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**K**ey chemotherapy drugs used around the world have failed quality tests, leaving patients exposed to ineffective treatments and potentially fatal side effects, an investigation by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ) in the UK has found.

The failed brands made by a profit-driven pharmaceutical industry have reached more than 100 countries across the world in the past six years. Many such drugs made by Indian companies are being used in Nepal, where there are gaping holes in safety nets supposed to protect patients from bad drugs.

Nepal is one of the countries where medicine regulation ranks the lowest, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The investigation found that Nepal is also one of the biggest importers of the failed chemotherapy brands.

Despite there being more than 20,000 brands of medicine on drug store shelves in Nepal, the Department of Drug Administration (DDA) has set a target of testing just 22 drugs in the next 12 months – none of them chemotherapy drugs.

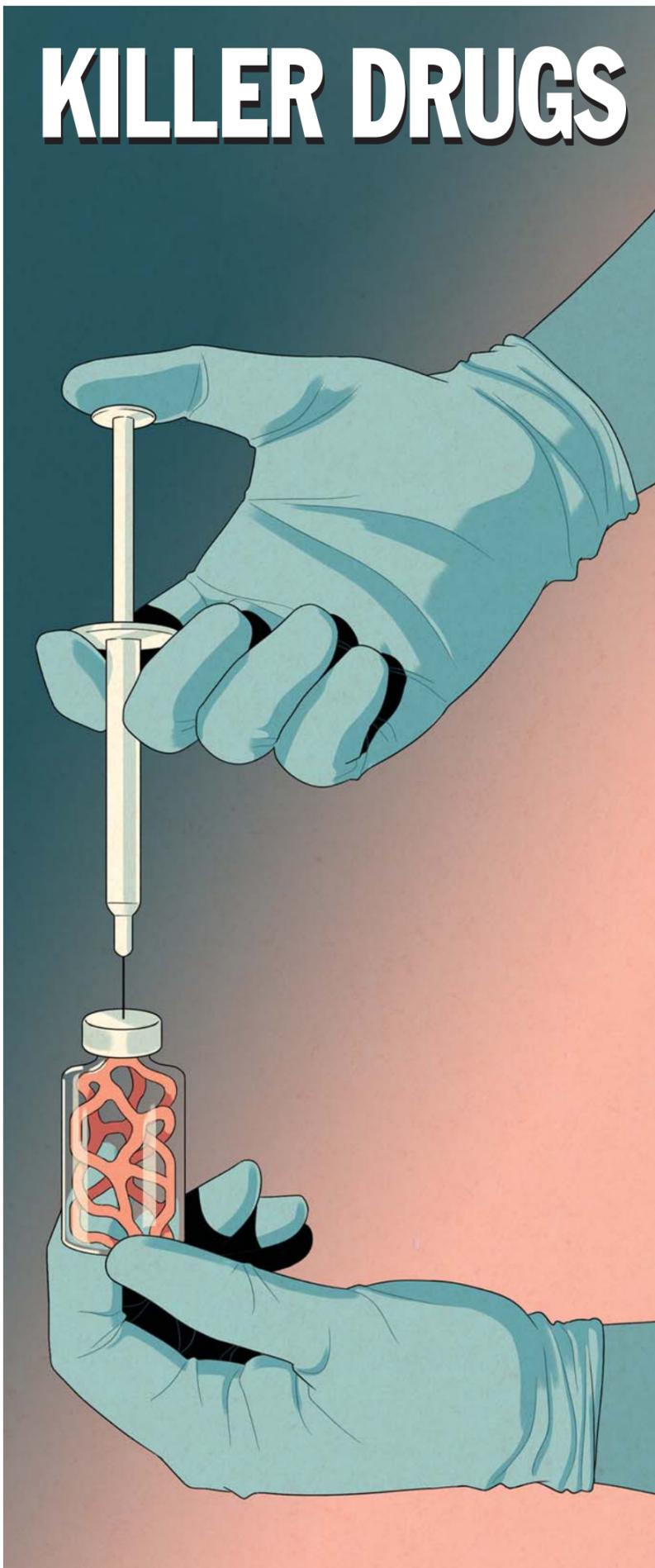
Narayan Prasad Dhakal, the regulator's director general, said the DDA's lab cannot currently test cancer drugs and admitted that the situation around quality-testing is "a concern". He also said that while his department can recall cancer drugs based on external evidence, it has never done so.

The issue is especially fraught for patients who may have travelled from remote, rural areas to get treatment that then may not even work.

"Neither patients nor their families have any way of knowing the quality of these drugs," said Smriti Pokharel of the Wish Nepal Foundation, which helps children from low-income families access cancer treatment. "Even doctors face challenges in verifying their quality. No one seems willing to take responsibility for ensuring proper treatment."

Laxmi Kumari, whose two-year-old son is being treated for cancer in Kathmandu, had to procure chemotherapy drugs from private pharmacies. The treatment has cost the family nearly Rs200,000 (£1,160), yet they have no reassurance that it will be effective.

Said Kumari: "We have no way of knowing the quality of the medications being used in his treatment, we rely entirely on what the doctors recommend."



ANUJ SHRESTHA/TBIJ

Cancer is one of the biggest killers worldwide, linked to around 10 million deaths every year – roughly one in six. The burden of cancer is growing, particularly in low- and middle-income regions. In Nepal, the incidence of reported cancers has doubled since 1990, and is the third most common cause of death.

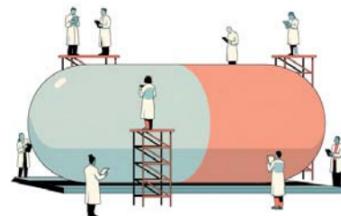
Much of the global demand for treatment is met by so-called generic drugs. These are versions of a drug that can be made once the original maker's patent expires, and are typically made far more cheaply. The spurious drugs listed in this TBIJ investigation were all generics.

Generics are widely used in all countries but are most crucial in those with fewer resources, where costlier treatments might be beyond reach. If generics were not available "any cancer treatment would be likely inaccessible to most of the population", said Claudia Martinez of the Access to Medicine Foundation, an Amsterdam-based non-profit.

In chemotherapy drugs, the active ingredient which fights cancer cells is also highly toxic. Patients need to receive enough of it to treat the cancer, but not so much that they overdose and suffer damaging side effects. Hospital pharmacists therefore calculate doses carefully, and in doing so, rely on the amount of active ingredient being exactly what is stated on the label.

India manufactures about 20% of the world's generic drugs which make many of these essential medicines affordable to the poorest people in poor countries. The investigation found that 16 of the 17 manufacturers of failed drugs are based in India and export their products around the world.

**Paul Eccles, Andjela Milivojevic, Ramu Sapkota**



**Beware of spurious cancer drugs**

PAGE 6-7

**Drugs vs Bugs**

PAGE 9

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# Water for Life

The monsoon this year arrived on time, and brought life-giving rain — irrigating paddy terraces, recharging groundwater, reviving springs, and increasing electricity generation.

But Nepal has to deal with either too much water or too little. On a clear April day before the monsoon, the hills of Sindhuli



**GUEST EDITORIAL**  
Ngamindra Dahal

district were parched, and there were wildfires burning out of control. There had been no rain for the past six months.

And that has been the perennial crisis for Nepal's farmers: that 85% of the rainfall occurs during just four months of the monsoon with little rain for the other eight months.

The water crisis is related to the powerful changes sweeping the mid-hill region of Nepal. With better roads, higher incomes and more exposure, many residents now aspire to have the kind of water supply seen in urban homes. They want hot or cold water at the turn of a tap, showers and flush tank toilets.

To meet this rising demand, many local and provincial governments are investing in large water supply projects often by lifting water from rivers hundreds of metres down the mountain. But these new systems may not be sustainable in the long run.

Many villages in Sindhuli are switching from local springs to piped systems, and even in rural homes, overhead tanks are becoming common.

But this new convenience comes with big challenges. Lifting water from rivers far below requires long pipes, electric pumps, and constant maintenance. These systems are costly, and the streams themselves often shrink to a trickle in the dry months. Big water-lifting schemes look impressive, but there is doubt if they can meet growing water demand.

A much more sustainable solution would be what some communities are doing: restoring old ponds or build new recharge systems. But those villages are exceptions, in most places traditional ponds and wallows are being filled up to be turned into sports fields, or make way for buildings.

Where there are new ponds, they are sometimes in the wrong places or without proper design. Roads and drains are not engineered properly and have increased

landslides and erosion. Water management in hilly areas is not just about building things, it is about building in the right way, in the right place.

Traditional water systems were based on nature. They were not perfect, but they used the land wisely. Ponds used to hold rainwater and slowly refill springs which supported families, farms, and forests.

Not everything worked well in the past, but we can learn from traditional water management practices. Across Nepal, some rural municipalities have launched campaigns to store monsoon runoff — either in tanks, ponds or by recharging the aquifers.

But not all efforts have been successful. Some ponds are built without any hydrological study. Some are rushed to meet deadlines rather than real needs.

Now, the Muhan initiative hopes to revive springs to make households more resilient and help farmings. With the financial support of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, research is being done

to understand how springs work and how they are affected by changes in rainfall, land use, and development.

Instead of just building pipes and tanks, the project maps the entire springshed so we can understand the root cause of water shortage.

In Sindhuli, the problem is not the amount of rain, but

the loss of natural systems that store it and the social systems that manage water.

Nepal's towns and villages now face a major challenge: how to manage water all year round as demand rises with people's living standards. Depending only on river-lift systems is not a sustainable solution.

We need a mix of

approaches that help store water from the rainy season to make it available for the rest of the year, whether by directly harvesting rainwater, restoring ponds, managing springsheds, or smart management of demand.

Rural Nepal is also seeing dramatic depopulation. Much of the outmigration can be stemmed if there is easier water supply for agriculture and household use. Across the mid hills, villages are emptying because springs are going dry. Government policy needs to catch up with the reality on the ground, and support solutions that work for people and nature. Every water supply plan should include recharge structures. Every road or building project should consider water flow and erosion. Local governments need more than budgets: they need training, tools, and data.

Ngamindra Dahal is with the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation, Kathmandu. Hemant Ojha collaborated in this piece and is associated with the Sydney-based Institute for Study and Development Worldwide.



GIRIRAJ BANSKOTA

**Nepal needs a sustainable solution to store 85% of rain that falls in four monsoon months for the other eight months.**

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Toon Time

Post 1 February coup by king Gyanendra, soldiers were posted in newsrooms of major publications, directed to spike news critical of the government. But those in the business of news found creative ways around it, including cartoonists who illustrated censorship as they saw it happen. Today, 20 years later, Nepal is supposed to have full constitutionally guaranteed press freedom, but there is pressure on the press.

Excerpts from issue #153 24 – 30 June 2005:



His real name is Durga Baral and the 53-year-old artist lives in Pokhara, which allows him a different perspective on the absurd goings-on in the capital. The developments were ripe for ridicule. But in the fear-filled weeks after February First, Batsayan remembers being not so sure about how far he could go.

"I didn't want the editor to get into trouble just because of me, so I held myself back," he recalls. But

when he read the columns of fellow-Kantipur contributor, Khagendra Sangraula and saw what Himal Khabarpatrika was getting away with, he decided to let himself go.

Batsayan's biting post-February cartoons boosted the morale of other editors and cartoonists. Playing cat-and-mouse with the censors, cartoonists started going further and taking more risks than writers.

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



**SAVING A LANGUAGE**

Listen to this podcast with spoken Kusunda, a 'language isolate' not related with any other language with just one native speaker alive. Sewa Bhattarai speaks to Kusunda language teacher Uday Raj Ale and one of his students Hima Kusunda. Listen on Spotify and read the story on page 10-11.



**CYCLE OF LIFE**

Makhumaya Tamang is one of the over 1,200 women in Patan who have learnt to use bicycles as part of an initiative by a local women's social media group called Women for Women. The women have gained mobility, freedom, economic opportunity and a sense of benign belonging on a bicycle. Watch the video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel, and subscribe for more multimedia content.

### JP CROSS

I remember meeting Colonel Cross at a linguistics seminar in Kirtipur decades ago, and his greeting with folded hands ('Pokhara's Century Man', Durga Rana Magar, #1266). He is such an unforgettable gentleman.

Rupa Joshi

■ I met Colonel Cross several times when taking the Junior Leaders from Shorncliffe round the Annapurna Circuit. He is a great man.

Jon Fleming

### FEDERALISM

Federalism was always a misguided project ('Federalism Express', Shristi Karki, #1266). But it is being undermined by the continuation of excessive control by the central government. Meanwhile, under spending is a chronic failure of provincial governments.

David Seddon

### BUDHANI

I hope this book is available in the local library or book shops when I visit Nepal again ('Of crows, and people', Sophia L. Pandé, nepalitimes.com). We understand indigenous struggle.

fluorescencyt

### GLOBAL CONFLICTS

Perhaps it is not exactly a World War but at the very least a World of Wars. History will likely be able to connect the dots ('World Wars', Editorial, #1266).

Tony Jones

### PAUBHA IN PARIS

Whatever artefacts we own is not ours anymore ('Priceless paubha in Paris', Shaguni Singh Sanya, #1265). There is much encroachment in all sectors, too much bribery and corruption, including in the arts.

Indra Raj Gurung

### SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Tourism has the potential to be a sustainable industry, generating substantial revenue ('Greening Nepal's tourism', Hanna Wells, nepalitimes.com). Sadly, we have become an example of mismanagement. A visionary leader in power could still turn things around for the better.

Hem Sagar Baral

## Times.com WHAT'S TRENDING



### Himalayan tipping points

by Sudiksha Tuladhar  
Taragon Next's ongoing exhibition At the Tipping Point: Art and Ecology from the Rooftop of the World has brought the climate emergency into focus, showing that it is not a distant threat, but a present reality reshaping the world. Read review at nepalitimes.com

**f** Most reached and shared on Facebook

### Repatriation for reconciliation

by Sonia Awale  
An international conference on looted cultural objects in Nepal last week was strategising about how to repatriate sacred icons, when news broke that a 400-year-old jewel studded gilt-copper necklace stolen from Kathmandu was up for auction in Belgium. Participants eventually halted the sale. Report online.

**X** Most popular on X

### America no longer prime destination

by 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. Follow us for the latest developments.

**🗨️** Most commented

### Music without borders

by Sangya Lamsal  
The Hari Maharjan Project mixed the traditional sounds of Nepal with world music at the Culture in Sync concert at the Sydney Opera House last week to bring a message of peace to a troubled world. Read profile of the maestro online.

**🔍** Most visited online page

## QUOTES

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Colonel J P Cross, a British Gurkha officer who led Nepal's soldiers to battle in many wars, decided to spend the rest of his life in Pokhara after retirement. Cross celebrates his 100th birthday on Saturday, 21 June. Details in Durga Rana Magar's story.

**Jainendra Jeevan @jainendrajeevan**  
Happy Birthday to Col. Cross, a British by birth and Nepali by heart. May you live longer and be happier!

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
As provinces struggle to spend their budgets and implement development projects, the federal leadership in Kathmandu continues to display its reluctance to decentralise power to the provinces.

**Gus Ferguson @xander\_fero**  
The introduction of a 'Federal Government' was always a scam: to extend and maintain economic control of the provinces while creating 10's of thousands of additional jobs for the KTM Bureaucratic Elite.

## 1,000 WORDS



PMO

**GAME OF THRONES:**  
Nepali Congress Chair Sher Bahadur Deuba and Prime Minister K P Oli of the UML during a governing coalition meeting in Baluwatar on Tuesday.

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# Being more intelligent about AI

■ Vishad Raj Onta

The country is poised to benefit from artificial intelligence, but needs a coherent strategy

**A**I can be a tiger. Will it eat us up, or can we ride it? The Cassandras fear it will make humans obsolete, while the Polyannas say what's wrong with that if it saves people from mundane work so they can devote time to more creative pursuits.

Even if AI solves major problems, might it lead to mass unemployment or exacerbate wealth inequality? Will artificial intelligence help solve the crises that the planet faces, or will it make everything more dangerous?

Some of these issues are addressed in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) annual Human Development Report for 2025 (pictured, overleaf). Titled *A Matter of Choice: People and Possibilities in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, it reasons that rather than assuming AI will run wild and result in either utopian or dystopian outcomes, it reflects values of those shaping it.

Some may view this as overly optimistic or naive, especially given the exponential rate at which AI is gaining capability. Yet, there are no major cases, yet, of AI models going rogue, but they do tend to reflect the biases of their training data.

UNDP's choice of the word 'choice' to title its 2025 report acknowledges that AI is science fiction no longer, and not under development, but a tangible presence. It is the most powerful and disruptive technology humanity has created.

Some utopian online communities, such as 'e/acc' (effective acceleration), believe AI will solve humanity's problems and



MADAN BHANDARI UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY / FACEBOOK

enhance its future. They advocate for rapid advancements with minimal, if any, regulation.

The UNDP report argues that AI should augment human work rather than replace it, that it will not magically solve poverty or climate change, and that it must prevent further exclusion. There is only a small group controlling AI development, and AI needs to be seen as a fundamental right.

While Nepal may lack cutting-edge AI talent and hardware, the country's hydropower potential

could supply the energy required to train AI models. India and China could even consider building data centres here.

Recently, Nepal's Ministry of Communication and Information Technology released an ambitious 'Draft of National AI Policy', but it is very much a draft, a wish list rather than a concrete strategy.

The only detailed section outlines the composition of a future regulatory body, mentions building 'international-standard data centres' and deploying '5G and beyond',

despite limited broadband access across the country, and leaves funding details to 'regular budgets' and 'international donors'.

Nepal's IT sector could be a key player. Global companies have long outsourced coding to Nepal, where skilled, English-speaking programmers work at competitive rates, even by South Asian standards (see story, overleaf). As AI improves at generating standardised, reusable 'boilerplate' code, coders may face job losses.

However, the ability to quickly

produce code could also spark a boom in jobs, much like the loom initially displaced weavers but ultimately created more jobs and affordable clothing.

The high demand and compensation for software engineers skilled in building AI tools could also encourage Nepal's sizeable IT workforce to pivot in that direction. UNDP notes that AI excels at bridging the gap between unskilled and skilled labour for general tasks.

With Nepal's low literacy rate and poor quality education, this could be a significant advantage. Nepal's companies are also taking strides in AI product development, beyond just coding services.

FuseMachines, for instance, builds AI tools to extract data from documents and detect financial fraud. It went public on NASDAQ in 2024. Wiseyak develops healthcare software that uses AI to analyse customer data for insights and diagnoses.

Communities like the Nepal Applied Mathematics and Informatics Institute for Research (NAAMII) drive AI innovation through research, hackathons, conferences, workshops, and lectures. Their projects include AI-Assisted Smartphone Microscopy, VIA Screening for Cervical Cancer, and large language models akin to ChatGPT, but in Nepali.

Students can engage with AI through academic programs. Numerous institutions now offer AI courses at undergraduate and graduate levels.

The Madan Bhandari University of Science and Technology (UST) in Chitlang (pictured, left) provides a Master's of Applied Science in AI and Data Science. Two PhD spots

## NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक

### Turkish finance



Turkish Airlines has been presented with the Sustainable Financing Pioneer Award by Ishka, recognising its landmark transaction that, for the first time, integrated a sustainability-linked loan structure into a multi-currency JOLCO financing model for

the acquisition of two next-generation, fuel-efficient Airbus A321neo aircraft. This innovative transaction, arranged by Societe Generale, links the financing terms to Turkish Airlines' Sustainability Performance Targets (SPTs), particularly the goal of reducing carbon intensity across its fleet.

"We believe this structure not only supports our fleet renewal and growth objectives, but also reinforces our long-term commitment to becoming a carbon-neutral airline by 2050," said Chief Financial Officer Murat Şeker.



### KU + SiHP

Kathmandu University and Southasia Institute for History and Philosophy (SiHP) are jointly launching a Master's in History and Philosophy programme with society, technology and environment streams. The joint project starts in February 2026, and aims to meet the need to offer quality social science instruction.



### Foton Tunland G7

Foton is launching the Tunland G7 pickup with a 160 HP engine and 225mm clearance ideal for Nepal's rough roads. It is available in Elite (Rs5.19 million), Luxury (Rs6.54 million), and Flagship (Rs6.99 million) variants, as well as in both 2WD and 4WD.



### New BYD Dolphin

The new BYD Dolphin 2025 is being offered in Nepal for Rs4.115 million and has a lighter, more efficient Lithium low voltage battery, offering 340km range. There is a six-year warranty and a 7kW charger.

### Weapons worth a Billion

The government is preparing a Rs1 billion weapon buy for Nepal Police by the end of this fiscal year for 9mm pistols and shotguns. The urgency is linked to the royalist protests on March 28 that turned violent, as well as to improve VIP protection and major event management. Critics warn of corrupt procurement syndicates being in on the act.

### IME hotel discounts

Those banking with Global IME can get up to 15% discounts on IME Hospitality properties, including Hotel Le Himalaya, Sake & Feng Restaurant, Ila Comfort, Ila Hotel & Resort Maula Kalika, Lakeside Retreat, and Maula Kalika Cable Car.



### Curvv EV K2K

Sipradi had sent two auto enthusiast vloggers on a 6700km 'K2K' round trip from the Thapathali Tata showroom in Kathmandu to Kanyakumari on India's southern tip on a Curvv EV, aiming to prove the capabilities of the model and the extent of the charging network in India. Sipradi also hosted the first 'Ride with Michelin' event with 50 riders on Royal Enfields testing Michelin tyres on the road from Kathmandu to Sukute in Sindhupalchok.

### Hyundai in Nepalganj

Laxmi Intercontinental launched the Creta EV at a Nepalganj Meet & Greet, part of Hyundai's efforts to introduce EVs nationwide. Spare parts are available for the Creta, and Hyundai is expanding a 66-strong network of charging stations.

### Ride-sharing regulations

The Supreme Court has instructed the Gandaki Provincial Government to go forward with its ride sharing regulation despite an initial planned one-month suspension. Transport entrepreneurs had protested the regulations with a nationwide transport strike, fearing decreasing revenue. Supreme Court judges cited public benefit and a writ petition to bring back the regulations which aim to formalise ride-sharing services and make them safer.

### Huawei EV chargers

Huawei in collaboration with GadiCharge and NEEK, have launched Nepal's first FusionCharge Smart EV Charging Station in Bagmati Province. Combining solar, battery storage, and AI, it could mark a major step toward building resilient, intelligent green infrastructure in Nepal.

### Enfield ambassador

Royal Enfield have hired entertainer Sandeep Chhetri as Brand Ambassador. "We expect that through Sandeep Chhetri, Royal Enfield's legacy, style, and passion for motorcycles will be communicated more effectively to the Nepali public," the company said.

### Amala Roka released

Amala Roka, a suspect in a 61-kg gold smuggling case, has been released on Rs200,000 bail. Roka was in the famous case of smuggling gold disguised as brake pads at the Kathmandu airport, but had been on the run for 23 months before being caught last week. Roka's husband Dawa Chhiring is also involved in helping foreign nationals get Nepali passports. They are alleged to have links to high profile Maoist leaders.



### Gham Power wins

Gham Power was one of ten winners, out of 2,500, of the \$50,000 Keeling Curve Prize which honours high-impact clean energy solutions. Gham Power offers strategic financing to make solar energy available to underserved communities, and has completed 4,000 projects so far, which include rural solar microgrids.



in Digital Technology will offer AI studies to undergraduates starting in November.

The Master's program is designed as a 'Master's by Research,' with over half of the 50 credit hours dedicated to a thesis project. Given AI's rapidly evolving nature, there is no fixed syllabus: professors tailor the curriculum.

"The university has a set of available projects, and we

science background, provided they have undergraduate statistics and programming experience," says Subba. "We encourage entrepreneurship and policy involvement, so students take elective courses in these areas."

Subba believes funding research is critical for AI progress in Nepal, as a successful model can have widespread applications.

"The government could allocate 50 lakhs in seed money for research to each university," he suggests. "The biggest obstacles are funding, limited high-quality data for training models, and a shortage of faculty. Qualified candidates are scarce and often reluctant to work in Chitlang or Nepal."

Retaining students for Master's programs is a first step toward building a local talent pool, with hopes that some will pursue PhDs and become faculty.

"We still learn from world-class AI educators, even if they can't

# AI widens scope for IT exports

A lot of the most critical healthcare software used in the United States, from insurance, medical records, analytics, billings to general operations are made in Nepal.

Coding is outsourced to IT companies in Nepal because it is cheap, and there is a large pool of coders with 15,000 graduates entering the job market every year.

Churn is low, and programming remains a desirable career, with people able to work remotely for high pay with little investment, often even without a degree.

Indeed, building US healthcare software holds up the growing Nepali IT industry which last year exported software worth \$900 million, nearly as much as Nepal

experts, and new programmers here are technically excellent as well."

The trust and skills that companies and individuals have built up is also how TechKraft gets clients, referrals and business, and they have to strictly ensure data security and privacy protection.

"This is personal information about people's insurance, their visits to the hospital, their diseases. Any breaches could lead to expensive lawsuits," says Koirala.

While it is much easier for subsidiary companies to keep data within their systems, vendors must put in place multiple layers of physical and cybersecurity to convince clients to work with them. They must work in what is called a 'cleanroom': a controlled environment where teams can work on sensitive data without compromising security or privacy.

Laptops and even pen and paper cannot leave the workplace, and all employees must pass training in globally recognised information security standards.

AI is transforming processing of healthcare data, and companies like TechKraft have integrated it in everything they do. Agentic AI is designed for a high level of autonomy, and can handle booking, rescheduling, and reminders for patient visits, detect anomalies in medical imagery, analyse patient data to create custom treatment plans, predict outcomes, even catch medical fraud.

AI also helps programmers at TechKraft write better code, faster. "AI has had a huge impact on our workflow, it is faster and more efficient," says Koirala, "but since it makes things so much easier, it may become harder to find business."

It also means that a project may require only four engineers skilled with AI instead of say, ten. The remaining six are out of a job.

Another Nepali company, Wiseyak, also works on a host of AI healthcare products. One is software that can diagnose diabetic retinopathy and pneumonia at least as well as the best doctors. Another is AI-EMR algorithms that can analyse patient data to provide insights and recommendations.

"We help doctors by building powerful tools, and not replace them," says co-founder and CEO of Wiseyak Suresh Manandhar,

who has been studying and working with AI for 40 years, long before it became a part of everyday life.

Wiseyak now wants to make software that can be used in Nepal's hospitals to diagnose various diseases. For retinopathy, an AI is trained on publicly available datasets of retinal scans.

The model can then learn to detect a range of symptoms such as microaneurysms in the eye, 'cotton wool', and macular degeneration. It can then make a diagnosis based on the quantity and size of the anomalies it detects.

"AI can be fine tuned by feeding it retinal scans of Nepalis," says Manandhar who admits to difficulties because medical records in Nepal are still paper-based and not digital, and few hospitals want to retool. "The government should invest and build momentum to adopt these technologies."

Santosh Koirala of TechKraft is also president of Nepal Association for Software and IT Services Companies (NAS-IT), a group that focuses on policy and advocacy with the government. He is optimistic about gradual progress in lobbying efforts.

"The government is slowly getting it," he told us. "Removing limits to Foreign Direct Investment and allowing Nepali companies to have offices abroad are big steps in the right direction."

NAS-IT also advises universities on the development of courses to keep students up to date with the latest developments in AI, as well as pushing for data insurance to make clients less reluctant to work with Nepali companies.

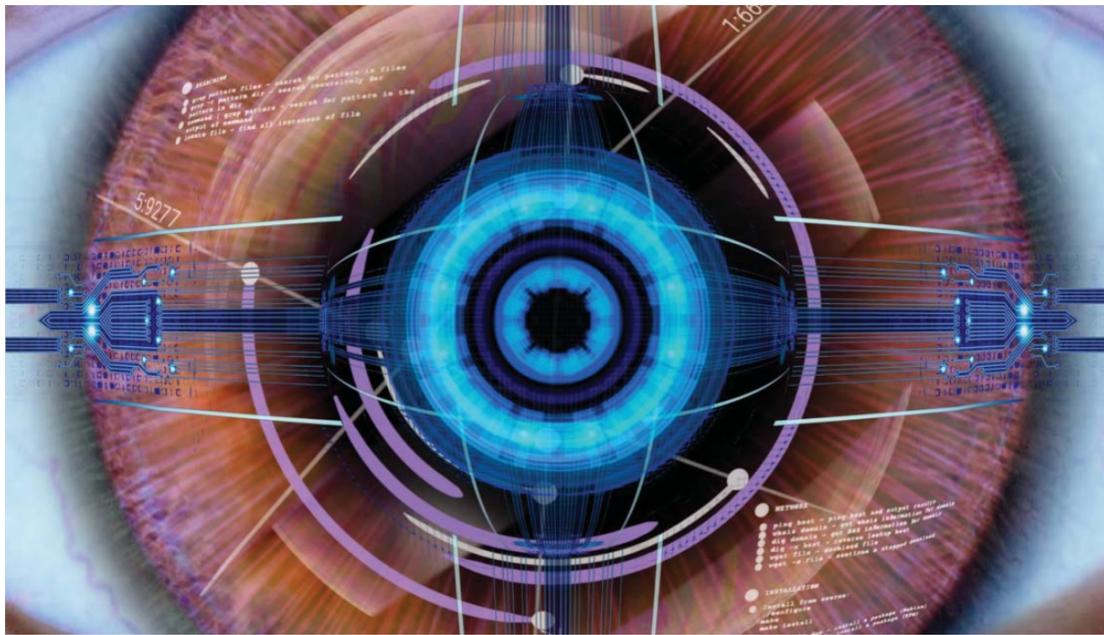
Both Koirala and Manandhar are optimistic about the general direction Nepal's IT sector is going in, and can build on.

"There is a lot of potential which is being recognised quite quickly," says Koirala. "We know the technology now, and we know how things are done at a global level. The next step is for Nepal to start making products that can be used widely across the world."

IT products for application within Nepal are now designed in Nepal itself, and software companies such as eSewa were ahead of their time in the region.

Manandhar is also bullish: "There is no limit to how helpful AI can be for Nepal. Trained, super-specialised doctors are scarce, so AI can be a substitute and make them three, four times more efficient."

**Vishad Raj Onta**



WISEYAK

evaluate a student's background and capabilities before assigning one," says Rajib Subba, Assistant Professor at the UST's Digital Technology Program.

While most current Master's students have computer engineering backgrounds, this is not a prerequisite. Rupesh Aryal, a Master's student in AI, says: "One person in my cohort has a background in agriculture, while another studied medicine and is working on AI for digital imaging."

His thesis focuses on a Nepali large language model. Other projects include early wildfire detection, AI for drug discovery, and models to predict human-wildlife conflict.

"We accept students from any

be here physically," says Aryal. A recent visitor was Professor Gerald Penn from the University of Toronto, an expert in natural language processing. "We have all the GPUs we need to train models, and students receive scholarships and stipends."

"Most of my peers are committed to staying in Nepal and contributing," Aryal adds, "while some plan to pursue PhDs abroad and return."

Nepal's best strategy for thriving in the AI era lies in developing talent through well-designed programs like the one at Madan Bhandari University. "The government's AI policies currently prioritise control and regulation over fostering growth," he adds. 🇳🇵

earns from tourism every year.

IT exports have a long history, starting from when Rudra Pandey co-founded D2Hawkeye, which pioneered healthcare analytics. The company is now Verisk Health.

There are over 15 technology companies that specialise in medical software, operating mostly as subsidiaries of US companies, but some are also 'vendors' that are completely Nepal-owned.

One such company is TechKraft, which builds software for clients across the world in healthcare, but also in finance. Its Executive Director Santosh Koirala says: "A big advantage Nepal has in making US healthcare software is simply how long it has been involved in it. This has created many domain

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चर्को घामबाट बचाउँछ



मुसलघारे वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ



१० वर्ष वारेन्टी



# Beware of spurious cancer drugs

Manufacturers are diluting anti-cancer medicines, affecting patients in countries like Nepal

■ Paul Eccles, Andjela Milivojevic, Ramu Sapkota

Chemotherapy drugs used worldwide have failed quality tests, leaving patients at risk of ineffective treatment and potentially fatal side effects, the UK-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ) has revealed.

The drugs form the backbone of treatment plans for common cancers – including breast, ovarian and leukemia. Some drugs contained so little of their key ingredient that pharmacists said giving them to patients would be as good as doing nothing.

Other drugs, containing too much active ingredient, put patients at risk of severe organ damage or even death. “Both scenarios are horrendous,” said one pharmacist. “It’s heartbreaking.”

Doctors from multiple countries told TBIJ of the drugs in question not working as expected, leaving patients suddenly unresponsive to treatment. Others suffered side effects so toxic that they could no longer tolerate the medicine. The variance in levels of active ingredient was alarming. In some cases, pills from the same blister pack contained different amounts.

These findings expose huge holes in the global safety nets intended to prevent profit-seeking manufacturers from cutting corners, and to protect patients from bad drugs. All the while, patients and governments with stretched resources are paying the price for drugs that don’t work.

The TBIJ investigation published on 26 June examined the amount of active ingredient in seven common types of cancer drugs: cisplatin, cyclophosphamide, doxorubicin, ifosfamide, leucovorin, methotrexate and oxaliplatin, all classed as essential medicines by the WHO.

Working with collaborators in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya and Malawi, researchers at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, analysed drug samples from the four countries.

Of 189 samples that had not expired at the time of testing, about one-fifth failed. This consisted of 20 different brands of generic drug made by 17 manufacturers.

“We were all taken aback when we saw the results,” said Marya Lieberman, the professor who led the research (pictured top, right). “Once a person has been diagnosed with cancer, there’s a limited window of opportunity for treatment to work. And if someone is treated with an ineffective product, they can lose that precious window.”

More than 30 manufacturers made products to a good standard. But for patients receiving the poor-quality drugs, the effects could be devastating. The majority of failed drugs had too little active ingredient (for most this meant less than 88% of the amount stated on the label) while some contained too much (more than 112%). Both thresholds were decided by researchers based on international standards.

“Both scenarios are horrendous in my eyes,” said Shereen Nabhani-Gebara of the British Oncology Pharmacists Association. “It takes a lot of courage for someone with cancer to accept a diagnosis, but then to be short-changed like this when they are trying their best is

heartbreaking – because this is someone’s life.”

Over the past six years, these drugs have been shipped to low- and middle-income nations like Nepal, Ethiopia and North Korea, to the US, UK and Saudi Arabia. The worst-performing drug in the study made by Indian manufacturer Venus Remedies is cyclophosphamide, often used to treat cancers including lymphoma and breast cancer.

All eight of the Venus Remedies samples failed, with six containing less than half the amount of active ingredient claimed by the manufacturer. One contained just over a quarter of the stated dose, which according to several cancer pharmacists would be as effective as no treatment at all.

The drug has been shipped to six countries, with its largest importer being Ethiopia. Wondemagegnhu Tigeneh, a clinical oncologist in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, said he has treated patients with chemotherapy drugs he believes did not work.

“I have a suspicion that the active ingredient was lower than expected,” he added, remembering a drug he gave to a recent patient who had responded well to the first three rounds of treatment.

But on the next round, their progress suddenly stopped. In his 20 years treating cancer, he has learned to notice tell-tale signs: a complete absence of side-effects such as nausea or hair loss.

Then there are the patients whose disease he struggles to get under control, such as a patient whose response to treatment halted without warning. Rather than reducing the size of the tumour enough to enable surgery, his team has been forced to move onto second-line treatment. If that fails, the next stage is palliative care. “It’s very sad,” said Tigeneh. “We didn’t used to see things like this.”

A 2020 study of cancer drugs in Ethiopia included 20 samples of cisplatin which were all found to be substandard, averaging just over half of the stated content.

Venus Remedies told TBIJ that the study results were “not scientifically plausible” given the company’s “validated manufacturing systems and quality controls”. It said it has received no complaints or concerns about the batches in question and shared the results of its own testing that indicated they were of a good standard. Storage conditions in the supply chain might have affected the researchers’ test results, it said.

However, Lieberman said that her researchers’ methods follow international standards as closely as possible and employ similar standards to a regulatory lab. Both the findings and methods have been scrutinised by independent academics.

While the majority of India-made drugs are safe, the country’s generics industry has long been dogged by scandal. In 2013, Indian manufacturer Ranbaxy agreed to pay a fine of \$500m after its US

subsidiary pleaded guilty to the improper manufacturing, storing and testing of drugs.

In 2022 and 2023, Indian-made cough syrups were linked to the deaths of children in Gambia, Cameroon and Uzbekistan. And last year, the Indian regulator found more than 50 drugs on the market to be substandard or fake, including some paracetamol and antacids.

Sixteen of the 17 manufacturers of cancer treatment drugs identified in this investigation are based in India, and five have been previously flagged by a regulator for producing substandard batches of drugs. One of them, Zee Laboratories, has been flagged 46 times since 2018.

India’s drug regulator told TBIJ Zee Laboratories has been audited and given a ‘stop production order’, which was lifted after the company resolved the problems in question. It did not give details about when this was, which issues it pertained to or whether the company faced any consequences.

It is unclear whether the manufacturers exposed in TBIJ’s previous investigation into substandard asparaginase have faced any repercussions, despite 70,000 children with leukemia being at risk.

Three companies, Getwell Pharmaceuticals, United Biotech and VHB Medi Sciences, also made some of the substandard drugs revealed by this investigation. Thakur said there’s only one way to explain the production of weak drugs by big companies: “Somebody’s cutting corners.” India’s drug regulator defended the oversight system, saying

that failing drugs are recalled and manufacturers face ‘either administrative penalties or legal prosecution in court’.

Meanwhile, these medicines continue to fill pharmacy shelves. Zuvius Lifesciences and GLS Pharma have supplied their failed brands to over 40 countries. And in the past two years, Venus Remedies has been awarded a series of contracts and licenses, including from the Pan American Health Organization to supply several essential cancer drugs to Latin American countries.

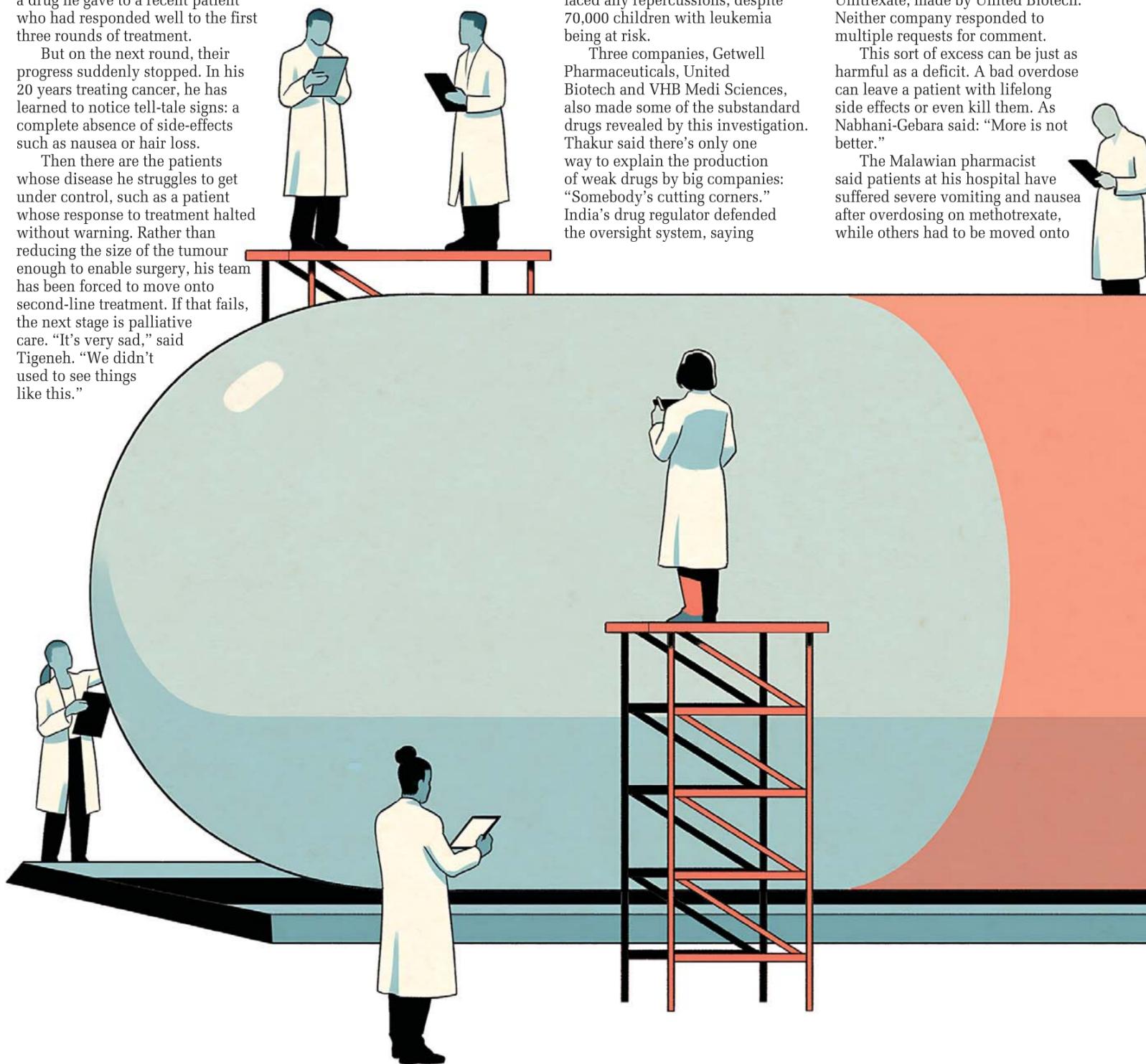
## Cascade of Failure

In Malawi, specialist cancer care has only been available for 15 years and patients depend on healthcare being free at the point of need. A pharmacist specialising in cancer care in Malawi told TBIJ of seeing patients at his hospital overdose on methotrexate, a drug used to treat leukaemia and lymphoma.

Malawi has also imported two of the brands of methotrexate the researchers in this investigation found to contain too much active ingredient: Zuvitrex, made by Zuvius Lifesciences, and Unitrexate, made by United Biotech. Neither company responded to multiple requests for comment.

This sort of excess can be just as harmful as a deficit. A bad overdose can leave a patient with lifelong side effects or even kill them. As Nabhani-Gebara said: “More is not better.”

The Malawian pharmacist said patients at his hospital have suffered severe vomiting and nausea after overdosing on methotrexate, while others had to be moved onto





BARBARA JOHNSTON/UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Marya Lieberman, professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Notre Dame and corresponding author of the study, preparing a fentanyl solution in her research lab.

a second-line treatment, which may not be as effective. For some patients, the side effects were so severe that they had to pause treatment entirely – giving the cancer a chance to grow.

When a sample of the methotrexate in question was tested as part of a research project taking place at the time, it was found to be too high in active ingredient. The pharmacist told TBIJ that he and his colleagues have on occasion had to stop using an entire batch of chemotherapy medicine and send samples to the national drug regulator after the medicine changed colour – a sign something is wrong with it.

“We had patients scheduled for clinic,” he said, “and then we had to break the news to them that we don’t have medicines.”

Countries all over the world have systems in place to stop bad drugs reaching patients. However, there are huge disparities in their effectiveness. According to Chaitanya Kumar Koduri of US Pharmacopeia, an organisation that sets standards for medicines in the US and internationally, 70% of countries cannot take care of their own medicine quality.

Most governments have a national regulator – but their remit and resources vary hugely. And even the better-funded regulators are far from foolproof. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), for instance, is struggling to keep up with inspections of manufacturing plants domestically and in India

and China, and has admitted that its inspections have not been a reliable indicator of drug quality.

The FDA recently announced it would expand unannounced inspections at foreign manufacturing facilities, saying this will help expose those who falsify records or hide violations. Generic drug manufacturers are operating in a global market that healthcare professionals and experts agree is driven by one thing: price. It is a market in which those operating under a less watchful eye can find ways to undercut their competitors.

This could mean scrimping on the amount or quality of the active ingredient, the most expensive component, or using outdated machinery. Research shows that the majority of substandard drugs occur due to problems with manufacturing, quality control, packaging or storage.

The results can be fatal. Four children died in Colombia after being given contaminated cancer drugs in 2019. Three years later, another batch of bad medicine caused the deaths of at least 10 children in Yemen who were being treated for leukaemia.

The price-driven market creates a dangerous dynamic in which the number of companies making a particular drug shrinks until global supply is precariously dependent on just a handful of manufacturers. Should one company slip up, thousands of patients can be left without the drugs they depend on.

Between 2018 and 2022, Intas Pharmaceuticals, the parent company of Accord

Healthcare which made the worst-performing cisplatin tested in this investigation, grew its market share of cisplatin from 24% to 62%. It also increased its share in methotrexate five fold. All the while, prices of both these chemotherapy drugs dropped.

At the end of 2022, a surprise inspection by the US drug regulator revealed a ‘cascade of failure’ at an Intas factory in India, where staff were seen shredding and pouring acid on quality records. The shutdown that ensued sent shockwaves across the US, with nearly every major cancer centre reporting shortfalls in chemotherapy drugs during the spring or summer of 2023.

Accord Healthcare said the batch of cisplatin that failed testing had met all established quality standards, and shared data from internal and external studies indicating its quality. It said it has not received any market concerns related to this batch.

In India, the world’s largest producer of generic drugs, questions have been raised over whether manufacturers are properly punished for producing drugs that aren’t fit for purpose, and whether regulators have proper oversight.

“The Indian government’s interest is in trying to protect the industry,” said public health activist and former Big Pharma whistleblower Dinesh Thakur.

The WHO has compiled a list of ‘essential medicines’ to help countries prioritise. It checks active ingredients and their manufacturers to create a pre-approved list that countries can trust.

The WHO also oversees a set of standards for manufacturers and drugs that many countries refer to when importing medicines. However, the list of recommended medicines only expanded to include cancer drugs in 2019.

Shalini Jayasekar-Zürn of the Union for International Cancer Control, a global membership organisation, says it currently only encompasses two cancer drugs, rituximab and trastuzumab. “It would be great if the list was expanded to include more essential medicines, especially for cancer,” she said.

While the WHO oversees standards for manufacturers and drugs, it is up to the countries buying medicines to make sure those standards are met – which is no easy task given the resources of national regulators. A WHO scheme that certifies a given drug meets various standards has been undermined by companies that have found ‘workarounds’ to get hold of the paperwork without improving quality.

“It’s not worth the paper it’s written on,” Thakur said. The upshot is that without the comprehensive oversight the WHO’s processes do not stop substandard medicines making their way onto shelves. The WHO did not respond to several requests for comment made by TBIJ.

It is the cancer patients who are often left to foot the bill, and those who have the least pay the most. In low income countries, the cost of 58% of essential cancer medicines is paid by patients, compared with 1.8% in richer countries.

One cancer pharmacist in Ethiopia estimated that it could take over a year for a patient to save for cancer treatment. If that medicine then turns out to be faulty, they simply might not be able to afford to pay for another. Most people believe cancer is incurable, and when they end up with a medicine that will not cure them, that is another tragedy.

“For me, it’s a question of fairness,” said Lieberman, the lead researcher. “Patients have the right to be treated with a medicine that actually is what it says it is.”

# Drug dealers push fake medicine

## Nepali family that lost a mother possibly due to counterfeit cancer drugs takes hospital and doctors to court

■ Dhanu Biswokarma

On 16 March 2024, New Delhi Police arrested Neeraj Chauhan and others for selling fake anti-cancer drugs to patients at a hospital in a suburb of the Indian capital.

The Indian media reported they were filling empty vials of expensive drugs with fake ingredients for which they charged up to INR300,000. They ran the racket in collusion with hospital staff, drug dealers, pharmacists, and brokers.

Here in Nepal, a family that lost its mother two years ago to oesophageal cancer was shocked by the news. They had ordered medication from the same Neeraj Chauhan in Delhi.

The woman’s daughter told us her mother was treated between 2021-2023 at Nepal Medicit Hospital by a team including oncologist Pankaj Barman, who is also Indian and allegedly put her in touch with Neeraj Chauhan.

Barman’s team at Medicit had treated the woman with chemotherapy, followed by radiotherapy at Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital. She was readmitted to Medicit on 5 February 2022 where Barman and another doctor, Vijay Sah, put her on Nivolumab, an immunotherapy drug, among others at various stages of treatment.

She was in remission for a while before the cancer came back. The family reached out to Barman and Sah after the relapse, who advised another immunotherapy drug called Pembrolizumab, sold under the brand name Keytruda.

The daughter was told the drug was not available in Nepal because it was very expensive and needed temperature control for storage. Barman is then said to have told the family about Neeraj Chauhan, who also supplied drugs at a cheaper rate to other Medicit patients.

The family purchased the drug, and started administering it to their mother, but her health deteriorated, and a month later, she died on 9 February 2023.

Believing that they tried their best to save their mother, but she eventually died of a complex illness, the grieving family moved back to everyday life. A year later, the daughter chanced upon a news item in the Indian Express news about Chauhan’s arrest.



Was the medicine they had ordered for their mother from Chauhan also a fake? This question haunted the family, and they started to investigate the drug and the company.

When they went to the Department of Drug Administration (DDA), they found that Keytruda was not even registered in Nepal when it was prescribed to their mother.

The daughter opted for legal remedy and filed a case at the Lalitpur District Court against Medicit, the doctors Barman and Sah and Neeraj Chauhan as defendants, demanding a compensation of NPR70 million.

Counterfeit drugs are a major problem worldwide, and Nepal is affected because it borders two of the biggest sources of fake medicines. Domestic production now meets half of Nepal’s needs, but even here quality control is lacking with some manufacturers.

### Medicit Response

Earlier this year, Medicit Hospital filed a response at the Lalitpur District Court through its lawyer Manju Phuyal. It alleged that while the woman was indeed at Medicit, the family had tried to conceal that the patient was also treated at Paras Health in India in 2021.

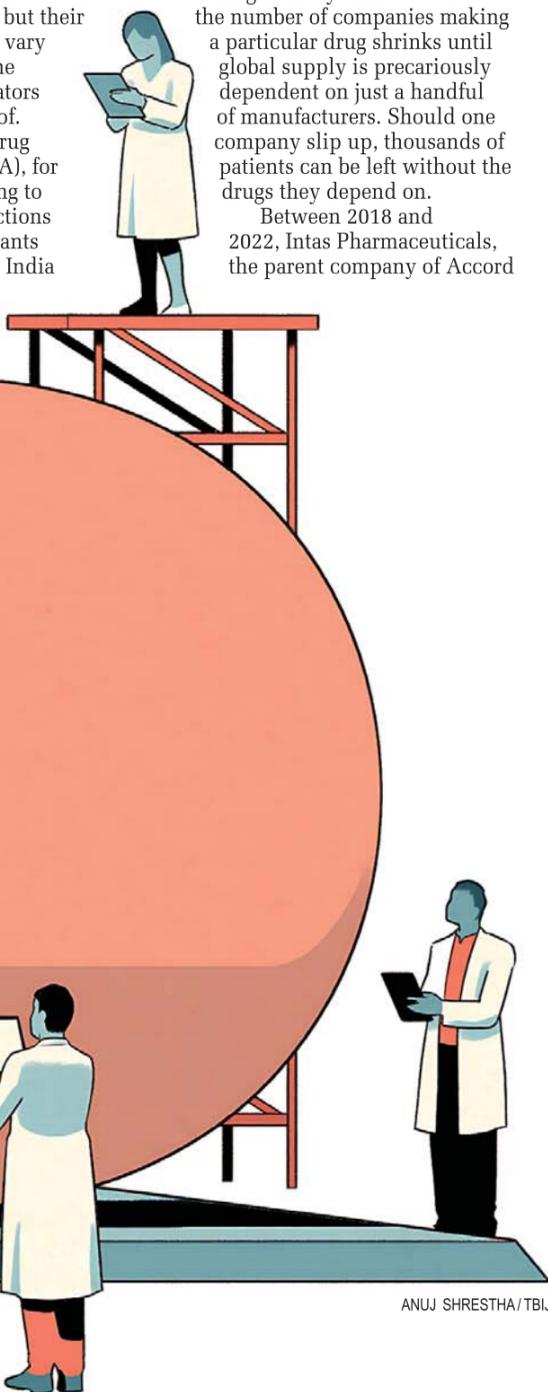
It also states that drugs not registered in Nepal have been used for treatment, since the law allows a doctor to recommend medicines essential for a patient, if a special permission is granted by the DDA.

However, the department does not appear to have approved the use of Keytruda for the concerned patient.

Medicit also argued that there is no proof that the person mentioned in the news is the same Neeraj Chauhan who sold the medicine for the patient.

Raj Rana, Medical Superintendent of Medicit, says the two doctors left the hospital voluntarily. Rana added, “Since it was a recommendation made by the doctor, the hospital was not responsible.”

The Nepal Medical Council has launched an investigation and taken steps against Barman for practicing without renewing his license. Foreign citizens must apply for registration with the council every year, but Barman had not. The Council also wrote to Chitwan Medical College where Barman worked till recently. Sah has not been investigated. ■



ANUJ SHRESTHA/TBIJ

## EVENTS



## Kori Trek

A moderate 5-day trek offering views of Annapurna IV, Machhapuchhre and Lamjung Himal. Starting from the traditional Gurung village of Sikles, the trail takes participants through dense forests, alpine meadows, and remote highlands to panoramic Kori Danda above 3,800m.

Call for details.  
1-5 July, Rs19,500, Booking: until 28 June, 9846190957



## Ropain

The annual paddy planting festival is here, get a little muddy and create joyous memories this season. Celebrate agriculture and monsoon as well as gender and sexual diversity with music, dance and dahi chiura.

29 June, 3am-5pm, Hotel Suva, Boudha  
Registration: by 27 June, 9801002972

## 여girl, 모발, 치야 tea

Korean artists Jung Ji Young 정지영 and Lee Dawon 이다원 are exhibiting their contemporary art as part of AIR Mcube International Artists' Residency – June 2025 Edition.

Until 29 June, 10am-7pm, Gallery Mcube, 9851170110



## Amalgam

An exhibition of 61 established and upcoming Nepali artists across mediums: drawings, acrylics, and ceramics, capturing a diverse set of voices, perspectives, and methods.

Until 8 July, 11am-5pm, Baber Mahal Revisited

## Farmers' Market

Le Sherpa Farmers' Market offers a wide variety of local goods and fresh produce alongside vibrant stalls of homemade treats and artisanal crafts. Enjoy your weekend!

7 June, 7:30am onwards, Le Sherpa, Maharajganj

## DINING



## Breakfast at Dhokaima

Start your morning right with some freshly-served buffet breakfast. Enjoy a delicious spread of buttery croissants, muffins, sausages, fluffy pancakes, sautéed potatoes, and fresh juice.

8am to 11am, Rs900, Dhokaima Cafe, Patan Dhoka (01) 5422113

## MUSIC

## Brahmunda Rock Jatra

Grunge, punk, ethno-rock and indie come together as The Flying Spirits, Blank Craft, Jhalluzz, Bad Eggs, Total Menace and Nainsook all perform at Brahmunda Rock Jatra this week.

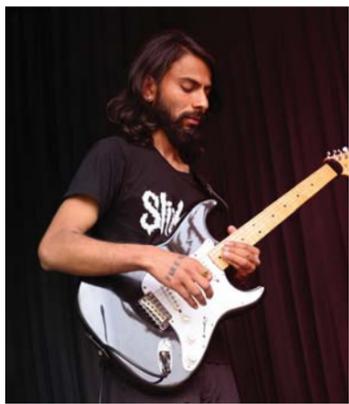
28 June, 1pm onwards, Da Junction, Boudha, 9861824834



## The Heart Breakers

The Heart Breakers is performing live at Hard Rock Café this Friday. Get ready for a night filled with great tunes and good food.

27 June, 7pm onwards, Sherpa Mall, 9801986771



## Folk Rock Music Night

Join Dinesh Dhakal & Doko Namlo at Club Omnia for a thrilling blend of soulful folk tunes and electrifying rock beats that will have you singing, dancing, and feeling the rhythm all night long.

28 June, 9pm onwards, Rs850, 9803278991

## Gone Elvis

Chill this weekend with friends, enjoy live performance from Gone Elvis at Hard Rock Café with their signature burgers.

28 June, 9801986771, Sherpa Mall, Darbarmarg



## Music Feast

Grab your crew for a night of insane music with top artists performing including The Firantee, Swar and Rockheads in Dharan. Book your tickets now.

1 August, 6pm onwards, Dharan Stadium, Rs300-700

## GETAWAY



## Chandragiri Hills Resort

Be a Chandragiri Hills Cloud Club Gold Membership and get benefits worth Rs73,500 at just Rs25,000 per year. The offer includes two night resort stay with breakfast in a deluxe room, 20 cable care round trips, one meal at Café Kathmandu, 15% off à la carte menu, pool, spa & cake vouchers, 20 round trip cable car passes, 10 zipline, 10 skywalk & 10 sky cycling vouchers, 25% off on cable car tickets (members only). Valid for a year and only for Nepali nationals.

Chandragiri, 9802300306, 9802084007

## The Harbor

With its distinct natural stone architecture, airy rooms, Mediterranean cuisine and proximity to Fewa Lake, The Harbor is one of Pokhara's newest luxury boutique hotels.

Lakeside, Gaurighat, Pokhara (61) 463722



## Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur

Immerse yourself into the rich culture and heritage of the ancient city of Bhaktapur in this Newari-style boutique hotel. Hotel Heritage also offers some of the best authentic Newari food in Bhaktapur.

Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur (01) 6611628

## Lapsi Tree Resort

Escape the noise of the valley and experience a serene, peaceful stay at Lapsi Tree with delicious food, comfortable rooms and a mesmerising view.

Danda Gaun Marg, 9761797014



## Grand Norling

Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel which provides a spacious bedroom with adjoining bathroom, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer herds, and not to forget, the garden.

Gokarna, 9801121560

## Chu-La

Chu-La might just be the very first place in Nepal to serve a good Philly Cheese Sandwich. With freshly baked bread, local cheeses and high quality ingredients, the sandwich is a must.

11am-7pm, New Baneswor (01) 4105200

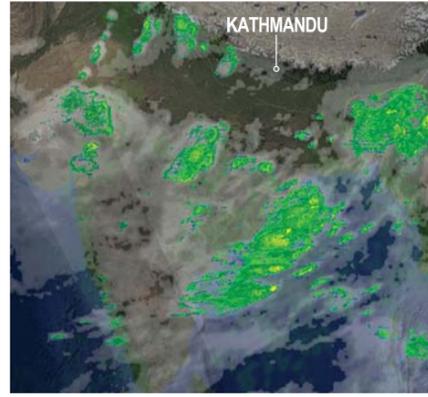


## Anatolia

Anatolia's Indian and Turkish dishes are packed with spices and an unforgettable assortment of flavours. From the Mutton Kofta Curry to the Baklava, the dishes will keep one wanting more. All the food is halal.

Thamel (01) 4258757

## WEEKEND WEATHER



## Healthy Monsoon

The monsoon rains have been picking up and precipitation so far has been normal with no major cloudbursts over the mountains. There is still thunder activity not characteristic of monsoon showers, and this is due to the heat from the plains creating local convection systems. The eastern and central Tarai has not been getting as much rain. Kathmandu may see heavier passing showers over the weekend with maximum temperature staying below 27C.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 20°	27° 20°	25° 19°

## OUR PICK



From the makers of Succession comes writer-director Jessie Armstrong's satirical comedy drama series Mountainhead where tech-billionaire friends reunite for a remote mountain retreat during worldwide economic crisis caused by AI-generated misinformation, produced and disseminated via fictitious social media platform Traam. The foursome is made up of Traam owner Venis Parish who is the world's richest person, owner of a company specialising in AI Jeff Abredazi, mentor of the group Randall Garrett who was recently diagnosed with incurable cancer and \$521 million net worth Hugo Van Valk who is still significantly less wealthy than his multi-billionaire friends. Stars Steve Carell, Jason Schwartzman, Cory Michael Smith and Ramy Youssef.

## MISS MOTI ESCAPES

KRIPA JOSHI



## 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 चिह्ना पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरोँ ।
- 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

**W**idespread abuse of antibiotics in Nepal has led to patients not responding to treatment because bacteria causing infections have developed resistance to the drugs.

In 2021 alone, the last year for which statistics are available, nearly 20,000 patients in Nepal died because prescribed antibiotics did not work for tuberculosis, pneumonia and other infections.

Recent estimates of bacterial anti-microbial resistance (AMR) associated deaths in the country also show that they surpassed those due to neoplasms, diabetes, respiratory infections, TB, kidney disease, digestive diseases, and maternal and neonatal disorders.

Globally, in 2019 AMR was responsible for an estimated 1.27 million deaths and contributed to another 4.95 million fatalities, making it one of the biggest public health burdens around the world.

Now, public health experts are pushing for vaccines to address the growing threat of AMR in Nepal. Vaccines are highly effective tools since they prevent infections, reduce the need of prescription antibiotics use thereby mitigating the emergence and spread of AMR.

Last week, the Global Antibiotic Resistance Partnership Nepal (GARP-Nepal) in collaboration with Nepal Public Health Foundation and The One Health Trust launched a policy brief (picture, above) titled 'The Value of Vaccines to Mitigate Antimicrobial Resistance'.



# DRUGS vs BUGS

Vaccines to address the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance in Nepal



KENJI KWOK / NT ARCHIVE

"We need to integrate vaccines more effectively into national AMR strategies and cross-sectoral collaboration under the One Health framework," said Sharad Onta of the Nepal Public Health Foundation. "The solution to antimicrobial resistance in Nepal is prevention, since there is no cure for it. And vaccines are the best way we know how to do it."

Narayan Dhakal of the Department of Drug Administration (DDA) agreed that preventing infections was easier and cheaper than treating it with antibiotics.

He added: "Promoting Water,



Sanitation, and Hygiene, and infection prevention can be complementary strategies."

Senior researcher Rishiraj Bhagawati from the One Health Trust highlighted the unique opportunity that the government has in using vaccines as a tool for mitigation

of AMR given that Nepal already has a robust national immunisation programme.

The launch brought together representatives from the Ministry of Health and Population, the Department of Livestock Services, academia, clinical professionals,

veterinarians and non-government stakeholders like World Health Organization, and FHI360.

Overuse of antibiotics in the veterinary sector has also contributed to AMR in humans due to the chicken, eggs and various other meats in the food chain.

Paras Kumar Pokharel of GARP-Nepal said: "Effective vaccination programs can lead to herd immunity, where a large proportion of the population is immune, protecting even those who are not vaccinated. So, maximise coverage and minimise anti-microbial uses."

Sameer Mani Dixit of the Centre for Molecular Dynamics Nepal (CMDN) urged: "We need

more action, not more words to fight AMR in Nepal."

The GARP policy brief recommends actions that include sustained policy advocacy, use of health economics to demonstrate vaccine benefits, and learning from best immunisation practices. It calls for inclusion of the livestock sector, adherence to treatment guidelines, prioritisation of high-risk populations, and improved surveillance systems.

The brief also emphasises the need for evidence generation, investment in vaccine development and regulatory support, international collaboration, and efforts to ensure equitable access, public education, and AMR awareness. 🇳🇵



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# Saving the Kusunda language from

■ Shristi Karki

The Kusunda are among the last remaining hunter-gatherer communities left in Nepal, and it has only one fluent speaker left of a language that is not related to any other language group in South Asia.

The Kusunda call themselves the King of the Forests (मेथ्याहाऊ in Kusunda, वन राजा in Nepali) and used to have a nomadic lifestyle till recently. But decades of exclusion from mainstream society and modernity have forced the Kusunda to assimilate.

Today, most Kusunda live across Nepal's mid-hills and western plains, choosing to identify themselves as Thakuri and adopting names like Sen, Shahi, and Khan to avoid ostracisation. Over time, inter-ethnic marriages between the Kusunda and other communities became increasingly common.

However, the assimilation with other communities also meant that almost no one from the Kusunda community can speak their mother tongue – considered by linguists to be a 'language isolate' not related to any other language group in the world, and lacking set rules of grammar that are foundational to other languages. There are no words for 'Yes' or 'No' in Kusunda, nor are there words to signify direction.

There are 23 languages with less than 1,000 speakers listed in Nepal's 2021 census, with Kusunda being the language with the least number of speakers.

The number of people who identified as Kusunda has



**LAST SPEAKERS:** Gyani Maiya Sen Kusunda (left) and Kamala Sen Kusunda pictured in 2018. Since Gyani Maiya's passing in 2020, Kamala is the only native fluent Kusunda speaker alive.

decreased with each subsequent census. Only 253 individuals identified themselves as Kusunda in the last National Census of 2021, down from 273 in 2011.

The government's decision to provide a social security stipend to the community for the past few years has prompted many from the Kusunda community to reclaim their identity and in the process, explore their culture and language.

Kamala Sen Kusunda, who lives in Dang, is the only fluent native

Kusunda speaker alive, although there are now other Kusunda and non-Kusunda people learning how to speak the language.

By the time Kamala Sen Kusunda was born in 1975, her family had settled in a village in Rolpa. Although she did not experience the nomadic life of her forebears, she still roamed the forests freely as a child and many of the values and socio-cultural practices of her community were instilled in her and her siblings.

This meant that Kamala grew up speaking Kusunda with her family. But by then, the Kusunda had increasingly begun to interact with people beyond their community, and inter-ethnic marriages had become a norm.

Kamala herself married at 18 to a 52-year-old man from the Chhetri community. She would go on to have four children, but they were brought up with her husband's culture and community rather than her own, and teaching them her

mother tongue seemed impractical.

"If I had spoken my language to them when they were children, they would have learned," she tells us ruefully. "But they were growing up in a different community, so I never pushed, and they never expressed interest."

At the time, she had other things to worry about, such as earning a livelihood and sustaining her family. To find work, Kamala and her family moved to Shimla in India, where she worked at an

## A language is both software and hardware

"Dropping out of school had a surprisingly positive impact on my life."

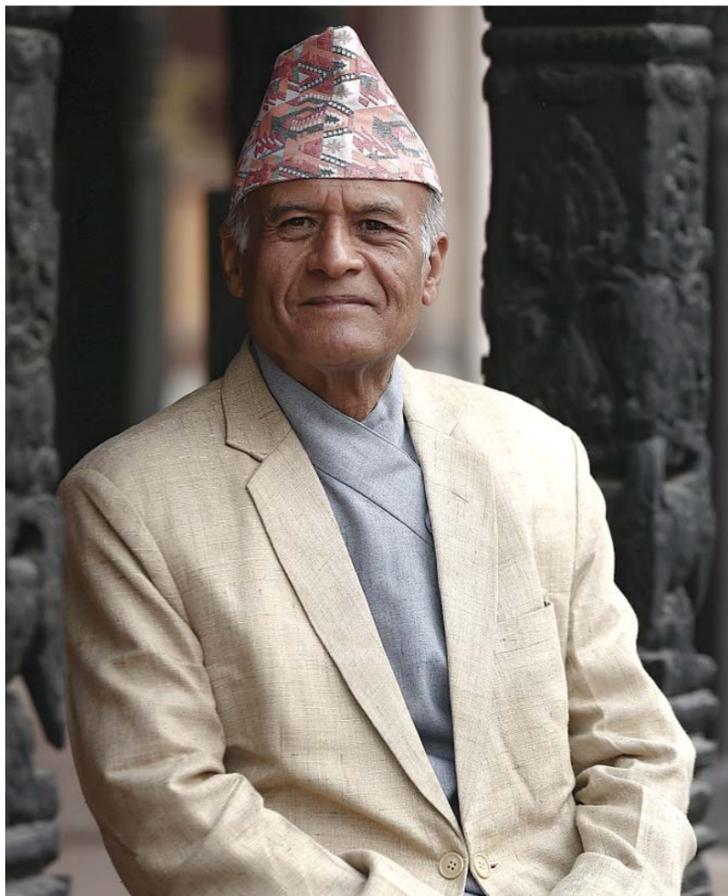
**Excerpts of a conversation between anthropologist and linguist Mark Turin and Lava Deo Awasthi, the first Chair of the Language Commission of Nepal.**

**Nepali Times: What is the role of Nepal's Language Commission?**

**Lava Deo Awasthi:** The 2015 Constitution created the Language Commission with four core mandates: to develop eligibility criteria for gaining status as an official language, offer recommendations about measures to be taken for the conservation, promotion, and development of languages, suggest possible ways of using mother tongues in education by assessing their stage of development, and finally to carry out research and monitor constitutional provisions for the federalisation of languages.

**What in your own professional background helped prepare you for the role?**

I have worked with the government for about 30 years, while teaching at universities. I served as permanent Secretary and worked as Chief Administrator of the Central Development Region. I was Director General of the Department of Education. My PhD project from the Danish University of Education was dedicated to making sense of Nepal's social construct and commitment to multilingualism,



SUMAN NEPALI

exploring the persistence of monolingual school practices in spite of state commitments to multilingualism. I conducted a survey of Nepal's languages and carried out a qualitative study of the Tharu language in Bardia.

I documented how teachers showed a tendency to resist change and maintain the status quo because they were not consulted when new

educational language policies were introduced. Teachers also exhibited a deeply-held adherence to the Gurukul education system which appears to have been harnessed as a way to resist newer pedagogical ideologies imported from the West.

Recognising how engrained these rich traditions of knowledge transmission are, I wanted to know how students' engagement in the

learning process appeared to have dwindled, creating a gap between children's home languages and the language(s) of the school. Whilst statutory provisions for education in the mother tongue were oriented towards promotion, classroom pedagogies remained resolutely monolingual and exclusionary. The result was that multilingual education policies did not result in meaningful changes in classrooms.

I grew up in a multilingual environment: brought up with Baitadeli, Hindi, Sanskrit, Nepali and English. Language played a major part in my decision to leave school and my later success is closely linked to my competence in several languages. It was rewarding to be at home with my family as I deepened my understanding of native language and culture, which in turn helped me to harness and refine my art of living. Languages matter so much to me because they are both software and hardware.

**What were your strategic goals and objectives in the Commission?**

My priority was to prepare a detailed action plan for my six-year tenure in consultation with language stakeholders, including language experts, professionals, activists, Indigenous community members and representatives of relevant national and local-level institutions. Another strategy was to establish close institutional linkages with federal, provincial, and local level governments for exchanging information widely.

**What critical issues did you face?**

When Nepal's new Constitution was drafted, the conservation of languages, the recognition of official

languages at the provincial level, and the use of mother tongues at federal, provincial, and local levels could not be adequately addressed. A five-year timeline had been set by the Constitution, and with great effort we succeeded in having all provinces agree to recognise their official languages.

**What were your greatest achievements?**

That we succeeded in setting a language agenda at all levels. Nepal's language communities and other stakeholders expressed the view that this was the first time their languages were recognised and their voices heard by the state. We encouraged people to speak in their own language(s) and provided translators during plenary sessions and group discussions.

We developed the criteria for the status planning of languages at federal, provincial, and local levels, and to recommended 11 province-level official languages, in addition to the Nepali language. Another notable achievement was recognising indigenous languages spoken by smaller communities, all of whom faced endangerment. The Commission identified nine new languages that had not been reported in the 2011 census, and provided a framework for recognising official languages within a municipality.

Languages of historical importance as well as classical languages were given recognition for their protection, growth, and development. We worked to emphasise mother tongue medium instruction in schools across the nation. Recognising the role of language in children's cognitive,

# extinction

The only person fluent in Nepal's unique Kusunda language is saving it by teaching others



Gyani Maiya Kusunda with Kusunda youth in 2015.

JOHAN REINHARD COLLECTION / ARCHIVE NEPAL

apple orchard for six years.

Over the next years, Kamala and her family moved back and forth between India and Nepal for work, and Kamala was not actively conversing in the language of her people or being able to connect with members of her community now scattered across Nepal.

Had she not forgotten her language after all those years? "How could I forget the language of my ancestors?" she replies. "Not speaking it did not mean that it

ceased to be a part of me."

Kamala had been working at a brick kiln in Thimi seven years ago when the National Language Commission tracked her down, offered her a paid position as a Kusunda language consultant and source person for basic language training in Dang.

It was there that Kamala met her cousin Gyani Maiya Sen Kusunda, the only other person able to speak Kusunda fluently, who had been working with the Commission to

conserve Kusunda language and culture. It was also where Kamala met language researcher and lexicographer Uday Raj Ale.

Ale had been in the middle of his research into the Tharu language and community 15 years ago when he met Gyani Maiya Kusunda's son, who told him that his mother was one of the few people who spoke Kusunda, but that no one had shown an interest in studying and preserving the language and culture.

Ale met Gyani Maiya, spending time with her learning and researching Kusunda. By 2017, Ale had collected enough words to put together a Kusunda dictionary. The Kusunda vocabulary currently comprises 2,000 words.

His research into the Kusunda language and culture has taken him to every known Kusunda household in Nepal. Although the census puts the number of Kusunda at 253, Ale reckons there are only 158.

"Kusunda language is endangered due to its lack of use in everyday life, literature, and religious and socio-cultural practices, as well as the prevalence of inter-ethnic marriages," explains Ale.

In 2019 the Language Commission began its language transfer programs for youth from indigenous communities. Since then, the Commission has completed multiple phases of Kusunda language classes in Dang facilitated by Uday Raj Ale. The classes have 20 students, not just from the Kusunda community, but also interested non-native students.

Khamba Rokaya, who worked as a caretaker for young Kusunda children in Dang, became interested in learning the language as she sat in with the children during their lessons, and for the last few years has been among the few non-native Kusunda language learners in Dang.

"I am not from the Kusunda community, but now that I have learned the language, I hope to do my part to carry on the work and share my knowledge with as many people as possible," she says. "One way to ensure that we preserve this language is to extend its speaker base, both within the Kusunda and non-native communities."

Ale and Kamala have continued to work together since Gyani Maya's passing in 2020, expanding the Kusunda vocabulary and

creating appropriate curricula to fit the needs of the students as their knowledge of Kusunda expands.

But without any documentation of Kusunda history, the community's traditions, stories, values and language were at risk of being lost to time. "The loss of an ethnicity, language or culture in a country is akin to losing a vital organ, and a unique perspective of looking at the world," says Ale.

Which is why Archive Nepal in collaboration with the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund and the UK's Department of Culture, Media, and Sport in February launched a book of creative writings in the Kusunda language titled पिन्डा (meaning 'The First' in Kusunda): A Compilation of Kusunda Literature.

The book is a collection of informative essays about the Kusunda language and culture, short stories that explore themes from nomadic life to universal Nepali experiences of poverty and migration, letters to loved ones, as well as conversational pieces by five Kusunda students ranging from ages 16 to 30. The works in the Kusunda language are also translated into Nepali and English.

"Language is an important part of ethnic identity, and our indigenous languages cannot evolve or be conserved unless they are spoken or taught," said Ale during the launch of the book earlier this year. "But most importantly, language exists as long as there exists literature in that language."

Kamala was in Kathmandu for the launch of the book, and smiled proudly as she looked at the young writers who had contributed to the collection. She said: "I'm glad the young people have chosen to learn and preserve Kusunda. Otherwise, our language would have died with me." 🇳🇵

socio-emotional and academic development, the Commission suggested strategies for linking schools with ward-level language clusters for use in the classroom.

A network of language groups and stakeholders proved to be a powerful way of bringing all language communities under one roof for a collective review of and response to the process of federalising language policy.

## What were the most significant challenges?

One of the major challenges was winning people's trust in advocating for the mission of the Language Commission. I faced considerable resistance as I sought to emphasise the use of native languages in families and communities. While the Commission advocated for multilingualism and promoted linguistic diversity, the prevailing policy circles and central level institutions had been deeply influenced by a one-language discourse. The spread of English also poses a threat to Nepal's languages. People in power do not seem to see this as a problem.

The way that municipalities are increasingly introducing English as a medium of instruction at the earliest stage of a child's school-based education has proven to be detrimental to their cognitive development, socio-emotional wellbeing and academic success. Nepal's elite are heavily influenced by the spread of English and remain unaware about its impact on their home languages as well as on the inter-generational transmission of indigenous languages.

## What do you see the Language Commission achieving in the next 5-10 years?

In 10 years' time, all seven of Nepal's provinces will have their official languages in place. These

languages will also be recognised as languages of federal business, alongside Nepali. I anticipate that all official languages in the federal and provincial systems will have a national portal for inter-language corpora using machine translation to fulfil their federal, provincial and local level language functions, and that all languages spoken in Nepal will be represented through a digital database.

By the end of the next decade, each municipality in the country will have recognised one or two official languages at the local level, based on speech populations. Other local languages will have received community-level legal recognition and official status to fulfil their functional roles. Languages that are highly endangered or at risk will be entitled to receive state grants for enhancing local level capabilities to encourage families and young learners to speak the language. Incentive schemes will be introduced in municipalities that promote language within the family and at home. Inter-generational transmission of languages will have received welcome and timely attention across Nepal.

It is my hope that all schools will have introduced mother tongue medium instruction at the earliest stage of school education, at least up to class five. Nepali, English and other national as well as classical and foreign languages will be taught as subjects. The policy of English medium education at the early stage of education will be abolished.

A Centre for Language Research and Innovation will be created for documentation. The Language Commission will morph into a centre of excellence to engage in collaborative language research, share experiences and document best practices in service of global linguistic diversity and Nepal's many indigenous languages. 🇳🇵

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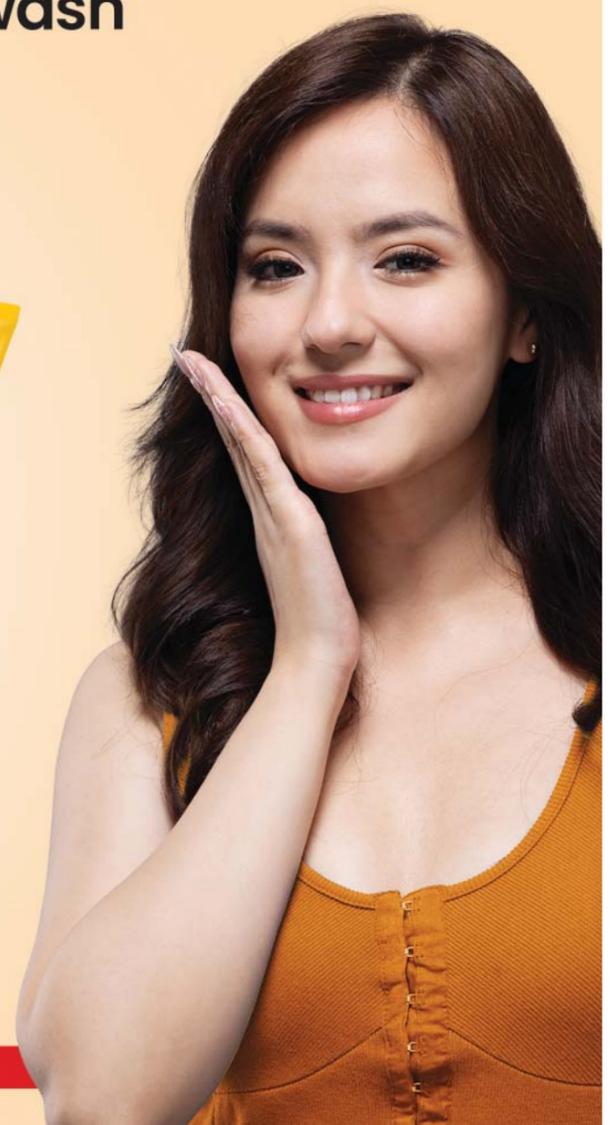
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