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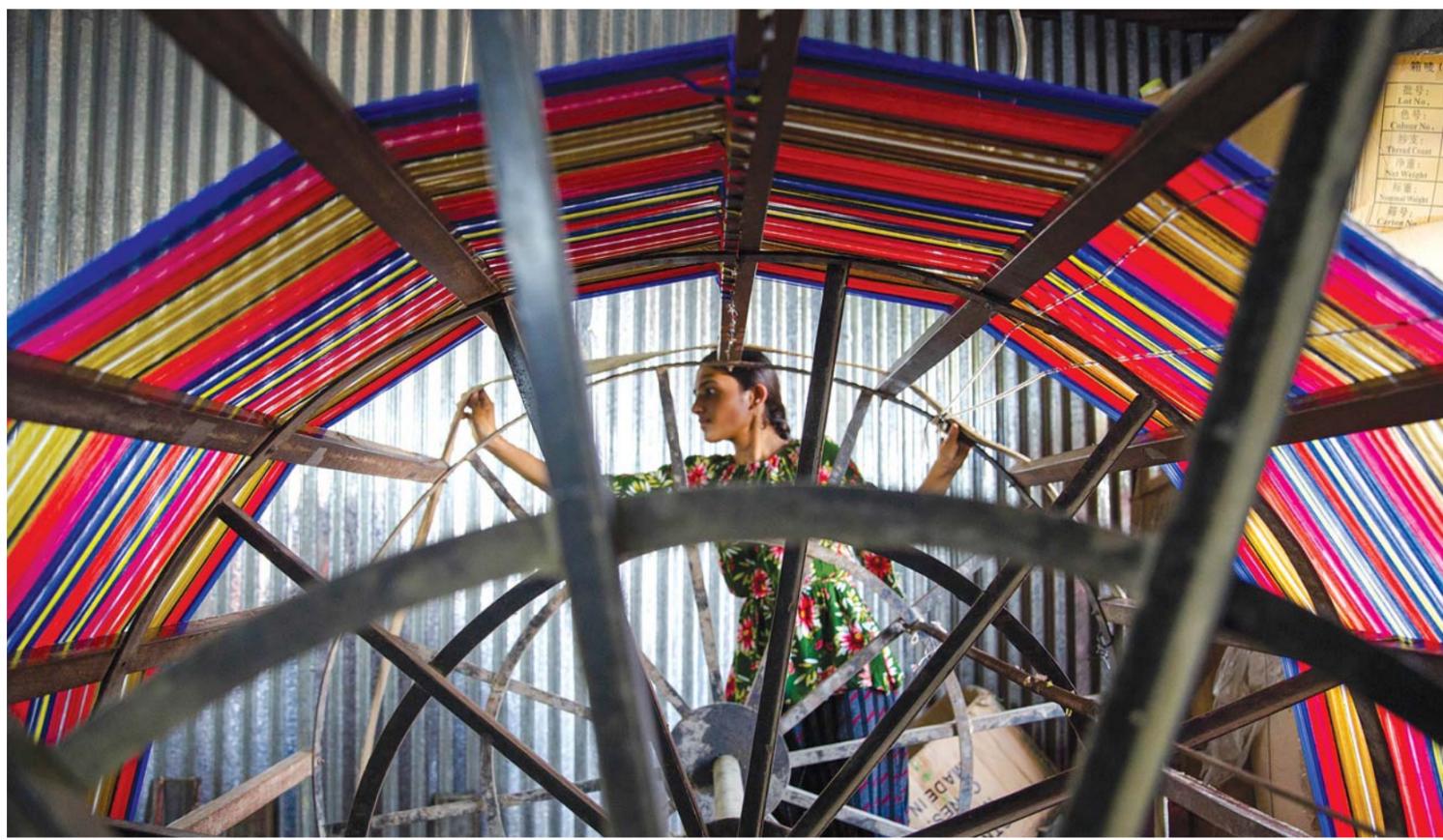
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SUMAN NEPALI

Not poor, but not rich

Sonia Awale

Nepal is graduating to become a developing country on 24 November 2026 after half-century in the Least Developed Country (LDC) category. By 2030, the country hopes to transition to middle-income status.

Everyone including Prime Minister K P Oli have boasted that this is a matter of national pride, and will have a multiplier impact on trade and economy.

But will it make any difference to the average Nepali? Not unless improved governance spurs investment and creates jobs.

Countries need to meet at least two of the three criteria in two consecutive triennial reviews to be eligible for graduation from LDC. Nepal has consistently met the thresholds for the Human Assets Index (HAI) and the Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI) in 2015, 2018, and 2021. But Nepal was recommended for graduation before meeting the per capita Gross National Income (GNI) threshold of \$1,306.

"A major implication of LDC

graduation is the loss of market access through Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) and other arrangements," explains economist Sameer Khatiwada. "But over two-thirds of Nepal's exports are to India, and the preferential market access to India is through a bilateral trade agreement. This has nothing to do with our LDC status."

Furthermore, a provision under the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) allows Nepal to export to India duty-free if the items are at least 30% value-added.

"Following graduation from LDC, the value addition threshold might increase to 40%," says Kalpana Khanal of the Policy Research Institute. "This is supposed to work to our advantage, because on paper value addition means job creation at home."

But Nepal's exports to other major destinations will face tariff increases with the graduation. A South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SWATEE) study shows that while tariff increase in the US market is relatively low (see page 5) it is considerably higher in Europe.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) in a 2022 study also estimated that graduation could result in a 4.3% decline in Nepal's projected exports, but this is excluding the impact of changes in 'rules of origin' provisions in preference-granting countries such as the UK and Europe.

There is also concern about Nepal's graduation at a time when the global economy is topsy-turvy, amidst tariff wars. This may impact remittances which hit \$11 billion in 2024.

"Look at data -- tourism is up, spending is up, IT exports are up, EV sales are up, Europe still needs 90 million skilled workers. We are sitting on \$16 billion in cash reserves, our balance of payment, foreign exchange reserve, tax to GDP ratio, credit flow are all positive, we have to build on these factors," says an upbeat Sujeev Shakya of the Nepal Economic Forum.

Investment may not be dependent on LDC status, but stable policy, a strong legal framework, market potential and

ease of doing business are more important.

Says Khanal, "That is where our focus needs to be. We need to retain Nepalis with jobs at home for our sustained growth."

After 2026, financing support from donors and aid agencies could be affected and Nepal will no longer be able to access Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) to adapt to the impacts of climate change. But the Global Environment Fund and Green Climate Fund will still be available.

"LDC status does not determine bilateral development aid, that is usually driven by broader geopolitical considerations," says Sameer Khatiwada. "The World Bank and Asian Development Bank, which provide concessional loans to Nepal, it is determined mainly by per capita income, not LDC status." (Guest Editorial, page 2)

He adds, "LDC graduation for Nepal might not be as earth-shattering as some tend to think."

Sujeev Shakya also sees the glass as half full: "Nepal's biggest advantage is our working age population and we have investments coming in. These aided by how adaptive we are as a society are the very foundations on which Nepal will grow." 🇳🇵

Investing in people
GUEST EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

Nepal and the US-India tariff tiff
PAGE 5

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Investing in people

Nepal's best bet for better jobs and economic growth



GUEST EDITORIAL
David Sisen

One of the greatest obstacles to better jobs and faster economic growth in Nepal today isn't a shortage of natural resources, challenging geography, or limited access to finance. It is the unrealised potential of its people because the country has not invested enough to unlock it.

Many Nepalis are growing up without quality education, healthcare, and skills needed to succeed in the modern economy. Much of Nepal's human capital remains underdeveloped and underused, reinforcing inequality and holding back productivity, innovation, and inclusive growth.

A new World Bank report—the Nepal Human Capital Review—finds that a child born in Nepal today is expected to achieve just 51% of their full productivity potential by age 18.

Limited access to quality education, healthcare, and nutrition means that half of a child's productivity potential remains unrealised. This is more than a missed



AMIT MACHAMAS/INT ARCHIVE

opportunity for the child—it represents a significant productivity loss for the country's long-term growth.

Beneath this national average lie even deeper inequalities. Imagine two children born on the same day in 2020—one in Karnali, the other in Bagmati, near the capital. The child in Bagmati is far more likely to attend a private school or benefit from better education and health services. The child in Karnali is more likely to rely solely on the public system, which remains under-resourced and overstretched.

A child born in Karnali is expected to reach just 46% of their productivity potential, well below the average for lower-middle-income countries. The child born in

Bagmati is expected to reach 58%—comparable to upper-middle-income economies.

These differences stem not just from geography, but from unequal access to quality services, whether public or private. They reflect a public system struggling to deliver quality services for all, and one that families with more resources are often able to supplement through private investments. These are not just numbers, they are life trajectories, shaped not by ability or ambition, but by the simple event of where a child is born and raised.

Given the difficulties of finding a good job, a child born in Nepal today is expected to realise just 18% of their productivity potential, one of the lowest rates in the world. There are just too few quality jobs. Between 2010 and 2018, only four in ten new entrants to the working-age population were able to secure paid employment. Most jobs are informal, low-paid, and offer little in terms of security or career growth.

Opportunities are especially limited in rural areas, where both private investment and job creation lag. The situation is especially challenging for young people: more than a third of those aged 15 to 24 are not in education, employment, or training. Labour force participation for women remains low at just 29%, about half the rate of men.

Nepal's low levels of human capital, combined with the wide gap between the number of people seeking work and the availability of jobs, pose a serious threat to long-term growth and social inclusion.

SHAPING A FUTURE

To change the course of Nepal's human capital trajectory and lay the foundation for a more prosperous future, public investments

in education, health, and social protection must increase while ensuring every rupee reaches those most in need.

Investments must be targeted so that every child, regardless of where they are born, has access to early learning opportunities, qualified teachers, textbooks, nutritious meals, and basic health services.

Just as important as building human capital is ensuring there are job opportunities. Over the next three decades, Nepal will need to create 6.5 million jobs just to keep up with its expanding working-age population.

This requires more than business as usual. It calls for a fundamental shift from short-term fixes to long-term, strategic investments in people and systems and by making Nepal a better place to invest, by Nepalis and foreigners, alike.

Today, too many young people leave school without a clear path into the workforce. That needs to change. Boosting youth employability demands stronger links between training and labour market needs, expanded reskilling programs, and developing public-private partnerships that deliver modern, relevant skills.

Young people must be equipped with quality technical and vocational education, digital skills, and lifelong learning opportunities, especially in underserved communities. These must become core elements of Nepal's education system if it is to be competitive in an increasingly fast-moving, technology-driven economy.

The future of a Nepali child should not be determined by whether they are born in Karnali or Bagmati. Investing in people is not just the right thing to do, it is the smartest strategy for creating jobs, driving growth, and building a more inclusive economy where all young Nepalis thrive.

David Sisen is the World Bank Country Division Director for Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

Trending Online



Kiran Manandhar in the abstract

by Sangya Lamsal
Kiran Manandhar's original artworks are currently on display across various locations in Kathmandu, honouring the maestro's five decades of artistic exploration. Read about his work at nepalitimes.com

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Kathmandu's religious opulence

by Alok Siddhi Tuladhar
The Bahi Dyo Bwoyegu festival is age-old practice of family bringing out the Buddhas from their altars for collective public worship, showcasing the heritage of Newa Buddhist families of Kathmandu Valley. Read about the festival and see photos online.

X Most popular on X

Nanny State

Editorial
The newly proposed amendment that seeks to legalise polygamy when extramarital affairs result in a child, reflects regressive mindset of the ruling class and is an attempt to undermine women's rights. Join the discussion online.

66 Most commented



Nepal's bubble economy

by Ramesh Kumar
The government is relying on iffy figures to suggest Nepal's economy is getting stronger. But trade, real estate, and stock market gains don't indicate economic recovery when farming, manufacturing, and jobs are still declining. Read the analysis on our website.

🔥 Most visited online page

Letters

POLYGAMY LAW

Women's rights are going backwards again in Nepal, and elsewhere, after hard won progress ('Nanny State', Editorial, #1273). And all decisions seem to be made by groups of men who fear women's rights.

Denise Tomecko

■ The proposed polygamy law is unbelievably sexist and antiquated.

Lesley Abhita

CHHAUPADI

Chhaupadi is just another proof that cultural mores take longer to eradicate ('Menstrual banishment moves to the Tarai', Unnati Chaudhary, nepalitimes.com).

Isabella P. P

RASUWA FLOOD

Climate crisis-related disasters are only going to become more

common ('From one disaster to the next', Sabina Devkota, #1273). What is actually being done to respond to this?

David Seddon

■ Due to lack of awareness and societal taboo about mental health ('The unseen wounds of climate disasters', Anek Rajbhandari, #1272), few in Nepal link climate-related disasters to post-traumatic stress or generalised anxiety disorder but the impact lasts even after a decade.

Suresh Bidari

GEOPOLITICS

One unintended consequence might well be Indian clothing being re-branded as Made in Nepal before being re-directed to the USA ('Turning point in US-India relations', Shashi Tharoor, #1273). Meanwhile, China is perhaps learning the lessons from the USA of how not to conduct its affairs ('What China wants', Yu Jie, #1273).

Tony Jones

SAURYA CRASH REPORT

The seemingly repetitive flouting of standard rules, sadly mirrors similarities existent within broader government oversight in other sectors as well ('Flouting rules caused Saurya tragedy', Vishad Raj Onta, nepalitimes.com). Lax monitoring and penalising offenses evidently can be fatal.

Iván G. Somlai

FUTURE NEPAL

We will not make gains under this political system. It's deeply corrupt ('Nepal in 2050', Sonia Awale, #1271).

Max Gurung

MUSTANG FEES

I had no idea permit fees were still being enforced in Mustang, the restriction was from a bygone era ('Lift restrictions on Upper Mustang', Shailendra Thakali, nepalitimes.com). It is totally absurd given how much the region has changed and the huge influx of domestic tourists.

Fraser Sugden

Quotes



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

A targeted Israeli strike killed six journalists including Al Jazeera's Anas al-Sharif on Sunday. Israel, which has labelled Palestinian journalists reporting on the Gaza genocide as combatants, alleged without evidence that al-Sharif was Hamas-affiliated.



Forester @kuenvmgt504

And loud complicit silence in nepal political well?!



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Tourists, entrepreneurs, politicians, and residents want fees on Upper Mustang to be abolished so it can attract a broader range of international travellers. Relaxed restrictions in Lower Mustang has also led to a tourism boom.



PaulBra @birdsay

As a regular (uk) traveller to Nepal the permit fees for those areas puts them out of my reach. I felt that exclusivity helped conserve and protect. But now are visited en masse by road trip tourists from Nepal and India. Maybe less the sustainable ecotourism that it could be.

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YARSA GOLD RUSH

Travel with us to Upper Dolpo where yarsagumba harvesters say that quality and quantity of this lucrative Himalayan fungus is declining and that the gold rush is riskier. Subscribe for multimedia content.

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SPOT THE WOMEN: Prime Minister K P Oli during annual progress review and the Ministerial Development Action Committee (MDAC) meeting this week where he discussed SDGs, LDC graduation as well Nepal's grey listing for money laundering under the FATF.



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'This massacre must end'

Strong international condemnation of Israel's targeted killing of six Al Jazeera journalists, including Anas al-Sharif (pictured, below)

Anas al-Sharif, 28, a prominent Al Jazeera correspondent and one of the network's most recognisable reporters in Gaza, was killed in an Israeli airstrike on 10 August while sheltering in a tent for journalists near al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City.

Four other Al Jazeera media persons also lost their lives in the same attack: journalist Mohammed Qreiqeh, camera operators Ibrahim Zaher and Moamen Aliwa, and their assistant Mohammed Noufal. Freelance reporter Mohammed al-Khalidi was also confirmed among the fatalities.

The Qatar-based network condemned the strike as a 'deliberate assassination' calling it a 'desperate attempt to silence the voices exposing the impending seizure and occupation of Gaza'.

Israel's military later acknowledged carrying out the strike, alleging without any evidence that al-Sharif was affiliated with Hamas. Rights groups and media watchdogs have repeatedly criticised Israel for labelling journalists who are bringing news of the genocide in Gaza to the outside world as combatants, without any substantiation.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) had previously expressed serious concerns for al-Sharif's safety, citing what it described as 'a military-led smear campaign' against him. CPJ warned last month that such tactics could foreshadow a targeted killing. The campaign against al-Sharif escalated after he



ANAS AL-SHARIF / X

broke down on live television while reporting on starvation in Gaza.

CPJ on Monday strongly condemned Israel's airstrike which killed the six journalists in the deadliest single attack on media workers since the Israel-Gaza war began in 2023.

"Israel wiped out an entire news crew," said CPJ Regional Director

Sara Qudah. "It has made no claims that any of the other journalists were terrorists. That's murder. Plain and simple."

She added that Israel had shown a 'longstanding, documented pattern of accusing journalists of being terrorists without providing credible proof'.

"It is no coincidence that the

smears against al-Sharif ... surfaced every time he reported on a major development in the war,' Qudah noted, pointing to his coverage of famine and the humanitarian crises in Gaza.

Al-Sharif had himself said in a dispatch from Gaza in July: "They accuse me of being a terrorist because the occupation wants to

assassinate me morally."

Last week's strike brings the number of journalists killed in the Israel-Gaza war to 192, including 184 Palestinian reporters. Thirteen journalists have been killed so far in 2025, up from 10 in 2024.

'If Israel can kill the most prominent Gazan journalist, then it can kill anyone,' Qudah warned. 'This massacre must end.'

Al-Sharif became widely known for a powerful moment earlier this year when, during a temporary ceasefire in January, he removed his protective vest during a live broadcast while surrounded by celebrating civilians.

Just minutes before his death, al-Sharif posted on X, describing 'intense, concentrated Israeli bombardment' targeting Gaza City with so-called 'fire belts'.

Following his death, a final message was posted to his X account, reading: 'I have lived through pain in all its details, tasted suffering and loss many times, yet I never once hesitated to convey the truth as it is, without distortion or falsification.'

Al Jazeera's operations in Israel were shut last year, with Israeli authorities citing security concerns. The network's West Bank offices were also raided by Israeli forces.

Foreign journalists remain barred from entering Gaza, leaving Palestinian reporters as the primary source of independent reporting from inside the enclave. News organisations, including the International Media Support (IMS), recently urged Israel to allow greater humanitarian access and permit more journalists to report freely. 🇵🇸

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Nepathya @ Wembley

The iconic Nepali band Nepathya performed to 10,000 fans at Wembley Arena in London on 8 August, returning to the venue after 12 years. The band played classics and songs like Kosi Ko Pani and Aanganai Bhari, with lead singer Amrit Gurung encouraging the diaspora audience to stay connected to the country. Organised by BSK Entertainment and Parcha Production, the concert set a potential record for the largest indoor Nepali music event, with attendees from as far as the Netherlands. Nepathya is continuing its European tour, with shows in Denmark, Malta, Portugal and Belgium.

Hyundai August

Laxmi Intercontinental's Hyundai Awesome August during the NAIMA Expo offered customers discounts of up to Rs800,000, a year of free insurance, and entry into a raffle to win washing machines or a couple's trip to Vietnam.

Samsung discounts

For a limited time, customers can get discounts of 17-32% on Galaxy Watch and Buds when buying Samsung S, Z, A or M series phones. This offer is available at Samsung stores across Nepal, with 0% financing plans applicable. Until 24 August, all Samsung mobile phone users regardless of warranty status can get free charging port repairs or replacements at official service centers as part of a 'monsoon camp'. The Galaxy Z Fold7 and Z Flip7 will also be available for pre-order in Nepal 7-14 August. The Z Flip7 starts at Rs154,999, while the Fold7 starts at Rs244,999.

NADA Auto Show

The 17th edition of the NADA Auto Show will be held 19-24 August at Bhrikutimandap. The show will gather automotive brands, experts, consumers and enthusiasts, and will feature over 90 national and international exhibitors over 120 stalls. Highlights: UNITREE quadruped robots, DEEPAL drones. Tickets on Khalti.

NPL 2 auction

The player auction for the second edition of the Nepal Premier League (NPL) cricket concluded on Saturday in Kathmandu. 37 out of 164 players were contracted. All eight teams retained their marquee players and much of their squads. Foreign player signings are yet to be finalised.



Cricket stadium

Only 30% of the work has been completed for the 15,000 seater cricket stadium in Bharatpur. Himalayan-Kalinchok-BBR Joint Venture signed the construction contract in 2024 for Rs780,000,000, with a completion deadline of January 2027. That deadline is expected to be missed.

Volkswagens

Volkswagen launched its Virtus and Taigun GT Plus models at the NAIMA Auto Show, unveiled by German Ambassador Udo Volz. The Virtus is a mid-size sedan and the Taigun is an SUV, both starting at Rs5,490,000. Bookings and test drives for both models are available at Volkswagen dealerships across Nepal.



Terraces suites

The Terraces Resort won the Best All Suite Resort in Asia, Best Mountain Resort in Asia, Best Resort Hotel in Asia, and Best Scenic View in Asia at the Haute Grandeur Global Excellence Awards based on guest feedback.

Mahindra eSUV

Mahindra launched the BE 6 and the XEV 9e electric SUVs at the NAIMA Mobility Expo. Features include triple screen displays, a digital cockpit, ranges of 557km and brake-by-wire. The BE6 starts at Rs5,700,000 and the XEV 9e models at Rs6,900,000.

TikTok Search

TikTok announced a search guide feature in Nepal aimed at supporting users impacted by or at risk of sexual abuse. Users in Nepal who search for terms with keywords such as 'sexual assault', 'abuse hotline', 'Metoo' will be shown a dedicated banner connecting them to local resources. The app's Safety Center educates users on sexual abuse.

TVS scooters

TVS Nepal unveiled Turquoise Blue and Nardo Gray color variants of the NTORQ Disc Fi scooter at the NAIMA expo. The model has a 125cc 3-valve engine offering 45 kmpl, and is priced at Rs283,000. Meanwhile, Ultraviolette Nepal launched the F77 Mach 2 electric motorcycle at the NAIMA Mobility Expo. The 402HP vehicle has a top speed of 155km/h, a range of 323km, and starts at Rs 8,440,000.

Deserted airports

Except for one flight a week from Pokhara to Lhasa, airlines have not been keen on operating international flights from Bhairawa and Pokhara airports, despite being offered waivers for passenger service fees, parking, landing, navigation charges, tourism fees, ground handling fees, and aviation fuel costs. Officials say that the airports are not being used because of a lack of facilities such as labour offices, immigration, and quarantine.

E-wallets on alert

As per the NRB's Guidelines on Targeted Financial Sanctions for Payment Service Providers, 10 digital wallet companies including eSewa and Khalti by IME will have to detect and stop online transactions made by suspicious individuals as identified on UN and domestic blacklists. Not abiding could result in a loss of operating licenses, who have also been ordered to check current customer databases. There were 675 online fraud cases this last fiscal year, an increase of 307% with losses of Rs347.2 million, 220 people have been arrested, including 33 foreigners. The rules are to help Nepal get off the FATF 'grey list' in the next two years.



Outreach win

Ad Agency Outreach Nepal won 13 awards at the Flame Awards South East Asia in New Delhi, organised by the Rural Marketing Association of India (RMAI). The awards saw participation from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, and Thailand, with a judging panel of senior industry experts.

Nepal and the US-India tariff tiff

The country can benefit if it plays its cards right, and adopts a long term strategy to boost exports

Sudiksha Tuladhar

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Trump have had a love-hate relationship. The two populist leaders have now fallen out, threatening a full scale Indo-American trade war.

Many of Nepal's exports to the United States like garments and rugs are also what India sells to the US. So, after Donald Trump announced additional tariffs on Indian exports to total 50%, Nepal could have an advantage.

But this is only if the government plays its cards right and develops a long term strategy to boost export of items in which it has comparative advantage, and find new export products.

The recent fallout ostensibly comes after India ignored western sanctions and continued to purchase Russian oil, and could be linked to Trump's meeting with Russian president Vladimir Putin in Alaska on Friday in which he wants to use India as a bargaining chip.

"Trump has not honoured any international trade agreements, making the global trade regime unstable," says economist Posh Raj Pandey. This could mean that the US could still pull back on tariffs, just as he has given China a reprieve of another 90 days this week. Compared to other South Asian countries, including India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, Nepal faces a relatively low tariff rate of 10%. Theoretically this could put Nepali exports at an advantage for items like garments and other products like tea. But it also carries its own risks.

Some 64% of Nepal's imports are from India, and US tariffs could make those products more expensive. A stronger USD vis-a-vis the INR would also devalue the Nepali rupee and increase the cost of imports from India of raw material for its exports, for example, garments.

The manufacturing sector in Nepal has never reached its true potential, its main export items to India are soya and palm oil which are actually just bulk imports of the same oils repackaged for export (page 1). Domestic production lacks capacity to keep up with demand.

"Nepal's productive capacity must be increased in order to boost exports, and the market should be diversified for Nepal to take advantage of a competitive market," says Pandey.

Indian exporters could try to reroute their finished products through the open border with Nepal, changing the tag from 'Made in India' to 'Made in Nepal' to avoid US tariffs. China did this by relocating its factories to Vietnam in the past, but such re-labelling may result in punitive measures.

"It is not worth the risk, we should be careful. Besides, there is no domestic value addition in such cases," states Kharel.

Nepal has a trade deficit with the US of Rs7.64 billion, which is probably why Trump has not increased tariffs on Nepal's exports to more than 10%. Nepal's main exports to the US are ready-made garments, dog chews and carpets. Nepal had preferential market access to the US, but did not take much advantage of it.

"Nepal's garment export to the US stands at Rs2 billion, and we could try to increase production and export more to take advantage of relatively lower tariffs, but reaching production worth Rs10 billion is not practical and Nepal does not have the capacity either," says Pandey.

Furthermore, if Nepal increases exports to the US and creates a trade surplus, it may raise eyebrows in Washington and Nepal could be slapped with higher tariffs if Trump is still around.

In a modern multilateral world, Donald Trump has pressed ahead unilaterally, using tariffs to arm-twist allies to get all kinds of concessions, even those not related to trade. Trump thinks he is doing this to protect the domestic US industry, but it is already backfiring with higher domestic consumer prices.

Adds Pandey, "Trump has used the tariffs as a Swiss Army knife to cut through everything. The tariffs are used as an instrument for national security, to increase investment and even to end conflict."

Trump claimed he initiated the ceasefire between India and Pakistan over their recent conflict by threatening both countries with tariffs. New Delhi denied Trump's claims, while Pakistan acknowledged his role, even nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

REGIONAL HEGEMON

"India had wanted to establish itself as a regional hegemon by aligning itself to the West," says Paras Kharel, executive director at South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics, and Environment (SAWTEE). But



WIKIMEDIA

the tariff tiff with India may have thrown that strategy off kilter.

Most countries use diplomatic channels to resolve existing trade issues. However, Trump has chosen the path of coercive diplomacy, which was seen in his response to issues like migration and the use of veto power at the United Nations.

India is the world's third largest consumer of oil, with Russia accounting for 30% of the country's oil imports. Russia was also the largest arms supplier for India, but that has decreased in recent times, as India shifted towards the US, Israel and France.

India is the largest arms importer in the world, and is

making more and more purchases from American manufacturers of weapons systems. But India has already retaliated by cancelling planned imports of military equipment from the US.

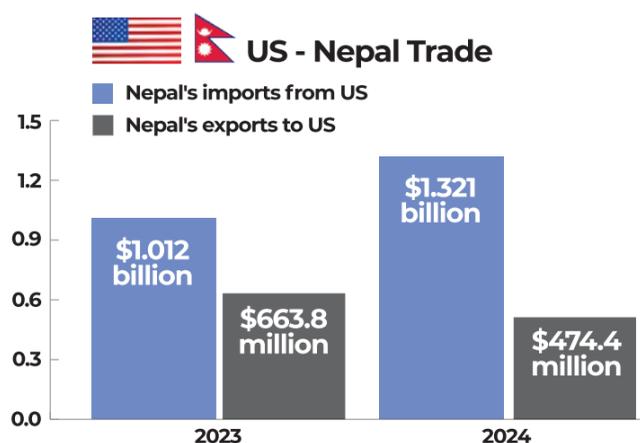
Uncertainty looms large as Trump's volatile flip-flopping upends global trade. The unpredictability was underlined by Trump extending his tariff truce for China by 90 days, saying Beijing "has been dealing with it nicely". The tariff threat on Indian exports could also be similarly postponed if New Delhi appeases Trump with compromises.

But Modi seems in no mood to give up India's national interest,

especially by allowing American agricultural imports. Modi is all set to visit China for the first time in seven years for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit on 31 August in Tianjin.

This could signify the beginning of a major realignment in geopolitical alliances in the Asia-Pacific. Nepal is a small player, but when India and China are buffeted by global turbulence, it will rock Nepal as well.

Nepal therefore needs to boost trade capacity to take advantage of new opportunities. Says Pandey, "Nepal needs to diversify its exports, find new markets and seek alternative finance sources." 🇳🇵



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The sisterhood of the snow leopard protectors

Film by and about women dedicated to saving Dolpo's endangered cats



Kunda Dixit

One of the most powerful recent examples of hyperlocal conservation in the Himalaya is the effort by two sisters from Dolpo, Tshiring Lhamu Lama and Sonam Choekyi Lama, to protect Nepal's snow leopards.

Their decade-long work to save the endangered and elusive Himalayan cat in this distant district in Nepal is now featured in a compelling new documentary.

The Snow Leopard Sisters has been doing the rounds of film festivals in North America to critical acclaim since its world premiere at SXSW in Austin in March, and has been screened at Telluride and other festivals.

The documentary received praise for its multi-layered depiction of the struggle between ecology and economics, tradition and modernity, indigenous and mainstream, spiritualism and materialism, between gender equality and patriarchy, and conservation vs livelihoods.

The sisters in The Snow Leopard Sisters are actually not Tshiring Lhamu and Sonam Choekyi. Tshiring is the documentary's main protagonist, and her sister Sonam co-directed the film.

Sisters refers to Tshiring Lhamu and 17-year-old Tenzin Bhuti, whom she takes on as an apprentice for snow leopard research in Upper Dolpo. Tenzin's women-led household had just lost 40 of its goats to a snow leopard attack, and Tshiring knows that snow leopards cannot be saved unless the Dolpopa learn to live

with the cats.

The nocturnal predators have this cruel habit of entering livestock corrals and killing for the sake of killing many more goats and yaks than they can possibly eat. But snow leopards are also regarded as sacred 'pets of the gods' in the Buddhist regions of northern Nepal.

There are only about 400 snow leopards in Nepal, 90 of them in Shey-Phoksundo National Park in Dolpo where their numbers are shrinking because of retaliatory poisoning by herders to protect livestock and climate breakdown.

Ever since she was growing

up, Tshiring harboured a spiritual affinity for snow leopards. At the beginning of the film, we see Tshiring playing back a camera trap clip of the trail above Phoksundo in which a pair of snow leopards ambles past the field of vision.

She lets out an ecstatic shriek, and narrates: "The first time I saw snow leopards, I fell in love." Tshiring quit her job with the national park and struck off on her lonely quest to find ways to save the cats from people.

The film follows a parallel plot of Tenzin, who has just lost a sister she was close to, the family's goat

herd has been massacred by snow leopards, and her father is jailed. She is under pressure from her grandfather to get married "because it is our culture and karma".

The stories of the two women then converge: Tshiring Lhamu takes Tenzin Bhuti under her wing as a trainee. Because her family is angry with snow leopards, it will help if Tshiring can convince Tenzin about the importance of conservation, which she can then pass on to her community.

But the family gives Tenzin a two-week ultimatum, she will have to get married to a cousin after the

apprenticeship is over.

Directors Ben Ayers, Andrew Lynch and Sonam Choekyi Lama have used Dolpo's stunning landscape as a backdrop for a nuanced and sensitive portrayal of the bond between Tenzin and Tshiring, who carried her baby son Sontse strapped to her back.

There are spectacular drone shots of the three as they cross high passes to Komang and Shey Gumpa. The cinematography evokes the sweeping scenery of films shot in Dolpo like Éric Valli's 1999 documentary Caravan, and Min Bham's Shambhala last year.

Youth action to protect the

Nepal's student-led wildlife conservation in mountain communities

Durga Rana Magar in Mustang

Milan BK is busy installing camera traps, checking its GPS location and peering through binoculars at outcrops on the other side of the valley for signs of snow leopard movement.

BK is 15 years old and still in school, but he handles the tracking equipment like a pro. He is a member of the conservation group from Thini village in the shadow of Mt Niligiri in Mustang.

Sonia BK is in Grade 7 at the Janwal Secondary School in nearby Marpha, and learnt about snow leopards in class, and is now being trained with her parents in tracking and monitoring the elusive and endangered animals.

"At first, I thought snow leopards were just cats, but after I started learning about their behaviour and habitat in school, I realised why it was important to protect them," she says.

Milan and Sonia were part of a snow leopard conservation program involving 750 students from Grades 6, 7, and 8 in schools across Mustang and in Taplejung district



SHANSHUIARCHIVE

in eastern Nepal.

Their fieldbook was the Conservation Education Reference Book published by Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Teka Group Nepal and the US-based Snow Leopard Conservancy.

"The book helps teach students

about conservation, involves the community in conservation activities, and enables them to value coexistence between humans and wildlife," says author Anil Adhikari of Teka.

He adds, "The students will grow up to be the guardians of the community, enabling them

to understand the importance of conservation from a young age will have long-term benefits for the protection of snow leopards."

The young conservationists are now putting their theoretical knowledge into practice by participating in the Snow Leopard Scouts Monitoring Camp and Snow



Leopard Nature Tour organised across 12 communities in the cat's habitats in Mustang and Taplejung.

Snow leopards live on steep slopes at elevations from 3,000-5,500m and are found in 12 countries besides Nepal: India, Bhutan, Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, and Russia (map, above).

The government's census earlier this year put the number of big cat population in Nepal at 397.

The animal is at the top of the Himalayan food chain and therefore an indicator species of a healthy ecosystem. Their presence indicates that their prey base, including sables, ghoral and musk deer are also in abundance.

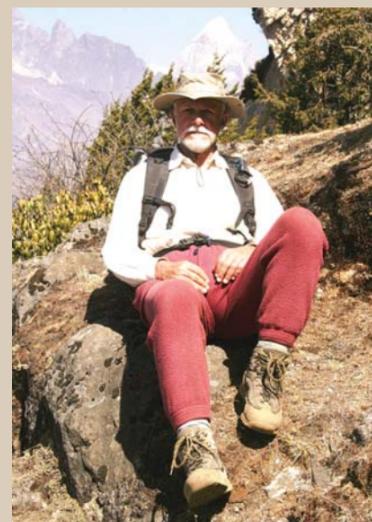
The mainly nocturnal hunters



SHANSHUI ARCHIVE

What future for snow leopards?

Beyond peacemeal initiatives to action to save snow leopards



F FERRETTI

Sandro Lovari has led research expeditions on large mammals in Nepal and around the world for 50 years. He has been associated with the University of Cambridge UK, University of Groningen, Stockholm University, and Peking University. He has chaired the Steering Committee of the Snow Leopard Network since 2020. Nepali Times recently caught up with Lovari for an interview. Excerpts of the conversation:

Nepali Times: What is the ecological importance of snow leopards?

Sandro Lovari: Recent data show that predators are quite important not only to influence the spatial behaviour, but also the population dynamics of mountain ungulates. The snow leopard, as the main predator of bharal (naur), ibex and Himalayan tahr, plays the important ecological role of a top-down regulator of the populations of these herbivores, for example through differential age and sex predation patterns.

Is the present information enough to help devise appropriate conservation measures?

Adequate protection of habitat comes first, but detailed information on ecological and behavioural issues is also quite important to plan conservation initiatives. Even the issue on its assumed territoriality has not been fully clarified yet.

The regulatory mechanisms of snow leopard populations, the predator-prey relationships and the snow leopard interactions with potentially competing predators are still unknown. In the last decade, most papers were based on camera-trapping to draw conclusions on snow leopard-wild prey-livestock relationships.

These studies have wrongly assumed that snow leopards and ungulates have the same probabilities to be detected by camera traps. The worst possible approach is to fragment funding into local exercises, with the aim of catching a few snow leopards, to fit them with radio-tags without appropriate research questions in mind, but only to gain visibility in the mass media. This would be deleterious for the conservation of the snow leopard, wasting money, time and credibility, eventually reaching no sensible goal.

How do you assess Nepal's achievements in protecting snow leopard habitats?

I would say that the snow leopards of Nepal are doing fine. In fact, steps have been made to improve the tolerance of locals for this magnificent large cat, thanks to the action of several dedicated people and NGOs.

If I may provide a few suggestions: develop a well organised procedure to prevent and refund damage to livestock, develop a routine of annual or biennial counts of wild prey, at least within protected areas, using a robust count method, monitor the consequences of the ongoing thermal anomaly, be it a meteorological or a climatic one, on plants at higher elevations which is food for wild prey, and remain open to cooperation with experts, even from foreign countries.

two scouring the horizon through binoculars. Tshiring mentors Tenzin in tracking, sniffing urinary markers, deciphering fresh scat, finding fur stuck to rocks, and installing cameras.

Tshiring Lhamu and Tenzin Bhuti pin their hope on monks, hoping that they can convince their congregation not to kill the predators. But in Shey-Saldang, monk Tondup Lama tells the two women the snow leopard is a "demon, possessed by the devil ... it has only sin in its heart".

GOOD KARMA

The women and baby press on over the 5,010m Shey Pass to where head monk Lopan Dawa Tenzin in Tsakang Monastery has declared Dolpo a haven for all animals.

"Everywhere people are violating the rights of animals, we destroy forests, we hunt, we set fires, fight wars, and drive animals away," the monk says. "People have too much greed."

It is karma that has brought the two women together, he tells them, and their karma is now intertwined with the karma of the snow leopard.

As the two-week internship nears its end, the prospect of marriage looms for Tenzin. But the time with Tshiring has empowered her: she is now more confident and determined not to get married. She

visits her father in prison in Dunai, and for once he does not insist on marriage anymore.

In an abrupt change of scenery, we see Tshiring walking down a street in San Francisco with Sontse in a baby carrier on her back. Instead of towering mountains there are skyscrapers, and mother and son visit a sad snow leopard in the zoo. Tshiring is speaking at a Wildlife Conservation Network conference, and fundraising for her work in Dolpo.

Her Snow Leopard Sisters Impact Campaign is building new leopard-proof corrals designed by Tshiring and Tenzin for herders in Dolpo made by assembling light weight metal frames and gabion wire.

This feature-length documentary needs to be screened in cinemas across Nepal not just to spread awareness about snow leopards, but the essence of what nature conservations means for a society marching mindlessly in the pursuit of 'development'. 🇳🇵



Snow Leopard Sisters
90 min
Cinematography: Sonam Choekyi Lama, Ben Ayers, Andrew Lynch
Producers: Joanna Natasagara, Ian Davies, Tshiring Lhamu Lama, Torquil Jones

the wilderness



are endangered due to increasing human-wildlife conflict, poaching, and effects of the climate crisis. In response, Nepal launched the Community-Based Snow Leopard Conservation Program in 2022.

"The children might get bored with regular lessons, but they study this reference book with great interest," notes Dhruba Baral, a conservation teacher at Janashanti Secondary School in Kagbeni. "The students are aware that snow leopards attack livestock, but there is now greater awareness about safely corralling yaks and sheep, as well as protect snow leopards."

Bheshraj Bastola, a conservation teacher at Janhit Secondary School in Jomsom takes students on field trips to see

how to minimise human-wildlife conflict, and the role of the community.

"Students understand these issues through factual stories from conservationists and experts, community work and interactions with parents," he says.

Sanju Sanwa, a Grade 8 student in Taplejung, learned about snow leopard conservation from books. Now, she teaches her parents about protecting the big cats.

"The children in this region have never seen or encountered a snow leopard, but they know about its habitat, diet, and behaviour," says Chandramani Limbu, a school principal in Taplejung.

Mustang's Gharpajhong Rural Municipality has now included snow leopards in the curricula for Grades 1, 2 and 3. Taplejung's Faktalung Rural Municipality has done the same in the east.

Snow leopards are considered culturally and spiritually significant to Nepal's indigenous mountain communities, and are regarded as 'God's pets'. This has helped in conservation efforts.

The indigenous communities in the Himalaya were already bound by tradition and religion to protect snow leopards, the conservation laws came along much later, says snow leopard expert Kamal Thapa.

"The people understand that the snow leopard is a vital part of the ecosystem, and have taken ownership of the animal and its protection," adds Thapa.

Recently, a snow leopard broke into a livestock shed and killed

goats in Mustang. The animal was captured and reintroduced into the wild by Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA).

"Snow leopards are usually rescued and released elsewhere," explains Umesh Poudel, head of ACA in Lo Manthang. "We operate under the assumption that the animals will not be similarly disruptive in a new area."

Snow leopards have been trapped or poisoned by local herders. Some animals also venture into lower valleys in winter in search of prey.

"Farmers used to get angry when livestock was killed, but there is now more awareness that the predators need protection," says Jamuna Thakali Thapa, vice-chair of Gharpajhong. Farmers are also insured so they are compensated in case of livestock loss.

The deeply devout Buddhists here rarely engage in retaliatory attacks against snow leopards because they consider the animal sacred, and also because they are well aware of legal repercussions.

"Learning about snow leopards from childhood makes more people inclined towards conservation, and has a long-term positive impact on the community," says Narayan Rupakheti, former Under Secretary at the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation.

The youth-led conservation programs in Mustang and Taplejung is now being replicated in other snow leopard regions. 🇳🇵



Events



Theatre

The play Awarti at Mandala invites the audience to experience the fate of humanity and the soul's inevitable path, with each having its own ultimate destination.

15 August, 5:30pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun

Powerlifting Champions

Asia's strongest powerlifters will put on a showcase of strength and sportsmanship that will have the audience on the edge of their seat.

15-17 August, 8:30am onwards, Ticket:Rs1,000, Nepal Police Club, Bhrikutimandap



Divine Realm

Explore sacred forms and philosophical dualities in Newar and Hindu-Buddhist traditions at this solo art exhibition by Manish Dhoju.

Till 30 August, 11am-6pm (Tuesday-Thursday) / 11am-7pm (Friday-Sunday), Takpa Gallery

Stand-up comedy

Showcase will bring together six new comics on one stage with seven minutes each, with the audience deciding the winner.

16 August, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, AmPm Jhamel Pub



Trail running

KTM Peak Trail aims to make trail running an inclusive grassroots sport in Kathmandu. Lace up your shoes and hit the trails.

16 August, 7am onwards, Fee: Rs500, Taudaha Lake

Movie night

'Bollywood and Chill' is raising funds for a cause with its movie night. This weekend, go with friends or family to watch Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara.

16 August, 1:30pm onwards, Ticket: Rs125, ClubHouse, Siphel



Art exhibition

Chering Gurung's solo exhibition brings tales from his homeland, Dolpo, to life through vivid, expressive canvases. The extended exhibition ends in a few days.

Till 17 August, 11am-8pm, The Kala Salon, Chhaya Center Mall, Thamel



Music

Anil Singh

Celebrate rock music as Anil Singh and the Black Hawk Band perform powerful tributes, new tracks. An after-party awaits the audience as well.

16 August, 8pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, XO Club



John Rai & co

John Chamling Rai is bringing his soulful vocals and band The Locals to the stage at Kritipur Music Fest. Line-up includes Samir Shrestha and The Hulaki. Get early bird tickets at Khalti.

23 August, 4pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Chobhar



Pine Canopy

Pine Canopy is set to for a genre-defying night of performance with Alterverse, featuring Jotma, 5150, and H.Y.U.

16 August, 6pm onwards, Ticket: Rs400, Titos Thamel

Live Music

Make your weekend memorable with an evening of live acoustic tunes with Prazil Shakya.

15 August, 5pm onwards, SUKULASA, Madhyapur Thimi



The Elements

The musical trio is back to perform, this time at Serenade Sessions. Listen to their soul-stirring alternative rock sound live.

22 August, Ticket: Rs700, Taragaon Next



Getaway



Staycation @ Aloft

Enjoy a stylish urban escape designed for Nepali nationals and expats. Experience a one-night stay in a Loft Room, breakfast and dinner at Nook, four complimentary cocktails at Nylgiri rooftop, 20% off spa treatments at RE:VIVE, full-day rooftop pool access, and flexible check-in/out.

Price: Rs14,999 (for two), Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976065

Kasara

Kasara Chitwan is the ideal retreat, featuring villas with private water-garden courtyards. Enjoy exciting guided activities like jeep and elephant safaris, canoe rides, birdwatching, and more.

Bharatpur, 9801249337

Riverside Springs Resort

Set beside the peaceful Trishuli River, Riverside features cosy twin-bed cabins, a welcoming restaurant with views of a swimming pool, and access to a sandy river beach.

Kurintar (01) 5444263



Raniban Retreat

Raniban offers a tranquil haven just a short trek from the World Peace Pagoda. With well-designed rooms featuring panoramic views of the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri ranges, it is the perfect spot to unwind and reconnect with nature.

Pokhara, 9841218466

Hotel Baha

This boutique hotel offers a fusion of traditional architecture and modern comforts. Guests can enjoy an on-site restaurant and café serving a variety of local and international dishes, and relax after exploring the beauty of Bhaktapur.

Bhaktapur (01) 6616810



Dining

Tij at Aloft

This Tij, celebrate the spirit of womanhood at Aloft with its specially curated "दर to Go" takeaway boxes. Pre-order four hours in advance and pick up orders from Nook. Explore their festive menu for on-site dining, with live food stations, a welcome drink, and decadent desserts. Call for prices.

Till 25 August, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976054



Roomali Ghar

With kebabs, curries, fulfilling biryanis, and their signature roomali roti, Roomali Ghar brings authentic North Indian flavours to your plate.

Gairidhara, 9741803195

Bajeko Sekuwa

This timeless Nepali food chain offers authentic flavours with a menu featuring smoky grilled meats, like varieties of sekuwa, timur chicken, as well as hearty thali sets.

Baluwatar (01) 4547052

Fire and Ice

Fire and Ice is back in Thamel after a makeover, but with the same mouthwatering flavours. Enjoy its wide variety of pizzas, creamy pasta, and refreshing drinks.

Thamel (01) 5350210

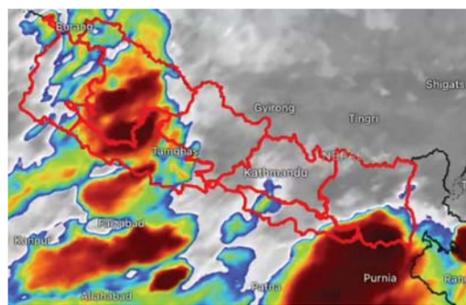


The Workshop Eatery

Workshop is the go-to fast-casual spot for dining and takeaways. Try its Nashville Hot Chicken Burger, or go for their signature donuts and creamy milkshakes if you have a sweet tooth.

Bakhundole, 9860431504

Weekend Weather



Breathe Easy

The monsoon is now in its ripe middle age, and moisture-laden clouds are coming in waves from the east. The pattern of night rain with drizzles during the day between sunny spells will continue into next week. Another pulse of rain is expected over the weekend with heavy bursts mainly in the early hours in Kathmandu Valley. All this cloud cover will keep the temperature in the 25-27 Celsius range, although it may get hot and sticky when the sun comes out. And the rain has washed down the pollution, so breathe easy.



Our Pick

Joe Barton's 2025 British spy action thriller tv series follows Helen, the wife of the British Defence Secretary, who in reality works for the titular Black Doves, a private espionage outfit that acquires industrial, political and diplomatic secrets for the highest bidder. When Helen's lover is murdered by members of the London underworld and her secret identity threatened, her agency sends in Sam, an old friend of Helen's, to protect her. Stars Keira Knightley, Ben Whishaw, and Sarah Lancashire. Available to stream on Netflix.

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

Digital verification of traditional art

New initiative uses blockchain to archive and track Nepal's thangka and paubha across the world

Vishad Raj Onta

Traditional thangka and paubha painters spend months hunched in small rooms making meticulous pieces of devotional art that follow ancient canons and style.

These are not starving artists hoping to make it big, but professionals who have trained for years under strict rules and masters.

They set a standard price that reflects three months' wages in Nepal. Local and foreign buyers visit the studios regularly, to acquire the pieces to keep or sell. That is often the last the artists see of their work -- they do not know where in the world it has gone, or how many times it has changed hands and for what prices.

This can be a problem because traditional art is often unsigned, so artists go unrecognised. Collectors and galleries may also be hesitant to buy or exhibit a piece if they cannot say for sure where it came from.

This is an even bigger problem in thangka and paubha because making pristine copies of the works of masters is not seen as forgery or a violation of intellectual property, but as a test of their ability to adhere to sacred tenets.

"When senior masters paint a piece, and photos of it get out, it gets copied immediately. I have heard stories of collectors selling these copies as if they were the original," says Thimi-based artist Sundar Shrestha, who switched from contemporary art to paubha.

The Kathmandu-based Himalayan Art Council is now trying to resolve the issues of ownership and provenance of traditional Nepali art by building a cutting-edge system that issues a tamper-proof digital certificate to each artwork.

The system tracks each time there is a transaction involving the piece, and provides a royalty to the artist. In doing so, the system also creates a detailed inventory of Nepal's traditional artforms, which will prove valuable for future scholars or repatriation efforts.

THE TEAM

Behind this initiative is a team with activist-entrepreneur Sean Howell, curator and museologist Meena Lama, Mercantile CEO Sanjib Rajbhandari, and blockchain expert Bijay Bogati.

Howell has a background in finance, the tech world and social communication. He has been art commissioner for Seattle, and knows all about blockchains, the technology underpinning this art initiative.

"I saw that there were many people working in art preservation in Nepal, and that current, living artists were facing problems," explains Howell. He recognised that these problems had already been solved elsewhere in the world. "This technology is a low-cost, high-value solution that ensures artists receive fair value for their work while also establishing a digital archive of Nepali art."

"Trust is paramount for collectors," adds Howell. "Thangka art has high market value globally that is not reflected in local transactions due to the opaque nature of its sales."

Building the actual system is a team of software engineers that works out of the Mercantile office in Kathmandu, led by Bijay Bogati. Bogati transitioned to blockchain in 2019 after working with Khalti as a founding engineer, and held remote senior software engineer



positions for German and US-based companies.

"The most interesting part of this project is how a futuristic technology is being used in Nepal to create a digital ledger of this huge legacy of traditional artists and art," says the soft-spoken Bogati.

Holding together the whole operation is Meena Lama, curator and museologist with a background in Buddhist studies. She says, "While there is a commercial side to this project, more importantly it helps digitally archive traditional Himalayan art to make it easier to study."

Lama is curating a collection to kickstart the project. Fifty significant pieces of thangka and paubha were selected from artists, certified at no cost, and displayed at the Patan Museum in an introductory exhibit last month.

Lama's connection to the art world and Bogati's blockchain expertise have been important to get artists to buy in to the project.

"Initially, other artists and I were a little skeptical," admits Sundar Shrestha. "But I had worked with Meena on exhibits before, and Bijay's grasp of the tech put me to ease and made me quite excited."

THE TECH

In the big picture, 'Web3' is a movement that is regarded as the next evolution of the internet which aims to devolve power over many users, giving them more say in identity, online interactions, and transactions.

The key concept for the Himalayan Art Council's Web3 project is blockchain, a technology without central authority that records transactions in a way that is both secure and transparent.

Each transaction is a 'block', and is linked mathematically to the transaction that happened before it to create a 'chain' of computers. Altering details of any one transaction causes a cascading reaction requiring all computers that come after it to agree, thus preventing tampering and fraud.

This has applications in currency, healthcare, voting systems and more. There are also blockchain contracts, which are coded to execute automatically after a certain time period, or after stipulated conditions are met. The blockchain creates and enforces trust between peers while still being secure, and without relying on a central or third party authority.

Himalayan Art Council will take data about the painting: authorship, high-resolution images, chain of ownership, transaction history and feed it into an algorithm that creates a 'hash', or a unique identifier for that particular piece. This hash then is turned into a QR code included on the art. Anyone can then scan the code to check the piece's history and legitimacy.

"This removes the need to trust an authority about the originality of any thangka or paubha, which can turn off international buyers," says Bogati. "The system also assigns value to Himalayan art, and is a more dignified way to sell art than say an e-commerce site."

A key feature is that every time the piece is resold, the original artist can opt to automatically receive royalties worth up to 10% of the value, and can choose whether this money goes directly to their family, a trust, a monastery.

Bogati points out a key caveat: "Blockchain is not just about cryptocurrency transactions which are not legal in Nepal anyway, so to make this system work without the government getting involved, we are using blockchain only to record

and verify and assign more value to Himalayan art."

Bogati acknowledges that once crypto is legalised in Nepal, the system could be migrated to a public blockchain, particularly if the value of Himalayan art rises globally and attracts a large number of international buyers.

THE ARTISTS

Sundar Shrestha says the Himalayan Art Council initiative inspires hope especially because it is finally about paying royalties.

"This is a new concept in traditional art," says Shrestha, who notes that his Newa artist forebears painted their whole life, often with no recognition and remuneration.

Over the lifetime of a body of work through multiple re-sales, the royalty system could make traditional art more worthwhile as a profession, and get more Nepali artists to take it up.

Shrestha admits that traditional systems also have merits, and will not go away soon: "Artists are focused on their work, because they have to be. Collectors and sellers understand art markets in Nepal and abroad much better, and they bring in regular work that gives us an income."

The Himalayan Art Council's digital initiative would also remove the taboo regarding talking about the price of traditional art. Says Shrestha: "The general sentiment is that paubha are sacred and should be a meditation and a discipline, and that artists are not in it for commercial reasons." 🇳🇵

DS GROUP

रोजुघोस् मास्टरप्रेफ सल्लोष साठको

उत्कृष्ट स्वादको रहस्य

उत्कृष्ट श्रोतबाट चुनिएको

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अब नेपालमा उपलब्ध छ!

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The power of one

A Nepali helping fellow Nepalis get better overseas jobs is awarded in Qatar



DIASPORA
DIARIES 71

This is the 71st episode of Diaspora Diaries, a Nepali Times series in collaboration with Migration Lab providing a platform to share experiences of living, working and studying abroad.

Yasmeen Naaz

The pressure to get married already started when I was 16, but my parents were very open-minded and wanted me to focus on my studies.

At 23, while working for Kingfisher, I got married. The Qatar-based Nepali man was a good match. I left work, but had to wait to join my husband because the paperwork was not easy. A minimum monthly salary of QAR10,000 (\$2,750) was required to sponsor family members.

While waiting, I gave birth to my daughter and we left for Qatar when she was about six months old in 2013. I did not know what to expect.

Soon, I started being anxious about being a stay at home mother

and wife. I already had a job in Nepal, and staying home all day was making me dull.

I had found a job at Qatar Airways while I was still in Nepal. But due to a change in management, it did not work out and was taking too much time.

An Indian acquaintance referred me to a newly established training centre for a receptionist job. Nepalis were viewed as suitable just for low-paid work and not for supervisors or receptionists. I had a good salary of QR2500 (\$680).

My manager had a similar image about Nepalis, but once he observed my work, he was so impressed that within 10 days he made me handle administrative and account sections.

I was reluctant because I knew nothing about accounts. He said I just needed to update an excel sheet, and offered to mentor me.

I enjoyed the independence that my job and the earnings gave me. Within a year, I was promoted to assistant operations manager, and in the next four years, I almost ran the company on my own.

If you have a good boss, you can achieve a lot. The freedom he gave me taught me how to deal with corporate clients, obtain international certifications, and learn about the training needed in construction, hospitality and other sectors.

I started getting noticed in the training industry in Qatar and built a strong network with our client



base. After five years, I left the job but I used to get calls from other companies with offers to help out, even when I was pregnant.

I used to attend meetings even in my ninth month. In all these stints, I had important roles but something or the other would not work out — an overbearing management or the company not delivering results.

These professional worries combined with a family problem took a toll on my mental health. On my doctor's advice, my husband and I decided that I should go to Nepal to clear my head. Maybe a change of scenery would do me good.

Leaving behind my husband, I came home with my children but was not my usual bubbly self. I had become quiet and gloomy. The move did not help much, and I kept worrying about my children's education which was affected by the move. I decided to go back, but this time with a stronger mindset.

I started working part time, but was just not satisfied. I was not sure I could work under someone any longer, and as a Nepali I doubted if I would be offered a leadership position anywhere. I shared this with my husband, who suggested I start a company on my own.

As a Nepali woman in a foreign land, it would be difficult. But despite not having any money, I decided to give it a go.

My husband helped with the company's registration: QST

Real migration stories on



Labour Mobility
Upasana Khadka

TikTok has come under scrutiny for misuse as a platform for recruiting Nepalis into the Russian Army, or promoting irregular migration.

One prevailing narrative on migration is that workers just post pictures in front of, say, Petronas or the Burj Khalifa that glamorises their lives overseas, which can mislead folks back in Nepal. This is further fueled by brokers who over-promise and deceive workers.

TikTok is different. The video-based app is unparalleled in its portrayal of the reality of migrant lives. Whether it is a Qatar-based Nepali camel herder who lives in the desert, a domestic worker in Oman who shares her life with fellow domestic workers from Nigeria, Burma and Bangladesh, or a farmhand knee deep in a water spinach field in Korea, TikTok provides a window to the daily lives of migrant workers as is.

With live commentary covering the good and bad, the posts are filled with humour, insights and creativity. And it is in the mundane that viewers become invested and aspirants learn more about lives overseas. The platform also allows mini-influencers to feel more connected digitally, as overseas jobs



especially in domestic work and agriculture can be isolating.

The videos are also a refreshing contrast from how migration is portrayed in movies or songs, or the mainstream media. Workers who pick up their phones and film their daily lives or thoughts, raw and unscripted, present migration in all its complexity, not with a binary lens of good or bad.

Migration is such a human centric topic that there are conversations, encounters, talent or moments that stay with us, tug at our hearts that we want to archive, share and revisit. TikTok allows that, and perhaps that is why we at Migration Lab are so invested in the platform, even though it is time-consuming and not monetised.

Our first TikTok post was

by a Malaysia-bound poet from Jajarkot who recited a poem that he had composed on the go at the airport. A migration song that another worker from the same recruitment drive sang has been reused over 2,300 times. A returnee explaining why everyone should migrate at least once has generated a huge response, as did a father bidding farewell to his UK-

bound son at the airport from his duty in Qatar.

Stories on TikTok are miniature versions of the Diaspora Diaries series in this newspaper, and is formatted for today's attention span.

Indeed, retaining viewers is tough in this fast-paced platform where views really do not amount to much on their own. What TikTok rewards most, we learn, is





Training and Consultancy. I got an office space, and it was just as I had imagined. Even though the rent was three times more than what I was able to pay, the landlord offered me two months free rent. I had 60 days to make it.

I hired one staff on a commission basis, and our client base grew. With each payment, I bought an additional sofa or a desk, or set up my classroom.

Within two months, I had a fully functioning office with international certifications, and two-and-half years later we are doing well thanks to the network I had collected over the years.

I have always had a soft spot for fellow Nepalis, especially those in low paid jobs. There was untapped potential due to lack of guidance.

SELF-IMPROVEMENT

I advised them to get certifications which can help with promotions. Nepalis are reticent about asking for raises despite being capable and having the required experience and skills. They needed more confidence and proper communication skills.

Previously, as an employee myself, I was not able to help other Nepalis much. But now as a company owner, I have helped 500 Nepalis get free training and internationally-recognised certifications. I remind them to invest in their skills development while in Qatar itself.

In Nepal, rather than providing free training that is not recognised elsewhere, it is important to have internationally accredited certifications. It costs money, but is a good investment because trainees can benefit from higher wages.

This is not just about sending a more skilled workforce from Nepal to the Gulf or elsewhere.

There are so many talented Nepalis overseas who will return sooner or later. What is waiting for them in Nepal when they go back? This should be an issue of biggest national concern.

Sometimes, a little nudge can go a long way. And being a part of the stories of the progress of fellow Nepalis through my company makes me proud. Nepali trainees feel connected to home because it is run by someone from Nepal.

I have now started a Toastmasters club for midlevel Nepali job holders so they can improve their managerial skills through better communication, confidence and leadership.

Talent is often not sufficient if a person cannot communicate well. The club helps people overcome such constraints so they can improve with practice, exposure and determination. Helping Nepali youth find their spark fuels me in ways nothing else can.

Perhaps it was watching my mother and father back help others that instilled in me a commitment to public service. They have been a source of inspiration for me.

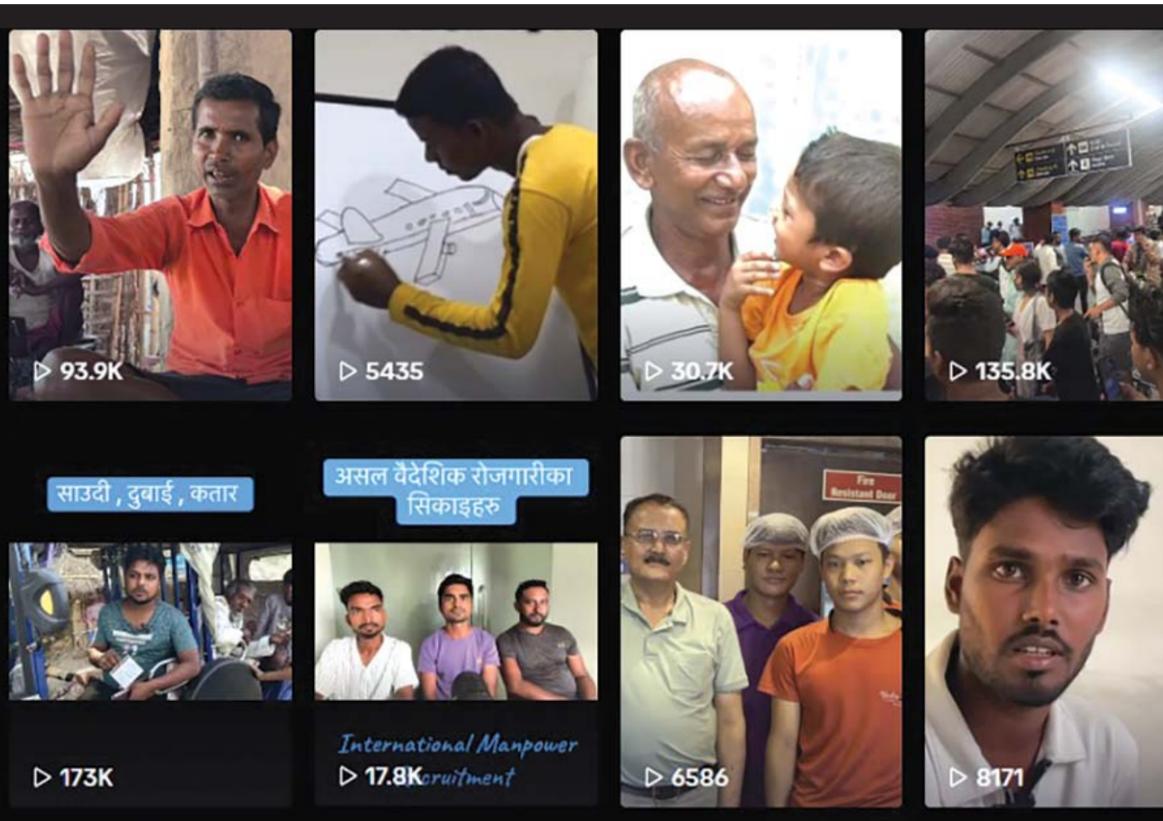
I was recently conferred the prestigious Qatar CSR Award, and my company QST has been awarded the Best Center globally twice by the UK-based qualifications body, Highfield.

This makes me proud because I am not just representing myself, but my country. Along the way, I am helping change the perception of Nepalis as professionals and leaders in the international job market. This also changes the way Nepalis themselves look at migrants in the Gulf, compared to those who work in the US or Europe.

When I first went to Qatar almost 12 years ago, I thought I would be a stay-at-home wife. I made sure life turned out differently. 🇶🇦

TikTok

How to leverage the platform to promote better overseas jobs, and shape positive narratives



reliability. If you can see yourself, your values or your experiences reflected in what you are watching, you are more likely to stay longer and engage more.

But ideally, that same relatability can also serve as inspiration to encourage someone to aim higher. If a seasoned migrant's story resonates with viewers because of shared experiences like

starting their overseas stints at low-wage positions, then what they have achieved despite the odds might also feel within reach.

Stories of migrant upward mobility, successful returnee entrepreneurs, and lessons learnt overseas can be useful for others. How can people like Yasmeen Naaz (see above), Shanti Bhandari who drives a double-decker tourist

bus in Dubai, or Raju Pakhrin who returned to Nepal to run a successful bakery, inspire more people to be bolder to reach their potential?

ETHICAL JOURNEY

Nepalis seeking jobs overseas often do not believe that ethical opportunities exist — they fear being scammed or left stranded abroad.

Our research with the ethical

recruiter partner International Manpower Recruitment (IMR) shows that most believe that only those with privileged connections can migrate without being cheated.

But research also shows that perceptions can change, especially if there is a trusted person in the network who has been ethically recruited. If used correctly, TikTok can be a second-best alternative to personal networks by directing those seeking overseas jobs to ethical channels.

Repetition and relatability can alleviate the mistrust migrants have towards ethical recruitment practices, and TikTok content can show migrant workers that responsible recruiters do exist.

But there are limitations. Brokers that we encourage workers to bypass also have access to the same platform, or are in their proximity. Even when workers do pay high fees, they have been made to sign documents or even make videos saying they have not paid. How not to be dismissed as just another fly-by-night is a challenge.

Nagendra Kumar Sah was recently recruited by IMR, and told us that he was initially skeptical of video testimonies on TikTok about ethical recruitment, but the comment section helped him build trust. Candidates who speak on camera may have been coerced to do so, but the comments pouring in from all over the world can share experiences about how much was paid and to whom. Such unsolicited feedback in the comments section can be powerful reviews of recruiters or employers.

Intentionally opening the 'room' for discussion to counter the disbelief and mistrust has sometimes worked for our TikTok account. The platform can also help understand public sentiments better. Awareness raising on its own does not amount to much, though. Knowing about ethical recruitment does not necessarily

improve a migrant's situation if the only available overseas jobs require a hefty fee.

Workers who pay Rs400,000, even when they know better face the same debt traps and diminished returns as those who do not. And the already small number of ethical drives in Nepal have shrunk significantly after Malaysia closed its doors to foreign workers.

In an ideal world, if there was a critical mass of zero or low cost recruitment opportunities in the market, our social media efforts would have been more interesting because we could then try to generate upward pressure from workers so they only select the best opportunities and agencies. Already, there are some workers who waited for ethical recruitment without applying for jobs that required fees.

In the current climate in which employers themselves do not abide by the employer-pays principle, the best we can hope for is that it at least makes people a little intentional and mindful while choosing their migration journey — think twice, do research, explore all avenues and not blindly rely on fraudulent middlemen.

The Migration Lab TikTok account recently hit the 100,000 followers milestone. The platform is wildly unpredictable: one of our early videos that was quickly put together on a phone took off, and far outperformed carefully edited posts.

We want to be more intentional about leveraging the platform to promote good migration, shape thoughtful narratives and tell good stories without being too serious about it lest the TikTok algorithm picks up on it, and punishes us. 🇶🇦

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.



Sudiksha Tuladhar

Hip-hop as a way of life

Nepali rapper OMG Spark connects music with heritage and culture

"I was exposed to Nepali and Newari culture and heritage since childhood, so linking my music to it made sense," Shrestha, famously known as OMG Spark, told us after a recent performance in Patan for 20 Canadian exchange students.

"Every song has some Newari words, so young people who do not understand it can go back and try to learn it. I aim to incorporate more languages in my songs to reach out to a larger audience," he adds.

Traditional instruments such as sitar, sarangi, dhime, and bhusyah are integral to Shrestha's music, as is the mix of Nepali, Newari, and English in his lyrics. And Newari pops out of nowhere in the words, surprising audiences.

Interestingly, OMG in Shrestha's rap name does not stand for Oh My God but Origami

Music Group, a music collective that he started with Sagun Khadka and Sarthak Gautam, which specialises in hip-hop and rap music as well as R&B and pop genres, providing a platform for young and aspiring artists to showcase their talent and creativity.

And Spark? "Spark has been with me since childhood. While playing Counter-Strike and rap battling online, my name was Spark," Shrestha adds.

Shrestha started his musical career straight out of his studio, and has composed for the likes of Uniq Poet and rapper turned Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah. In the last 10 years, he collaborated with both emerging and established artists. He has also composed for movies.

But his biggest success yet is the single Babal which is a collaboration with Sisan Baniya and Nawaj Ansari and has over 12 million views on YouTube. Nepalese Brilliance,

Gurkhali, Manakamana, Valley Jamz, and Jojolapa are some of his other popular songs.

"In the land where peaks touch the sky, man we shine

Nepalese brilliance is divine, every day I'm learning, man I'm tryna see fine

But they be telling me there's a struggle for the nation

The system, the progress, the schisms, the bondage

.....This ain't nation for a coward dog'

Every day is do or die, so you gotta muscle up.'

These lyrics from his song Nepalese Brilliance depict the frustration of young Nepalis, the lack of opportunities that is pushing many out. "As youth are mostly migrating out, my music aims to inspire and connect with them and strengthen the hip-hop movement in Nepal," Shrestha explains.

He adds, "I am just tapping into whatever is inside of me. Nepalis relate to my songs because they have also had similar experiences."

For Shrestha, hip-hop is not just a genre, but a lifestyle and collective culture that empowers, elevates, and entertains. He separates the two words and brings out his interpretation of those two words -- 'hip' is being knowledgeable about the surroundings and finding a voice, whereas 'hop' is being free and letting loose.

He aims to connect, create awareness, and anchor young Nepalis to their roots. Shrestha himself felt like a misfit once, but found solace in hip-hop.

"Hip-hop resonated deeply with me, allowing me to be free-spirited," says Shrestha. "The next step is to take Nepali hip-hop to the global stage." 🇳🇵



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