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REWIND 2025

Known as the land of Mt Everest, Nepal in 2025 became synonymous with youth-led regime change

In August Kathmandu's chatterati were busy speculating on whether PM K P Oli would get an official invitation to visit New Delhi. When that offer did not come, he made a controversial trip to attend the Victory Day Parade in Beijing on 3 September marking the 80th anniversary of Japan's defeat in World War II.

He was in the illustrious company of Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un – and back in Kathmandu six days later he was out of a job. Oli had to be rescued by an Army helicopter just before protesters set fire to his official residence.

Throughout the year, the UML-NC coalition had been working on a series of Bills to limit freedom of speech with an amendment to the Print and Publication Act, the Social Media Bill, the Counter-intelligence Bill and a

move to replace the Social Welfare Council. The spark that lit the fuse was the ban on 26 social media platforms on 4 September.

When the GenZ called for a rally against corruption and poor governance on 8 September, no one (least the youthful protesters) could have imagined that it would spiral out of control like it did. Nineteen demonstrators were massacred by APF gunmen using assault rifles.

The bloodshed was broadcast live and unfiltered on social media. The next day, with the youth still reeling from shock, anyone and everyone with a grievance went on a rampage of arson and looting. More than 74 people were killed, and hundreds injured.

The GenZ voted Sushila Karki in as prime minister, but an outspoken faction is now not happy with her. Adding to the distraction are UML and NC leaders

who still cannot believe they have been toppled, and want to revive the House. Both parties have no choice but to go for elections, even though they have not reformed.

President Ram Chandra Paudel this week convened a meeting of the UML, NC and NCP with Karki. The RSP is talking to Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah, and suddenly polls in March look possible. Whatever the outcome, 2026 will change the trajectory of Nepali politics with the dominance of the established parties challenged by new forces (page 2).

But whether this will bring a new political culture of transparency, democracy and accountability, or degenerate into populism and despotism, we will begin to see in 2026. 🇳🇵

70 days, and counting
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

Sonia Awale

The year started off uneventfully, but ended in tumult and uncertainty about the future. There were tensions simmering under the surface. In February, Nepal made it to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list for failing to address money-laundering. On 28 March, a pro-monarchy rally in Kathmandu led by loan defaulter Durga Prasai was dispersed by riot police. Two people, including a tv reporter, were killed when his supporters resorted to arson and looting – a dress rehearsal for what was to come later in the year.

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70 days, and counting

2026 onwards, alternative and emerging political forces will challenge legacy parties

Shristi Karki

For the first time in decades, Nepal's political structure is on the cusp of change as the monopoly of the legacy parties is tested by emerging political forces.

Whatever the outcome of the 5 March elections, the Oli-Deuba-Dahal triumvirate will have to struggle to stay relevant in the post-GenZ era.

As Nepal's milestone year 2025 comes to a close, the three leaders are mounting a rearguard action to retain supremacy within their own parties, and in the wider polity. But they do not realise that it is a lost cause — history has moved on.

GenZ youth were not behind the mayhem and arson of 9 September that brought down the UML-NC coalition, but the regime change that followed bears their name. The alternative parties aim to carry their brand forward.

Another troika is emerging: that of RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane, Kulman Ghising of the Ujyalo Nepal Party and Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah. Talks among the three for some kind of electoral togetherness have sent tremors across the established parties.

Freshly released from prison on bail last week, Lamichhane was welcomed back to his party as the chair with open arms even though his reputation took a hit after he made a jailbreak during the September protest.

'People really want change, and any change will do,' noted public policy expert Ashutosh Tiwari in a social media post. 'It's not that Kulman, Balen, and Rabi will present a superior alternative, it's just that they will



PMO

present an alternative, which, at this time, is more than enough—it is much, much better than having Deuba, Oli and Prachanda in governance forever.'

News of a potential partnership between the three must have come as a welcome new year message for Prime Minister Sushila Karki who has been under pressure from both GenZ factions and the UML-NC to put off elections.

Karki does not want anything to dim chances of polls, so it is looking unlikely that the Judicial Inquiry Commission formed to investigate the 8 September massacre and the destruction the next day will be naming names anytime soon.

Former PM K P Oli has shown no contrition for state violence, and defied summons from the Commission saying he would rather be shot than cross-examined.

The chances of the UML-NC strategy of reinstating the House and forming an all-party

government is now looking slimmer, which is why they are now working on finalising the ticket list of candidates.

Some GenZ figures like Sudan Gurung also want the elections postponed (even if it means House reinstatement) perhaps because

they need time to pull together their own party.

Others like the GenZ Front and the GenZ Movement Alliance are for elections, while some youth have joined alternative parties, or are shopping around for ones to join.

There is also wariness among youth about the possible backing of the RSP for Balen Shah as a PM candidate. The RSP may feel it can piggyback on the mayor's popularity and tempt him with a leadership role in case Lamichhane is barred from contesting.

These reservations are not unfounded. Any partnership between Lamichhane and Shah must not (just) be based on political opportunism, but a shared platform of good governance and service delivery.

They must put their egos aside and temper their populist, divisive rhetoric — exactly the kind of political culture that the GenZ have been trying to change.

The three elephants in the room are Nepal's two neighbours and the United States. The Chinese and American ambassadors were recalled this week, and the Indian envoy has medical issues.

Trump-Modi falling out could already be seen in the violence in Bangladesh, with Washington no longer regarding New Delhi as a regional hegemon.

Beijing appears wary of the direction the interim government is going. Aside from suspicions of pro-Tibet antecedents of some GenZ figures, it has also taken umbrage at Chinese entities being dragged into the Pokhara airport payoff scandal.

New Delhi, meanwhile, has been cosy up to the Sushila Karki administration, throwing its weight behind the March polls. In 2026, a lot may depend on the next pro-Trump US ambassador in Kathmandu.

DEMOCRATIC DECAY

The September movement will have meant nothing if we elect the same people who have led Nepal to democratic decay. Voters in March must not just be swayed by changing the structure of politics, but also its culture.

'Nepal does not need to search for perfect leaders, it needs institutions capable of handling imperfect ones,' wrote Alok K Bohara, professor at the University of New Mexico, in a recent blog post.

He continued: 'The task is to rally around a civic campaign to design institutional architecture that can absorb failure, constrain abuse, and correct deviation. Let the system take care of behavior, rather than hoping that behavior will take care of the system.'

Trending Online



The river of life

by Thomas Kelly

The Karnali is the last great free-flowing river in the Himalaya. It sustains an entire living system of wildlife, communities and cultures that cannot be replicated once a river is turned into a staircase of reservoirs. See the photo story at nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Looking good by doing good

by Sudiksha Tuladhar

Nepali scientist-entrepreneur Prativa Pandey has taken her skincare brand Herveda global, blending Ayurveda and modern science. Read the first instalment of Nepali Times' new series Nepal Made online.

Most popular on X

The sins of our mothers

by Shristi Karki

Booker prize-winning author Arundhati Roy's memoir *Mother Mary Comes To Me* chronicles her complex relationship with her mother and her motherland. Read review on page 9.

Most commented

A dystopian motherland

by Vishad Raj Onta

Samrat Upadhyay's newest novel *Darkmotherland* imagines Kathmandu in political turmoil after a large earthquake. His narrative blends the ever-present risk of a big earthquake and the actuality of political tremors. Visit our website to read the review.

Most visited online page

Letters

ARUNDHATI MEMOIR

I wonder how Arundhati Roy made it alive after all those traumatic experiences in her life ('The sins of our mothers', Shristi Karki, page 9). The more I read the book, the more I come to respect this woman. Truly in awe of the woman she has become.

Madina Rai

Arundhati Roy is a very courageous writer, reading her is like facing the truth.

Uday Adhikari

Arundhati Roy is an amazing woman. I missed the chance to meet her when she was in Nepal.

Sudha Gurung

Mother Mary Comes to Me is a wonderful book written by a wonderful woman.

Glen Pallier

I couldn't put it down. Arundhati Roy is an amazing writer. I love this review in Nepali Times too, it is a wonderful synopsis of a fabulous book.

Mohini Malhotra

This is a nice review, and I read it with interest. I am interested to read the book itself.

Krishna Gyawali

SAMRAT UPADHYAY

Darkmotherland is Samrat's most ambitious work yet ('A dystopian motherland', Vishad Raj Onta, #1290). But in the US, aside from a lone but laudatory review in the NYT, it sank without trace. The problem is that so much of the jokes asides, word-play embedded in Nepali history, geography and psyche would be lost to a curious outsider.

Niraj Shrestha

I remember Samrat Upadhyay for his book *Arresting God* in Kathmandu, which was brilliant storytelling.

Madan Suvedi

Arresting God in Kathmandu was the first novel I bought when I was in class 9.

Bibek Adhikari Chhetri

KARNALI

Fantastic article ('The river of life', Thomas Kelly, #1290). I am blessed to be friends with the photographer/writer of this story, and with the featured Megh Ale, who is one of the foremost river protectors of the Himalaya.

James Aplington

HERVEDA

Herveda does have really good skin care products ('Looking good by doing good', Sudiksha Tuladhar, #1289).

Caroline Milne



POST-PROTEST POLITICS

The institutionalisation of protests ('Establishmentarianism', Sonia Awale, #1290). Will the students that risked their life be adults and support the institutional alternatives given to them? Why are they discomfited? What were you looking for?

Christian Nyumbayire

Online Package



DAMMED

As Nepal embarks on a dam-building spree, can planners balance geopolitics, rising energy demand and economic growth with ecosystem protection and human rights? Watch the video.



OLD NEPAL TOKYO

Ryo Honda is a Japanese chef who specialises in authentic but innovative Nepali cuisine. Watch him talk about plans to expand in Nepal. Subscribe for multimedia content.

1,000 Words



AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCHS: Nepali Communist Party leaders (from left to right) Agni Sapkota, Narayan Kaji Shrestha, Bamdev Gautam, Madhav Kumar Nepal (once PM), Pushpa Kamal Dahal (thrice PM), Jhalanath Khanal (once PM), and Rajendra Prasad Pandey sing the national anthem at its Unity Assembly in Kathmandu last week.



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Coffee guff from Korea

Prawin Adhikari's translation breathes new life into the book on Narayan Wagle's writing life

Alfa M Shakya

Koreana Coffee Guff begins with a scene where Narayan Wagle, the editor-turned-farmer, appears in reverse cameo, as a character in a novel. He has just landed at Incheon in the dead of winter.

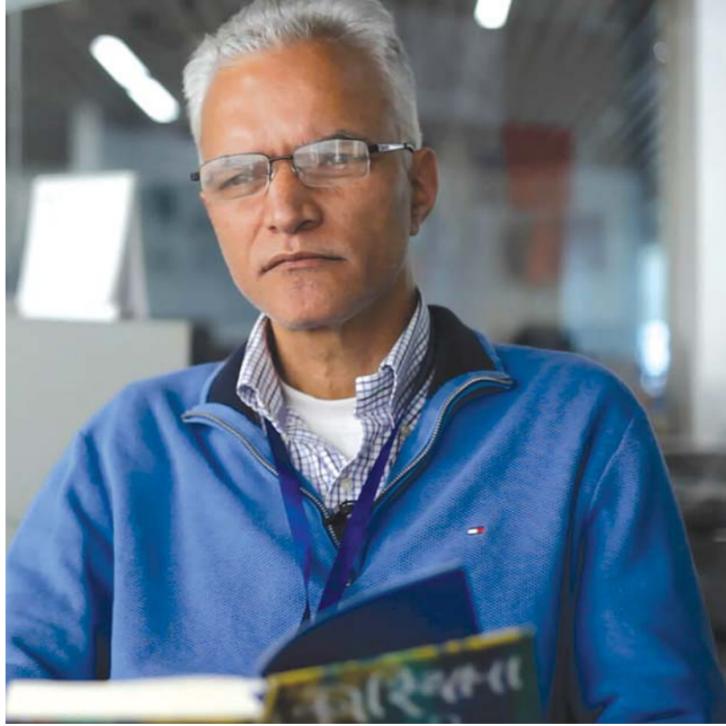
The opening premise reminds one of Tolstoy's saying about how stories begin either when someone goes on a journey, or when a stranger comes to town.

'The winds of each city are its original inheritance, shaped by its local language, its specific topography and the buffets of the airborne wings of birds and airplanes,' Wagle writes.

The author is both on a journey and a stranger to the town. The word 'stranger' might need to be redefined here, as he has visited Korea several times before. But if every journey is new, then he is a stranger of sorts — stranger to the people he meets for the first time in the book, stranger to the reader who will encounter him for the first time like I did in high school reading the English translation of his 2005 Madan Puraskar winning novel Palpasa Cafe.

Koreana is non-fiction, and was first published in 2017 in Nepali, and recently rendered into English by Prawin Adhikari, who specialises in translating Nepali works into English in such a way that they do not read like translations at all.

Even so, I turned to a few chapters from the original text,



MONIKA DEUPALA / NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

curious to see how ideas have morphed. Take Wagle's journey to Ansan Mountain. It is the same mountain, but something different happens in the two languages. The inexplicable feeling is that the translation has to conquer the mountain itself.

At its best, the book gives the reader a peek into Wagle's mind, his internal monologues, his writing ideas, his thoughts on the people around him, his deep yearning and

respect for nature, his exploration of Seoul and Korea, where he is attending the Asian Literary Creative Writing Workshop in 2017.

BACK TO THE LAND

'All cities appear the same everywhere,' he writes of Seoul, speaking of how 'development' has masked the original charm of a city rebuilt after war. In recent years, Wagle has moved on from being the editor of Kantipur, to activism, and

has now returned to his ancestral land in Tanahu to farm.

Clues to this metamorphosis can be detected in this book, which was written nearly ten years ago and before his transition. Wagle used to write a column called Coffee Guff, and the book carries that conversational style.

But not all monologues land. Thoughts rooted in a specific time and space like the hike to Ansan where the author reflects on buildings, birds, and trees feel connected with a context and background. Then there are those that bring in a new metaphor, a new reflection, a new connection in almost each new sentence which make it difficult to follow the author's stream of consciousness.

Halfway into the book, we finally meet the writers who have come from different parts of Asia for the workshop. Not speaking a common language, the writers have to rely on interpreters and Google, which turns their exchanges into quirky moments of laughter.

Writers are an important part of the book, the lens through which Wagle invites us to see the world. Poets Manjul from Nepal and Shiva Ryu from Korea make guest appearances. Through two Korean writers who share the surname Kim, we get a glimpse into Korean history and society, and how writing is intertwined with politics.

This Korea is different from the Kpop idols and skincare routine that has dominated recent imagination of the divided peninsular nation. Wagle writes, 'Literature attempts to unite, politics impedes it. They

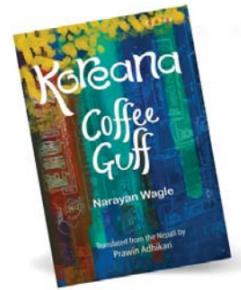
are being continuously thwarted by the conflicts ongoing in the nation's politics.'

One of the Kims is Kim Minjung (김민정), author of The World's Most Expensive Novel, that explores what it means to be a writer in Korea.

Reading Koreana feels like a hike through a jungle. If one is able to move past the tangled and stretched monologues, the book can hold moments of awe and wonder. But there is always a desire for a clearer trail to follow.

Narayan Wagle's characteristic witticism is there aplenty, his observations are astute. Writers exploring their craft and readers curious of what is churning inside Wagle's mind will find treats -- sometimes well-crafted, other times to be searched between the lines. 

Alfa M Shakya is a writer, researcher, and podcaster. She runs and hosts 'How'd You Create That?', an art podcast about the creative process.



Koreana Coffee Guff
Translated by Prawin Adhikari
Nepalaya, 2025
268 pages
Rs575

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Turkish to Cambodia

Turkish Airlines has started flights to Cambodian capital Phnom Penh, making it the seventh country in Southeast Asia to be served by the Turkish flag carrier and 11th city in the region. Flights will operate three times a week, departing from Istanbul at \$699 on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays, and returning at \$679 on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. "Adding Cambodia as our 132nd country to our unparalleled network will present new opportunities for both tourism and business. As the only European carrier flying to this destination, we will further solidify our leadership in the region," said Turkish Airlines CEO Bilal Ekşi.

ILO+SSF

The International Labour Organisation and the Social Security Fund (SSF) are partnering to extend coverage to informal workers and the self-employed. Some 2.7 million Nepalis are currently enrolled in the SSF, most of them are migrant workers and does not include the informal sector where 86% of Nepalis work. "The goal of the campaign is to leave no worker behind," said ILO's Nepal Director Numan Özcan.

Flower farmers

Global IME and Floriculture Association Nepal signed an agreement for greenhouse loans for flower farmers. The initiative hopes to increase flower production, create sustainable business models, and promote the use of climate-friendly technologies and greenhouses.

DV Suspended

The US has suspended its Diversity Visa Lottery program after a deadly shooting at a university by a Portuguese green card holder. The US also deported 75 Nepalis last week on a special flight. They had overstayed visas, or arrived through irregular channels — 439 Nepalis have been deported since Trump's second term.

Laxmi temple

Laxmi Commercial Vehicles cleaned the premises of Chandan Prabhateswar Temple in Chandragiri as part of its 52nd Corporate and Thanksgiving Day. The group plans to continue balancing business success with social responsibility.

India, Kathmandu Pokhara Tourism Council presents



India-Nepal tourism

The Embassy of India, the Nepal Tourism Board and the Pokhara Tourism Council organised the 2nd India-Nepal Tourism Meet on 18 December in Pokhara which focused on promoting tourism between Uttar Pradesh and Gandaki Province destinations like Pokhara and Muktinath.

MCC highway

MCA-Nepal has signed two contracts worth \$23.7million for highway upgrading and maintenance projects with two Nepali companies under the MCC: a 40-km stretch of the East-West Highway from Dhan Khola to Lamahi, and maintenance on the Narayanghat-Mugling section. The highway stretch will be expanded to 12m width.



Himalaya Hideaway

Himalayan Hideaway Resort Pokhara, The Centara Collection, is opening on 1 January. Situated in Kaskikot, the Thai brand offers 42 rooms, suites or villas and is offering an opening package of Rs25,000 a night for bed and breakfast, plus 10% off on food and spa until 31 March, valid for Nepali guests.

NAIMA emergency aid

Nepal Automobile Importers and Manufacturers Association (NAIMA) handed over emergency aid including furniture, computers, printers as well as door and window replacements to the Department of Transport and the Traffic Police Offices that were badly damaged during the GenZ protests.

Dairy dues

The state-owned Dairy Development Corporation says it has cleared 2/3rd of what it owes dairy farmers, while private dairies claim to have no outstanding dues. The milk market is in the flush season from August to February, with production three times higher than the lean season. Extra milk during this time is turned into butter, powdered milk, cheese, and chhurpi.

Mustang substations

Construction has started on electricity substations in Chhaila and Charang in Mustang. An Indian and a Nepali firm are collaborating on the project, worth Rs380 million. The substations have to be designed to withstand high winds at 3800m elevation and bring reliable electricity to the district.

IELTS Upahar

IELTS test-takers have won 97 prizes including Macbook Airls, and one-way tickets to the USA, the UK, Europe and Australia under the British Council's IELTS Upahar through a lucky draw. "As we continue to strengthen access to IELTS across Nepal, our focus remains on expanding choice, convenience, and quality," said the Council's Pratistha Thapa Rayamajhi.

PRIA payments

The government is struggling to pay back the principal and interest for the loan for the Pokhara Regional International Airport. CAAN is required to pay Rs2.17 billion in two instalments annually to Chinese lenders. The loan currently amounts to about Rs28.25 billion. A lack of international flights means that the airport has not been able to generate revenue, and allegations of payoffs during construction are under investigation by the CIAA.



NMB ICT Award

NMB Bank won the Digital Services ICT Award 2025 (Enterprise Sector). The award recognises organisations that have enhanced public services through digitalisation. NMB's digital services include Omnichannel which allows online banking, QR Code payment, debit/credit cards with added security, and Mobile/SMS banking.

Siddhababa tunnel

Construction of the Siddhababa Tunnel on the Siddhartha Highway in Palpa is 65% complete. The 1.13km long main tunnel will shorten travel time between Pokhara and Butwal. The agreement for the tunnel requires completion by April 2027. The Siddhababa section frequently sees accidents due to falling rocks, landslides, and flood debris.

Not taking loyalty for granted

Retired British Gurkha soldier relives the Falklands war and the Hawaii brawl

Vishad Raj Onta

Nepal's Gurkha soldiers have a well-deserved reputation worldwide for uncommon valour and loyalty. However, what happened in Hawaii in 1986 and the long struggle for fair pay and pension show that the formidable fighters from Nepal also do not tolerate injustice.

The Hong Kong-based 1st Battalion of the 7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles was in Hawaii for jungle warfare training exercises at the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center when some of them beat up their commanding officer, Major Corin Pearce.

The Gurkhas said Pearce had insulted them, and 111 soldiers were dismissed. Pearce suffered broken ribs and a head injury, and was himself also discharged.

The incident got worldwide publicity and enforced the belief that the Nepalis were not treated fairly in the British Army. It also led some retired soldiers to begin a decades-long struggle for compensation at par with their British peers.

Retired British Gurkha soldier Shankar Rai in his book *Triumph and Tears* revisits the Hawaii incident which he witnessed, and also his experience in the Falkland Islands/Malvinas war in 1982 (pictured).

He has lots of grievances: unequal treatment and injustice from the British Army towards himself and his comrades. This is an indignant and disillusioned account of the good, the bad and the ugly of being a British Gurkha, which he says let him down despite his service and belief in it.

The book could also be a cautionary tale of how one person on a power-trip can tarnish two centuries of the shared history of Nepal and the UK, as well as ruin the lives of those involved. It also is proof that loyalty should never be taken for granted.

Four years after the Falklands, several companies and platoons of Gurkha rifles were stationed in Hawaii in 1986 for joint US-UK



PHOTO COURTESY: SHANKAR RAI / FACEBOOK

'Exercise Union Pacific' exercise. The goal was to 'perfect the art of marine warfare in collaboration with the US Marine Force'.

The rules were that a British Gurkha company commander needed to have the rank of major and pass a Nepali language test. Captain Pearce was the son-in-law of a British Brigadier on extra-regiment employment, and this rule was waived. He was appointed Acting Major.

MASTER-SERVANT

Pearce didn't bother to learn Nepali language or culture, and from Rai's account took every chance to belittle and embarrass the Gurkhas as poor, stupid, rude, backward, and lucky to be there. He writes: 'After Captain Pearce reached Hawaii, he began to project himself as a master and the Gurkhas as servants, to show off to the Americans.'

The author also recounts other slights, such as only receiving a fourth of the rations they were due during hard training, being forced to train even when some of the soldiers had high fever, and claims to have 'civilised' the Nepalis.

Pearce had been to eastern Nepal

before the training and seen the grinding poverty. He kept telling the Gurkhas how lucky they were to be in the job, and that they were making 'more money than Nepal's prime minister'.

During the final farewell party in Hawaii, Pearce set up tables to form a saluting platform, and asked the Gurkha pipe and drum band to march around him while playing. The enraged soldiers could not take it anymore, and after the party an inebriated group ran Captains Pearce and Chandra Kumar Pradhan out of their tents and beat them up. Both officers broke ribs, and the major needed 15 stitches on his head.

'This sorry and unseemly episode is considered to have been entirely at odds with the Brigade of Gurkhas' tradition of loyalty and gallant service in the British Army. It is regarded as an isolated and untypical event, which will not be permitted to detract from the high esteem in which the Brigade is held,' reads the report of an investigation.

Most of the 1/7 company soldiers were dismissed whether they had been involved in the

assault or not. The author describes the shame that followed, with dismissed soldiers returning to Nepal with lost face.

'I burned with humiliation, and life scared me,' writes the author, whose father told him that he was ashamed to call him his son. 'Many of my friends' girlfriends left them and married other people. Rifleman Khem Gurung (21162015) of Itahari committed suicide,' writes Rai, adding that those dismissed were blacklisted, and could not get jobs.

They tried to pursue legal action against the British Government, but backed down when they could not afford expensive hotshot lawyers, and would not have the money to cover the government's legal fees in the likely case of a loss in court.

Gurkhas who had served for four years in the UK were allowed to move there, an option that many of those dismissed in the Hawaii incident took, including the author, who now lives in Oxford.

Rai pours out his hurt and emotion in the book. Towards the end, he writes: 'I depend on small jobs for livelihood. In the remaining time, I actively raise the issue of the victims of the Hawaii incident. We

are burdened with insults, hatred, and contempt for a lifetime. It was harsher than a court martial, too heavy to bear.'

This a slim book, and is a quick, engaging read of an incident 30 years ago, and Rai writes with a soldier's precision. Even though the anger shows even after all these years, there is no over-dramatisation in the narrative.

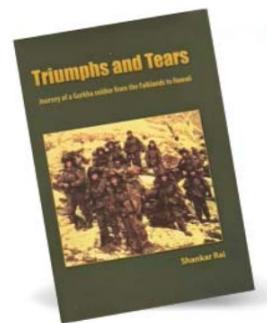
The first part of the book is about sailing across the South Atlantic in the QEII, which had been converted into a troop ship to take the Gurkhas to war. The soldiers from landlocked Nepal were mostly sea-sick, but were happy to get two cans of beer a day. Barclays Bank even had a branch on board.

Rai's descriptions of the friendships he developed in the Company and on the battlefield are poignant. They braved Argentinian bombs, dug trenches and fought through the rain in the Southern Hemisphere winter.

There are vignettes of sharing tea with fellow Nepalis, seeing comrades fall, and finding pictures of wives and children in the pockets of dead Argentine soldiers.

Behind the prestige, honour and myths of being a Gurkha soldier, it seems this is just another job with nepotism, horrible bosses and bad pay.

But such is the desperation that up to 20,000 young Nepalis still apply for 300 openings in the British Army every year. 🇳🇵



Triumphs and Tears: Journey of a Gurkha soldier from the Falklands to Hawaii
Shankar Rai
Lok Maya Rai, Ilam, 2025
110 pages
Rs750

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RAGE IN 2025, REPAIR IN 2026

Two high school graduates turn frustration with the system into action for reform

Rishavi Gautam and Sarwashree Subedi

“Two lakhs and your job will be done.”

We overheard a bureaucrat casually say this to a single mother in a government office. Corruption is a given in Nepali society.

From Social Studies books in school to conversations at dinners, it was always understood that a key reason why our country fails time and again is the kleptocracy.

Seeing it play out in front of our eyes was disconcerting. The woman pleaded that she did not have that kind of money: “हामीसँग तेत्रो पैसा छैन सर, मिलाइदिनुस न”।

If it is so normal for people to need social or economic capital to get the simplest things done, what happens to those who have neither? Corruption is not just stealing

money, it steals time, agency, it steals dreams, robs citizens of their rights, it steals their future.

The very system supposed to protect the underserved serves the already privileged, further widening class, caste and gender gaps.

Everywhere, we saw recurring normalisation of corruption. We saw no future for ourselves in a country rotten to the core.

We sought escape just like the 65,000 Nepali youth who leave the country every month searching for opportunities beyond our borders. The system was driving us out.

We saw and experienced the dysfunction, but stayed silent. We carried the discontent, and accepted it as the norm. That shared silence broke on 8 September 2025.

The collective anger was not just towards corruption by politicians and bureaucrats, but the impunity and opacity of the system. The rot at the top infected every level of the

state, legitimising and seeping into mundane everyday transactions.

The GenZ protest became the turning point. Engulfed by a sense of helplessness, we gathered at Maitighar Mandala that Monday morning to vent our pent up frustration.

The protests escalated into a massacre, and then devastating destruction. We needed to channel the rage and remorse into reform, and not deepen the crisis. Our anger was not just directed at the political Troika, but also at the entire culture of impunity and the systemic barriers to progress.

We were not alone in this bureaucratic hell, it was a national collective experience. We were saying enough is enough, and we will not accept it anymore.

SEEKING A SAVIOUR

But here is the thing: we are so used to heroic stories and movies

that end with the protagonist saving all of humanity that we often fall into the trap of looking for a singular saviour in real life as well.

Even during this national crisis, we turned to individuals in the hope that they would correct historical wrongs overnight. We conveniently avoided pointing out our own hypocrisy. It was us who vilified the Big Three serial prime ministers for ruining the country, yet here we are expecting one single person to save us all.

In conversations with friends before September, they would be resigned to their fate and would say “यस्ते हो अब देशमा केहि हुँदेन”. We realise now that disengagement is a trap.

The more we withdraw, the more we become isolated from the countless people and their active efforts to make this nation better. Hopelessness takes root when good people do nothing and evade their



own responsibilities.

So, if we can neither rely on a singular hero nor live in a bubble of hopelessness, where does that leave us? It leaves us with each other. In our disillusionment with new saviours, we began to notice a different group of people.

These were not leaders on the podium reciting a million promises, but ordinary citizens who made the extraordinary decision to stop waiting and start building. They were the living embodiment of accountability, and we wanted to join in.



SUMAN NEPALI



KAMAL PRASAI



PHOTOS: AMIT MACHAMASI



While we are hopeful and full of ideas, we still lack real-world knowledge to navigate these systemic issues ourselves. This truth hit home during our time with Incubate Nepal, a research program that gave our project, Bureaucrazy, its initial head start. What began as an eight-week student project quickly revealed its scope as far larger.

Bureaucrazy is an AI-enabled platform built voluntarily by us high school graduates led by three female mentors. It was initially designed to help students

get two crucial documents (No-objection Certificate and Letter of Equivalence) for education overseas.

We were building solutions for our own generation, hoping to smooth a path we had found frustratingly rough. When we took our prototype to the very bureaucrats it was meant to assist, we were met with skepticism.

Their reluctance was clear, but it only fueled our determination. Today, Bureaucrazy has evolved beyond its original purpose. By integrating updated AI and expanding our databases, it now answers questions on various bureaucratic processes, from student documents to the ongoing national elections.

We are continually updating it, solving problems as they crop up. Being confronted with both our own limitations and systemic inertia was a deeply personal and humbling experience.

Corruption stole our roads, our education, our resources, but it did not steal our spirit. Every day, we are more hopeful, not because the problems have vanished, but because we now know with certainty that there are people already at work, patiently and skillfully building a better country.

When we work on Bureaucrazy.co, when we meet honest bureaucrats, when we talk to young people navigating ways of entrepreneurship, we know that

this country is not lost.

Maybe we cannot fix everything at once, but we can keep showing up. We can keep building small pockets of hope until they connect into something larger. And one day, living in our Motherland will not feel like a burden that one has to escape, but a place full of possibilities. 🇳🇵



DIMAKAR CHEITRI

Party Problem

Political parties do not need another rebranding in 2026, but institutionalisation

Suvexa Tuladhar

After the 2008 Constituent Assembly election and the 2015 Constitution, civil society believed the country was on the path to lasting change.

Despite early optimism, democracy remains fragile and falls short of the expectations of citizens. A corrupt elite dominates the political landscape while young citizens grow disillusioned to the point of taking to the streets or staging a mass exodus.

The GenZ movement toppled the government and fresh elections are on the horizon, with that there is another promise of a 'New Nepal'. Young people previously uninterested in state affairs are now alert and demand a voice. Promising new parties are emerging.

This political awakening should prompt reflection on where we went wrong and how to do better. One striking feature undermining Nepal's democracy over the past three decades was the sheer number of coalition governments in such a short time. Nepal has had 14 prime ministers in 16 years, each serving an average of just a little over a year.

Coalitions are not inherently bad for a democracy. In fact, coalitions can help bring in diversity of values, voices, and participation in Parliament. However, chronic and unpredictable coalition patterns undermine and destabilise democracy. Nepal's fragile coalition governments degenerated into unholy alliances and horse trading between ideologically divergent and previously rival groups.

When one coalition collapsed, the cycle repeated, leaving little room for long-term vision or consistent governance. The result? Corruption, endless infighting, stalled progress, and a nation stuck in political limbo.

This observation is not new, but the blame is misdirected. Some suggest a different electoral system, but instead of scrapping the entire structure and building a new one from scratch, why not examine the problems within the systems we already have and fix those?

The coalition problem is not a result of the electoral system but of the party system. While political

parties are the medium through which representation and mass participation occur, a party system is the entire network of how they interact, compete, and cooperate within a country's political landscape. It is not just one party that is the bad apple, the entire basket is creating conditions for the apples to rot.

The party system is weakly institutionalised. Nepal struggles with unpredictable electoral competition, widespread public distrust in political parties, fragmented internal party structures, and shallow societal embeddedness.

PARTY SYSTEM

Institutionalisation should create a structured, programmatic competition, but in Nepal the political environment is dominated by elite-level bargaining and opportunistic alliances.

This fragility did not emerge overnight. Nepal's history of a turbulent democracy led to the creation of a necessity- and survival-driven party system. Political parties were born in precarious circumstances, emerging in secrecy, exile, or in response to survival imperatives, rather than organic political development.

The absolute monarchy was always a looming threat preventing the institutionalisation of party structures, even after 1990. Coalition reshuffling became a reactionary survival strategy, reinforcing patterns of short-termism and deepening the perception of parties as opportunistic.

FICKLE AND FRAGILE

Over the years, this cycle has hollowed out the substantive meaning of electoral competition: while parties compete and governments change, the underlying political dynamics remain stagnant, offering few real alternatives and fostering a culture of fickle and fragile coalitions.

Building a resilient democracy would require returning to the basics to strengthen the foundations of our party system. Political parties need to look inward and invest in their own institutional development. That means promoting internal democracy through leadership term limits and transparent succession processes, building clearer ideological platforms that speak to citizens' real concerns, and forging deeper and more consistent connections that go beyond election season. Nepal's parties need a fundamental reassessment of their purpose, vision, and social relevance.

These lessons are especially important for new political parties hoping to present themselves as genuine alternatives to the status quo. Real change will not come from winning seats alone, it will come from the hard, sustained work of building strong institutions and earning public confidence.

If we have hung parliaments, parties will need to build alliances grounded in shared policy visions and ideological goals. Otherwise, Nepal will remain trapped in the same cycle of coalition instability that has long undermined its promise of stable governance and a thriving democracy. 🇳🇵

Suvexa Tuladhar is a fellow at the Nepal Institute for Policy Research.



Events



BFA Show 2025

Annual exhibition by Fine Art students showcasing works in painting, printmaking, drawing, mixed-media, branding, animation, illustration, photography, product design, and more at the Nepal Art Council.
Until 27 December, 10:30am-5:30pm

Botanical Painting Class

Learn watercolor techniques and the science behind plants with Neera Joshi Pradhan in ten days. Explore botanical art while gaining insights into the fascinating world of flora.
Until 18 January (Sundays, Tuesdays), 10:30am-12:30pm, Rs3,000 per session, Rs1,500 for students, Kathmandu Art Gallery

Whispers of the Inner Self

A solo exhibition by Suchin Shrestha exploring the human figure and interiority through contemporary visual language. The works reflect the nuanced intersections of thought, desire, and presence.
28 December-10 January, 11am-5pm, Patan Wing, Nakabahal



Artha Run Club

A 6KM morning run open to all ages and paces, with parking and bag drop available. Register via the link in their Instagram bio @artha.runclub.
Every Saturday, 6:45 onwards, International Club, Lalitpur

Stop Motion Animation

Join Ukrainian filmmaker Polina Piddubna for a 2-day stop motion animation workshop. Participants will also have the opportunity to screen their creations alongside Polina's film My Grandmother is a Skydiver on 3 January 2026.
27-28 December, 10am-3pm, Rs2,000, Taragaon Next



Music

JUSS Live

Indian pop sensation JUSS performs live in Kathmandu for a Fake New Year celebration, bringing his signature Punjabi-pop sound to the stage. Known for hits like Suniyan Suniyan.
27 December, 9pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1,500-Rs2,000, Club NOVA

Eve Music Fest

Celebrate New Year's Eve with live performances by Purna Rai and Daju Bhai Haru, John and the Locals, and Dilip and the Valley Crew.
31 December, 4pm onwards, Tickets: Rs2,000-Rs12,000, Malla Hotel



Food and Music Carnival

Ring in the New Year at Chitwan's biggest food and music festival, featuring your favorite artists: Kandara, Samir Shrestha, Laure, Hulaki, Vten, and Trishna Gurung.
28 December-1 January, 4pm onwards, Tickets: Rs300-Rs1,500, Campachaur, Chitwan

Culture in Sync

Experience a soulful blend of music and culture with the Hari Maharjan Project.
31 December, 6pm onwards, Tickets: Rs3,000, Courtyard Pujan Hotel



Tribal Rain and The Hulaki

Enjoy the soothing melodies of Tribal Rain and The Hulaki for a night of soft music and relaxed celebration.
31 December, 8pm onwards, Tickets: Rs500-Rs800, Club Platinum



Getaway



Hotel Barahi

Located just beyond the banks of Phewa Lake, Hotel Barahi offers stunning views and luxury rooms. The rooms are decorated with rustic pieces, earthy tones and a clean, understated design.
Lakeside, Pokhara (61) 450617

Aloft staycation

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



Milla Guesthouse

If you like the quiet and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far from the city, yet worlds apart.
Bhaktapur, 9817849759

The Last Resort

Bungee jump, tandem swing, or white water rafting—take an adventurous trip to the Bhote Kosi near the Tibetan border.
Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchok (01) 4700525

Chandragiri Hills Resort

Celebrate New Year's Eve at Chandragiri Hills with special room packages, which includes welcome drink, unlimited snacks, early bird happy hour on selected beverages and more. Call for more details.
31 December, Rs23,999 (standard) / Rs25,499 (deluxe) / Rs26,999 (executive), 9802069949



Dining

TAZA

Taza has the softest pita breads, perfectly spiced shawarmas and an assortment of middle eastern dishes that will have you craving more.
11am-8:20pm, Pulchok, 9860960177

New Orleans Cafe

New Orleans Cafe offers 15% off on wines on new year. Also—buy 2 mulled wine get 1 free.
31 December and 1 January (01) 4700736



Holiday Inn Express

Ring in the New Year at Holiday Inn Express. Guests can choose to celebrate at the Express Café & Bar, FuAsian, Rooftop Bar & Kitchen, or the Banquet Hall. Each venue features curated menus and live music. Call for reservations.

Rs2,750 net per person (Express Café & Bar) / Rs 5,500 (FuAsian, Rooftop Bar & Kitchen), 9802356232 / 9802354209, Naxal

Koto

Maki sushi, cold or fried tofu, tempura, fried chicken, miso soup, chicken karaage, Katsu Don, anything to satisfy your appetite for Japanese food.

Darbar Marg (01) 4220346



New Year's Eve @ Aloft

Celebrate the arrival of 2026 with a buffet dinner at Nook, along with a welcome drink. Children under six dine free.
31 December, 6:30pm-10:30pm, Rs3,500 nett, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel

Miss Moti Escapes

Kripa Joshi



Weekend Weather



New Year Snow

The Tarai is blanketed by fog so thick (pictured, Thursday) that it does not lift even by late afternoon. Flights to the western Tarai cities will remain disrupted. The surface fog is 200m thick, with glorious sunshine above it. In Kathmandu the max temperature could dip to 18°C, and the minimum will hover around 5°C with morning and evening smog. Next week may see the arrival of a westerly front that could sprinkle the first winter snow at higher elevations, with some drizzles in the mid-western mountains.



Our Pick

Avatar: Fire and Ash, the third instalment in the Avatar franchise follows Jake Sully and his family following the events of The Way of Water, as they grieve Neteyam's death. Neytiri has developed hatred toward humans. Meanwhile, the conflict on Pandora escalates as Jake, Neytiri's and their loved ones confront a new, aggressive Na'vi tribe, the Ash People, who are led by Varang. Stars Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Sigourney Weaver, Stephen Lang, and Kate Winslet. Catch it in nearby theatres.

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 चिह्न 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

The sins of our mothers

Arundhati Roy's powerful memoir of her tumultuous relationship with birth-giver and birth-place

Shristi Karki

'Get out of my house.'
'All my sickness is because of you.'
'You're a millstone around my neck.'

Arundhati Roy heard these admonitions from her mother over and over throughout her life.

This must be a singular, yet universal experience. There may be very few daughters who make it through life unscathed by their mothers. And vice-versa.

How many of our mothers see in us the potential of all of the lives they could have lived? How many resent us for it, or want us to live those lives in their stead?

And how many of us look back at our mothers and imagine what they would have achieved had they not been expected and assigned to play the role of wife, daughter-in-law, mother — had we never existed in their lives?

How many mothers project their experiences onto their own daughters and continue the cycle? No daughter seems to escape it — no matter how well-behaved, docile, unruly, or rebellious.

Certainly not the child who would go on to become a Booker prize-winning author.

Arundhati Roy's memoir *Mother Mary Comes To Me* chronicles a complex relationship with her mother Mary, or 'Mrs Roy', as her educator mother had her two children refer to her.

In December, Arundhati Roy was in Kathmandu to sign

books and briefly interact with readers at two bookshops in the city. She describes a childhood overshadowed by her mother's volatility towards her and her brother.

Mary herself was raised by an abusive father. To escape him she married the first man who proposed — Arundhati's father who in her mother's words turned out to be an alcoholic 'Nothing Man'. Mary left her husband in Assam and eventually wound up with her children in her town of Aymanam in Kerala, encountering other family members along the way who did not treat her, or her children with respect.

The trauma and cruelty her mother endured could not be contained in her body, and spilled out onto her two children, towards whom she was physically, verbally, and emotionally abusive.

While she treated her children with disregard, she would build a school in the nearby town of Kottayam, educate thousands of children, take up a legal fight that led to the Supreme Court granting Syrian Christian women in India equal inheritance rights, and uplift many orphaned children and women in Kerala.

Arundhati lived with both her mother's brutality and brilliance. And like her daughter, readers must reconcile the indefensible parts of Mary Roy's personality — the cruelty of calling her nine-year-old daughter a bitch, or shooting the family dog that mated with a stray — with her unyielding drive to educate thousands, fight for equal rights, and challenge the way her world viewed women.

Mrs Roy had little kindness for her own children, but plenty for the students, children, and women whose lives she shaped, and made better. And her kindness was not rooted in empathy, but in anger at the hand she had been dealt in life.

Eventually, Arundhati decided to temporarily cut all contact with Mrs Roy — not because she did not love her, she writes, but so that she

could continue to love her. Her desire to get away from her abusive mother, and her fascination with the ideas inspired by the architect who built her mother's school, would lead her to the Delhi School of Architecture at age 16.

In Delhi, Arundhati became roommates with Hisila Yami before she and her Maoist ideologue husband Baburam Bhattarai went underground to lead Nepal's decade-long armed struggle.

But architecture was not her calling. In Delhi, the heart of India's statecraft, Arundhati came into young adulthood against a backdrop of the country's changing socio-politics, which began to take a turn for the hyper-nationalist, Hindu supremacist community that it has now largely become. The winds of those changes have now blown into Nepal.

MORE POLITICAL

She went on to write her Booker prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things*, but the wealth and status the book brought did not sit well. So she smashed her newly-built gilded cage, as she describes it, and became more political.

Contrary to norm, she published several works of non-fiction, and would only publish her second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, in 2017, 20 years after *The God of Small Things*.

Her fierce opposition to India's nuclear policies, to a dam that would displace millions of indigenous people and ecologically damage the Narmada Valley, her championing of Kashmiri self-determination, and her time spent with Maoist rebels in the forests of Chhattisgarh as they took up arms

to defend their land and resources against corporate interests made her an enemy of the state.

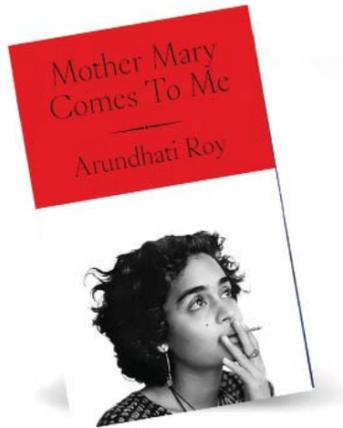
Meanwhile, being raised by a single mother had never sat well within her Syrian Christian community. 'I wasn't Christian enough. I wasn't Hindu enough. I wasn't communist enough. I wasn't enough,' Roy writes in her memoir. For all her love for India, the nation did not seem to reciprocate.

Circumstances might be different, but may strike a chord with readers in Nepal, who marched in September hoping for a better tomorrow, but were killed by the very institutions meant to protect them. It might resonate with those who are not seen as Nepali citizens simply because they do not fit an imagined idea of Nepali nationhood.

Arundhati's relationship with her mother, who was simultaneously proud and disdainful of her daughter's accomplishments, continued to be tumultuous until the end.

One of Mrs Roy's last messages to her daughter before she passed was: 'There is no one in the world whom I have loved more than you.' Arundhati muses that her lifelong refusal to stop loving her mother must have finally breached her barriers. One wonders if that final declaration of love was solace enough, apology enough, for all the pain caused.

But for Arundhati Roy, her love for her mother and her motherland outweighs the cruelty both have shown her. This, too, must be a singular, yet universal experience. 🇳🇵



Mother Mary Comes to Me
Arundhati Roy
Penguin Random House India, 2025
384 pages
Hardcover Rs1,438

That time of the month

Activists, artists, journalists share diverse menstrual experiences and interventions from across Nepal

Sangya Lamsal

Menstrual stigma remains a lived reality in Nepal, where taboos and violence are still justified in the name of tradition. What is framed as cultural practice is often unsafe, excludes women and deprives them of dignity.

Women are forced to face everyday restrictions, to isolate themselves, limit them from access to health information, sanitation, and timely care. Although with education, the practice is less prevalent, it is still entrenched in rural and marginalised communities.

Which is why the book *Celebrating Menstrual Activists in Nepal* is an important reflective documentation of such experiences, practical interventions, lessons and possibilities, with grassroots activism against menstrual banishment from across Nepal.

The dominant international narrative of menstruation in Nepal is often reduced to images of women confined in cowsheds on the internet. While the practice of chhaupadi is real and brutal, focusing just on this singular issue erases the diversity of menstrual experiences and activism all over Nepal.

'Simply searching 'menstruation' in Nepal shows a starkly stereotypical narrative as compared to other countries, where activism, products, and choice dominate the imagery,' says the book's curator Sara Parker:

Parker and Laxmi Dhital interviewed activists from different walks of life, purpose, and responsibilities, all of whom

are central to translating legislation into change at the grassroots, some through their focus on practical access and sustainability, others foregrounding gender norms and structural power.

LOCAL SOLUTIONS

Anupa Shrestha addresses fundamental menstrual health issues such as hygiene, irregular menstruation, menopause, and family planning, but her primary focus is on producing reusable menstrual pads. Anupa spent over two months researching reusable pad production online before locating a trainer in Kathmandu.

She then organised her first training session with 15 women. The pads, made from cotton cloth and other absorbent materials, are designed to last at least one year, making them both cost-effective and environmentally sustainable, and has reached over 1,000 people. School-based training is particularly effective.

Beni Rani Ghale's Freedom Period Pads and Claire Lin's Love Lovely Pads also integrate sustainability, livelihoods, and bodily education, employing local women and reducing menstrual waste.

Gyan Maharjan, widely known as 'Pad Man', argues that menstrual stigma is rooted in patriarchy and cannot be dismantled without men's involvement. He envisions a society where fathers can openly explain menstruation to their daughters without shame, and where adolescent girls are equipped with accurate information rather than fear.

Maharjan founded X-pose Nepal to address sexual harassment and now employs local women to create reusable and disposable menstrual products.



Celebrating Menstrual Activists in Nepal
Curated and edited by Sara Parker
Co-created, illustrated, and designed by Sophie Maliphant
2023

Youth activist Ashwin Karki believes in involving young people in awareness campaigns for behavioural change to ensure that the next generation experiences less discrimination. Babu Kaji Shrestha of Global Action Nepal (GAN), views education as essential for long-term change with improved teaching practices around reproductive and sexual health education.

The book expands menstruation beyond hygiene, linking it to nutrition, mental health, and dignity. Bonita Sharma talks about diet, mental health, hygiene, and bodily changes, addressing cramps, hormonal fluctuations, weakness, and variations in bleeding and discharge.

Pema Lhaki, a member of the Nepal Fertility Care Centre (NFCC) adapts campaigns to specific communities. She questions the term 'dignified menstruation',

arguing that activists should focus on normalising menstruation rather than moralising it.

In western Nepal, Durga Giri works directly with communities, politicians, teachers, and police to challenge chhaupadi practices, remaining optimistic that sustained engagement at the grassroots level can shift entrenched mindsets.

Artist Ashmina Ranjitkar uses visual and political art to confront menstrual shame, saying it is life-affirming rather than impure. Journalists and advocates such as Ganga Khadka demonstrate how activism can influence national policy, most notably through the provision of free menstrual pads in schools.

Despite threats, violence, and exclusion, Radha Paudel, founder of the Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation, frames menstrual discrimination as a human right violation rooted in the myth of impurity that sustains gender-based violence and inequality.

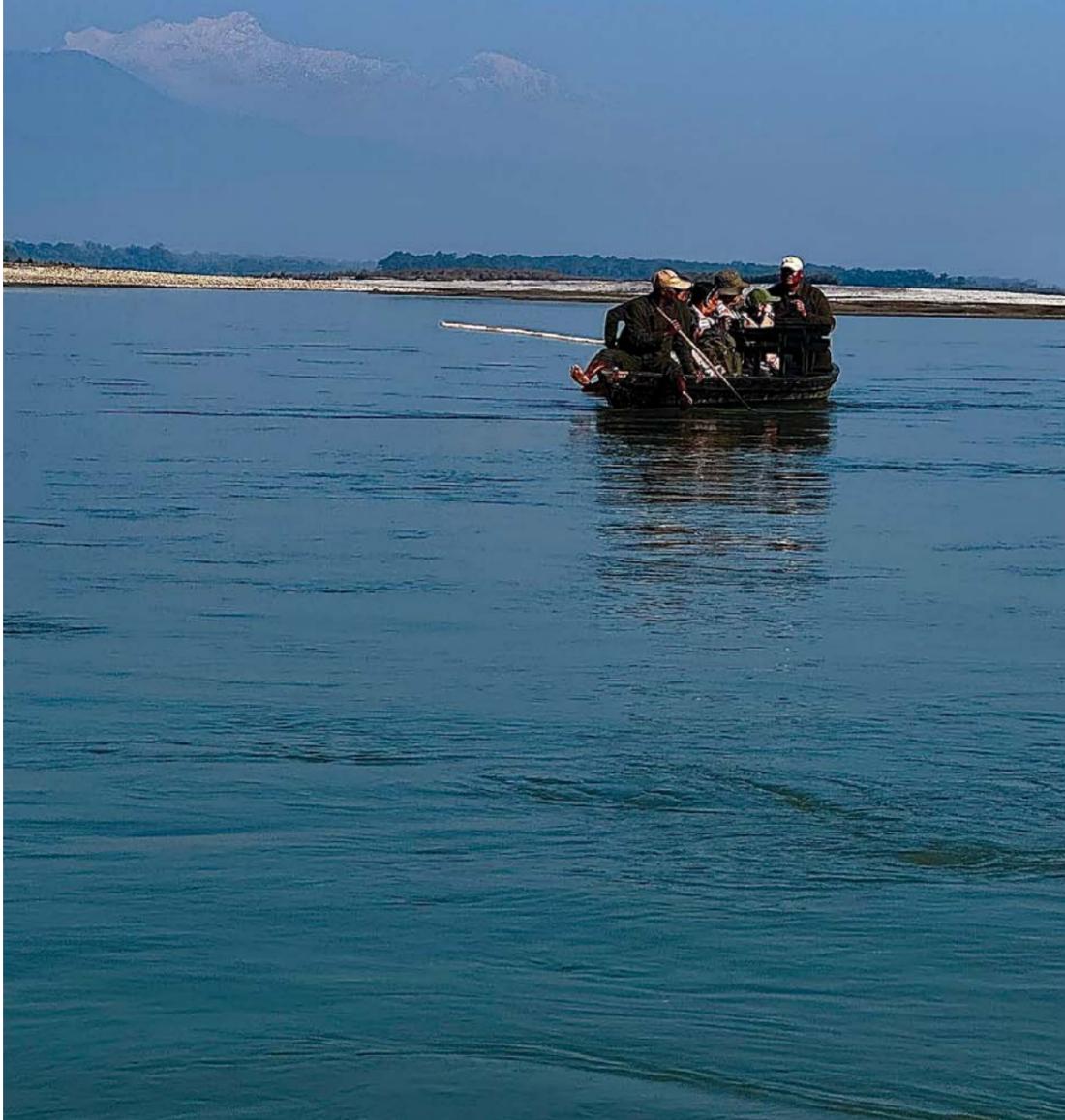
The book shuns simplification and offers a layered, grounded account of why the fight to normalise menstruation must continue. It is a creative outcome of Dignity Without Danger (DWD), a British Academy-GCRF-funded research project.

Illustrated by Sophie Maliphant, the book invites readers to engage, to reflect on their learnings and become a part of this movement by sharing the impact of reading these stories with #CelebratingMenstrualActivists, #MenstrualActivistStories and @DignityWithoutDanger.

The funds raised from the book will be used to support further menstrual education initiatives by Global Action Nepal. 🇳🇵

PEOPLE, NATURALLY

Local communities in the buffer zones of Chitwan National Park play vital role in conservation



PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT

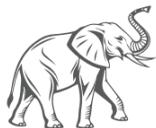
CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK BIODIVERSITY



140
Tigers



700
Rhinos



50
Wild elephants



200
Butterfly species



600
Bird species



350
Vascular plants



Kunda Dixit in Chitwan

The Narayani River in Chitwan National Park is at only 180m above sea level, but on a rare clear day recently, visitors could see the summit of 7,893m-high Himalchuli right across Nepal, 150km away (left).

Upstream, the Trisuli, Seti and Kali Gandaki join to form the Narayani in a catchment stretching from Dhaulagiri to Langtang — spanning one-third of Nepal's area.

Glaciers in those mountains, and a part of the Tibetan Plateau, feed the Narayani. Seeing the snows and river together underscores the need to regard the Himalaya not just as a mountain range, but as a composite watershed. This delicate balance between peaks and plains is now destabilised by climate breakdown.

"The climate crisis is a water issue. It is not just about this river, but the glaciers we can see from here," said Adil Najam, President of the World Wildlife Fund International during a visit to Chitwan. "Water is going to be a frontline climate issue not only for Nepal but for the world."

Rivers and wetlands shaped Chitwan's conservation success story. But the region now suffers from either too much water during the monsoon, or too little in the dry season due to climate breakdown.

Insufficient recharge of aquifers and over-extraction of groundwater have caused oxbow lakes and watering holes to dry up, and solar-powered pumps have had to be installed to replenish some of them.

Nepal tripled its tiger population to nearly 400 in the past 14 years, rhino numbers have rebounded to 752 with near-zero poaching for the past decade, and vulture species have been rescued from the brink of extinction — largely due to the efforts of local communities in the buffer zones of parks like Chitwan and Bardia.

"The biodiversity here was protected because conservation has been collaborative," said Birendra Mahato, an elected member of the Ratnanagar ward adjacent to the Park. "This involvement of people in the buffer zone, including us from the indigenous communities, has helped reduce poaching and human-wildlife conflict."

Tharu, Bote and Musahar indigenous groups that used to live inside what is now the Park knew about the behaviour of tigers, rhinos and wild elephants, and there were few fatal wildlife attacks.

"We need to revive that traditional knowledge so there is human-wildlife coexistence, not conflict," Mahato added.

And communities living in the buffer zone will only protect wildlife if they see benefit from

saving them. The proven way to ensure that coexistence is through well-managed and sustainable tourism that lifts living standards.

The village of Amaltari along the Narayani river has several high-end resorts that employ local people as nature guides, hotel staff, and cultural groups performing for tourists. There are also 35 women-led homestays where visitors can enjoy indigenous culture, food and lifestyle, besides wildlife safaris.

"Lifting living standards is the most effective way to ensure nature conservation, and this means protecting authentic local heritage to generate income from tourism," Adil Najam said (next page).

Tourists come to the buffer zone at the western edge of Chitwan National Park in Amaltari to see tigers, rhinos, a culture conservation site, or float down the river to watch gharial, crocodiles, and migratory birds. Chitwan National Park saw 300,000 visitors last year, with Nepalis now outnumbering foreign tourists.

Gita Mahato runs one of the Amaltari homestays and admits that it was not easy in the beginning to ensure that the quality of service was up to mark, and business suffered during and after the pandemic.

"But now we have more experience and confidence. Our incomes have gone up, and it has restored pride in our culture and helped protect nature," she added.

BEAUTY PARLOURS

Improved living standards have impacted other aspects: children are educated and have better nutrition, child marriage has gone down, no one is stealing electricity with hooks anymore, and there are now three beauty parlours in Amaltari.

WWF Nepal gave seed money to set up the local Hamar Cooperative, which ploughs tourism income into a savings scheme that lends to Musahar, Bote and Tharu members. There are no defaulters.

The municipality has built electric fences to protect the rice and mustard fields, eliminating fatalities here from wildlife attacks. The community's Anti-poaching Youth Group and the Park's military have increased vigilance after the jailbreak of notorious wildlife traffickers in September.

Chitwan and other national parks and buffer zones across Nepal are conducting a tiger census this month, installing 1,100 camera traps. The cameras also help curb poaching, and Nepal's total tiger population is expected to exceed 400.

Says Ghana Gurung from WWF Nepal: "This is the best example that protecting one charismatic species that is at the top of the food chain helps to preserve biodiversity and entire ecosystems, while at the same time lifting people's living standards." 

“Water is the frontline climate issue”

World Wildlife Fund International President Adil Najam was in Chitwan this month, and spoke to Ghana Gurung of WWF Nepal.



SNEHA TAMRAKAR / WWF

Ghana Gurung: What are your impressions after visiting Chitwan National Park?

Adil Najam: I always knew Nepal was special, and the work of WWF Nepal was special, but I just didn't realise how special. We saw the work first hand in Chitwan with species protection, zero-poaching and, most importantly, how to work with indigenous communities so that we turn this rhetoric of nature vs people into truly a bridge of nature and people. Meeting members of indigenous communities and conservation officials, seeing their sense of pride about what has been achieved was very motivating.

So much of what you are doing here in Nepal is relevant to the UN's SDG goals and WWF's own 2030 roadmap — especially our core work on species. The challenges are great, but we do not take enough time to appreciate the achievements. We haven't got to where we want to yet, but we are much further down the road.

Tigers have almost tripled, rhinos more than tripled, zero poaching for many years, and all of this with a grassroots approach working with communities. It is not always easy, their concerns are real, but working with them as partners shows that conservation and people do not need to be contradictions.

You mention challenges. What are some of the difficulties ahead?

When you are working at a high level, the first challenge is keeping it at that level. Unfortunately global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss are now so great that we have to multiply our efforts multiple times to keep up.

Nepal also needs to share what you do here with the rest of the world. Unless we learn from each other, we are not going to solve the planetary crises.

I was very happy to see how much the youth are involved in Nepal's conservation efforts, but the challenge is to get young people excited about conservation and aspire to do more.

Yes, we try to work more with the youth. What were some of the other highlights of the trip?

Clearly, one of the outstanding highlights was the visit to the homestay collective run

by indigenous communities, particularly that they are women-led and they have become entrepreneurial, learning new ways to work with nature in the buffer zone, designing new livelihoods, by having guests who enjoy nature. The homestay program in Nepal really has ownership and links nature and people.

Nepal is one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world. What were some of the impacts you noticed?

I think every country now is climate vulnerable. For the developing world, it is a compounded challenge not only because it was not responsible for the problem, but also because they now face its consequences. Because the world has not done very much on mitigation, the challenges have become more difficult. Besides carbon mitigation, we need to focus on adaptation and address the issue of water.

Climate in the age of adaptation essentially becomes a water issue, and Chitwan has done well to protect its fresh water habitats. It is not just about these rivers, but the mountains and the glaciers we can see from here that feed them. We have compartmentalised problems: this is climate, this is biodiversity, that is plastic. That is not how nature works. There is no solution to the climate challenge without dealing with nature, and vice versa. So, water is going to be a frontline climate issue not only for Nepal but for the world itself. Leadership on climate will have to rest with countries like Nepal in demonstrating ways to build climate resilience. And resilience resides in people.

Given this, what are the strategies we need going forward?

We are seeing resource constraints, and that is not news. But beyond that many of the biggest challenges of our time are at threshold or beyond threshold level — whether they are climate related, loss of nature, or water stress, etc. We are at this pivotal point, and I hope we will invent better ways on how to deal with these crises. As you already do in Nepal, we have to look at ecosystems as integrated and connected, where doing good for one thing has a positive impact on another. We know that with species here in Chitwan — if one species does well, a whole bunch of others also benefit.

And like you do here, we have to work in partnerships with communities, conservation people, other international organisations, the private sector. This is not the time for finding your corner and hiding in it. This is a planetary problem, and we need an 8 billion people solution.

And the writing on the wall in Nepal and elsewhere is that young people are the key to the present and the future. It is really their world. We have to create an environment in which they can thrive to reach their own potential. And we have to give them the sense that although things are difficult, if we do the right things there are solutions.



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American Ayla

US-based distillery launches the traditional Kathmandu spirit for a diaspora market

Ancient heritage met modern distillery craft as the US-based The Nepali Spirit Company made its global debut with Kathmandu Ayla.

Inspired by Nepal's ancient rice whiskey tradition, the product is the first of four handcrafted spirits that brings Kathmandu Valley's 1,000-year-old ayla tradition to the world stage. "The first four products combine history, culture, and tradition and it has taken eight years to get to this launch point," says CEO of The Nepali Spirit Company Kashish Das Shrestha.

The other three ayla products are Masala Whiskey aged in Brazilian Amburana casks and spiced with black cardamom from Nepal, Annapurna Ayla, and Haku Chaku Himalayan Espresso Liqueur with Nepali coffee and dark molasses.

Once poured in Nepal's royal courts, ayla is a clear rice spirit that is a millennia-old living heritage of Kathmandu, used in rituals from birth to death and the traditional life milestones of its inhabitants.

Ayla is distilled to capture classic aromas and flavours, with a soft, sweet aftertaste. It can be enjoyed neat, sipped through meals, or enjoyed as shots. With 15% of Nepal's population living and working abroad, there is a demand for ayla in the diaspora from Asan to Amsterdam to Australia.

"We believe ayla is a wonderful way to tell Nepal's



CHEERS: Kashish Das Shrestha with a colleague at his company's distillery in Florida (above).

Ayla is sold in bottles with Nepali designs that include a Mt Everest that raises into the bottle.

It can be mixed into imaginative cocktails like the Aylapolitan.

story to the world," says promoter Lilu KC Shrestha. "We intend to use our platform to promote Nepal in any way we can, and also find ways to give back to the country."

LOVE LETTER TO NEPAL

Aside from the ayla itself, the bottle and packaging was conceived by New York-based designer Sahara Shrestha to reflect a complete Nepalianness.

The bottom of each bottle has an embossed Mandala representing the universe and its interconnectedness. A glass molding of Himalayan peaks Chomolungma and Nuptse signifies the earth and heaven.

"Each bottle and box is a love letter to Nepal, and every detail is an expression of respect and appreciation of Nepali heritage and our desire to share it with the world," says Kashish Das Shrestha. "And ayla itself is a sacred part of our culture, so we wanted to make sure the bottle reflects this reverence."

The logo of The Nepali Spirit Company is inspired by the unti, a traditional vessel used to pour ayla. This motif is also on the label of Annapurna Whiskey, named in honour of both the mountain and the goddess, the giver of grain.

For a new take, ayla can be paired with a lime wedge lathered in honey, cumin, and salt, or on the glass rim. It can also be mixed into cocktails to make Aylarita, Aylatini, or Aylapolitan. 🇳🇵

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