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NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

## WARPATHS

“normalised” the valley after revoking its autonomy in 2019. It looks a lot like occupation.

Manipur's descent into ethnic bloodshed in 2023 exposed another fault line Delhi prefers to ignore. Long-simmering tensions between the Meitei and Kuki communities erupted into violence that shattered any illusions of northeastern integration.

Even the Rohingya, stateless and exiled from Myanmar, find themselves entangled in South Asia's ethnonationalist calculus. Fleeing genocide, they are criminalised anew in Bangladesh and India – trapped between the countries that reject them and the memories that refuse to let them go.

South Asia's states have excelled at suppressing rebellion, but failed at extinguishing the reasons rebellions rise in the first place. And the wars South Asia tries to forget at home have found new life abroad.

Across Canada, Australia, Britain, and the United States, diasporic communities have become memory-keepers and, increasingly, the agitators for the struggles their home states would rather erase.

Khalistan flags fly outside Indian consulates in Vancouver and Melbourne.

Tamil activists march through London, demanding accountability for the massacres in Mullivaikkal. Kashmiri protests in Washington and New York refuse to let India's crackdown slip into diplomatic amnesia.

For host countries, these movements pose uncomfortable questions. Freedom of expression collides with fears of extremism. Clashes erupt between communities carrying wounds that their new homelands do not fully understand – or wish to manage.

Meanwhile, South Asian states pursue their adversaries across borders. India faces allegations of targeting Sikh activists for assassination in Canada and the United States. Pakistan continues to court Kashmiri separatists abroad while crushing Baloch dissent at home. Sri Lanka lobbies furiously to brand Tamil diaspora organisations as fronts for terrorism, even as it stonewalls investigations into its own wartime atrocities.

The old insurgencies have not been defeated. They have been globalised. South Asia's governments have long mistaken silence for stability.

In Punjab, India broke the back of the Khalistan insurgency through brute force. The fields grew green again, the trains ran on time. But the wounds were never closed, the movement's heart beats not in Amritsar but in Brampton and Surrey.

In Sri Lanka, the military crushed the Tamil Tigers with overwhelming brutality in 2009. Tamil families still search for their missing, still mourn their dead – and still organise across the diaspora for justice that remains undelivered.

In Kashmir, Delhi boasts of new highways and investment corridors, showcasing the region as a trophy of unity. But when the visitors leave and the cameras are packed away, the checkpoints, the raids, and the quiet despair remain.

Victory parades fade. Grievance endures. Suppressing insurgency may end battles. It does not end the ideas that fueled them.

South Asia's unfinished wars are not accidents. They are the inevitable consequences of states that confuse conquest with consent, and erasure with reconciliation. They cannot legislate memory out of existence.

The region's future will not be decided by GDP figures or infrastructure projects alone. It will be decided by whether its governments can summon the political courage to face the truths they have long suppressed – or whether they will continue down a path where forgetting is demanded, and rebellion becomes inevitable.

*Shyam Tekwani is a professor at the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Hawaii. This article was originally published on DKJ APSS Security Nexus. The views expressed here are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of Daniel K Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies.*



### Nukes in the neighbourhood

EDITORIAL PAGE 2

### Shyam Tekwani

In 2025, two seemingly disconnected acts of violence shattered the illusion of stability in the region. In March, militants hijacked a passenger train near the Bolan Pass in Balochistan, executing soldiers in cold blood. A month later, gunmen in Kashmir's Pahalgam Valley massacred tourists.

In both Islamabad and New Delhi, the reaction was reflexive: condemn the violence, blame external enemies, declare the situation contained. But South Asia's leaders are not fighting terrorists alone. They are fighting the consequences of their own betrayals.

Across Balochistan, Kashmir, Manipur, and beyond, decades of enforced disappearances, broken promises, and brute militarisation have hollowed out the social contracts meant to hold these nations together. The grievances that drove rebellions from the 1940s through the 1990s – demands for dignity,

recognition, and political agency – were never meaningfully addressed. They were buried beneath asphalt and propaganda, paved over by development projects and security checkpoints.

States may claim victory. But, their victories are mirages, dissolving the moment anyone looks too closely. South Asia's unfinished wars are not relics of a violent past. They are live ammunition, loaded into the future.

Balochistan has been at war with Pakistan for most of its modern history. Rich in gas, minerals, and coastline, the province has been plundered for decades under the language of national development.

The insurgency endures not because of foreign conspiracies, as Islamabad endlessly insists, but because the Pakistani state remains incapable of seeing its Baloch citizens as anything other than a security problem to be managed.

In Kashmir, the Indian government claims to have

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# Nukes in the neighbourhood

India and Pakistan are twins separated at birth. Tensions between them have been on a hair trigger ever since independence, and has erupted into full scale conflict at least four times in the past nearly 80 years.

The 22 April terrorist attack in Kashmir that killed 25 Indian tourists and a Nepali citizen has now escalated into a fifth war with Pakistan. Only this time, both countries have nuclear weapons and the missiles to deliver their warheads.

India squarely blamed Pakistan for the attack, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave his military "operational freedom" to respond which it did on the night of 7 May with missile attacks on what it said were five 'terrorist cells'.



Pakistan had said it had "credible intelligence" of an imminent Indian military strike, and its officials promised a "full spectrum" response — a code for a nuclear retaliation. But till press time on Thursday, they have shelled India's border points.

For Nepal, the killing of its national in the Pahalgam attack comes as another stark reminder that in conflicts from Afghanistan to Iraq, from Ukraine to Israel, Nepal is getting caught in the crossfire. The last time full-scale fighting broke out between India and Pakistan on Kargil in 1999, at least 22 Nepalis fighting for the Indian Army were killed in action.

Three of Nepal's immediate neighbours (China, India, Pakistan) have nuclear weapons, and they do not exactly have friendly relations. This triangular friction could set off a regional conflagration, impact on overseas migration and tourism, hurting Nepal's economy.

Research at Rutgers University has calculated that even a week-long tactical nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan would throw up enough smoke into the atmosphere to block out the sun for years, leading to a collapse of the global food system.

This does not take into account radioactive fallout that prevailing winds would blow up to the Himalaya and the Tibetan Plateau, contaminating glaciers that are the sources of Asia's main rivers from the Ganga and Indus, the Yarlung Tsangpo

(Brahmaputra), Mekong, Yangtse and Huanghe in China. Two billion people downstream depend on those waters.

The Himalaya is both a climate and nuclear hotspot. The impact of climate breakdown on High Asia was already ringing alarm bells about its shrinking ice cap reducing the dry season flow of water downstream. Water is a strategic commodity, and experts had warned that the next wars in Asia would be over water.

That water war has started. India retaliated to the Kashmir attack by suspending the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 mediated by the World Bank that has withstood at least three wars between India and Pakistan since then. The treaty gives

India control over the three eastern tributaries of the Indus (Beas, Ravi and Sutlej), while Pakistan got water from the Indus and two of its western tributaries (Chenab and Jhelum).

Pakistan was assured of 70% of the annual flow, and India could use a reasonable amount of water for irrigation and hydropower. Last week, India stopped water flowing down to Pakistan from the Chenab river and is reportedly preparing to do the same on the Jhelum.

The sabre-rattling has reached a crescendo, with officials in both countries broadly hinting that nuclear strikes are not off the table. Last week, Pakistan test-fired

its Abdali ballistic missile with a range of 450km, and India already has the Agni V intercontinental missile with a range of 5,000km, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. All are capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

Both India and Pakistan have ratcheted up the jingoism against each other so much that they now have to appease domestic public opinion for fear of looking weak. Because of India's overwhelmingly bigger military, Pakistan is using the threat of nuclear deterrence warning of "catastrophic consequences".

The two neighbours came close to a nuclear exchange in 2019 after an attack on the Indian military in Kashmir, and prompt international intervention led by the United States cooled tensions.

This time, the Trump administration is too distracted and not as engaged. India and Pakistan have stopped overflights by each other's airlines, and all international carriers have stopped using routes using the India-Pakistan aviation corridors.

India and Pakistan both share similar problems of joblessness, poverty and environmental threats. Neither side needs the threat of a senseless war, and we in the neighbourhood do not need it either.

**Kunda Dixit**

**The water war has arrived in South Asia sooner than any of us imagined it.**

## ONLINE PACKAGES



Nepal's longest chariot festival started this week in Patan, and social media is abuzz with photos. But little is known about the people who make the festival of the rain god possible. Watch this video on our YouTube channel and go to page 6-7 for a special spread on Rato Matsyendranath.



The neighbourhood of Te Bahal emerged relatively unharmed from the 2015 earthquake even as Dharara came down, killing and injuring many. Watch video on YouTube of longtime Te Bahal resident Kanchhi Khadgi as she recounts her experiences on the day the tower collapsed during the earthquake 10 years ago.

### ELEPHANTS & LIVELIHOOD

Elephant sanctuaries are fortunately a better and more ethical option that offer a safe, natural environment in Nepal where elephants can live freely, without being forced to give rides or perform ('Elephants become white elephants', Urmila Gamwa Tharu, #1259). These sanctuaries still attract tourists who want to observe and learn about elephants in a respectful and educational setting. For elephant owners, sanctuaries provide a sustainable way to earn income.

**Salim Msm**

Exploiting animal in any form, be it for tourism, the circus, or for entertainment, is a deplorable act. It is better to put an end to elephant safari as the animals are cruelly handled, overworked, and dying.

**Des Man**

Sauraha must stop vehicle-based tourism and start elephant safari, maybe reducing the number of passengers. That way elephants and wildlife can thrive, and people can afford to keep their elephants too.

**Hemant Gurung**

It is a great shame the special bond between man and pachyderm is disappearing due to abuse of these animals.

**Tony Jones**

### WHITLEY AWARD

Huge congratulations to Reshu ji who won Whitley for her work in protecting orchids ('Nepali wins Whitley Award 2025', Vishad Raj Onta, #1259). You are making us proud.

**Rejina Maskey Byanju**

### DIASPORA DIARIES

The women who migrated overseas to support their families have displayed such courage, endurance, and strength ('Every day is closer to pay day', Diaspora Diaries, nepalitimes.com).

**Renate Schwarz**

### NEPALI CINEMA

A true deeply thought provoking article on the state of affairs of our movie industry ('Nepali cinema's melodramatic realism', Abishek Budhathoki, #1259). Kudos to the author. It is a refreshing read.

**Deepak Gurung**

## Times.com

### WHAT'S TRENDING



### Whitley Award 2025

by Vishad Raj Onta

Nepali conservation scientist Reshu Bashyal is on a mission to save endangered Himalayan yew and rare orchids from poaching. She was conferred one of the Whitley Awards 2025 last week in London. Read about her work at nepalitimes.com.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**



### Before the monsoon

by Amit Machamasi

Still reeling from last September's flood, residents of Panauti live in fear of the coming monsoon. Illegal quarries and crushers that worsened the damage continue to operate. Join the discussion online.

**Most popular on X**

### Elephants become white elephants

by Urmila Gamwa Tharu

Once a booming safari attraction, domesticated elephants in Sauraha have become a financial burden amid legal restrictions and waning tourism. Elephant owners cannot afford to keep the animals. Details on our website.

**Most commented**

### Bhutan, the movie

by Sudiksha Tuladhar

In a powerful portrayal of longing for one's homeland and the lasting trauma of forced displacement, the movie Bhuthan tells the story of an exiled national footballer who wants to visit once before he dies. Read the review online.

**Most visited online page**

## QUOTES



**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**

SELFIE CENTRED: Celebrities taking selfies with Prime Minister K P Oli during the ruling party's youth rally on Thursday 24 April in Kathmandu. #1000words



**'Gaijin' - A Pessimist! @Gaijin\_Ram**

Resembles Modi's strategy during the 2014 and subsequent elections in India.

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Written in the stars

We are a nation obsessed with astrology. From births and deaths to weddings and even nation building, everything is guided by planets and moons and their positions. We have scores of 'astrologers' predicting earthquakes and political upheavals on YouTube. And according to his astrologer, five-time Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba will be premier for at least another 2 times.

Revisit this Under My Hat column from 20 years ago this week titled Our nation's horoscope. Excerpts from the issue #246 6-12 May 2005. Have fun.

...at the present time in which we have no parliament and no prime minister, we also don't have a royal astrologer. How on earth are we supposed to make important decisions on matters of state if the post of Astrologer General is vacant?...

So, in the public interest and to hasten the decision-making process here is the nation's horoscope. (Instructions for use: read all the zodiacal forecasts and pick the one that is best suited to you.)



**Aries:** Be patient and let them make the first move.

**Taurus:** You will be released from house arrest today.

**Gemini:** Strong chances of party unity this Friday.

**Cancer:** Come above ground and rethink your strategy. Read Sun Tzu.

**Leo:** You'll receive a gift from someone you haven't seen in a long time. Don't open it.

**Virgo:** Go away, I have nothing to say to you.

**Libra:** An alteration of the home furniture will be beneficial, replace cabinet.

**Scorpio:** Money is coming your way this week but I wouldn't put that down in the personal asset declaration form just yet if I were you.

**Sagittarius:** Try again to fly out to New Delhi on another airline.

**Capricorn:** Isn't it embarrassing to be caught actually reading this stuff?

**Aquarius:** You'll be meeting a lot of world leaders, so work on your handshake.

**Pisces:** You will get away with another weekly column in which you turn yourself into a complete dork.

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

## 1,000 WORDS



PMO OFFICE NEPAL / RSS

### NEIGHBOURHOOD

**FIRST:** Prime Minister K P Oli with visiting head of the Foreign Affairs Department of India's ruling BJP, Vijay Chauthaiwale, in Kathmandu on Thursday. Chauthaiwale met other political figures during his visit which centred around getting Nepal's support against the 22 April terror attack in Kashmir that killed 26 tourists, including a Nepali. India has blamed Pakistan for the killings, and vowed retaliation (see Editorial).



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Editor: **Sonia Awale** | Special Correspondent: **Shristi Karki**  
Reporters: **Sudiksha Tuladhar, Vishad Raj Onta** | Layout: **Kiran Maharjan**  
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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# Nepal's only growth industry:

■ Ramesh Kumar

The discourse around corruption in Nepal is mainly about politicians and bureaucrats accepting bribes and kickbacks. The private sector usually does not get as much blame.

But the prevalent climate of cronyism in Nepal means that the politicians and businesses are often hand in glove. The private sector is generally considered to be in favour of free market competition to encourage investment and innovation so that wealth is generated.

But insider trading, cartelling, and conflict of interest have become a given in Nepal's private sector, and it all happens with the blessings of the government. In fact, tycoons have become legislators and politicians have become businessmen.

"Such collusion kills the free market, and does not allow entrepreneurship and innovation to flourish," says Kush Kumar Joshi, former president of the Federation of Nepal Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI).

An example of this is the Dangote Group of Nigeria, which was planning for a cement factory in Nepal. A Dangote executive told us that Nepal's cement cartel got the government to sabotage their plans.

Earlier, the same cartel tried to do the same thing to the Chinese companies Hongxi and Huaxin, arguing that Nepal's cement industry was capable of meeting domestic demand and did not require foreign

investment. Ultimately, Hongxi partnered with Nepal's Shivam and Huaxin with former FNCCI president Suraj Vaidya.

In 2019, industrialists successfully lobbied lawmakers to prevent foreign investment in agriculture by amending the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act. Two years later, foreign investment in agriculture was opened, but only if 75% of the products were exported.

There is a long history of local lobbyists obstructing the entry of multinationals, like J Walter Thompson advertising agency and the international shipping company Maersk. Microbreweries, which can be operated by restaurants, have been prohibited at the behest of larger beer companies. The private dairy sector opposed the government-owned Dairy Development Corporation when it tried to begin production in Pokhara a decade ago.

"The business sector is a reflection of Nepali society and government which do not care about ethical business practices," says former CNI president Hari Bhakta Sharma. "The environment is not conducive to the few

businessmen who are honest."

Lobbying by businesses is not unusual in a democracy, but its basic character should be for the collective good, not individual greed.

"This kind of profit-over-everything mindset is fatal for businesses. Entrepreneurs must prioritise social, worker, and customer welfare," adds Sharma.

Industrialists have actively lobbied for the removal of policies that prevent loan misuse and require bank loans in specific areas. They have partially reversed such directives.

Until the economic slowdown, Nepal's fastest growing industry was construction. But even there, cement and steel rod manufacturers colluded by price-fixing. Banker Parshuram Kunwar Chhetri says Nepal's corporates just do not believe in free market principles, adding: "Their ideas go against competition benefiting consumers. It is all about price fixing, cartels and monopolies."

Ideologically, Nepal's Communist parties are supposed to be against the neoliberal

free market, globalisation and the 'imperialism' of international financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. But cronyism is rife there, too.

Two years ago, the FNCCI and the Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) accused the IMF of interfering in Nepal's domestic economic policy after the Fund demanded economic reforms as conditions for its Extended Credit Facility.

Says economic analyst Sujeev Shakya: "How can we expect an honest and ethical business sector when we as a society tend to laud those who earn money through illicit and corrupt means rather than lament their moral bankruptcy?"

In October 2012, the Chaudhary Group's CG Electronics warehouse in Kathmandu caught fire. A surveyor certified that the company had suffered Rs580 million damage, which was paid out by United Insurance Company.

The Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) directed the Nepal Insurance Authority to investigate suspected insurance fraud, and found that the fire damage was actually Rs340 million.

The Patan High Court ordered Chaudhary Group to return the excess amount, a decision the company challenged in the Supreme Court. But in March, the apex court also found the Chaudhary Group guilty of insurance fraud.

Chaudhary Group's Binod Chaudhary, Nepal's only known dollar billionaire, is a Nepali Congress central committee member



DIWAKAR CHHETRI

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## Mustang tourism

51,000 foreign tourists have visited Mustang in the first four months of 2025, a 37% increase from the same period last year. More than 83% of the tourists are South Asian, often Hindus or Buddhists on pilgrimage to Muktinath.

## Airport protests

Hospitality entrepreneurs and investors in Bhairawa, Lumbini and Butwal have been protesting the lack of international flights at Gautam Buddha International Airport. They hoped for an economic boom from airport traffic, but even the five international airlines who ran flights between Sep-Nov 2024 have now withdrawn.



## Kosi investments

At a two-day investment summit, the Kosi Province government signed agreements for 46 projects worth a total Rs152 billion. The projects span agriculture, tourism, and IT. One is a chemical fertilizer factory that will be fueled by green hydrogen.

## IME Gateway

Global IME Bank, working with Nepal Clearing House, has launched a card-based online Global Payment Gateway that enables the bank's merchants to accept payments through Visa or Mastercard cards issued by any Nepali or international bank.



## Nagdhunga-Naubise

A 1.8km of the Nagdhunga-Naubise road will close at night 11pm-3am, from 5-15 May for blacktopping. Only emergency vehicles will be allowed to pass.



## Energy from India

The NEA has made a deal with India for the supply of 600MW to Nepal from 2am-5pm, four more hours than before, easing power cuts in factories. While peak demand in Nepal is 2,100MW, maximum generation is only 1,600MW due to low flow in rivers.



## TikTok Family Pairing

TikTok's new Family Pairing feature enables parents to control the safety and privacy settings on their kids' account, such as screen time, direct messaging, and age-appropriate content.



## Carlsberg Golf

Phuntsok N Lama won the Carlsberg Golf Classic, held at the Gokarna Forest Resort Golf Club on 3 May. Lama, who was playing with a two-handicap, won a trip to the Carlsberg Brewery in Copenhagen.

## NMB heritage walks

NMB Bank organized trips in all seven provinces from branch offices to heritage sites to promote awareness about cultural conservation. The bank also donated Rs500,000 to Nepali Heritage Society.

## Mechi-Mahakali

From 9-17 May, Holiday Inn Express Kathmandu is hosting 'Mechi Dekhi Mahakali', showcasing flavours from across Nepal in a buffet dinner.

## IME AI hackathon

Global IME held a hackathon focused on integrating AI/ Machine Learning in banking software. Team Calculus won first place, Rs 100,000 and a chance to collaborate with the bank.



## Ms Nepal for Titan

Titan has signed Ashma Kumari KC, current Miss Nepal, as brand ambassador for its watches. Titan is India's largest watchmaker and the fifth largest in the world. It has operated in Nepal for the last twenty years, and recently opened stores in Birgunj and Simara.

## Kaiyi XCHANGE

At Kaiyi's XCHANGE CARNIVAL 9-11 May, customers can trade any car for exchange bonuses towards the E-Quote 02, E-Quote 04 or X3 Pro EV. Booking perks include insurance, road tax coverage, and Bosch car washers (E-Quote) or washing machines (X3 Pro).



## Ncell highest taxpayer

The government recognized Ncell for paying Rs20.3 billion in taxes and fees last fiscal year, the most of any Information and Communications Technology company.

# private sector corruption

Political cronyism, cartelling, conflict of interest and price-fixing are all standard operating procedure for Nepal's businesses

and MP, former president of FNCCI and founder of the CNI.

Then last February, the Central Investigation Bureau questioned Binod Chaudhary and arrested his brother Arun Chaudhary of CG Holdings over their alleged involvement in the illegal acquisition of the state-run shoe factory, following an investigative report by Ukaalo Online.

In 2021, Chaudhary and his family's offshore business dealings landed them in the Pandora Papers list by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) for hidden assets in Panama.

Says Krishna Khanal, assistant professor of business ethics at King's College: "Cronyism, political collusion, and anti-competitive cartelling are routine in the private sector. There is no other objective than to make money at any cost."

Conflict of interest is rife in Nepal's share market. In 2023, Ghorahi Cement owned by Triveni Group issued primary shares at a premium price. There is also evidence that a river was diverted for the construction of its business tycoon Upendra Mahato's Mediciti Hospital. Bhatbhateni owner Min Bahadur Gurung is also involved in Lalita Niwas land grab scam in Baluwatar.

Meanwhile, Shankar Group Vice President Sulabh Agrawal, former honorary consul of Kyrgyzstan, was arrested by the police during the Covid-19 pandemic after he was found selling 67 infrared thermometers from a vehicle with diplomatic credentials. He was later

acquitted by the court for price-gouging.

Nepal's most influential corporates were accused of evading billions in VAT by forcing invoices. Freedom Forum invoked the Right to Information to collect evidence of the involvement of CG Foods, Him Electronics of Shekhar Golchha, Morang Auto Works of Bishnu Agarwal, Sulabh Agarwal's Jagdamba Steels, United Builders of Shakuntal Hirachan, United Traders of Anuj Agarwal, and Min Bahadur Gurung's Bhatbhateni Supermarket.

Most of these businessmen have held leadership positions in the FNCCI. Former FNCCI presidents Shekhar Golchha, Pashupati Murarka and Pradeep Jung Pandey, along with members of the federation's governing council Birendra Kumar Shanghai, Shashikant Agrawal, and others all have unpaid dues of Rs22 billion to Nepal Electricity Authority.

Former FNCCI president Chandiraj Dhakal was blacklisted by the Credit Information Bureau Nepal for non-payment of bank loans.

He had previously obtained permission to use 36 hectares of government forest land in Chandragiri for 40 years without competition, and had received an exemption to build a ropeway there. The 54<sup>th</sup> report of the Auditor General, stating that Nepal

had suffered as a result of these decisions, had suggested that the state be investigated for leasing land at low rates allowing large revenue exemptions.

Another ex-FNCCI president Pradeep Jung Pandey was sentenced to prison in 2014 following a corruption case spanning three decades. Former FNCCI treasurer Gyanendra Lal Pradhan is currently facing charges of money laundering through insider trading.

Former FNCCI president Pashupati Murarka was acquitted by the special court in a corruption case, but it is still pending in the Supreme Court. His cement company was found to have

exploited the environment by over-mining limestone at various times.

His Siddhartha Minerals was also found to have encroached forests in Palpa, following which the District

Forest Office registered a criminal case against him and co-investor Manoj Kedia. Arrest warrants were issued for six people, including Murarka and Kedia, but Murarka was released on bail, while Kedia is on the run.

Current FNCCI president Chandra Prasad Dhakal during his tenure as a member of the Securities Board of Nepal (SEBON) was accused of conflict of interest in being a regulator in the sale of shares in a company that his family

had invested in.

Dhakal is the chair of the IME Group, which owns banks, insurance, remittance companies, several cable cars and hotels, and has been embroiled in numerous ropeway-related controversies — most recently for allegedly using political connections to suppress local opposition to a cable car project in Pathibhara.

Another example of fraud committed in collusion with political leadership is Himalayan Reinsurance, the investors of which include prominent businessmen who have led FNCCI and CNI in the past, including Shekhar Golchha, Pashupati Murarka, Bhawani Rana, Rajesh Kumar Agrawa, Rohit Gupta, Amit Mor, Satish Mor, Shashikant Agrawal, and Sulabh Agrawal.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Nepal Insurance Authority requested approval for a reinsurance company through an emergency notice, even though such a government-operated company already existed. But Himalayan Re-insurance was granted permission without any explanation as to why another reinsurance company was needed, or how it was selected out of the five companies that submitted proposals.

It was found that the Securities Registration and Issue Regulation was amended to allow this company to issue shares at a premium price, allowing the shares priced at Rs100 to be sold for Rs206. Himalayan Re-insurance raised Rs6 billion. The Companies

Act stipulates that primary shares can be issued at a premium price only after three years of operation, a criteria Himalayan Re-insurance did not fulfil.

Open competition, consumer protection, worker welfare, environmental consciousness, anti-corruption, and tax responsibility are the foundations of a country's healthy business world. But most captains of Nepal's industry themselves do not uphold those principles.

The business community here is instead actively engaged in lobbying and colluding with the political leadership, and forcing the appointment of their candidates to lead various regulatory bodies.

"While the new generation of entrepreneurs operating in sectors linked to external markets such as IT seem sensitive to and compliant with professional codes, ethics, professionalism, and honesty are sorely lacking in Nepal's business sector in general," says Rameshore Khanal, former Secretary of the Ministry of Finance.

He adds: "Even those following ethical practices have been forced to seek political favours for fear of being left behind. There will thus be no integrity in the private sector until there is honesty in politics."

Following the publication of this report in Himalkhabar, a Supreme Court judge on the condition of anonymity said: "Businessmen do not adhere to the principles of judicial independence, rule of law and good governance. They use intermediaries and






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# DIVINE CHARIOT

Patan's Rato Matsyendranath procession is an intergenerational and transboundary festival

■ Sangya Lamsal

The streets of Patan are alive this month with lavender jacaranda trees under rain-washed skies as the chariot of Rato Matsyendranath is pulled across town.

This is the festival of the rain god, and inevitably the heavens opened up and pre-monsoon showers pelted the chariot as it started being pulled in Pulchok last week.

Thousands of devotees, onlookers and the chariot procession organisers thronged the streets on the first day last week (pictured). The rhythmic cymbals and drums exuded a vibrant energy as the enormous four wheels turned and the chariot lurched.

The red rain god has Hindu and Buddhist antecedents, alternatively called Bungadya and Karunamaya — reflecting Kathmandu Valley's syncretic mixture of the two religions.

"Bungadya is a profoundly intangible form of heritage," explains heritage expert Monalisa Maharjan. "It embodies traditional knowledge, artisanal skills passed down through generations. Local communities and specific families have specified roles in being custodians of the heritage, ensuring their survival over the centuries."

There are many legends and stories about this annual tradition. Lichhavi king Narendra Dev is supposed to have brought Rato Matsyendranath from Assam to Kathmandu Valley to convince Guru Gorakhnath to lift a spell that created a two-year drought in Kathmandu (see below).

Matsyendranath was Gorakhnath's mentor, and upon seeing him, the serpents were released, unleashing the rains. The chariot festival honours the return of this life-giving rain. The deity is seen as an icon for thriving agriculture, the arrival of monsoon showers, and the welfare of the community.

Till this day, the Rato Matsyendranath festival is no ordinary celebration. Patan does not sleep for a month as the chariot is pulled through various neighbourhoods. It unfolds at a state level with the president (formerly the king) attending the climax of the Bhoto Jatra in Jawalakhel later this month.

The intergenerational transmission of tradition is unique in the world, and the reason the festival is one of the most vibrant cultural expressions that thrives despite inroads of modernity. The



other unique aspect is that it is a transnational festival, binding Patan with Guwahati in the Indian state of Assam.

"Unlike Nepal, where the deity commands grandeur and devotion, many in Assam are unaware of Rato Matsyendranath," says Khagen Sharma of Gauhati University, which convened a symposium in February in Guwahati on the rain god. Attending was a delegation led by Lalitpur Mayor Chiribabu

Maharjan, organisers of the festival, and builders of the chariot.

After the symposium, a committee was formed to explore and revive the tradition in Assam as well. Although the team had planned to visit Nepal this month, logistical challenges delayed the trip. Still, there are plans to build a Guru Matsyendranath statue in Assam to reestablish regular worship practices in the Guwahati shrine.

The vines used to build the

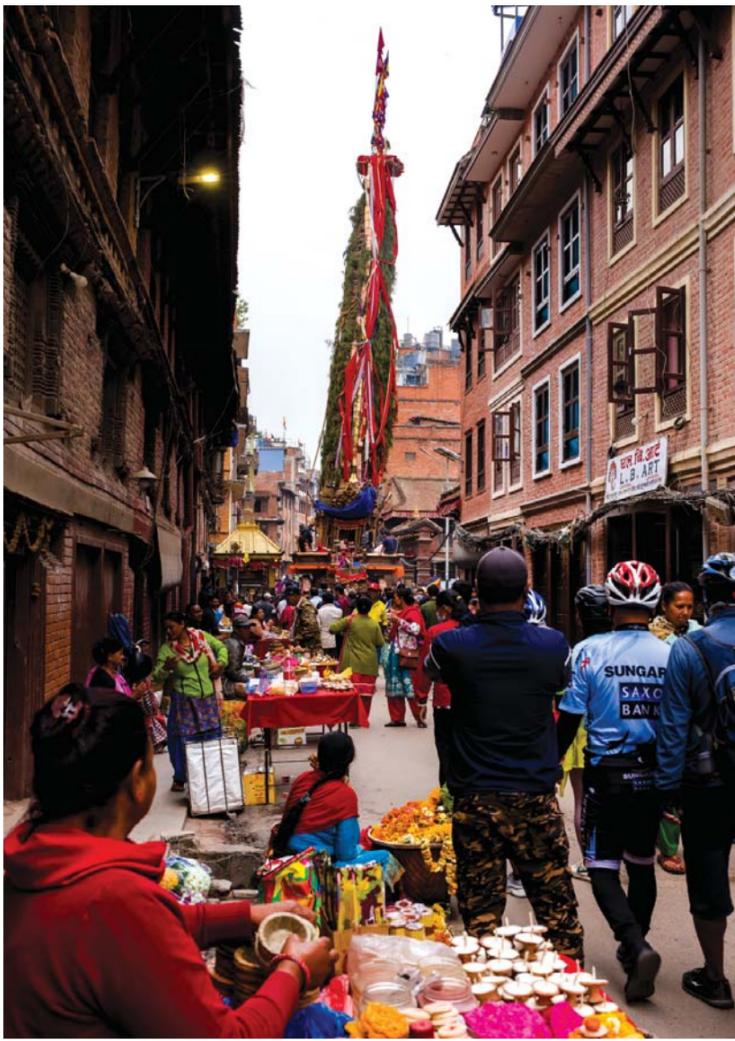
chariot in Patan are sourced from the jungles of Assam. But Sharma notes that in recent years unclear regulations have blocked the official import of the vines, although they are still brought to Nepal informally.

The chariot making has also had a taste of modernisation in recent times. In the past, even a single nail or piece of steel was avoided. But over time, the wooden structure, particularly the shaft between the wheels, has been replaced with

bronze. When that too proved unstable, metal clamps were introduced, which have become a pragmatic compromise.

Another welcome change is the focus on safety. Builders climbing the chariot's tower now wear harnesses and there are efforts in crowd control. The most visible change in recent years has been the involvement of Patan's enthusiastic youth in the festival — the tradition is now passing to a new generation.

Says Matsyendranath expert



ALL PHOTOS: LOCHAN GYAWALI

Vidhu Kayastha: "There is more energy, the young people in red t-shirts this year were very organised, these modern touches aren't diluting our culture, they're keeping it alive in new forms."

He adds, "We are reconnecting with our roots, we have more resources, more awareness than ever before. We must not be swept away by western values that may not serve us, and in some ways, cause more harm than good. We must revive our own culture." 📺



MAKERS OF MATSYENDRANATH

Nepal's longest chariot festival started this week in Patan, and social media is abuzz with photos. But little is known about the people who make the festival of the rain god possible. Watch this video on our YouTube channel.

# The reign of the god of rain

The month-long annual Rato Matsyendranath chariot festival with its legend in deep history has begun

■ Vidhu Prakash Kayastha

**T**he Rato Matsyendranath Chariot Festival started in Patan this week, one of the longest such carnivals in the world.

Matsyendranath is a festival that spans South Asia and is revered as a rain-giver god by both Hindus and Buddhists. It has close historical links to the Indian state of Assam.

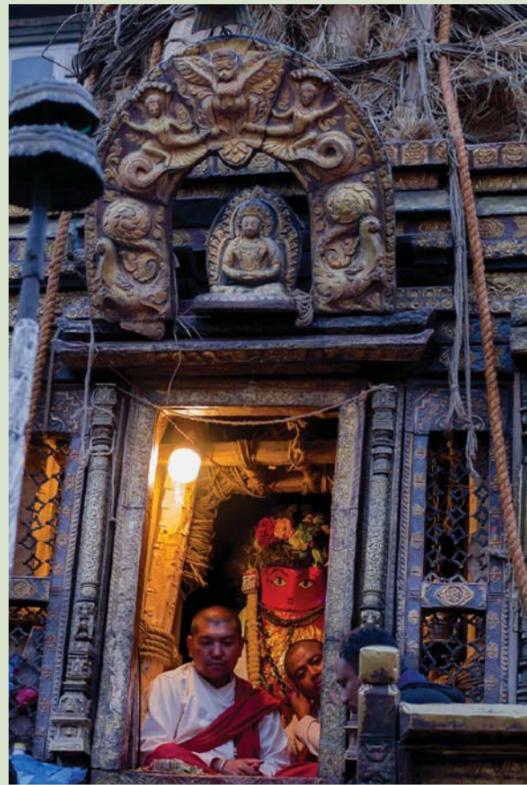
Legend has it that 1,500 years ago, a 12-year drought threatened famine in Kathmandu Valley because the sage Gorakhnath was sitting on a bed of serpents preventing rain from falling. In despair, the Lichhavi King Narendra Dev travelled to Guwahati to bring Guru Matsyendranath to the town of Bungamati.

Gorakhnath was a disciple of Matsyendranath, and upon seeing his guru, promptly stood up, thus setting the serpents free. The heavens then opened up with life-giving rain. Ever since, the Rato Matsyendra idol is brought from Bungamati and taken around Patan in a month-long chariot festival.

Matsyendranath is also known as Bungadyo in Kathmandu Valley and revered as the Buddhist divinity Karunamaya, his teachings influenced Hatha Yoga and Tantric practices. It is believed that Matsyendranath was an actual sage, and while it is not clear when exactly he lived, it is thought that he was incarnated from a fish and became a great yogi, carrying divine wisdom from his early spiritual experiences.

Matsyendranath started being worshipped as the god of rain and fertility around the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE during the reign of King Narendra Dev in Kathmandu Valley. Researchers have been unable to agree on the exact dates and the actual historical details of his life are connected to Nepal and Bengal, Assam, and Karnataka in India.

This festival is celebrated according to the lunar calendar and it holds great significance for the people of Kathmandu Valley. Millions of devotees travel to the chariot during its month-long journey through the



LOCHAN GYAWALI

chariot will pass through Patan Darbar Square, on to Lagankhel and then Jawalakhel. The streets are cleaned and cleared as though it is a divine path, transforming the physical world into something celestial.

The chariot itself is the result of a collective effort. Designated teams take one month to construct a new chariot every year, the act of assembling the chariot itself is a devotional act, with the technique passed down from one generation to the next. The artisans believe they are receiving blessings from Rato Matsyendranath through their work.

The Guthi devotees contribute financially to the costs of maintaining and repairing the chariot, the donations are not merely physical exchanges, but also serve as expressions of devotion. This creates a

reciprocal relationship between people and their god.

Once every 12 years, the procession travels from Bungamati to Jawalakhel and it becomes a grand religious and cultural event, with tens of thousands thronging the route to offer respects. Local communities from 21 neighbourhoods along the way take turns pulling the chariot, providing drinking water, sanitation, and health services.

The 30m high wooden chariot is built and dismantled every year, without the use of any nails. The timber beams are strung together with vines especially imported from Assam. The chariot is pulled by various Guthi communities along the route, and there are strict procedures that have to be adhered to in the construction and the locomotion of the four-wheeled chariot.

The climax of the festival is the viewing of a jewel-encrusted vest (bhoto) in the presence of the king of Nepal when the country was still a monarchy and now before the President. The bhoto is not only a piece of jewelry but also a physical manifestation of the god's blessings.

The festival fosters religious devotion and cultural identity not just among Kathmandu Valley's Newar population, but it also connects Nepalis emotionally and spiritually.

In the coming weeks, the chariot procession of Matsyendranath and the smaller accompanying Minnath

reciprocal relationship between people and their god.

From a tourism perspective, the festival also holds great importance, benefiting the local economy. In living religions, physical culture is often linked to tourism and pilgrimage. The chariot festival attracts visitors from Nepal and abroad, creating a blend of religious pilgrimage and cultural events that bring people together.

The festival also requires close coordination between various agencies of government, and it works more seamlessly than in other spheres of national life: Lalitpur District Administration, Department of Roads, Drinking Water Corporation, and the Nepal Electricity Authority.

The government's Guthi Sansthan is responsible for managing cultural programs and fundraising efforts, ensuring that the festival's cultural heritage is preserved. Alongside this, the Lalitpur Metropolitan City, the local governing body, oversees the festival's organisation.

Mayor Chiribabu Maharjan himself led a delegation of chariot construction and pulling teams to Guwahati earlier this year to revive the connection between Nepal and Assam. 📺

Vidhu Kayastha, PhD, has been conducting research on Rato Matsyendranath since 2011.

## TEAMWORK

Many organisations and professions are involved in the Matsyendranath Chariot Festival:

**Jyapu Samaj:** a community-based volunteer organisation that works closely with various ethnic groups across Patan, coordinating festival activities and ensuring effective collaboration.

**Paneju Sangh:** an organisation of priests from the Matsyendranath tradition overseeing religious activities. They perform daily prayers and other religious rituals to uphold the spiritual sanctity of the event.

**Astrologers:** play a critical role by

determining the auspicious time for the deity's transfer, ensuring that the process is conducted according to divine timings.

**Bosi:** are responsible for selecting and preparing the appropriate timber for the chariot, ensuring its readiness for the journey.

**Barahi:** are the carpenters who handle the construction and leadership of the chariot ensuring its craftsmanship and precision.

**Yenwa:** are tasked with reinforcing the chariot's structure using bamboo, rope, and other materials, and they also guide the chariot during the procession.

**Ghaku:** steer the movement of the chariot carefully through Patan's narrow streets.

**Pun:** are painters responsible for repairing and painting the deity's face to maintain its visual integrity throughout the procession.

**Dila Chahre:** they go before the chariot

procession to Kwoduwa twice a year to receive blessings from the deity and manage the morning puja throughout the chariot procession.

**Kuma:** prepare clay containers needed for the Dashakarma puja.

**Suwa:** offer sacrifices during the puja, bring water from Bungamati during the bath procession, and cover the deity with a canopy while bringing the deity from the Kuduwama twice a year.

**Guruju:** participate in the lvu bath procession, offer sacrifices at Nasalchok, and engage in the Mahabali puja.

**Rakami:** participate in the pre-procession rituals before the chariot procession begins.

**Tole Sudhar Samiti:** 21 local wards take turns pulling the chariot and provide essential services such as drinking water, sanitation, and health support to participants.

## EVENTS

**Community trek**

Discover Lamjung on this community trek through villages, cultural landmarks, and stunning Himalayan views. From the royal heritage of the Lamjung Durbar to the Ghatu Nach, tea gardens to serene stupas, the trail offers a perfect blend of nature and culture.

10-13 May, 6:45am onwards, Fee: Rs12,900, Nakkhop, 9846190957

**A Watercolor Odyssey**

Explore a collection by artists from Bangladesh, China, and Nepal showcased at The Kala Salon in collaboration with Siddhartha Art Gallery.

Till 18 May, 11am-8pm, Chhaya Center Mall

**Stand-up comedy**

Catch Accidentally Funny, a one-hour stand-up show, where Sushant Basyal turns a brutal car crash into comedy.

11 May, 6:30pm onwards, Nepal Film Campus, Studio Theatre, Gaushala

**Words and Melodies**

Poetry and music weave the heart of each story at Words and Melodies. Expect soulful words, acoustic tunes, and a guest appearance by poet Viplob Pratik.

9 May, 5:30pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Bikalpa Art Cafe, Pulchok

**Kathaa Ek**

Directed by Anup Neupane, Kathaa Ek follows two people navigating the quiet tensions of unspoken feelings and everyday misunderstandings.

Till 11 May, Ticket: Rs300+, Mandala Theatre

**Chitra Katha**

Explore Bhaktapur's vibrant contemporary art at this exhibition through the work of multiple artists exploring themes of religion, mortality, and divinity.

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

**South Community Market**

Browse through fresh produce, sip on wine, pick up unique accessories, and enjoy a brunch buffet. Every Sunday morning at the South Community Market in Sanepa.

Every Sunday, 8am-1pm, Piano Piano South, Sanepa

## MUSIC

**Sandarva**

Sandarva is set to launch a brand new music video for their latest song to go with their high-energy live shows.

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

**Live Music**

Grab some friends and head out for a night of tunes with The Heartbreakers, live this Friday at Hard Rock Café.

9 May, 7pm-10pm, Hard Rock Cafe, Sherpa Mall, Durbar Marg

**Group Music Class**

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

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

**Purna Rai & DajuBhai**

Experience the magic of Purna Rai & Dajubhai Haru at this gig hosted by Baaja Gaajaa Nepal.

12 May, 6pm onwards, Ticket: 1000, Infinity Lounge, Pepsicola

**Kanta Dab Dab**

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

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

## DINING

**Saturdays at Nook**

Enjoy the Buy One Get One free lunch offer, every Saturday at Nook. Perfect for a weekend lunch with friends and family, call for reservations.

12pm-3pm, Price: Rs3600 nett (for two), Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976054

## GETAWAY

**Aabas Pokhara**

Blending modern comfort with breathtaking Himalayan views, one can indulge in the luxurious at Aabas Unwind in the rooftop infinity pool overlooking the cityscape.

Lakeside, Pokhara, 9856012901

**Paradise Villa**

Paradise Villa is an escape with an on-site spa, relaxing massages, dry sauna, and jacuzzi. Also explore their cafeteria that serves both local and international cuisines.

Budhanilkantha, 9851365487

**Lavanya Villa**

Lavanya villa offers scenic views, a private pool, terrace and lush garden surroundings for guests to relax.

Dhulikhel, 9801087571

**Mountain Vista Retreat**

This resort blends traditional charm with minimalist design, featuring expansive outdoor seating areas that invite guests to connect with nature. Enjoy modern amenities within close proximity to scenic hiking trails and cultural landmarks.

Nagarkot, 9741731212

**Riverside Springs Resort**

Nestled along the tranquil banks of the Trishuli River, this retreat offers comfortable twin-bed cabins, a hearty restaurant overlooking a luxurious landscaped swimming pool, and the warm sands of the river beach.

Kurintar (01) 5444263

**Frenzie Fries**

Frenzie Fries is the go-to spot for flavor-packed fries, with options like classic salted, butter garlic, sour cream, and spicy cheese. Explore other items like the cheesy chicken roll or their Korean chicken rice bowl with kimchi.

Pimbahal, 9768874336

**Achaar Ghar**

Nothing beats a home-cooked meal with an assortment of pickles prepared from recipes passed down from generations. Get yourself a thali set.

Bhaisepati (01) 5912440

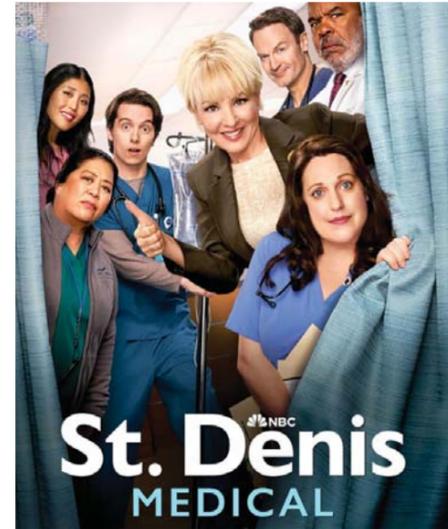
## WEEKEND WEATHER



| FRIDAY     | SATURDAY   | SUNDAY     | MONDAY     | TUESDAY    |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 29°<br>18° | 29°<br>19° | 28°<br>19° | 26°<br>18° | 26°<br>18° |

**Rain and Shine**

After that wet week with above average rainfall in Central Nepal, and heavy snowfall in the high trekking trails, there will be some respite from the showers. Maximum temperature in Kathmandu will climb to more normal levels, Friday will be dry with some isolated thunderstorms picking up by Sunday and into next week. This will be the pattern through the pre-monsoon period in May.



## OUR PICK

St. Denis Medical is an American mockumentary sitcom that follows the overworked doctors and nurses at a hospital in Oregon. The series explores the day-to-day of the hospital staff, including executive director Joyce, head nurse Alex, and new nurse Matt who is from a religious community in Montana. The show stars Wendi McLendon-Covey, David Alan Grier, Allison Tolman, Josh Lawson, Mekki Leeper, Kaliko Kauahi, and Kahyun Kim. Available on Peacock, Apple TV, Prime Video 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

**4stories**

4stories is a vibrant, instagrammable cafe offering hearty breakfasts and delectable dinners. Try their comforting cappuccino with almond milk or their flavorful vegan pizza.

Thamel, 9808790813

**Grill Durbar**

Indulge in a feast of flavors at Grill Durbar, with their signature grilled meats and platters. While there, also try some Arabic Kabsa rice.

Jawalakhel, 9849777410

**Silk**

Silk Artisanal Creamery offers ice cream made with the finest ingredients and no artificial additives. Peruse their range of flavors, including pistachio, dark chocolate with rum, pineapple coconut, and mango.

Lozipat, 9861444776

**Octave**

Octave features Japanese and continental dishes, such as the Salmon Sushi and a MoMo Platter. Enjoy live music, karaoke, and a panoramic view of Kathmandu Valley from their space.

Durbar Marg (01) 4220569

# Ghiblification is more than cute pixels

The latest AI image trend can be a new outlet for child exploitation



All Ghibli-style images created by the author using copyright-free sources.

## ■ Anil Raghuvanshi

The soft pastels and whimsical background looked like a moment stolen from a Hayao Miyazaki film. The thrill on my niece's face was palpable as she shared her first Ghibli-style portrait earlier this month.

This surge in the latest generative AI tool can transform personal photographs into Studio Ghibli-inspired artwork. It is dubbed 'Ghiblification' and has captured the global imagination.

But danger lurks. The playful trend masks serious hazards. Every image can be retained and repurposed as training data, jeopardising privacy and creating fresh pathways for child sexual abuse material, sextortion, bullying, and hate speech.

A recent study by our ChildSafeNet with UNICEF Nepal on generative AI and child safety reveals that over 60% of young people in Kathmandu have experimented with generative AI, often oblivious to the hidden costs.

Every time a photograph is uploaded to create AI-generated artwork or submitted to an app like Dreamify, the user is giving away

more than just pixels: they are entrusting their likeness, metadata, and private spaces to an opaque system. The image may be stored indefinitely and woven into the AI model's training data.

OpenAI, the company that owns generative AI models like ChatGPT and DALL-E, uses the images shared by users as training data to refine the model, unless the user opts out. However, the potential for misuse is great.

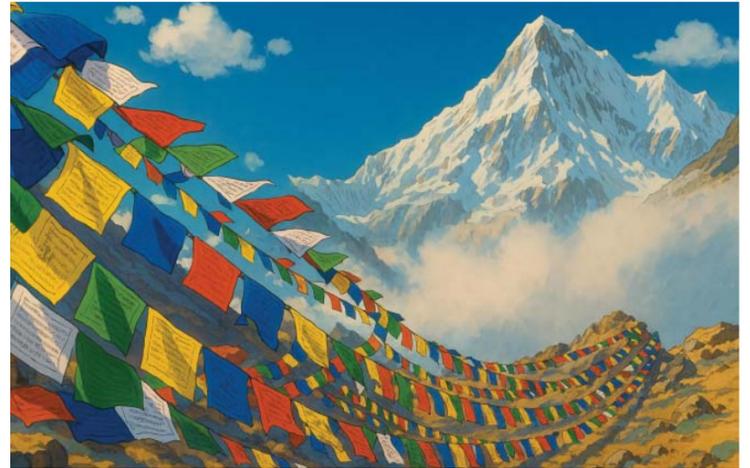
Viral adoption of AI-generated imagery makes people inclined to upload personal images, including those of families and minors. These images contain rich personal information, and serve as a significant source of data for companies, allowing technology firms to collect valuable insights into facial features, social dynamics, and cultural nuances.

"Such visually appealing images can be easily misused for generating seemingly credible imagery for spreading misinformation and reinforcing cultural stereotypes," says computer scientist Dovan Rai with Body and Data. "Children are particularly vulnerable, as sexualised deepfake content can be generated with ease."

Most platforms that provide

AI image-generation tools do not transparently disclose how they handle uploaded content. When children's photos are ingested, the model internalises these features, which can later resurface in contexts no one intended, creating an ethical time bomb.

"Children's likenesses could also appear in unexpected contexts, such as advertisements, memes, or controversial content, all without their families'



knowledge," Rai warns.

The Internet Watch Foundation recently identified over 3,500 AI-generated child sexual abuse material in one month on encrypted forums — some grotesque deepfakes superimposing children's faces onto sexual content. While those examples were not in the Ghibli style, they demonstrate how any benign filter can be twisted into a tool for exploitation.

On the other hand, AI tools have even begun to produce deepfake videos of child rape and torture by superimposing victims' faces onto pornographic content. Such material can normalise sexual violence, facilitate grooming, enable sextortion, and serve as instruments of bullying and hate speech.

The risks associated with generative AI have already begun to emerge in countries like Nepal, says Superintendent Deepak Raj Awasthi

at the Nepal Police Cyber Bureau.

"We are investigating cases involving the use of AI-generated images and videos for defamation and the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and hate against teens and young people," Awasthi says. "We have also received complaints regarding AI-generated deepfake videos aimed at defaming politicians and celebrities."

Parents should be concerned about how AI-generated imagery may affect children's safety as well as creativity. Over-reliance on AI tools could diminish traditional creative skills like drawing and painting, among others.

Says Kabindra Napit of Smart Parents Nepal: "Parents must educate their children about associated online risks and stay updated on emerging threats."

Anil Raghuvanshi is the founder of ChildSafeNet.

## Tips to protect the young

**Safety-by-Design:** Technology companies need to prioritise safety for children and vulnerable groups, from the very beginning of product and service development using the Safety-by-Design approach, developed by Australia's eSafety Commissioner.

**Consent and Transparency:** Every AI art application should provide clear disclosure that submitted images may be used as training data, offering users an easy option to opt out.

**Stronger Moderation:** Technology companies must combine automated detection and human oversight to intercept and prevent the spread of harmful content. Any prompts requesting the sexualised imagery of minors must be swiftly removed. Watermarking or 'fingerprinting' systems to trace and punish harmful AI-generated images.

**Legal Protection:** Laws must criminalise the creation, distribution, and use of AI-generated child sexual abuse material. Enhancing international

collaboration will be crucial for tracking and prosecuting offenders.

**Multi-stakeholder Collaboration:** Technology companies, law enforcement agencies, educators, and NGOs must collaborate to share knowledge and resources.

**Digital Literacy:** Develop digital literacy skills among children so they can distinguish between fantasy art and reality, and recognise risks. Clear and confidential reporting channels must be established to report harmful content.

**Parental Support:** Establishing open and trusted communication with children and educating them about the potential dangers of AI is crucial. Parents and carers can also implement age-appropriate filters and monitoring tools to enhance safety.

**Support Services:** Service providers need to create support systems that can provide children and young people friendly counselling and legal support as needed.

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# Climate magnifies earthquake

A decade after earthquake, Singati residents still cope with trauma and debt

■ Shankar Dahal in Dolakha

Most Nepalis thought they had seen the last of it after the 25 April 7.8 magnitude earthquake ten years ago. But the Himalaya had more surprises in store.

On 12 May, another 7.3 magnitude tremor that some said was an aftershock, but was strong enough to itself be a major earthquake, struck Dolakha.

Not many people had heard of Singati till then — a cluster of houses by the Tama Kosi River along a narrow gorge that is the roadhead to Rolwaling Valley.

It was here that dozens were killed on 25 April in the first earthquake. Hundreds of Singati survivors had lined up for food and relief supplies in the morning of 12 May when the second earthquake triggered a rock slide that buried a nearby camp. At least 50 people were killed.

Three hours later, a US Marine Corps UH-1Y Venom helicopter landed in a nearby cornfield to pick up the wounded, and flew off. The aircraft lost contact with air traffic control in Kathmandu and its wreckage was located high on Kalinchok four days later. Six American servicemen, two Nepal Army soldiers, and five wounded civilians from Singati were killed.

Today, Singati bears little physical scar of the multiple tragedies that struck the town ten years ago. Most houses have been



rebuilt as urban-style concrete structures (pictured, above), and Singati has become an economic hub on the road leading up to several hydropower plants and a popular trekking destination.

The town looks less like a village and more like a suburb of the Dolakha district headquarter of

Charikot, 47km away.

“The demand for construction material, cement, iron rods and bricks peaked after the earthquakes,” says Suresh Khadka, who owns a hardware business here and now supplies material to the 456MW Upper Tama Kosi hydropower project that is

undergoing repairs after it was damaged by a landslide last year.

The demand for cement boomed since most residents believe, not necessarily correctly, that cement houses are safer. Although Khadka did well selling construction material after the earthquake, he worries that most new structures

do not follow seismic-resistant building codes.

The construction boom financed by bank loans has in turn forced many from Singati to migrate overseas for work so they can service their debt.

“My family had no choice but to borrow money to rebuild our home

## Technology and tectonics

What recent earthquakes in Burma and Nepal reveal about our fragile humanitarian systems, and how to fix them

■ Ruby Thapaliya

“Now with every gust of wind, the smell of dead bodies fills the air.” Thar Nge, a resident of Sagaing in Burma, was speaking to the conditions in earthquake-affected areas following the country’s catastrophic 7.7M earthquake on 28 March last month.

Over four thousand people died in the disaster. For many in Nepal, scenes of the earthquake on the news and photos on social media brought back painful memories of the 2015 Nepal earthquakes 10 years ago.

As a data analyst at Togglecorp, a private data analysis and software development company in Kathmandu, I have worked on several projects that included reviews of secondary data related to the most recent earthquakes in Burma, Morocco, Türkiye-Syria, and Nepal. The data shows a clear pattern and painful gaps in how countries respond to large-scale disasters.

Analysis conducted through the Data Entry and Exploration Platform (DEEP) reveals a clear but grim reality: the cost of earthquakes is not just measured in lives lost or buildings destroyed, but also in the speed, equity, and coordination of response efforts. The data exposed not only shared struggles between Nepal, Burma and other countries that have suffered from earthquakes, such as health system overloads and water-related disease outbreaks, but also how drastically governance and politics affect outcomes.

One theme that emerged, especially in Nepal and other countries in the region, is that earthquakes do not discriminate, but responses do. In the Burma earthquake, in some regions, 90% of homes were wiped out and over 28 hospitals were destroyed. Even as this happened, aid workers continued to face security threats while delivering aid and relief.



BIKRAM RAI / NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

Nepal faced similar hospital infrastructure challenges during the 2015 earthquake, where up to 90% of health facilities in districts like Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, and Gorkha were either destroyed or overwhelmed. In some areas, doctors treated patients in open fields, under tarpaulins, due to the collapse of ward buildings and lack of emergency tents.

During the 2015 earthquakes, landslides and damaged roads cut off villages in Rasuwa, Gorkha, and Lamjung, forcing rescue teams to rely on helicopters. Even today, remote hill and mountain areas, especially in Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces, remain hard to reach during natural disasters. While earthquakes are natural, unequal and delayed responses are manmade and preventable.

Patterns across countries repeat, often due to preventable gaps. One glaring example is the chronic underfunding of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support despite growing recognition that trauma constitutes a silent

second wave of devastation.

In Burma, with over 9 million severely affected, most women and girls in areas like Sagaing and Mandalay had no access to mental health services. Healthcare systems also collapsed quickly. Burma saw around 25 hospitals in Mandalay, 28 in Shan, 22 in Bago and 24 in Naypyitaw damaged or destroyed.

Nepal’s own experience in 2015 tragically echoes these patterns: mental health issues were sidelined, hospitals in districts like Sindhupalchok and Dolakha were affected, and gender-based protection in temporary shelters was grossly inadequate. The lesson from this cross-country analysis is clear: unless countries like Nepal invest in mental health services, mobile health infrastructure, and gender-sensitive protection before disaster strikes, history will continue to repeat itself in harsh ways.

Here is where technology proves critical. Data and digital tools can identify trends

across borders, strengthen coordination, and improve early response. In Nepal, digital targeting tools have helped humanitarian responders fine-tune who needs what and where, even in remote or politically unstable settings.

For example, digital tools like Vulnerability Assessment Mapping and KOBO surveys were used after Nepal’s 2015 earthquakes to identify vulnerable households in hard-to-reach areas of Sindhupalchok and Dolakha, helping responders deliver aid more accurately. These platforms ensure that responses are not only faster and more efficient but also cost-effective, avoiding duplication and ensuring that limited resources go where they are needed most.

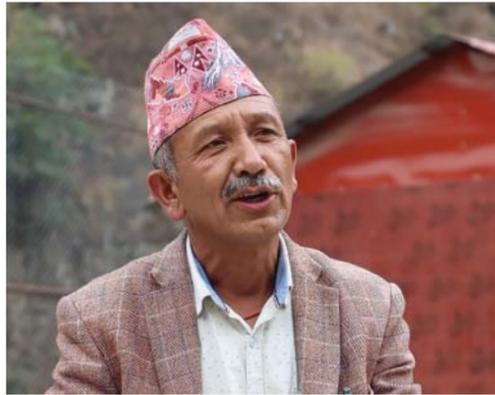
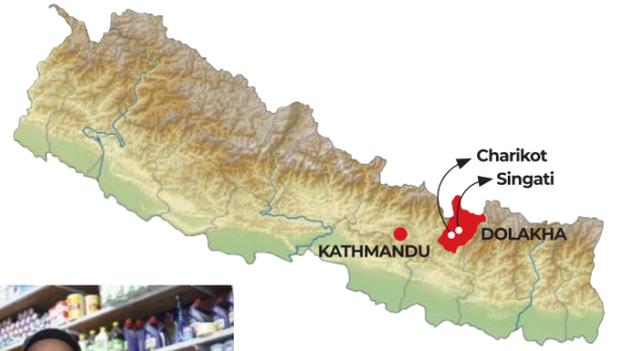
By collecting and analysing the right kind of data, including field reports, government updates, and third-party insights, the analysis through a digital-first approach can help shape a more inclusive, evidence-based response to disasters. The shift from ad hoc reaction to data-informed action allows us to save time, money, and lives.

Ultimately, earthquakes will continue to strike, but how we respond can and must change. Tools like DEEP and the use of cross-crisis digital analysis are essential for humanitarian professionals to make smarter decisions, faster. With better preparedness plans, integrated community-level responses, and real-time insights, we can transform how governments and aid agencies protect people in moments of crisis.

Earthquakes reveal more than seismic cracks: they expose the weaknesses in our humanitarian systems. And with the right tools and mindset, we can start sealing those cracks before the next tremors hit. ■

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# risk in Nepal village



Kul Bahadur Budathoki



Suresh Khadka



Phu Doma Sherpa (right)

ALL PHOTOS: SHANKAR DAHAL

since the government compensation was not enough, and ten years later we are still paying off the loan," says Phu Doma Sherpa, 60.

Because of the shortage of qualified masons and proper seismic engineering, many of the buildings are of questionable building standards and the traditional architecture has been abandoned, admits Kul Bahadur Budathoki, deputy chair of the municipality.

"But these buildings were more expensive than what the government grants could cover, many people here are heavily in debt and the men have migrated to the Gulf to pay their loans," Budathoki says.

Singati is in a multi-hazard zone. The 12 May 2015 earthquake could have led to the collapse of Nepal's largest glacial lake, Tso Rolpa, upstream. Due to global warming, the glacier has turned into an expanding lake 3.5km long, and its collapse would have unleashed a catastrophic Himalayan tsunami down the Tama Kosi Valley, with Singati directly in its path.

Singati has literally risen from the ashes of 2015, with its residents beginning to recover from the trauma and financial toll. But it is not out of danger as climate breakdown magnifies the risk from future earthquakes. 🇳🇵

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