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## WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

SUMAN NEPALI

### Sonia Awale

A New York Times report this week on Nepal's electric vehicle boom was widely shared. The world is finally taking notice of the country's energy transition.

But the success story also brings new problems. Nepal will soon be facing a crisis in managing the lithium-ion of battery-powered cars, scooters and three-wheelers.

"It used to be just laptops and mobiles, so people didn't care so much, but one electric car can mean up to 500kg of waste, it will be beyond our control once they start piling up," warns Pankaj Panjiyar of Doko Recyclers. "We were on track to generate 3,500 tons of lithium battery waste a year after 2027, but given the increased market of EVs, the actual figure will now be much bigger."

Besides lithium, there are also heavy metals such as cobalt, nickel, and manganese that can contaminate the air, soil, and water, as well as rare earths. Nepal imported nearly 1.9 million mobile phones in the past year, a 40%

growth from the year before — and that was only through official channels. With 76% of new car sales being fully battery-powered, Nepal is second only to Norway.

Lithium-ion battery waste from electric cars, mobile phones, toys, solar panels and the 9,000 telecommunication towers all over the country already makes up a sizeable chunk of electronic waste.

Recycling lithium-ion batteries is possible but expensive, while the recovery rate of heavy metals, including gold, is at 95% or more. China is leading the game with more than half of the global recycling capacity of heavy metals at about 500,000 metric tons a year.

Nepal does not have recycling infrastructure for lithium-ion batteries. In fact, there is no recycling plant for lead-acid batteries either: the acid is usually just dumped while lead, other metals and plastic are extracted by the informal sector or sent to India.

"Battery recycling is textbook engineering, it is not difficult, we should be able to do it ourselves," energy economist Dipak Gyawali told a recent climate discussion. "But when there is no market, the

standard law of political economy is that the state has to create one, that is how it happened in the US, the UK and China."

Doko Recyclers had tried to set up recycling infrastructure for lithium-ion batteries, and had nearly got a Rs40 million investment from Singapore-based Total Environment Solutions (TES). But Nepal's lack of e-waste policy and investment guidelines meant the company was not assured of a return on investment and pulled out. Nepal also does not have Extended Producer's Responsibility (EPR), wherein manufacturers and distributors are responsible for disposal and pay for the recycling of the waste generated by their product, including batteries.

"It is only a matter of technology transfer when it comes to lithium-ion recycling, but it requires investment backed by government policies such as EPR," explains Panjiyar. "But there must also be provisions for extracted raw materials like lithium. We don't manufacture batteries in Nepal, so we have to export them. But who is going to pay for that?"

Lithium, heavy metals and rare earths also draw much criticism for unethical mining and environmental cost. One ton of mined lithium emits nearly 15 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. Lithium is either extracted from briny water or hard rock minerals, and can cause water contamination as well as loss of water sources. Nickel and cobalt mining also comes with massive ecological cost and labour exploitation.

Sodium-ion batteries are a safer, cheaper and more sustainable alternative. Battery-powered transportation could also be just a stepping stone to green hydrogen fuel of the future.

"If we are using these metals, at the very least deploy them for the benefit of the larger public, like by promoting electric buses," says Shilshila Acharya of Avni Center for Sustainability. "Ultimately, it comes down to our consumption patterns. It is much easier to use one less mobile phone or a car which wasn't even necessary, than recycling." 🇳🇵

FULL STORY PAGE 5

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# How Israel lost its soul

The Jewish state's identity has now gone from being the victim of genocide to perpetrator.



**GUEST EDITORIAL**

James E Jennings

The dramatic story of Israel's birth in 1948 following the Nazi Holocaust captured the wonder and admiration of the world. Its founders claimed that Israel would be a light to nations.

But the Jewish state's identity has now gone from being the victim of genocide to perpetrator in less than two generations.

Israel's Likud government stands accused of genocide in Gaza by a UN Special Committee, the World Court's admission that the accusation is plausible, and recently by 28 nations acting in concert to declare Israel in violation of International Humanitarian Law.

What happened? Rather than face the truth of 75 years of injustice to Palestinians that led to the terrible slaughter and hostage-taking by Hamas in 2023, most Israelis support the daily overkill in Gaza, now nearly two years long. After more than 100,000 casualties under constant bombing of the civilian population with no one shooting back, famine has begun.

Israel as a society and government have performed exactly the opposite of what David Ben Gurion declared:

The State of Israel will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace ...



Israel lost its soul by becoming racist, then racist, with the doctrinaire view that Jews are by nature and divine right superior to other races. This has led to suppression of the Palestinians, and, if given the opportunity, to their extermination, as is now evident in Gaza.

Why under its decades-long military occupation of Palestine, have Arabs been killed, imprisoned, wounded, neighbourhoods bombed, houses destroyed, streets ploughed up, families imprisoned behind concrete walls, and an entire population denied the right to travel?

The Zionist's answer to these questions

may be that the Palestinians under decades of military rule are not actually citizens of Israel. That is a distinction without a difference, because the occupying authority has legal responsibility for the population under occupation, including the West Bank and Gaza.

True, there are areas declared to be administered by the Palestinians alone, but no one pretends that the Palestinian territory is truly free and independent. The occupied territory and its people remain wards of the Israeli state. Even though the UN created Israel, its various governments have long denied any right of the UN to curtail its

expansionist aims and war-making powers.

Jewish Holocaust survivor Raphael Lemkin coined the word 'genocide' and made it his lifelong task to see it implemented in international law. The Genocide Convention was ratified by the United Nations in 1948, but is being deliberately flaunted by Israel in Gaza.

Genocide is a serious charge, but its terms in international law are clear: no killing or setting up conditions for the destruction of a people group just because they are members of that group, no forced expulsion or transfers of that group, and no public advocacy to do so, which is a key provision already violated by Messrs Netanyahu, Trump, Galant, and others.

In January 2024 the International Court of Justice (ICJ), joined by an Israeli ad hoc Judge, Aharon Barak, voted to urge punishment of those advocating expulsion or transfer of the population of Gaza.

The citizens of Israel bear collective responsibility for the actions of their government, but not as individuals unless they specifically vote for or advocate genocidal actions. Israeli opposition figures, of which there are very few, are courageous and deserve praise.

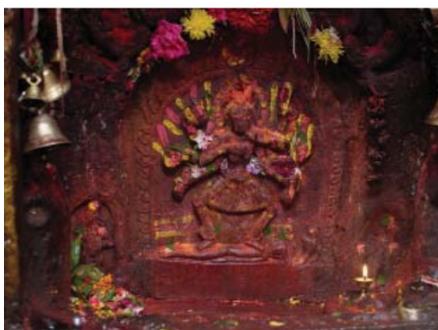
What about the citizens of the United States where both Democrats and Republicans have long aided and abetted Israel's violence toward those under its protection? Governments and citizens everywhere must join forces to prevent famine from claiming more children in Gaza.

Citizens must raise our voices now or be forever classed with those who allowed and abetted today's Genocide.

(Inter Press Service)

James E Jennings, PhD, is President of Conscience International, and Leader of US Academics for Peace delegations to Iraq, Iran, Syria, Sudan, and other countries. He taught Middle East History, Archaeology, and Religion at US universities.

## Trending Online



### Offerings corrode Kathmandu's gods

by Anita Bhetwal  
While Nepal rightly focuses on recovering stolen artefacts, centuries-old idols at home crumble due to chemical-based dyes and offerings, defacing sacred statues. Read full story at nepalitimes.com

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**

### Nepal in 2050

by Sonia Awale  
By 2050, Nepal's poverty rate will drop to near zero, infrastructure will boost connectivity. But only if all goes well. To meet its socioeconomic goals in 25 years, Nepal must have improved governance starting yesterday. Read analysis online.

**Most popular on X**

### Tarai gasps for water

by Chandrakishore  
The Madhes Province water crisis has exposed the historical neglect by Kathmandu. The Cabinet's decision to declare it a 'disaster-hit zone' is too little too late since this crisis took years to build up. Join the discussion online.

**Most commented**



### Swimming with sharks

by Vishad Raj Onta  
The Nepal edition of the global reality franchise Shark Tank features entrepreneurs pitching business ideas to investors. The show lacks the drama of the US version, but is a feel-good show Nepalis prefer. Details on our website.

**Most visited online page**

## Letters

### NEPALI TIMES TURNS 25

Imagine no internet, no Google, just good old newsstands. Congrats for staying relevant for a quarter of a century. You were viral before viral was a thing. Here is to journalism that outlasts smartphones and keeps it real, no hashtag needed.

Arup Rajouria

■ Congratulations, Kunda Dixit. We are aware of the tests and challenges you have gone through for a quarter century to make Nepali Times readers like us well-informed with our copy every Friday.

Bharat Dutta Koirala

■ Congratulations to Nepali Times on 25 years of impactful journalism. Special appreciation to the team, your contributions have been instrumental in raising awareness and

simplifying climate science to highlight its impact and help build urgency and action.

Manjeet Dhakal

■ At 25, your publication is relatively young and like your country and its ancient mountains, a barometer for freedom of expression and climate change beyond our region.

Naresh Khanna

■ A hundred thanks for being a bastion for the values and practices once found in journalism. I do miss the Ass' Backside Column though.

David Durkan

■ Nepali Times is fair and balanced, but confrontational and argumentative too, which I trust.

Tony Jones

■ I loved the pull out supplement covering the past 25 years. It was well put together.

Jackie Taylor

■ Here's to many many more facts

that matter, digging deeper and telling better stories with snapshots of reality.

Rajiv Desraj Shrestha

■ I am enjoying the 25<sup>th</sup> edition of Nepali Times. As an avid fan over the years, I too am feeling the same sense of nostalgia of how this weekly English newspaper changed my own habits to seek credible and relatable news.

Siddhant Pandey

■ A reader since I was abroad in 2003, I valued Nepali Times for amplifying voices like mine. However, I observed limitations: perceived alignment with established powers during the Maoists' ascension to power, an 'NGOised' focus on returnee and expats' narratives, selective coverage of the downtrodden, and superficial success stories. Despite this critique, its distinct voice remains vital compared to the insular mainstream media.

Nirmal Ghimire Sharma

## Quotes



### Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Nepali Times publisher @kundadixit in his weekly newsletter ruminates about getting old, as the newspaper he started marks the 25th year of publication this week.



### Jeevan R. Sharma @jrs437

An excellent newspaper that has catered to the needs of a specific set of audience, and has adapted very well to the changing publishing landscape, congratulations to @kundadixit and his team



### भूमि घिमिरे @BhumiGhimir

Congratulations Nepali Times on your quarter of a century birthday! PS - but where is the Ass?



### कमल गह्रा मगर @kamalKThapa

One of the Best Newspapers of Nepal.



### Indra Mainali @IndraMainali

Respected Kunda Sir, a synonym of quality and professionalism, deserves our respect and appreciation for serving the nation and beyond our borders with factual and trustworthy news representing/ reflecting ground realities of contemporary Nepal.

## Online Package



### 25 YEARS OF JOURNALISM

To mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nepali Times, we asked longtime readers and well-wishers what the paper means to them. Watch on YouTube to find out what keeps them coming back every Friday, and online.



### 25 TIMES NEPALI

Watch slide show on our YouTube Channel featuring the memorable covers year-by-year from 2000 to 2025 and relive the nostalgia of the good (and not so good) old days.

## 1,000 Words



GOPAL DAHAL / RSS

**PRESIDENTIAL COMEBACK:** Former President Bidhya Devi Bhandari addressing a press conference on Friday amidst criticism both from within her UML and outside about a former head of state re-entering politics. But supporters said she was trying to save her UML party from going astray under Prime Minister K P Oli, the person who helped make her nomination to be president. The row threatens the party's unity.



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# Being intelligent about journalism

The hidden costs of AI and the fight for ethics



**Technocrat**  
Naresh Newar

I was asked to give a presentation at the Himal Media Mela on 25 July on the ethical and productive use of AI in journalism. I am using the first of this new monthly Technocrat column in Nepali Times to say what I did not have time for at my session about real dangers, real potentials, and hard-won lessons about AI, journalism, and ethics.

I'm not a natural public speaker, and a member of the audience last week told me I sounded like I was chewing gum. True, I mumble, and often lose my train of thought. But one does not need to be a great orator to get the message across. You just need to care deeply and speak the truth.

Nepali Times readers will have seen the supplement in last week's edition in both print and online that carried a year-by-year summary from 2000 to 2025. I am told the five-member newsroom staff took weeks to put it all together.

They did a great job, but I used ChatGPT's plus feature Deep Research to crawl 25 years of archives to produce similar content in a few hours with workable links and all the right references.



**SAFETY FIRST:** Mamta Siwakoti of Tiktok speaking about safety and privacy issues on digital platforms, especially with Generative AI tools, at the Himal Media Mela on 25 July.

True, the text needed some fine tuning, but if this sort of normally exhausting human work can save time and energy then AI can be an amazing asset.

But many AI enthusiasts are dumbing down by using image and video generators, and wasting their credits. This is causing AI fatigue among young people on digital networking sites.

Before using AI effectively, we must first understand its true cost. The glossy marketing of AI tools hides the dark side of the deep learning machine underneath, a system built on a foundation of

our work, often taken without our knowledge or consent. And you thought, all those words and sentences were AI magic!

AI is a hungry beast voraciously devouring whatever you post. Every article, every photograph, every personal post, every comment you make is raw material for training the next generation of AI models. It does not matter if you gave permission. Nobody is asking.

AI does not need permission to train itself using my sentences from the digital version of this column.

This is not 'fair use'. It is exploitation on an industrial scale.

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SUMAN NEPALI

overnight. Teenage girls have been blackmailed with fake videos. In India and Bangladesh, politicians have seen their words twisted to incite chaos.

The scariest outcome is not just the production of individual fakes, it is the erosion of all trust. When 'anything can be faked', who can prove if they are telling the truth? The greatest risk is not that people will believe fake content, but that they will stop believing any content, undermining our shared foundation of reality.

As journalists, we risk becoming unwitting amplifiers of these falsehoods if we are not equipped to detect and expose them. AI is a stereotyping machine that amplifies our worst biases.

Prompts on platforms are sexualised, gendered, or reinforce harmful ethnic stereotypes. Many women participate in this cycle, sometimes out of curiosity, unconsciously reproducing the very biases inherent in patriarchal societies.

The faces of children are now circulating in AI-generated images worldwide, stripped of context, consent, or protection. A simple search for 'Nepali or Indian or White girl' on an AI image site brings up content no parent would ever want to see.

This is not just a privacy issue, it is a violation of dignity and safety. We make it easy for 'content scrapers' by posting photos and videos of our children on Tiktok.

Faced with these realities, we cannot afford to be silent. Indifference is not an option, it is complicity. Fortunately, there is a quiet but growing resistance among artists, musicians, and photographers. But journalists, the very people who create the facts and narratives that train AI, have been too slow to join the fight. 🇳🇵

*Naresh Newar is a writer on strategic communications and Artificial Intelligence and content specialist.*

## NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक

### Turkish Airbus 350

Turkish Airlines is financing an Airbus A350 aircraft in Swiss francs (CHF) with Dubai Islamic Bank on an Islamic finance structure. The 'halal Ijarah' deal, nearly a year in the making, features a rent-to-own interest-free



Sharia-compliant type agreement. "This transaction demonstrates our commitment to financial innovation and strengthening our fleet while also marking a new chapter in our cooperation with leading institutions in the UAE and the broader Gulf region," stated Turkish Chairman Prof. Ahmet Bolat.



### Toyota at NAIMA

Customers who book Toyota vehicles at the NAIMA Auto Show 2025, 6-10 August at Bhrikuti Mandap, will get discounts, gift hampers, and lifetime free service. The Auto Expo will launch 15 two-wheelers, 15 four-wheelers, and five commercial vehicles, many of them EVs. There will be discussion panels with auto experts.

### EV imports

More than 73% of all four-wheelers imported to Nepal in the past fiscal year were electric, the highest in the world after Norway. There were 16,701 EVs worth Rs41.23 billion imported, compared to only 236 EVs five years ago. Electric two-wheeler imports are also increasing, with 11,320 units last year. However, the loan financing cap for EVs has been reduced from 90% to 60%, which hurts sales in the less expensive segments.

### Miss Nepal on TikTok

This July through September, content about Miss Nepal 2025 will be posted on TikTok at @missnepal and under #MissNepal.



### Unlimited social media

Ncell has launched data packs for students for unlimited Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok. Student SIMs can be obtained at Ncell centres, and passport-size photo, student ID, and citizenship are required. Customers subscribing to the Ncell Biz Sadhain ON 399 or Biz Sadhain ON 649 plan for 10 months get an additional two months free. Subscribing annually for three numbers yields six months free for one number, for five, two.

Meanwhile, Parbati Karki from Dhading has won Ncell's Sadhain ON Crorepati campaign, which entered customers who bought data packs into a raffle. Karki, a health volunteer, plans to pay off debts, bring her husband home from Bahrain, invest in her son's education, and start a business.



### Soaltee in Pokhara

Soaltee Westend Lakeside is being developed in Pokhara by Soaltee Hotels & Resorts and Hotel Peninsula. Event space, spa, health club available. Bookings to open in September.

### Business programs

Kathmandu University School of Management, Little Angels' College of Management, and Nepal College of Management offer business programs in Nepal. MBA programs, BBA, BBIS, BHM, EMBA, PhD degrees available with curriculums that emphasise internships, case studies, seminars, and industry visits.

### UN relocating

The United Nations is relocating its headquarters from New York to Nairobi, Kenya by 2026. The move marks a significant strategy shift aiming to decentralise its presence and bring decision making closer to the Global South, particularly Africa. The global offices of UNICEF, UNFPA, and UN Women will also move to Nairobi, a statement said.



### Seats at TU Stadium

Seats are being installed at the Tribhuvan University International Cricket Ground in Kirtipur. The Rs1 billion project aims to add more than 10,000 seats and six floodlights for night matches.

### Rain blocks highways

Heavy incessant rain has blocked eight major highways across the country, including Kosi Highway in Sankhuwasabha, Pasang Lhamu Highway in Rasuwa, Arniko Highway in Sindhupalchok, Mid-hill Highway in Nuwakot, Jajarkot-Dolpa-Bheri Corridor in Rukum West, Mid-hill Highway in Jajarkot, and Karnali Corridor in Humla.



### Upper Sardi Hydro

NMB Bank is solely financing 70% of the Rs661.894 million Upper Sardi Khola Hydropower Project and construction by Mandakini Hydropower Ltd in Machhapuchhre, Kaski.

### MCC Resumes

US international development agency Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) will continue transport, energy projects in Nepal as per a 24 July letter from Washington. The MCC had been suspended after a 20 January Trump executive order.

### Gelato galore

Sagtani Group, LAIEF Ice Cream Machineries and the Nepal Italy Chamber of Commerce & Industries hosted 'Transforming Ice Cream Production in Nepal', aiming to introduce cutting-edge technology and sustainable practices across the full chain of value-added dairy product manufacturing and distribution in Nepal.

# What happens to your phone when it dies

Government policies to drive recycling are crucial for electrical and electronic waste management in Nepal

Sonia Awale

Nepal generated 42,000 tons of e-waste in 2023, up from just 13,000 ten years ago, according to a worldwide survey by Global E-waste Monitor. The figure for Nepal is projected to reach 69,000 tons in 2026.

While this is modest compared to most other countries, the growth and lack of recycling facilities are worrying.

Household appliances such as washing machines, refrigerators, cooking stoves and ovens still make up nearly half of electrical and electronic waste in Nepal, while phones, laptops, tablets, hard drives, routers and modems come next at 9%. Consumer electronics made up 17% of e-waste, followed by lighting equipment at 14%, screen and monitors at 8%, and toys at 9%. (Chart)

"The nature of e-waste has changed in the last decade or so, we now have less CRT monitors and CFL bulbs but more devices, solar panels, optic fibre which actually has a negative recycling value, and now EV batteries," says Pankaj Panjiyar of Doko Recyclers.

The nature of e-waste is also guided by changing consumption patterns where people upgrade to newer gadgets every couple of years, not necessarily because they are at the end of their lives.

The average lifespan for mobile phones in Nepal is only two years, four years for laptops, eight years for televisions and computers, and ten years for refrigerators and washing machines. Just the last fiscal year, Nepal imported nearly 1.9 million smartphones worth Rs24 billion.

"Businesses today, especially electronics, have exchange offers wherein customers can exchange even well-functioning goods for a newer version. By not using electronic goods to the end of their lives, we are creating a problem that wasn't there to begin with," says Shilshila Acharya of Avni Center for Sustainability. "Electronic use has increased dramatically, but our e-waste management capacity remains the same."

When municipal governments have failed to even manage biodegradable waste, they have not even started thinking about e-waste. Which is why electronic and electrical waste is left to the informal sector.

There are some 1,200 scrap dealers in Kathmandu and 20% of e-waste is thought to be recycled despite the lack of proper formal channels, and most of it ends up in India.

This means limited extraction of plastic parts as well as metals such as aluminium and copper, but removal of precious and heavy elements is not yet carried out in Nepal. Liquid waste, such as acid from lead batteries, is disposed of in the dumping sites, poisoning ground water and rivers.

There is also a small but growing market to refurbish used electronic goods led by the likes of Sabko Phone which buys second-hand smartphones and reconditions them to an almost new cheaper device.

"It was very difficult for us in the beginning to get people



SUMAN NEPALI

behind this campaign, but over the last couple of years, we have seen a change," says Uttam Kafle of Sabko. "The fact that they are buying a refurbished phone today means they might buy a refurbished washing machine in future."

### UPCYCLE

Fourteen percent of the 1.22 billion mobile phones sold in 2023 globally were refurbished — that translated to 190 million fewer new phones that year. Says Kafle: "If we can associate refurbishing and upcycling with environmental gain, we will go a long way."

Indeed, experts recommend reducing the consumption of electronic goods not required as the first step to managing waste, followed by repair, reuse, and upcycling. Recycling is often the last option, also because Nepal lacks proper infrastructure as well as a legal mechanism.

Nepal's Solid Waste Management Act 2011 has no mention of e-waste. It has since been revised, but the document is making rounds of various ministers and is yet to be finalised. Even so, it does not have any guidelines on managing electrical and electronic waste, and has only defined the terminology.

India has an Extended Producer's Responsibility (EPR) as well as Battery Waste Management Rules 2022 which clearly outline the responsibilities of producers, recyclers, and refurbishers.

"A national-level e-waste legislation with EPR is a must with provisions at municipalities such that there is a separate collection value chain, and such a policy should allow for recycling infrastructure," says Panjiyar. "All of this should happen simultaneously and with public awareness about e-waste in Nepal."

EPR will also help remove unreliable players in the market, and in turn reduce the flow of unwanted goods. This is in line with calls to curb unchecked and uncontrolled consumption of goods as well as prioritising ethical and sustainable development.

This has much relevance for the EV boom in Nepal. Of the 22,907 four-wheelers worth Rs50.88 billion that the country imported last fiscal year, 16,701

units valued at Rs41.23 billion were electric vehicles. Few of them were passenger buses, which are much more expensive than diesel ones of the same size.

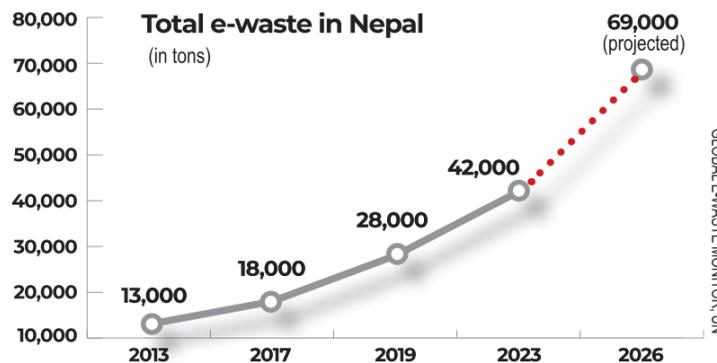
Until grid-to-motor technology, such as trolley and tram, are introduced, the government must subsidise electric buses to make the best use of surplus hydroelectricity while cleaning up the air and reducing Nepal's petroleum bill.

After all, only so many individuals can afford private EVs, and even then, they do not nearly reduce emissions as much, but add to traffic. Large electric buses also mean fewer lithium-ion batteries per person.

"Our EV adoption is both a success story and a disaster waiting to happen given all that battery waste we will be faced with soon. It is like by trying to solve one problem we have created another," says Acharya.

Uttam Kafle at Sabko Phone says the concept of responsible use and circular economy which involves reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible, should be the way forward.

"We must make the best use of electronics for the betterment of our lives, there are still places and people without much access to these goods. But their ethical use and management, especially at the end of their life, will help save us from a lot of future problems." 🇳🇵



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# VISIT NEPAL IN THE MONSOON

For decades tourists have been told to avoid Nepal in the rainy season, but in many ways it is the best time of year



KULDEEP NEUPANE

**Santosh Dahit**  
in Rukum East

The monsoon has got bad press because Nepal's tourism operators actively told visitors to avoid the rainy season. It is time to change that.

The reason can be found right here in the vast alpine meadows of Central Nepal where this time of year you can walk on velvet grass of pastures abloom with delicate pink, red and yellow flowers as the mist rolls up the valley. There is no sound except the hum of bumble bees.

There are dozens of places

across high Nepal called Chaurikharka, which means yak pasture. But this particular Chaurikharka in Rukum East located at an altitude of 4,000m stands out for its serene beauty, rustic charm and bucolic setting. There is just the occasional chime of yak bells in the distance, and the sharp whistle of herders corralling sheep.

The grass shoots are so fragile that one hesitates to step on them, the rounded ridges appear and quickly vanish in waves of mist. With the arrival of monsoon, these meadows are a soothing shade of green dotted with millions of multi-coloured flowers.

Until very recently, it took a

week or so to hike up to places like Chaurikharka, but with the expansion of the road network even to these far-flung mountains in the lap of Dhaulagiri, they are much more accessible. It is just a three-hour uphill from the Mid-Hill Highway on the border between Baglung and Rukum East.

Purists would say that such easy access devalues the sanctity of these remote high meadows, but it also means more people will be moved to treasure the experience, appreciate the value of nature so they can take steps to protect it.

To be sure, the monsoon season can be challenging for road travel. The roads are rough even at the best of times, and in the monsoon they

become muddy and treacherous, often blocked by landslides. But that could be precisely the kind of adventure that the more intrepid visitors crave.

Improved road connectivity has already made Chaurikharka and places like Badimallika and other sacred lakes in the mountains of western Nepal popular with domestic tourists. What is driving this traffic is the urge to go to exotic new places and share videos and selfies on social media.

Several of Nepal's travel vloggers have visited Chaurikharka and popularised the place, enticing followers on TikTok or YouTube to retrace

their footsteps. But even as they become more popular, these fragile and once-remote places should be protected from over-tourism.

## INCREASING FOOTFALL

Chaurikharka is located in Bhume Rural Municipality of East Rukum, near the scenic valley of Dhorpatan in Baglung district. Even in the middle of the monsoon, there is a steady stream of Nepali hikers trooping to these high pastures – especially during festival days like Saune Sankranti which this year was on 17 July and actually marks the auspicious beginning of the monsoon here.

"This year the rains have not been as heavy and there have



PHOTOS: DILCHAN PUN



PHOTOS: DURGA RANA MAGAR

# Trailing off in Manang

Trekking routes are being replaced by roads along the Annapurna Circuit, affecting local livelihoods

**Durga Rana Magar**  
in Manang

French citizen Louis arrived in Nepal for the first time earlier this year, planning to trek the Annapurna Circuit before heading down to Bardia to hopefully catch a glimpse of some tigers.

Before he began his journey from Besisahar, Louis (who only revealed his first name) had imagined breathing crisp mountain air, and following the melodious gurgle of the Marsyangdi.

Instead, he had to breathe fumes and dust all the way to Chame. Louis says he masked his face with a handkerchief: "It was not what I expected, this is not right."

of Manang's economy. The number of tourists visiting the scenic valley behind the Annapurnas grew from 21,245 in 2023 to 30,866 in 2024.

The Annapurna Circuit is known for unique sights like Tilicho, one of the highest lakes in the world, the Thorong La pass that connects Manang to Mustang, and the valley's own rich cultural heritage.

Thorong La at 5,416m is the highest hiking pass in the world, and was used by locals for trade with Mustang before it became a popular trekking route.

"For guests, the excitement of reaching Thorong La is now overshadowed by their disappointment of having to journey through dusty roads to get there," says Manang lodge-owner Ongma Gurung. "That is the complaint we get the most."

Local tourism operators are trying to get the government to build alternative foot trails. But there have been delays due to a lack of budget.

The Naso Rural Municipality has identified other routes along the Annapurna Circuit in Chyamche,

Tal, and Khotro so trekkers can bypass heavy vehicles involved in the construction of the Manang-Marsyangdi Hydropower Project.

"But the local government cannot do everything," admits the chair Dhan Bahadur Gurung. "And for leaders in Kathmandu, Manang is out of sight and out of mind."

Munindra Jung Gurung represents

Manang in the Gandaki Provincial Assembly, and says he has raised the issue in Pokhara. He is hopeful there will be a hearing.

To be sure, the road is not all bad news. Locals benefit, the number of visitors has grown, and trekkers can now also save time and use it to explore side valleys in Manang, visiting the villages like Nar and Phu.

Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) chief Rabin Kadariya concedes that the road to Upper Manang was crucial to connect the remote region with the rest of Nepal, but adds: "We have built an alternative trail connecting Talgaun, and we will consult local communities about their priorities on other hiking trails." 🇳🇵



## How To Get To Chaurikharka

Take the Mid-Hill Highway from Ghorahi of Dang district to Lukum in East Rukum. The fare is Rs1,500. Lukum to Patihalne is 17km, and from there it is a three-hour hike to Chaurikharka. The ride from Baglung is rougher and may take longer.

Prakash Shrestha. "After that, we hope to promote Chaurikharka as a top tourist spot."

Economic activity is also picking up with the arrival of visitors, but there seems to be a need to manage the makeshift sheds made of corrugated sheets that spoil the beauty of the place. Tea shops and lodges are also available but facilities are basic.

Kuldeep Neupane took a three-day trip from Ghorahi in Dang to visit Chaurikharka recently, and says: "This is an ideal trip to make a quick getaway and let nature recharge your mind and body. And it is much more fun with a tent, to watch the sunrise over the Himalaya or the mist blowing in." 🇳🇵



been some clear mornings when we could see everything from Dhaulagiri to Machapuchre," says Khageswar Bhandari, who trekked up here from the road. "The flowers, the greenery and the snowy mountain views make this an incredibly unique place."

Chaurikharka is worthwhile to get to in any season, but it has a different charm during the monsoon. Word has spread and because it is now easy to get to from Baglung or even Pokhara, people have been flocking here.

"Holidays and Saturdays see the largest crowds, with up to 500 visitors every day," says ward chair Mankaji Pun of Bhume.

There was a time not too long

ago when local herders brought sheep, goats, cows, buffaloes, horses, and mules to graze here during the monsoon. Although there are still livestock around, animals have been replaced by visitors taking selfies.

Ward Chair Pun says infrastructure development is his main priority. A foot trail to Chaurikharka was built last year by the Tourism Division Office in Kohalpur, but access via the Raniwas-Koipa road section still remains challenging.

"If we get more budget, we can improve the road and facilities to make Chaurikharka the main tourist attraction of this region," says Bhume Municipality Chair Hom



## Events



### Waterfall hike

Hike through breathtaking landscapes on the way to the Mailung waterfall. Take in the view, and even go for a refreshing dip into the natural pool.

**2 August, 6pm onwards, Fee: Rs1,800, Meet point: New Road**

### Trail running

KTM Peak Trail is making trail running an inclusive and accessible sport in Kathmandu. Join them, get moving, and run.

**16 August, 7am onwards, Fee: Rs500, Taudaha, 9851113000**



### Labim Bazaar

Shop for fresh and baked goodies, agro products, thrift items, handicrafts and support local businesses.

**Saturdays, 10am-4pm, Labim Mall, Pulchok**

### Yala Yatra

Head to Peter Makela's solo exhibition as the artist reveals his artistic journey and reflections that unfolded during his month-long residency. Review on Page 12.

**1 August, 5-8pm, Gallery Mcube**



### Theatre

Written and directed by Nabin Chandra Aryal, Kagtali unravels a disturbing event in a wealthy household. Watch the play to discover a gradual unfolding of long-buried secrets. Go on Facebook for show time details.

**Till 16 August, Ticket: Rs500, Kausi Theatre, Teku**

### Absent Gods

Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign and Chitrakar Legacy and Fire Studio's exhibition Absent Gods sheds light on the loss and hopeful return of Nepal's displaced heritage.

**Till 4 August, Patan Museum**

### Art Exhibition

Artudio International Artist Residency recipients Rubab Batool and Konain Niaz explore interwoven narratives in their exhibition Connection, Memory, & Borders.

**Till 5 August, 11am-6pm, Artudio, Swayambhu**



## Music

### Sacar

Brace yourself as Sacar aka Lil Buddha takes the stage with his signature flow and lyricism.

This celebration of hip-hop comes as a part of his Sacar Musical City Tour 2025.

**2 August, 6pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, XO Club, Thamel**



### Shannon Scam

Shannon Scam's music reflects the quest of survival in a hustle-driven world. Be part of the launch of their first full length album 2042: Messed up memories.

**2 August, 1pm onwards, Music City Nepal, Balkumari**



### Spinductor

India's top DJ, The Spinductor is bringing his unique flair and electrifying beats at XO. Tune in for the ultimate DJ experience!

**1 August, 10 pm onwards, Ticket: Rs990, XO Club, Thamel**

### Sing & Soak

Break the Saturday routine with an intimate evening of Kajri folk music and dance to the rhythm of music from Madhes. Show up in your red and greens, for the ultimate monsoon feel.

**2 August, 4pm onwards, Ticket: Rs590, Nextdoor Kathmandu**

### Shree 3

Do not miss out on the exclusive live preview of Shree 3's third studio album. The band will also have a meet and greet with fans accompanied by a live performance.

**2 August, 5pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel**



## Getaway

### Hotel Shanker

Nepal's rich heritage meets relaxation at Hotel Shanker. Perfect for both business and leisure, this historic landmark is a regal retreat with modern amenities and top hospitality.

**Lazimpat (01) 4510151**



### Staycation @ Aloft

Planning a staycation? Aloft's Local Luxe Escape offer exclusively for Nepali nationals and expats, includes a stylish staycation with a loft room stay, breakfast and dinner at Nook, cocktails at Nylgiri, rooftop pool access, spa discounts, and more.

**Price: Rs 14,999, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976073**

### Mountain Vista Retreat

Blending traditional charm with minimal ambience, Mountain Vista offers an expansive outdoor seating area that invites guests to become one with nature. You can also enjoy scenic hiking trails and cultural landmarks nearby.

**Nagarkot, 9741731212**



### Shaligram Hotel & Spa

Nestled in the heart of Lalitpur, Shaligram offers rejuvenating treatments at Mantra Spa and Wellness, located within their lush, green premises.

**Jawlahel, 9802073899**

### Riverside Springs Resort

Beat the heat in the luxurious landscaped swimming pool of Riverside Springs, or relax by the river beach at Trisuli, followed by a delicious meal at their restaurant and a relaxed retreat in their comfortable twin-bed cabin.

**Kurintar (01) 5444263**



## Dining



### Pasa Deli

Start your day at Pasa Deli, the ultimate breakfast spot. Savor the hearty one pan grill with eggs, bacon, hash browns, and toast, or indulge in their healthy acai bowls.

**Boudha, 9820805958**

### Lunch offer @ Aloft

Make Saturdays special with Nook's Buy One Get One Free Lunch offer, and catch up with friends and family over a delicious lunch.

**Saturdays, 12pm-3pm, Price: Rs3,600, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976065**

### Thistle Triangle

Thistle's diverse Eurasian menu is a treat for food lovers, from fiery Peri Peri wings to the hearty Triple Chicken Feast.

**Maitighar Mandala (01) 4101740**

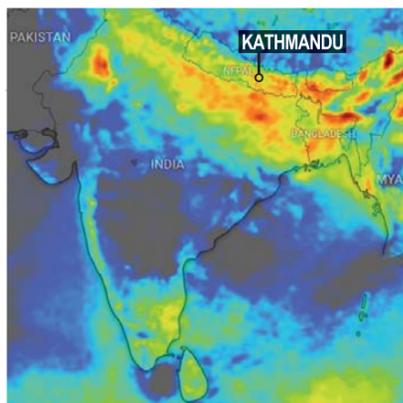


### Holiday Inn Express

Treat yourself and your loved ones to a good morning with Holiday Inn Express' Buy 2 Get 1 Free breakfast spread. Call to make a reservation.

**Till 17 August, Holiday Inn Express, Naxal, 9802356232**

## Weekend Weather



### Monsoon Second Wind

The monsoon was sputtering till last week, but it has picked up again and promises quite a lot of total precipitation in the first week of August. Forecasters predict up to 450mm of rain in eastern Nepal, and over 200mm in Kathmandu Valley region – most of it probably falling from Sunday onwards in sharp bursts. This will also bring the maximum temperature to more tolerable levels. Nepal's rainfall gradient being east-west, south-north, the western and northern regions will not get as much rain.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 21°	27° 21°	25° 20°



## Our Pick

Common Side Effects, the 2025 animated series created by Joseph Bennett and Steve Hely, follows former high school lab partners, Marshall and Frances, who get in touch with one another after Marshall discovers the Blue Angel Mushroom, a rare fungus with healing effects that could cure all the world's illnesses. In the process, they stumble upon a conspiracy involving Big Pharma and the government's efforts to suppress knowledge of the mushroom. Stars Dave King, Emily Pendergast, Mike Judge, Martha Kelly, and Joseph Lee Anderson.

## गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचौ र बचाऔं

- गर्मी मौसममा मलेरिया, कालाजार, डेंगी, हैजालगायतका विभिन्न संक्रामक रोगहरू फैलिन सक्छन् ।
- संक्रामक रोग फैलाउने झिँगा, लामखुट्टे, भुसुना आदिको नियन्त्रण गरौं ।
- संक्रामक रोगबाट बच्न शुद्ध र उमालेको पानी पिऔं ।
- बासी तथा सडेगलेका खाना नखाऔं ।
- घरभित्र र वरपरको सरसफाइमा ध्यान दिऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड



**CLIMATE ANXIETY:** Arjun BK and Devi Sunar of Kaski survived a flashflood on the Harpan Khola on 28 July 2015 that killed 30 people.

ANEK RAJBHANDARI

### Anek Rajbhandari in Kaski

P hewa Lake in Pokhara used to be much bigger, but it has been shrinking because of the sediment brought down from the surrounding mountains as well as human encroachment.

The slopes above the lake used to be heavily denuded, and there was severe soil erosion because Pokhara Valley gets one of the highest annual rainfall in Nepal. To trap the silt, small dams were constructed across streams that flowed into the lake, but the Community Forestry Program restored the catchment's lush vegetation, reducing sedimentation.

However, there is now a new danger: extreme weather caused by climate breakdown. And it was here 10 years ago on 28 July 2015 that torrential rain over two days killed over 30 people in Kaski district.

Thirteen of them were swept away in a flashflood on the Harpan Khola. But a month later, there was such heavy rain that even the thickly forested mountain above could not prevent a landslide that killed more people.

Teacher at the local school, Arjun BK, lost several of his students in that disaster. The tragedy was so traumatic that it left a deep emotional wound that he carries to this day, a decade later. Returning to the classroom to see the empty desks became too unbearable.

"That's why I quit my job as a teacher", BK tells us as he shows us around the village which still bears scars of that landslide and flood ten years ago.

Teaching, once a source of joy, became a source of anxiety, grief and frustration. BK showed signs of post-traumatic stress: he would find himself angry, would be cross with his students. Aware of his declining mental health, BK made the difficult decision to leave his job.

BK's struggle also exposed an aspect of climate breakdown that has not got as much attention: how climate change induced disasters are affecting the mental health of survivors. He then founded Koshish Kaski, an organisation working on mental health awareness and care. Koshish Kaski is a satellite

organisation of Koshish Nepal, which is the country's first mental health organization.

BK's symptoms aligned with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): negative thoughts, irritability, difficulty in emotion regulation and avoidance of places that reminded him of the trauma.

"I realised these symptoms were not only affecting my mental well-being, but also compromised my ability to teach effectively, so I quit on time," says BK, while admitting that not everyone has the wisdom to recognise the wounds, nor the privilege to quit their jobs.

Many continue teaching while silently struggling, and this can profoundly impact the student's growth in the process. Arjun BK's niece Devi Sunar survived the disaster ten years ago, and recalls how her farming community along the Haadi Khola struggled with trauma, fear and sleepless nights.

Sunar herself has noticed that the once-predictable weather pattern in the mountains has changed, the monsoons are erratic, springs have dried up, and it is hotter than before. This has led to a decline in harvests – adding to crop loss due to raids by monkeys and wild boar. All this has placed psychological and economic strain on farmers like Devi Sunar.

#### MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

Studies have found that women are more susceptible to anxiety and depression, and this is corroborated by Arjun BK's own findings at Koshish Kaski. Climate-related disasters and crop loss add to gender discrimination at home and work. The stress, he found, can disrupt hormonal balance, leading to irregular menstrual cycles and poor general health.

Along with women, ethnic and 'lower' caste groups are more affected by climate-related disasters. Indeed, most of the lives lost in the 2015 disaster were from marginalised groups. In Nepal, these communities are more vulnerable because they live in riskier terrain, have limited access to resources, and heavy dependence on the natural environment for subsistence agriculture.

To the north of Pokhara in the Trans-Himalayan Mustang district, farmers say winter rain and snow

# The unseen wounds of climate disasters

Ten years after floods devastated a community in Nepal, survivors still cope with mental trauma



The site of the flashflood 10 years later.

KAREN SUDMEIRE

have failed for the past three years. This is critical since the region's apple orchards need snow to moisten the soil in spring, as well as control pests.

In Kagbeni at the confluence of the Kali Gandaki and Jhong Khola, there are still signs of the devastating debris flow that came down in August 2023, washing away 35 homes, a monastery, livestock and infrastructure.

"Luckily, no human lives were

lost because there was warning from upstream communities," recalls Kagbeni Mayor Phenchok Tseptan.

Although that flood was likely caused by a landslide lake outburst upstream, local people suffer anxiety and spend sleepless nights even if there is a light drizzle as it brings back memories of that terrifying day.

Because of the lack of awareness and societal taboo about mental health, few in Nepal link climate-

related disasters like the ones in Kaski and Mustang to post-traumatic stress or generalised anxiety disorder. And as the Harpan Khola tragedy shows, the impact can be felt even a decade or more later.

Arjun BK is a rare survivor of a disaster who not only spoke up about his condition, but also chose to do something about it and help others suffering silently. In recent years, mental health awareness has reached many communities across Nepal and the government has announced plans to establish outpatient mental health units in hospitals.

Teachers in schools are also being trained to recognise and care for those who struggle silently with mental health issues – especially after climate-induced disasters. Better early-warning systems to reduce the impact would be a way to prevent trauma, anxiety and stress in the first place. 🇳🇵

*Anek Rajbhandari is a graduate of New York University in Abu Dhabi and has a background in Psychology.*

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# Flouting rules caused Saurya tragedy

Airline, airport and regulator disregarded their own procedures in crash that killed 18 a year ago

Vishad Raj Onta

The final investigation report on the crash of a Saurya Airlines jet on 24 July 2024 at Kathmandu airport has revealed flaws in the carrier's technical operation procedures, poor monitoring by the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) and gaps in the airport's emergency response.

Eighteen people including a child were killed, and only the captain survived as the plane plunged seconds after takeoff, crashing within the airport perimeter.

This was the latest in a series of aircraft accidents in previous years, and further tarnished Nepal's already poor aviation safety record and contributed to the country being retained in the EU's air safety list.

The circumstances in the Saurya crash were different from the Yeti Airlines crash in Pokhara in January 2022 that killed all 72 on board, and two Tara Air crashes in February 2016 and May 2022 on approach to Jomsom that together claimed 45 lives. However, all four tragedies were a result of negligence of carriers and crew, failure to follow procedures, regulatory slackness, and overconfidence.

The Surya crash, especially,

was a glaring example of how an ailing airline broke its own rules to allow passengers, including non-employees, a joy ride to Pokhara on a maintenance ferry flight.

## CRASH REPORT

The Final Investigation Report prepared by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Commission and released on the first anniversary of the crash last week carried a long list of rules that were ignored or broken, and of regulatory failure.

The first mistake was to cram spares, tools and inflammable chemicals needed for the aircraft's C-Check in Pokhara into the cargo hold flouting its own ground handling procedures.

There was no check-in of passengers, some of whom were not even employees – even though regulations say only flight and maintenance crew should be on board a maintenance positioning flight. Many brought their own luggage into the plane and stored it unsecured in the cabin. There was no flight attendant to give a safety briefing to passengers.

The load and trim charts given to the flight crew were rough estimates, and the total takeoff weight of the plane was 18,300kg plus or minus 200 kg. That would still have been all right, but there was a glaring mistake in the speedchart Saurya pilots were using to calculate the minimum takeoff speed (known as VR), and

it had been wrong ever since the 21-year-old aircraft entered service with the airline in 2017.

## FAULTY DATA

The Commission probed Flight Data Recorder inputs from previous takeoffs of the Canadian-built CRJ200-LR in 2023-2024 and found that the undetected error in the speedchart had caused the plane to pitch up at an abnormal rotation rate at least 18 times on previous takeoffs.

Any rotation rate more than 3°/sec is regarded as unusual. But on at least two occasions, this aircraft with tail number 9N-AME had rotation rates of 5.8°/sec and 5.5°/

sec, the second one was when the pilot who survived was flying in March 2024.

On this particular day, the plane's rotation rate was 6.5°/sec, causing it to go into a deep stall soon after takeoff, the Commission report said. Essentially, the plane was not flying fast enough down the runway to take off safely.

It is not yet clear whether excess weight, unsecured luggage, wrong centre of gravity were also factors, but relying on a faulty speedchart for the given takeoff weight, the captain flying pulled back on the yoke before the plane had reached takeoff speed and at a pitch angle that was too steep.

The investigation report says the plane then went into a deep stall and started banking right with the stick shaking. At this point, the flight officer on the right hand seat is heard on the cockpit voice recorder saying: "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Sir, Sir, Sir..."

It then banked left before the pilot flying turned the plane sharply to the right again in an evasive action to avoid the parking aprons of the international and domestic terminals. Had he not done so, there would have been a disaster of a much greater magnitude at Kathmandu airport that day.

The plane scraped the runway with its right wingtip, collided with a container having helicopter spare parts, and plunged into a gully east of the runway, exploding in a fireball.

The investigation also noted that the impact forces seemed to be survivable for some occupants. The fire trucks took unnecessarily long to reach the site even though it was inside the airport perimeter. The absence of an ICAO-standard runway strip, inadequate rescue drills, lack of training, and a blocked emergency service gate leading to the crash site were cited as other factors. 🇳🇵

[nepalitimes.com](https://nepalitimes.com)

Go online for link to full report.



11:11:03

Without enough speed to generate lift, the plane banks right, then left and right again in these CCTV photos (above) taken from the domestic apron. If it had not banked right, it could have hit the aprons and terminal buildings. Seen parked is Saurya's other CRJ200 with tail number 9N-ANM.

## TIMESTAMP OF A DISASTER

11:10:34

The Saurya Airlines CRJ200 on the takeoff roll from runway 02. It had a takeoff weight of about 18,300kg, but the pilot's speedcard had a previously undetected mistake about the minimum takeoff speed.

11:10:55

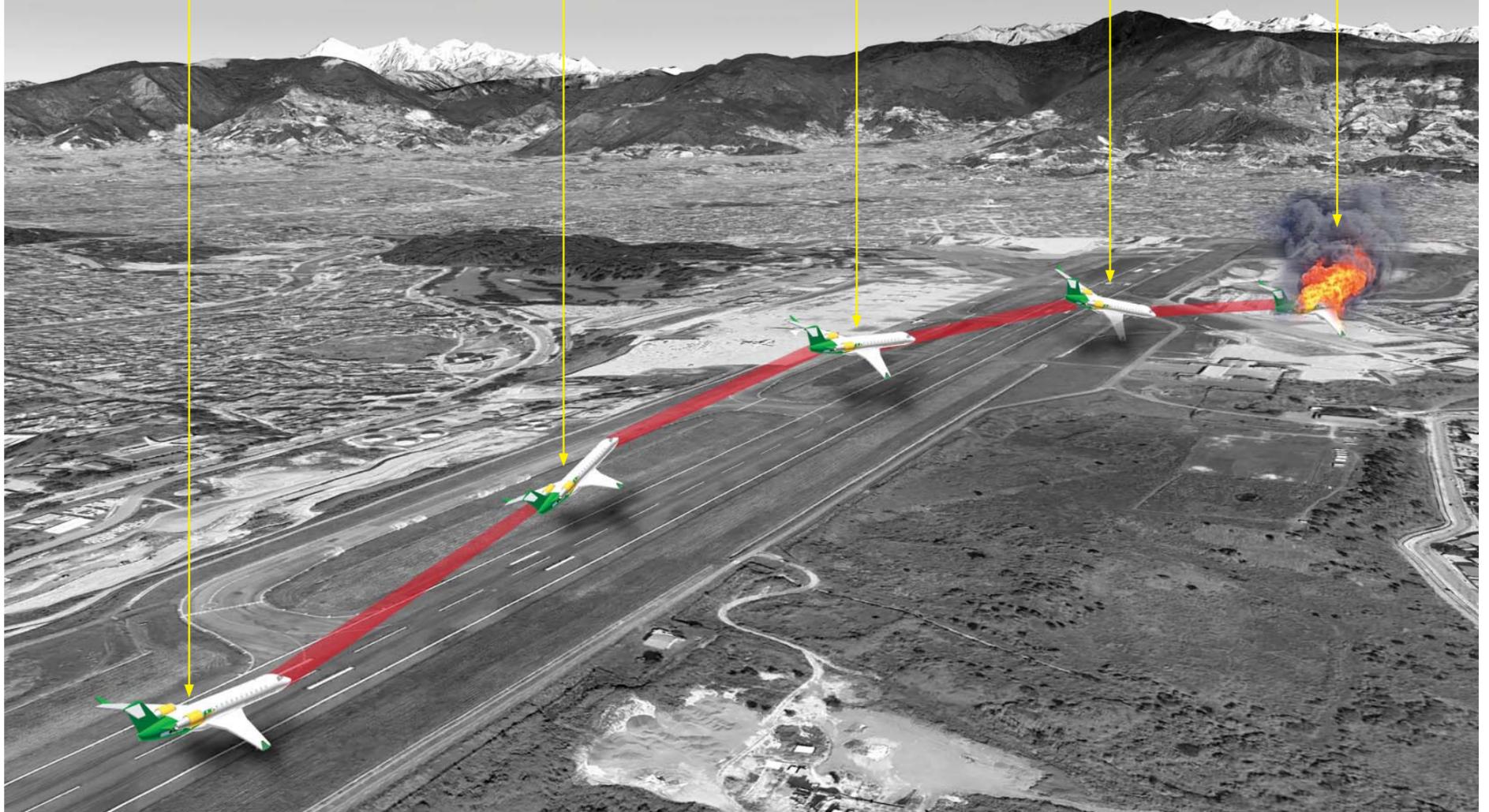
The plane with tail number 9N-AME goes into deep stall soon after takeoff because it does not have enough speed to lift its weight. The plane also has an abnormally steep nose-up attitude.

11:11:08

The plane scrapes the runway with its right wingtip, and falls into the gully. The captain is thrown off the left side of the cockpit and survives.

11:11:15

Plane explodes in a fireball inside the airport perimeter. Firefighters take time to reach the site because of lack of access road and a blocked gate.



# Nepal's unchanging domestic worker saga

OnWorld Day against Trafficking in Persons, Nepali Times' coverage of migration in the last 25 years



**Labour Mobility**  
Upasana Khadka

Nepali Times celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 25 July, and this piqued my curiosity about how the paper covered migration in the early days. Things must have been so different back then. Or were they?

If we look at restrictive emigration policies that disproportionately impact women, contributors have changed, protagonists have changed, but the message remains more or less the same. Many aspects of what we write today about bans are no different from what was written back then, and it is timely to revisit this issue on World Day Against Trafficking in Persons.

Trafficking can only be addressed when people have access to safe and legal migration pathways, not with bans. In an article in 2000, the year this paper was born, correspondent Hemlata Rai wrote an article called 'Misplaced Chivalry' that criticised the ban on women migration. Back then, it was not a ban on just domestic work but on women migration altogether.

Excerpt from the article: 'What the prohibition has done is make women more vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation. Since the women now use illegal channels to reach their destinations, they remain invisible in official books and therefore unprotected by laws that ensure workers' rights.... The government has simply not been able to put an end to this trafficking, and by its across-the-board ban on women workers going to the Gulf has only succeeded in pushing an employment channel underground.'

Twenty-five years later, I could just reuse this paragraph, and it would still be relevant, albeit the current ban is on domestic work that disproportionately impacts women and not all women migrants.



In a 2003 news piece, there was a hopeful government announcement that the ban on women working in Gulf countries was lifted, provided a recruiter and embassy could guarantee safe working conditions, after 'activists criticised the restriction as discriminatory'.

In 2006, Dambar Shrestha noted that the remaining restriction on women migrating to the Gulf for domestic work would also likely be repealed after the introduction of the Foreign Employment Act in 2007.

The ban was lifted but in its aftermath Mallika Aryal's 2009 article 'The Invisible' and Rubeena Mahato's 'Womanpower' noted that women still struggled to migrate because of the bureaucratic challenges:

'Despite being legally allowed to go abroad to work, government rules make it as difficult as possible for them to do so.' (Mallika Aryal) or because of the perception of the ban, 'After the Foreign Employment Act 2007 was passed, the ban has officially been lifted, and there are no restrictions on women migrant workers going



abroad. But the perception of a ban remains, and this has led many women to continue using illegal routes.'

By the time people become aware that bans have been lifted or got a grasp of how to navigate the post-ban recruitment system, another iteration of the ban is introduced whether it is conditional (age-specific, country-specific) or blanket bans bringing us back to square 1.

Just like the ban is a reactionary policy, my 2021 article, 'History of Female Im-mobility in Nepal' was a reaction to a bizarre proposal to require consent from a guardian and local government for women under the age of 40 travelling to the Gulf or Africa which fortunately got quashed.

### EMPTY PROMISES

But bans don't work, have never worked, given irregular options via open borders and visit visas, as has been extensively covered in this paper since its first year. The latest ban, imposed in 2017 after a Parliamentary committee visited the Gulf, decided it was unsafe for domestic workers, regardless of gender.

Any promise for change such as a 2020 Parliamentary trip after which the committee instructed the government to revisit the ban considering country-specific policies and several preconditions, which were still deemed restrictive, has stalled. A proposal around lifting the ban starting with a pilot agreement with the UAE submitted by the Labour Ministry has also stalled.

One would think that 25 years is a long enough time horizon for progress that would bring us to a point where we would look back and gasp at how bans were imposed to curb migration that disproportionately impacted women.

What on earth was the Government thinking, we could have wondered? On the contrary, this is still our reality and we are in fact in the midst of a fresh, high profile visit visa scandal that has become a core public contention issue. The misuse of visit visas is inevitably linked to deployment bans and profit motives.

These scandals cast doubt on the claim that the bans are really for 'protection' of women. To be sure, domestic work remains one of the most vulnerable sectors with women disproportionately affected. Excessive working hours, non-payment or underpayment, verbal, physical and even sexual abuse are prevalent.

Countries including in the Middle East have increasingly

adopted regulations protecting women but there are severe limits in both the protections they offer or their implementation. These abuses are very much present, prevalent and cannot be ignored.

The restrictive policy that bans women workers has not been overhauled despite decades of progress since Hemlata Rai first reported on this subject in this paper in terms of better databases for recordkeeping, stronger international conventions, laws and standards governing this sector, better developed curricula on domestic work, stronger regulations for recruiters deploying domestic workers, and social media that keeps domestic workers connected.

There are developments from the last two decades that can be utilised to make the sector safer should there be a willingness to do so. Because the reality is, these opportunities are life-changing for many migrants and their families.

If and when we get to celebrate the lifting of the ban, it will be just that: a celebration of the ban being lifted, which is not a lot to begin with. A low bar. Because it will only clear the way to begin real work to tangibly make this sector safe.

What is needed past the ban will be a lot of work: stronger embassies, better recordkeeping, enforceable bilateral labour agreements, monitoring, pre-

departure training and awareness campaigns. Perhaps that is another reason why there is such slow progress because imposing a ban does give the semblance of doing something in the name of protection without really doing much.

In this spirit of lazy policymaking and the lackluster progress on addressing deployment bans, here are five endings from previous articles covered in the paper on this issue. Please choose as per your liking:

'The government has simply not been able to put an end to this trafficking, and by its across-the-board ban on women workers going to the Gulf has only succeeded in pushing an employment channel underground.' (Hemlata Rai, 2000)

'How can the government be so apathetic towards this problem when women make such a significant contribution to the national economy?' (Dewan Rai, 2009)

'Unless the government is serious about enforcing the provisions of the Foreign Employment Act and creates a safety net for migrant workers, these statistics and the lives of countless Nepali women will only get worse.' (Sushila Budhathoki and Mina Sharma, 2012)

'The ban needs to be lifted, but this is also an opportune moment to address other less-explicit but enduring factors that are holding women back, both literally and figuratively.' (Upasana Khadka, 2020)

'Undocumented domestic workers are citizens too, and it is the duty of the state not to abandon them.' (Ayushman Bhagat and Sunita Mainali, 2025) 🇳🇵

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

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# Walking, working, worshipping in Patan

An American artist's exhibition pays homage to the town's spirituality and heritage

**Sudiksha Tuladhar**

American artist Peter Makela was in Nepal in 2022 on a Fulbright scholarship when he experienced the Matya festival in Patan in which devotees made the rounds of the city's shrines.

He joined the procession, walking through 2,600 stupa and 140 bahal of the town. That immersion left a lasting impression.

As part of Gallery Mcube's international residency program in Patan, he put his inspiration to canvas in the ongoing exhibition Yala Yatra: Walking, Working, Worshipping. The exhibition also coincides with this month's Matya festival.

Makela has visited Nepal often in the past 11 years but he mostly stayed in and spent his time around Boudha. "This time I stayed in Patan, put the sites I wanted to visit on my map, and off I went," he tells us. "Each of my artwork is inspired by the stupas and shrines in Patan that I visited."

The stupa and Ganesh are recurring motifs in his watercolours, and the elephant gods are located in chaityas — reflecting the interplay and blending of the Hindu and Buddhist faiths in Kathmandu Valley.



The stupas and Ganesh are painted in vivid red, yellow, blue and green against abstract backgrounds meant to represent the sky.

"I use the sky as a backdrop because the sky has no border,"

says Makela. "The four colours represent the four elements, the different Buddha families and also lights bouncing off of a rainbow."

The use of just four colours for all the artwork stands out, and combined with the absence of



heavy canvases, frames or stands render Makela's art striking in its simplicity.

The Ganesh is always holding something and the art also portrays the elephant god's sacred vehicle, the mouse.

While his vibrant stupas and Ganesh reflect the tangibility of Patan's tradition and heritage, it is as if the backdrops with their shades of grey and red and yellow capture the soul of the city's shrines.

"If you look closely, there is a sense of form and formlessness at the same time," he says.

Makela walked 108 kora around the shrines during his exploration of the town, and in the process developed a spiritual connection with Patan's heritage and traditions.

The exhibition connects with visitors on a deeper, more spiritual, level as well. And with it, they feel a sense of pride as well as the need to urgently preserve Patan's heritage for future generations.

"Peter's inclination and approach towards Nepali art and culture is fascinating, and it reflects in his work," says Mcube curator Manish Lal Shrestha, whose international artist residency program promotes Nepal's cultural heritage.

*Yala Yatra: Walking, Working, Worshipping*  
1-5 August  
10AM-7PM  
Gallery Mcube, Patan

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