

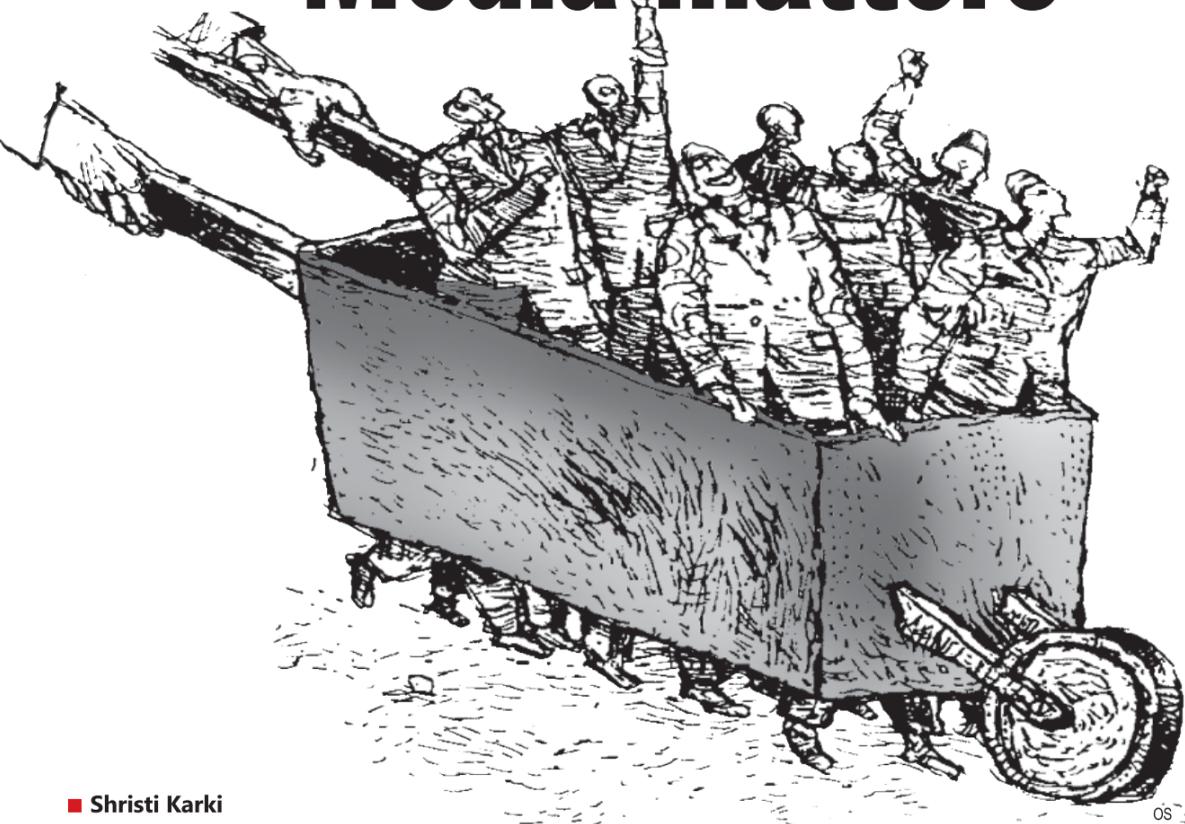
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Media matters



■ Shristi Karki

2024 was marked by Nepal's politicians repeatedly attempting to silence journalists critical of them. Despite being elected, they seemed to have learnt tricks about gagging the media from authoritarians in the neighbourhood. But the lesson from the region in the past year was also that such suppression is counterproductive to rulers.

First it was Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane who, as home minister in the previous coalition, jailed the publisher of Kantipur which had exposed the tv anchor-turned-politician's alleged involvement in defrauding cooperatives.

Lamichhane lost his job when the coalition collapsed after the Nepali Congress switched to the UML side in June. He has now been charged, and is in jail himself. He lost his MP seat and party chairmanship as well.

Lamichhane and other political leaders who catapulted to national politics after the 2022 local and federal elections copied the proven method of fanning populism through social media. Once in power, like elected authoritarians elsewhere, they have tried to emasculate the mainstream press.

Earlier this month, Dharan Mayor Harka Sampang openly

threatened journalist Gopal Dahal and the Centre for Investigative Journalism-Nepal (CIJ-N) for an exposé of governance and fundraising irregularities. Sampang said he would 'end the career' of Dahal and ex-Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) Sunsari chair Janak Rishi Rai who had shared the story on social media.

Sampang's supporters have since been sending Dahal death threats using ethnic slurs, and praising the mayor for 'teaching the media a lesson'.

The mayor's actions have drawn widespread condemnation. Dharan journalists staged rallies outside the mayor's office.

"There is no environment for freedom of expression in Dharan, where the mayor has long been intimidating the press," CIJ-N editor Kiran Nepal says. "All the while, the central government is silent in the complaints against Sampang."

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in a statement called for 'a swift and thorough investigation' into the death threats against Dahal.

CPJ added: Authorities must hold all perpetrators accountable while ensuring the journalists' safety ... the media must be allowed

to report without fear of harassment or violence.'

Lamichhane, Sampang and Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah campaigned in 2022 riding the wave of public disenchantment against established parties.

They have continued to rile up the base by magnifying the message on social media, scathingly trolling and threatening anyone daring to criticise them, including journalists in the mainstream press.

The new leaders have their sights on the 2027 elections, and have benefited from the silence of the political establishment over their attempts to gag the press. Mainstream politicians seem wary of engaging with these younger leaders and their supporter base.

Nepal's established parties also appear to have developed a thin skin, especially to social media content that lampoons them.

This intolerance of criticism is not just limited to the media, but to dissenting voices within their own parties. On Wednesday the UML expelled Bhim Rawal and suspended Binda Pandey and Usha Kiran Timilsina for speaking out against Prime Minister Oli.

The coalition Cabinet has also approved a bill to regulate social

Thinking the thinkable
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

media networks and online content.

Communication Minister Prithvi Subba Gurung says the bill is aimed at "countering the chaos created by social media" and he is urging Oli to pass the bill through ordinance.

The bill will require social media networks to be registered, establish offices, and pay taxes in Nepal. Social media and online users can be fined or jailed if found to violate norms in the bill.

Last year, the Maoist-NC coalition banned TikTok to 'maintain social harmony', but actually it was spooked by the rising popularity of the Hindu-right and royalists on the platform.

Established parties are worried that mayors like Sampang and Shah will mobilise social media to join national politics like the RSP's Rabi Lamichhane did.

While populist leaders demonstrate intolerance towards criticism in the mainstream press, they and their supporters use their social media handles to threaten and troll critics on those platforms.

This puts free speech activists in a dilemma: hate speech and trolling corrode democracy, but censoring the internet is a slippery slope.

They say that while monitoring social media is important, putting controls over social media is the wrong way to go about it.

Nepal is one of the most open societies in Asia. Any restrictions on media freedom will set a bad precedent in the region.

However, even as politicians try to mute the media and despite the online support for populist leaders who attack the press, an annual media survey shows that Nepalis still have a lot of trust in mainstream press (page 4-5).

Even though legacy media is losing readership, there is still a critical mass that appreciates the role free media plays in making democracy function better.

"What Sampang, Shah and Lamichhane have in common is that they think they are above media scrutiny, and prefer to mobilise their troll armies," says CIJ-N's Kiran Nepal. "Nepal's media has problems, too, but this new crop of politicians thinks there is no role at all for a free press." 🇳🇵

2025

Nepali Times wishes readers in print and online, and all partners a happy and healthy New Year.

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Thinking the thinkable

One reason deterrence has worked since the end of World War II is that all-out nuclear war is so unthinkable.

Yet, wars in Ukraine and West Asia, a new Cold War that pits US against Russia and China, and an erratic American president all make nuclear conflict thinkable in 2025, and beyond.

Russia has repeatedly threatened to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine, and last month fired a new hypersonic missile at Dnipro. It has put into orbit a new prototype satellite that can knock out other satellites with a nuclear explosion in space.

Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu recently spoke about a joint strike on Iranian nuclear sites. North Korea has been testing long range missiles. Tensions remain high between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

These dangers come on top of signs of accelerated climate breakdown with weather extremes, record-breaking heat, and rapid melting of polar icecaps and Himalayan glaciers.

United States and Russia would cause a nuclear winter lasting more than 15 years, the study showed, unleashing global starvation that would kill 5 billion people.

Anti-nuclear activists challenge the security paradigm based on nuclear deterrence, pushing for an all-out ban on nuclear weapons. At a meeting on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the United Nations in New York last December, members declared that the doctrine of deterrence used by nuclear-armed states and their allies was a threat to human security, and an obstacle to nuclear disarmament.

Deterrence is an unproven gamble based on the implicit threat to use nuclear weapons, which itself is playing brinkmanship with nuclear annihilation.

"Deterrence is unacceptable," stated Melissa Parke of ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons). "It is based on the threat to wage nuclear war which would kill millions outright and lead to a nuclear winter and mass starvation



'The world-ending potential of nuclear weapons looms over populations around the world,' writes Cameron Vega in Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. 'Climate change is a slower-moving catastrophe, but it openly threatens every community.'

The Bulletin's Doomsday Clock was reset to 90 seconds before midnight (from 100 seconds) in January this year due to 'ominous trends that continue to point the world toward global catastrophe'. The minute hand on the Doomsday Clock has been reset 25 times since 1947, and it is most likely be brought forward to less than a minute in 2025.

Both climate breakdown and nuclear war are human induced, but while one is heating up the planet, the smoke and dust from nuclear explosions will cool it. Either way, both threats are inextricably linked.

Even the tactical use of battlefield nuclear weapons would have a climate impact. And climate-induced crop failures, water shortage, mass migration and socio-political unrest could spark wars that go nuclear. This is without even considering the long term effect of radioactive fallout on land, water and sea.

Rutgers University researchers recently projected that even a one-week nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan would cause the collapse of food systems worldwide, killing 2 billion people. Prevailing winds would carry the fallout to the Himalaya and Tibetan Plateau, irradiating glaciers that feed into all of Asia's main rivers.

An all-out nuclear war between the

Two entwined global threats in 2025: climate breakdown and nuclear catastrophe.

that would kill billions of people."

It has been 50 years since the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was first proposed in Geneva. The NPT entered into force in 1970, and has the membership of 191 states, with mandatory obligations

on disarmament and non-proliferation. These commitments are now threatened by a new Cold War and global tensions. Nine nuclear weapon states have total stockpiles of 14,500 warheads, many of them on missiles ready to be launched.

Three countries in Nepal's immediate neighbourhood (China, India, Pakistan) have nuclear weapons, and they do not share good relations. The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD) is located in Kathmandu, and helps countries to meet disarmament goals.

A report titled Nuclear Famine by the group International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War sounds the alarm: even a limited nuclear war using only 100 weapons anywhere in the world would disrupt the global climate, putting 2 billion at risk of starvation.

Coincidentally, 2 billion is also the number of people who would be affected by water shortages caused by the melting of glaciers in the mountains of High Asia.

Given the twin global threats, climate activism now has to go hand-in-hand with the campaign to abolish nuclear weapons.

Kunda Dixit

ONLINE PACKAGES



Watch our interview with Ira Helfand, co-president of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, about its report on the implications of nuclear war and the dangers to civilisation. Read the Editorial, Thinking the Thinkable (left).



This centuries-old art form has gone commercial, enabling female artists to hone skills passed down generations, giving them financial independence, recognition and respect within and outside Nepal. Watch on the Nepali Times YouTube channel.

STARCHITECTS

None of these designs are relevant in the Nepali context ('Forgotten international starchitects in Nepal', Anne Feenstra and Varun S Bapu, #1240). They've failed despite their architectural background. It is better to trust designers from Nepal.

Rahul Sayama

My problem is, why do we need to imitate the west? Why take such a brutalist approach to our architecture when our ancestors were meticulous in detailing every inch of our surroundings?

Prashant Tamang

Meanwhile, the legacy and historical work of architects Carl Pruscha and Benjamin Polk still stand tall.

Prajwal Kadariya

These architects might have been often talked about at one time, but have been forgotten. The contributions still stand out as very special.

Bharat Koirala

MACHAPUCHRE

The visionless development in the Himalaya is killing these mountains (Nepali Times social media posts of snowless Machapuchre last week).

Vinod Upreti

This is a sad effect of global warming. Developed countries are the main reason this is happening, and must take responsibility.

Avi Magar

This is exactly what I used to imagine during my school days: what if it stops snowing on our mountains? Well, here it is.

Yogesh Gurung

NATIONAL DEBT

Tax reforms sound like a solution for some other South Asian nations too ('Near-debt experience', Ramesh Kumar, #1239).

Kusum Athukorala

BHUTAN REFUGEES

I do not understand how Nepal's government gleefully welcomed the current Bhutan king in Kathmandu when his father evicted hundreds of thousands of Bhutan's citizens and made them stateless ('Mindfulness about Bhutan's refugees', Archana Darji, nepalitimes.com).

Pradeep Bhandari

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Chandra's Annapurna

by Kunda Dixit
Chandra Gurung's book Caring for the Annapurna encapsulates his ethos that biodiversity is threatened because responsibility for its protection has been taken away from local communities. Read review: nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Nepal's crony-Communism

by Shristi Karki
Journalist Tom Burgis weaves a fast-paced tale in his book, CuckooLand: Where the Rich Own the Truth, charting the careers of deal-makers in the global telecommunication industry, and exposing corruption in high places in Nepal. Details online.

Most popular on X

Forgotten foreign starchitects

by Anne Feenstra and Varun S Bapu
Shigeru Ban, Rem Koolhaas, Tadao Ando and Louis Isadore Kahn, all left their mark in Nepal. But despite their best intentions, the ambitious designs fizzled out. Read about their work online.

Most commented

It's cricket!

by Vishad Raj Onta
Nepal's cricket carnival ended with the Janakpur Bolts' victory over the Sudurpaschim Royals at the NPL finals last week. The quality of the game and the broadcast has set the NPL apart from any other sporting event in Nepal's history. More on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
BLACK PYRAMID: The south face of Mt Machapuchre (6,993m) is usually snow-covered this time of year, but it has become just a black rock due to global warming as seen in this photo taken this week from Pokhara by Yunis Gurung.

Bashanta Gautam @GautamBashanta
We need better action to save our Himalayas. @WeDontHaveTime @UN @antoniogetterres #BlackPyramid

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Bhutan is planning an ambitious urban development project at Gelephu bordering India. But some of that land belongs to people the Bhutan regime evicted 30 years ago, and they have land titles to prove it. Read Archana Darji's report:

Mingmar Sadhana @Upasika1
Calling it 'Mindfulness City' is adding insult to injury! Bhutan's rulers, citizens (those that still remain within the country) should be mindful of the indisputable fact that ethnic cleansing is a crime against humanity. Covering up that unforgivable crime is another crime.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Collateral Damage

The decade-long Maoist insurgency killed, wounded and traumatised children. Many of whom were recruited into the militia as 'whole timers' directly from their classrooms. A huge setback to Nepal's fledgling education system, just when enrolment had improved. Teachers were killed and thousands of school buildings and classrooms were destroyed.

Excerpts of one such report detailing the recruitment of children in the war from issue #227 24 - 30 December 2004:

Going on nine years, this conflict is degenerating into a competition between the two warring sides to be nastier than the other in tormenting non-combatants. Nowhere is this more evident than in the blatant use of children in Nepal's armed conflict. The party that has been most insistent on calling for United Nations mediation is the one that is recruiting children directly from their classrooms,



forcing them to join militia training, closing schools down with threats, and menacing teachers. As a result, the country's education system is now in shambles, the remarkable progress made in the past decade in raising the country's literacy rate is seriously jeopardised.

Even in conflicts more vicious than ours, we have seen an unspoken agreement between belligerents not to target children and schools. But in Nepal there has been a cynical and deliberate attempt to wreck the school system. Day care centres are bombed, children are used as cannon fodder and education turned into a theatre of war.

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

1,000 WORDS



BHAI-BHAI: India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing on 18 December at the first bilateral meeting after deadly Sino-Indian clashes in Ladakh in 2020. Among other issues, the two also agreed to reopen the Kailash-Mansarovar route for Indian pilgrims that passes through the Lipu-Leikh region that Nepal regards as its territory.

Times

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Editor: **Sonia Awale** | Special Correspondent: **Shristi Karki**
Reporters: **Pinki Sris Rana, Vishad Raj Onta** | Layout: **Kiran Maharjan**
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What do Nepalis think of the media?

2024 survey reveals fascinating interplay between mainstream media and digital platforms

■ **Madhu Acharya and Bhumiraj Chapagain**

While most Nepalis understand 'media' to mean tv (21.5%) and radio (20.6%), younger, urban, and educated audiences also equate Facebook (19.9%) and YouTube (16.9%) with 'media'.

In provinces like Sudurpaschim, reliance on radio (40.4%) and tv (30.7%) far outpace digital platforms, but in Bagmati Province, Facebook (35.4%) and YouTube (32.8%) are more common sources of news.

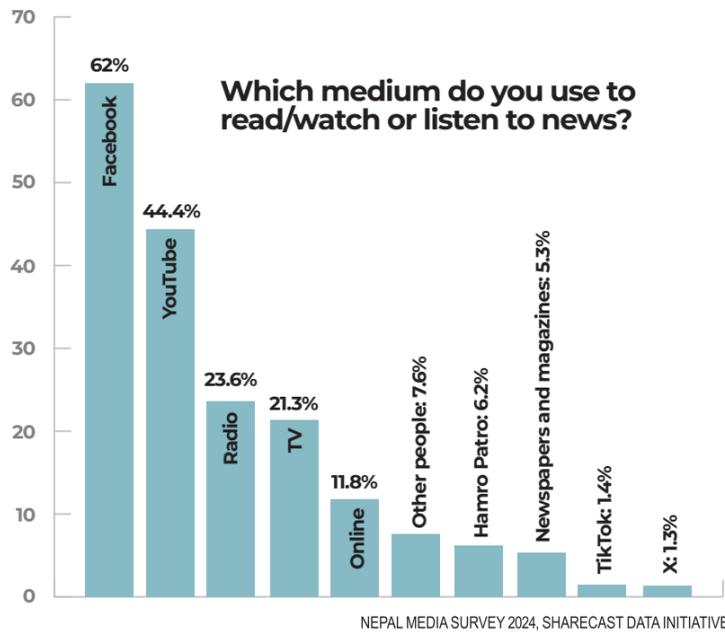
Respondents with at least a Bachelor's degree are far more likely to associate media with both traditional and digital platforms, with 59.3% mentioning tv, 54.7% radio, and 42.1% citing Facebook.

Defining Facebook as 'media' reflects its accessibility and role in delivering diverse, user-generated content that resonates with younger, urban, and educated audiences. This shift indicates a transition from traditional gatekeeping to algorithm-driven news consumption.

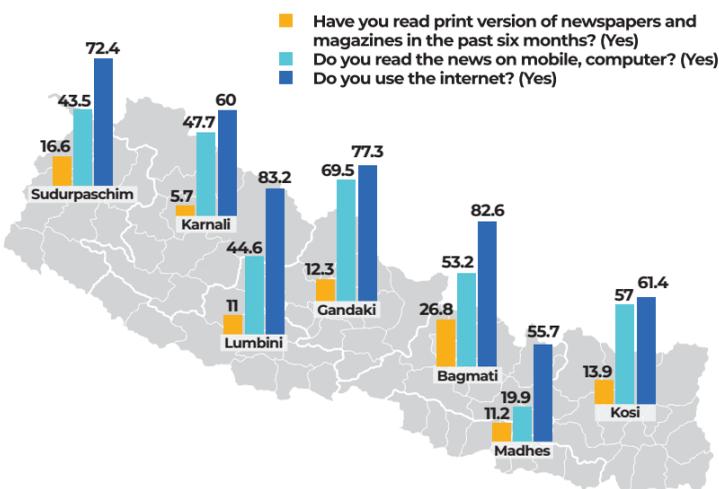
Madhes and Karnali Provinces, with lower literacy rates and limited access to electricity and local media outlets, show lower media engagement. On the other hand, Bagmati and Gandaki Provinces have higher adoption of both traditional and digital platforms, indicating that media habits are shaped by infrastructure and socio-economic status.

However, a high proportion of 'Don't Know' responses indicates gaps in media awareness, particularly in areas like Madhes Province, and among less-educated populations.

For Nepal's media sector, therefore, the challenge is to navigate this evolving landscape by balancing the strengths of traditional media with the



PROVINCIAL MINDSET

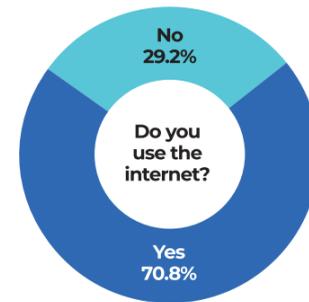
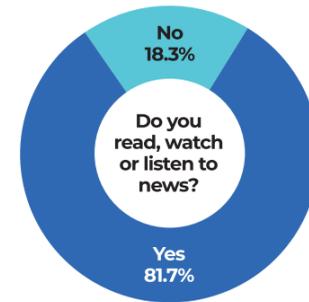


growing demand for accessible and engaging digital content.

While digital news is steadily gaining ground, tv and radio remain relevant for significant population segments. Print media, however, is in steady decline.

News on mobiles

Digital platforms are increasingly the preferred medium for news, with 46.8% of respondents using the internet (33% of surveyed population) saying they read the news on their mobiles or



computers. This trend is most pronounced in Gandaki (69.5%), Bagmati (53.2%), and Kosi (57.0%) Provinces.

The younger, better educated are leading this digital shift. For example, 83.3% of respondents with higher education consume news digitally, compared to just 13.1% of illiterate respondents. The gap is evident in regions like Madhes, where only 19.9% engage with digital news, underscoring disparities in access and adoption.

This digital transition can be attributed to the accessibility and convenience of mobile devices and the internet, the immediacy of digital news, and the interactive nature of online platforms. Younger and educated audiences increasingly prefer digital platforms for personalised and real-time content, which mainstream press often cannot match.

Additionally, the declining relevance of traditional media in some regions stems from their limited ability to adapt to the fast-paced, on-demand consumption habits that digital platforms readily

fulfill. This shift underscores the growing importance of technological access and user-centric content in shaping media preferences.

Despite its gradual decline, television remains a significant medium, with 37.3% of respondents saying they have watched tv in the past three months. Tv is strongest in Bagmati (48.0%) and Kosi (43.6%) provinces, while Karnali lags at 22.7%. Respondents with higher education (60.7%) are more likely to watch tv than their less-educated counterparts with a notable gender disparity.

Radio, once a dominant medium, now caters to a shrinking audience (32.2%). Print media faces the steepest decline (only 13.8% saying they read a newspaper or magazine in the past 6 months), with higher engagement only among urban (28.2%) and educated audiences. Lowest print usage is in Karnali (5.7%). But print still has remarkable staying power among those with higher education (53.4%). Of the surveyed population, 58% say they go to at least one of the legacy media, whereas 73% have internet access.

The message for the mainstream press: innovate to remain relevant. Print outlets must rethink strategy, perhaps by targeting urban and educated audiences with specialised or niche content. Previous surveys had shown that many Nepalis would read print if it was available.

Nepal's media landscape is at a tipping point, and the industry must adapt to the changing and diverse needs of an evolving audience.

In media we trust

Respondents who primarily associate media with the mainstream press are more likely to express 'Complete Trust' or 'Mostly Trust' driven by the credibility they have built over the decades. Conversely, digital media audiences, while appreciating its accessibility and interactivity, have cautious optimism about the credibility of their content.

Bagmati Province with Kathmandu Valley's media hub leads in trust, with 47.2% expressing

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Turkish to Santiago

Turkish Airlines has started flights to Santiago in Chile, its 26th destination in the Americas, and the 10th country that the carrier is serving in the western hemisphere. Flights will operate four times a week from Istanbul to Santiago via São Paulo. Economy tickets for this route are priced at \$1,099, and the reverse route at \$999. This new route means that Turkish Airlines now flies to 131 countries, and the achievement was officially recognised by



Guinness with the 'Most Countries Flown to by an Airline' title. The record considered the 120 countries that Turkish flew to over the past year -- 31 more than its closest competitor. The record certificate was presented at Santiago Arturo Merino Benitez International Airport in Chile after the Airlines' inaugural flight to the country.



Ncell Data Saapati

Prepaid Ncell customers can now dial *9988*4# to get unlimited data for the next 24 hours when they run out of balance. Rs52.48 will be deducted when they next recharge. Ncell users can now also set Nepali songs or NPL themes as their Ring Back Tones, or upload their own audios. Each tone costs Rs31 and will be active for 30 days. Dial *123*# to set.

Meanwhile, Lalitpur Metropolitan City (LMC) recognised Ncell for being the highest taxpayer in Fiscal year 2023/24. Ncell paid Rs20.3B in taxes and fees, and has also contributed over Rs2B through CSR initiatives. Ncell also donated 2,612 educational kits to in-need students, four for each of the 653 boundaries hit in the NPL. Janakpur Bolts opener Lahiru Malintha scored the most, with 35 which works out to 140 kits.

NMB & USAID

NMB Bank and USAID hosted a session to educate SMEs and MSMEs in Pokhara about digital finances, including online marketing, digital payment systems, and NMB's paperless QR loan.

Upper Tama Kosi

The 456MW Upper Tama Kosi hydropower station, damaged in a September landslide, has partially resumed operations and is generating 120MW. A rockfall destroyed the control room and damaged the desander and culvert,



killing two employees and two soldiers. Further repairs are ongoing to return the plant to full capacity. An initial insurance claim of Rs1.78B has been filed to cover repair costs and lost revenue.



Laxmi turns 51

Laxmi Group marked its 51st anniversary. Having started out as Laxmi Mithai Bhandar in 1973, the company is now involved in automotives, manufacturing, and sports and employs over 2000.



Honda NX 200

Syakar Trading hosted a test ride for the Honda NX 200. Starting at Ekantakuna, riders rode through Nakkhu, Chobar, Taudaha, Chalnakhel, and Pharping, before ending in Hattiban. The route tested the bike's performance in urban, rugged, and uphill terrain.

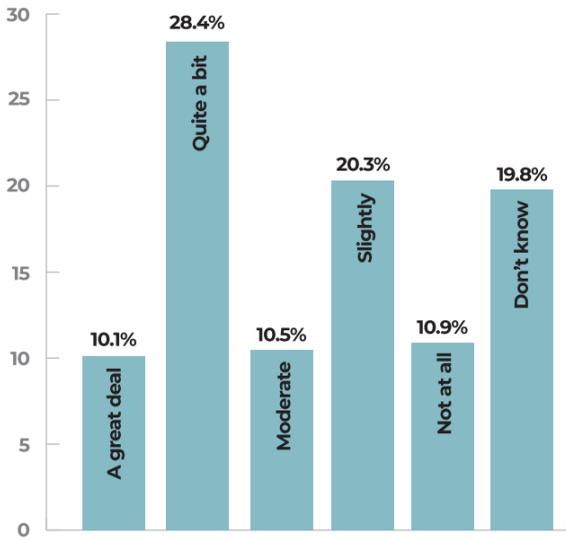
Nabil quake shelters

Nabil Bank handed over 96 shelters to those affected by the 6.4 magnitude quake in November 2023 in Jajarkot and West Rukum. The Bank contributed construction material worth Rs10M and worked with local governments to build the temporary homes.

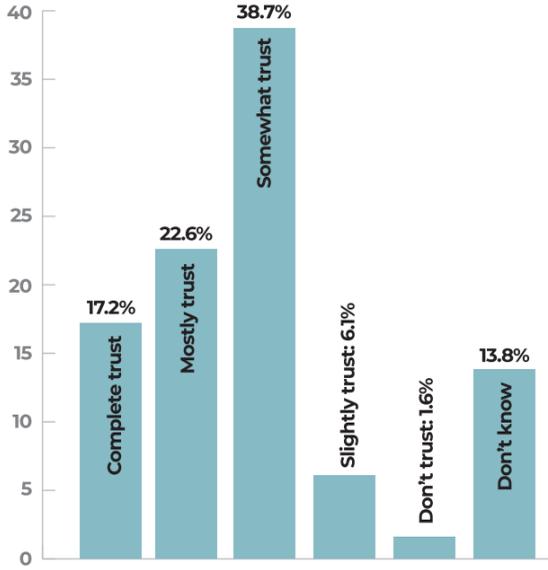
WorldLink Carnival

WorldLink is hosting a carnival in Pokhara on 28 December, the fifth day of the International Balloon Festival. There will be food, games and performances from The Elements, DJ Amy, and local artists. A free shuttle service will be available.

How much does Nepali journalism/media care about your issues/problems?



How much do you trust the information and news provided by journalism/media in Nepal?



‘Somewhat Trust’. While urban respondents generally report higher trust levels, there is some skepticism in rural areas.

Younger respondents aged 16–24 show the highest levels of trust of digital platforms, highlighting their greater engagement and openness to newer forms of media. By contrast, older demographics, (age 60 and above) show lower trust and more uncertainty about online content.

This generational divide shows that legacy media need to meet the expectations of younger audiences, while maintaining relevance for older groups.

Respondents with higher education consume media more diversely and report higher trust levels (55.4%), while 45.2% of illiterate respondents remain uncertain, reflecting broader literacy, access, and inclusivity issues in the media landscape.

The Nepal Media Survey 2024 shows a media landscape in which traditional and digital media coexist. While trust in media remains relatively strong, significant gaps in representation and accessibility persist across regions, age groups, and educational levels.

Not surprisingly, younger urban audiences gravitate towards interactive digital platforms, while older and rural populations continue to rely on traditional media. However, pervasive uncertainties among specific demographics highlight the need for a more inclusive and localised approach.

As Nepal’s media landscape

evolves, it faces dual challenges: maintaining credibility and trust, while adapting to diverse and shifting consumption habits. Media stakeholders need to think about the steps they now need to take for their own survival, to ensure pluralism and healthy public debate, and ensure that the voices of the marginalised are included in the national conversation.

Policymakers, media owners and journalists must strive to balance innovation with accessibility, fostering a trusted space that informs, empowers, and connects all Nepalis. This media transition is shaped by regional disparities, generational differences, and the growing dominance of digital platforms.

Consumers of news

An overwhelming majority (81.7%) of respondents report engaging with news in some form, underscoring a widespread appetite for staying informed. However, 18.3% do not use media for news at all either because of lack of access, or distrust.

Regionally, news consumption is strongest in Bagmati (91.6%) and Sudurpaschim (90.5%), while Madhes (60.6%) lags significantly behind. This finding reflects potential challenges in access or outreach in the region. In rural areas, 79.5% of respondents consume news compared to 87.6% in cities. Urbanisation continues to drive higher engagement with media.

Among social media platforms, Facebook (62.0%) and YouTube (44.4%) dominate, particularly

among younger and urban audiences. In the 16-24 age group, 82.6% of respondents rely on Facebook as their primary news source, while 51.5% turn to YouTube. In contrast, their use of radio (23.6%) and tv (21.3%) is considerably lower. Among those 60 and above, 38.4% rely on radio and tv equally for news.

Although Facebook is not a media platform in itself, the tendency to perceive posts on Facebook as ‘news’, or view content shared by traditional media on the site as originating from Facebook likely contributes to this perception. There is a blurring of boundaries between mainstream media and social media platforms, and the content they host.

Print media is struggling to maintain relevance, with only 5.3% of respondents citing newspapers and magazines as their go-to news source. This sharp decline in print engagement suggests a broader shift toward instant, accessible digital content, leaving traditional formats struggling to adapt.

Interestingly, media aggregate sites like Hamro Patro (6.2%) and emerging spaces like TikTok (1.4%) show how niche tools and apps carve out their own spaces in the news ecosystem.

Higher education is a strong predictor of news consumption with 99.1% of respondents using news content in one form or other. Only 52.1% of illiterate respondents engage with news, raising issues of literacy, access, and media inclusion.

Responsive media

The question of how much Nepali media cares about the public issues reveals disparities across regions, demographics, and platforms. While 38.5% of respondents believe the media cares about their needs, a significant 31.2% feels otherwise, with 20% are uncertain.

Confidence in media is strongest in Bagmati and Karnali, while Sudurpaschim and Madhes highlight gaps in engagement and relatable coverage. This divide reflects earlier findings about Nepal’s media landscape, where digital platforms dominate urban and younger demographics, while traditional platforms hold sway in rural and older populations.

Nepal’s journalism needs to bridge this gap in representation and trust by creating inclusive, localised content that resonates with diverse audiences. The age, urban-rural and education divide is also reflected in how media responsiveness is perceived.

The survey result shows that while journalism is often seen as addressing more significant national issues, it struggles to connect with individual or localised concerns with a persistent trust gap and regional disparities.

This likely stems from the media’s tendency to prioritise macro-level narratives, such as politics and societal challenges which resonate on a broader scale, while often overlooking the lived experiences of individuals or underrepresented communities.

Over half of respondents (51.3%) feel that journalism cares ‘A Great Deal’, ‘Quite a Bit’, about

public concerns, while 34.2% feel the media pays only ‘Slight’ or ‘No’ attention to their needs.

Age and education continue to influence perceptions of media responsiveness. Younger respondents aged 16–34 are more optimistic, with over 35% stating journalism cares ‘Quite a lot’ about public concerns. However, confidence diminishes among older age groups, where 39.8% of those aged 60 and above express uncertainty.

Urban respondents (35.2%) consistently report higher trust in media responsiveness compared to 33.8% in rural areas. This data aligns with earlier findings, where urban audiences, engaging more with digital platforms, feel better represented.

The contrast between personal and public perceptions suggests that while Nepali journalism is recognised for addressing large-scale, national issues, it struggles to connect with localised or individual concerns.

Digital platforms, which dominate urban and younger audiences, likely contribute to the more positive perceptions of media care for public concerns. In comparison, mainstream media, which is used more by older and rural audiences, may not foster the same level of trust or engagement. Nepal’s traditional press must balance coverage of national issues with more relevant local content to build lasting trust.

Bridging this gap requires headline-worthy grassroots storytelling that resonates with individuals and communities while building a national narrative, fostering trust and representation in society. 🇳🇵

Madhu Acharya is the CEO/President, and Bhumiraj Chapagain, PhD, is the Research Director at Sharecast Data Initiative.

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HOT AND COLD: A balloon takes off from Pame near Pokhara on Tuesday below overcast skies, and against a backdrop of a snowless Mt Machapuchre (6,693m).

The mountain in December 2023 (right, above) and last week (below). Besides the lack of seasonal snow on Mt Machapuchre, the ice-cap has also melted due to climate breakdown.



SKANDA GAUTAM



RAJESH KC



YUNIS GURUNG

Up, up, and away

Just as Nepal's cybersphere was sharing photographs of a snowless Mt Machapuchre (above), the country's first hot-air balloon festival got off the ground in Pokhara on Tuesday. It starkly juxtaposed the global climate crisis with the carbon footprint of tourism.

As luck would have it, a westerly front finally arrived, sugar-coating the black pyramid of Machapuchre temporarily with a dusting of snow. The festival, organised by Balloon Nepal, had BYD as main sponsor. The EV-maker unveiled its battery-powered M6 minivan at the event.

The festival puts Nepal on the global adventure destination map, as Pokhara adds ballooning to a list of leisure activities including bungee, zipline, paragliding, ultra-lights, canyoning, and whitewater rafting.

Pilots from Spain, France, US, UK, Latvia, Germany, Laos, Austria, Korea and Italy are taking part in the festival which will run till 1 January. Tickets for a 30-minute ride for Nepalis costs Rs11,000. Foreigners pay more.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) published a NOTAM for an airspace radius of 3km over Pokhara as no-fly. This will affect paragliders, helicopter flights, but not flights at Pokhara International

Airport. The balloons are expected to conduct 500 commercial flights lifting 3,000 passengers for stunning sunrise and sunset views of the Annapurnas.

This will happen only 6-9am and 4-6pm when the temperature is cooler. The festival also has a daily 20-minute firework display and night flights with glowing balloons.

Balloon Nepal was established in 2016 and started operating flights in Pokhara in 2018. The festival is designed to take advantage of Pokhara's topography and location.

There are food stalls, games, and performances from national and local artists, bands, and DJs in Pame's carnival atmosphere.

Also on 29-30 December, the Chinese Embassy is partnering with Gandaki Province, Pokhara Metropolitan City and Nepal Tourism Board to host its second annual Dragon Boat Race on Phewa Lake. Altogether, 32 teams from China, Nepal and Singapore are taking part.

Commercial hot-air ballooning was first tried in Kathmandu Valley in the 1990s by Balloon Sunrise, with takeoffs from Kirtipur and drop zones in Bhaktapur. But air traffic growth and urbanisation put a stop to that.

There has also been an attempt to fly a hot-air balloon over Mt Everest, although initial tries by Japanese and British-Australian teams were unsuccessful.

The gondola crew struggled with hypoxia as the jetstream blew the balloon over Everest to China. The adventure is recorded in Leo Dickinson's book *Ballooning Over Everest*, and a video on YouTube.

Austrian mountaineer Wolfgang Nairz also conducted flights over Chitwan in 2003 during the Everest Golden Jubilee Year.

There are still unexplored sites for hot-air ballooning in Nepal, including Chitwan National Park, Rara and Manang. Tethered balloons over Lumbini could be an attraction for pilgrims and tourists, as it is at Angkor Wat.

Similar festivals happen all around the world: in Turkey, Qatar, New Mexico, Bristol, Japan, and France. The sight of these massive objects, gliding silently across the landscape amidst stunning natural backdrops, make for a memorable spectacle. 🇳🇵

Vishad Raj Onta

*BYD International Balloon Festival 2024, Pokhara
Till 1 January 2025*

PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI



EVENTS

**Untold Narratives**

Discover the paintings of Dr Manoranjana Herath, where human emotions are expressed through intricate lines forming powerful human figures.
Until 4 January, 11am-8pm, The Kalā Salon, Chhaya Center

Pokhara Street Festival

Celebrate New Year's Eve at the Pokhara street festival, featuring live performances, games, food stalls, and a firework countdown.
31 December, 3pm onwards, Tickets: Rs. 500+, Komagane Park, Lakeside

**Dragon Boat Race**

Be part of the 2nd edition of the Nepal-China Friendship Dragon Boat Race on the Phewa lake.
29-30 December, Phewa Lake, Pokhara

Wonderland Winter Carnival

Enjoy mascot parades, magic shows, lucky draws, and live music at the Wonderland Winter Carnival.
24 December- 1 January, Bungamati, Lalitpur

**Weekend Theatre**

Catch the last few shows of the play But Still, We Rise, directed by Sudam CK and Akanchha Karki.
27-28 December, Shilpee Theatre, Battispatali, 9861315317 / 9861078876

DINING

**Brunch Party**

Want to kick off your morning with croissants and coffee? Visit Bro Bakery for the cozy ambience and free tasting.
21 December, 11am onwards, The Baha, Sanepa

**Kathmandu Steak House**

The best quality grilled steaks and freshest fish at Kathmandu Steak House make for hearty meals during winter.
Thamel (01) 4264946

Lhakpa's Chulo

From Nepali dal bhat to Italian Risotto, Lhakpa's Chulo serves a variety of cuisines.
Jhamsikhel (01) 5542986

**New Year's Eve with Aloft**

Celebrate New Year's Eve at Aloft. Buffet dinner packages are available at the Nook restaurant and Nilgiri lounge. Deals available on rooms for Nepalis and expats.
31 December. Nook buffet package: Rs3,000 Nilgiri buffet package: Rs5,000, Thamel (01) 5252000

Club Himalaya

With stunning views from private balconies, Club Himalaya is a blend of natural and modern services with a cosy atmosphere and delicious food.
Nagarkot (01) 6680080

**New Year @ Dusit**

Indulge in a chef-curated buffet and dance to live music while taking in the sky-high views as you count down to 2025. Door prizes are included.
31 December, 6:30pm onwards, Tickets: 4000+, Dusit Princess

**Lemon Tree Premier**

Offering a wide menu selection, expansive banquet facilities and a lavish New Year's Eve dinner buffet, Lemon Tree is a go-to destination for travellers on business or leisure.
Budhanilkantha (01) 5900928

Dwarika's Resort

Boasting luxury accommodations, attentive staff, and award winning dishes from around the world, Dwarika's has established itself as a must-visit place in Dhulikhel.
Dhulikhel (11) 490612

Noodle Shop

The Winter Delight offer at the Noodle Shop includes soul-warming ramen and other complimentary dishes.
Sanepa (01) 5449673

**New Orleans Cafe**

Enjoy New Year with live music and delectable dinner at New Orleans Cafe Thamel.
31 December-1 Jan, 7pm onwards, Thamel (01) 4700736

GETAWAY

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Rain and Snow Coming**

This week's weak westerly brought a short drizzle to Kathmandu Tuesday night, and some snow flurries higher up. But a wider frontal system is approaching (left), and will bring heavier rain and snow to western and central Nepal on Friday. The system will reach Kathmandu by Saturday which will experience the first real rain since September. But this system will move away quickly.

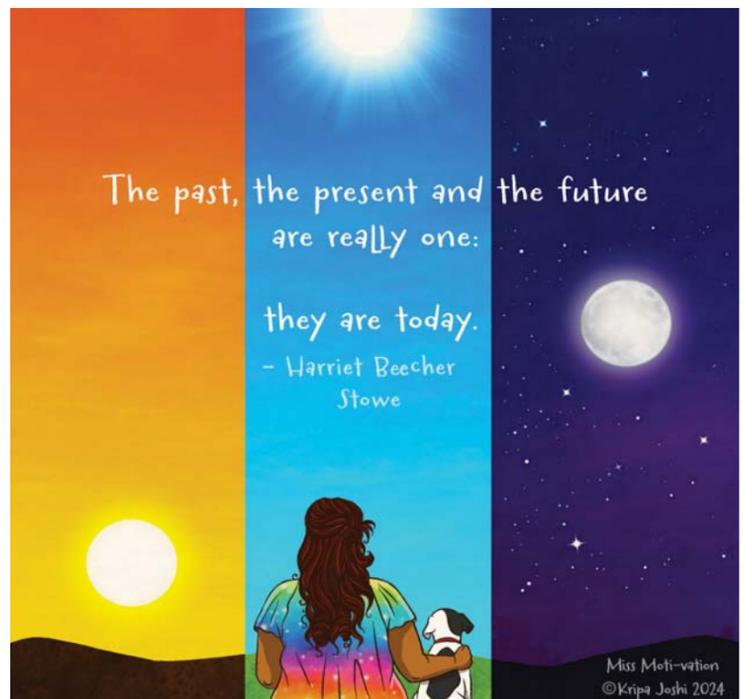


OUR PICK

Jesse Eisenberg's acclaimed 2024 comedy-drama A Real Pain stars Eisenberg and Kieran Culkin as estranged cousins David and Benji who reunite to travel to Poland to honour their grandmother and connect to their Jewish heritage. Throughout the trip, their already fraught relationship is further tested as David's practical and reserved personality clashes with Benji's distinctly more free-spirited approach to life. The film, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival this year, also stars Will Sharpe, Jennifer Grey, and Kurt Egyiawan.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



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- 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
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PHOTOS: PINKI SRIS RANA

THE MITHILA DREAM

A conservationist redefines the natural and cultural potential of Madhes Province

■ Pinki Sris Rana in Dhanusha

Nepali men in the border towns of the Tarai are usually content with salaried jobs in India. Young Dev Narayan Mandal (above, right) was no different.

After completing Grade 10, he became an office boy in India. Now 38, Mandal has made a name for himself in Madhes Province for his work in nature conservation, and is moving to cultural preservation.

Mandal set up the Mithila Wildlife Trust that has, over the past ten years, restored forests in degraded land, conserved the region's snake population and invested in snakebite mitigation.

"Though my academic background is very different, it was my personal interest that steered me towards wildlife conservation," says Mandal, who worked as an accountant at the Indian non-profit Wildlife SOS for seven years before returning to Nepal.

Mandal harbored a passion for nature and wildlife. In India, he had tagged along with bear rescue operations that rescued 200 circus bears. During one vacation back in Dhanusha, he was aghast at seeing the lush forest near his home completely denuded.

He quit his job in India and returned to collaborate with the Dhanusa Department of Forestry to declare Dhanusadhama an 'illegal felling and grazing free zone'.

The forest returned, but so did the snakes. Snakebites were taking a large toll on human life, and people were killing even non-venomous snakes out of fear. He began educating people to identify dangerous snakes, their behaviours and their habitats.

"There were many more snakebite deaths than what was being recorded," says Mandal. Villagers started calling him when they saw a snake instead of killing

it like they did before.

Mithila Wildlife Trust works with the UK-based Pipal Tree Foundation in strategic reforestation, and Mandal has introduced the Miyawaki Method of restoring compact forests (above, left) packed with native species. Within three years, the plots here have become dense jungles.

"Unlike the Dhanusadhama forest, we did not have to wait up to 10-15 years to see the impact of our work here," says Mandal.

Villagers are allowed to harvest deadwood, twigs and leaves in return for protecting the forest. Birds and burrowing animals have returned.

A fox made a recent guest appearance. Mandal stops and points his camera towards the undergrowth, and spots the bushy-tailed brown animal in the bushes.

Mandal's next project is to save Mithila heritage with his Cultural

Village. "The village will take you back to the Madhes as it was 30 years ago," explains Mandal, showing a visitor around mud-thatched huts with vibrant Mithila paintings on the walls, where guests can savour an authentic Mithila thali.

The Cultural Village generates income to sustain the Trust and offers a quiet venue for residencies, workshops and conferences. "The food in the restaurant is from our own vegetable farms, and any waste is turned into fertiliser," he says.

Madhes Province ranks one of the lowest in terms of human development in Nepal, but Mandal's work is a model for other provinces to practice sustainable development.

He adds: "Conservation has to be self-sustaining. This model can be replicated in any locality, and even upscaled to the national level." 🇳🇵






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DIASPORA
DIARIES 55

■ Mahesh Sah

This is the 55th edition of Diaspora Diaries, a regular column about migration in Nepali Times.

Trying to escape being recruited by the Maoists, and running out of options in Nepal, I dropped out of school and paid Rs300,000 to a recruiter to take me to the UAE on a tourist visa.

I was stranded there for two months, and just as my visa was about to expire, I landed a job in the warehouse of an American base in Afghanistan.

Within three months, I got promoted to a Senior Supervisor which irked some of my colleagues who had been working there for seven years. I was already also feeling discriminated against by my Nepali colleagues, except one colleague from Taplejung who had a good heart.

One day, a bomb exploded in a container with food items, killing nine people. I had enough and returned to Nepal. When you are so close to death, you reassess your life choices. In my 17 months in



Afghanistan, I had earned close to Rs3 million which helped me buy land and build a house.

In Kathmandu, I came across an ad in Kantipur for Korean language classes, and without even returning to Janakpur I enrolled. The EPS language test was just 58 days

away, and there were people who had been preparing for the Korean language test for up to three years. The odds were stacked against me.

I studied for the exam as though my life depended on it. I aced the mock exams. I ranked first out of 600 students, and this reminded

me of my childhood when I was a class topper. It was the financial situation that had made me discontinue my studies.

I managed to pass the exam, the only person out of the 36 living in our rented building. I went to Korea and worked in manufacturing.

Three months into my stint, my father was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and I came home for a month to take care of him.

Even if I did not have liquid cash, I knew I had a job waiting for me in Korea and could have borrowed money to take my father

Low-hanging fruit in UK farms

Manoj was an agricultural seasonal worker in the UK. He is back in Nepal, having saved £8,000 in just five months picking berries (pictured, right).

An estimated 3,365 Nepalis worked under seasonal work visas in Britain in 2021-22, but last year that number dropped to zero. UK-based farm operators stopped hiring from Nepal after media exposed Nepali workers being charged exorbitant recruitment fees.



LABOUR MOBILITY
Upasana Khadka

It is critical to expose stories about fraudulent recruitment and employment conditions that often trap workers. However, employers pulling out from the Nepal labour market in response is not a desired outcome -- especially not for migrant workers and their families.

It deprives them of income, since seasonal jobs offer wages that are many times higher than what Nepalis can earn in Nepal, or in the Gulf and Malaysia where workers also have to pay recruitment costs.

Such decisions also overlook the good actors in Nepal's labour mobility industry. As elsewhere, good and bad entities coexist in Nepal's recruitment sector, a distinction that needs to be made before the whole labour market is tarred with the same brush.

Nepal's recruitment industry actually has innovative home-grown responsible practices that offer practical insights relevant for the industry globally.

But why should employers care? Closing the door to Nepali



Nepalis miss out on seasonal berry-picking work in Britain due to news reports of high recruitment fees

workers does not save operators from similar reputation risks and penalties like getting their licenses revoked, because workers elsewhere are also vulnerable to abuses including high recruitment fees.

Media exposés showed similar abuses of workers from Indonesia and Bangladesh. Research by Focus on Labor Exploitation (FLEX), showed 72% of the 396 workers interviewed including from Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Uzbekistan also had to borrow money to pay for the costs of coming to the UK.

A better solution for hiring companies would be to instead be more selective about the recruiters they partner with regardless of the migrant origin country. Nepal has examples of good recruitment

actors and innovative practices which have not gotten global attention, and which are worth showcasing.

Responsible recruitment requires innovations that go beyond those prescribed in documents, but are products of trial-and-error and multiple iterations to win the confidence of aspirants. Recruiters travel to villages to bypass fraudulent middlemen.

They conduct one-on-one counseling and investigation at various stages of the recruitment process to ensure that workers have, in fact, not paid any fees. The goal of these safeguards is to collectively help workers understand that refusing to pay for jobs will not cost them their job.

It is not surprising that seasonal workers in the UK from Nepal,

Indonesia or Bangladesh paid high fees for jobs in an attractive destination which makes it easier for unauthorised intermediaries to manipulate and cheat them.

Employers also play a critical role in influencing the behaviour of recruiters. Due diligence and monitoring before and during the recruitment process, and a credible threat to recruiters of losing future business in case of non-compliance are part of a responsible recruitment arrangement. Then there are concerns about employment conditions in some of the farms, including worker safety, accommodation, pay and unrealistic daily targets.

Good migration can be transformational when it is transparent and responsible with the right players involved. Research

has shown the potential gains of reducing migration barriers are in the trillions of dollars.

We have witnessed the remarkable journeys of returnee migrant workers now running factories, bakeries or restaurants who attribute their success to foreign employment. The Nepali Times series 'Diaspora Diaries' showcases many of these stories.

Of course, not everyone becomes a successful entrepreneur, but the more common stories are that of incremental progress including better investment in children's education, concrete houses, healthcare, and repaid loans. The larger the wage differentials, such as between the UK and Nepal--without hefty recruitment costs or other contractual violations to dampen

creates jobs in Nepal

A migrant worker who rose from nothing to be a successful entrepreneur back home in Nepal



to India. My only priority was to keep my father alive. But the doctor said his case was terminal. He was discharged from hospital, and we brought him home. As I left for Korea, he could not speak properly but acknowledged that I was leaving and gestured his blessings. He died a week later. I was at work, and went to my room to grieve. I declined my employer's offer to buy me a ticket home as I had already lost my father. I mourned for him for a week in my room. In the five years there, I repaid the loans I had taken for my father's medical bills and even had some

savings. I could have renewed my contract in Korea for another five years, but I decided against it. Of course, it was exhilarating to be paid Rs200,000 a month in my bank account, but I had worked for others all my life, and now that I had made some money, I wanted to do something on my own in Nepal. The technical skills I had accumulated working in a car company were not very applicable here. But I also learnt many other things in Korea like work ethic, respect for peers, and discipline. I bought a used machine that makes notebooks and set up Rudraksha, a

notebook factory. I hired a former worker from the same factory I had bought the machine from and he taught me how to operate it and about the stationery business. Seven years later, he is still working with me. It is in Korea that I learnt how bosses and staff work side-by-side and there is no task that is too big or small. I know that when I work with my staff, it makes them more proactive. I used to deliver the notebooks on my bike to shops all over my district and beyond. Later I diversified and took on dealership of brands like Natraj, Cello and

Doms. This spread out my income sources naturally because it was related to my notebook factory. Things were going well until the pandemic hit and I suffered a huge loss. The notebooks in stock were all damaged. I was idle, so I became a dealer for Bikaji and expanded to other brands like Horlicks, Nestle, Dabur Nepal and Tokla tea. As things recovered, I dabbled in a shoe factory (left). Other than instinctively knowing that there was a high demand for affordable shoes in my area, I did not have any prior knowledge or experience in this sector. It was a gamble and the upfront investments were high, but fortunately it has worked out well. My company, TNT, has good designs and finishing at affordable prices and it has attracted customers across Nepal. While there are challenges like fierce competition and high bank interest rates, we are doing quite well for ourselves. Across my portfolio, I am providing jobs to 122 workers. I first started with a Rs150 business as a kid selling plastic bags in a vegetable market for Rs1.25 each. I have come a long way since then. My work has given me recognition in my area, even though I tend to be quite introverted. My community members who have watched me since I was little tell me that I am a legend in the tea shops as someone who rose from nothing to be a successful entrepreneur. With my father's salary as a

teacher, we did not even have money to buy school uniforms. I value hard work and that is what I tell young people. When I am on someone's payroll, I take ownership of the work. I do not let time dictate my work schedule. If I can stay an extra ten minutes to solve something, I do not leave it for tomorrow. Little things like this matter. For those of us without a strong family back-up, foreign employment can be beneficial. But I have also met a few people who were overseas who are still there. Their children are now also overseas. Those stories are a bit disheartening. I am not sure why things are that way. Perhaps people overspend and do not prioritise savings? I was one of the first workers in Korea from our Maithili community and I did not have many friends from the Tarai there. Towards the end of my stay there, I met a few here and there. Many from our villages opt for overseas employment opportunities where agents just hand over their visas at a price. I remind young people to be patient and take up language classes so they can benefit from higher paying jobs. Working hard has not stopped even now. I want to leave a legacy. Let's see what the future holds. My next goal is to start a pen factory. 

Diaspora Diaries is a Nepali Times collaboration with Migration Lab providing a platform to share experiences of living, working, studying abroad.

it-- the higher the benefits. Conducting ethical recruitment drives is a Nepali story. Being intentional about using good migration to help families move out of poverty, discrimination or to recover from disaster are Nepali stories. Well managed bilateral migration programs such as to Korea under the EPS is a Nepali story. Cases of positive transformations owed to migration are all Nepali stories. These, too, are stories that need to be told, lessons of which can inform the UK seasonal worker scheme. To be sure, malpractices in the recruitment and employment of migrant workers should be exposed and often are the impetus for concrete actions against the perpetrators. But when there are good actors in the Nepali labour mobility ecosystem that could conduct the same recruitment drives responsibly and transparently, it is a pity to lose opportunities. This alternative as opposed to doors getting closed for our workers would be a win-win for all including the workers who are hired without false promises, for employers who get better matched workers and are spared of damaging reputational risks, and for good recruiters who will get to compete fairly. The UK returnee Manoj says, "The seasonal agriculture experience I got could be even more transformational for the poorest farmers of rural Nepal if there was a farm-to-farm transfer mechanism. They would be even more physically and mentally suited for the job. Furthermore, they would return with experience and exposure to new ideas they

could apply back home." Economically, geographically or socially marginalised Nepali farmers can gain even more from access to ethical recruitment drives. Such a strategic design of labour mobility is possible to achieve larger developmental goals for which there is a role for donor organisations like UKAid, and social enterprises, including those engaged in inclusive finance. If the onus is only on UK-based employers hiring workers, they may look to hire from closer destinations that are cheaper or from countries where the visa process is less onerous. A 2022 survey of seasonal workers in the UK shows a greater proportion of Indonesians and Nepalis compared to other nationalities had paid higher recruitment and job finding fees before arrival. A Review of the Seasonal Worker Visa has recommended 'consideration of the employer pays principle' and 'investigations into how these costs might be more equitably shared along supply chains'. There is resistance to it from businesses including how it would drive up consumer prices. It is a topic currently under review in the UK. In 2023 and 2024, another 3,500 plus Nepalis could have benefited as previously from the UK seasonal program had we not lost access to this corridor, and if the right players had been involved from the onset. We would be remiss not to see this as a wasted opportunity with tractable solutions. 

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



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