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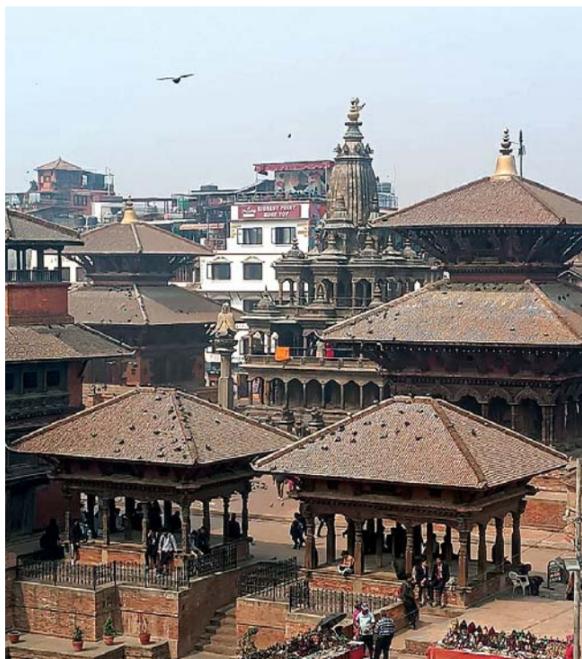
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KUNDA DIXIT



SONIA AWALE

Inside

Langtang after 10 years
PAGE 4-5

Bhaktapur 2.0
Bungamati builds back
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Away from home when Nepal shook
PAGE 10-11

MONUMENTAL LOSS: Patan's Manga Hiti and Krishna Mandir at 3:30PM on 25 April 2015 (left) and on Thursday morning (above). All the temples destroyed and damaged in the palace square have been rebuilt.

China, including those close to the epicentre, burst. No major landslides blocked any rivers.

The unique characteristic of the rupture meant the earthquake was felt mostly eastwards from the epicentre, concentrated in and around Kathmandu Valley. The frequency of the earthquake waves and its duration damaged or destroyed older brick and clay buildings, but most cement-built structures survived.

All these factors ensured a relatively low loss of life, although 10 years later, 2015 is also a stark reminder that we may not be so lucky in the future. It is not panic-mongering to remind ourselves that there will be next times. Nepal sits on one of the most seismically active parts of the Himalaya.

The 7.7 magnitude quake in Burma last week serves as a reminder that earthquakes are a regular phenomenon along the Himalayan arc, and there is a seismic gap in western Nepal where a mega quake is long overdue.

It is also important to keep the 8,900 earthquake fatalities in 2015 in perspective. Nearly 40,000 children in Nepal die every year before their first birthday due to preventable diseases -- that is 109 every day.

But that does not get as much international media attention.  **Kunda Dixit**

11:56 25 April 2015

On 15 January 2015 on National Earthquake Safety Day, an Editorial in Nepali Times titled 'Preparing To Be Prepared' warned: 'When (not if) the next earthquake strikes Nepal, don't ask what the government can do for you, ask what your community can do for itself.'

Just over three months later, Kathmandu was struck at 11:56AM on 25 April by a 7.8M earthquake epicentred in Gorkha. Nearly 9,000 people were killed, tens of thousands wounded, and entire neighbourhoods were destroyed.

There were tragic scenes in the immediate aftermath, followed by days of uncertainty, rumours and disinformation. But it was the

same community spirit cited in the Editorial that helped Nepalis pull together to get through the calamity.

Relief groups sprang up spontaneously through the Internet to rush relief and help survivors to rebuild. Government agencies that were initially slow to respond ultimately stepped in.

The Nepal Army, APF, and Police pulled out most people from the ruins, even though international search and rescue teams got most high profile media coverage.

It was clear from the outset that despite the loss of life and the destruction, things could have been much worse. Had it not been a Saturday, schools would be open and filled with children. Nearly 35,000 class rooms in 7,000 schools in 14 districts were destroyed.

Even if there were only 10 children per class, a mind boggling number of students and teachers would have been killed.

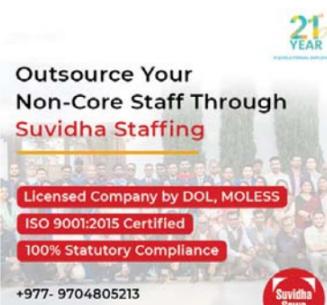
Although there was network congestion, mobile phones worked, most national highways were serviceable, and Kathmandu airport was back in operation by 1PM. Electricity was restored in most places by nightfall. None of the glacial lakes in Nepal and




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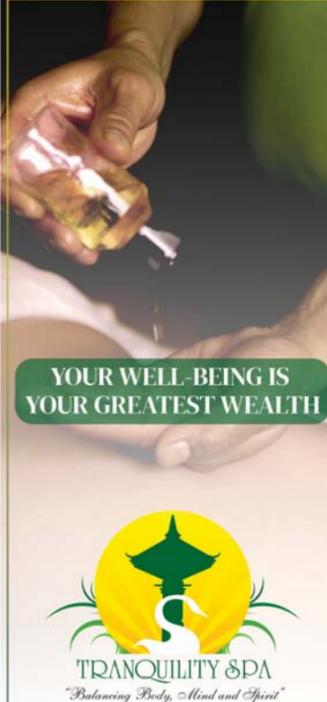
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Philanthropy in an era of declining development aid

Philanthropy will never replace public aid, but it can be a powerhouse if we use it right. With global development funding under strain, European aid budgets being redirected toward defence and rearmament, and the United States rethinking foreign assistance altogether, the aid community has been left scrambling.



GUEST EDITORIAL
William Moore

The reactions so far have been of two kinds: calls for philanthropy to fill the gap, and moralising statements shaming governments for stepping back. Unfortunately, the first is unrealistic, and the second is ineffective.



MONIKA DEUPALA / NT ARCHIVES

Focus on proven solutions like investing in prenatal nutrition, rather than on flashy, multisectoral schemes with no immediate payoff

Private donors cannot solve systemic global challenges alone, and telling politicians that they are morally bankrupt generally does not bring them around to your side. Instead, we need to meet policymakers where they are, sharpen our arguments, and focus on what actually works. The hard truth is that most government aid is not even designed for effectiveness, because it prioritises processes over results. Nor has philanthropy been immune to this impulse.

In early years at the Eleanor Crook Foundation, we funded holistic, multisectoral programs that tried to tackle all causes of malnutrition simultaneously. But the results were underwhelming. The approach looked good on paper, but produced no measurable improvements in malnutrition. So, we learned from that failure and changed course. Now, we direct our funding where the evidence is strongest and the results most immediate.

At the recent Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit in Paris, we announced a \$50 million commitment, alongside \$200 million from other donors, to scale up one of the most cost-effective interventions in global health: prenatal vitamins – known as multiple micronutrient supplements (MMS). This funding will go toward a \$1 billion roadmap to ensure access to MMS for pregnant women no matter where they live.

The science on this issue is unequivocal. MMS replaces outdated iron and folic acid (IFA) tablets still given to many pregnant women in low-income countries. With MMS, women receive 15 nutrients, instead of just two, leading to a dramatic reduction in maternal anemia, stillbirth, and low birth weight. The estimated economic returns are \$37 for every \$1 invested while infant mortality is reduced by nearly one-third.

The global inequities in maternal health are profound. In London, a pregnant woman routinely has access to comprehensive prenatal vitamins. In Lagos, she might receive IFA, or nothing at all. The difference reflects a gap in will, not knowledge. Ending such disparities does not require a scientific breakthrough, just greater investment in already proven solutions.

More than two decades of research, three Lancet studies, and multiple World Bank investment cases have identified roughly ten nutrition interventions that are consistently underfunded despite their proven efficacy. These are not flashy, multisectoral, utopian initiatives. They are targeted, evidence-based programs that can be implemented immediately to deliver measurable results.

Solutions like breastfeeding support, Vitamin A supplementation, prenatal vitamins, and ready-to-use foods for severely malnourished children belong to a package of interventions that could save at least two million lives over five years if scaled up in nine high-burden countries. Such life-changing results would cost just \$887 million per year.

Malnutrition is now the leading driver of child mortality globally, contributing to some three million deaths in 2023 alone. These are not mysterious tragedies. They are predictable and in many cases cost little to prevent. In a world that routinely sends tourists to space, we obviously can afford to ensure that all pregnant women have access to a \$2 bottle of vitamins.

This year's N4G Summit may be the last of its kind. It was part of a summit series linked to the Olympics, which will next be hosted by the US. With the current US administration already signaling that it will not continue the tradition, recent commitments made in Paris have gained new urgency. Vague pledges and political posturing will no longer do.

We are not asking governments to spend like they used to. Rather, we are urging them to look at the evidence and use their remaining budgets for official development assistance to scale up proven, cost-effective solutions. A modest investment in MMS – representing less than the cost of one week of G7 countries' defense spending – could save 600,000 lives.

Even with constrained budgets, we have a chance to save millions of lives. But only if we stop trying to do everything, and focus instead on what is the right thing to do.

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William Moore is the CEO of the Eleanor Crook Foundation and Chair of Stronger Foundations for Nutrition.

ONLINE PACKAGES



Ten years since the 2015 earthquake, Bhaktapur has rebuilt its own monuments without outside help while Bungamati's original architecture has been replaced with modern concrete boxes. Watch the video on our YouTube channel and read stories on page 6-7.



Aman Eakal was working in the UAE when the 2015 Nepal earthquake struck. He was constantly worried and longed to help in the rescue and relief efforts. Read his story on page 10-11, and watch him perform one of his songs. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more multimedia content.

PRO-MONARCHY

The first time I was in Nepal, the king had just declared a state of emergency due to a Maoist uprising ('Nepal's déjà vu on Black Friday', Sonia Awale, nepalimes.com). By my third time here, there were multiple general strikes. It wasn't long after I left that Nepal officially became a republic. It is strange to see a pro-monarchy movement now.

Nick Mather

■ Nepal just unlocked a new achievement: 'Reverse Progression.' At this rate, we might as well bring back kings, witch trials, and sending letters via pigeons.

Nitesh Patel

■ The violence is a total misunderstanding of the right to free speech and voicing an opinion ('Republicans and royalists on Nepal's streets', nepalimes.com). Looting and arson is a crime whatever your opinion might be. A sad day for Nepal.

Ben-Erik Ness

■ Monarchy and 2025 just doesn't sound right

Rupson Singh

KATHMANDU MOST POLLUTED

I am smoking four packs of cigarettes a day in Kathmandu, so are my lovely dogs, my colleagues, friends as well as neighbours too ('No smoke without fire', nepalimes.com). I feel like urging a lockdown to save the next generation.

Maria Kempe

HITI WATER

Water would be distributed from Kathmandu's underground aqueducts through gradually declining stone paved tunnels, that's why most hiti and dhunge-dhara are a few feet below the roads ('Kathmandu's liquid landscape', Sudiksha Tuladhar, #1254). This is such a complex system that the only other civilisation that was able to master it was the Romans.

Aashish Mani Acharya

TROLLEY BUSES

The China-aided, now defunct electric buses that used to run from Kathmandu to Bhaktapur, should have been maintained and expanded ('The public in public transportation', Sonia Awale, #1254). Why was it ended?

Daniel Birch

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Liquid landscape

by Sudiksha Tuladhar
The hiti exhibition at Patan Museum last week showcased the hydrological heritage of Kathmandu Valley's water supply network and how modern technology can help restore them. Read our review at nepalimes.com.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Public in public transport

by Sonia Awale
The state of democracy in a country can be measured by the quality of its public transport system. Going by that criteria, Nepal is not doing very well. Join the discussion online about the current state of Nepal's public transport, and its future.

x Most popular on X



Republicans vs royalists

Nepali Times
Kathmandu ground to a halt last week as pro- and anti-monarchy protests rocked separate parts of the capital. The pro-monarchy protest turned violent, with rioters resorting to arson and looting. One protester and one reporter died (page 12). Read coverage of the protests at our website.

66 Most commented

NEA sacking exposes cronyism

by Vishad Raj Onta
The coalition's sacking of NEA Executive Director Kulman Ghising— who many Nepalis credit for ending prolonged daily power cuts—added fuel to the fire of anti-government sentiments. Details online.

🔥 Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Protestors by a pro-monarchy group at Kathmandu's Tinkune resorted to arson and stone throwing, attacking newspaper offices and party buildings. The domestic airport has suspended flights.

Janine Jamarkattel @Mrs_Jamarkattel
Gorkha Parishad 2.0
Who are the modern-day Bharat Shumsher and Mrigendra Shumsher?
(Those who know history will know.)

Susanna Haapalainen @susannaelina
Kathmandu demonstrations turn violent, leading to curfew in parts of the city. The Socialist Front was rallying to defend the federal republic, while pro-monarchy forces protested seeking to revive Hindu state.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Paying tribute to Kathmandu Valley's Hiti system, the ongoing exhibition The Liquid Landscape of Kathmandu Valley at Patan Museum showcases archaeological research exploring their maintenance to supplement modern systems. Read Sudiksha Tuladhar's story:

Netashwa @netashwa
Nice and detailed clear reporting. Thank you.

1,000 WORDS



COMEBACK KID: Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) chair Rabi Lamichhane speaks with the press on Tuesday after meeting House Speaker Dev Raj Ghimire at Singha Darbar, during which he was denied a request to be reinstated as a Member of Parliament.

RSS

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Who'll Blink First?

Two decades after Gyanendra's 1 February 2005 coup that was the beginning of the end of the monarchy in Nepal, royalists want to reinstate a Hindu monarchy. A pro-monarchy protest last week in Kathmandu turned violent as rioters resorted to arson and looting, leading to the death of a journalist and another civilian (page 9). Meanwhile, a collective of leftist opposition parties led by the Maoists gathered across town on the same day in a peaceful demonstration against the reestablishment of the monarchy. Let us look back 20 years ago this week to our main story from issue #241 1-7 April 2005:



while simultaneously proving to the people that things are returning to normal after he took over.

● **Political parties** still believe in a constitutional monarchy, they want to give the king a face-saving way out, but they aren't in a position to be of any help.

● The **Maoists** are in a fix, too. A serious rift in the ranks threatens to undermine the revolution, a soft landing is out of the question and there is no immediate prospect of gaining the upper hand militarily.

● The **Nepali people** are confused. The security forces were supposed to be chasing Maoists, but if there have been any major victories the army is not boasting about them. In fact, security forces had their hands full in the past two months putting down pro-democracy rallies, keeping politicians in detention, enforcing censorship and intimidating the media. The people may want to give the king a chance, but the longer this drags on the more they will see February First for what it really was.

Two months after King Gyanendra seized power on 1 February everyone is in a fix:

● **King Gyanendra** gave the international community and his subjects a choice: me or the Maoists. He needs to show foreign powers that the Maoists are a real threat to the state,

For archived material of Nepal Times of the past 20 years, site search: nepalimes.com

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LANGTANG AFTER 10 YEARS

Nepal's oldest cheese plant destroyed and rebuilt after the 2015 earthquake, now at risk from state neglect

■ Sonia Awale

Gyalbu Tamang had spent the night in Langtang village for a prayer vigil, and was on his way back to his home in Kyanjin, three hours up the valley.

It started drizzling, and he took shelter at a friend's place. Just before noon as tea was being served, the ground shook violently. It was strangely dark, large lumps of snow started falling like in a blizzard.

Tamang knew it was a big earthquake, and rushed on to Kyanjin to see if his two daughters were safe. His heart sank when he looked down from a bluff overlooking the village. His house and much of the monastic town were piles of rubble and ice.

His daughters had been taught in school to take cover in an earthquake, and this saved them when it hit. Tamang's sister Sumjo was outside and blown off by the blast. When she came to, she could not move because of a broken leg and her baby daughter had been thrown away but safe.

Tamang then ran back down to Langtang where the rest of his extended family lived. He passed people fleeing in the opposite direction who said there was nothing left of Langtang. His parents, sisters and their families were all buried by the avalanche.

"If I had not left that morning, I would have been dead too," says Tamang, now 49.

The 7.8 magnitude earthquake unleashed an avalanche from Mt Langtang Lirung (7,234m) that bulldozed a glacier, burying the village below in debris 100m deep.

At least 310 people were killed,



LUISMI ORTIZ / OCCUME

80 of them international trekkers. Most were never found, some were blown off by the shock wave to the other side of the valley. Langtang village was wiped off the map.

Tamang returned to the Langtang Cheese Production Centre which he heads. It was set up in the 1950s by the Swiss, and now run by the government's Dairy Development Cooperation (DDC).

The factory was flattened by the earthquake. What was left of the equipment, raw material and 150kg of cheese in the

storeroom were destroyed. Of the yak herders who supplied milk to the plant, 22 had been killed and 700 of their yaks.

Langtang's survivors, including Tamang's family, were evacuated to Phuntsok Choeling Monastery in Kathmandu for safety as aftershocks rattled Langtang.

That was where Tamang reconnected with film-maker Kesang Tseten, who was so moved by the tales of survivors who had lost family members, that he made his award-

winning documentary Trembling Mountain.

"I wasn't initially thinking of making a film, however, the story started unfolding itself," recalls Tseten.

Trembling Mountain became not just the story of the rebirth of Langtang but also about its yak herders and cheese makers who had lost their livelihood.

"Mountain people struck by disaster with the tangible goal of rebuilding a cheese factory was a metaphor for the community getting back on its feet," Tseten explains.

The film crew visited Langtang

five times over the next year, trekking across trails made treacherous by landslides and rockfalls. The Nepal Army was still recovering bodies, and Kesang filmed a masked Gyalbu Tamang chanting with prayer beads as he identified the decomposed bodies of relatives.

After watching the film, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Kathmandu helped rebuild the cheese plant.

Gyalbu Tamang's father was one of the first cheese makers trained by the Swiss 70 years ago, and he grew up milking yaks in high pasture and



25 APRIL 2015

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Turkish to Ohrid

Turkish Airlines is now flying to Ohrid, its second destination in North Macedonia. The city of Ohrid is popular with tourists and recognised by UNESCO for its historical, cultural, and natural significance. It is also home to the richly biodiverse Lake Ohrid. The carrier will operate four flights a week between Istanbul and Ohrid St Paul the Apostle Airport, with tickets starting at \$139. This is Turkish's 123rd destination in Europe, and its 353rd worldwide.



Pokhara-Lhasa

Nearly three years after it was inaugurated, Pokhara International Airport is finally operating regular international flights. The first once-a-week flight by Himalaya Airlines on the Lhasa-Pokhara-Lhasa-Kathmandu route started on 1 April with 107 passengers on the 1 hour and 34 minute trans-Himalayan flight.

Ncell NSL begins

The third season of the Ncell Super League started on Saturday, with an opening ceremony that featured pop singer Durgesh Thapa. Seven teams will play each other over 34 games. The top four teams will then play a qualifier/eliminator format to reach the final on April 26. Ncell is also a sponsor of Lalitpur City FC, who drew 2-2 against Kathmandu Rayzrs in the opening match. The telecom company has pledged to donate 25 educational kits to government schools across Nepal for each goal scored in the tournament.



India-Nepal projects

India and Nepal have signed a MoU to implement 10 High Impact Community Development Projects worth Rs625 million. These include construction of school buildings and health posts in various parts of rural Nepal.

Anti-violence businesses

The Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce (FNCCI) and the Federation of Nepali Industry and Entrepreneurship (FNIE) have condemned the violence on 28 March during pro-monarchy protests. Businesses were damaged, looted, and set on fire, and the groups demanded arrests and compensation.



Ather scooters

Vaidya Energy has launched the Ather 450S with a 105km range and costing Rs325,000. It comes in two variants: the 2.9kWh option has 105km range, and the 3.7kWh option has 130km range and costs Rs400,000. The scooters come with a 8year/80,000km battery warranty.

World Bank package

The World Bank has approved a financing package of \$150m for Nepal's Third Bridges Improvement and Maintenance Program. Nepal's bridge systems are critical in connecting remote communities to essential services, and are vulnerable to landslides, floods, and earthquakes.



IME x IFC

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) has agreed to assess Global IME Bank's digital services and recommend strategies for improvement.



Thailand-Nepal pact

Thailand and Nepal signed eight agreements during Prime Minister K.P. Oli's visit to the country this week in the presence of Thai PM Paetongtarn Shinawatra involving tourism, agriculture and Thai investment in Nepal.

Pond's rebrands

Beauty brand Pond's has rebranded to Pond's Skin Institute to showcase three core ingredients: Niacinamide, Hyaluronic Acid, and Activated Charcoal.



Nepal Army in Burma

Nepal Army sent its CASA aircraft to Nay Pyi Taw this week with relief material and a medical team to treat survivors of the 7.7 earthquake that struck central Burma on 28 March.

Women in Motion

Nabil Bank held the Women in Motion-Accelerate Action program, aimed at encouraging female leadership in managerial positions in the banking sector, and at preventing workplace violence.



learning the art of cheese-making which he is now passing on to a younger generation.

Trembling Mountain also prompted the DDC to raise the buying rate of yak milk from Rs70 per litre to Rs100.

The Langtang cheese factory survived a catastrophic earthquake and was rebuilt, but ten years later its very existence is in doubt again because the herders are getting older and the youth have migrated. It is also too expensive to rear yaks.

“Even a cup of black tea costs Rs120, so why would yak herders do such hard work?” asks Tamang, who was in Kathmandu this week to lobby with the DDC to increase the price of milk.

The number of herders supplying milk to the cheese plant has come down from 36 to five. Some of the yaks are already being bought by other cheese factories down the valley or in Gatlang.

Langtang cheese has strong brand value, and Tamang hopes that a private investor will be interested. This would not just revive the dairy business, but also the cultural heritage associated with yak herding that is in decline.

The climate crisis has added to the problem. Less snow in winter affects grass in spring, leading to lower nutrition levels in yaks and



less fat content in their milk.

This has a direct impact on cheese production at the factory, which has fallen to 2,300kg per season from a high of 7,000kg when Tamang’s father Pasang Norbu used to head the plant.

“My father had 15 yaks himself, and he bought more with his retirement money so that his children would continue to be in the dairy business,” says Tamang. “My son is in Grade 6 in Kathmandu, and I hope he grows up to be a cheese maker too.”

In the 10 years after the earthquake and avalanche, Kyanjin has become the new tourism hub with 46 lodges and has been dubbed ‘Thamel on the Mountain’.

REBUILD AND REVIVE: Spanish search and rescue team with sniffer dogs scour the debris that buried Langtang village after the earthquake in 2015 (far left).

Langtang Cheese Production Centre was set up by the Swiss 70 years ago, and was destroyed in the 2015 disaster (above). It was rebuilt after the earthquake (above, right) but has been impacted by dwindling yak herders.

As a boy, Gyalbu Tamang (left) learnt cheesemaking from his father who was trained by the Swiss in the 1950s.

Karma Tamang, a lodge owner in Kyanjin whose relatives also perished, told us in 2021 that perhaps the earthquake was punishment to people of the valley for becoming too money-minded and greedy.

“Back then immediately after the earthquake, many of us said that we have to fall back on religion again. After all, we cannot take anything with us when we die.”

Besides cheesemaking, Gyalbu Tamang owns a small lodge in Kyanjin. He says, “That feeling is long gone, people are back to their old ways. Trekkers have returned, it is business as usual, and there is envy and competition.”

Cheesemaking for beginners

Technically, yak cheese is a misnomer. Yaks are male, and the female is a nak. There are also specialised names like zopyko or dzom depending on whether they are male or female crossbred with cattle.

Nepalis, even in the highlands, do not traditionally eat cheese, but do turn surplus yak milk into churpi, a hard cheese with a long shelf life. It was the Swiss 70 years ago who wished to make Nepal in their image and introduce cheese making to places like Langtang and Jiri.

The yak cheese production window is between March to November. Langtang Cheese Production Centre staff travel to high pastures up to 5,000m with their yaks. Yala has the highest quality milk as yaks graze on lush grass, yarsagumba and panchaunle in the spring season. When they have grazed on one slope, they move on to the next.

At camp, the milk is boiled to 65°C using firewood already stacked up during the off-season. The milk is then cooled to 35°C and the fat content brought down to 3.5-3.6%

from 6.5-7%.

Once the mixture attains the required fat content, an enzyme is added at about 32°C and left for five minutes after which the milk turns jelly-like. For the next 15 minutes, the smaller pieces are stirred in the vat by slowly increasing the temperature up to 52°C. At this point, the fire is stopped, but manual stirring continues for the next hour.



Next, the curd is separated using cheesecloth every few minutes throughout the night, and filled into circular moulds. The whey byproduct is traditionally used as a home remedy for gastritis.

The cheese disks are transported down to the factory in Kyanjin and dipped in salt water for 48 hours and then stored in racks for three months. They are moistened with salt water every once in a while before the cheese disks ripen.

Today, churpi has become popular in Europe and the US as dog chew, and last year Nepal exported nearly 1,000 tonnes of dog chew worth \$90 million to the United States.

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BHAKTAPUR 2.0

The ancient town rebuilt its own monuments while much of Kathmandu Valley relied on outside help

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Every earthquake, even a minor one, shakes Bhaktapur more severely than other parts of Kathmandu Valley, and seismologists attribute this to its soil structure. It was no different in 2015 when a 7.8M earthquake rocked central Nepal. Brown dust from collapsed buildings blanketed the town like a sand storm.

Even 10 years later, the scars of that disaster are all around, even though most of the monuments have been rebuilt.

At the entrance to Bhaktapur Darbar Square is the Rameswar temple, where workers are lifting bricks to repair the damage. The Vatsala Durga temple inside the palace complex collapsed, but the all-stone structure has been masterfully restored.

The Yaksheswar Mahadev temple is encased in a bamboo scaffold. Piles of bricks and tiles are stacked below it. Some workers are on top of the temple, while others work on the ground mixing mortar.

To the north of the Darbar Square is the Fasi Dega temple which has been rebuilt. The 55-window palace and the art museum which were damaged have also been repaired.

The five-storey Nyatapola, which survived both the 1934 and 2015 earthquakes, just underwent a \$6.3 million renovation. In

Taumadhi Square below, the Biska Jatra chariot is under construction for upcoming festivities. Some tourists are on it, posing for pictures.

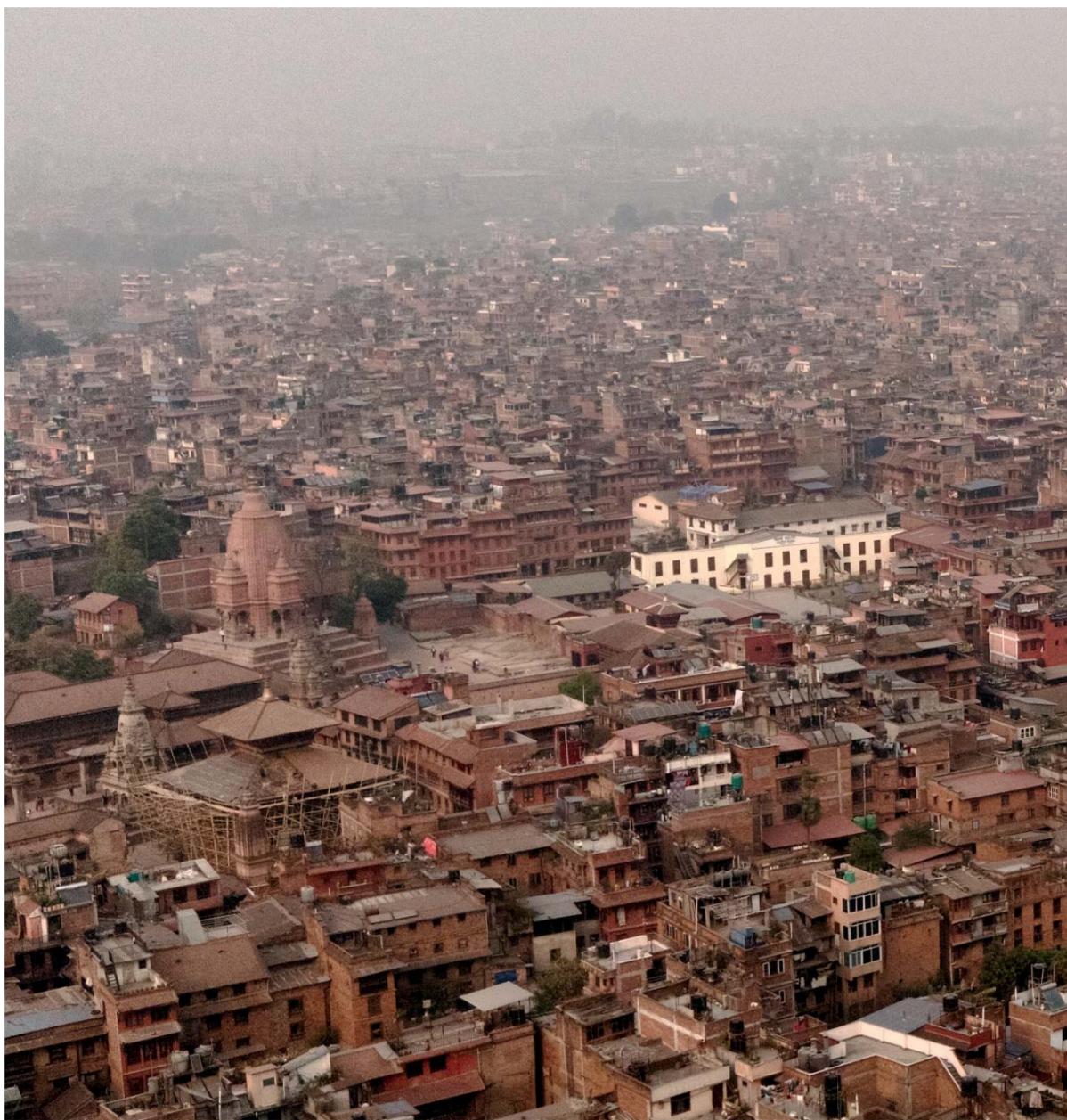
At Pottery Square, three workers sit atop an under-construction structure whittling away with chisels. Nearby houses are still supported by wooden beams. Dattatreya Square was also damaged during the earthquake, but has been renovated.

After the earthquake, the international community rushed in with offers of help. Kathmandu's Hanuman Dhoka was restored by the Chinese, Gaddi Baithak by the Americans and various countries 'adopted' other monuments.

But Bhaktapur declined assistance. UNESCO wanted to be involved since Bhaktapur had been a World Heritage Site since 1979. Germany wanted to help with a €10 million grant, since it had spearheaded the Bhaktapur Development Project 40 years ago.

"We believed that we should be able to reconstruct our monuments ourselves," says Ram Govinda Shrestha, an architect with the municipality. Indeed, Kathmandu Valley has historically rebuilt after every major earthquake with its own resources.

Architect and conservationist Rabin Puri says, "It is shameful to let someone else come in and



do the reconstruction for us, especially since the manpower and material would be ours anyway. Why use money from elsewhere?"

The budget for reconstruction came from the government, town entry fees, taxes, and donations. That was the easy part. But this was followed by multiple discussions between

the municipality, the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), the Department of Archaeology, and multiple stages of proposals, designs, estimations, and building. New committees had to be formed at every step.

"Part of the reason why there were so many steps is because we have to let the government know

Bungamati builds

A decade after the 2015 earthquake, ancient town balances recon

■ Sangya Lamsal

At 11:56AM on 25 April 2015, the ancient Newa town of Bungamati on the southern fringes of Kathmandu Valley suffered more damage than most-- it was completely razed.

Some 700 buildings collapsed and at least seven people were killed. The iconic Bungadyo temple dedicated to the rain god Machindranath collapsed in the 7.8 magnitude quake.

Ten years later, Bungamati was rebuilt. But the original architecture of two-storey houses with tilted tile roofs have been replaced with modern concrete boxes, their façades still gleaming with fresh paint.

The Bungadyo complex at the heart of the town, however, is being restored to its original grandeur as it prepares for this year's Machindranath chariot festival.

For many residents here, the horror of that day is still fresh in their minds. They remember narrow escapes, losing loved ones and the numerous aftershocks. The survivors took refuge in tents and had just started drifting back to their damaged homes when the 7 May aftershock hit.

"We got exactly one tent," says a local Kamala Tuladhar, 40, of the earthquake rescue and relief, recalling the financial strain of rebuilding. "We rebuilt everything by ourselves, that money could have gone to our children's education."

Some families in Bungamati received financial aid of up to Rs50,000 for reconstruction but most families here say that they never got any help and rebuilt on

their own. Jogmaya Maharjan, 52, received only Rs20,000 from the Red Cross despite government promises of reconstruction grants, and had to sell a plot of land to build a new house. "Everything is new now, which is good for progress, but it doesn't feel the same," she says, adding that she misses the cosy warmth of her old mud-mortar house.

Kamala currently runs a small eatery in the town and says almost everyone now has concrete houses, as well as increased awareness about earthquake safety. "We have a concrete house now, it is stronger but we lost our ancestral building," she adds.

Ratnaman Maharjan's five-storey Bungamati Homestay offering a panoramic view of the Valley to the north is a popular lodging destination for tourists looking to stay over the weekend.

"Without the earthquake, Bungamati would have remained a sleepy town that few people visited," he says. "The earthquake was a tragedy, but it forced a much-needed change."

Bungamati has always embodied a quintessential Newa ambience of the kind that had steadily disappeared from Patan or Kathmandu. It is a compact and densely-packed town sitting on higher ground with vegetable and paddy terraces below.

This unique urban-rural symbiosis was the hallmark of the Kathmandu Valley culturescape. Despite its proximity to Kathmandu, Bungamati was essentially a traditional farming village — but after the earthquake it has transitioned into a modern suburb.

The rebuilding of the Machindranath



temple has been a rather long and arduous journey, and is only now nearing completion. Unlike in Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, there were no aid agencies to help rebuild the temples here. The local chair of the

reconstruction committee also died by suicide, further delaying the process.

"In the immediate aftermath, it was all about survival, so gods and religion were the last thing on our minds," recalls Amir



PHOTOS: AJAYA HAKUJU



some neighbourhoods are still in ruins with small trees and bushes growing from the rubble.

More than 300 people were killed and over 2,000 wounded in house collapses in Bhaktapur. There were some dramatic rescues, including of a baby Sonish Awal who was rescued by an APF team 24 hours after being buried under the rubble. Sonish is now 10 years old, but his house has still not been rebuilt. The government vowed to 'Build Back Better' as fast as possible, by removing bureaucratic hurdles and grant Rs300,000 in three instalments, as well as access to loans at low interest. But things

did not go smoothly.

"Bhaktapur is very dense, so there was a lot of confusion about where property lines ended, and where walls were," says Biswanath Sujakhu, a municipality engineer. There were also disputes in families with multiple sons who had stakes in the house, as the act treated them as a single household. Many of the disputes have not been resolved yet, which is why there are so many ruins. Homeowners who chose to remake their houses to look traditional were promised further subsidies of up to Rs300,000, but even that was not enough to pay for the Rs5 million or so needed

to build a multi-storey cement structure.

Banks weren't giving loans easily, and multiple changes to the NRA chief meant the grants were not easy to access. Many residents took high-interest loans from local cooperatives. Or they were forced to undersell their land plots.

"Bhaktapur also had restrictions about the styles and height of buildings, but many houses didn't comply as people could only work with the money they had at the time," adds Sujakhu.

Nepal Vocational Academy, established by Rabintra Puri two years before the earthquake in 2013, played a crucial role. The academy produced enough masons, woodcarvers, and stone carvers so that there wasn't a shortage. The students were also involved in reconstruction efforts across the country.

Puri has just one gripe: "A lot of old houses that were perfectly fine were torn down for no reason. Those houses are 200-300 years old and could have been restored instead of being reconstructed." 🇳🇵



Ten years since the 2015 earthquake, Bhaktapur has rebuilt its own monuments without outside help while Bungamati's original architecture has been replaced with modern concrete boxes. Watch the video on our YouTube channel and subscribe to our YouTube channel for multimedia content.

that we were working as frugally as possible," recalls Shrestha. It cost more than \$200 million to rebuild the 116 heritage structures that were destroyed and damaged.

Nevertheless, Bhaktapur stands as a model of locally sourced reconstruction in every way. Community people themselves got their hands dirty along with

domestic workers and learned various aspects of reconstruction. "We showed what is possible when locals feel a strong sense of responsibility," adds Shrestha.

But while the monuments were rebuilt, it was not the same with residential buildings. Many of them still have cracks running down their brick façades, and

s back

construction with restoration



PHOTO: SUMAN NEPALI

Shakya (above right), chair of the rebuilding committee for Rato Machindranath.

But as the dust settled after the earthquake, it became clear that unless the community took charge, the temple would



never be built. The National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) formed a rebuilding committee, officially putting efforts in motion.

Restoring the temple was no easy feat, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Even transporting construction material was a logistical nightmare while prices skyrocketed. The community had to arrange for highly specific materials and intricate craftsmanship, both of which were not readily available in the market.

"Rebuilding had to be meticulous and precise to truly preserve the cultural essence of the old Machindranath temple," adds Shakya. "We lost more than just structures, we lost the very heartbeat of our heritage. Even now, it feels like we are still struggling to recover, and despite the reconstruction, something is still missing."

Ward chair Sagar Tuladhar says that the situation remained dire until the 2017 local elections, when the elected municipal council finally stepped in. The European Union

provided help for mapping and technical support.

"Before the earthquake, most families lived in ancestral homes—structures built using raw bricks and mud. In hindsight, we realise this was a major reason why so many of them collapsed," says Tuladhar.

But today, while houses are stronger and more reliable, the challenge of balancing structural resilience with the preservation of traditional settlements remains. There is also a danger of substandard concrete buildings which will not be able to withstand stronger earthquakes in the future, becoming death traps. In response, regulations have been introduced to prevent haphazard building as well as to safeguard cultural integrity. The cultural resettlement map design was approved after the earthquake, and requires the maximum height of buildings to be no more than 35m.

"Many resist restrictions on the number of floors and construction materials," admits ward chair Tuladhar. "Despite modern housing trends, we have also made every effort to uphold the distinct Newa architectural identity. Residents are not allowed to install shutters, use iron reinforcements, or plaster over traditional façades."

He adds that nearly all the homes and heritage structures have now been rebuilt, with only a few remaining to be completed in the next two years.

Concrete structures stand where mud-brick homes once did, yet the soul of Bungamati endures in its traditions and its people as it prepares for next month's Machindranath festival. 🇳🇵

EVENTS



Nepal Super League

The third season of Nepal's top-tier football league has teams from across Nepal, like Pokhara Thunder and Lalitpur City FC. 5-26 April, Tickets: Rs300-Rs800, Dasrath Rangashala, Tripureshwar

Photography exhibition

Photographer Ben Rook's upcoming photo exhibition What's Normal for the Spider is Chaos for the Fly is a series of images that suggest normality is an illusion. Stop by Gallery Mcube to see the photos. 5 April, Gallery Mcube



South Community Market

Find fresh produce, wine and cheese, accessories, and wrap up the morning with a buffet brunch at the weekly South Community Market. Sundays, 8am-1pm, Piano Piano South, Sanepa

Annapurna summit 75

The exhibition Summit of Friendship marks 75 years since the first ascent of Annapurna. Explore the past, present, and enduring legacy of one of mountaineering's greatest achievements. 5-18 April, 9am to 5pm, Alliance Française, Dhobighat

Nepal Tattoo Convention

The 12th Nepal Tattoo Convention will draw body ink enthusiasts and experts from across the world. 11-13 April, 11am onwards, Tickets: Rs500, Heritage Garden, Sanepa



Walk for Health

Join Lemon Tree Premier's Walk for Health around the city on the occasion of World Health Day 2025, aimed at raising awareness about health and fitness. The walk will begin from Narayan Chaur and end at the Lemon Tree Premier premises. Register via the QR code. 7 April, 6:30am onwards, 9802371881

Arko Euta Dronacharya

The latest play Arko Euta Dronacharya at Mandala Theatre is about a teacher who, inspired by the legendary Dronacharya, fights against corruption, attempting to restore honesty and character-building in academia. Till April 20, 5:15pm onwards Tickets: Rs500, Mandala Theatre Nepal, Thapagaun

MUSIC

Jameson Patan Fest

Sing and dance along to a phenomenal lineup of artists including Purna Rai, John Chamling, Swar and The Albatross at the Jameson Patan fest. 5 April, 2pm onwards, Tickets: Rs900++, Chyasal Stadium, Patan



1974 AD

Gear up for an unforgettable night of Nepali folk, rock, jazz, and blues with 1974 AD in honour of their 30th anniversary. Formed in the early 1990s, 1974 AD is one of the most successful rock bands in Nepal. 5 April, Tickets: Rs1,000-Rs12,000, Hyatt Ground

KatJazz 2025

This year's KatJazz Music Festival will have a special emphasis on women in music and will bring together artists from across the world for 10 specially curated concerts held across the city. Stay tuned for more details. 13-30 April, Kathmandu



Relive Nepali classics

Be part of a legendary night where Albatross and Sabin Rai & The Pharaoh revive Nepali classics for New Year's Eve. 13 April, 7pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1000, Club Prive, The Soaltee



Nawaj Ansari

Nawaj Ansari takes the stage to deliver powerful beats and raw bars, next week. 19 April, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Rs700-4,000, LOD

GETAWAY



SEE students @ Chandragiri Hills

Chandragiri Hills is offering students who just completed their SEE exams this year 50% off on Cable Car rides, Cycle 360, Swing, and Skywalk. Meanwhile, more thrills await with Zipline, Sky Cycling, Wall Climbing, and Pony Rides. Students must bring their SEE admit cards to avail the offer. Until 15 May, Chandragiri, 9802069900

Hotel Shanker

This historic Kathmandu gem blends the charm of Nepal's rich history with the comfort of contemporary amenities, and is the ideal choice for leisure or business alike. Lazimpat (01) 4510151



Hotel Barahi

Located just beyond the banks of Phewa Lake, Hotel Barahi offers stunning views and luxury rooms decorated with rustic pieces, and earthy tones. Lakeside, Pokhara (061) 450617



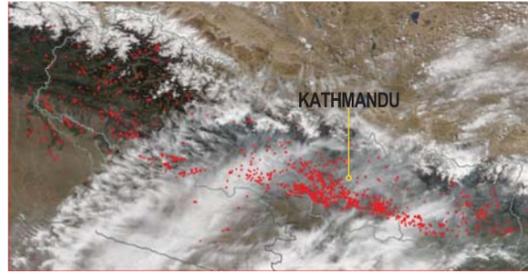
Lavanya Villa

Lavanya Villa offers modern luxuries in an ambience as visitors are surrounded by the beauty of the Himalayas. Dhulikhel, 9801087571

Grand Norling

Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at Norling with their spacious rooms. The large balconies provide front-row seats to the garden, the golf course, as well as monkeys and deer herds that wander by. Gokarna (01) 4910296

WEEKEND WEATHER



Smoke Haze

Kathmandu Valley's AQI hit 300 this week due to forest fires raging out of control in Parsa, Salyan, Makwanpur and along the East-West Highway. The expected rains from a westerly front midweek did not materialise. The thick haze will therefore continue for next few days until another system arrives on Tuesday, hopefully with some rain to douse the flames. A heat wave is baking northern India, but its effect will be lessened in Kathmandu due to the filtering action of the smoke in the air.



OUR PICK



The 2025 British crime drama mini-series Adolence centres around 13-year-old schoolboy Jamie Miller, who is taken into custody by police on suspicion of murder of his high-school classmate Katie Leonard. During the course of the investigation, it is revealed that Jamie had been constantly bullied by Katie and other students via social media. Meanwhile, Jamie's parents must confront their community's judgement of their son's arrest. The series is streaming on Netflix, and stars Stephen Graham, Owen Cooper, Ashley Walters, Erin Doherty, Faye Marsay and Christine Trempaco.

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



Kairos Cafe

Kairos is a must for foodies, with its customisable breakfast, juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine. Its rustic and minimalist setting is ideal for food photography. Jawalakhel, 9813493902



Aloft April BOGO

Take a friend to Aloft's Buy One, Get One Free buffet lunch, available every Saturday at the hotel's Nook restaurant throughout April. 12:30pm-3:30pm, Rs3,599 nett, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel

Mr. Gimnap

Mr. Gimnap serves some of the best Korean gimnap in town. Their gimnap is a combination of sweet, salty and umami flavours. Jawalakhel, 9818281368

The Workshop Eatery

Indulge in an assortment of doughnuts, fries, wraps, and burgers at Workshop. The triple chocolate doughnut and the Nashville-style chicken sandwich are a must-try. Boudha, 9806394657



Casa Mexicana

Try authentic Mexican dishes, including an assortment of tacos, burritos, quesadillas and tres leches cakes, at Casa Mexicana. Bakhundole, 9803624067



Achaar Ghar

Satisfy the desire for home-cooked meals along with the various choices of pickles prepared using recipes passed down from generations. Bhaisepati (01) 5912440

Genesis Cafe

Whether you're looking to work, relax, or catch up with friends, Genesis Cafe offers the perfect blend of cosy ambience and delicious food, with a menu featuring specialty coffee, hearty all-day breakfasts, fresh salads, and a variety of desserts. Panipokhari (01) 4002788

A Tale of Two Deaths



“My brother died in front of my eyes”

Sujani Magiya was busy preparing for a family gathering that fateful Friday at her home in Chandragiri as her husband, television journalist Suresh Rajak, got ready to head to work.

Sujani reminded him to be home early for the get-together. “I’ll be there,” Suresh promised, and left to cover the royalist rally at Tinkune.

He had climbed up an office building for a vantage point to film the confrontation between riot police and demonstrators unfolding below. Just then, some in the crowd shouted that there were police on the roof of the building and started stoning the green glass façade.

Suresh was last photographed filming through the broken windows, as the rioters set fire to the building after blocking the front door (pictured, above right). Suresh was either asphyxiated or was burned to death. His body was discovered hours later.

Meanwhile, Sujani was too busy preparing dinner to check her phone, and was unaware of what was happening across town.

When she finally saw the news, she tried calling her husband, but could not get through. The rest of the family had heard that Suresh was dead, but did not have the heart to break the news to his wife.

“They told me in the evening that my husband had an accident and was in hospital,” Sujani



KUNDA DIXIT

recalls. “But they stopped me from going there.” Fearing the worst, she prayed fervently. It was only on Saturday evening that she finally got confirmation that her husband had lost his life. “I have lost everything,” she tells us, weeping.

Suresh was the youngest of four siblings, and the family could not afford to send him to college. The eldest brother Ramesh took care of the brothers, but his police job did not pay enough.

Suresh worked in Malaysia for two years but came back after his mother died. His other brother Dinesh, who is a video journalist with Lokpath, suggested he also get a job as a reporter. He had been at Avenues tv for the past seven years.

Dinesh and Suresh left home together on 28 March to cover the rallies and had agreed to be home early for dinner. Dinesh reached Tinkune as the royalists were gathering.

At around 4PM when he was filming the building that had been set alight, a colleague informed that there was a reporter trapped inside. Dinesh immediately dialled his brother but could not reach him.

Dinesh asked Suresh’s colleagues and called hospitals with no avail. It was then that he felt the journalist in the burning building could be his brother.

“I had been filming the very house that my brother was burned to death in,” he says, weeping.

Dinesh has not been able to face his sister-in-law, he has no answers to the questions she might have.

Suresh and Sujani had got married seven years ago after a long-term relationship. She had been with him through much of his journalism career, and was increasingly frustrated that he was often required to work overtime. Suresh used to dismiss her worries.

He had been injured once before while filming anti-MCC protests in Baneswor three years ago. Dinesh says that his brother would often take risks to take exclusive clips.

He was well regarded by colleagues, and was the 2022 recipient of the Hem-Sunil Journalism award.

Suresh was cremated on Tuesday, and his family met the prime minister on Monday to demand a martyr’s compensation, and punishment to the arsonists.

The Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) has organised memorials nationwide for Suresh and condemned the various attacks on the media during the protests.

Dinesh says that while the rioters were guilty of setting fire to the building, he faulted the police for not helping rescue his brother even when repeatedly told that there was a reporter inside.

He says, “Had they gone to that building, my brother’s life could have been saved.”

Dhanu Bishwakarma

The last time Sabin left home

There may have been a few thousand pro-monarchist demonstrators at Tinkune on 28 March. But many of those caught up in the melee were either bystanders, or passersby.

There are at least a dozen people in hospitals being treated for bullet wounds. Police had resorted to live rounds to disperse the angry crowds on an arson rampage.

One of them was Sabin Maharjan, 29, from Kirtipur who was a driver on the Hetauda-Kathmandu route. He left home that morning telling his wife Bhavisha that he was going to pick up his vehicle that he had left for repair at a garage in Balkhu.

Sabin was passionate about driving, and had learnt to drive at age 14. He met Bhavisha in Hetauda and got married in 2016.

Sabin had come back to Kathmandu in the evening after spending a week in Hetauda, leaving his Tata Sumo at the garage before heading home to Kirtipur.

Relatives and co-workers say they have no idea why a man who had said he was going to pick up his van from the garage had ended



up across town at a violent protest.

“Maybe someone took him to Tinkune from the garage, or he could have gone there to pick up a spare part,” Bhavisha says, her voice breaking.

Bhavisha was doing her chores with her daughter when she got a call from TU Teaching Hospital. She rushed to Maharajganj, but was informed that Sabin had died of a gunshot to the chest.

Bhavisha stares listlessly at her daughter Subisa beside her as mourners file into the room to offer words of consolation. “The bullet wound was on the left side of his chest, he must have died instantly, without knowing what hit him,” she says. “Those here ask what they can do for me. Can they bring my husband back?”

Relatives say Sabin had no interest in politics, the only time he left home was to drive his van.

Family and neighbours were not the only ones at Sabin’s house in Kirtipur to offer condolences. There were participants from the pro-monarchy protests, as well as government representatives.

But Bhavisha has no interest in meeting them. “I do not know what this protest was for. All I know is that if it had been peaceful, this would never have happened.”

Bikash Maharjan, Sabin’s uncle, says his death should not be exploited by any political side for propaganda purposes. “We are ordinary people, we do not want anyone to use the name of the son we have lost for any political purpose.”

“Since Sabin cannot take care of his family now, it is up to the government to support them,” he adds.

Anita Bhetwal

WEATHERCOAT
LONG LIFE
EXTERIOR EMULSION WITH PU & SILICON

**घाम-पानी छेक्छ,
१० वर्ष टिक्छ**

चर्को घामबाट बचाउँछ

मुसलधारै वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ

१० वर्ष वारेन्टी

Away from home when Nepal



DIASPORA DIARIES 62

This is the 62nd episode of Diaspora Diaries, a Nepali Times series in collaboration with Migration Lab providing a platform to share experiences of living, working, and studying abroad.

■ Aman Eakal

On 25 April 2015, I was on a video call with my friend in Nepal from the UAE when she suddenly panicked. Her house had started shaking. My instinct told me it was an earthquake so I told her to get out of the house as soon as possible.

As she ran outside, the line got disconnected. It was my turn to panic. A few moments later, she called again to tell me she was safe, but got disconnected again. Since then, I have not heard from her and all my efforts to reach her have been in vain.



Even after a decade, I do not even know if she is alive. After her call, I was worried about my family as news of the mega earthquake had already started spreading. I could not get in touch with my father in Rasuwa, but was relieved to know my brother and other family members were okay and camping outdoors.



My father, who had gone to the market, was missing and I was worried. My brother finally called to say he was all right. I was somewhat relieved that my family back home had survived the earthquake, unlike thousands of others. That our house was destroyed mattered less, but I was concerned about the frequent

aftershocks.

Being away at such a time is difficult. I am sure most Nepalis in the diaspora were in a similar situation: restless, sleepless and desperate to be back home as we refreshed our phones for updates or tried to call relatives. Some replied, others did not. My heart was in a constant state of worry: about my

family, my village and my country.

I was desperate to come home. My family was safe and alive, but maybe I could at least save one person from under the rubble if I went back to Nepal. But I was in the middle of my employment contract in the UAE and could not just leave.

After around two weeks, the



In limbo in Lisbon

Surge of Portugal's anti-immigrant party worries Nepalis waiting for residence permits

■ Aseem Banstola in Porto

Increasing numbers of Nepalis have been flocking to Europe as students and workers, or paying traffickers to sneak in through the back door.

And no other country in Europe seems to be as popular a destination as Portugal for them to seek a better life.

According to Gabinete de Estratégia e Estudos (GEE) in Lisbon, the number of Nepalis in Portugal had crossed 21,000 even by 2022, and it is expected to be much higher now. This year, Nepal established a resident embassy in Lisbon.

Portugal was the most appealing destination for Nepalis and other immigrants because of its immigration-friendly policy that allowed them to ultimately obtain

European permanent residence or passport.

Even Nepalis from other parts of Europe, like Malta, Cyprus, and the UK used to flock to Portugal. When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 and foreigners were allowed to pass into Poland, many of the 7,000 Nepalis in Ukraine ended up in Portugal.

Non-Europeans could directly move to Portugal without a job contract and later request residency after paying social security for a year. But everything changed in June 2024 after Portugal repealed a key migration policy, requiring migrants including those from Nepal to have an employee contract before arriving.

Most Nepalis here work in hospitality, agriculture, or manufacturing. But at their

salary levels, they can barely afford soaring house rentals. Nepalis interviewed for this article and pictured here said they hardly had any savings to send home after paying for immigration lawyers or middlemen.

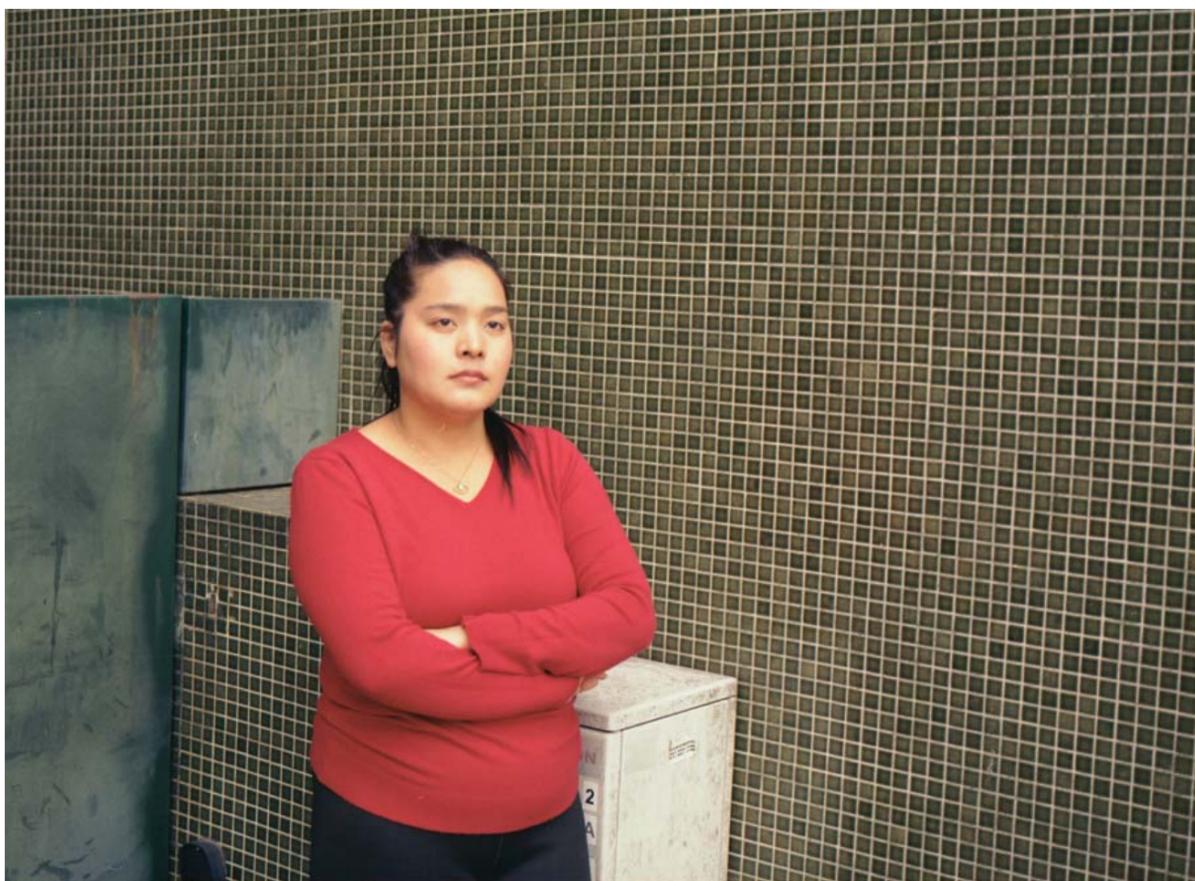
Thousands of immigrants are applying for residency permits but it takes years to get them, and without legal documents they cannot even go back to Nepal without jeopardising their chance of finally getting Portuguese citizenship. Back home they have family, friends and hefty loans.

Vision Gurung, 29, from Pokhara came to Portugal in 2023 from Croatia after working there in construction. He started as a farm worker, but soon quit because it was too physically taxing.

Now he works at a sushi restaurant and earns €1,100 a month and gets free food and accommodation. Gurung's temporary residence permit is on its way, and he wants to go home after his it is issued.

Amos Tamang, 30, is worried that he has not yet found a Portuguese person to go with him as a witness to the local government office, a requirement to process his temporary residence permit. He came to Portugal last year from Romania just after the new immigration policy was announced and remembers sleeping hungry in the streets.

Tamang has two children and a wife back home, and has now found a restaurant job earning €1,000 a month. At Namaste Porto restaurant he looks pensive as he tells a

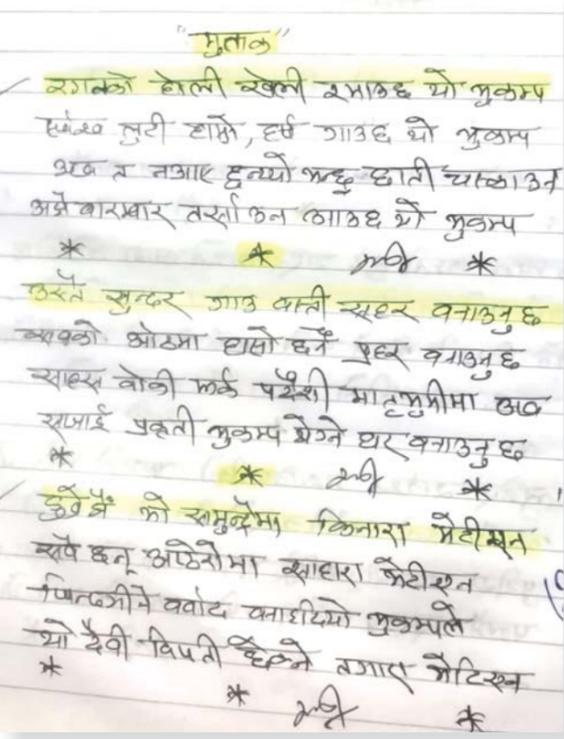


Rajani Garbuja



shook

A migrant worker remembers the worry when being so far away during the 2015 earthquake



FAR AWAY:
(From left to right) Aman Ekal as an Armed Police Force soldier in Nepal during the Maoist conflict.

With fellow Nepali security guards in Dubai in 2015, when the earthquake struck Nepal.

Back in Kathmandu, showing a photo of his home destroyed in the earthquake, and trying to build a singing career.

A page of lyrics he wrote during the earthquake that evokes longing for the motherland, worry about home and family, and a commitment to rebuild the country.

remitting as much as I could to my family. Even before the earthquake, I was most careful about my spending habits, some might even consider me a कन्जूस miser.

We value every paisa because we are aware of the pain of our families back home, and our own sacrifices: eating the previous day's rice with cold veggies or dal in a plastic bag on the roadside during lunch breaks.

The earthquake made me even more cautious. I wanted to send home every extra Dirham I could. I took on more overtime hours and even stopped spending on fruit and meat in the market on my days off.

I was in the APF's communication department, so I knew people in the Nepal government and I stayed in touch with them for earthquake updates. Nepalis in Dubai also asked me about the latest from home.

Even today, when I think of that time during the earthquake, my heart feels heavy. It was poverty that kept me far from my family and country. I had migrated to work so I could invest my savings in my younger brother and children.

My childhood memories are of scarcity and challenges. I did not even know what it meant to eat खाजा snacks in school. Till Grade 5, all I had was a pair of shorts, we could not even afford trousers. My family could buy me a school uniform only after Grade 7, and I wore it right through my school life.

It was only after my father went

to work in Kathmandu that we stopped worrying about eating two meals a day. But poverty is relative. There were fellow students who got to eat lunch in school and focus on homework, whereas I had to finish household chores that left no time for assignments.

And there were those who were even worse off, and did not go to school at all, or dropped out. The Maoist conflict made it impossible for me to stay in the village because the guerrillas tried to force me to join their militia.

My older brother was in the Army and refused. To avoid them, I even used to ask my mother to lock my room from the outside. But one day, they dragged me out and warned that my brother or I had to join the Maoists within one month.

They even fired shots to scare me. My brother was posted in Itahari and told me to run away to Kathmandu. I quit my studies and joined the APF but the salary was low and my mentor from the force, a deputy inspector who treated me like a son, died in an accident.

I lost interest and decided to migrate overseas. My APF salary was Rs10,200 a month at the time, and in the UAE I would earn over Rs72,000. I had loans of over Rs850,000 mainly because of my mother's health expenses. With my Nepal salary, it would take me a lifetime to pay off these loans so I had to migrate.

I worked as a security guard and later refilled cash in ATM machines

in the UAE, and it was all to support my family. I focused a lot on my younger brother and parents as I was unmarried for the first few years. My own studies had been affected by poverty, but I could not let my brother face the same fate.

I enrolled him in a private school and asked him to focus on his studies. I would fulfil all my personal dreams through him. He is now doing a PhD in China and this could not make me prouder. I think it is my life's biggest achievement.

My father sacrificed his life for us. I was told that he used to bleed from his mouth from overwork as he crushed stones or cut wood. I wanted to make sure my parents would not have to worry about work or money anymore.

I gave up all my dreams and passions in life except one — a deep desire to one day record my own songs. After returning to Nepal, I recorded three songs, including one that I had written some 20 years ago.

I do not know what the future holds. I do not have the money to start my own business in Nepal, although it is constantly on my mind. I am a new father and my responsibilities are growing. If I am unable to start a business soon, I may very well have to migrate again to the UAE or to Europe. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com
Go online to watch Aman Ekal perform one of his songs.

desperate urge to return started subsiding and I became more practical. If I returned to Nepal, I would once again be unemployed and hard up. My family was living in a temporary shelter, and the best thing I could do was to earn as much as possible so we could rebuild our house.

My heart was aching not just for

my family but also for my country. I transferred my first month's salary of Rs80,000 to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. As my family was safe, I thought it was more important to contribute to the nation.

I had served seven years in the Armed Police Force (APF), and perhaps that is why I felt a sense of responsibility. I also started



Amos Tamang



Vision Gurung



Bikas Saud

visiting Nepali: "There's still a long way to go, If I can't make it here I will go to Spain, I may have better luck there."

Bikas Saud, 31, shares a rented room with six others in Porto, on the Atlantic coast north of Lisbon. Three are from Nepal and the other three are from Indian Punjab. Saud came to Portugal last year from Cyprus and struggled for months before finally finding a job at a Chinese company. But he was fired without notice after 15 days.

Now he works at a restaurant and says: "I want to go to Nepal and get married, that is the first thing I will do after getting a residence permit."

Rajani Garbuja, 28, came from Nepal just three months ago and started working at



A Chega party supporter.

Namaste Porto. She arrived on a dependent visa through her husband, who lives near the Spanish border and works on a farm.

"I am finally together with my husband after two years, but it looks like the paperwork will take time," says Garbuja, whose husband comes to visit once a month. She only earns €500 a month working 12 hours a day for six days a week at the restaurant.

As immigration becomes an election issue in Portugal (left), Nepalis here fear that the policies will become stricter and they may never get their residence permits. The conservative populist Chega party saw a surge of support in last year's elections, and hopes to win bigger next time. 🇳🇵



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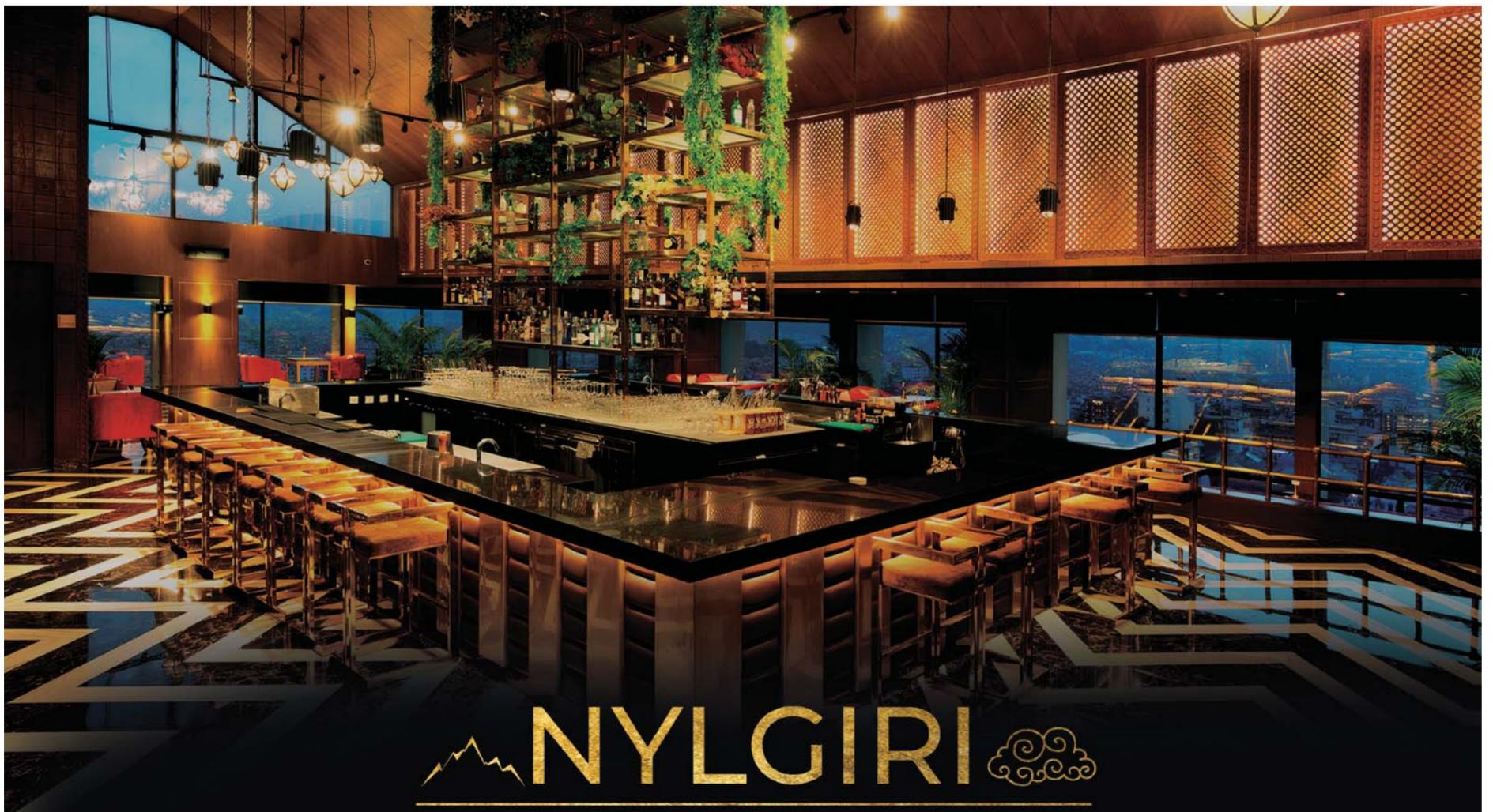
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