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Bhote Kosi Nepal



RAIN BOMBS

Sonia Awale

- At least 400 people are dead or missing after heavy rainfall lashed arid regions of northwestern Pakistan this week. Walls of mud and boulders engulfed entire villages in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. More than 700 people have been killed in floods in Pakistan since June.
- Over in Indian-administrated Jammu and Kashmir, multiple slurry floods on 17-18 August killed more than 80 people.

- A mudslide possibly caused by a glacial collapse upstream in Uttarakhand on 5 August nearly wiped the village of Dharali off the map. At least 70 people, 23 of them Nepalis, are dead or missing.
- On the night of 8 July, glacial lakes in Tibet overflowed. By dawn the mudflow had demolished the Nepal-China border bridge, killing at least 11 people, destroying hydropower plants, sweeping away bridges, roads, over 100 cargo trucks and newly imported electric vehicles.

All these disasters have a common thread: a cascade of hazards caused by record-breaking rainfall on fragile Himalayan slopes destabilised by melting glaciers and permafrost, seismicity and poorly engineered infrastructure.

They are called 'rain bombs' — a heavy localised downpour measuring more than 100mm/h on a steep mountainside. As global warming heats the atmosphere, warmer air can hold more water vapour. The heavy rain then falls where there should be snowfall: on moraines and slopes that have lost the permafrost adhesive that held

the debris together.

"Increasingly, there is now more rainfall at higher altitudes where there used to be snowfall previously, and this directly impacts loose material in that fragile landscape which moves down," explains Mohan B Chand, a Himalayan glaciologist at Kathmandu University. "Moreover, the rains these days are heavy and fall within a few hours. So even a small burst has bigger impact."

The 2021 Melamchi flood and the Sikkim disaster in 2023 have been attributed to record-breaking torrential rain on a glacial moraine that collapsed, unleashing a catastrophic debris flow.

The Bhote Kosi flood this year happened even without torrential rain, and originated at rapidly expanding supraglacial lakes that overflowed, similar to what happened on the Mendenhall Glacier in Alaska last week. In Uttarakhand, the trigger could be in the upper catchment cryosphere, or a landslide dammed lake.

Basanta Raj Adhikari of the Centre for Disaster Studies at the Institute of Engineering also calls them 'sediment bombs'. He clarifies: "There is lots of sediment up there from landslides or glacial activity, and when there is heavy rainfall and hotter temperature, they are unleashed downstream. One thing is for sure, these extreme events are getting more frequent and more destructive."

Researcher Alton C Byers who has studied melting glaciers in the Himalaya and Andes names the eight most potentially dangerous glacial lakes in Nepal: Lower Barun, Chamlang North Tso, Chamlang South Tso, Dig Tso which burst in 1984, Lumding Tso, Thulagi, Tso Rolpa and Imja Tso (see map, page 4).

Of these, Tso Rolpa and Imja have been lowered by 3m each, while Thulagi, Lower Barun, Lumding Tsho, and Hongu II glacial lakes have been targeted for lowering by the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology as part of the recent Green Climate Fund grant of \$36.1 million awarded to Nepal.

"These lakes have changed over the years as their debris-covered glaciers continue to recede," Byers tells Nepali Times. "When water volume in the lake basin increases, they become more vulnerable to flood triggers such as overhanging ice as glaciers recede further to their headwalls, and permafrost on their moraines continue to melt."

FULL STORY PAGE 4

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Command and control

Nepal's government is moving to muzzle the media ahead of the 2027 elections



GUEST EDITORIAL
Bidhya Rai

In July, the government announced an amendment to Nepal's Printing and Publication Act, which gives Nepal's Chief District Officers (CDO) exclusive authority to regulate the registration, operation and renewal of online media, relieving the Department of Information the responsibility.

This gives local bodies unchecked power to register and suspend online news platforms 'as they deem fit'. This is the latest in a series of decisions to suppress Nepal's constitutionally guaranteed press freedom.

Successive governments since 2015 have attempted to enact laws that suppress criticism of officials, disagreement with government policies and the right to information. Although veiled as an attempt to regulate excesses on social media, the primary targets of the draft Media Council Bill are journalists and journalism.

The draft Bill has been debated in the House of Representatives since last month with provisions like the formation of a Media



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA / NT ARCHIVE

Council which will be headed by someone recommended by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, which can also arbitrarily sack the person. It can also take journalists to court and suspend their media IDs. "The government, with zero opposition and increasing lenience from the judiciary, is setting up legal pathways to retaliate against the media for fulfilling its responsibility of check and balance," says lawyer Om Prakash Aryal.

These provisions seek to weaken the Press Council and give politicians and bureaucracy almost absolute power over the press. Stakeholders have proposed amendments to the Bill during deliberations with the National Assembly's Legislative Committee, but only a few have been addressed. The Nepali Congress had also introduced 24 amendment, but has not backed them after joining the UML-led coalition.

Prime Minister K P Oli had appeared to favour a free press when he assumed office during his tenure last year, but recent press exposes about corruption in high places has made him increasingly critical

of journalists and social media content. He has publicly attacked the media's "intolerance and unwillingness to report on the good work done by the government" and urged the press not to publish or broadcast news "that harms the country, causes confusion and weakens public morale".

Even while the Bill is being debated, the government has repeatedly invoked the Electronic Transaction Act to harass journalists or accuse the media of contempt of court. Bizmandu, Nepalkhabar, Drishti Weekly, and Nepali Times' sister publication

Himalkhabar have all been charged. Last week the Supreme Court published the full text of the verdict of the contempt of court against sidhakura.com, which was convicted last year after the outlet published news that included audio files claiming collusion between media operators and Supreme Court justices to dismiss corruption cases, which were determined to be fake following a forensic examination.

In the verdict, the Supreme Court states that while the media is guaranteed the right to print and publish news and audiovisual material, these rights are not absolute but 'subject to restriction', per constitutional provision, which is under Article 19 of Nepal's Constitution. But the top court's interpretation and verbiage sets a precedent that allows for state intimidation towards the press for any content that it dictates must be restricted, and subjects media institutions to unjustified judicial penalties.

Despite its history of defending media freedom, the Press Council has become an instrument of government and corporate entities, and is so politicised that it has not

gone beyond platitudes. It has blacklisted 29 media outlets, instructed registered online portals and unregistered outlets to remove content, and shadow-banned other web portals. Violations of the Press Council's code of conduct were previously classified as disobedience. Now, it has gone as far as to have the Cyber Bureau go after the media.

While the Press Council has been monitoring journalists, the proposed Media Council Bill attempts to control media companies themselves. This is a double-barrel targeting of journalism.

Meanwhile, the US State Department's 2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices briefly outlined Nepal's press freedom scenario, stating that the government generally respected the right to freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but added that "the government did not make sufficient efforts to preserve the safety and independence of media."

The report is ironic coming from an administration that has defunded public broadcasting institutions and continued to be hostile to media and journalists. In April, the Committee to Protect Journalists, following Trump's 100th day in office, released a report concluding that press freedom was 'no longer a given in the United States'. Nepal is still considered one of the few remaining open societies in Asia, but recent government moves threaten our hard won freedom.

As it stands, Prime Minister Oli seems to be taking tips from Indian PM Modi on suppressing freedom of expression. The government is not just muzzling the press, but also constricting the right to peaceful assembly, dissent and debate. The end-goal seems to be to gag the press ahead of the 2027 elections.

Bidhya Rai is a journalist covering gender and social inclusion, internet security and human rights.

Trending Online



Snowleopard Sisterhood

by Kunda Dixit
Exploring conservation and livelihoods in the Himalaya, the film Snow Leopard Sisters by Tshiring Lhamu Lama and Sonam Choekyi Lama who have spent over a decade protecting Dolpo's endangered snow leopards. Read the review at nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Investing in people

by David Sislen
Nepal's greatest barrier to economic growth isn't a lack of resources, but the untapped potential of its people which is being held back by inadequate investment in education, healthcare, and skills, writes David Sislen of the World Bank. Read the Guest Editorial online.

Most popular on X



Not rich, but not poor

by Sonia Awale
Nepal will graduate from Least Developed Country status in November 2026, aiming to reach middle-income status by 2030. But while LDC graduation is a stepping stone for Nepal's development, a better investment climate would help. Join the discussion online.

Most commented

What future for snow leopards?

Nepali Times
Sandro Lovari has researched large mammals in Nepal and elsewhere for 50 years. In an interview with Nepali Times, Lovari discussed appropriate conservation measures for snow leopards and offered suggestions for Nepal. Read excerpts of the conversation on our website.

Most visited online page

Letters

NEPAL LDC GRADUATION

Nepal's improvements in key criteria for graduation from LDC is commendable ('Not poor, but not rich', Sonia Awale, #1274). But with the decline in development aid, doubling of interest rates and added trade limitations, will we be able to sustain this new status? Our debt burden will impact the development budget.

Bishow Parajuli

■ Nepal's working age population is outsourced to serve global capital that benefits from cheap and exploitative temporary and circular migrant labour with direct impact on inequality. Given this, LDC graduation is likely to have very little meaningful impact on the economy.

Jeevan R Sharma

■ Nepal's graduation from LDC status will mean loss of various



privileges and concessions. Is Nepal ready for that?

David Seddon

■ Good to hear someone believing in the potential and positive prospects for Nepal.

Tony Jones

■ News of Nepal's LDC graduation is not sad, but not exciting either.

Pradeep Ghimire Kshetry

ECONOMIC GROWTH

The government has failed because politicians are more interested in amassing their own wealth than the wealth of the country ('Investing in people', David Sislen, #1274). Meanwhile, the West needs cheap labour.

Pan Chy

US-INDIA TARIFFS

These tariffs on India are a short-sighted attempt to score political points, but they will backfire badly ('Turning point in US-India relations', Shashi Tharoor, #1273).

Joseph Maiden

FREE SPEECH

Ahead of the 2027 elections, handing such sweeping power to CDOs could be seen as a preemptive move to control dissenting or critical online outlets ('Command and control', Bidhya Rai, read above). This could raise concerns about fair competition, transparency, and press freedom.

Nepali Horizons

Quotes



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Menstrual banishment is still practiced and it is proof that cultural mores take longer to eradicate. It has also followed people as they migrate from the mountains to the plains.



Pan Chy

Forester @kuenvmgt504
Menstrual banishment like casteism are banned from law books and govt policy but very much still the engine of Nepali state mitochondria both at the state and pan state cultural levels



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Experts view Nepal's LDC graduation as a stepping stone, noting that with the right policies, the country can harness its youthful workforce, rising investments, and adaptability as key drivers of growth.



Gus Ferguson @xander_fero

Nep Gov already have a 'policy' for the 1700 youths leaving Nepal Every Day: Fleece them for as much \$\$\$ as possible when they leave, and make commission from remittance while they are overseas working. Zero Investment and Maximum Profiteering by Greedy, Corrupt Gundhas.

Online Package



NEPAL'S FIVE LITTLE RAILWAYS

From forest railways in the southern plains to Kathmandu Valley motor railway and Kosi Project stone railway to facilitate dam building, here are five obscure train tracks that you probably have never heard of. Read story on page 6-7, and watch the video.



KINSHIP AND KUNG FU

Kung fu nuns practice at the Druk Amitabha Nunnery, wielding swords, sticks and paper fans. The nuns work and live at the nunnery, and belong to the Drukpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Watch video on YouTube.

1,000 Words



DR SHANKAR P SHARMA / X

MUTUAL RESPECT: Nepal's Ambassador to India, Shankar Sharma, exchanging traditional greetings with Indian President Draupadi Murmu during an Independence Day reception in New Delhi on 15 August. This week, Nepal protested an agreement between India and China to open up the Lipulek Pass for bilateral trade, a territory on the trjunction of all three countries over which Nepal has laid historical claim.



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These are not 'natural disasters'

Human activity has made the inherently fragile Himalaya even more prone to disasters

Sonia Awale

Scientists have given the current planetary epoch a name: the Anthropocene. And anthropogenic causes in this era heighten the risk of disasters.

Indeed, an analysis of recent Himalayan calamities (page 1) shows that there is much more at play here than climate breakdown. Haphazard encroachment of floodplains, quarrying and crusher activity exacerbated the effect of extreme rainfall on 28 September around Kathmandu Valley that killed 200.

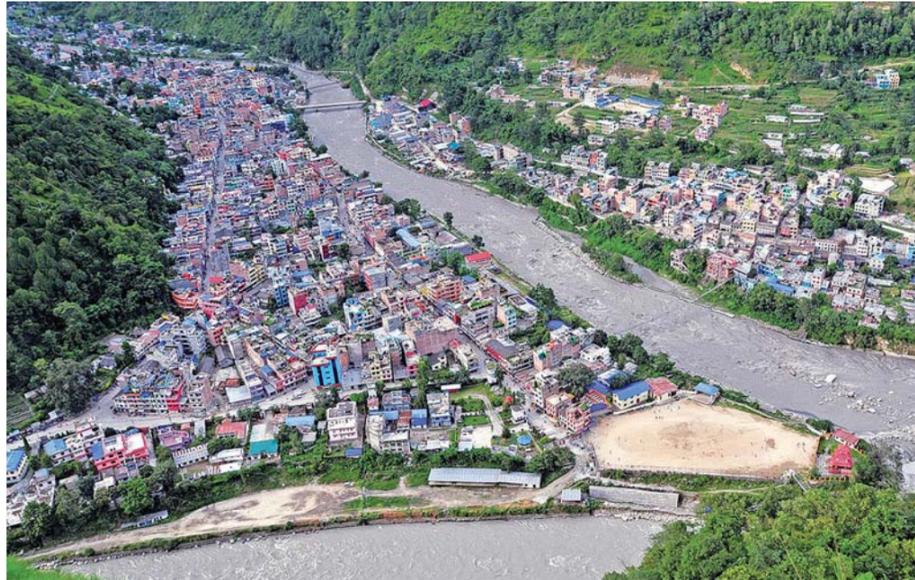
The human cost of the 5 August catastrophe in Uttarakhand would have been high in any case, but the fact that the tiny village had expanded across a vulnerable alluvial fan to cater to a tourism boom meant more death and destruction.

There are similar alluvial fans across Nepal, where small towns have expanded because new highways follow rivers, like Beni located at the confluence of the Myagdi Khola and Kali Gandaki. Other towns like Kagbeni or Damauli are located on the banks of rivers and tributaries that are directly downstream from rapidly expanding glacial lakes or unstable mountains.

"In Butwal, people are building houses on the floodplain of the Tinau River, and yet people blame climate change or rainfall when there is a disaster," says Basanta Raj Adhikari at the Institute of Engineering. "This is happening all over the country."

Traditionally, Nepal's villages and settlements were located high above rivers because our forebears learnt lessons from recurring flash floods. Now, the road network follows rivers, and towns have sprung up along these highways. Even when roads are not on river banks, many gouge out slopes above, unleashing massive landslides that block rivers.

Experts say Nepal's hazard map should now be updated for glacial outbursts so municipalities can plan risk-sensitive



BENI TOURISM

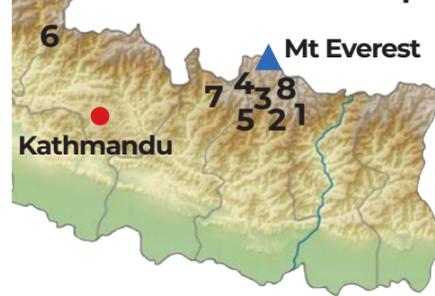
RISKY CONFLUENCE: Beni has expanded rapidly after the highway to Mustang was built. But the town is situated on the alluvial fan of past flashfloods on both the Kali Gandaki and Myagdi Khola which have dangerous glacial lakes in their upper catchment.

land use zoning. This must go hand-in-hand with measures to reduce the risk by structural mitigation, such as engineering and construction, and then with risk awareness and early-warning systems.

Says Himalayan researcher Alton C Byers: "Sooner or later, communities will realise that certain sites are simply no longer safe for a village or city, especially because of climate change in the mountains. The Himalaya has always been high-risk with its steep slopes, thin soil, monsoon rainfall regime, and frequent seismic activity."

Mohan B Chand of Kathmandu University adds that hazard mapping is especially crucial for expensive hydropower plants: "Most of these are on snow-fed rivers, but environmental risk assessment is not taken seriously." He says that because Nepal is set to generate 28,500MW by 2035 to meet its

High-risk Glacial Lakes in Nepal



1-8: Lower Barun, Chamlang North Tso, Chamlang South Tso, Dig Tso, Lumding Tso, Thulagi, Tso Rolpa and Imja Tso.

carbon neutral target, the government must work to minimise upstream risk by integrating disaster mitigation components in new energy investments.

Few know that Nepal's first hazard mapping was done 40 years ago in the Khumbu with a United Nations University study titled 'Highland Lowland Interactive Systems'. It is hard to find that document anywhere.

Today, hazard mapping technologies, satellite remote sensing, drones, synthetic aperture radar (SAR) and modelling with AI have made it much easier to integrate multi-hazard risk assessment. That data needs to be made available to local governments so they can plan.

Recent disasters have shown that even the smallest of glacial lakes can cause much damage. Langmale Lake in the Barun Valley was less than 0.1 km² in size, but the flood in 2017 caused extensive downstream damage. The 2012 Seti flood in Pokhara, the Chamoli disaster in Uttarakhand in 2021, the South Lhonak proglacial lake burst in Sikkim in 2023 that washed away the \$1.7 billion Chungthang Teesta III Project, and the August 2024 floods above Thame in Khumbu are other recent examples.

Says glaciologist Chand: "We have to monitor the lakes, not just via remote sensing but with field visits. These may be costly, but mitigating the risk is less expensive than the disasters themselves."

Nepal has the technology and trained personnel to do hazard mapping, monitoring, and to design early warning apps. That data and information now needs to be available to all three levels of government to improve preparedness and risk reduction.

"The cascading and compounding hazards are increasing in the Himalaya, this must be the subject of our research now," says Adhikari at the Centre for Disaster Studies. "Recent events are a wake-up call, if we do not take this seriously things may be more dangerous in the future." 🇳🇵

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NADA Fair

Prime Minister K P Oli unveiled the Deepal eVTOL (electric vertical take-off and landing) flying car on the first day of NADA Auto Show at Bhrikuti Mandap. The model offers a glimpse of what sustainable transport might look like in the future. The electric motor addresses both air and noise pollution problems.

Tata Motors is featuring its line up of EVs, including the Tiago, Punch, Nexon and Curv models, in Stall A4 at the Nada Auto Show. The company is also offering deals such as lifetime free DC Fast Charging, three years of free servicing, and free charging station installation at home.



NMB Bank announced an EV loan program with a 7.13% interest rate to coincide with the NADA Auto Show and the upcoming festive season. Customers can visit the NMB stall E-24 at NADA, or any branch.

Yamaha Nepal launched its MT-15 V2 motorbike at NADA in the new Ice Storm and Vivid Violet Metallic colours. It also presented the FZ-S V3 DLX in Ice Fluo Vermillion.

IME-Shangrila MoU

Global IME Bank signed an agreement with Shangrila Development Bank to provide non-fund-based banking facilities to their customers. These services include Letters of Credit, Bank Guarantees, Documents Against Payment and Documents Against Acceptance. Global IME also received the Best Bank in Nepal – Euromoney Award for Excellence 2025. The award was established in 1992 by Euromoney Magazine, and was also awarded to IME in 2022 and 2024.



TikTok for Tourism

Nepal Tourism Board is working with TikTok to boost tourism in Nepal through digital storytelling. TikTok will dedicate a 'Destination' app page for tourism content created by locals aimed at a global audience. The company also plans to hold video creation workshops for tour operators.

Power profit

Nepal made a profit of Rs4.57 billion from trading electricity in FY 2024/25, according to an NEA report. Exports to India generated Rs17.47 billion, but there were also imports worth Rs12.9 billion. Nepal has clearance to export 1,010 megawatts from 30 hydropower plants, and last year also began selling energy to Bangladesh.



Proton-Jagdamba

To reaffirm their partnership, PROTON Malaysia and Jagdamba Motors launched the e.MAS 7 model, which is the first EV developed in Malaysia. The launch event emphasised the continuing need to promote sustainable transport.

NTC profit nosedive

Nepal Telecom saw net profit drop 57.2% in FY 24/25, from Rs6.23 billion to Rs2.66 billion. Main reasons include a reduction in revenue from international calls, and a decline in mobile data usage due to wider wifi coverage.



Samsung AI TVs

Samsung has introduced Vision AI technology in its 2025 QLED TV line. AI Mode optimises picture quality and sound in real time using algorithms that adapt to content and surroundings. AI Experience personalises content discovery and settings by learning what the user likes. TVs cost between Rs38,990-Rs399,990.



Cardamom price

Demand for Large Cardamom has surged and it is selling at Rs2350/kg at Birtamode Trading Hub, the highest it has been in seven years. Last year prices were less than half this. The record remains Rs3000/kg, in 2010.

Festive Hyundai

Laxmi Intercontinental has launched a festive offer under which customers can get cash discounts up to Rs800,000 when buying Hyundai vehicles. There is also a scratch card lottery to win up to Rs1,000,000.



New Shikhar

Shikhar Insurance launched a new plan called Shikhar Swasthya Suraksha, which covers up to Rs2,000,000 of cost. The scheme also offers cashless services at affiliated hospitals for admitted treatments, as well as 30 days of pre- and 60 days of post-hospitalisation costs.

New Holiday Inn GM

Holiday Inn Express Kathmandu Naxal has appointed Vara Prasad as the new General Manager. He has over 18 years of industry experience, previously serving as Director of Operations at Fairfield by Marriott in Ahmedabad.

FDI

Nepal recorded the highest ever foreign investment commitment in the first month of FY 2025/26. Pledges topped Rs24 billion for 127 projects that will employ 8,200 Nepalis.



Goats for Dasain

The Food Management and Trading Company is preparing to spend Rs47.7 million on goats and mountain goats for Dasain in order to stabilise supply, control market prices and prevent black-marketing. Customers can also buy goats online.

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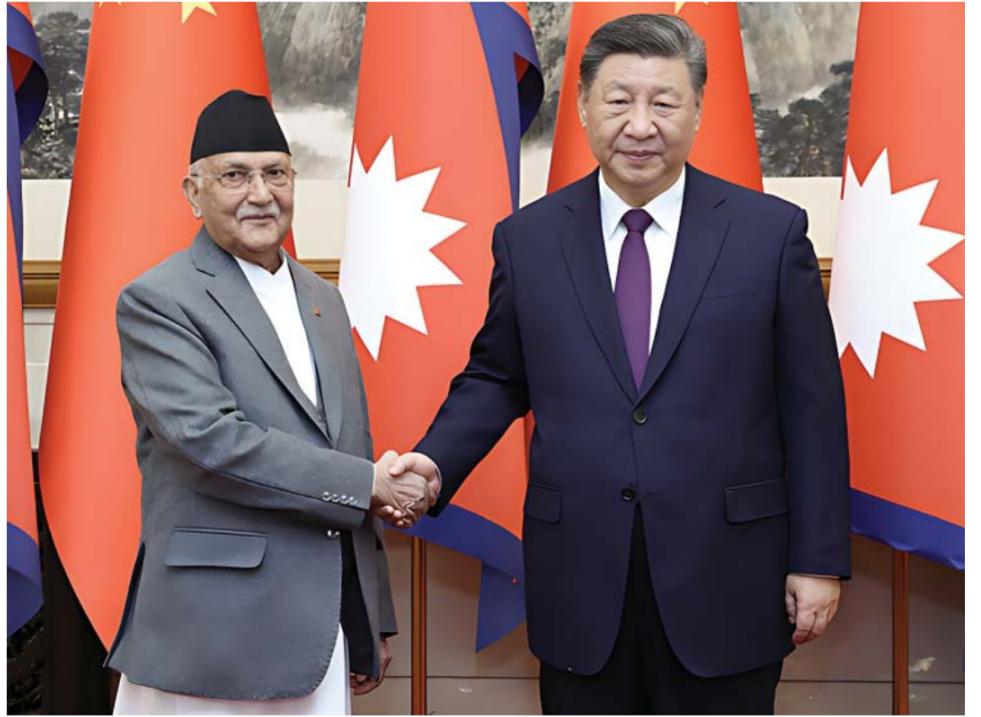
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When Xi meets Modi and Oli

That Beijing has once again ignored Nepal's claims on the Limpiyadhura Triangle vis-a-vis New Delhi points to need for urgent diplomacy by Kathmandu to arouse sensitivity

Kanak Mani Dixit

With Xi Jinping as host, Narendra Modi and K P Oli are both attending the Shanghai Cooperation Council (SCO) meeting on 31 August. It would be appropriate if the diplomatic 'sherpas' were able to organise a joint meeting to overcome some sticking points that have emerged in the trilateral interface.

These issues are relatively new, related to China's economic and geo-strategic rise, which has reversed its earlier disinterest on matters south of the Himalaya (other than concerns over Tibet activism). While Beijing's leaders used to be standoffish on Nepal, even advising Nepali leaders to remain on good terms with New Delhi, they are now bullish while lacking full appreciation of Nepal's positions and interests.

Matters are complicated for Nepal by the fact that after decades of relative Indo-Chinese calm following the debacle (for India) of the 1962 war, the 2023 Galwan clashes led to a bilateral nosedive. Both neighbours entered a phase of hi-decibel rancour, with the Indian officialdom and media expecting Kathmandu to choose sides.

New Delhi tends to hype any engagement by Kathmandu with Beijing as proof of a 'China tilt', or opportunistic use of the 'China card'. There is irony in this, of course, because China is India's foremost trading partner, and a source for much that makes India's economy hum, from pharmaceutical raw material to EV batteries, solar panels, integrated circuits, industrial machinery, etc.

While in an inextricable economic embrace with Beijing, New Delhi diplomats, media commentators and 'think-tankers' would want Kathmandu (and Dhaka, Colombo) to keep Beijing at arm's length. Nor would they stop to consider that it was the Indian economic blockade of 2015 that accelerated Kathmandu's signing a slew of agreements with Beijing two years later on cross-border roads, transmission lines, bilateral trade, third-country transit, as well as the Belt and Road Initiative Framework.

CHINESE GOODS AND SERVICES

New Delhi analysts must abandon suspicions of foul play whenever a South Asian neighbour seeks out Chinese goods and services, scientific advances, education, and bilateral and third-country trade. They also need to consider the advantages of Nepal providing the most geographically practical surface connectivity between the Chinese mainland and the Indus-Ganga-Brahmaputra basin, using the railhead that has already arrived at Shigatse west of Lhasa.

Of the 14 countries that China borders, and India's seven, Nepal is unique for its open border to the south. New Delhi security experts constantly warn of third-country infiltration into India using the free passage, but if that is the case Beijing too will now have reason to feel vulnerable, given the possibility of quick south-to-north passage across Nepal on new highways. Nepal is also unique in that its citizens have historically been allowed to join the Indian military, even though recruitment is halted since 2022 due to the Covid pandemic, followed by India's introduction of the Agnipath recruitment scheme.

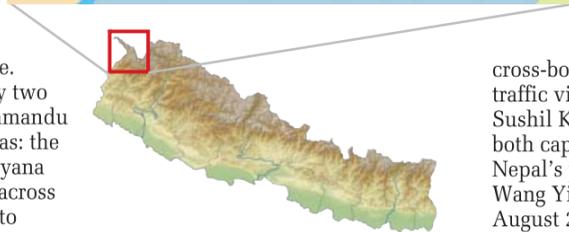
As is natural between any two neighbours, Beijing and Kathmandu have issues to sort out, such as: the mutual respect of Bon, Mahayana and Vajrayana communities across the Himalaya defiles, access to historically shared high pastures, unilateral closure of border points by Beijing that impacts tourism and trade, and the occasional ill-considered statements regarding Nepal's third-country relations that emerge from Beijing officialdom, such as on the US-funded Millennium Challenge Compact.

It is a fact, however, that the Nepal-China relationship is clouded by diffidence of the Kathmandu polity in dealing with Beijing interlocutors. The Nepal side has been conditioned over the



BIKRAM RAI / NT ARCHIVE

TERRITORIAL IMPERATIVE: Demonstrations in Kathmandu against India's opening of a new link road to Mansarovar of Tibet via Nepal's Lipulek in 2020.



decades by the need for Kathmandu to prop up the China relationship as a counter to the overwhelming presence of India in the polity, which has meant more fawning northward than is healthy.

Meanwhile, it would help for Chinese delegations not to insist on the Nepali side repeating ad nauseum its commitment to the one-China policy, or disallowing Nepali territory to be used against China. These are by now state policy, not requiring humiliating repetition.

INDIA-CHINA-NEPAL

The India-China-Nepal interface has not been discussed enough as a foreign affairs sub-discipline, mainly because of the timidity of Kathmandu's officialdom and intelligentsia. In these times of ascendant China and defensive India, Nepal must place its concerns on the three-way table.

Limpiyadhura Triangle: The area in Nepal's northwest encompassing 370 sq km between Limpiyadhura peak, Lipulek pass and Kalapani encampment is claimed by Kathmandu, the area having been incorporated in the 2015 Constitution. The Sugauli Treaty of 1816 indicates Nepal's western boundary as the Kali River, and Kathmandu claims the main river stem as starting from Limpiyadhura. Whereas, New Delhi claims that the smaller stream going straight north from Kalapani is the official Kali.

Nepal is thus in a significant territorial dispute with India, a matter that was ignored by both New Delhi and Beijing when they reached an accord in May 2015 to regularise cross-border trade and pilgrim traffic via Lipulek. Prime Minister Sushil Koirala sent a protest note to both capitals. And yet, tone-deaf to Nepal's position, foreign ministers Wang Yi and S Jaishankar on 19 August 2025 signed an agreement to resume border trade via Lipulek.

Especially because he is scheduled to visit the SCO Summit in end-August and Bodh Gaya on 17 September, it is important for PM Oli to immediately send diplomatic notes to both capitals as did his predecessor PM Koirala. To recall, it was under Oli as Prime Minister that the Limpiyadhura Triangle was officially incorporated into Nepal's Constitution in the Second Amendment of June 2020.

Hydropower Exports: While there is a power trade agreement

between Nepal and India, New Delhi has put regulations that restrict Kathmandu from exporting from hydropower plants that are funded, financed or constructed with Chinese involvement. This stricture even applies to the agreement to supply 40MW to Bangladesh via the Indian grid.

New Delhi's officialdom evidently believes that electrons have nationality, and anything with a whiff of Chinese involvement is to be rejected. This is an unfriendly position towards both Nepal and China, though one does not know whether Beijing is bothered enough as it seeks to woo India and its massive consumer market. Meanwhile, the restrictions on 'China tainted' energy exports have impacted Chinese FDI in Nepal's hydropower sector.

Airports and Airlines: The new international airports at Bhairawa and Pokhara have become a burden on the economy because of the in-country graft and malfeasance. Neither of the two airports has been able to 'go international' due to the government's inability to plan ahead on air routes, passenger traffic and tourism. India has been least cooperative, however, disallowing instrumental landing system at Bhairawa on the pretext that it will interfere with flights at its nearby military airbase. This point is moot now because of satellite-aided navigation systems, but New Delhi officialdom continues to dissuade airlines from connecting Indian cities to both airports because of Chinese involvement in their construction.

Sourcing international loans, grants and contractors is Kathmandu's sovereign lookout, and it is improper for New Delhi to act so obstructionist. While Pokhara's airport was built on a loan from the Export-Import Bank of China, Bhairawa was financed by the Asian Development Bank, with only the civil works carried out by a Chinese company responding to a global tender.

At the upcoming SCO summit, whose goal is "regional security, economic cooperation and cultural exchange", PM Oli must remind both his host President Xi and fellow guest PM Modi that the China-India relationship even as it blows hot and cold can never be at the cost of Nepal. 🇳🇵

Security or espionage?

Nepal's new draft counter-intelligence Bill allows Big Government to tap phones, read messages

Santa Gaha Magar

A new draft counter-intelligence Bill is raising fears that Big Government wants to constrict constitutionally-guaranteed freedoms of expression and individual privacy.

This comes even as the UML-NC coalition is trying to push through the Media Council Bill (see Editorial, page 2) that would increase government interference in the media.

The counter-intelligence Bill harks back to the Panchayat absolute monarchy days and also 2014-15 when a repressive anti-corruption agency listened in on citizens and tracked them.

The government says the National Intelligence Act is outdated because of advances in private messaging apps with end-to-end encryption, and needs to be regulated. But after the Prime Minister's Office released a draft, it has sparked debate even before reaching Parliament.

Civil rights activists have particular objection to a provision in the Bill for 'interception' — allowing authorities to monitor, surveil, or record communications, audio, video, or electronic signals from suspected individuals or organisations.

Section 15 of the draft bill states: '...If it is not possible to collect information through other means, and if the Inspector General of Police is convinced that immediate collection of such information is necessary to prevent serious harm to the country,

they may issue a written order to any officer under their direct supervision to monitor or surveil communications, audio, video, or electronic signals or data from any suspected individual, organisation, or institution, or to intercept and record such information.'

Such surveillance is deemed necessary for 'internal and external intelligence and investigative work and to protect and promote the country's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, national security, national interest, unity, and autonomy'.

Experts say such a provision could be misused as has happened in the recent past when such unchecked authority falls into the wrong hands. "It is not that such powers should not exist, but other safeguards are necessary which are missing in this draft," argues constitutional expert Bipin Adhikari, adding that these should include measures against the blatant and arbitrary misuse of surveillance powers.

During the investigation into the murder of Acting Supreme Court Justice Rana Bahadur Bam in 2012, the police collected call details from 500,000 mobile phones as well as 30,000 SMS messages. Many messages that were unrelated to the investigation were reportedly used by officers for entertainment, with sexual content being the most widely shared. This was exposed by an investigation in Kantipur with the headline एसएमएस अरूले हेर्लान् नि! (Others might see your SMS!).

In 2016, a motion for impeachment was filed in Parliament against Lokman Singh Karki, the vicious head of the



Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). Although he was appointed by the same politicians who wanted him out, one of the reasons for the move was Karki's abuse of surveillance powers, including phone tapping and spying on political leaders, security officials, judges, civil society leaders, journalists, and administrative officers. The phones of 293 individuals were later found to have been tapped.

'NATIONAL INTEREST'

This is not the first attempt to push such legislation, ostensibly in the 'national interest'. In 2019, a Bill consolidating and amending the law on Special Services included similar provisions, which passed the National Assembly despite opposition. After committee deliberation, it was approved in May 2020 but became inactive in September 2022 when the term of the Lower House ended.

"Globally, provisions like this are used to protect sovereignty and independence, territorial integrity, and national unity. This is standard policy worldwide and is not unique to Nepal," says Deviram Sharma, former head of the National Investigation Department.

The current draft Bill further states that the Inspector General of Police's order would be sufficient to monitor, surveil, or intercept the communications of a suspect.

Taranath Dahal, former president of the Federation of Nepali Journalists, warns that arbitrary surveillance could violate fundamental rights and create an atmosphere of fear. "Investigators need data and information, but

the right to intercept should only be exercised with court approval. Without this, it will lead to a climate of fear, anyone can be kept under surveillance."

During the investigation of Justice Rana Bahadur Bam's murder, concerns about the exposure of collected SMS data led lawyers Baburam Aryal, Tankaraj Aryal, Santosh Babu Sigdel and Taranath Dahal to file a writ in the Supreme Court in 2012 to restrict access to private phone and SMS records.

In 2016, the bench of then Chief Justice Kalyan Shrestha and Justice Devendra Gopal Shrestha ruled that access to phone and SMS records must be approved by the district court until a law governing the matter was in place.

Constitutional expert Bipin Adhikari adds that the law should not infringe on constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech, press, or the right to privacy: "There must be a provision to obtain orders from an impartial authority to prevent the state from using such powers arbitrarily."

Rights activists and lawyers interviewed for this report unanimously agreed that a citizen's right should not be compromised to facilitate a broader investigation, and that any information collected should not be misused.

Dahal is confident that the controversial provisions will be removed before the Bill reaches Parliament, and sees this early discussion as a positive sign: "I hope none of the clauses that undermine our constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights make it into the Bill." 🇳🇵

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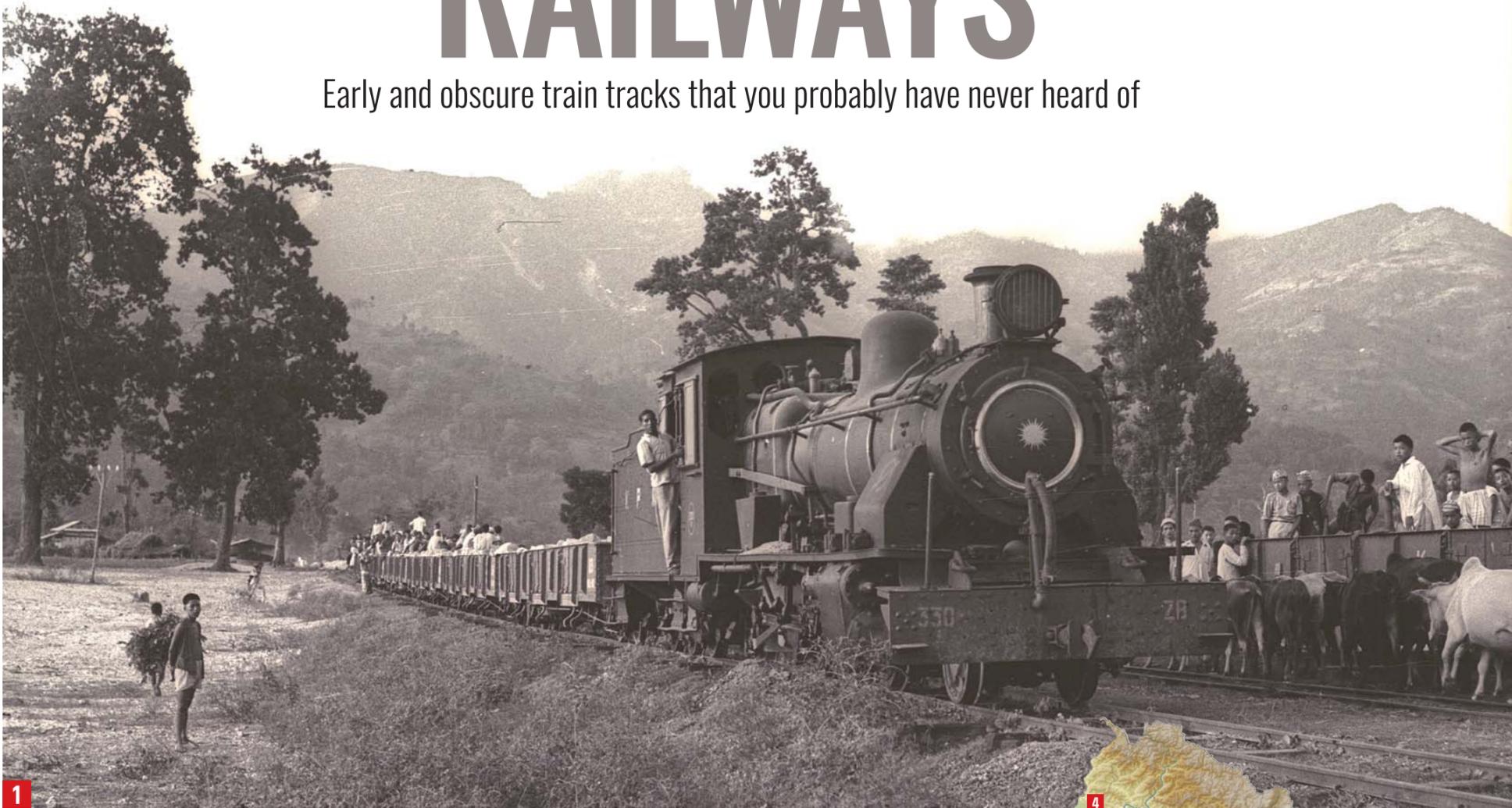
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NEPAL'S FIVE LITTLE RAILWAYS

Early and obscure train tracks that you probably have never heard of



1 A Kosi Project Railway train of stones near Dharan in October 1966.

JOHN BENSON



Daniel W Edwards

This is the first instalment in a new limited series in Nepali Times on the historic transportation infrastructures of Nepal.

Nepal's Forest Railways

As India's railway network expanded in the 1890s and 1900s, the demand for wooden railway sleepers, called 'ties' in America, likewise increased. The Rana regime realised that western Nepal's dense forests, from which sal trees could be extracted and sold, represented a valuable source of revenue.

There was a problem of accessing large tracts of Tarai forests. However, once Indian railway lines were extended to Nepal's border in several places, this issue could be resolved by constructing logging railways, also known as 'tramways' or 'light railways'.

The Nepal Government awarded a contract to Punjabi timber contractors to supply

15,000 sal sleepers to Chandan Chauki station of India's Oudh & Rohilkhand State Railway in 1908. The contractors also received a concession to construct a steam tramway to run 48km into Nepal's forests for cutting and transporting trees.

The author found no records, however, indicating that such an ambitious tramway was built in 1908. The hewn logs were probably carried into India by bullock carts or elephants.

The earliest known forest railway in Nepal was built in 1914 in the southwestern corner of the present-day Parsa district. A British engineer went to the Indian border town of Bikna Thori to plan a 4-mile portable light railway for the transport of timber from the forest of Chitwan to the Thori depot on the Bengal & Northwestern Railway.

This short line was laid upon wooden sleepers, and its rails could be taken up and repositioned when logging in one section of the forest was completed. This forest railway was in operation at least through 1917.

A few years down the line in 1923, J V Collier of the Indian Forest Service built a narrow-gauge

railway in Kailali district also to export timber to India. This line, the Nepal Government Forest Railway, departed Chandan Chauki in Uttar Pradesh and ran 48km northwest into Nepal.

It was a 2-foot railway supported by 11kg rails. The line was 'temporary' in that as sal trees were thinned out in one area, railway tracks were shifted to uncut areas of the forest. The railway crossed seven small rivers, but the bridges were taken down during the summer and monsoon. Trains ran only from November to April.

This forest railway purchased four 4-6-0T 'tank' engines built in Leeds, England. Each bogie could carry 100 broad-gauge sleepers, and two engines were needed to haul a 21-car train loaded with 2,100 sleepers. This huge commercial forest operation once employed about 14,000 men, most of them Indians. During one season, nearly 800,000 broad and metre-gauge sleepers were exported to India. When India suffered a depression in 1930, large scale operations came to an end.

A third railway was built in Bardia where some scattered rails and signs of an old roadbed were

seen in the 1960s. It ran from Nishangada in India to Khairbhathi in Nepal. From there, stations heading south were Ranipur, Karmak, Taratal and Madhuwan. Collier likely built this railway as well in the 1920s. An elderly man in Bardia in 2022, whose father had worked on this forest railway, was interviewed for this account.

Kathmandu Valley's Motor (Trolley) Railway

Merchants importing goods from India via the ropeway Chandra Shamsheer built in 1927 had to go to the ropeway's terminus at Matatirtha near Thankot to claim their goods and then haul them 6km to the customs house Bhansar Adda at Teku for clearance and payment of customs duties.

The Motor Railway was built to carry goods from the ropeway station directly to the customs office, making it cheaper and more convenient for merchants to receive their shipments.

In December 1931, Prime Minister Bhim Shamsheer issued an order (sanad) putting Lt Gen Singha Shamsheer Rana in charge of building this rail line to Teku and on to 'Nabalak Khana' in

Tripureswar, a distance of 10km. The project was subdivided into four sections or 'phant', and for each, budgets and timelines were established.

There was bato phant (constructing the roadbed), lik sleeper and jordne phant (laying sleepers and joining the rails), culvert phant (installing culverts) and pul phant (building bridges). Colonel Kishore Narsingh Rana was put in charge of the sleeper and rail section, while Colonel Dilli Jung Thapa, an engineer at Ghar Kaj Adda, also was involved. The Motor Railway was completed by the end of 1933.

In the beginning, the railway's small wagons may have been pulled and pushed by men and bullocks. However, in 1938 a British railway manufacturer sent Nepal a four-wheel, 5½ ton, 2-foot narrow-gauge diesel-powered locomotive with mechanical transmission, hence the name motor railway.

Leaving Matatirtha, the trains passed Satungal, Naikap, the Bishnudevi Temple, crossed an iron



2 A Nepal Government Forest train in Kailali District hauling sal sleepers in 1925.

COURTESY: DAVID CHURCHILL



3 Rails extended north from this spot into the virgin sal forests of Bardia in western Nepal 100 years ago.

DANIEL W EDWARDS



4 KPR locomotives, water tank and staff at Chakraghatti in Nepal.

JOHN BENSON



5 The author by the remains of the Balkhu Khola bridge built in 1932 with American steel.

JEEVAN NEPAL

bridge over Balkhu Khola, then to Ghattepakha, Sunagau, through what is now a section of Kuleshwar ('Lik Marg') to the Customs Office at Teku.

In 1945, Motor Trolley had four engines, but spare parts were badly needed. The charge for transporting one maund (about 40kg) of cargo from Matatirtha to Teku was 50 paisa.

Even though the trains ran slowly and only for a short distance, accidents were not unknown. A train loaded with rice, salt and cotton derailed on a curve in July 1946, and two railway employees were crushed under the cars and killed, while five others were injured. Besides the driver and a brakeman, guards rode the trains to prevent theft of goods.

By 1953, government budget estimates indicated the Motor Railway would break even with an income of Rs70,000 against Rs71,000 in expenditure. It appears the railway stopped service around 1957 with the opening of the Raj Path and the extension of the ropeway from Matatirtha to Bhansar Adda.

Bent steel beams of the bridge across Balkhu Khola and two plaques recovered from the river a few years ago are the only remains of this railway today. Photos of the Motor Trolley Railway in operation are hard to come by.

The Kosi Project Railway (KPR)

As early as 1941, India and Nepal considered building a dam on the Kosi River to prevent destructive floods caused by monsoon rains. Floods in 1950 inundated 500 villages in Bihar and left 500,000 people homeless. The two governments signed an agreement in 1954 to build a barrage on the Kosi, and King Mahendra and Prime Minister Nehru laid the foundation stone in April 1959.

To transport stones from a quarry near Dharan to use in mixing concrete at the construction site, the Indian government, in charge of building the barrage, made plans to build a narrow-gauge railway linking Bihar and its border town of Bhimnagar with Nepal's settlements at Chakraghatti, Chatra and Ghopa, the outskirts of Dharan.

The section of the KPR in Nepal totaled 66km — the country's longest railway to date. The stations south of Chakraghatti were Rajabas, Madhuwan, Kushaha, Haripur and Bhandabari. The line built, operated and owned by the Indian Government, was opened in 1958 and known locally as Dhunge (stone) Rail.

Procuring locomotives, wagons and other materials was a challenge. India's Railway

Board searched the country for old 41lb rails, and located steam engines, most built around 1910, in poor condition, and stored in 'retirement'. These decrepit locomotives were later cannibalised for parts to keep the remaining engines running, and six newer locomotives built in Yugoslavia were sent to the KPR in 1960 to prevent the railway from shutting down and halting construction of the barrage.

Used bogie-wagons (gondolas) came from Indian railways that had been converted to metre-gauge, others were manufactured in Muzaffarpur without couplers due to the non-availability of steel. A hundred new wagons arrived from Japan, but only half could be put in service, as couplers from the other 50 were removed and attached to the Muzaffarpur wagons.

This smorgasbord of equipment kept shop mechanics and work crews busy, but now-abandoned railways in Nepal always operated under less-than-ideal conditions.

Although the purpose of the KPR was to transport gravel, stones and boulders to the site of the barrage, photographs show people riding in loaded wagons. Excluding Dharan, there was no bus service through the wild animal infested jungle between Dharan and Chakraghatti or along the dusty paths linking other small villages on the KPR, so patient locals sat in wagons at Dharan, waiting perhaps for hours for trains to depart.

Sons of former railway workers in Chakraghatti say that there were no fixed schedules, three or four trains ran both ways daily in the early 1960s. Southbound trains carried gravel, stones and boulders,

while northbound trains would carry coal, cement and provisions, including sacks of coins to pay the workers. Trains even ran at night, and the crews worked long hours.

Workers received free housing in project-built tenements but had to buy food supplies and items for personal use. The Babu Saheb or the superintendent lived at Chakraghatti, and at one time supervised more than 1,000 employees, nearly all of them from India.

The barrage was completed in 1964, but by 1970, the Kosi Project Railway had passed into history.

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

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More photos online

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Events



Fitness expo

Nepal Fitness Expo 2025, the first of its kind, will bring together the fitness industry and the public through workshops, classes and competitions.

30 August, 10am-7pm, The Malla Hotel

Art exhibition

'X' Decade of Art celebrates the works of ten renowned and emerging Nepali artists, honouring the past decade of artistic excellence and looking to the years ahead.

Till 16 September, Music Art Gallery, Sanepa



Awarti

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

Stand up show

Sushant Basyal turns a near-death car accident into pure comedy in his one-hour stand-up show, Accidentally Funny.

22 August, 6pm onwards, Ticket: Rs300, Shilpee Theatre



Burned and Being

Aishworya Shakya's solo exhibition Burned and Being uses ceramics to reflect her belief in simplicity, peace, and healing. Through freeform designs and contemplative patterns, she transforms intangible experiences into inner beauty.

Till 30 September, 11am-7pm, Dalai-La Art Space, Thamel

Career Conclave

Insightful workshops and opportunities await participants at the 'Nepal ma Future Cha?' conclave that will include Nepal's top companies.

6 September, 10am onwards, Ticket: Rs100, Hotel Yak & Yeti



Healing camp

Recharge and revive the spirit with healing sessions designed to restore balance and uplift your mind, body, and soul.

23 August, 11am-4pm, Fee: Rs100, The Divine Touch, Sano Gaucharan



Music

Ghazal Night

Be part of Ghazal night at Musicology for a midweek wind down with family and friends.

27 August (Wednesdays), 7pm onwards, Cafe Musicology



Nishank Yakthumba

Nishank Yakthumba with The Walkman is bringing some jazzy tunes to KatJaz Sessions at Moksh.

28 August, 7:30pm onwards, Ticket: Rs800, Moksh

John Rai & co

John Chamling Rai will take the stage with his soulful vocals at Kritipur Music Fest alongside his band The Locals.

The line-up also includes Samir Shrestha and The Hulaki.

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



The Elements

Head over to Taragaon, where The Elements will be live at the Serenade Sessions this Friday

22 August, Ticket: Rs700, Taragaon Next



Vek

Celebrated for weaving traditional Nepali melodies with contemporary sounds, Vek is set to showcase his music in an intimate live show at Take 1.

29 August, 3pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, Eden, Sanepa



Getaway



Staycation @ Aloft

Treat yourself to a chic urban getaway, crafted for Nepali nationals and expats. The package includes 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 access to the rooftop pool, and flexible check-in and check-out.

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

Sunshine Resort Pokhara

Escape to this boutique resort for a tranquil retreat offering luxurious accommodations with breathtaking mountain views. Enjoy their infinity pool, and easy access to local attractions like Phewa Lake and World Peace Pagoda.

Phedi Patan, 9801181115

Paradise Villa

Paradise Villa promises an unforgettable experience with their on-site spa featuring rejuvenating massages, dry sauna, and jacuzzi, or culinary delights at their cafeteria, which serves both local and international cuisines.

Budhanilkantha, 9851365487



Serene Resort

Serene is where breathtaking Himalayan vistas meet unparalleled comfort. Whether you're looking for a peaceful retreat or an adventurous getaway, this resort will be your perfect escape for the weekend.

Nagarkot (01) 6680189

Hotel Bhrikuti Tara

Hotel Bhrikuti Tara offers a blend of modern comfort and cultural charm, making it an ideal getaway for travelers seeking a retreat near Boudha. The hotel's Rooftop Oasis Restaurant is a must-try featuring British, French, Indian, and Nepali cuisine.

Boudhadwar Marg (01) 4595266



Dining

Blenders

Cool off at Blenders with a refreshing milkshake this summer. Their signature light-bulb shaped reusable bottles and fun, flavorful options, make it all the more exciting.

City Centre, Kamal Pokhari, 9851219100



Teej at Aloft

This Teej, 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

Thistle Triangle

Thistle is a true treat for any food lover. Explore their diverse Eurasian menu or indulge in their mouthwatering fiery Peri Peri wings or the hearty Triple Chicken Feast.

Maitighar Mandala (01) 4101740

The Big O

A great spot for a wide range of menu, including their popular chicken doner kebab and flavorful slushies that come in six different flavours. The restaurant also serves tasty kebabs, grilled wings, and loaded fries.

Sanepa, 9702156951

JAR

JAR whips up a fascinating mix of global and local favorites from Nepali sets to creamy pastas and sizzling steaks. Head to their premises for an exclusive dining experience.

Baneshwor, 9802325777

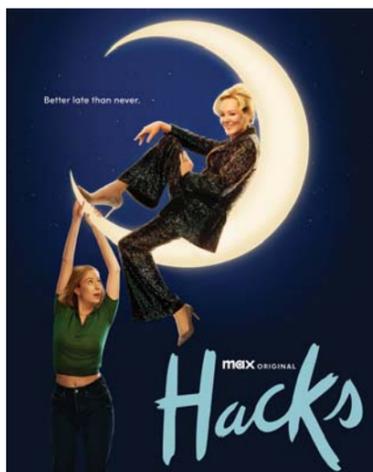


Weekend Weather



Wet Weekend

We are now entering what in Nepali is called the Bhadaure Jhari phase of the monsoon, where the moisture from the Bay of Bengal is diminishing but there is infusion of water vapour from eddies off the Arabian Sea. These two sometimes collide, leading to destructive cloudbursts. For Kathmandu Valley, this means bright humid mornings giving way to localised convective storms. More heavy rain forecast for the weekend in Central Nepal.



Our Pick

American dark dramedy tv series Hacks follows celebrated stand-up comedian Deborah Vance whose residency at the Palmetto Casino in Las Vegas is in jeopardy unless she can reinvent her acclaimed but outdated act. Desperate, Deborah hires young comedy writer Ava Daniels—who has become a pariah in the industry due to her reputation as being arrogant—to spruce up her material. Butting heads as soon as the two begin their partnership, they must navigate their professional and personal dynamics as they start a new journey in the comedy world. Stars Jean Smart and Hannah Einbinder.

गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचौं 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

Menstrual banishment moves to the Tarai

As families migrate from mountains to the plains, so does the outlawed practice of chhaupadi



GONE TOO SOON: Kamala Auji (above) was staying in a menstrual shed of a relative (left) when she was bitten by a snake and passed away. She was 30.

Unnati Chaudhary in Kanchanpur

Kamala Auji's family moved from the mountains of Achham to the Kanchanpur plains in search of an easier life.

They bought a patch of farm and built a one-storey mud thatched house, and a smaller shed beside it.

Kamala and her husband then left for India to work as labourers in Mumbai, earning enough to upgrade their little house into a concrete structure. When the house was finally ready in April, Kamala returned to the village to raise her children while her husband stayed behind in Mumbai.

But despite the family having moved into a new house, the dingy shed was still there. This was the छुड गोठ, the menstrual hut in which Kamala spent nights during her periods every month.

Despite laws against it, menstrual banishment is still practised and it is proof that cultural mores take longer to eradicate. It has also followed people as they migrate from the mountains to the plains.

Kamala was spending a rainy night in the shed last month when its roof started leaking. She shifted to her relative's menstrual hut next door where shortly after midnight she was bitten by a snake.

The family and neighbours rushed Kamala to the Seti Provincial Hospital, but she died the next day in hospital at age 30.

"We did not have to practice chhaupadi when we were in Mumbai, but here in the village, we had no choice but to follow the custom," says Kamala's sister-in-law Ashmita. "Superstition took Kamala's life."

The majority of people in the plains of Kailali and Kanchanpur are from the indigenous Tharu community, where chhaupadi is not the norm. But as Nepalis move from the mountains to the plains, their traditions are also migrating south.

In spite of the government ban on the practice, and frequent campaigns to demolish chhaupadi sheds, there are 120 of such huts just in Ward 2 of Krishnapur Municipality alone.

"Until some years ago, chhaupadi and menstrual huts were a problem in the hills that we would only hear about," says ward chair Arjun Saud. "Now they are in our own backyard."

Parbati Chaudhary was born and raised in Kailali and says women from her Tharu community never had to isolate themselves in

the sheds while menstruating.

"We never practiced chhaupadi, but some of our sisters are following a practice that was never a part of our tradition," says Chaudhary.

The Tharu had their own customs in which the eldest son and daughter-in-law would together be custodians of the main religious shrines. The daughters-in-law used to sleep in the temples even during menstruation.

But now some Tharu women have taken on the superstition of their neighbours from the mountains and avoid religious events while menstruating — believing that doing so will anger the gods.

The nights that women in rural western Nepal are forced to spend in menstrual sheds exposes them to risk of rape, robbery, fires and attacks by wild animals. In January, a woman in Kailali was injured in a tiger attack as she slept inside a shed. Snakes are rampant during the monsoon in the Tarai.

Last year, a teenager in Achham was raped by her relative as she spent a night in a menstrual hut. Most cases of rape and sexual violence go unreported.

"The safety of women is increasingly compromised due to this practice, but most people do not seem to understand these threats in their adherence to customs," says Dammar Bahadur BK, Deputy Inspector General of Sudurpaschim Provincial Police.

The government issued a directive to eradicate menstrual huts in 2006, but it took another decade for Nepal to criminalise the practice. The National Penal Code imposes a three month prison term and a fine of up to Rs3,000 for individuals who force women into menstrual huts.

A slew of deaths of women in menstrual huts prompted the government in 2019 to search-and-destroy all sheds used for menstrual banishment across 19 districts in the Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces. Subsequently, 7,545 structures were razed.

DEMOLISHING THE HUTS

Days after Kamala Auji's death in her village of Nigali the Kanchanpur District Administration Office wrote to all local governments in the district to demolish every menstrual huts they could find.

Says Mayor Hemraj Ojha of Krishnapur Municipality: "Any individual or family which does not demolish their menstrual hut will be fined Rs10,000 and face further action."

But despite laws, cases related to menstrual huts have not reached

the courts, preventing legal action against perpetrators.

"The problem is we do not receive any complaints because people consider it a tradition and not criminal," says advocate Shrestha. "We cannot blame this on weak implementation of the law."

Sudurpaschim Province has introduced its own policy to eradicate the practice, and has conducted awareness campaigns in Achham, where the custom is most rampant, to promote safe menstruation.

"But awareness campaigns are not enough when people still

fear divine wrath," says Meghraj Khadka, Sudurpaschim's Minister for Social Development.

Women's rights activist Sabitra Ghimire says it is not enough to demolish menstrual huts: "People must see it as an unlawful, violent and criminal act."

So far, communities in western Nepal have been known to rebuild the sheds as soon as they are demolished. Even women from educated families practise the custom every month.

Ved Awasthi of the Single Mother's Group here says she and her daughter do not practice

chhaupadi, and she adds, "Our children learn whatever we teach them."

Dhangadi-based sociology teacher Tikkeswori Joshi says that while students who lived with their parents still practice chhaupadi, those who live on their own do not.

Says Joshi: "Our culture and customs are a way of life passed down from generations, they live on through us and go where we go. Chhaupadi will be difficult to eliminate unless lessons against cultural malpractices begin right at home." 🇳🇵

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PHOTOS: RABINDRA DHANT / INSTAGRAM

Fighting tooth and nail for Nepal

Sky is the limit for mixed martial arts champion Rabindra Dhant

Vishad Raj Onta

Rabindra Dhant stood at the centre of the octagonal ring at Shaheed Vijay Singh Sports Complex in Noida near New Delhi earlier this month. White trunks, mouth open, breathing heavy, taking it all in. A Nepal flag was draped proudly over his shoulders as the national anthem played.

The referee raised Dhant's hand in victory. A gold championship belt joined the flag on his shoulders, as confetti burst into the air.

"After 54 seconds of round 3, for your winner, by knockout, and the new Matric Fight Night bantamweight champion, Rabindra Dhant," belted the announcer.

Dhant had just defeated Chungren 'The Indian Rhino' Koren, 27, from Manipur in the main event of Indian fight promotion Matrix Fight Night (MFN) on 2 August in the bantamweight division (125-135 lbs).

Koren had been confident he could easily overpower the fighter from Nepal, and said as much: "He's a kid, I'm going to break him mentally. It's not going to be a problem."

Dhant was more subdued. Before the main event, he told the interviewer: "I am not feeling a lot of pressure, I feel pretty normal since I have fought in international promotions and quite a bit in India."

In round one the two touched gloves and started tentatively, before locking in a clinch against the cage. The fight went to the ground, and Dhant moved

seamlessly to first mount and then get behind Koren, raining in punches and causing early damage.

Koren stood up and ate a barrage of kicks to the body. Koren had his moments punching back in the first round, but could not sustain a long attack.

Already in the second round, it was clear that Dhant had a fuller gas tank. He wriggled out of bad positions and turned them quickly into pins and punches. Koren's background in wrestling showed, with some pretty smooth transitions, and ended the round

on top, having locked in a 'Darce' choke, in which the arm triangles around their opponent's neck and shoulder.

But Koren was clearly exhausted by the third round, and even the commentator noticed. Dhant still looked fresh and was able to land strike after strike on his sluggish opponent, who was soon knocked out. The Nepalis in the audience, many wearing topi, erupted in delight.

Dhant's improbable journey to become a professional fighter started from a tiny village in Bajhang. Like most young men from this district in far-western Nepal, he went to India after school and worked first as a labourer in Pithoragarh and then in an office in New Delhi.

The foray into martial arts started with training in karate in the mornings. Dhant's coaches noted his abilities, and pushed him to explore mixed martial arts (MMA). Dhant took to the sport immediately, winning first a local fight night, then a national-level amateur competition. All while facing pressure from home to give up the sport -- there simply was no money in it.

He continued fighting

professionally in New Delhi and started coaching at the local gym. During and after Covid, he would bounce between Nepal and India, finding it harder and harder to find opportunities to fight, and even considered migrating to the Gulf.

It was then that he met Jiu Jitsu coach Diwiz Piya, who was struck by Dhant's talent, fearlessness, and humility. Only after their first training session did Dhant reveal his fighting background.

Dhant started training under Piya, who helped fix fights across India. Dhant won six fights in a row, earning a chance to fight in the ONE Fighting Championship. He won his first ONE FC fight in September 2023 against the Russian Torepchi Dongak, but then lost to Ismail Khan of Pakistan.

Dhant regrouped and had two more wins. His last fight had been at the BRAVE CF 93 in Zhengzhou where he had taken on Chinese fighter Eqiyebeu, wrestling him to the ground, getting behind him, and knocking him out with punches — an effective strategy referred to as ground and pound.

Dhant had then been training out of Soma Fight Club in Bali, Indonesia, when the opportunity for the fight at MFN came up.



"This fight came about, I wouldn't say out of nowhere. We had always anticipated a fight in MFN," says Piya, who also manages Dhant in addition to coaching him.

NO-HOLDS-BARRED

The sport of MMA is about professional fighting. It is about defeating the other person in the ring, through submission holds or a knockout. Or, in the case that neither of those yield definitive results, a panel of judges decides which fighter was better overall.

As the name suggests, MMA involves a melding of martial arts, including boxing, kickboxing, Muay Thai, judo, wrestling, submission grappling, karate, and taekwondo. This makes for a much more complex and complete fighting sport than, say, boxing, which only allows punches.

This no-holds-barred fighting originated in ancient Greece as Pankration blended wrestling and boxing, and allowed strikes, pins, and submissions. Limits were drawn at biting and eye gouging. Fights often lasted for hours, and it was one of the most popular events at the ancient Olympics.

In its modern form MMA was born in the early 1990s in Colorado, with an organisation called Ultimate Fighting Championship. The early instances of the UFC saw athletes from different styles fight each other. A kickboxer went up against a practitioner of Kenpo Karate, and a boxer fought an athlete trained in Brazilian jiu jitsu, a submission grappling martial art.

As the sport matured and athletes got better and more professional, MMA became more structured, and disciplines started blurring into each other.

It is also one of the only sports where women fight on the same cards as men, and are respected and appreciated for their skill as much as the other gender.

The sport is still in its early stages in Nepal, but maturing quickly. Driving its development is Diwiz Piya, who had been obsessed with fighting and fought in amateur bouts while studying in Thailand.

Piya founded Lock n Roll MMA and has been teaching out of The Pump at Jhamsikhel, and Tapout Fitness at Maharajganj. His team of experienced fighters provides world-class instruction on Jiu Jitsu, Kickboxing, and MMA six days a week. Local regulars as well as tourists and expats drop in for their sessions.

Lock n Roll has also been holding popular UFC-style fighting events at venues including Club LoD in Thamel, Gyanmandala in Jhamsikhel, and the Dasrath Stadium with Nepali, Indian, and French fighters.

Other gyms that teach MMA in Kathmandu include Rage Fitness, Fight Club Nepal, and Gymkhana. Outside Kathmandu, there is the Pokhara Fight Club, as well as a few gyms that teach Muay Thai. Another option is the Himalayan Blood Kickboxing Gym in Damak.

Following the win in Noida, Prime Minister K P Oli and Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah have met Dhant. Kathmandu Metropolitan City has awarded him Rs200,000, and Oli announced a Rs500,000 prize.

Given Dhant's journey and an increased audience for the sport in Nepal, one can expect Nepal Warriors Championship (NWC) events to be packed out at bigger venues. But more importantly, this will inspire many more fighters, also from rural parts of the country.

Besides Dhant, other rising young Nepali fighters include UK-based Yuki 'The Gorkha' Angdembe, and Japan-based kickboxer Abiral 'Himalayan Cheetah' Ghimire.

For Dhant now, the sky is the limit. He says: "I want to be a fighter from Nepal doing it at the highest level." 🇳🇵

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The cost of preserving

Manju Bajracharya
von Rospatt in Kapilvastu

Rajkumar Yadav is a community activist and tour guide in Shivgarh, a small village situated by the western gateway of Tilaurakot, the ancient city of Kapilvastu.

The village appears in early sketches of PC Mukherjee, the Bengali archaeologist who first excavated Tilaurakot in 1899 -- a reminder that the village has been part of this landscape for at least over a century.

Just 15km to the west of the birthplace of the Buddha in Lumbini is the less visited Tilaurakot, the archaeological site widely believed to be the former palace of the Shakya kingdom into which Siddhartha Gautam was born and raised.

Several rounds of excavations and research have found artefacts, some of which are on display at the Kapilvastu Museum. Despite its cultural, religious and historical importance, Tilaurakot has remained on UNESCO's tentative list for World Heritage nomination since 1996, in the absence of diplomatic support needed for full recognition.

The Department of Archaeology's geophysical survey mapping and excavation work was initiated in 2013 with sponsorship from the Japanese-Funds-in-Trust. It revealed more ruins near Tilaurakot, around Shivgarh -- remains of monasteries, stupas, ponds, and an industrial zone outside of the current compound of Tilaurakot.

Officials hope to unearth more of the ruins of the ancient Shakya Kingdom. Ram Bahadur Kunwar of the Department of Archaeology in Kathmandu says the intention is to preserve existing ruins and create tourism facilities.

LOST HOMES

But the expansion comes at a human cost. Archaeological work has meant losing homes and fracturing the social ties that have bound the Shivgarh community for generations. The government planned a phased land acquisition outside the palace's western gate in early 2025.

Though a formal notice was issued last year by the Department of Archaeology, residents had been informally warned for years. Previous evictions cleared most of the village, with families resettling nearby, leaving piles of brick and cement where homes once stood.

Another round of evictions is imminent. Electricity has already been cut to remaining houses, and even the few homes still standing on the western edge are expected to be demolished soon. By the end of 2025, Shivgarh is likely to disappear entirely, a stark scene in a place tied to Buddhism and the legacy of Kapilvastu.

Shivgarh's plight mirrors earlier displacements in the region. Eight villages in Lumbini were relocated during the Master Plan, documented in a 2005 ethnography by Kate Molesworth and Ulrike Müller-Böcker: homes were demolished, electricity cut, compensation fell short, and the poorest residents, often those with the smallest landholdings, were pushed into landlessness.

The anger and disillusionment felt toward the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) and opaque, top-down decision-making processes they describe are strikingly similar to what residents of Tilaurakot express today. The



RAJKUMAR YADAV



RAJKUMAR YADAV



MANJU BAJRACHARYA VON ROSPATT

HOMELESS: Demolished home in Shivgarh in Tilaurakot.

Pulmati Ahirani, Rajkumar Yadav's mother, in her home before eviction.

Rajkumar Yadav in his home which will be demolished in the coming weeks.

demolitions in Shivgarh are therefore not simply about land acquisition for heritage, they are part of a broader pattern where the language of preservation obscures the displacement of marginalised communities.

It is a rainy late afternoon when I return to Shivgarh to speak with residents, days from another round of evictions. The humid air hangs heavy, and rain pools in the rutted paths.

Rajkumar Yadav's wife, brother, three children, sister, and mother have gathered in his home. The family has lived in Shivgarh for five generations. Rajkumar and his brother Bijay Yadav work as tour guides, following in the footsteps of their father, Ram Nath Yadav, who spent 40 years with the LDT, and Tilaurakot first as a security guard and then a tour guide. Before this house, the Yadavs were part of a 50-person joint family that split into multiple households; two have already been evicted.

Rajkumar's family has roughly ten days before they must leave, though the rains may buy them extra time. Their new home, a few kilometres away, is only partially built. The state compensation falls far short of rebuilding costs, and Rajkumar explains that plots are undervalued, with a 10% depreciation and a 5% profit tax applied even on the payout.

"We have sacrificed," he says, "and still we have to pay tax on what little we get."

He and his fellow community members have received no proof of payment for the profit tax, he adds, noting that while compensation ranges from Rs700,000 to Rs1.8 million near the highway, constructing a new home now costs up to Rs2.5-3 million.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Rajkumar and I walk through Shivgarh, once a roughly 35-home settlement, now down to around eight. Each story of residents still facing imminent eviction reveals the human toll behind the statistics and plans of the authorities.

Some former neighbours have moved nearby, while a few have gone as far away as Kathmandu. Many struggle to rebuild homes or cover medical bills. Others must go abroad to find work, pushed further into poverty by displacement. Most of the people who remain in Shivgarh are Dalit, others have a Muslim background. They are land-poor, poor in general, and hard hit by the displacement.

Those who received compensation first and those with more assets have been able to acquire land and make the move. Families are scattering, unravelling the dense web of social and familial ties that has bound the community for generations.

A community member explains that several households that had gone abroad for seasonal migration, or left the village for extended periods faced particular difficulties. In some cases, their land had even been confiscated in their absence, with no compensation provided upon return.

Although there is a legal provision to claim missed compensation, doing so requires documentation from the local authorities. This process is burdensome and only a few people in the community have successfully done so.

In the downpour, I met Mehni Hasan Mina, an elderly Muslim man living nearby. He lives with his grandchildren and children. His son drives an auto-rickshaw,

and Mehni himself once pedalled a cycle rickshaw. "I feel pain in my chest," he says, voice cracking. "The village where we all lived together is gone now."

His new home is unfinished, he struggles to pay for its construction. His house sits between the ruins of two larger family homes, now piles of rubble.

The day before, a construction contractor came to persuade Mehni to leave. Instead, Mehni bargained for time, explaining that his daughter had just given birth and was in the hospital. It is a temporary reprieve, eviction looms.

Down the lane, four teenage girls huddled under a large umbrella. We spoke as the rain poured down around us. Their new home, still under construction, has no electricity or paved roads and is far from inhabitable. One girl took me to her home, a dilapidated brick building with a tin roof.

Her mother, Janiki Pasi, points out gaping holes in the walls. The bricks have been salvaged for the new home because they cannot afford new materials.

They received only Rs700,000 from the government. For now, the family of five sleeps in one room, two beds outside are only covered by tin and mosquito nets. Strong wind would strip them bare. The electricity to their home was cut a month ago, leaving them afraid of snakes and the dark.

Rajkumar Yadav adds: "The village had electricity, a good road, clean water. Now we have nothing. At night, the children can't study." The electricity cuts to these houses soon to be evicted were deliberate, he said, and made without warning.

The home of 90-year-old Ram Rati Pasi, a long time inhabitant of Shivgarh, is lit only by a phone

flashlight. She sits on the ground surrounded by grandchildren, daughters and daughters-in-law. At least ten people live in her 100-year-old mud home, which Yadav argues should also be protected for its heritage value.

"I wish I could die here," she says. Floods long ago took most of her land, the new plot her family acquired is inundated in the monsoon. Her family received Rs1.8 million in three installments. Given their poverty, a significant portion went toward medical expenses and education, leaving little for house-construction. "The government is neglecting us," Ram Rati Pasi says. "How can we move from this place?"

'SMALL COMMUNITY'

In a shop at the northern edge of the village are shopkeeper Rita Bhandari, her father Nandaram and two other men, Suresh Yadav and Mukesh Paswan. The electricity cuts to the community have not yet affected the shop.

As the humid evening set in, our conversation took on the rhythm of a focus group. "We have to live like we are landless," says Rita, who plans to stay until the end because of her shop. She adds that the family will likely have to move far away.

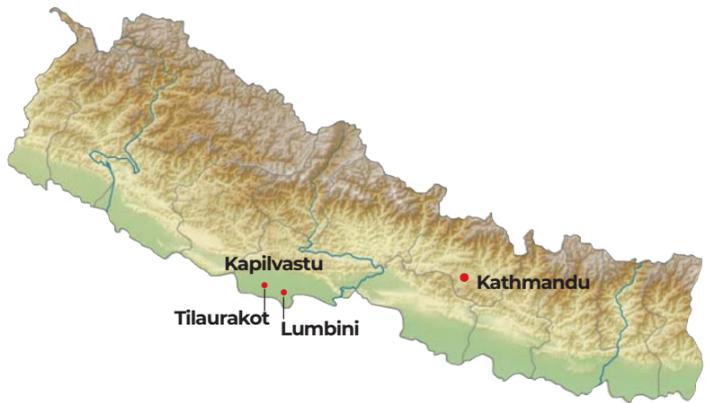
Officials from the LDT had first encouraged her to open this shop for tourists, providing a place for food and refreshment and maintained an information kiosk counter right next to it. Residents say that the government-owned kiosk was the first building demolished as a show of symbolic participation from LDT.

Rita's Hindu family values its own culture, but respects Buddhism as well. "The government has broken our connection with Tilaurakot, and undermined our feeling of belonging," she says.

Suresh Yadav says: "We have to move to a different place, but we used to live well together. We don't know what kind of place or people we will encounter. You don't see our tears, but we are crying inside."

Born and raised in Shivgarh, Suresh has not yet built a home, the rain and electricity cuts make construction impossible. "The children are afraid of the dark and

Nepal's past



of snakes. At night, they sit in candlelight," he says. He anticipates relocating in the next two months.

Rajkumar Yadav had repeatedly advocated for the community, appealing to numerous officials, including those at the Department of Archaeology, but the community's voice was largely ignored and their concerns went unheard. "For the government, a small community is just a small community," Rajkumar says.

Mukesh says achieving World Heritage Site status is essential for better protection, adding that the government neglects Tilaurakot: "If Nepal's diplomacy were stronger, this site could bring more tourism and income for locals."

Rajkumar says heritage conservation must involve local communities before international or national priorities are considered, highlighting neglect from top-down decision-making.

Suresh's frustration with local authorities is even sharper: "The mayor should be jailed for

not doing anything to protect the community or preserve the site."

Everyone fears that outsiders, "people from Kathmandu," will take over their land and run businesses where their homes once stood. Suresh believes Parliament knows little of the displacement here, and legislators would be outraged once they find out.

As night sets over Kapilvastu, Shivgarh is half-empty, its remaining homes framed by rubble and rain-soaked paths. At Rajkumar's home, we share a meal and speak of Buddhism and hope for the future.

Rajkumar hopes to use his NGO, Lotus Sutra, to train locals in tour guiding, Buddhist awareness, and skills for youth and women to support livelihoods. His brother Bijay dreams of working abroad to support his family, a sacrifice he outlines in the shadow of the palace where Siddhartha once left his own wife and newborn son.

The stakes of heritage preservation are becoming

strikingly clear: neglect is not only a practical issue but a structural one, rooted in the top-down systems of governance that marginalise those living closest to the sites they are meant to protect. The poorest suffer most from relocation. The irony is stark: the birthplace of the Buddha's renunciation has become the site of a different departure, a forced eviction into uncertainty.

The spokesperson for the Department of Archaeology in Kathmandu, Ram Bahadur Kunwar, was the official overseeing Tilaurakot for over a decade. He defended the government's approach: "We have been giving compensation with justice, we gave good money for the land. If I lived there, I would also want a lot of money from the government, but what we gave was fair."

Kunwar rejected the idea that families have been shortchanged. "I don't think the compensation is too little. In fact, when people buy new land with the money, they manage to buy more land than before and build better homes." He says residents were given years of notice, with formal eviction orders in 2024. "They had time to figure out their next plans."

When pressed about depreciation deductions and the 5% profit tax, which residents say was never properly documented, he maintained that all receipts had already been sent.

Kunwar outlined the DoA's broader vision: acquiring land around Tilaurakot to strengthen its candidacy for UNESCO World Heritage status. A Master Plan, he explained, will include a bus park by the museum and a pedestrian route to the site. The aim, he said, is to "uplift the community" through tourism, including local guide and crafts training. But residents dispute that such programs have reached their community.

The Taiwanese Buddhist

organisation Tzu Chi once worked with Rajkumar on a village resettlement plan to preserve community cohesion and provide services, documenting the village before eviction. According to Rajkumar and Tzu Chi, the proposal was rejected by the LDT and the Department of Archaeology.

Rajkumar believes officials didn't want to admit to failing the community, some villagers suspected corruption. However, when prompted about the work of Tzu Chi for the preservation of Shivgarh, Kunwar was dismissive: "There was no plan like that. I don't think I saw such a plan."

It appears that since local inhabitants have accepted compensation, there is nothing more for officials to do or say. They feel their responsibility has been discharged. Yet, many of those displaced were already among the poorest, least-protected families in Kapilvastu, ill-served by the state long before the bulldozers arrived.

The failure rests with state officials, who have prioritised revenue and tourism over the welfare of local residents. Had relocation genuinely improved housing and living conditions, frustration towards the authorities, and the desperation would likely have been far less.

HEALING

In Kapilvastu under the expansive evening sky, I sit with Rajkumar, Bijay, and Ram Achal Yadav and other founding members of the Lotus Sutra. We gather at the site where the foundation has just been laid for a meditation centre.

They proudly show me the site and share their vision to build a guesthouse, the Zen Heritage House, as a place to anchor spiritual connection for the local community. Lotus Sutra's executive director Ram Achal Yadav is a scholar of Buddhist

studies and a community leader committed to preserving not only the site's tangible ruins, but also its intangible heritage of belonging.

Through Lotus Sutra, he and others are working to link heritage preservation with skill training, livelihoods, and cultural projects, aiming to ensure that the community remains connected to Tilaurakot even if their physical homes are gone.

Ram Achal Yadav together with Rajkumar and Bijay has applied for funding to launch a project combining heritage conservation with livelihood development for 25 local women and youth. "To heal the trauma of relocation," Ram Achal says, "we must use spirituality for the common good."

While Tilaurakot and Lumbini are celebrated globally as sites of Buddhist heritage, the surrounding communities are overwhelmingly Hindu and Muslim, with only a small Buddhist minority. Yadav's aim is to grow the community's awareness and participation in heritage promotion and preservation.

"It's our shared history here," he says, "whether Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist. Everyone here is part of this heritage."

But as state and international actors work to restore Tilaurakot's palace ruins, the living heritage of Shivgarh is quietly disappearing. If communities like Shivgarh are sidelined, the legacy of Kapilvastu may be remembered not for its heritage, but for the lives displaced to protect it. 🇳🇵

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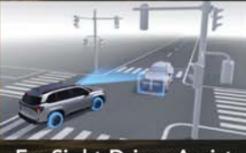
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