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THE JUGGLER

■ Shristi Karki

The pre-monsoon season of street upheaval is upon us, and as public frustration builds up there is pressure once more on Nepal's revolving political leadership to switch partners.

There has hardly been a day in the past month when Kathmandu's main intersections have not been blocked by royal rallies, teacher's marches, doctors' demos, sit-ins by victims of cooperatives scams, and even the ruling UML last week staged its own show of youth force.

In the middle of all this is Prime Minister K P Oli, who assures us that all is well. He is sounding more and more like Emperor Nero.

The street demonstrations by various professions are about corruption, bad governance, job insecurity, and unsustainable wages, but the general public finds resonance in the anger.

Teachers had been on warpath for a month, demanding that Parliament pass the School Education Bill for salaries and benefits on par with civil servants and other reforms.

As it stands, Education Minister Bidhya Bhattarai of the UML had resigned last week following disagreements with Oli over meeting teachers' demands. Earlier, Binda Pandey and Ushakiran Timalsina were suspended for daring to challenge Oli for taking a tycoon's donation of real estate for the party office.

However, on Wednesday, the teachers called off their protest after negotiating a nine-point deal with the government, warning that they would resume demonstrations if the agreements were not implemented.

The Nepal Medical Association has shut down non-essential medical services in solidarity with resident doctors in private hospitals who are demanding stipends on par with government facilities.

For months, victims of cooperatives and loan sharks have come to Kathmandu from all over the country to demand justice and compensation. The government has formed multiple committees, signed many agreements, passed an ordinance to return their money, but relevant laws have languished.



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

All agitating groups have been given the runaround by successive governments led by the three main parties. Indeed, Oli, the NC's Sher Bahadur Duda, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoist Centre have

reached multi-point agreements with teachers, doctors, and victims of fraud to address their grievances. But they were empty promises.

And now that the Maoists are in the opposition, Dahal is using

Messaging is the Message
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the street protests to drive a wedge in the ruling coalition. In fact, the only issue uniting all three parties so far is their objection to reinstate a Hindu monarchy — although sections of the NC seem to be fence-sitting.

In Baluwatar, Oli issues directives to his ministers to hold marathon meetings with protesting groups even while some coalition partners in the NC question his handling of the demonstrations.

Haggling between the NC and UML on the appointment of the new Rastra Bank governor and appointments to the Constitutional Commission have widened the fissures within the coalition.

Various factions of the pro-monarchy groups have also been holding different street rallies, including for the release of the royalist Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) leaders who were arrested following the violent pro-monarchy protest in Tinkune last month.

Nepal Police have released some detained RPP leaders but former journalist and party senior vice-president Rabintra Mishra remains in police custody, as does Durga Prasai, the business tycoon whom ex-king Gyanendra had appointed to lead the Tinkune rally.

Nepalis across the political spectrum have condemned the continued detention and police treatment of Mishra, calling him a prisoner of conscience.

At another demonstration in Balkhu last week, the RPP criticised the government for not allowing peaceful march at the city centre.

"A democratic state must give citizens the right to assemble and express their opinions, and to create public spaces where they can practice those views," says Taranath Dahal of Freedom Forum.

Added Dahal: "Open platforms were established in Nepal for its citizens to be able to voice their opposition even during authoritarian systems. But in an established republic where freedom of expression is considered a fundamental right, we see an erosion of the public space." 🇳🇵

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Messaging is the Message

The Canadian media philosopher Marshall McLuhan was way ahead of his time in foreseeing how the digital age would transform the public sphere. The medium was indeed the message, and today the messaging app is the message.

On World Press Freedom Day on Saturday 3 May, journalists must remind ourselves that it is not only our freedom that needs to be protected. Freedom of press guarantees the public's right to know, journalists are just defending the freedom of their fellow-citizens.

Democracy and freedom of expression, by definition, go hand-in-hand. There can be no democracy without participation, and there is no participation without open communication.

But today, democracy is in retreat across the world, a trend that has gone hand-in-hand and has been abetted by the uncontrolled spread of social media platforms.

The world's two most populous countries to Nepal's north and south now have converging political systems and media landscapes. China's phenomenal economic progress seems to have convinced its admirers that democracy and development are antithetical.

Over the past century, the United States demonstrated that a free press and the free market were two sides of the same coin — open society needed to be defended to ensure accountability and economic growth. The First Amendment to the US Constitution laid down that the legislature should make no laws that infringed on complete freedom of expression.

Yet, the United States is proof now of how too much freedom can kill freedom. We now know that the liberty to say anything can mean we end up saying nothing. There can be so much freedom that the truth can be buried in an avalanche of lies. The free-for-all on the internet is merely an illusion of freedom.

Democracy allows citizens even the freedom to destroy democracy itself. With democracies in decay worldwide, media as the fourth pillar of democracy is turning into a pillar of authoritarianism.

Hyper-local digital media content is so polarised that it paralyzes democracy and pierces the armour protecting the free press. Algorithms reinforce and further radicalise entrenched beliefs, muffle public debate, and muzzle journalists.

The truth is then drowned in a cacophony of toxic trolling, hate speech and disinformation. AI has made it possible for deep fake content to be even more potent

and pervasive.

Democracy and social networking sites, alas, are not compatible. We have been reluctant to put it so bluntly before because agreeing to social media bans in Nepal (like the government did with TikTok) would mean infringing on constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression. Such control could lead to creeping censorship of digital content by a thin-skinned government.

The age of AI-driven algorithms coincides with democratic reversal globally, and an existential crisis in the mainstream press. Journalists are no longer sole gatekeepers, 'content creators' and 'influencers' now give 'users' what they want, not what they need to make informed choices — for example about mitigating climate breakdown.

As a press freedom activist said at a recent gathering: "We do not go to a citizen doctor when we are sick, so why do we need citizen journalists to tell us what is happening?"

Yet publishers and editors are stuck in their old ways, unable or unwilling to adapt to new

storytelling styles and multimedia packaging formats. With falling revenue, there is less money for investigative reporting which was already jeopardised by corporate conflict of interest.

The free press must survive so that democracy is made more accountable, and pluralism can prevail over populism. For this, journalism must fight back. Smaller, isolated pockets of independence and professionalism need support to resist. Even practicing independent journalism in this day and age is a form of resistance.

AI will embolden techno-fascists, replacing physical death squads with cyber lynch mobs. Governments do not need to censor the media, journalists can be silenced by corporate takeovers and mass trolling. They do not need to kill journalists anymore, they can just let journalism die.

Free speech is no longer about journalism, 'free speech' is what is on YouTube or TikTok. Journalism used to be governed by rules about verification, double-checking, about credibility and trust. Posts on X do not have to abide by any of those rules, and the tyranny of the algorithm remakes McLuhan's global village with tribalism.

Media freedom has ended up killing freedom, as another philosopher of resistance, Janis Joplin, once sang 60 years ago: "Freedom just another word for nothing left to lose."

Kunda Dixit



AI-GENERATED IMAGE

A polarised internet paralyzes democracy and drowns out independent journalism

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Shooting the messenger

The state of emergency imposed on 1 February 2005 when King Gyanendra staged a coup was coming to an end and we wrote that the emergency had outlived its usefulness, was counterproductive to state security and should be lifted to steer the country towards national reconciliation. As we mark the World Press Freedom Day on 3 May this Saturday, we revisit an editorial from 20 years ago this week. Excerpts of the editorial published on #245 29 April – 5 May 2005.

The raison d'être for February First, as laid out in the royal proclamation, was that the political process had gone astray and it was undermining the counterinsurgency campaign. Fair enough. But although a state of emergency was declared in a separate notice, there was nothing in the royal proclamation that said anything about such a harsh crackdown on the press and politicians.



The state of emergency has deeply polarised Nepalis. The middle ground has been removed. The Maoists seemed to be headed towards ultimate self-destruction anyway, now they have new reason to rally against the monarchy and focus their fight. Intimidation of media has tarnished the credibility of the very institution the state needs to put its views to the people. The role of the bureaucracy and constitutional organs have been emasculated by newly-formed authorities with overlapping functions.

Prolonging the emergency will just bolster the argument of those who believe that it was not really designed to curb Maoism, but to put out pluralism.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



STAYING HOME

Sita Pun started a homestay program with help from the local government, and six years later has gained not just financial independence but the confidence to lead community action. Take a tour of Torikhola Community Homestay in Baglung and watch Sita narrate her story on Nepali Times' YouTube channel.



ELEGANZA EXTRAVAGANZA

For the LGBTQIA+ community in Nepal, drag has provided a powerful platform to express, explore and celebrate their own identities. Nepali drag queens, kings and performers are taking the culture in stride and using it for visibility and representation. Watch the video on our YouTube channel and subscribe for multimedia content.

DHARARA

Ironically, the redevelopment of Dharara has failed to connect people, place and events ('Towering monument to 2015', Shristi Karki, #1258). The white view tower is intimidating, the high boundary kills emotions. This place could have been an oasis for social, cultural and financial growth, but it is just a jailed concrete park right now.

Sushmita Ranjit Shrestha

■ We have tried twice to enter Dharara, but it is always full.

Selva Arumugam

CRISIS REPORTING

Several foreign 'First Responder Teams' were accompanied by news crews during the 2015 Nepal earthquake ('Disaster Journalism', Kunda Dixit, #1258) and their priorities were soon in danger of getting pretty warped.

Tony Jones

CONVERSATION WITH EX-KING

What purpose does it serve to wage a smear campaign against King Gyanendra ('Tell me what the common man is thinking!', Sam Cowan, #1258)? Why doesn't Nepali Times report on the massive serial corruption scams since Nepal became a republic in 2008? You risk losing your credibility by engaging in gimmicks.

Shyamal Krishna Shrestha

LAGAN TOLE

When rulers are not local and do not understand local values, everything disintegrates like the rebuilding of Lagan tole after the 2015 earthquake ('Loss of soul and soil', Suman Nepali, #1257).

Raj Gyawali

MANDEEP PATHAK

Love to learn more about Surgeon Pathak ('The healer of far-western Nepal', Dirgha Raj Upadhyay, #1257) and his work including the unsung heroes who are quietly changing people's lives.

Subarna Newar

■ Thank you for sharing information about Dr Pathak who has saved so many lives working in a remote hospital in a remote district. We must appreciate what he has done and thank him for what he is doing.

Bharat Koirala

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



The sacred and the everyday

by Sangya Lamsal
28 artists from Bhaktapur are exhibiting their work at the Chitra Katha exhibition in Siddhartha Art Gallery, reflecting on heritage, belief, and identity. The artists offer intimate stories, inviting onlookers to find personal resonance within the folds of collective memory. Visit nepalitimes.com for the review.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Disaster Journalism

Editorial
When journalists are part of the crisis they cover, they often realise how narrowly reality is portrayed. Read Kunda Dixit's reflections from May 2015 on the skewed lens of disaster reporting in the aftermath of the earthquake 10 years ago. Longer version at BBC Academy Blogs.

Most popular on X



Towering monument to 2015

by Shristi Karki
Ten years after Dharara collapsed during the earthquake, its replica now stands next to the stump of the earlier structure that has been preserved as a monument to the disaster. For many in Nepal, the destruction of the iconic tower has become a motif of the 2015 earthquake. Join the discussion online.

Most commented

Fromage, vin et charcuterie Népalais

by Sonia Awale
From reporting for international media to crafting award-winning yak cheese in Nepal, François Driard has built a life and an award-winning cheese empire in Nepal, blending French tradition with Himalayan resilience. Read the profile on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepali conservation scientist Reshu Bhashyal is on a mission to save endangered Himalayan yew and rare orchids from poaching and unsustainable harvesting. Her efforts earned her the prestigious Whitley Award 2025, presented by Princess Royal Anne in London.

Rita Thapa @bheribas
Huge loving congratulations to Reshu Bhashyal, with pride

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SELFIE CENTRED:
Celebrities taking selfies with Prime Minister K P Oli during the ruling party's youth rally on Thursday 24 April in Kathmandu. Critics said it was absurd for the UML to stage a rally when it is itself in power, with some adding that it proved the fragility of the current coalition. The UML tried to woo back youth support and had many life size cutouts for the party's past leaders as selfie spots.



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Publisher: **Kunda Dixit**, Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: +977 1 5005601-08 Fax: +977 1 5005518



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Bhutan, the movie

A powerful portrayal of longing for one's homeland, even from the afterlife

■ Sudiksha Tuladhar

Bhutan भुटान starts with Bishnu Bahadur KC, played by Hari Bansha Acharya, on a call, requesting to speak to the visa officer. By this point, he had applied for a visa to Bhutan 10 times, but was denied each time.

KC was a national football player in Bhutan in 1988 before he and other Nepali-speaking Lhotsampa people were forced out of the country in the 1990s as part of the Druk regime's 'One Nation One People' campaign.

Over 100,000 Bhutanese Nepalis were forced out, driven across India and dumped in Nepal where they lived in seven refugee camps supervised by the United Nations and other charities until they were resettled in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and some European countries starting in 2007.

In the fictional movie with the satirical English title *The World's Happiest Man*, KC has resettled in the state of Ohio in the US but wishes to visit his home country once before he dies. Between flashbacks, we learn KC has died without having fulfilled his wish.

The drama then focuses on KC's two families from two marriages as they debate whether to cremate him as per Hindu rites or give him a Christian burial. A mediator played by Hollywood actor Bruce Dern urges them to take a firm decision before it is too long.

There are drawn out scenes of KC being baptised and when he is confronted by his first wife from Darjeeling, played by Anuradha



Majumdar, he says he changed his religion in the hope that he will be allowed back in Bhutan.

We find that KC has another wife, played by Puja Chand, who is a Christian Nepali. Dayahang Rai as KC's son from his second marriage doesn't have much screen time to flex his acting chops.

Acharya competently portrays a man that is equal parts haunted by the memories of and longing for his home country. KC's pain and loss is acute when he is teaching football to his granddaughter Gungun, played by Aditi Pyakurel, but mid-scene, he freezes, perhaps lost in memories of being in Bhutan's national team.



In another scene, KC recalls his mother singing a lullaby in Dzongkha. He also has a box filled with medals, photographs and a football which he deflates with a knife in a powerful depiction of his complicated emotions about his homeland.

KC keeps checking his mailbox in the hopes that his visa application has been accepted. He says in Nepali: "If a tree that has already struck roots in one place is shifted to another, it will not survive." Dern's character says that the western world has become "lonely in pursuit of happiness", another reference to Bhutan's obsession with its Gross National Happiness index.

Scenes shift quickly, making the story difficult to follow at times.

The use of symbolism is a trite overdone. Nonetheless, *भुटान* is a nuanced depiction of raw pain and agony of losing one's homeland.

One cannot help but leave the theatre feeling deflated. KC dies without having visited Bhutan, but perhaps he does in his afterlife. It is up to the audience to create their own ending to this sad story of exile. 🇳🇵

भुटान
Mad Monkey Films, 2025
Directed by Binod Paudel
102 minutes
In cinemas in Nepal

NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक



Turkish at Expo25

Turkish Airlines at Expo 2025 Osaka debuted its Crystal Business Class Suite, held a Gala, and premiered *Kushimoto*, a documentary honoring Japan-Turkiye friendship. Turkish Trade Minister and Airline executives were present. Following the documentary, Japanese green tea was paired with Turkish baklava in a ceremony.

New Everest rules

A tourism bill in the Upper House requires climbers to have climbed a 7,000m mountain before attempting Everest. A similar 6,000m requirement was introduced in 1995-96 but scrapped after the number of climbers plummeted. The bill also mandates expedition staff to be Nepali citizens.



60th SAARC meeting

SAARC's Programming Committee met in Kathmandu 28-30 April for the 60th time, and reviewed previous plans, approved budgets and programs, and set the 2025 SAARC Calendar. The organisation has been in limbo due to India-Pakistan tensions and has not been able to hold its Summit.

Cement, iron up

Cement prices are up Rs20 to Rs770 per sack, iron rods by Rs3 to Rs 90 per kg, due to power shortages at factories. The industries have justified the hikes saying they have incurred losses due to power cuts up to 12 hours a day, while the government says they are using it as an excuse.



HBL relocates branch

Himalayan Bank relocated its Battispatali branch down the road to the Nepal Rastriya Marwadi Parishad building.



WorldLink ambassadors

WorldLink signed six cricketers including Rohit Paudel and D.S. Airee as brand ambassadors to boost community ties.



StanChart Academy

Standard Chartered's Regional Banking Academy, 24-25 April, trained 130+ participants from 15 Asian countries on cross-border transactions and combating money laundering and terrorist financing.



NMB green loans

NMB Bank is to issue loans worth \$60m to fund eco-projects in Nepal, such as EVs and solar. The loan, expected to create 8,000 jobs, is backed by IFC, BII and MetLife.



Ncell services

The Department of Information Technology enrolled Ncell as a Data Centre and Cloud Service Provider. Ncell currently runs data centres in Nakkhu, Pokhara and Hetauda that are used by banks, the government, and businesses.

Vice tax hike

Health Minister Paudel has proposed tripling the prices of cigarettes by Rs30 and alcohol to Rs3,000 to generate money for health insurance. Universal health insurance has stalled because of lack of customers, low coverage, and delays in reimbursement.



BC education report

The British Council released a report on Transnational Education in Nepal that advised less regulation, high academic standards, and market-aligned curricula.

Tea exports rise

16.5 million kgs of tea worth Rs3.63 billion was exported in fiscal year 23/24. Rs4.5 billion is predicted by the end of fiscal year 24/25, which would be an increase of 24%.

Nepali cinema's melodramatic realism

Where is the anger in Nepal's cinema? What has become of satire, irony, provocation?

■ Abishek Budhathoki

Taken in totality, Nepali mainstream cinema concerns itself with a specific ideological inclination, a tendency towards 'melodramatic realism'.

Disguised as social realism, this is cinema of affirmation cloaked in the language of critique. This tendency is not indigenous but inherited: a diluted echo and imitation of Bollywood.

Film directors, driven by the understandable desire for commercial viability, have adopted Bollywood's worst tendencies: its emotional maximalism and narrative predictability. But they have done so without the budget, without its system, without its technicality.

The result is cinema that mimics form without function. The cinematography with its saturated colour and glamour-obsessed image is an aesthetic colonisation. Let us name it what it is: a cinema of sympathy.

Social injustice is not interrogated but assumed. Suffering is not resisted but aestheticised. Characters do not struggle to change the world, they endure it. They are saints in ragged clothes, martyrs in the mountains, whose nobility lies in their passivity. In this cinema, pain is purity, and purity is always poor.

These films are said to reflect contemporary society—but they do so in the way a mirror reflects a dream: distorted, beautified, bathed in the light of sentimentalism. They portray not society as it is, but as it feels to remember. What we have, then, is not realism, but a kind of sentimental mythos.

The culprits are not hard to find. They are the most celebrated directors of our time. Their films win national awards, their actors become stars. Yet what unites them all — from rural dramedies like Kabaddi, family melodramas like Prasad, or soft-issue social parables like Saili — is a fundamental conservatism of narrative logic.

If there is politics, it is personal. If there is history, it is just the setting. Society, in these films, is static. The caste system, the labour exodus, gendered violence, these are presented as conditions of nature, not conditions of power. To suffer within them is to be good, to fight against them would be, it seems, impolite.

What defines this tendency is its inability to dramatise complexity. The films are either naively dualistic or neurotically symbolic. Women are either goddesses or ghosts. Men are either stoic heroes or cartoonish predators. The poor are noble. The rich are cruel. Nothing is ambiguous. Nothing is difficult. Nothing is allowed to breathe.

Most insidious is the rise of populist humour, that soft, crowd-pleasing comedy



IN BLACK AND WHITE: Audience gather outside Ranjana Cinema in Kathmandu for the screening of Newari movie Rajmati.

BIKAS RAUNIYAR

which diffuses even the most tragic premises, like a nervous laugh at a funeral. Laughter that is not disruptive.

This humour, often rooted in exaggerated dialect, village caricature, or romantic incompetence, serves to neutralise discomfort. It appears not only in comedies but in 'social drama', where it functions as an emotional pressure valve. A girl is nearly sold into marriage — but wait, here comes the lovable drunk uncle with a one-liner.

The humour, while infectious, mocks just the symptoms like arranged marriage and patriarchal values, but not the structures themselves. There is no class struggle here, only romantic miscommunication. When misogyny appears, it is played for laughs, when caste lines emerge, they're side-stepped in favour of musical reconciliation.

Politicians are corrupt, yes, but hilariously so. Systemic failure is rendered absurd, not grotesque. Their jokes are universal. But in avoiding discomfort, they also avoid depth. They laugh with the people, not for them.

But why are we laughing? And what are we laughing at? If the answer is that we are laughing without bitterness and rage, at our own condition, then our cinema is no longer a mirror but a lullaby.

Even stylistically, the image is clean but unimaginative, the dialogue is moralistic, almost liturgical. The endings are too often redemptive, even when they pretend to be tragic. One watches these films not to be challenged, but to be comforted: to be reminded that pain is meaningful, that goodness suffers, that, in the end, Nepal is still beautiful.

But cinema is not therapy. It is not the job of film to make pain feel poetic. To reduce our political and economic trauma to matters of individual heartbreak is not just aesthetically lazy, it is dangerous. This is how ideology works: not through propaganda, but through sentiment.

The films, by making injustice feel tragic instead of intolerable, teach audiences not to resist reality, but to accept it.

This is not to say that all cinema is compromised. There are filmmakers, few but growing—who refuse the consolation of melodrama, like Min Bahadur Bham's *The Black Hen*, and Sujit Bidari's *Butterfly on the Windowpane*, which create spaces of silence, of interiority. Their characters are not metaphors, but people. Their conflicts are not tidy, their resolutions are not redemptive. In short, they resist the tendency.

But these exceptions only highlight the

rule. The mainstream appetite, whether among producers or the public, still favours the emotionally saturated, the morally clear and the forced humour.

"Show Nepal," they say. "Make it cry. Make it real. But not too real."

What has become of anger in our cinema? What has become of satire, irony, provocation? Where are the films that disrupt rather than reflect? That confront the audience, rather than embrace them?

If art is meant to mirror society, then what society are we mirroring? A quiet one, perhaps, a stoic one, a beautiful one. But not a just one.

This is the paradox of our cinema: in trying so hard to reflect the people, it forgets to challenge them. In trying to represent suffering, it aestheticises it. In trying to honour tradition, it enshrines conservatism.

Cinema should not be devotional. It should not be a hymn. It must be a question. And until directors begin to ask those questions — not in press kits, but in the language of cinema itself — we will remain, for all fanfare and film festivals, a national cinema without a national consciousness. 🇳🇵

Abishek Budhathoki is a multidisciplinary artist specialising in media and mass culture, and has directed a number of short films.

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मुसलधारै वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ



१० वर्ष वारेन्टी



■ Text and photos by
Amit Machamasi in Kavre

There are still two months to go before the monsoon breaks, but Roma Gurung who survived last September's flash flood in Panauti is worried about what the rainy season has in store.

The massive debris flow of 28-29 September was unleashed by record-breaking rainfall, but it was made worse by stone quarries and sand mining as well as encroachment along the floodplains.

"The rains will arrive soon, and we don't know where we should go," says Gurung, who was nearly swept away last year. "Last time I ran up the hill with my husband and two children and watched our house being swept away by a flood. I do not know if I have the strength and courage to go through that again."

For residents of Ward 12 in Panauti, the flood seven months ago is still etched in their memories. The unprecedented precipitation killed 224 people across the country, 32 of them just in Panauti. Five people were killed in Gurung's neighbourhood where 187 houses were destroyed.

The floods also destroyed hydropower plants, slashing Nepal's generation capacity by half, and damaged parts of national highways. About 25km of the BP Highway was washed away, and the temporary road is along the riverbed. This monsoon, the highway will have to be closed.

"If I were alone, I would have stayed home and let the flood and landslide take me away," says another Ward 12 resident, Jamuna Biswakarma. "I ran for the sake of my family and my 10-day-old granddaughter."

Locals here did not just lose loved ones or their homes: many also lost their livelihoods. On a recent visit, Sangita Pariyar was pleading with the ward chair for a sewing machine.

"A machine would help me earn a living. I could repay my loan and pay for the school admission of my children," she said.

Pariyar and her husband had been running a tailoring shop in Ward 12. They had a decent income and were planning to expand their business. But the flood washed away everything: the shop, sewing machines, cash saved for Dasain, new clothes for sale, and some crucial documents.

Much of the death and damage was due to the unchecked operation of stone quarries and crusher companies in the catchment of Rosi, and much less with heavy monsoon rains.

There are 25 crusher and mining companies in the Rosi catchment—many of them illegal—extracting sand, stones and gravel to feed the capital's construction boom. This makes the slopes and river bed very unstable and greatly increases the risk of landslides and floods.

A government report has recommended shutting down some of the mining and crusher operations in the area. Some were running without registration, and others were not adhering to guidelines. According to Standards on Extraction, Sale and Management of Stones, Pebbles, and Sand (2020), such plants must be situated 2km away from any settlements. But that was not followed near the Rosi, and mining operations have resumed.

Residents along the riverbanks had long feared that these industries would trigger disasters. "The operators of these mines and crushers are powerful and influential people. We had protested to stop them, but who listens to ordinary people like us?" asks Biswakarma.

Some locals are now building shelters while others have sold their land and have moved elsewhere, fearing more disaster as pre-monsoon storms lash the mountains.

"My neighbours have started building temporary houses, but I don't have the money," says Gurung. "If the floods come, we could climb the slopes for safety, but now there is the danger of landslides too. How are we supposed to get through this monsoon?"

Ward chair Jaya Ram KC says that there are preparations to reduce the risk of floods and landslides this monsoon season. Flood control measures are also planned along the Rosi to protect Ward 12.

But locals are still haunted by the trauma of last September and do not feel prepared at all. They say they have received no support, not from the government, nor from the illegal stone quarries and crushers which are again operating with impunity.

Says Jamuna Biswakarma: "We are living with uncertainty and anxiety about the rains. Will anyone be held accountable for our suffering this time?"

In collaboration with Sajira Shrestha.



Before the no

Inhabitants of Rosi Khola dread the coming



187 houses were destroyed and five people were killed, in Panauti's Ward 12.



Many of the houses damaged in the floods last year, like this one, are yet



CARVING KAVRE'S MOUNTAINS:
 A mountain slope in Kavre gouged out by quarries in Panauti, seven months after last year's devastating floods. Many of these illegal quarries, blamed for exacerbating the floods, are back in operation.



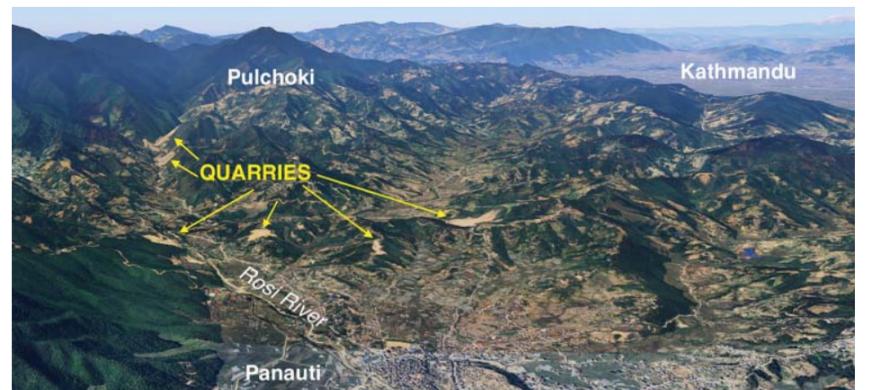
Sangita Pariyar and her husband ran a tailoring business, and were planning to expand before the flood washed away everything, including their sewing machines.



Jamuna Biswakarma is dreading the coming monsoon season. She has not received any compensation from the government or crusher companies for the damage to her house.

next monsoon

ning rains after last year's devastating floods



Panauti and the Rosi watershed area, taken from Google Maps in May 2024



are yet to be constructed on. Most do not have the money to rebuild.



The damage of the record-breaking rainfall on 28-29 September 2024 was amplified by stone crushing operations on the Rosi Khola.

EVENTS

**Kathaa ek**

Directed by Anup Neupane, the play Kathaa Ek follows two people who find their connection strained by the quiet weight of everyday misunderstandings and unspoken feelings. Catch a show.

Till 11 May, Ticket: Rs300+, Mandala Theatre

Realms and Cemeteries

Artist Urgen Dorje's symbolic Thangka paintings reinterpret mythical realms and cemeteries at the exhibition Realms and Cemeteries.

Till 17 May, Tuesday-Thursday: 11am-6pm, Friday-Sunday: 11am-7pm, Takpa Gallery

**Stand-up comedy**

Get ready to laugh out loud with stand-up acts by Saddam Miya, Satish Karki, and Rajneesh Aryal. Ticket holder receive 20% off the food menu at JamPuroti.

3 May, 5pm onwards, Ticket: Rs300, JamPuroti Food & Drinks, Baneshwor

South Asian art

Presented in collaboration with CHITRA-ANGAN (India) and SOMA (Nepal), Nepal Art Council's ongoing exhibition features works by artists from Nepal, India, and Bangladesh, bringing together South Asia's evolving art scene with both contemporary and traditional styles.

Till 4 May, 10am-6pm, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal

**One Day Hike**

Step away from the city and spend a day exploring the Khani Danda Fedi Khola, while on a community hike. The trail winds through jungles and local villages. Call for details.

3 May, 6:45am-6pm, Fee: Rs900, Lalitpur, 9846190957

**Pop up Market**

Visit the May Fest Pop up Market to support local vendors, shop for unique handicrafts, and try a variety of food. Also enjoy live magic shows, games, and lucky draws.

Till 3 May, 1pm-7pm, International Club

Art exhibition

Some Things in the Belly, curated by Bunu Dhungana compels visitors to examine a child's relationship with their mother. Artist talks, workshops, performances and film screenings will accompany the exhibit.

3-16 May, 11am-7pm, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal

MUSIC

Group Music Classes

Join group music classes by Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory to learn and connect with fellow music-enthusiasts. Small groups for vocals, guitar, and violin are available, with two classes per week.

Fees, Rs500 onwards, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Chabahil, 9704543010

**Shailu Rai**

Join Shailu Rai for a night of soul-stirring music at Serenade Sessions. The Robin Wagle Trio will be the opening performance.

2 May, 6pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1000, Taragaon Next

Phurba Tamang live

Soak in the mellow tunes of Phurba Tamang and enjoy a soulful evening of live music this Saturday with friends and family.

3 May, 5pm-8pm, Sundown Ktm, Tripureshwor

**Sandarva band**

Celebrate the launch of the up-and-coming band Sandarva's new music video. The band will also perform their music live.

10 May, 6:30pm onwards, Ticket: Rs250, Beers n Cheers, Jhamsikhel

**Kanta Dab Dab**

Head with friends to New Orleans Cafe where Kanta Dab Dab take the stage next Friday.

9 May, 7pm onwards, New Orleans Cafe, Thamel

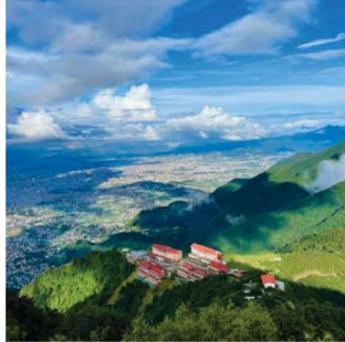
DINING

**BOGO Breakfast Bonanza**

Enjoy a Buy One, Get One Free breakfast buffet at Nook while exploring Re:Fuel's Coffee Experience, featuring nine specialty brews from Colombia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Brazil. Don't miss 30% off all bakery items after 3pm.

Every day, 7am-10:30am, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976054

GETAWAY

**Mondays @ Chandragiri Hills**

Make Mondays memorable with a serene escape to Chandragiri Hills. Enjoy 25% off on cable car tickets exclusively for Nepali citizens. The offer is not valid on public holidays.

8am-6pm, Chandragiri, 9802069900

Neo Farm Retreat

Looking for a nearby weekend getaway? Head to this secluded hillside villa that provides panoramic views of the city and the Himalayas. Make a reservation through direct message on the retreat's Instagram page (@neo.farm.retreat).

Bosan, Kathmandu

**Serene Resort**

Nestled amidst the tranquil forests of Nagarkot, Serene Resort has comfortable rooms with modern amenities, and an on-site restaurant serving international cuisine.

Nagarkot (01) 6680189

**Treebones Resort**

Unwind amidst lush greenery and embark on outdoor adventures at Treebones Resort, which offers a luxurious glamping experience with its spacious villas, private balconies, outdoor hot tubs, and spaces for yoga and meditation.

Lankuri Phedi, Lalitpur (01) 5917063

Hotel Goodwill

Hotel Goodwill at the heart of Patan is a serene blend of traditional Newari architecture and modern comfort, making it an ideal retreat for travelers seeking cultural immersion as well as relaxation.

Kanibahal, 9765341026

**JAR**

JAR serves up a flavorful mix of global and local favorites including creamy pastas, loaded burgers, sizzling steaks, and hearty Nepali sets for the ultimate dining experience.

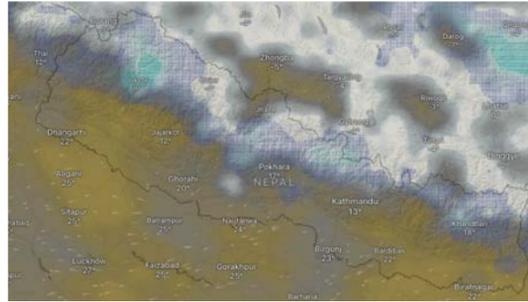
Baneshwor, 9802325777

Bitters & Co.

Known for a rotating selection of signature cocktails, Bitters & Co. is a favourite among visitors with its one-of-a-kind charcuterie board and other seasonal flavours.

Lazimpat, 9802361001

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Stormy Afternoons**

We are now in the pre-monsoon phase of the sub-Himalayan weather system. This means bright clear mornings leading to cloud buildup by afternoon and sudden storms, accompanied by high winds, lightning and thunder. There can also be localised hailstorms. The snow that was supposed to fall in winter will now come down in May across the high areas. Temperature in Kathmandu will stay in the pleasant mid-20s.

OUR PICK



The seven-episode Netflix miniseries The Queen's Gambit is set in 1950s and 60s USA, and follows Beth Harmon— who, orphaned at a young age, grows up to master the game of chess. As she rises to the top of the chess world, the young prodigy must grapple with her dependency on alcohol and drugs, as well as everything that comes with child stardom. The 2020 show is based on Walter Tevis' 1983 novel of the same name. Stars Anya Taylor Joy, Bill Camp, Marielle Heller, Harry Melling, 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

Feels

Feels offers the perfect blend of music and city views, making it an ideal place to unwind or catch up with friends. While there, treat yourself to sizzling grills, freshly brewed coffee, or a glass of craft beer.

Jhamsikhel, 9702681253

**Pasa Deli**

Looking for a wholesome breakfast or a cosy spot to unwind? Pasa Deli is the place to go. For a hearty breakfast, go for the One Pan Grill with eggs, bacon, hash browns, and toast, or get the sweet and creamy French Toast made with thick-cut brioche.

Boudha, 9820805958

**Hokkaido House**

Hokkaido offers authentic Japanese cuisine in a tranquil ambiance. Try their tender chicken glazed with a sweet and savory teriyaki sauce, served over a bed of steamed rice.

International Club, 9801029933

The Weavers

Head to Weavers for a casual meal. Get their soft Bao Buns, or enjoy Nepali staples such as momo, thali sets, and sekuwa.

Lagankhel, 9818409661

Nepali wins Whitley Award 2025

Another grassroots conservationist from Nepal is among the winners of this year's environmental award

■ Vishad Raj Onta

The Himalayan yew has a chemical used to treat cancer, but it is an endangered coniferous tree which has been unsustainably harvested.

Some rare species of orchids in the Nepal Himalayan are prized in Chinese traditional medicine, and are smuggled across the border.

Nepali conservation scientist Reshu Bashyal is doing pioneering work to save these two 'flagship plants' by protecting them from poachers and cultivating them sustainably, which can generate income for local communities.

For her work, Bashyal was recognised with the £50,000 Whitley Award 2025 presented to her by Princess Royal Anne on Wednesday at the Royal Geographical Society in London. The awards are given out by the UK-based Whitley Fund for Nature that recognises conservationists working at the grassroots.

Bashyal works on research at the environmental non-profit Greenhood Nepal which has been involved in protecting the country's biodiversity by using indigenous knowledge and finding ways to benefit local communities by protecting nature.

"I first learned about the precarious status of orchids when I was in the field doing animal research," Bashyal told Nepali Times on the phone from London. "I had no idea about the scale in which these plants, locally called 'the monkey's bananas' were being harvested. I realised there was a lot to be done to save the orchid."



PHOTOS: WHITLEY FUND FOR NATURE



Many orchid species found in Nepal are in high demand in Chinese and Indian traditional medicine as pain relievers, aphrodisiacs, ingredients in Ayurvedic medicine and as ornamental flowers.

Orchids were allowed to be

legally exported before 2017, after which CITES put all but two species in its appendix, stopping its international trade unless it was harvested sustainably. Still, such is the demand that smuggling has continued.

"Distinguishing traded plant parts is hard, because when dry they can be mistaken very easily for other plants, like potatoes," says Bashyal, who has an MSc in Environmental Science at Tribhuvan University and an MSc in Conservation and International Wildlife Trade from the University of Kent.

Some harvesters are simply not aware that it is illegal, and raising awareness is one of the first steps. Restoring the habitat of orchids and reducing poaching come next.

Bashyal hopes to form community-based task forces to monitor orchid smuggling, as has

been done to stop poaching of tigers and rhinos in Chitwan National Park.

Bashyal's current project focuses on the Maire's yew (*Taxus mairei* or Lauth Salla in Nepali), which are the most sought after for their leaves. Sadly, there are now as few as 500 such trees left in the wild. Maire's yew is one of the three *Taxus* species found in the country. *Taxus wallichiana* (Himalayan yew) is found in central to east Nepal, and the rarer *Taxus mairei* is found only in Kavre, Makwanpur and Sindhuli districts and is classified as 'Vulnerable' in the IUCN red list.

Harvesting 10,000 kgs of leaves of the yew tree, known in Nepal as the Lath Salla, yields only 1-2 kgs of DAB-10, a white powder that is then turned into taxol, used to treat early and late-stage breast, skin, and ovarian cancer.

It has always been illegal in Nepal to harvest wild yew, although it is legal if the trees are cultivated. Part of Bashyal's work is also to understand how best to grow the trees commercially.

"I talk to people who grow yew trees to understand how it is being done, and to learn and document the best harvest guidelines," says Bashyal.

Such information will be key for the work she plans to do with the prize money of £100,000, over two years to focus research on five community forests in Makwanpur, where Maire's yew is native.

With the initial £50,000 grant, Bashyal will focus her research on five community forests in Makwanpur, where Maire's Yew is native. She plans to restore 1,000 hectares of orchid habitat, plant 5,000 Maire's yew, and create a 100-hectare community forest that will serve as a model to study and promote best long-term practices. The Whitley Fund also offers a continuation fund of £100,000 over two years if the project is successful.

Bashyal has faced funding challenges for her work because most conservation grants go to protecting endangered animals like the red panda or pangolins. "We tend to think only of animals when we think about conservation, but all living species must be considered," she says. This is changing though, and she has received funding from the Swiss Foundation Franklinia, and the British Darwin Initiative.

Bashyal is the fourth Nepali to win the Whitley Award in the last four years. Past winners include Raju Acharya in 2024 for safeguarding owls in Central Nepal, Tulshi Laxmi Suwal in 2023 for protecting pangolins, and Sonam Lama for monitoring and conserving red panda in Eastern Nepal. 🇳🇵

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Not out of the woods yet

After poaching, human-wildlife conflict and climate breakdown threaten rhino conservation in Nepal

■ **Sudiksha Tuladhar**

Rhino sightings in the wild used to be rare in Nepal. Not any more, nowadays videos of them coming out of ATM booths or patrolling the sidewalks in Sauraha often go viral on YouTube.

Tourists hashtag the videos with #OnlyInNepal, getting the country's wildlife tourism much traction. But these visuals also underline new concerns about the conservation status of the endangered pachyderms.

The rhino population in Nepal was nearly decimated by poaching and clearing of the Tarai jungles in the last century, but have sprung back. Last week marked two years since a rhino was poached in Nepal.

These higher numbers mean that the national parks are getting crowded with rhinos and tigers, leading to more human-animal contact.

"When old, most male rhinos are pushed out by other young male rhinos. The old male rhinos then roam around the peripheral areas in search of food and safety," explains conservation biologist Shanta Raj Jnawali of the animals seen out in the streets.

The greater one-horned rhinoceros was once found from Pakistan to Burma. Over the years, as human settlement expanded, encroaching on the habitat of the



SAGAR GIRI

animals reduced rhinos to parts of India, Nepal and Bhutan.

The last rhino census in 2021 put the total number of rhinos in Nepal at 752, with most of them in Chitwan National Park, which has 694. Another 38 rhinos are in Bardia, three in Parsa and 17 in Shuklaphanta national parks.

The rhino census is undertaken every 4-5 years and the authorities were supposed to conduct a new one this year, but it did not go ahead because of budgetary cuts.

For any species to flourish, management of the ecosystem, food and water sources as well as forest cover for reproduction

and protection are important. But the Tarai now has 53% of Nepal's population and human-wildlife contacts have increased.

"Both humans and wildlife are dependent on nature. But we are the wiser species, so we must learn to coexist," says Kamal Jung Kunwar formerly with the Chitwan National Park. "Rhinos almost never attack humans, unless they feel threatened or sense danger for their offspring."

In areas that have seen tiger attacks or destruction of crops by wild elephants, villagers have erected electrified fences to keep away wildlife. Rhinos are sometimes electrocuted, and there

have been instances of roadkill on highways that run through protected areas.

Forest fires and habitat degradation further shrink wild spaces, while rising temperature and droughts due to climate change push rhinos into closer contact with humans, increasing conflict. Weather extremes such as record floods have swept rhinos downstream, sometimes into India.

Floods also wash down plastic trash into rhino habitats, and research found that 10% of rhino dung piles in Chitwan contained plastic residue.

Prolonged droughts reduce water availability for rhinos

to wallow and regulate body temperature and protect their skin from parasites. Without enough water, rhinos face heat stress and disease.

"The changing climate and its impact on rhinos and their habitat must be addressed, and we must plan for at least 100 years down the line," warns Jnawali.

Logging and degradation of the fragile Chure Range are also threatening the Tarai ecosystem, lowering the groundwater table and posing risks to plant life.

Nepal is an international model for wildlife conservation, but it was a collaborative process. Under the Community-Based Anti-Poaching Units, villagers patrol forests, share information, and report suspicious activities.

Many women's groups, like Chitwan's Buffer Zone User Committees, lead reforestation and awareness campaigns, planting trees to restore habitats.

Ecotourism has improved living standards and provided jobs through community-managed homestays and rhino treks. Locals now have a reason to protect rhinos as an economic asset.

Despite these successes, rhino conservation must now have a focus on human-wildlife coexistence, says conservation biologist Jnawali: "Every stakeholder has their own role. There is a growing need to maintain harmony between conservation and human needs." 🇳🇵

Elephants become white elephants

Chitwan's safaris can no longer afford to keep the animals and want to sell them

■ **Urmila Gamwa Tharu**
in Sauraha

Om Rijal has been training and caring for elephants for years, but unable to keep up with the high cost of maintenance, he now wants to sell them. He owns nine elephants and employs 13 people, costing him Rs800,000 a month.

Income from elephant safaris has dropped in recent years due to animal rights activism. They are not allowed to graze in the forests like they used to and local villagers blame domesticated elephants for attracting wild ones, often leading to conflict.

"It is no longer feasible to keep elephants," says Rijal, "but we are in a dilemma. We can neither sell them nor abandon them."

Binod Timalisina has a hotel in Sauraha and also owns an elephant. He says: "There's not even enough grass to feed them, and we can't forage in the forest. And there is no way to sell them."

There is no legal framework in Nepal permitting the sale or transfer of elephants, but such transactions were common until a few years ago. During the



URMILA GAMWA THARU

pandemic, when tourism ground to a halt, many businessmen sold their elephants to India to avoid financial loss. Even rented elephants were returned as their expense became unsustainable.

"Back then, people who had even one elephant managed to sell it for a good price," adds Timalisina. "But since the government imposed a ban, it has become increasingly difficult."

The value of an elephant is based on factors such as age, health,

and utility. An adult elephant in Nepal can cost up to Rs8 million, while in India, the price can go up to Rs10 million.

Another elephant-keeper, Dhurba Giri from Sauraha, says upkeep is difficult since an adult elephant consumes 40 kg of grain daily, in addition to large quantities of grass and other food items. Each elephant also requires two dedicated mahouts to care for it.

According to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife

Conservation, Nepal has between 255 and 265 wild elephants and 150 domesticated Asian elephants spread across Chitwan, Bardia, Kosi Tappu, Parsa, Banke, and Shuklaphanta. There are 45 domesticated elephants in Sauraha alone.

In response to growing concerns about illegal trade, advocates Sanjay Adhikari and Arnab Chowdhury, representing Janhit Sanrakshan Mancha, filed a case in the Supreme Court in 2021, seeking

a ban on the sale, purchase, and transfer of elephants. Just five days later, the court issued an interim order halting all such transactions, citing conservation concerns.

Nepal's Domestic Elephant Management Policy also prohibits the sale and transport of elephants, primarily due to concerns over poaching and habitat loss. Additionally, the Asian elephant is listed under Index I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES),

Guarding the guardians of the Himalaya

Protecting snow leopards and wolves also protects the mountain ecosystem

In the icy wilderness areas of High Asia, snow leopards glide like shadows across the snows as the haunting howls of Himalayan wolves echo across the crags.

In Nepal, high mountain dwellers have forged a delicate balance with these two elusive Himalayan predators, a timeless coexistence of human livelihoods with the wild. Snow leopards inhabit steep slopes at elevations from 3,000m to 5,500m. Wolves patrol more open stretches across grasslands and mountain meadows.

With overlapping habitats, snow leopards and wolves share a similar prey base. Snow leopards primarily hunt Siberian ibex, blue sheep, and Himalayan tahr, while wolves target a range of large to medium-sized ungulates including yaks and blue sheep.

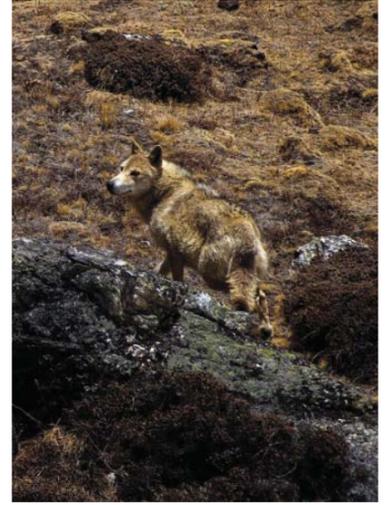
“The population density of snow leopards in a region is closely tied to the abundance of their wild prey,” explains Charu Dutt Mishra of Snow Leopard Trust. “To secure a single successful kill, they endure up to 25 failed hunting attempts.”

As apex predators, snow leopards are at the top of the food chain and are iconic representatives of their ecosystems. Protecting snow leopards therefore helps protect this delicate mountain ecology, now also threatened by climate breakdown.

“The health of an ecosystem can be gauged by the presence of snow leopards and wolves in a specific area,” says Sanjeevani Yonzan of Wildlife Conservation Nepal. “The abundance of predator



SANJOG RAI / WWF NEPAL



RYAN DAVY

species depends on a healthy prey population, reflecting a balanced and thriving ecosystem.”

Nepal is at the forefront of snow leopard conservation in the region and has the highest density of snow leopards, with a survey last month showing a count of 397 individuals. This is remarkable given that Nepal has just 2% of the species' range across Central Asia and the Himalaya.

Snow leopards are often referred to as the ‘Ghosts of the Himalayas’ and their protection with predators like wolves needs active support of local communities. The big cats are often killed in retaliation for attacks on livestock.

Mishra did his PhD on snow leopards in India’s Spiti Valley and

recalls local villagers trapping and killing a snow leopard. “When I asked why, they explained that they lacked the resources and capacity to protect leopards that killed their livestock,” he says.

That same community in Spiti was later empowered and motivated to engage in conservation and in recognition was awarded the Wildlife Tourism Award last year in New Delhi. “When communities are properly encouraged to coexist with wildlife, conservation efforts are bound to succeed,” he adds.

As human focus shifts more toward economic development, there is a growing disconnect with nature and biodiversity. Human-wildlife conflict, overgrazing, poaching, and now climate

breakdown are the challenges. Infrastructure and ‘development’ activities sharpens the problems.

Cultural attitudes play a crucial role in supporting conservation efforts. In many communities, snow leopards are considered spiritually significant, and are regarded as ‘God’s pets’. This cultural reverence fosters acceptance of the species despite risks they pose to livestock, giving Nepal a distinct advantage in community-driven conservation.

Himalayan wolves do not have similar cultural associations, and are mercilessly hunted. But the Himalayan Wolves Project, led by researchers like Naresh Kusi at Upper Humla, focuses on studying their ecology and fostering coexistence through education and

alternative livelihood options.

“Human well-being is deeply rooted in nature. Indigenous communities must be granted the authority and active involvement in conservation efforts,” says Mishra.

A new documentary, Snow Leopard Sisters, tells the inspiring story of two Nepali women, Tenzin Bhuti Gurung and Tshiring Lhamu Lama, who are dedicated to the protection of snow leopards in the Dolpo region. They developed the Snow Leopard Trekking Trail to promote ecotourism and increase public awareness.

As Yonzan says: “In nature, there is a law of interconnectedness and interdependence that must be preserved to maintain balance.” **Sudiksha Tuladhar**

meaning international trade and transport are prohibited.

Nepal, a signatory to CITES, enacted a law 19 years ago to regulate international trade in endangered species. Under the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, selling or transferring elephants is a criminal offence. Yet, elephants are still brought in from India for religious purposes and then sold illegally within Nepal.

Elephant domestication is not new in Nepal. Historically, the animals were reared by royal families and used for military and ceremonial purposes. With the growth of tourism, especially in Chitwan, elephants began to be privately raised to cater to the increasing demand for jungle safaris. While government use of elephants in tourism declined, private ownership filled the gap.

Giri has been rearing elephants in Sauraha for over 40 years and says allowing elephants to graze in forests could reduce upkeep costs by as much as 35%. He explains: “Feeding green vegetation not only saves money but also improves the elephants’ health and lifespan. Instead of watching forested areas burn annually, wouldn’t it make more sense to let elephants graze?”

He also argues that the government has a stake in protecting these animals as well as the livelihood of the people. “If the government won’t support us in raising elephants, then at least allow us to sell them,” he urges. “There’s demand from India—we should be allowed to sell them legally.”

Elephant safaris and such businesses have long been criticised for exploiting the mammal, but activist Shristi Singh says that there was a proposal for reform to adopt ethical elephant-based tourism models which was largely ignored.

“Before the earthquake, stakeholders visited Thailand and observed the Century Model. It is possible to involve elephants in tourism without exploiting them, but the model was never adopted,” she says. “Even older elephants that can no longer work are made to suffer.”

Dhurba Giri has implemented the Century Model in Sauraha after his visit to Thailand. “My friends didn’t support it. But 95% of the tourists who visit me leave happy,” he tells us.

The Century Model emphasises the welfare of the animals with a particular focus on retired or rescued elephants. They are kept in open, natural environments where they can roam, bathe, and interact freely. Tourists are invited to watch them from a distance or engage in non-exploitative activities like feeding or bathing.

“This model allows for sustainable tourism while respecting elephant dignity,” says elephant expert Sanjita Sharma Pokharel, adding that Thailand’s elephant parks are prime examples of this practice which attracts not only tourists, but also researchers, students, and activists.

Such parks also create local employment and contribute to conservation through responsible tourism, but local entrepreneurs argue that the model alone cannot sustain their business due to declining tourist numbers.

“We’ve invested so much in these elephants. We can’t just give them away to the parks,” Omprakash Pandey states.

Meanwhile, talks on the matter are ongoing at the DNPWC office in Kathmandu. Says Ved Kumar Dhakal of the department: “Only if traders formally declare their inability to care for the elephants in written form will the government intervene.”

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