

DEAD HEAT

■ Sonia Awale

Kathmandu Valley recorded its highest-ever temperature in 25 years in May 2024 at 35.3°C. This year, the maximum temperature exceeded 30°C on many days. Rains in early June made towns in the mountains swelter under high heat plus humidity.

Measuring just temperature does not give a true picture. Factoring in humidity means the heat index this summer has been much higher. The hotter it is, the higher the concentration of water vapour in the air.

"We feel it is getting hotter,

and our statistics back that up," says Shanti Kandel at the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, which issued two heat wave warnings this year, compared to 11 last year. "We need more research to analyse how humidity is making this situation worse."

The heat index is also called 'wet-bulb temperature' and is a measure of how hot the human body feels when humidity levels are also high, usually much hotter than the recorded temperature. For example, a wet-bulb temperature of 35°C is considered the maximum humans can handle, beyond which the body cannot cool by perspiration.

Aside from higher average temperatures worldwide this year, what makes heat and humidity more unbearable is that cities are always hotter than their surroundings. This is due to the urban heat island (UHI) effect. For example the temperature inside Kathmandu's Ring Road can be hotter by up to 4°C during the daytime and by 1-3°C in the evening compared to the outskirts.

"Climate change is one reason for rising temperature, but there

are other factors for heat in urban spaces such as concrete buildings and infrastructure, emissions from vehicles, and industries," explains urban planner Bhushan Tuladhar.

There is a feedback loop at work: as it gets hotter, more energy is used for fans, coolers, and air-conditioners which in turn add to the atmospheric carbon and the urban heat bubble.

A recent study published in the journal Urban Climate by Nepali researchers at the University of Massachusetts, Tribhuvan University, University of Groningen, and others showed that even within Kathmandu, urban forests cooled neighbourhoods by as much as 1.2°C while ponds reduced the temperature by up to 0.85°C compared to nearby houses.

"Our results demonstrate that blue-green spaces provide significant cooling benefits across the Kathmandu Valley, with distinct patterns by type, size, design, and urban context," concludes the paper of which the lead author is Saurav Bhattarai at Jackson State University.

The old towns in Kathmandu Valley with traditional brick and tile architecture, ponds and trees, managed hot summers better. There were open spaces, fertile land along the floodplains for farming, and brick pavements that allowed for seepage.

"Our cities were planned taking nature into account," says Sangeeta Singh, a professor of urban planning at the Institute of Engineering. "Kathmandu Valley is now built up, but we can still reintegrate blue-green spaces into town planning with vertical gardening, urban forestry, using local material and harvesting rainwater."

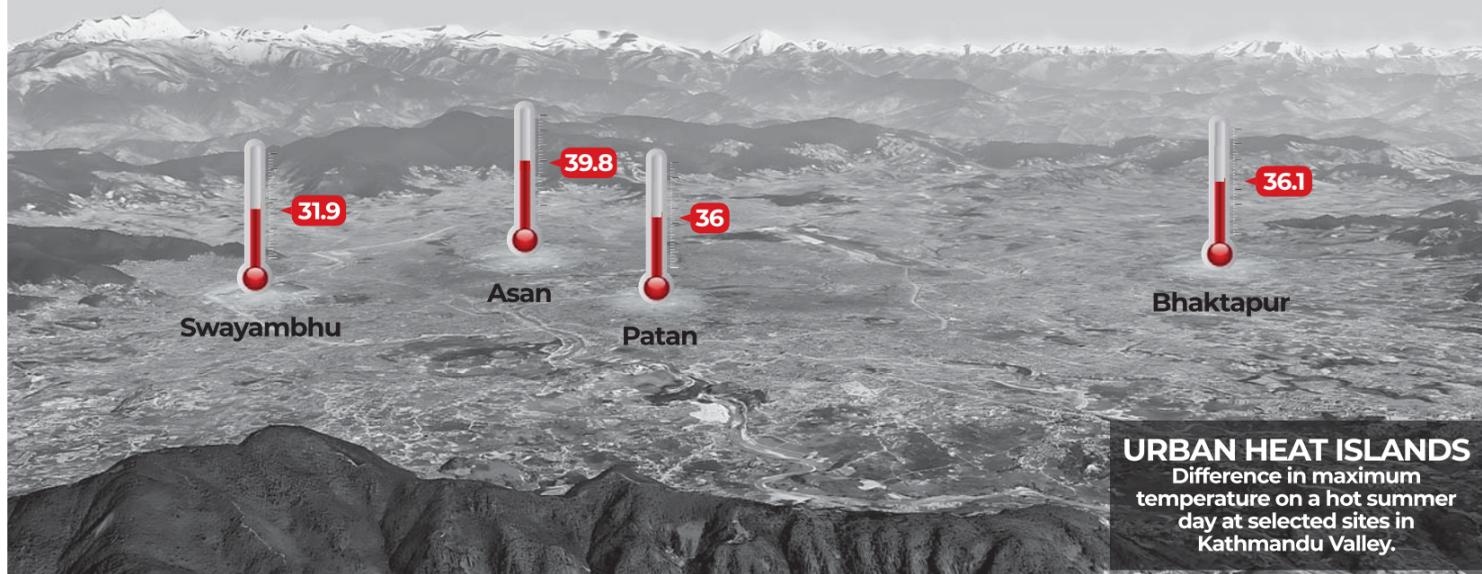
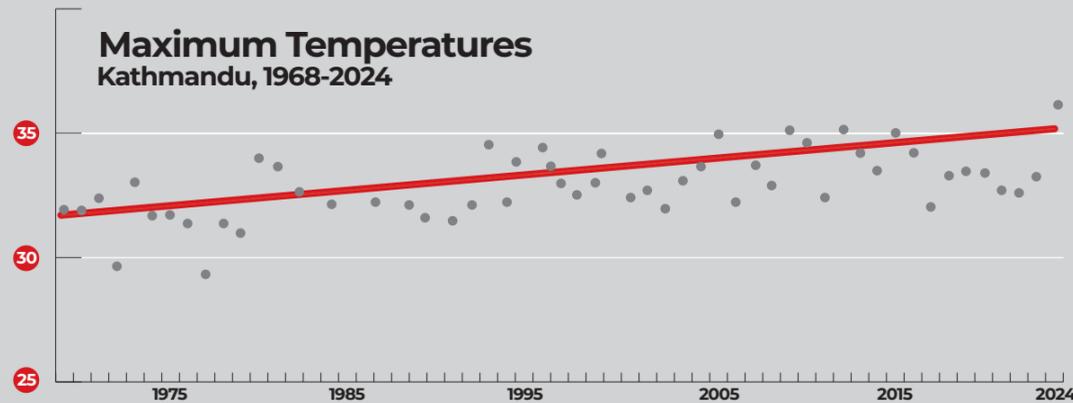
Kathmandu's municipalities have by-laws controlling building design and structure, but strict enforcement of land use and zoning are missing.

Cities in the plains have it even worse. As heat and humidity rise, it could reverse migration, with people returning to the mountains from the Tarai, where 53% of Nepal's population currently lives.

"Heat has to be seen from a class perspective," adds Singh. "Those with money can afford gadgets and appliances to keep their homes and offices cool, but not day labourers or poor families living in cramped housing with poor ventilation."

Climate breakdown is going to widen the class divide in cities, as summers become unliveable.

Says Singh: "We need policy intervention to address this class injustice. Building by-laws and new town development must urgently integrate climate and energy efficiency elements."



SOURCE: URBAN CLIMATE ET AL.

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SLAPP in the face of democracy

When the three pillars of democracy are compromised, the role of the free press becomes even more vital. As soon as populist autocrats are elected to the executive, their first order of business is usually to co-opt the legislature and the judiciary. Then buy off, intimidate, or neutralise the media with Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP).

Nepal's officialdom seems to be taking midnight Zoom lessons from other despots on ways to gag the media. Last month, popular talk show host Dil Bhushan Pathak was served an arrest warrant by the Kathmandu District Court for a YouTube explainer about the alleged involvement of the son of Foreign Minister Arzu Deuba Rana in a reported purchase of a Kathmandu hotel.



The Lalitpur District Court ruled that Pathak could not be arrested without fair trial, but this week the Kathmandu District Court filed another case against the journalist based on a complaint by the Cyber Bureau, and put him on a fugitive list.

Without going into the veracity of Pathak's

explainer, it is deeply problematic that the Electronic Transaction Act has been invoked – proof that politicians are getting the courts and investigating agencies to make an example of a high profile journalist.

The intention seems to be to silence media probing further into the fake refugee scandal in which the main partner in the ruling coalition is implicated.

The Kathmandu High Court has been mysteriously active in targeting journalists these days. Bizmandu and Nepalkhabar were served a notice last month to withdraw a story they did on the Chair of the Security and Exchange Board of Nepal (SEBON) Santosh Narayan Shrestha, allegedly demanding kickbacks from hydropower investors.

Incredibly, the court even asked the two portals not to report on the subject anymore – a ruling so absurd that it was quashed by another judge in the same court a week later.

The allegations against Shrestha were made in a public meeting of the Independent Power Producers Association of Nepal

(IPPAN), and MPs have demanded a Parliament inquiry into the regulator. HimalKhabar reported this week that even while Shrestha was reportedly demanding commissions from private investors for IPOs, he cleared sale of primary shares in Bajhang's 10.75MW Bungal Hydro in which his family has investments.

Last week, the Special Court summoned the publisher, editor, and a reporter from Drishti weekly to provide a statement in a contempt of court case.

A writ petition in the Supreme Court last week accused our sister magazine HimalKhabar of contempt of court for two stories: one about how high courts have been overturning a majority of verdicts of district courts in cases of rape, and another about

the Biratnagar High Court clearing a self-proclaimed holy man, Krishna Bahadur Giri, of alleged rape despite physical evidence from the police.

Then on Monday, bureaucrats hoodwinked MPs by deleting references in a bill requiring a two-year 'cooling off' period which would bar civil servants from holding

constitutional positions for two years.

The debate about who is less accountable to the public: politicians or bureaucrats is as old as Nepal's democracy.

Some blame politicians for being beholden to businessmen who finance their election campaigns. Others say it is civil

servants who are neither civil nor servants, and coach ministers, MPs, mayors, or ward chairs about kickbacks.

In reality, both have their hands deep in the honey pot. Corruption is now such a given that yet another exposé in the mainstream press, like the latest visit-visa scam, does not raise eyebrows any more.

Politicians and businesses work hand-in-glove so that conflict of interest in contracts, insider trading, cartelling become the norm. Our survey after the 2017 local election showed that out of the 753 newly-elected local government chairs, nearly 300 were contractors involved in sand-mining, quarrying, or transportation syndicates.

Instead of donating to election war chests of politicians, tycoons have figured out that there is a much surer return on investment if they become politicians themselves.

We may have to edit Lord Acton's famous quote to say that in Nepal we do not even need absolute power to corrupt absolutely. **Kunda Dixit**

In Nepal, politicians and bureaucrats do not even need absolute power to corrupt absolutely – because they work hand-in-glove.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Public Opinion Matters

Twenty years ago this week, the Nepali Times editorial was about the politicians, Maoists and the king not respecting public opinion. It is not very different today. Back then, people wanted peace. Today, they want better education and jobs, clean air and water, affordable healthcare – none of which elected leaders seem to be bothered about.

Excerpt from the editorial published in issue #2541 – 7 July 2005:

The Maoists say they are fighting a 'people's war' although many who supported the revolution don't want to have anything to do with it anymore. The king says he took over to save the people from conflict but all we have seen in the past three years is a systematic plan to dismantle what remained of democratic institutions and civil liberties. The political parties haven't faced their electorates in six years, their mandates have expired and there is little public enthusiasm toward their call for restoration of Parliament.

All three forces think that lack of support for the other two translates into support for themselves. The Maoists



pose as the people's genuine liberators, promising to wipe the slate clean of a feudal monarchy and malfunctioning democracy. The king thinks the lack of public support for the parties means the people back his autocratic experiment. And the political parties take it for granted that most Nepalis are against February First.

What we have seen year after year in nationwide polls since 2000 is a vast and overwhelming yearning for an end to violence. If the three forces want to genuinely address the people's most important concern they should be making urgent moves to restart the peace process instead of clawing at each other.

Eighty percent of Nepalis surveyed have always rejected communist totalitarianism and royal authoritarianism. Extremists of the left and right will overlook this at their own peril. But the mainstream political parties haven't stood up convincingly for the middle ground either.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



ELEGANZA EXTRAVAGANZA

For the LGBTQIA+ community in Nepal, drag has provided a powerful platform to express, explore and celebrate its identities. Although at a nascent stage, Nepali drag queens, drag kings, and drag performers are taking the culture in stride and using it for visibility and representation. Watch video on our YouTube channel.



MOTHERS OF SARLAHI

Madhes Province still has a high number of home deliveries. But more women are using health facilities to be as healthy as possible before giving birth and for safe delivery. Watch the video on our YouTube channel and subscribe for multimedia content.

KUSUNDA

It is exciting to know that there are Kusunda who are now learning their language ('Saving the Kusunda language from extinction', Shristi Karki #1267). Is Kamala Sen willing to tape her own memoir?

David Seddon

■ This is why it is important to speak and to preserve mother tongues for the next generation.

Suraj Tharu Khonma

WATER FOR LIFE

Thanks to Nepali Times for the guest editorial on the slow cancer of springs drying up across the Himalaya is destroying rural life ('Water for Life', Ngamindra Dahal, #1267). The primary driver of this is current mal-development, and it is not climate change that will worsen things in the future

Dipak Gyawali

■ If they haven't even sorted out issues with water yet, how are they going to sort out other more pressing matters?

Varvāra H.

STUDENT VISA

The US visa directive is shortsighted from the perspective of any American desire to spread influence of western cultural, business, governance models, and way of life to these students and their home countries ('America no longer prime destination for Nepali students', Sudiksha Tuladhar, nepalitimes.com). As noted in the article, China is ever ready to immediately fill in gaps left by western withdrawals in virtually any sector.

Iván G. Somlai

SAME SEX MARRIAGE

Not just binary, only fathers, husbands and sons are recognised when it comes to citizenship, inheritance and death rites ('Nepal's laws stuck in binary mode', Anannya Shrestha, page 4-5).

Shirrin Barakzai

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Tourism has the potential to be a sustainable industry, generating substantial revenue by promoting & preserving Nepal's rich natural & cultural heritage ('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



Kangchenjunga

by Vishad Raj Onta
Recent outrage in Sikkim over an Indian Army expedition climbing Kangchenjunga, the world's third highest peak, has spiked attention to the need to balance mountaineering jobs with indigenous reverence for sacred landmarks. Full story on page 9.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Beware of spurious cancer drugs

by Paul Eccles, Andjela Milivojevic, Ramu Sapkota
Vital chemotherapy drugs used around the world have failed quality tests, leaving cancer patients in more than 100 countries at risk of ineffective treatments and potentially fatal side effects, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ) revealed last week. Details in the report online.

Most popular on X

Saving Kusunda from extinction

by Shristi Karki
The Kusunda language is not related to any linguistic group in South Asia and Kamala Sen Kusunda is the only fluent native speaker alive. But a language activist has taken it upon himself to teach Kusunda and non-Kusunda people the language. Visit nepalitimes.com for the story.

Most commented



Water for life

by Ngamindra Dahal
The monsoon this year arrived on time, but Nepal has always had either too much water or too little. The country needs a sustainable solution to store 85% of rain that falls in four monsoon months for the other eight months. Join the discussion online.

Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepal's greatest resource is its natural beauty. But it is ironic that the very reason why tourists flock to Nepal has been marred by shoddy infrastructure that aims to make it accessible to tourists.



Bishow Parajuli @BishowParajuli
Sadly, key objectives for every political leaders in power seems to be they want to start new projects so that they can earn kick backs and don't put efforts to complete old one given someone else has benefited from them and that they have little incentive to work them.

1,000 WORDS



HARIRAM BHETWAL / RSS

WELCOME TO NEPAL:

CPN (Unified Socialist) Chair Madhav Kumar Nepal being received with a paddy garland by the All Nepal Peasants Federation to mark National Paddy Planting Day in Kathmandu on Sunday. The former Prime Minister was charged with corruption last month by the CIAA in connection with the Patanjali land scam, and is currently out on bail. Nepal says the case against him is politically motivated.



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Nepal's laws stuck in binary mode

The country's laws must move beyond same-sex marriage to protecting sexual and gender minorities

■ Anannya Shrestha

Last April, Nepal became the first South Asian country to provisionally recognise same-sex marriage, and the second only after Taiwan in Asia.

The Supreme Court ruling on Sunil Babu Pant and Others v Nepal Government in 2008 decriminalised same-sex marriage and ordered the government to enact new laws or amending existing ones to ensure rights of those with different gender identities and sexual orientations.

Nepal has long been recognised for its relatively progressive LGBTQIA+ laws in Asia. In 2023, the Supreme Court issued a temporary order to register same-sex and non-heterosexual marriages, following which a municipality in Lamjung became the first authority to recognise a same-sex union by registering the marriage of Maya Gurung, a transgender woman assigned male at birth and and Surendra Pandey, a cisgender man.

The Supreme Court had ordered the creation of an interim registry for non-heterosexual marriages until Parliament changes the law. But there has been little progress to codify marriage equality into law, which activists say hinders progress to protect queer rights in Nepal.

Article 18 of the Constitution states '...nothing shall be deemed to prevent special provisions by law for the protection, empowerment or development citizens including gender and sexual minorities'.

However, this is in contradiction with Nepal's Civil



AMIT MACHAMASI / NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

Code, Section 67, which defines marriage as being between 'a man and a woman'.

"Even though the Constitution guarantees the right to equality, the Civil Code has gendered terms like 'man' and 'woman' which automatically exclude same-sex

couples," says Sujan Panta, a legal expert on sexual and gender minorities. "This has caused it to become a major issue for many same-sex couples as they are not legally allowed to get married."

Mitini Nepal, alongside Forum for Women and Law and

Development, filed a writ petition in 2022 to nullify Civil Code Section 67 and to legally recognise same-sex marriage. The petition suggested using gender-friendly terms like 'persons' instead of 'man' and 'woman' and using 'spouse' instead of 'husband' and 'wife'.

Experts and members of the LGBTQIA+ community have noted that legal discourse surrounding marriage equality in Nepal has so far been limited to marriage registration. Indeed, the provisional recognition of same-sex marriage does not grant full legal rights and marriage benefits to same-sex couples that are afforded to heterosexual couples: inheritance, adoption, and divorce laws.

'Marriage registration, unlike other civil matters, invites a complex web of legal repercussions. It affects laws on divorce, domestic violence, polygamy, adoption, child adoption, custody, property inheritance and property division amongst spouses,' wrote lawyer Aastha Dahal in an op-ed in Nepali Times in 2023 after the Supreme Court's interim order to register same-sex marriages.

Sukumaya Magar was with her partner for 30 years before the latter passed away three years ago. But without legal recognition of their relationship, Magar was unable to claim her partner's property as inheritance. Her partner's family claimed all assets, including their joint bank account.

Shree Maya Gurung also lost her partner Kiran to Covid-19 in 2021, but could not inherit property because their partnership was not legally recognised.

Magar and Gurung's stories are documented in Mitini Nepal's A Life-Changing Hurricane, a book on the experiences of Nepal's lesbian, bisexual and queer women.

"As long as the definition of marriage continues to be between

NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक



GCF's \$36 million

The Global Climate Fund has allocated a grant worth \$36.2 million to Nepal to reduce the risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF). The money will be administered by UNDP and Nepal will get another \$14 million from other sources and be implemented jointly by the government and the Independent Power Producers' Association of Nepal (IPPAN).

Nabil Green Week

Nabil Bank is holding Nabil Green Week from 1-7 July. An opening program will look to connect stakeholders in solar, EVs, sustainable agriculture and conservation through investments in hydro, EVs, waste management projects to reduce the carbon footprint of its portfolio. It has also installed renewable energy and water collection systems at its offices.



Aloft certified

Aloft Kathmandu Thamel has been awarded the Waste Smart Certificate by Creasion Ventures for its commitment to sustainability through plastic waste recycling initiatives, with the hotel planning to repurpose recycled materials into souvenirs for guests.

IME HaatBazaar

Global IME Bank holds a HaatBazaar every Friday for micro, small, and medium enterprises that it has financed, helping them sell organic, indigenous, and local products directly to customers.



IME also announced a Dhan Kheti Karja on Paddy Day 29 June, under which farmers can get loans of upto Rs2 million to buy seeds, fertiliser, and equipment to plant rice. The bank also held a paddy planting program in Tokha.



Depot delayed

The NOC plans to relocate its aviation fuel storage from the airport to land near the Nepal Army Golf Course to make way for taxiway extension and for safety. The current depot is more than 50 years old, is too close to the runway, and can only store five days worth of fuel. The planned new depot will double the capacity, but the relocation is stalled by lack of coordination.

New Ncell Range

Ncell has gained permission from the NTA to issue mobile phone numbers that start with 971, having run out of the previous ranges 980, 981, 982 and 970.

Vape Ban Overturned

The Patan High Court has ordered the government to not restrict the import and sale of vapes. The National Health Education, Information and Communication Center under the Ministry of Health and Population had earlier issued a circular banning vape trading citing Sub-rule 3 of Rule 28 of the Tobacco Products Control and Regulation Directive, 2015. The Patan Court issued a verdict on a writ petition filed by Vape Mandu Traders reversing the ban. In the fiscal year 2023/24, vape trade brought in over Rs230m of customs revenue.

Galaxy Buds Core

Samsung is set to launch the Galaxy Buds Core wireless earphones which come with active noise cancellation, real time translation, IP54 water and dust resistance, and 35 hours of battery. They are available in black or white and cost Rs7,399.

Proton Shark Tank

Malaysian EV model Proton e.Mas will be sponsoring Shark Tank Nepal, the adaptation of the reality tv series where entrepreneurs pitch their business ideas to a panel of 'shark' investors.



Merging paragliders

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) is preparing to order the 54 registered paragliding companies in Pokhara to merge into ten, so that they can be managed better and operate more professionally.



Foton Tunland G7

Foton's Tunland G7 pickup has 160HP, 390Nm torque, and 225mm clearance, ideal for Nepali roads. It is available in Elite (Rs5.2 million), Luxury (Rs6.54 million), and Flagship (Rs6.9 million) variants, as well as in both 2WD and 4WD.



Nagarjun Mayor

The Special Court has convicted Mohan Bahadur Basnet, mayor of Nagarjun, for accepting a Rs92.2 million bribe from Padma Housing and for laundering Rs131.2 million. Basnet, a Nepali Congress representative, has been fined Rs262.5 million and sentenced to eight years in prison.

Buffalos to China

Nepal plans to start exporting 5,000 tonnes of water buffalo meat every day to China starting next June, according to an agreement signed between Himalayan Food International and China's Shanghai Ziyun Food. The abattoir in Sindhuli is being built by a Chinese contractor, and will process the meat from buffalos reared on leased land in Udayapur and Chitwan. Livestock experts say Nepal's current buffalo meat production does not even meet domestic demand.

a man and a woman, there will be difficulties in regards to family planning and property laws," says Pantu. "All of this leads back to the Civil Code Section 67."

"How can it be said that same-sex marriage has been fully legalised if same-sex couples don't even have the same rights as their parents?" Sarita KC of Mitini Nepal adds.

Experts say issues surrounding LGBTQIA+ rights are not taken as seriously in Nepal due to ignorance and lack of education, both among politicians and wider society. KC notes that the lack of knowledge does not seem to come from a place of ill-intent, but because of a one-dimensional view about the LGBTQIA+ community and queer identities.

In 2022, the government denied a non-tourist visa to Tobias Volz, a German national who had gotten married to Nepali citizen Adheep Pokharel in Germany. The case went to the Supreme Court, which ordered that Volz be issued a non-tourist visa.

"When my partner and I were going through the visa process as a same-sex couple, we weren't necessarily met with backlash or malice," says Adheep Pokharel. "Despite their confusion, they were really willing to help us, at least that is what I felt."

Sexual and gender minority groups have engaged with the government, and the National Statistics Office included an 'other' category in the 2021 census.

"There is misunderstanding about the terminologies and what LGBTQ really means," says KC. "Most people assume the term only refers to transgender people, which means lesbian, bisexual, and queer women's issues aren't often addressed. Even MPs have to be repeatedly explained the entire basis of gender and sexual orientation." 📺

Bigotry is not innate, it is learned behaviour — that message is front and centre in Akanchha Karki's short film, *Sanai*.

The film won best director, best cinematography, best story, best original score, and best picture at Malaysia's Neo South Independent Film Festival as well as awards at the Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival and the Nepal America International Film Festival.

Sanai is the story of Rupa and Maya, two teenage Dalit and Brahmin girls who form an unconditional friendship within a patriarchal, caste-ridden society. The film starts with Rupa's father heading to Maya's house to play the sanai, a musical instrument of the Dalit community, at the wedding of Maya's uncle.

Dialogue and the behaviour of characters allude to or explicitly exhibit the caste divide. Maya longs to play the sanai, but is yelled at by her mother for 'almost causing a disaster' when she tries to reach for one of the instruments.

Rupa's mother mends clothes for Maya's mother and sends Rupa to deliver it, but Maya's mother will only touch the clothing after 'purifying' it first.

However, the two children, brought together by their shared love of music, rebel in their own ways. Rupa throws away the sel roti dropped onto her hand without touching it by Maya's mother. Maya refuses candy to persuade her to stay away from Rupa.

At the wedding, Maya defiantly plays the sanai given to her by Rupa during her uncle's wedding.

After Maya is told by an adult

An instrument of liberation

Short film *Sanai* explores forbidden friendships and youth defiance to customs



KATHA GHERA THEATRE / YOUTUBE

not to hang out with Rupa due to their caste difference, there is radiant joy when the two girls are told by their teacher that Rupa should ask her mother to sew her the same frock as Maya.

The following scene where Maya and Rupa exchange their clothes, with Rupa wearing Maya's prettier outfit, is among the most quietly powerful moments in the film.

Queerness is a subtly recurring motif in the *sanai*, especially notable when Maya watches her uncle and his bride dance during their wedding ceremony and imagines herself and Rupa, with matching frocks, in their place.

"As kids, all they care about is their friendship and their love, but queerness is also an angle in

the film," says director Akanchha Karki, of the Kathmandu theatre, Katha Ghera (below).

The girls' shared desire to play the *sanai* binds them together. And while Rupa's father and his community are expected to breathe music through their *sanai* in the life and celebrations of upper-caste communities, they are not allowed to be part of those ceremonies.

Karki picked *sanai* both because it was convenient for the children to carry and because of its unique sound. "The *sanai* produces an aching beautiful music, which I wanted to bring to film," Karki says.

At the end, a grown-up Rupa and Maya reunite against a backdrop of *sanai* players. "Did you have to wait long?" asks Maya, as the two hug one another

tightly. "Only an eternity," Rupa replies with a smile.

Only an eternity, not just for the two of them to become adults, but to wait for the walls built by the hierarchy of caste, class and exclusion to begin to crumble. "It is not only about the physical waiting, but they had to wait for society to transform," says Karki.

Having directed, written, and acted in Nepali theatre herself, Karki found it easy to work with actors. But while theatre is a collaborative effort, working with separate departments in filmmaking was a new experience.

"Everything is not always under your control in filmmaking," Karki notes. "My next film is going to be about my own experiences." 📺

Anannya Shrestha

Story of scars and solace

Play displays physical and emotional injury, and shared healing through selfless companionship



KRISHPA SHRESTHA

■ Sangya Lamsal

Some seek solitude, some the company of others, still others find a balance between the two. Yet, we all long for someone to go home to and share our smiles and sorrows.

Kalina and Diwas find that someone in each other — most often, it must be said, in sorrow. Their story begins in a school sickroom. Kalina lies curled up with stomach pain, and Diwas stumbles in, bruised and breathless from a fall off the school roof. What starts as curiosity about each other's pain turns into a friendship woven together with shared ache.

This opening scene of the play *Sickroom* on the stage of Katha Ghera (above) is a precursor to how, through the years and separate storms, Kalina and Diwas keep finding their way back to each other. In pain, in comfort, and the quiet knowing that even the wounded can become each other's solace.

Director Akanchha Karki's *Sickroom* is an adaptation of *Gruesome Playground Injuries* by American playwright Rajiv Joseph. The play moves in fragments that shift between childhood and adulthood, echoing the fractured nature of memories and the scars people carry.

After their first encounter in the school sickroom, we meet the two as their older selves. Kalina walks into a hospital room where Diwas lies injured, his eye wounded in a firework accident. Initially, their exchange is hesitant after years of separation. But the distance and time dissolve quickly.

Their bond is stitched together by shared physical and emotional wounds. Diwas bears scrapes and scars from reckless acts, and Kalina struggles with mental health and self-harm tendencies.

Their separate sufferings seem to always find a symmetry of quiet understanding and a desire to soothe the other, even when their own self is hurting. The two broken souls find

healing not in saving themselves, but each other. The closeness they share carries the weight of love, and their hearts consistently orbit one another regardless of their partners.

In one scene, an injured Diwas visits Kalina, who is distant and withdrawn. It is soon revealed that she has been sleeping with her boyfriend, not out of desire, but in an attempt to dull the ache inside her. She has found a different outlet now, where her vulnerability is violated.

Diwas is against this, and becomes a place of care for Kalina once again. And for him, Kalina's touch is enough to mend even his deepest wounds. At one point, Diwas tells Kalina, "I am not someone else, I am you."

Noor Khanal and Abishek Khadka, as the younger Kalina and Diwas, bring an unfiltered innocence on stage, their exchanges so raw that it is like eavesdropping on real life in motion. There are flickers of humour, the scenes unfold with tender music. Akanchha Karki and Sudam CK step in as the older

personas, delivering bold performances that show how relationships, over time, shift and knot themselves around personal grief.

Towards the end, in an extraordinary moment, young and adult versions of Kalina and Diwas speak in tandem, transcending time as a young Kalina speaks to an adult Diwas, and adult Kalina to young Diwas. Our present selves are never far from the children we once were, the pieces of our past selves and past experiences linger within us forever.

Sickroom explores Kalina and Diwas's deep reliance on one another. It also lays bare their inability to fully settle into a conventional relationship because sometimes the aches leave us hollow, in search of no one but ourselves. 📺

Sickroom
Until 12 July
Sunday-Friday (except Tuesday): 5:15PM
Saturday: 1PM, 5:15PM
Kausi Theatre, Teku

Target 2030 for maternal and newborn health

Nepal's healthcare community is striving to reach the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for high-risk districts

■ Marty Logan in Kapilvastu

Turn off the hectic East-West Highway, bump up a short dirt road, and you reach the Basic Health Services Hospital in Shivraj Municipality. People line up around its two single-storey buildings, fanning themselves in the morning heat.

To the left is a new, smaller building. At one end, a pharmacist sits at a window serving the line of people outside. A nurse talks to a pregnant woman during a pre-delivery visit.

"This Smart Integrated Clinic will be a one-stop shop for mother and child healthcare," says Hospital Director Birendra Kumar Mishra. Financed by the municipality and equipped by UNICEF, the clinic will focus on vaccinating children in a catchment area of 100,000 people.

Only about 70% of children here are vaccinated due to low awareness or hesitation, or because many born at the hospital are from families who live elsewhere.

"Many families from outside can't afford to wait until the next vaccination day, the Smart Clinic will offer inoculations daily so they won't have to," says Mishra, as a ceiling fan whirrs. The clinic's records will be linked to a Government of Nepal information system, so if a mother or child misses an appointment they can be contacted."

UNICEF credits proactive local leaders and a strong willingness to invest in innovation for the Smart Clinic, which is supposed to deliver other services like nutritional counselling by female community health volunteers (FCHVs).

But like much of maternal and newborn health across Nepal, the news is not all positive.

About a month later in the same office, Amit Pandey is explaining the recent death of a pregnant woman. Close to her delivery date, she arrived at the hospital with high blood pressure (pre-eclampsia) and severe anaemia.

Doctors referred her to the provincial hospital in Butwal, but her family took her home instead. Eight days later she returned, unconscious. Again, doctors referred her to Butwal but the family again returned home.

The next day she hadn't improved so the family decided to follow the doctors' advice but the woman, a mother of three, died on the way to the facility.

"They are very poor," says Pandey. "We referred the case but they were worried about the cost. We even offered them a free ambulance but they didn't take it."

Ironically, two days earlier the Director of the Lumbini Province Health Directorate singled out the referral system as a weakness in the province's healthcare.

"Our referral mechanisms

are very poor," says Roshan Lal Chaudhary in an interview in Taulihawa. "For example, we lack facilities so a referral is made to Butwal. We prepare the papers, but they don't go. Sometimes it's a financial issue. It could also be because they lack confidence speaking or they don't know anyone there."

Asked if Lumbini Province will meet the 2030 target for maternal mortality in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Chaudhary said: "It will be difficult."

Nepal's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is at 151 deaths per 100,000 live births, with Lumbini Province having the highest: 207 (see map). Kapilvastu's MMR was 229.

In February 2025, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated Nepal's national MMR had dipped to 142. Between 2016 and 2023 it fell 5.8% yearly, and if that trend is maintained, Nepal's MMR could reach 93 by 2030, missing the SDG target of 70.

Early triumph

In 1996, Nepal's MMR was 539 but by 2016 it had dropped to 239 and the country was celebrated globally for reducing maternal deaths (graph). While progress has slowed, multiple efforts are being made at all three levels of government, to regain momentum.

But inadequate funding from the central government and the sudden cut earlier this year of millions of dollars injected annually by USAID have made that more difficult.

Kapilvastu followed the national trend: it made a huge improvement and then momentum braked. Home deliveries, which are riskier because they usually occur without skilled medical staff, dropped from 2,256 in 2019-20 to 284 in 2024-25, according to Kalika Self-Reliance Social Centre.

But with larger marginalised communities, whose members are less educated and more conservative, and frequent movement across the border with India, the challenge in Kapilvastu is greater. Between 2020-21 and 2022-23, deliveries attended by skilled birth attendants fell from 60% to 54%. Births in health facilities dipped from 60% to 58%.

Ganeshpur health post in-charge Gautam Roy hopes that replacing 10 of 12 FCHVs, who retired, will spark greater awareness-raising but he says the scope for gain is limited by the community.

"We have fewer home deliveries now, just one or two a month compared to five when I arrived five years ago. Some local people are not well educated so they don't follow our advice," says Roy.

In Buddhabhumi Municipality, six wards had zero home deliveries in the previous year, the other four will reach the target this year, says Mayor Keshav Shrestha. One of those wards is Muslim majority.

Now in his second term in office, Shrestha says it is clear why his government is investing in maternal and child health: "If we don't look after these basic needs, then the community will not be developed for the future."

The Madhesi and Muslim communities are often singled out for avoiding healthcare services. "In those communities the literacy rate is a little lower and the decision-making power of women is less," said Chaudhary.

Muslim women are the least likely group in Nepal to deliver in a health facility (67%). The most common are Brahmin/Chhetri women (87%). Muslims make up 18% of Kapilvastu's population.

At the Basic Hospital, director Mishra says Muslim families do not necessarily lack awareness, some believe their religion bars the use of certain services.

The group Fairmed has worked in Kapilvastu since 2011, and its Country Coordinator Nirmala Sharma says her team has worked with Muslim religious leaders.

"We developed trust...they went to mosques and sensitised people. Still, they can't guarantee that 100% of people will comply."

Teacher Niyaz Ahmad says that he has been encouraging family planning within the Muslim community since 2016. "I tell them, 'planning starts before marriage. You have to choose your wife, your partner for life. After that, when do you want to have a child?'" he says. "After your first child, you must wait a minimum of two years to have your second."

The point is not to limit family size but to plan, says the teacher, founder of Madrasa Jamia Matalul Uloom Alsalamia.

"These ideas are found in Islam, in the Quran, in the Prophet's sayings," adds Ahmad, who works within a program known as Khusahal Pariwar, managed by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

In Shivraj Municipality the use of family planning has risen 45% in the past four years, and maternal and child health statistics have improved, says UNFPA.

Khushal Pariwar concepts have also been included in the Grade 8 health education curriculum and endorsed by the Madrasa Board of Lumbini Province and the National Madrasa Association.

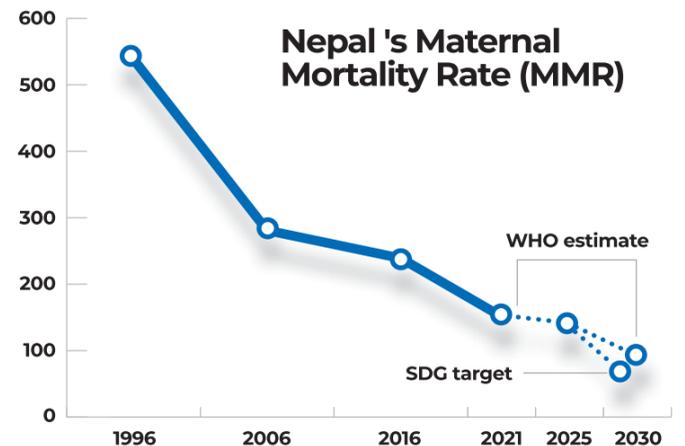
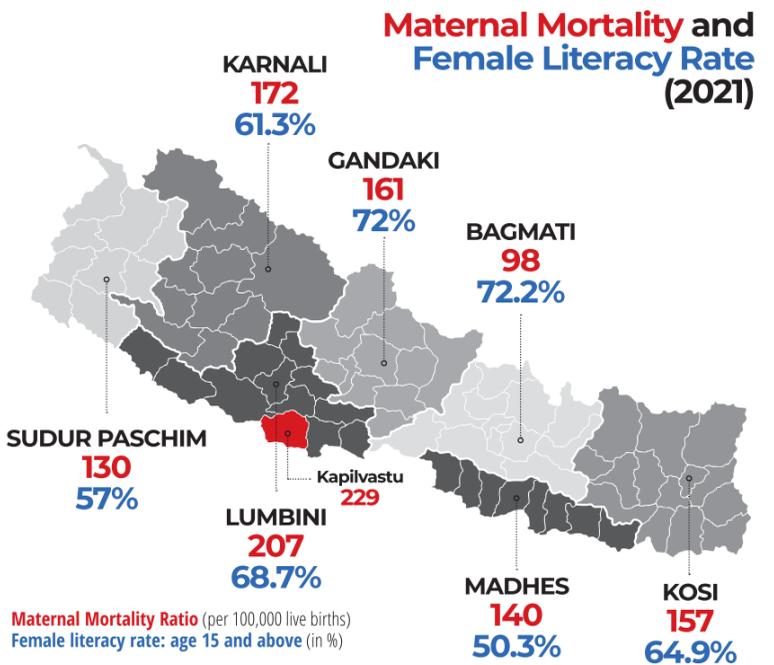
Auxiliary Nurse Midwife Anjali Sahani says she has seen a change in the behaviour of Muslim women: "They come with other pregnant women for checkups and have home visits after delivery."

Matron Leela Sharma says she has seen awareness grow among women in general during the seven years she has worked at Kapilvastu Hospital.

Demand is also rising for family planning and gynaecological services. "Maternal mortality does not happen much at home but on the way to the hospital," she adds.



Nurses at the pilot training session in the new Simulation Lab - Centre of Excellence at Paropakar Maternity and Women's Hospital





Women's in Kathmandu.

MALATI SHRESTHA, ONE HEART WORLDWIDE

Every mother counts, so count them

When the 2021 census found that Lumbini had the highest maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of the seven provinces (207 deaths per 100,000 live births), it surprised Mahesh Maskey of the Nepal Public Health Foundation (NPHF).

After analysis, NPHF decided that if they could increase the annual drop in the MMR to 25% from the trend of 6-7% a year, they could reach the SDGs target of 70. Other provinces would follow suit. They chose to focus on Kapilvastu because the district had been well studied but still had one of the highest MMRs in the province (229).

"Reaching 25% seems very difficult but if you think of it, if there are four deaths in one place the first year, you only have to reduce that by one to have a 25% reduction the next year," says Maskey.

"With close supervision, monitoring, and all the facilities that the government is providing for maternal health, it is doable. Provincial and local governments are highly committed. Lumbini Province has allotted Rs120.6 million for MNH this fiscal year and municipalities have committed to reduce maternal mortality to zero," he added.

NPHF needed an accurate picture of pregnancies in the district. Over 15 months, the team collected data on every pregnant woman in eight out of 10 municipalities.

"Once we have the data, each and every mother should be followed up, are they prepared for the birth, where do they want to go for delivery, do they have complications, what are health staff advising?" says Maskey.

Data analysis can reveal significant trends, but is not being done now, he adds. For example, is there a correlation between the average age of new mothers and the health of women and their children?

The data showed that MMR in the municipalities varied widely. The lowest had zero deaths over 15 months, the highest MMR was 695. Interestingly, the local unit with the highest MMR was in the mid-range for home deliveries: 9%.

NPHF presented the results to policy makers in the province and nationally. "They agreed that our main focus has to be quality of care — how to strengthen the hospital, the centre, how to encourage them, motivate them," says Maskey. "The more the clinical centres become attractive for delivery, the more people will give up home delivery and go there."

Politics before newborns

Prior to Covid-19, the INGO Fairmed agreed to a request from the then chief of the Kapilvastu Hospital in Taulihawa and invested Rs1.5 million to build a special newborn care unit (SNCU). It opened in June 2018 and ran until the hospital paediatrician left, each month serving 15-20 newborns with severe illnesses.

The paediatrician wasn't the only specialist who left. The exodus happened after the hospital chief, a political appointee, was moved out following a change in government and replaced by a junior doctor, who many of the seniors didn't want to work under, according to a media report.

Earlier this year a new hospital head was appointed but as of press time he has yet to take up his duties, and no money has been included in the current year's budget to run the SNCU. That means families with seriously ill newborns must travel to larger centres for care, like Lumbini Provincial Hospital in Butwal.

"It's so sad," says Fairmed Country Coordinator Nirmala Sharma. "That's one of the hospitals we invested a lot in. We had to renovate the building, buy and install the equipment — the director was very happy."

One-quarter (24%) of all cases nationwide admitted for specialised newborn care in 2023-24 came from Lumbini, according to the DHS annual report.

The director of the Lumbini Province Health Directorate, Roshan Lal Chaudhary, says there is nothing he can do. "We have no influence on this — it's a political issue." In fact, the hospital in Piuthan district is facing the same situation, he adds.



A monthly mothers group meeting at Bhalwad in Banganga Municipality, Kapilvastu.

MARTY LOGAN

The 2021 census report found that 57% of maternal deaths occur in facilities, 26% at home, and 17% on the way to a facility.

"Women want to come to health institutions, but are they properly taken care of? This is the major challenge," says Mahesh Maskey of the Nepal Public Health Foundation, whose team is analysing 15 months' data on maternal and newborn deaths in Kapilvastu.

To boost quality of care nationwide, the Family Welfare Division (FWD) of the Department of Health Services (DoHS) bought dozens of anti-shock garments for remote facilities, to treat women who haemorrhage following

delivery. The suits stabilise their condition until they can be moved to a better-equipped facility.

Post-partum haemorrhage is a leading cause of maternal death, and was responsible for 26% of maternal deaths in 2021.

Labs survive USAID cut

In Kathmandu, the National Health Training Centre worked with WHO and other partners to develop a training module to enhance the skills of nurses working in Maternal and Neonatal Health (MNH).

The pilot session was delivered in April at the new Maternal and Neonatal Simulation Lab Centre of Excellence in the new building

of the Paropakar Maternity and Women's Hospital.

The project lost funding when USAID stopped in early 2025, but the implementing partner, One Heart Worldwide (OHW), has raised money to replace the \$1 million-plus budget.

"Our goal is to complete these labs within the next two years," says Co-CEO Surya Bhatta. "OHW has always been a diverse pool of funders, so we were able to cope with the situation and are hoping that this will continue, but the future is going to be very challenging."

Other MNH initiatives cut after the departure of USAID include a suite of items to boost breastfeeding

rates across the country: hiring of 36 nurses trained to work in 18 hospitals in all provinces, equipment for the country's only milk bank, at Paropakar Hospital, and the opening of UNICEF-sponsored lactation management units in 8 hospitals across Nepal.

Health Minister Pradip Paudel managed a small increase in the health budget for this fiscal year. Some of it will be used to hire public health officers to work in every municipality.

The FWD also announced in June that lost USAID funding for a key micronutrient survey will be replaced by another US agency.

Still, Paudel recently told a ministerial meeting in Geneva that foreign aid cuts put Nepal's MNH progress at risk. "Vital services for nearly 5 million women and nutrition programs for 1.5 million children under five have been affected," said the minister, as reported by the Kathmandu Post.

Despite Chaudhary's negative forecast, maternal deaths plummeted in Lumbini in 2024-25, from 82 the previous year to 57, according to the health directorate's annual report. Other positive signs: the percentage of pregnant women having eight ANC visits rose from 28% the previous year to 58%, the percentage having four postnatal checkups climbed by 21%, to 56%.

But the picture painted by the latest DoHS annual report is, surprisingly, darker. Key statistics nationwide have declined in the previous year. Facility deliveries fell by 5%, deliveries by specially trained staff declined by 6%, and the rate of women getting four ANC visits dropped by nearly 6%. 🇳🇵

EVENTS

**Weekend Hike**

Embrace the calm of the trail to Mohini Jharana as you hike through serene landscapes, far from the chaos of the city. 5 July, 7am onwards, Fee: Rs1,400 (newcomers) / Rs 900 (regulars), Thamel, 9841657144

**Interdependence**

Curated by Michelle Lama, this art exhibition explores the interdependence of Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Space through the eyes of nine Nepali women artists, and invites viewers to reflect on the fragile balance that sustains life.

Till 12 July, 11am-7pm, Nepal Art Council

Exposure /36

Anne Mai Baan's solo photography exhibition Exposure /36 is a visual journey that explores the idea of exposure as both a photographic technique and a personal unfolding. Each of the 36 frames is a poetic pause that invites reflection, vulnerability, and transformation. Until 10 July, 10am-6pm, Bikalpa Art Center, Pulchok

**Sickroom**

Sickroom at Katha Ghera is the story of Kalina and Diwas, who keep finding their way back to each other through time, pain, and endurance. Directed by Akanchha Karki, the play is an adaptation of Rajiv Joseph's play Gruesome Playground Injuries. Read review and get details on Page 5. Until 12 July, Ticket: Rs500, Kausi Theatre, Teku

South Community Market

Support local businesses at the South Community Market, and don't miss out on the delicious buffet brunch. 6 July, 8am-1pm, Piano Piano South, Sanepa

**Meditation session**

Reconnect with yourself and release stress at this seven-step guided meditation session that is rooted in ancient traditions. 5 July, 5pm-6pm, 9843634222, Mind Body Center, Baber Mahal

Archival care

Be part of the two-day dialogue Ephemeral & Enduring: Conversations on Archival and Collection Care Practices where artists, archivists, and researchers explore memory, identity, and preservation through community archives, oral histories, and cultural heritage. 4-5 July, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Pulchok

MUSIC

Spanish music

Join in for a night of Spanish lyrical songs being showcased in the memory of Ambica Shrestha, featuring music from Spanish and European composers with additional performances by mezzo-soprano Huiling Zhu and pianist Nise Meruno. 6 July, 7pm onwards, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Moksh

**Music Memorabilia**

Step into Hard Rock Cafe where every wall tells the history of music. From Michael Jackson's iconic hat to Metallica's guitar, discover pieces of music history up close as you dine. Hard Rock Cafe, Sherpa Mall, Darbar Marg

**John Chamling Rai**

Get swept away by the soulful vocals of John Chamling Rai on a night that promises music and memories. 12 July, 9pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, XO Club, Thamel

Live Music

Enjoy live music every Friday at Tyandro, and take your friends and family along for some authentic Newari cuisine on the side. 4 July, 5pm onwards, Cafe Tyandro, Sano Thimi

**Sonagi Blues**

Presenting traditional melodies with contemporary flair, Sonagi Blues will bring their signature sound to a much-awaited live performance. 4 July, 8pm onwards, Ticket: Rs200, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel

DINING

**Offers @ Aloft**

This July, enjoy midweek and weekend deals at Nylgiri with 50% off all food & drinks for gentlemen on Super Man Sunday and for the ladies on Wonder Women Wednesdays. Until 31 July, Aloft Kathmandu, Thamel, 9801976054

GETAWAY

**Hotel Country Villa**

Escape to this hill-top retreat in Nagarkot that boasts sweeping sunrise views and lush gardens. The hotel offers spacious rooms with private balconies, some with hot tubs or saunas, perfect for unwinding. Nagarkot (01) 6680127

Hotel Bhrikuti Tara

Hotel Bhrikuti Tara is a harmonious blend of modern comfort and cultural charm, making it an ideal getaway for travelers seeking a retreat near Boudha. Boudhadwar Marg (01) 4595266

**Park Village Resort**

Park Village is a serene oasis with an outdoor pool, tennis court, and three on-site dining options, from al-fresco buffets to Pan-Asian cuisine. Book your luxurious getaway here! Budhanilkantha (01) 4375280

Club Himalaya

Club Himalaya by ACE Hotels offers an escape with panoramic views of the Himalayas. Explore recreational activities like mountain biking, yoga and meditation sessions, along with nearby hiking trails. Nagarkot (01) 6680080

**Lake View Resort**

Whether you're craving a quiet weekend getaway, a family retreat, or a wellness escape, Lake View is the perfect place with their cozy rooms and scenic views. Pokhara (061) 451477

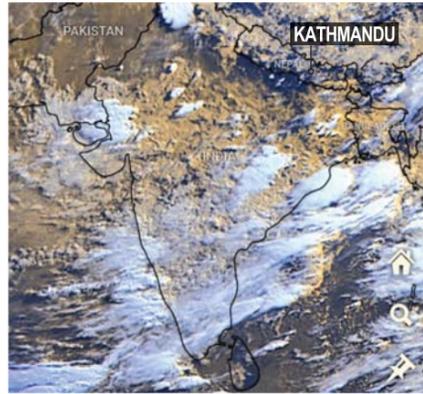
**Wok n Roll**

Spice up your meal with Wok n Roll's flavourful Kung Pao noodles or customise your noodles as you like with fresh veggies, protein or any go-to sauce. Patan, 9801913080

View Brew

Soak in the city's charm at View Brew with flavours served up against a backdrop of Kathmandu Valley. Try their customisable pizzas or go for the mustang aloo or jhol momo for a more local taste. Ekantakuna, 9761693878

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Less Rain in the Plain**

A strong monsoon pulse is drifting from east to west, and it is expected to bring showers across Nepal. Some isolated heavy showers with thunder are expected, but most of it will be spread-out drizzles by late evening and night. The eastern Tarai and foothills may be drier. Mornings should usually be relatively clear with brief sunshine. Major rivers are full, but none are approaching the danger mark yet.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 20°	27° 19°	28° 19°

OUR PICK



American crime drama Long Bright River, based on the 2020 book of the same name by Liz Moore, follows veteran Philadelphia police officer Mickey Fitzpatrick, who patrols a high-crime neighborhood overcome by the opioid crisis. When a series of women in the district die of drug overdose, Fitzpatrick suspects them to be murders, even though her colleagues disagree. As she investigates the deaths, Fitzpatrick comes to believe the cases might be connected to the disappearance of her own sister. Stars Amanda Seyfried, Nicholas Pinnock, Ashleigh Cummings, and John Doman.

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 चिन्ता पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- 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

Sam Ye Garden

Sam Ye offers delicious dry wonton and fulfilling platters both for vegetarians and meat-lovers. Their beautifully curated garden makes it an ideal spot for family and friend gatherings. Swayambhu, 9820150840

**Dokdo Sarang**

Dokdo Sarang is the perfect spot for both casual meals or BBQ feasts. Try their filling kimbap rolls to get an authentic taste of Korean flavours. Kupondol, 9803472187

**La Mari**

From flaky croissants, artisan sourdough loaves, and heavenly eclairs, explore La Mari's Parisian-style menu of sweet and savory treats. Lazimpat, 9801022302

Kharayo Bakes

Known for its handcrafted desserts, Kharayo Bakes serves an array of pastries, cakes, and cookies, from its classic cheesecakes and flaky croissants to custom cakes for special occasions. Hanuman Dhoka, 9851132172

Kangchenjunga too sacred to climb?

Despite anger in Sikkim, it is unlikely Nepal will also ban climbing the world's third highest mountain

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Outrage in Sikkim after an Indian Army expedition climbed Kangchenjunga, the world's third highest peak, spiked attention on balancing jobs with reverence for sacred landmarks.

Kangchenjunga (8,586m) is not a peak as much as a mountain range with 16 peaks above 7,000m on the border between India and Nepal. Climbing the peak from the Indian side has been banned since 2001 because the indigenous Lepcha community regard the mountain as the abode of Dzoe-nga, the patron deity of Sikkim. Kangchenjunga National Park covers an area one-third of the state.

'Climbing this sacred peak is not only a matter of serious concern but also a violation of both the prevailing legal provisions and the deeply held religious beliefs of the people of Sikkim,' read a letter last month from Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) to Amit Shah, India's Minister of Home Affairs and Cooperation.

Tamang continued: 'We further request Your Honour to take up the issue with the Government of Nepal to ensure that no future expeditions are permitted.'

Kangchenjunga was climbed for the first time 70 years ago by a British team which promised King Tashi Namgyal of Sikkim that it would not set foot on the peak.

This spring climbing season alone, there were 70 climbing permits for foreigners issued for Kangchenjunga by the Nepal government. A dozen made it to the top, while one French climber died.

One of the expeditions this year was an Indian Army team led by Col Ranveer Jamwal on the final leg of a 'Har Shikhar Tiranga' (The Tricolour on Every Peak) mission to plant the Indian flag at the highest points of each of India's 28 states. It put five climbers on top.

What seems to have incensed the



LOCHAN GYAWALI

Sikkimese is that it was an Indian military expedition that went to Nepal to climb the mountain. The Sikkim Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association asked people to observe purification ceremonies in temples in the state.

The somber mood of the Sikkim people contrasted with Jamwal's sense of accomplishment. "Without a doubt, the most difficult summit of my life," he told reporters. "It tested every ounce of our will."

Nepal has not said anything publicly, but a ban on climbing Kangchenjunga is unlikely, since it is popular with expeditions.

Nepal has banned climbing some of its own mountains out of respect for local beliefs. Mt Machapuchre (6,990m) is out of bounds because it is regarded as sacred by the Gurung people. Khumbila that stands above Namche Bazar is only 5,761m high, but is considered the protector deity of the Sherpa people. Gauri Shankar on the Nepal-China border (called Chomo Tseringma by the local community) was off-limits for some time due to its holy name.

In Tibet, climbing Mount Kailash is prohibited by the Chinese government because it is revered by the Hindus,

Buddhists, and followers of the Bon faith.

Economically, climbs on Kangchenjunga bring in decent revenue. This climbing season, the permits, at \$1,800 each, was worth \$73,800. This number is dwarfed by the \$4 million in Everest permits, but Kangchenjunga expeditions also provide jobs to hundreds of high altitude guides, porters, base camp support staff and other logistical costs.

As the third highest mountain in the world and the tallest in India, there will always be significant motivation to climb it from the Nepal side. 🇳🇵

HELLO HYBRID HELLO FUTURE

YARIS CROSS HYBRID ELECTRIC VEHICLE

TOYOTA

WHAT IS A HYBRID VEHICLE?

Hybrid vehicles are called hybrids because they use two powertrains - internal combustion engine (ICE) and an electric motor to obtain maximum power and fuel economy with minimum emissions.

SELF-CHARGING HYBRID



All shaken up while

Every time a disaster strikes Nepal, more migrants spend extended time abroad to save enough to rebuild

■ **Shrijan Raj Pandey** in Doha

Last year, under a scorching September sun, Jupiter Ghimire, 30, took a few minutes off from his food delivery work in Qatar's oppressive heat to scroll through Facebook.

His feed was full of news of a devastating flood and landslides in Nepal. Suddenly, he froze: one news item mentioned that among the worst hit was Gotikhel, his home village in Lalitpur.

Panic gripped him as he frantically dialled home, but the phones were down. The news was all bad: floods had ravaged Kavre and Lalitpur, killing 217 people. Ghimire's heart sank as he saw familiar names and places.

Social media became both a lifeline and a source of torment, as video updates streamed in about the rising death toll. About 40 people were dead or missing in the Gotikhel area, and Ghimire knew most of those who perished.

"There were names of people I grew up with," he recalls. For three agonising days, he was in the dark about his family, consumed by fear for his loved ones, especially his 11-year-old daughter.

Ghimire finally learned that his family had survived. But the flood had swept away their farm, and part of their home. He did not go home for Dasain last year to save money to rebuild the house. He isn't going this year either.



As the monsoon rains lash Nepal again, nearly a year after the 2024 disaster, Ghimire and other Nepalis here worry about another flood threatening their families, homes, crops, and livestock.

Added to that is more recent worry of the Israel-Iran conflict spilling over to Qatar, as it did recently when Iran fired missiles at a US military base in Doha.

Ghimire's life working overseas had begun with another disaster:

the 2015 earthquake that killed nearly 9,000 people. He left for Malaysia and stayed there for three years to make enough money to start a new life back home.

After returning to Nepal, he invested his savings in a small canteen to support his family. But business faltered, and before long Ghimire was forced to leave once again, this time to Qatar where he has worked for the past seven years.

"If there were opportunities in

Nepal, who would want to leave their families behind and live in the heat and solitude of the desert?" he asks, in between sips of Nepali-style milk tea in a street cafe.

Tirtha Gautam, another worker in Qatar, got a call on the morning of 28 September last year that turned his world upside down. The flood on the Rosi Khola had ravaged his family's home in Kavre, destroying their farm and ready-to-harvest paddy crop.

"I couldn't believe that this time it was happening to me," Gautam says, recalling earlier misfortunes that had befallen families of other Nepalis in Doha.

Gautam clung to fleeting moments of connection with home, often parking his bus near buildings with free wi-fi during breaks to check in on news from Nepal. Tragedies in his homeland have always been a source of sorrow, but this time it was deeply personal.

Village in India with retired soldiers from Nepal

■ **Bikas Rauniyar** in Gorakhpur

Barely 60km from the Nepal border in India is the village of Uditpur where most residents are retired Gorkha soldiers and their descendants.

Called 'Army Village', there are 85 households with former veterans from Nepal and their families. Every other house in this neighbourhood belongs to a former soldier, and Nepali can be heard being spoken on the streets.

The village was previously named Baikunthapur, but was renamed Army Village by the district magistrate as a sign of respect to Nepal by the Indian government, says Suk Bahadur Gurung, 76, one of the retirees.

Suk Bahadur (pictured, right) was deployed in the artillery unit of the Indian Army before retiring as a major in 1994, and now heads the Gorkha Village Social Welfare Committee.

Gurung has a family of three including his wife Basanti and son Sonu who has followed his father's footsteps and is posted with the Indian Army in the border town of Pathankot in Punjab.

As tensions between India and Pakistan rose last month, Suk Bahadur worried for his son.

"I have fought in previous India-Pakistan wars, it was our duty as soldiers," he says, "but



PHOTOS: BIKAS RAUNIYAR

even so, I wish there was peace. As parents, we worry."

Suk Bahadur Gurung was awarded medals for his bravery in both the 1962 and 1965 wars with China and Pakistan. But now in late life, he says wars do not solve anything, and all disputes can be peacefully negotiated.

The larger irony, of course, is

that Nepali nationals are fighting on behalf of one neighbour against two other neighbours with which Nepal has good relations. Recruitment of Nepalis in the Indian Army is a geopolitically sensitive matter.

At present, there are an estimated 32,000 Nepali nationals in the Gorkha Regiments of the

Indian Army, and there are many other Indians of Nepali origin.

But recruitment of soldiers from Nepal into the Indian military has been stopped since 2022 after Prime Minister Modi's Agneepath scheme.

Suk Bahadur Gurung was himself born in India but his ancestral home is in Gulmi district. It was his grandfather who moved

to India after enlisting in the British Indian Army. After retirement, he stayed on in India.

Suk Bahadur has not tried to trace his roots in Nepal, and does not feel the need either.

"When my grandfather came here, he also invited our relatives and other people. There is no one left back in Gulmi," he says. ■

GEN NEXT: Suk Bahadur Gurung (left) is an Indian Army veteran. His grandfather was from Gulmi, and joined the British Indian Army. His descendants, including the next generation (above) all live in a village near Gorakhpur.

abroad



PHOTOS: SHRIJAN RAJ PANDEY

"I was devastated, but also furious," says Gautam, who is critical of the government's slow response even one year later to the disaster. "During these times, I wish I could help or donate, but with my little salary, do I look after my

family or help my community?" Gautam was working as a driver in Kathmandu when he left Nepal in 2012, hoping to work a few years and come back with enough savings to buy his own vehicle. Twelve years later, at 34, he is still in Qatar.

He is married with two children, but the distance from family weighs heavily in his mind. His second son was born just two days before this interview. Gautam embraced the joy through a video call, but had to cut it short to return to work.

"I want to go back to Nepal and be with my family and my new son," Gautam says. "I am done living here."

Yet for workers like Gautam and Ghimire, that is easier said than done. Each disaster, natural or economic, forces them to extend their time abroad indefinitely.

"I am not staying here by choice but compulsion," adds Gautam, who has not gone home for Dasain for the past 12 years that he has been in Qatar. "My parents get very upset every time they hear I can't come home."

Gautam does visit Nepal every two years, but feels like a stranger. "There is a stigma about working in Khadi," he says, using the Nepali term for the Gulf. "People who go to the US or Europe are held in higher regard."

Despite sending money to Nepal that keeps the country's economy and their own households afloat, migrant workers are sometimes met with subtle disdain.

This unspoken rejection deepens a sense of alienation, since most workers sacrifice time with family and children to earn enough to support their folks in Nepal.

"To truly belong, I'd need to be home, surrounded by my family and culture," Gautam tells us. "But economic reality keeps me here, away from everything that makes me feel Nepali." 🇳🇵

Diaspora disaster response

For professional migrants in the West with resources and opportunities, the focus tends to be on organised aid and advocacy in times when Nepal suffers disasters. But for economic migrants in the Gulf or Malaysia, challenges of daily survival limit their ability to help.

Yet, there is a collective will to support Nepal in times of need. As political instability and economic challenges persist, the government must find ways to mobilise this emotional attachment in the diaspora.

Disasters, upheavals, and economic turmoil in Nepal often spark fervent discussions when Nepalis abroad meet up. The conversations highlight both the ways the diaspora strives to help the homeland, and the helplessness felt by many.

In the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake, the 2020-21 Covid lockdowns, and the 2024 floods, donation and advocacy campaigns emerged spontaneously in the diaspora.

Nepal Rising's Fill the Bucket campaign after 2024 floods, for example, raised \$7,000 through global donations, targeting both international and Nepali migrants. For a donation of just \$40, a family of four received essential food, sanitation, and medical supplies in Nepal.

The campaign gained significant traction on social media, with hundreds of shares worldwide.

"It's an emotional response," says Preeti Pandey Adhikary

of The Great Nepali Diaspora Network (TGTN). "Whenever a disaster strikes, everyone is incredibly generous with their donations."

She adds: "People back home see us as the lucky ones who don't have to worry about basic needs. And yet, when we share ideas about how Nepal could be improved, we're dismissed with, 'How dare you tell us how to run Nepal?'"

TGTN fosters collaboration within the Nepali professional diaspora to bridge this divide. She rejects the term "brain drain," arguing that geographical distance doesn't diminish the ability to contribute meaningfully to the home country.

"Nepali identity is fluid," Adhikary says, "whether you live in Europe, the US, or Asia, you can adopt new homes while still retaining your Nepaliness."

This fluid identity has enabled professional migrants to reconnect with Nepal in innovative ways, from volunteering to establishing impactful projects.

Connectivity through phone apps is a lifeline. These donations are a reaction to disaster, but do not help with preparedness and prevention.

Says Adhikary: "There's a lot of excitement, optimism, and a sense of empowerment. There is growing collaboration and active engagement within the diaspora as well as an evolving sense of national identity and responsibility."






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