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Understanding underspending



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

BUDGET CLOCK

■ **Shristi Karki**

It is the same every year. Just as the finance minister prepares to deliver his budget, there is a last minute spending spree across the country to disburse as much money as possible before the fiscal year ends in July.

The habit even has a pejorative Nepali phrase: असारे विकास, the

frantic last-minute resource execution. But every year, even after all that eleventh-hour expenditure, the budget remains woefully underspent.

Nepal's budget is classified into three parts: current expenditure for administrative spending, capital expenditure for long-term development and infrastructure, and debt servicing.

Current expenditure and debt servicing account for a significant portion of government spending, leaving little money to improve roads, build facilities and buy equipment. But every year for the last nine years, the government underspent by an average of 35.3%.

Till Wednesday, the three layers of government had spent only 66% of the total budget of Rs1.8 trillion, and 37% of its Rs352 billion development budget. Where does all that unspent

money go? Unused funds from some ministries go back to the national treasury. But Nepal has a revenue shortfall, and there is a tendency to allocate funds without ensuring resource availability.

"The main reason Nepal is unable to spend even the money allocated for development is because projects are not prioritised properly," explains economist Kalpana Khanal.

The National Planning Commission's Project Bank is tasked with selecting national projects for public-private partnership investments and ranking them into three tiers based on priority.

Per the classification, the standards for Priority 1 projects include a completed Detailed Project Report and Environmental Impact Assessment report, as well as land acquisition guarantees. But these are just on paper, which means resources are diverted to politically expedient projects or those not fully developed.

Furthermore, Nepal's procurement mechanism involves choosing the lowest bidder, which presents domestic barriers since contracts are stretched beyond capacity and expertise. This is compounded by the quick turnover of skilled administrative and technical staff, and project managers.

Then there is over-regulation.

Budget expense categories are rigid, which limits the ability to reallocate funds where they are needed.

In October

2024, a High-Level Commission on Economic Reform, was formed to assess the country's overall economic situation and provide recommendations. Khanal was a member of the commission, and says it remains to be seen whether their suggestions are implemented in the budget.

"We must first properly identify national priority projects, strengthen our internal capacity and human resources, diversify our procurement process, and ensure oversight agencies focus on monitoring and evaluation without over-regulating," says Khanal. "For this, we need both political and bureaucratic integrity."

That is a polite way to say that there is too much corruption and cronyism. Case in point: discussions surrounding the new budget took a backseat this week as Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak was embroiled in a scandal involving payoffs for Nepalis leaving on visit visas.

Opposition parties including the Maoist-Centre and the RSP obstructed Parliament and demanded Lekhak's resignation. The scandal has already led to the removal of and an investigation into Chief Immigration Officer Tirtharaj Bhattarai.

This is reminiscent of last year's budget presentation by Prime Minister Puspha Kamal Dahal's government. The Nepali Congress, which was then in opposition, similarly obstructed Parliament and demanded the resignation of Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane citing his involvement in a cooperatives fraud.

Home Minister Lekhak, who was not able to explain himself in Parliament, held a press conference to deny any wrongdoing. Despite obstruction, opposition parties said they would allow the budget to be presented, and this had not happened till press time on Thursday.

29 May was also Republic Day, and marked symbolically by the monarchist RPP to launch a campaign of pro-royal rallies in the capital.

The budget comes as the government faces a revenue crunch (page 2), as well as the loss of funding for the social sector because of the USAID cutoff and shrinking donor aid. Rights-based programs related to gender, health, and education will suffer. Common sense would dictate that the unspent funds in the next budget be quickly reallocated to health and education.

Says Khanal: "Once the budget is allocated, the budget cycle must be improved—the tendency to overspend towards the end of the fiscal year must be minimised."

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Don't tax green energy

Fresh off the Sagarmatha Sambaad international climate conference last week where Nepal committed to lofty goals for electric mobility, one would think the Finance Ministry would commit to promote sustainable transport.

But alarmed by falling national revenue, Finance Minister Bishnu Paudel's new budget on Thursday will likely backtrack on climate pledges, showing that government agencies work at cross purposes.

Past tax cuts on electric cars boosted battery-powered vehicles, and this year Nepal was only behind Norway for the highest percentage of new electric car sales. More than 75% of vehicles sold in Nepal last year were electric — with 1,400 imported in just the past month because of worries that the budget would raise taxes.



SUMAN NEPALI

Tax rebates, monsoon power surplus, time of day metering, and improved range of EVs have contributed to the phenomenal increase in electric mobility. Even though car owners make up less than 3% of the population, there has also been a massive increase in electric vans on intercity public transport routes. And regardless of who owns EVs, conversion helps reduce Nepal's petroleum import bill — which makes up 25% of all imports.

Taxing outsized luxury electric SUVs is reasonable, but much more urgent are tax subsidies on big battery-powered buses. Replacing diesel buses with an efficient electric public transport network would also lessen air pollution and reduce road congestion. Furthermore, the life cycle cost of electric variants is much lower than that of those with internal combustion engines (ICE), and will be even more affordable as battery technology evolves.

The Finance Ministry should have used the budget to streamline excise and import taxes for EVs so they are in line with Nepal's Nationally Determined Contribution (NCD 3.0) announced during the climate conference last week.

When Nepal Rastra Bank increased the 'Loan-to-Value (LTV) Ratio' for electric vehicle financing to 40%, up from 20% in March, it dampened sales of public electric vehicles — showing extreme price sensitivity of buyers. The constant flip-flopping on

EV taxes over the years because of the need to compensate for revenue shortfalls have confused consumers. The Finance Ministry is taking an easy short-term fix to boost government income by increasing the tax on EVs, but it is not looking at the huge medium-term gain from reduced petroleum imports.

During the monsoon, battery-powered cars are using electricity that would have been wasted. The benefits to public health and national productivity from reduced street-level emissions with more EVs is incalculable.

More importantly, the discourse on sustainable transport in Nepal is limited to fiscal taxes, when it should be on regulating transportation management.

Nepal imports most of its vehicles from China and India, and both countries will soon be switching completely to electric

4- and 2-wheelers. We have no choice but to transition accordingly, and have the charging infrastructure and transport regulation in place.

For now, the government must urgently come up with a long-term financing and subsidy mechanism for electric buses, and it could start by using the Rs3

billion in 'pollution tax' that it collects every year from diesel and petrol sales.

Our National Transport Policy dates back to 2001, and it prioritises road infrastructure rather than transport management.

The former mayor of Bogota Enrique Peñalosa who implemented a

successful bus rapid transit system for his city once said: "An advanced city is not a place where the poor move about in cars, rather it's where even the rich use public transportation." We could paraphrase that to 'electric public transportation'.

Public transport is a public service, and the onus lies on the government to ensure reliable and efficient electric buses. At present public transport is almost entirely provided by private companies with the government only setting fares.

True to its name, the Department of Roads is all about building roads, and even that it does so poorly that 2,500 Nepalis are killed on dangerous highways every year. The Department of Transport Management keeps itself busy only issuing driving licenses, and is a hotbed of corruption with people waiting years for their licenses.

This year's budget could have turned things around. The coalition government's main preoccupation seems to be staying on in power and countering pro-monarchy rallies fuelled by discontent when it should have focussed on improving public services.

Sonia Awale

The Budget focuses on road building rather than public transport, and flouts Nepal's own climate targets.



20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Gagging the Press

Kathmandu is the regional hub for freedom and expression today but it wasn't always so. One of the strictest media censorship was after king Gyanendra's 1 February coup which was followed by an ordinance that significantly restricted media freedom, particularly during and after the state of emergency that ended in April 2005.

Here is an excerpt of an editorial 20 years ago this week forewarning the king that such a move would backfire, as it did less than a year later. From issue #249 27 May - 2 June 2005:

If it had to be done, the intelligent way to do February First would have been to build domestic consensus, bring political parties in as a block, build bridges, assuage the international community, and work with a free media as an ally. That is the way to fight fascism. But by patterning their repression on Maoist tactics, our rulers have shown the same sloppy desperation as the enemy they are supposedly fighting...

... Elsewhere, we see the same petty-minded, counter-productive techniques to intimidate the media. The ministry's



threats to close down Rishi Dhamala's Reporter's Club, an important forum for independent public debate, is just one example of this ham-handedness. It doesn't work in this day and age, this belief that you can shackle journalists. Power must come from popular legitimacy, not by cloaking yourself in sycophantic propaganda of pseudo-events on state media.

When lies fly, telling the truth is the media's minimum responsibility. Protecting the credibility and independence of media is one of the ways to protect legitimacy. But they never learn. The draft media ordinance seeks to give the royal seal of approval and

permanence to the harsh restrictions already in place, making it more difficult to tell the truth.

In his acceptance speech on receiving this year's UNESCO Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize, Chinese journalist Cheng Yizhong thanked the state for its stupidity in jailing him and turning him into a hero.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



PLOTTING TO PLUNDER

With little to no land left in the densely populated city, developers are venturing further afield to the valley's rim and forcibly taking over community forests. Watch this video on YouTube about how a new housing development has affected towns in Suryabinayak, and read the story on page 6-7.



IN SEARCH OF NEPALI IDENTITY

Born to Nepali immigrant family in Japan, eight-year-old Ayan Dallakoti was brought to Nepal so he could receive better English-medium education. Learn about challenges children like Ayan go through as they integrate back in Nepali society. Watch the video on YouTube, and subscribe to Nepali Times' YouTube channel for multimedia content.

KHAMPA IN NEPAL

As a young doctor, I had the opportunity to work in the High Altitude Mountain Warfare School, Kaisang Camp serving the Royal Nepal Army 48 years ago in Mustang, where the original Khampa headquarters were located ('The last of the Khampa', Lisa Choegyal, #1262). I also visited the other outposts scattered strategically above the Kali Gandaki River. All the locations were built at vantage points above the main trails with defensive advantages.

Jung Bahadur Thapa

The areas restricted in northern Nepal including in Upper Mustang, Dolpo, Mugu, and Humla during the Khampa rebellion are still closed off, and are deprived of tourism. If we do not make use of the regions, we may lose it to our neighbour just like we lost Limpiyadhura.

Rajendra N Suwal

The tale of Tibetan freedom fighters is also poignantly narrated by Madhu Gurung in her anthology Tibet with My Eyes Closed.

Aashish Bhandari

NRN ADOPTEES

I read this article with interest ('Born in Nepal, treated as a foreigner', Page 9), and feel sorry for NRN citizenship appliers who have to go through corrupt civil servants.

Etienne Loyon

This is a pathetic state of affairs.

Paritosh Jha

JUNKO Tabei

I remember reading about Junko Tabei during my school days ('Remembering Junko Tabei', Miki Upreti, #1261). This article beautifully captures her brave adventures and kindness.

Sanjeeta Sharma Pokharel

MATERNAL HEALTH

While Nepal's progress in maternal health stalls, the government prepares to lower minimum age for marriage ('Nepal lagging in safe motherhood', Sudiksha Tuladhar, #1262).

Simran Paudel

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



One mother at a time

by Ashish Poudel
Surgeon Ashish Poudel faced a life-or-death emergency in Bhojpur attending to a woman in labour with a ruptured uterus. With limited resources and sheer resolve, his team fought to save both mother and child. Visit nepalitimes.com for the dramatic story.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Himalayan meltdown

by Sonia Awale
As global climate commitments continue to falter, Sagarmatha Sambaad held last week in Kathmandu, despite its 25-point Call For Action, lacked urgency, concrete solutions, and regional cooperation. Join the discussion online.

Most popular on X

The last of the Khampa

by Lisa Choegyal
General Wangdu was the last leader of Tibetan guerrillas who led the resistance against the Chinese from their remote mountain hideouts in Mustang. Read Lisa Choegyal's recollection of meeting the Khampa leader in Kathmandu, five months before his death.

Most commented

Being Prabal Gurung by design

by Kunda Dixit
In his newly-released memoir Walk Like a Girl, Nepali-American fashion designer Prabal Gurung lays bare his harrowing journey of facing bullying and homophobia in boarding school in Nepal, and chasing his dream in New York. Read the review online.

Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Kathmandu Valley's momo scene is diverse and delicious. While prices range from budget bites under Rs150 to gourmet plates nearing Rs400, all these places offer their own take on Nepal's favorite snack, served with plenty of achar.



Bhushan Tuladhar @BhushanTuladhar

Glad to see @NepaliTimes highlight small momo spots around town. One of them is Cafe 97 in Jhamsikhel, which I used to visit years ago when my office was nearby, I loved its momo then and when I went back yesterday, it was just as tasty. Try it - it is simple yet delicious.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

In Kathmandu's dialysis wards, young patients like Sagar face financial hardship, isolation, and an uncertain future. Despite free dialysis and limited government support, inconsistent allowances and high living costs strain families like his.



Rita Thapa @bheribas

That is why Ministry of Health Population should invest more in prevention of such non communicable diseases, 80% of which are preventable at affordable cost. Spending money in more hospitals & dialysis wards not only lead to bankruptcy, but would increase human suffering!

1,000 WORDS



SAGAR GIRI / RSS

ONLY IN NEPAL: A statue of tiger leaping at two bucks at the premises of the Bandipur cablecar station in Tanahu district. There is also a life-size cement giraffe in the background, even though the animal is not native to Nepal.



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Reporters: Sudiksha Tuladhar, Vishad Raj Onta | Layout: Kiran Maharjan
Publisher: Kunda Dixit, Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
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The Everest Industry

Despite government efforts to spread out expeditions, the world's highest mountain was the main draw in Spring 2025



TENDI SHERPA

■ Vishad Raj Onta

While Nepal was hosting the Sagarmatha Sambaad international climate conference in Kathmandu this month, on Mt Everest it was pretty much business as usual.

The signs of climate breakdown are all there: a river now runs through Base Camp in summer, the Khumbu Icefall is more unstable, and there are more frequent avalanches. When expeditions arrived in March, the mountains were bare: it had not snowed since September, but then blizzards dumped unseasonal snow in May.

And despite climate worries, such is the pull of Himalayan mountaineering that the Everest Industry showed no signs of slowdown. More than 600 international climbers and their Nepali guides had made it to the summit of the world's highest mountain. At one point there were an estimated 2,000 people in the tent city on the Khumbu Glacier.

All the ropes and ladders on the Icefall came down on Thursday, marking the official end of the spring climbing season, and just in time to avoid a monsoon cyclone approaching from the Bay of Bengal.

It has been an action-packed season. One factor could be that Everest fees will go up from

September: each foreign climber needs to pay a \$15,000 royalty, up from the present \$11,000. The cost for a Nepali climber on the South Col route will also go up: from Rs75,000 to Rs150,000.

The fee to climb Everest in autumn is \$7,500 (up from \$5,500), but most climbers still prefer spring. Winter permit fee (December-February) is only \$3,750 per person and the mountain is now also open for monsoon (June-August) climbs, when the fee is ever lower at \$2,750. The revised rule also makes it mandatory for every two climbers on an 8,000m peak to hire one Nepali mountain guide.

In addition, climbers also have to pay for porters and guides, equipment, Base Camp costs, Ice Fall and fixed rope team fees, so climbing Everest does not come cheap. But such is the draw of climbing the world's highest peak that some say the increased fees will not diminish the crowds next year.

The government has tried to spread expeditions out to other seasons and other 8,000ers, but with not much success. Earlier this year, Nepal unilaterally increased the number of 8,000m peaks to 14 by adding six more sub-summits to broaden the choice for climbers. Added were: Yalung Kang (8,505m), Yalung Kang West (8,077m), Kangchenjunga Central (8,473m), Kangchenjunga South (8,476m), Lhotse Middle (8,410m) and Lhotse Shar (8,400m).



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Turkish Basketball

Fenerbahçe Beko won the Turkish Airlines EuroLeague finals in Abu Dhabi, held 23-25 May, defeating Monaco 81-70 in the final. Olympiacos, who defeated Panathinaikos 97-93, finished the series in third place. The Most Valuable Player (MVP) of the final match, Nigel Hayes-Davis from Fenerbahçe Beko, received a prize of 1,000,000 Miles&Smiles from Turkish Airlines' Chief Commercial Officer Ahmet Olmüştür. The carrier has been the title sponsor of the Turkish Airlines EuroLeague, a top tier tournament, since 2010.



Digital nomad visa

A new digital nomad visa would allow remote workers to live in Nepal for a year at a time, open bank accounts, own vehicles, and pay taxes. Eligibility would require a \$1,500 monthly income or a \$20,000 bank balance. Implementation expected in a year.

Province GDPs

Gandaki, Bagmati, Karnali, and Lumbini provinces expect economic growth rates of 5.51%, 5.18%, 4.74%, and 4.70% - higher than Nepal's 4.61%. Gandaki's main industries are agriculture, forest, and fishery, while for Bagmati it is trade.



Aloft Awarded

Aloft Kathmandu Thamel was awarded 'Most Centrally Located Business Hotel - Nepal' at the Haute Grandeur Global Awards 2025.



Manaslu trekking

A record 12,259 foreign trekkers and mountaineers visited the Manaslu Conservation Area by mid-May this year, up from 9,782 in 2023/24. Permit fees for the region and its valleys are significant revenue sources.

StanChart AAA

Standard Chartered was rated AAA by ICRA Nepal for the sixth year in a row, reflecting low financial risk. The rating takes into account the bank's assets, loans, 37-year track record, and backing from the Standard Chartered Group.

TATA spares

Tata strongly encourages the use of genuine spare parts, available at Siprodi retail stores across Nepal. To identify if parts are genuine, customers can look for a logo, hologram, and scan a QR code.



IME x Yeti

Global IME Bank's 'Global Sky Club Card' provides flight discounts on Yeti Airlines, priority check-in and boarding, and 5kg extra baggage. E-commerce using the Card earns mileage points.

US visa pause

The US State Department has put a pause on scheduling new student visa interviews while it prepares to expand social media vetting. Interviews already scheduled will go ahead; the halt is expected to be temporary.



Agni 1.7T Pik-Up

Mahindra dealer Agni launched the Bolero Pik-Up Flatbed 1.7T, with a 2.5ltr diesel engine, 9-foot cargo bed, and 1.7 ton payload. The vehicle starts at Rs25,65,000, with financing available.

TikTok Mindfulness

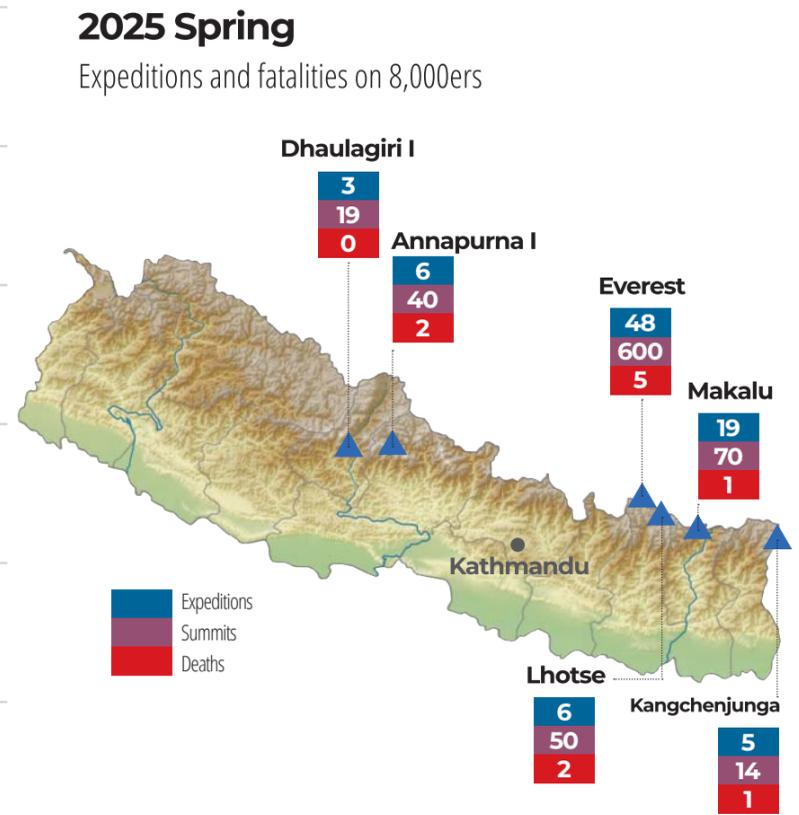
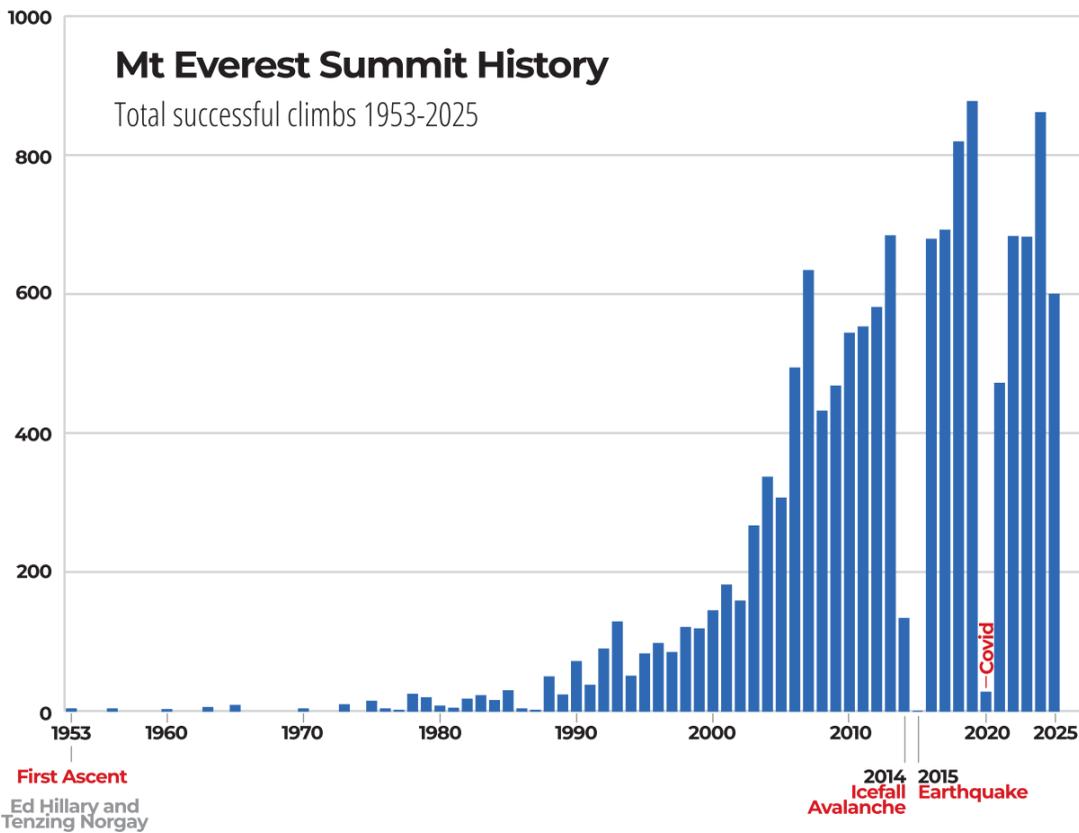
TikTok's new in-app guided meditation feature replaces the For You feed, for teen users, after 10PM. This mode can be turned on manually but may also be bypassed. The company also started a \$2.3M fund to support 31 mental health organisations in 22 countries.

Pokhara paragliding

Paragliders in Pokhara are back to Sarangkot-takeoff and Khaupadi-landing, allowing flights over the Phewa Lake again. The route had been moved in 2022 after the new airport came into operation. With the original route restored and flight times increased, a visitor rebound is expected.

WorldLink + Saregama

WorldLink is the title sponsor for the second season of children's singing reality show Saregamapa Little Champs, which airs after 15 June every Sunday and Monday at 8:30PM on SPACE4K Television.



The announcement could go against the accepted topographic criteria that a stand alone peak has to be at least 300m higher than an adjoining prominence, and at more than 3km isolation from it. The UIAA (Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme) still recognises only 14 mountains as eight-thousanders, and only eight of those are in Nepal, or on the border with China.

Nepal's revised mountaineering regulations also increased the insurance coverage of high-altitude workers to protect porters and high altitude guides who usually take more risks on the mountains. Rescue teams and clean-up campaigners to collect trash and remove bodies of dead climbers up to Camp IV of Mt Everest do not need permits.

The Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee is now using drones to fly down trash in 20kg sacks. Each climber is also required to bring down at least 6kg of waste and not just their own, but this rule is erratically enforced.

With five fatalities on Everest and Lhotse, Spring 2025 had a historically low death toll. Another five climbers died on Annapurna, Kangchenjunga and Makalu.

Journalist Ben Ayers who ran the Everest Live social media channel from Everest Base Camp with daily updates credited the low death rate to dramatic rescues of climbers from the 'Death Zone' by their Nepali guides and longline helievacs — the visuals all uploaded on YouTube.

"Ironically, this perception of safety is bringing more and more inexperienced climbers to the mountain, and they need more rescues," Ayers said in one of his dispatches.

American expedition chronicler and summiteer Alan Arnette suspects there is a lot of under-reporting given that the jet stream and storms were lashing Everest even till late in the season.

He told us: "I heard a lot about frostbite and rescues that were not made public. It's become practically impossible to cover the details on Everest. All the teams report nice news, and they don't talk about bad stuff to avoid hurting businesses."

Although trash on Nepal's mountains makes headlines, what does not receive as much attention is the climate impact of so many expeditions. The Sagarmatha Sambaad conference sidestepped this issue, which is ironic given that the impact of climate breakdown is most evident on Himalayan peaks and their glaciers. 🇳🇵

The big stories this year have been about speed-running from their home cities to the top of Everest. Ukrainian entrepreneur Andrew Ushakov flew out of JFK on 15 May at 10:15AM Nepal time, and was on the summit 3 days, 23 hours, and 7 minutes later on 19 May at 9:22AM.

"I could never find the time for the traditional 40-50 days of acclimatisation," Ushakov explained matter-of-factly. His 'Everest Sea-to-Summit' climb was possible because he spent 400 hours in hypoxic sleep tents over the past four years in New York.

However, Ushakov did use ropes already fixed, hired four Nepali guides, helicoptered to Base Camp, and used much more oxygen than an average climber. And after the climb, Ushakov was arrested at Kathmandu airport for being in possession of \$20,000 of undeclared cash and spent a night in jail and fined \$60,000.

The other speedsters were Garth Miller, Alastair Cairns, Anthony Stazicker, and Kev Godlington, all former British Army commandos. They left London and summited five days later on 21 May, and flew right back. They also used hypoxic tents to simulate the thin air high on Everest.

But more controversial was their use of xenon gas therapy in a German hospital to ramp up the production of oxygen-carrying haemoglobins in their blood. Xenon is banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency for being performance enhancing in sports. Expedition leader Lukas Furtenbach said this rule does not apply to mountaineering, as it is not a regulated sport like swimming.

Nepal has no rules about xenon, but the Department of Tourism said it was launching an 'investigation' to decide on future policy since it is difficult to ban xenon, but allow oxygen. The controversy has also divided the mountaineering community, with some climbers saying they just want to maximise their chances of survival.

Spending less time on the mountain could make climbing safer by reducing avalanche risk. It would also mean less trash on the mountains, but it would reduce the income of Nepal's expedition industry. It is also

Need for Speed

unclear how much of the success was due to xenon therapy and whether the ex-special forces were already in good physical shape.

The need for speed hides the fact that climbing in the Himalaya is dangerous business, and climbers cannot sprint to the top just by huffing xenon. But ultra-fast climbs could be charged more, and the revenue generated can be used to establish state-of-the-art rescue operations, and increase pay and

insurance for guides.

Two other speed chasers this season were Swiss-Ecuadorian Karl Egloff and American Tyler Andrews, both on Everest without oxygen. Andrews choppered to Base Camp to catch a weather window, but turned back from 8,500m due to high winds. Heavy snow and wind also forced Egloff to descend from 7,000m.

Slow and steady climbers like Anja Blacha from Germany did

make it to the summit without oxygen, while Kami Rita Sherpa broke his own record with his 31st Everest summit as he led a 26-strong Indian Army group.

There were 468 permits issued for foreign climbers from 48 expeditions to Everest this spring. Nepal's other eight-thousanders together had only 17 expeditions. Nepal has more than 1,000 peaks above 6,000m, and has opened only 476 of them for climbing.



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New real estate project in Bhaktapur encroaches on protected forest and displaces community

■ Archana Darji

At the edge of the dense forest overlooking Bhaktapur, the sound of chirping birds and the wind rustling through the trees have been replaced by the growl of dozens of bulldozers.

This Kakrabari Community Forest behind Suryabinayak shrine was carefully protected and managed by the local Tamang community for centuries. Today, heavy earthmovers claw noisily at the slope, opening it up like a big red wound.

With little land left in the densely populated city, developers are venturing further afield to the valley's rim and forcibly taking over forests that local communities have depended on for fodder, firewood and to protect their watershed.

This project of Nic Vujicic Housing Company in Suryabinayak's Kakrabari Bhanjyang is just the latest and most blatant example of encroachment of forests by real estate developers in collusion with local government officials.

"One day, they just came and bulldozed my house," says Shanta Lama of Ghising Danda, whose family has been living in a tent since March. "Company workers gathered my belongings, deposited them in this tent and demolished my house."

Unlike some of her neighbours, Lama refused to give up her home, but stood no chance against the heavy machines and strongmen mobilised by the company.

Adds Shanta: "I have not signed any document of agreement, the company keeps telling me that they will settle the paperwork later."

Her neighbour Bal Bahadur Tamang, says a bulldozer razed his house while he was out grazing goats in the forest. He recalls: "My wife shouted to the neighbours for help, but no one heard her."

The company used strongarm tactics to try to force Bal Bahadur to sign away his small plot at the edge of the forest that the housing company needed. The family refused, so the property was simply taken over.

"Many families have been forcibly evicted from their homes and moved elsewhere to make way for the new housing colony," says Bal Bahadur. But such is the fear of the young vigilantes employed by the company, that they are afraid to speak out.



But there appears to be a generational divide among the local community in Ghising Danda. Many young men have migrated to the city or abroad, but those that remain have been promised jobs and a piece of land by the company, and support the project.

For centuries, Suryabinayak communities have tended to the land, and the land has tended to them. The protected trees provide them with livelihood, prevent landslides on the slopes above and recharge ground water so the springs do not go dry.

But this historic connection was severed in January when the excavators arrived to chop down

trees and dig up the hill, razing 1.1 hectares of the community forest and surrounding settlements.

Much of the forest is now gone, and recent rains have washed the red mud down the mountain like a bleeding gash. On a recent visit excavators were levelling the slope.

Nic Vujicic Housing is owned by Purna Bahadur Limbu, Prabin Kusma and Dillidhwaj Baraili. It had parcelled 14.6 hectares in the neighbouring Palanse village three years ago, and was even awarded by the municipality for the project.

Now, the company is clearing

27 hectares of private property and community forest in Ghising Danda without a planning permit either from the municipality or the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority (KVDA).

In fact, its application has been pending at the Authority since last October. The company has dangled a lollipop by promising 21 out of the 451 private plots to the government.

Nepal's 2015 Basic Standards for the Development of Settlements, and Urban Planning and Building Construction by-laws stipulate that land transactions, construction projects, and housing development via land

consolidation require approval from either the KVDA or local government.

Projects involving land up to 0.1 hectares require permission from the local level, and those of up to 2.5 hectares require approval from the district authorities, and plans exceeding that area need a permit from the KVDA.

Nic Vujicic Housing's director Dillidhwaj Baraili, is a member of the Federation of Nepalese Industries and Entrepreneurs (FENIE), and close to the ruling UML party.

While the company did consult with locals, conduct an EIA, tested soil quality, and

Plotting to plunder



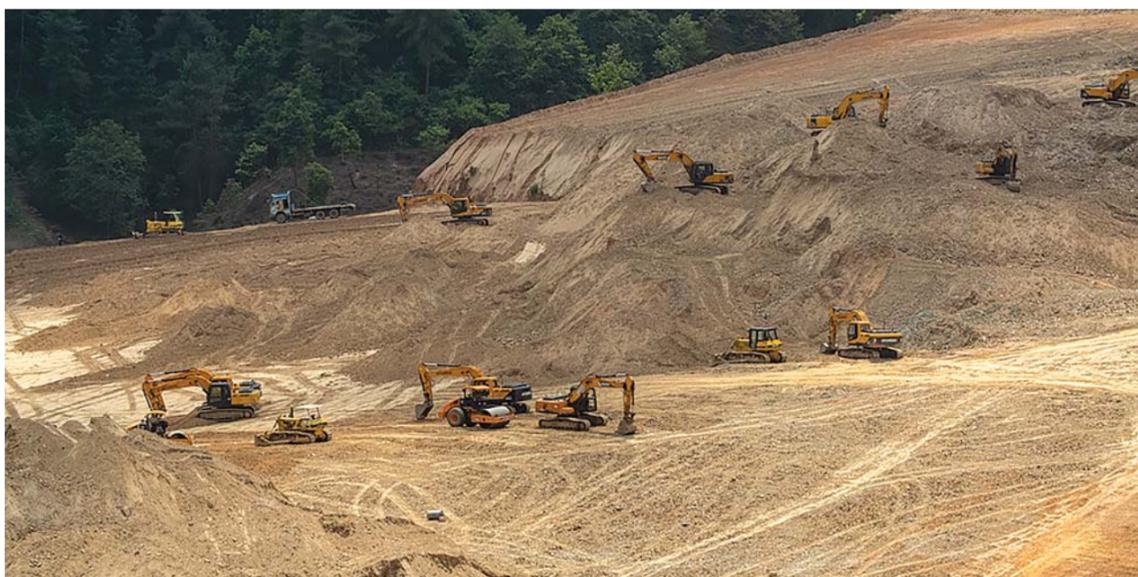
PLOT THICKENS:

Drone image of housing site that has encroached on a community forest and farmers' homesteads in Suryabinayak (left). The developer does not have the necessary permits to build.

Shanta Lama of Ghising Danda (far left, below) whose house was bulldozed last month. She and her family are now living in makeshift huts nearby.

Many families like this one (middle, lower left) have been forcibly evicted, and do not want to speak openly because of the fear of vigilantes.

Dozens of heavy earthmovers were at work at the site one morning earlier this month (left, below). With an early monsoon, residents fear mud slides on the mountain.



ALL PHOTOS: AJAY HAKAJU

conducted a hydrological study of the area, these were perfunctory and incomplete for a proper permit application. The approval of private landowners and the municipality as well as project details were missing.

The company had excavated half of Ghising Danda without permission when the local community started raising questions. Only then did it seek permission from the ward, which directed it to apply for a planning permit from the Suryabinayak Municipality.

"We are yet to verify whether all the documents

submitted by the company are in order, which is why the application is still pending," Rajendra Prasad Nepal, the municipality's information officer, told Nepali Times.

But the lack of a permit does not seem to deter company director Dillidhwaj Baraili, who uses convoluted semantics to justify using excavators on private and community land.

"It is the plotting of the land that requires approval from the KVDA, we do not need permission from local authorities to operate heavy machinery on the project site," Baraili told us.

However, Ward 9 Chair

Bhagwan Khatri says no such permission to use excavators and bulldozers have been given without first obtaining a planning permit.

"The housing project is illegal because it has moved forward without a planning permit," says KVDA's District Commissioner for Bhaktapur, Safal Shrestha.

When the bulldozers started felling trees in the community forest in March, a joint task force of four local guthi put up a resistance, and demanded that the housing company ensure that there would be no mudslide danger downslope during the monsoon.

It also wanted the company to make sure the flow of water

in springs were not affected, and to set up a boundary along the community forest to prevent further encroachment. It also demanded compensation to displaced homeowners.

But Nic Vujcic Housing paid no heed, and sent in excavators. Last month, the Kakrabari Community Forest Users Struggle Committee wrote to the Bhaktapur District Administration Office, Suryabinayak Municipality, and the Division forest Office to halt the project.

In response, the housing company put out a press release accusing residents of spreading rumours, but the statement presented contradicting information about the status of its planning permit at various levels of the government.

It has taken a month for the local government to even send an inspection team to the site. But the team concluded that the forest had been encroached upon and asked the housing company to halt its activities immediately.

The company refused to comply, and on 9 May the Police was sent to shut down the project. Baraili maintains the forest was levelled with the consent of all four Guthi as well as Ram Krishna Tamang of the Kakrabari Community Forest User group. Tamang told us he has given no such go-ahead.

"How could we have permitted the operation of construction machinery in the community forest when the Nepal government itself does not allow the destruction of

public property?" adds Tamang.

Because of the controversy, the company is now trying to use a carrot and stick approach by placating the local community, while also intimidating those who speak out.

"Even though we had obtained permission, perhaps we should have not started using our heavy machinery yet," Baraili admitted. However, the company is trying to silence dissenters in the community with threats.

The company has deployed local youth who have been promised jobs to convince and cajole outspoken community members in Ghising Danda.

One of them is Chewang Tamang, who says jobs are more important, and lashes out at locals for being "anti-development".

He says: "There is no point sitting around complaining that a few trees have been cut. The only people who are opposed to this project are those who do not want this place to develop." 🇳🇵



PLOTTING TO PLUNDER

With little to no land left in the densely populated city, developers are venturing further afield to the valley's rim and forcibly taking over community forests. Watch this video on YouTube about how a new housing development has affected towns in Suryabinayak.



EVENTS



Running Festival

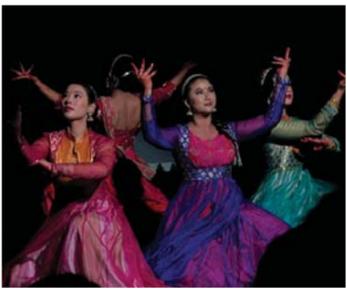
Gear up for a full day of fun, fitness, and community at the Farm Running Festival 2025. Kids can take part in solo and team obstacle races, all set in a vibrant farm setting.

7 June, 8:30am onwards, The Urban Farm, Tokha

Lost and Found

Lost and Found, a thought-provoking play by Ghimire Yubaraj, explores themes of identity, belonging, and complexity of human emotions. Book tickets and check play timings via Thuprai. Read review on Page 12.

Till 31 May (except on Tuesdays), Ticket: 500, Shilpee Theatre, Battisputali, (01) 4569621



Kathak Bela

Immerse in an evening of rhythm and storytelling through mesmerising Kathak dance performances by dedicated artists aiming to keep the tradition alive.

31 May, 5:30pm onwards, Ticket: 1,200, Studio Theatre, Pingalasthan

Takpa exhibit

Roshan Bhandari's collection of artworks Once upon a time is visual retelling of Nepali folktales, where myth meets modernity and tradition comes alive on canvas, taking one on an evocative journey of experiencing culture.

Till 21 June, Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat



Ritu Raag

This play revolves around a young girl and her wise grandfather and their heartwarming journey through nature's rhythms and treasured memories brought to life through song, story, and imagination.

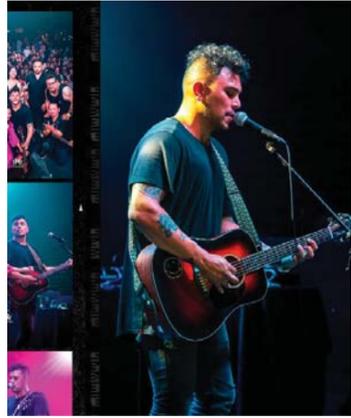
Till 1 June, 6:30pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun

MUSIC

Abhaya & co

Fusing a dynamic range of genres, Abhaya and the Steam Engines are bringing their signature sound to Purple Haze as part of their Laijau Malai tour.

31 May, 6pm onwards, Purple Haze Rock Bar



Neetesh Jung Kunwar

Neetesh Jung Kunwar is back to perform his crowd-favourite tracks and light up the stage with his signature sound in Kathmandu.

7 June, 6pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, Club Platinum

Hip-hop night

Brace yourself for an epic hip-hop takeover featuring Lil Jhola, Krizen, Yabi The Goat.

31 May, 8pm onwards, Ticket: 1,000, Club Platinum



Kutumba

Nepal's beloved folk instrumental ensemble, Kutumba, will showcase their music for a cause in support of the Rotary WISE Fund to empower Nepali women in STEM.

30 May, 5pm onwards, Ticket: Rs3,000, The Plaza



Underside

Don't miss the chance to experience one of the country's most notable metal bands, Underside, live in action.

31 May, 3pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, Calm Tangalwood

GETAWAY



Godavari Village Resort

Surrounded by lush gardens, Godavari Village Resort offers an escape with its perfect blend of natural beauty and modern comfort, making it an ideal retreat for relaxation and family getaways.

Amarabati, Lalitpur (01) 5560675

Hotel Shanker

Step into timeless elegance at this historic landmark, where Nepal's rich heritage meets world-class relaxation. Perfect for both business and leisure, it offers a regal retreat with modern amenities.

Lazimpat (01) 4510151



Park Village Resort

This expansive retreat offers a harmonious blend of nature and luxuriously furnished rooms equipped with modern amenities and private balconies. A fitness center, sauna, and steam room, and an outdoor pool are available for wellness enthusiasts.

Budhanilkantha, 9851020727



The Pavilions Himalayas

The Pavilions features Nepal's first lakeside tented luxury eco-villas, designed to offer every modern comfort in a stunning natural setting, promising a rejuvenating getaway.

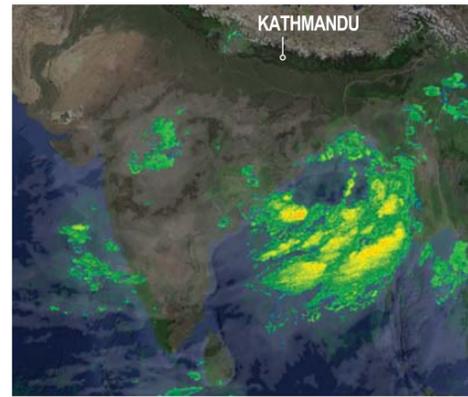
Pokhara, 9856027997

Serene Resort

Whether you're looking for a peaceful retreat or an adventurous getaway, Serene Resort will be your perfect escape for the weekend, providing an ideal setting with its views of the Himalaya.

Nagarkot, 01-6680189

WEEKEND WEATHER



Soon, Monsoon

The southwest monsoon hit the west coast of India with a bang this week – up to 10 days ahead of schedule and the earliest rainy season on record. This has been attributed to the Madden-Julian Oscillation which sometimes brings heavier than usual rain. The Bay of Bengal arm of the monsoon will advance into eastern Nepal early next week, but may be temporarily pushed back by a lingering westerly system. Meteorological models predict a wetter than usual monsoon across Nepal, although there may be a slight lull after the first rains in June.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 29°	26° 19°	27° 18°

OUR PICK

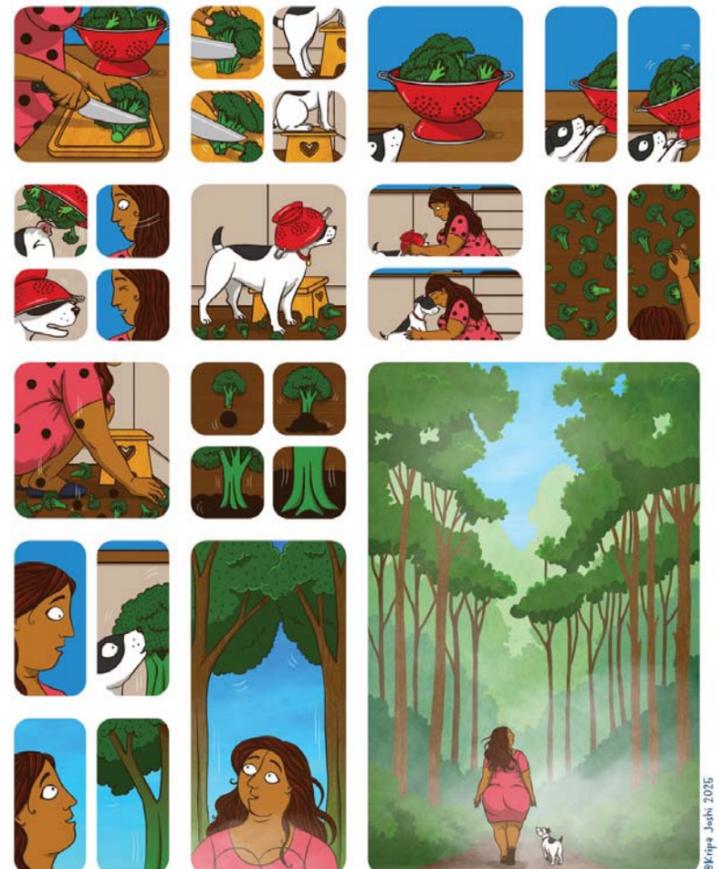


Nepali cinema is seeing a renaissance, from Shambhala that won big at Locarno to a sharp commentary on race relations that was Rajagunj. The latest to join the list is Nabin Chauhan directed Onko Sweater, a layered social drama set in Panchthar in the eastern mountains of Nepal. Through its central love story, the movie explores several key issues including casteism and class divide, as well as highlighting local norms and traditions. Catch Onko Sweater in theaters near you. Stars Bipin Karki, Miruna Magar, Alex Biswokarma, and Pariksha Limbu.

MISS MOTI ESCAPES

KRIPA JOSHI

MISS MOTI AND THE BROCCOLI



©Kripa Joshi 2025

सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिठ्ठा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपर्ौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

DINING



Weekend lunch @ Aloft

Enjoy delicious meals with friends and family at Nook with their Buy One Get One Free lunch offer.

Every Saturday, 12pm–3pm, Price: Rs. 3,600, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976054



Thistle Triangle

Explore Thistle's diverse Eurasian menu or indulge in their mouthwatering specialties, from fiery Peri Peri wings to the hearty Triple Chicken Feast. A true treat for any food lover.

Maitighar Mandala (01) 4101740

Mamagoto Nepal

Enjoy Maki rolls, satays, dumplings, and ramen with a side of cocktails at this pan-Asian restaurant.

Panipokhari (01) 4446299

The Diner

Savour a unique culinary experience featuring Nepal's first Milwaukee-style firewood pizza. Don't miss their smashed croissant sandwiches, fresh salad bowls, and gourmet burgers packed with meat.

Bhaisepati, 9764634651



Cafe Soma

Looking for the perfect sunny spot to enjoy a delicious brunch? Head to Soma for their hearty meals and irresistible desserts.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5428732

Born in Nepal, treated as a foreigner

How adoptees face hostility and human rights violations in Nepal's citizenship system

■ Hari Prasad Adhikari Sacré

A growing number of adult adoptees of Nepali origin have started returning to the land of their birth, seeking not only emotional reconnection but formal recognition through the Non-resident Nepali (NRN) card or citizenship.

But they are often met not with welcome, but suspicion, obstruction, and at times, open hostility.

After becoming the first adoptee to obtain an NRN card, I recently returned to Nepal to successfully claim NRN citizenship. It was an odyssey through psychological, legal and transnational hurdles.

My case is a more straightforward one: my birth parents are alive, and my adoption paperwork is legally valid. Yet even in this privileged scenario, officials created hurdles and used intimidation. I was able to counter this with legal knowledge and persistence. But for most adoptees it is not so easy.

Nepal's citizenship laws are built on assumptions that do not hold for internationally adopted citizens -- they presume patrilineal continuity, uninterrupted documentation, and lifelong presence within the country. But intercountry adoption especially interrupts all of these.

It severs legal ties with birth parents, replaces surnames, and shifts jurisdiction abroad. What remains is often a fragile or incomplete paper trail, if at all. Yet adoptees are still expected to prove family ties that the law itself dissolved, claim a birthplace without official records, and seek recognition while being treated as foreigners.

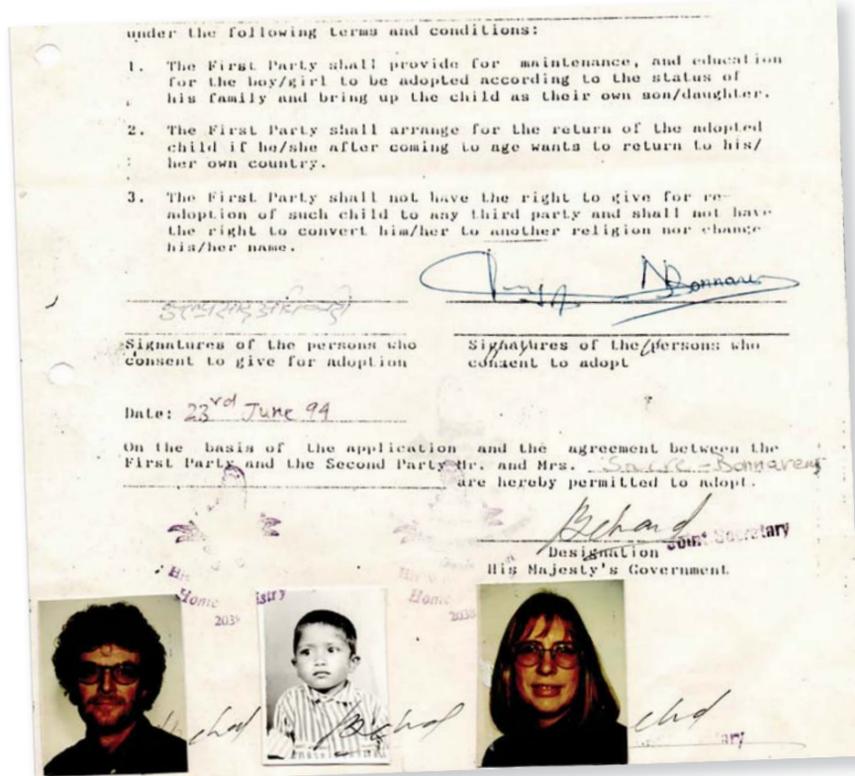
Nepal follows *jus sanguinis* — the right of blood — as its guiding principle, meaning that descent from a Nepali parent should be sufficient to establish eligibility. In theory, this includes adoptees who can prove their birth and parentage.

But the practical process demands documentation that many adoptees simply do not possess due to systemic negligence during the adoption era such as a citizenship certificate of a parent or grandparent, an original Nepali birth certificate, verified family links, or a local ward recommendation.

The structural failure of the government to rectify those mistakes and grant birthright citizenship is in violation of the human rights of its five thousand adoptees.

In my own file, for example, my birth father and adoptive parents signed a clause agreeing not to erase my religion or name and to facilitate my return to Nepal. These were not symbolic gestures — they were official commitments enshrined in Nepali legal documents. They demonstrate an intention by the Nepali state to protect the child's identity and connection to the country, not to erase it.

The state must therefore do its part to honour the clauses it required others to sign. Failing to do so does not just betray individual adoptees—it undermines Nepal's



DOCUMENTED: The adoption agreement between Kul Prasad Adhikari and the family Sacré-Bonnarens with official government stamps detailing Clause 3 about facilitating the return of the adoptee to his/her own country.

credibility in its own legal system and its obligations under international human rights and children's rights frameworks.

Yet, what adult adoptees now face is the opposite. The hostility we encounter at orphanages, local wards, and District Administration Offices (DAO) stands in sharp contrast to the protective spirit of the original documents. More troubling still is the contradiction between Nepal's 2010 suspension of intercountry adoption — initiated after international concern over child trafficking, falsified documentation, and lack of regulatory oversight — and its ongoing refusal to facilitate the legal return of adoptees.

UNICEF and the Hague Conference documented children being declared orphans while biological families were still alive, prompting countries like the US, France, and Italy to halt adoptions from Nepal.

In 2007 and again in 2010, Nepal pledged reform, but while the pipeline of adoptions was shut down, no system was created for those sent abroad to come back home. The very individuals whose lives were shaped by the corrupt system Nepal sought to abolish are now being left in limbo.

At the Kaski DAO office, I was told to my face, while the officer held my Nepali birth certificate in his hands: "You are not a Nepali." My Belgian citizenship documents

also stated my place of birth as Kaski, and my adoption papers clarified my connection to my birth and adoptive parents. Yet the verdict was final. It was only after we requested to speak to the Deputy Officer and argued based on Nepal's own adoption documents that we were permitted to begin the procedure. Ironically, the Legal Handbook for Non-Resident Nepalis explicitly lists birth in Nepal as one of the primary forms of proof for establishing NRN eligibility, yet even this was dismissed at the local level.

Several officers opposed the Deputy's decision. They began obstructing the process, questioning my motive, and ridiculing my language ability. One insisted that I respond without my lawyer, as if speaking Nepali, even imperfectly, could serve as legal proof of citizenship.

"You don't speak Nepali, you're not Nepali," said a Kaski DAO official.

Another official absurdly accused me of speaking with a Hindi accent. Yet language proficiency is not a criterion for citizenship by descent, making these remarks not only discriminatory but legally unfounded. I know my rights and persevered, but many adoptees would be deterred by such hostile behaviour.

The accusation of forgery came from a more senior officer. Like most adoptees, I only had English translations of my adoption records, and the originals were not preserved

by the ward office. The ward office of my birth parents facilitated the renewal of the certificate based on the English translation.

The Embassy of Nepal in Belgium had accepted this same document for my NRN card. Yet at the Kaski DAO office, it became grounds for suspicion. "You faked your birth certificate," the official said.

Here lies the deeper issue for adoptees: due to incomplete or untranslated records, ward offices often need to reconstruct or reissue birth certificates to align with the format required for legal procedures in Nepal. If Nepal failed to preserve its records, why punish the adoptee?

The official said: "You should be grateful you're even considered for citizenship."

Despite having fulfilled every legal requirement, my file was repeatedly placed at the bottom of the pile. When we questioned the delay, we were told to be grateful that I was even being considered. But citizenship is not a gesture of goodwill. It is a legal right.

Adoptees, like all Nepalis born in Nepal, are entitled to that right, regardless of where they grew up. The ability of lower-level staff to delay or obstruct files at their discretion reveals a deeper structural problem: access to rights in Nepal too often depends not on the law, but on the personal attitudes of those tasked with upholding it.

While the hostility was jarring, there were also moments of empathy. The Deputy Officer and Chief Officer acted with integrity, supported my case, and even apologised for the unnecessary delays. But this does not erase the need for structural change.

Adoptees returning to claim citizenship are not asking for special treatment. They are invoking rights already granted to them under international law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These frameworks guarantee the right to identity, family, and nationality. Nepal has an obligation to honour them.

Countries like South Korea have embraced returnee adoptees as part of their diaspora. Nepal must do the same. Public education campaigns and training for administrative staff are urgent.

DAO officers must be equipped to understand who adoptees are, what records they can bring, and how their return is not a threat, but a form of justice.

The roughly 5,000 Nepali children adopted abroad were once exported as orphans. Now, many are returning as adults — educated, legally prepared, and determined. They are not visitors. They are citizens.

And they will not wait. They will claim their rights, case by case, until the system is forced to evolve. 🇳🇵

Hari Prasad Adhikari Sacré, PhD, is a postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University in Belgium, specialising in education, multilingualism, identity and intercountry adoption.

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**घाम-पानी छेक्छ,
१० वर्ष टिक्छ**

चर्को घामबाट बचाउँछ

मुसलधारै वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ

१० वर्ष वारेन्टी



World
Environment Day
5 JUNE

■ Ken Shimizu

With forests covering 43% of the country's territory, Nepal's dry season from February to June sees multiple wildfire emergencies that consume human lives, destroy ecosystems, displace wildlife, and wipe out homes and crops.

To be sure, not all wildfires are to be feared. They are a regular natural phenomenon on every continent of the world except Antarctica. They can even help regenerate ecosystems.

What we see today, however, is more humans living closer to forests than in the past and increasing the chance that a fire might break out through negligence, accidents and land clearance.

There is also more potential fuel on forest floors – dead wood and undergrowth, caused by more protracted and frequent heatwaves and droughts that dry out forests.

Together, it makes for a deadly combination. Indeed, in the dry season, the forests of Nepal are covered in thick carpets of dry leaves and branches ready to turn into tinderboxes. A single mishap can ignite a catastrophe.

Putting out wildfires once they break out is costly and time-

Community reduces wildfire risk,



BIDEK DULAI / FAO

consuming. A far more effective solution is prevention, which can even offer added financial benefits.

In the municipality of Binayi Triveni, Nawalpur district, in the southwest of the country, a remarkable group of 20 local women has been showing what innovation and tenacity can achieve. They saw

an opportunity in mobilising and collecting the forest litter, which consists of fallen leaves, bark, and sticks, all in accordance with technical guidance and monitoring to ensure no harm to the ecosystem. The collected materials are in turn transformed into organic compost.

This business currently

produces 60,000 kilograms of nutrient-rich bio-fertiliser each year and employs 400 people from the community. Local farmers using this natural fertiliser report more productive harvests, and government-run nurseries buy the compost to support reforestation projects.

The initiative also contributed to a 70 percent reduction in the municipality's forest fires last year.

As the Binayi Community Forest User Group, the women do not simply demonstrate their desire to upskill and connect to the forest landscape. They have gained financial independence

Ordinary Nepali's extraordinary sacrifice

A woman lets her home be demolished to save her village from fire, but now is homeless

■ Dhanu Bishwakarma
in Achham

Nepal's public sphere is replete with tales of corruption in high places and the powerful stealing the hard-earned deposits of cooperatives. But there are ordinary Nepalis showing extraordinary compassion and sacrifice like Nirmala Rawal.

Rawal lives in Jayagad village in an isolated corner of Achham, and had just returned to her home and climbed to an upstairs room when she heard a commotion outside. There were cries "Fire!".

Looking out the window, she saw an inferno moving up the sloping market town. Nearby houses and stores were in flames, and she rushed outside for safety.

The fire had started at 7PM after a gas cylinder exploded in one of the houses. Police and army teams arrived, but they were too ill equipped to tackle the flames which were too high and spreading quickly, fanned by winds.

A fire truck arrived but there was no paved road up to the fire.

Jayagad's bazar area is made up of 150 densely-packed houses, and within one hour 15 houses had gone up in flames. The only way to stop the flames was to create a fire break by demolishing a house.

No was willing to do so, except 45-year-old Nirmala Rawal. It was a difficult decision, but after her house was bulldozed, the fire was contained and the village was saved.

Jayagad's village chief Navaraj Saud says bringing down Rawal's



house was the last resort: "We could not have contained the fire any other way. It was just too big."

It has been over a month since the fire, but Rawal is now faced with a new reality. She has lost not just her home but her possessions. All of Rawal's valuables were destroyed in the blaze. She has not been able to return to her job at the rural municipality office.

"Even the clothes I am wearing were given to me, I lost everything,"

she says. "I had to sacrifice my house to save others."

Like many girls at the time, Rawal dropped out of school in Grade 8 to be married to a husband who owned a general store in Jayagad. He died of a heart attack and she has been living in the house he built for the family.

As a widow, Rawal had to contend with stigma and hardship. The job in the municipality was a respite, giving her life a welcome

daily structure, although raising her four children on a Rs18,000 salary was still a struggle.

Rawal's eldest daughter is already married, another daughter is studying agriculture in Punjab. Her older son is studying hotel management in Kathmandu and the youngest son is in Tikapur, where Rawal is originally from.

All of her relatives have migrated to the Tarai, and her land in the village is barren. She is in



RAZED TO THE GROUND: Jayagad village in Achham in the aftermath of a fire (left) that would have been impossible to contain if not for Nirmala Rawal's (right) decision to tear down her house to prevent further damage.

no position, financial or otherwise, to rebuild. "My son is considering heading to India to find work, so we can rebuild our home," she says.

All of the 30 families who survived the fire are living in temporary arrangements and do not know how to start over.

A request has been sent to the Sudurpaschim provincial government, and the Social Welfare minister visited from Dhangadi.

Rawal is not hopeful, and does not expect much since she has experienced firsthand how slow government processes take.

"The monsoon will soon be here, and we will need permanent houses," says Rawal. "I don't know if I should put my salary towards a new house or my children's education." 🇳🇵

increases wellbeing

Tarai women protect their forest from fires by turning dry litter into fertiliser to improve harvests



BIJAYABAR PRADHAN



PYROTECHNICS: (left to right) Members of the Binayi Community Forest User Group in Nawalpur gather forest litter to convert into compost to fertilise their farms and increase food production.

Forest fires inside community forests have become common because of the dry fuel accumulating in the undergrowth. Wildfires this year caused an air pollution emergency throughout the country.

Today, groups from nearby regions are visiting Binayi Triveni to learn about its achievement so that the initiative and plans can be replicated in more than 40 community forests next year. And governments, community organisations and international organisations like ours must work together to share the best emerging practices and adapt them to different settings so that the benefits can reach beyond one district, one region and one country.

Binayi Triveni is a shining example of what action is possible in the age of climate change. By supporting and scaling up such community-driven models, governments and development partners can combat natural disasters and simultaneously foster a new, sustainable kind of economic growth. 🇳🇵

Ken Shimizu is Country Representative for Nepal of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations.

and elevated their status within their homes and communities. They are now decision-makers, entrepreneurs, and role models. Far from just an isolated success story, this is a solution that addresses multiple urgent global challenges: climate change, wildfire, soil degradation, food insecurity and gender inequality.

Next week on 5 June is World Environment Day, and with only five years to go to achieve the 2030 Global Development Goals

and global climate targets, it is imperative that the potential of local communities be harnessed to help solve global challenges.

Grassroots operations are often the first to identify and address pressing local issues, develop context-specific solutions, and foster community engagement and education. Policies and strategies must be put in place to engage local communities and encourage and enable them to be creative.

And when effective solutions

emerge, like the example in Binayi Triveni, they should be celebrated, rapidly replicated and scaled up.

It means mustering financial, technical, and political support to support such transformative ideas and approaches that local communities, which can belong to some of the world's poorest groups, bring to the table.

The Forest and Farm Facility – a partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO),

the International Institute for Environment and Development, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and AgriCord – and its Nepali partner FECOFUN assisted the women of the Biyani Community Forest User Group in developing a business plan, conducting market analysis, and receiving funding to scale up operations. An additional 50% subsidy from the local government helped them purchase machinery and improve infrastructure.



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Drama of loss and discovery

A stage portrayal of complex human emotion and relationship, and their fleeting nature

■ Sangya Lamsal

Bhumi is a 25-year-old tourist guide and Sagar, 48, is a Nepali-Canadian visiting Lumbini. The two find themselves paired in a guesthouse.

It is their intimacy and conversations that form the story behind director Ghimire Yubaraj's play *Lost and Found* being staged at Shilpee Theatre till 31 May.

They are occasionally interrupted by calls from their families, providing fleeting glimpses into their personal lives, yet never telling the full story. The audience is left anticipating how this relationship will unfold.

The stage set shifts back and forth between the guesthouse cafe and the palace of Siddhartha Gautam in Lumbini.

Bhumi and Sagar played by Pabitra Khadka and Sumit Bhandari exchange strong opinions on nation, philosophy, and history. Why did Siddhartha abandon his wife Yasodhara and newborn son Rahul, and leave the palace?

The story of the Buddha has resonance for the characters. Bhumi, we learn, was raised by a single mother, and Sagar is a husband and father growing distant from his own family.

Bhumi is vibrant and outspoken, her laughter infectious yet laced with an eerie undertone that hints at tension ahead. Sagar, on the other hand, is more reserved but gradually softens,



absorbing some of Bhumi's lively energy. Bhumi is a self-assured woman, unafraid to speak the truth about herself. She openly shares her sexual desires, how she enjoys intimacy and multiple partners, and declares that she wants to live life on her own terms. Such a portrayal of a young woman is rarely seen on the Nepali stage or cinema.

Bhumi also suffers from multiple personality disorder, she has sudden episodes as her body trembles, and she transforms into

different people, revealing hidden truths that the viewers must piece together from the intense scenes.

Two cafe servers played by Suhana Acharya and Govinda Oli are ever-present and add another dimension to the intricate layers of narrative and occasional play-within-a-play.

Their presence complements the dialogue between Bhumi and Sagar with humour and intrigue, but their own stories reveal personal struggles shaped by vastly different

journeys of different people on different life paths.

The play keeps the audience on its toes for its 1 hour 40 minute runtime. Transitions between scenes are swift and the acting is spot on.

Bhumi talks about her struggles with citizenship due to an absent father, and is frustrated by systemic injustices. Sagar is in an unhappy marriage, navigating conflict with his wife and the children, and the legal complexities of divorce.

People are torn by the threads of life, love, and relationships. People give up on people. And people give up on themselves. Personal and societal struggles make survival difficult, forcing them to seek survival in unexpected places and in personal quests.

Each problem is uniquely tangled up to individual life stories, shaping how one sees the world and connects, or doesn't, with another. Hence, the complexity of human relationships and human emotions.

Lost and Found manages to capture all of this in a story of two drifting souls seeking to find their own survival.

In his director's note, Ghimire Yubaraj writes: 'Why is humanity so restless in today's world? Why do relationships, built through personal choice and care, break apart so quickly? And in the name of peace, why has humanity strayed so far from it?'

The ending and the climax collide. What begins as a light-hearted conversation between Bhumi and Sagar saying their goodbyes, quickly unfolds into an intense revelation.

This last epiphany reshapes the entire narrative, and leaves the audience stunned even after the curtains close. ■

Lost and Found
Till 31 May
Shilpee Theatre, Battispatali
Sun-Fri except Tue: 5:15PM
Saturday: 5:15PM, 1PM (Matinee)

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