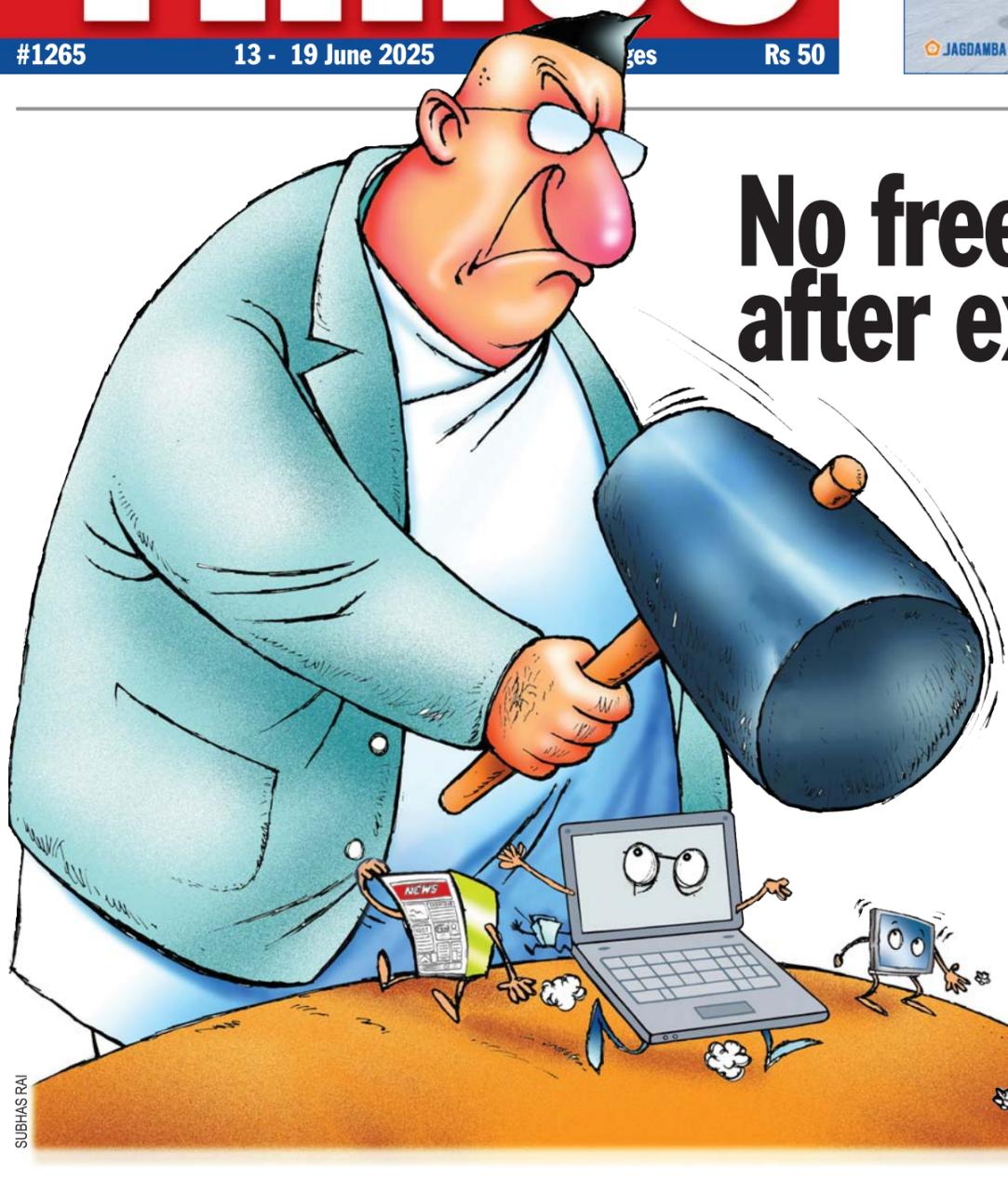


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No freedom after expression

Man Bahadur Basnet

The Kathmandu District court on Wednesday issued an arrest warrant against journalist Dil Bhushan Pathak on cybercrime charges three weeks after he posted an explainer video on his Tough Talk YouTube channel about Jaiveer Singh Deuba's alleged investment in Kathmandu's Hilton Hotel, and business dealings overseas.

Jaiveer is the son of Nepali Congress (NC) chair Sher Bahadur Deuba and Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba. Pathak based his content on news reports previously posted on various online platforms.

The same day, the Kathmandu District Court also issued a temporary order to remove a news report published on Nepal Khabar and Bizmandu about the Securities and Exchange Board of Nepal, whose Chair Santosh Narayan Shrestha had filed a complaint. The court even directed them not to report on the subject anymore.

The moves reignited fierce debate about politicians, bureaucrats and businesses becoming increasingly intolerant of media exposés of wrongdoing, and trying to squelch constitutionally guaranteed protection of freedom of expression. As of press time on Thursday, Pathak had switched off his phone and was avoiding arrest.

"Whenever someone raises questions about a public figure in Nepal, there is a tendency to file a cybercrime case without any investigation," notes former Supreme Court Justice Balram KC. "this is reminiscent of the Panchayat era."

Interestingly, the warrant against Pathak was issued under the Electronic Transactions Act following a complaint filed at the Cyber Bureau. That Act was legislated to regulate online transactions and money laundering, and recent governments have been resorting to that law to intimidate and jail journalists.

"The Act is being misused by political leadership and people who wield power to target those who

question, criticise and attempt to hold them accountable," says Kiran Nepal of the Centre for Investigative Journalism. "This is blaming the messenger, and completely wrong."

There is growing public anger against the three main political parties that have been in power since 2006 for not addressing issues like unemployment, social welfare, shoddy infrastructure. Lack of accountability and corruption lie at the root of those problems, but when journalists are targeted when they investigate them. Prominent journalists like Pathak are singled out as an example to intimidate others.

"In Nepal, the medium through which news and views are expressed have become more of a target than content," says attorney and cyber law expert Baburam Aryal. "A crime is a crime no matter where it is committed, why should it be all right to print the same news in a newspaper but not online?"

Taranath Dahal, former president of the Federation of Nepali

Journalists and founder of Freedom Forum, says that the court can order the removal of news only if it causes serious harm to someone's life and reputation.

He adds: "It sets a dangerous precedent if a person who holds public office orders the removal of news content instead of factually refuting the allegations reported in the report."

To be sure, both legacy and online media in Nepal have problems. Click bait and views-chasing for revenue on YouTube have allowed disinformation and hate speech to proliferate. Algorithms reinforce and further radicalise entrenched beliefs, amplifying toxic trolling and fanning populism. Experts have called for regulation that does not undermine the citizen's right to know.

Any complaint against Dil Bhushan Pathak should have gone to the Press Council, which is legally mandated to respond to objectionable media content, including on digital platforms.

But powerful politicians and businesses prefer to file cases directly in court, and invoke the Electronic Transaction Act because it allows the journalist to be held in custody during the investigation process.

"This practice has led to not just the violation of press freedom, but also of civil liberties," says attorney Santosh Sigdel. "The attempt to limit digital spaces and restrictions on the right to gather peacefully in public spaces, is an attack on our democratic values and norms."

Valuing moral migration EDITORIAL PAGE 2

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Valuing moral migration

A Nepal-based ethical migrant worker recruiter has created waves to be only the second company worldwide to be certified recently under the International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS).

International Manpower Recruitment (IMR) was recognised for its high ethical recruitment standards. IRIS is an initiative of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to promote ethical recruitment of



LABOUR MOBILITY
Upasana Khadka

migrant workers. It is a bit like fair trade certifications for consumer products like coffee, tea or chocolate that assure conscious consumers that they are not complicit in labour abuses, even if it means having to pay a premium. Certifications like IRIS give responsible companies wanting to ethically hire Nepali workers more confidence that workers will not be cheated.

It is remarkable that a Nepali recruiter has been recognised as a global pioneer in obtaining this certification after a rigorous audit process. Only one other recruiter in Singapore has received this global certification so far, and a Kenyan company got it after Nepal's IMR.

All this is happening when the international labour market is not yet ready for ethical recruitment. Many employers still do not pay for the costs and fees that workers incur, unhealthy competition among recruiters persists, and individual brokers prey on workers.

IMR has been one of the biggest recruiters in some years, but there have also been periods when the numbers have gone down to zero, as during Covid-19, or after Nepal's ban on emigration to Malaysia, its primary destination. Now, Malaysia has stopped intake of foreign workers.

There are many companies looking for Nepali workers, but do not abide by the 'employer pays' principle. And many workers are desperate to migrate overseas even if it means by paying unjustifiably high recruitment fees.

It may also not always be feasible for employers to conduct their own due diligence as it can be time consuming, costly, and they may not be familiar with the Nepal market. Not doing so can also be damning for reputation conscious brands. Exports by Malaysian manufacturers, for example,

were banned after forced labour allegations.

With standards like IRIS, identifying ethical recruiters will be easier, and it will bring more visibility to the labour supply chain. Workers also need to understand what such certifications mean. Overseas jobs are advertised as 'free visa free ticket' to abide by Nepal's laws, and misused to an extent that no one takes it seriously.

Certifications like IRIS and other ethical accreditations would help migrants identify reliable recruiters, rather than just depending on familiar but fraudulent individual brokers who they trust more.

After exposés of malpractice, the entire recruitment industry in Nepal has been tarred with the same brush in the past. For example, employers have pulled out from the UK seasonal visa recruitment.

With certifications like IRIS, journalists, activists and others can also be more constructive in their exposés by putting the spotlight on 'alternate', well-vetted players and good practices.

If these expectations from international certifications can translate to practice and ethical recruiters like IMR see their businesses expand, it will have a positive spillover effect across the industry.

A strong business case for ethical recruitment standards will inspire more

actors to forego ridiculously high profits from the traditional worker-paid model and transition from traditional to hybrid methods, then from hybrid to ethical models.

A critical mass of ethical businesses would raise the standard of Nepal's recruitment industry. Recruiters serve an important purpose linking workers from the periphery to rewarding jobs abroad, but this is easy to overlook amidst all the malpractices.

The positive spillover also goes beyond the recruitment industry to larger development goals. For example, Migration Lab partnered with IMR in two projects to send Musahar youth and Jajarkot earthquake victims to Malaysia at zero cost (pictured). Using migration strategically for good is possible, provided recruitment drives are free from malpractice and abuse.

We are still a long way from workers actively seeking out vetted recruiters. But the fact that a Nepali company has achieved a demanding international certification, and is the second in the world to do so, is promising.

Upasana Khadka heads Migration Lab, a social enterprise aimed at making migration outcomes better for workers and their families. Labour Mobility is a regular column in Nepali Times.



Overseas migrant recruiter from Nepal makes international waves with certification

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Budget then, budget now

Every year there is much anticipation ahead of the annual budget. But chronic underspending aided by corruption and cronyism is not new and was no different 20 years ago. But with the Maoist insurgency in its final years, businesses were down, remittance was not as big, and military spending had tripled. Excerpts from the issue #251 10 - 16 June 2005:

Even at the best of times, balancing the Nepal budget is a thankless and exasperating job. But budget-making in the midst of an unprecedented national crisis is an even bigger challenge.

There isn't much that number-crunchers can do when everything adds up to minus. Revenue from trade has plummeted because trade is down, export receipts have crashed, tourism is at an all-time low and even remittances are sluggish. On the other hand there are huge new demands on expenditure from the military.

The finance walls are tantalised by the prospect of expanding the tax-base. This may sound good in theory but with the economy withering, shops shutting, industries closing, there just isn't enough wealth being created to be taxed. Even Maoist extortionists have realised this.

Traditionally, shortfalls in revenue are met through internal borrowing but inflation now rules that out. It leaves only one option: beg.

But February First has put a freeze on many grants and



even multilateral budgetary support has been suspended because of the slow pace of reforms. With current expenditures spiraling out of control, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that the national exchequer is in very deep crisis. The Home Ministry this week issued a public tender notice in the state media for weapons from international suppliers. Where is the money going to come from? Development.

Less development spending means fewer jobs which in turn will fuel the insurgency. If winning hearts and minds is a part of the counterinsurgency strategy, axing development is going to alienate the people even more.

Singha Darbar faces an impossible task: finding an economic solution for a political problem. If aid is to be resumed, February First needs to be rolled back. To reduce security expenses, there has to be a genuine attempt to mainstream the Maoists. To increase economic activity, political contestation has to be amicably resolved. These are challenges worthy of a statesman.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



Self-taught musician Ashik Shrestha's journey has taken him from Kathmandu's underground bands to singing for migrant workers in Dubai. Through hardships, he clung to music like a lifeline, refusing to return home until he could stand tall on his own terms. Watch videos of his performances on YouTube.



Watch video on YouTube of Nepali survivors of the 2023 Jajarkot earthquake who got job placements in Malaysia by an ethical recruiting company before boarding their flight in Kathmandu last year. Upasana Khadka of the Migration Lab has the details (left).

HIMALAYAN DISASTERS

It might also be circumspect to factor-in that, even at the best of times, these remain the youngest, newest, least stable mountains in the world ('Blatten, Langtang, and Disasters Yet to Come?', Austin Lord, #1264)

Tony Jones

■ These two disasters have different triggers, but almost similar effects.

Christine Baudin Régnier

SHERPAS IN COLORADO

As a native Coloradan, I'm thrilled that these incredible athletes, line cooks, entrepreneurs, pilots, Uber drivers and chefs have chosen to settle down here ('Sherpaland, CO, USA', Dirgha Raj Upadhyay, #1264). I hope they all find happiness and success here.

Melissa McKibben

■ I don't know much of the trekking business, but I have been to Nepal around eight times and I have had enough discussions with people of the mountain communities to know what they have to pay to agencies. Seeing how difficult it is for them to make a decent living, I just can say some travel agencies have taken their greed too far.

Etienne Loyon

WOMEN AND WILDFIRES

Seasonal grazing and making briquettes from forest debris is another option to curb wildfires ('Community reduces wildfire risk, increases wellbeing', Ken Shimizu, #1263). Seasonal prescribed burning is suggested to prevent forest fire and save nesting birds from March onwards.

Rajendra N Suwal

BHAKTAPUR PLOTTING

This housing project in Bhaktapur is a blatant example of forest encroachment ('Plotting to plunder', Archana Darji, #1263).

Dawa Tamang

OVERSEAS ADOPTEEES

Nepal is a beautiful country with a very corrupt government ('Born in Nepal, treated as a foreigner', Hari Prasad Adhikari Sacré #1263).

Tshering Sherpa

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Sherpaland, CO, USA

by Dirgha Raj Upadhyay
In Colorado, veteran Sherpas who have summited Everest dozens of times now work as chefs and mountain guides. Others from Nepal's mountain communities have become successful entrepreneurs. Visit nepalitimes.com for their profiles.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Love thy neighbours

Editorial by Sonia Awale
Nepal has long survived on subtle diplomacy with its powerful neighbours. Like Finland during the Cold War, this strategy has worked so far, but in today's shifting geopolitics Nepal must strengthen politics at home while staying steady abroad. Join the discussion online.

X Most popular on X

Blatten, Langtang, and Future Disasters

by Austin Lord
There are correlations between the Blatten glacier collapse on 28 May in Switzerland and the earthquake-avalanche in Langtang in 2015. Early warning saved lives in Blatten, but that may not always be possible with the co-risk factors of seismicity and climate breakdown in the Himalaya. Details on the website.

66 Most commented



Asma BK hits the ground running

by Vishad Raj Onta
At just 22, Asma BK has already made a name for herself as a high-level trail runner. She recently finished in the top 15% in the London Marathon, and is now training with the Armed Police Force team in Nepal. Read about her journey online.

🔥 Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
"Will the latest 'visit visa scandal' lead to constructive discussions around how to manage emigration better? Or will it just lead to a further clamp down on visit visa misuse by proposing bizarre alternates as has been done in the past?"

pigreen1 @pigreen1
Lift the ban and regularise procedures for foreign employment for women

1,000 WORDS



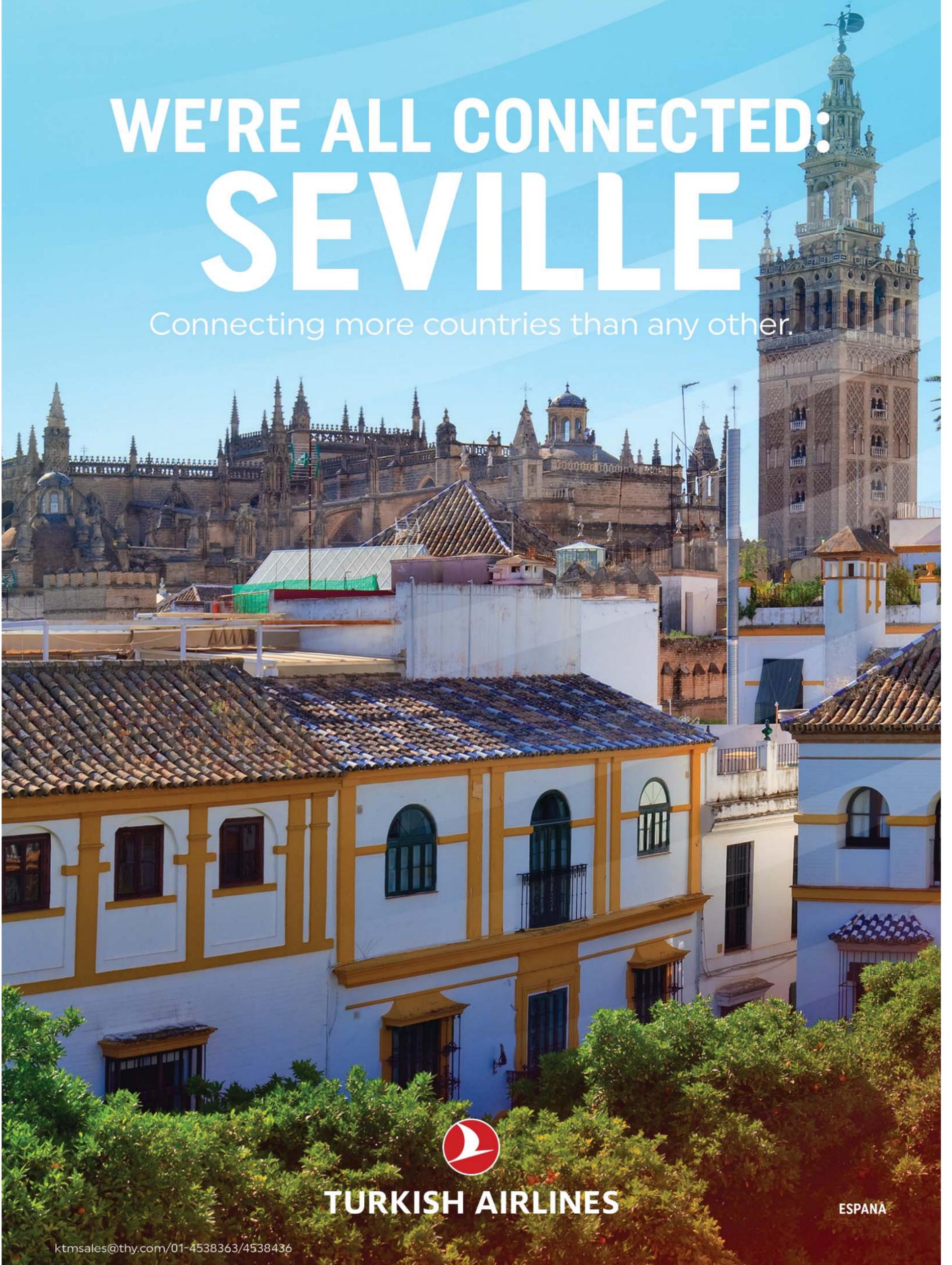
LEADERS DOING THINGS: Amidst rumblings in the governing NC-UML coalition and internal grumbling within them, the leaders of Nepal's three main parties kept themselves busy with extra-curricular activities.

Prime Minister KP Oli of the UML found time to inspect the cricket stadium in Kirtipur on Monday. The NC's Sher Bahadur Deuba was in traditional headgear inaugurating Maithili Bhavan in Janakpur. And Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal was in hot water at Tatopani in Myagdi, taking a dip with party faithful.

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America no longer prime destination

Visa restrictions make Nepalis rethink applying to US universities, and instead head to other countries

■ Sudiksha Tuladhar

Thousands of Nepali students dreaming of an American education have been forced to look elsewhere as the Trump administration's visa restrictions make their future uncertain.

The US was long considered a top destination for higher studies, making Nepal the 10th biggest country of origin for international students in America.

However, that number has seen a significant decline with the total for Nepali students now at 16,482. Some 8,000 Nepali students obtained no-objection certificates to study in the US from the Ministry of Education in the past year.

India, Australia, Canada, South Korea, United Kingdom and Japan are the other popular destinations for Nepali students. There are no clear numbers for Nepalis going to India, but a slight decline was noted this year after the deaths of two female students.

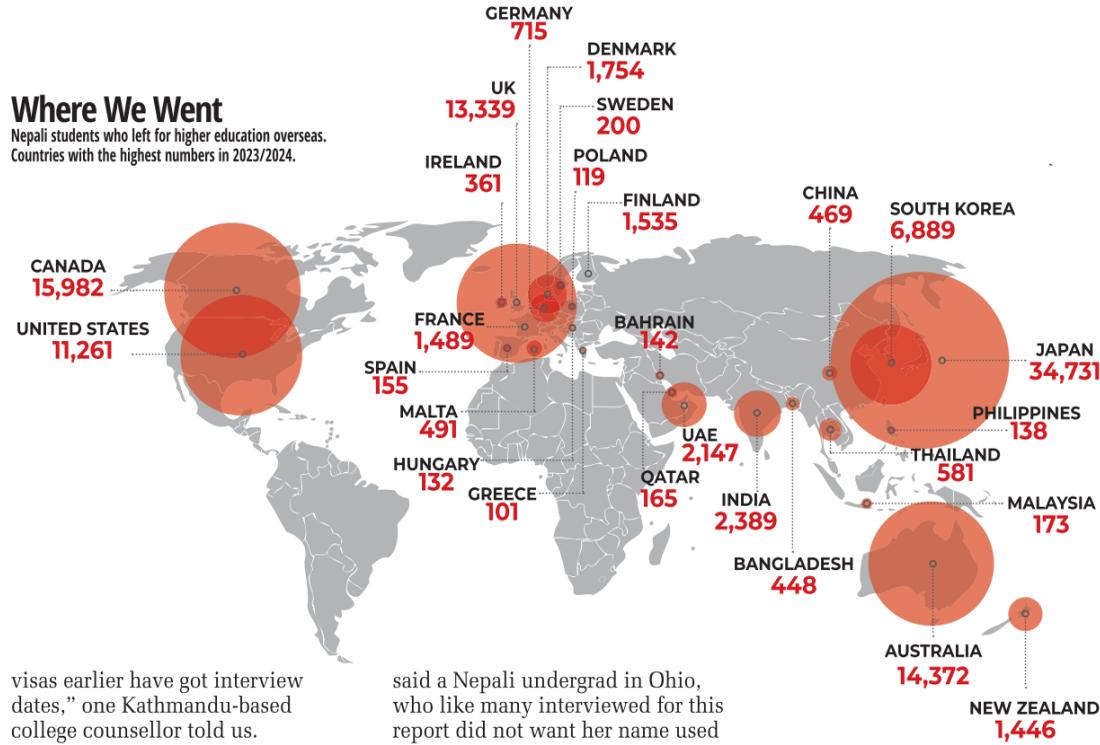
The US State Department has issued a circular to its embassies not to issue new visas to applicants until further notice. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in the directive stated that the department planned to expand the screening of applicants' social media.

While new applicants are barred including those applying for visitor visas, students with scheduled interviews are allowed to proceed.

"Many of our students are affected by the new restrictions, but those who had applied for student

Where We Went

Nepali students who left for higher education overseas. Countries with the highest numbers in 2023/2024.



visas earlier have got interview dates," one Kathmandu-based college counsellor told us.

Meanwhile, even foreign students with spotless records already in the US have not been spared, as visa scrutiny intensifies under the new policy. In a move that underscores the growing sense of insecurity, many US colleges advised international students to carry their passports and documents at all times, even when traveling locally.

"Me and my friends did not go home this summer because we were not sure we would be allowed back, so we just went to Niagara Falls,"

said a Nepali undergrad in Ohio, who like many interviewed for this report did not want her name used for fear of repercussions.

Nepali students have adopted a cautious stance, with many choosing not to return home during summer vacation due to fear of visa revocations as well as travel bans. Meanwhile, over 7,000 Nepalis with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) will have to come back to Nepal by 5 August or face deportation. Thirty-seven were flown back to Kathmandu on Omni Air last week.

"The US is one of the most sought-after destinations for higher education, and the ban will

definitely impact bright students," says Narottam Aryal of the King's College in Kathmandu.

Indeed, Nepali undergraduates admitted into Ivy League colleges for the 2025 academic year have been asked to look for alternatives. The entire Fulbright Foreign Scholarships Board resigned on Wednesday citing interference from the Trump administration on the selection of this year's cohort. Some Nepali students already



on Fulbright scholarships have noted disruptions, delays and even cancellation of stipends.

The student visa restrictions were initially just for foreign students admitted to Harvard University, but it was later extended to all Chinese students and now to all students. Universities like Columbia which actively recruit foreign students, face sharp enrolment declines, threatening their financial stability

NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक

Turkish-Thai

Turkish Airlines and Thai Airways International signed a Joint Business Agreement at the IATA Annual General Meeting in New Delhi on 1 June to enhance strategic cooperation between the flag carriers of Türkiye and Thailand. It will build on Thai starting daily flights between Bangkok to Istanbul, and combine the strengths of the two Star Alliance member airlines.



Turkish Airlines Chair Ahmet Bolat said: "This marks a significant milestone to further develop the tourism potential between Türkiye and Thailand with seamless travel experiences and expanded connectivity." Thai's CEO, Chai Eamsiri, said: "The agreement between Thai and Turkish Airlines on operating codeshare flights on the Bangkok-Istanbul route is an opportunity for both carriers in enhancing their route networks."



K2K Drive

Sipradi is sending motorheads Avashish Prasad Ojha and Vijay Ram Kasaju on a 'K2K Drive' on a Tata Curvv EV from Kathmandu to Kanyakumari on India's southern tip to test the car and the charging network.



Himalaya Turns 10

Himalaya Airlines celebrated its 10th anniversary hosting the Chinese Ambassador and CAAN officials. The airline flies to five cities in China, to Kuala Lumpur, Dhaka and Gulf destinations from Kathmandu with a fleet of five Airbus 320 and 319 aircraft.



SEEP Mela

MAW Enterprises and KMC agreed to organise the SEEP Mela jointly from 20 May in Tundikhel, offering skill-building sessions and aiming to connect job seekers to employers across many sectors.

Dengue Rising

Early monsoon is peak dengue season, and cases are on the rise in 72 districts: 1,255 cases have been recorded since 1 January. Kathmandu has the most cases, with 132. Doctors recommend long-sleeve clothing and looking out for stagnant pools of water collecting in buckets, tires.

Trees, Cleanup Hikes

World Environment Day on 5 June was marked with tree planting by various offices:

Staff from Aloft Kathmandu Thamel planted 700 trees and cleaned up the Tarebhir hiking trail in Shivapuri. The hotel's parent group, Marriott India, planted 100,000 trees across its 150 hotels.



Standard Chartered Bank planted 700 saplings at the Laboratory School in Kirtipur, and held a student session about preservation.

IME planted 18,000 trees across Nepal, and collected 150kg of waste on the Maccageaun - Champadevi route in southwest Kathmandu, and installed an EV charging station at its Kamaladi office.

Lemon Tree Premier led a cleanup at Budhanilkantha Temple, and also worked with the Nepal Army and Nepal Scout to clear trash on the Tarebhir trail.

Gender-affirming surgery

TU Teaching Hospital successfully carried out the first gender-affirming surgery in Nepal. A 25-year-old transgender woman from Janakpur received a vaginoplasty.

Bajura Blaze

A fire in Bama Bazaar in Budhiganga, Bajura, Sudurpashchim burned down 35 shops, destroying property worth Rs87.7 million. A cooking gas cylinder explosion at Nabadurga Hotel started the fire.



BMW iX2 E-SAV

The BMW iX2 Electric SAV can go 0-100 in 8.6s, and has a top speed of 170km/h and a 475km range. See and test drive at the Laxmi Premium Motors facility in Tinkune, along with other BMW models.

HONOR at Everest

Honor launched its 400 5G Series smartphones at an event at Everest Base Camp. The phones, ranging from Rs39,999 to Rs88,480, have a 200MP Main Camera, a 6000mAh Battery, 100W Charging, and many AI tools.



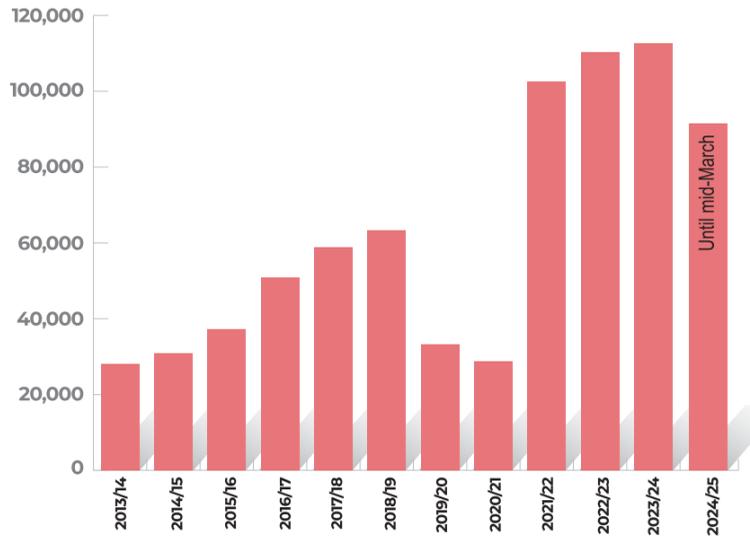
Samsung finance

Customers now only need Nepali citizenship to use Samsung's Insta Finance service which is available at 200 stores across Nepal, offers 0% interest EMIs on appliances Rs30k and over, after a 30% down payment.

for Nepali students

MORE NO OBJECTIONS

Number of No-Objection Certificates (NOC) issued by the Ministry of Education to Nepali students so they can go to universities abroad.



SOURCE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



SUMAN NEPALI

of scholarships, work-study programs, loans, or even the sale of family assets to afford fees.

Most Nepali students pursue STEM subjects which offer extended Optional Practical Training (OPT) periods that help fund their education. But with the US backsliding on education and humanitarian matters, countries like the UK and Canada are becoming more attractive despite their own recent stricter controls on student visas.

The UK universities saw a 63% rise in Nepali students' admissions in 2024. Japan is another popular destination with 64,816 Nepali students enrolled as of 2024 (map).

Already, China, Hong Kong and Malaysia are poised to benefit

from the increased scrutiny of US student visas. Several Hong Kong universities are offering unconditional admission to affected students, while Malaysian institutions are targeting previously US-bound Asian students. China and India have 330,000 and 280,000 students respectively in America, but the numbers for China have seen a sharp drop in the past year.

Elsewhere, branch campuses of American institutions such as NYU in Abu Dhabi, Georgetown in Dubai and Northwestern in Doha are getting more admission applications, and universities in the Gulf region are expanding infrastructure to accommodate those who would otherwise have gone to the US.

Even educational institutions in Nepal are hopeful that the US visa restrictions can be an opportunity to at least keep Nepali undergrads in Nepal, and also attract foreign students from the region.

"Many students might choose to complete their undergraduate degree here in Nepal and then move abroad for their Master's degree later," says Aryal of King's College. "There was a need for quality higher education in Nepal anyway in terms of innovation and opportunities, so this could be the time to reduce our dependence on other countries."

Nepal's strategic position between India and China makes it sensitive to US policy shifts. India, a key ally, is also under US scrutiny for potential student travel restrictions. Chinese universities are already offering more scholarships to Nepali talent to capitalise on the US retreat.

American universities have challenged student visa restrictions in the courts. A federal court in Boston revoked the blanket ban on Harvard, and the State Department has ordered the resumption of processing student and exchange visitor visas.

Some are still hoping that President Trump will backtrack on the student visa restrictions, just like he has done with many of his more drastic executive orders.

Even so, the visa see-saw and longer-term uncertainties about living in the United States and its education system means students across the world are making alternative plans.

Says Aryal: "Policies of foreign countries change according to their needs, so excessive dependence was never a good idea. We should work to create different opportunities and choices of higher education within Nepal, so students are retained." 🇳🇵

and diversity.

An Indian female PhD candidate at Columbia University had her visa revoked by the US State Department, and said she was targeted on the basis of her social media posts on Israeli military attacks in Gaza. Social media vetting of political activism has raised concerns about privacy and freedom of expression in a country where such rights were a given.

Many students have been

informed via email that their visas have been revoked for getting speeding or parking tickets, but even others with no criminal record have been affected. The fear of deportation looms large amongst international students, including those from Nepal.

For most Nepalis who migrate to the US for education, the journey is a high-stakes investment. They come largely from middle-class families, often rely on a patchwork

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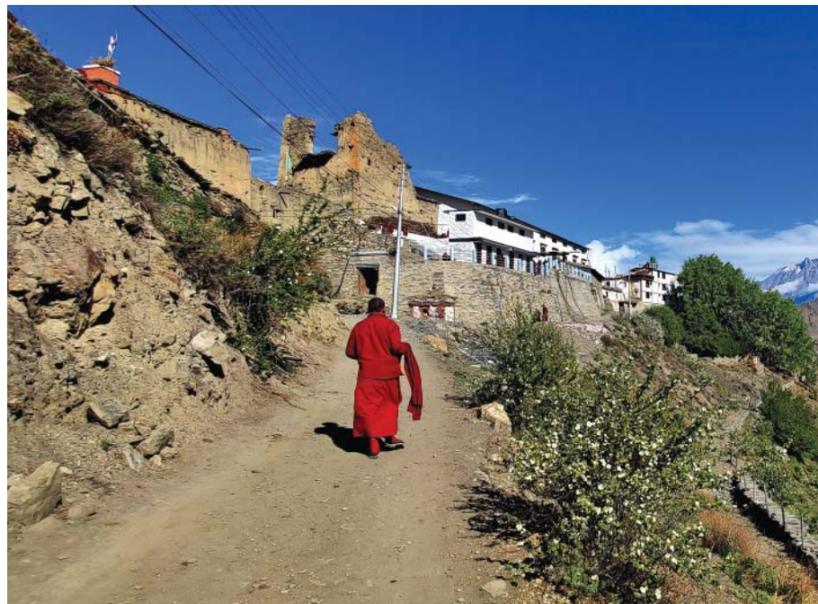
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A million ma

Monks attend the Lo Monlam Chenmo praye

■ Photos by **Mani Lama** in Mustang

Every year in the first month of the Tibetan calendar, devotees observe the ritual of Lo Monlam Chenmo within the holy month of Saga Dawa to mark the birth, enlightenment, and parinirvana of the Buddha.

Lo Monlam Chenmo literally translates into the Great Prayer Festival of Mustang and earlier this month was observed for a week during which devotees chanted mantras over a million times for the long life and wellbeing of all sentient beings, for the continuation, survival and spread of Dharma, and for world peace.

The annual prayer vigil drew 578 monks and nuns and hundreds of local people to the monastery town of Jharkot near Muktinath. The festival has been observed for over 600 years, but saw a decline in the second half of the 20th century when Monlam

Chenmo was used to pray for the long life of the Dalai Lama.

“Lo Monlam Chenmo was revived in Nepal seven years ago with much donation from the locals, many of whom have migrated overseas,” says Kunjon Thakuri of the Norbusum Foundation in Jharkot supporting traditional culture, local education, and the preservation of Mustangi heritage. “The festival will be held in Upper Mustang next year and again in Lower Mustang the year after, as the two regions take turns every other year.”

The festival is also celebrated in Tibet, parts of Nepal including Kathmandu, Ladakh and Sikkim in India as well as Bhutan.

The Monlam Chenmo festival was first conducted for two weeks at the start of the new year in Tibet in 1409 by Lama Tsongkhapa to commemorate the miracles performed by Shakyamuni Buddha. The final day is the full moon which was on 11 June this week, is also called the Day of Miracles when several festivals and rituals are held.



Mantras in Mustang

Prayer vigil dedicated to the birth and enlightenment of the Buddha



killing and harming living creatures as well as practice vegetarianism for the whole month of Saga Dawa, in line with the Buddhist principle of non-violence (अहिंसा). People can also choose to make donations (दान) including drinks and food to participating monks and monasteries in acts of compassion.

In many ways, the festival bears similarities to another month-long celebration observed by Newar Buddhists, primarily in Kathmandu. Gunla, which translates into the month of merits, is the tenth month in the Nepal Sambat calendar which typically falls during the monsoon.

Gunla is a time for spiritual reflection on the Dharma by reciting the scriptures, fasting, playing devotional music, going on pilgrimages and attaining the five moral precepts known as the (पञ्चशौल) -- abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicants. 🇳🇵

Sonia Awale

“The grande finale is considered an auspicious day for prayer and practice, and good deeds on this day are multiplied exponentially,” adds Thakuri. “As such, all major Buddhist shrines including Swayambhu and Boudhanath see prayers gather from midnight on the last day.”

Many attempt a 21 kora clockwise circumambulation of Swayambhu on the very day, a gruelling 30km on foot. Others do a

108 circumambulation of a sacred site during the month of Saga Dawa as a way of purifying one’s karma and gaining spiritual merit.

Throughout the festival, devotees can also choose to perform their own puja including श्राद्ध, a Hindu ritual to honour deceased ancestors. Jharkot’s proximity to Muktinath also means that the festival is observed by Hindus and Buddhists alike.

Devotees also abstain from



EVENTS

**Weekend hike**

Escape the city and immerse yourself in the Rana Gaun–Lamidanda hike to explore hidden trails, historic villages, and breathtaking landscapes. Call for details.
14 June, 6:30am onwards, Fee: Rs900, Lalitpur, 9846190957

Peeda Geet

The play Peeda Geet is a solo performance that follows protagonist Dal Bahadur's journey through displacement, memory, and survival in post-conflict Nepal, revealing the lasting scars of war.
14 June, 6pm onwards, Ticket: Rs400, Bikalpa Art Cafe, Pulchok

**Etched by Progress**

Min Thapa's artwork invites viewers to contemplate the deeper, often overlooked impacts of a rapidly shifting world by going beyond ecological critique to reflect on cultural displacement and the quiet devastation of climate change.
Till 30 June, 11am-7pm, Dalai-La Art Space, Thamel

Meditation

Be a part of guided meditation sessions offering a peaceful space to release stress through a seven-step universal meditation practice.
14 June, 3pm-4pm, Mind Body Center, Babermahal, 9843634222

**Manjira: The Muted Melody**

Manjira, a Nepali adaptation of Ariel Dorfman's Death and the Maiden, is a tense psychological drama that follows an encounter that forces long-buried truths to surface. Adapted by Som Nath Khanal and Sandesh Ghimire.
Till 22 June, 5:15pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun

**Amalgam**

Amalgam is a landmark exhibition featuring 61 artists at Siddhartha Art Gallery exploring diverse styles and compelling themes.
Till 8 July, 5:30pm onwards, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

South Community Market

Sip on wine, sample fine cheese as you browse, and check out the delicious buffet brunch available every Sunday at the South Community market.
15 June, 8am-1pm, Piano Piano South, Sanepa

MUSIC

The Heart Breakers

Get ready to listen to great live music when The Heart Breakers hit the stage at Hard Rock Cafe this Friday.
13 June, 7pm onwards, Hard Rock Cafe, Sherpa Mall

**Live Music**

Unwind with some live music while savouring authentic Newari dishes and refreshing drinks.
13 June, 5pm-8pm, Cafe Tyandro, Sano Thimi

Chumbak

An exclusive performance by Chumbak: they will play all 20 of their songs, live. Tickets at KGarira.
14 June, 8pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Beers N Cheers, Jhamsikhel

**Bipul Chettri**

Bipul Chettri is set to make his return with an intimate live performance, bringing his signature indie-folk sound to the stage again.
21 June, 9pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, XO Club

**Grunchiez**

Grunchiez is back with their new album Gaas Baas Kapaas. Be a part of this celebration, a musical experience packed with fresh sounds.
21 June, 12pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Reggae Bar, Thamel

DINING

**Dine @ Aloft**

This June and July, Nylgiri celebrates the superheroes of K-Town with skyline views and special midweek and weekend offers. Enjoy 50% off on all food and drinks on Super Man Sundays for gentlemen and Wonder Women Wednesdays for ladies.
Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976054

GETAWAY

**Dwarika's Hotel**

A heritage oasis celebrated for its serene courtyards and cultural elements, Dwarika's offers warm hospitality, a wide range of facilities and special multi-course Nepali feasts, all right here in the city.
Battisputali (01) 4570770

Pashupati Boutique

Just a short walk from the sacred Pashupatinath Temple, this boutique stay features floor-to-ceiling windows, private balconies with city views, and modern amenities.
Gaushala (01) 4587747

**Lemon Tree Premier**

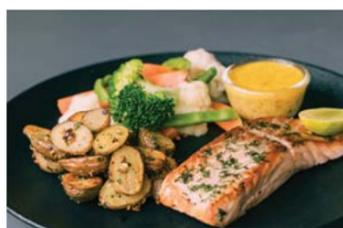
Lemon Tree Premier is the ultimate urban retreat with luxurious rooms, an infinity pool, spa, sauna, and lush garden. All just a few kilometers away from the city, perfect for a weekend getaway.
Budhanilkantha (01) 5900928

**Tiger Mountain**

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge is a serene hilltop haven offering panoramic views of Nepal's mountains through its multiple verandas, providing a tranquil retreat for visitors.
Pokhara (01) 4720580

Hotel Country Villa

Perched on the hills of Nagarkot, the hotel offers breathtaking sunrise and sunset views, making it a peaceful escape from the hustle and bustle of the city.
Nagarkot (01) 6680127/28

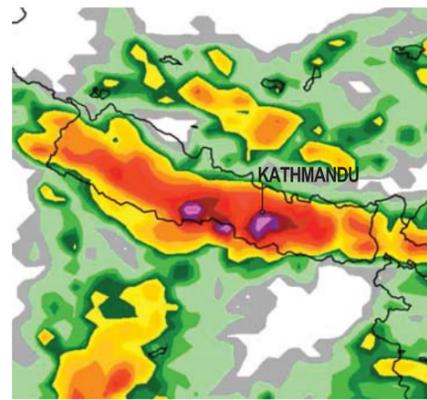
**Le Sherpa**

Indulge in a unique, modern dining experience at Le Sherpa. Their special pan-seared salmon steak, which is crispy on the outside and tender and buttery within, is a must-try.
Maharajgunj (01) 4528604

Nandani Food Court

Craving authentic Newari food? Head to Nandani Food Court and pick your favourite from their Yomari, Chatamari, Kachila, and Bara.
Kalimati, 9863198552

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Monsoon On Track**

After a premature start, the monsoon took a long break and is now back on track. Some of the moisture-bearing winds from the Bay of Bengal are being pushed up the mountains by the searing heat of the north-Indian plains and this may trigger thunderstorms that are not very characteristic of monsoon precipitation. Expect constant showers, some of them heavy into the weekend and beyond, which will reduce the maximum temperature in Kathmandu, and bring respite from the heat in the Tarai.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
26° 20°	28° 20°	27° 20°

**OUR PICK**

CNN's live broadcast of the Tony-nominated Broadway play Good Night, and Good Luck starring George Clooney as veteran CBS broadcaster Edward R. Murrow earlier this week drew 7.34 million viewers worldwide. The play is a powerful portrayal of media intimidation during the 1950s McCarthy era with eerie relevance to Trump's America today. If you missed the show, you can still watch the 2005 movie the play is based on, where Murrow confronts Senator Joseph McCarthy for his persecution of suspected leftists amidst growing paranoia about the Soviet threat. Stars David Strathairn, Patricia Clarkson, George Clooney and Jeff Daniels.

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

The Weavers

Visit The Weavers for a relaxed meal or a special celebration. Try their soft Bao Buns or indulge in classic Nepali favorites, like momo and thali sets.
Lagankhel, 9818409661

**Attic**

Excellent food meets great ambience at Attic. Their menu has many Nepali-Indian-Asian fusion dishes. Don't miss out on their specials: the Attic Chicken Chop, and House Biryani.
Gyanshwar (01) 4517843

**Vera Pizza**

Try their authentic Neapolitan-style pizza with classics like pollo pizza alongside iced drinks, perfect in the summer heat.
Thamel, 9763398430

JAR

JAR serves a flavorful mix of global and local favorites. Try their creamy pastas, loaded burgers, sizzling steaks, and hearty Nepali sets.
Baneshwar, 9802325777

Priceless paubha in Paris

Nepal's first depiction in art of a historical event 500 years ago, and its lost legacy

■ Shaguni Singh Sakya

That winter day in January 1664 marked an exceptional event in the reign of King Pratap Malla of Kathmandu. It was 15 Paus 784 of the Nepal Sambat and for the first time, a historical event was being immortalised on canvas for generations to come.

The occasion was the grand Tuladaan ceremony of the King's youngest son Chakrabartendra Malla from his wife Anantapriya, an Indian princess from Cooch Behar in present-day Assam.

During the ritual, the prince was weighed against gold, silver, pearls, and other precious stones, which were then offered to Goddess Taleju Bhavani, the guardian deity of the Malla dynasty.

The 170 x120cm painting captures the time of King Pratap Malla in all its splendour and is more than a personal tribute to his son: it is a significant visual historical document. It was evidently completed five years later in 1669, and could be considered a photographic record, with retrospective recreation of the event by the unknown artist.

A Tuladaan ceremony is performed to purify one's karma, quell impending bad luck, or as an act of charity and devotion. Chakrabartendra Malla was not well, and the ritual was performed in hopes of restoring his health. King Pratap Malla had arranged for each of his sons to take turns ruling Kathmandu so they got administrative experience. But Chakrabartendra died just two days after assuming power in 1670 (790 NS).

This painting is considered the earliest known example in which the composition is dominated by an architectural landscape: the Taleju Temple. Given the stylistic features such as side-profile facial depictions and the rendering of human forms, it is believed that the Nepali artist was trained by a Rajput master.

During that era, there were regular exchanges of artists between Northern India and Kathmandu Valley. The painting is also a melding of Nepali, Tibetan, Mughal, and Rajput art styles of the time.

Pratap Malla could have been inspired by a painting of Mughal Emperor Jahangir's Tuladaan ceremony for his son Khurram in 1607. The Mallas and Mughals shared cordial relations, which is reflected in the cultural influences seen in the art and attire of the period.

The clothing of the Malla ruling class, in particular, features colourful tunics, turbans, and jewelry that display strong Rajput and Mughal stylistic elements. The musicians in the upper tier are also dressed in Indian-style clothing, while the ensemble on the lower steps wear local attire, notably without turbans. Their hairstyles also differ, with the lower group wearing their hair tied in a bun at the front.

This national treasure is currently in storage at the Collège de France in Paris, and has never been publicly displayed. Nepal's art scholars like Gautam Vajracharya, Pratap Aditya Pal and Anne Vergati have written



about this iconic paubha in the past, but the only detailed study is from the perspective of music history by researcher Richard Widdess who had access to high resolution copies of the original.

Widdess from the Department of Music at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London describes the paubha as the most significant and richly detailed documentation of music in Nepali art. He identifies distinct musical ensembles on the terraces of the temple, and remarkably most of them are actively used today.

One of them reflects the Mughal naqqārakhāna model — a loud outdoor ensemble typically composed of kettledrums, trumpets, and cymbals, traditionally performed from the gateway of the emperor's palace to announce his entrances and exits. The depiction of such an ensemble in the tulādāna painting is likely the earliest known representation of a complete naqqārakhāna

in Nepal — considered the forerunner of the panche baja, the traditional Nepali ensemble.

On the stepped pyramid base of the temple are two groups of musicians playing local instruments: dhimey, bhushya, and dha. They are unmistakably Newar musicians, wearing short skirts and short-sleeved tops, with bare heads and legs—clearly distinguished as local performers.

Higher still on the temple pyramid are musicians of apparently higher status, positioned close to the king, and his courtiers, possibly professional court musicians from India, well-versed in rāga and tāla. A dāphā group is also clearly depicted, identifiable by their characteristic instruments.

Dāphā bhajan is likely the oldest surviving tradition of Newar devotional singing, and this paubha is the oldest visual record of it. Pratap Malla himself is believed to have composed songs that continue to

be performed by dāphā groups throughout Kathmandu till today.

The artist's thorough attention to musical detail may be attributed to King Pratap Malla's own deep interest in music. His inscriptions on this painting and elsewhere proclaim his mastery of all branches of knowledge, including music. He is also known as the author of dance dramas and poems, penning his name as Kavindra (king of poets).

Some noteworthy elements of new art techniques stand out: for example, the roof of the temple is filled with realistically rendered white doves and pigeons. This is a rare feature in paubha, where animals and birds are stylised, mythological forms.

This remarkably talented unknown artist has managed to also render an orthographic projection: the front and side view of Nepal's first architectural paubha. The Taleju Temple, with its staggering multi-tiered structure and numerous steps and platforms, is masterfully translated into layers within the painting. This represents a significant artistic achievement of the time, especially considering that dimensional perspectives had not started in deity-based paubha.

The artist has also made a meticulous effort to capture architectural details such as the toran (ornamental arch) and temple struts with impressive precision. There are flickering lamps along the steps and some people carrying what appear to be oil pots.

It is a full moon night and the dark sky is adorned with all the gods and goddesses, who are depicted as blessing the ceremony while seated on stylised thangka clouds. There is a lot happening in this painting, with people engaged in various activities. The artist has also rendered a forest backdrop behind the temple, complete with deer, trees, and flowers. Could there have once been a royal garden behind the Taleju Temple?

More details and clarity can only be achieved if we are able to view the original or a high-resolution scanned version of the artwork. Many countries proudly display art depicting historical events in their national museums with great reverence. France, for example, has The Coronation of Emperor Napoleon and Empress Joséphine by Jacques-Louis David (1808–1822), along with numerous paintings of the Napoleonic Wars. Many were commissioned by Napoleon himself for future generations to remember.

For Nepal, the equivalent is the Tuladaan paubha which is a visual record capturing a historic moment involving one of Kathmandu's greatest kings, on the very day the event took place. Sadly, we await the day when this masterpiece is displayed, shared in high resolution for detailed study, or more rightfully — repatriated to its homeland, where it truly belongs. 🇳🇵

Shaguni Singh Sakya is the Director of the Museum of Nepali Arts (MoNA) at Kathmandu Guest House in Thamel.

nepalitimes.com

More close-up images online.

Gods homeward bound

The Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign and Nepal's Department of Archaeology are convening the first international conference on the Recovery of Cultural Heritage from 16-18 June in Patan.

The conference will address urgent issues of theft, illicit trafficking, the campaign to repatriate looted cultural artifacts, and explore how the return of sacred antiquities contributes to justice, healing, and reconciliation for communities and nations affected by cultural loss.

American art crime professor Erin L Thompson and Saubhagya Pradhananga of the Department of Archaeology will deliver the keynote. Meanwhile, author and Nepali Times publisher Kunda Dixit will lead a conversation on Illicit Trafficking: Public Opinion and Role of Media with Erin Thompson, Amr Al Azm, associate professor

of Middle East History and Anthropology at Shawnee State University in Ohio, as well as Bradley J Gordon, a lawyer based in Phnom Penh.

There will be sessions looking at repatriation perspectives from Cambodia, India, Vietnam, China and Poland, international frameworks for repatriation, emerging digital technologies in the repatriation of cultural heritage, cultural property agreements, museums as well as trends in the art market, and heritage diplomacy and the role of media.

Some of the other highlights include James K. Reap, a professor in the Master of Historic Preservation Program at the University of Georgia who has a session on the US response to illicit trafficking. Art historian Lea Saint-Raymond is taking on "Gods at Auction: The Market for Himalayan Artefacts", while

lecturer of criminology at the University of Glasgow Emiline Smith is delving into transformative approaches to heritage ownership and repatriation.

Helena Arose of Antiquities Coalition and Melina Antoniadis of NOSTOS Strategies that specialise on the return home of cultural heritage as well as Hao Liu of International Cultural Heritage Law at the School of Law at Shandong University are some of the others attending.

The Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign



was set up in 2020 to develop a coordinated movement to reclaim Nepal's stolen gods and goddesses, with an aim to ensure that recovered items are returned to their original shrines, niches or sanctums.

Ahead of the conference opening organisers have arranged for a film screening of Loot & Return: 4 Documentaries at Yala Maya Kendra in

Patan Dhoka between 14-15 June. Following the conference is a multimedia exhibition titled Absent Gods: Nepal's Lost Heritage from 31 July to 4 August at Patan Museum.

Remembering not to forget war crimes

Nearly 20 years after the end of the Maoist conflict, an investigation into ex-House Speaker offers hope for transitional justice

■ Sudiksha Tuladhar

The Supreme Court order last week to press criminal investigation against former House Speaker Agni Sapkota for his alleged involvement in abduction and murder of Arjun Bahadur Lama in 2005 has opened the door to investigate other war crimes.

Lama was 45 years old in 2005 and a UML member when he was abducted by Maoists. His body was exhumed two months later. A National Human Rights Commission report implicated Maoist leaders including Sapkota who commanded the guerrilla unit in Kavre.

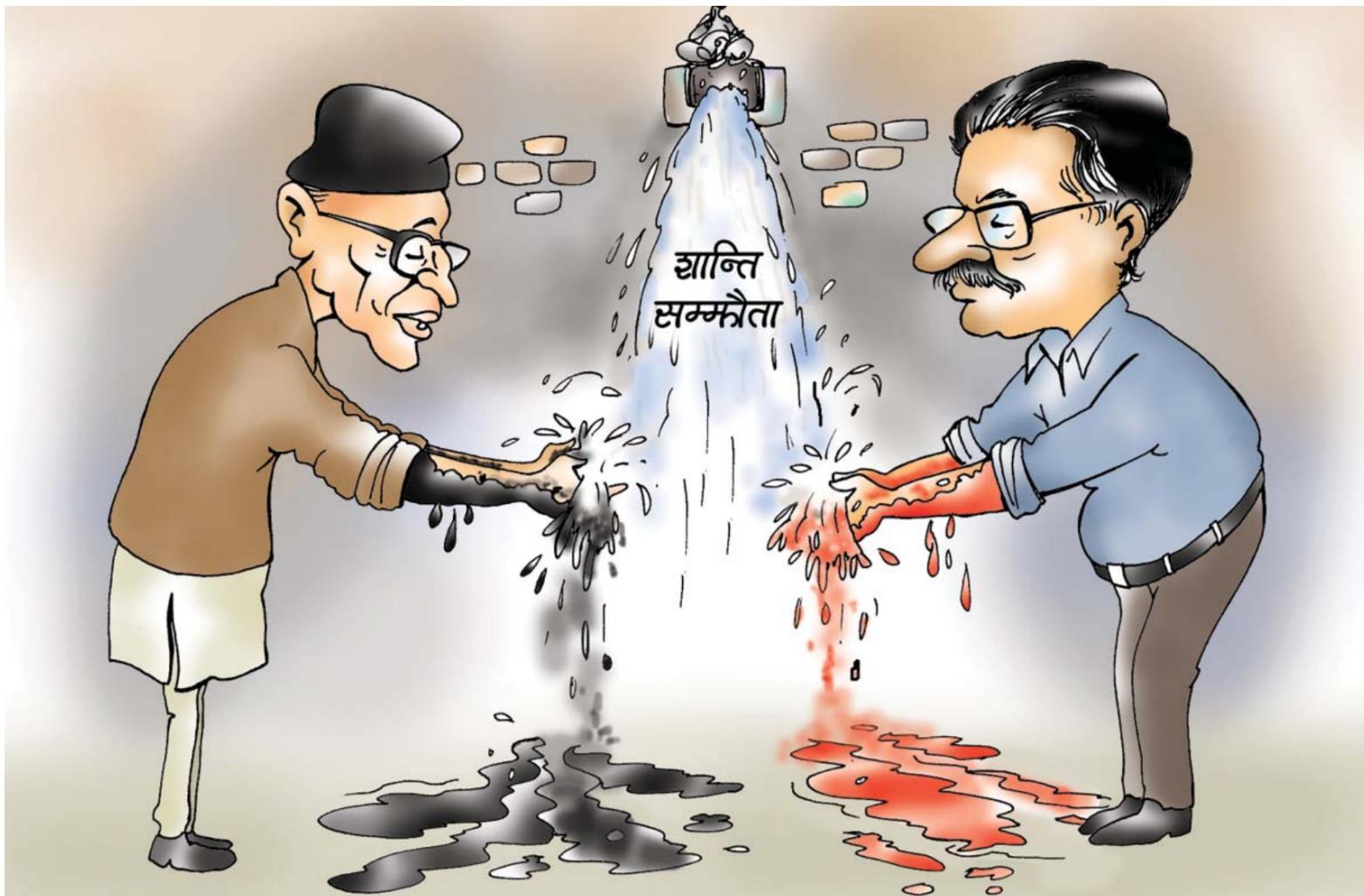
Lama's wife, Purnimaya, filed a complaint at the Kavre District Police Office in 2007, but police refused to register it, stating that it should be forwarded to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). She then filed a writ at the Supreme Court, which in 2008 ordered the police to register the complaint.

The case was under police investigation and an arrest warrant issued, only for the Cabinet led in 2012 by Maoist Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai to shelve the complaint and the Supreme Court's order. But last week's ruling led by Chief Justice Prakash Man Singh Raut overturned that decision, allowing the investigation to proceed.

In all this time, Sapkota has served as Minister of Information and Communication in 2011 and Minister of Forest and Soil Conservation in 2015. Despite being accused of murder, Sapkota was nominated as Speaker of the House of Representatives in 2020.

The Comprehensive Peace Accord between the Maoists and the government in 2006, envisaged the formation of a TRC and a Commission of Investigation of Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP). When finally set up in 2015, both commissions were headed by political appointees, and there were no investigations or prosecutions.

Last month, after prolonged discussions, the three main political parties selected former high court



RABIN SAYAMI



SAGAR SHRESTHA/NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

OUT, OUT, DAMN SPOT: Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal (left, below) shake hands after signing the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006.

Cartoonist Rabin Sayami depicted it in Himal Khabarpatrika (above) as an opportunity for the democratic parties to clean the dirt of corruption, and the Maoists to wash the blood from their hands.

judge Mahesh Thapa as the TRC chair and former chief secretary Lila Devi Gadaula to head the CIEDP.

The two appointments and membership have been criticised by survivors and their families. They said there was no consultation, and the selection was arbitrary, untrustworthy, and disrespectful.

"Transparency was lacking during the appointment of the officials at the commissions and the officials appointed are not competent in transitional justice issues," says Suman Adhikari, Founder Chairperson of Conflict Victims Common Platform.

The CPA marked the beginning

How did other countries deal with it?

Germany, Morocco, Malawi, Argentina, and Brazil have all carried out reparations post conflict that did not follow the concept of truth and reconciliation.

Meanwhile, post-Apartheid South Africa set up its transitional justice mechanism in 1995, but focused on truth and reconciliation, not necessarily full legal accountability.

In fact, the TRC's primary goals were to document the truth about human rights abuses, facilitate reconciliation, and contribute to a national post-apartheid process of healing. It also granted amnesty to perpetrators who provided full disclosure about their involvement in specific human rights violations.

Over the years, the South African model championed by Nelson Mandela

played a significant role in transitional justice systems around the world, but has often been criticised for letting known perpetrators go free.

But others believe it has also allowed for society to move on, and not be dragged down by a brutal past. Indeed, Maoists leaders in Nepal have often said that persecuting those accused of war crimes would "endanger the peace process".

The Colombian government battled the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and signed a peace agreement in 2016 that led to the formation of a complex Special Jurisdiction for Peace.

"During peace talks the most difficult point was the design of the judicial system, because it was very obvious that

top leaders of both the guerrillas and the military were not going to sign the peace agreement if they were going to go to jail. It was as simple as that," Colombian judge Caterina Heyck told Nepali Times during a visit to Nepal in 2023.

The process included two paths for prosecution: acknowledgement and non-acknowledgement. Those who accepted got restorative sanctions, while those who did not get alternative or ordinary sentences.

Heyck told us that Colombia complies with international law in that it bans amnesty for those who were most responsible. "But they're not going to go to jail if they acknowledge the truth, they're just going to have a restorative sentence," she said.

Nepal can choose from several models of transitional justice from around the

world, and adapt them to the local context so that the process is transformative and inclusive.

The process could have moved ahead much faster, if the people in power included victims and their voices, instead of taking political control.

When 24 civil society organisations last week called on the government to engage in dialogue and consultation, they also warned of the formation of a 'citizen commission' if the government did not take the victims into account. They also asked the United Nations to block any financial or technical assistance to Nepal unless the process is brought back on track. Says Ram Bhandari, "The solution is local. The delay of the justice process only strains the image of Nepal in the international community."

of Nepal's transitional justice process and formally brought an end to decades long Maoist insurgency. TRC and CIEDP were set up to ensure justice for the victims of the conflict. But the two commissions were formed nine years after the ceasefire because the two former enemies had by then become the state and did not want war crimes to be raked up.

The 2015 earthquake became the pretext for delaying the appointment of the first group of commissioners, and Covid pandemic became the second. The inability of the three main political parties to agree on appointments meant the commissions stayed vacant for years. Both the commissions have also had their mandates extended since 2017.

There are over 60,000 complaints registered at both commissions, of which 63,000 wartime excesses were at the TRC and 3,300 cases of disappearances at the CIEDP. But not a single case was investigated, and the perpetrators brought to justice.

International human rights agencies have repeatedly called for amendments in the acts of the commissions, which have been endorsed but lack implementation.

Says Ram Bhandari of the National Network of the Victims of Serious Human Rights Violations: "The implementation of the acts is in limbo. A major concern is that political leaders have tried to take the process ahead single-handedly."

Just as the Maoists and the parties they fought against are now in Parliament and are a part of Nepal's democratic system, families of victims whose kin were killed by both sides have now also united in their call for justice for war crimes.

For example, Suman Adhikari's father Mukti Adhikari, who was a teacher in a village school in Lamjung, was executed by Maoist guerrillas in 2002. Ram Bhandari's father who was also a teacher was disappeared by the Army in 2001 from Besisahar.

The Supreme Court in 2020 upheld that there cannot be amnesties for serious crimes like torture and enforced disappearances as per international law. Nearly 1,400 people were disappeared by both sides during the 10-year conflict, and 322 cases of war rape and of sexual violence have been registered in both commissions.

"Cases of sexual violence must be registered three months post the issuance of the notice, not from the date of incident," states Geeta Rasaili of the Conflict Victims National Women Network. "Such cases must be treated with utmost sensitivity, ensuring the victims'

protection of identity. This can be done only by capable and experienced personnel."

Much like everything else, transitional justice in Nepal is political. Successive governments since 2006 have been made up of former rebels who committed war crimes and Nepali Congress (NC) ministers who were in power during the insurgency, and this has undermined the process.

"The key decision makers in the government from both sides are the same people who were involved in human rights violations during the conflict," says Ram Bhandari. "The peace process has therefore become perpetrator centric, rather than victim centric."

Suman Adhikari echoes this view: "Instead of being answerable and responsible towards the victims in the justice process, the leaders have instead been looking to protect their own interests. Our voices and representation have largely been ignored, the leaders have been continuously trying to delay, dilute and deny the process."

After 2006, the peace process was steered by the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) which supervised camps to disarm and demobilise the guerrillas. Initially, there was strong financial support and political pressure from Western countries and rights groups for Nepal's transitional justice process.

But with America backsliding on democracy and human rights and Europe increasingly distracted by the Ukraine-Russia war, the West has lost much of its moral high ground.

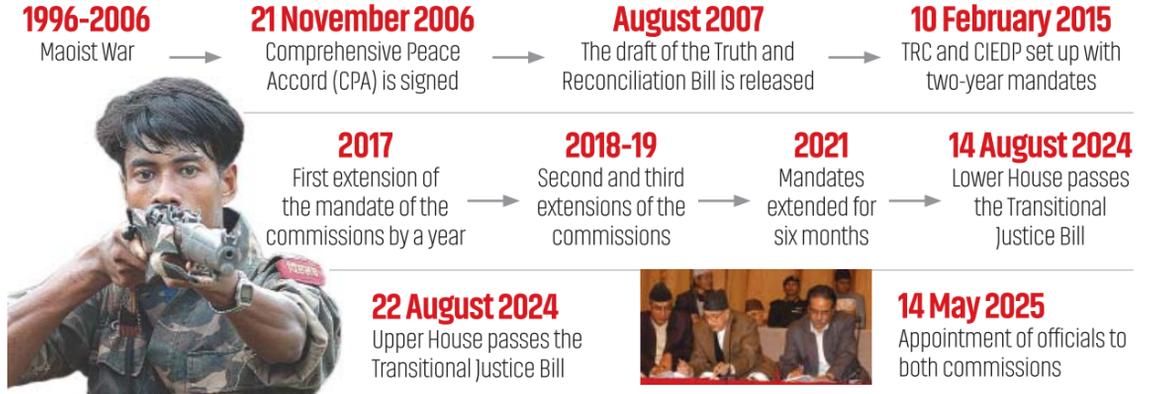
This has coincided with the rise of emerging global powers, China and India, in Nepal's neighbourhood who have never been big on human rights and freedom of expression.

At its current pace, it may take decades to resolve all the 67,000 cases registered in both the commissions — which suits the NC and Maoists fine since time is on their side. However, the lethargy in sanctioning reparations and investigations will further erode public trust, and risk a future resurgence of violence fuelled by vengeance.

Rights activists recommended that rather than compiling and making bulky reports of cases, they should be sent to the attorney general in batches with periodic reports. But there is little political will to even do this.

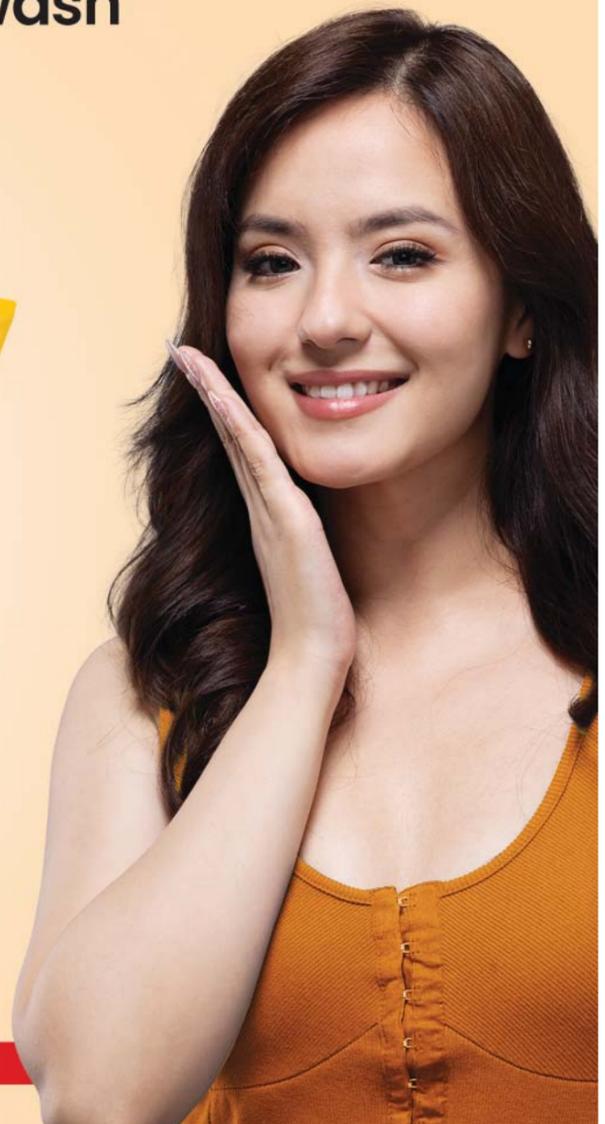
Says transitional justice expert Rajendra Senchurey: "The process of investigations, truth-seeking and archiving must be expedited. Reparations also must be fast tracked alongside." ■

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१० वर्ष टिक्छ**

चर्को घामबाट बचाउँछ

मुसलधारे वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ

१० वर्ष वारेन्टी



Morals in murals

Folklore transformed into visual stories preserve treasured oral traditions at Takpa Gallery

■ Sangya Lamsal

“एकादेशमा...” is how every bedtime story that Nepali parents tell children starts. It is a portal to shared childhood memories, and a collective moral code.

The stories live in our hearts, and as adults quietly mould the way we see the world. The jolts of everyday life and distance from parents fade treasured oral traditions, and fairy tales that once stitched generations are lost.

Some of these tales come to life in Roshan Bhandari's exhibition, *Once Upon A Time / एकादेशमा* at Takpa Gallery. Folktales have been transformed into visual stories, showing fables passed down through generations, heard crackling through old radios, and discovered in the pages of well-worn books.

Bhandari moves between abstraction and figuration, creating a masterpiece of deliberate fusion. Yet, they remain grounded in the figurative, allowing viewers to follow a narrative thread. The result is a dramatic, emotional landscape of unfolding stories.

He explains: “A lot of it is abstract because it carries the soul. And the soul has no shape. You cannot shape the soul and the subconscious. It flows.”

The final piece in Bhandari's previous series, *The Story of Mountain - Contemplation*, now stands as the opening to this new



collection. The painting captures a young girl in a moment of introspection, embodying the quiet inner strength of Nepalis.

She is suspended in time, mirroring the weight of everyday

life in the mountains, marked by limited access to roads, healthcare, and education. The bold brushwork reflects the layered complexity of her emotions, caught between the harshness of reality and the strength

it takes to endure.

Around her, mountain goats graze calmly, life goes on, but she pauses. Not necessarily in defeat but in reflection. It is a moment of stillness we so often overlook in our own fast-paced lives. “She’s my kind of Mona Lisa,” Bhandari says with a broad smile.

The aggression of the brushstrokes speaks to the intensity of her struggles, while the vibrant colour palette suggests that there is hope even in hardship. Life, the painting reminds us, is a balance between chaos and calm.

Whispers of Nature (pictured) tells the story of a radiant woman from the Tarai who can speak to birds and animals, but is an outcast, accused of witchcraft.

A Tale of Virtue and Reward on the other hand

highlights the timeless truth that compassion, even when quietly practiced, never goes unnoticed. It portrays the contrasting outcomes of benevolence and malevolence -- a moral reflection on how the

intentions behind our actions shape the fate that follows.

Many of the wildlife-inspired tales in Bhandari's work echoes a bygone era, when humans and animals lived in closer harmony. Though fantasy made animals talk, reason and relate, the core of these stories remain real. They make us ponder the growing rift between humans and nature today.

Tied by Love, Freed by Empathy echo themes of freedom, coexistence, and justice, while *From Humble Roots to Golden Roads* offers lessons in how small acts of goodness can pave the way to hopeful outcomes. Each piece carries tales of timeless truths and its own distinct moral core.

“Roshan Bhandari's visual form is incredibly attractive. There is a sense of movement within the paintings, almost as if something is alive inside them,” says Tsherin Sherpa, artist and founder of Takpa. “The narratives are woven in such a unique and engaging way. These age-old stories are presented through a contemporary visual lens, which makes them feel both timeless and fresh.”

Once Upon A Time / एकादेशमा
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Friday-Sunday: 11AM-7PM
Closed on Mondays
Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat

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