

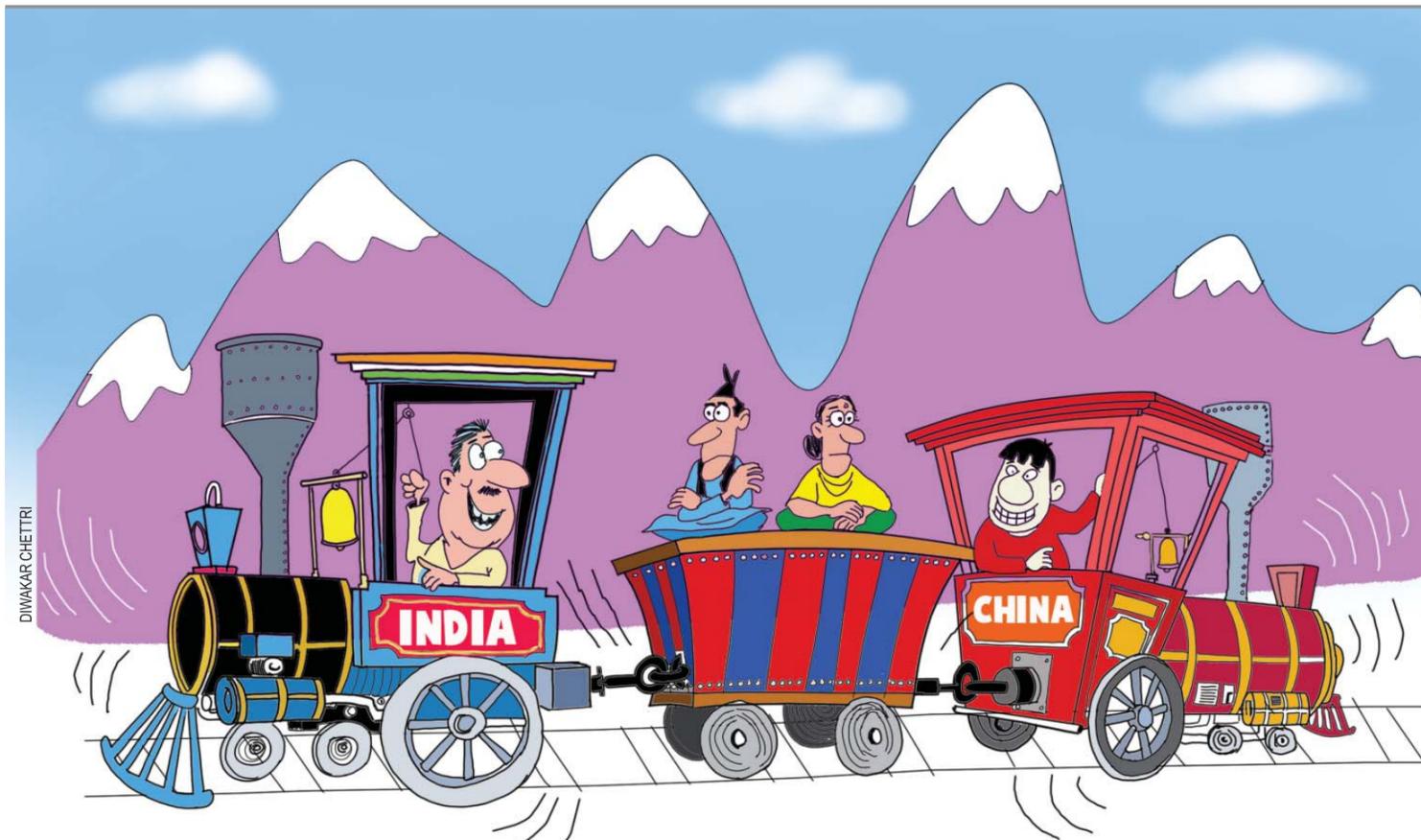


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India-China rail race

■ Shristi Karki

Prime Minister K P Oli returned from Beijing in December with a freshly re-inked 'Belt and Road Initiative Framework Cooperation Agreement'.

Ten infrastructure projects proposed by Nepal were part of the deal to projects through 'aid-assistance', wordage used to get around political sensitivity about more loans from China.

One of them is the ambitious Kerung-Kathmandu railway, part of China's Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network. It was looking uncertain because of financing, geotechnical and geopolitical challenges.

Not to be outdone, India signed an MoU in 2018 with Nepal to survey the Raxaul-Kathmandu railway, and another agreement in 2021 for a Detailed Project Report. Konkan Railway handed over its final location survey to the Nepal government in 2023.

"We have added our comments and feedback to the draft after review and sent it to India, but haven't got back the final report," says Kamal Kumar Shah of Nepal's Department of Railways. The 141km long broad gauge line will include 42km of tunnels, 124

bridges, and 13 stations, and will cost more than \$3billion.

More expensive and difficult will be the trans-Himalayan railway for which a Chinese pre-feasibility study proposed a spiral tunnel to offset the gradient drop from 4,000m on the Tibetan Plateau to 1,400m in Kathmandu. More than 98% of the 73km standard gauge railway will burrow under Langtang National Park, costing \$5.5 billion.

Chinese consultants expect to complete a feasibility study, which will include drilling rock samples, by June 2026. For China the trans-Himalayan railway has strategic connectivity value that goes beyond Nepal to facilitate a future non-maritime trade route with India.

China is India's biggest trade partner and its ocean route could be affected by future tension in the disputed South China Sea.

Ultimately, the Kerung-Kathmandu railway will have a terminal at Tokha, while the Raxaul-Kathmandu line will approach the Valley from the south at Chobhar.

"As far as technical challenges are concerned, there are no limitations to connect China and India via railway, should both countries be open to it," explains infrastructure expert Surya Raj Acharya. "But there have been some unnecessary comments from India,

which seems especially unhappy with the BRI."

Despite a trans-Himalayan rail line also being in India's interest, the present geopolitical climate is not conducive to cooperation to improve connectivity.

New Delhi refuses to buy electricity from hydropower projects in Nepal with Chinese involvement, and also embargos imports of Nepali goods with Chinese components.

Some analysts say Nepal should stick to building better expressways rather than invest in expensive railway lines, especially with its two neighbours.

"The biggest concern with both projects is that there is zero technical input from our side, which means they have been designed according to Indian and Chinese parameters," says Paribesh Parajuli, one of Nepal's few railway engineers who was a consultant at the Department of Railways for the Kerung-Kathmandu project.

He says China and India have their own geopolitical interests, but Nepal should be more assertive in what it wants and needs, and stipulate the technical standards it wants followed.

One of the hurdles for a China-India train connection through Nepal will be that the northern

line is standard gauge, while the southern one is broad gauge.

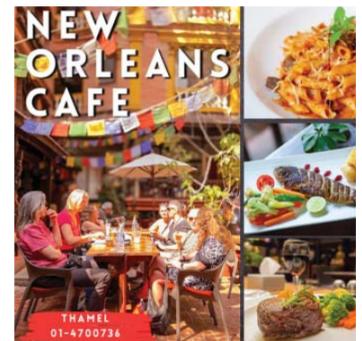
"It seems that India's proposal for the Raxaul-Kathmandu railway as a broad gauge line is a risk-mitigation exercise to prevent China from getting directly to the Indian border from Kerung through a standard gauge railway," says Acharya. Nepal will now have to play the waiting game until India decides on the next step of the project and whether China deems the mega trans-Himalayan project worth undertaking.

But waiting should not mean that Nepal should just sit on its hands. There is much strategic planning to be done both for the trans-national railway lines as well as a future domestic network running on Nepal's surplus electricity, and training railway technicians.

The expansion of the domestic railway network along the east-west corridor has been delayed due to land acquisition and environmental concerns. These will need to be addressed in future. (Page 4-5)

Train project struggles to stay on track

PAGE 4-5



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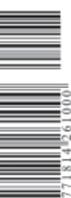
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Nepal's NPL lessons

Off the pitch, the first Nepal Premier League (NPL) cricket tournament offers important lessons to Nepali society.

The main message is that there is no substitute for professional excellence to ensure success. The trick is to strive to perform one's best at all times.

A player has to be completely invested in the game: day and night. The cricket team is no place for players who cannot collaborate, commit to teamwork and prove themselves.



GUEST EDITORIAL
Chaitanya Mishra

Compare this ethos to the rigid जागिरखाने mentality of most of Nepal's teachers, professors, doctors, engineers, managers, government officials, politicians.

Surely, there are a few in all these professions committed to excellence. Maybe 5% in all? The proportion among cricketers, on the other hand, has to be 100%.

What is the cost of such mediocrity to households, communities and country? High schools keep incompetent teachers on life-long tenure, not to prepare students for life.

Expertise and high productivity is gained through engaged and agentic experience. Seniority is not a good criterion either of current performance or potential productivity.

In cricket also, engaged and productive work experience is what really counts. Don't rest on your laurels, as they say.

This is a useful philosophy, especially for government officials. Bureaucrats and politicians have to earn expertise through long years of service in a sector. They must not be shunted from one ministry to another.

Civil servants are not 'servants' of political parties. Public administration in a modern democratic polity is based on expertise and professional competence, not a top-down हुकुमी शासन.

In cricket, batsmen and wicket keepers rarely become good bowlers and vice versa. A fast bowler rarely serves leg spin. Even the best cricket players are hired series-to-series, not on permanent or annual contracts.

Public sector employees should similarly be hired on a periodic, not life-long, basis. Performance assessments must be both frequent and transparent. The point is to optimise individual and team output. The cricket player is not paid on a salaried जागिरे basis. They are paid as long as they perform, and the best performers are paid more.

We have too many poorly-paid public officials. Those of the same rank ought to be paid differentially based on the assessment of their work. Incremental salary grades ought not to be based solely on seniority.

Excellence is spread out evenly across social groups, including marginalised ones. Virtue and high performance are not inherited through caste, gender, regional or class affiliation.

NPL players came from all directions, locations, colours, faiths, castes and ethnic groups. Notwithstanding some racist social media posts, the inclusiveness in all teams helped in national cohesion.

In cricket, a team that is up in the league tables can be down in the next tournament. Similarly, in society it may be wise for privileged groups to be pro-change rather than maintain the status quo.

There are many in Nepal today who find refuge in exclusion, in abusing and trolling those who are different from us in colour, location of residence, language.

During and after the Janakpur Bolts' win over Sudurpaschim Royals there was some of that. But it was encouraging to see far more Nepalis who celebrated their victory, and cancelled the hate.

Many Nepalis possess much too keen a sense of nationalism partly because we

live between two large, populous and emerging global powers. But international collaboration and competition is fundamental for success in the modern globalised world.

This holds true for cricket teams, and their players, who collaborated in the larger interest of the sport and their careers, but much less for their

own countries. Players in teams were from different countries and parts of Nepal, yet worked together. Each player came to appreciate teammates, audiences and people from other countries. They were not bigoted nationalists.

Hopefully, a tiny seed of tolerance and विशव बन्धुत्व was planted at the NPL and it will germinate in future. In workplaces, schools, universities, and government we can also benefit from working with professional high-quality international workers.

There is an immense possibility to learn and grow from such collaboration, a condition sorely lacking in Nepal. It is as if most of us have made up our mind that it is unnecessary or even unpatriotic to learn from countries and people which are ahead of us.

The cricket lesson can apply to education, too. No citizen of another country can serve in our university boards. It is illegal even for a Nepali citizen who has received a work permit to work in universities in other countries to become a member of the university board here. This is narrow nationalism run amok.

Citizenship is not the be all and end all of our identity, belonging, distinctiveness, professional performance and self-worth. Non-citizens may be barred only from voting, top decision-making positions, and the military. All other professions should be open, just as it was for the NPL.



A sociology professor dissects the recent cricket tournament and offers tips for better governance.

RSS

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

New Year Resolutions

It is that time of the year again for new New Year resolutions. Take a look back at some representative resolutions from 20 years ago this week in the Ass column on issue #228 31 December 2004 – 6 January 2005. Some of them are totally applicable today:

Haku, the sleepy household Lab: "Being a son of a bitch, I guess I'll strive to be an even greater son of a bitch in the new year. Now, if you'll excuse me, can I go back to sleep?"

Neighbourhood petrol station wallah: "It's been a good year for us, with blockades, the kerosene price differential and artificial shortages. I'm sure that in 2005 things will get better before they get worse."

Middle Marsyangdi Contractor: "We are looking forward to doing even less work in the new year than we did in 2004."

Comrade Awesome: "In 2005, our brave and



courageous fighters will set fire to more milk trucks and Maruti taxis, stop all ambulances and school buses and ruin vegetable farmers by preventing them from taking their produce to market. Onward with the great proletarian liberation, long live the strategic counter-retaliation offensive tunnel campaign against running dog imperialists and their blood-thirsty hegemonistic expansionist reactionary fascist mongrels."

Comrade UML General Secretary: "This government is hopeless and inept, it is a royal puppet, the minister has completely bungled the Korean labour issue, the country is a bloody mess, the ministers are in cahoots with the sugar barons. In 2005, we will support this government to the hilt."

The Kanchi Shankaracharya: "In the new year I'll seek political asylum in Nepal."

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



IN THE DRIVING SEAT

For Nepal's female drivers, operating electric three-wheelers has been a path to financial independence, supporting their families, and putting children through school for. Watch video about their experience on our YouTube channel and subscribe for multimedia content.



DESIGNER BY DESIGN

Growing up in Rupandehi, Keshar Kala Thapa was fascinated by the dresses in fashion magazines. After completing high school, she enrolled in a fashion designing course and then did a Master's in Business Studies. She opened a business and training centre for women. Watch the video on our YouTube channel.

NEPAL-DUTCH ART

I first moved to Nepal for work in 1985, and feel privileged to have known the city for nearly 40 years now. I'm now back in the USA, and return every few years. I return for my friends, not Kathmandu. I tear up when I see the further destruction of a once beautiful city. ('Rice fields to concrete terraces', Page 12)

Margaret Kerr

■ As a Dutch citizen, I believe it would be good if the usage of bicycles would be promoted as a mode of transport inside the city area in Kathmandu. The streets are congested with motorised vehicles.

Martin Max Aart de Jong

DIASPORA DIARIES

Migrant worker Mahesh Sah's entrepreneurial traits were most likely nurtured overseas ('Overseas job-seeker now creates jobs in Nepal', Mahesh Sah, #1241).

Tony Jones

2025 THREATS

These threats need to be heeded by politicians, the business world and all of us. ('Thinking the thinkable', Kunda Dixit, Editorial, #1241)

Ylva Sörman Nath

DEVKOTA ESSAY

As much as I love Nepal's nature, its government and social injustice are among the worst, most repugnant in the world. ('Laxmi Prasad Devkota in English', Vishad Raj Onta, #1240)

Forester

LEAD POISONING

Great reporting from the Nepali Times on lead poisoning in Nepal, where one in three urban children are affected. Thank you to Chandrakishore for citing our research, which found that 14 types of ceramic, aluminium and plastic goods in Nepal had high lead levels. ('The silent danger of lead', Chandrakishore, nepalitimes.com)

Pure Earth

NEPAL DEVELOPMENT

Dor Bahadur Bista identified the source-force network and social pathology of Nepal as the single most powerful brake on the nation's development and modernisation ('Why Nepal is stuck', Sumana Shrestha, nepalitimes)

Amulya Sir

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Up, up, and away

The International Balloon Festival in Pame near Pokhara, designed to take advantage of the city's topography and location, has put Nepal on the global adventure destination map. Photo feature at nepalitimes.com.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Nepal media survey

by Madhu Acharya and Bhumiraj Chapagain
Sharecast Data Initiative's Nepal Media Survey 2024 reveals that Nepal's media has to navigate the evolving landscape by balancing the strengths of traditional media with the growing demand for engaging digital content. Join the discussion online.

x Most popular on X

Rice fields to concrete terraces

Nepali Times
Four Nepali and four Dutch artists are featured in the NEDNEP3 2024/2026 art project to draw attention to what has been lost as Kathmandu Valley is transformed from an integrated rural-urban society to a dense metropolis. Story on page 9.

💬 Most commented

Thinking the thinkable

by Kunda Dixit
Climate breakdown and nuclear war are human induced, both are inextricably linked and pose global threats for the planet in 2025. While one is heating up the planet, the smoke and dust from explosions of the other will cool it. Read Editorial online and let us know what you think.

🔍 Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
'As a nation we have no vision and no attempt at self-sufficiency. We have no contribution to an advancing globe.' In his collection of essays, Devkota brutally criticises Nepal despite his love for the country.

Mahavir Sherpa @SherpaMahavir01
I believe Devkota's criticism of Nepal, though harsh, comes from a place of deep love—he sees a nation with no vision or self-sufficiency, struggling to keep pace with the advancing world.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Conservationist Dev Narayan Mandal is behind 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.
The Mithila Dream | Pinki Sris Rana

Hem Sagar Baral @WorshipNature
Dev Narayan is a true Prakriti Premi in Mithilanchal

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SANAD ADHIKARI / RSS

FLOWER POWER: Former prime minister and Maoist-Centre chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal (whose first and middle names mean flower and lotus) addressing the Visit Bharatpur Year 2025 in Meghauri on Monday. Dahal accused the UML and NC of unseating the coalition he led in June 2024 because he was getting close to exposing the corruption their leaders were allegedly involved in.



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Train project struggles to stay on

Progress on the East-West Railway is stuck due to problems with land acquisition and environmental concerns

■ **Urmila Gamwa Tharu**
in Sarlahi

Villages along the proposed alignment of Nepal's ambitious east-west train project are excited about the connectivity and development it will bring. But here in Hariban village there is only apprehension.

While elsewhere, there are environmental concerns about the train track slicing through national parks and protected forests, here along the densely populated Tarai plains there is worry about losing farmlands.

"This project will cost me a big chunk of my land," says Dinesh Mahato, who farms a small plot in the Ghurkauli village near the East-West Highway. "Why should I agree to give it all away when I will only be compensated partially?"

Hari Narayan Mahato echoes his brother's anger. "The map shows that I have to give up nearly 700 sq m of land, but I know the area is going to be three times bigger once construction begins," he says. "It's just not worth it."

There is also opposition in the Dhanpati locality, and 10 households from these two villages have refused to accept the government's compensation rate for land which they say is much less than market value.

The East-West Electric Railway project will ultimately be Nepal's transportation artery stretching from the eastern border with India in Jhapa to Kanchanpur, connecting 24 districts. It will intersect with the proposed Birganj-Kathmandu railway at a junction in Sarlahi district.

When completed, Nepal's 950km long 'gateway to prosperity' as it has been dubbed, will have 123 stations, 10 tunnels, 334 bridges, a dam, and a 132kV transmission line to supply electricity to the locomotives.



SLOW TRAIN: Work on the East-West Railway is progressing at a snail's pace in the Bardibas-Nijgad section in Sarlahi with bridges, overpasses and embankments.

The project will require the acquisition of about 4,520 hectares of land, including 518 plots belonging to 4,000 households. Some of this will be along corridors through Chitwan, Bardia, Banke and Sukla Phanta National Parks and other nature reserves.

Controversy about land acquisition and compensation as well as environmental impact have stalled the project since 2010. "The biggest issue has been compensation for land," admits Kamal Kumar Shah of the Department of Railways.

This means less than half of the work along the 70km Bardibas-Nijgad segment has been completed and 16 bridges built, and this is the



PHOTOS: EAST-WEST RAILWAY PROJECT OFFICE

first section of the railway where construction started 15 years ago.

Says Senior Division Engineer Kiran Karki: "It is difficult to work here, people have built houses in public land, knowing that the railway is coming. How do we ask them to leave?"

Part of the delay is also due to lack of budget, and this has increased the initial estimate of the total cost because of the increase in land value. The government has nationalised over 190 hectares for the Kakabhitta-Inaruwa section of the railway in the eastern Tarai for which it will have to distribute Rs24.41 billion in compensation. But the budget allocated for that is only Rs1.5 billion.

This means farmers have lost their land, but have not yet been compensated. The East-West Railway line was initially estimated to cost around Rs1 billion per km, but this has increased to Rs1.5 billion per km. Just the first Bardibas-Nijgad section will need an additional Rs50 billion to complete.

The estimate for the entire project was estimated at Rs955 billion, but a revised budget has already surpassed Rs1.5 trillion. A major bridge across the Kosi north of the barrage on the Indian border is expected to cost more than Rs410 billion. The Detailed Project Report (DPR) has been revised to build an elevated line over towns in the Butwal section, for example, to avoid paying exorbitant compensation.

"This project works on multi-year contracts, which have been difficult to award due to a lack of budget," says Shah. "So the date of completion of the project depends on money being forthcoming."

Meanwhile, activists have raised concern over the project's environmental cost. The Railway Department has prepared DPRs for four sections of the railway, but Environmental Impact



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BYD M6 launched

The distributor, Cimex, launched the BYD M6 electric 7-seater during the Pokhara International Balloon Festival last week. The M6 is priced at Rs5,890,000, has a range of 440km and can charge from 0-80% in 40 minutes. Other features include ventilated front seats and a glass roof.

IME scholarship

As Global IME turns 18, it is continuing its scholarship program for underprivileged female students. The bank sponsors the studies of 5 students from each of Nepal's 7 provinces from grades 7-12, at Rs12,000/year.



Ncell tech award

The Ncell Women ICON ICT Award was presented to Bandana Sharma, who heads the Cards and Digital Banking Division at Nepal Bank. She joined in 2006, and has been key to digitising the bank's systems and services.



Samsung coding course

Samsung's five-month coding course, held at the TU Institute of Engineering in Pulchok, provides key programming skills to students so they can succeed in the fast-evolving tech industry. Thirty students recently completed the course, and a new batch of 60 have started.

IONIQ Guinness record

The Hyundai IONIQ 5 achieved a Guinness World Record for the Greatest Altitude Change by an Electric Car - 5,802m. The vehicle completed a 14-day, 4,900km journey from Umling La in Leh Ladakh (5,799m) to Kuttanad, Kerala (-3m).



Nabil + Vivanta

Nabil Customers now get 10% discounts on food, beverages and spa services at Vivanta Kathmandu when paying through the Nbank app, direct transfer, or with a Nabil debit/credit card.

Yamaha financing

Yamaha Nepal's Dream It, Own It launched on 25 December is a financing program that covers all Yamaha two-wheelers, with 40% down payment and flexible EMI at 7.99% interest. Under a different deal, customers can test-ride Yamahas to win guaranteed gifts and get entered into a lucky draw.

Female Health Camp

Global IME and FPAN are holding women's health camps in rural and semi-urban areas in all seven provinces, where women can get free checkups, cancer screenings, and treatment for uterine prolapse. Advanced cancer diagnoses will be treated with surgery in the second phase of this initiative.

Go Bandipur 2025

Bandipur Municipality has launched Visit Year 2025 to attract domestic and international tourists to the historic and culturally-vibrant ridge-top town. Bandipur is now connected to the Prithvi Highway by cable car, and offers a panoramic view of the Central Himalaya.



Fairfield solar

Fairfield by Marriott Kathmandu has installed solar panels across its property to reduce its carbon footprint. The hotel plans to implement other sustainability practices in 2025, including reducing the use of single-use plastics.

track

Assessments (EIA) have not been carried out.

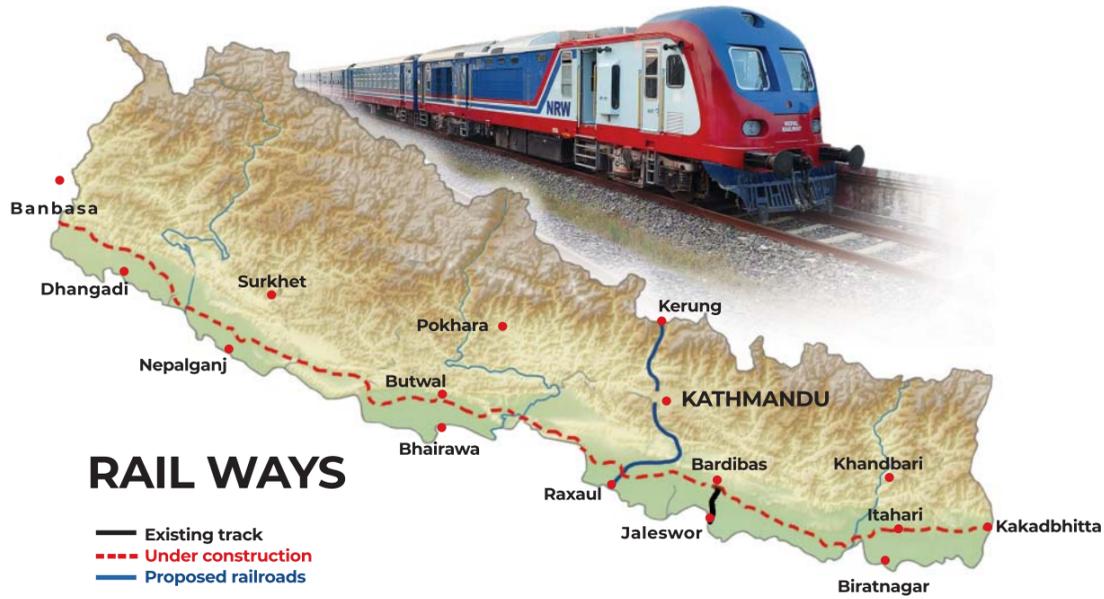
In Chitwan, the proposed route was realigned to avoid Chitwan National Park following a Supreme Court stay order. However, Chitwan residents have now formed a Railway Victims' Struggle Committee, saying that the new route would cut through their densely populated communities.

"We only found that our land would be part of the railway line when the people from the Railway Department came here last year," says Hari Thapaliya of Bharatpur Municipality. "The decision to reroute the track was made overnight without any consultation with us."

Angered locals had set fire to a Railway Department vehicle when a survey team reached Krishnapur in July. Bharatpur Deputy Mayor Chitrasen Adhikari says the Railway Department did not even coordinate with the municipality about the new route. "We have proposed an alternate route to the Department," she adds.

"This project affects the livelihoods of people across the Tarai, their concerns must be heard, and they must be included in the decision-making process," says infrastructure expert Surya Raj Acharya.

The problem is that 53% of Nepal's total population now lives along the narrow strip of plains along the Indian border through which the railway line will pass. The Railway Department



is squeezed between the need to balance environmental concerns with high compensation demands of locals.

Conservationists have maintained that the railway alignment will go through ecologically sensitive areas, disturbing and fragmenting the habitat of endangered species, blocking their migration routes and disrupting water and food sources. All of this could in turn increase human-wildlife conflict.

Experts have suggested measures to invest in 'ecological offsetting' programs that help in the creation of new protected areas, restoration projects, and wildlife underpass and overpass corridors.

There is also concern about the forests that have to be sacrificed. Already, 13,500 trees have been

cut down in the Bardibas-Nijgad section alone. The Sagarnath Forest, which stretches from Sarlahi to Mahottari, and areas under the Rautahat Division Forest also lie along the proposed alignment.

Surya Raj Acharya blames inadequate monitoring and evaluation during the preparation of the DPR because government agencies lack sufficient technical capacity and experience in the railway sector.

He adds, "Transparent financial planning and management are necessary to ensure the project's sustainability and economic viability. But the contracts have been hurriedly awarded without proper land acquisition. An urgent review is necessary."

All this needs stronger political will and coordination between

various agencies which is sorely lacking not just in the east-west railway project, but in other infrastructure schemes as well.

When built, the nearly 1,000 km long railway will streamline cargo and passenger traffic, making it cheaper and more convenient for ordinary people. Railway junctions can also facilitate the north-south transshipment of goods and passenger traffic when coordinated with public transport. Transport costs for exports and imports from India will also be slashed.

"A high-speed train running at 200 to 250km per hour will mean that trains will get from Kathmandu to Dhangadi faster than planes, and at much cheaper fares," notes Acharya.

Trains will also reduce carbon emissions by up to 30% compared

to trucks and buses. Train lines will be the backbone of Nepal's transportation system, boosting tourism in the Kathmandu, Chitwan and Lumbini triangle.

Ultimately, the Kerung-Kathmandu trans-Himalayan railway will connect with the Birganj-Kathmandu line and in future be a future non-maritime corridor for India-China trade. Nepal has been trying to get the East-West railway project funded through foreign investment, but so far there has not been much interest. There also needs to be a better viability study for future railway links, otherwise Nepal may be straddled with loans it cannot repay.

"The border region along the Tarai remains behind in terms of education, health, and the economy," says economist Bishwo Poudel. "A railway line alone will not do much to improve their quality of life, there have to be other interventions."

Poudel adds that a north-south railway through Kathmandu to connect India and China through Nepal makes much more economic sense. China has been studying the Kerung-Kathmandu track with tunnels under Langtang National Park, which would have technological and financial challenges. India is also working on a railway alignment to connect Kathmandu to its border town of Raxaul. (See page 1)

At present the only operational passenger railway in Nepal is the 35km cross-border Jaynagar-Janakpur-Bardibas line.

The former Department of Railways Director General Rohit Kumar Bisural is a road engineer, and says: "Very few people in Nepal have experience in railways." 🇳🇵



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FUSION *Fashion*

Old inspirations, fresh takes and new ideas on traditional Nepali style

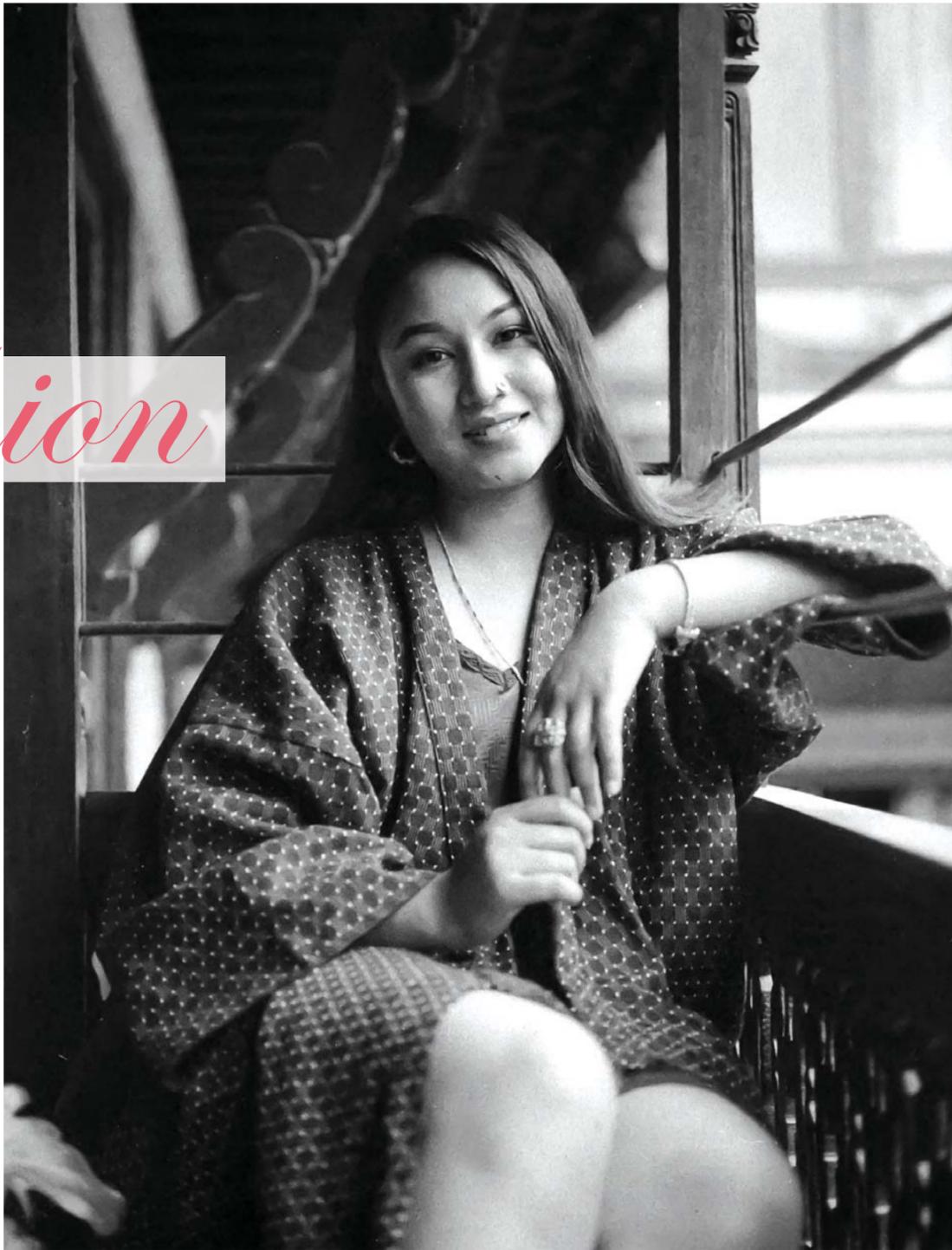
■ Isabelle Shrestha

With its abundant cultural and environmental diversity, the ripples of Nepal's aesthetic influence are being felt within the country and across the world. Creatives are constantly finding fresh ways to mix traditional elements into their personal inspirations.

Be it their grandmother's Bulaki or ethnic textiles reimagined in global silhouettes, Nepali designers, artists, and musicians are breathing new life into historic styles.

Nepal has a wealth of traditional textiles, from handloom Dhaka to Haku Patasi. With their distinctive colour schemes and wide variety of patterns, these textiles lend themselves to being reworked as fusion style garments. Nepali brands and local tailors alike are increasingly using these weaves.

Kathmandu-based tailor Riddhi Bajracharya has begun creating tailored overcoats and blazers in Haku Patasi while Nepal-Scotland based brand Clove and Moon reimagines the weave in Japanese



Jinbei, waistcoats, and accessories. Other brands are adding elements of the textile to their accessories as the popularity of traditional Newari dress is visibly increasing, even beyond jatra and feasts.

"We are seeing huge increases in demand for Haku Patasi clothing," says Manjushree Tailors owner Riddhi Bajracharya. "We see many more people going out wearing Newari dress in the

streets, wearing both traditional and fusion styles like tailored coats and gowns. Some people find wearing sari uncomfortable for events, so they order Haku Patasi gowns in different styles to mix



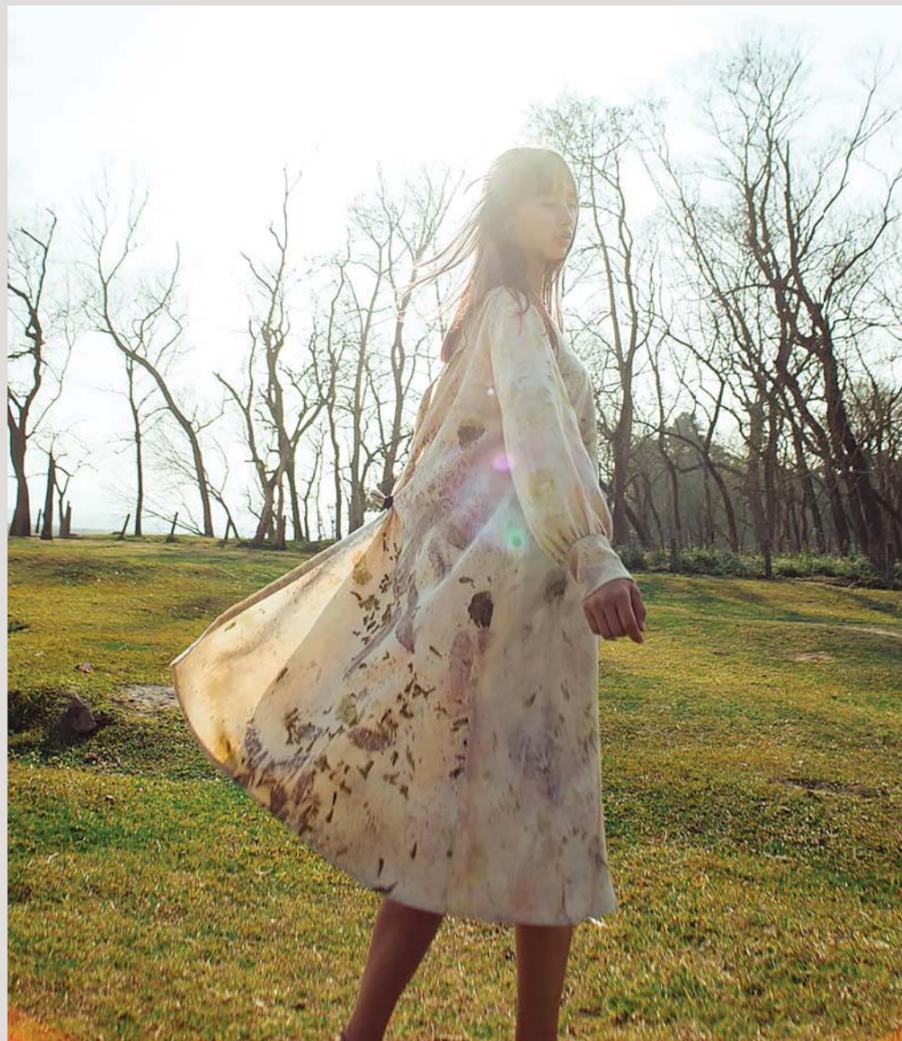
heritage with comfort." Nepal's contemporary musicians blend local with global in their songs, and they also often experiment with innovative fusionwear looks both on- and off-stage.

"I enjoy mixing traditional Nepali and western style because it looks cool," says Samrat Manandhar, drummer for Shree 3 and Tumbleweed Inc. "It's comfortable as well, and mixed styles look unique."

Perhaps one of the most recognisable Nepali women's garments is the Chaubandi Cholo. Whether in jewel toned velvets or patterned Cauterize (needlecord), the eclectically inclined are pairing these traditional blouses with everything from miniskirts to maxi dresses. They are using fabrics often reserved for the blouse to make waistcoats or vintage style separates.

As thrifting continues to gain popularity in Nepal, vintage and secondhand clothing is increasingly seen mixed with Nepalese garments by all ages to create unique looks.

Nepali Dago, arguably the original hair extensions, are another



Seams sustainable

Women entrepreneurs use fabrics with low social and environmental impact to make a fashion statement





ALL PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI



part of Nepal's rich aesthetic heritage making a comeback in recent years. Paired equally well with jeans and a t-shirt as with a ruby red sari, this accessory is increasingly brightening up streetwear from Kathmandu to New York.

Many countries associate nose piercings with subcultures, especially the septum piercing. In Nepal, the Fuli and Bulaki have been worn by multiple ethnic groups for generations, sometimes measuring over an inch long. Having a unique ability to signal an alternative leaning and a nod to tradition, some find the piercing a beautiful way to showcase facets of their identity, in Nepal and abroad.

"Growing up, I never really understood the significance of fusion wear," says e-commerce account manager Krisha Bhattarai. "My mom would always incorporate tika, potey, and other Nepali bits and pieces into her everyday outfits, but it wasn't until I started to decolonise my mindset that I began to see why she did it."

She adds, "Now, I see it as a way of staying in touch with my background. I wear a Bulaki and Chaubandi Cholo because they were the fashion of my paternal grandmother and the women before her... explaining the significance of the Bulaki or the history of the Ashrafi to people in the UK helps me express myself

and share parts of my culture."

Nepali jewellery has communicated everything from marital status to profession over the centuries. Traditional statement ornaments are equally at home styled with streetwear as they are worn at weddings.

Numerous young designers and entrepreneurs are choosing traditional jewellery designs and techniques to express themselves, responding to increasing consumer demand for accessible ways to wear ethnic styles.

Says Pragati Shrestha founder of Euphoria Nepal: "We create a harmonious fusion between our traditional jewellery and modern everyday wear... It's a great learning experience. I get to learn more about our culture, art and most importantly the significance of every intricate detail of the different symbols, statues, and artefacts of our history."

Euphoria Nepal incorporates the essence of Nepali art and craft in modern fashion and has now expanded its business internationally, with a sister brand in Canada.

A more permanent fashion element is tattoo, and here too artists and enthusiasts have flocked to Nepal to ink traditional designs on their skin or get inspired for their own work. Many of Nepal's tattoo artists are not only mixing different art styles in their work, they are also using these designs on clothing.

Thamel-based studio Tattoo Junction's Anitya Chakra makes Japanese inspired cotton sets and graphic t-shirts, collaborating with a range of tattoo artists to print their unique creations in wearable form. UK and Nepal based tattooer Tatt Art Nepal makes organic cotton tote bags featuring his Himalayan inspired fusion designs, blurring the boundaries between art and fashion.

Those who choose to cover themselves in tattoos add yet another aesthetic layer to traditional ensembles, showing the ever evolving nature of culture. Many of Nepal's ethnic groups have traditional tattoo practices. Heritage art often lends itself to creating striking tattoo designs,

offering a wealth of possibilities for self-expression through ink.

"I am always fond of wearing traditional clothes. Mostly my grandmom and granddad's vintage stuff," says Kathmandu-based stylist StyledbyShreya. "I feel like tattoos are ornaments on me and so is traditional clothing: I love all the variations of different cultures."

Nepal's creatives are exploring fresh ways of interacting with culture, adding yet another level of meaning to classical textiles, jewellery, fashion, and art. This interactive and energetic approach to Nepal's design heritage is equally important as a traditional or academic one in promoting the country's rich and diverse cultures across the world.

By harmoniously blending personal and community identities, Nepal's designers, tattooers, stylists, and consumers are contributing to keeping valuable skills and knowledge alive – and having fun while doing it. 🇳🇵

Isabelle Shrestha is a writer and creative based between Scotland and Nepal, and holds a degree in Japanese and Tibetan from the University of Oxford.

But Gurung is not too fond of the term 'sustainable fashion' because she feels that the concept has been commodified, turning it into a marketing buzzword to greenwash products that are actually about greenbacks.

She adds: "True sustainability requires conscientious decisions made by both seller and buyer."

Since 2017 at Bora Studio, Gurung has been exploring natural, locally sourced fabrics like hemp, bamboo, nettle and raw silk, along with plant-dyeing and botanical printing. These fabrics provide eco-friendly alternatives to conventional textiles and require less resources like water and chemicals.

The other fabric from Nepal that is finding buyers worldwide is सिस्नु nettle, which can be a game-changer, as it grows in abundance even in wild, dry areas and regenerates quickly. Hemp also grows wild, and has proven to be a popular raw material for clothing and bags. Bamboo grows in abundance all over the mid-mountains, and among its multiple uses, its pulp can also be turned into an organic fabric.

Mala Thapa Magar of Himalayan Allo Udhyog is one of the top suppliers of woven nettle textile and clothing from Nepal. She says, "Nettle fabric is smooth, strong, light and durable. It has great potential, although production is challenging because it has to be harvested from remote forests. Transporting it is difficult."

Stinging nettle grows and decomposes in the wild, and sustainably harvesting the plants has a minimal ecological



PHOTOS: HIMALAYAN ALLO UDHYOG

footprint. Despite its abundance in the forest undergrowth, however, lack of awareness and difficulties in harvesting and transportation means the true potential to turn this plant into a silk-like fabric has not been fully realised.

When it comes to sourcing new fabric, Meena Gurung personally visits various parts of Nepal, relying on small-scale industries and local artisans who weave using traditional material in their homes.

"The quality may not always be perfect, but knowing that the raw material is local and natural gives me peace of mind," says Gurung, whose company also recycles and reuses what has already come in.

She does not use refined silk because of the larval loss and harm to the environment, and does not source raw silk for bigger projects, purposely limiting its demand. Mass production, she believes, undermines the very essence of sustainability.

"Sustainability doesn't always have to be expensive or difficult," she says. "You can start by reusing and recycling what you, or your parents and grandparents have. Swap clothes with friends. You can live sustainably without spending a fortune."

Gurung and Magar are two women Nepali social entrepreneurs who are making a mark with nature-friendly products that are also socially beneficial.

Their work forces us to question what we eat and wear every day, where the products we use come from, how they are made, where they go, and what happens along the way.

Turning to sustainable fashion in 2025 could be one new year's resolution that will benefit people and the planet. 🇳🇵

■ Sangya Lamsal

As with every new year, 2025 also brings new fashion trends. Ever-changing styles prompt people to follow a handful of global brands.

The fashion industry is designed for quick turnover, and the planned obsolescence of what is currently 'in'. Even with greater public consciousness about the environment, the industry has seldom responded with more sustainable choices of fabric, better treatment of its labour force, or efforts to reduce waste.

The global fashion industry accounted for 10% of all carbon emissions in 2019, and it is the second-largest consumer of water, according to UNEP. Which is why there is now a move towards 'sustainable fashion' so consumers can make choices that benefit both the planet and the people making the products.

"Sustainable fashion is a lifestyle choice," explains Meena Gurung, founder of Bora Studio, which uses natural fabrics and dyes in its clothes. "It's about how we live and what we choose to wear, being humble, being content with what we already have, and finding happiness in simplicity."

EVENTS

**New Year Laughter**

Don't miss out on an evening of laughs with comedian Sunil Grover live at this New Year fundraising event.

4 January, 5pm onwards, Tickets: 3000++, Biratnagar

Kapil Mani Dixit

Visit Kapil Mani Dixit's solo exhibition, Lines of Emotion: Nude Expressions curated by Roshan Mishra, and experience an intricate exploration of the human form through nude art. Read our preview on page 9.

4 January, 3pm-7pm, Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat

**Winter Art Camp**

Nurture young minds with creativity through hands-on exploration of art forms and to engage with prominent Nepali artists at the Little Arniko Winter Art Camp. Suitable for ages 6-14.

2-11 January, 10am-1pm (morning session) / 1:30pm-4:30pm (day session), Fee: NPR 8000, Artudio

Mustang photo exhibit

Stop by MUSTANG: A Two Decade Odyssey, the upcoming exhibition of 30 panoramas by Kishor Kayastha.

7-14 January, 11am-4pm, Nepal Art Council

**Almost, maya**

Based on Almost, Maine by John Cariana, Mandala theatre is presenting Almost, Maya, an play with intertwined stories exploring the bittersweet nature of relationships.

Until 4 January, 4pm (weekdays) / 3pm (Saturday), Thapagaun, New Baneshwor

MUSIC

Music Room

Join Jazzmandu's Music Room to learn Western and Eastern music and instruments from the best instructors in town. Call for more information.

9818856982, Bhatbhateni, Naxal

**The Elements**

You must've heard of The Elements, but have you listened to them up-close in an intimate setting? Grab tickets now for this exclusive upcoming gig.

4 January, 7pm onwards, Tickets: 1000++, Beers n Cheers, Jhamsikhel

Winter Carnival 2025

Immerse yourself in music with an exciting lineup alongside Paribartan and Rockheads. A surprise artist will light up the night.

4 January, 12pm onwards, Tickets: 500++, OOPS! Nepal, Pipalbot

**New Year Music Fest 2025**

Celebrate the new season with a thrilling performance by Kuma Sagar & The Khwopa.

4 January, 4pm onwards, Tickets: 200++, Khel Maidan, Biratnagar

**Jamesy Live at LOD Nepal**

Kick off 2025 with an electrifying performance by Jamesy, packed with hits and surprises.

8 January, 7pm onwards, Tickets: 1000++, LOD, Thamel

GETAWAY

**Riverside Springs Resort**

About 100km from Kathmandu, this resort offers exciting activities like horse-back riding and rafting, along with cosy rooms and attentive service.

Kurintar (01) 5544263

Lake View

For a relaxing weekend, escape to Lake View Resort's cosy wooden huts and explore their exclusive deals this new season.

Pokhara (061) 441477

**Yatri**

Treat yourself to a relaxing spa treatment including a full body massage, body scrub, and sauna at Yatri Suites and Spa.

Thamel, 9802063086

**Winter Wonderland Staycation**

Indulge in a luxurious buffet breakfast and get exciting discounts on spa and beverages at Marriott. Offer valid until 5 January. Call for more information.

Kathmandu, 9801227628

Mount Princess

Surrounded by mountains and forests, Mount Princess is a haven for city-dwellers who do not want to venture too far out to get away for the weekend.

Dhulikhel (01) 490616

**Pho 99**

The winter cold calls for a soul-warming bowl of pho. Their Vietnamese chicken stew is delicious too.

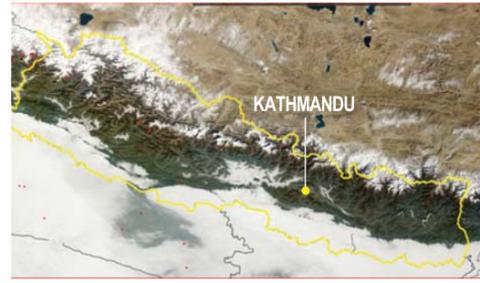
Jhamsikhel, 9803203119

**Haadi Biryani**

Craving some Biryani? Haadi is the go-to place for slow-cooked biryanis in clay pots, seasoned with a secret spice blend.

Dilli Bazaar (01) 4438444

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
21° 7°	21° 8°	20° 8°	19° 8°	19° 6°

Cold and Dry

Another westerly front is heading our way. It is moisture-laden and could bring light showers to Kathmandu on Tuesday. The lack of rain in the east has ignited some wildfires in the mountains, with a particularly big one below Ganesh Himal this week (NASA FIRMS image). Other than that, Kathmandu will have frosty mornings, warming up by noon this weekend. The Tarai is fog-bound by a cold wave, with the mist lifting in a few places by afternoon.

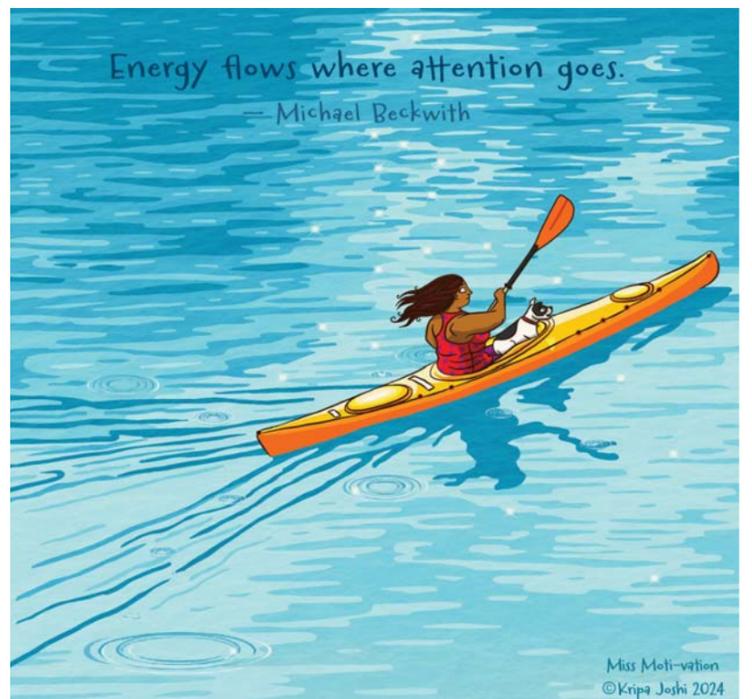
OUR PICK



In the American crime drama The Penguin—based on the DC Comics character of the same name—the eponymous character, also known as Oz Cobb, steps up to fill the power vacuum in Gotham City's criminal underworld after the death of his boss Carmine Falcone. All the while, Cobb is locked in a battle for Carmine's throne with the deceased crime boss's daughter Sofia, who has just been released from the Arkham State Hospital. The series stars Colin Farrell as the titular character, alongside Cristin Milioti and Rhenzy Feliz.

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

DINING

**Bricks Café**

A multi-cuisine restaurant in the heart of Kathmandu known for its firewood pizza, and their lasagna is a must-try.

Kupondole, 9801179333

**Café Soma**

Head to Café Soma for a sunny spot to grab breakfast or brunch.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5428732 / Baluwatar (01) 4515792

Mechung

Get the best sha phaley, thukpa and gyuma. at this authentic Tibetan restaurant.

Boudha (01) 4477759

Visible to the naked eye

Given modern taboos about nudity in art, this solo exhibition is courageous and contemporary

■ Vishad Raj Onta

For the last thirty years, Kapil Mani Dixit has been obsessed with the naked human figure. All he has painted are female and male nudes.

He has drawn the human body so often that he can paint them from memory. The intention is not to draw perfect bodies like Greek statues, but evoke emotions about human force, frailty or beauty among viewers.

"I don't need models anymore," says Dixit, who has a solo exhibition *Lines of Emotions: Nude Expressions* at Takpa Gallery this month. The works break the rules to convey human emotions in a raw, unprocessed style. Fingers can look like toes, and eyes can take the place of heads.

Only seeing it as nude art would not do justice to Dixit's pieces. In one painting, a warped female figure is lying on her side, her body spilling onto the ground. "The inspiration for this one was when I saw a woman reclining comfortably in a park," explains Dixit, moving on to another painting also inspired by a park spectacle: a couple embracing, one figure behind the other making the body look double-headed, multi-armed and hugging itself.

Dixit keeps the colours simple and does not hide the underpainting on the canvas. The bodies are jarring but fascinating to look at, they are deliberately imperfect as the artist lets his intuition guide the process.

"I don't paint over mistakes.



CHHIRING DORJE GURUNG

They don't matter to me. Sometimes there are six fingers instead of five," he says. "I work every day, all the time, fast, in flow. I don't know what's going to come out when I sit down to paint."

In many of the paintings at his show, Dixit has abandoned the brush and painted with his fingers, likening this to the feeling of sculpting with clay. The spontaneity and improvisation is



problem saying in school that their Dad is a nude painter."

Indeed, Dixit thinks he was inspired by his father who used to sketch the human body. He shifted later from drawing landscapes to painting the humanscape.

Dixit always knew he was going to be an artist, but it was while pursuing fine art at the University of Texas in Austin that he began drawing nudes. "It was pretty unheard of, for a Nepali, to study art. People were always pushing me

towards more sensible fields, like tech," recalls Dixit, who worked fast food, pizza delivery, and gas station jobs to pay his way.

Dixit says he has gone through phases as an artist, and currently he is fascinated by eyes. Large, complex eyes are present in almost all of the pieces at the Takpa exhibition. "The human eye reveals a person's naked emotion," he says. "I started painting eyes during the pandemic after noticing how people's eyes were full of fear and confusion. And with everyone having masks on, the eyes were much more prominent."

Given the modern taboos about nudity and the lack of understanding of expressionist art in Nepal, Kapil Mani Dixit's exhibition is courageous and contemporary. 🇳🇵

And yet Nepal deserves a lot of credit: it is a lot more tolerant than many other places in the world today. Even in the US, one of Dixit's exhibitions was deemed suitable only for people 18 and over. There is no such label at Takpa. "Actually, the art audience in Nepal is quite open-minded to new ideas," he says. "But I still wish my work would start to be seen more as a form of self-expression, rather than just focusing on the nude aspect. My children have no

different from traditional Nepali art forms.

But Dixit has faced criticism throughout his career for the nudity he portrays, with some saying it is 'un-Nepali'. When asked, he replies with the air of someone who is tired of answering this question: "That does not make a lot of sense to me, since I am a Nepali and this is my work. Just look at the temples in Kathmandu, you see nudity everywhere."

Lines of Emotions: Nude Expressions by Kapil Mani Dixit Takpa Gallery (4 January - 1 February)

HAPPY
New Year

TOYOTA

2025



Wishing you a joyful and prosperous New Year! May the coming year bring you success, happiness, and all the good things life has to offer

With warm regards and best wishes
-Toyota Family

Move your world

Searching for a homeland away

Adoptees return to Nepal to find a society that no longer recognises them, legally or socially

■ Hari Prasad Sacré and Chandra Kala Clemente-Martinez

Between the 1980s and 2000s, over 5,000 Nepali children were adopted abroad, primarily to the United States, France, and Spain. While international adoption was intended to provide vulnerable children with better opportunities, child trafficking and irregular practices prompted Nepal to suspend adoptions in 2007, and overhaul its policies.

By 2010, stricter regulations aligned with the Hague Adoption Convention drastically reduced adoption numbers. Today, many of these children, now adults, are returning to Nepal in search of their roots, only to encounter a society that no longer recognises them, legally or socially.

Behind the statistics lie the deeply personal and emotional journey of adoptees returning to reconnect with their past, seek family, and rediscover a sense of belonging. These stories reflect a broader struggle for identity and the complexities of bridging two worlds.

Maya

Adopted at 9 by a family in Barcelona, Maya carried fragmented memories of her early life in Nepal including the painful recollection of the day her mother and sister vanished, leaving her and her younger siblings behind. She had faint images of her mother, elder sister, and the village where she once lived.

In June 2017, Maya came to Nepal accompanied by Chandra Kala and two other friends, Jay and Vikram. With only a few photographs of her mother Tulsi, her elder sister Pargati, and her brother-in-law Kamal, along with a street name, Maya arrived in Birendranagar after a 20-hour bus ride from Kathmandu.

"Now that we're close, I feel like I can't face them," she confessed to Chandra Kala, wrestling with anxiety about what she might uncover. "I'm nervous. I don't know if I'll recognise them, or they'll recognise me. I don't know how they'll react or what they'll say. And then there's him [Kamal]. I have such bad memories of him. I don't know if I can handle this."

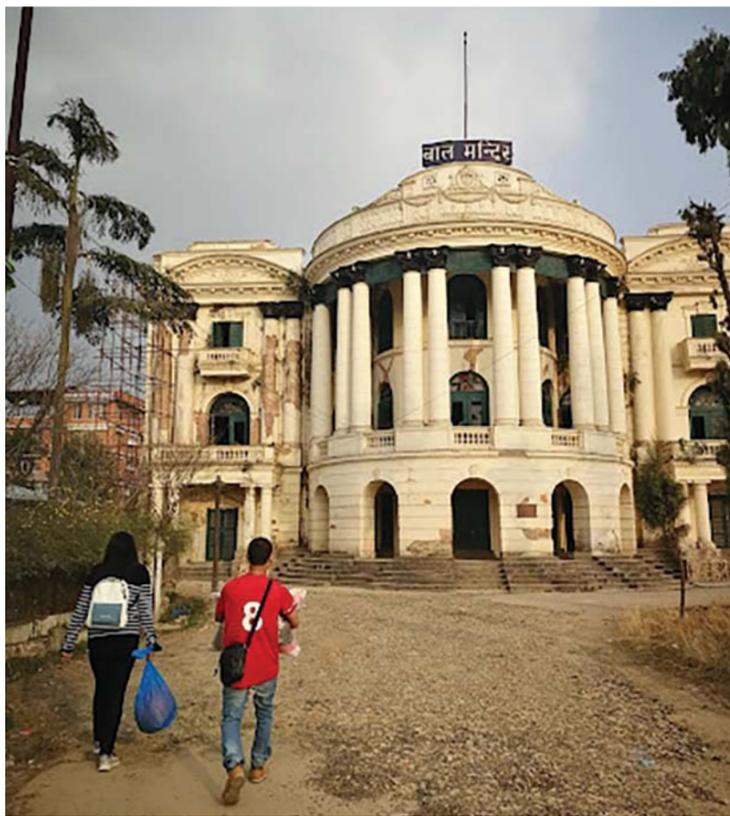
Chandra Kala reassured her, reminding her of her courage and the importance of this moment. Maya and her companions asked around the town with little success until a shopkeeper recognised Kamal and directed them to a nearby village. Jay went to confirm and returned excitedly, shouting, "It's her! It's your sister!"

Maya froze, paralysed by fear and anticipation, but she pushed ahead. At the village, Maya's sister Pargati initially struggled to recognise her. Jay introduced Maya: "Do you recognise her? This is your younger sister. She's come all the way from Spain to find you."

Slowly, realisation dawned, and the two women embraced, bridging the decades of separation with tears and disbelief. The next



Ashmita in Lalitpur, where she started to search for information.



An adoptee and companion return to Bal Mandir in Kathmandu after 19 years.

day, Maya met her mother Tulsi in an emotionally overwhelming reunion. Tulsi rushed into the room and embraced Maya tightly, sobbing uncontrollably: "Mero chhora-chhori, gaye, gaye... my children they went, they went ..."

Once the tears subsided, Tulsi and Pargati began recounting the heartbreaking circumstances of their separation. After the death of her husband, Tulsi faced relentless judgment in their village when Kamal stayed with the family before his marriage to Pargati. The villagers accused Tulsi of impropriety, calling her *sinful* and demanded that the family leave.

"We didn't want to leave, but the village didn't want us here," explained Pargati. "We left intending to bring you and your siblings later. But when we returned, you were gone."

Tulsi recalled how she had

entrusted Maya and her siblings to relatives, hoping they would be cared for temporarily. But when she returned, the children had been sent away without her knowledge.

"I only trusted them because I had no other choice," Tulsi said through tears. "I didn't know they would send my children away. What kind of mother does that make me? They called me a bad mother, but what else could I have done?"

The reunion brought healing and answers but it also exposed the societal pressures that had fractured Maya's family. Despite the challenges, Maya spent the rest of her visit bonding with her sister, nieces, and younger half-sister, Sunita, slowly bridging the gaps created by time and distance.

Maya's journey was a testament to the courage required to confront the past, the pain of uncovering



A mother reunites with her son after 18 years.

CHANDRA KALA CLEMENTE-MARTINEZ

difficult truths, and the hope of rebuilding connections once lost. Her story highlights the enduring emotional complexity faced by adoptees navigating their history and identity.

Ashmita

Unlike some adoptees whose main focus is reuniting with their biological family, 26-year-old Ashmita's priority has been to uncover the institutional details surrounding her adoption. She wanted to understand what the orphanage and the government knew about her background and why so much information seemed concealed.

"I just want to know where I come from," she said. "Even if I never find my biological family, having a better sense of the places and people connected to my story would mean so much."

For many adoptees, returning to Nepal is not just about reconnecting emotionally, but seeking formal recognition as members of the Nepali community. However, the legal framework in Nepal often fails to acknowledge their unique status.

In Nepali law, adoptees are left in limbo: their birth parents are not considered legal parents, and their ties to the country are effectively erased upon adoption. This lack of recognition creates significant hurdles, particularly in two key areas: accessing pre-adoption records and obtaining Non-Resident Nepali (NRN) status.

Despite international norms like the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which guarantees the right to know one's origins, institutions often refuse to cooperate. Orphanages and non-profits in Nepal, which hold critical pre-adoption records such

from home



CHANDRAKALA CLEMENTE-MARTÍNEZ

as birth certificates and citizenship documents, frequently withhold this information, reflecting the systemic reluctance to provide transparency.

In numerous cases, records that should include family names, addresses, or relinquishment agreements were either incomplete or falsified, which not only prevent adoptees from reclaiming their histories but also perpetuate their disconnection from their heritage.

Ashmita's initial requests for information from her adoption agency were met with delays and incomplete responses. When she turned to the orphanage where she spent her early years, she encountered even greater resistance. At one point, the director of the orphanage issued veiled threats.

Nevertheless, Ashmita persisted and managed to find the name of the individual who had brought her to the orphanage. However, the person had disappeared, leaving yet another gap in her story.

A breakthrough came when Ashmita accessed a police report that suggested she might have been born in a different municipality than the one in her adoption records, prompting her to seek help from local authorities. The police took an interest in her case and began investigating possible connections to her birth family. While progress was slow, they meticulously followed leads to help her trace her origins.

"It's not easy," Ashmita said of the process. "But every small step feels like I'm piecing something back together."

She also noted that societal perceptions could add to the difficulty. At times, she felt questioned about her identity and her right to seek answers. "People have asked me why I care so much or even suggested that I'm not Nepali anymore because I was adopted abroad," she reflected.

Ashmita's story is a complex account of persistence in the face of institutional and personal



Hari Prasad Sacré receives tika from his father Khul Prasad Adhikari during Dasain, a few weeks after receiving his NRN card.

HARI PRASAD SACRÉ

challenges. While her search has not yet provided all the answers, it continues to offer her insights into her early life and the systems that shaped her adoption journey.

"These records are sealed for a reason. They are not meant to be reopened," said a government official. Even an NGO representative said: "It's better for everyone if the past remains in the past." An orphanage director asked: "Why are you asking these questions? This is not your place anymore."

Hari Prasad Sacré

The NRN card is a lifeline for Nepali diaspora, granting them residency and property rights in Nepal. Yet, adoptees are notably excluded from this framework. While the law stipulates eligibility for individuals whose parents or grandparents were Nepali citizens, it makes no provision for adoptees whose legal ties to their Nepali parents were severed by adoption.

When Hari Prasad Sacré, a Nepali adoptee, sought to obtain an NRN card at the Nepal Embassy in Belgium, he encountered officials unfamiliar with processing an NRN request from an adoptee. His case was the first of its kind, setting a precedent but also highlighting the systemic barriers adoptees face.

"You are not eligible; your surname is Sacré, it is not a Nepali name," an embassy staff said.

Sacré's situation was legally ambiguous. Although his biological parents, including his father, Khul Prasad Adhikari, are alive and he maintains contact with them, he no longer had "legal" ties to Nepal due to the adoption process.

The embassy staff was initially convinced an adoptee with a Belgian surname couldn't claim Nepali origin. Nepali law, which does not recognise biological parents as legal guardians once a child is adopted, created complications for the NRN application.

To navigate this complexity, Sacré relied on a testimony from his father. Issued by a local government body in Kaski, the testimony affirmed that Hari had been put up for adoption and was of Nepali origin. While this enabled the embassy to approve his NRN card, the process was unnecessarily protracted and

emotionally charged, highlighting the inadequacy of current policies to accommodate the unique situations of adoptees.

Sacré's case represents a rare instance where biological parents were alive and willing to provide testimony, but many adoptees are not as fortunate.

A large number of adoptees were declared "orphans" during the adoption process, even when their parents were alive. This severed their legal ties to Nepal,

stripping them of documentation that could later prove their origin. For others, the absence of living biological relatives or access to their original adoption records creates insurmountable barriers.

Without clear documentation or a family member to vouch for their Nepali heritage, adoptees are excluded from the NRN framework. This denies them the rights and privileges afforded by the card, including property rights, legal recognition, and a formal connection to their homeland.

Current laws fail to account for the complexities of adoptees' legal status, leaving them disconnected from their cultural and legal heritage. Adoption papers, as evidence of Nepali descent, should be accepted as proof, granting adoptees rightful access to the NRN card and ensuring their inclusion in Nepal's diaspora.

Such reforms are crucial to ensure all adoptees, regardless of their circumstances, can reclaim their heritage and establish a sense of belonging in Nepali society. Without these changes, the systemic exclusion of adoptees will persist, perpetuating inequities and denying them the opportunity to step up as active members of the Nepali diaspora. Sacré's case serves as both a precedent and a call to action. It exemplifies the challenges and triumphs of adoptees navigating complex bureaucracies and advocates for a more inclusive and equitable approach to reconnecting adoptees with their homeland.

Nepal can draw inspiration from South Korea, where the government has actively supported the reintegration of adoptees into their society. The F4 visa, established through efforts by organisations like the Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (GOA'L), grants adoptees the right to live and work in Korea, while dual citizenship acknowledges their dual identity as members of the diaspora

and their country of origin.

GOA'L further fosters reconnection by offering language classes and cultural exchange programs, creating opportunities for meaningful reintegration.

As Nepal refines its NRN citizenship framework, explicitly including adoptees could address the severance of legal and cultural ties caused by international adoption.

Such inclusion would provide adoptees a pathway to residency, citizenship, and rights, enabling them to reconnect with their heritage. Complementing this with programs for language acquisition, cultural immersion, and historical education would honour Nepal's responsibility to the approximately 5,000 children sent abroad.

Nepal could establish a dedicated organisation similar to South Korea's GOA'L and help adoptees access pre-adoption records, navigate legal processes, and engage in cultural exchange initiatives. It would also serve as a bridge between adoptees and Nepali society, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. 



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