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## Nepal in the red



BHANU BHATTARAI

### ■ Ramesh Kumar

Nepal's Finance Minister Bishnu Paudel is a Red. And as Finance Minister in a coalition led by his Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) he has the unenviable job of saving a country deep in the red.

Despite its impressive name, there is nothing even remotely 'communist' about his party as Paudel works on the upcoming budget. He has warned repeatedly about a massive revenue shortfall with Nepal's expenditure now 25% higher than its income.

The government has already reduced subsidies to local governments due to lack of money, and plans to cut small-scale programs entirely in the budget. But such rollbacks do not even make a dent in reducing the deficit gap.

Revenue has been falling since Covid-19, and never really recovered — even though in 2023/2024 revenue was a record high compared to the previous year. Collections rose to Rs919 billion by mid-May this year, a 11.5% increase over the previous year, but with only two months to go before the end of this fiscal year, the government has only collected 65% of the expected revenue.

Revenue mainly comes through VAT, customs, excise and income tax. A slowdown in imports and domestic economic activity has led to a fall in collection. Domestic consumption has slowed as young Nepalis migrate overseas. There is also concern about smuggling across the border.

"Our revenue is not rising in proportion to our imports," says Kewal Prasad Bhandari, former Secretary to the Government of Nepal. "This points to significant leakage at border checkpoints."

Customs evasion has been rising since Covid-19, and non-compliance with custom duty regulations worsened during the 2022 elections. "Customs evasion has been out of control since 2022, with people blatantly flouting the laws," says a former secretary who wished not to be named. "Customs fraud is widespread because there is little political will to hold those who break the law to account due to their political connections."

The Finance Ministry is currently

staffed by officials who have no experience and expertise in the sector. "It used to be called a 'Super Ministry' with capable financial administrators, but that is no longer the case," adds the former secretary.

VAT fraud is also rampant with almost 28% of registered taxpayers failing to file annual turnover details to revenue offices. Another 24% of VAT-registered taxpayers who do file documents show zero VAT on transactions.

"We can generate up to Rs2 trillion in revenue if we make active efforts to monitor tax, VAT, and customs fraud," says Min Bahadur Shrestha, former Vice President of the National Planning Commission.

With the implementation of the federal system, government expenditure has increased exceptionally in the form of grants administered by the central government for provinces and municipalities. Such grants are a significant part of current expenditure, which also includes social security and administrative spending.

Even as the number of development and infrastructure

projects goes down, the size of the budget has increased every year, primarily due to the debt burden. Unable to raise enough revenue to cover expenditure, the government has borrowed extensively from within and outside the country, quadrupling its public debt over the last decade.

Nepal has now reached a point where it is borrowing more money to pay back what it has borrowed.

Current expenditure and debt servicing make up much of government spending, leaving little money for essential development. In the previous fiscal year, 67.6% of Nepal's spending was current expenditure and 18.8% on debt servicing, leaving only 13.6% for development projects.

Nepal's public debt has exceeded Rs2.67 trillion as of mid-April, and forms 46.75 % of its GDP in comparison to 22.3% ten years ago.

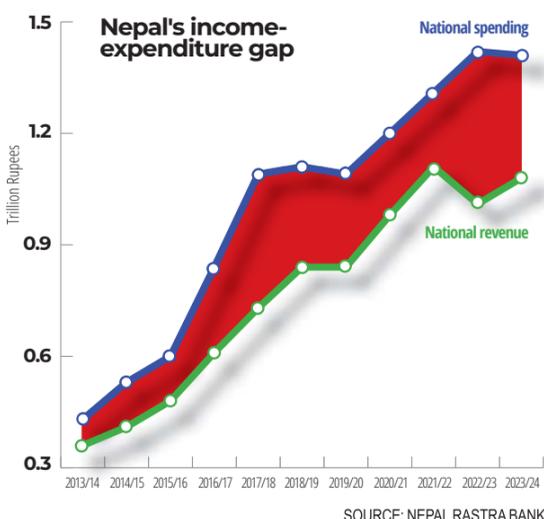
Nepal has to either significantly cut spending, or scale up revenue generation. Min Bahadur Shrestha says reducing expenditure is not the right policy for a country like Nepal, the focus should be on income generation.

And then there is the corruption. Instead of holding those flouting tax laws to account, politicians pander to lobbyists and special interest groups. Defaulters and tax evaders get away, and cronies are appointed to leadership positions in regulatory bodies whose job it is to monitor tax evasion.

"The government's credibility comes into question when it allows itself to be bribed into handing over leadership of regulatory bodies to middlemen," says Shrestha. "A lot of money goes not towards our national coffers, but to line the pockets of a select few individuals."

Various committees have recommended economic austerity in order to minimise wasteful spending, including banning unnecessary travel, cutting down on the purchase of vehicles, furniture, and IT infrastructure, as well as closing and downsizing offices. None of this has been followed through.

Says former secretary Kewal Prasad Bhandari: "There is no other country in the world with such large-scale waste of government resources like ours, that is why we need stronger policies that make appropriate use of taxpayer money. Otherwise we will just go deeper into the red." ■



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# Nepal's Power Struggles

The recent removal of Kulman Ghising a few months before his tenure heading the National Electricity Authority (NEA) ended made headlines. Hitendra Dev Shakya, whose previous tenure ended amid similar behind-the-scenes politics, was put back in charge.



**GUEST EDITORIAL**  
Bibek Raj Kandel

For many, Ghising was the architect of the end of 18-hour-a-day power cuts. His abrupt removal sparked outrage across the public sphere and the political spectrum.

Leadership at the NEA has never been just about performance or merit, it has long been entangled in political proximity. The agency is more than a power utility, it is more about control of budgets, contracts, and narratives.

A decade after routine load-shedding ended, political leaders still scramble to claim credit, over what should fundamentally be just the day-to-day work. The sector is mired in controversies, from metering disputes to ad hoc political committees, tariff issues, to negotiating cross border power trade.

There are three agencies involved: the Ministry of Energy, the NEA, and the little-known Electricity Regulatory Commission (ERC), each with a distinct mandate, at least on paper.

In a well-regulated market, issues like metering disputes and executive appointments would barely register outside the industry. In Nepal, such decisions often spill into political crises and can shake the fate of governments. Yet, the ERC is rarely seen or heard, even when these issues strike at the heart of its regulatory mandate.

Created in 2019 after years of industry bargaining, the regulator's job is to establish rules, resolve disputes, and bring predictability and fairness back to the system. And this critical role remains a blind spot in Nepal's energy debate and power struggles.

Despite the politics, if a regulator cannot assert itself in matters squarely within its mandate like pricing, contracts, disputes, and compliance, what exactly is it regulating?

We did not create this new regulator just to be another spectator. But that, for now, is all it seems determined to be.

The regulatory mess runs deeper into the way Nepal prices its electricity. By many measures, Nepal's electricity sector has made real progress. The country now exports

surplus power to India while still relying on imports during peak demand. In 2023/24, Nepal became a net electricity exporter for the first time, selling as much power as two and half months of domestic demand.

Every hydropower project under 100 megawatts is paid the same flat rate: Rs8.40 per kilowatt-hour in the dry season, Rs4.80 in the wet season. Hard or easy, near or remote, the price stays flat. Whether a project is built right along the accessible roads of Trisuli corridor or in the remote gorges of the Karnali that demand new roads and transmission lines to generation sites, it is the same price.

The Chamelia Hydropower Project cost Rs560 million per megawatt. Chilime came in at about Rs140 million. In a functioning system, a regulator would benchmark these costs, scrutinise financial models, and adjust tariffs to reflect real-world differences.

To give the ERC some benefit of doubt: it is a young institution. But institutions do not mature by aging; they need to step up and take positions, enforce rules, intervene, and

speak up whether the pressure comes from a utility boss or a political heavyweight.

Nepal's energy industry cannot afford a regulator that hides every time the stakes get high. That responsibility weighs even heavier today. Ram Prasad Dhital, the current Chair of the ERC, was not an outsider parachuted

into the role. He served as one of the Commission's founding cohort and has seen it through its formative years.

His second term cannot be for keeping the seat warm. But will the ERC act, or will it continue to choose the safer path of

silence? As the ERC evolves, the challenge is not just about leadership. It must resist the prevailing tendency to solely rely on short-term contracts and recycled bureaucratic networks. Building a credible regulatory institution requires stability and technical depth, a professional core of energy experts, economists, engineers, financial analysts, and legal specialists who can audit costs, arbitrate disputes, and navigate the rapidly evolving regulatory terrains.

Tariffs must reflect real costs and real geographies. Export pricing must adapt to dynamic domestic and regional markets. Disputes must be settled through credible regulatory mechanisms rather than through endless political committees.

The real question now is not just what the ERC was created to do, but whether it has the will, the knowledge, and the courage to do it. And the longer it forgets that and drifts further to become another spectator, the deeper the price the industry will pay.

*Bibek Raj Kandel works at the intersection of energy, climate, and political economy.*



SUMAN NEPALI

## The Electricity Regulatory Authority should be making its presence felt, but is mysteriously taking a back seat

## ONLINE PACKAGES



MOMO LOCO

A plate of momo filled with spiced meat served with an achar or jhol is often the go-to food for Nepalis. Watch how momo brings friends, families, and loved ones together at Kathmandu's eateries. Read story on page 6-7.



DYING TO WORK

One in four Nepali kidney patients is estimated to be a returnee migrant. Watch video of Sagar Tamang, a migrant returnee with Chronic Kidney Disease, and his wife Laxmi Tamang, who live in a rented house near the National Kidney Centre in Kathmandu with other dialysis patients and their families. Read story on page 9.

## INDIA-PAKISTAN CONFLICT

Nepal is not just landlocked, it is also the most nuclear-locked nation in the world ('Nukes in the neighbourhood', Editorial, #1260). That is what makes its diplomacy such a critical part of the conduct of statecraft. What does the state of SAARC, of which Nepal is the longest serving Chair as well as the host country of the secretariat, say about the state of its diplomacy? Is SAARC the victim of Indo-Pakistan relations or is the continuing tension between the two a failure of SAARC?

**Shambhu Ram Simkhada**

■ This conflict is surely nothing less than another log on the fire of global incineration. The logs might not come from the same supply but they all become part of the same conflagration.

**Tony Jones**

■ War means something terribly wrong in the country where it happens. Without understanding the ambition of political leaders and their failures to their people, one can not come up with solutions.

**Kabita Bhattarai**

■ It seems like fewer and fewer governments in our world seek or listen to sage advice, preferring megalomaniacal rhetoric.

**Iván G. Somlai**

■ When travelling by train in India, I found an Indian fellow passenger interested in Nepali politics who asked me about the possibility of Nepal's merger with India. He was speechless when I asked a counter question, "If Kashmiri people wanted to merge their state to Pakistan, and the people of Arunachal Pradesh wished their state to be a part of China, would you accept the people's verdict?"

**Bigyan Niva**

## PRIVATE SECTOR

This article is for anyone wondering why progress in Nepal is slow ('Nepal's only growth industry: private sector corruption', Ramesh Kumar #1260)

**Ben-Erik Ness**

## PRESS FREEDOM

It is not democracy which has caused mis-governance ('Messaging is the message', Editorial #1259), it is the arrogance of political elites and the tyranny of meritocrats who have ignored the people in the lust of power, money and authority.

**Kedar Neupane**

## Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Reign of the God of Rain

by Vidhu Prakash Kayastha

The month-long Rato Matsyendranath festival, one of the world's longest-running chariot events, is dedicated to the god of rain and fertility and holds great significance for the people of Kathmandu Valley. Read an expert's explanation about the festival at nepalitimes.com.



Most reached and shared on Facebook

### Nepal's only growth industry: private sector corruption

by Ramesh Kumar

The corruption discourse in Nepal often focuses on politicians and bureaucrats but practices like political cronyism, cartelling, and price-fixing are also deeply embedded in the country's private sector businesses. Read the investigative report on our website.



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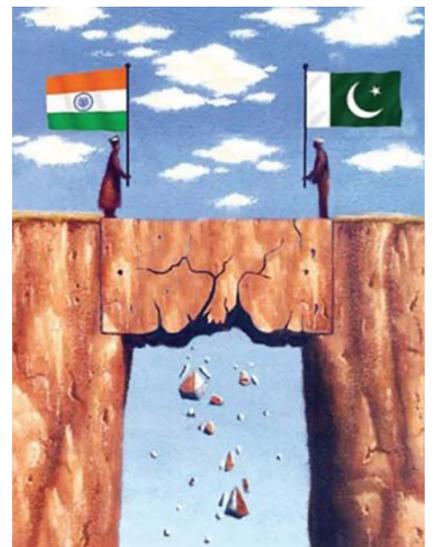
### Nukes in the Neighbourhood

Editorial

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, wrote Kunda Dixit in his editorial as conflict flared up last week before a ceasefire.



Most commented



### Balochistan to Kashmir

by Shyam Tekwani

South Asian leaders are not just fighting terrorists. They're facing fallout of their own betrayals while decades of repression and broken promises have fractured the social fabric from Balochistan to Kashmir and beyond, writes Shyam Tekwani. Join the discussion online.



Most visited online page

## QUOTES



**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**

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.



**Jeevan R. Sharma @jrs437**

More investigative reporting on these please! More in-depth coverage on 'following the money' please

## 1,000 WORDS



SAUDI ARABIA MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**HORSEPOWER:** US President Donald Trump was welcomed to Saudi Arabia on 13 May by an escort of F-15s of the Saudi Air Force, and by Arabian horses to the Royal Court in Riyadh. Trump attended the US-Saudi Investment Summit and signed a \$600 billion deal, while also lifting sanctions on Syria.

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### 100 days of solitude

One hundred days after king Gyanendra's 1 February 2005 coup, and two weeks after its consequent state of emergency was lifted, Nepal's international relationships were beginning to get back on track. India resumed military assistance to Nepal, while British and American envoys flew to Kathmandu for talks with Nepali officials.

Excerpts from C K Lal's *State of the State* column on Nepal's equation with the rest of the world, published on issue #247 13-19 May 2005.



From the Shah to Marcos to Musharraf, the Americans don't really care as long as strongmen are friendly.

The Indian U-turn was more surprising and seems to have shocked the parties. In what amounts to a sharp rebuke to Girija Prasad Koirala, New Delhi decided to re-open the military pipeline barely a day after the leader of the seven party alliance made a public plea to Nepal's

international friends not to do so in an interview to the BBC Hindi service.

The national economy is hurting from the fall of remittances from India, the country from which we import all our essential items. To make matters worse, tourist arrivals from India fell by 33 percent compared to last year.

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

The honeymoon period is over. It is at this point that marriages start going rocky, but for the royal regime, relations with the outside world are actually getting easier

New Delhi set the tone by deciding to resume military supplies that had remained "under review" since February First. Christina Rocca added credence to the softening international stance simply by arriving here via New Delhi.

That the Americans would go soft was predictable.



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# No-man's land

Conflict along the India-Pakistan border impacts another border: between India and Nepal

The two sides of Punjab in India and Pakistan may be 2,000km away, but the war between two South Asian neighbours last week sent aftershocks here to the India-Nepal border before a ceasefire came into effect on Saturday.



**BORDERLINES**  
Chandrakishore

Among the 26 tourists killed by terrorists in Pahalgam on 22 April was a Nepali from Butwal on a holiday with his family, and Nepali nationals enlisted in the Indian Army could be seen in action in case of conflict escalation between India and Pakistan.

The open border between India and Nepal is usually relaxed with people going back and forth without much checking, but after hostilities broke out last week, controls by India's Border Security Force of documents and inspections of vehicles has been stepped up.

About 15km east of Birganj is the frontier village of Ghodasahan. On the Nepal side, the settlement is under the Birsampur Rural Municipality in Bara District and on the other side it is in East Champaran of India's Bihar state.

There are Hindus and Muslims on both sides of the national boundary that slices through the village. The increased security on both sides of the border is starting to affect the daily life of villagers who had been used to going back and forth without any hindrance.



"We know who the locals are, but if there are people who we don't know and they look different, we interrogate them," one Nepali security official said, adding that local people also inform the police if they see any strangers.

Right along the 1,700km Nepal-India border, there are many townships like Ghodasahan which have the same name on both sides of the border. In some places, the border divides homes and households, in others, one side of the road is in Nepal and the other side is in India.

In most of these villages, the local people have come to accept the presence of security forces on both sides. Some farms are divided by the border, and villagers are used to border guards inspecting harvests being brought across.

The India-Nepal border is also a hotbed of smuggling, so police inspections are normal, but the heightened tension between India and Pakistan have made such checks stricter.

In Bara district is the village of Gulariya which also stretches on both sides of the border. Seventy-

year-old Satan Bhagat's house is on the other side of no-man's land in India but his livestock shed is in Nepal.

With new requirements for citizenship on both sides, and stricter enforcement for those with dual citizenship, families are having to decide whether they are Nepali or Indian.

"We don't want war, we want peace," said one villager, apprehensive of the spillover effect of the India-Pakistan conflict. "In the 1971 war we followed what was happening on the radio, but now

we know minute-by-minute what is happening on our mobiles."

The open Nepal-India border is a model for other parts of the world, where frontier controls are getting tighter and populist anti-migration parties are winning elections. The rhyming slogan in Hindi here has been 'बॉर्डर बनेगे अमन के निशान, दोनों मित्र नेपाल - हिंदुस्तान' (Nepal-India Border: A Symbol of Peace).

But slogans only go far when policies about these borderlands are made in faraway national capitals in New Delhi and Kathmandu. The media also has a role in making border controls only about security and crime, and not about how much it helps local people on both sides.

The reason there are calls for stricter border control is due to geopolitics, and this concern has been enhanced by the India-Pakistan conflict. This is not just about safeguarding India's security interests, but also about Nepal being vigilant and taking advantage of its open border.

Terrorism cannot be defined as 'moderate' or 'radical'. Terror has no morals. It cannot be justified by arguments for or against. Terrorism has no respect for innocent human life — whether it is structural violence of the state, or militant counter-violence.

Pahalgam was proof that terrorism is not an accident. It does not happen in a vacuum. When geopolitical rivalry is involved, it complicates matters further as a tit-for-tat in which innocent civilians are cruelly caught in the crossfire.

As Naser Ahmed on the Nepal side of the border village of Ghodasahan says: "The open border may not be open forever, we have to work to safeguard peace on both sides of no-man's land." 🇳🇵

Chandrakishore is a Birganj-based political commentator who writes this monthly column **BORDERLINES** in Nepali Times. @kishore\_chandra

## NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक



### Turkish to Seville

Starting 17 September Turkish Airlines will fly daily to Seville, one of Spain's major tourist draws. This is Turkish's sixth destination in Spain after Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Malaga, and Bilbao. Seville is in the Andalusia region on Spain's south coast with a rich Moor history. There are approximately 30,000 Nepalis living in Spain.

### Air routes restored

With the ceasefire between India-Pakistan west-bound, air routes from Nepal are coming back to normal. The conflict had caused upto two-hour delays on flights to and from Nepal from Turkey and the Middle East.



### Hyundai in Bharatpur

Hyundai dealer Laxmi launched the Creta EV in Bharatpur, Chitwan. Hyundai already manufactures the regular Creta in Nepal, so spare parts and servicing are very available. Laxmi is also expanding its charging network across the country.

### School leader summit

The India-Nepal School Leaders' Summit on 9 May will discuss cross-border collaboration, using technology to improve student learning, and adapting education systems to the modern world.

### Licenses not printing

The Department of Transport Management has been unable to issue emergency driving licenses since 8 May due to an error in the printing system. No timeline of repair has been given.



### NMB hydros

NMB has closed finances for the 24.8MW, Rs5.35b Bajra Madi Hydropower Project in Kaski, and the 42MW Rs7b Lapche Tamakoshi Hydropower Project in Dolakha. The bank also officially opened the 25MW Seti Nadi Hydroelectric Project, which has been in operation since Nov '24.

### IP Bill

The Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies has drafted an Industrial Property Bill that proposes an office to oversee protections for patents, trademarks, trade secrets. Violators could face fines of up to Rs1.5 million. Many duplicate products currently exist in the food, beverage, paint industries.



### Nabil Boudha Lounge

Nabil Bank opened a lounge at its Boudha Branch, where Nabil Priority Banking customers can enjoy personalised service, reduced waiting times, and investment advice.

### British Council grants

The British Council invites Nepali artists and companies to apply online 28 April - 23 June to its Connections Through Culture Grants 2025 for upto £10k towards projects that bring together creative communities. The grant is open-ended: literature, residencies, research, videos are some possible projects.

### Peaks of Courage

Mountain Dew with the NTB and Discovery Channel, launched a 'Peaks of Courage' ad campaign inviting climbers to Nepal's peaks other than Everest. The ad shows a climber and his guide overcoming obstacles on various peaks.



### Pre-budget exchange

Sipradi has announced a pre-budget exchange fest 15-18 May where customers can exchange any vehicle for money towards a TATA Tiago, Curve, Punch or Nexon. Free accessories and charging are also part of the deal.



### Aloft animal welfare

Hotel Aloft and animal welfare society Oksa Nepal fed street dogs in Jwagal and Teku.

### Huawei Program

Huawei Nepal has opened applications for its Seeds for the Future program for Nepalis in undergraduate IT programs. The best applicants will travel to China to train in the latest AI, 5G and Green Tech innovations.



### Ncell Shop-in-Shop

Ncell's new Shop-in-Shop at New Lumbini A 2 Z Mobile in Mailawar, Bhairawa, offers all the services of an Ncell Centre, including KYCs, SIMs, eSIMs. More locations are planned.

### Korea NOCs paused

GoN has paused No Objection Certificates for South Korea due to a large number of students being misled by consultancies about jobs.

# Remembering Junko Tabei

On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her climb, a tribute to the first woman to summit Mt Everest

■ Miki Upreti

Many events are planned this year for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first ascent of Annapurna, and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first successful expeditions on Kangchenjunga and Makalu.

But there is much less fanfare about Junko Tabei, the first ever woman to climb Mt Everest on 16 May 1975 (pictured, right) as part of a female Japanese expedition.

I was a 14-year-old girl in a small town in western Japan 50 years ago when Tabei's climb made global headlines, becoming a source of great national pride.

Japanese expeditions had been showing remarkable organisational and mountaineering skills, and sheer determination on Himalayan peaks since the heroic first ascent of Manaslu (8,163 m) in 1956 by Toshio Imanishi. These were the heydays of siege style climbing that carried national ambitions. Limited team members were given the chance to reach the summit, and traditionally male-dominated Japanese expeditions did not offer female members the opportunity to reach the top.

But, Japanese women mountaineers were carving a space for themselves. Eiko Miyazaki-Hisano led expeditions to Annapurna III (7,555 m) in 1970 and Everest in 1975. Tabei summited on both occasions, and on Everest it was with Ang Tsering Sherpa.

There were those who tried to belittle Tabei's feat. She made light of it to me ten years after her summit: "There are some people who say behind my back that I was carried up by a Sherpa, but they



know very well it is impossible to negotiate that narrow summit ridge with someone on your back."

Tabei continued climbing the highest peaks on all seven continents, and inspired women climbers from all over the world.

She inspired me too, and I also started climbing mountains in Japan and the Himalaya with her. I also got involved in her many charitable activities in Nepal.

In Japan, Tabei set up the Himalayan Adventure Trust, Japan (HAT-J) dedicated to protecting Nepal's fragile mountains. The group set up a waste management mechanism and an incinerator in Lukla to address the problem of garbage along the Everest Trail.

These initiatives, including one to promote apple farming in Khumbu, had mixed success, mainly because of the language barrier. The community was also reluctant to open up to outsiders.

Tabei's good intentions were perhaps not enough, and it still pains me that I ended up taking a critical stance toward HAT-J's activities in Nepal at the time.

Junko Tabei focused not only on



**LEADING WOMEN:**  
Junko Tabei at Patan Darbar Square in 2008.

her own mountaineering, but also on encouraging children and young people to connect with nature. From 1992 to 2008, Hat-J organised 15 exchange trekking trips for Asian youth from countries including Japan and Nepal.

After the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, Tabei, who was born in Tohoku-Fukushima, took a group of high school students affected by the disaster to climb Japan's highest peak, Mt Fuji (3,776m).

Junko Tabei helped everyone around her with kindness and sincerity, and she supported me, both materially and emotionally,

when I decided to move to Nepal despite opposition from loved ones.

In 2016, when I was diagnosed as needing shoulder surgery, she offered me financial assistance. It turned out to be a misdiagnosis, so I declined her help.

Junko Tabei died soon after. Only her husband, two children, and one close friend knew that she was in the final stages of cancer. She had offered to help me even in her own terminal condition. How she kept such a secret makes me think she wanted to close her simple life and make a graceful exit.

Junko Tabei rose from obscurity

in rural Japan to be a global icon of courage and adventure — especially for women who have followed in her footsteps. For many of us who had the privilege of knowing her, Tabei was a model of humility and living life lightly.

Fifty years after summiting Mt Everest, Junko Tabei still inspires us to reach the summit of our own lives. Her example will live on long after we are all gone. 🇯🇵

*Miki Upreti is a native of Japan who has lived in Nepal since 1990. She is a former mountaineer, trail-runner, development worker, and now a cyclist and writer.*

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# MOMO LOCO

If dal bhat is the national dish of Nepal, then momo is the national snack

■ Vishad Raj Onta

A plate of momo filled with spiced meat served with an achar or jhol is often the go-to order after flipping through the multi-page menus at Kathmandu's eateries.

Momo is the perfect food: juicy, ubiquitous, affordable, quick, filling, fresh, and healthier than other fast food.

Making the dumplings from scratch is fun, too. Momo parties require much labour but they bring families and friends together as each member takes responsibility for one of the steps: prepping the filling, rolling out the dough, cutting out circles, or blending the all-important sauce.

This is where mastery of the vital skill of momo-folding can set you apart. And momo parties abroad can bring together long lost friends amid much nostalgia.

Prashanta Khanal has two entries for momos in Timmur, his cookbook of dishes from



across Nepal. One is momo-char ('dumplings with a buffalo meat filling and served with soupy jhol achar made from sesame seeds and soybeans'). The other is the longer style of momo, which originally came from Tibet, but has been adapted to local tastes.

"The momo seems to have come to Kathmandu around the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the long standing India-Nepal-Tibet trade route got more organised," says Khanal. "At first, only trader families in the Valley made momo. They became wildly popular only about four decades ago after they started being sold commercially."

Khanal reckons that momo was initially just a food of the valley, and he credits refugees from Tibet starting the 1950s for spreading of the food beyond the valley.

Legend has it that dumplings were invented in northwestern China about 1,800 years ago by Zhang Zhongjing, a prominent physician in the eastern Han dynasty (25-220 AD). The legend goes that Zhongjing created



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

ear-shaped dumplings to cure frostbitten ears, when he wrapped lamb, black pepper, and herbs in dough scraps. Eating these 'jiaozi' would cure the patient by improving blood circulation.

The food then spread through the region, through present-day China, Mongolia, and Tibet, and were actually already called momo. Each place developed its own variation. "The Mongolian momo has mutton or lamb, uses minimal spices, and is not served with sauce," explains Khanal, "and the Tibetan momo contains sheep, yak or mountain goat. They were often served with butter tea."

The Chinese retained a distinctive style of dumplings called dim sum. And when Newari traders brought the momo

to Kathmandu, it was customised for local taste and ingredients. The strongly spiced buffalo meat is unique to the Valley. "Sherpa momos are usually spiced lightly, usually just with ginger, garlic and onion," adds Khanal.

Khanal has several recommendations to savour momos in Kathmandu: "Jazz Upstairs in Lazimpat has very juicy momos, and there is a store called Moti Didi Ko Momo in Thamel that is spiced mildly and comes with cooked tomato achar."

Some of the more unique vegetarian fillings can be found in the khuwa momo in Baneswor, the spinach-cheese momo at Shambala Cafe in Boudha, and the dried turnip momos in Mustang. 🇳🇵



## Here are some other momo spots inside Ring Road that scored highest in a Nepali Times online survey:

**1 Cafe '97 (Sanepa)**  
This is an understated eatery with pictures of the Annapurna range and faded lanterns as decor. A plate of steamed buff momo is Rs160 and takes about 15 minutes from freezer to steamer in the open kitchen, and to the table. Ten momo come arranged around a small bowl of a spicy thin achar that does not stick to the momo but tastes good. 7.2/10.

**2 Akabare Jhol Momo (Dhobighat)**  
Akabare Jhol Momo is a franchise with branches in Dhobighat, Baneswor, Putali Sadak and more. The name references the famous Mughal and the Nepali idiom about not needing to peddle a quality product with super potent chillies. Despite 'Jhol Momo' in the name, the Dhobighat branch also has choila, bara, biryani in the menu. A plate of chicken jhol momo is Rs170 and you are even offered a choice of warm or cold jhol, plus tomato achar and a dry chili condiment. The momo is very good and the jhol tasting of toasted sesame seeds could even stand alone as a soup. 8.6/10.



**3 Drop In (Bhanimandal)**  
Drop In is a hallowed momo spot up a flight of stairs that lead to two small rooms near the Bhanimandal basketball court. A plate of pork momo costs Rs200 and comes with 12 dumplings, not ten. The elongated momo are accompanied by a generous bowl of orange achar in which you can mix in toasted dry chili pickle or green chili vinegar. While they could be more generous with the filling, the dough is thin and the momo are light and feel authentic Tibetan. 9.4/10.

**4 Narayan Dai ko Masangalli Ko Momo (Patan Darbar Square)**  
Narayan Dai ko Masangalli Ko Momo is another popular momo chain. This branch is tucked into the entrance into Patan Darbar Square from Mangal Bazaar. Seating is at low tables on tree stump stools, and a plate of buff momo is Rs180. Perhaps this was an off day, but the jhol left stuff to be desired and filling carried too much whiff of buff. Don't know who Narayan Dai was, but he would probably have set things right. 5.1/10.

**5 Nice Momo (Pulchok)**  
This den behind Labim Mall has a rather shady ambience but there is outside seating too. A plate of chicken momo is Rs180, served up quick, and they are very light and almost sweet. There are two sauces, a red tomato achar and a darker red hot sauce. 7.6/10.



**6 Tas and Sekuwa Mahal (Teku)**  
It may not be the best idea to order momo at a place called Tas and Sekuwa Mahal, but it has a mutton momo on the menu at Rs280. Many plates of tas leave the kitchen before the momo are ready, which come with a peanut and a tomato achar. The mutton filling is chewy and dense, but with the spices it is pretty hard to tell apart from buff except for a slight aftertaste. 6.1/10.

**7 House of Momo (Tripureswor)**  
The House of Momo is a stall on the ground floor of the United World Trade Center Mall. The solo lady running the stall instantly serves up a plate of chicken momo for Rs150 in a leaf bowl. There are two strong achar, mild and hot. While the filling is bland and the momo falls apart on the fork, the sauces and the convenience sort of make up for it. 7.1/10

**8 Bakery Cafe (Baneswor)**  
The Bakery Cafe is a classic momo spot with a mascot of a man with a giant momo head, and staff wearing 'I <3 MOMOS' t-shirts. This Baneswar branch has a huge interior with many unfilled seats, eerie compared to the bustling rallies and bus stop right outside. Get your momo any way you like: veg, buff, chicken, pork, mutton. Eight, ten or twelve-piece, steamed, Tibetan, T.S. Fried, C, jhol. The quality of the momo is undeniable. The filling has a perfect flavour and the two sauces complement each other and stick to the dumpling, which also holds up when you take a bite. But Rs350+ for an eight-piece chicken plate is above market rates. 8.7/10

**9 Shandar Momo (Old Baneswor)**  
Shandar Momo was recently in the news for tragic reasons. Its Baneswor branch looks small from the outside but opens into a large area, busy with both dine-in eaters and many takeouts being prepared. A plate of buff is only Rs145, and comes in a sectioned plate where you can separate different sauces. The place lives up to its 'Shandar' name, with a wonderfully spiced momo and toasty jhol with a distinct pleasant cardamom flavour that can be addictive. 7.9/10

**10 Ghangri Cafe (Jhamsikhel)**  
Ghangri Cafe's signature open top momo is served with a trio of tomato, peanut and vinegar achar. The open top lets you experiment with different combinations of condiments poured straight into the filling. While deviating from the momo norm quite a bit, and expensive at Rs375 for a plate of open chicken steamed, the gimmick works and makes for an engaging, unique experience. 9.0/10.



**11 Swadista Momo (Patan Dhoka)**  
Located just past Patan Dhoka, a plate of buff is only Rs140 at Swadista and almost always instant, and a plate of chicken is on the cheaper side at Rs150 and takes about five more minutes to arrive. The best part is the three excellent jhol choices: the standard beige soybean-sesame, an orange tomato and a fiery red chili. The trick is to create a small opening in the momo skin and let the soup seep through. 8.7/10.



PHOTOS: VISHAD RAJ ONTA

## EVENTS



## Saturday hike

Escape into lush jungle trails to explore the sacred Bagdwar spring and the panoramic views from Shivapuri peak. The hike is a perfect blend of adventure and breathtaking landscapes.

17 May, 6:30am onwards, Nakhipot, Lalitpur, 9768771129

## Peeda Geet

Peeda Geet is a stirring solo play that traces protagonist Dal Bahadur's journey through memory, displacement, and survival in post-conflict Nepal, laying bare the wounds of war.

17 May, 6pm onwards, Tickets: Rs500, Bikalpa Art Cafe, Pulchok



## Sambandh

Through two interconnected artworks by research-based artist Lingam K, this exhibition confronts the realities of climate change and its effects on melting glaciers, inviting reflection on the fragility of our mountain ecosystems and the urgent need for action.

Till 23 May, Taragaon Next

## Lost and Found

Shilpee Theatre's new play Lost and Found, supported by the European Union, takes viewers on a thought-provoking journey through themes of identity, belonging, love, spirituality and societal expectations. Book tickets via Thuprai, and check play timings on the Theatre's facebook page.

17-31 May (except Tuesdays), Shilpee Theatre, Battisputali (01) 4569621



## Culture &amp; Tech

Himalayan Art Council's exhibition will showcase Nepal's extraordinary thangka and paubha art traditions. Experts also discussing how to protect Nepali art from being lost, undervalued, or faked in global markets using blockchain technology.

15 May onwards, Patan Museum



## Farmers' Market

Discover local goods and fresh produce at the Le Sherpa Farmers' Market. Enjoy vibrant stalls, homemade flavors, and a community spirit.

17 May, 7:30 am onwards, Le Sherpa, Maharajganj

## Shakti: The Feminine Power

Explore themes of feminine strength, resilience, and transformation, in this solo art exhibition by Lachhen Nyarten Tamang.

Opening 16 May, 5pm onwards, Gallery Mcube

## MUSIC

## Playground Saturday

Dive into a sonic journey of house, techno, and psy beats with sets by DJ Funky Rabbit, DJ Falcon, and more.

17 May, 1pm-10pm, Temple Tree Restaurant, Hattisar



## Chakachak

Chakachak brings a bold sound with their high-voltage blend of nu-metal and rap-hard rock. Gear up for their comeback with a new lineup this weekend.

17 May, 3pm onwards, Tickets:Rs500, Purple Haze Rock Bar

## Small Room Rave

Get dancing this Saturday night as DJ Raku from the UK brings summer beats to Lalitpur.

17 May, 7pm onwards, Cafe Musicology, Bakhundole



## Sax &amp; Soul

This Friday, go with loved ones to listen to Aashik Shrestha's as he plays his jazz rhythms during a musical evening.

16 May, 7pm onwards, Mesohat, Sanepa



## Raako Sessions

Join Pahenlo Batti Muni for Raako Sessions: Katha Pani, Ramita Pani: an anniversary night of music and memories including exclusive live sets.

23 May, 8pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

## DINING



## Kairos Café

With customisable breakfasts, mouthwatering burgers, and a delicious mix of Italian, Spanish, and English cuisine, Kairos Cafe is a go-to spot for every foodie craving variety and flavor.

Jawalakhel, 981349390

## About Town

## 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

## Hotel Country Villa

Sat atop the Nagarkot hill, Hotel Country Villa provides spectacular sunrise and sunset views and is a relaxing retreat for those wishing to escape the pandemonium of the city.

Nagarkot (01) 6680127/28



## Dusit Thani Himalayan Resort

Book an escapade to the lush emerald tapestry of Dusit, just an hour away from Kathmandu. Also explore their exclusive offers on rejuvenating retreats, daily yoga sessions, and hikes to the sacred Namu Buddha Monastery.

Dhulikhel, 9851373755



## Hotel Heritage

A Newari-style boutique hotel offering culture and comfort at the ancient city of Bhaktapur. Reserve a stay for an authentic experience without any compromise on modern amenities.

Suryabinayak (01) 6611628

## Escape Stay

With premium apartment-style rooms, a cosy atmosphere, and an excellent on-site restaurant, Escape Stay is the go-to getaway for the weekend.

Maharajgunj, 9808031497



## Cocktails @ Aloft

Experience the rich, smooth allure of Woodford Reserve with exclusive cocktails at WXYZ Bar and enjoy handcrafted bourbon creations.

Throughout May, Price: Rs1,400 nett, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976054

## Sizzling by Doko

Get your best pick at Sizzling by Doko, from their sizzling platters, juicy burgers, and loaded fries, to hearty rice bowls.

Jhamsikhel, 9801046708

## WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
28° 17°	26° 17°	25° 16°	25° 17°	25° 17°

## Thundery

## Afternoons

The heat is now really building up in the plains, and this is building up thermals along the Himalayan foothills in the afternoons, which turn into large cells. This means isolated thunder and lightning in the late afternoon and night into the weekend and beyond. Some of these systems could come with high winds. Means localised forecasts are not necessarily very accurate.



## OUR PICK

Will Trent is an American police procedural series based on Karin Slaughter's bestselling books. It follows the titular character and his career as a Special Agent with the Georgia Bureau of Investigations (GBI). Abandoned as a child, Trent was forced to grow up in Atlanta's overwhelmed foster care system. Overcoming the difficulties of his childhood, Trent is able to join law enforcement, becoming the investigator with the highest clearance rate at the GBI — to the chagrin of many of his peers. Stars Ramón Rodríguez, Erika Christensen, Ianthe Richardson, Jake McLaughlin and Sonja Sohn.

## 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

## Mecha Dekhi Mahakali

Catch the last two days of Holiday Inn Express Kathmandu's Mecha Dekhi Mahakali: a buffet of delicacies from across the country. Dishes include Sisnu ko Jhol and Mutton Kawab.

Till 17 May, 6:30pm-10pm, Price: 2,200 per person, Holiday Inn Express Kathmandu



## Soul Café

Try authentic Korean dishes at Soul Cafe, from their creamy rosé rabokki, to the pork kimchi-jjigae. Refreshing drinks like matcha strawberry or avocado smoothies complement the cafe's dishes.

Lazimpat, 9808042959



## The Patisserie

Whether you're celebrating a special occasion or simply treating yourself, The Patisserie offers a variety of cakes, cupcakes, and other sweet treats. Pre-order for next-day delivery.

Kathmandu, 9803368875

## Cafe Soma

Head to Soma for a weekend brunch with friends or family, and if you have a sweet tooth, check out their wonderful desserts.

Baluwatar (01) 4515792

# Dying to work overseas

Another migrant worker returns with kidney failure, but hopes of a future after a transplant

■ Ava Francis-Hall

Sagar Tamang first met Laxmi Tamang in video calls between Malaysia and Pokhara. He was working as a security guard in Malaysia, and had sent her a Facebook request.

Before long, between messages and calls, they were in love and planning a future together. Laxmi could see it clearly: after six years Sagar would return home to Sankuwasabha, they would get married and have children, live in the home that Sagar had built, and she would open up her tailoring shop with Sagar's savings from abroad.

But Sagar revealed that he was experiencing shortness of breath and his legs had begun to swell. Laxmi pleaded with him to come back, but he would only return after his roadside property back home was built. Sagar's parents had already built a new house with his income and were planning another nearby.

The symptoms worsened over time, prompting Sagar to eventually consult a doctor. Both his kidneys had completely failed. A seemingly healthy, energetic 28-year-old suddenly turned into a dialysis patient.

Sagar lived with his mother, father, five sisters and four brothers in Sankuwasabha, and the family depended entirely on a piece of land they farmed. An older brother left home to seek work elsewhere but that was not enough. So, after just finishing Grade 10, Sagar decided on an overseas job.

He arrived in Malaysia at just 20, saddled with loans, and an immense pressure to raise the economic status of his family. But upon arrival, he found that he would be working in agriculture, not as a security guard as per his contract.

Toiling for 11 hours in the sun every day, he felt worn down and disillusioned with the promise of life abroad. His living situation, a tightly regulated, crowded compound with other migrant workers, was no better. Only when he heard the distorted voice of his mother through his flip phone did Sagar find a sense of solace.

Over the next two years, Sagar developed friendships with other



**HARD LABOUR:** Sagar Tamang in a dialysis session at the National Kidney Centre in Kathmandu after both his kidneys failed while working abroad in harsh conditions (left). Sagar with his wife Laxmi in Pokhara (right).



Nepalis working with him, and eventually accepted that his life abroad was nearly permanent. He planned to stay aboard at least 10 years.

And after writing a letter to his company, he was able to successfully switch to security guard work. Although the hours were longer, it beat the difficult manual labour Sagar was previously forced to complete for a meagre salary.

Sagar fell into a routine he thought he would follow for the next eight years: get ready, go to work, return to the compound, and call Laxmi before going to sleep. But two years ago, his health reached a breaking point, and he had to return to Nepal for dialysis.

Upon his arrival, he was rushed to Bir Hospital for immediate treatment. To this day, Sagar has never stepped foot inside the houses his family built with his overseas earnings.

#### Dialectics of dialysis

It is estimated that one in four Nepali kidney patients is a returnee migrant. Factors such as excessive heat, dehydration, and unhealthy diets can lead to chronic kidney disease, including

kidney failure. Many returnees head straight to a dialysis bed in Kathmandu instead of taking the first bus home.

In dialysis wards across the country, scores of young men under 40 sit in hospital beds, unable to work or earn for their families anymore. Many remain in debt for treatment, or have had to relocate to seek care.

For patients with no source of reliable income, even finding a willing landlord to rent out a room in the capital can be almost impossible without the right connections. However, Sagar's cousin, who had also developed chronic kidney disease while working abroad and had moved to Kathmandu from Sankhuwasaba for dialysis, took him in.

Laxmi finally met Sagar two months later. She found it hard to hold back tears whenever she saw his face. She was able to stay with her brother in Bhaktapur for some time, but eventually the couple decided to marry.

Laxmi's mother and sisters urged her to put off the marriage until Sagar had completed a kidney transplant. The couple eloped. Two days after their marriage, Laxmi's family called them to come to their home in Nagarkot to celebrate.

Now, the couple lives in a rented house near the National Kidney Centre with other dialysis patients and their families. Sagar walks to his dialysis sessions, three times a week.

In this house, there is a sense of solidarity among patients, and Laxmi especially feels a comfort knowing that her neighbours understand her position as the wife and caretaker of a dialysis patient. Members of the house cook for each other, help with transport to the hospital, and sometimes even lend money.

So far, Sagar has used his savings from abroad to pay for the direct and indirect costs of his treatment. However, the money is running out as the couple grapples with the city's cost of living and medical bills.

The government offers free lifetime haemodialysis for patients, but the Rs5,000 monthly allowance does not come consistently, in full, or just never comes at all despite repeated requests to the patient's municipal office.

Those receiving treatment in the Kathmandu Valley also access medicine through Bhaktapur's Shahid Dharmabhakta National Transplant Centre (SDNTC), but under the hospital's insurance are

required to pay for 10% of the cost.

Once his family's primary earner, Sagar can no longer make or send money due to his condition. His family runs a goat and poultry farm, but has been forced to take loans to stay afloat and cannot send money for Sagar's treatment. Until recently, Laxmi worked 12 hours a day as a tailor and house cleaner.

Sagar, his mother and Laxmi, have been making trips to SDNTC in preparation for his transplant. In Nepal, only relatives or the spouse of the patient are allowed to be donors for their kidney transplant.

This can be debilitating for patients whose families are unwilling or unable to donate due to pre-existing health issues such as hypertension or diabetes. Wives and mothers are the most likely demographic to donate to a male patient.

Due to Sagar's inability to come home and officiate his marriage, it is yet to be recognised by the municipality, making Laxmi an ineligible donor. After finding out his father's blood type did not match and refusing his younger sister's offer to give her kidney, he and his mother decided that they could start the transplant process together.

Even Nepal's prime minister K P Oli has had a double kidney transplant, but for those who cannot find a donor within the family, the remaining years of life is measured by the humming and erratic beeps of a dialysis machine three times a week.

It is going to be a lengthy and expensive process, but it is the only hope for Sagar. And what are his immediate plans after a successful transplant? To return home, to finally see his siblings, father, neighbours and friends, he tells us.

He has seen his father once since his return to Nepal, but has not seen his siblings since he left for Malaysia. They have not visited him in Kathmandu yet, but he hopes that they will before his transplant.

The couple believes that after his transplant, anything is possible: finally getting their marriage recognised, opening up a tailoring shop, having children, building a life in Sankuwashaba.

Laxmi strongly objects to Sagar ever leaving Nepal again, but he remains open to the idea. 🇳🇵

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**घाम-पानी छेक्छ,  
१० वर्ष टिक्छ**







चर्को घामबाट बचाउँछ



मुसलधारे वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ



१० वर्ष वारेन्टी



# Every day is closer to pay day

Two stories of Nepali women who migrated overseas to support their families



DIASPORA  
DIARIES 66-67

These are the 66<sup>th</sup> and 67<sup>th</sup> episodes of Diaspora Diaries, a Nepali Times series in collaboration with Migration Lab providing a platform to share experiences of living, working, and studying abroad.

## Siya Sada

My husband never gets on cars or buses on his own. I cannot even imagine him flying on a plane by himself. His phobia of travel is very strong. Which is why unlike many men here in Janakpur, he never migrated.

Instead, I sent my son to Saudi Arabia and Qatar, but both times he returned before his contract was up, with outstanding recruitment loans of Rs400,000.

I had also taken additional loans for my daughter's wedding. Heavily in debt, and frustrated with constant calls from the money lender, I decided to go overseas myself.

There were other women I knew who had migrated to work as domestic workers in the Gulf and



sent money home, so I decided to do the same. I did not tell anyone that I was migrating until the last minute.

I had disappeared for 11 days in Kathmandu getting my documents ready, and my husband had gone around the village frantically

looking for me with my father. I only informed them about my decision before my flight and ignored pleas from family not to leave.

After our plane took off from Kathmandu to Kuwait, I enjoyed looking out of the window as we

flew higher and higher. I worked there for six years.

The first employer was mean spirited and terrible. She had a mischievous चकचके son whom I had difficulty taking care of. She expected me to carry his heavy toy car down four flights of stairs on



my head for him to drive. This was just too much.

She did not care whether I ate or not. After two years, I moved to a new family which was much nicer and treated me like family. The work was lighter because the children were all grown up and there was more consideration of my time to sleep, eat and work.

There were no disagreements like with the previous employer, and I did as I was told उठ भने उठ, बस भने बस. The arrangement in that joint family was that each had their own domestic worker.

We shared a room with an Ethiopian, Filipino and fellow Nepali. We had a strong bond between us, and we communicated with each other in Arabic which I had already picked up.

In a foreign land, every day was a day closer to pay day. We

# Nepali nurses caring for the world

Two migrants talk about their careers in the UK and Japan

## Alpana Adhikari, UK

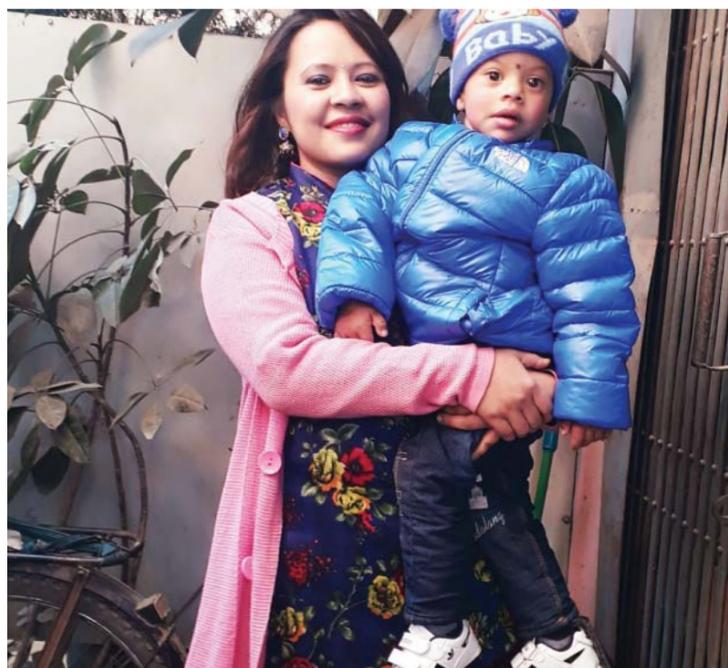
Back in Nepal, I had worked as a nurse for a decade, but I had my heart set on going overseas.

My reason for wanting to migrate, however, was a bit different as it was for my son. He has a disability, and considering his situation from multiple perspectives—including societal attitudes, the preparedness of schools, and the availability of facilities for individuals with his condition—Nepal did not feel safe for my baby.

I had to migrate, no matter what, for his sake. The facilities in the UK for children with his condition are significantly better, and I am glad he and my husband will join me in a few months.

I was applying via private routes like everyone else when the Government to Government pilot program between Britain and Nepal was announced. Even though the initial program targeted 100 nurses, only 40 of us were able to meet the criteria.

I made it to the UK in February 2024 without paying a single paisa to any broker. The G2G scheme was unique as we were treated with dignity and valued for our skills: they covered ticket and visa costs, reimbursed us for exams we



had taken, and costs involved in the preparation and testing of the Objective Structured Clinical Examination were also covered.

I started work in March last year, and currently am based in the respiratory ward of a hospital. I am enjoying my work a lot. In one year, I have received 26 WOW nominations which are notes of appreciation from patients.

'Alpana is one of the kindest nurses I have seen. Awesome and talented ... always smiling, never appears tired and helps everyone,' one patient testimonial said. Another: 'You can see clearly that she cares about her

patients...She was cool amidst great stress and ALWAYS with a smile which gave me confidence.'

I am also the International Educated Nurses Advocate which means I can raise issues with management about issues facing international nurses here.

Recruitment from NHS linked hospitals is free but when we migrate through private routes, agencies either charge upfront costs or in some cases, deduct wages once the nurses start earning.

I have met Nepalis who have paid up to Rs1 million for the same job. These costs can go even as high as Rs3 million for work in



**CAREGIVERS:** One reason Alpana Adhikari migrated to the UK to work as a nurse was so there would be better facilities for her son (left), who has a disability.

caregiving or nursing homes. I am lucky not to have to pay anyone for my posting.

But beyond costs, there is also a reputational advantage of coming through the government selection process at the hospital. Such programs need to be expanded because nurses are migrating anyway and it would save people unnecessary costs and hassles.

I will always be protective about Nepal and am grateful for the experience I gained, but it is true that nurses lack dignity in the workplace back home. Nursing is laborious work and completing the education takes a fortune but the pay for nurses in Nepal is unfairly

low at most health institutions.

It naturally makes nurses want to migrate. People often ask me what the difference between the UK and Nepal is. Work is similar but in terms of technology, there is less paperwork here, everything is digitised. Treatment is also more nurse-led. We have more say while making recommendations about medicine and discharging decisions which can be empowering.

I am not sure what it is about nursing but I am always in high spirits and energetic about showing up to work every day. To be a good nurse, you have to have the passion for patient care.

Sometimes people tell me it is because my family has not yet joined me which has freed up my time to singularly focus on work, but I do not believe that is true. Back home too, I used to be as passionate about my job.

What fuels my passion here is the appreciation we get. It is not just about the income. Sometimes after long hours at work when it has been a particularly busy day, a phone message from my manager and colleagues appreciating me for a job well done can go a long way.

Likewise, the WOW recommendations from my patients have boosted my confidence. I bonded with one of my elderly patients who had a mental illness, and she felt comfortable enough to open up to me. She began referring to me as her friend.

It is little things like this that make a big difference. Perhaps that is why my flat mate and colleagues often question why I don't look tired even after a long shift.

would wait impatiently and count our fingers. I earned money, and I sent everything home to my family back in Nepal: मेले कमाउने, परिवारले गर्ने”.

I had plans to stay in Kuwait for 10 years but had to come back after six when I fell sick. I broke down when leaving, as I had become attached to the family I worked for.

They bought me parting gifts like a watch, blanket, flashlight. I handed over my job to another Nepali domestic worker from Sunsari whom I trained before returning.

I had managed to pay off my loans with my earnings in Kuwait, and had enough left over to buy some land and marry off my son. But since my stay was cut short, I could not manage to build a house.

No other woman from my neighbourhood in Janakpur has migrated overseas that I am aware of. It is only men who migrate from around here.

Perhaps I too would not have migrated if my husband had gone overseas, and my son had not returned. In addition to freeing myself from loan sharks, going overseas also widened my mind and horizon. If I had just stayed here in Nepal I would not have achieved as much, my loans would still have been unpaid.

Life is back to normal now in Nepal. I am back to washing clothes with my hands and getting water from the well. I wish we could have brought back appliances like washing machines, rice cookers and vacuum cleaners but they are not practical here.

Here, even when we leave the lights on for too long we have to worry about the electricity bill. How can we afford anything more? I don't even use the iron and hair dryer that I brought back.



### Gulbandan Devi Sada

I spent three years and three months in Saudi Arabia and almost six years in Kuwait. It has been five years since I returned.

My aunt-in-law had gone overseas, and I also wanted to go abroad to pay the medical bills of my sick husband and support four children. My husband supported my decision saying fate would determine if he would live or not, but we had to take care of our children.

I traveled through India where the agent made us wait for a month. My husband died the day before my flight to Saudi Arabia. Everyone told me to continue with my journey as my husband would not return and my children needed to be taken care of.

I went, and it took me a year to learn Arabic. Me and my employers relied on sign language and hand gestures to communicate with each other. It was not easy by any means.

My employer taught me how to run the washing machine, iron,

and to cook as per their liking, after which she left things in my hands. Initially, I burnt clothes while ironing, broke the washing machine and my employer threatened to deduct the cost from my wages, but she thankfully did not do it.

But I found out my employer made money off of me by sending me to work at other people's homes. I did not enjoy my stay there as she was किकिकिचे demanding. I used to miss my children while taking care of her children who were of similar age. I had left them with



my late mother. When I took care of children overseas, I had to be more cautious than with my own back home since the consequences would be severe if they fell down and got hurt while running around.

With my savings, I bought land here, got my brother married and did a big puja.

After a few months in Nepal, I went to Kuwait to work. This time, the experience was easier because I spoke Arabic and had gathered experience. But even there, I had to change two employers as I did not have a good experience with the families. The third house I worked in was better, and I stayed with them.

Back home I built a house with my earnings, and married off my daughter. Although I wanted to stay longer, I decided to return because I had health issues. I worry about old age and the need to have savings, and even consider migrating sometimes. My only hope now is my children.

When I returned to Nepal, my Kuwaiti employer kept calling me saying I should return because the children missed me. But I have my own children to focus on now.



Binu Gurung on arrival in Japan to work as a nurse three years ago (left). Gurung's work involves taking care of elderly Japanese (right).



### Binu Gurung, Japan

It has been five-and-a-half years since I came to Japan under the Specified Skilled Workers (SSW) visa in the nursing category. I had previously been here as a language student too. I grew up in Ghandruk and had just started my Bachelor's course when a friend suggested we try to go to Japan so I just followed the trend and stayed here for three years. Two years after returning to Nepal, I re-migrated to Japan under the SSW scheme which was at its early stages and only open to nursing initially.

I take care of the elderly Japanese who are mostly above 80 years, a few even above 100. I try not to get too attached to patients but it is of course not always easy because of the nature of the job.

Patients dying of age is common as it is not a care facility where patients recover to return home. Just recently, an elderly lady who had been here from the day I joined 5.5 years ago passed.

These leave you a bit खिन्न and emotionally drained. Most are dementia patients who do not even recognise family. Some patients do not feel comfortable as the work entails helping with personal care tasks like using the toilet or bathing

and they can be irritable.

Building trust and rapport takes time, patience and familiarity. I do not think there is a way to explain how happy I feel when they are happy with our care and thank us in smiles like we are family.

My own grandmother back in Nepal was in a similar situation requiring care before she passed and I am able to extend that kind of care to many patients.

I know this job is not for everyone. Caregiving might not be for nurses who come to Japan wanting to migrate overseas at any cost without considering the kind of employment.

You have to be mentally, physically and emotionally prepared for it. If you are short-tempered, it may not be the best fit. However, for those who are genuinely interested in care work like I am, there are many growth opportunities in nursing which are also financially rewarding.

While working under the SSW visa, I was able to take training classes on the side and passed the national exam for nursing. I was then able to change my visa from SSW to a nursing caregiver one. My son joined my husband and I recently in Japan and has started school.

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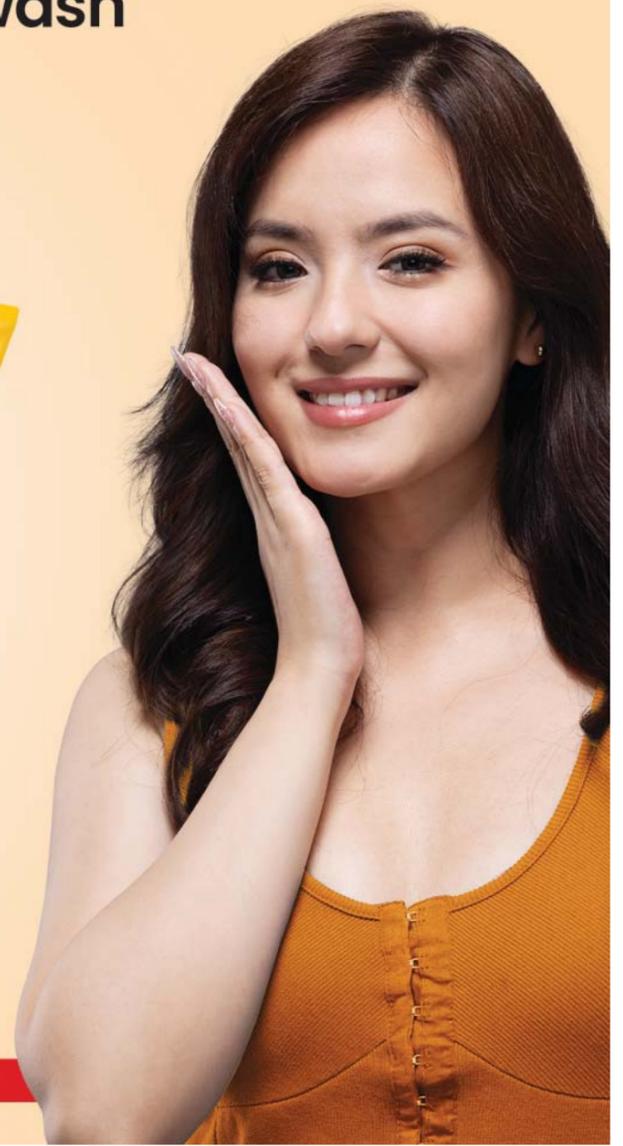
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