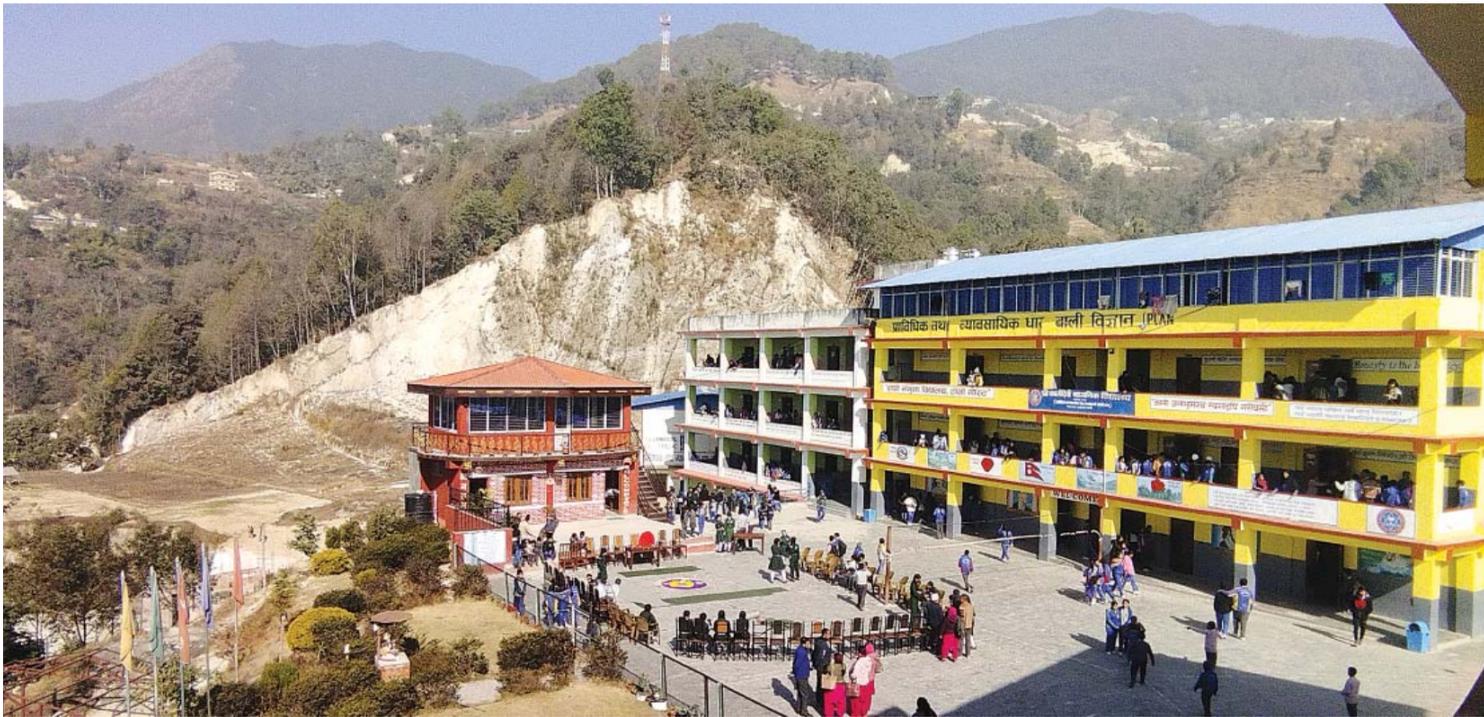


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Structural problems

In 2023, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) conducted a Structural Integrity Assessment of 29,000 public buildings in 145 municipalities across Nepal. Only 9.4% of them were found to be safe.

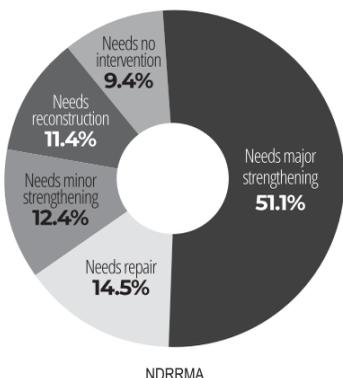
The study deployed remote sensing as well as engineers on the ground to assess the risk, and showed that more than half needed major strengthening, while 12.5% could be retrofitted. Another 12% would need immediate demolition, and 5% of the public buildings were sited in poor soil (right).

After the 2015 earthquake, NDRRMA assessed 18,000 school buildings in the affected areas where over a million students were enrolled. More than half the buildings were found to be structurally vulnerable, while 30% of the schools with 184,000 students had been damaged. None of the classrooms retrofitted for seismic resistance collapsed.

The surveys prove that Nepal could have seen a catastrophic loss of children's lives had the 2015 disaster occurred on a weekday when classrooms would be full.

National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET-Nepal) also surveyed hospitals, water supply and telecommunication in the early 2000s to see how Nepal would fare in an 8M+ earthquake. Even then, the data showed that over

STATE OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS IN NEPAL



half of such infrastructure would be destroyed. Increased population density and multi-storey structures since then means the death and destruction could be much greater.

The studies also point to a critical lack of structural integrity of public buildings, emergency preparedness and response systems. They underscore Nepal's limited capacity for search and rescue, a dysfunctional emergency operations

centre, and poorly constructed houses and public buildings.

Ten years after the earthquake, most of these public buildings have been rebuilt or retrofitted, and there is general understanding that schools and hospitals at the very least need to be stronger.

But much of this awareness and subsequent action is limited to the 14 districts affected by the 2015 disaster. The rest of the country, especially western Nepal where a mega-quake is long overdue, is woefully unprepared.

Globally, Nepal ranks 11th in the list of countries vulnerable to seismic hazard. Added to this is risk from climate breakdown.

Nepal is disaster-prone, and preparedness is the first line of defense. Schools, hospitals and other public buildings need special priority not only because of the chance of mass casualties, but also because they can be shelters after a disaster strikes and hospitals need to be intact to treat the wounded.

Nearly 8,000 schools and 30,000 classrooms were damaged or destroyed in the 2015 earthquake. Another 1,000 government buildings were destroyed and over 3,000 were partially damaged, 1,211 hospitals and primary health posts collapsed.

If it was not a Saturday, total fatalities would have been much higher than the official toll of 8,962. Apart from infrastructure,

STRONG SCHOOLING: Students and teacher gather at the Kalidevi School at Tarkeswor in Kathmandu for an event (above). All school buildings that were retrofitted survived the 2015 quake.

emergency preparedness includes stockpiling essential supplies for effective first response. In schools, this means immediate rescue and evacuation of children, and getting them safely to their families.

Disaster preparedness education is in school curricula, but should also include safety instructions depending on the type of building and conduct regular emergency evacuation drills.

Hospitals, doctors, nurses and paramedics will themselves be affected in a disaster, but must also treat and care for the overwhelming numbers after a quake. Health facilities must have functioning back-up power, and pre-positioned water, drugs, equipment.

The suspension of USAID has had a direct impact on ongoing rebuilding and retrofitting activities across Nepal.

One of the projects halted is for building 500 temporary learning centres in Jajarkot and Rukum where some 150,000 children were out of school after the 6.4M quake in November 2023. 🇳🇵

Sonia Awale

FULL STORY PAGE 5

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Higher corruption in high places

I have just finished reading the recently published *CuckooLand: Where the Rich Own the Truth*, by Tom Burgis that was recently reviewed in this paper, and examines the phenomenon of corruption across several continents, and the career of powerbroker Mohamed Amersi.



GUEST EDITORIAL
David Seddon

In the Nepal section, the focus is on Amersi's links with prominent Nepali 'businessman' Ajeya Sumargi, the activities of the Nordic telecommunications giant TeliaSonera and its Nepali network Ncell, and Amersi's relationship first with the royal family and after 2006, with certain prominent politicians, including the Maoist leader formerly known as 'Prachanda'.

It is well recognised in Nepal that corruption in high places is one of the major features of Nepal's political economy. In February, while I was visiting Kathmandu for the first time in five years, there was an editorial in *The Kathmandu Post* headed 'Rotting from the Head' which suggested that 'frustration with corruption, mismanagement and bad governance is reaching a boiling point'.

The latest Transparency International report showed Nepal's corruption perception index (CPI) was 34 out of 100, marginally lower than last year. In the review period, Prachanda (the CPN Maoist Centre chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal) was prime minister until mid-July 2024 when he was replaced in the merry-go-round of Nepali politics by UML chief and current PM K P Oli.

Several decisions of the Oli-led government, including one to build his party's central office with funds from Min Bahadur Gurung of Bhatbhateni and the Giribandhu Tea Estate scam related to the illegal use of land exceeding the prescribed ceiling, were just the latest corruption cases linked to the prime minister.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal claimed that the two other major parties, the Nepali Congress (NC) and the UML had plotted his removal because of his 'campaign against corruption', but he himself was compromised by colleagues like Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who was implicated in a gold smuggling case and, arguably, by his own dealings with Ajeya Sumargi and TeliaSonera, which are discussed by Tom Burgis in *CuckooLand*.

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) emerged dramatically as the fourth largest party in the House of Representatives in 2022 on a platform of corruption control

and good governance. But its president Rabi Lamichhane has been suspended as a lawmaker and faces charges of embezzlement of the deposits of cooperatives in five districts.

Other politicians also, including former NC home minister Balkrishna Khand, who was only released on bail after detention on the charge of sending Nepalis as fake refugees from Bhutan to the United States, and former prime ministers Baburam Bhattarai and Madhav Kumar Nepal (now leaders of their own small parties) were considered not to be 'above question' with regard to illegal sales of government land at Lalita Niwas.

On 20 March 2025, the East Asia Forum published a piece by Anil Sigdel, founder of Nepal Matters in Washington DC, lecturer at the University of Vienna and author of *India in the Era of China's Belt and Road Initiative: How Modi Responds to Xi*. He looked back on the previous year and suggested that corruption and crisis defined Nepal's 2024.

In addition to the dire state of the economy, stagnant agricultural production, the virtual absence of industry, massive trade deficit especially with India and crippling reliance on remittances from Nepalis living and working abroad, Sigdel highlights the sclerosis, the pervasive corruption and the rent-seeking of the political elite, and the phenomenon of what might be termed 'the abuse of public trust for private gain' -- a definition of corruption provided by Tom Burgis.

Now, Nepal has introduced a fresh provision in its newly-amended anti-corruption law that will penalise

public officials not only for the abuse of power but also for their inaction or indecision. The amended Anti-Corruption Act 2002, which took five years to pass through the federal parliament, has now come into effect following presidential approval. Offenders could face up to six months detention or a fine of up to Rs50,000, or both.

The Act also imposes up to a year's imprisonment or a fine of Rs500,000, or both, for officials found guilty of abusing their official position or duties. But this amendment is directed essentially at civil servants, and does little to deal with those in high places, politicians and businesses, who continue all too often to abuse public trust for private gain.

Is it too much to hope that continued pressure from the public and scrutiny by the media will not only bring to light corruption where it exists but gradually reduce its incidence?

David Seddon is Director of Critical Faculty, author and co-author of many publications on Nepal, including Nepal in Crisis (with John Cameron and P M Blaikie) first published in 1980.



Is it too much to hope that continued pressure from the public and scrutiny by the media will demobilise Nepal's kleptocrats?

DIWAKAR CHETTRI

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Media in Crisis

Twenty years ago this week, we interviewed Anne Cooper, then-executive director of the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). She told us that defending press freedom means defending the public's right to know. Nearly three months into national emergency following a royal coup, Cooper observed that Nepal's media situation was the biggest press freedom crisis in the world at the time.

Excerpts of the interview published in issue #243 15-21 April 2005:



Did you raise the issue of curbs on radio journalism?

Broadcasting is all in the state's hands. In some areas, you can get state broadcasting while in other areas you can also get these clandestine illegal Maoist radio broadcasts. There is nothing independent in between to give people a more objective view about what is going on. FM radio stations are very important in rural areas and now they are told not to broadcast any news at all. They had local discussion programs where people could talk about very local issues like clean water, women and children's health and environment. All of

that is being taken away.

Globally, how do you rate the media situation here?

It is definitely one of the worst in the world. It's been very difficult for journalists as things got much worse after February First.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



HEALTH AND JUSTICE

Watch video produced by Nyaya Health Nepal about its Bayalpata Hospital, featuring the work of hospital director and surgeon Mandeep Pathak and his team. The hospital has treated more than 1.8 million patients in the past 14 years. Watch the video, and read the profile on page 12.



LAST OF KATHMANDU

Since 2022, Pranidhi Tuladhar and Aabhushan Man Singh Tuladhar have been running a page on Instagram called The Last of Kathmandu Valley where they capture and share the slowly disappearing old architecture of Kathmandu Valley. Watch video on YouTube of their ode to old Kathmandu and subscribe for multimedia content.

MANDEEP PATHAK

Mandeep Pathak is an exceptional surgeon, leader and colleague ('The healer of far-western Nepal', Dirgha Raj Upadhyay, Page 12). His passion and dedication to serving those in need, especially with no resources, resonate with the core values of Bayalpata Hospital. I had an opportunity to serve at Bayalpata and work under Dr Mandeep's leadership for more than half a decade. Beyond his clinical expertise, his collaborative spirit, supportive nature, and humility are truly commendable.

Ram Raj Khakurel

■ Mandeep Pathak is one of the best doctors, and person, I have ever known.

Aruna Uprety

■ We need more positive stories to calm our minds—and there are plenty unfolding in our society. Nepali people shouldn't be overwhelmed with negativity.

Hem Sagar Baral

KATHMANDU POLLUTION

Thanks for sharing this story ('What is invisible is more dangerous', Sonia Awale, #1256).

Abani Bhushan Upadhyaya

■ Forest fires in May will be worse. As a precaution we must allow grazing, forest debris collection, prescribed burning to reduce the wildfire hazard in the coming weeks.

Rajendra N Suwal

BUNGAMATI

The speed of reconstruction of Bungadyo temple is very very slow ('Bungamati builds back', Sangya Lamsal, #1255)

Prajol Man

RPP RALLY

The royalists' entire drama of a Hindu State is nonsensical. Who do they think were ruling Nepal all this while? Whose bells and colours are the loudest in the streets? Whose festivals are the most elaborate and lavish? Who are the ones in leadership?

Chandan Lama

DISASTER RELIEF

Experience has taught us that better First Responses in a quake need to be backed up by better defined and implemented Secondary Responses ('It better be better next time', Sudiksha Tuladhar, #1256). This is perhaps less heroic or news-worthy, but is actually fundamental to disaster recovery prospects.

Tony Jones

Times.com WHAT'S TRENDING

Il y a d'autres Annapurnas dans la vie des hommes

by Sangya Lamsal

The exhibition Summit of Friendship: 75 Years of Annapurna Ascent at Alliance Française Kathmandu commemorated the historic 1950 French expedition led by Maurice Herzog, and honoured the legacy of Nepali guides. Visit nepalitimes.com for the review.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

82 in 2022

For our New Year 2022 special last week, the Nepali Times team spoke with people born around Bikram Sambat 2000 to reflect on how life was then and how it has changed. Read about their experiences on our website.

Most popular on X



What is invisible is more dangerous

by Sonia Awale

Air pollution occupied national discourse last week because of smoke from wildfires across the country. But much more toxic are the invisible and odourless gases from vehicular and industrial emissions which have always been there. Details in the report online.

Most commented

Trump tariffs and Nepal

by Ramesh Kumar

US President Donald Trump's announcement of hefty tariffs, then a 90-day pause on all countries except China have reverberated worldwide. Nepal had got away with only 10% tariffs, but any benefit Nepal could have derived from lower tariffs could be diminished by a global recession. Follow us for the latest developments.

Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Everyone was talking about air pollution this week because wildfire smoke was visible. But much more toxic are the invisible and odourless gases from vehicular and industrial emissions which have always been there. Details in this report by Sonia Awale:

Prashanta Khanal @theprashanta

"Kathmandu Valley's air is not polluted, it is poisonous." -@SoniaAwale @NepaliTimes

Most daily pollution comes from transport. However, the Transport Ministry is unfazed by this--no programs to reduce transport emissions. Need to shift accountability to the transport ministry.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

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.

Ann-Marie Dodson RN @amd4_ann

The depopulation in mountainous areas is a real threat. I saw tremendous change in my last visit in November.

1,000 WORDS



BISHNU PRASAD GAUDELRSS

MEET AND GREET:

Maoist Centre chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal during a press conference in Nawalparasi on Tuesday as part of the party's Tarai-Madhes Awareness Campaign. On left, former House Speaker Agni Sapkota.



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Yes, quakes can be forecast

It is not a question of 'if', but 'when' the next earthquake strikes, and early warning systems have improved

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Earthquakes would be less scary if they could be forecast, like the weather. Small quakes would no longer be startling, and there could be early warning of bigger quakes, preventing a greater loss of life.

In seismic zones like Nepal, it is not a question of 'if' but 'when' an earthquake will strike. And most gadgets that detect earthquakes are either false alarms or come just a few seconds before the violent shaking starts.

Earthquake Early Warning Systems (EWS) are instruments which can buy people 5-60 seconds before an earthquake hits, depending on distance from the epicenter. This is not a lot of time, but often enough to get out of a building and head to safety.

EWS do not forecast an earthquake, but the sensitive instruments detect the initial P-waves of an earthquake and send out the warning before the more destructive S-waves arrive. Such systems are used in Japan to stop bullet trains and to make lifts stop at the next floor. Installing the relatively inexpensive systems in schools and other public buildings, can provide critical seconds for building evacuation.

Although they do not provide much time, the most reliable method is the EWS. How much early warning these systems can

buy depends on the density of the sensor network, how fast the data is transmitted, and distance from the epicenter. As seismic waves travel through speeds of 1-5 km/second, EWS is not much use in the areas right around the epicenter, but can be life-saving further away.

Such a system is already in place now in many countries, but has not been used much in Nepal. If a proper system had been in place during the 2015 earthquake epicentered in Gorkha, Kathmandu could have received a warning 30-40 seconds prior, says earthquake hazard expert Prashant Rawal of the National Society for Earthquake Technology - Nepal (NSET).

"Before we can implement a functioning warning system, we need to have a denser network of sensors," says Rawal, "Right now, we only have about 40 sensors setup, so we are still in the first stage of network establishment."

Japan's EWS system, for example, features over 1,000 sensors, while China has more than 150,000 monitoring stations. The sensors detect the early P-waves of an earthquake, and then use later S-waves to update the magnitude. Alerts are then broadcast through multiple channels, including mass media, phones, apps, and sirens.

Upon receiving a signal, trains are programmed to stop at the nearest possible station, and



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elevators at the closest floor. The system is not perfect, sometimes underestimating and other times overestimating the strength of a quake, but it worked well enough to give Tokyo 30 seconds in the 9.0 Sendai earthquake in 2011, and 10-20 seconds in the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake.

In Nepal, there is no clear policy from the government for such a project, which makes it difficult

to fund -- although NSET has worked with the local and federal governments to place sensors.

Other problems are largely technical. In regions like Karnali and Surkhet, fluctuations in voltage and lightning strikes often damage sensors, and even when they do detect shaking, there is no reliable internet to transmit these signals.

"We have to establish these sensors in hill or mountain areas, and make long trips in order to maintain or repair them. There is often a lack of budget to make these trips," says Rawal.

Duke University and Tribhuvan University are collaborating to set up a smart seismic sensing network in Kathmandu, create a mobile messaging system for early warnings, and develop data science models from previous seismic data.

There is now promise of even more accurate prediction systems that use Artificial Intelligence. Researchers from the University of Texas at Austin trained AI and were able to develop a model that predicted 70% of earthquakes during a seven-month trial in China, with accurate forecasts of magnitude and epicentre.

Another traditional prediction method is to observe animals which have a sixth sense to feel earthquakes before they happen. Other theories include measuring the emission of the radioactive



gas radon which is trapped underground and is released as the ground shifts before an earthquake. But there is the issue of false positives: the release of the gas may be triggered by rainfall.

However, while the developers of these theories have always claimed to have predicted certain earthquakes, none have been able to do so reliably. Some have been debunked, after failed forecasts, or due to shoddy methodology.

EWS sensors use accelerometers which detect how fast the ground moves. If three to four accelerometers spaced at a distance apart all detect the movement of the ground, then it is likely that an earthquake is happening.

The magnitude and approximate location of the earthquake is then calculated using computer algorithms, and a message would be sent out if the quake is deemed to be large enough. It is not a lack of budget that is holding back using EWS: the sensors cost only \$200-500. "The system could be certainly implemented if the necessary political will was there," says Rawal, presumably from the government. 🇳🇵

NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक



Turkish x Galataport

Turkish Airlines and port operator Galataport Istanbul together took part in the Seatrade Cruise Global Fair in Miami, aiming to promote Turkey's position as a global hub for cruise tourism. Galataport Istanbul boasts the world's only underground cruise terminal, and Turkish flies to over 300 destinations across 131 countries.

88 public holidays

The government announced 88 public holidays in 2082 BS, including 52 Saturdays. The 36 other days-off include seven during Dashain and five during Tihar.



BYD warranties

Dealer Cimex has extended warranties on BYD EVs sold in Nepal for 10yrs/200,000km, up from 8yrs/160,000km. Lights, tyre pressure monitors, suspension and ball joints now have 5yr/125,000km warranties, and all other parts now have 7.5yr/187,500km warranties.

Tata 2082

Sipradi ran an exchange program for Tata cars to bring in 2082 BS. Customers could exchange any car for a Tiago.EV, Punch.EV, Nexon K3.E or Curv.EV, with a 20% down payment, exchange bonuses, free accessories, and lifetime charging on the Sipradi network. Sipradi is also organising nationwide football training camps for girls under Football for Future. 84 girls in Dharan and 90 in Janakpur participated in the first two phases of the camps, and the program is now headed to Pokhara.



NSL underway

The Ncell Nepal Super League is in progress. Dhangadhi FC and Lalitpur City FC were joint top as of 15 April, with identical records of three wins and two draws. Knockouts start on 19 April, with the final on 26 April.

Tunnelling resumes

Work on the Nagdhunga-Sisnekhola tunnel resumed on 13 April after a 28-day hiatus due to local protests demanding compensation, employment, and access to drinking water. The project started in 2019 and was expected to be completed in three and a half years. But the pandemic, protests and material shortage have postponed the deadline to October 2025. Once completed, the tunnel is hoped to ease traffic at Nagdhunga.

Lemon Tree turns 1

Lemon Tree Premier Budhanilkantha marked its first anniversary on 11 April, with a Nepali culture themed celebration.

58 million in FDI

Nepal has received Rs58 million worth of commitments in Foreign Direct Investments in the first nine months of this fiscal year, almost double compared to the same period last year. The service and tourism sectors together almost completely dominate these commitments.

516 day streak

Nepal has now gone 516 days without losing a one-horned rhino to poaching. The last poaching incident was on Nov 16 2023, when two rhinos were caught in a trap pit and killed. However, 24 rhinos have been found dead this past fiscal year due to natural causes. A 2021 census put Nepal's Rhino population at 752, with 694 in the Chitwan National Park.



APF x Agni Awards

Nepal APF Club and Agni Corp organised a ceremony to recognise exceptional performances in sports over the past year. Badminton player Prince Dahal won male athlete of the year, and footballer Renuka Nagarkoti won female athlete of the year, winning Rs50,000 each.

Ganja on the Sapta

Based on a tip, Udayapur Police seized 180kgs of marijuana about to be transported via the Sapta River in Chhatara, in north-western Nepal. The bags of ganja were floating downstream on makeshift rafts made from bamboo and inflated inner tubes, presumably headed to India.



Nabil's taxes

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry recognized Nabil Bank for paying the highest taxes in the Fiscal Year 2022/23 in the banks, financial institutions and insurance category.

Galaxy S25 1TB

Samsung has launched a Samsung Galaxy S25 Ultra that has 1 terabyte storage. The model, which comes with 12GB RAM, starts at Rs234,999, with financing at Rs11,750/month at 0% interest.

Soy Oil to India

In the first eight months of this fiscal year, Nepal exported to India almost 230,000 tonnes of refined soybean oil worth Rs48 billion -- a 60x increase. Indian oil producers claim that Nepal is taking advantage of trade agreement loopholes to reroute crude soybean oil from Argentina, Brazil, and Thailand. They are calling for increased and specific tariffs, and proof of origin on imports.

Load not Shed

The Nepal Electricity Authority made clear that recent power outages were not load-shedding but due to strong winds and pre-monsoon rains. They condemned social media posts as exaggerated and false, and in fact claimed to be working on repairs around the clock.

Retrofit public buildings

Strict building codes, emergency preparedness and proper land use to make schools and hospitals safer

■ Sonia Awale

Ten years after the 2015 earthquake, it is accepted that Nepal's reconstruction efforts have been largely successful and relatively quick compared to disasters of similar scale in India, Pakistan, Iran and Haiti.

Nepal was lucky that many things helped reduce the loss of life on 25 April 2015. The magnitude was less than 8 Richter, the duration and frequency of shaking meant that most concrete buildings did not collapse. And the earthquake struck during daytime on a weekend which meant children were out of school.

"If it were a working day, at least 10,000 children would have died, and another 7,000 government officers which would include security personnel, critical to rescue and relief," says Anil Pokhrel, who till recently headed the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA).

In Nepal in 2015, nearly 8,000 schools and 30,000 classrooms were damaged or destroyed. Some 1,000 government buildings were destroyed, over 3,000 were partially damaged. As many as 1,211 health facilities, including hospitals, primary health care centres, and health posts, were destroyed or damaged.

The safety of public buildings is important not just because they involve a larger number of people, their continued functionality is even more crucial after a disaster. While schools serve as temporary shelters, hospitals become a battleground to save as many people as possible with limited resources, including doctors and nurses.

"The safety of public buildings during earthquakes is of utmost importance which is why their design and construction standards are much higher and stringent than those of regular residential structures," says Surya Narayan Shrestha of the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) – Nepal.

He adds: "But emergency preparedness and safety behaviour are as important. Students should



LESSONS NOT LEARNT: Nava Adhasha Secondary School at Kathmandu Darbar Square was severely damaged in the 2015 earthquake but classes are being held in it.

SUMAN NEPALI

be rescued and evacuated from schools, while hospitals should be equipped to handle an increased influx of people as well as provide uninterrupted services."

Hospital Preparedness for Emergency (HOPE) is a four-day course developed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for effective management of disaster and public health emergencies at the health facility level.

Experts say the training, which was first implemented in 2004, was crucial in allowing doctors and nurses in Kathmandu hospitals like Bir and Teaching, to provide immediate and uninterrupted service in the aftermath of the earthquake. Such preparedness should be extended in other parts of the country, especially to health workers and facilities, including stockpiling essential supplies. However, similar support from USAID has now been terminated.

Sangeeta Singh is a professor

of urban planning at the Institute of Engineering, and was in Khokana for an assessment when the 7.3M aftershock hit on 12 May 2015. She ran out of a narrow alley directly into an open square. She recalls how, despite suffering much damage, traditional structures provided enough time for locals to escape, leading to fewer casualties. Community-designated open spaces, alternative routes and supplies of essential items also helped.

"We must allow local units of government in emergency response, implement building codes, and while we are at it, why not allocate some of the budget money to retrofitting instead of only building roads?" says Singh. "Ten years later, Nepalis have all but forgotten 2015, individuals and institutions flout building codes and the monitoring mechanism is not effective."

In the past ten years, municipalities have been trying to enforce building codes more strictly in the 14 districts affected

in 2015. But the same is not true for the rest of the country, especially the far west which hasn't seen a major quake in over 500 years, and has accumulated enough stress to cause an 8M+ megaquake.

The level of unpreparedness was proven by how disastrous even the moderate 6.4M Jajarkot earthquake was in 2023, killing 153 people and injuring at least 375. Over 62,000 houses were destroyed or damaged, as well as 750 school buildings.

Earthquake-resistant designs must be promoted and deployed across the country, especially for schools built with heavy construction materials like stone and round slippery boulders. Bamboo, hollow concrete blocks and rammed earth technologies are better, and concrete buildings must be reinforced so they do not become death traps.

For a country as prone to multi-hazards, the government should implement proper land use with zoning. A recent

example is Nepal Mediciti Hospital which was inundated in last September's floods, disrupting medical care. The hospital was built on a floodplain.

As a former lakebed with soft topsoil and shallow groundwater table, particularly in the central and southern floodplain areas, Kathmandu Valley is prone to liquefaction and excessive shaking during an earthquake.

One 2016 study said that 33% of the total area of Kathmandu Valley lies in a very high risk zone for liquefaction. Another study published in the journal *GeoHazards* in 2021 said that 60% of the hospitals, 64% of colleges, 54% of the schools and 42% of the road network in Kathmandu are in high liquefaction risk zones if there was a magnitude 8 earthquake. Furthermore, 78% of Kathmandu airport's area is similarly vulnerable.

The study recommends relocation of these facilities as well as other critical services, or at the very least, retrofitting. "The development of all these facilities should be carried out considering appropriate land use guided by the liquefaction risks to mitigate potential loss and proper functioning after earthquakes," it states.

Explains Sangeeta Singh: "In addition to structural safety and emergency preparedness, a policy to guide proper land use is the need of the hour, especially for urban centres. We must assess multi-hazard vulnerability, and conduct a safety audit for existing public buildings, our lack of preparedness is astounding."

Former NDRRMA chief Anil Pokhrel adds that asset registry and an inventory of the safety status of public buildings are urgent must-dos. It is also needed in case of insurance payouts. Such a system could also help Nepal to quantify climate damage and, in turn, claim reparations.

"In many ways, we are better prepared after 10 years of the 2015 earthquake, we have much experience in rebuilding but we are nowhere close to where we need to be," admits Pokhrel. "The risk is growing rapidly, our preparedness hasn't kept pace." 🇳🇵

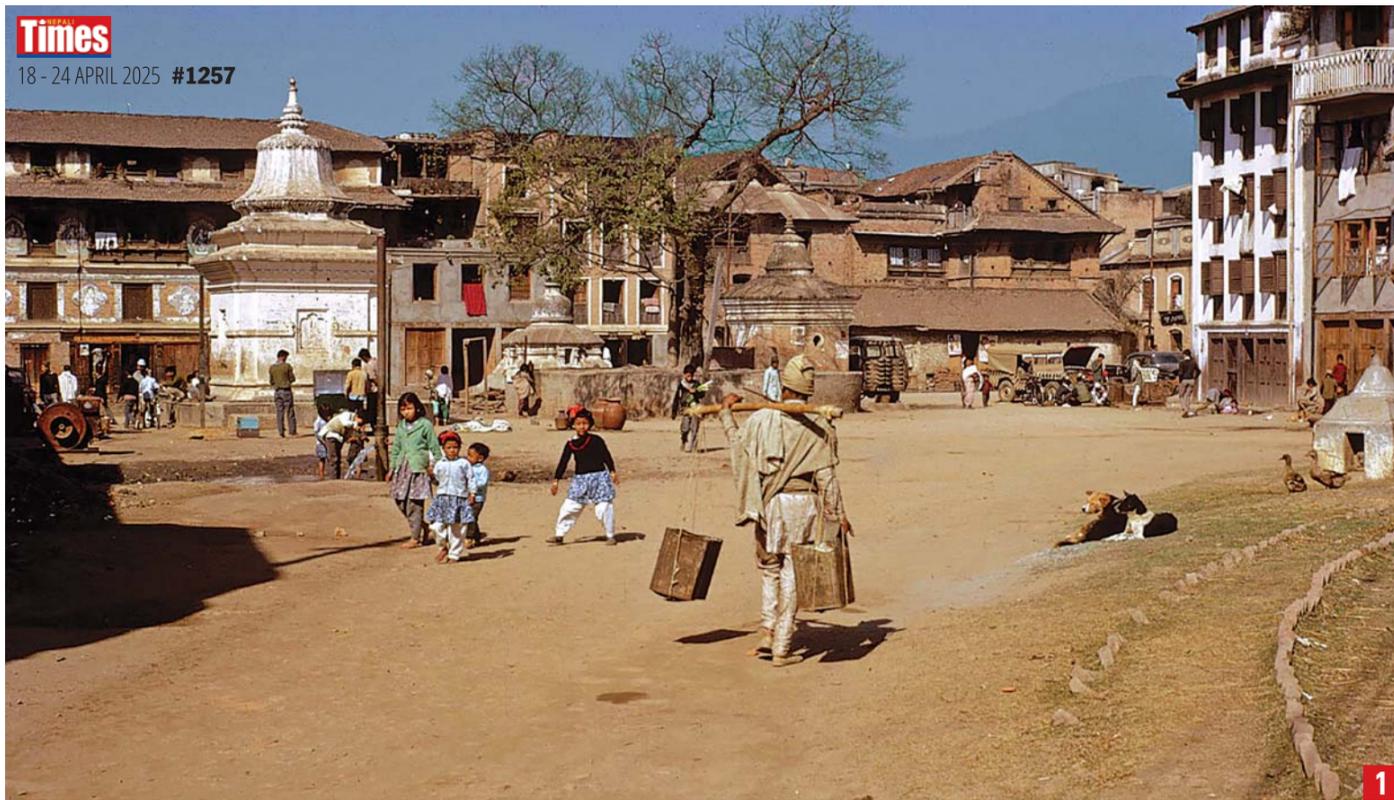
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**घाम-पानी छेक्छ,
१० वर्ष टिक्छ**

चर्को घामबाट बचाउँछ

मुसलधारै वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ

१० वर्ष वारेन्टी



NEIL S RAWLINS

LOSS OF SOUL AND SOIL

Kathmandu neighbourhood escaped relatively unscathed in the earthquake, but 10 years later has lost much of its essence

■ Suman Nepali



He had just sat down for lunch after tending his garden at his house in Lagan Tole on 25 April 2015 when the ground began to shake violently.

Gautam Nepal was 56 at the time, and realised it was an earthquake. He panicked at the thought of the multi-storied

buildings of his neighbours toppling over his modest one-storey house. He rushed out as the highrises swayed and groaned.

“We were used to earthquakes, moderate ones are a regular occurrence in Kathmandu, but I had never felt fear like I felt on that day,” recalls Gautam. “My house

itself is strong, it did not collapse.”

Other residents of Lagan who also live in traditional low rise houses had the same fear. Tara Nepali, then 48, was doing the washing that Saturday.

She recalls, “When my house began to shake, I could only think about the bigger buildings falling

on top of me. I was sure my house would collapse, but to my surprise, it survived, and so did we.”

But Buddha Khadgi, 68, was not so lucky. His was one of the few houses in the neighbourhood to be reduced to rubble. His lifelong collection of photographic prints were buried, and so were

the traditional Newari musical instruments passed down through generations of his family that he used to give music lessons.

“I lost the things that connected me to my roots and my heritage. That was infinitely more heartbreaking than the fact that my house was gone,” says

When a disaster strikes



This is the 63rd episode of **Diaspora Diaries**, a Nepali Times series in collaboration with Migration Lab.



Mani Prasad Gurung

When the earthquake hit, I was in Bhaktapur for work. My friend who had driven us from Kathmandu was so scared after the earthquake that he was shaking and was unable to drive as his arms were too weak.

So I took the driver's seat as we headed back to Kathmandu. Perhaps living in Japan for almost a decade meant that I was more used to the shaking. Many around me were panicking. Thankfully, I managed to call my family immediately after the earthquake and found out they were safe before the phones got disconnected. After reaching Kathmandu through damaged roads, everyone was outside their houses and scared because of the frequent aftershocks.

I am originally from Bahundanda in Lamjung. It was difficult to reach people on the phone, but we did what we could to stay updated. Recently, we took it upon ourselves to rebuild one of the historic temples that had been destroyed by the earthquake. It will be inaugurated this week on 19 April, ten years after it collapsed (left).

Over 320 people from Lamjung now living in the US, Australia, Japan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia as well as various parts of Nepal contributed. It is a collective effort of hundreds of individuals attached to our village.



Sitaram Giri

I worked in Dubai for seven years, starting out as a construction helper before my boss hired me as his personal driver since he liked my work and trusted me. Life was all right overseas, I suppose. But coming home for a two-month break after five years abroad and spending time with my children, I just did not want to be away again. I wanted to come home to Nepal.

I am not sure what changed,

but my heart just was not in Dubai. I dragged myself to stay on for 2.5 more years before finally deciding to call it quits in 2015. I had driving skills, so I could use that to find a job in Nepal.

I stayed in Kathmandu for a few days and headed to my village in Sindhupalchok to help out on the farm. I was having my morning meal one day exactly ten years ago, when everything started shaking. I ran outside just as my home collapsed in a cloud of dust.



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

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SOCIAL MEDIA

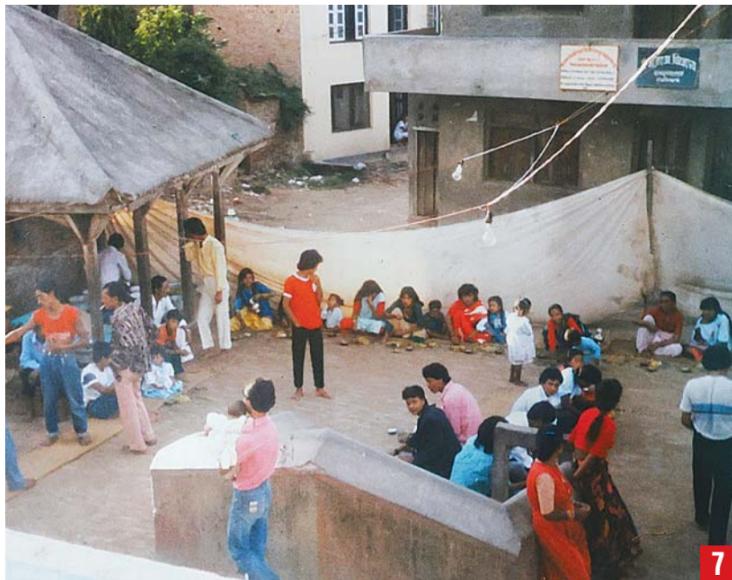
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6



7

SHREE RAM NEPALI



8

LAGAN TOLE'S TOLL:

- 1 Lagan Tole photographed by tour guide Neil S Rawlins during his travel to Kathmandu in February 1970.
- 2 Lagan Tole in 2025.
- 3 The Seto Machindranath procession at Lagan on 10 April 1998, during which the chariot caught fire.
- 4 The Seto Machindranath procession at Lagan earlier this month.
- 5 Tara Nepali in front of her house in Lagan. She was doing the washing during the earthquake in 2015.
- 6 Gautam Nepali in front of his one-storey Lagan home, where he had been having lunch just before the quake struck 10 years ago.
- 7 Lagan's Maka Galli some decades ago.
- 8 Lagan's Maka Galli in 2025. The neighbourhood's old Newari houses have been replaced by concrete structures, although the falcha has been rebuilt in traditional style.

Khadgi, now living in a new cement structure.

Lagan Tole in Kathmandu's historic heart emerged relatively unscathed from the earthquake in large part because, like in nearby Asan, the buildings are densely packed and lean on each other.

But in the years after the

earthquake, urban pressure and fear of future quakes have made families tear down their traditional houses with sloping tile roofs and replace them with concrete structures.

Lagan's longtime residents, especially the elderly whose families have lived here for generations, say that

the neighbourhood with its characterless new tall cement boxes is no longer familiar to them.

"We used to say that our houses are not supposed to be taller than temples, the houses of our gods," says Gautam. "Now, the houses here dwarf the temples and even the chariot of Seto Machindranath."

The old baha courtyards, falcha resting places, and open spaces where Lagan's residents used to grow vegetables and gather as a community are nearly all gone.

And the taller the houses get, residents say they feel less anchored to the soil. Lagan has also lost its soul -- the community spirit is

eroding as elderly neighbours rarely venture down to meet each other in the evenings.

"This no longer feels like the tole I grew up in," says a resident. "We are beginning to lose the relationships we had with each other as a community, and with it, the spirit of Lagan." 🇳🇵

kes home

Four Nepali migrant workers share their experiences of the earthquake 10 years ago



People were screaming that there were children buried under the rubble. I lost my grandmother, but could rescue my nephew from a collapsed building. We tried to dig out as many people as we could while consoling those who lost family members and helping with the funerals. Many survivors lost their livestock. The earthquake struck just a few days after my return to Nepal. It was God who brought me back to be with my family. If I was abroad, I would be in so much stress. As it is, my children were in Kathmandu, and it was difficult for me to reach them. But they were safe.

Being in my village also meant I could help my neighbours. Friends from abroad sent us support for reconstruction. With that, some of my own savings, a government grant and some loans, I eventually rebuilt my house for Rs700,000.

It did cross my mind that I might have to migrate for work again, but I also had this *जति गरे नी एस्ते हो* feeling that it would not make a difference. After years of hard work overseas to build my home, the earthquake destroyed it in seconds -- as if the house never even existed.

I lost my phone in the quake. In it were all my photos from Dubai.



Subhash Acharya

I worked in Iraq for 32 months, and again in Saudi Arabia for 44 months before heading back to Nepal where I now run an electronic shop.

My economic situation made me decide to migrate, but I chose Iraq because my brother was there. I was in Saudi Arabia when

the earthquake struck Nepal in 2015. I saw images of destruction online, Dharara had collapsed and there was death and devastation everywhere.

I worried because if that was what happened in Kathmandu, my home village in Sindhupalchok would also have been affected. Indeed, when I got in touch with my family four hours later, I learnt that there was nothing left of my home but the first floor. Thankfully, everyone was alive.

I already had a return ticket for Nepal for my vacation after a week so I decided to come home as planned. If I did not have a ticket, I would have bought one for the very next day. My family was safe, so I decided to stay in a tent for two months. Everyone around us was affected. My friends and company in Saudi Arabia helped me and my colleagues who bore losses.

When overseas, we help each other during times of trouble like medical or family emergencies. We pool funds and chip in however much we can, whatever we can manage. This time I was at the receiving end.

In addition to the SAR2,000 (\$540) from my company, I received about \$1,000 from my fellow workers from India, Bangladesh, and Philippines. I was really very touched by their generosity.



Gopal Theeng Tamang

I was an undocumented security guard in Malaysia when I heard about the earthquake that shook Nepal in 2015. My mind immediately went to my brother and sister-in-law in Sindhupalchok which was badly affected.

The rest of my family was in Kathmandu, and were safe. But I could not reach my brother and his wife. Calls were not going through the first few days. When I finally made contact, I learnt that their house had collapsed completely.

They had built this home with their lifetime of earnings. My sister-in-law would cry on the phone, and I tried to help my brother in whatever small way I could. A group of us in Malaysia also organised a small campaign to raise funds to buy rice for families in our village.

As security guards in Malaysia, we had to work long hours. I had 12 hour night shifts, and even though a disaster had struck my home country, duty called.

My brother has rebuilt a smaller tin-roofed house. I left Malaysia and emigrated to Iraq for five years where I worked as a housekeeper, waiter and then barista. I moved back to Nepal for good two years ago.

EVENTS

**One Day Hike**

Join a one-day Chhirkey Bhanjyang hike and explore the landscapes, forests, and villages along the route. Call for details.

Entry: Rs900 per person, Nakhpot, 9768771129

Here, Now, Us

Artudio and Outside Studio's collaborative art show features seven interdisciplinary Nepali artists and is a celebration of the collective expression and transformative power of contemporary art.

19-28 April, 11am-6pm, Outside Studio, Jhamsikhel

**Chitra Katha**

Step into the vibrant world of Bhaktapur's contemporary art scene at this exhibition showcasing the works of over twenty artists.

11am-5pm (Sunday-Friday) / 12pm-5pm (Saturday), Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

Bo Suk Lee

Experience the captivating world of abstract art and stories through Korean visual and installation artist Bo Suk Lee's unique creation

Till 21 April, 10am-5pm, Nepal Art Council

**Le Sherpa Market**

Support small and local businesses. Shop for fresh and organic vegetables, fruit, cheese, bread, meat products, honey, and much more at Le Sherpa farmers market.

Saturdays, 7:30am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa, Maharajgunj

Contemporary Art

The artwork series To All The Women Who Came Before Me by Priyanka Singh Maharjan pays tribute to the often-overlooked voices and stories of women through embroidery on fabric.

18 April, 4:30 pm onwards, Dalaila Art Space, Thamel

**Nepal Super League**

The 2025 Nepal Super League (NSL) is in full swing, delivering thrilling football action as it enters its final week.

Till 26 April, 6pm onwards, Tickets: 150-600, Dasarath Rangasala, Tripureshor

MUSIC

Soulful Wednesday

Unwind with the soothing sound of Vivek Lama during an evening of acoustic music.

23 April, 7pm onwards, Mesohat, Sanepa

**Carole Alston @ KatJazz**

Carole Alston will grace KatJazz 2025 with her soulful voice, infusing into her performance jazz, gospel, and musical theatre.

25 April, 7:30 pm onwards, Dhokaima Cafe

**Nawaj Ansari**

Hip hop artist Nawaj Ansari is set to bring his energy and raw bars to the stage.

19 April, Tickets: 900, 7pm onwards, LOD

**Lost in Paradise**

Dive into a sonic escape crafted by Nepal's top DJs this weekend. Get tickets now.

19 April, Tickets: 1,000, 4pm onwards, GAA Hall, Thamel

Ujjwal Saaga

Kathmandu-based musician Ujjwal Saagar's music explores love, heartache, and the quiet struggles of existence. Watch him live.

19 April, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Rs700 / Door Sales: Rs1,000, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

DINING

**Breakfast at Dhokaima**

Start your morning right with the ultimate buffet breakfast served fresh. Enjoy a spread of buttery croissants, muffins, sausages, fluffy pancakes, sautéed potatoes, and fresh juice.

8am-11am, Rs900, Dhokaima Cafe, Patan Dhoka (01) 5422113

GETAWAY

**Hotel Country Villa**

With breathtaking views of the Himalayas, Hotel Country Villa is the ideal hillside escape. Reconnect with nature and experience comfort with their warm hospitality, scenic rooms, and soul-soothing ambience.

Nagarkot (01) 6680127

Club Oasis Spa

Enjoy the weekend at Hyatt's luxury spa. --take a dip in the jacuzzi, get a full-body massage and facial, and step into a sauna before heading to weekend brunch.

Hyatt Regency Boudha (01) 5171234

**Nomad Kathmandu**

Nomad is not just a boutique hotel but a lifestyle hub for creatives, wanderers, and anyone who prefers a laid-back vibe. Book one of their deluxe rooms.

Lazimpat, 9801022392

Hotel Yukhang

With touches of both the old and the new, Hotel Yukhang embodies the blending of Bhaktapur's medieval history with the touch of contemporary amenities.

Thamel (01) 5367358

**Temple Tree Resort & Spa**

Framed by the Annapurna range and lush gardens, Temple Tree is the perfect escape to relax and recharge. Whether it is lounging by the pool or enjoying a peaceful spa treatment, every moment at Temple Tree is designed for comfort and calm.

Lakeside, Pokhara, 9856021669

**MTR Kathmandu**

From crispy dosas and soft idlis to spicy vadas, explore authentic South Indian cuisine at MTR. As part of their on-going anniversary offer, get a special 30% off on all meals at all MTR Kathmandu outlets.

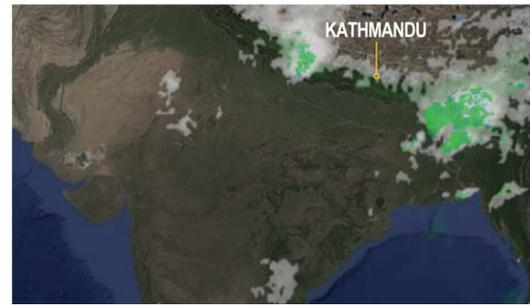
Till 20 April, Kamladi, 9802356867

Sam's One Tree Cafe

Head to Sam's for a memorable dining experience with cuisines ranging from Nepali to Continental. Try their pork chop with mustard sauce or stuffed chicken breast with mushroom sauce.

Darbar Marg (01) 5343610

WEEKEND WEATHER



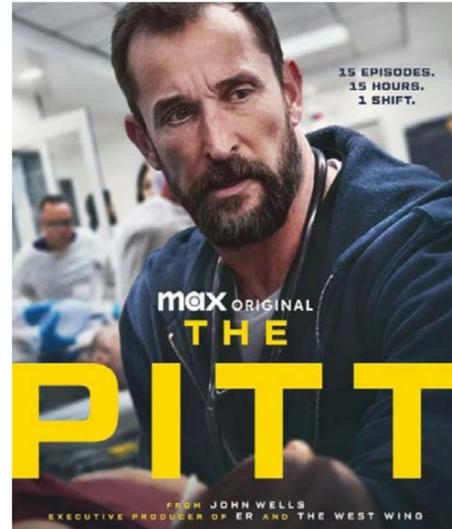
FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
26° 15°	26° 15°	27° 14°	29° 15°	28° 15°

Stormy Forecast

The heat is building up in the Indo-Gangetic plains and the Tarai with Delhi hitting 41°C Celsius on Friday. The updraft of warm air combined with infusion of moisture from a westerly system will bring stormy weather with thunder and lightning over the mountains on Friday and into the weekend. This means a drop in temperature in Kathmandu, but the heat will get up to more normal levels next week when drier weather will hold sway.

While the rain this week doused wildfires, there is still a lot of haze about and this is mainly fine sand from the Thar desert whipped up by wind.

OUR PICK



The 2025 American medical drama series The Pitt follows a single 15-hour work shift of healthcare professionals working at the emergency department of the fictional Pittsburgh Trauma Medical Hospital. As the frontline staff confront mass casualty events, epidemics, and other medical emergencies, they must navigate staff shortages, workplace politics, personal crises — all the while dealing with the emotional toll of doing their jobs. Each episode of the 15-episode season covers approximately one hour of their work shift. Stars Noah Wyle, Tracy Ifeachor, Patrick Ball, Katherine LaNasa, Taylor Dearden, Isa Briones, Supriya Ganesh, and more.

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

Malaysian Night @ The Yellow House

Head to The Yellow House this Friday for an exclusive home-cooked Malaysian dinner by Lalita Raj Kausar. There are 15 spots only.

Price: Rs3,000 per person, Sanepa (01) 5453869

**The Patisserie**

Indulge in a variety of cakes and sweets at The Patisserie, a Parisian-style bakery in Kathmandu. Whether it is celebrating a special occasion or simply treating oneself, The Patisserie offers next-day delivery on pre-orders.

9803368875

**EDEN**

EDEN offers a serene space paired with a menu full of fresh flavors, from their vibrant salads and gourmet mains to artisan coffees and cocktails.

Sanepa, 9860484454

Paalcha Newari Kitchen

Paalcha brings the heart of Newa culture to the plate. This cosy spot serves up authentic Newari flavors — from choila and bara to yomari and chhyang — all crafted with tradition.

Jawlahkel, 9801056357



Carole Alston
(USA)

Carole Alston, a gospel, blues, and jazz vocalist, has played leading roles in multiple musicals including West Side Story, The Man of LaMancha, and Jesus Christ Superstar. She has taught jazz at the Austrian conservatory in Klagenfurt as well as at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München.

Carole Alston - Voice
Martin Zenker - Bass
Abhisek Bhandra - Piano
Lucas Fixel - Drums

Friday, 25 April
7:30PM onwards
Rs1,000
Dhokaima Cafe, Patan Dhoka



Once We Knew
(Switzerland/Nepal)

Once We Knew was formed by four friends (Maria von Rütte, Alice Auclair, Martina Henriques Dias and Sneha Lama) at Jazzcampus in Basel in 2023. Inspired by groups like American vocal quartet Säje, the friends share a love and fascination for singing and creating harmonies.

Sneha Lama - Voice
Martina Henriques Dias - Voice
Maria von Rütte - Voice
Alice Auclair - Voice
Sébastien Rudhard - Bass
Marcelo Figueiredo - Guitar

Thursday, 24 April
7:30PM onwards
Rs1,000
Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Jazzy April in Kathmandu

KatJazz returns for its seventh edition, celebrating women performers

Kathmandu's 'other' jazz festival, KatJazz, has returned for its seventh iteration this month, blending contemporary music with Nepal's rich traditions.

The music fest began on 13 April and will conclude with a grand celebration on 30 April, which is International Jazz Day. This year's line-up features 10 international and Nepali musicians as well as 12 student recitals. There are also masterclasses and workshops

that are free to all. The festival's mission at its inception in 2017 was to educate, and so KatJazz also raises funds for scholarships at the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (KJC).

"It is not just a Jazz Festival, it is also a music conservatory festival," explains Abhisek Bhadra, academic director at KJC and co-organiser of Katjazz.

The 2025 festival has the theme Taking the Lead, and is celebrating women in music. Half of the events will be led by or feature women

across musical backgrounds, including Carole Alston, Once We Knew, and Emerging Voices.

Organisers are also highlighting the interpretations of jazz across the world's communities, with artists representing Spanish music, Thai Jazz, Nepali folk, and more.

Co-organiser Mari Fajardo is a vocalist for the five-member Spanish group Ya Si Ver & co, which blends Spanish folk with jazz. Fajardo says: "Folk music has always been something to share. This core essence of folk music is

the same everywhere."

Once We Knew, made up of Swiss and Nepali performers, formed only in 2023 and is developing an understanding of how to work together as a group.

"We are excited to bring our voices and music to Nepal for KatJazz," says group member Sneha Lama, "This almost feels too good to be true."

The jazz scene in Kathmandu has evolved over the last two decades. Jazzmandu held its 20th festival last year, pioneering and

cultivating a taste for jazz in Nepal while also providing a platform for new and home-grown artists.

"Jazz is a very generous language, it is one of the few art forms that can connect you to your own roots," says Bhadra of KJC. 🇳🇵

Future Harmonies: KatJazz Festival Finale
Wednesday, 30 April
7PM onwards
Rs1,500
Eden Amphitheatre, Sanepa



Roots Rewired
(Nepal)

Roots Rewired is the collaborative effort of two Nepali bands. Rajat Rai has taken inspiration from Reggae, Afro-Beat and West African music, and infused it with Nepali folk, jazz, and West African rhythms. Sonagi Blues blends traditional instruments such as Nagara, Sichya, Bhuchya, Dha, and Sarod with modern ones like Guitar to create a mix of rock and Indian classical music.

Rajat Rai - Voice / Guitar
Chhitij KC - Drums
Pau Roses - Bass
Paul Tynan - Trumpet
Tomas Carrasco - Flute & Saxophone
Abhisek Bhadra - Keyboards

Tuesday, 22 April
7:30PM onwards
Rs1,000
Electric Pagoda, Thamel



Emerging Voices
(Nepal)

With three singers and one instrumentalist, this Nepali group includes Yaju Acharya and Samita Limbu's blend of folk and classical influences, Kunzane's exploration of tradition through contemporary lens, and Nami's vibrant and personal set of original songs that draw inspiration from jazz, pop, indie, reggae, and more.

Yaju Acharya - Voice / Flute
Samita Limbu - Voice
Kunzane - Voice
Nami - Voice

Friday, 18 April
7PM onwards
Rs1,000
Bhumi, Lazimpat



Ya Si Ver & co
(Spain)

Ya Si Ver & co is a collaborative project rooted in the folk traditions of Spain, and reimagines Spanish Folk by combining Spanish Folk with Jazz music, drawing from art forms like Flamenco.

María Fajardo - Voice
Nené Álvarez - Voice
Javier Galiana - Piano
Javier Delgado - Upright Bass
Guillermo Martín-Viana - Drums

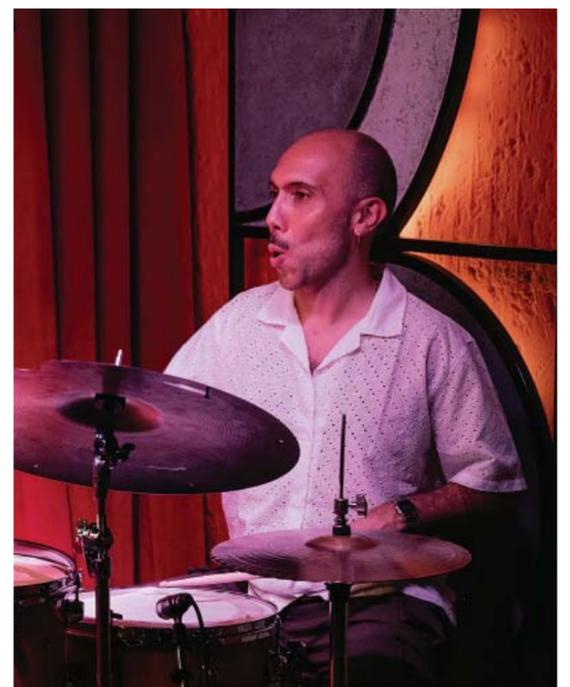
Wednesday, 23 April
7:30PM onwards
Rs1,000
La Terrasse, Chundevi

Fixel Trio ft. Jatziri Gallegos & Siddharth Gautam
(Brazil/Mexico/India)

This group captures the spirit of Brazilian culture and celebrates the various communities that have shaped musician Lucas Fixel's journey. As a part of this year's KatJazz theme, Taking the Lead, Fixel Trio will be featured with Carole Alston, Once We Knew, and Ya Si Ver & co on a series of concerts to celebrate women in music.

Lucas Fixel - Drums
Jatziri Gallegos - Voice
Siddhartha Gautam - Guitar

Saturday, 26 April
3PM onwards
Rs500
Yellow House, Sanepa



Glory and risk on

Spring 2025 will see more record chasing expeditions on the mountains

■ Vishad Raj Onta

The spring 2025 mountaineering season has started with an early reminder of the fine balance of glory and risk on Himalayan peaks.

Everest as always is the biggest draw. But on the 75th anniversary of its first ascent, Annapurna has seen record numbers of expeditions, and climbers are also commemorating 70 years of Kangchenjunga's first successful climb in 1955.

But as a stark reminder of the dangers of Himalayan mountaineering that have been exacerbated by a warming climate, came on Annapurna with the tragic deaths of two promising young Nepali high altitude guides.

Everest is seeing big numbers because it is Everest, and it is there. Some 220 international climbers and their guides from 22 expeditions have already arrived at Everest Base Camp, but this number is expected to cross 450, and could even beat the 2023 record of 478 foreign climbers.

There seems to be greater demand for Everest permits because the fee is being hiked up from \$11,000 to \$15,000 starting this autumn. But the \$4,000 increase is not expected to reduce the crowds, and therefore the risks, on the world's highest mountain.

The Department of Tourism starts issuing permits for the mountain only in early-April, which many find absurd because mountaineers start preparing for their

Everest climb years in advance.

"That is just the process, we want to make sure climbers have all of their paperwork in order once they land in Nepal," says Goma Rai from the Department of Tourism.

Even as expeditions make their first forays up the Khumbu Icefall on Everest, there has already been considerable activity on other Himalayan peaks. Makalu (8,485m) has already seen successful summits this season. Ten guides fixing ropes reached the top of the world's fifth highest mountain on 10 April.

There are two Indian expeditions on Kanchenjunga, which at 8,586m is the third-tallest mountain in the world. The Indian teams are climbing from the Nepal side of the border peak because climbing from the Indian side is not allowed.

One of the teams is led by three-time Everest summiteer Col Ranveer Sing Jamwal which is on the last leg of the 'Har Shikhar Tiranga' campaign to plant an Indian tricolour on the highest point of all 28 Indian states.

Unpredictable weather and its technical nature makes the north face of 'Kangch' treacherous. There have been 12,884 Everest summits since 1953, but there have only been 250 ascents of Kanchenjunga in 70 years.

Annapurna saw 45 summits over 6-7 April before the weather worsened. On 7 April, an avalanche swept away Ngima Tashi Sherpa and Rima Rinje Sherpa. Pemba Thenduk Sherpa, who was also roped up, survived.

"It was a big avalanche, taller than a Kathmandu house when it came down," recalls Pemba Thenduk. "Me and my client were right under a serac and were saved. We realised our two friends had been swept



A new architecture for Nepal's tourism

Local style and material to build high value sustainable tourism in rural Nepal



SAROSH PRADHAN

■ Sudiksha Tuladhar

Architecture can be a powerful agent of change, shaping not just spaces but the way people live, connect, and experience the world.

For Nepal, which is gifted by nature and rich in cultural heritage, reviving rural architecture with modern amenities could hold the key to more sustainable tourism that benefits local people more.

"Design and architecture are amazing tools to create a unique experience for visitors," says Spanish architect Tomeu Esteva of Esteva i Esteva Architecture Studio. "Difficult destinations have

beautiful hotels with design and comfort."

Esteva was in Kathmandu with his colleagues at an event organised by the Spanish Honorary Consulate at Dwarika's Hotel last week to showcase buildings which Nepali architects can adapt with local material and design inputs.

Rural architecture holds a unique significance: it is more than a shelter and must reflect local identity, culture and heritage. An area's natural and cultural harmony can be upset by poorly planned development, speakers at the event said, but the environment can be improved and revitalised by well-integrated structures.

Another Spanish architect, Belen Moneo, has designed hotels at elevations of 3,700m in her home country Spain that supply natural spring water spas. "Creativity in construction must be encouraged. Rural architecture always shows possibilities of what we can do better," Moneo explains, adding that designs must enhance the beauty of nature and give a natural feel at a time when steel, glass and cement dominate urban design.

This is why the use of natural products such as bamboo, local timber, straw and rammed earth are in demand from customers who want a fresh eco-friendly look encouraged in construction of rural architectural structures.

The demand for boutique hotels has increased world over, with more and more tourists favouring aesthetics, experience and comfort over price.

While creativity is an important part of construction and architecture, incentives to build and use rural construction materials still remain minimal, and Moneo emphasises the significance of design and execution.

Esteva helped design the Vana Retreat in Dehradun that kept the natural environment in focus, with the structure giving an elaborate aesthetic experience to visitors.

Another example is Hotel Las Mercedes in the Dominican Republic which was designed and

constructed by Moneo and the company she co-founded Moneo Brock, respecting and revaluing the traditional architecture of the area. Hotels providing such experience could attract tourists and revenue.

The Spanish ambassador to Nepal Juan Antonio March Pujol said, "The role of architecture and architects in developing tourism is crucial, not only in urban areas but rural settings as well."

The concept of rural boutique hotels gained traction in Spain during the 1990s, particularly in regions like Majorca with economic and environmental sustainability as the main focus. In Nepal the tourism industry directly employs about 1 million people, and makes

Himalayan peaks



JOHN BLACK

away but could not find them.”

After four days of searching with two helicopters, the expedition company Seven Summit Trek abandoned the search. Nima Tashi was the unsung hero who helped save the life of an incapacitated Malaysian climber, carrying him down from 8,400m on Everest last year. A video of the rescue by Ngima Tashi and Gelje Sherpa became an international sensation.

But luck ran out for Ngima Tashi and Rima Rinje on Annapurna last week. ‘We have lost two of our finest Sherpa guides,’ Seven Summits said in a statement. ‘It is no longer possible for anyone to survive this long under the ice, and prolonging search means risking the lives of other Sherpas.’

In the past 75 years, Annapurna has seen the highest fatality rate among Himalayan peaks, with one third of those trying to climb it not making it down alive. This year, guides ran out of fixed rope because there were so

many crevasses on the north face. They also reported bigger and more frequent rockfalls and avalanches.

South African climber John Black was nearly caught in the avalanche that killed the guides. He then made the agonising decision to turn back soon after leaving Camp 3 last week on Annapurna.

“I was uncomfortable and uneasy. Some may call it gut, others may call it calculated,” says Black, who actually shared a chocolate with the two Sherpas just before they were swept away by the avalanche. “It is certainly a sharp reminder that the risks are real and things can change in a heartbeat.”

After the avalanche, there has been criticism of some climbers deciding to be helicoptered off the north face despite not showing signs of immediate emergency.

A problem in Himalayan mountaineering in recent years has been the greater numbers of inexperienced climbers who are not only risks to themselves, but also to guides and other climbers. Many do not know when to turn back when the going gets tough.

“Some climbers struggled with crampons, some seemed to lack decent techniques for climbing rock and ice,” says Black. “In many cases, the climbers were too slow and struggled to move efficiently across tricky terrain. On a mountain like Annapurna, speed is the only thing you can do to reduce exposure to danger.”

The problem has been made worse by instant gratification through social media

posts. The challenge of climbing a Himalayan peak has been replaced by an Instagram summit fetish, and expedition companies try to accommodate the wishes of their clients.

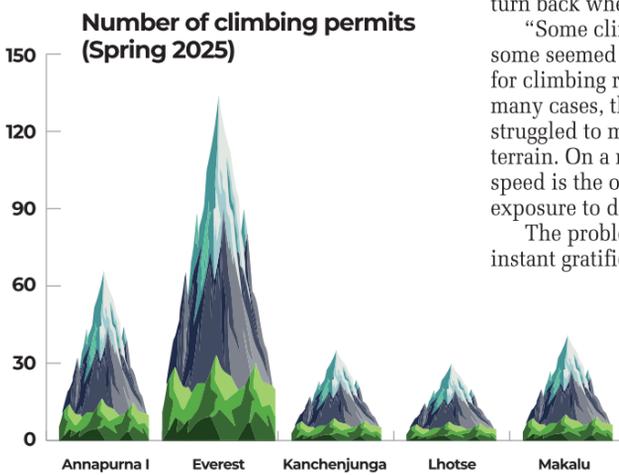
The other expedition that generated a controversy even before it started is of a four-member team of British Army veterans who are ‘acclimatising’ by breathing xenon gas ahead of the climb to enhance production of their red blood corpuscles. Although this is said to be an ‘experiment’, use of the gas by the Mission Everest Expedition has been criticised because it is banned by the Anti-doping Agency as performance enhancing.

Dimantha Dilan Thenuwara, a Sri Lankan IT professional, is attempting the gorgeous Ama Dablam. He plans to take both the Sri Lanka and Nepal flags up to the summit, and wear the daura suruwal Nepali national dress on top. He wants to promote a message of ‘prosperity through unity’, especially among South Asian countries.

Thenuwara describes himself as a pampered child who was best friends with his dad, who was killed in the 2004 Sri Lanka tsunami. The tragedy drives him to climb.

“This expedition is a mission that began 20 years ago,” says Thenuwara, who had to grow up quickly, and put himself through tech school. He is financing the trip himself, and believes strongly in the need for youth to remember their roots. The Ama Dablam climb is preparation for an expedition to climb K2 later this year.

Another notable expedition is of Peter Hamor of Slovakia and the Italian couple Nives Meroi and Romano Benet, who are attempting a new route on 7,590m Yalung Peak in the Kanchenjunga massif. A two-member British team is already at Everest Base Camp to go up the Lhotse face and make one more attempt to jump off the mountain in wingsuits. 🇨🇳



up about 8% of the country’s GDP.

In Nepal, the stone homes of Mustang and Manang, bamboo and mud structures of the Tarai, and the Kathmandu Valley’s terra cotta tile skylines, graceful temples, and tranquil bahal courtyards are all examples of Nepal’s traditional architecture.

Nepali architect Sarosh Pradhan has been working for the past eight years on the Brakka Village project (pictured, left) in Manang Valley north of the Annapurnas. Other examples of this kind of rural architecture for high-end tourism are the Shinta Mani Hotel in Mustang and Khumbu Lodge below Mt Everest. Says Pradhan, “There are places in Nepal that radiate purity and embrace simplicity. Creating projects in such settings require deep reflection and thoughtful planning.”

Rural architecture is not easy, and sometimes more expensive. Inflation, energy efficiency, the climate crisis, and increased costs of living pose obstacles to sustainable rural architecture.

Esteva says faith and trust between client and architect is necessary for any project to be successful. He adds that architects must practice being humble, the process of designing always involves learning and not imposing their ideas on clients.

Nepal is uniquely positioned for the growth of rural tourism because of its stunning countryside as well as its internationally renowned traditions in holistic wellness. Creating infrastructure that is small, thoughtfully planned and that respects both tradition and contemporary hospitality standards is crucial.

“Projects in Nepal can be made cost effective by using materials from houses that have been brought down,” says Esteva. “Pilot projects involving local people and simple designing also helps the process.”

The growth of homestays in Nepal is a step in the right

direction, but they are still a bit too rustic for the international traveller who also wants comfort and is willing to pay extra for it. Upgrading the facilities in homestays and ensuring that the architectural heritage of the locality is preserved using locally sourced building material could allow owners to charge more.

Says Sangita Shrestha of Dwarika’s Hotel, “Our effort is to build upon rural architecture by empowering local communities and using what is available locally. We can fine tune and encourage indigenous design and training.”

The vision goes beyond just boosting the economy, it is about building a future where tourism helps villages grow in a healthy and lasting way. Instead of using up resources, it gives back to the land and the people. It supports local communities by creating jobs, improving infrastructure, and protecting natural beauty. When done right, tourism can be a tool for preserving culture and nature, not harming them.

Architects must therefore see their work as more than just designing buildings, they also need to care deeply about people and places, especially in rural areas that can benefit the most.

With global interest in sustainable and off-the-beaten-path travel increasing, Nepal stands at the cusp of a tourism transformation that values community-driven, eco-conscious hospitality. A mix of modern ideas and traditional knowledge could transform rural tourism in Nepal.

Says Shrestha, “Young architects should spend time with local and indigenous communities, listen to their stories, and learn from their ways of living. These communities have deep knowledge about the land, materials, and climate. If this wisdom is used in new designs, it can help create tourism spaces that truly benefit everyone.” 🇨🇳

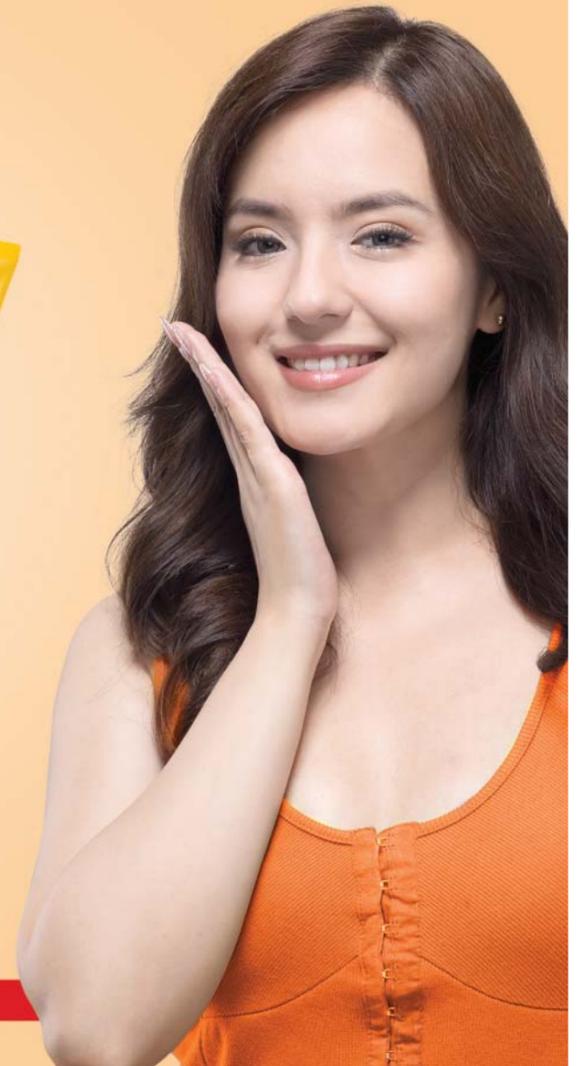
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The healer of far-western Nepal

Compassionate surgeon in distant district treats broken bones, but is helpless against poverty and injustice

■ **Dirgha Raj Upadhyay**
in Achham

Here in the mountains of far-western Nepal, the biggest threat to life and limb is gravity. Women collecting fodder fall from trees, boys grazing goats drop off cliffs, tractors plunge from dirt roads on steep slopes.

Nothing can be done about those who die. But for the wounded, there is only one hospital: Bayalpata. And it is there that orthopaedic surgeon Mandeep Pathak (right) is the last hope for many patients.

Pathak, 42, is too modest to tell us how many lives he has saved over the past 10 years he has worked at Bayalpata. But hospital records show he has performed more than 4,000 operations, many of them preventing permanent physical disabilities. Pathak also did 800 major life-saving surgeries.

"I treat patients with injuries, but I wish I could also treat poverty," Pathak says.

Sudurpaschim Province in Nepal's far-west is far away from everything: from Kathmandu, from adequate medical care, from food security, and far from the reach of government services.

Pathak remembers the searing sadness he felt when a patient once told him, "Doctor, I sold the last of my rice to pay to come here, please give me a medicine that I can take on an empty stomach."

Pathak was born in Kathmandu, and after MBBS from Kathmandu University, he got an MD from The Philippines. At a time when many



Nepali doctors and staff nurses were emigrating, Pathak did not just return to Kathmandu but decided to go to one of the remotest districts in Nepal to serve those most in need.

The hospital was established in 2009 in the village of Bayalpata, and has been managed by the non-profit Nyaya Health Nepal (NHN) treating 100,000 patients a year at no cost. NHN is now preparing to hand over the hospital to the provincial government so its model for care can be replicated.

People from not just Achham but surrounding districts, and from as far away as Humla, bring patients to Bayalpata. And Pathak is always there with his team performing triage, and doing orthopaedic surgeries that would be difficult even in Kathmandu. Recently, his team performed a hip replacement.

Mild-mannered, modest, soft-spoken, hard-working, professional are the words families of patients who have been treated at Bayalpata Hospital use to describe Mandeep

Pathak. But the surgeon is too busy to let all this get to his head.

When asked why he does not emigrate like his peers or get a lucrative position at a private hospital in Kathmandu, Pathak answers simply, without a trace of self-importance, "I do not think I could get the satisfaction or sense of fulfilment anywhere else."

When he returns from seminars abroad, Pathak's suitcases are not full of presents, but titanium bone implants, external fixation rods, or intramedullary nails to be used in surgeries at Bayalpata.

Now as Bayalpata's Hospital Director, Pathak also has administrative and fundraising duties. He has to take a 10-hour ride down to Dhangadi frequently to meet ministers so they release the hospital's budget. This can sometimes be more difficult than the most complicated surgery.

Recently, he had to cancel an appointment with the Chief Minister to rush back to Bayalpata



because there was a patient who needed emergency surgery.

"I told myself, let me save this patient first, I can try to save the hospital later," he recalls.

Once, when he had to be away for a month on surgery training in the US, the family of a 90-year-old woman who had dislocated her hip after falling from a staircase was waiting for him to return.

Her son told Pathak: "Doctor, either put her out of her suffering, or cure her." Pathak replied it was too dangerous to operate at her age, but the son said his mother was in so much pain it was worth the risk.

The operation was touch-and-go, but was successful. The woman who had been brought in on a stretcher, walked out of the hospital three days after the operation.

A few months later, a 27-year-old woman was brought into ER bleeding profusely from an arm mangled by a thresher machine. Even in that state, she was breastfeeding her baby.

Pathak welled up seeing this display of selfless motherhood, as he wheeled her into surgery. She needed three operations, but now has full use of her hand.

It is a sense of achievement from such recovery that keeps Mandeep Pathak here in this isolated village in the middle of nowhere. Bayalpata Hospital has not just saved lives, it also saves families from poverty because they do not have to take sick relatives to expensive city hospitals.

In January, a woman was brought to Bayalpata with both hands broken. She said she had taken a fall, but Pathak did not believe her. When alone in the surgery, she finally admitted that her husband had beaten her.

It was her husband who had brought her to hospital, but she refused to file a police report.

Pathak quietly put both her arms in casts, thinking about the poverty, patriarchy and injustice in society that he is unable to treat.

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