

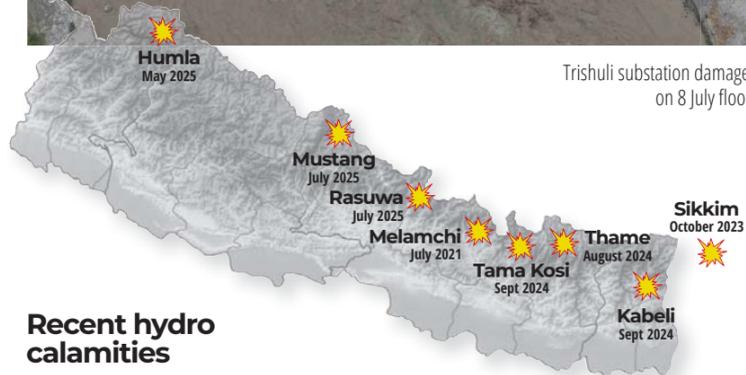
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PRAKASH CHANDRA TIMLSENA / NPL



Trishuli substation damaged on 8 July flood.

Recent hydro calamities

Resource curse

■ Sonia Awale

- On 15 May, two glacial lakes burst in Tharka in Humla and the debris flow washed away homes and bridges.
- Last week, a slurry surge on the Kali Gandaki in Upper Mustang caused at least Rs15 million in damage, and was traced to a melting glacier.
- Dozens are feared dead after an expanding glacial lake in Tibet overflowed last week, sweeping into Nepal and damaging four hydropower plants generating 230MW, nearly 8% of the country's total grid supply.

And those are just in the past month. Climate scientists say Himalayan glacial lake outbursts are becoming more frequent and destructive, and are a warning for Nepal not to put all its eggs in the hydropower basket. Record precipitation last September unleashed floods that killed 200 people, and temporarily slashed Nepal's total generation capacity of 3,000MW by nearly half. The Melamchi flood of 2021 caused by permafrost melting on a glacier upstream nearly destroyed a \$800 million water supply scheme, Nepal's largest infrastructure project which four years later still has not resumed full operation. The glacial lake overflow in Sikkim caused by record rainfall in September 2023 destroyed the \$1.2 billion Chungthung Dam and caused catastrophic damage to infrastructure on the Teesta River.

This was a warning to the cascade of hydropower plants on the Arun and Marsyangdi river basins. Nepal has set a target of generating an additional 28,500MW by 2035 -- out of the feasible 48,000MW -- but how viable is an energy strategy that is exposed to heightened risk due to climate breakdown? "As extreme weather events increase, we must design and build infrastructures respecting river flow and topography," points out former Energy Secretary Dwarika Nath Dhungel. "We must make the best use of our water resources, but not by letting excavators loose everywhere, mining riverbeds and building haphazardly where we shouldn't be building." Although no project can be completely disaster-proof, climate smart design can minimise damage from flash floods and landslides. Energy diversification to other renewables such as solar, wind or biogas would lessen dependence on high-risk, high-investment hydropower projects. Nepal gets annual sunlight on average of 300 days with 6-7 hours on average to total 50,000 terawatt-hours (TWh) per year. Solar energy stations are cheaper and quicker to build, and would be an ideal alternative to over-reliance on hydropower (page 5). The Solar and Wind Energy Resource Assessment last year calculated that Nepal could source 3,000MW from wind energy alone, considering 10% of the area with more than 300W/m²

wind power density, mainly in the trans-Himalaya. "There has been some investment in solar power, especially from the state sector," says water expert Madhukar Upadhyay. "But there is an issue of land acquisition since the arrays need a lot of space. It is comparatively easier to get a permit to put up a hydropower plant on a river."

But the best solution for Nepal could be a hybrid scheme that uses solar energy to pump water up to a reservoir in the day time and drain it during the evening peak demand to generate electricity. Such pump storage hydro could be cheaper and quicker to build. Nepal's public sphere is buzzing with excitement over the discovery of potentially 430 billion m³ of methane gas beneath Dailekh district that, if properly harnessed, would meet the country's energy demand for the next 50 years. A feasibility study is awaited, but politicians from the prime minister down already see this as a petro bonanza that will make Nepal rich.

Drilling, storage and distribution of CNG in the country's current kleptocratic state make that unlikely. If Nepal was to get rich solely on its hydro-energy potential, for example, it would have done so in the past 50 years. Says Dhungel: "This is not exactly a new discovery, but it is premature to celebrate until its extraction is proven to be cost effective. And let us hope it does not get tangled in geopolitics, since China is involved in the prospecting and drilling, which could make India uneasy."

Nepal suffers from the Dutch Disease curse even before its resource is fully exploited. And the current cronyism, corruption and rent-seeking structures cannot deliver the riches we expect from Dailekh's methane discovery.

With hydropower now in jeopardy, Nepal's planners will have to evolve a new strategy for energy security into the future. But first, governance needs to be cleaned up with long-term planning that takes climate risk into account. For example, do we need to mine fossil gas when there are abundant renewable options? Will Dailekh take Nepal away from its climate commitments?

Says Madhukar Upadhyay: "Nepal has always been resource rich and management poor. And the larger the resource, the bigger our management incapacity. It is a societal malaise." 🇳🇵

Here comes the sun
PAGE 5

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Lift restrictions on Upper Mustang

Local residents of Mustang, including a sitting MP and several politicians, submitted a petition to Prime Minister K P Oli in Kathmandu this week urging the government to lift the region's 'restricted' status.

This is not the first time such a demand has been raised, and as the region's accessibility has improved over the years, calls to remove the long-standing restriction have grown louder.



GUEST EDITORIAL
Shailendra Thakali

Upper Mustang is no longer weeks away from Kathmandu. Nearly 85% of the road from Beni to Kagbeni has been blacktopped, and one can drive from Kathmandu to Lo Manthang with an overnight stop in Pokhara.

Between April 2024 and April 2025, Lower Mustang received 144,745 international tourists, a near 50% increase from the previous year. Most of these were Indian pilgrims travelling to Muktinath.



NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

Mustang is also gaining popularity among Nepali tourists, with 700,000 visiting the region in 2024. A hotel operator in Kagbeni says about 20% of Nepali visitors to Muktinath also travel to Korala, the trade and transit checkpoint on the China border. That would mean that nearly 100,000 domestic tourists visit Upper Mustang annually.

In stark contrast, international tourist numbers to Upper Mustang (north of Kagbeni) have remained stagnant, hovering around 4,000 per year, the primary reason being its restricted status. Foreign visitors must pay a steep permit fee of \$500 for 10 days, with an additional \$50 per day thereafter.

Tourism entrepreneurs, politicians, and residents want these fees to be abolished so Upper Mustang can attract a broader range of international travellers. The success of Lower Mustang, where relaxed restrictions have led to a tourism boom, is often cited as proof of what lifting restrictions could achieve.

Several northern areas prefixed with 'Upper' (Upper Manaslu, Upper Dolpo, Upper Kanchenjunga, and Upper Arun) also need similar permits and fees. Although no clear official explanation exists, these areas were primarily restricted due to historical inaccessibility, ecological and cultural fragility, and security concerns.

In the 1960s and 1970s, these remote regions served as shelters for Khampa guerrilla fighters who launched ambushes on

the Chinese military across the border.

The Khampa have long gone but security concerns rooted in that era seem to persist. The government in Kathmandu is seemingly unaware of the changed political and security landscape. If concerns do remain, they are not made public.

One of the main reasons for maintaining the restricted designation is to limit visitor numbers. But with improved road access and services, as Upper Mustang has seen, this justification no longer holds.

When Upper Mustang first opened to international tourists in 1992, it had no formal lodges or hotels, and it took four to five days of trekking from Jomsom to Lo Manthang. Today, there are more than 80 lodges and hotels above Kagbeni, spread across nearly every village. Several upmarket hotels now struggle to stay afloat during the off-season, relying on low-spending domestic visitors to survive.

There has been no serious review of the permit structure to align with current realities, nor any response to local aspirations to attract more international tourists and harness tourism for economic development.

Concerns about over-tourism are valid. There is a risk that increasing visitor

The hefty permit and fees for foreign tourists visiting Upper Mustang are obsolete and outdated

numbers could erode Upper Mustang's cultural heritage, social fabric, and fragile natural environment, precisely the features that make it special. However, the region's 33 years of tourism experience have been largely positive.

Tourism has contributed significantly to the restoration and preservation of religious and historical sites like the Thubchen and Jampa monasteries in Lo Manthang, the ongoing conversion of the old palace in Ghami into a premium hotel, and the rehabilitation of many monasteries and chortens.

The most pressing need now is for all levels of government—federal, provincial, and local—to invest in managing tourist flows and maintaining tourist sites. These efforts are essential not only to enhance visitor experience but also to build long-term resilience and sustainability for the destination.

Visitor numbers are central to any tourism development strategy that aims to balance economic, social, and environmental goals. Clinging to obsolete policies and concerns to justify Upper Mustang's restricted status is not only unfair, it also suggests an undemocratic and discriminatory attitude toward a remote district.

Shailendra Thakali, PhD, is from Jomsom and is a freelance consultant on protected areas, tourism, conservation, and sustainable livelihoods.

ONLINE PACKAGES



WEAVING NEW LIFE

Pabi Sara and Chandra Bahadur's New Sangharsha Dhaka Udhyog is one of 32 small-scale dhaka businesses in Palpa, and their success has come after much hardship. Watch our video of this Nepali couple's life-long struggle to run their hand-woven dhaka shop. Subscribe for multimedia content.



WHO BUILDS KATHMANDU

The foundation of Kathmandu sits atop the blood, sweat and tears of construction workers in the informal economy. Kathmandu's buildings may have been designed by famous architects, but it is built by day labourers. Watch on the Nepali Times YouTube.

FALLING FERTILITY

It's absurd to expect three babies by 30 in a country that is run by morally corrupt politicians, lacks infrastructure, has limited economic prospects, is heavily polluted, has institutions that are decades behind technology, and lacks social welfare (Nepalis are having fewer babies. Why?, Sudiksha Tuladhar, page 10-11).

Bibhuti Willems

There are many issues that need exploring in relation to the underlying causes of decreasing fertility. It is a very sensitive topic, and it is heart-wrenching when someone like the Prime Minister resorts to teashop gossip instead of taking meaningful action.

Bidesh K Paudel

Finally, an acknowledgement that husbands have to be more involved in childcare. Right now, most do the bare minimum to contribute to raising a child.

Pema Chhodon

This is an easy way for Mr Oli to secure national income, as all the kids will have to work abroad.

Tom van Groeningen

It is ridiculous for governments to tell women to have more babies -- you guys are not the ones carrying the baby in your body and trying to feed and care for it amid a fraying family and social structure and skyrocketing costs. I am talking about the US, of course.

Ellen Coon

NEPALI POLITICS

This is funny and sad ('Nepal Communist Party (Groucho-Lennonist', Kunda Dixit's Newsletter, nepalitimes.substack.com). The political leadership's musical chairs— with its internal conflicts compounded by the publicly open display of an inability and/or disinterest in nurturing their emerging cadre to pursue ethical politics and governance—guarantees instability. Each change in government results in constant changes in staffing, policies, processes and intended progress.

Ivan G. Somlai

Perhaps there is another way of looking at it: Ms Bhandari's comeback will put corruption and syndicate politics to rest and contribute to a flourishing democracy, which is under huge threat at the moment ('Two to Tango', Shristi Karki, #1269).

Bishow Parajuli

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Meltwater ponds in the Himalaya

by Alton C Byers

While visiting Lhonak, research scientist Alton Byers spotted ten newly formed meltwater ponds on the Kangchenjunga Glacier, reminiscent of Imja Glacier which turned into a vast glacial lake. As pro-glacial lakes expand, experts urge early warning systems and zoning reforms. Details at nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

On life lessons

by Pratibha Tuladhar

Anbika Giri's five-part young adult fiction series introduces topics like child marriage, menstruation, bullying, to children, while portraying female characters that are resolute, self-aware, astute, and feisty. Review online.

Most popular on X

Nepalis are having fewer babies. Why?

by Sudiksha Tuladhar

The total fertility rate in Nepal has plummeted to replacement level in 30 years. For most urban young, having a child is now a fraught decision shaped by income, individual autonomy, and family pressure. Story on page 10-11.

Most commented

Two to Tango

by Shristi Karki

Nepal's political scene is in flux with internal rifts, leadership crises, and shifting alliances within the major parties. Amid growing strife, Nepal's major parties are already manoeuvring for the 2027 elections. Read the report on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Businesses work hand-in-glove with politicians to protect mutual interests in Nepal. This entrenched system normalises conflict of interest in contracts, cartels, and insider deals. Read more:



Roshan Sedhai @sedhairoshan

If you defined anocracy, gerontocracy and kakistocracy, you might as well be describing Nepal. Yet we still call it a democracy. Wonder why?



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

To combat antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in Nepal, there is need for evidence generation, vaccine development, regulatory support, global collaboration, and public awareness to ensure equitable access and effective prevention.



Sameer Mani (A) Dixit, PhD @smadixit

Vaccines can help mitigate AMR!

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Malnutrition

Twenty years ago this week, we reported about how malnutrition was indirectly responsible for 70% of all child mortality in Nepal, and how inadequate food increased susceptibility to diarrhoea, measles and acute respiratory infection.

In 2025, malnutrition is still one of the biggest causes of child mortality, except now it is not simply a lack of food but also too much junk food in the diet. Purchasing power has increased, but we are eating more of what we should not be eating.

Excerpt of a report published in issue #256 15 – 21 July 2005:

Despite recent official statements about rising average living standards, grinding poverty and the conflict, the effects of junk food in cities have made undernourishment and malnutrition a serious national epidemic.

Protein-energy malnutrition affects 63 percent of Nepali children which means they don't get enough food



to ensure normal physical and mental development. More than half of Nepali children are therefore physically stunted, and although this is reversible if the child starts eating enough after age two, they may suffer learning disabilities as well if undernourishment persists.

Hunger increases their susceptibility to diarrhoea, measles and acute respiratory infection. Diarrhoeal dehydration alone causes an estimated 30,000 child deaths every year as undernourished children are weaker and more likely to be brought down by the vicious spiral of disease and

malnutrition. Combined with worms, undernourishment is seen by many as Nepal's primary health concern for children.

Malnutrition hits many Nepali children even before they are born because their mothers don't have adequate food while pregnant. Between 30-50 percent of Nepali children are born underweight, below 2.5 kg.

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

1,000 WORDS



GOPAL DAHAL / RSS

MANSPLAINING: Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah and Deputy Mayor Sunita Dangol of the UML met after months of strained relations to finalise the city's budget this week.



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Tourism needs a new push

Visitors are coming to Nepal organically, the industry needs a more deliberate push

■ Sudiksha Tuladhar

Does anyone know that 2023-24 was declared the Visit Nepal Decade? Or that Pokhara announced that 2025 is a Special Tourism Year? The fuselage of Nepal Airlines jets still carry the Visit Nepal Year 2020 logos.

Such ad hoc and unnoticed promotion is emblematic of the way Nepal has tried to increase visitor arrivals post-Covid — and of the country's wider political disarray.

Deepak Raj Joshi of the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) has his work cut out to coordinate various agencies of the government to boost arrivals.

He says, "We have been working on marketing strategies to revive the tourism sector, and are hopeful that this year will mark a 8-10% increase in arrivals compared to the pre-pandemic times."

On paper, tourist numbers have rebounded to pre-Covid numbers with over 1 million last year, but official figures do not give a true picture of duration of stay, average spending, and the fact every visitor is counted as a 'tourist', even repeat visitors who come on business.

The few bright spots are largely a result of private sector promotion of niche tourism products, individual social media posts of adventurous treks in Nepal, or the fact that Indians are allowed to enter China again to visit Lake Mansarovar and Mt Kailash via Nepal.

Indeed, Simkot airport has up to 15 flights a day from Nepalganj bringing in Indian pilgrims who are then ferried by helicopter to

the border in Hilsa, or Lapcha Pass from where the holy sites in Tibet are visible. The rudimentary hotels and rest houses along the route in Humla have been bursting at the seams for the past month, to the point that some establishments are no longer able to provide patrons basic amenities.

Last year, 1.14 million tourists visited Nepal, and the government has projected up to 10% increase in tourist arrivals this year. International tourist arrivals to Nepal have been steadily increasing, especially from the US, Europe, and India. Domestic and regional travel has also increased after the Covid lockdowns.

The tourism industry employs at least 1 million people, trekking injects money directly into the rural economy and sustains ancillary sectors like handicrafts and

domestic aviation. In the last fiscal year, tourism brought in Rs82.33 billion, according to Nepal Rastra Bank. But the industry has been affected by negative publicity about poor infrastructure, air pollution in Kathmandu, travel safety and news of disasters like the China-Nepal flood last week that made international headlines. Growing worries about the climate crisis is also affecting youth travel, especially from Europe.

"The limitations of airport and road infrastructure has hindered the development of the tourism sector," admits Joshi. "And many are put off by the appalling state of our road network, especially during the monsoon season."

Nepal is home to 20 protected areas, 10 heritage sites, and eight out of the world's 10 highest mountains, and despite all the

obstacles it is still the perfect destination for the modern social media savvy traveller, who are experience-driven and inclined to look for itineraries that emphasise wellness and cultural immersion.

Some hotels around Kathmandu, Pokhara, Jomsom and the Khumbu have strived to adapt to this new tourism landscape, expanding facilities with significant international investment.

Luxury hotels like Aloft Kathmandu in Thamel were inaugurated just before the pandemic lockdowns, survived the crisis and thrived as it. Says General Manager Vikram Singh: "Our prime location in Thamel enhances the guest experience, especially for those seeking convenience and immersion in the local scene and travellers who want to be in the centre of it all."

Sustainability and environmental consciousness has also become an integral part of the hospitality industry. ISO certifications as well as sustainability initiatives like the Travelife sustainability certification for eco-friendly resorts validate credibility of hotels.

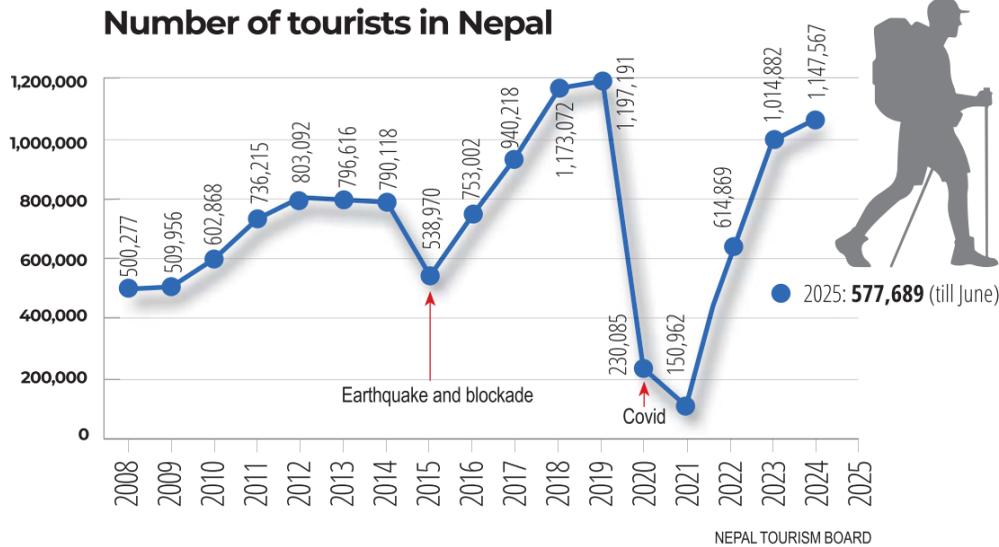
Aloft is the first five-star hotel in Nepal to have earned the Waste Smart Certificate, and it has also been awarded the ISO 14001:2015 certification, which is the internationally recognised standard for environmental management systems (EMS).

But such investments will not amount to much unless Nepal makes serious efforts to promote itself as a tourism destination, especially to its two giant neighbours. More importantly, the country needs to increase activities in which tourists can spend the money they want to. "While mountaineering and adventure tourism are extensively promoted, we have fallen short of marketing other elements such as wildlife, pilgrimage and cultural heritage," says Joshi. "There is a need to diversify promotion to increase income from the tourism sector."

Meanwhile, making Nepal more accessible to international and domestic visitors, must also be a priority. Kathmandu remains the sole aerial gateway despite new airports in Pokhara and Bhairawa.

"International airlines have shown interest, and if access and flights are increased these airports can be fully functional," says Joshi. But Sichuan Airlines has stopped flying to Pokhara, and there does not seem to be much interest from Thai, Vietnamese and Cambodian carriers to fly directly to Lumbini.

Says Singh: "There's tremendous opportunity to strengthen Nepal's destination marketing by telling richer, more compelling stories that connect travellers with our culture, nature, and people." 🇳🇵



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Rasuwa floods

Repair efforts have begun on the Rasuwagadi-Kerung border following extensive damage due to last week's flash floods. Nepali and Chinese teams are working and aim to resume cross-border operations within 10 days. The floods also damaged key hydropower projects along the Trisuli River Corridor, such as Rasuwagadi (111MW), Chilime (22MW), Trishuli (21MW) and Devghat (14MW).



TVS Scooter

The new TVS Jupiter 110 scooter is available with 113.3 cc engine and two-helmet storage under-seat. Comes in Blue Dawn Matte at Rs257,900.



Catch Spices

DS Group's Catch Spices has launched in Nepal with straight spices, whole spices, and various blends and pastes that will be available in Bhatbhateni and on Daraz. It is partnering with Chef Santosh Shah.



Dharara income

Ticket Sales from Dharara have grossed more than Rs48.3m since its reopening on 24 Nov 2024. A total of 262,555 people have climbed the viewing deck, which also generates money through parking, advertising and photoshoots. Starting 17 July, the tower will open 8am-8pm and on public holidays.



IME best

Global IME Bank has been voted Nepal's Best Bank 2025 by Global Finance Magazine. The award, which IME also won last year, is reportedly based on the bank's 'reliability, reach, relationships, and credit rating'.

Online traffic classes

Traffic rule violators can now pay fines and attend remedial awareness online, through the Nagarik App. AI will monitor if the participant's camera is on and focused on their face.

TikTok vs flood misinfo

Users searching for flood-related updates on TikTok are urged to verify information through credible sources. The guide will also provide information on how to responsibly share content about tragic events, and where to seek mental health support.

TeachingEnglish

The South Asia TeachingEnglish Online Conference, 17-19 July, will discuss issues in modern English instruction, such as using AI to enhance teaching and learning. Register for free on the British Council website.

Free cancer meds

Minister for Health and Population Pradip Paudel announced that essential cancer drugs will be free at government hospitals. The first shipment of such medicine has arrived in Nepal, provided by the medical charity Direct Relief.



Nabil turns 41

For its 41st anniversary, Nabil Bank is offering home loans for women and a 41-day period where customers can get free debit cards. The bank started with two branches and 144 employees and has grown to 268 branches and 2,431 employees. In that time deposits have grown from Rs146m to Rs510.66b.



Ncell creators

Aman Maharjan has won a 1 year deal with Ncell worth Rs 1 million for winning the 'League of Creators' competition that aimed to identify and train emerging Nepali digital creators. Fifty creators were chosen and mentored by influencers like Mr Foodie Nepal on content planning, messaging etc.

Churpi exports

This fiscal year, Nepal exported 2,265 tonnes of churpi worth Rs3.99b - a 34% increase from last year. The hard Himalayan yak cheese is mostly turned into dog chew in the United States which accounts for nearly 90% of all churpi exports. However, rising milk prices has put the industry at risk. Nepal also exported 14,625 tonnes of tea exports worth Rs4.20b through official channels, tea exported to India is not counted in this figure.

IVF scam

Nepal Police is investigating two fertility clinics in Kathmandu for harvesting eggs from underage girls for Rs15,000 and selling them to infertile couples for Rs2m, in major violation of medical ethics and child protection laws.

ZTE Financing

ZTE has launched zero-interest financing schemes for its V70 Max and V70 Design smartphones. The V70 Max (6+128GB) is available at Rs15,999 with Rs1,600 EMIs for six months after Rs6,400 down.

Here comes the sun

Solar energy is suddenly looking much more attractive after recent floods destroyed hydropower plants

■ Vishad Onta

The Bhote Kosi flood this month was a stark warning of the increased risk to Nepal's hydropower plants due to climate breakdown, and the disaster has prompted a rethinking into solar energy options (page 1).

Nepal has pursued an energy strategy that relies almost totally on hydroelectricity, but grid-scale solar power is becoming cheaper and offers a viable alternative.

Solar energy accounts for a mere 0.1% of Nepal's total installed generation of nearly 3,800MW. The rest of the world can now afford solar power because of China's production. The price of solar panels has gone down by up to 90% in the past decade.

"One advantage of solar over hydro is the speed at which projects can be set up," says Kushal Gurung of WindPower, "a 100MW hydro might take ten years to build, while a solar plant of the same capacity can be set up in six months."

Landslides, floods and earthquakes frequently damage hydropower stations. The Rasuwa flood last week affected 230MW of generation capacity from four plants along the Trisuli. Last September's flood badly damaged the 456MW Upper Tama Kosi.

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) and private power producers lost much revenue, and Nepal had to stop exporting monsoon surplus electricity to India last year. Damaged solar projects, on the other hand, can be up and running after repairs within a few weeks.



GHAMPOWER

"The main limitation of solar is land," explains Gurung. "While a relatively small hydro project can generate 5-10MW pretty easily, a 1MW solar plant requires 500 m² of land."

Where the plant is situated matters as well. The best region is Mustang, because it gets the most solar radiation per unit area over a specific period. The Tarai may get a lot of sun but cloud cover, fog and pollution makes it less 'irradiated'. The efficiency of a photovoltaic cell also drops, the higher the ambient temperature.

"A 1kW panel in Mustang might give you 6-7 units per day, while the same panel in the Tarai would

give you half that," says Gurung.

Another advantage for solar in Nepal is how decentralised it can be. An unreliable grid and difficult terrain make it hard to build hydropower stations and transmission lines, but home solar systems can be set up easily and provide reliable energy especially when paired with batteries for morning and the night.

Hydropower dams submerge large tracts of fertile valleys, impact ecosystems and displace people. But NEA and energy producers are locked into hydro, and are reluctant to shift to solar.

GhamPower is moving into solar in a big way, offering strategic

funding to make panels available to poorer communities, and setting up solar microgrids.

The company was one of ten winners, out of 2,500 applicants, of the \$50,000 Keeling Curve Prize which honours high-impact clean energy solutions.

The company sets up solar water pumps for farmers so that they can access water from boring wells year-round. It also set up solar systems that can power equipment needed during and after birthing such as baby warmers, incubators, sterilisers in remote health posts.

"Industries generally have large, unused rooftop spaces ideal for solar systems that can help reduce electricity bills," says Pradip Humagain at Gham Power but points out a flaw in national policy, which caps the capacity of a solar power plant for a particular industry at 1MW. "This limitation makes no sense, and removing it would actually help the NEA by making them better able to provide electricity to industry."

Nepal's energy mix should be expanded to other renewables like solar, wind and even geothermal to reduce the risk of catastrophic damage to hydropower generation in future glacial floods. Reverse

metering would allow solar producers to sell electricity to the grid, and time-of-day tariff would balance load.

"Our energy policy is heavily biased: 90% hydro, and 10% 'other'," says Gurung, "we should aim for at least 30% solar."

Net metering involves solar rooftop systems that are connected to the grid, which would allow people to 'export' surplus energy generated during the day. This would offset the price of electricity the household uses at other times of the day, and the grid would essentially be like a battery.

But NEA is fixated on hydro and has opposed net metering for decades, seeing it as a threat. The government actually passed a net metering policy in 2018, but the NEA never properly adopted it.

In fact, despite hardly any solar energy systems that allow net metering having been installed, the NEA changed it to a 'net billing' system that makes exported energy cheaper than energy used in the home instead of a 1:1 offset.

Then the NEA quietly dropped all net metering in July 2022. This blindsided consumers and developers who had implemented such systems, the distrust scared away potential future investors.

The technology is affordable, but solar energy needs political will in Nepal. The policy should be to generate as much renewable energy as possible, instead of making solar and hydro compete.

Even more efficient than solar energy is wind power. In terms of area needed, wind is even more cost-effective, and much easier to set up than hydro.

India and China are already the biggest producers of wind turbine blades. Even though Nepal lacks coastlines where wind power is most efficient, there are places in the trans-Himalaya where it is viable. The only problem is the lack of roads, says Gurung. 🇳🇵

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The life, times, and legacy of Dorothy Mierow in Nepal

■ Daniel W Edwards

Many of us former Nepal Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs) would agree that our time in Nepal changed in significant but very different ways our perspectives on life if not the future paths we chose to follow. Of no one was this truer than Dorothy Mierow.

Dorothy was born in 1920 in Colorado Springs. Her father Charles C Mierow was a classics scholar and Latin professor, who served for ten years as president of Colorado College.

Dorothy developed an interest in animals as a child, graduated with a BA degree in natural history from Carlton College in 1942, a Master's in biology from the University of Pittsburgh, and another Master's in geography from the University of Minnesota.

As a young woman, Dorothy traveled with her father in Europe, visited ancient Greek ruins, and took a Magellan Tour by cruise ship around the world in 1958.

She was a college teacher during much of the 1940s, also teaching at a girls' school in Hawaii. Then back to her native Colorado in 1953, she became a curator and later director of the Colorado College Natural History Museum. She taught geography classes, and in her free time climbed 22 of Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks.

Traveling in India in 1960, Dorothy spent two weeks in Nepal. In late 1961, she filled out an application to join the Peace Corps and specified that she wanted to go to Nepal, 'because I admired the people so much when my father



HOME AWAY FROM HOME:

(left to right) Dorothy Mierow as a college student in her native Colorado.

Pokhara Bazar in 1962.

Mierow and friends at Phewa Lake.

Mierow with local women in Pokhara in 1969.

Mierow's four books on Nepal and its biodiversity.

and I were there on our trip'.

Dorothy reached Kathmandu in September 1962 as the first group of American Peace Corps volunteers in Nepal. She stood out from the others: one of the few women in that group, surely the oldest at age 41, a world traveler, and a woman who already had established a professional career.

One doubts if Dorothy had had a husband and children whether she would ever have spent much of the rest of her life in Nepal.

The Peace Corps assigned Dorothy to teach geography at Tri-Chandra College. After the school closed in the winter due to lack of heating, USAID and the College of Education asked Dorothy to help train general science teachers.

She taught for two months and became involved in a textbook-writing project, commenting: 'I would like the children to know something about public health, conservation (the trees are going fast and so is the soil), and learn the names of some of their common birds, trees, and flowers. They are more impressed with electricity, airplanes, and cell structure.'

When a new college opened in Pokhara in 1963, Dorothy was transferred there and lived with a family. The college had 30 students and no permanent buildings.

In October 1963, Dorothy wrote: 'Pokhara is a town of almost 5,000 people ... We are in a fertile valley surrounded by foothills ... There is no electricity, and the

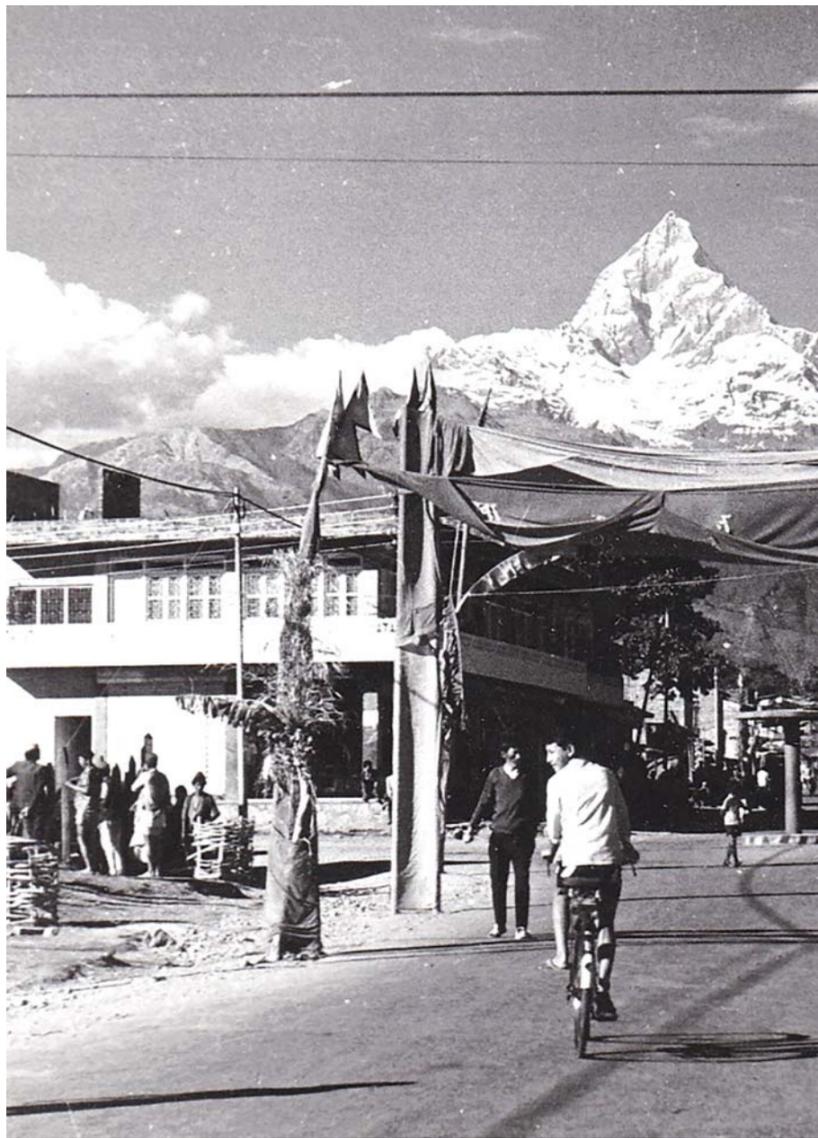
transportation problems make many items scarce and expensive. The landlord brings all kinds of people in to see how I live and count my shoes and dresses. They express amazement at my books, pictures, tin oven, Nepali dolls from Kathmandu, screened food shelves and curtained closet.'

The standard term for Peace Corps volunteers was two years, but Dorothy was still at Prithvi Narayan College at the end of 1965, when she wrote that she had 20 Geography students in the first-year class and six in the second year preparing for the IA Examination. There were 25 students, and the foundation for a new science building was being excavated.

Dorothy noted that she ate one

meal a day at the (Shining Mission) Hospital but otherwise lived on dal-bhat, momo, and potato curry at local shops. She had developed a new passion: to build what she initially called the Pokhara Museum of the Himalaya.

'The greatest joy and satisfaction I have had has been from the building of a Museum-Library in memory of my parents ... It has been possible to feel like a wealthy benefactor with the money saved by father for the family's education and now available for the education of others... (Father) would have loved to be in on the founding of a new college and be able to plan a library. Several hundred of the books to be in the museum-library came from



DURGA RANA MAGAR

Trees of

■ Durga Rana Magar in Pokhara

चौलारा rest stops have long been an integral part of scenic Pokhara, but are now rarely seen as the city bursts at the seams.

Pokhara inhabitants saw a plane before they saw cars. The grass airfield was built in the 1950s, while the highway got here 20 years later.

Before roads, people walked to get around, resting or even taking naps under banyan-pipal trees. Pokhara airport's 'terminal' was a shady chautara where passengers checked in for flights (pictured, right).

Chautara bore silent witness to daily life: travellers seeking a brief respite from the summer heat or villagers gathering for a chat. Herders brought livestock to graze and drink by the lake, while they took naps under the chautara shade.

With roads, Pokhara transformed from a serene village to a bustling city. The banyan-pipal trees were chopped down to make way for wider intersections and buildings.

'Building chautara was once considered a religious duty,' says archivist Sunil Ulak.

But the gentle rustle of leaves --



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his collection and were carefully selected to be of use for students in Nepal...'

"The museum part is to satisfy my own inclinations and was thought of when I found how little diversion there was for the people of Pokhara... It is part of the University requirements for the college that it should have a geography and biology museum. The museum building is small but adequate.

I have tried to design it in harmony with Nepalese architecture and decorate it with some of the art of the best artists or woodcarvers... Posts holding up the porch roof are carved by Cottage Industries to represent different peoples of Nepal in typical

costumes. The door was carved by a local wood carver and has typical birds of Nepal around it. Inside are 10 roof-support carvings designed by the retired Director of the National Museum in Kathmandu, Mr. C.M. Maskey.

They were carved by the best wood carvers in Patan very skilfully. The building has three rooms: the library, the exhibition room, and a smaller workroom which can be used by our newly formed Woman's Club as well as other groups or classes.'

Dorothy promoted her project to influential Nepalis connected with organisations whose support she solicited: The Department of Archaeology, the Department of Agriculture, the Godavari Botanical



Gardens; Tribhuvan University's Science and Education Department, Nature Conservation Society.

The museum was opened in early 1967. The Annapurna Natural History Museum, the building Dorothy designed and had constructed, is still open and features some exhibits which she created many years ago.

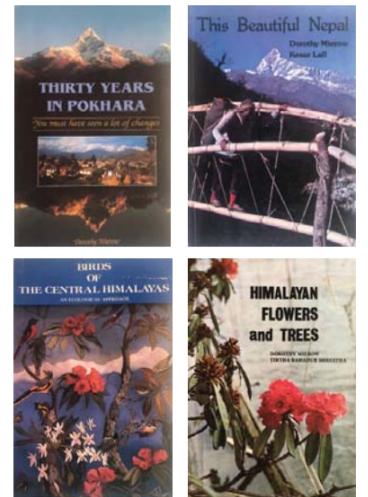
Dorothy returned to America in 1967, but she longed for Nepal. In the spring of 1969, she again tried to enroll as a Peace Corps volunteer but was told that as she had spent more than four years, she would not be eligible for another assignment. Undeterred, she persuaded the college in Pokhara to invite her to return as a teacher.

UNICEF and the Forestry

Department sponsored Dorothy to prepare charts on trees, birds, animals and flowers in colour for distribution to the schools of Nepal. Dorothy, back in the Peace Corps, returned to Pokhara and the Museum in 1972.

She formed a friendship with her former geography student from Siklis, Chandra Prasad Gurung, and in 1974, she brought Chandra to America, where he enrolled in Colorado College and studied cultural anthropology.

Chandra subsequently earned his PhD in geography from the University of Hawaii and returned to Pokhara to become director of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. Gurung actively promoted ecotourism, landscape



conservation, and biodiversity conservation in Nepal. His life was cut short along with those of 23 other Nepalis and foreigners who perished in a helicopter crash near Taplejung in September 2006.

Dorothy worked with several Nepalis to publish her paintings and photos in beautifully illustrated books. She and Hemanta Mishra of the National Parks and Wildlife Service wrote *Wild Animals of Nepal* (Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1976). More than 400 photos Dorothy took on treks to the Everest region, Gosaikunda, Muktinath, Jumla and Rara Lake, as well as travels in the Tarai, appeared in *Himalayan Flowers and Trees* (Sahayogi Prakashan, 1978).

The botanist Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha identified the species. Dorothy and Kesar Lall published *This Beautiful Nepal* (Sahayogi Press, 1981). *Birds of the Central Himalayas* (1988) contained Dorothy's paintings of 250 species of birds found along the areas of the Kali Gandaki River, Pokhara, Chitwan and the central Tarai. Dorothy summed up her life and work in Nepal in *Thirty Years in Pokhara* (Pilgrims, 1997).

Dorothy returned to Pokhara and her adopted Gurung family several times during the 1980s and 1990s to celebrate festivals and meet old friends. Her final years were spent at her mountain cottage in Green Mountain Falls north of Colorado Springs. She died at 79 in August, 2000. Nepal gave new meaning and purpose to Dorothy Mierow's life. 🇳🇵

Daniel W Edwards was a Peace Corps volunteer in 1966 and is the author of several books on Nepal.

f life and living

'nature's breeze' as botanist Kalyan Panta puts it -- is now history.

"When the wind strikes against one leaf, it creates a domino effect and other leaves start waving as well," Panta explains.

There were 632 chautara in Pokhara until 1977, and by 2000 the number had fallen to 278. In some wards the number of trees fell from 55 in 1984 to only five now. The gradual loss of these resting places has also destroyed the habitat of birds and insects.

Researcher Jagannath Adhikari's study showed that infrastructure projects ignored the environment, and Pokhara's urbanisation was unsustainable. The destruction continues to this day.

Recently, old chautara in wards 6, 13 and 14 were cleared to make way for a ritual. Ward 6 even got a permit from the local government to clear its remaining trees.

In wards 13 and 14, the Human Service Foundation cut down 33 trees for which it is in a dispute with the metropolitan city. The Kaski Division Forest Office is currently investigating the matter.

Elsewhere in ward 19, the ward office had launched 'मेरो रूख, म काटछु'

campaign due to an alleged chaos caused by monkeys in the area. The decision was rescinded after an all-around opposition.

To be sure, there are policies in place to protect pipal, silk cotton and other trees of natural and historical importance, but the local government is doing the opposite.

"If this rapid rate of tree felling continues, neither trees nor chautara will survive for future generations," says conservationist Ram Bahadur Poudel.

Interestingly, Ulak notes that Pokhara-8 was called सिमलचौर in the past because there were so many majestic silk cotton trees, but there are very few, if any, left, hence altering the identity of the place.

Pokhara residents question the relevance of chautara in this day and age. But research has shown that cities like Pokhara and Kathmandu are much hotter than the outskirts because of the urban heat island effect.

Says archivist Ulak: "While their original purpose was to provide rest, today they continue to play a crucial role in regulating temperature, beautifying the city, and preserving our environment." 🇳🇵



EVENTS

**Cricket tournament**

One X One, the thrilling one-over faceoff that is set to put cricket skills in the spotlight, promises intense matches, and other events for sports enthusiasts.

29 July, 8am onwards, Ticket: Rs400, Great Himalaya Cricket Academy

**Theatre**

The play Chandralai Kastle Maryo traces the moments of despair of a queer man caught between life and death on the banks of the mythical Baitarnee river, blending dark humour and raw emotion to explore the search for self.

Till 3 August, Ticket: Rs500, Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun

Youth unite

Uniting the Youth 2025 is an inter-college celebration of music, and ideas, where young individuals making an impact will be honoured through the Changemaker Awards from a judging panel featuring Anil Keshary Shah, Srichaa Pradhan, and Bidhan Shrestha.

19 July, 1pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Octave, Darbar Marg

**Farmers' Market**

Shop fresh and local at the weekly Le Sherpa Farmers' Market. Discover everything from farm-fresh produce to handcrafted delights and artisanal goods.

19 July, 7:30am onwards, Le Sherpa, Maharajganj

Zestiva Carnival

Join in on the fun at the Zestiva fest, a day filled with delicious feasts and refreshing brews accompanied by groovy performances from bands including Chumbak and Grunchiez.

19 July, 11am onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, The Malla Hotel

**Art exhibition**

Featuring the work of ten artists, the ongoing exhibition As We Trace the Light and Dust brings to focus the details of ordinary objects and smaller moments in our life through captivating visual forms.

Till 30 July, 11am-7pm, Dalai-la Art Space, Thamel

Duthik

A solo exhibition by Chering Gurung where he brings stories from his birthplace and home Dolpo onto canvases through bold and vibrant colors.

Till 1 August, 11am-8pm, The Kala Salon, Chhaya Cente, Thamel

MUSIC

Live Music

Catch The HeartBreakers Band live with friends and family and celebrate the end of the week.

19 July, 7pm onwards, Hard Rock Cafe, Sherpa Mall

**Kuma Sagar & The Khwopa**

From electrifying riffs to soul-stirring vocals, enjoy a night of pure rock and roll with Kuma Sagar and The Khwopa.

23 July, 7pm onwards, Ticket:Rs1,000, Purple Haze Rock Bar

**Phatcowlee**

Step into Phatcowlee's world of sound, where folk tunes meet original lyrics and timeless melodies come alive on stage.

18 July, 8pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Beers N' Cheers

Laure

Under Wraps and Laure are set for a high-voltage night of hip-hop this weekend. Don't miss out.

19 July, 7pm onwards, Ticket:Rs1,000, Omnia Club

**Cocoa Zhou**

Cocoa Zhou will perform a genre-mixing set this Friday that flows through electronic, house, and indie rhythms.

18 July, 10pm onwards, Ticket:Rs1,000, XO Club

GETAWAY

**Chandragiri Hills**

Celebrate Shrawan Sombar at Chandragiri Hills and witness the Maha Arati, join live bhajans, and enjoy pure vegetarian meals. Plus buy one get one free offer on cable car tickets after 4pm. Call for more offers.

11am-6pm (Live Bhajan) / 6:30pm-7:15pm (Maha Arati) / Chandragiri, 9802300306 / 9802084007

**Staycation @ Aloft**

Treat yourself to a stylish city getaway for two at Aloft, exclusively for Nepali nationals and expats. Enjoy a one-night stay in a loft-inspired room with breakfast and dinner at Nook, four cocktails at Nylgiri, rooftop pool access, spa discounts, and flexible check-in and check-out.

Rs14,999, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976065

Marriott Kathmandu

With Marriott, there is no need to venture beyond the valley for a five-star deluxe hotel experience. Enjoy the luxury amenities of this global brand and dine at their Thamel Kitchen, Edamame or Raksi Music Bar.

Naxal (01)5970300

**Dusit Thani**

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

Dhulikhel, 9851373755

Serene Resort

Whether you're after a peaceful retreat or a bit of thrill, Serene Resort offers the ideal weekend escape alongside stunning Himalayan views blending with unmatched comfort.

Nagarkot (01)6680189

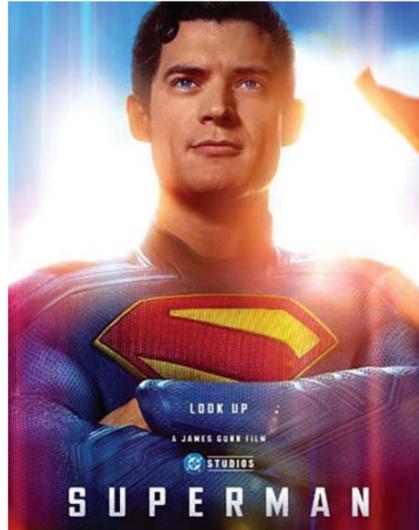
WEEKEND WEATHER

**Pulsating Monsoon**

We are coming to about midway through the rainy season and the monsoon has matured to a healthy state. The eastern Tarai is still suffering a deficit, with drought conditions and water shortages. But there seems to be a respite as another monsoon pulse is arriving this weekend from eastern Nepal. For Kathmandu this means heavier than usual showers Sunday onwards into next week.



OUR PICK



The latest Superman movie follows reporter Clark Kent as he embarks on a journey to reconnect with his alien Kryptonian heritage while navigating secret identity in the human world. Directed by James Gunn, David Corenswet as Superman/Kent must overcome authorities and public outrage following a leaked message from his home planet, but is backed by fellow reporter and partner Lois Lane and his superpowered pet, Krypto. The film also stars Rachel Brosnahan and Nicholas Hoult. Catch the movie in theatres near you.

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

DINING

**Mangolicious Nights**

Savour summer with a 4-course mango-inspired dinner throughout July at Nook. Each dish brings a flavorful twist to your weekend evening in the sweetest way possible.

Fridays and Saturdays, 6:30pm-10:30pm, Rs2,799 (Vegetarian) / Rs2,999 (Non-vegetarian), Nook, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976054

**View Brew**

Customise your own perfect pizza or dive into local classics like Mustang Aloo and Jhol Momo, all while soaking up panoramic city views.

Ekantakuna, 9761693878

Mak Mak

A modern Thai restaurant serving authentic cuisine made from locally sourced Thai ingredients. Start your meal with their golden Calamari and end on a sweet note with the creamy mango sticky rice.

Lazimpat, 9802390312

Sam Ye Garden

Sam Ye dishes out some of the best dry wonton momos and filling platters. Its garden also makes it a top pick for hangouts.

Swayambhu, 9820150840

**Soulfully Vegan**

Elevate your dining experience through FuAsian Rooftop Bar & Kitchen's Soulfully Vegan menu inspired by the vibrant flavors and wholesome traditions of Asian cuisine.

FuAsian Rooftop Bar & Kitchen, Holiday Inn Express, Naxal, 9802356232

**Attic**

Attic blends cosy ambience with bold flavors, serving a vibrant mix of Nepali, Indian, and Asian fusion. Try their signature Attic Chicken Chop and house-special biryani.

Gyaneshwor (01) 4517843

The Diner

Indulge at The Diner with Nepal's first Milwaukee style firewood pizza. Their smashed croissant sandwiches, salad bowls, and heavy meaty gourmet burgers, are a hit.

Bhaisepati, 9764634651

“Journalism will never be out of fashion ...”

The annual Himal Media Mela 2025 on Friday, 25 July brings together Nepal’s journalists, publishers, editors, multimedia content producers and news adjacent executives. The one-day conference will have eight sessions, and go beyond examining the crisis in media to finding ways that journalism can increase reach and revenue in the next generation digital space. It will not be a ‘talkshop’ but a ‘workshop’.

Manisha Pande of the Indian digital portal Newslaundry will be delivering the keynote address, and will later chat with editor Roman Gautam of Himal Southasian. In a short curtain raiser interview from Mumbai, Pande told Nepali Times about future prospects for journalism.



talking down to them or taking ourselves too seriously. We use podcasts, longform videos, even reels — formats that feel fresh but what we do essentially is rooted in old-school journalistic values. That’s what sets us apart from the noise and click-chasing chaos of social media.

The business model of mainstream media is in trouble, how have you adapted your engagement with readers in terms of content and revenue?

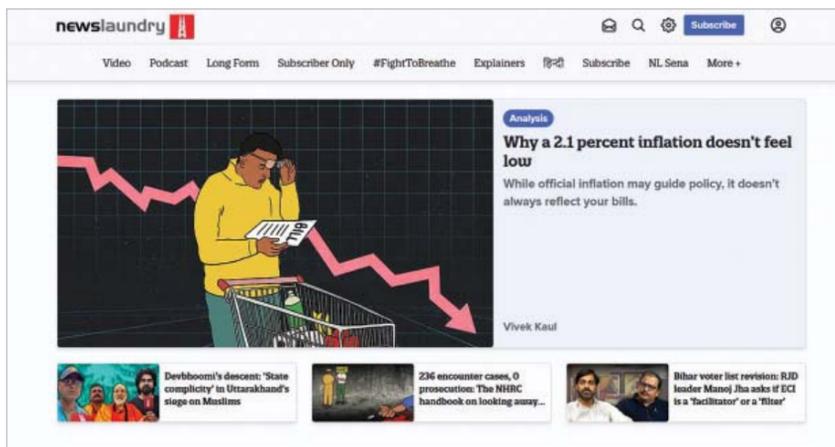
Yes it is and this is precisely why we have a model that has wholesale rejected advertisements. This means a lot of advocacy with our readers and listeners — telling them why it’s important to pay for news in a democracy. Everything we do is powered with the message that it’s possible to bring stories in public interest only when the public pays for news. Our motto is Pay To Keep News Free — and we’re constantly drilling that message. Like I just did here.

Nepali Times: When did you feel the need for a digital portal like Newslaundry, and how are you doing things differently?

Manisha Pande: Newslaundry started in 2012 to do exactly what our name suggests: take the media to the cleaners. The media holds everyone accountable — from politicians to bureaucrats to film stars — but who holds the media accountable? We wanted to turn the spotlight inward: expose propaganda, track corporate and political influence, unpack ownership patterns, and make the fourth pillar of democracy answerable.

Over time, we’ve grown into a platform known not just for media critique, but also for ground reportage and hard-hitting investigative journalism. What sets us apart is that we’re 100% ad-free: no Google ads, no corporate ads, no political funding. We’re fully powered by our subscribers, and I’m proud to say we’re the only truly successful subscription-driven news platform in India.

Does this mean that Newslaundry can now also be regarded as ‘mainstream’ media? The idea of mainstream and alternate is perhaps redundant now in the age of the



Internet. A small YouTube channel reporting on a district is mainstream for the people living there. But in terms of an important stop for credible information, perspective and context I think we’re right up there with what you’d call mainstream. But our ad-free model is as alternate as it gets. You won’t find that in legacy media.

How do you ensure that your voice is heard and taken seriously above the din of other social media platforms?

We stick to the fundamentals of good journalism: fairness, balance, rigour, and giving all sides a voice. But we use the tools of the digital age to deliver it. We speak the language of a newer audience without

And you did it quite effectively. And how do you handle excessive and abusive trolling?

I think it’s pretty clear when someone engages with you in bad faith, I find it easy to ignore that. But I make sure I learn from criticism on the Internet that is genuinely engaging with our work, and there is plenty of that too. Ignore the abuse, but learn from your audience that wants you to do better — that’s how I keep it sane.

Is there still scope for journalists among all those content creators out there?

Yes absolutely. Journalism will never be out of fashion. Increasingly, there’s a hunger for information and context, and we are best poised to serve it.

Limited registration for Himal Media Mela is open here:



HELLO HYBRID HELLO FUTURE



WHAT IS A HYBRID VEHICLE?

Hybrid electric vehicle is a system that uses two different kinds of power sources, one being the traditional internal combustion engines or ICEs and an electric motor combined with batteries.

The combination uses the best of both worlds, giving it a longer range than an ICE and the sustainability benefits that electric vehicles offers.



YARIS CROSS
HYBRID ELECTRIC VEHICLE

Scan here





SONIAAWALE

Smart ageing

Technology can facilitate essential care and well-being for the country's growing elderly

■ **Yugeshwor Koirala and Yugottam Koirala**

Nepalis are living longer than ever. By 2028, the country is set to join the ranks of other ageing societies around the world, and by 2054, one out of every seven people in Nepal will be over 65.

Life expectancy at birth has risen dramatically from just 55 in 1990 to 71 today, thanks to improvements in public health and access. But as more people live longer, the country must also prepare for a parallel rise in age-related illnesses and complex social and medical needs that come with an ageing population.

Extended families have acted as a safety net for the elderly, with children and grandchildren shouldering caregiving duties. But with 1,600 young Nepalis migrating every day, parents are left behind with no one to care for them.

Remittances accounts for nearly a quarter of Nepal's GDP, keeps the economy afloat, but money sent home cannot make up for the chronic departure of kin and caregivers, often the first to catch the signs of disease in elders.

In rural areas where over 85% of Nepal's elderly live, the absence of this vigilance means symptoms go unnoticed until they become debilitating. Chronic conditions like hypertension, diabetes, and depression are left unmanaged.

Geriatric medicine is largely absent from medical curricula and there is no national plan to manage cognitive decline, memory loss and confusion. These are often mistaken for signs of normal ageing, instead of dementia, delaying care until it is too late.

Nepal is not ready for an older future. It needs a strategy for 'smart ageing' where the focus is not adding years to life, but enhancing years lived through the intelligent application of policy, infrastructure, and crucially, technology.

Eroding traditional family care and an underdeveloped formal care system means there is a large gap that cannot be filled by copy-pasting foreign models. Nepal must shape its own smart ageing model.

Homegrown digital healthcare apps such as Hamro Doctor, Cura Health, Jeevee, and Health Yaad Ayo offer teleconsultations, online appointments, and at-home test bookings. As smartphones and internet extend to rural areas, geography is no longer a barrier.

What limits their use is the lack of digital proficiency among the older generation. Others find the idea of turning to a device instead of a familiar, reassuring face uncomfortable. Digital literacy must be paired with guided human support to build skills and trust.

Such a model of community-led digital mediation is already gaining traction elsewhere. In the UK, 'digital health ambassadors'—often young people or even schoolchildren—are trained to co-design and advocate for online platforms that resonate with peers who might otherwise feel excluded from automated health services.

A Nepali version could engage cohorts of nursing students, tech-savvy youngsters and returnee migrants to assist elders in navigating digital health platforms and troubleshooting problems, and normalising the idea of health apps being a reliable recourse.

Nepal's own network of Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs), whose credibility is rooted in long-standing relationships across rural communities, could be upskilled, their roles in maternal and child health expanded and repurposed to also include geriatric tech support.

However, there is a limit to how much older adults can adapt to new technologies. So, we should also invest in passive technologies: tools that monitor and act for the elderly, instead of demanding active use. That is where wearables and in-home smart health devices collectively known as 'gerontechnology' come in.

Picture an 82-year-old in far-flung Rolpa, away from the facilities of an urban hospital. Installed in her home are low-cost motion sensors that monitor prolonged inactivity or signs of a fall, instantly triggering alerts to the nearest health post when necessary.

On her wrist, a wearable

bracelet continuously tracks her sleep, vital signs, oxygen saturation, and glucose levels. This data is encrypted and synced to a digital dashboard accessible by health staff at the local post. If the system flags an acute risk, such as a potential stroke or hypoglycemia, a nearby health worker is dispatched immediately to her home.

If her readings over time indicate a trend toward a chronic condition like diabetes, community health volunteers step in. They help schedule a virtual consultation with an endocrinologist in Butwal. Based on the advice received, she gets a prescription and picks up her medication from the local community pharmacy, along with a smart dispenser to ensure she sticks to her treatment plan.

This is not as far-fetched as it sounds. Many devices forming this connected medical system called an Internet of Medical Things (IoMT) already exist in Nepal.

What is missing is a stronger framework for public-private collaboration: one where health tech companies continue developing locally adapted tools, and the government actively integrates these innovations into public health delivery.

Nepal's tech ecosystem is maturing, but policymaking must evolve in tandem, especially when it affects an older generation largely resistant to change. The backlash against the recent mandate requiring National Identity Cards for accessing social security benefits revealed the pitfalls of imposing top-down reforms without adequate preparation or support for seniors.

For Nepalis to age well, community caregivers, doctors, innovators, and above all, the state, must step in where families have stepped away. The goal is not to replicate traditional care, but to build a coordinated system of support that connects everyone through technology. The future is older for Nepal, let us be wiser too. 📌

The writers are pursuing their undergraduate studies in biomedical engineering at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Nepalis are having

Total Fertility Rate

1.24 Lalitpur (lowest), 4.33 Rautahat (highest), 1.94 (Nepal)

Female literacy rate age 15 and above (in %)

KARNALI
2.19
61.3%

GANDAKI
1.54
72%

BAGMATI
1.37
72.2%

SUDUR PASCHIM
1.88
57%

LUMBINI
1.84
68.7%

MADHES
2.85
50.3%

SOURCE: NEPAL CENSUS 2021

Family-friendly policies prioritising women and youth to sustain fertility rates

■ **Sudiksha Tuladhar**

This week at the launch of the National Population Policy, Prime Minister K P Oli exhorted Nepalis to get married by age 20 and have three babies by the time they are 30.

This was the first indication that the highest office in the land has understood the need to address Nepal's dramatically falling birth rate, but Oli's statement was greeted with ridicule on social media—especially by women.

Most urban young are already grappling with economic pressures and shifting life priorities. Even with a university degree, many cannot find jobs, and are taking the first flight out for overseas employment. Having a child is now a fraught decision shaped by income, individual autonomy, and family pressure.

The UNFPA's State of the World Population report released last month highlighted a significant decline in fertility rates around the world. The global average fertility rate is 2.25 children per woman, and 18% of the reproductive adults said they will not be able to have the number of children they desire.

The total fertility rate in Nepal has plummeted to 1.94 births per woman—down from 5 just 30 years ago. This is considered below the replacement level of 2.1, meaning the level at which newborns will replace their parents.

However, birth rates are not declining as rapidly everywhere. The Tarai has a total fertility rate of 2.20, and the mountains 2.24.

There are multiple factors in play, and the report broadly divides them into four categories: health issues, economic concerns, fears about the future, and lack of a supportive partner or their absence. More than half of the respondents said finance, which includes unemployment and increased cost of housing, as well as parenthood, was a barrier to having children.

"People today prefer one or two children at maximum. Many

women also decide to have children at a much later age," says Kamala Devi Lamichhane of Tribhuvan University. "The opportunity cost is far higher for women."

But there is also a cost for the country, as the National Population Policy notes. At the rate the total fertility rate is falling, Nepal will be confronted with an ageing population in the next three decades.

Besides income, there are also cultural factors at play in women having fewer babies—they are expected to do all the childcare duties, even putting their careers on hold. In general, there is little help from spouses, and with more nuclear families there is less support from relatives.

"Women today are well educated, career-oriented, and economically independent, allowing them to delay marriage as well as be conscious about their body and reproductive rights," says Laxmi Tamang of the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM).

Also present at the policy launch was demographer Yagya Bahadur Karki, who said that women are more educated and hence, empowered to take their own informed decisions regarding having children. He adds, "But the fertility rates have reached replacement rate, and that stands as a warning for the future."

Fertility rates have fallen in inverse proportion to the rise in female literacy. The regions of Nepal where couples have more babies is where women are less educated. Couples in Madhes province, where child marriage, gender-based discrimination, and dowry are still widespread are where the fertility rate is still high.

And because female literacy also has a direct correlation with infant and child mortality, couples in those regions tend to have more babies so that some of them survive.

But it is Nepal's urban centres among the educated where the increased choices in reproductive health, including alternative methods of conception like IVF and treatment for infertility, as well as contraceptives offer more options for family planning.

"There are more choices regarding reproductive health, and there is more awareness as well, which is why people decide carefully on whether or not to bear a child," says population expert Yogendra B Gurung.

fewer babies. Why?



measures to control the birth rate, while urban areas will need a strategy to help parents have more babies.

One way to help families have more children is to develop more family-friendly policies that favour women and youth as the Nordic countries, which also have falling birth rates, have done. They have introduced flexible parental leaves for both parents, including financial and health incentives.

China, also concerned about its declining birth rate and an ageing population, now has a three-child policy as well as tax deductions, expanded childcare services, and leave policies.

"We must work towards childbirth and childcare policies that are suitable for Nepal, so that couples planning for children do not have to think twice about it because of finances or other reasons," adds Gurung.

Tamang of the International Confederation of Midwives says a gender transformative approach is needed to address the issues of the gender gap which is adding to the decline in childbirth. Husbands need to play a more important role in child-rearing.

Instead of increasing fertility for the sake of it, the objective should be to assist young people to start the families they desire, at a point and time of their choice. Respect for everyone's rights and dignity lays a foundation for a more balanced demographic trend.

Lamichhane sums it up: "If fertility rates are to be sustained, it requires changes in the gender roles and behaviour, keeping the youth's aspirations in mind."

Migration is another factor adding to the decline in fertility rates.

Many young Nepalis of reproductive age leave every day in pursuit of better jobs overseas. Spousal separation means fewer children. "Once away, even if not educated, they realise that child-rearing costs are high, and try to have fewer and even no children in some cases," Gurung adds.

Recent studies have also shown that men returning after their stint in the Gulf and Malaysia, where they are exposed to extreme heat for extended periods as well as various chemicals and toxins in their work environment, have a range of health problems, including infertility.

To increase the birth rate, Nepal will have to reverse its family planning strategy of the past 40 years. Complicating this is that some regions of Nepal will need



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