution of the Nepali investigators, more than 60 million children have been protected against typhoid around the world in the past two years and many tens of millions more will be protected in the decade ahead."

Typhoid fever is also often misdiagnosed. Nine years ago in the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake, there were several deaths across the country as they were wrongly diagnosed because of the widespread use of the Widal test that is consistently known to give false results.

In reality, these patients had typhus fever which is spread to humans by fleas, lice, and chiggers, and required a different antibiotic, not ceftriaxone, a potent antibiotic for typhoid fever. 🇳🇵

## ASCODD 2024

The ASCODD 2024 is a platform for Nepal to present its public health research, including in the prevention and treatment of enteric illnesses like typhoid. The conference theme is Emerging Enteric Infections and Impact of Climate Change.

Another key highlight is the launch and discussion of Nepal's National Cholera Control Plan which reflects the country's commitment to eliminating the disease. The last big cholera outbreak was in Jajarkot in 2009 that killed 111 people, mainly children, and in 2016 in Kathmandu with 169 cases.

"At the conference, we will explore the latest scientific advancement in diagnostics, treatment, vaccines while emphasising equitable access to these tools in resource-limited settings and in climate vulnerable countries like Nepal," says Abhilasha Karkey, director of OUCRU Nepal.

Keynote speaker is the former director general of the International Vaccine Institute (IVI) John Clemens and other sessions will look at the latest trends in antimicrobial resistance, the impact of the climate crisis on enteric diseases and community-based interventions.




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NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

# 'Art Lover' accused of sexual abuse

Former students press legal charges against noted artist to prevent him from abusing other women

■ Subeksha Poudel

One smoggy winter morning in February 2019, Ekta regretted coming to her sculpture class. It was the first day of her period, and the 19-year-old wished she was home, curled up in bed with a hot water bag to soothe her cramps.

Her class was at Kalapremi Ceramic Studio, a dark room on the ground floor of a house in Maharajganj, and Ekta's teacher was the artist Gopal Das Shrestha 'Kalapremi', a noted sculptor.

Two other students were already there, using all their muscle strength to knead the sculpting clay. Ekta, now 24, recalls how Kalapremi asked her if she was feeling all right. She avoided him, as she did not want everyone to know she was menstruating.

Kalapremi repeatedly asked Ekta what was wrong. She finally muttered that she was having her period, after which he grabbed her hand and led her to a partitioned corner of the studio and sat her on a chair. Before she could stop him, he slid his hand under her dress, and started massaging her abdomen.

"I was horrified," Ekta recalls. "I told him to stop, but he didn't listen, asking me not to be shy, saying he knew how to relieve my pain. He stopped only after I protested furiously."

The art tutor then said, "You're like my daughter. I'm doing it out of love to make you feel better, but you're so stubborn."

"Instead of saying sorry he acted like I was the one having crazy thoughts," remembers Ekta, adding that from April 2016 to August 2020 beginning the time she was 16, the artist sexually abused and harassed her on several occasions.

Now, Ekta and the artist's other former students are finally sharing their experiences and some are pressing legal charges against him, hoping that others do not have to endure what they did.

Award-winning artist and teacher Gopal Das Shrestha 'Kalapremi' (the name

means 'Art Lover') is known for his ceramic art, sculpture, and contemporary pottery. He was profiled in Nepali Times after a collaborative exhibition, 'Where the Wild Things Are' at the Siddhartha Art Gallery three years ago.

His pieces, titled Gaalis, featured sculpted dogs, sheep, and donkeys with women's heads (above) to depict derogatory terms for women. Some critics said the collection was a satire on feminists.

Kalapremi started his artistic and teaching career in 1983 and over the years taught at Bhanubhakta School, Kathmandu University School of Arts, Lalitkala Campus and at his private Kalapremi Ceramic Studio. He has also lectured at Jeonju University in South Korea and recently at Tabor Academy in the United States.

Seven of Kalapremi's former students were interviewed for this story. Five female students said he touched them inappropriately in his studio or at Kathmandu University. Two male students said they witnessed him abuse and harass the women. In all cases, the students struggled to recognise the abuse when it occurred, and the lack of reporting systems left them to cope on their own for years.

Earlier this year, students shared a social media post hinting at Kalapremi's history of abusive behaviour following which more students of the artist reached out sharing similar experiences. Some students spoke of abuse that happened as long as 20 years ago.

Kalapremi, 60, has denied the allegations. He told Nepali Times: "Some years ago, there was a movement encouraging people to hug and kiss. I used to do it purely out of friendship and love. But after seeing posts on social media last year calling out my behaviour, I realised my actions may have hurt some people. I understand now that I should have been more mindful."

He added: "I am also an auxiliary health worker, so I know the exact points to massage to relieve menstrual pain. It's not just menstruation, I take anyone who is ill to the hospital."

Sexual abuse is much more rampant than reported given how difficult it is to prove it in court. The law defines sexual abuse as occurring when someone touches another's private parts, coerces them into touching theirs, uses vulgar language, shows degrading images, or behaves indecently towards them without consent.

Ekta and her fellow students are consulting lawyer Suneeta Regmi Pokhrel, who says they know that even if the court decides in their favour, it is difficult to survive after speaking up, and influential men defend themselves saying they are being framed.

"They are in a lot of pain and weep when recalling how he abused them," Regmi Pokhrel told us. "They are angry and have filed a case against him, but they are also terrified. They know he is a powerful man and they have seen how our society treats women who speak up against abusers. Unless people speak up, perpetrators will be emboldened."

Art and academia in Nepal simply reflect the power imbalances in society where people with intersecting identities experience worse forms of abuse. Theatre actors Raj Kumar Pudasaini, Rajan Khatiwada, and Sunil Pokhrel were called out during the #MeToo movement in the Nepali theatre scene in 2019. Even after the allegations Pokhrel went on to receive national awards, while others continued to work without repercussions.

"If you speak up against abusers, you gradually get sidelined from projects," explained a theatre artist who wished anonymity fearing professional setbacks. "The theatre scene in Nepal is quite small, you just have to make peace with the perpetrators and work with them if you want to sustain yourself."

In academia there is a history of faculty members sexually harassing students and getting away with it. After Tribhuvan University (TU) lecturer Krishna Bhattachan

was accused of harassing women students, the university said it would follow Nepal's sexual harassment law and set up a reporting mechanism. But nothing happened to the professor, who had already retired. Instead, he counter-accused the students of 'attacking the indigenous people's movement with baseless allegations' as he told the Kathmandu Post in 2019. He continues to be featured as a prominent speaker including at TU.

Other faculty members previously accused of sexual harassment include Jagdish Murti Koirala from TU, Bishnu Prasad Acharya from Ratna Rajya Campus, and Bodha Raj Tripathi from Lalitpur Madhyamik Vidhyalaya. A woman staff member from TU also filed a sexual abuse complaint against Dambar Chemjong from TU.

Prominent figures like mountaineer Nims Purja have been accused of sexual assault, and cricketer Sandeep Lamichhane, actor Paul Shah, and former speaker of Parliament Krishna Bahadur Mahara have been accused of rape, but society-at-large has let off the alleged perpetrators amidst a larger debate about justice for survivors and punishment of perpetrators.

'Gaushala-26' is the court name given to the 18-year-old who accused Sandeep Lamichhane, former captain of Nepal's national cricket team and skipper of Biratnagar Kings in the ongoing Nepal Premier League, of rape. She left the country citing society questioning her character affecting her mental health while Lamichhane got an outpouring of support. In May, the Patan High Court overturned a prior verdict that found Lamichhane guilty of rape and had sentenced him to eight years in prison. During the 23-month legal battle to pursue justice, Gaushala-26 faced threats of gang rape and acid attacks.

Exhausted by the struggle, Gaushala-26 sought to "move to a new world" where she could live free without hiding her identity.

Veteran actor Bhuwan KC was accused of sexual abuse by actress Samragyee Rajya Laxmi Shah during a movie shoot. The film star then filed a defamation case against Rana, but the court ruled that the charge lacked sufficient evidence.

Former Kathmandu mayor Keshav Sthapit also mocked the #MeToo movement, calling accusations against him by journalists Rashmila Prajapati and Ujjwala Maharjan "a rape of men's rights".

## Serial Abuse

Back at the Kalapremi Ceramics studio, another former student, 24-year-old Rajiv, says he felt the need to speak out after seeing his female classmates being abused.

"He frequently kissed them on their cheeks," he told Nepali Times. "Whenever they walked into the studio he flailed his arms like a child asking for a hug. They awkwardly hugged him from the side, but he pulled them closer, held their chin, and kissed their cheeks."

Rajiv says he also saw Kalapremi pull the women's bra straps, touch their breasts, and slap their buttocks. The young students would freeze, not knowing how to react, and if they protested, he would say it was "normal in art". Rajiv, 19 at the time like his classmates, remembers thinking perhaps the well-respected artist was right after all.

Another student, Luna, who took lessons at Kalapremi's studio from 2020 to 2022 did try to confront the tutor after he made an obscene proposal to her. She recalls: "One day when the other students had left the studio and it was just the two of us, he told me that God had given him special artistic talent and he could transfer those powers to me. But to do that both of us will have to be naked, inside a dark room, and have sex."

Luna, who was 18 then, was livid and told him she did not want any of his powers, but she says he laughed at her as if he was joking. She did not tell her family about the incident because she thought no one would believe her.

"They were all in awe of this famous artist and felt I should be grateful that to be learning sculpting from him," she says. "I was scared to be alone with him in case he talked about sex again. My coping mechanism was to be rude so he wouldn't try to come close to me."

Seeing how some classmates were standing up to Kalapremi, Ekta too tried to push back against his advances, but she said he found ways to coerce her. Since Ekta, Rajiv, and Luna could not afford Kalapremi's Rs30,000 monthly fee for lessons, he had offered them all a stipend to assist him in the studio.

"He had spondylosis and took me to his therapy sessions to learn massage techniques, then he often made me and other students massage him," says Ekta. Whenever she refused, he would feign pain to make her feel sorry for him. "He would insist that I put my hands under his shirt so that I could massage him better," she adds.

The art tutor often tried to "seduce sympathy" from Ekta by sharing how he had never been loved as a child and was "sexually frustrated" as an adult.

"At 7PM, he would pour himself Signature whiskey and immediately go off again about how he was sex-starved. I didn't know how to respond. It took me time to realise alcohol was just an excuse to talk about sex," Ekta says.

If convicted, Kalapremi could face financial penalty and/or a prison sentence of up to three years according to Section 224 of National Penal (Code) Act 2017.

Data suggests that victims of child sexual abuse on average take nearly 24 years to tell someone about their trauma, and some may never disclose it at all.

"In our culture, children are rarely taught about boundaries. They



often react, show anger when adults pinch their cheeks. But adults insist they did it out of love, and force the children to accept it," says Sita Lama, a psychotherapist at Manka Kura. "And even when someone touches them inappropriately they struggle to identify and verbalise it."

When perpetrators claim to be "acting out of love", Lama says survivors are likely to perceive it as something safe, rather than recognising it as abuse.

"It may take years for them to realise they were abused," she explains. "And even when they become aware, the power imbalance with the abuser and the associated shame often prevents survivors from speaking up."

Other former students from the School of Art at Kathmandu University have also come forward years later, saying Kalapremi sexually abused them. As young adults, they felt his behaviour was off but were uncertain if it was inappropriate, illegal, or they did not know how to respond. After having understood that it was indeed abuse, they say they are speaking out now to protect others.

Amina Singh, a visiting faculty member at Kathmandu University, says there is no clause against sexual abuse in contracts of teachers, and there is no formal grievance handling mechanism for the students.

"So the only way students can to deal with sexual abuse is approach someone they trust," she says.

Eight other former art students of Lalit Kala Campus and Srijana College of Fine Arts of Tribhuvan University and other private art studios in Kathmandu say they were also sexually abused by their art teachers. Three faculty members interviewed from these institutions said they saw the abuse, but felt it was futile to report it given how powerful the teachers were.

In the absence of a formal system, some longtime women artists warned each other about "problematic" artists. They shared a "heads-up" to be more cautious when collaborating with them, and avoided responding to their calls and texts after work hours.

To ensure art institutions are safe for all, galleries, museums, artist studios, and smaller art spaces need to develop policies on sexual harassment. This would include a code of conduct or studio policies that hold the leadership accountable and outline the principles of professional ethics.

Students and employees should inquire about accountability mechanisms for raising concerns, both formally and informally, advocates say.

Three years after Ekta left the ceramics studio, she learnt that Kalapremi had harassed many other women. Still trying to get a footing in the art industry, she attended a workshop in Kathmandu where women artists discussed ways to stay safe in the art sector.

Since it was a close-knit group Ekta opened up about how she felt violated and realised she was not alone, he had been abusing underprivileged students for years, and this was common knowledge among artists in Nepal.

Ekta says that even after she quit, Kalapremi continued sending her text messages like 'I am thinking of you', 'Why have you stopped speaking with me', or 'I am waiting for your call'.

But what really forced her to act was when Ekta found out that he was sending similar texts to her younger sister.

"I've had enough," she told us. "He abused me all these years but I won't let him abuse my sister." 🇳🇵

*Ekta, Rajiv and Luna are not the real names of the students.*



**Alliance Asia Nepal** is a dynamic organization committed to promoting sustainable development and enabling positive change. Collaborating with governments, non-profit organizations, and communities, we address critical global challenges through innovative and impactful initiatives.

Our team comprises seasoned professionals with extensive experience working with international development agencies, including the United Nations, European Union, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), USAID, and other global entities like DT Global, Particip, and WSP. This diverse expertise empowers us to design and implement transformative solutions tailored to local needs.

**Thematic Focus Areas:**

Aligned with global development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our focus areas include:

- Economic Development and Livelihoods
- Social Development
- Governance and Humanitarian Support
- Resilience and Climate Action
- Clean Energy

**Why Join Us?**

At Alliance Asia Nepal, we integrate global expertise with localized insights to amplify grassroots voices and deliver meaningful, sustainable impacts. By addressing interconnected challenges such as poverty, gender inequality, climate change, and governance, we strive to build a more equitable and resilient future.

**Be a part of the change. Together, we can create lasting solutions for a better world.**

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We are inviting passionate and skilled professionals to become part of our Global Consultant Pool and apply for a range of internal positions.

- 1. Contracts and Consultant Lead:** Drive strategic partnerships, manage contracts, and oversee consultant engagement to deliver impactful solutions.
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