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ex-King's Gambit



BHANU BHATTARAI/NT ARCHIVE

■ Shristi Karki

A pro-monarchy rally that saw thousands take to the streets in Kathmandu this week was a stark reminder to the country's serial rulers that the public is losing patience with their greed and incompetence.

The size of the flag-waving crowd was even more remarkable because ex-king Gyanendra was not popular to begin with. But he has cashed in on public frustration about chronic corruption, poor service delivery and impunity.

Adding to this is the wind from the South. Elements in India's Hindutva establishment favour Nepal as a Hindu kingdom, and the visage of Yogi Adityanath, the cleric chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, at

the 9 March rally was seen as proof of his support for Gyanendra as a 'Hindu emperor'.

Nepal's cybersphere is agog with algorithm-amplified posts and archival videos fanning nostalgia about former kings Mahendra and Birendra as nationalists who commanded respect worldwide, contrasting it to the poor standing of present serial prime ministers.

Support for the monarchy among younger Nepalis is a manifestation of anti-incumbent protest, but also means they have little or no memory of living under an absolute monarchy. After his 2005 coup, Gyanendra dissolved Parliament, muzzled the media and jailed activists.

Gyanendra had stayed largely out of controversy since the monarchy was abolished by the

Constituent Assembly in 2008. But gauging the public mood, he wants to strike while the iron is hot. In a statement on Democracy Day last month he said he was willing to play a role in "saving the country".

Nepal's royal-right has been divided with the split in the RPP, and there is still disagreement between headline royalists who want a return to absolute monarchy, and those who favour a ceremonial role for Gyanendra.

Restoring a constitutional monarchy would not be so different from the present political system, we would have a king instead of a president as the ceremonial head of state. As a descendant of Nepal's founder Prithvi Narayan Shah, the king would be considered a symbol of national unity.

If he returns to Narayanhiti

Palace, it would be the third time in history Gyanendra would be king. But social media posts also reference persisting belief that he had something to do with the massacre of his brother king Birendra's family in 2001.

In 2008, New Delhi had pushed a last resort compromise to put Gyanendra's grandson on the throne with what was called the 'Baby King' solution. But Gyanendra rejected it, and sealed his and the monarchy's fate.

Some pro-monarchist politicians have been backpedalling on Yogi Adityanath's poster at the rally. An RPP MP accused Prime Minister K P Oli's government of planting the photo to sabotage the movement. Oli laughed it off at an event this week.

Speaking in Parliament, Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, without naming names, said there was an "organised entity that included movements within and outside the country" behind this week's royalist show of force.

But he also added that it was the governing coalition's poor governance that had added fuel to the fire, and the public was more content when he was prime minister. He conveniently forgot that there were nationwide pro-monarchy protests in 2023 when the rallying cry of royalists was also incompetence of his coalition.

Gyanendra has met Adityanath frequently, and last month visited Bhutan where he was given a red carpet welcome befitting a king. The usually pro-establishment Indian mainstream media has also been playing up the royalist resurgence in Nepal.

Rabindra Mishra of the RPP, a former journalist, was on an Indian TV channel this week calling on New Delhi to help restore the Hindu monarchy in Nepal.

Support in the New Delhi establishment for Nepal to become a Hindu kingdom again appears to be a late reaction by the BJP to the Nepal's 2015 secular republican Constitution which was backed by India's previous Congress-Left government. Even so, New Delhi's foreign policy establishment never really trusted Nepal's kings whom it considered too 'nationalistic'.

The leaders of the three main parties have urged Gyanendra, if he really wants power, to form a political party and run in the next elections in 2027.

For what it is worth, Gyanendra has done one thing: he has united the leaders of the three main parties to speak out in support of a secular, federal republic. And perhaps they have got the message about rising public disenchantment. 🇳🇵

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The UN vs Trump 2.0

Of all the geopolitical stunts Donald Trump has pulled since returning to the White House, the United States' votes at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on 4 March stand out as the most revealing.

The US opposed a seemingly innocuous resolution establishing an International Day of Peaceful Coexistence and reaffirming the UN's



GUEST EDITORIAL
Jayati Ghosh

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite its symbolic nature, the US voted against the resolution, with representative Edward Heartney explaining that the US 'rejects and denounces the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, and it will no longer reaffirm them as a matter of course'.



UN

Despite US opposition, the resolution ultimately passed with 162 countries voting in favour, two abstaining, and only the US, Israel and Argentina voting against.

Then the US was the sole vote against a resolution reaffirming 'the right of everyone to education ... including equal opportunities for young women' likely because it conflicted with a pillar of the Trump administration's domestic agenda: dismantling diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs.

These moves may well foreshadow America's withdrawal from the UN, something Elon Musk and other Trump supporters have urged. Trump has already pulled the US out of the WHO, and abandoned the Paris climate agreement.

His administration has also withdrawn the US from several UN bodies, including the Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and is now reassessing its involvement in the Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

The Trump administration is not merely unhappy with certain international institutions, it is fundamentally opposed to any multilateral framework that even suggests equality among countries.

Recent actions by the United States may foreshadow its withdrawal from the world's foremost multilateral institution.

Some analysts argue that a complete US withdrawal from the UN is unlikely, given the disproportionate influence America wields through its Security Council veto. But given Trump's law-of-the-jungle approach to geopolitics even that advantage may no longer seem essential.

Should the US leave the UN, the financial consequences could be immediate and severe. As the UN's largest financial backer, the US contributed a record \$18.1 billion in 2022, accounting for roughly 20% of the organisation's total funding. Notably, more than 70% of US contributions went to just four UN entities: 40% to the World Food Programme (WFP), 12% to the High Commissioner for Refugees, 10% to UNICEF, and another 10% to the Department of Peace Operations. And since much of this funding was channeled through USAID which Trump has shut down, it may have already vanished.

Given the current geopolitical climate, it would take nothing short of a miracle for other governments to step in immediately to fill the gap. As a result, many critical and life-saving UN programs are now at risk.

The paradigm shift in US foreign policy does not necessarily signal the impending decline or outright collapse of multilateralism and the UN system despite the Trump administration bullying individual countries rather than working through international institutions.

As the world's leading superpower turns its back on global cooperation, the system of multilateral governance that the US helped establish nearly eight decades ago could begin to unravel.

Paradoxically, Trump's actions could also serve as a catalyst for greater international cooperation, impelling other countries to work together more closely. Humanity's most pressing challenges are global in nature. They will not go away simply because Trump refuses to acknowledge them.

Climate change, extreme inequality, emerging health threats, disruptive new technologies, and the erosion of stable employment all transcend national borders.

Global solidarity is thus not just a moral imperative but an existential one. Many political leaders seem to understand this and remain committed to multilateralism. International negotiations on taxation, climate action, and development financing are moving forward, even without US participation.

In fact, the absence of the US, which has all too often acted as a spoiler in the past, could pave the way for more ambitious and effective global agreements. In this sense, the current climate of uncertainty and upheaval could represent a unique opportunity to build a truly international movement for progressive change. © Project Syndicate

Jayati Ghosh, Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is a member of the Club of Rome's Transformational Economics Commission.

ONLINE PACKAGES



CRAFTING CLAY

Pottery has a deep history in the Kathmandu Valley civilisation. The practice now thrives in new ways beyond commerce, and has become a creative outlet of therapeutic escape for those stressed by the pressures of modern life. Watch the video on our YouTube channel and subscribe for multimedia content.



PASSION FOR PASHMINA

A Kathmandu-based pashmina manufacturer and wholesaler exports 90% of its products to Germany, Austria, France, the UK, the US and Japan. In seven steps, experts at Nature Knit demonstrate how balls of nondescript cashmere yarn are weaved into some of the finest luxury garments. Watch our video on YouTube.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Thanks for a thorough dive into this important issue ('The slaughter of our daughters', Shristi Karki, #1251). When I saw this in Achham, I thought it was a rural problem associated with lower socioeconomic status, but it is quite sad that this is common in cities and among the educated.

Ruma Rajbhandari

■ Thank you for this very well-written article. I wish we did not have to discuss these issues, but this is the reality.

Aruna Uprety

PRO-MONARCHY

I was in Nepal during part of Gyanendra's reign from 2001 to 2003 ('The ghost of monarchy returns to haunt Nepal', Shristi Karki, page 1). Things were not good then. One thing I am learning here in the US is how many people want to bend the knee to a national father and how many people take the narcotic that is nostalgia.

Tim Deveny

■ Is Nepal going back to becoming a kingdom hoping for prosperity? After Trump, anything is possible.

Akku Chowdhury

NEPAL TOURISM

I first arrived in Nepal in 1972. The immigration department was corrupt and dishonest, and it still is ('Missing out on Nepal's tourism potential', nepalitimes.com). The people in Nepal are welcoming and friendly. Not so much the immigration authorities.

Daniel Birch

WOMEN ON TOP

What a beautiful story of a female Nepali double-decker driver in Dubai ('A woman's drive to push boundaries', Shanti Bhandari, #1251). These are the kind of stories that we should be seeing more online instead of all the disinformation being spread like wildfire.

Soon Rahunna

STOLEN DEITIES

We need more initiatives and research to track our lost heritage and initiate processes to retrieve them ('Back where they belong', Saraswati Rashmi Shakya, #1251).

Prashant Tamang

Times.com WHAT'S TRENDING

Back where they belong

by Saraswati Rashmi Shakya
Three paubha paintings stolen from Itumbaha which were missing for 45 years, along with 17 other deities were returned from New York last week in a powerful moment of cultural reclamation driven by inter-generations campaigning. Latest developments online.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Public-Private Collusion

Editorial
Nepal's regulatory bodies exist to serve the public, and are crucial to maintaining ethical practices. But bending laws to appoint cronies to leadership positions in regulatory bodies at the whim of powerful lobbyists has become the norm in Nepal. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full article.

X Most popular on X



Slaughter of daughters

by Shristi Karki
Nepal has a sex ratio at birth of 112 males per 100 females, among the highest in the region. Contributing to this is gender-biased sex selection (GBSS) and other forms of inequality enabled by Nepal's socio-cultural structures. Join the discussion online.

46 Most commented



Woman pushes boundaries

by Shanti Bhandari
After struggling to get an education in Nepal, Shanti Bhandari found a job as a beautician in Abu Dhabi and now drives a double-decker tourist bus in Dubai. Read the inspirational story of a woman who has charted her own road in life in the latest edition of Diaspora Diaries on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepal's rising sex ratio at birth (SRB) sparks concerns about future demographic disparities. Districts like Dhanusa record 133 boys per 100 girls and the Madhes province leads at 118 in the 2021 census, stressing the need to look into causes of this gap.

Rita Thapa @bheribas
Alarming, a serious gap not only from demographic prospects but also that of Human Rights! Need serious enquiries

Mark Pickett @DrMarkPickett
Prosecute the criminal sonographers who tell parents the gender.

1,000 WORDS



SUBASH SHRESTHA

KINGMAKER: The visage of the cleric and Chief Minister of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath appeared at the pro-monarchy rally alongside a poster of ex-king Gyanendra.

This photograph has circulated widely on social media, leading to speculation that elements in the Indian establishment want a reinstatement of Nepal's Hindu monarchy.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

180 degree turn

Nepalis disillusioned with the current crop of leaders took to the streets this week rallying for Gyanendra, the same king who staged a coup and banned free speech in 2005. Excerpts of the report on the government restriction on FM radio published 20 years ago this week on issue #238 11 - 17 March 2005:

Big things have small beginnings. When a group of Nepali media activists and journalists finally got the license to launch the country's (and the region's) first community radio station in 1996, the shabby one-room studio in Kathmandu didn't look like much.

But Radio Sagarmatha did not just launch itself, it unleashed a wave of public broadcasting in Nepal bringing an unprecedented deregulation in the FM spectrum. Within a decade there were more than 50 FM stations across the country. And contrary to the government's worst fears, the stations didn't



Fleeing school

spread anarchy and chaos. In fact, radio became a vital source of information and expanded the public space for debate and consensus. They didn't undermine our culture with Hindi pop, in fact Nepali folk and dohori got a big boost.

Nepal became recognised the world over as a pioneer in public service broadcasting in developing societies and young democracies. Nepalis could hold their heads high at international media seminars and show others how to do it.

Ten years of effort, training and investment has now been dismantled in one fell swoop by the government's ban on news and current affairs on FM for security reasons. Even educational and farming programs can't be aired. Some FMs have closed, others are broadcasting music all day long.

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



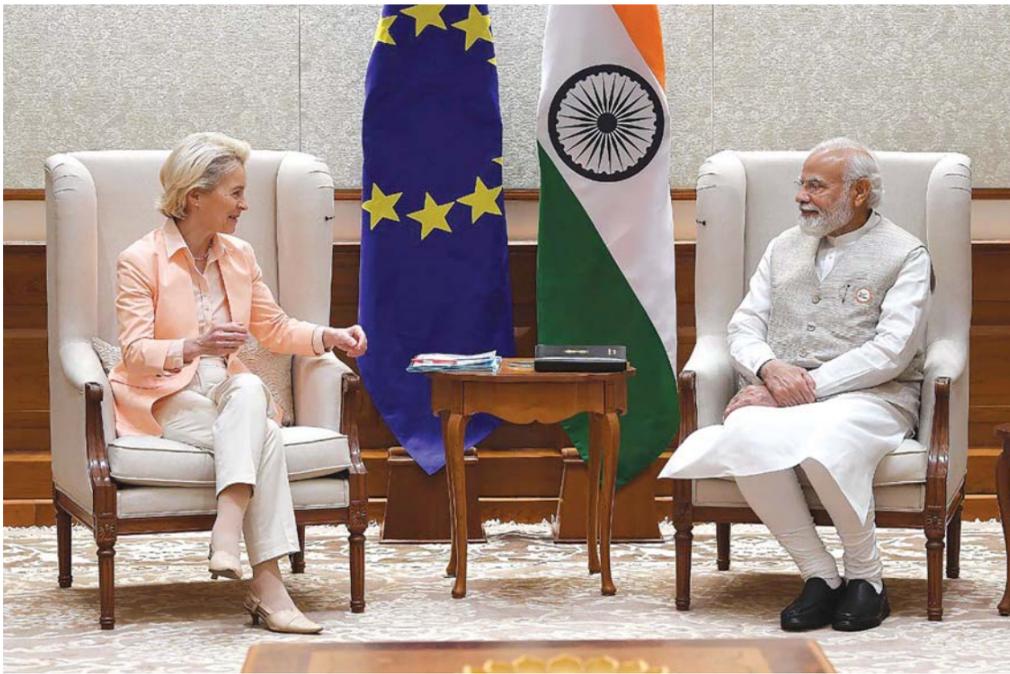
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PM INDIA OFFICE

President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen with India's PM Narendra Modi.

India has arrived

Despite its vast potential, India was long overlooked by the West, both economically and geopolitically. No more.

affairs. During the Cold War, it skillfully balanced its policies toward the US and the Soviet Union.

When it engaged with the Soviet Union, from which it received considerable military assistance, it calibrated its approach to offset US support of Pakistan, without taking sides in the great-power competition.

India has since maintained this pragmatic balancing act, adapting its foreign policy to a shifting geopolitical landscape. Today, that means recognising its potential to shape global affairs, including by playing a leading role in building an efficient, realistic, and inclusive multilateralism.

This is reflected in Modi's pursuit of a more assertive, internationalist foreign policy. Beyond building new partnerships and strengthening old ones, Modi has sought to increase India's influence in traditional and emerging multilateral fora. In 2023 alone, India held the presidency of both the G20 and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (a Chinese creation, comprising nine Middle Eastern and Asian countries).

India plays a leading role in the BRICS, and is characteristically nuanced: whereas Russia and, to a significant extent, China see themselves as disruptors of the existing order, India views itself as a reformer. This enables it to maintain strategic flexibility as it advances its interests.

India's relationship with China is complicated by other factors. While the countries work together in some fora, they are also locked in protracted territorial disputes and a competition for leadership in

the so-called Global South.

India's growing global clout, including its appeal to Western powers, stems in large part from its ability to act as a counterweight to China. It is indispensable to the Quad alliance with Australia, Japan, and the US, a grouping that is officially focused on maritime security and economic cooperation, though its members clearly seek to provide a buffer against China in the Indo-Pacific region. It is thanks to India that the Quad is not viewed as just another Western vehicle.

Modi has sought to bolster India's Southern credentials, including by highlighting its status as the "mother of democracy". By framing democracy as intrinsic to Indian civilisation, rather than a colonial legacy, he aligned India with 'middle powers' seeking to redefine global governance on their own terms.

To be sure, Modi has moved India away from the secular and pluralistic values that had flourished after independence, in favour of assertive Hindu nationalism. So many international indices have downgraded India's democratic status that he is now seeking to create his own.

Modi is the second leader of independent India (after Jawaharlal Nehru) to be elected to three consecutive terms, and remains a dominant force in Indian politics.

And at a time of rapid geopolitical change, he is committed to leveraging his position, and India's profound strengths, to turn it into a global player. India has long had the potential to be an active shaper of international affairs. It has now arrived.

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Ana Palacio, a former minister of foreign affairs of Spain and former senior vice president and general counsel of the World Bank Group, is a visiting lecturer at Georgetown University.

■ Ana Palacio in Madrid

Last month, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced that the first official foreign visit of the commission in her second term would be to India. On the same day, Marco Rubio held his first bilateral meeting as US Secretary of State with India's minister of external affairs, Subrahmanya Jaishankar.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Washington last month confirmed his country's rising international profile. The visit ended with the promise of what Modi called a US-India "mega partnership." He has committed to double trade with the US by 2030, increase oil and gas imports, and expand US military sales to India.

India is now the fastest-growing major

economy, with the IMF forecasting a 6.5% increase in GDP this year. India is expected to overtake Japan and Germany to become the world's third-largest economy by 2030.

Despite its vast potential, India has long been overlooked by the West, both economically and geopolitically. But a fundamental global realignment is now underway. America's 'unipolar moment' has given way to an era of great-power competition that, unlike during the Cold War, features demands by emerging and developing economies for a more inclusive and representative multilateral system.

In this multipolar age, both the US and Europe see India, a neutral foreign-policy actor and dynamic emerging economy, as vital to the future of their strategic priorities.

A founder of the Non-Aligned Movement, India has plenty of experience navigating precarious moments in world

NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक



Nepalis in Japan

Nepalis have overtaken Brazilians to become the fifth-largest foreign community in Japan. As of June 2024, there were a total of 206,898 Nepalis with an annual rise of 30-50,000 individuals. Brazilians have been increasing by a mere 2-5,000. Only China, Vietnam, South Korea, and the Philippines have more people than Nepal in Japan. Nepalis usually come to Japan on student visas that also allow them to work mainly in the Kyushu region in restaurants.

Forex record

Nepal's foreign exchange reserves have hit record high in the first seven months of the current fiscal year due to increases in remittance and tourism. At the end of the last fiscal year in July 2024, the reserves were Rs2.041 trillion. By February 2025, this had grown 16.1% to Rs2.369 trillion which is enough to cover 14 months of imports.



Samsung fridges

Samsung has released a new line of refrigerators that are energy efficient and can be controlled through the SmartThings app. Coming in 396L and 419L variants, these appliances start at Rs112,990, and are currently available at a 10% discount.

Bhairawa takes off

Four International airlines: Nepal Airlines, Fly Dubai, Thai AirAsia and Kuwait's Jazeera now regularly operate out of Gautam Buddha International Airport that serves Lumbini. In February, 115 Flights from GBIA carried a total of 6,879 passengers. However, this has not reduced congestion in Kathmandu since Nepalis flying out still have to come to the capital to get their documents.



Women's Day at Aloft

Aloft Kathmandu Thamel marked International Women's Day at the Chhaya Centre Courtyard under the theme #AccelerateAction. The event included workshops on menstrual hygiene and local women-led businesses.

NMB Execs

Current NMB Bank Deputy CEO Govinda Ghimire has been appointed CEO for four years, effective 23 April. Deputy CEO Sudesh Upadhyaya has been promoted to Senior Deputy CEO.

38 Nepalis deported

So far, 38 Nepalis have been deported from the USA after Donald Trump took office on 20 January. Of these, eight were flown back to Kathmandu in handcuffs on a chartered flight, while the others returned on regular flights. The deportees were handed over to the Nepal Police's Human Trafficking Investigation Bureau.



Ncell Title Sponsor

Ncell is now the title sponsor of the Nepal Super League (NSL), set to begin on 29 March with seven teams representing cities across the country. "We believe in the power of football to unite communities and inspire positive change," says Ncell CCO Umair Mohsin.

IME Loan

Global IME Bank has launched the Ma Udhyaami Karja loan for small and medium businesses that are at least 50% women-led. Eligible businesses can get up to Rs10 million loan at minimal interest rates.



Cambridge Awards

A total of 48 A-level students from Nepal received Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards in the November 2023 and June 2024 exam series. Winners come from 20 different schools and cover 35 subjects while two students achieved the Highest in the World Award, 12 High Achievement awards, two Best Across recognitions, and 39 Top in Nepal awards.

Icefall docs

An eight-member 'icefall doctor' team left for Everest Base Camp to fix climbing routes up to Camp 2 led by Ang Sarki Sherpa. Icefall doctors conduct a survey of the glacier and fix ladders and ropes on the dangerous Khumbu Icefall. The ropes will be used by climbers attempting Mt Everest, Lhotse, and Nuptse in Spring 2025.



MG S5

Official MG distributor Paramount has launched the MG S5 EV, successor to the MG ZS. Priced between Rs4.39-5.49 million, the car comes in several variants with ranges between 420-520km. The four-wheeler also features a 12.8 inch control screen, 453L of boot space, and a max speed of 174kmph.

KMC fines RPP

Kathmandu Metropolitan City has fined the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Rs100,000 for littering during the party's Sunday rally to welcome ex-king Gyanendra Shah. The litter was mostly around the Airport, Tilganga, and Gaushala areas.

Prabhakar SJB Rana

The Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry this week organised a program to honour the late Prabhakar SJB Rana, the founding president of the joint chamber.

Holi days along the border

This week's festival binds Nepal's ethnicities and geographies together in a celebration of coexistence

The fact that the festival of Holi is celebrated on two different days in Nepal is itself an indication of how the mountains and plains of Nepal are culturally united.



BORDERLINES
Chandrakishore

The full moon day of Fagu Purnima is marked with much merriment in the mountains on Thursday, while the festival of colours is celebrated on Friday in the Tarai. And it would be fair to say that the passion with which Holi is celebrated in the plains is several times more intense. In fact, along the Nepal Tarai, Holi is celebrated on both days.

In many places in Birganj, Janakpur and Rajbiraj, young Hindu or Muslim, Madhesi or Pahadi, celebrate each other's festivals together. The 2021 census shows that more than half the country's population now lives in the Tarai, and this coexistence has made the Holi mosaic in the Tarai even more colourful.

The festival proves that as long as the rulers on either side of these borderlands do not mix politics with religion, Nepalis of all faiths and ethnicities can get along as they have for centuries. An example of this is the tradition of folk songs in the Bhojpuri language sung during the Holi festival by people in India and Nepal.

One such song actually prays for



SUMAN NEPALI

the prosperity of Nepal: 'Blessed be Nepal, the land of Pashupati which I will decorate with gold and sprinkle Nepal with silver.' The lyrics of this song are contained in a 1948 Hindi book, Bhojpuri Folk Songs, and shows that reverence for Pashupati and its role as Nepal's patron deity is part of the culture on both sides of the Nepal-India border. The language is a bond that ties the people of these borderlands together, but it is also the festival

of Holi that cements the people-to-people relations. The folk songs sung during the festival have been passed down for generations, highlighting the age-old ties.

Holi is celebrated all week this week in Nepal as well as in India with communities gathering in the evenings to sing the 'Hori' folk songs. With outmigration, it is mostly older people who take part in these rituals and there are fewer and fewer people every year who

can sing the songs.

"The cultural erosion had been happening, but it is accelerating in recent years," says Harinder Himkar, a historian from the neighbouring Indian state of Bihar. "Because of this, mutual closeness of people in the border regions of India and Nepal have also diminished." Holi is a festival of love, intimacy and celebration of spring. It is flirtatious, and represents the changing of the

seasons and new beginnings. Which is why the songs sung are happy and optimistic despite the daily grind that the farming communities here are engaged in. It is believed that the deities Krishna, Shiva, Ram and Sita all splashed colours on each other, and humans are just emulating their merrymaking.

Folk songs are by definition old. They are moulded by centuries of experience and knowledge that makes them relevant to this day. No one knows who wrote these songs, or who gave them music, and yet they are immortal.

This particular Bhojpuri folk song sung at Holi reminds us that Nepal is an ancient country, and it is Pashupati that is the holy bond. Says cultural historian Ramsharan Agrawal from Sitamarhi, just across the border in Bihar state: "The folk song proves that the ties that bind our civilisations together are ancient, and the fact that there are references to Pashupati and wishing prosperity on the people of Nepal shows just how interconnected we were, and are."

Holi may be celebrated differently on different dates in the Tarai and the mountains, but it is a festival of solidarity between different ethnicities and geographies of Nepal. 'Holi Friendship Ceremonies' are held in just about every town along the border.

Just like the song itself says: "May you be happy all year round, like today." 🇳🇵

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

Heritage of Excellence

COROLLA CROSS HYBRID ELECTRIC



WHAT IS A HYBRID VEHICLE?

Hybrid electric vehicle is a system that uses two different kinds of power sources, one being the traditional internal combustion engines or ICEs and an electric motor combined with batteries. The combination uses the best of both worlds, giving it a longer range than an ICE and the sustainability benefits that electric vehicles offers.



Move your world



Phalaenopsis taenialis



Dendrobium bicameratum



Coelogyne cristata

Orchids

The wild abundance of the

■ **Nomika Tamang**

The lush forest of Godavari-Phulchoki along the southern rim of Kathmandu Valley has double the annual rainfall compared to the city, and is known for the great diversity of plants, birds, butterflies and other insects.

Soaring steeply from Godavari at 1,500m, Phulchoki Peak at 2,750m is the highest point on the Valley rim. The altitude range is also what gives this temperate broadleaf forest such rich biodiversity with an interlocking mosaic of habitats, allowing a diverse range of species to thrive – especially orchids.

There is a breathtaking array of orchids, some common, many rare, and others so elusive they have only just been discovered and classified. Even the name Phulchoki means 'Hill of Flowers'.

The orchid plant has long captivated houseplant owners and

botanists alike due to its natural beauty and unique form. But it also serves a vital function in maintaining the forest's ecosystem.

The small paradise of Godavari-Phulchoki harbours plant species that face mounting threats despite the conservation successes in the watershed. The hill is home to the highest diversity-to-area ratio for orchid species, making it a hotspot because of the threats from increased tourism, poaching, climate breakdown and habitat disturbance.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has been running the Living Mountain Lab in Godavari as a demonstration site for biodiversity conservation and appropriate technology. The Lab alone has recorded 54 orchid species, and the Godavari-Phulchoki landscape has over 80 species.

Uniquely, the orchid's survival depends even more on very specific ecological conditions, requiring the right balance of moisture, humidity

Saving the Karnali otters

Communities protect rare mammals important for aquatic ecosystem balance

■ **Sudiksha Tuladhar** in Kailali

If visitors to the Bardia National Park are lucky, they can sometimes spot a bevy of otters frolicking with their pups along the Karnali River. Or they might be out fishing, brown fur gleaming in the sun as they emerge from the water with a fish in the mouth.

But on a recent daytime visit to the national park in Kailali, there was no such luck. All that pointed to their presence were tracks on the sand by the banks of the Karnali (pictured, far right).

When it comes to wildlife, the news cycle in Nepal is dominated by tigers and rhinos, and their conservation success stories. This means other endangered mammals like pangolins and otters remain in the shadows.

Many Nepalis are not even aware that otters exist in Nepal. There are three species found here: the Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*), Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*), and Asian Small-clawed Otter (*Aonyx*

cinereus). All are usually nocturnal, or most active at dawn or dusk to avoid predators like crocodiles, tigers, and leopards.

Otter species found in Nepal prefer freshwater ecosystems along fast flowing Himalayan rivers and the wetlands that they feed. The Asian Small-clawed Otter feeds on crabs and mollusks, the Smooth-coated otter, primarily found in rivers of Karnali and Narayani, preys on fish, playing a crucial role in maintaining balance in the aquatic ecosystem.

Their dependence on clean water makes otters bioindicators, which means their abundance shows a healthy ecosystem and unpolluted water bodies.

"Otters hunt in the water, but they spend most of their time on land, often along the boulders and sand on the banks," explains Arun Sonaha, otter conservation expert from the indigenous Sonaha community.

Otter scat contributes to nutrient cycling as well as the fertilisation of riverbanks and wetlands, indirectly promoting vegetation. Smooth-coated Otters and Asian small-clawed Otters prefer lowland habitats. The former have adapted to survive in human-altered landscapes, and have been found to reside in rice fields and irrigation canals.

However, Eurasian Otters adapt to seasonal changes by moving up to 3,660m during the summer, and migrating to lower elevations in the winter.

The presence of Eurasian Otters has been recorded in 24 districts across Nepal, while

the Smooth-coated and Asian Small-clawed species have been documented in 12 districts. Otters have been spotted in the Karnali, Narayani, Kosi, and Mahakali river systems. The smallest of the 13 known otter species, Asian Small-clawed otters, were recorded in Nepal for the first time in 185 years earlier this year in February in Dadeldhura.

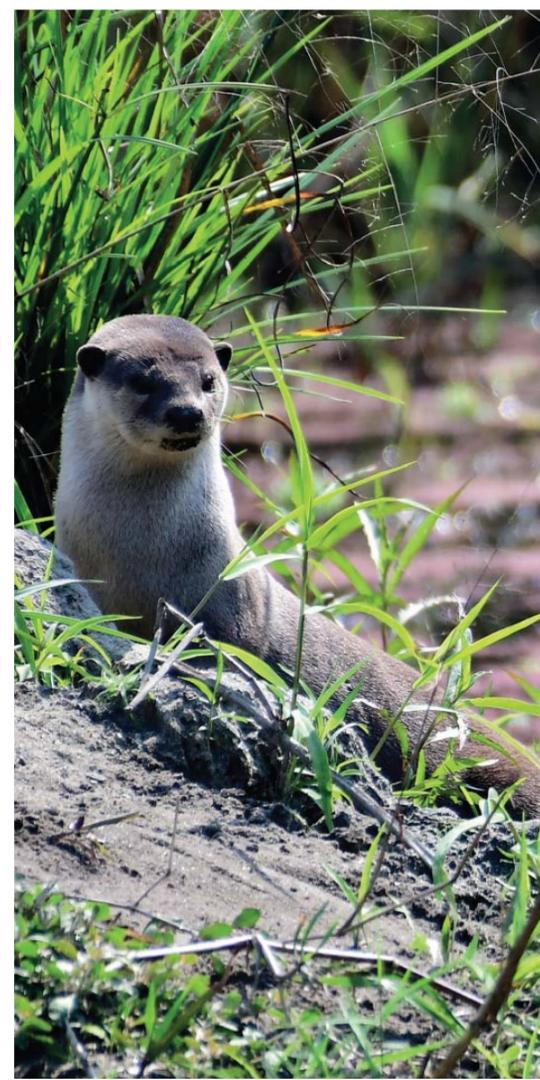
"We track the movement of Smooth-coated Otters using 18 camera traps in Bardia," explains Aashish Kapali from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Nepal.

Smooth-coated otters have still been observed in healthy numbers along the Karnali, but the otter population is in decline. The smooth-coated otter and Asian small-clawed are currently listed as 'vulnerable' in the IUCN Red List, while the Eurasian Otter is 'near endangered'.

River damming, indiscriminate and illegal fishing, changing rainfall patterns and extreme weather, rapid urbanisation in Nepal's lowlands have contributed to loss of otter habitats and depletion of food sources. Pollution from raw sewage and industrial waste has also added to habitat degradation while pesticides have directly impacted their prey population.

"The pesticides sprayed on fields drain into the rivers, affecting the fish population," says Kapali. "This reverberates across the food chain and affects otter numbers."

Until a few years ago, otter poaching also ran rampant. Between 1989 and 2017, 755 otter pelts were confiscated in Nepal



A pair of Smooth-coated otters in Suklaphanta National Park's Rani Tal area.



Habenaria intermedia



Eria coronaria



Lecanorchis japonica

Is of Godavari-Phulchoki

These unique flowers help maintain the ecological biodiversity of Nepal's forests



Rhynchostylis retusa

and host plants to flourish – conditions that the Godavari-Phulchoki landscape is ideal for. Orchids mostly grow with support from other plants or on rocks, and are called epiphytes.

Orchids have a sophisticated flower that is androgynous with a modified petal, and produces seeds that germinate symbiotically with fungi.

This means the flowers need their own insect pollinators that are attracted by specialised scents and designs of the labellum that serve as landing pads for insects.

In this ecologically diverse landscape, the orchids stand as a testament to the health of the region's ecosystem. Healthy orchids indicate a happy forest.

Hiking through the Phulchoki forest, visitors can easily spot many of the 80 indigenous species in their natural habitat. Others are more difficult to see.

One of the most common orchids on Phulchoki is

the *Coelogyne nitida* that has white petals and a sun-gold centre.

The orchid has prominent green pseudobulbs that store water and has abundant seed production, which is what makes it one of the more common species.

Abu Hang Samuel is a botany student who has independently documented orchids for the past eight years. Last year, while looking into the dark undergrowth on Phulchoki, he discovered the *Lecanorchis japonica*, a rare species previously found only in China, Japan, and Korea (picture, far right).

"This rare orchid does not have leaves and mostly stays underground, living off fungi in the soil, which is why it is difficult to find," Samuel explains. "When the season is right, slender flowers emerge from the forest floor for a few days before disappearing again. I was lucky to be at the right place at the right time."

Orchids and other native

plants in the Godavari-Phulchoki landscape face significant threats, including illegal collection and poaching, despite laws prohibiting their extraction from the wild.

However, the bigger challenge comes from urban expansion and infrastructure projects, which lead to habitat destruction.

"The Godavari bus park once had many trees covered in orchids," Samuel notes, "but they were cleared to expand the parking area to accommodate growing numbers of picnickers."

Similarly, road construction and development projects have led to the destruction of trees, boulders and slopes where orchids naturally grow, disrupting delicate ecological networks.

Ecosystems function as intricate webs, with each species playing a role in maintaining balance. When habitat destruction disrupts this balance, this natural network of symbiotic relationships among plants and animals unravels.

This sets off a domino effect with hazardous and sometimes unexpected consequences that ultimately threaten the survival of orchids and other interdependent species.

Amidst rapid urban development, the primary goal of conservation is to protect plants, their habitats and the broader ecosystem they rely on.

ICIMOD's Living Mountain Lab, for instance, does a botanical tour called an 'Orchid Walk' to spread awareness about the strengths and struggles of this plant, all the while showing visitors the up-close beauty of the flowers.

"The goal is to enhance the visitors' experience and raise awareness about the incredible orchid biodiversity of the Godavari-Phulchoki landscape," says Yufang Su, who heads the Lab. "We hope to inspire a deeper appreciation for these delicate blooms and the need for their conservation." 🇳🇵



FRIEDRICH ESSER



SUDIJKSHATULADHAR

but communities living along the Karnali have since stepped up efforts to protect the mammals. "Our continuous conservation efforts have meant that we currently do not have issues with poaching," says Sonaha.

Community members are also working to revive the indigenous knowledge about over-fishing, and they also get skills training for alternative livelihoods.

"The training not only enables us to earn a living but also helps us conserve otters," says Buddhi Singh Tharu, chair of Himal Samuha community group for otter conservation.

Fishing in the river is still allowed, but it

must be done in a way that ensures smaller fish and tadpoles, the primary prey for otters, are not caught. "We use fishing nets that allow smaller fish to escape so that numbers in the river are balanced and under control," explains Tharu.

Across Kailali and Bardia, 15 Community River Stretch Management Groups have been established to conserve Smooth-coated otters. Women have been significantly more active in otter conservation efforts, with a 68% participation rate. Sudha Chaudhary, 45, was once a fisher, but now has transitioned to chili and tomato farming with support from WWF Nepal and believes that conserving otters is essential for maintaining and sustaining the Karnali ecosystem.

Meanwhile, despite constant monitoring, sand mining and inadequate waste management continue in the Karnali, including by local officials, destroying otter habitats. Community conservation groups here have expressed concerns about municipal authorities dumping waste near the Karnali River.

However, experts also point to a lack of policies when it comes to otter conservation. While the Aquatic Animal Protection Act of 1961 and the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1973 exist, they are inadequate for the conservation of these vulnerable semi-aquatic animals. Talks are underway for the government to approve a new action plan for otter conservation.

For now, conservationists emphasise the need for human-wildlife coexistence to foster sustainable ecosystems that protect Nepal's biodiversity, to achieve which continued community conservation, education and awareness efforts are crucial.

Says Tharu: "It is our responsibility to conserve otters to ensure their survival for generations to come." 🇳🇵

EVENTS

**NIFF 2025**

The 8th edition of the Nepal International Film Festival (NIFF) explores the power of film to inspire, inform, and entertain. It will feature 87 films from 40 countries.

20-24 March, 11am onwards, Tickets: Rs100-Rs400, QFX Civil Mall and QFX Chhaya Center

Women Leadership Summit

The Women Leadership Summit 2025 brings together trailblazing women from diverse industries. It will have interactive panels where women share their journeys, insights, and strategies for driving change in different fields of expertise.

16 March, 11am-6pm, The Soaltee Kathmandu

**Meditation session**

Join a one-day meditation session for self-discovery and relaxation through a fusion of mindfulness, movement and colors. Call to reserve a spot.

14-15 March, 3pm to 5:30pm, Artan, Kumaripati 9803041676

The Thread Project

The artists Constanza Bitthoff, from Argentina, and Manish Lal Shrestha, from Nepal, have collaborated to explore intricate connections woven through art, culture, and creativity.

Till 16 March, 5pm onwards, Gallery Mcube

**Spring Klean Market**

The exclusive Spring Klean Market redefines fashion and wellness, celebrating eco-conscious shopping and mindful living. Stop by to browse through a curated selection of sustainable brands, thrift shop pop-ups, fresh produce, and wellness products.

The Baha, Sanepa, 22 March, 11am-6pm

Art Exhibition

Erina Tamrakar's solo exhibition Shakti is an exploration of feminine expression, personal growth, and emotional connection. Her works offer a window into the artist's heart and soul, where external and internal worlds intertwine.

15 March, 3pm-7pm, Takpa Gallery

Accelerate Actions

Twenty female artists from Nepal and Malaysia exhibit their artwork through a diverse range of mediums including painting, ceramics, and printmaking.

Till 1 April, 10am-6pm, Classic Gallery, Chakupat

MUSIC

Music Fest

Rockheads, Kali Prasad Baskota ft. Sathi Bhai, Jhilkey and The Company, and Jamesy will light up the stage at the Chill Music Fest.

22 March, 2pm onwards, Tickets: Rs500, Madhyapur Thimi

**Music Class**

Join group music classes at Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. Small groups for vocals, guitar, and violin are available, with two classes per week and structured learning to keep you on track.

Fees: Rs500+, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Chabahil, 9704543010

Ghazal sessions

Make your Saturdays soulful with live Ghazal sessions featuring the Indreni Ghazal Band.

Mirch, Jhamsikhel, 6:30pm onwards

**Phosphenes**

Vibe to the indie melodies of the Phosphenes band, live at Moksh next weekend.

21 March, 7pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1000, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

**Jenn Cleary**

Listen to Jenn Cleary perform some acoustic rock and blues live alongside the Ramsterdam house band.

21 March, 7pm onwards, Ramsterdam Cafe

GETAWAY

**Jal Mahal**

With stunning views of Phewa Lake, Hotel Jal Mahal provides a peaceful retreat in the heart of Pokhara where visitors can relax, unwind, and enjoy a tranquil atmosphere.

Gharipatan, 9856087030

Mirabel Resort

Perfect for families, Mirabel Resort offers comfort, continental cuisines and views of Kathmandu Valley. Take a walk around Dhulikhel before tucking into a Nepali lunch or some barbecue.

Dhulikhel (01)490975

**Club Oasis Spa**

Save a weekend for yourself and head to Hyatt's luxury spa. Take a dip in the jacuzzi, get a full-body massage or a facial and step into a sauna before brunch.

Hyatt Regency Boudha (01)5171234

**Hotel Yukhang**

With touches of both the old and the new, Hotel Yukhang blends Bhaktapur's medieval history with contemporary amenities. Book your stay now.

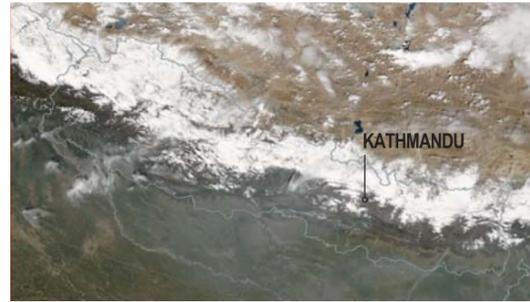
Thamel (01) 5367358

Marriott Kathmandu

With Marriott Kathmandu, there is no need to venture beyond the valley for a five-star deluxe hotel experience. Enjoy the luxury amenities of this global brand and dine at their Thamel Kitchen, Edamame or Raksi Music Bar.

Naxal (01)5970300

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
25° 13°	26° 14°	26° 14°	26° 13°	26° 13°

Warmer and Drier

With just light drizzles in the past week, we are now going to full scale spring drier and warmer. The temperatures in Kathmandu will climb up to the mid-20s and the minimum entering the double digits. The temperature would have been higher, but the thick Indo-Gangetic haze is filtering the sunlight. No significant low pressure system driven by the westerlies on the horizon till next week. The higher mountains will get windy afternoons, and Kathmandu will get a brisk afternoon breeze.

OUR PICK



Director Bong Joon-ho's 2025 science fiction dark comedy Mickey 17 is set 30 years into the future and follows Mickey Barnes, who in the year 2054 is out of luck and money after a failed business venture. On the run from a dangerous loan shark, Mickey joins a space expedition to colonise the planet Niflheim as an 'Expendable', — a disposable crew member who for research purposes gets cloned, his memory restored, and regenerated every time he dies. Stars Robert Pattinson, Naomi Ackie, Steven Yeun, Toni Collette, and Mark Ruffalo. See the film in nearby theatres.

गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउ र बचाऔं

- गर्मी मौसममा मलेरिया, कालाजार, डेंगी, हैजालगायतका विभिन्न संक्रामक रोगहरू फैलिन सक्छन् ।
- संक्रामक रोग फैलाउने झिँगा, लामखुट्टे, भुसुना आदिको नियन्त्रण गरौं ।
- संक्रामक रोगबाट बच्न शुद्ध र उमालेको पानी पिऔं ।
- बासी तथा सडेगलेका खाना नखाऔं ।
- घरभित्र र वरपरको सरसफाइमा ध्यान दिऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

DINING

**Yala Cafe**

Start your day with a stack of pancakes, eggs benedict and bacon in the cosy ambience of Yala Cafe.

Thamel, 9801169212

**Koko Korean Fast Food**

Koko brings the bold flavors of Korean street food to Kathmandu, from crispy fried chicken and loaded tteokbokki, to flavorful kimbap and hearty ramyeon.

Golfutar, 9700350625

Kharayo Bakes

Specializing in handcrafted desserts, Kharayo Bakes offers a wide selection of pastries, cakes, and cookies. Order the classic cheesecake, fluffy croissants, or custom cakes for special occasions.

Hanuman Dhoka, 9851132172

Mamagoto Nepal

Mamagoto Nepal boasts a wide menu of asian and asian-fusion dishes. Enjoy Maki Rolls, satay, dumplings, and ramen, and wash it down with their exclusive cocktails.

Panipokhari (01)4446299

**Feels**

With music and city views, Feels is the ideal spot to catch up with friends or simply take a break. While you're there, enjoy sizzling grills, crafted beer, or a fine cup of coffee.

Jhamsikhel, 9702681253

**The Workshop Eatery**

Indulge in classic American cuisine at The Workshop Eatery. The Nutella Doughnut and Nashville Style Chicken Sandwich are must-tries.

Bakhundole, 9860431504

Red Mud Coffee

Elevate your coffee experience with the finest Nepali beans at Red Mud. Also on the menu: a variety of mouthwatering pizzas and loaded sandwiches, as well as a large variety of Nepali snacks.

Gairidhara (01) 4422306

Around Kathmandu in 100 miles

The Manjushree Trail Race starting Friday is the ultimate endurance test

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Kathmandu was once a lake inhabited by serpents, until Manjushree visiting from present-day China saw a fluorescent lotus in the water. To reach it, the sage used his flaming sword to cut a gorge at Chobhar, draining the lake and turning it into a fertile valley.

The Manjushree Trail Race (MTR) is inspired by this legend. There are five categories along a near-circular route around the rim of Kathmandu Valley: 10k, 30k, 50k, 100k, and one that is 100 miles that is 157.7km (map, right).

The 100 miles category starts at 8AM on 14 March, and runners have 52 hours until noon on 16 March to complete it. Arjun Kulung Rai's 26:52:56 is the current record, set in 2024.

"The Manjushree legend and the perfect loop make the race very meaningful, and I wanted to do it," says participant Dong Sheng from the northern Chinese city of Harbin who started running in 2016 with 5k until he accomplished a 100 miler in 2022. "Running is spiritual, as you are always trying to overcome what you could previously do."

Sheng is one of 131 international runners who have signed up for the Manjushree race, where there are a total of 502 participants this year, 94 of them women. The first edition of the race only had 7 runners total.

"A reason this race is popular is because it is a good mix of rural and accessible," says Jimmy Oostrom, a Dutch runner. "Often, 100-milers are way out of the way. Here, the start is only a short drive after landing in Kathmandu."

The 100 mile and 50km are now qualifier races for the Asia Trail Masters, an international series of trail races based in Hong Kong. Last year, a Nepali team competed and won in the Asia Trail Master Championship series in Borneo. The 100-mile category starts and finishes at Single Tree on Nagarjun, other distances have different start and end points.

On the winning team was Rashila Tamang, who is part



PHOTOS: MTR

of Trailmandu that implements logistics for the race, such as recruiting and training volunteers, and marking the route. "Nepal has great geography for trail running, but it is still very hard to make it your career," says Tamang.

The MTR has a guidebook detailing the categories, route, checkpoints, rules and what is available at each stop.

"If we say we're going to start

at 8, we're going to start at 8," says Narayan Acharya, the man behind naming the race 'Manjushree'.

"People tried to sign up after the deadline, we had to tell them no." Acharya who builds traditional rammed earth houses through his company Sustainable Future Nepal, has been long involved with promoting trail running in Nepal, and hailing from Jumla himself, mentored Sunmaya Budha also

from Jumla, now a trail running star in and outside Nepal.

The organisers are sponsoring up to 50 runners from rural Nepal who may not afford the Rs6,000 entry fee to participate.

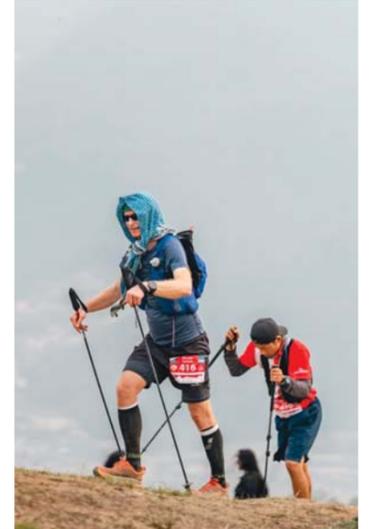
"It is hard to get sponsors to give us money because Nepal is still a pretty small market," says Oostrom, currently on crutches due to an ACL injury. "We also have to take the necessary precautions to make sure we can quickly help a runner in trouble."

The logistics of an ultra trail race are more complicated than a marathon. Marking and maintaining the trail requires careful work, especially as signs often get lost. The long distances also require runners to run through the night.

A live tracking system would ensure a runner's safety as well as prevent cheating, but for now organisers are relying on vigilant volunteers and fellow runners to find runners needing help.

There are strict rules for the race, and breaking them can result in significant time penalties or even disqualification. Get food or drink assistance outside of the checkpoints and you get a penalty of 15 minutes. Miss any pieces of mandatory gear and an hour is added to your time. Take some sort of shortcut or cheat using a vehicle, and you are disqualified.

There are dangers like cliffs along the trail, lightning on exposed



ridges, landslides caused by earthquakes, leopards, and hornet swarms. Ultra running takes a massive toll on the body. The brain may shut off certain areas to be able to keep going, so volunteers watch runners carefully.

"After mile 50, your body starts digesting itself," says Oostrom.

Alongside Acharya and Oostrom, the organising crew is made up of race director Ashish Mishra, and Jeevan Lama and Rashila Tamang from Trailmandu.

"We can execute this race well because we are all passionate runners ourselves," says Acharya.

The team has taken measures to make the race safe and comfortable for female participants. 'Run freely, speak openly, and wear what makes you feel comfortable in our races,' says the guidebook. Prize money is the same for male and female winners, across categories.

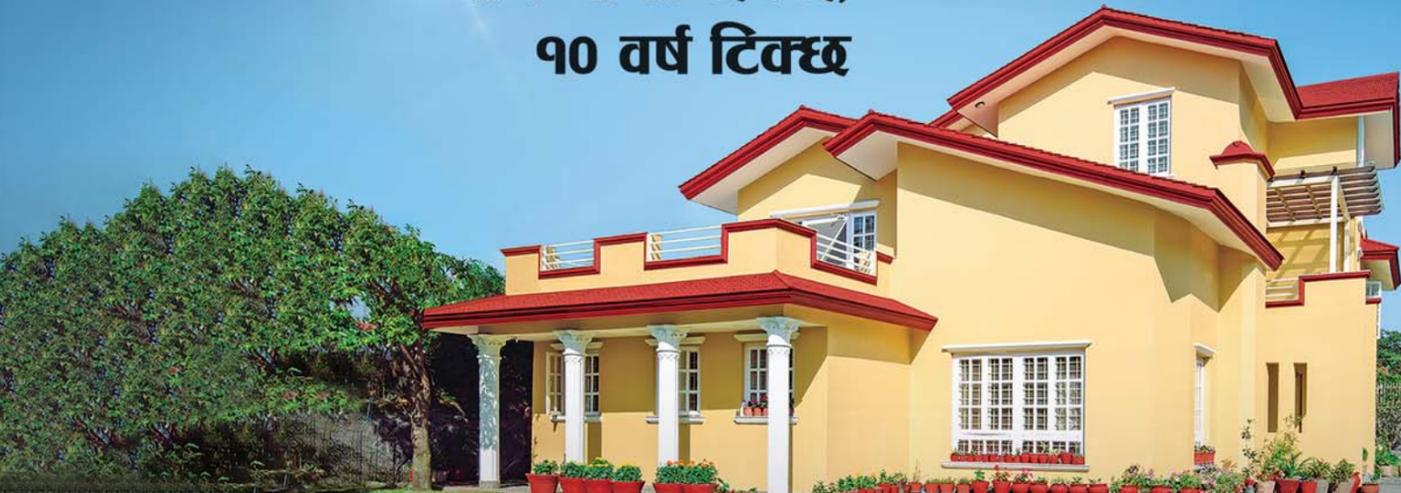
Lately, Nepal has been steadily building itself as a destination for adventure sports such as mountain biking and trail running. And with the Manjushree race, enthusiasts have hopes to set the standard for other trail races in the country.

Sheng has been part of big races in China. "The better the economy, and more money people have, the more they can get involved in such pursuits," he says. "But I have to say, for the scale of this race, everything has been done very professionally." 🇳🇵

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**घाम-पानी छेक्छ,
१० वर्ष टिक्छ**







चर्को घामबाट बचाउँछ



मुसलधारै वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ



१० वर्ष वारेन्टी



A burning problem that needs

60,000 Nepalis are burned every year, but most suffer far from treatment centres in Kathmandu

■ Marty Logan

Last month, Finance Minister Bishnu Paudel and Pokhara Mayor Dhanraj Acharya were burned when hydrogen-filled balloons exploded at the launch of Pokhara Visit Year 2025. Both were flown to Kathmandu for treatment.

In 2023, Nepali Congress Member of Parliament (MP) Chandra Bhandari was severely burned in a kitchen fire. He was taken to India for treatment. His Rs5.6 million medevac and treatment bill was paid by the government.

It took the burn injuries of high-profile figures in Nepal to finally spark action on an issue that affects mainly the country's poorest.

"We call this the burns paradox," says Kiran Nakarmi at the Nepal Cleft and Burn Centre at Kirtipur Hospital, where the Pokhara patients received care. "Treatment is costly and most victims are poor."

About 60,000 people suffer burn injuries in Nepal each year and 2,200 of them die. The demand for care in Kirtipur is growing.

In 2014, it treated 90 burn patients and this more than doubled to 194 in 2015, reached 373 in 2016, and peaked at 790 in 2023. Last year the Centre treated 753



Health workers participate in a training session to treat burns at the Sushma Koirala Memorial Hospital (SKMH) in Kathmandu recently.

MARTY LOGAN

patients, and in January alone this year it was 111.

Ninety-two percent of cases come from outside Kathmandu from 75 districts," says Nakarmi. "When we started it was 42%."

Ideally, burns treatment should

be decentralised so that local levels have primary burn care centres no more than two hours away, where patients can get initial treatment like cooling and dressing of wounds, and fluid replacement.

If necessary, they could be



This boy from Dailekh with burn injuries was brought to SKMH for treatment by his family.

SKMH

transferred to regional centres to handle surgery for minor burns. The government has already designated six such facilities across the country, and Nakarmi says the Centre could train their staff.

He clicks forward on a slide to

show a female patient brought in two months ago with her buttocks and thighs burned. "The wound was deep, it was not going to heal on its own. She needed some kind of graft."

If surgeons at a regional facility

Undernourished to overweight

As obesity and diabetes increase in Nepal, comes the blockbuster drug Ozempic

■ Sonia Awale

For the longest time, most Nepalis lacked adequate food and were undernourished. Fast forward three decades, and the country is starting to grapple with obesity.

At the pace with which the proportion of overweight people is growing, half of Nepal's adult population will be obese by 2050, according to a forecast study published this week in the health journal *The Lancet*. This is much higher than next-door India where about one-third of its vast population is projected to be obese.

"Obesity is the mother of all diseases, it is the biggest public health concern draining our already limited resources," says public health expert Aruna Uprety. "Changing eating habits including the intake of junk food and a sedentary lifestyle is making more and more Nepalis overweight."

Obesity has been associated with diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, heart, kidney and liver diseases, visual impairment, dementia, infertility, and certain cancers. Increasing obesity means dietary plans and fitness have become big business, even though many people cannot lose weight fast enough.

In 2017, in came a new drug that has become a game changer: the anti-diabetic medication Ozempic developed by the Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk. By chance, it was also found to be effective for weight loss, and Ozempic export and licenses gave the company a market value of \$570 billion, making it larger than the Danish economy.

"Ozempic is a classic case of a serendipitous discovery," explains Buddha Basnyat of the Patan Academy of Health Sciences. "It was



supposed to be a drug for diabetes, and not intended for weight loss. But it was so effective, it threatened to put weight loss regimens in danger of going out of business."

An active ingredient in Ozempic is the compound semaglutide, which belongs to a class of molecules known as glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) that delays gastric emptying, causing a feeling of fullness. It also seems to influence areas of the brain that controls appetite, making people feel satiated.

It also reduces cardiovascular disease as well as the risk of dementia, and in stroke prevention and fighting alcoholism. Says Basnyat: "In many ways, Ozempic is that one modern medicine that can treat a lot of

conditions. It is a blockbuster drug."

Ozempic is not available in Nepal yet but as a Least Developed Country (LDC), the country is exempt from patent protection for pharmaceuticals until 1 January 2033, and can manufacture generic medicines without compensating or informing the innovators. Novo Nordisk is set to enter the Indian market despite quickly approaching patent expiry in January 2026. Its patent in China is also set to expire in 2026.

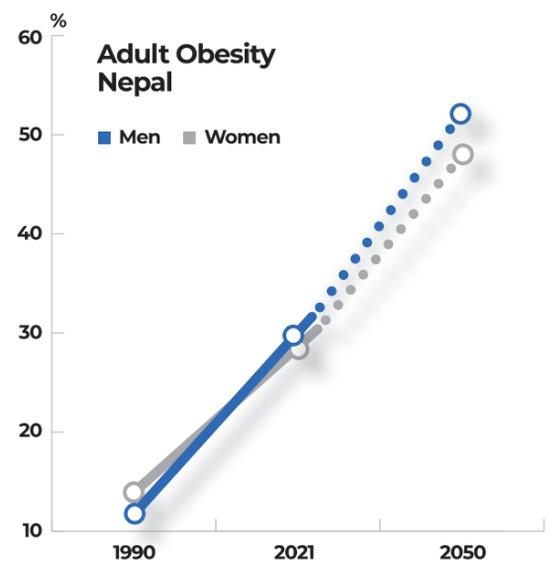
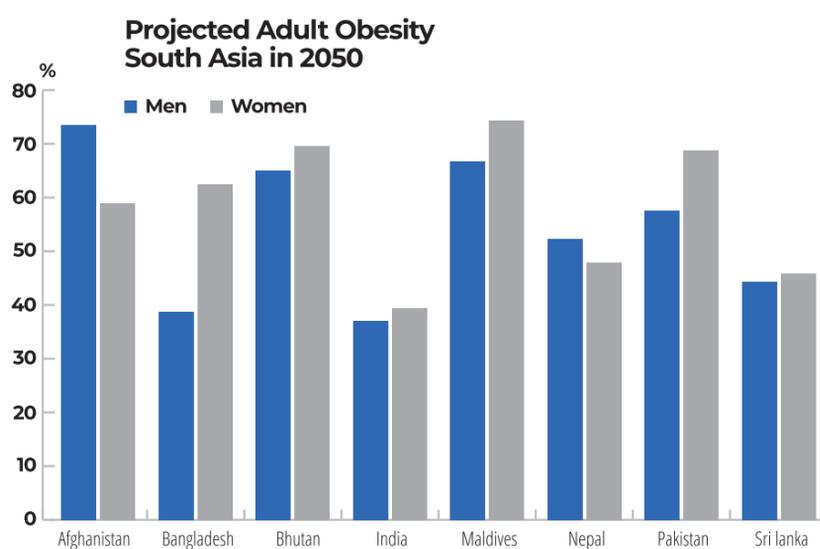
"Manufacturing a new drug in Nepal isn't simple as approval doesn't come easy unlike in our neighbouring countries but we are trying," says Shankar Ghimire of Asian Pharmaceuticals about Ozempic, adding that it did start working on semaglutide three years ago. "If we have approval, we can bring the molecule and formulate it here in three months."

Ozempic is usually given as an injection once a week but is also available in a pill form called Rybelsus which has to be taken daily. The drug can cost about Rs10,000 per month.

Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and bloating are some of the side effects to the drug. Because it can cause rapid muscle loss, users may experience sagging and develop a gaunt appearance. Stopping the medication could again lead to weight gain.

Aruna Uprety also cautions against following certain weight loss trends too quickly, and to take into considerations specific health needs and conditions before taking new medication.

She says: "We don't yet know long term effects of these drugs for obesity, elsewhere people are also opting for bariatric stomach surgery but nothing quite beats a healthy diet and natural methods to keep fit." 🇳🇵



solutions

were properly trained, they could have done the graft. Instead, the patient waited for one month before coming to Kirtipur.

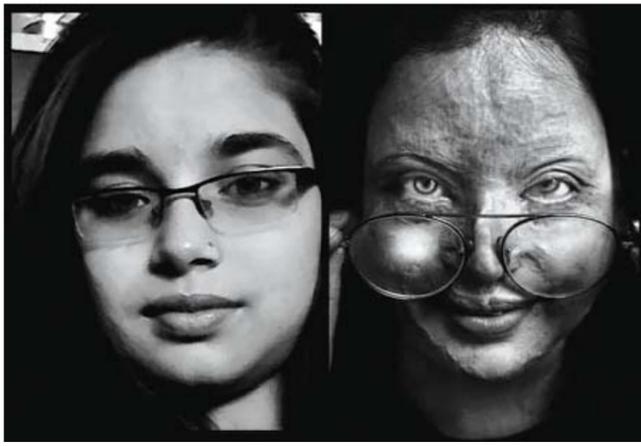
Nakarmi is looking for funding for a 70-bed national burn care centre at Kirtipur Hospital, where patients can be isolated from the risk of infection that comes with sharing space in general wards.

Another MP, Bindabasini Kansakar, is herself a survivor of an acid attack by a spurned suitor in 2013. She registered a Bill in Parliament last year that includes specialised burn units in all government hospitals with 100+ beds, and in some private hospitals and medical colleges in Kathmandu.

She is also calling on the government to create a fund to give immediate financial support to victims and their families, discounts for women and children, especially from poorer communities, as well as training for health staff, twice yearly awareness programmes at local levels, and strong penalties to deter acid attacks and intentional burn injuries.

Parliament's delay in passing the Bill is 'deeply frustrating, especially given my personal experience,' Kansakar wrote to us.

'I know first-hand the physical, emotional, and financial struggles burn victims endure. Delays mean more victims are left without proper care, financial support, or legal protection,' she added. 'If burns affected wealthier or more influential communities, the response might have been swifter. This inequality is precisely why the Bill is so crucial — to ensure justice and support for all



Member of Parliament Bindabasini Kansakar before an acid attack by a spurned suitor in 2013 (left), after, and now.

victims, regardless of their social standing.'

Burn incidents are the second most common injury in rural Nepal, according to the World Health Organization, and researcher Kamal Phuyal says that making just a handful of simple adjustments to everyday life could prevent most major burns.

Before Covid-19, he ran a research project in three municipalities in the mountains, hills and Tarai. After six months gathering data, the team told locals to make changes in their communities to prevent burns.

For the next two and a half years, Phuyal worked with health staff, female community health volunteers and other locals. In that time, the number of major burns in the three districts dropped from 21 to zero for two years running.

The most effective change was to stop people from cooking on the ground. "If you can put the cooking stoves just three feet (1m) off the ground, 50% of burns can be eliminated," explains Phuyal.

Nakarmi says that 70% of patients at Kirtipur Hospital, too, got burn injuries in the kitchen. "It should be the safest

place to be, but it is the most unsafe," she adds.

Phuyal says local representatives were convinced by his findings and, especially in Makwanpur, eager to make changes. In a training session at Sushma Koirala Memorial Hospital (SKMH) last October, he expected local governments to approve construction of a house only if the plans included putting the cooking space 1m off the ground, to reduce burn incidents.

But Covid-19 hit, the project ended, the officials were replaced after elections, and the work lost momentum. Today, no local government seems to have moved forward on burn prevention.

During the training session at SKMH, the hospital's deputy director, Rojina Shilpakar, described some of the burn cases at the facility in recent months.

In Dailekh district, two boys were severely burned while collecting fodder. "The parents all thought that they would die so they didn't take them for medical help. But after two weeks they survived and the story was posted on social media."

The hospital reached out and arranged for both boys to be



brought to Kathmandu, one to Kirtipur Hospital and the other to SKMH, with burns on 40% of his body. "He was emaciated, just flesh and bones, covered in herbal medicine that looked like mud," recalls Shilpakar.

If he had been brought for treatment quickly, he could have recovered sooner, she adds. But he was malnourished, and contractures had developed where one part of the body sticks to another, preventing movement.

"We couldn't take him to the operating room right away because of his malnourished condition. He had to gain some weight, increase his haemoglobin levels. Even skin grafts were not taken properly, so it affected the healing," explains Shilpakar.

Poverty prevents many families from seeking care, although both facilities will not turn away burn cases for lack of money. SKMH paid the bills for the Dailekh boys' treatment, including an eight-month hospital stay. Now seven, the youngster has already had a follow-up surgery and is likely to need more operations as he grows.

Smaller hospitals outside Kathmandu often do not not

accept severe burn cases, and instead send them immediately to a larger facility. "If the patient dies within a few hours, they will be blamed, So they just try to push them away," adds Shilpakar.

SKMH has been training health workers from across the country to treat burns since 2012. This includes countering the prevalent belief at the time that burn victims should not be given fluids. Patients would reach the centre dehydrated, and then go into acute kidney failure. Some with a high percentage of burns die.

Those cases have decreased in the last few years because health workers have been trained, including to give fluids to patients.

The treatment at the Cleft and Burn Centre has become much more effective since it opened in 2014. Says Nakarmi: "Back then we could not save anyone who had 40% burns or greater. Now we can save half of victims with 40% burns, and if someone has 60% burns, they have a 15% chance of survival. We aim to save half of patients with 60% burns."

The centre developed a six-day training for health staff on burns care for workers from facilities country-wide, but funding was provided by USAID and has been cut. There is no replacement in sight.

Recent increase in government support for burns treatment seems to have been sparked by the case of MP Bhandari. In October, the government announced free treatment for patients from the poorest families.

"But there is a little catch," says Nakarmi. "The treatment of destitute burn victims, are supposed to be covered right? But everyone else also wants to get support. A lot of Nepali people are not destitute, but they are poor. We just try to cover their costs as much as possible." 🇳🇵

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