

New wine, new bottles

Shristi Karki

There is nothing like an election to focus the minds of politicians. So, with less than three months to go for the 5 March political parties both new and old are in full preparation mode.

The UML and the NC are following a two-pronged strategy: filing separate writ petitions in the Supreme Court for the reinstatement of the House, even as they prepare for general conventions to decide on tickets for candidates.

Following the example of the alliance of left-aligned parties into the new Nepali Communist Party, the RSP and Bibeksheel parties have also joined forces.

“Old political parties that were supposed to defend democracy are themselves hegemonic, oligarchic, exclusive, and patriarchal, and the only strong voices inside political parties seem to be coming from women like Binda Pandey, Usha Kiran Timilsina and Sumana Shrestha,” says political scientist Sucheta Pyakuryal.

The new post-September political parties are trying to change that perception by projecting themselves as reform minded and clean, and navigating the dynamics of election preparation.

There are over 800,000 new young voters, and their ballots will be a key determinant in the outcome in March. Only a few youth leaders have formed their own parties, others are trying to decide which party to team up with. Others have partnered with

career politicians who left their mainstream outfits out of frustration with the leadership.

“The newly-formed parties are relatively more inclusive, but they are also led by strongmen,” says Pyakuryal. “It remains to be seen how long we can sustain democracy if our only choices are these personalities.”

Activist Ojaswee Bhattarai is part of the five-member council of the Pragatishil Loktantrik Party launched by former Maoists Baburam Bhattarai and Janardan Sharma. Ojaswee Bhattarai told a roundtable last week: “Our movement exposed youth exclusion from decision making and resistance of political leaders, who themselves have been part of Nepali politics since their youth, to make space for a new generation.”

She added: “It is now crucial for young people to come forward and seek leadership positions, and take part in a process that has so far been limited to the political elite.”

Will seniors in politics want to genuinely do a better job, or are they simply looking for opportunities that were denied to them in their old parties? We will have to wait and see. Not everyone is happy with elderly leaders pretending that they are with the youthful groups.

Janardan Sharma, who left the Maoists after falling out with his former comrade Pushpa Kamal Dahal, was heckled this week in his home district of Rukum West.

The main parties still have support among older rural voters, and if the new parties do not unite they may dilute the vote in March, which would help the NCP, UML and NC.

“There is a huge opportunity for these new parties to onboard young political figures to push the agenda of young and marginalised Nepalis,” says Pyakuryal. “These new parties will also have a better chance in the polls if they unite under a single banner.”

Former RSP minister Sumana Shrestha is yet to join any political party, but was present at the launch of the Ujyalo Nepal Party last week. She also urged new political actors emerging from the September movement to unite.

“Not working together will be like rolling out the red carpet for old parties,” Shrestha said.

There is anticipation about what plans Shrestha and Kathmandu mayor Balen Shah have. Also closely watched are emergent figures like Birendra Basnet of Buddha Air, who may be keeping his options open for candidacy through the Gatishil Loktantrik Party he recently formed.

Kulman Ghising has faced flak for launching his Ujyalo party while still serving in the interim Cabinet. He may resign ahead of elections to declare his candidacy.

Says Pyakurel: “Any new leader who contests the election needs to have political acumen as well as a strong sense of responsibility and ethical accountability, not just charisma. They will need to approach Nepal’s socio-political and economic needs in a more technical, less political manner as they put forward their ideas of reforms before voters.”



SIGNED AND DELIVERED: Prime Minister Sushila Karki and GenZ leaders signed a 10-point agreement on Wednesday that recognises the September protest as a political movement. The accord also incorporates constitutional, political, governance, and electoral reforms.

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The Himalaya is not fragile

The real fragility of Nepal's mountains is of economics and governance, not geology.



GUEST EDITORIAL

Ngamindra Dahal

International Mountain Day on 11 December should have inspired celebration, not cynicism. At COP30 in Belém there was a rare diplomatic win: an agreement to hold a dedicated global dialogue on mountains in 2026, to include mountain-specific indicators in the new climate adaptation framework.

A welcome shift, certainly. But the old narrative lingers — mountains are fragile, disaster-prone, eternally vulnerable. The uncomfortable truth is that safe and environment-friendly development in the mountains is simply too expensive.

To build a kilometre of two-lane highway in the Tarai costs Rs200 million. That same kilometre on a Himalayan slope with retaining walls, drainage, bioengineering, and landslide protection costs more than Rs1 billion. Add tunnels, viaducts or design speeds of 80km/h and that figure can easily triple.

This pattern repeats across all sectors. A 50MW run-of-river hydropower plant that costs \$80 million in low-lying valleys costs four times more in the mountains. The headrace tunnels have to be longer, desanding basins must trap the silt, the access roads cost more than the entire project. And there is no way to prevent the scheme from being washed



SONAM CHOEKYI LAMA

away by a glacial collapse flood.

Nepal's annual road budget is only Rs150 billion and scattered thinly across 753 municipalities, most of them perched on steep, unstable slopes. When resources are inadequate and political cycles short, incentives for corruption are predictable: shaving a slope at 70 degrees instead of 45, shortcuts on drainage canals, skimping on asphalt thickness, or skipping the gabion.

In high Nepal, the bulldozer is the engineer. We hang on the prayer that the monsoon will be merciful. July arrives, and reality returns. Mountains fall on roads, flash floods sweep away swathes of highways.

Each failure costs more to repair than proper engineering would have cost at the start. We are not just paying once. We the taxpayers are signing up for a subscription to disaster. The real fragility of Nepal's mountains is of governance, not geology.

This is what the international climate conversation habitually misses. Mountain communities are repeatedly told to 'respect nature' and avoid linear infrastructure, often by the same countries proudly announcing new expressways and their airports in their own countries.

Mountain people are not anti-development. They want what everyone else wants: electricity that does not flicker, roads that survive the monsoon, schools their children can reach in winter. What they lack is not aspiration, it is the budget required to build things safely that is not stolen by politicians and their crony contractors.

If the world truly wants to protect the Himalaya, Andes or Alps, and the billions who rely on them for water, the answer is not more romantic slogans about fragility of the mountains. It is concessional, patient financing that narrows the gap between cheap and dangerous versus expensive and resilient. And a transparent government machinery that spends that money wisely.

This means money for tunnels instead of unstable surface cuts. Money for

bioengineered slopes instead of bulldozer scars. Money for hydropower built for 1-in-100-year floods, not 1-in-25-year budgets.

This is not charity. Mountain infrastructure safeguards global water, carbon, energy and biodiversity systems. It is a global public good.

In Syangja, small investments under the Climate Adaptive Equitable Water Management Practices have restored nine community ponds, protected recharge zones and increased dry-season spring flow by about a third. All of this for less than the cost of repairing 1km of poorly built road.

Our experience from the Subnational Governance Programme (SNGP) in some districts show that when municipalities receive practical guidance backed by scientific research, they can scale these solutions with modest, targeted budgets. Local governments are not the problem — they are the missing link.

The problem is not technical incapacity, it is chronic under-financing of the most cost-intensive terrain on earth. Let us retire the language of Himalayan fragility that excuses inaction.

Mountains are not pleading for sympathy. They are demanding fairness: that the true cost of safe development in the world's steepest geographies be acknowledged and shared. Until that bill is paid, the monsoon will continue to do the accounting, one landslide, one road, one abandoned promise at a time.

Ngamindra Dahal is a water and climate adaptation practitioner based at the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation, Kathmandu.



Trending Online



Cricket Carnival

by Vishad Raj Onta

The second season of the Nepal Premier League which is now coming to an end was a more mature product. Sudurpaschim Royals is now waiting for a winner between Biratnagar Kings and Lumbini Lions for the finals on Saturday. Follow us for the latest developments.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Doomscrolling Democracy

by Ayusha Chalise

Rumour, bias and propaganda have always been a part of the informationsphere, but what makes it different today is the velocity at which falsehood spreads. Visit nepalitimes.com to read the full article.

Most popular on X



A New Normal

by Shristi Karki

Shantanu Dhakal was shot during the anti-corruption in Itahari on 8 September, and spent three weeks in hospital. Once back home, as he spent time in recovery, he decided to document online his near-death experience and post-protest life. Join the online discussion.

Most commented

Things Eventually Work Out

by Hiroshi Khanal

A Nepali migrant in Australia who raised AUD514,386 for the victims of the GenZ protests but faced much logistical challenge, online hate and the delays is finally able to release money to families amidst personal crisis. Details on our website.

Most visited online page

Letters

DEMOCRACY-MEDIA

Part of the problem is that many media outlets now optimise for audience preference rather than editorial integrity ('Doomscrolling democracy', Ayusha Chalise, #1288). When engagement becomes the main metric, truth often gets sidelined. This is why independent researchers, fact-checkers, and freelancers who aren't driven purely by profit or speed should have a larger role in shaping the media ecosystem. Strengthening these voices could help restore accountability and improve the quality of information circulating in the infosphere.

Sujal Koirala

SHANTANU DHAKAL

He is a fighter and a hero of the country ('A new normal', Shristi Karki, #1288).

Sonica Rai



More power to you.

Yawha Magrjt

God bless you, our braveheart.

Debbie Dewan

Much respect. Get well soon.

Ashutosh Chhetri

NEPAL MOUNTAINS

Thank you for this informative Editorial. If things don't change, they stay as they are... Stopping endemic corruption is almost impossible, it is well embedded and waves over the fragile framework of Nepal, the mountains and its people ('The Himalayan is not fragile', Ngamindra Dhala, guest editorial, page 2). However articles like yours give us hope.

Gill Porteous

This irony is beautifully written. Climate change will indeed have a greater impact on the community living in this area ('Hydropower on thin ice', Ayusha Chalise, nepalitimes.com). Thank you Ayusha for writing this.

Lamia Putri Damayanti

So sad. Back then Mustang was great ('Too little snow, too

much rain', Diya Rijal, #1287). Last year I was back and I just cried. Just awful, I am lucky I lived back then! With Aama and Bhaa in Samle. Garab-Dzong forever!

Coco Dkr

NEPAL ELECTIONS

With so much incendiary stuff afoot in the world the fear of combustible elections in Nepal is additionally real ('Stages of grief', Rabin Giri, #1288). Of course the civic powers know this - which is at least a start-point for the awareness of the balancing-act that they will need to employ.

Tony Jones

HENRY BARCLAY TODD

The passing of a true legend - more than a few fine single malts shared with Henry under the grandeur of Everest ('Henry Barclay Todd', Billi Bierling, nepalitimes.com).

Robert Mads Anderson

Online Package



KANGCHENJUNGA TREK

The world's third highest mountain is one of the Nepal's last pure wilderness areas. See photos and read story on page 6-7. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for multimedia content.



PIKEY PEAK

Pikey Peak at 4,065m is the ideal lookout from where eight eight-thousanders are visible. Join us on the Lumsa route, a lesser-known trail through quaint villages. Read the story on page 6-7.

1,000 Words



STATE OF THE STATE:

Prime Minister Sushila Karki met former president Bidya Devi Bhandari at Singha Darbar on Sunday, during which the two leaders discussed the 5 March election. The former president was on a visit to Singha Darbar to inspect damage caused by arson and vandalism on 9 September.

PMO



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Nepali scientist takes her skincare brand global by blending Ayurveda and modern scientific knowhow



Nepal Made #1
Our new series profiles world-class Nepali products and the people behind them.

Sudiksha Tuladhar

The Himalaya is the home to Ayurveda, the preventive and curative medicinal practice that relies on the tremendous diversity of plant life. This is where Hanuman is said to have come to find a specific rare herb when Ram was wounded in battle. When he could not find it, he tore off a whole mountain and hauled it down to Lanka.

Since then, herbal medicines and care products have been steadily modernised in India and Nepal. Now, one Kathmandu-based company, Herveda, is going global with an all-natural skincare brand that blends traditional knowledge of medicinal plants with modern technology.

Originally a Sanskrit word, Ayurveda literally means 'the science of life' and promotes physical and mental wellbeing through a holistic knowledge system that is 4,000 years old.

Ayurvedic products have gotten more popular as global demand rises for all-natural, chemical-free cosmetic and wellness products, instead of wasteful fast fashion and beauty trends.

Herveda was founded by Prativa Pandey, a scientist-entrepreneur and



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mother of two. She did her PhD in nanotechnology chemistry from Northwestern University in the United States and returned to Nepal in 2015 after the earthquake, staying back to explore the market and launch her brand.

"I wanted to do something in Nepal, but didn't want to be a doctor or engineer," says Pandey at the elegant Herveda showroom in

Jhamsikhel. "Whatever knowledge that I had gathered, I wanted to spread it in my own country."

Nepal is rich in traditional medicinal herbs and Ayurvedic plants, but proper utilisation and mobilisation has always been lagging. Most of the benefits are reaped by large companies and not local farmers. Pandey wanted to change that.



To ensure that it gives back to the community, Herveda collaborates with farmers and local traders for fair trade.

"I have always been fascinated by the medicinal herbs found in Nepal, and wanted to create high value products with them. It was a way to combine valuable indigenous knowledge with my academic research background," adds Pandey. "I did not require a huge investment, just a proper marketing strategy."

According to the Trade and Promotion Center under the Ministry of Industry, Nepal's import of cosmetic products is increasing every year, driven by demand from a younger population.

These younger customers are also more conscious about the products they use. For brands like Herveda, it is important that customers engage in wellness and skincare in an ethical and sustainable manner. Apart from being all natural, Herveda's flagship

store in Jhamsikhel has a reuse box where consumers can drop used bottles, which are then recycled.

The store also displays products from 35 local businesses. Pandey believes that Nepali brands should cross-promote and complement each other: "Rather than competing, I believe we should support each other. 1+1 can be 11, and not two."

Effectiveness and functionality hold great importance for Herveda, which employs 25 scientists to develop and lab test its products at its research institute.

Currently, there are products ranging from Rs400-2,000, which include lip balms, serums, and essential oils. A signature product is the Berry Boost Radiance Mask, which contains Spikenard (Jatamansi), Ashwagandha, Orange Peel, and Rhododendron.

Herveda exports to the United States and plans to expand to China and Europe. The products get a 50-100% markup in the international market.

The company recently received a grant from UKAid to expand the market as well as build capacity to scale up. It has partnered with Agriplayer software to help to develop QR codes on its products, which consumers will be able to scan to track the product sources and evaluate pricing.

Nepal lags behind in rules and regulations, and the lack of monitoring has allowed low quality cosmetic products to penetrate into the market. Herveda has got an international certification from USFTA, which is important for its foray into the export market.

"For the cosmetic industry to scale up, there should be a central testing facility that is well equipped and meets international standards. Additionally, export should be made easy," adds Pandey. "If there are too many barriers to entry, no one will be willing to invest." ❏



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Turkish Airlines pax

Turkish Airlines carried 7.4 million passengers in November, and available seat kilometers rose by 10.3% compared to 2024. International load factor was 84.3% while it was 86.8% for flights within Turkey. The number of passengers transiting Istanbul increased by 18.9% to 2.9 million compared to November 2024. Cargo/Mail carried during the period of November 2025 increased by 14.8% to 190,000 tons last month. From January-November 2025 the number of passengers increased by 8.4% to 85.3 million compared to the same period of 2024.

SAARC turns 40

SAARC Secretary General Golam Sarwar hosted a reception in Kathmandu to mark the 40th anniversary of the SAARC Charter adopted on 8 December 1985 by seven South Asian heads of state. Vice President Ramshah Prasad Yadav was chief guest and it was attended by Nepali dignitaries, ambassadors, diplomatic heads, business representatives, civil society, and media. Sarwar noted SAARC's progress from institutional building to program implementation and global outreach.

Fonepay iPhone

Two participants who complete at least three fund transfers via Global IME's Fonepay between 1 December and 8 January can win one of two iPhone 17s. Users who upload a video of their Fonepay direct transfer to social media can win Samsung wireless earphones.

Tiago.EV offer

Sipradi Trading has introduced the 'Greatest Offer of All Time' for the Tata Tiago.EV that starts at Rs2.75 million. Buyers can choose from a two-person Bali vacation, an iPhone 17 Pro Max, or a cash discount. Other benefits include lifetime access to DC fast charging, one year of vehicle tax coverage, free accessories, home charger installation.

Note ban overturned

Nepal is set to allow the use of INR500 and 1,000 notes, which it had banned in 2018. Migrant workers will find it easier to bring cash back to Nepal, and Indian tourists may spend more.

Contractor crackdown

GoN has cancelled Rs2 billion worth of infrastructure contracts and marked 250 projects as 'sick' due to contractor negligence in irrigation, road, and bridge projects. Contractors are required to submit revised proposals within 15 days or get terminated. Contractors blame political favouritism and absurdly long approval delays for stalled progress.

Rasuwagadi power



The 111MW Rasuwagadi Hydropower Project operated by NEA's Chilime restarted partial operation after floods in July destroyed its headworks, gates, debris systems, and tailrace. Repairs enable one of three units to generate 37 MW via temporary river diversion; the other two are expected to follow within a month.



Nabil SSE

Nabil Bank Limited renewed its agreement with TU's Faculty of Management to continue the Nabil Social and Sustainable Entrepreneurship program until 2028 which aims at sustainable business creation and jobs by educating potential and current entrepreneurs and connecting them to mentor networks and capital.

Dabur Khajurprash

Dabur has launched Khajurprash, a date-based health supplement that contains herbs and spices like Amla, Haritaki, Ashwagandha. The product helps with iron deficiency, provides sustained energy, boosts the immune system, and reduces inflammation, Dabur says.

Foton total care

The Chinese vehicle manufacturer Foton has announced the after-sale Total Care system that includes reliable service, genuine spare parts, warranty coverage, roadside assistance, and dedicated customer care at 17 service centers across Nepal.

Customs fraud

The GoN is imposing 200% cash fines and/or jail time for smuggling, fake documents, specification changes, or misusing tax exemptions. Export manipulators face 100% fines on goods value with confiscation. Customs agents protested the move in Bhairawa, claiming harsh penalties are being imposed for minor documentation errors.

NMB Insta Buy

NMB Insta Buy allows holders to convert purchases of more than Rs5,000 into monthly installments over 6 to 12 months. Customers upload their purchase invoices and POS slips via the eNMB mobile app or a dedicated portal. The service has transparent fees, competitive interest rates, and no prepayment penalties.

NMB also financed a 865kWh rooftop solar power system at Yashoda Foods in Chandrapur, Kapilvastu that reduces electricity costs by 65% and cuts annual CO2 emissions by 2,000 tonnes. The system, which used bifacial panels and AI-inverters, was installed by Prime Renewables.

Ncell 971 numbers

Ncell has started distributing mobile numbers beginning with 971 after running out of the prior ranges of 980, 981, 982, and 970. This expansion reflects a growing demand for SIM cards as mobiles get more popular.



Royal Enfield Hunter

Bookings and test rides are open for the Royal Enfield 2025 Hunter 350 which has a 349cc engine and starts at Rs494,900 for single-tone variants (Rio White, Dapper Grey, Graphite Grey) and Rs499,900 for dual-tone.

Bangkok races

The Nepal Embassy in Thailand is organising the Lumbini-Nepal Mini-Marathon on Gautam Buddha's birthday in May 2026 in Bangkok featuring 5k and 10k races to showcase Lumbini, and promote tourism.

Can the developing world weather the next financial crisis?

As asset prices soar and speculative money floods into risky markets, the global financial system is slipping back into perilous territory

Jayati Ghosh

As stock markets hit record highs, rising financial fragility is setting off alarm bells across the United States and Europe. The International Monetary Fund has recently echoed these concerns, stoking fears of a looming crisis.

The warning signs are everywhere – and they are disturbingly familiar. Asset prices are climbing well beyond what can be justified by underlying fundamentals, while non-bank financial intermediaries now play a similar role to that of “shadow banks” in the years leading up to the 2008 financial crisis. At the same time, the rise of stablecoins has pulled regulated banks into the opaque world of cryptocurrencies, and vast sums of speculative capital are flooding into AI stocks, driven more by hype than by proven returns.

These trends bear the unmistakable marks of a financial bubble entering its most precarious stage, when even minor shifts in investor sentiment can trigger a sharp correction. The recent collapse of US auto parts supplier First Brands and subprime auto lender Tricolor, both heavily leveraged and closely linked to non-bank financial institutions, may be early indications of structural vulnerabilities that are only just coming into view.

Behind this growing fragility lies the rapid expansion of private financial institutions over the past decade. According to the Financial Stability Board, these entities – which raise funds from retail investors and leverage their positions through aggressive borrowing – now account for nearly half of the world’s total financial assets. Their appetite for risk has helped drive up asset prices, even amid trade uncertainties and policy volatility. And the dismantling of already-weak financial regulations under US President Donald Trump has only compounded the threat.

Taken together, these forces could set in motion the manic cycle famously described by the economic historian Charles Kindleberger. The first stage, “euphoria,” is dominated by



SUMAN NEPALI

optimism and excess. It is inevitably followed by a period of “stringency” as defaults rise and credit tightens, before giving way to “revulsion,” when fear grips financial markets and even solvent borrowers struggle to find financing. Whether this sequence culminates in full-blown panic and collapse depends largely on how governments respond. But even without a crash, the consequences can be severe.

If history is any guide, the question is when – not if – another major financial meltdown will occur. For most of the world’s population, however, the more pressing concern is how a crisis that originates in the US and Europe will affect their own countries.

The precedents are hardly reassuring: both the 2008 crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic showed that turmoil in the US and other wealthy economies can devastate poorer countries with limited fiscal space and little protection against external shocks. When crises spread

beyond financial markets, the damage is swift and far-reaching. Investment dries up, growth falters, and unemployment rises, triggering a chain reaction that reduces export demand and curtails foreign-exchange inflows from tourism and remittances, spreading the pain worldwide.

Entrenched currency hierarchies exacerbate the problem. The dominance of the dollar, for example, ensures that in times of heightened uncertainty, private capital flows back to the US, causing sharp depreciations and banking crises in lower-income countries. Fears of capital flight further impede governments’ ability to pursue countercyclical macroeconomic policies, making an already-difficult adjustment even harder.

The fallout could be especially severe for debt-distressed countries, many of which built their growth strategies around exports to advanced economies. That model

has since been undermined by Trump’s protectionist policies, leaving indebted countries dangerously exposed to a confluence of economic, geopolitical, and climate shocks that threaten to turn the next global financial crisis into a truly catastrophic event.

Developing countries must recognise these risks and take urgent steps to strengthen their economic resilience. The top priority should be to diversify trade relationships. Confronted with the Trump administration’s erratic and often unreasonable demands, some have already begun reducing dependence on the US. This process, though necessary, will not be painless.

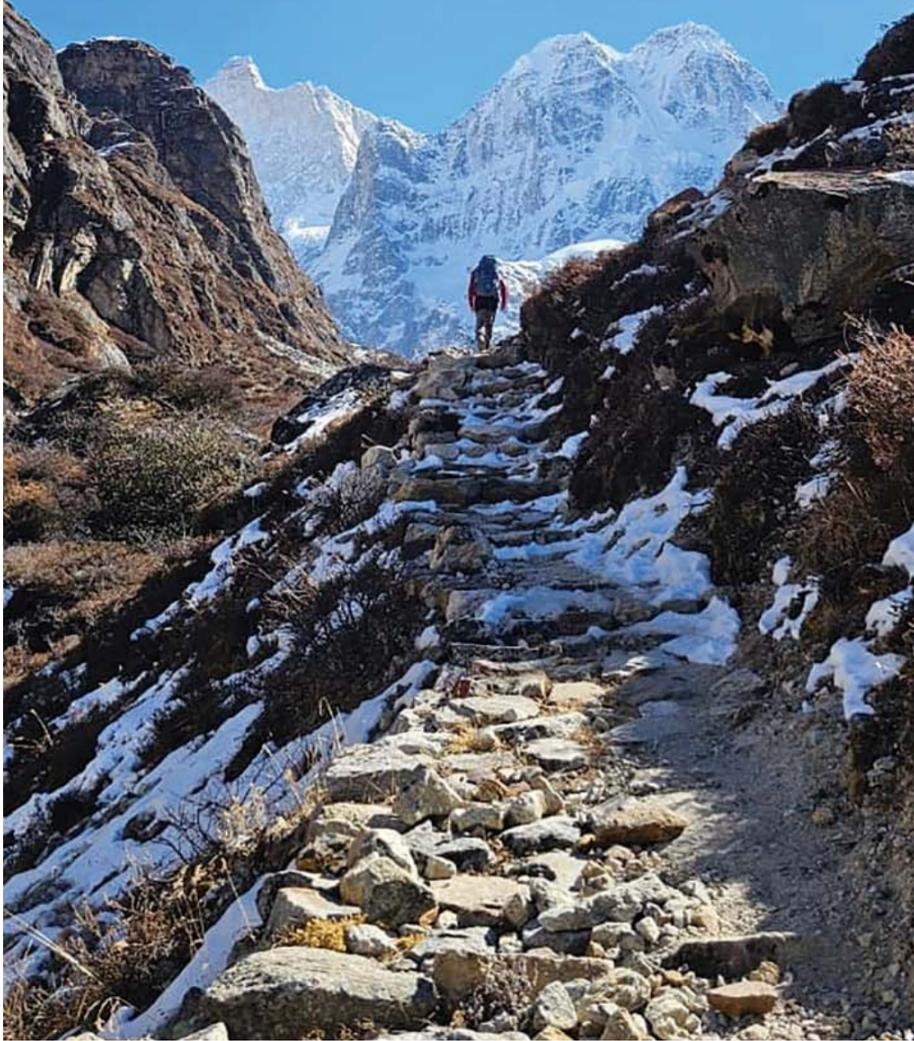
To bolster their financial resilience, developing countries need to limit their exposure to volatile capital flows by adopting effective capital-management tools and strengthening financial oversight, not merely through

prudential regulations but by curbing speculative and opaque activities. Such safeguards must be in place before the next crisis erupts. In the medium term, reducing dependence on external debt is essential, as is preventing destabilising outflows by redefining the terms under which foreign investors operate.

Admittedly, the Trump administration’s efforts to steer its trading partners in the opposite direction – toward loosening regulation, particularly of cryptocurrencies – make this task exceedingly difficult. But only by resisting such pressures can developing countries avoid being swept into another crisis not of their making. 🇮🇳

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Jayati Ghosh, Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is a member of the Club of Rome’s Transformational Economics Commission and Co-Chair of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation.



PHOTOS: NORBU TAMANG



Kangchenjunga i

Norbu Lama in Taplejung



Trekking to the base of the world's third highest mountain is a wilderness experience like no other

The Kangchenjunga Trek in far-eastern Nepal is a remote and less-crowded adventure that offers raw wilderness, diverse cultures, and breathtaking terrain below the world's third highest mountain.

Kangchenjunga (8,586m) grabbed the world's attention before Mt Everest ever did because its imposing rampart dominated the northern horizon from Darjeeling, the summer refuge for the British in India. The Kangchenjunga massif is more a mountain range rather than a peak, its high ridge stretching 25km from Nepal to Sikkim.

Sikkim considers the mountain sacred, and has banned mountaineering expeditions. But the various prominences of Kangchenjunga are increasingly popular for climbers via the north face in Nepal.

For non-mountaineers, even the Kangchenjunga trek can be arduous, especially in winter. It is one of the last pure wilderness areas in Nepal, traversing sparsely populated valleys that are rich in biodiversity because of the high annual rainfall.



Going offtrek in Solu

Take the lesser-known Lumsa route to Pikey Peak

Aditya Khare in Solukhumbu

Amber Tamang leads his group of trekkers through Lumsa village, past traditional houses with sturdy stone walls and hemlock tile roofs. He stops on the trail to point out his childhood home.

He is taking the team to Pikey Peak (4,065 m), the ideal lookout from where on clear days eight eight-thousander peaks from Annapurna to Kangchenjunga, including Everest, are visible.

Tamang, founder of the Three Jewels Adventures agency, takes his clients to lesser-known trails as

part of his Lower Everest trekking route, on the way up to Pikey.

Trekkers usually do not take the Lumsa route because the quaint villages do not present as much excitement as the scenic panorama of mountains.

But hiking through the bucolic countryside provides insight into the community's deep Lamaist faith reflected in the chorten, mani walls, sacred inscriptions on stones, prayer flags on houses, the festivals and in the way the villagers interact with one another.

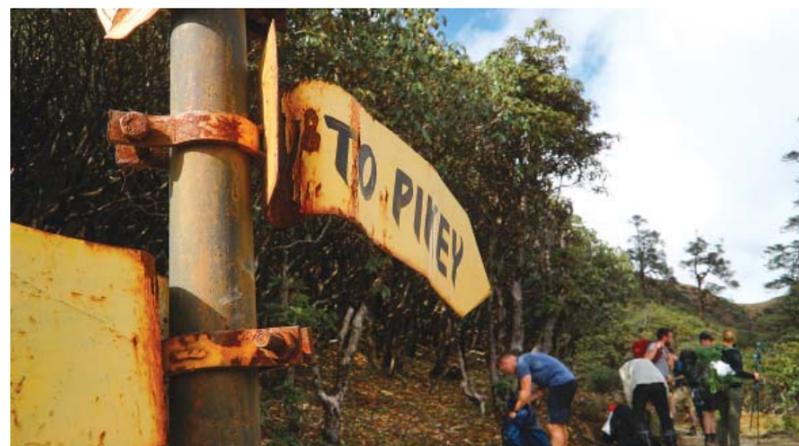
"I wish more people would soak in the villages and their culture on their trek, rather than just wanting mountain views," says Tamang.

Jangbu Sherpa owns the Lama Hotel in Lumsa, one of just two accommodations in the village. There is no signage along the trail advertising his business, and guests are still few and far between.

So in the evenings, he calls his neighbours over to his lodge for some beer, conversation, and dancing. And on special occasions, a group welcomes guests with a traditional Syabru dance.

"I'm working on expanding this little lodge," he says with a smile. "Lumsa could become a buzzing stop on the trekking route."

Jangbu's son Nima is a porter-guide, and is preparing to take a group of trekkers to Pikey Peak and the Thupten Chholing Monastery



above Junbesi.

There is a downhill bicycle route from Pikey, and lucky trekkers might even spot red pandas on the forest canopy.

"I saw a red panda with my

own eyes once," interjects Pemba Tamang, a veteran guide, from across the room. He begins listing other wildlife he has encountered enroute to Pikey — danphe pheasants, their wings resplendent



The establishment of Kangchenjunga Conservation Area in September 2006 was accompanied by tragedy when 24 people, including Nepal's nature preservation pioneers were killed in a helicopter crash. The Conservation Area is now the only one managed completely by the local indigenous people. It has 70 varieties of orchids, 30 rhododendron types, and 15 out of 28 endemic plants of Nepal.



Kangchenjunga still gets very few of the 200,000 foreign trekkers who visit Nepal every year, but improved road access in recent years is making it more popular.

Trekkers have a choice of exploring the North Base Camp (Pangpema) or the South Base Camp (Yalung Glacier), or combine both for the full Kangchenjunga Circuit (map).

This trek is considered strenuous, with long walking days, high altitude, and tea house accommodation that is much more basic than the Everest or Annapurna regions. Trekkers have to be fit and with prior hiking experience. Most teams take tents and camp, and carry most of their food.

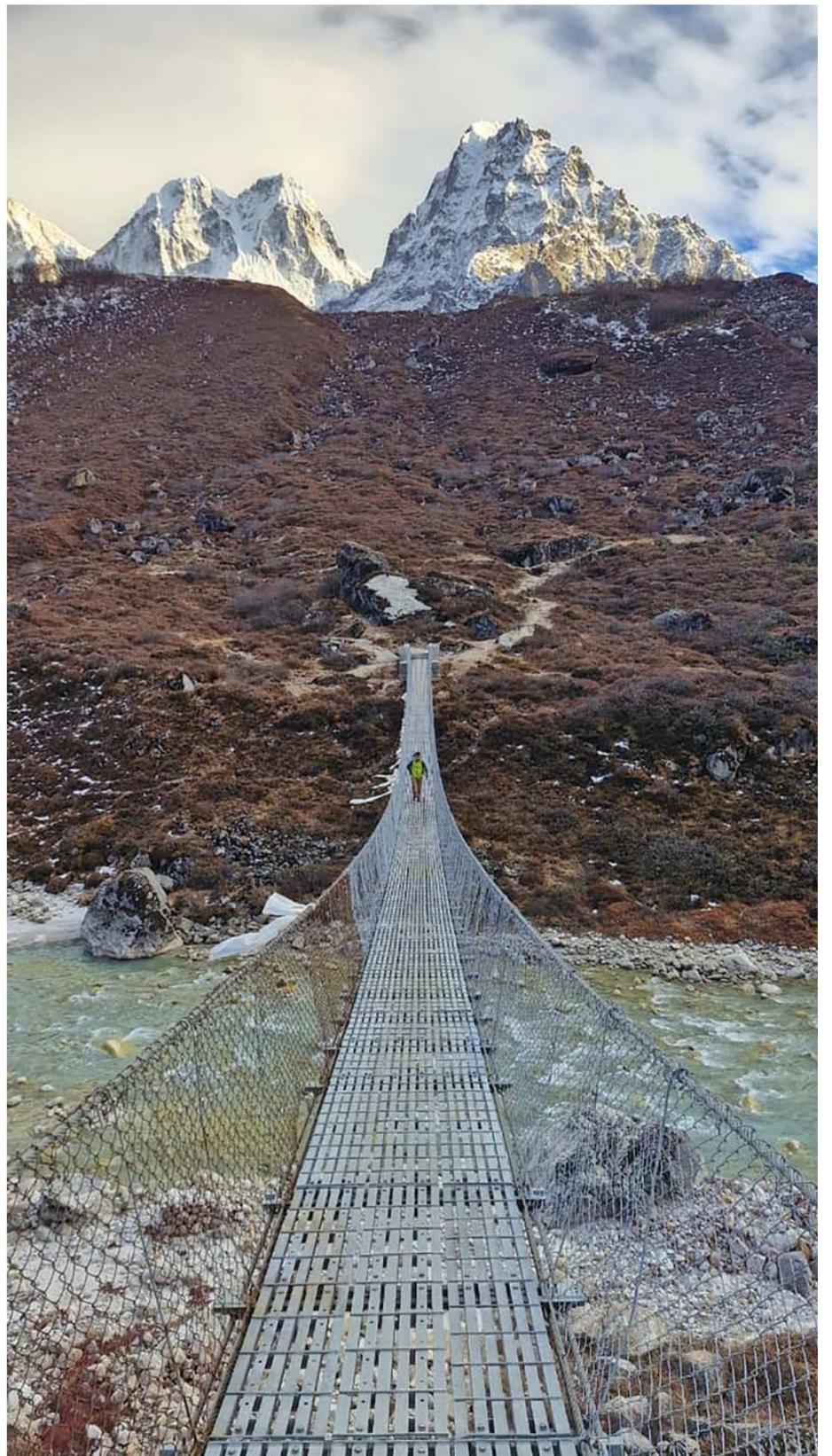
FULL CIRCUIT

Because the region is restricted, trekkers must obtain a permit and be accompanied by a licensed guide. A full circuit can take three weeks, while doing only the North or South Base Camps will take two weeks, including flying from Kathmandu to Bhadrapur and jeep to Taplejung or a rough trail to Hellok.

The lower forested stretches are teeming with wildlife, and this is red panda and snow leopard country. The streams and ponds have amphibians and reptiles, some of which have not yet even been classified. The route also passes the homelands of the Limbu, Rai and Tibetan communities with the local culture and architecture more intact than in most other mountain areas of Nepal.

The best seasons to trek are spring (March–May) and autumn (September–November). There are fewer trekkers and climbers in winter, and many of the birds and wildlife have migrated down to warmer climes. Despite its beauty, trekkers should be prepared for challenges like long distances between villages, unpredictable weather, and limited emergency rescue options due to the remoteness of the area — all even more challenging in winter.

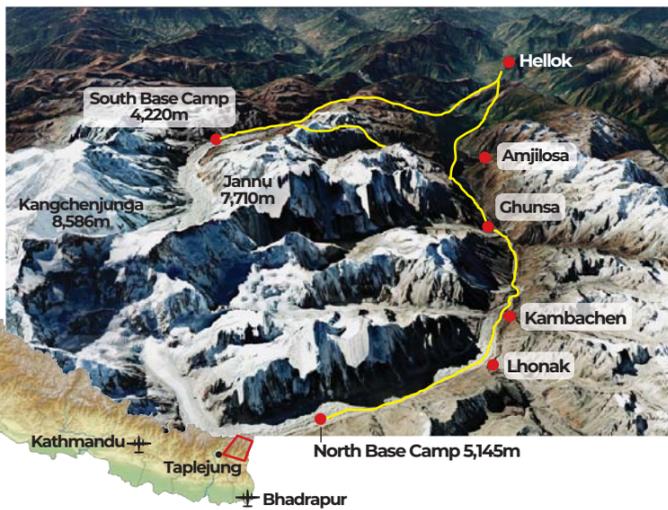
Norbu Lama is an international hiking guide with www.dolpocaravantreks.com and just returned after leading a trek to Kangchenjunga Base Camps.



in Winter

Even when Nepal was a forbidden land, among the first foreign visitors was British botanist J D Hooker who explored the Nepal side of Kangchenjunga in 1850 to collect plant samples. The peak was first climbed in 1955, two years after the first ascent of Mt Everest.

Kangchenjunga Trek (LOOKING SOUTH)

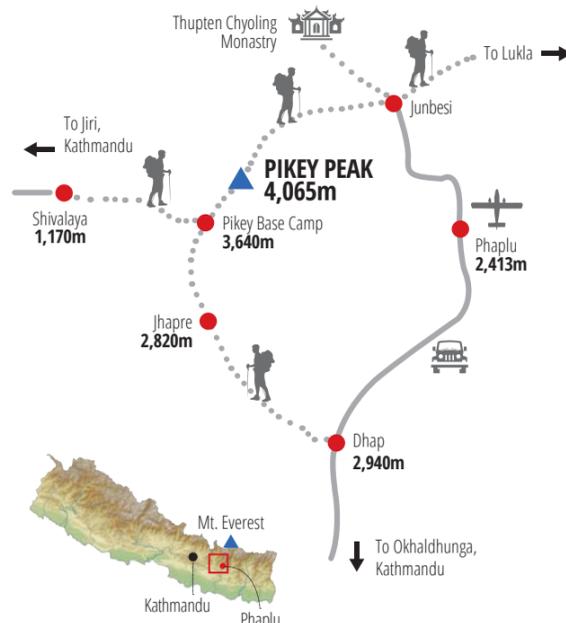


PHOTOS: ADITYA KHARE



in the sun, ghoral blue sheep jumping nimbly on rock cliffs, a lumbering black bear, and once, memorably, a leopard. Amber Tamang, Nima Sherpa, and Pemba Sherpa are among the

men in Lumsa who are most often away from home, leading trekking and mountaineering expeditions. Some from the village have summited Everest multiple times. To get to Pikey Peak, drive



up the BP highway to Dhap, with Numbur and Karyolung towering up the valley to the north.

Up in Pikey Base Camp at 3,700m is the Tunga Baje Lodge, now operated by his son Pasang Lhamu Sherpa. If they are lucky, guests will catch baje in a performance, singing and strumming his tunga.

The trek can be made a circuit—hikers do not have to come down the same way they went up.

Winter is not the best time for a Pikey hike, but the views of the mountains, especially after snowfall, are dazzling. It is best to go in early spring when forests are ablaze with rhododendron. The region is home to 32 different types of the flower.

Says Pasang Lhamu: "Tourism is picking up, but it is tough to keep things running. I hope for stability so we can invest in the lodge." □



Events



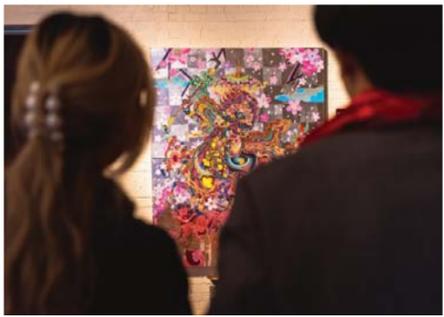
के? Us.

Katha Ghera's latest play के? Us., a dark comedy created and performed by Bijay Ananda Tamrakar and Eelum Dixit, has been extended. Catch the extra shows. **Till 3 December, 5:15pm (except Tuesdays) / 1pm Saturday, Kausi Theater, Teku, 9842156109 / 9842574607**

The Coloring Room

Step into a fully paper-wrapped world of outlines, doodles, and giant murals waiting to be brought to life. Relax on the floor, perch on a ladder, or wander through the space as you paint and color inside the playful stencils – a slow, creative escape open to everyone.

7-27 December, 1pm-6pm, Kala Shala, Patan Darbar Square



Guided tours @ Taragaon

Explore Taragaon Next with guided tours focused on the theme of Archiving for the Future and the building's unique architecture. Entry is free.

Every Sunday, 11am onwards; Thursdays, 11am onwards, Taragaon Next, Boudha

Art exhibition

Siddhartha Art Gallery presents a new exhibition by eminent artist S.C. Suman, inaugurated by art historian Julia Lloyd Williams. Explore the intricate and vibrant world of Mithila art in this thoughtfully curated showcase. Review on page 12.

9 December-10 January, 11am-5pm (Sunday to Friday), 12 noon-5pm (Saturday), Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited



Nepal Premier League Finals

Catch the excitement of Nepal's premier cricket tournament. The finals are scheduled for 13 December at Tribhuvan University International Cricket Ground. Details on timings, tickets, and teams will be announced as the playoffs conclude.

13 December, Tribhuvan University International Cricket Ground, Kirtipur

Impressions of Nepal

Artist Marianne Heredge's expressive watercolour paintings translate the layered atmospheres and everyday rhythms of Kathmandu Valley, Dolakha, and Ramechhap into visual narratives that reflect her evolving artistic dialogue with Nepal.

13-16 December, Artudio Patan

Field of Light

Licchavi House's upcoming exhibition Field of Light will showcase photography, poetry, and films by young Buddhist monks and nuns.

19 December, Jan Kath Rug & Art Space, Boudha



Music

Hulaki

Experience an exclusive performance from The Hulaki in an intimate, stripped-down format.

19 December, 4pm onwards, Rs500, Moksh, Jhamsikhel



Edge Band @ 25

Celebrate 25 enduring years of The Edge Band with a night of timeless hits, soulful performances, and pure nostalgia.

13 December, 8pm onwards, Rs1,500-Rs2,000, Club Nova, Thamel

Ujan Shakya Wo: Emerge

Catch Ujan Shakya Wo: Emerge performing live for an electrifying evening of music in Thamel.

12 December, 8pm-11:59pm, X.O. Club, Thamel

Ronan Perrett Quartet

This installment of the KatJazz Sessions features the exploratory and deeply expressive music of Ronan Perrett, blending free jazz, indie, contemporary, and electronic influences. This performance supports scholarships at the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory.

18 December, 7:30pm, Presale: Rs800 / Door: Rs1,000 / KJC: Rs500, Moksh, Jhamsikhel



Pokhara Winter Fest

Sanju Rathod and ST Man bring a high-energy night of live performances at the 2025 Pokhara Winter Fest. Expect vibrant vibes, powerful beats, and an unforgettable musical experience.

13 December, 8pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1,500, Catwalk, Pokhara



Getaway



Atithi Resort & Spa

Continuously on the top ten lists of hotels in Nepal by TripAdvisor, the resort is a quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities. Spend a night or two here and make it remarkable.

Lakeside, Pokhara, 9851160080

Festive season @ Aloft

Have a joyful, cosy, and relaxing staycation at Aloft Kathmandu Thamel this holiday season. Check out discounts and other perks under the exclusive offer.

Till 15 January, Rs11,000 (Single occupancy) / Rs12,000 (Double occupancy), Aloft Kathmandu Thamel (01) 5252000



Dhulikhel Mountain Resort

This resort blends together culture and comfort seamlessly with well-designed bungalows and Newa accents visible throughout the resort.

Dhulikhel, 9801362088

The Old Inn

This bed and breakfast place offers a cosy getaway with a scenic view of Annapurna, Langtang and beyond. With its traditional Newa architecture, the timber and brick designs are reminiscent of old Newa houses.

Bandipur, Tanahu, 9808882270

Hotel Country Villa

From the top of the Nagarkot hill, the hotel provides spectacular views of the sunrise and sunset, and showcases the mountain range on clear days. A natural and relaxing retreat for those wishing to escape the pandemonium of the city.

Nagarkot, 9851192106



Dining

Christmas Eve Dinner

Celebrate Christmas Eve at Aloft Kathmandu's Nook with an evening of comfort, warmth, and togetherness. Enjoy a festive buffet dinner including a welcome drink. Complimentary dinner for children under 6.

24 December, 6:30pm-10:30pm, Rs3,200 (Rs1,600 for kids aged 6-11), Nook, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel

New Orleans Cafe

Have a festive pre-Christmas dinner that includes roast turkey mulled wine, and other wine offers accompanied by live music. There will also be pop-up stalls.

New Orleans Cafe, Thamel (01) 4700736



Tip Top

In the mood for Indian? Enjoy sweets and South Indian cuisine at Tip Top. The Chola Bhatara is a must-try.

New Road (01) 4240470

Casa Mexicana

What's striking about this Mexican eatery is not just their fantastic authentic tacos, but the warm and welcoming service. The owners are more than happy to walk you through the menu and chat with you while you wait for nachos or the mouth-watering tres leches cake.

Gairidhara and Patan, 9840542082



Mamagoto Nepal

Mamagoto is a fun Pan-Asian restaurant that serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes. Enjoy Maki Rolls, Satays, Dumplings, Ramen and more all with a side of cocktails in this new quirky eatery.

Panipokhari, Lazimpat, 9802320960

Weekend Weather



Smoggy mornings

Winter has truly set in, but it has been unseasonably warm this week with average temperatures 2 degrees higher than normal in Kathmandu. Inversion has made mornings smoggy with AQI topping 160. The Seti, Marsyangdi, Trisuli and Narayani river valleys are blanketed in fog till noon. A weak westerly system will pass over Central Nepal on Sunday and Monday bringing some cloud cover, with some snow in western Nepal, but not much precipitation elsewhere.



Our Pick

Based on Denis Johnson's beloved 2011 novella of the same name, Train Dreams recounts the 80 years of the life of Robert Grainier of Idaho, a logger and railroad worker who leads a life of unexpected depth and beauty in the rapidly-changing early 20th century America. Named as one of the top ten films of 2025 by both the National Board of Review and the American Film Institute, Train Dreams is now streaming on Netflix. Stars Joel Edgerton, Felicity Jones and Clifton Collins Jr.

सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिड्डा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

How much ice must melt before we act?

Durga Rana Magar in Belém

The Himalaya is melting twice as fast as the global average, and this is accelerated by air pollution. Called black carbon, suspended particles emitted by industries, vehicle exhaust, or forest fires accelerate glacial retreat in High Asia. Dark matter makes the ice melt faster (as seen in Kapuche Lake in Kaski, right).

The snowline is already retreating up the mountains due to winter drought and global warming, and this process is quickened by black carbon and reduced snowfall.

The Cryosphere Report 2025 by the International Cryosphere Climate Initiative (ICCI) underscores these alarming trends. Between 2000 and 2023, mountain glaciers lost an average of 273 gigatons of ice per year. Even the higher central and eastern regions of High Mountain Asia are projected to lose up to 60% of existing ice under a 1.5°C warming scenario and only 15% may remain if it touches 3°C.

The Hindu Kush and Karakoram were relatively stable in recent decades, but may lose 40% of their ice under a 2°C future but only 15% under a 1.5°C pathway.

These losses are not merely physical or environmental. They translate into long-term water, food, economic, and political insecurity for millions. According to the report, such cryosphere-driven impacts should be considered permanent on human time scales.

"Frozen systems are highly sensitive to seasonal changes, and their degradation can dramatically



DURGARANA MAGAR

increase hazards such as rockfalls and landslides, threatening communities, infrastructure," Hugues Lantuit, Researcher at the Alfred Wegener Institute, told Nepali Times in Belém. "This is why we need collaboration between researchers, local governments, and communities that translate scientific knowledge into practical adaptation strategies."

At COP30 in Belém, global

climate negotiations faced widespread criticism for sidelining key science. Major emitter countries were held unaccountable, and progress on phasing out fossil fuels was delayed. Only 88 countries have voluntarily supported a roadmap to phase out fossil fuels. While the biggest emitters continue to delay commitments, countries in the Global South bear the brunt of climate impact.

Since science was not sufficiently prioritised, important topics like the cryosphere received limited attention. Most cryosphere related events at COP30 were organised at a pavilion jointly hosted by ICCI and Iceland, but attendance was low, reflecting how glacier and permafrost loss remain niche topics within broader climate negotiations. Nepal participated in the High-Level Meeting on Global

Impacts of Cryosphere Loss and Paths of Return from Overshoot, organised by Iceland/Ambition on Melting Ice (AMI) high-level group and Tajikistan. Pakistan's Secretary of Climate Change Aisha Humera, noted that glaciers in the Hindu Kush and Karakoram region are melting rapidly, impacting livelihoods and requiring massive adaptation efforts.

AKM Sohel of the Bangladesh Ministry of Finance drew attention to his country being at risk from record-breaking cyclones, storms, and long-term coastal flooding.

"Achieving the 1.5°C target is essential, and climate finance is necessary to implement adaptation



measures nationwide," Sohel said. The latest cryosphere assessments further underline

the urgency of immediate and deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions globally. Reports recommend aiming for global temperature targets closer to 1°C to preserve as much of the cryosphere as possible. This requires more ambitious climate action, combined monitoring of cryosphere changes, adapting to impact, and mitigating future damage.

The cryosphere is at a tipping point, and its loss has immediate consequences for water security, livelihoods, infrastructure, and climate justice. Across High Asia, melting glaciers and thawing permafrost threaten communities and those living downstream. 🇳🇵

With support from Earth Journalism Network.

Preventing irreversible glacier loss

James Kirkham is a climate scientist with the Ambition on Melting Ice (AMI) High-Level Group. He previously worked with ICIMOD in Kathmandu, and spoke to Nepali Times during COP30 in Belém.

Nepali Times: Why should we be worried about the cryosphere?

James Kirkham: People often talk a lot about coral reefs and the Amazon rainforest as tipping points. But the cryosphere also has a tipping point and it is very close to the temperatures we are already at now, 1.5°C. If we stay at this temperature, ice sheets will begin to tip into unstable configurations and begin to retreat irreversibly.

High Asia's glaciers are important to society, economy, and livelihoods. The water from those glaciers follows downstream and helps about two billion people with drinking water, irrigation, agriculture, and power. So, it is crucial to do everything we can to maintain those glaciers. We can still make a big difference, but we are going to lose a lot of ice in the future regardless of what we do now because we have acted too late.

Why does Nepal need to speak up?

It is really important that Nepal talks about it because it is vulnerable to the effects of cryosphere loss, and it has done the least to contribute to this crisis. It is our moral obligation to make sure countries like Nepal are well informed about the implications of the loss of the cryosphere, so they have early warning systems to detect the implications, and also to reduce the impact of those losses.

You have worked in Nepal. How has that shaped your perspective?

When you live in a country like Nepal you



see that the culture is so intimately tied to mountains. The communities see these changes better than the scientists. They have lived there for decades, they have stories from generations going back about where the glaciers used to be, and the effect of this.

We are currently heading towards about 2.7°C as our long-term temperature. Now, under 2.7°C, the glaciers in the Himalayas will be massively diminished. In the central part of the Himalaya, there will be only 16% of glacier ice left. It is an enormously important message to give to policymakers that by acting ambitiously now with policies in a fair, equitable way, they can lock in these changes and limit the damage to those living in the mountains.

But are countries like Nepal actually being heard at COPs?

Nepal is a consistent champion for climate and mountain issues, and it is one of the most vocal countries. Bangladesh is facing

a crisis mostly from sea level rise. But they are saying, we do not want to be seen as the victims of climate change all the time. We want to be the leaders in adaptation. And we want to be the ones that the world looks to as an example of what they can do. This is where Nepal and other countries can show leadership here at climate summits and play a vital role to play. They can showcase their actions. And that is a much more inspiring message to send to leaders around the world.

I commend countries like Nepal for their ambitious adaptation action, raising their voice about the importance of mitigation to save glaciers, and of course, financing to make all the adaptation and mitigation possible. I am amazed by the progress Nepal has made. The cars are largely electric now. This is an example of fantastic change that can happen very quickly, even in a country where financial resources and mobility are not so advanced. Nepal's example can be inspiring for other countries to elevate their ambitions.

How do you see the crisis affecting people on the ground in the Himalaya?

As a scientist, we do talk a lot about numbers and if I tell you that half the glaciers will disappear, it will sound really scary. But actually linking it to people is the way to tell that story. And there are so many stories that put faces to the shape of this wider climate crisis emerging. In the mountains, it might be that rivers and streams are drying up or changes to the flora and fauna of those mountains are noticeable and may have an impact on livelihoods as well. It might be the increasing number of disasters like outbursts which wipe away communities that have been there for centuries.

We need to do more as scientists to communicate to policymakers and the wider public. It is a much more powerful message when you can link it to stories people can relate to. Because ultimately, policymakers are humans too, and they have families, they care about these ideals and these values, and they want to act if we can express these messages very clearly.

Do you think COP30 gave enough attention and priority to the cryosphere issue?

We try our best. We have had a Cryosphere Pavilion now for five years and we get lots of good feedback from this. People say we really like having scientists there as a space to give this information. But in this COP we have been quite worried by the treatment of science more broadly, both in the research and systematic observation tracks, but also in things like the fight around whether IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) is the best available science. I find this really alarming because the policy needs to be informed by the best available science, and we have seen some countries who want to dismantle this too.

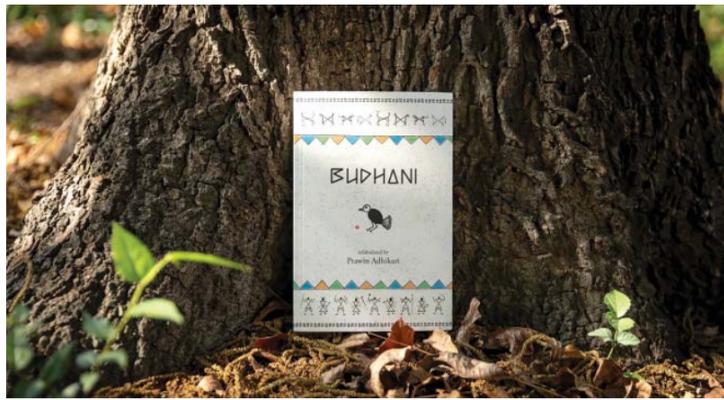
Of crows, and people

Sophia L. Pandé

Reimagining a Tharu folklore that draws from past and present injustices before wisdom finally prevails

Prawin Adhikari's new novel, *Budhani*, is a compelling and compassionate act of reinterpretation, reimagining a tale from indigenous folklore that draws its power from age-old fables of good versus evil and wisdom versus wilful ignorance.

In the first part of the book, *Budhani*, a name taken from the Tharu stories that inspired the author, the eponymous crow is born. We hear her inner, most personal thoughts as she grows from little chick to young, preening crow, learning temperance and



SHIKHAR BHATTARAI

tenderness from those around her as she comes of age. All the while, she retains a kernel of fierce independence deep inside amidst the all too familiar norms and expectations of the animal world.

Budhani, the adult crow, continues to cherish the succour that nature provides, revelling in it. As with all adults, she begins to understand the suffering that can arise from the crueler nature of those who ought to care for her wellbeing. The whole story, both the imagining of the animal world, and later *Budhani*'s place in it, draws inspiration from speculative fiction, encompassing fantasy and science fiction, bringing alive a world that is parallel to ours, but

just a little different.

Adhikari has a keen affinity for nature that informs his writing. We are drawn into the world of the crows as surely as we might have been into those of a human. The bond between crow characters is effortlessly defined, and friendships and relationships, between people, and between animals and human, are so nuanced as to bring tears to the eyes.

In the way of speculative fiction, the writer must be cognizant of every nook and cranny of his made up world to convince the reader, as those who love N K Jemisin and Ursula K. LeGuin will know. Any hint that the creator might not know every goddess and princeling in the world he is defining, or may not carry every small detail of the nature of the trees, skies and creatures of this realm in his mind, causes cognitive dissonance for the reader - resulting in a failure to convince.

This writer succeeds in his

On life lessons

Anbika Giri's book series for young adults is about superheroines

Pratibha Tuladhar

“Why are adults sexist?” my ten-year-old nephew, Paartha, asks in response to a scene where the parents threaten to marry off Asha Karki, if she fails her exams. I've been reading to him from an illustrated young adult fiction series by Anbika Giri.

In the story, Asha, like many girls in Nepal, has to juggle between household chores and schoolwork. By the time she is done at night, she is too tired to study. In the mornings, she is always late for the school assembly because of chores. And as if the burden of household work wasn't enough, there is constant threat from her parents to “marry her off” if she fails—the idea of marriage, dangling like a dagger over her head the entire time.

Asha is compliant to the daily needs of her family over her own desire to study. The elders do not appear aware of her aspirations as a schoolgirl, but it is her brother who shows up, becomes an ally. The boy starts to take up responsibility for household errand and is present for his sister in times of distress, eventually helping her to win the accolades and recognition she is deserving of.

The series comes in the form of five books: *Mother is Mighty*, *Nisha's Life Lessons*, *Lakshu's Silence*, *Superhero Sister* and *Payal Goes to School* (आमाले सक्नुहुन्छ, नाक कसरी ठाडो हुन्छ, लक्षु किन बोल्दिन, मेरी दिदी र पायल पढ्न जान्छे). It was completed in 2021 and was first published in Nepali, taught at schools. The English edition translated by Prawin Adhikari, hit the bookstores in June 2025.

In each, the story pivots around a schoolgirl, either as the narrator or the protagonist. She is faced with a range of challenges -- from the yearning for a bicycle to the agony over confronting social afflictions. And in all of them, Anbika creates male allies in the roles of family members, teachers or neighbours or government representatives.

Her female characters as mothers, sisters, friends, students are resolute, self-aware, astute, and feisty. If they are cast down because of life's circumstances, they get up, pick their bicycles and pedal again.

Anbika started writing these books in 2017, when she and I used to be colleagues. She would disappear one weekend and would show up at work on Monday and announce she had sort of finished writing a novella. That's right, one of the books was written in exactly three days. I recall her saying she wanted

to create a series about how girls in different parts of Nepal commute to school, which appears in a different series. Her books for children all hinge on the idea of bringing books about Nepali girls to young readers.

“I wanted to write these books for my daughter, Awani. I wanted to write books that are gender sensitive, female-led, and represent cultural diversity,” says Anbika. “Awani has never had books like that to read. Female leads do not exist in Nepali literature for children.”

Like many other children in Nepal, Awani too grew up on books by international writers. And while the beauty of that is that a wide range of context is presented to children, which helps build empathy, they lack the local context. And that is the gap Anbika tries to fill through her books.



“I wanted to put into context some important questions. How can we change ourselves as humans? How can we have empathy, gain realisation and evolve as individuals? I wanted stories that carry morals,” she explains. “I wanted to introduce politics to children in the simplest way.”

Anbika's girl characters aim at becoming prime minister, local leader, doctor and riding bikes when they grow up -- challenging the traditional portrayal of women's desire for beauty, love, marriage and home. She introduces topics like child marriage, menstruation, casteism, bullying, property ownership, economic independence and the local governance system. None are easy subjects when writing for children.

“I'm a political writer and I have my own politics, and it shows in everything I write. I think of gender as my politics. And it shows in subtle ways in the children's books I write,” says Anbika, adding that she hopes the books will also be read by parents.

The stories are mostly set against the rural Madhes backdrop. “Some have questioned me about the romanticisation of village life, but that kind of life also exists and needs to be seen and understood,” she says. Some scenes slide into what could be difficult to read for some children, such as maternal death. There is no sanitised version of life here, but there is triumph and hope.

Anbika says the details of village life and the core sentiment of the book have been earnestly transferred to the English iteration, something she had always hoped for when she had started writing the books.

“Thanks to the thoughtful and sensitive translation by Prawin Adhikari, the dream has taken flight. I'm deeply grateful for the care he's brought to every word and nuance. I chose him to translate these books because he understands the context of my stories.”

Prolific and also deeply passionate about her projects, Anbika wants to eventually write books in English. That passion is embodied by her characters.

“My characters in *Ama le Saknu huncha* and *Payal Padhna Janche* carry books, dreams and strength on the handlebars of their simple bicycles. They are brave, determined, and ready to ride against the wind.”

Each book has been illustrated by a different artist, some depictions better than the others. The books' covers bear dreamy images by Anamika Gautam-- the one with a schoolgirl on a bicycle.

Paartha, was very impatient when we read the parts

where the key characters went through difficulties. One of the questions he asked on repeat was why do adults treat girls unfairly, reminding me of the deep responsibility we bear towards children.

When we had finished reading *Superhero Sister*, I told him: “That unfair treatment needs to change, so girls can live as boys do.”



PRATIBHA TULADHAR

All me inside:

Whose story does “Lysan” tell? Of each one of us.

My nephew watched in rapt attention as the slides, telling the story of *Lysan*, shifted on the screen before him. For those few minutes, the noise and chaos in the massive hall, packed with children and their parents at the book launch event, became obscured and only the story became foregrounded. And in that moment, I felt exactly as my nephew might have—being found by the feeling of wonderment and enchantment.

Lysan, a children's book illustrated by Kanchan Burathoki and written by Sandra van Doesburg was launched in Kathmandu in August, along with other books produced by Van Doesburg Creative Works. The set included *Namaste*, a high contrast book for infants, *Are You a Snow Leopard?*, two part set book and workbook, and *Mijok's Trip*, a children's illustrated novel by Niranjana Kunwar.

Lysan is the story of the longing to belong. *Lysan* is a creature, half eagle, half rhino. She has wings and talons and tough and rugged skin and a horn. *Lysan* wishes she didn't look as she does and wonders if the way she looks is why her friends look at her differently. She has difficulty opening up to her friends because she is different and she wants to be seen for who she is, but has little confidence. It isn't until she meets someone quite like her that she is able to look inward and appreciate her true self.

Whose story does “*Lysan*” tell? Of each one of us.

Although the story appears like a simple children's story about someone who thinks herself a misfit, the meaning goes much deeper. And in that, it transcends the narrative aimed at children and speaks to people in different age groups.

“When I was writing the business plan to set up Van Doesburg Creative Works and working on my first two books, *Namaste* and *Are You a Snow Leopard?*, one of my friends in Switzerland, Lys, suggested we create a story centered around biracial children since both of us, and now our kids, are biracial,” explains the writer, Sandra Shiwani van Doesburg, who is also an HR professional. “Her son and mine were born during Covid, and I was eager to explore that experience.”

“I wanted to capture the universal childhood feeling of being different. It did not have to be about race or culture alone; it could mean anything to anyone,” Sandra says.

Lys wrote the German version and Sandra wrote the English. Sandra reached out to Kanchan Burathoki, with whom she was working on *Are You a Snow Leopard?*

Kanchan and Sandra go back to their boarding school days at Budanilkantha, and so between the two friends, Kanchan immediately understood the soul of *Lysan*.

world building, but while the characters are incredibly specific, the natural world of the jungle sometimes drifts into something more generic. Regardless of these occasional generalisms, this part of the book is both captivating and heart-wrenching, setting us up for the second half when Budhani manifests as a girl.

Without giving away major plot points (the two-part structure of the book is clear to anyone who opens the book), the girl Budhani is as vital, clever, and curious as her former bird incarnation. She grows up in a loving micro-family that is further strengthened by the strong Tharu community around her.

She becomes sage through hard knocks, and profound friendships. She learns the law of the jungle, but she is no wide-eyed Mowgli. Instead, she is once again nursed to wisdom by the innate, indigenous knowledge of her Tharu elders who live at peace

with the land, taking the idyllic but also harsh, agrarian way of life in stride and adapting with graceful acceptance, their ethos never quelled.

This half of the story is anchored by exceptional research on the part of the writer. Every nuance of daily life in the world of Budhani's village rings true, along with the precious indigenous knowledge that is imparted along the way. When she must leave her beloved village to face the inconstant, arbitrary justice of the king, that court smacks vividly of so many other courts in humanity's past and present. It is at this archetypal court of the inane, indolent king, led by his supposedly learned, cruel, priest that Budhani comes into her own.

Budhani's journey has a happy ending, but be warned, there is anguish in these pages. Animal lovers and the kind of heart will suffer an aching feeling in the chest while reading. However, as is in

the best of such tales, each loss metamorphoses into something else, coming full circle, balanced by karma, leaving the reader wishing that such things were true even in the real world.

As a fable, which always has a lesson, there are too many to list here, but as an allegory, there is one learning of critical importance. Encapsulated in the tale of Budhani is the tale of Nepal and the injustices that have been wrought upon her nature, her indigenous peoples, her female and girl folk, and all those who do not have the ability to speak truth to power like Budhani does. With this teaching, this story will transform the reader.

Budhani is sometimes didactic but gentled by the framework of the fable, and uplifted by the unforgettable character who first claws and then walks her way into the reader's heart, her every struggle, small and large, coming alive for us. We cannot help but

invest in this marvelously drawn, feisty, undaunted character and all those she loves so fiercely.

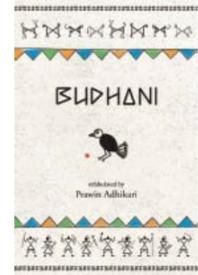
Adhikari's writing has always been inspired by the minutiae of life, whether urban or in the village. He writes equally well in English and in Nepali. This affinity for both languages enriches his novels in a way that someone writing in English, but with a lesser grasp of the Nepali language, may not be able to convey.

This particular writer's portrayal of Tharu folktales, therefore, becomes an invaluable part of the canon of Nepali writers writing in English with its nuanced ear for language, its keen eye for detail and the deep responsibility it bears for translating the stories of one culture for the eyes of others.

Cultural appropriation is very real, but Adhikari's Budhani transmogrifies without appropriating. Enriched by Lavkant Chaudhary's thoughtful, playful illustrations, and further

authenticated by Indu Tharu's retelling of Budhani into the Tharu language, this enchanting, tragic, memorable story will carve a place in your heart. 📖

Sophia L. Pandé is a writer, art-historian and filmmaker. She is Director of Development at the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, and the Founding Director of The Kalā Salon.



Budhani
Prawn Adhikari
Safu, 2025
Rs500

Lysan: a story about flight

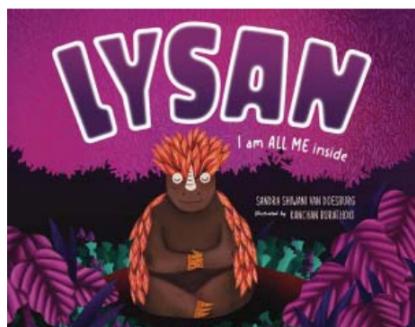


VAN DOESBURG CREATIVE WORKS/ FACEBOOK

And thus, the Rhino-Eagle who loves running and then flying, came into being. "As our lives evolved into motherhood, we reconnected deeply and creatively. Kanchan is truly magical with her illustrations," says Sandra. "With her fine arts background and experience running a graphic design business, she intuitively understood not only illustration but also book production."

Lysan isn't just a confused, solitary being. Her character is full. When she sees a new creature, she says: "Let's mush that ICKY THING!". There's no attempt here on the writer's part to create a protagonist who is only good. Every time we get to this page while re-reading Lysan, my nephew laughs. Lysan's face speaks!

The other characters in the book are just as quirky as Lysan. There are the lynx who are also narwhal and there are the pangolin who are also falcon. And there's Wormfishly,



Lysan
Sandra Shiwani van Doesburg
Illustrated by Kanchan Burathoki
Van Doesburg Creative Works, 2024
32 pages
Hardcover Rs4,811

who's a worm and fish and a fly at the same time.

The animals featured in the book are some of the endangered species from Nepal, the Philippines, Switzerland, Thailand, and Austria, the countries close to the creators' hearts. A mood board describing the colour palette for illustrations and a specific narrative on each character was first prepared.

"I didn't want human characters, and so through anthropomorphism, I wanted the story to feel universally relatable," Sandra adds.

For a decade now, I've been one of my nephew's bedtime story readers. And over the years, we've read many books together, exploring all kinds of scenarios and landscapes together, laughing, sighing and sometimes, smiling as we shut the book.

Reading Lysan was a repeat of that act, as we followed the beautiful landscape with our eyes, the blue sky, spotted with clouds, the greenery and the cuteness of the characters. The imaginary land Kanchan visualises, is the kind one wants to be inside. Here, magical hybrid creatures become part of a moving world.

As an adult reading Lysan, I've felt moved by it every time, as it transports me back to my childhood, where I too felt like a misfit—wishing I looked different, spoke differently, and even felt differently. The curious thing about this feeling is that it barely wears out even as we outgrow innocence.

The feeling keeps burrowing into new forms and faces as we step into adulthood, and often we are the ones who leave a party early, who are unable to show up for dates with friends, who sit and spend hours staring at the sky for no reason, who refuse to wear a certain shirt because the texture feels too queasy, or who leave a drink untouched because its colour reminds us of something unpleasant.

Each one of us is made up of loads of these feelings and things. Some of us are made of other things, but just as interesting or uninteresting to the others. And so each one of us is whole, each one "ALL ME inside", as Lysan says. But in the crowd we might be pressured to blend, even if it means pulling on a mask and taking cues from friends and family.

At some point in life those differences start to make sense and we understand that in being unlike others, each one of us is original and thus contribute to the huge map that makes this world as magical as it is. That's what the story of Lysan is about.

Over the weeks, I've read the book to my nephew a couple of times and every time, he approaches it with new light and love. To borrow Sandra's own words: "The best stories are simple but open to multiple interpretations. What you take from a story might not be what I take, and that's beautiful." 📖

Pratibha Tuladhar

The war between people

How war alters and defines the paths of innocents

Sangya Lamsal

People like myself were too young during the decade of the Maoist War to remember its horrors. We often wonder what life was truly like back then. Perhaps the closest we have come to experiencing a national crisis of that scale – with the protests, violence, curfews, and political maneuvering – was the GenZ movement in September.

How did people cope? What did they fear? What was it like in the cities and villages? How was it that the king still held so much power? What motivated the guerrillas? And, how did ordinary people adjust and endure the war?

My curiosity about the war that ended 20 years ago was met with a rollercoaster of emotions with Monica Rana's debut novel, *The Paths We Choose*.

The novel is not a retelling of events from the vantage of leaders, rebels. It is not about the violence, but a carefully curated perspective of ordinary people caught up in it. It is a glimpse into how the war altered or defined their paths. This is the 'People's War' from the people's own perspective.

Readers are immediately invested into the lives of two central characters, the sister duo, Sumnima and Rita. The elder radiating from the beginning with her brave and cunning aura, and the latter, more timid and obedient, much of her time absorbed in awe of her sister.

The writer's language flows as effortlessly as the sisters' strides up the hills to steal mangoes from Dhire Dai's trees, only to race back down to Rato Mato, carrying us through their journey into adolescence. Amidst the rolling hills, mango trees, life is filled with laughter, adventures, and everyday banter, scenes so serene that they carry an unsettling calm that hints at what lies ahead.

Village life is not all painted in romantic hues. The stark reality of poverty, subsistence, and contrast with the comfort of city living are never far away. Amidst these reminders, there runs a humbling truth: happiness once rested on small things, not on the material excess that define urban life.

As the pages turn, the title begins to resonate: two sisters, once bound by the same bloodline, shared dreams, and the same roof, are caught in the crosshairs of

war and forced onto separate paths. One by choice, and the other by necessity.

The story unfolds with the seasons: the relentless monsoon rains, the scorching heat of summer, and a liberating winter that carries bittersweet truths. The year is 2001, as the insurgency intensifies. Against this backdrop, the cousins' lives diverge.

Sumnima is drawn into the rebels' ranks to 'fight for equality and freedom', while Rita is uprooted, carried across distances, and placed in Seto Bangala as a helping hand among the higher-ups, in her family's desperate attempt to secure her a better life after their village is reduced to a 'ghost city' by violent attacks.

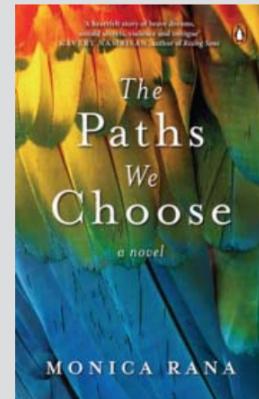
There are betrayals and beginnings, high palaces and humble hills, royals and rurals, identity and ideology, loss and lament, distance and discovery. Through upheavals, tears, and struggles, one thing remains constant: both sisters wonder about the other. They care. They long to reconnect. They hold fast to the dream they once shared to open a guesthouse in their village someday. A dream to simply live with no fear. To be free. To be happy. And, to be together.

The writing illuminates vital themes: innocent people caught up in strife, the vast chasm of class from royals dining on silver plates to villagers back home hiding their last grain to save it from looters. And discrimination so stark it was as if people carried labels on their foreheads, marked by caste, skin colour, and gender.

The sisters eventually reunite, but their journey is not an easy one, and what lies ahead is far from the future either of them once imagined. One might romanticise it as fate, or might recoil at the harsh reality Monica Rana lays bare: it is often the innocent who bear the heaviest burdens of war. Civilians are trapped between warring sides, enduring hunger, displacement, and violence through no fault of their own.

Wars continue to rage across the world. Though the novel does not particularly focus on exposing the horrifying depths of war crimes, it remains a timeless reminder of what the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish once said:

"The war will end, and leaders will shake hands. The old woman will keep waiting for her martyred son. And those children will keep waiting for their hero father. I don't know who sold our homeland, but I saw who paid the price." 📖



The Paths We Choose
Monica Rana
Penguin Random House, 2025
285 pages
Rs798



Pilgrimage to the Mithila cosmos

Indigenous art form from Mithila gets an added new dimension at ongoing exhibition

Sudiksha Tuladhar

Mithila art has represented Nepal's indigenous culture, passed down through generations. Now, noted artist S C Suman explores this tradition with a modern touch that gives it added relevance.

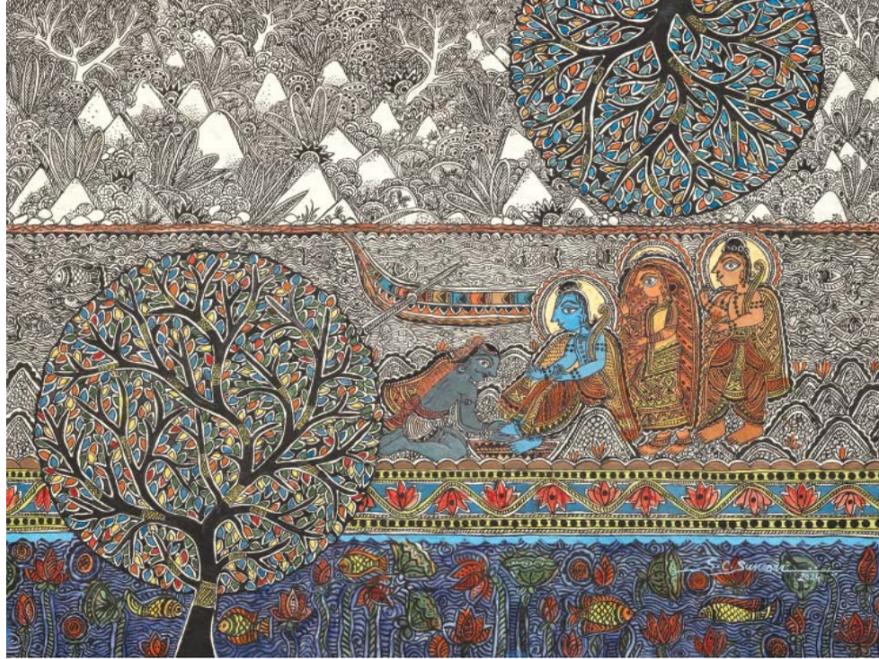
Each of his paintings at the 'Mithila Cosmos VII: Journey of a Pilgrim' exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery exudes culture, colours and feminism, but with added improvisations that make them contemporary.

"Mithila art is mostly done by women, they are the ones preserving the culture and passing it on to upcoming generations. The art form is what it is today because of women," explains Suman.

Inaugurating the exhibition on Monday, art historian Julia Llyod Williams spoke fondly of Nepal and Mithila art, relating how she once bought a Mithila painting she liked without knowing its historical and cultural importance to the Mithila civilisation.

Suman is a self-taught artist, textile designer, a radio host from Biratnagar, and one of the country's most celebrated artists, with national and international honours. He has held 14 solo exhibitions and numerous group shows in Nepal and all over the world.

"With Mithila Cosmos, Suman brings his artistic evolution into a deeper, more traditional realm, where pilgrimage is shaped not



only by movement but by cultural memory and sacred stories," says Sangeeta Thapa, curator of Siddhartha Art Gallery.

The seventh edition of the exhibition series explores and displays reflections of pilgrimage, sharing the artist's physical and spiritual experience with viewers.

"I am confident that this edition will also win visitors' hearts. This time around as well, I have



tried to give viewers a new perspective," says Suman.

The exhibition is displayed on two floors of the gallery and includes paintings of Swayambhu, Pashupati, Lord Ganesh, Krishna, Ram Sita Bibabah among other renderings. Explains Suman: "The Pashupati painting depicts the evolution of the temple, and since I live near Swayambhu, the mantra chanted there gives me energy, inspiring me to paint the shrine."

Use of colour, especially hues of blue, grab the attention of

the viewers creating a sublime experience. 'Samundra Manthan' depicts how Lord Shiva drank poison to save the world. All the elements of the episode including Vasuki Nag, Kamdhenu and others are elaborately depicted. This carries on the Mithila tradition of telling stories by showing them through art.

'Ram Sita Bibah' shows the marriage of Ram and Sita in an intricate and intimate manner. The Banbas series is the story of Lord Ram expelled from the palace, owing to family politics for power.

'Nava Durga' is painted over canvas, and has mantra spread over the background and comprises ten avatars of Goddess Durga that is worshipped throughout Dasain.

"I finished the Nava Durga painting in the ten days of Dasain. Each day I used to wake up, do my daily puja and then sit for painting. No matter what, I separated time to paint even during festivities," Suman says, showing how the paintings are a deeply reverential devotional artform.

'Geeta Saar' is an exposition from the Bhagavad Gita, the blues once again giving the show a tranquil mood. Visitors at the exhibition do not just walk past the works, they stand in front of each of them for a minute or two, almost in prayer.

The Mithila Cosmos exhibition series started in 2007, just after the ceasefire, and today it is taking place in the aftermath of recent protests during which government buildings surrounding the Siddhartha Art Gallery were all torched.

Suman's 'Journey of a Pilgrim' makes us ponder how it all fits in with Nepal's history, culture and faith. He says, "My aim is to bring stories of the Valley, Madhes and other cultures into a single canvas. I have tried to find ways to incorporate Nepal's diversity in every single painting."

Mithila Cosmos VII: Journey of a Pilgrim
Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited
Till 10 January
11:00am - 5:00pm




Chill to Thrill

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